

Special Lectures

Jon SOLOMON: "Translating Enlightenment: Towards a transcultural meaning of Enlightenment."

This lecture proposes to explore a transcultural meaning of "Enlightenment" through an encounter between Madhyamaka Buddhism and contemporary critiques of Kantianism inspired by Object-Oriented Ontology. The concept of "translation-as-Enlightenment" in relation to the affective multitude of existence is explained in relation to ideas about causality, compassion, translation, aesthetics, epistemology and politics.

Keywords: aesthetic causality, Steven Shaviro, Timothy Morton, Madhyamaka, Nagarjuna, Immanuel Kant, translation, Naoki Sakai, Gilbert Simondon, Michel Foucault, Enlightenment.

Naomi APPLETON: "Jataka Stories as Indian Literature."

This lecture explores the early history of the jātaka genre and its relation to other bodies of Indian literature. It asks to what extent a jātaka can be defined, how jātakas functioned within early Buddhist communities, and how their particular generic conventions allowed for both distinctively Buddhist perspectives and the inclusion of wider Indian narrative motifs. The relationship between jātaka literature and other early Indian narrative texts, such as Jain scriptures and the Hindu Mahābhārata, will also be explored.

Neekee CHATURVEDI: "Recovering the Repressed, their Oppression and Coping Strategies through the *Jātaka* Tales."

The *Jātakas* are a valuable resource for reconstructing various aspects of everyday lives of ordinary people. They also touch upon aspects of their relations with the elite, the repression that they had to suffer and the strategies they devised to cope with a society marked by deep differences based on caste, class and gender. The various forms of subordination, aggravated by oppressive factors of political power, patriarchal mindset and vulnerability of groups like the aged, form the focus of this study. The *Jātaka* tales have descriptions of everyday lives from different angles and they non-deliberately bring out various forms of repression that plagued the Indian society. Very rarely do we see the marginalized groups breaking out into an open, unified, organized struggle. Their efforts do not reflect class consciousness nor are they aimed at subverting the mechanism of exploitation. They have modest intentions of "working the system...to their minimum disadvantage." Bringing disrepute to the king, malicious gossips about the powerful, resorting to concealing lower status, garnering public support, fleeing the villages to evade exorbitant taxes are some of the subtle strategies that emerged as "the truly durable weapons."

Elizabeth DAHAB: "The Rebirth of Ganesh in VS Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*."

Ganesh, the God with an elephant head worshipped by a number of Buddhists under a variety of names, such as Ganesha, Vinayaka, and Phra Pikanet, is associated with overcoming obstacles. He is also the deity of grace, and prosperity. The affinity Buddhism has with Ganesh is well documented, and his association with potentials of rebirth and success is the backbone of Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*, where the protagonist named Ganesh, evolves under the auspices of his namesake through trials and tribulations that eventually catapult him to fame, success, and, ultimately, politics. Ganesh-the-protagonist is reinvented and reborn,

first as schoolmaster, then as writer, as pundit, and finally as statesman. It is under the providence of Ganesh the God that the protagonist's work as a professional healer brings him to the act of writing, and to fame.

This paper addresses the poetics of rebirth under the mantle of the allegory behind the myth of Ganesh, guardian of his mother's door. When Ganesh becomes a celebrated figure in Trinidad, Ganesh's wife commissions "two stone elephants" to be built on the roof of his villa. A wink towards one of the gifts received by the god Ganesh, a pen with colored ink, used by him to write the Mahabharata. Ganesh the protagonist finally succeeds through reading and writing, the very gifts accorded by the god Ganesh.

Shruti DAS: "Renaissance of Buddhism, Ambedkar and Dalit Emancipation in India."

