

AJAY K. RAO

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

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Department of Historical Studies
University of Toronto Mississauga
Department of Historical Studies
Maanjiwe nendamowinan, 4th Floor
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Mississauga, ON, L5L 1C6

Department for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto
170 St. George Street, Rm. 331
Toronto, ON M5R 2M8
Phone: (416) 978-4785

Degrees

Ph.D. in History of Religions, 2006
Divinity School, University of Chicago
Thesis Title: *The Theologization of the Rāmāyaṇa in South India, 1250-1600*

M.A. in History of Religions, 1999
Divinity School, University of Chicago

M.A. in Comparative Literature, 1997
University of Michigan

B.A. in Comparative Literature, 1994
University of Michigan

Employment

Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto
Department of Historical Studies, UTM
Associate Professor, 6/2013-present
Assistant Professor, 6/2006-5/2013

Committee on the Study of Religion, Harvard University
Lecturer, 2005-2006

Department of Theology, Loyola University

Visiting Professor, 2004

Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago
Lecturer, 2004

ACADEMIC HISTORY

Research Interests

South Asian Religions
Sanskrit literary and intellectual history

Fellowships, Scholarships, and Awards

SSHRC Partnership Development Grant, 2016-2020, \$171,015
Mellon Foundation John E. Sawyer Seminar on the Comparative Study of Cultures, 2014-2016,
\$175,000 (with Karen Ruffle, Walid Saleh, and Nhung Tran)
Jackman Humanities Institute Program for the Arts Grant, 2013-2014, \$4000 (with Karen Ruffle)
Shastri India Studies Fellowship, 2012-2013
Provost's Instructional Technology Innovation Fund, 2011-2012
Jackman Humanities Institute Workshop Grant, 2008
Martin Marty Center Advisory Board, 2004-2005
Martin Marty Center Dissertation Fellowship, 2004-2005
Doolittle-Harrison Fellowship, 2003
Committee on South Asian Studies Dissertation Fellowship, 2003, 2005
Fulbright-Hayes Dissertation Abroad Fellowship, 2002-2003
American Institute of Indian Studies Junior Research Fellowship, 2002-2003 (declined)
Foreign Languages and Area Studies Fellowship, 2000-2002
Committee on South Asian Studies Pre-Dissertation Fellowship, 1999, 2001
Rackam Merit Fellowship, 1994-1997

SCHOLARLY AND PROFESSIONAL WORK

Refereed Publications

Book

Re-figuring the Rāmāyaṇa as Theology: A History of Reception in Premodern India. Abingdon, UK:
Routledge, 2015.

Articles

"From Fear to Hostility: Responses to the Conquests of Madurai". *Journal of South Asian Studies* 32:1
(2016): 68-79.

"The Vaiṣṇava Writings of a Śaiva Intellectual". *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44.1 (2016): 41-65.

"Theologising the Inaugural Verse: Śleṣa Reading in Rāmāyaṇa Commentary". *Journal of Hindu
Studies* 1.1-2 (2008): 77-92.

"A New Perspective on the Royal Rāma Cult at Vijayanagara". In Bronner, Yigal, Cox, Whitney,
and McCrea, Lawrence, (Eds.) *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*,
pp. 25-44. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011.

Edited Volume

Reuse of the Past: Producing the Deccan, 1300-1800. Journal of South Asian Studies 32:1 (2016).

Non-Refereed Publications

“Rāmāyaṇa”. In Brulotte, Gaetan and Phillips, John (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature*. London: Routledge, 2006.

The Rāmāyaṇa Revisited, in *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol 65, 4 (2006): 838-840.

“Allegorical Features of Kafka’s ‘The Metamorphosis’ and Anantha Murthy’s *Samskara*”. *Journal of South Asian Literature* 30, 1 and 2 (1995): 194-211.

Invited Lectures

“Intertextual Contextualism and Debates About Indivisible Meaning”. Stanford University, 2019.

“Vedānta Deśika’s *Tattvamuktākālāpa*”. Vienna, Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2017.

“New Directions in Epic Studies”. Department of Asian Studies, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 2017.

