

# The Study of Indian Religions in Latin America

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**Abstract** In the present paper, we examine the current state of the study of Indian religions in Latin America. An important investigation on the study of Sanskrit outside India conveys the image that the situation of the study of Indian religions in Latin America is perceived internationally as an activity carried out by isolated scholars. Relevant analyses on the Study of Religion in Latin America, on the other hand, show that many social scientists of the region tend to overlook the presence and the effect that religious phenomena linked to Indian culture have over the religious scenario of Latin American countries. The exam of the field we carry out in this paper, in contrast, seeks to demonstrate that the study of Indian religions in Latin America is neither an isolated phenomenon nor an issue disregarded by all social scientists. In order to corroborate our point of view, we discuss, in the first place, the orientation and activities of the main scholarly centers dedicated to the field, and the larger academic areas in which the study of Indian religions appears to be included. We survey, in the second place, the works of important scholars of the region published in the present decade with the purpose of analyzing the main tendencies of current research and of showing which are the main editorial channels involved in the circulation of such works. Our study provides, thus, substantial information on the current state of the field in the region and suggests that the conditions are favorable enough for the field to attain, in the near future, a considerable degree of regional integration and international projection.

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## Introduction

In 2012, Radhavallabh Tripathi edited two volumes dedicated to the study of Sanskrit that were published on the occasion of the 15th World Sanskrit Conference.<sup>1</sup> The first one discusses the study of Sanskrit in India, while the second one contains articles devoted to Sanskrit Studies in countries other than India. The second volume evinces, on the other hand, that the study of Sanskrit in various parts of the world had covered, in the period reviewed (1950–2010), a vast range of texts and topics “pertaining the Vedic lore, Buddhism, Jainism, Indian philosophy, art, archaeology, epics and classics, literature and literary criticism.” We could swiftly suggest, even without delving into the discussion of what we mean by “religion” that, apart from being associated to Sanskrit studies, all these topics are closely related to Indian religions. The fact that we would like to stress from Tripathi’s edition, however, is that the only country included from Latin America is Argentina and, from it, just the work of Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti.<sup>2</sup> We should note, on the one hand, that Fernando Tola was, in 2016, the sole Sanskrit scholar of the world to be awarded in India the international instance of the Presidential Award for Certificate of Honour to Sanskrit. His relevance in the area, hence, is undisputed. We must ask, nevertheless: is the study of Sanskrit and of Indian religions in Latin America such an isolated phenomenon as it is perceived internationally?<sup>3</sup>

In an article published in 2016 in *The Annual Review of Sociology* entitled “Religious Studies in Latin America,” Renée de la Torre and Eloisa Martín offer a critical review of recent contributions to religious research in Latin America.<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the article contains not a single reference to the study of any aspect of Indian religions. Not even the solitary reference present in Tripathi’s book is alluded to here. We must also ask us, hence: apart from being perceived as an isolated instance by world scholarship, does the study of Indian religions tend to be disregarded even by Latin American social scientists?<sup>5</sup>

We could point out, however, that our expectation to find some reference to the study of Indian religions in de la Torre and Martín’s paper might partially rest on an ambiguity. What does “Religious Studies in Latin America,” in fact, mean? The answer to this question is not only relevant to understand the mentioned article, but will also

<sup>1</sup> Jointly organized by the International Association of Sanskrit Studies (IASS) and the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan (under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India).

<sup>2</sup> Tripathi (2012: 11–34). The article also mentions Rosalía C. Vofchuk, Tola’s disciple, who took up the chair of Sanskrit in the University of Buenos Aires in 1985 after Tola’s retirement (p. 12).

<sup>3</sup> There is an interesting review of the history of Buddhist studies in Latin America, though not including exclusively those with an academic perspective, in the Spanish version by Francisco Díez de Velazo and Silvia Noble of Peter Harvey’s *Buddhism*, published by Cambridge (see our Harvey 1998), pages 391–406.

<sup>4</sup> De la Torre and Martín (2016: 473–492).

<sup>5</sup> In a previous article, De la torre (2014: 67–91) provides a state of the art of the topics, interests and debates that frame the study of religion in Mexico. Her paper “seeks to make comprehensible the approaches, the omissions and the inclusions in the area in the light of the historical conditions that model the interests and emphasis of the matter studied.” Nevertheless, no mention of any kind of Indian religious phenomena or Indian religions’ study is mentioned in this paper either.

allow us to anticipate different aspects of the subject our present work addresses. Being the result of a research carried out under the social sciences approach, de la Torre and Martin seem to understand the subject of their paper as the study, carried out in Latin America (LA hereafter), concerning religious phenomena that occur in LA. Accepting this, however, we could ask, as well, if there are any religious phenomena occurring in LA, despite not being acknowledged by many social scientists, that could still be considered as Indian religions. If this were case, our analysis of the study of Indian religions in Latin America should contemplate the research not only on different kinds of expressions of distant religious phenomena but also on historical and current phenomena, in some relevant way connected to Indian culture, that take place in our region and constitute a structural feature of our own local culture and society.