The Buddha was born in India of Hindu parents and raised as an upper caste Hindu. Disillusioned by the pain, pathos and ills of society he severed his links with the society and religion of his birth forming and propagating a new way of life altogether, which was non-discriminatory, and doctrinated principles of life, later known as Buddhism., which would help the practitioners to accept the harsh reality they encountered within the dogmatic moralising of Hindu caste system. The practitioners or *Shramans* were recluses, who led a casteless, classless and austere life within and in the fringes of society. The Hindus, while accepting Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu, did not take cognizance of the *Vikshus/Shramans* who were not necessarily from the higher castes of Hindu society. Buddhism never aimed at reforming the Hindu caste system; rather it had a completely different philosophy. The aspect that Babasaheb Ambedkar, the father of Dalit Movement in India and a great statesman, envisioned for the Dalits is emancipation through community and participation. It was felt that emancipation and participation could be possible only through self knowledge and induction into *Sangha* or community. Ambedkar envisioned that Dalit intellectuals should use the community strength and property to build a formidable post-Hindu Buddhist *Sangha* to face challenges towards Dalit empowerment. This is Ambedkar's vision of the renaissance of Buddhism which would show the Dalits a path to regain their human dignity. This paper proposes to look at the Hindu oppression of Dalits and Babasaheb Ambedkar's endeavour, in the early twentieth century, to revive the *Sangha* Doctrine of Buddhism whereby a vision of Dalit emancipation could be ensured.

Keywords: Buddhism, Dalits, Ambedkar, Emancipation, *Sangha*.

Debashree DATTARAY: "Cultural memory and the birth of a nation: Jātakas in the writings of Gandhi and Rabindranath."

The secular tone of the Jātaka tales make them fine examples of the moralistic, aphoristic strain in Indian literature, in which virtue is extolled and vice condemned. Further, the tales present diverse possibilities for human conduct, each leading to different kinds of destiny. The Jātaka tales are not only part of the Buddhist canon, but show a way of life integral to the India's socio-cultural heritage. In the context of twentieth century pre-Independence India, the Jātaka tales articulated the imagination of the populace as it tried to forge symbols for a new nation. Consequently, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore counterbalanced the colonial agenda with a parallel engagement with the repository of cultural memory invested in the Jātakas. According to them, the Jātakas not only reflected the pluralistic geography of the subcontinent, but also helped to reconstruct the past and create meaning for a changing present. This paper would explore how the reception of the Jātaka tales in the twentieth century India thrives on the concepts of plurality and inclusiveness and mobilize the categories of 'caste,' 'class,' 'religion,' 'tradition' and 'modernity' to define alternative understanding of 'individual' and 'community.' Further, through ideas on education, social movements and community involvement as articulated in the writings of Gandhi and

Rabindranath, the Jātakas signify a real, complex trajectory of a nation with its triumphs and failures, strengths and weaknesses, clarities and confusions.

Chris DORSETT & Janaki NAIR: "Revisiting Tantra: contemporary British and Indian responses to the Tantra-oriented songs of Rabindranath Tagore."

In contemporary India the communicative presence of the performing human body continues to be celebrated whether the context is traditional (e.g. sacred rituals and classical dance forms) or a Bollywood film (where historically codified meaning is often emptied out to generate greater visual immediacy and appeal). The persistent significance of embodied meaning in Asian cultures has become an academic growth industry for performance theorists (see George 1999, Zarrilli 2000, Foley 2008, Reeve 2013, Nair 2015) and this paper responds to the expanding intellectual platform by reporting on a current cross-cultural collaboration that explores the transgressive sensuality of tantric divination in relation to present-day India and the UK. The authors, a British artist-curator (Dorsett) and a Kathakali dancer from Kerala (Nair), use their creative practices to engage with the recording history of Tagore's Tantra-oriented 'folk' songs. They utilize mudra (symbolic hand gestures associated across the Indo-Himalayan world with ceremonial/theatrical story-telling and yogic/meditative exercises) to contrast ancient methods of transmitting narratives (i.e. the Jātaka tales) with the unconventional character of the Tantra belief system. This is especially interesting when 'variations, rewritings, and adaptations' of bodily presence are pictured, like Giorgio Agamben's recent philosophic writing on post-history, in both animal and human form.

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Maria-Sabina DRAGA ALEXANDRU: "Jātaka Tales and Kipling's Commitment to India."

