

The Path Not Taken: Meghanādāri Sūri's Exclusion of Śūdras

Guest Speaker: **Manasicha Akepiyapornchai**
(The University of Texas at Austin)

July 10, 2026 || 12:15-14:00 hrs
Venue: Room 002, Keplerstr.2



This talk presents the core intervention of my book on multilingualism and doctrinal formation in the medieval Śrīvaiṣṇava community through a focused case study: Meghanādāri Sūri's exclusion of śūdras from the practice of self-surrender, one of the community's central soteriological doctrines. While the book examines a broader corpus of Sanskrit and Manipravalam theological treatises from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, this presentation foregrounds what I call a "path not taken" as a particularly clear lens for examining the interdependence of language choice, theological authority, and social and institutional eligibility. The book argues that the development of self-surrender cannot be understood apart from the multilingual spheres in which Śrīvaiṣṇava intellectuals operated. Within these overlapping spheres, authors made strategic linguistic choices that shaped which sources could be cited as authoritative, which audiences could be addressed, which aspects of doctrine should be emphasized, and who could legitimately pursue liberation. Meghanādāri Sūri, a thirteenth-century Sanskrit intellectual, offers a revealing and somewhat exceptional case. Unlike most of his contemporaries and successors, he argued that self-surrender was an exclusively Upaniṣadic practice restricted to the twice-born, who alone were eligible to study the Vedic corpus, the highest scriptural authority. By denying the soteriological relevance of the community's Tamil devotional corpus of the Ālvārs and excluding śūdras (and women) from both the doctrines of devotion and self-surrender, he sought to secure the doctrine within a narrowly Sanskritic, Vedic-derived framework. His position exposes the limits of the Sanskrit sphere at a moment when Tamil theology and broader participation were reshaping Śrīvaiṣṇava life. Ultimately, the "path not taken" demonstrates how multilingual negotiation drove theological change and, simultaneously, how authors exercised agency in shaping the interplay between theological dynamics and linguistic movements.

About the Speaker: Manasicha Akepiyapornchai is Assistant Professor of Classical Studies of South Asia in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Her primary area of research focuses on the intellectual history of South Asia during the medieval and early modern periods, especially the role of religion, philosophy, and multilingualism in religious and intellectual communities in South India. Professor Akepiyapornchai is also working on various collaborative projects related to the Śrīvaisnava community and the Brahmanical culture in Thailand.



Indology Colloquium Series - SS 2026

Asien-Orient-Institut | Abteilung für Indologie

