

Seminar SAW

Rethinking Practices and Cultures in the History of Science

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On schools, traditions or cultures in Sanskrit mathematical and astral sciences: some considerations

Abstract – The mathematics and astral science found in Sanskrit texts have more often than not been considered as a homogenous, ahistorical whole, both from within this scholarly tradition as by those who have studied it. Little has then been reflected on what notions of « culture » could be applied within it. We suggest here to critically re-open the notion of « school », and « tradition » categories that exist within the Sanskrit scholarly sources themselves, to see if they help us describe different sets of practices and associated values, by a group of people. In the background we will wonder: when does a system with a set of practices and values become a culture? When are we describing variations within a same culture? Should we apply to actors categories that do not belong to them? To do so, we will take two case studies: one on the sharing and transformations of proofs between commentators [Bhāskara (fl. 629), Pṛthūdaka (fl. 850) and Amarāja (fl. 12th century)], the other to critically re-open the idea of « Kerala school ».