According to Peter Morey (in *Fictions of India: Narrative and Power*, 2000), narrative is an important political space and "the story of English language fiction on India is also the story of a struggle around representational politics." In colonial India, fiction undertook the task of history rewriting, but was also a space of encounter – whether complementary or oppositional – between Indo-Anglian and Anglo-Indian writers, who coexisted within the same space of writing in English and proposed different alternatives to official history. One of the most visible British authors of the Raj, Rudyard Kipling, was often accused of upholding imperialist political views, yet his deep emotional attachment to the country of his upbringing is manifest in much of his writing.

This paper will analyze the impact of the Jātaka tales and of the Buddhist background associated with them on Kipling's work, with a particular focus on *Just-So Stories*, which are most directly informed by them. I will argue that the Jātakas underlie Kipling's understanding

of the cultural traditions of India, as well as the dynamic relationship between the empire and its colony, and that they play a crucial role in the world image reflected in his fiction.

Geetha GANAPATHY-DORE: "A Fictional Evaluation of Buddhism in Postcolonial Sri Lanka: Manuka Wijesinghe's Trilogy."

The prolonged ethnic conflict (1983-2009) in Sri Lanka had highlighted the tension between the Sinhala speaking Buddhist majority and the Tamil speaking Hindu minority in postcolonial Sri Lanka. Writers like Michael Ondaatje and Shyam Selvadurai do deal with Sri Lankan politics but through the prism of human rights. The Srilankan born German resident poet, playwright, dancer and actress, Manuka Wijesinghe offers a rather bold, satirical and fictional evaluation of Buddhism in Sri Lankan politics in fiction. Her autobiographical novel *Monsoons and Potholes* (2006) deconstructs the Sri Lankan "obsession with Buddhism" during the 1970/80s. *Theravada Man* (2009), centering on the 'Iskolemahattaya,' a school principal and his wife and school teacher, the 'Iskolehamine,' orchestrates a subtle confrontation of tribal knowledge, Buddhist learning and Western education in a feminist perspective. Manuka Wijesinghe's hybrid narrative published in 2014, *Sinhala Only* refers to the 1956 Act that replaced English as the official language of Sri Lanka and explores the misconceptions of identity caused by this public policy. Wijesinghe looks upon it as a "great diversion" masterminded by the Sri Lankan political elite. This conscious manipulation of religion and language for political ends resulted in violence, symbolic and real. This paper examines Wijesinghe's critical examination of the relevance of Buddhism, her deconstruction of the process of nation building by a focus on educational reforms and her mixing of different literary forms and narrative resources (Jātakas, mythology, epics, tribal customs and stories of the Muslim minority) to defend cultural diversity as the only path to non-violence in contemporary Sri Lanka.

Deborah JENNER: "Could American "tricksters" be Bodhisattvas?"

Ancient Buddhist stories may well have echoes, parallels or even direct inspirations in America from Pueblo Tricksters through Mark Twain and on to New York Dada and to even Obama (?). The role of the outsider who comes to upset and set right a community reveals a universal theme throughout these so varied sources. Their protagonists' shared element of compassion can ultimately lead to self-immolation in order to put an end to the wrongs of their days. This only reinforces the Buddhist perspective of non-attachment to self-existence. The reason they often assume animal characters may well be that it offers them an alibi within increasingly institutionalized traditions. How and why such tales pop up in such diverse civilizations can best be explained through Joseph Campbell's life-long study of mythology. Just what links with India and Buddhism these American tricksters have had will be explored to shed light on this rather appropriately tongue-in-cheek topic.

Anupama MOHAN: "The Paradoxes of Realism: Martin Wickramasinghe and *The Jātakas* in Sinhala Literature."