“Narrative Representations of Islamic Conquest”. Religious Studies Seminar, Halifax, St. Mary’s University, 2017.

“Renunciation in the *Rāmāyaṇa*”. Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, 2017.

“Śāstra as Social Datum”. Vijayanagara Conference, Chicago, University of Chicago, 2015.

“Becoming the Other”. Manipal University Centre for Philosophy and Humanities, Manipal, India. Manipal University, 2013.

“Towards a Social History of Conflict”. Azim Premji University Colloquium, Bangalore, India. Azim Premji University, 2012.

“Re-writing Rāma”. Open Space, Pune, India. Centre for Communication and Development Studies, 2012.

“Fear, Eschatology, and Memory: Representing the Conquest and Re-conquest of Madurai”. Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life, New York, NY. Columbia University, 2011.

“Representing the Conquest and Re-conquest of Madurai”. New Delhi, India. Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2011.

“The Vaiṣṇava Writings of a Śaiva Intellectual”. Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life, New York, NY. Columbia University, 2009.

“Theologizing the Inaugural Verse”. Junior/Senior Scholarly Symposium with Robert Goldman, Vancouver. University of British Columbia, 2009.

“Śaivas Versus Vaiṣṇavas at Vijayanagara”. Religion, Conflict, and Accommodation Consultation, New York, NY. Columbia University, 2008.

“A New Perspective on the Royal Rāma Cult at Vijayanagara”. Conference in Honor of Sheldon Pollock, New York, NY. Columbia University, 2008.

“Śrīvaiṣṇavas at Vijayanagara”. Consultation on Circulatory Processes Between North and South India in the Early Modern Period, New York, NY. Columbia University, 2007.

“Śrīvaiṣṇavas and the Royal Rāma Cult at Vijayanagara”. Sacred Cows and False Prophets—Ronald B. Inden Festschrift, Chicago, IL. University of Chicago, 2006.

Papers Presented (Selected by Conference Committee)

“Aesthetics as Epistemology: Mahimabhaṭṭa and the Inference of Rasa”. Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, 2018.

“Polemics and Social Hierarchies: Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita Perspectives on the *apaśūdrādhikaraṇa*”. World Sanskrit Conference, Vancouver, 2018.

“Recounting Reconsecration”. American Oriental Society Annual Conference, Boston, 2016.

“Who’s Afraid of Vidyāraṇaya’s Work”. Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, 2015. (with Anand Venkatkrishnan)

“Updating Critique”. Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, 2014.

“Memory, Lineage, and the Poetic Crafting of the Past”. Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, 2013.

“Double Reading: Literature into Theology in Rāmāyaṇa Commentary”. Receptions: Reading the Past Across Time and Space Conference, University of California Davis, 2013.

“Creative Commentary”. American Comparative Literature Association Annual Conference, Toronto, 2013.

“Opportunities for Indian Students at the University of Toronto”. Engaging Canada Conference: Higher Education in India and Canada, Mumbai University, Mumbai 2012.

Presentation in Sanskrit. Annual Sanskrit Conference, McGill University, Montreal, 2007.

“Grammar as Interpretation: Construing *Tat Tvam Asi*”. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Washington D.C., 2006.

“Appayya’s Vaiṣṇava Predecessor”. University of Wisconsin Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, 2006.

“Rāma as King, Rāma as God”. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting,

Philadelphia, 2005.

“The Intertextuality of Vedānta Deśika’s *Haṃsa Sandeśa*”. American Oriental Society Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, 2005.

“From Maṇipravāla to Sanskrit: Translating Vibhīṣaṇa’s Surrender”. University of Wisconsin Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, 2004.

“Allegoresis in *Rāmāyaṇa* Commentaries”. International Association of the History of Religions Conference, New Delhi, 2003.

Panel Respondent

Panel on South Asian Literature. Graduate Student Conference on South Asian Religions, Toronto, 2019.

Panel on Vedānta and Literature, Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, 2018.

Panel on Text and Knowledge-Power in Medieval and Early-Modern South Asia. Graduate Student Conference on South Asian Religions, 2017.