Our paper, in the last place, should acknowledge another feature of the area in question which can be clearly perceived in the following example. Since Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi assumed office, he has repeatedly traveled the globe taking the *Bhagavag Gītā* as a gift to different world leaders, such as Barack Obama, the Japanese Emperor Akihito, or Xi Jinping, the Chinese President. This has turned out to be, for some sectors of the Indian nation at least, a controversial gift, since it appears neither to represent many of the different religious communities in India nor to respond to the secular expectations of others. The issue to be posed regarding this example is, however: which is the dividing line between politics and religion in Modi's move?<sup>6</sup> One might adduce that the *Gītā* gifted is the version by Gandhi, "the father of the Indian nation." But in what ways is Gandhi's version of the *Gītā* different from other versions, and in what way has this difference a political relevance? And, furthermore, up to what extent is knowledge of ancient Indian traditions necessary to understand this difference, or, even more, contemporary Indian religious and (arguably) nonreligious affairs? Let us also consider, for instance, the case of the International Day of Yoga as another interesting and even (multi-)local phenomenon. These examples evince, we believe, that the study of Indian religions present to the specialist a double challenge. The scholar that approaches them through an indological perspective can (and maybe should) attend the impact that the ancient ideas, texts, and practices he studies have both in present India and outside the subcontinent. While concerning the specialist that follows a sociological approach, in order to understand the phenomena he is addressing, he should (though he not always does) ponder that most of these contemporary religious (and, disputably, nonreligious) expressions, whether occurring in the Indian homeland or elsewhere, are rooted in millenary texts, practices and institutions, almost all of a religious character. This fact, hence, does not only demand specialists a broad spectrum theoretical and time frame expertise but also indicates the multidisciplinary and multilocal profile that the study of Indian religions has and the way it connects to the different angles of the broader field of India studies.

In order to provide an analysis of the present situation of the study of Indian religions in LA, hence, we have divided our paper into two main sections: (1) academic units and associations and (2) publications. In our discussion, we include only those units that are currently at work in the field, organizing activities

<sup>6</sup> See Dussort and Giaccaglia (forthcoming).

on a regular basis which, so I believe, will have continuity in the future. We also analyze the tendencies and some research trends evinced in a limited number of publications to which we make reference. We only include some relevant publications on the subject appeared in the present decade and written by LA scholars.<sup>7</sup> This way of organizing our discussion tries, on the one hand, to provide an image of our subject that emphasizes its continuity, systematic character and integration in the international academic field and seeks, on the other hand, to strengthen its regional identity and cohesion. We believe, lastly, that addressing the issue in this way is a fairer presentation of the topic, given the current state of the area in LA, than approaching it with a focus on individual scholars.

## Academic Units and Associations

The Study of Indian Religions in LA, as we exhibit in the present paper, is not an isolated phenomenon, and the study of local religious phenomena connected to religious expressions of Indian origin is not dismissed by all social scientists working in the region. We could say, furthermore, that the area has a rich and quite established tradition. Our discussion of the present situation of this tradition, however, shall be partial and incomplete and we hope that following works will not only complete the picture but also help further integrating the different centers and scholars involved, promoting, in this way, both the consolidation of the regional identity of the area and its inclusion in the international academic exchange and debate.

In January 2016 the 15th International Congress of ALADAA (Latin American Association of Asian and African Studies) was held in Chile. In one of her conferences Dr. Flora Botton, a renowned scholar from the Centre for the Study of Asia and Africa of the Colegio de México, asserted that “holding in Latin America a congress on the study of Asia is the consequence of the work of pioneers like Fernando Tola.” In the present work, however, we will not trace the extensive antecedents of Dr. Tola which have already been described in different publications, especially last year, in virtue of his hundredth birthday.<sup>8</sup> But we should say, nonetheless, that if our appraisal of the research on Sanskrit and Indian Religions carried out in the region during the last half of a century or more is limited to Dr. Fernando Tola’s publication record, however vast it may be, not only we are setting aside very important scholars and numerous institutions but we are also silencing a not less relevant aspect of Dr. Tola’s activity: his formation of other scholars and his contribution to the development of the area in academic institutions of different countries of the region.

In a paper published in 2016 in which we discussed the state of India Studies in LA, we pointed out a few academic centers that stand out for their trajectory and intense educational, research and editorial activity on India Studies and, especially, on Indian religions: (1) Centro de Estudios de Asia y África of the Colegio de México; (2)

<sup>7</sup> A thorough analysis of the bibliography produced in the region on Indian religions, if something like this is possible to accomplish, is certainly nonexistent. Anything like it, moreover, amply exceeds the scope of the analysis we carry out in the present paper.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Rodríguez de la Vega (2016: 135–139).