Martin Wickramasinghe (1890-1976), often called the Bard of Sri Lanka, had a long writing career spanning many decades and was also concerned with the dynamics of the changing village in Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was called until 1972). Along with Ediraweera Sarachandra, Wickramasinghe was at the forefront of literary realism in the 20th century: his book *Landmarks of Sinhalese Literature* (1948) established a pioneering model of criticism for social realism that was to influence several writers for many decades in Sri Lanka. It was a model that tied in with Wickramasinghe's anti-colonial politics and one of the central essays in *Landmarks* was on *The Jātakas* upon which Wickramasinghe drew in order to examine the modes of realistic writing that he felt best represented Ceylonese life and culture. And yet, it

is a curious paradox that, in his own novels, Wickramasinghe never employed the kind of realism he extolled in *The Jātakas*, taking for his own model the psychological realism of European masters, especially the Russians. What explains this paradoxical approach to social realism as a representational mode? Indeed, how does one examine the question of Wickramasinghe's literary style which straddles the European and the Ceylonese? In my paper, I would like to explore Wickramasinghe's own discussion of specific *Jātaka* tales in order to understand what constituted for him the *locus vivendi* of Sinhala literature in the middle of the last century. It is a template that provides a compelling counterpoint to the adaptive examples one finds in India, where *The Jātakas* remained at the peripheries of the question of realism. Instead, in Indian literatures (in English as well as Hindi and Malayalam, two of the more established vernacular languages), realism took on very different functions, and in my paper, I will try to create an orbital reading of these multiple traditions bearing upon the pivotal legacies of *The Jātakas*.

Subhendu MUND: "Travelling Tales: Migration, Translation, Adaptation and Appropriation of the Jātaka Katha."

In his Introduction to the re-issue of *Fables of Bidpai: The Morall Philosophie of Doni*, Sir Thomas North's (1535-1601?) translation of the Italian writer Antonio Francesco Doni's (1513-1574) *The Moral Philosophia* (1552), Joseph Jacobs writes: "The bare description of the "Morall Philosophic of Doni" will suffice to indicate how wide a traveller it had been before it reached these shores. It is the English version of an Italian adaptation of a Spanish translation of a Latin version of a Hebrew translation of an Arabic adaptation of the Pehlevi version of the Indian original. And this enumeration only indicates one of many paths which these fables took to reach Europe' (xi).

The travelling of these tales tells many a tale, because they kept being adapted to various cultures, times and histories. Even in India, believed to be the origin of these tales, there has been a good deal of intertextuality through the overlapping of the stories in different frames.

In my paper I propose to make a study of these migrations, translations, adaptations and appropriations of the Jātaka tales, while chiefly focusing on North's translation of Doni.

Michel NAUMANN: "The Jātakas of non-believers or the accounts of non-believers on the origins of Buddha."

This paper proposes to study some texts which present the Buddha and his vocation from an external point of view. The gaze is sometimes unjust and ill-informed, sometimes noteworthy and sometimes revelatory of unaccustomed aspects of the personality of the founder of Buddhism. I shall take up for discussion, among other texts, the presentations of Buddhism by Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta.

Jayita SENGUPTA: "Buddha in new resurrections: A Comparative Analysis of *The Birth of the Maitreya* and *Buddhas of the Celestial Galler*."

Gautama Buddha has time and again haunted the literary and aesthetic imagination in manifold ways. My intention in this presentation would be to take up two texts: the Bengali modern classic, *The Birth of the Maitreya* by Bani Basu (in English translation by Sipra Bhattacharya, published by Stree, 2004) which could also be categorized as a historiographic metafiction along with some of the narratives of aesthetic imagination in the thangka paintings by a Himalayan artist, Romio Shreshtha in *Buddhas of the Celestial Gallery*, (published by OM Books International, 2011). The former text, reconstructs Buddha, not as a saint *per se*, but more so as a man of impeccable diplomatic skills, whose ambition did not allow him to restrict himself as a mere prince of the Sakya dynasty, but to reign over the world through the principles of his newly founded religion of Buddhism. The second book

