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Editorial

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This issue of *Religions of South Asia* contains articles that were originally presented as papers at the 41st Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions, which took place on 15–17 April 2016, at St Michael's College, Llandaff, under the auspices of the Cardiff University Centre for the History of Religion in Asia. The symposium was organized by James Hegarty and Simon Brodbeck, with the assistance of the symposium's standing committee led by Naomi Appleton. The Spalding Trust made a generous contribution towards the symposium's funding, Cardiff University finance staff helped with the processing of bookings, and the staff at St Michael's College went out of their way to provide the warm welcome for which the symposium is renowned.

The guiding theme for the symposium was 'narrative'. Of the many papers that were proposed under this theme, 15 were selected for presentation, and the academic standard—of the papers themselves, and of the discussions that followed them—was very high. Keynote lectures were delivered by Phyllis Granoff of Yale University and Rupert Gethin of the University of Bristol, and the after-dinner paper on the first evening was given by James Laine of Macalester College. Many of the papers have been or will be published elsewhere, but this issue of *Religions of South Asia* contains four articles that between them provide a flavour of the symposium and touch on many of the issues that recurred across it. They have been revised by the authors in the light

of discussion at the symposium, and in response to comments by our anonymous reviewers.

Phyllis Granoff's article, 'Narrating Conversion: Some Reflections on Buddhist and Jain Stories', acknowledges that Buddhism and Jainism were missionary religions, and analyses their stories about the process and methods of conversion. In Buddhist texts, the missionary initiative is traced in particular to the third Buddhist council, with the Sri Lankan chronicles giving details of which monks were sent to which regions, and mentioning particular *sutta*s whose recitation is said to have been effective in converting particular communities. Granoff focuses upon these particular *sutta*s, suggesting that in many cases it is unlikely that populations would have been converted by them. She argues that such recitations run contrary to advice given in other texts about how Buddhist monks should address lay audiences, and also contrary to other famous conversion stories in which the Buddha used simple, accessible, relatively non-doctrinal sermons. Granoff argues that the conversion narratives in the Sri Lankan chronicles are products of a development that sought to stress the importance of canonical texts. In Śvetāmbara Jain texts, in contrast, the conversion narratives describe lay audiences being converted by simple, direct sermons, with complex doctrinal matters being reserved for the monks.

James Laine's article, 'Narrating Shivaji the Great', begins by mentioning recent philosophical investigations of different kinds of autobiographical narrative, and questioning the extent to which an autobiographical narrative has to be coherent or consistent. Laine then moves on to discuss 'cracks' in the biographical and hagiographical narrative of the seventeenth-century Maratha hero Shivaji as presented in the *Śivabhārata* of Kavīndra Paramānanda. Particular attention is paid to the *Śivabhārata*'s account of the conflict between Shivaji's father Shahji and the latter's father-in-law Jadhavrao, which culminates in Shahji's move to the south to work for the Adil Shah. The *Śivabhārata* presents the conflict as the outcome of a tragic accident, and the rapport between Shahji and the Adil Shah as a result of divine intervention; but Laine supplements these narrative explanations with political ones by filling in the historical context, and also with personal ones by speculating about the relationship between Shivaji's parents. In the final part of the article, Laine describes the controversy that ensued when he made similar speculations in print in 2003, and explains it in terms of a conflict between Marathas and brahmins over the interpretation of Shivaji's biography.

Saswati Sengupta and Sharmila Purkayastha's article, 'Of Famines and Females: The Politics of Lakṣmī Bratakathās of Bengal', explores a genre of Bengali verse narratives dedicated to Lakṣmī, the Hindu goddess of plenty, and associated with specific *vrata*s (religious undertakings) undertaken in particular by married women. Sengupta and Purkayastha begin by contextualizing these narratives within the high-class patriarchal ideal of the good wife, which was particularly important to the new middle class under British

colonial rule; and they go on to situate them also within the context of the great Bengal famine of 1769–70, in which a third of the Bengali population died. The narrative presented in these Bratakathās is one in which Lakṣmī explains the people's suffering as a result of the neglect of Sanskrit-traditional wifely duties and virtues by women influenced by English education and culture—women associated with what Sengupta and Purkayastha call the ideal of the 'new woman'. Analysing the intersection of colonial politics, Brahmanical sociology, and patriarchal ideology at a particular place and time, this thought-provoking article attempts to explain why the Lakṣmī of the Bratakathā narratives seems to blame victims for their own fate.

This issue's final article, by Noor van Brussel, is entitled 'Revenge, Hatred, Love, and Regret: The Use of Narrative Empathy in a Regional Purāṇa'. It discusses the Sanskrit *Bhadrakālīmāhātmya*, which presents a version of the Keralan myth of the defeat of the demon Dārika by the goddess Bhadrakālī. After introducing the myth and its textualization within the *Bhadrakālīmāhātmya*—a text which, typically for a regional Purāṇa, is intertextual to a high degree—van Brussel analyses the text's presentation of the demon. She shows that he is depicted in the round, with attention to his background and motives, such that his behaviour is explicable and the audience might empathize with him. She then reviews Western and Indian literary-theoretical explorations of the idea of narrative empathy, details some techniques that authors (and/or audiences) typically employ in their attempts to activate empathetic response, and describes the techniques that the *Bhadrakālīmāhātmya* uses in this regard: defamiliarization, foregrounding, and direct dialogue. In the final section of the article, van Brussel explains, from several different angles (including the devotional), *why* the text presents the demon in such a fashion that the audience might empathize with him.

The issue concludes, as usual, with a handful of reviews of recently published books. These are not necessarily aligned with the theme of 'narrative'. Bringing reviews of books on one particular theme together in one issue would involve delaying the publication of reviews, which is something we don't want to do.