Escuela de Estudios Orientales, Universidad del Salvador (Argentina); and (3) Fundación Instituto de Estudios Budistas (Argentina).<sup>9</sup> Together with these important centers with several decades of intense scholarly life, we provided a list of more recent centers, programs, and academic units dedicated to the research or instruction on India studies, traditional or contemporary, from a humanistic, a linguistic, or a social sciences perspective, in all of which, aspects of the study of Indian religions, are present as key elements.<sup>10</sup>

In the present section, hence, we offer, in the first place, a succinct description of the activity of the three centers previously mentioned. We briefly discuss, in the second place, the situation of the study of Indian religions in Brazil, where it appears to have an intense life though not associated, as far as I know, to an already traditional program or center dedicated to this specific subject. Thirdly, we provide a concise mention of some academic units that appear to be important focal points of activity in relation to Indian religions (more specifically, the Sanskrit chairs in LA universities) though not belonging to larger programs related to Indian studies in general. We also mention some important scholarly associations devoted to the subject.

The Centro de Estudios de Asia y África (Center for the Study of Asia and Africa, CEAA) was founded in 1964.<sup>11</sup> It offered in the beginning masters courses on China, Japan, India, and the Middle East and was concerned since its inception with the teaching of the languages of the different areas studied. Since 1997, it offers a doctoral program, stressing, thus, research activities and promoting international research stays among its students. The initial program included training in Mandarin, Japanese, Hindi, and Arabic. Nowadays, the language curriculum has broadened to also include Sanskrit, Indonesian, and Swahili. Focused, hence, on the possibility of approaching the sources in their original modern or ancient languages, the CEAA promotes a systematic study of Asia and Africa on an interdisciplinary basis with an emphasis on the subjects that are relevant for LA. The center publishes the Journal *Estudios de Asia y África (Asia and Africa Studies)*, which includes peer-reviewed articles, book reviews and translations and is one of the most prestigious and traditional journals of the region devoted to the subject.<sup>12</sup> The first number of the journal was published in 1966 and has been published on a quarterly basis until 1987, issuing, since then, three numbers yearly. The CEAA also has an important editorial activity publishing books of international quality research on diverse topics with several volumes devoted to different aspects of Indian religions.<sup>13</sup> In the specific area of Indian religions, the CEAA counts with highly qualified Mexican and Indian scholars who teach and research on topics such as Indian religious movements of the XIII–XVIII centuries, medieval yogic traditions, Hindu mythology, Hindu and Buddhist iconography, Tantric Buddhism, and

<sup>9</sup> Martino and Ossa (2016: 18). Another academic unit that could be included in this main group is the Centro de Estudios Orientales (CEO, Center of Oriental Studies) of the Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP). The center was founded in 1987 and organizes community outreach seminars on Hinduism, Buddhism, Indian Sacred Texts, and Sanskrit. The CEO is currently directed by Dr. José A. León Herrera. <http://ceo.pucp.edu.pe/index.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> Martino and Ossa (2016: 21).

<sup>11</sup> <http://ceaa.colmex.mx/>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://estudiosdeasiayafrika.colmex.mx/index.php/caa>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://ceaa.colmex.mx/catalogo-de-publicaciones/2014-09-04-17-28-58#page>.

contemporary Indian religious movements, among other topics, all approached by means of a direct contact with (mainly) its Sanskrit and Hindi sources.

The Escuela de Estudios Orientales (School of Oriental Studies) is an undergraduate unit of the Universidad del Salvador devoted to the study of Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Middle Eastern South-East Asian, and Egyptian cultures. It has traditionally offered a degree in Oriental Studies and, since 1971, it also offers a pre-grade degree in Yoga (as well as a pre-grade degree in Contemporary Chinese Studies since 2005). It was founded in 1967 by father Ismael Quiles, who, with a group of scholars working at the University also created, in 1973, the Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Comparadas sobre Oriente Occidente (ILICOO—Latin American Institute for Comparative East-West Research). The Institute emphasized the comparison between the eastern and Latin American present cultures, as well as the interdisciplinary approach to comparison, promoting, in addition, the integration of research teams devoted to Oriental Studies in the region. The school published two journals. From 1980 to 1999, it issued the *Revista Oriente-Occidente (East-West Journal)* and between 2000 to 2009, the *Transoxiana. Journal Libre de Estudios Orientales (Transoxiana. Free Journal of Oriental Studies)*.<sup>14</sup> Both of these journals included several articles devoted to Indian religions written by former students or professors of the school and by Latin American or international scholars. In the area related to Indian religions the degree includes subjects dedicated to the study of ancient Buddhism and its dissemination through Asia, Hindu mythology and religious traditions, Indian philosophy and literature, and Indian art. It also provides instruction on contemporary India. The institution, as far as I know, is a unique case in LA providing intense and focused undergraduate training on Indian culture and religion, as well as on other “oriental” traditions.

The Fundación Instituto de Estudios Budistas (FIEB, Institute of Buddhist Studies Foundation) was founded in 1989 by the Drs. Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti, his wife and colleague. The Foundation has the largest library in Indology and Buddhist studies in LA, counting with thousands of volumes, including a large collection of Sanskrit editions of many ancient Indian works, versions in different languages of the Buddhist canons, and a vast collection of modern secondary literature on Hinduism, Indian philosophy, literature and art, Buddhism, etc. The foundation is the center where Drs. Tola and Dragonetti have carried out their research activity for the last three decades, though in these years they also made important research stays in India, the USA, and Japan. It also hosts the research work of Dra. Rosalía Vofchuk, Tola’s disciple, who apart from teaching Sanskrit since 1985 in the University of Buenos Aires, is a research member of the CONICET, Argentina’s National Committee for Scientific and Technical Research. The FIEB has held, as well, courses on history of Buddhism, Sanskrit, Hinduism, and Buddhist idealist and nihilist philosophies. In 1991, the FIEB launched the *Revista de Estudios Budistas (Buddhist Studies Journal)* together with the mexican editor Sergio Mondragón and an impressive international committee including Luis Óscar Gómez, Benjamín Preciado, Lambert Schmithausen, Ernst Steinkellner, Bimal Matilal, among other distinguished specialists. The journal issued 13 numbers between 1991 and 1997.

