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Editorial

SIMON BRODBECK
Cardiff University
CF10 3EU
brodbecksp@cardiff.ac.uk

DERMOT KILLINGLEY
Newcastle University
NE1 7RU
d.h.killingley@ncl.ac.uk

ANNA KING
University of Winchester
SO22 4NR
anna.king@winchester.ac.uk

The five articles in this issue of *RoSA* are as varied in subject as ever. They have reached us from Poland and Turkey, as well as from the UK; we are glad to find that the Web allows us to communicate easily with authors wherever they are. We are grateful to these authors for submitting their articles, and for their co-operation in revising them for publication.

Laxshmi Greaves describes a number of terracotta panels representing scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, some with brief Brāhmī inscriptions, and showing a unity of style, material, and size—each is around a foot high. While these panels are now in various museums and private collections, in India, the USA and Canada, she argues that they have all come from one site in Katingara, Uttar Pradesh, and were made in the fifth century CE, for one or perhaps two temples. The absence of records of find spots, and the fact that the best-preserved pieces are in Europe or North America, while the Gurukul Museum in India has fragments or damaged panels, point to ethical, legal and economic issues which Greaves raises. But her main aim here is to reassemble the panels, in a virtual way, describing their iconography and artistic quality, and their relation to the *Rāmāyaṇa*. She also wishes to 'place Katingara on the map, as it were'; if this does happen, the same economic forces which separated the corpus may lead to the appearance on the market of yet more examples, in mint condition.

Another ancient epic, the Tamil *Cilappatikāram*, is the subject of Dinesh Ramoo's article. He applies to it the theory of the epic hero which Joseph Campbell developed in his many books from 1949 onwards. Campbell held that all heroic stories are variants of a common structure which he called the monomyth; and Ramoo analyses the *Cilappatikāram* in detail in terms of this structure. While the hero of the story, in terms of Tamil literary theory, is the husband Kōvalaṉ, it is his wife Kaṇṇaki who is the most morally powerful figure, and it is she who is deified—as Māriyamman—and who moves between two worlds. It is she, therefore, who fits the structure laid out by Campbell for a hero; Campbell himself admitted women and goddesses to this category. Her heroism, however, belongs to a male-dominated moral world, in which a woman's supreme virtue is her submission to her husband. Ramoo acknowledges the problems involved in applying a universal theory to all the stories in the world; and he does not allow it to prevent him from discussing the place of the *Cilappatikāram* in Tamil and wider culture.

Feminine power in a male-dominated world appears in a different form in Robert Czyżykowski's study of the place of the Tantric concept of *kuṇḍalinī* in the Sahajiyā tradition of Bengali Vaiṣṇavism, known mainly from the seventeenth century onwards. Sahajiyā remains, as Shashibhusan Dasgupta called it over seventy years ago, an 'obscure religious cult'; and, as Czyżykowski points out, while the name Sahajiyā is commonly used by Dasgupta and other specialists, its followers did not usually use it to identify themselves. While this tradition is mainly known for its emphasis on the erotic aspects of the Kṛṣṇa story, it also uses many ideas about the body found in Yoga and Tantra. Among these is the *kuṇḍalinī*: the serpentine or coiled feminine power that dwells in the lower body. With the caution required by the sparsity of the evidence, Czyżykowski considers the relation between the *kuṇḍalinī* and another feminine figure, Gandhakāli, and between Sahajiyā and Yoga, Tantra and Buddhist texts.

One of the most famous locations of the feminine in South Asia is the *śākta-pīṭha* of Kāmākhyā in Assam, whose myth of origin, studied by Paolo Rosati in *RoSA* 10.3, combines the erotic and the violent. In the present issue, Mikel Burley observes the annual festival of Kāmākhyā, at which men possessed by the goddess—whose identity is typically fluid, as Kāmākhyā, Satī, Manasā, Bhairavī or another—dance on swords, drink goats' blood, and bite off the heads of pigeons. To understand these phenomena, Burley invokes the idea of the grotesque which Mikhail Bakhtin examined in his study of Rabelais—taking a theory developed in one culture for the understanding of another, and applying it to a third with illuminating results, rather as Ramoo does with Campbell. The term 'grotesque', derived, as Burley explains, from the Italian *grotto,* is particularly appropriate since the centre of holiness in Kāmākhyā is an underground cavern in which the yoni of the goddess is to be seen.

A very different kind of femininity appears in Eleanor Nesbitt's survey of the Western, mainly British, women who have observed and written about

Sikhs from the early nineteenth century onwards. The feminine which these women embodied was not always free from violence of a kind: one of them delights in violating sanctity with her leather soles. Nesbitt remarks that it is only her most recent writer, J. K. Rowling, who has been publicly criticized or condemned by Sikhs; but that may be because the Web and the vogue for instant public condemnation did not exist previously. Since she herself, though in different ways, has observed and written about Sikhs, Nesbitt sees herself as an ethnographer of these women writers. Insofar as to read sensitively is to participate, she is even a participant observer. Many were connected, by marriage or consanguinity, with the colonial power, such as the vicereine Lady Dufferin; but, as Nesbitt notes, they 'were free from the constraints of needing to please employers'. Most, however, were Christians who understood their faith as the opposite of 'idolatry'; they viewed Sikhs as people who had rejected idolatry, or failed to reject it.

Here, then, are Sītā, Kaṇṇaki, the *kuṇḍalinī*, Satī, and Lady Dufferin: a varied collection of feminine figures in South Asia, ancient and modern, northern and southern, indigenous and foreign, grotesque and averse to idolatry.