

Thank you for considering my application for admission to the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. At the doctoral level, I endeavor to pursue questions related to the formation of South Asian textual traditions and their respective philosophical, epistemological, and metaphysical articulations in relation to both orthodox and heterodox currents of South Asian religious expression. More specifically, I intend to investigate the development of the non-dual (*Advaita*) hermeneutical tradition of *Vedānta* in relation to the anti-Brahmanical attitudes of Buddhism, the exegetical imperatives of *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā*, and epistemological developments specific to *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika*.

Vedānta, and specifically non-dual (*Advaita*) *Vedānta*, has been a centerpiece of South Asian religious and philosophical expression for a number of centuries. Through the efforts of Hindu reformers such as Rammohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda in the 19th century, the philosophies of a specific style of *Advaita Vedānta* were reinvigorated and recast as a preeminent and *sui generis* form of South Asian religious identity. Contrary to the hagiographic claims of *Advaita Vedānta's* eighth-century forebear, Śaṅkarācārya, that allege he expunged the subcontinent of anti-Brahmanical religious traditions through his irrefutable exegesis of the *Vedas*, textual evidence suggests that prior to the 11th and 12th centuries prominent schools of philosophical thought such as *Nyāya*, *Mīmāṃsā*, and Buddhism scarcely engaged non-dual *Vedānta* whatsoever. Despite later claims to Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara's immediate celebrity, it was not until the 12th century that *Nyāya* specifically addressed *Vedānta* through a response to Śrīharṣa's *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā*, a text in which Śrīharṣa uses *Vedānta* tenets to critique core *Nyāya* philosophies. Similarly, while certain Buddhist thinkers such as Bhavya dealt with fragments of *Vedānta* thought, it was not until the 11th century that Advayavajra devoted significant attention to addressing claims of *Vedānta* proponents. Surprisingly, Advayavajra elects to critique the *Bhedābheda Vedānta* of Bhaskara, which further complicates later claims to the immediate preeminence of *Advaita Vedānta*.

Was this paucity of engagement prior to the 12th century due to an inchoate *Vedānta* school whose doctrinal positions had not yet gained the attention of more prominent schools of thought? Or were *Vedānta* doctrines well known but not engaged because they were not sufficiently rooted in the styles of argumentation more common to *Buddhist*, *Mīmāṃsaka*, and *Naiyāyaka* philosophies until Śrīharṣa? With these questions in mind, I would like to situate my research in the formative period between Śaṅkara and Śrīharṣa in order to investigate how non-dual *Vedānta* doctrine, which subsequently became a foundational current in South Asian religious and intellectual life, developed in relation to Buddhist, *Mīmāṃsaka*, and *Naiyāyaka* debates about knowledge, scripture, and language.

I became interested in these questions through the work of scholars such as Johannes Bronkhorst and Marcus Schmücker, who have made significant contributions towards understanding the 8th century *Mīmāṃsaka-cum-Vedāntin*, Maṇḍana Miśra's engagement with *Mīmāṃsā*. Additionally, I have examined the work of scholars such as Purushottama Bilimoria, whose treatment of the 17th century *Navya-Naiyāyika* thinker Dharmarājādhvarīndra's critiques of *Vedānta* makes significant advancements in understanding the later importance of *Vedānta* thought in South Asian intellectual communities. The work of these scholars has inspired me to investigate the extent to which Buddhist, *Mīmāṃsaka*, and *Naiyāyika* modes of investigation set the precedent for authoritative textual production in South Asia and how the doctrinal positions of *Vedānta* in the period between Śaṅkara and Śrīharṣa were framed relative to these imperatives.

In order to understand the extent to which these three schools influenced the formation and later proliferation of *Vedānta* doctrine, I anticipate engaging Śrīharṣa's *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā* in relation to Śaṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* and Maṇḍana Miśra's *Brahmasiddhi*. Additionally, because this project seeks to account for doctrinal histories and influences, I anticipate that familiarity with the thought of *Naiyāyika*, *Mīmāṃsaka*, and Buddhist thinkers such as Gautama, Kumāriḷa, Vasubandhu, and Dīnnāga will be important not only for knowledge of principal forebears of respective traditions, but also for contextualizing the work of Śaṅkara, Maṇḍanamīśra, and Śrīharṣa. Given the faculty expertise in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto, and their command of multiple genres of Sanskrit intellectual histories, I believe that my proposed research interests would be well supported in consultation with faculty such as Professor Ajay Rao, whom I would like to situate as my principle supervisor, Professor Srilata Raman, Professor Christoph Emmrich, and Professor Arti Dhand.

I have come to know Professor Ajay Rao's work through his monograph *Re-figuring the Rāmāyaṇa as Theology*, where he demonstrates the hermeneutical strategies of South Indian Śrīvaiṣṇava orders in interpreting the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In this work, Professor Rao skillfully navigates three simultaneous modes of assessing Śrīvaiṣṇava interpretation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* - the philosophies of *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, Tamil devotional poetry, and the *Pāñcarātrāgama*, the Śrīvaiṣṇava collection of religious texts. I believe that Professor Rao's command of both Sanskrit and vernacular literary and commentarial textual traditions, coupled with his scrupulous and methodical style, would provide exceptional guidance for me in my doctoral research.