If we turn our attention to Brazil, we can see that the study of Indian religions has flourished considerably, especially in the past two decades. The growth of this area of

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.transoxiana.org/archivo.html>

study, however, seems to be associated to the development of other related areas: over the past two to three decades, to religious studies, and, recently, to international relations. In the field of religious studies, on the one hand, Brazil presents a unique panorama in comparison to all other LA countries, as far as I know. The Brazilian Associação de Pós-graduação e Pesquisa em Teologia e Ciências da Religião (ANPTECRE, Post-graduate Association of Research in Theology and Sciences of Religion),<sup>15</sup> for example, active since 2008, counts with 21 affiliated programs in different Brazilian universities, public and private, confessional and non confessional.<sup>16</sup> The Grupo de Pesquisa “Educação e Religião” (GPER, Group of Research “Education and Religion”) on the other hand, registers ten degrees (Licenciatura) on science of religion available in Brazilian higher education institutions.<sup>17</sup> One of the most traditional programs, both of graduate and postgraduate studies, is the one offered by the Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF), where the formal study of religions seems to have given its first steps in Brazil.<sup>18</sup> The degree program (Licenciatura) of this university includes courses on Indian Religions and on Buddhism,<sup>19</sup> while the postgraduate program, which includes a master’s and a doctorate degree, includes specific seminars on Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as thematic courses, such as history of religions, themes of comparative religions, or comparative mysticism, where different elements of Hinduism and Buddhism are taught.<sup>20</sup> The program includes, as well, a Núcleo de Estudos “Religiões e Filosofias da Índia” (NERFI, Nucleus for the study of Indian philosophies and religions), coordinated by Dr. Dilip Loundo, which has the purpose of investigating in a systematic manner the plurality of religious and philosophical traditions that developed in the Indian subcontinent along thousands of years, studying the subject with three main methodological approaches: hermeneutical, comparative, and historico-critical. In this single university, three doctoral theses and two masters’ dissertations have been presented in the past 5 years which deal, specifically, with aspects of Indian religions.<sup>21</sup>

If we consider another of the first postgraduate programs available in Brazil since 1979 on the science of religion, offered by the Catholic University of São Paulo (PUCSP), we also find several final works dedicated to Indian religions.<sup>22</sup> This other program is coordinated by Dr. Frank Usarski who conducts, as well, the CERAL—Centro de Estudo de Religiões Alternativas de Origem Oriental (Center for the Study of Alternative Religions of Oriental Origin), mainly focused on the research on the history and current status of Buddhism in Brazil. Both programs alluded, as well as many others in Brazil, have important Journals where the research carried out by their staff

<sup>15</sup> In 2015, the Association held its 5th conference which included a thematic session on Indian religions coordinated by Dilip Loundo (UFJF), Dra. Maria Lucia Abaurre Gnerre (UFPB), and Dr. Giuseppe Ferraro (UFMG). A thematic session of contemporary buddhism was also included, conducted by Dr. Deyve Redyson (UFPB), Dr. Clodomir Andrade (UFJF), Dra. Suzana Ramos Coutinho (UPM), and Dr. Joaquim A. B. C. Monteiro (UFPB). The 6th edition of the conference will be held in 2017.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.anptecre.org.br/index.php?pagina=associado&tela=14>.

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.gper.com.br/ensino\\_religioso.php?secaoId=7&categoriaId=7](http://www.gper.com.br/ensino_religioso.php?secaoId=7&categoriaId=7).

<sup>18</sup> Teixeira (2012: 537-550).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ufjf.br/graduacao/curso/ppp/>.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ufjf.br/ppcir/cursos/mestrado/disciplinas-mestrado/>.

<sup>21</sup> Four of the five theses mentioned were supervised by Dr. Dilip Loundo.

<sup>22</sup> In the period 2011–2013, for example, we find two masters’ dissertations and one doctoral thesis, devoted, one to *Bhagavad Gītā*, the other to contemporary Buddhism in Brazil and the last one to modern studies on yoga as a religious practice. <http://www.pucsp.br/pos-graduacao/mestrado-e-doutorado/ciencia-da-religiao#dissertacoes-e-teses-defendidas>.

and also by international scholars is published and shared with the academic community. The journal *Numen*, for example, is published since 1998 by the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciência da Religião of the UFJF and is currently preparing a monographic issue for its first number of 2017 devoted to Buddhism in India and in the Far East.<sup>23</sup> *Rever*, on the other hand, is the journal of the post-graduate program on the science of religion of the PUCSP and also regularly includes articles on Indian religions.<sup>24</sup> These few examples, we believe, are enough to show that in Brazil the study of Indian religions, both of their traditional and contemporary expressions, is an important element considerably developed in the larger area of the study of religions.

