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2016 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion

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second part covered environmental sustainability through the lens of sustainable solar energy in Ladakh and Zaskar (Carey Clouse, University of Massachusetts-Amherst), clean water in Kumaon (Rachael Goodman, University of Wisconsin-Madison), and trekking and religious tourism in the Sahyadris (Anne Feldhaus, Arizona State University).

In a separate panel on environmental development in South Asia, Sya Kedzior (Towson University) presented on her study of changing environmental awareness among Hindu devotees in the Ganga River Basin, for which she drew on interviews and analysis of educational materials and other program information to understand the approach and rationale behind a high-profile awareness-raising program organized at the 2013 Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh.

The panel “Deities, Pilgrimage, and Tourism in the Western Himalayas” focused on religion in the Indian Himalaya. Aftab Singh Jassal (Duke University) presented on narrative and ritual incarnations of Krishna in Garhwal, and Ehud Halperin (Tel Aviv University) discussed the obscure origins of the Indian Himalayan goddess Hadimba and how she entered into local retellings of the *Mahabharata* epic. James Lochtefeld (Carthage College) discussed sacred networks in the Garhwal Himalaya and Luke Whitmore’s (University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point) paper “The Pursuit of Siva and the Pursuit of Dharma” focused on religion in Kedarnath. Whitmore presented a second paper on tourism and development in Uttarakhand in the panel “Contestations of Place: New intersections of Tourism, Development, and Heritage.” Jessica Vantine Birkenholtz (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign) put

Nepal’s popular *Svasthanivrataskatha* textual tradition into conversation with other Puranic works from elsewhere on the subcontinent in the panel “What Makes a Mahatmya a Mahatmya? Genre, Form and Function in South Asian Textual Traditions.”

The annual meeting of the Association of Nepal and Himalayan Studies’ Executive Council met on Friday night, and the General Members meeting was held on Saturday evening. Next year, the ANHS Executive Council will meet at the Himalayan Studies Conference (HSC) V, which will take place September 1–4, 2017 at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Acclaimed author Manjushree Thapa and scholar and writer Lama Jabb will be the keynote speakers.

Pasang Yangjee Sherpa
The New School

2016 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion

San Antonio, TX

17–22 November 2016

Religious Studies scholars from around the United States and abroad gathered in San Antonio, Texas from 17–22 November for the 2016 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society for Biblical Literature (SBL). The world’s largest conference on the study of religion, this year’s joint meeting of the AAR and SBL had nearly 9,500 members in attendance at over 1,300 panels and exhibitions <<https://www.aarweb.org/node/2562>>.

Several groups and sections focused on Hinduism, Buddhism, and South Asia held panels and sessions related

to the Himalayan region. The Religion in South Asia Section’s “Garland of Forgotten Goddesses” featured papers examining regional deities in Nepal and India. These presentations explored the local traditions surrounding these deities, as well as the ways that they configure in transregional goddess traditions. Also sponsored by the Religion in South Asia Section, “Praise Poetry across South Asian Religious Traditions” considered modes of interpreting praises to gods, kings, religious figures, and pilgrimage sites, as well as the role of praise poetry in cross-cultural South Asian traditions.

An exploratory session on “Navaratri in South Asia and Beyond” queried the socio- and politico-religious dimensions of the performance of the Navaratri festival in India and Nepal. Co-sponsored by the Religion in South Asia Section and the Religion and Ecology Group, the “Religion, Landscape, and Ecology in South Asia” panel explored “how new relationships of humanity to nature have been negotiated in the religious imagination of early modern and contemporary South Asia.” Its papers considered the complexities of sacralizing space in a number of contexts throughout the Himalayas and South Asia, from Kashmir to south India and beyond.

The Buddhism section’s “Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Tibetan Protector Deities” endeavored to think through ways of developing a theoretical framework for understanding protector deities and the communities that develop around them. Papers in this panel examined the ritual, cosmological, mythical, and sectarian aspects of texts and ritual practices related to protector deities in Tibet. A book session for Janet Gyatso’s *Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early*

Modern Tibet (Columbia University Press, 2015) had a lively discussion about a number of issues covered in Gyatso's book, particularly modernity, narrative history, and the ways in which the categories of "Buddhism," "medicine," and "human" configure in the study of Tibet's early modern past.

The Tibetan and Himalayan Religions Group, which promotes scholarly engagement across a wide span of disciplinary approaches to the study of religion in this region, sponsored three panels. "Cosmos, Language, and Local Practice: New Research in Tibetan and Himalayan Religions" brought together various disciplinary approaches in highlighting the diversity of material and methods deployed in the study of Himalayan and Tibetan religion. These four papers considered issues from art history, folklore studies, poetics, and literary theory in presenting new research on cosmological murals in Tibetan sacred spaces, emanated scriptures, ethical formation in the Gesar epic, tradition and modernity in eastern Tibetan contemporary poetry, and local religious practices in southeastern Tibet. Another Tibetan and Himalayan Religions Group session was devoted to Sarah Jacoby's *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* (Columbia University Press, 2014). In conjunction with the motif of the conference's Presidential Address, "Revolutionary Love," this roundtable reflected on the themes of love, gender, and sexuality raised in Jacoby's study of Sera Khandro's autobiography.

Co-sponsored with the Tantric Studies Group, "Imagination and Visualization in Tibetan Buddhist Literature" explored the functions of imaginal and visionary practices in

Tibetan language Buddhist literature. Analyzing a number of case studies ranging from dream diaries to travel journals to ritual performance texts, papers in this panel investigated the empirical, soteriological, and political dimensions of visualization and imagination in the Tibetan Buddhist context.

In all, the 2016 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion hosted a number of engaging and thoughtful panels for students and scholars of religion focusing on the Himalayan region. Drawing from a broad array of trans-regional sources and content—Navaratri performances and ritual sacrifice in Nepal, cosmological paintings in Buddhist monasteries, Sufi shrines and saints in Kashmir, and Tibetan epic poems being but a small sample of the many topics explored—these sessions reflect the vibrancy and richness of the religious traditions and communities of this region. In addition to connecting scholars and forging new academic ties, the endeavors of these well-attended panels also highlight the diversity of disciplinary approaches to the study of Himalayan religions, and point to a future full of exciting new directions and possibilities.

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