

Seminar on "Encounters of traditional Indian systems of learning with modern means of creating and preserving knowledge."

Time: 26.5.2011, 13:15-16:00

Place: PAM Seminarroom 6

Two lectures:

Sumathi Ramaswamy: Global Encounters, Earthly Knowledges, Worldly Selves

and

Rich Freeman: Meta-pragmatics and Practicalities: Pedagogy in the Priestcraft of Kerala

While Sumathi Ramaswamy looks at how modern, scientific geography was pedagogically introduced into a historically pre-scientific, traditional world, Rich Freeman's considers how a pre-scientific ritual tradition is brought forward into the milieu of a modern pedagogical setting.

After the two lectures there will be enough time for intensive discussions.

Abstracts:

Sumathi Ramaswamy: Global Encounters, Earthly Knowledges, Worldly Selves

In this presentation, Ramaswamy tracks the appearance of Geography as a novel school subject in nineteenth-century India, and charts its complicity in transforming young Indians into enlightened but colonized subjects within the context of the colonial school room and with the help of novel artifacts such as maps, atlases and globes. Building upon the small but important body of work that considers Geography's imbrication in colonial empires, she focusses on one particular object—the terraqueous globe—that was introduced (albeit in fits and starts) into the colonial schoolroom in India as a pedagogic tool for the transmission of the new knowledge. In following the fortunes of earth's sphericity as it especially came to be debated and disseminated through the means of the terrestrial globe, Ramaswamy is interested in understanding



how and why school lessons regarding the form of our planet shape the formation of the self, empire, and ultimately, the nation itself.

Rich Freeman: Meta-pragmatics and Practicalities: Pedagogy in the Priestcraft of Kerala

In previous studies of a statewide school where Nambudiri Brahman boys are trained for the priesthood in Kerala's Hindu temples, I have charted two trajectories of ritual knowledge: on the one hand, I have considered how historically textualized knowledge has been carried forward and reproduced in a modern context (Freeman 1999), and on the other, I have shown how



an apparent textual fixity has been mediated by the pedagogy of practical ritual performance (2010). In the current study I will attempt to show how these two potentially opposing tendencies are mediated through a language-practice interface that is pragmatically structured through the use of "technical" language which provides students a map of ritual action allowing them to calibrate an idealized textual fixity to practical the necessities of worship.

On the presenters:

Sumathi Ramaswamy is Professor of History at Duke University. She is a cultural historian of South Asia and the British empire and her research over the last few years has been largely in the areas of visual studies, the history of cartography, and gender (see my recent book "The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India," published in 2010 by Duke University Press, and an edited volume from Routledge, also published in 2010, titled "Barefoot across the Nation: Maqbool Fida Husain and the Idea of India.") Her work in popular visual history has also led her to co-establish Tasveerghar: A Digital Network of South Asian Popular Visual Culture at <http://www.tasveerghar.net/>. She is now pursuing a new research agenda on the cultures of learning in colonial and postcolonial India. In the first of the projects centered on this new research program titled "Global Itineraries: The Indian Travels of a Worldly Object," she explores the debates in colonial India about the shape and disposition of the earth in the universe and examines the course of science education. Another project titled "Giving and Learning: Philanthropy and Higher Education in Modern India," draws upon her experience as Program Officer for Education, Arts & Culture for the Ford Foundation in New Delhi (2002-2005). It charts the ethical and political impulses that governed new patterns of giving directed towards the establishment of colleges and universities across colonial India.

John R Freeman is Visiting Assistant Professor in Religious Studies at Duke University. His interdisciplinary training both as a field anthropologist and scholar of the vernacular and classical languages and literatures of India is reflected in his writings and research projects as a historical anthropologist of South Asian religions. In his principal ethnographic research, he has worked for

many years on the lower-caste, spirit-possession cult of Teyyam in the state of Kerala. As a complement to this, and drawing more centrally on his textual training, he has developed a corresponding program of research into both the Brahmanical culture of Sanskrit learning and regimes of worship in the region's high temple culture, and into the local, vernacular cultures of the martial and yeoman caste-strata. The goal has been to explore how these distinctive systems of knowledge and worship articulate in the wider region's social and political history over long stretches of historical development. His broadest research agenda is thus to bring together the rich literary sources of South Asia with the perspectives and methods of social anthropology and history to develop an overview of south India's religious culture that is ethnological in substance and historical in sweep.

ALL ARE WELCOME!