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Editorial

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We apologize for the late arrival of this issue, which should have been ready before the end of last year. *RoSA* has been running behind schedule, but we hope to catch up in the course of 2010 and early 2011. In doing so, we have been greatly helped by the cooperation of Brian Black. As guest editor of Volume 3, No. 1, he took on the work of assembling, assessing and editing the articles, and prepared a coherent yet varied collection on the relationship between Brahmanism and Buddhism, arising from a panel on this subject at the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Atlanta in June 2008. We are grateful for the opportunity to publish such an important collection, and look forward to collaborating with other guest editors in the near future.

Five of the six articles in the present issue were papers given at the Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions in March 2009, and reflect the Symposium's multiple interest in South Asian religious traditions, and in the scholarly approaches and methods used in their study. All, in their different ways, relate current or relatively recent concerns and controversies to the South Asian textual traditions on which they draw. Three of them testify to the pervasive presence of the Rāma story, especially in Tulsī Dās's version: as a source for a radical assertion of equality (Vanita); as a cultural and religious monument and a paradigm of the experience of exile (Rohatgi); and as an authority for patriarchy and misogyny which also contains material for challenging them (Bradley and Tomalin).

The keynote address at the 2009 Symposium was given by Ruth Vanita, who emphasizes the ethical, social and political concerns which both motivate the study of South Asian religions and are provoked by it. Using the figure of the disabled sage Ashtavakra, and the textual traditions associated with him, she explores the possibilities within Hinduism for an inclusive ethical stance

which disregards gender, disability and sexual orientation. Overtly following the example of recent attempts at radical reinterpretation within the Christian tradition which point in the same direction, she argues from within the Hindu tradition, and cites Hindu authorities, both textual and personal.

James Hegarty takes up the many recent critiques of religious labels and boundaries, such as 'Hinduism' and 'Sikhism', but suggests that these critiques have been excessively concerned with words, especially English words. Drawing on the textual work of the late Hew McLeod, and taking it further, he shows how hagiography is used in the demarcation of communities and the assertion of their claims, independently of verbal labels. Looking further into the past, Catherine Robinson examines the Victorian translator Edwin Arnold's claims as an interpreter of ancient Indian textual traditions, in relation to both the scholarship and the popular taste of his time, and to his own religious and political positions. In doing so, she also considers the usefulness and limitations of the Saidian critique of Orientalism, as well as Arnold's attempts to reinterpret and even remodel a tradition to which he remains an outsider. Rashi Rohatgi's article, the only one in this issue that deals with a diasporic community, is concerned with a very different poetic evocation of ancient India. She discusses a contemporary Mauritian writer, dealing with his use of the Hindi literary tradition, and the political and sociolinguistic implications of his choice of language. By referring to African as well as Indian literature, and relating the ancestral experience of indentured labour to that of slavery (from which it differed little), she illuminates the complexities arising from the multi-ethnic population of Mauritius, its shifting colonial and postcolonial history, and its position on the margin of the Indian ocean and of the African continent.

While George Pati's article does not arise from the Spalding Symposium, it is welcome as a contribution from abroad, and like the other articles it has both ethical and textual concerns. Drawing on his own fieldwork, he describes the *kaḷari* tradition of Kerala, which from a modern and alien point of view can be classed as either martial arts or alternative medicine. He shows how commercial considerations, including the tourist trade, have recently led it to be presented without reference to the textual and religious background which he considers essential to a true understanding of it. His discussion is informed by modern studies of South Asian views of the body, and of the place of *kaḷari* in the cultural and political history of Kerala. Tamsin Bradley and Emma Tomalin also present a field study, on the position of women in Rajasthan. Since their work, as part of the Dowry Project established in 1995, is driven by a concern for justice, they criticize not only academic assumptions but those influencing political, social and legal action. Firstly, they show the need to look beyond dowry to other aspects of gender relations—a need which, as they show, has long been recognized within the Dowry Project itself. Secondly, they argue that religion has too often been seen solely as part of the problem, as a means of oppression or as a source of false comfort, and not as a

resource on which women can draw for support. To show this positive aspect of religion, they give examples of the use of textual traditions by the women they have worked with. In a different way from Ruth Vanita, these women radically reinterpret the tradition from within, and rebut the objection that ideas of gender equality are an alien importation.

We are already working on Volume 4 No. 1, and look forward to passing it to the staff of Equinox for their expert attention.