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Editorial

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This edition of *Religions of South Asia* fulfils the hopes of its founding editors in providing a platform for scholarly articles from very different methodological and interdisciplinary perspectives. The articles included here reveal the vibrancy and dynamism of South Asian religious traditions both past and present, and offer fine examples of textual analysis, historical commentary, postcolonial inter-religious encounter, and a dialogic approach to an increasingly polemical, and sometimes violent, debate among opposing sections of Indian society. Two of the articles relate principally to the Hindu tradition. One explores the development in the early texts of the relationship between pilgrimage to sacred places (*tīrtha*) and the performance of rituals in honour of the ancestors (*śrāddha*); the other considers the position of Hindu sacred cows caught in the cross-fire of political debate in contemporary India. The other two articles focus on the confluence of religious cultures in premodern and contemporary Sri Lanka. The first explores how mediaeval Sinhala poets appropriate cosmopolitan Sanskritic norms while asserting a sense of cultural difference. The second considers how, and whether, Christian participation in, and respect for, Buddhist performative rituals, liturgy and arts can transform and erase the Buddhist mistrust of Christianity stemming from Sri Lanka's colonial past.

The first article, 'Early Gayā: The Emergence of *Tīrthaśrāddha*', analyses the emerging interest in *tīrtha* in the *dharmaśāstra* literature, and the references to *tīrthaśrāddha* and Gayā found in the earliest Brahmanical *dharma* texts.

Matthew R. Sayers focuses on what he calls the Early Gayā Period, explaining that this is characterized by the first efforts to integrate practices at *tīrtha*s into the Brahmanical discourse, and by the earliest Brahmanical references to Gayā. He notes that despite the vast literature on pilgrimage there are only stray references to pilgrimage to a sacred place until the 'brahmanized' *Mahābhārata*. It then appears as a fully developed tradition. The author describes the earliest stages of the Brahmanical reaction to these non-Vedic pilgrimage traditions, suggesting that it is best understood as an effort to appropriate such practices by incorporating them into the *dharmaśāstra* tradition, thereby legitimating them. Advocacy for the performance of *śrāddha* at the *tīrtha* at Gayā and the 'brahmanization' of *tīrtha and tīrthaśrāddha* are therefore a part of the wider integration of the Brahmanical and non-Vedic traditions taking place in the transition from Vedic modes of religiosity to those of Classical Hinduism.

The article by Stephen C. Berkwitz, 'Sinhala Buddhist Appropriations of Indic Cultural Forms: Literary Imitations and Conquests', is a fascinating exploration of the ways in which Sinhala Buddhist poets and writers were able to use the Sinhala language and their affiliation to Buddhism to their advantage, and to assert a sense of cultural difference that aimed to rival the prestigious Sankritic culture of their far grander neighbour. By examining the use of Sinhala—which unlike Sanskrit is both a literary language and a vernacular—and the character of Sinhala praise poetry and messenger poetry, Berkwitz is able to show how medieval Sri Lankan writers appropriated the literary and religious cultures of the neighbouring subcontinent while preserving their distinct religious and cultural identity.

He shows that this selective appropriation and transformation helped to prevent Sri Lanka from being wholly subsumed within the Indic cultural sphere, and also enhanced the statures of local rulers and poets. This discussion of a mediaeval encounter has relevance for scholars researching the contemporary cultural influences of dominant civilizations upon their regional neighbours and the ambivalence and resistance that often results. This is a beautifully told narrative of how a small neighbour can appropriate the cultural riches of a larger neighbour but in so doing twist the story to their own advantage. The reader may be reminded of the encounter of the Gruffalo with the little brown mouse in the deep dark wood.

Elizabeth J. Harris's article, 'Art, Liturgy and the Transformation of Memory: Christian Rapprochement with Buddhism in Post-Independence Sri Lanka', also focuses on dialogue; but this time between an ecumenical group of Sri Lankan Christians and Sri Lankan Buddhists. The author notes that the Sri Lankan Buddhists' early model of inter-religious encounter was based on courtesy and respect, but this was damaged and almost destroyed by missionary attitudes as the nineteenth century progressed. A small number of Christians sought to transform this hostility and mistrust by engaging in the performative worlds of Sri Lankan Buddhism, which included poetry,

liturgy, art, drama and ritual. Elizabeth Harris discusses in turn the distinctive approaches of four men who committed themselves to this Christian–Buddhist rapprochement: Yohan Devananda, Vijaya Vidyasagara, Michael Rodrigo OMI, and Aloysius Pieris SJ. The article develops into a compelling discussion of whether the performative (in this case inter-religious practice) proved transformative. The author's conclusion is nuanced. The Buddhist monks and laity were able to reclaim their original model of interfaith encounter. On the other hand, in Sri Lanka mistrust between Buddhists and Christians remains high. What is particularly interesting and thought-provoking about this article is the author's decision to privilege the performative and show us the importance of ideas of shared practice and inter-riting, ideas which are often treated as secondary to questions of theology and belief.

Deborah Nadal, in 'Cows Caught in the Crossfire: Provisional Remarks on India's Current Cow-Slaughter Debate', offers a historical overview of the cow's symbolic development from its status within the Vedic period until today, tracing briefly the gradual development of the inviolability of the cow, the Brahmanical abandonment of cow slaughter and beef eating, and the cow protection movements. However, the main focus of her article is the public debate today (particularly in the virtual or social media) between cow protectors and those from Muslim, Christian and Dalit communities who have political, religious and economic reasons for opposing cow protection. The author adopts what she calls a dialogic approach in setting out the views and opinions of all sides on the sensitive subjects of beef consumption, the slaughtering of cows, and their role as religious icons. There is, of course, an extensive literature on the sanctity of cattle in Hindu religion and culture, particularly in the wake of Dwijendra Narayan Jha's 2001 book *Holy Cow: Beef in Indian Dietary Traditions*. However, the original contribution that Deborah Nadal makes is to explore the current passionate and often fiery debates between rightwing nationalist political parties and those who are protesting against the increasing severity of the anti-slaughter laws and spiritual and dietary fascism.