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Department of Religious Studies

# Occult South Asia. From the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

23–24 November 2018

Campus of the University of Vienna, Aula  
Spitalgasse 2, 1090 Vienna



*The Posture of Samadhi or Trance through Uddisita  
Bhoga practiced by The Madras Syogi.  
Clear becomes to Lingam or Chakras & many.*

*By the Hon. Mrs. S. S. S.*



UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM



History of Hermetic Philosophy  
and related currents

# 23 November 2018

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9:00

Welcome Address and Acknowledgements

## Panel 1: Entangled History and Comparative Approaches

9:15

**The Grammar of Occultism: Studying Modern South Asia in the Context of an Entangled History of Esotericism**

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay (University of Amsterdam)

10:00

**Awakening India's Shakti: Tantra and (Anti-)Modern Hindu Identity**

Julian Strube (University of Heidelberg)

10:45

Coffee Break

11:15

**Occult Currents and Mediums between the United States and South Asia**

Philip Deslippe (University of California, Santa Barbara)

12:00

**Going Against the Grain: Comparing Practices of Reversal in South Asian and Western Esotericism**

Gordan Djurdjevic (Simon Fraser University)

12:45

Lunch Break

# 23 November 2018

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## Panel 2: The Theosophical Society and Occultism in India

**14:45**

**Universal Brotherhood in India: Globalizing the Theosophical Society**

Tim Rudbøg (University of Copenhagen)

**15:30**

**Blavatsky, Reincarnation, and India**

Julie Chajes (Tel Aviv University)

**16:15**

Short Break

**16:30**

**Discussion of Future Projects, Collaborations etc.**

**19:00**

Joint Dinner

# 24 November 2018

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## Panel 3: Yoga

**9:00**

**The Vedāntic Rājayoga of Śrī Sabhāpati Swāmī:  
Its History and Practice**

Keith Cantu (University of California, Santa Barbara)

**9:45**

**Yoga and the Quest for Occult Knowledge within  
Annie Besant's Theosophy**

Karl Baier (University of Vienna)

**10:30**

Coffee Break

**11:00**

**The Occult Side of Sri Aurobindo: Esoteric and  
Tantric Strands in the Teachings of a Twentieth-  
Century Yogin**

Peter Heehs (Independent Scholar, Puducherry)

**11:45**

Lunchbreak

## Panel 4: Postcolonial and Contemporary Developments

**13:15**

**Desmond Dunne's "Insight School of Yoga":  
Between Occultism and Secularism**

Magdalena Kraler (University of Vienna)

**14:00**

**Dealing with Visible and Invisible Fruits: Astrology,  
Karman and Karmic Healing in North India**

Caterina Guenzi (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences  
Social (EHESS), Paris)

**14:45**

**Closing Remarks by the Organizers, Farewell**

In the academic study of esoteric currents and occultism, the theme “India” has remained a strong undercurrent since the early days. There have been discussions around the concept of “the Mystic East” or “the Magic East” and its influence towards Western esotericism from the very beginning. In recent times, approaches that emphasise the interaction of South Asian and foreign occult cultures in colonial and postcolonial times have become increasingly important.

The workshop aims to contribute to a critical and nuanced understanding of

- occult and esoteric currents and their practitioners in modern South Asia
- the impact of South Asian ideas and practices on modern esoteric and occult currents on the global stage.

South Asia will thus be viewed as a theme as well as a site for the study of esotericism and occultism. Steps will be taken in establishing occult South Asia as a significant field in South Asian academic research.



**Organizers:**

Karl Baier

(Department of Religious Studies, University of Vienna)

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay

(Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and  
Related Currents, University of Amsterdam)

**Partners:**

Research Center Religion and Transformation in  
Contemporary Society (RaT), University of Vienna

Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist  
Studies, University of Vienna

Austrian Society for the Study of Religions (OEGRW)

Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Documentation  
of Inner and South Asian Cultural History (CIRDIS),  
University of Vienna

**Contact:**

[dagmar.hofko@univie.ac.at](mailto:dagmar.hofko@univie.ac.at)

**University of Vienna**

Department of Religious Studies

Schenkenstrasse 8–10

1010 Vienna



**CIRDIS** Center for Interdisciplinary Research and  
Documentation of Inner and South Asian  
Cultural History at the University of Vienna

