

Interdisciplinary Workshop on Transgender and Gender in India

I. Legal and Cultural Aspects of Gender Diversity in India

Thursday,
26 November 2015
13.50 – 18.30

Lehrstuhl für Indologie,
Philosophiegebäude,
Am Hubland, Raum 8U11b



Würzburg Centre
for Modern India



13.15 Welcome and Introduction

13.30 – 15.00
Sex-change in Buddhist legal literature
*Dr. Petra Kieffer-Pülz, Dept. of Indology,
Martin-Luther-University, Halle-Wittenberg*

The idea of sex-change during one's lifetime is a widespread topic in Indian literary culture. Be it an involuntary sex-change inflicted by gods on someone as a revenge or a voluntary sex-change caused by magic pills or herbs, etc., in Hindu literature (Purāṇas, Ramāyāna, etc.), or as an act of truth in Buddhist literature, etc. Thus sex-change as such belongs to the cultural heritage of India. It, therefore, comes not as a surprise that the Buddhist legal experts who dealt with the legal codes for Buddhist monastics (Vinaya), and who tried to cover all eventualities, also regulated the case that a Buddhist monk might wake up as a female or a Buddhist nun as a male. The cause for the sex-change or the question whether it ever occurred in reality is of no importance for the legal experts. They focus on the solution of the legal aspects that arise as a consequence of the altered sex.

15.00 – 16.30
The colonial state and 'eunuchism' in late 19th century India
Manju Ludwig, M.A., Dept. of History, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg

In the 1860s and 1870s efforts to regiment sexually deviant men intensified under colonial rule in British India. One of the campaigns aimed at 'rooting out' the so-called institution of 'eunuchism'.

The move against groups that included men who dressed as women, 'hermaphrodites', but also men who had sex with men was implemented as Part II of the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act in certain parts in North India and subsequently extended to other regions of British India. The act was informed by a deep-rooted belief in the need to regiment Indian hereditary criminal collectives and thus played an important role in the colonial civilising mission. Alleged crimes of the eunuch groups included kidnapping of young boys ('for immoral purposes'), sexual immorality and dressing in female attire in public places. The colonial state invested a lot of energy and funds in order to register eunuchs and restrict their movements as well as their modes of occupation. It also created medical knowledge about the targeted individuals in order to understand the supposedly Indian institution of 'eunuchism'. My paper will analyse the underlying colonial assumptions and theories about Indian male sexual deviance, show the limited reach of the colonial regime in matters of reform of sexuality and gender but will also try to unearth some of the thus targeted individuals' voices.

16.30 Coffee break

Partners in India:



17.00 – 18.30 Performing Transgender: Rituals and Festivals as Sites of Conflict

*M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, Director,
National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai*

The traditional sites of rituals and performances for the transgender people in India are no longer the isolated places of congregation and identity assertion because the institutional ideological apparatuses of government and media invade them restraining their negotiating power. The annual Kūttāṅṭavar transgender temple festival in the village of Kūvākkam in Villupuram district, Tamilnadu, epitomizes the political and ideological struggles of performing transgender in the public domain. I present in this paper how the liminal space of the Kūttāṅṭavar transgender temple festival traditionally manifests as the gendered opposition to the dominant Vanniar caste male warrior identity. Over the last two decades, the government propaganda machinery has converted the site of the festival an advertising ground for the prevention of AIDS. If sexual differences accentuate the conflicts within the transgender community, the presence of governmental machinery and the media diminish the importance of rituals and accord prominence to beauty pageants, and other spectacles.

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II. Changing Norms of Performing Gender Diversity

Friday,
27 November 2015
9.00 – 14.00

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9.00 – 10.30

Doing Gender: Male Impersonators of the Female in Traditional Indian Performing Arts

*PD Dr. Heike Oberlin, Dept. of Indology,
Asia-Orient-Institute, University of Tübingen*

Despite of texts like the Nāṭyaśāstra or several passages in the kāvya-literature giving proof of female actresses on Indian theatre stages we rarely find them in the theatre traditions still alive today. The ensembles of such companies usually consist exclusively of men, who also enact the female roles. What are the reasons? Why, how and by whom are women embodied and imagined in Indian theatre and how do women and men deal with such stylized images? What about the construction of gender as a primarily binary category? How far does the stage provide a protected space to “try out” the “opposite sex”?

10.30

Coffee Break

11.00 – 12.30

Transgenderism as Religious Practice? The Jōgappas between Notions on Religion and Gender.

*Sarah Merkle-Schneider, M.A.,
Chair of Indology, Würzburg University*

Today the jōgappas community is confronted with and affected by a wide range of notions on religion and gender. Jōgappas belong to one of the local groups of dedicated devotees, who solely serve and worship the South Indian goddess Reṇukā-Ellamma and therefore primarily follow folk-religious beliefs and practices. They are regarded as spouses of the dēvi and in some contexts are respected as divine.

Especially characteristic is their gender specific expression: jōgappas are male born but adopt a female role as part of their devotion to the dēvi. This change in gender links jōgappas with the growing movement of sexual minorities and the work of NGOs and CBOs. Though jōgappas clearly distance themselves from the hijras, who make up the dominant third gender or male to female transgender community, they become increasingly interlinked with their social and cultural structures. In the context of some villages the obvious transgenderism of jōgappas is related to the divine and gender non-normative expression is understood within the framework of a devotional mindset and as religious practice. This paper sets the jōgappa community in rural as well as more urban, local and trans-regional discourses on gender and religion and gives insights into individual examples taken out of recent field data from Karnataka.

12.30 – 13.45

Mediatization and its influence on ritual performances in the Kūvākkam village festival

*M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, Director,
National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai*

Media misrepresentations of transgender people in Tamilnadu have a long history.

Tamil feature films and television presentations have portrayed transgender people as criminals, sexual pervers, and public nuisance beggars. The transgender beauty pageants of Kūvākkam village have always been the subject of newspaper reports and their sensationalism. Of recently, the Kūvākkam festival and its ritual site, Kūttāṇṭavar temple have acquired websites leading to an unprecedented worldwide collaboration between Indian transgender communities and worldwide LGBT activists. Whilst the protests against the media misrepresentations and negative portrayals have swelled in Tamilnadu the rituals in Kūvākkam village have become spectacles for the waiting cameras. In this presentation, I would like to analyse the inner dynamics of the rituals becoming spectacles with the increasing mediatization of the Kūttāṇṭavar temple festival in Kūvākkam village.

13.45 – 14.00

Concluding Discussion

Partners in India:

