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Fabrizio M. Ferrari and Thomas W. P. Dähnhardt (eds.). *Soulless Matter, Seats of Energy: Metals, Gems and Minerals in South Asian Traditions*. pp. xxxii, 282. Sheffield, Bristol: Equinox. 2016. – Reviewed by Ilona Kędzia (Jagiellonian University, Kraków) and Ariadna Matyszkiewicz (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

The volume is the third and the final one of the series devoted to representations of nature in South Asian traditions. All the chapters included in the tome explore from different perspectives issues relating to the place and role ascribed to inorganic matter in South Asian traditions. The book contains eleven chapters divided into four sections: Myth and Ritual, Science and Health, Power and Devotion and Body and Embodiment. Four sections are preceded by the Introduction, written by the editors, in which some early Indian philosophical concepts about what could be referred to as inanimate/insentient and animate/sentient world are addressed in concise form. This opening summary focuses on the concepts of life and sentience, emphasising that the components of the phenomenal world considered in the South Asian traditions cannot always be easily and neatly classified as either inanimate or animate beings.

The first section of the volume is devoted to myths and rituals in which inorganic materials, such as minerals and metals are considered to be endowed with special powers. In the first chapter Mikael Aktor investigates the ritual of *pañcāyatanapūjā*, still performed nowadays in South India, in which five gods, namely Śiva, Viṣṇu, Sūrya,

Gaṇeśa and Devī are worshipped in the aniconic forms as five natural stones, each of which is traditionally related to the particular location in South Asia, ranging from Nepal in the north to Tamil Nadu in the South. The chapter presents reflections on the structure and practice of the ritual, its theological explanations and the present context associated with the groups of *smārta* Brahmins. The chapter discusses individually the five stones, i.e. *bāṇaliṅga*, *śālagrāma*, *sphaṭika*, *śoṇabhadra* and *suvarṇamukhi*. Their preferable physical properties, identification with certain minerals, provenances, collection or manufacture, trade, divisions, associations with mythology of particular gods are all considered in detail.

Chapter 2, by Francesco Bringhenti, investigates from a historical and ethnographical perspective the worship of Goddess Hiṅgulā named after cinnabar or vermilion (*hiṅgula*), in the cave temple considered to be the westernmost among Śākta *pīṭha*s located in Pakistani Beluchistan. The chapter opens with the description of the site and the shrine, in which the cult image is represented by aniconic group of connected stones. The author examines symbolism and ritual use of cinnabar/vermilion in South Asian traditions, among which Tantric alchemy is particularly referred to. Literary references to goddess Hiṅgulā and her worship are provided, starting from the 9th or 10th century. The hypothesis states that the site could have served as a center for goddess worship even before this period. The chapter explores geophysical and geochemical features of the shrine location, presenting its characteristic features, such as volcanic activity and gas seepage and their connection with the local cult. Moreover, the chapter addresses an interesting question of the possibility of the worship of goddess Nanā in the Hiṅgulā temple, allegedly fostered in the shrine by Parthians, Scythians and Kuṣāṇas.

Chapter 3, by Monia Marchetto and Manuel Martin Hoefer, presents a study of the pan-Indian worship of planet Saturn. This celestial body, known in India as 'Śani', belongs to the group of traditionally recognized nine planets (*graha*s)—perceived as animate beings and elevated to the status of astral deities capable of projecting

their own qualities on people. According to Jyotiṣa and traditional lore, Śani is a maleficent planet associated with the quality of *tamas* (darkness, ignorance, inactivity) and elements of this world that are to be neglected, such as impure places and social groups, old age, crookedness, disability, suffering. On the basis of Sanskrit source texts accompanied with specialised literature and a thorough study of the living tradition, the authors present various ways of propitiating Saturn. As one can learn from their research, this planet, being predominantly an originator of suffering and destruction, can also lead individuals to the higher realm of existence and even reward some privileged ascetics, such as Śaivas and Śāktas) during their lifetime.

The second section concerns inorganic matter in relation to science and medicine. Chapter 4, by Anthony Cerulli and Caterina Guenzi, focuses on the use of remedies in which gemstones are the primary ingredient in Indian astrological and medical traditions. The authors draw material for their analysis from representative Sanskrit scientific literature related to gemstones, such as astronomy and astrology (*jyotiṣā*), medicine (*āyurveda*) and gemology (*ratnaśāstra*), as well as from present day observations of gemstone therapy practiced by astrologers in north Indian Banaras. The chapter explores forms of the gemstone remedies, along with the process of their preparation and their therapeutic application. Connections between the group of nine gemstones and nine planets, widely spread in Indian culture, are also investigated. Subsequently, authors consider the possible beneficial and harmful consequences of using gemstones as remedies. It is noticed that the visibility of the gemstones is regarded to be a significant factor in the healing process. The chapter is concluded with reflections on the relation between the gemstones' costliness and their alleged therapeutic efficacy. The authors suggest that the qualities of the gemstone remedies considered in the chapter are specific for this kind of remedies in opposition to the other therapies, such as amulets or religious practices.

In chapter 5 Dagmar Wujastyk investigates the use of mercury tonics described in Sanskrit medical literature. The survey focuses

on Sanskrit treatises from about the 7th century, when mercury was first mentioned as an ingredient of rejuvenating therapy (*rasāyana*) in an important Ayurvedic treatise entitled *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā*. From about the 11th century, as attested in the texts, such as Cakrapāṇidatta's *Cakradatta* and Vaṅgasena's *Cikitsāsārasaṃgraha,* mercury was widely used in *rasāyana* theraphy. Chapter considers application of the Sanskrit term *rasāyana* within the sphere of classical Indian medical literature, starting from the oldest ayurvedic treatises. The use of mercury, special qualities ascribed to the substance and its status among other materials are discussed. An overview of the basic Ayurvedic theories in relation to the mercurial remedies is also provided. Alchemical concepts of *rasāyana* and entanglement between alchemical and medical ideas concerning *rasāyana* are addressed in the chapter as well.

The next chapter also deals with mercury, but in this case in the context of traditional Tibetan medicine. Barbara Gerke investigates medical classifications and sources of *ngülchu (dngul chu*), i.e. 'silver-water', translated often as mercury in English literature on Tibetan medicine. The author draws her research material from the *Four Treatises,* the fundamental Tibetan medical texts from about the 12th century, from important Tibetan pharmacopeia from 18th and 19th centuries and some contemporary works, as well as from fieldwork among contemporary Tibetan physicians. The study contributes to the discussion on naming and classification of substances in Asian medical systems and applying European equivalences and classifications to the Asian context. Drawing from textual analysis the author shows that identification of *ngülchu* was not always clear and that in fact numerous classifications coexisted in regard to the substance. On the grounds of the analysis of several Tibetan pharmacopeias various sources of *ngülchu*, accepted also by contemporary medical practitioners, are discussed. The author suggests that *ngülchu* should not be straightforwardly identified with mercury, as some substances of herbal or animal origin can also be designated by the term.

The third section of the volume is focused on the inorganic substances in the context of power and devotion and it consists of two

chapters. In the first one (chapter 7) Antoinette E. DeNapoli discusses uses of gems and metals in relation to healing practices in vernacular asceticism in North India. The study is based on the ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author among female *sādhu*s over the last fifteen years. The chapter explores the significance that the ascetics attribute to gems and metals in the therapeutic practices called 'stone therapy medicine'. Stone therapy is perceived by the *sādhu*s as medicine, science and technology and at the same time as a part of the religious sphere (*dharm*). Basing itself on the religious teachings, devotional songs and personal experience narratives, the chapter analyzes the rhetoric of renunciants and enumerates three themes in representations of the stone therapy as effective therapeutic technology, i.e. stone therapy as empowered by *dharm*, stones as conscious and transforming agents and stone therapy as efficient healing technology for modern milieu. It is argued that stone medicine within the ascetic tradition creates and fosters the notions of fullness of life and complete living in relation to health, happiness and the modern age.