Ritual Landscapes Conference, Toronto, 2015.

Panel on Powerful Poetry—The Centrality of *kāvya* in South Asian Religious Literature. Crossing Boundaries: Texts, Traditions, Temporalities. Graduate Student Conference on South Asian Religions, Toronto, 2011.

Panel on Sanskrit in Toronto. Tri-Campus Symposium on Innovations and Challenges of Second Language Pedagogy, Toronto, 2011.

Workshops and Panels Organized

Age of Vedānta Conference, Stanford University, 2019 (co-organized with Elaine Fisher and Lawrence McCrea).

Age of Vedānta SSHRC PDG Sanskrit reading workshop, Vancouver, 2018.

Age of Vedānta SSHRC PDG Sanskrit reading workshop, Toronto, 2017.

Age of Vedānta SSHRC PDG Sanskrit reading workshop, Delhi, 2016.

Critical Philology and the Study of South Asian Pasts, Parekh Institute for Indian Thought, Delhi, 2016. (with Ananya Vajpeyi and Rajeev Bhargava)

Deccan Studies, Wisconsin South Asia Preconference, Madison, WI, 2015.

Deccan Studies, Jackman Humanities Institute Workshop, Toronto, 2015. (with Karen Ruffle)

Age of Vedānta, Wisconsin South Asia Preconference, Madison, WI, 2014. (with Lawrence McCrea)

Materialities of South Asian Islamic Manuscripts Workshop, University of Toronto Mississauga, Mississauga, 2014. (with Karen Ruffle)

Devotion and Display: Religion in the Public Sphere Forum and Workshop, Royal Ontario Museum and University of Toronto, Toronto, 2014. (with Pamela Klassen)

Language of the Gods Workshop and Discussion. Centre for South Asian Studies, Toronto, 2010.

Encounters Between Early Modern Indo-Persian Cultures Workshop, International Society for Iranian Studies Conference, Toronto, 2008.
www1.utm.utoronto.ca/sanskritpersian

Panel on Religion and Aesthetics in South Asia. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, 2005.

TEACHING

Undergraduate Courses Taught

RLG 205 Introduction to South Asian Religions
RLG 307 Indian Scholasticism
RLG 308 Monuments, Inscriptions, and Narratives in South Asia
RLG 310 The Ramayana
RLG 312 Method and Theory in the History of Religions
RLG 361 Encounters Between Indo-Islamic and Hindu Cultures
RLG 380 Museums and Material Religion
RLG/SAN 390 Introductory Sanskrit
RLG 461 Religion and Aesthetics in South Asia

Graduate Courses Taught

RLG 3460 Sanskrit Readings I
RLG 3461 Sanskrit Readings II
RLG 3750 Topics in South Asian Religions
RLG 3762 Religion and Aesthetics in South Asia
RLG 3764 Readings in Sanskrit Philosophy
RLG 3792 Rāmāyaṇa in Literature, Theology, and Political Imagination

Graduate Training

Masters Supervision:

- o Angie Rajani. Reproductive Anxiety in Early South Asian History, 2017-2018.
- o Sukhdeep Singh. The Reception of Advaita Vedānta in Sikh Scriptures, 2017-2018.
- o Patrick Cummins. The New Epistemology and Early Modern Sanskrit Aesthetics, 2013-2015. Awarded SSHRC.
- o Vishal Sharma. Shot in the Foot: Theologizing the Death of Kṛṣṇa, 2013-present.
- o Amy Da Silva. Representations of Muslims in Sanskrit Poetry, 2008-2010. Awarded SSHRC.
- o Raj Balkaran. Just War in the Rāmāyaṇa, 2007-2010.
- o Jackie Barber. The Sthalavṛkṣa in South Asian Temple Compounds, 2007-2009.