includes narratives of Buddha as a celestial figure. The two texts do take their inspiration from the *Maitreya Jātaka*, and reconstruct the ideal of amity in their own ways, resurrecting the image of Buddha differently. The historiographic metafiction foregrounds an awareness of a Buddha, who had control over the nation, had the royal powers of the divine grace to hold the Jambudwipa together, and inspired to affect the minds of the human race beyond its geographical/cultural boundaries. The narratives of the thangkas by Shrestha, with notes by the Buddhist scholar Ian Baker, intrigue us with the history of a syncretic imagination that is at work, as tantric Buddhist paintings. My endeavour in this comparative study of the two different narratives is to unfold the dialogics of a discursive narrative of the Buddha as text himself, appealing to both literary and aesthetic imagination, across time, space and history. Both the texts in their own ways as *recit* and pictorial narrative offer a rich fare for a cultural studies researcher.

Ludmila VOLNÁ: "Devadhamma Jātaka and Rusalka: Water, Sprites, and New Beginnings."

Jātakas as narratives of birth and re-birth are the stories of transformation, changes of identity, different appearances, and also of progress and striving for enlightenment. In *Devadhamma Jātaka* water and associated elements can be analyzed as making these occur for the characters within the story, which is also the case for the story of *Rusalka*, a Czech opera by Antonín Dvořák. Besides this crucial resemblance each of the two narratives presents a human kingdom and its Prince as moving between the kingdom's inflexible power structure and its counterpart, the world of nature, where water and water-sprites, the most significant elements, trigger indeed a radical reshaping of the characters. The paper intends to highlight the ways in which the paradigms behind the imagery of water function in each of these two works, to pinpoint the perceptions common to both as well as to bring to light the imagination structures inherent in the cultures that have respectively produced them.

Nishat ZAIDI: "Partition, Migration and the Quest for Meaning in Times of Moral Crisis: Intizar Husain's Adaptation of Jatakas in his Urdu Short Stories."

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 unleashed an absurd saga of irrational violence and mass migration and altered the civilizational history of South Asia. The fictional oeuvre of Intizar Hussain [1925-2016], one of the greatest Urdu writers, and undoubtedly a world writer, is as enmeshed in the cataclysmic events of the Partition, as his own life was. Born in Dibrugarh, in Uttar Pradesh, Husain migrated to Pakistan in 1947, an event left an indelible mark on his creative self.

Written in the backdrop of the Partition, Intizar Husain's stories are attempts to fathom the meaning of existence and the myriad ways in which external events exert themselves upon existence. Abandoning the linear framework in favour of an elliptical and complex structure, Hussain sails through the three dominant narrative traditions, Indian, Perso-Arabic and Western to tell his tales.

Among the Indian traditions that Intizar Husain draws from, the Jātakas occupy a central strand. At one level, several of Intizar Husain's stories such as "Leaves" [Patte] and "Tortoise" [Kachhwe] are a direct retelling of the Jātakas. These stories provide us with an insight into the current events. The trauma of exile experienced by the author is resonated in the exiled bhikshus. The latent timelessness in the stories allows us to see the here and now in the light of always already there.

But on a broader plane the ethical fabric of the Jātakas permeate the moral universe of Husain's fictional work. Never rattled by the upheavals caused by the wheel of history the Buddha, according to Intizar Hussain, tells stories. His stories, drawn as they are from the experiences of his past lives, together may be called his life-history. But first and foremost

they are stories. All lessons of morality or other elements are purely incidental to them. Like his Buddha, Intizar Husain's stories too are first and foremost stories. Elements of nostalgia, engagements with the vexed and knotted histories of Hindus and Muslims and the understanding of Muslim identity are only one facet of them. Diving into these labyrinths the author hopes to recuperate a world which is not man-centric and which holds possibilities of the good and the moral.

Husain's fiction is also influenced by and enacts the element of circularity that marks the Jātaka tales whereby each tale stands on its own while it also forms a part of chain and 'transcends itself to create some higher meaning.'

My paper will attempt to explore the various ways in which the tapestry of Jātaka tales is interwoven in the fictional fabric of Intizar Hussain and argue that they become a significant tool in the writer's quest for meaning in the time of moral crisis caused by the Partition.