



The God Kamadeva in Jainism

Indology Colloquium Lecture Series
Summer Semester 2025

Guest speaker:
Eva De Clercq (Ghent University)

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Seminar Room 002 || Keplerstr. 2

As a religion focused on renunciation in order to sever one's karmic binds that tie the self to *saṃsāra*, one intuitively expects Jainism to outright reject (sexual) desire, *kāma*, and its embodiment as the deity Kāmadeva. Indeed, Jain literature depicts ascetics as vanquishers of desire. However, these same texts, perhaps surprisingly, also bear witness to an acceptance and integration of *kāma*, to the point that the embodied Kāmadeva became a category of heroes in the so-called Jain universal history, the biographies of the Jain śālākā- or mahā-puruṣas, “great men”. These biographies form the subject matter of Jain *purāṇic* literature. Texts in this genre deal with the lives of the twenty-four Tīrthaṃkaras, “ford-makers”, of the current era, of the twelve Cakravartins, “universal monarchs”, and nine sets of a Baladeva, Vāsudeva and Prativāsudeva, hence all together numbering sixty-three. Secondary categories of heroes were at one point added to these, including twenty-four Kāmadevas. In this lecture, I explore and discuss this apparent paradox of Kāmadeva presences in the early and authoritative Jain purāṇic texts.



Eva De Clercq is Associate Professor at the department of Indian languages and cultures of Ghent University. She obtained her MA and PhD (2003) from Ghent University in Oriental Languages and Cultures with a dissertation on Svayambhūdeva's Paūmacariu, a Jain version of the Rāmāyaṇa in Apabhramsha. The first two volumes (of a total of five) of her translation of the Paūmacariu have appeared as *Life of Padma* in the Murty Classical Library of India at Harvard University Press. In addition to working on the Paūmacariu, Eva De Clercq also does research on Apabhramsha and Jain literary culture, and the history of the Jains.

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