The next chapter concerns the relationship between metals and Sikh tradition. Eleanor Nesbitt analyses the importance of iron and steel as a material and as a metaphor in Sikhism. The author surveys references to iron in the Sikh scripture *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, which in the end does not appear to be the source of later high esteem for iron in Khālsā Sikh tradition. Further research focuses on the personages of the sixth and the tenth Gurūs, i.e. Gurū Hargobind and Gurū Gobind Siṅgh. The former is famous especially for his military leadership and connections with iron weaponry, while the second is particularly renowned for his literary works in which the author traces the concept of the spiritual significance of iron and steel. The interpretation of the Sikh invocative prayer is provided, in which invoked *bhagautī* is understood as a sword rather than a goddess. The term *bhagautī*, interpreted also as a sword in the context of Khālsā code called *rahitnāmā*, is explored. References to iron in the codes of contemporary Khālsā groups, such as Nihaṅgs, Akhaṇḍ Kirtanī Jathā and Damdamī Ṭaksāl, are subsequently provided. The chapter is concluded

with reflections on the material aspect of Sikhism and distinction of iron among the Sikh tradition, which is seen as a specific feature of Khālsā among the religious communities.

The last section of the volume focuses on issues connected with body and embodiment. In chapter 9 Deeksa Sivakumar examines the role of cosmetics in Indian society. The author provides a short study on the use of cosmetics in a few regions of the pre-modern world. Afterwards two dialogues derived from the Sanskrit epics are analyzed. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, Anasūyā (wife of sage Ātri) speaks with Sītā. During the conversation Anasūyā presents Sītā with beautifying cream. In the second conversation, contained in *Mahābhārata*, Draupadī speaks with Satyabhāmā, her cousin-in-law. Draupadī shares with her female companion some methods of maintaining her husbands interest, among which one finds application of makeup and cosmetics. Sivakumar emphasizes the secrecy of the above-mentioned conversations regarding cosmetics. It is suggested that in both of the examined instances the use of the cosmetics is motivated by ensuring the male partner's affection. Cosmetics are regarded as factors that enhance female transformation and help to maintain an affectionate relationship with her husband.

Chapter 10, by Mattia Salvini, explores the concept of *ratna* (jewel) within the Buddhist traditions of South Asia. In Buddhist culture there are multiple references to the world of gems and precious metals, such as the title of the textual collections— 'Heap of Jewels' or the present-day practice of covering statues with layers of gold-leaf. Salvini examines the understanding of the term *ratna* in Pāli commentaries on the Piṭakas. Then the focus is put on the few texts belonging to the *ratnaśāstra* ('science of gems') branch of South Asian knowledge, in which Buddhist authors seem to be particularly interested. The importance of diamond (*vajra*) and its connection with thunderbolt is analyzed. The survey on the Buddhist application of the term *vajra* is provided. Finally, the concept of yet another gem spoken of in South Asian tradition is investigated, namely the Wish-Fulfillling Gem (*cintāmaṇi*). It is argued that gems and precious substances are

treated as symbols not only for what is beautiful and valuable, but also for what is extraordinarily powerful as a beneficial factor. The chapter emphasizes the significance of the complex idea of *ratna*, which figures prominently in the wide dominion of Buddhist tradition and is interrelated with other streams of pre-modern Indian systems of knowledge.

Chapter 11, by Ana Bajželj, shows that in Jain tradition even such a seemingly lifeless element of nature as earth is perceived as a living being endowed with its own passions and basic instincts. Moreover, it is depicted as capable of experiencing pleasure or pain and as participating in the process of karmic rebirth. The author shows the complexity of the Jain concept of earth by introducing its four main types, only one of which resembles our understanding of this natural object as a purely material substance. In order to explain those types, she introduces the reader to the basics of Jain ontology, in which the scope of living beings is very broad and elaborately described. The concept of *jīva* (soul/self) and its relation to materialistically understood *karman*, discussed here in depth, account for the processes that shape the Jain universe—crowded with living beings undergoing complicated processes of modifications and rebirths. The idea of things, such as earth-bodied beings, is presented here as an element of the extraordinarily complex ontology constructed accordingly to the Jain ethical principle of *ahiṃsā* that is nonviolence towards all living beings. The author shows that although reflection on earth-bodied beings concerns mainly Jain mendicant practices as delineated in canonical sutras and philosophical works, it affected also liberalized laic preferences.

To conclude, the book is a valuable contribution to the examination of concepts relating to nature in South Asian traditions. The volume offers an insightful and useful study in some as yet poorly explored areas of Indian culture. Although, taking into consideration the title, it may be expected that the volume should include more references to other South Asian regions, the tome, focusing mostly on Indian traditions, presents nonetheless, an interesting and valuable overview of the richness of various perspectives on the inorganic world in manifold pre-modern and contemporary traditions.