

In the Footsteps of Śaṅkara: Local Advaita Vedānta Monastic Tradition in the Topographies of Keralan Hagiographies

Research project concerns the hitherto unstudied regional hagiographic tradition of the great Indian philosopher Śaṅkara in Kerala (South India). This literary tradition is represented by a series of lesser-known texts in Sanskrit and Malayalam. The main objective of the project is to recognize the cultural and literary methods of space valorization and creation of topographies. The sacred topography created through the hagiographic narrative causes the overlapping of spatial religious concepts and the Kerala's physical geography of temples, monasteries and pilgrimage sites.

The main examination methods are planned to be a critical and comparative analysis of the source materials followed by the historical and cultural contextualization. The final interpretation will be carried out with the application of the literary cartography approach - situated at the intersection of the literary theory and cartographic concepts – in order to investigate the process of „making places” (Piatti, Hurni 2011) referring to Advaita Vedānta monastic institutions in Kerala.

Original, unpublished Sanskrit sources are going to be used as a textual basis for the project. Some of these documents are in the form of the palm leaf manuscripts only. Source texts are going to be thoroughly analyzed with application of the philological method. Important part within the project is going to be the field research which will result in the systematic study of the Keralan Advaita Vedānta monastic tradition's micro-history. All the information gathered during the fieldwork will help in the process of contextualization of the hagiographic tradition in Kerala, which is necessary to fully understand discussed local phenomenon.

I chose this research topic because the subject of local Advaita Vedānta hagiographic tradition in Kerala is highly unrepresented in the modern scholarship as well as the literary cartography perspective seems to be still unexplored in the field of Indian Studies. Moreover, proposed research project provides basis for the further explorations in the local variant of the Advaita Vedānta monasticism in Kerala which appears to be in the 21st century an endangered phenomenon.