The other field with which the study of Indian religions seems to be increasingly articulated in Brazil's academic scenario, particularly in the last couple of years, is international relations. The bilateral relation between India and Brazil has grown and tightened significantly in the last decade, widely exceeding the closeness that any other country of the region has achieved with India.<sup>25</sup> We will not offer an analysis of their relations here,<sup>26</sup> but we would like to mention some initiatives which, in our opinion, will be able to have a noteworthy impact in the near future over the study of Indian religions in Brazil. One of them is the Programa de Estudos Indianos, established in the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). This unit has the following main objectives: improving the potential for an integration between India and Brazil, creating an institutional space for bringing together researchers on India studies or on comparative studies Brazil-India, promoting regular interchange of professors and students both from graduate and from postgraduate levels, and organizing regular events in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to account for the progress made by joint and independent researchers in Indian or comparative Brazil-India studies.<sup>27</sup> A similar initiative is the Centro de Estudos Indianos (Center of India Studies) of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). Its main objectives are to operate as a reference unit concerning India in the university, seeking financial support for research, publication, and events; gathering scholars and students interested in India and in Brasil-India relationships from a multidisciplinary approach; promoting academic exchange between Brazil and India; and incentivizing postgraduate students to undertake master's and doctoral studies in Indian economy, culture, or history.<sup>28</sup> A third similar case is the Brasil-Índia Associação de Redes de Conhecimento (BRINDAR). This initiative is a non-profit association with the aim of enhancing knowledge of India in Brazil, of strengthening cultural and scientific bonds between the two countries and of promoting the academic exchange with foreign institutions.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> <https://numen.ufjf.emnuvens.com.br/numen/index>.

<sup>24</sup> <http://revistas.pucsp.br/index.php/rever/index>.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Rubiolo-Baroni (2014: 101–121). The authors show that Brazil did not have, until 2010, agreements on the area of education with India, while Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador, and Chile did have. Contrast this, however, with Leite (2014: 72–84).

<sup>26</sup> As we mentioned in a previous paper, Martino-Ossa (2016: 17–23), there is an interesting corpus of bibliography published in the last decade on the recent stage of the relationship India-LA. See, for example, Shidore (2013) and Tharoor (2012: 69–74). On the specific relation of Mexico with India, see Preciado Solís (2001: 891–900) and (2008: 487–493).

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.peind.org/sobre-1-c3xu>.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ufmg.br/dri/cei/>.

<sup>29</sup> <http://brindarc.wixsite.com/brindarc>. The Grupo de trabajo sobre India y Asia del Sur in the CARI (Argentinian Center of International Relations) is a similar initiative to the ones described.



These programs count only with 3 to 4 years of existence. They seem, however, to be the perfect match for scholarly departments, capable of fostering the study of the different aspects of Indian culture and contemporary affairs as well as of promoting the exchange of students, professors and researchers between both countries. Academic exchange, in fact, as bilateral cooperation, is an important facet both for institutions and for individuals and is beginning to happen in the field only timidly in Brazil and in other countries of the region.<sup>30</sup> Hopefully, initiatives like the three mentioned will be replicated in other LA countries allowing scholars and students to enter into a closer contact with the phenomena they are devoted to, opening the way, as well, to a new stage in the development of the study of Indian religions in our region.

Another certainly relevant aspect in the study of Indian religions, taught in various LA higher education institutions and already counting with almost two centuries of existence in the region, is Sanskrit. We cannot offer here a narrative of the early arrival of the discipline and its late institutionalization in LA universities; there are interesting documents that offer elements of such an account, at least regarding some of the countries of the region.<sup>31</sup> We limit our exposition, thus, to those currently on-going courses taking place in institutionalized contexts that we have knowledge of. We have already mentioned that the COLMEX teaches Sanskrit in its master's course on South Asia. Students can, in fact, choose between Sanskrit and Hindi or even study both languages. The course is structured in four semesters and, in all of them, if the student is interested in ancient rather than in contemporary India, Sanskrit is included as a compulsory subject. The latest courses have been taught by the following professors: Dr. Benjamín Preciado, Dr. Joshi Rasik Vihari, Dr. David Lorenzen, Dr. Adrián Muñoz García, and Dr. Sergio A. Rentería. The University of São Paulo in Brazil, on the other hand, includes Sanskrit as an elective course of two semesters in its Faculty of Philosophy, Letters, and Human Sciences. The course is taught by the professors Dr. Lilian Gulmini and Dr. João Carlos Barbosa Gonçalves.<sup>32</sup> Another Brazilian university which counts with a Sanskrit course in its Letters Department is the Universidade Federal de Ceará. The course is structured in several levels and is currently taught by Dr. Robert Brose Pires, a former student of the Universidade de São Paulo. Similarly, the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, offers an elective course in Sanskrit in its Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. The course lasts 1 year and is taught by Dr. Rosalía Vofchuk and Dr. Gabriela Müller. The Institute of Classical Philology of the same University offers, as well, an annual Workshop on Sanskrit texts, addressed, mainly, to former students of the regular course previously mentioned. The purpose of the workshop is to develop the reading abilities, to deepen the analysis skills already learnt, and to expand the knowledge of specific topics of Indian ancient religions, philosophies, and literature. The workshop is conducted by Dr. Gabriela Müller, Dr. Gabriel Martino, and María Luz Pedace. In Argentina, furthermore, the Department of Letters

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Leite (2012: 58–67) and Leite (2014: 72–84). The Colegio de México seems to be an exception since it has important exchange agreements with several Indian universities. See <http://ceaa.colmex.mx/2014-08-19-21-35-35>.

