

ISAS Public Lecture Series



RĀMA AND SĪTĀ IN A ŚAIVA LITERARY KEY?: RETHINKING THE LITERARY AND RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION OF KAMPAṆ'S IRĀMĀVATĀRAM

a talk by

ANNE MONIUS

Professor of South Asian Religions at Harvard Divinity School

Talk Abstract: Contemporary scholarship has long assumed Kampan's magisterial twelfth-century retelling of the Rāmāyaṇa narrative in Tamil to be a work primarily of Vaiṣṇava devotion, akin to Tulsīdās' sixteenth-century Avadhī Rāmcaritmānas. Yet a close reading of Kampan's text itself suggests a more complex project at work, that of a Śaiva poet ("Kampan" is also a name of Śiva) seeking to understand the workings of the divine on earth in avatāra or incarnational form. This talk will examine the interpretive possibilities that reading the Irāmāvatāram as a work of Śaiva literary art opens up for contemporary scholarly understandings of its place in Tamil literary history.

Speaker Bio: Anne Monius is a historian of religion specializing in the religious traditions of India. Her research interests lie in examining the practices and products of literary culture to reconstruct the history of religions in South Asia. Her first book, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-Speaking South India*, examines the two extant Buddhist texts composed in Tamil; her current research project, "Singing the Lives of Śiva's Saints: History, Aesthetics, and Religious Identity in Tamil-Speaking South India," considers the role of aesthetics and moral vision in the articulation of a distinctly Hindu religious identity in twelfth-century South India. Both works point to a larger research focus on the ways in which aesthetics and ethics define religious identity and community in South Asia, as well as to the creative and productive encounters among competing sectarian religious communities. Future research projects will explore the relationship of Hindu devotional and philosophical literature in Tamil to its Sanskritic forebears, as well as consider the transmission of South Indian strands of Buddhism and Hinduism to Southeast Asia.

Thursday, May 03, 2018

5 - 7 pm

10 Stephens Hall (ISAS Conf. Room)

Event Cosponsor: The Sarah Kailath Chair of India Studies

Event is free & open to public. Information at 510-642-3608 or southasia.berkeley.edu