

## The Blend of Tantra: Continuity and Discontinuity within South Asian Mainstream Religions

What is called Tantra is a religious phenomenon that throughout the centuries was appropriated by and adapted to the Indian mainstream religions in and outside South Asia. Tantra, indeed, is a non-univocal religious phenomenon which since the middle of the first millennium CE spread out from South Asia to Central, Eastern and South-eastern Asia affecting both Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical religious systems. A large number of scholarly researches have been conducted in order to shed light on its origins through the lens of textual, anthropological, archaeological, historical-artistic, historical-religious studies but more rarely combining different disciplines. Recently, a number of studies combining indological and ethnographical studies emerged as relevant in the methodological approach (ethno-indology) to the study of pre-modern Tantra in order to decipher its cross-cultural connotation.

Currently, there is no agreement on Tantra's origins, and what Tantra was before its integration within the mainstream Brahmanic and non-Brahmanic religious ideologies is obscure yet. While some scholars claimed Tantra as a mainly Brahmanic phenomenon, which was successively appropriated by non-Brahmanic religious systems, it cannot be ignored that a number of ethno-indological studies has pointed out that a cross-cultural dialectic between Brahmanic and South Asian pre-Vedic traditions stands at the origin of Tantra. The later involvement of heterodox Brahmanic Śaiva sects in the formation of Tantric Buddhism is still dubious.

In fact, there is no one peculiar Tantric religious system but a number of different systems, across and outside South Asia throughout the centuries emerged, which have blended and confused non-orthodox religious elements within the folds of mainstream religions. Although Tantra found a fertile ground in influencing popular, folk, low-caste and village religions and deities, it was also embraced and actively patronised by many Buddhist and Hindu royal dynasties since the Gupta Empire's fall in the sixth century.

Tantra, indeed, has been considered a vehicle to spread political and religious ideas basing on the fact that its extremely transgressive rituals, such as blood sacrifices and sexual rites, have been an instrument to produce a dangerous power, which could only be harnessed by the Tantric king. Unfortunately, there is no certain evidence on the origin of this non-orthodox practices although they mark a grade of discontinuity with mainstream Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical religions tracing, thus, an evident path of dialectic between pure and impure, *noa* and *taboo*, orthodox and heterodox, mainstream and marginal that has affected Tantra throughout its history.

Moving across disciplines and methodologies, the purpose of this panel is to explore the multifarious aspects of Tantra, taking into account canonical and non-canonical elements through the analysis, interrelation, comparison and interpretation of data such as but not limited to textual, historical, archaeological, iconographical and iconological, architectural, and ethnographic ones. Pure empirical papers as well as papers that intertwine empirical and theoretical methodology are very welcomed.

Therefore this panel aims to put together interdisciplinary studies which focus on the dialectic between Tantra and South Asian mainstream religions in any geographical and historical context.

Successful papers are expected to cover one or more of fields such as but not limited to:

- Tantra and Hindu-Brahmanism
- Tantra and Buddhism

- Tantra and the Goddess
- Tantra and Jainism
- Tantra and Islam
- Tantra and Yoga
- Tantra and tribal, low-caste, village, folk traditions
- Tantra in ancient and medieval time
- Tantra and the politics
- Tantra in Asia
- Tantra in contemporary ages
- Tantra and pilgrimages/religious geography
- Tantric festivals
- Tantra and women
- Tantra and 'priesthood'
- Tantra and art
- Tantra in purāṇas
- Tantra and myth
- Tantra and magic
- Methodology of research in Tantric studies

**Please email your name, title, abstract (max 300 words), and your short CV (max 1 page) to [paoloe.rosati@gmail.com](mailto:paoloe.rosati@gmail.com) by 18 September 2018.**