

Editorial

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This issue of *Religions of South Asia* consists of papers that were presented at the 44th annual Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions, held on 12–14 April 2019 at the Storey Institute, Lancaster. The symposium was organized by Naomi Appleton and Brian Black, under the general theme of *gender*. Sixteen papers were presented, five of which have been reworked for this issue, which shares the general theme of the symposium.

We are delighted to be publishing another collection of papers from the annual Spalding Symposium, as that is one of the founding purposes of this journal. We are also delighted to be publishing an issue under the general theme of gender, which was for too long neglected or ignored. Despite this neglect, and largely through the work of pioneering women scholars, gender studies and feminist perspectives have featured in many degree programmes in religious studies, sociology and social anthropology, and have inspired and informed advances in research in these areas. In recent decades, gender has moved from being a topic pursued usually by women, and about which some scholars were rather haughty, to being widely acknowledged as a key theme in our research area, and one that scholars of any gender ignore or sideline at their peril. The five articles presented here are too small a sample to indicate a trend, but we do notice that most of them are by scholars at comparatively early stages of their careers, suggesting that study of gender in South Asian religions is increasingly prevalent. Two of the contributors work in the UK,

two in Italy, and one in Israel. The five articles explore gender in a variety of religious contexts and historical periods, and, for want of any more pressing organizing principle, they are presented here in approximate chronological order of their subject matter.

Simon Brodbeck's article explores 'Patrilocality in the *Harivaṃśa*'s *Viṣṇu-parvan*'. The *Harivaṃśa* is the last part of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, and its central and longest book, the *Viṣṇu-parvan*, focuses on the life and deeds of Kṛṣṇa. On the basis of a narrative survey, Brodbeck argues that the theme of patrilocality—the tendency for children to grow up where their father is from, and thus for a couple to settle where the man is from—is a key theme of the *Viṣṇu-parvan*, and that Kṛṣṇa and his brother Baladeva champion and enforce a patrilocal custom, often with the use of violence. This argument is framed by brief discussion of the gendered asymmetry of human reproduction, and of the context that recent discoveries in historical genetics can provide for our interpretation of this textual source.

The second article, by Ruth Westoby, is entitled 'Raising *Rajas* in Haṭhayoga and Beyond'. It focuses on *rajas*, which in Haṭhayoga is usually conceptualized as a feminine fluid, sometimes in the form of menstrual discharge, that *yogins* may retain, take in or manipulate. Westoby emphasizes the elasticity of the concept, and illustrates it by presenting a detailed survey of *rajas* as it occurs in fifteen different Haṭhayoga texts—often in the context of *vajrolimudrā*, the practice of drawing fluids up the urethra. After delineating the idea of *rajas* in Haṭhayoga, Westoby compares it with *rajas* in Āyurveda, and then with certain ideas in the Daoist tradition of 'inner alchemy'. On the basis of the latter comparison, the article suggests that some *yoginīs* may have sought to stop themselves menstruating.

At the heart of this issue is Paolo Rosati's nicely illustrated article, 'The *Yoni* of Kāmākhyā: The Intersection of Power and Gender in its Mythology'. The *yonī* in question is the Kāmākhyā-*pīṭha* in present-day Assam, a site which has been researched from various angles in recent years, through articles by Rosati in *RoSA* 10.3 ('The *Yoni* Cult at Kāmākhyā: Its Cross-Cultural Roots'), by Mikel Burley in *RoSA* 12.2 ('Dance of the Deodhās: Divine Possession, Blood Sacrifice and the Grotesque Body in Assamese Goddess Worship') and, alongside Rosati's paper at the Lancaster Spalding Symposium, by Sundari Johansen Hurwitt's paper 'The Goddess and her Shadow: Gender, Menstruation, Purity, and Power in Kumārī Worship in Assam'. In the article published here, Rosati discusses 'the evolution of the *yonī* symbol and its related cult' against the backdrop of his fieldwork and the available textual sources (such as the eleventh-century *Kālikāpurāṇa* and the fifteenth- or sixteenth-century *Yoginītantra* and *Yonitantra*), and in relation to paragen-dered possibilities in modern theory. Rosati shows how the Kāmākhyā *yonī* cult was Brahmanized through the Purāṇic myth of the goddess Satī, and he expands upon its vision of pansexual cosmogonic energy in terms of desire,

power and gender: the Goddess 'is constrained in the artificial construction of the female category'.

The next article, by Ofer Peres, is entitled 'Who by Fire: Models of Ideal Femininity in Pre-Modern Tamil Literature'. It discusses Ayyam-perumāl's sixteenth-century *Purūrava-caritai*, an account of the adventures of King Purūravas. In Vedic sources and various Purāṇas, Purūravas is the lover of his long-lost *apsaras* Urvaśī, but this Tamil version adds a new portion of his biography in which Purūravas has other, human wives, one of whom he loses, and when he finds her again she walks through fire to show she was faithful while they were apart. Peres carefully contextualizes the *Purūrava-caritai*'s various parts, and then compares its climactic fire-walking incident with Sītā's 'trial by fire' in the Rāmāyaṇas of Vālmīki and Kampaṇ, showing how it critiques Sītā's divine femininity.

The fifth and final article, by Annalisa Bocchetti, is entitled 'Gender Constructions in the Theological Dimension of the Sūfī *Premākhyāns*: Sūfī Politics of Representation in the *Citrāvalī* by Usmān'. The *Citrāvalī* was written in the Avadhī language early in the seventeenth century, and follows an Islamic narrative tradition of romance that is also theological allegory. In the *Citrāvalī*, on one level erotic union stands for mystical union, with the hero as human seeker and the heroine as God. The article discusses how and why the poet adapts the Islamic narrative form in light of the Hindu narrative and social traditions prevailing in the local milieu, with fascinating implications for the specific gendering of both main characters.

Among other things, this final article can serve to remind us that 'Islamic' and 'Hindu' are generalizations just as 'Sanskritic' and 'folk' are, and just as 'male' and 'female' are, and that religious, romantic or erotic realities and fantasies are always improvised out of initially fluid materials.