Additionally, Professor Srilata Raman and her work on Śrīvaiṣṇava traditions would be an invaluable resource to help guide my proposed research. I have come to know her work through her book *Self-surrender (prapatti) to God in Śrīvaiṣṇavism* in which she demonstrates how the notion of self-surrender was molded through various literary genres, including the hagiographic

style, in 12th and 13th century South India. This work, coupled with her scholarship on Sanskrit and Tamil commentarial traditions more broadly, would lend exceptional depth to my doctoral research. Furthermore, I believe the expertise of both Professor Emmrich and his work on South Asian Buddhist and Jain traditions along with Professor Dhand and her scholarship on Hindu epics and gender politics would greatly contribute to my proposed research.

I believe that my M.A. studies have prepared me to undertake the doctoral research I indicated above. While working with Professor Loriliai Biernacki at the University of Colorado Boulder, I have investigated the intellectual tradition of the *Vedāntin*, Śaṅkarācārya, culminating in an M.A. thesis that engages how Śaṅkara's critique of *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* necessitated the rejection of Bhartṛhari's theory of *śabdabrahman*. Despite Śaṅkara's apparent ambivalence towards philosophies of language, he diverges from Bhartṛhari's exposition of the nature of language and God. I demonstrate this through a translation and analysis of Śaṅkara's only statements about *śabdabrahman* in the third chapter of the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*. Situated against the claims that Bhartṛhari makes in the first chapter of the *Vākyapadīya*, I indicate how Śaṅkara's rejection of *śabdabrahman* accords with his critique of *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* and the nature of knowledge and action. This then lends insight to the importance of *Maṇḍana Miśra* as a reconciler of *Vedānta* with the views of *Mīmāṃsā* and *Bhartṛhari*.

In addition to my M.A. thesis, I have completed numerous seminars covering topics in religious studies, history, and philosophy, and I have earned a *Certificate in Critical Theory* offered through the *Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures* at the University of Colorado Boulder. These courses have introduced me to a wide range of academic thinking on modern and pre-modern South Asia, European intellectual history and philosophy, and the traditions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. I have worked closely with Professor Ruth Mas, a scholar of contemporary Islam and Critical Theory, throughout numerous seminars, reading courses, and an independent study. In addition to regular course work, I have also been working with Professor Biernacki on a manuscript project through which I have been analyzing sections of the *Āgamādhikāra* of Abhinavagupta's *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivimarśinī* and comparing early manuscripts written in the Kashmiri *Śāradā* script to subsequent versions in *Nāgarī*. The quality of training I have undertaken with my primary advisor, Professor Loriliai Biernacki, and with additional support from Professor Ruth Mas and others, has made me attentive to questions of interdisciplinarity, textual analysis, conceptual trajectories in intellectual histories and contemporary debates in politics and religion.

Throughout my M.A. studies, I have completed numerous formal Sanskrit courses, including an advanced reading course with Professor Biernacki during spring 2013 in which I studied Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka* and Śaṅkara's *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya*. I spent over a year

studying Sanskrit in Pune, India at the *American Institute for Indian Studies* (AIIS), after I was awarded a language fellowship to attend the 2013 summer and 2013-2014 academic year Sanskrit Language Programs. Over that year, I attended classes for twenty hours per week with Dr. Madhura Godbole, Dr. Minal Kulkarni, Dr. Prasad Joshi, and Dr. Prajna Deshpande. In addition to reading well-known literary works such as Śudraka's *Mṛcchakaṭika*, Bhāsa's *Svapnavāsavadatta*, Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya*, and Daṇḍin's *Daśakumāracārīta*, I also studied philosophies of grammar such as the *Laghusiddhantaśāstra* and Patañjali's *Prasaṅgahikā*; poetics and aesthetics through the *Kāvyaśāstra* and the *Abhinavabharati*; and philosophical works such as the *Catuhśūtri* of Śāṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*, and Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya*. I continue to read regularly with Dr. David Mellins, a research scholar at the *American Institute for Buddhist Studies* at Columbia University. We recently finished a selection of Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* and have begun Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśakuntala* with the commentary of Rāghavabhaṭṭa. I will continue with advanced Sanskrit readings during the upcoming spring semester.

I have additional language training in Marathi and German, and I plan to matriculate into a second semester Hindi course this spring. While in India, I studied Marathi with Dr. Neeti Badwe during the academic year, and I attended an intensive Marathi language course with Dr. Sujata Mahajan at AIIS from May through early June of 2014. I have reading knowledge of German and have completed a course for graduate students on reading German academic literature in the *Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures* in Boulder. Throughout doctoral work at the University of Toronto, I plan to continue work in these languages in addition to ongoing training in Sanskrit.

The opportunity to work with Professor Rao, Professor Raman, Professor Emmrich, Professor Dhand, and the greater community of scholars and students at the University of Toronto would provide me with an incredible network of support and resources to broaden my knowledge and carry out my research. I believe that my earnest commitment to the study of South Asian religious and textual traditions coupled with my previous training will contribute to the rigorous scholarship and diversity of thought and dialogue that the University of Toronto and the Department for the Study of Religion are renowned for.

Sincerely,
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