<sup>31</sup> Apart from Tripathi's account of Dr. Tola's activity related to Sanskrit in LA see, for example, Pérez (2002: 5–39), de Mello Vargas (1985/1987: 41–49) and (1994: 409–413). See also Rodríguez de la Vega (2016: 135–139).

<sup>32</sup> Dr. Barbosa Gonçalves runs together with Dr. Adriano Aprigliano the Instituto Paulista de Sânscrito in São Paulo, Brasil.

of the Faculty of Humanities and Science of Education of the Universidad Nacional de la Plata (UNLP) offers a seminar on Sanskrit as an elective course which lasts one semester. The course is regularly taught by the Lic. Emilio Rolié.<sup>33</sup> In Perú, at the Centro de Estudios Orientales of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Sanskrit seminars with a duration of one semester are regularly offered as an outreach activity. The courses are delivered by MA. Pablo Carreño Cabrejos.

The Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) is an atypical example in the region where the activities offered in relation to India in general and, specifically, to Indian religions, have considerably developed in the last decade. In the recent past years, Sanskrit courses with a duration of one semester were taught by Dr. Óscar Figueroa Castro as outreach activities. Currently, a Workshop on Sanskrit texts is taught in the UNAM by Dr. Figueroa and Dr. Muñoz (COLMEX) with important Mexican and international guest scholars. Prof. Figueroa is also teaching in this institution courses on Indian religions and philosophy, both as part of the degree in Philosophy and as graduate courses or research seminars. The UNAM is also offering in 2017 the second edition of its Diplomado en Estudios sobre Asia (Diplomature in Asian Studies), which, in its third module on South Asia, addresses different issues of Indian culture, both ancient and contemporary, with an inter and multidisciplinary approach. It is interesting to point out that this program is taught jointly by scholars from the COLMEX and the UNAM.<sup>34</sup> Several other initiatives are currently active in the UNAM as the result of the collaboration of researchers from these two institutions: the special lecture series on Tantra (Tantra: historia, doctrinas, recepción) and on the *Bhagavad Gītā* (*La Bhagavad-Gītā. El clásico de la literatura sánscrita y su recepción*). All these activities, on the other hand, are articulated with the recently created section of Indology of the UNAM. This valuable and unique academic unit is dedicated to provide an impulse and to foster the integration of the variegated humanistic studies related to India that are carried out in Spanish. A special emphasis is laid on religion, literature, philosophy and on the social dynamics that made up the fabric of the diversified culture of the Indian subcontinent throughout its history. Indology UNAM was created in 2016 and gathers talented Spanish-speaking scholars from the university and from other Mexican and international institutions. The unit is conducted by Dr. Figueroa Castro and is integrated by Dr. Benjamín Preciado, Dra. Wendy Phillips, Dr. Adrián Muñoz, Dr. Luis Gómez, Dr. Luis González Reimann, and Dr. Óscar Pujol.<sup>35</sup> In 2016, on the other hand, the first conference on Indology was held in the UNAM with the participation of important international scholars together with the just mentioned specialists from the UNAM and the COLMEX. Along with the aims and activities described, the program's staff is engaged with the creation of a digital platform that nucleates diverse research resources and tools for the study of the intellectual traditions originated in India.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> In Martino (2015: 38–59) we examined the different academic units in Argentinean universities dedicated to the study of Indian philosophy. The analysis we provided in that paper complements our present discussion.

<sup>34</sup> <http://adeaunam.wixsite.com/suea-diplomado/programa>.

<sup>35</sup> The program also includes the following students: Vanessa Larios Robles, Anselmo Hernández Quiroz, Pablo Barahona Sánchez, María Fernanda Ramírez Reyes, Rodrigo Ponciano Ojeda.

<sup>36</sup> <http://indologia.crim.unam.mx/indo/>.

We would like to finish this section mentioning some regional associations intimately related to the study of Indian religions. The first one is ALADAA (the Latin American Association of Asian and African Studies). The Association was created in 1976 with the aim of fostering among its members the exchange of academic experiences, collaborating with the higher education centers in LA dedicated to the formation of professors and researchers, and promoting the studies on Asia and Africa, both ancient and modern, in LA. ALADAA has already organized 15 international conferences which are now held every 2 years, and the sections of ALADAA established in the different countries of LA usually have their national conferences also on a regular basis. In these conferences, the study of Indian religions has had a constant presence over the decades and is addressed interdisciplinary drawing near different approaches and perspectives. The organizers of the conferences usually publish the papers presented in proceedings which remain as a valuable bibliographic reference for scholars, as well as a testimony of the lines of research developed in the region. During its 40 years of activity, ALADAA has worked as an important net for contacting and gathering specialists dedicated to related subjects in distant countries in LA promoting not only the exchange of knowledge among them but also the collaborative production of knowledge evidenced in several collective publications. Several of these joint editions, as we will see in the third section, are dedicated to Indian religions.

