Research Colloquium on Varanasi

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An Intermediate Stage in the Textual Sanctification of Varanasi

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(A-)khaṇḍa Vidyā – Glimpses into Gopīnāth Kavirāj's Writings

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Considerations on Svāmī Dayānanda's and Svāmī Karapātrī's programs

Donnerstag, 11. Juli 2024, 16:00–19:00 Uhr

Philosophiegebäude, Raum Ü 14, Am Hubland, Universität Würzburg

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1. _An Intermediate Stage in the Textual Sanctification of Varanasi_
Olli-Pekka Antero Littunen – PhD candidate at the University of Leiden

Vārāṇasīmāhātmyas are texts expounding on the sanctity of the city of Varanasi. These Sanskrit texts narrate origin stories of specific sacred sites, mention other events which have happened there, praise the deities one may encounter, and mention the results of worship (usually liberation).

A unique compendium of Vārāṇasīmāhātmyas survives in a 12th to 14th century CE palm-leaf manuscript. The manuscript was likely made in the Mithila region, and it is currently in the Kaiser Library in Kathmandu, Nepal. The compendium attributes its texts to various Purāṇas. However, most of these texts are not found in extant Purāṇas at all, and several are attributed to other Purāṇas. Some of them have also seemingly been created by using multiple textual sources, and recontextualized to make them fit the context of Varanasi and Śaivism.

The texts of the compendium may be said to represent an intermediate stage in the textual sanctification of Varanasi, between earlier Vārāṇasīmāhātmyas and the later, more detailed and famous _Kāśīkhaṇḍa_. Through its Purāṇa-attributions which do not match with extant Purāṇas and its patchwork-like texts, the compendium provides a unique perspective to understanding the intertextuality and textual creation of Vārāṇasīmāhātmyas. Additionally, by representing a specific network of sacred sites and their surroundings, the compendium also reflects a part of the historical realities of the people and communities involved in its creation. In this presentation, I will examine two chapters of the compendium, showing their intertextuality and recontextualization.

PhD Project: _The Sanctification of Vārāṇasī_
The sanctification of Vārāṇasī has largely taken place through intertextual, glorificatory Sanskrit texts called _Māhātmya_s, which are found in various _Purāṇa_s ("Primordial Texts"). The voluminous _Kāśīkhaṇḍa_ (14th century CE) has been the most influential _Māhātmya_ about Vārāṇasī to the present day and will be one of the texts central to the research. Another major source is a unique 12th-century CE manuscript from Nepal, which contains a compendium of individual _Māhātmya_s attributed to different _Purāṇa_s. The manuscript will be used to investigate how different teachings and storylines may have provided the basis for the

comprehensive composition of the canonical *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*. Medieval Sanskrit collections (*Nibandha*s), alongside 20th-century Hindi texts, will be used to look into the continuing reception of these storylines.

Through detailed text-critical analysis, translation, and fieldwork, this research will contribute to a nuanced understanding of the development of localized *Purāṇa* narratives and the dynamic intertextuality of the Purāṇic tradition. It will also provide background information regarding how these narratives are used to promote various goals, including the current politicization of a uniquely Hindu Vārāṇasī.

2. *(A-)khaṇḍa Vidyā – Glimpses into Gopīnāth Kavirāj's writings*
Sebastian Samuel Meier – PhD candidate at the University of Zürich

Gopīnāth Kavirāj's work spans his critical-historical writings as an academic and his scholastic writings as a spiritual practitioner (*sādhaka*). After briefly introducing Kavirāj's life, my presentation aims to showcase a few samples from both aspects and offer a brief reflection on their relationship in his life and thinking. By doing so, I will adress the concept of *(a-)khaṇḍa vidyā* and its significance in Kavirāj's work.

PhD Project: *Between Indian and Western Cultures of Knowledge: Life and Work of Gopīnāth Kavirāj (1887-1976).*
Mahāmahopādhyāya (1934), Padmavibhūṣana (1964), and Sahitya Akademi Award (1964), head of the "Sarasvati Bhavan Library" and eventually the director of the "Government Sanskrit College" in Varanasi (now Sampūrnānand Sanskrit University) – these are just a few of the significant milestones in Gopīnāth Kavirāj's academic career. Known in Varanasi as a "walking encyclopedia" he spent most of his life there as a scholar and *sādhaka*. His body of work includes articles published in English and critical editions during his academic career mainly till 1937, as well as numerous scholastic essays primarily in Hindi and Bengali written till the end of 1960. To this day, his name frequently appears in Indological research. For instance, Gerald James Larson mentions his pivotal encounter with the "great Gopīnāth Kavirāj" at two different points. Despite his attributed "greatness" and the importance of his work for the critical-historical study of "Indian Philosophy" and the relevance of his scholarly work for the "modernization of traditional Hinduism", his life and work have received little academic attention.

