Editorial

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Following our special issue on Mīmāṃsā, guest-edited by Elisa Freschi (*RoSA* 17.1), we return to a general issue which spreads in time from the earliest Vedic period to the present. Indeed, each of the first two articles extends almost throughout recorded time.

In 'Gāyatrī in the Modern Era: Ritual Innovation and Universalization of a Mantra', Neil Dalal surveys the history of the Vedic verse commonly known as the Gāyatrī mantra from its metre, or more precisely as the Sāvitrī mantra from the sun god to which it is addressed. Since it occurs first as *Ṛg Veda* 3.62.10, this mantra is more ancient than can be reliably calculated, or, according to traditional understanding of the Veda, actually eternal; but its use has a history that can be traced through the *sūtra* and Dharmaśāstra literature, through the activities of Vivekānanda and others in the nineteenth century, to the present. The most notable change which Dalal traces is from its use as the mark of an exclusive class, distinguished by ancestry, gender and initiation, to its use as an inclusive device to incorporate hitherto excluded people into an all-embracing Hindu community. The mantra has been legally judged to be not religious but secular—using these words in a distinctively Indian sense.

In 'Freedom from the World and Freedom in the Worlds: Some Vedic Concepts of Salvation', Dermot Killingley also draws on sources from the Ṛgvedic hymns to the recent past. His article, exploring the linguistic and interpretive difficulties posed by *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.4, falls within a long-standing and well-established Sanskrit subfield of detailed exploration

into early religious texts, in this case the Upaniṣads. He presents an elegant and convincing solution to a textual problem that has long puzzled scholars of the Upaniṣads, and in so doing also makes a significant contribution to our understanding of Vedic and late Vedic conceptions of life after death, as well as the role of the body in Vedic religion. Through careful analysis of a single difficult Sanskrit verse, Killingley opens up new ways of thinking about embodiment and religion in ancient India, while weaving together primary text, traditional commentary (Śaṅkara, Madhva, and the like), interpretation from nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Indian thinkers—Rammohun Roy and S. Radhakrishnan—and various Sanskritists' academic discourse.

The other three articles examine post-Vedic texts of various periods. 'Viṣṇu's Cakra as Narrative Weapon in the *Skandapurāṇa*', by Sanne Dokter-Mersch, is one of a series of articles by participants in a research project on this sixth- or seventh-century Purāṇa, initiated in the 1990s by Rob Adriaensen, Hans T. Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, and based in the University of Leiden. As well as establishing a critical edition, which is still in progress, with the parts so far published available online, the project aims to situate the text in its historical context, and Dokter-Mersch's study contributes to this aim. She shows how exploits and attributes of Viṣṇu, known from Vedic and other sources, are retold in this Śaiva Purāṇa in such a way that the glory is due not to Viṣṇu but to Śiva. The retelling is described in terms of 'narrative consistency', whereby a new narration retains elements from previous narrations—in this case, those which glorify Viṣṇu—while introducing new elements, in this case glorifying Śiva.

Moving on a thousand years, 'Vernacularizing Jainism: The *Dharmaparīkṣā* by Manohardās' by Heleen De Jonckheere also examines how older material is presented in a new context—this time within a particular tradition, rather than transferring material from one tradition to another. The *Dharmaparīkṣā*, or *Dharmaparīkṣā Bhāṣā*, is a seventeenth-century vernacular rendering (*bhāṣā*) of the *Dharmaparīkṣā* of Amitagati, an eleventh-century Jain text in Sanskrit which ridicules the claims of brahmins. In this rendering, the process of vernacularization is not just a matter of language, but of cultural setting; for instance, it involves 'transform[ing] Pāṭaliputra from a city of *śāstra* into a city of *bhakti*'. In emphasizing the inexpressibility of the experience of the Self, the text alludes to purāṇic and epic stories to show the danger of reliance on words; and it relates Jain doctrines to the everyday experience of lay Jains engaged in trade.

Also from the seventeenth century, but from a very different environment, is the text examined, together with others, in 'Alchemical Metaphors and Their Yogic Interpretations in Selected Passages of the Tamil *Siddha* Literature' by Ilona Kȩdzia-Warych. This cryptic literature concerns not everyday experience but unusual experience, of a kind in which alchemy overlaps with yoga. Kȩdzia-Warych examines the ambiguities and word-play

with which the writers evoke yogic concepts while appearing to give instructions for alchemical procedures. Gold, as the product of such procedures, may stand for yogic perfection or immortality; *nātu* may mean sound (Skt. *nāda*), or sulphur. Such ambiguities are not only a literary feature of the texts, but serve to show the elusive nature of matter in the *siddhar*s' thought.

All these articles include references to texts in Sanskrit, Tamil and other Indian languages, as well as to publications in various modern languages. *RoSA* uses bracketed references, reserving footnotes for matter which is relevant to the argument, but which would interrupt or confuse it if it were included in the main text. Bracketed references typically consist of author, date and (where appropriate) page number(s)—what is often called the Harvard system, though that is only one version of it. Author-and-date references work for most publications from the nineteenth century onwards; but many of the texts studied in *RoSA* have no date, or no author, or neither. (The same is often true of websites, which did not exist when the author-and-date system was devised.) In some cases, a text that existed first in manuscript or orally can be listed and referenced by the editor and date of a printed edition, as in Kędzia-Warych's article; or by the author of the text and the date of the (much later) edition used, as in De Jonckheere's. Another solution is to list such texts separately under their titles, often under the heading 'Primary sources', while the kind of publications that have authors and dates are listed as 'Secondary sources'. This is the convention followed by Dokter-Mersch; in some cases the same publication appears in both lists, because it includes both the Sanskrit text and the editor's introduction and other material. In this case the distinction of 'primary' and 'secondary' is useful and commonly understood; but it implies a clear divide between scholars and the material which they study. In Killingley's article, where the works of modern scholars are themselves objects of study, this divide is particularly inappropriate; accordingly, the two lists are headed 'Ancient Sources' and 'Modern Sources'—a division which itself may be questionable. Where there are two lists, however they are headed, the form of the references should make it clear which list to look in. Above all, the concern is to help the reader, not to set puzzles; and different systems may be appropriate for different articles.