The second society is the Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios sobre India (LA Association of India Studies) created in 2015 with the purpose of promoting the development of the studies of India and the exchange between the scholars involved in this discipline in LA. The association has already organized its first international conference in 2015 in Buenos Aires and will have its second conference this year, 2017, in the same city. The first edition of the event gathered many specialists from Argentina and from other countries of the region, many of whom research on Sanskrit, Indian religions, philosophy, art, and other related subjects. The conference also published its proceedings, putting into circulation an important bibliographic material for the area.

The third mention involves a program that gathers scholars from different countries of the region and is devoted to the academic study of the development of yoga in LA.<sup>37</sup> YOLA is a very recent initiative created in 2016 coordinated by Dr. Adrian Muñoz (COLMEX) and integrated by Dr. Borayin Larios (U. Heidelberg), Dr. Felipe Luarte Correa (U. Delhi, U. Católica de Chile), Lic. Virginia Bersais (U. Nacional de la Patagonia, Argentina) and Dr. Gabriel Martino (U.B.A., CONICET, USAL). The general aims of the initiative are to incorporate the region of Latin America into the mainstream circuits of academic research dedicated to the study of the history and development of (Indian) religions and to achieve a better understanding of the links that interconnect the local developments of religious movements in the current globalized world. YOLA also seeks, specifically, to elucidate the conduits through which yoga reached and established in the region, to analyze the

<sup>37</sup> YOLA. Red internacional de investigadores. El yoga en Latinoamérica: historia, recepción y praxis. (YOLA. International network of researchers. Yoga in Latin America: history, reception and praxis).

mechanisms of reception and adaptation that operated in that process, and to evaluate the current situation of yoga in LA. The initiative already counts with the support of international specialists on the field of modern yoga studies.

We would like to mention, lastly, some Brazilian groups which, although having a local and not a regional character as the ones previously mentioned, they have organized in 2015 the first International Conference of Oriental Philosophy held in the region in the present century.<sup>38</sup> The groups are the Grupo de Estudos sobre o Pensamento Oriental of the University of São Paulo and the Grupo de Trabalho de Filosofia Oriental of the ANPOF (Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia). The Conference was held in the University of São Paulo, it gathered specialists not only from Brasil but also from Japan and Argentina, and it counted with the presence of Dr. Ashok Aklujkar who delivered the conference: *Indian Philosophy as a Part of the Global History of Philosophy*. Indian philosophies, in fact, and religions, were prominently present in the communications of the participants where texts such as the Upaniṣads, the Yogasūtras, the Vaiśeṣika Sūtras, and figures such as Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and Śāṅkara, among others, were discussed. The international conference is planned to have its second edition in 2017.

## Publications

In the present section, we intend to give a brief and general overview of the topics that are being studied by many of the scholars mentioned in the previous section and other specialists working in the most important institutions in LA. We have limited our collection of the bibliography to the last 8 years (2010–2017), leaving, hence, outside of our inventory, significant earlier publications of renowned LA specialists. We have omitted, as well, works by the same author that deal with similar topics and, unfortunately, many works that remained beyond the reach of our present survey. Our purpose, however, rather than providing an exhaustive account, is to illustrate the current state of the area through the references to the works of some of its representatives and to provide information about the main editorial channels through which these works circulate.

The first section of our list includes resources for learning Sanskrit such as grammars and methods. We can see that the last 5 years have been of intense production in this regard, both for Argentina and for Mexico. The section also includes articles that imply a linguistic reflection, both ancient and modern, on Sanskrit. These other papers are composed by specialists working as well in Brazil and in Chile. Both kinds of works are evidence of a mature knowledge of Sanskrit and a rich experience in teaching the language. The second section is closely related to the first one since it implies a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit and an ability to reflect on it as a diachronic phenomenon tied, as well, to author and genre styles. We included here several bilingual editions

<sup>38</sup> An International Colloquium on Buddhism and Philosophy was also held in 2013.