My research focuses on Kavirāj's academic and scholastic work and the continuity or discontinuity between the two. I also consider Kavirāj's correspondence and the biographical material available in Hindi against the background of the intellectual and cultural milieu of his time. Building on the phenomenon of "religious individualization", which in the colonial context often went hand in hand with the introduction of new knowledge systems, the guiding

question of my work is: How did Gopīnāth Kavirāj, as a "scholar practitioner" translate and convey religious-philosophical content and practices between Indian and Western cultures of knowledge? The sketching of a "spiritual-intellectual profile" of Gopīnāth Kavirāj promises to elucidate an important aspect of 20th-century Indian intellectual and religious history. It provides valuable insights into the interplay between "religious individualization processes" and the introduction of new knowledge systems that accompanied the modernization of "traditional Hinduism". Finally, my research project aims to contribute to (Indian) religious philosophy (monotheism-monism debate), the relationship between philosophy (*ānvīkṣikī*) and religious practice (*sādhanā*), and the relationship between modern science and "mysticism".

3. *Considerations on Svāmī Dayānanda's and Svāmī Karapātrī's programs*
Anna Scarabel – PhD candidate at the University of Heidelberg and wiss. Mitarbeiterin at the University of Würzburg

Svāmī Karapātrī (1907-1982), a prominent 'traditionalist' *sannyāsin* from Varanasi, analysed and critiqued the reformative program of Svāmī Dayānanda (1824-1883), the founder of the Ārya Samāja. Svāmī Dayānanda argued that his own positions and agenda were based on the 'authentic' meanings of the Vedas (*vedārtha*). Yet, according to Svāmī Karapātrī, the founder of the Ārya Samāja did not follow the 'orthodox' Vedic exegetical traditions, but rather emulated early 'Orientalist' scholarships in his search of the 'original' meanings of the Vedas. In my presentation, I will illustrate a few excerpts from Svāmī Karapātrī's *prācīn vedbhāṣy aur ādhunik anusundhān* (*Siddhānt* 1943), where he moved a criticism of early 'Orientalist' scholarships, and then claimed that Svāmī Dayānanda emulated the works of the 'Orientalists', thus undermining his credibility as Vedic scholar and religious figure in India.

PhD Project: *The Night Jasmine of Vedic Meanings. Svāmī Karapātrī and Dayānanda Sarasvatī: two competing discourses on icon worship.*
My PhD examines the intellectual debate on *mūrtipūjā* (icon worship) arising in 19th and 20th century India. In the specific, I look at the 'iconoclasm' of Svāmī Dayānanda (1824-1883), the founder of the Ārya Samāja (1875), and how Svāmī Karapātrī engaged with the positions of Svāmī Dayānanda in relation to *mūrtipūja* (main sources: *Vedārtha Pārijāta* and articles from *Sanmarg* and Siddhānt).

Svāmī Karapātrī (1907–1982) was a *daṇḍi sannyāsin* and scholar who played a relevant role in the religious, social and political society of 20th century India. He was the author of more than 40 books, the founder of two journals (*Sanmarg* and *Siddhānt*) and a political party (*Rām Rājy Pariṣad*). Svāmī Karapātrī was an eclectic ascetic, a rigid and inflexible interpreter and representative of the Śaṅkarian tradition, as well as adapter and uplifter of various aspects of

'Hinduism'. He was a scholar of Sanskrit texts schooled in a traditional manner, but at the same time critically engaging with world literature and thoughts. Although he lived at a later time than the founder of the Ārya Samāja, he challenged Svāmī Dayānanda's Vedic exegesis, which still had a great relevance at his time, as it was the ideological foundation of the Ārya Samāja.

In particular, this project looks at the 'traditionalist' response of Svāmī Karapātrī to a 'neo-Hindu/revivalist' reality. Svāmī Karapātrī accused Svāmī Dayānanda to be heavily influenced by 'European thinking' and thus engaged in a throughout analysis of the theoretical foundation of Ārya Samāja.