Doctoral Student Supervision:

- o Anusha Sudhindra Rao. *Mādhva Vedānta*, 2019-present.
- o Tanisha Chakma. *Comparative Epic Studies*, 2019-present.
- o Sloane Geddes. *Sanskrit Literary Anthologies*, 2018-present.
- o Sukshmadarshi Maharaj. *Harivaṃśa*, 2017-present.
- o Jonathan Peterson. *An Intellectual History of Early Modern Vedānta*, 2015-present. Awarded SSHRC and Fulbright.
- o Arun Brahmabhatt. *Scholastic Publics: Sanskrit Textual Practices in Gujarat, 1800-Present, 2008-2018*. Awarded OGS, Fulbright, and Selva Raj Dissertation Fellowship.

Doctoral Committees:

- o Jesse Pruitt. *The Figure of Kumāra in South Indian History*, 2018-present.
- o Kalpesh Bhatt. *Tracing Rural-Urban Imaginaries Through Swaminarayan Temples*, 2013-present.
- o Candis Haak. *The Perception, Experience, and Imagining of Sacred Landscapes: A Spatial Analysis of the Pilgrimage Routes of Vijayanagara*, 2010-present.
- o Eric Steinchneider. *Envisioning Orthodoxy in South India: Smārta Literature and the Making of Modern Tamil Brahminhood, c.1700-1967*, 2009-2016.
- o Ben Wood. *The Jeweled Fish Hook: Ecclesiastical Exemplarity in the Shalu Abbatial History*, 2008-2012.
- o Maithili Thayanithy. *The Concept of Living Liberation in the Tirumantiram*, 2006-2010.

Other Teaching and Lectures

- Guest lecture, UTM History of Religions 312.
- Respondent to Centre for South Asian Studies Graduate Student Lectures (Prasad Bidaye, 2008, and Maithili Thayanithy, 2010)
- Guest lecture, UTM Historical Studies 101.
- Guest lecture, CSAS South Asian Studies seminar.

ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS

- Director of Graduate Studies, Department for the Study of Religion (2019-Present)
- Director, Centre for South Asian Civilizations (2017-Present)
- Program Director, History of Religions (2017-2019)
- Chair, Study of Religion Sanskrit Committee (2017-Present)
- Teaching Observation, Yigal Nizri (2018)
- Study of Religions Sikh Studies Search Committee (2018)
- Tenure Review Committee, Kyle Smith (2017)
- Historical Studies South Asian Religions Search (2016-17)
- Historical Studies Curriculum Committee (2016-17)
- Historical Studies PTR Committee (2016)
- Historical Studies Curriculum Committee (2015-16)
- Study of Religion Curriculum and Language Examinations Committee (2015-16)
- Study of Religion Admissions Committee (2015-16)
- Historical Studies PTR Committee (2015)
- Acting Director, Centre for South Asian Civilizations (2014-15)
- Historical Studies Teaching Excellence Committee (2014-15)
- Study of Religion RPS Committee (2014-15)
- Study of Religion Sanskrit Committee (2014-15)

Study of Religion Curriculum and Language Examinations Committee (2014-15)
Study of Religions Admissions Committee (2014-15)
Historical Studies Hindi-Urdu Search Committee (2014)
Promotion Committee, Ken Derry (2014)
Third-year Review Committee, Kyle Smith (2014)
Third-year Review Committee, Libbie Mills (2014)
Historical Studies PTR Committee (2014)
Historical Studies Intellectual Community Committee (2013-2014)
Study of Religion Graduate Curriculum and Languages Committee (2013-2014)
Historical Studies Curriculum Committee (2010-2012)
Historical Studies Intellectual Community Committee (2010-2012)
Historical Studies Teaching Excellence Committee (2010-2011)
Study of Religion Curriculum Committee (2007-2010)
Study of Religion Languages Committee (2010-2011)
Study of Religion Admissions Committee (2011-2012)
Historical Studies Christianity Search (2010)
Historical Studies Chair Search (2010)
Historical Studies Religion CLTA Search (2010)
New College/Language Studies Sanskrit Search (2009)
New College Hindi Search (2008)
Study of Religion Modern Hinduism Search (2007)
Historical Studies Zoroastrianism Search (2006)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American Oriental Society
Association for Asian Studies
American Academy of Religion
American Comparative Literature Association
Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute

LANGUAGES

Sanskrit
Tamil
Hindi
Kannada (speaking)
German (reading)
French (reading)