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Translation, Theosophy, and the Global History of Religion

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay

University of Vienna, May 20, 2021, 18.30 – 20.00, online

Registration until May 18 (link will be sent the day before the lecture date): patricia.mayer@univie.ac.at

In this talk, I will discuss how the process of translation is important for studying the global history of alternative religious currents. Against the backdrop of British colonialism in India, Orientalist discourses, and the transcultural intellectual encounters of the nineteenth century, I will reflect upon the several translational projects taken up by the Theosophical Society and its members in the period between the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. The Theosophical Society's translation of several Indian philosophical and theological textual doctrines from Sanskrit into English, on one hand, and the translation of English works of Theosophy and occultism into various modern Indian vernaculars, on the other hand, opened up new channels for inter-cultural dialogues between India and the Euro-American societies. I would like to argue that the Theosophical Society used translational works as tools for the propagation of its movement on the international level. Finally, I will also reflect upon a few loan words from Sanskrit and other South Asian languages which entered English-language writings through the Theosophical Society's projects, and how these words influenced the global religious discourses in modern times. This lecture will also suggest why linguistic and philological approaches, as well as approaches from global intellectual history, are important for understanding the modern history of occultism and esotericism and their global entanglements.

—Mriganka Mukhopadhyay

Organiser: Dr. Julian Strube, julian.strube@univie.ac.at

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Bio Note



Mr Mriganka Mukhopadhyay, M.A, M.Phil., is a PhD candidate at the Centre for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (HHP Centre), University of Amsterdam. He is interested in the history of occultism and esotericism in India and their global intersections. He is currently working on his PhD dissertation entitled *Occultism in the Orient: Dissemination of the Theosophical Movement in Bengal and the Role of the Bengali Theosophists 1882-1942*. Mukhopadhyay is one of the co-founders of OSAN (Occult South Asia Network) along with Karl Baier and the Student Representative and ex-officio Board Member at the ESSWE (European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism). He has published in various journals and spoken at several international platforms including the British Library and Harvard University. As a visiting scholar, in 2019, he had also taught a course at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Vienna.

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THE UPANISHADS

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