and translations of classical Sanskrit works. These works comprise Buddhist texts, Vedic Saṃhitā-s, Upaniṣads, a translation of Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra, epics, and texts belonging to the Sāṅkhya and yoga traditions. The countries involved here are, once again, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and also Venezuela, where the version of the Arthaśāstra was published recently. The third section of our list includes works on Vedic literature (Saṃhitā-s, Upaniṣad-s, Sūtra-s). The analysis carried out in these papers seems to focus mainly on the meaning and uses of certain notions and on methodological issues concerning Vedic literature. The section that follows includes texts on a wide range of topics, subsumed under the rather vague category "General topics on Hindu literature." We find here works on Hindu legal literature, Hindu philosophy and theology, Hindu epics, sociological aspects of ancient Indian culture, and general approaches to Hinduism. In this last regard, it is worth mentioning Drs. Loundo's and Winter's translation *Uma Introdução ao Hinduismo* of Gavin Flood's introductory work on the subject.<sup>39</sup> This translation is a valuable contribution to religious and cultural studies in LA and makes available to the general public, as well, an introductory and updated work which addresses the plurality of religious traditions of Hinduism both in its historical and its contemporary expressions. The following three sections also include works that deal with texts of what we could call the Hindu tradition. However, we preferred to classify these publications under distinct categories since they provide evidence of specific interests. The first category is *Bhagavad Gītā* and we find here several studies produced, mainly, in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. Though they were included in the specific section of translations, it is worth noting that three different translations of the text have been published in the region in the last decade: one in Brazil, by Dr. Andrade Martins, the other one in Peru, by MA Carreño Cabrejos, who teaches Sanskrit at the Oriental Studies Centre in Peru, and the third one, currently in print, by Lic. Rollie, the Sanskrit professor at the UNLP, Argentina. Another valuable contribution which evinces, as well, the progressive regional character of the study of Indian religions, is the volume edited by Figueroa Castro and published in 2017, *La Bhagavad-Gītā. El clásico de la literatura sánscrita y su recepción*. The book contains contributions by specialists from Mexico, Argentina, Spain, and other Latin American scholars working in other regions. The volume analyses aspects of the Bhagavad Gītā from a philological, philosophical, hermeneutic, and sociological point of view. The next section includes works on the Tantric traditions written by Mexican and Argentinean scholars. The last section related to the Hindu tradition is yoga. This part includes studies on the classical and medieval periods which address the more philosophical as well as the *hatha* yogic trends. The authors involved in these studies are from Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. Several Spanish versions of Sanskrit yogic texts were also included in the section on translations.

<sup>39</sup> Flood (1996).

Another important area of interest for scholars devoted to Indian religions is Buddhism. In the section dedicated to this tradition, we find several articles and books produced by LA specialists not only in Spanish and in Portuguese but also in English which deal with different aspects of Buddhist thought. The main topics addressed, however, are issues on Buddhist philosophy and hermeneutics. There are also some papers that undertake a comparative approach and, in overall, the favorite Buddhist figure for the scholars in LA appears to be Nāgārjuna.

A comment apart deserves the literature produced on religious phenomena that occur in LA related to Indian religions. The PEW report, on the one hand, indicates that although 90% of the population in LA was Catholic during the period 1900 to 1960, currently only 69% of the adults of the entire region identify themselves as Catholic. The groups with the largest increment in their affiliates are, according to the report, Protestant churches (19%). Eight percent of the surveyed population manifests no religious affiliation and the remaining 4% includes Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, followers of Afro-Caribbean religions, autochthonous religious groups, and others.<sup>40</sup>

We believe that, although the report manages primarily large figures, given that its main theme is religious change (“in a historically catholic region”—a phrase rather difficult to justify if we talk about early LA history), subsuming Hinduism and Buddhism to a category such as “other religions” makes invisible the progressive growth of Buddhist and (neo)Hindu groups in LA, as well as the radical increase of the adherents of spiritual practices of Indian origin such as yoga. We consider that much is left unsaid in the report in relation to important aspects of the change that the religious scenario of LA is undergoing, especially in regard to the assimilation of Indian religions and spiritual practices of Indian origin.

Despite a somehow generalized propensity of sidestepping the issue, not few social scientists are devoting their efforts to acknowledge and understand the edges of the religious change that LA is undergoing in connection to Indian religions. This recent tendency is clearly evinced in our list, in the section dedicated to Indian religions in LA social context. A prominent evidence of this effort, though of international character, is the newly edited *Encyclopedia of Latin American Religions*, which dedicates several entries to describe the existence of Buddhist groups and of Hinduism in the region. Our survey shows, indeed, that scholars from different countries of the region are concerned with the development of Hindu and Buddhist religious trends in LA and even with specific instances within these trends such as new age spirituality, yoga, Sathya Sai Baba's Organization, and also Ravi Shankar's The Art of Living Foundation. This section also includes some works devoted to the analysis of the presence of Indian religious thought in traditional Argentinean and Brazilian

<sup>40</sup> Cooperman (2014: 26, 125).

literature. Finally, the last section of our list includes a few works by LA scholars which discuss aspects of Indian religions in the socio-political context of contemporary India.

## A Brief Account of Latin American Scholarship on Indian Religions (2010–2017)

### Sanskrit and Linguistics

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## Conclusions

In the present paper, we have discussed the general and current situation of the study of Indian religions in Latin America. We saw that although related activity can be found in almost all the countries of the region, according to our account, the main centers of research and instruction on Indian religions seem to be Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. We have also seen that the study of Indian religions as a discipline in itself is almost nonexistent in the region. On the contrary, the field is developed as a subarea of larger fields like religious studies, as in Brazil, and Asia studies, as in México and Argentina.<sup>41</sup> The case of the FIEB, however, seems to be an exception to this general panorama, since it is an already traditional and internationally recognized academic center for the study mainly of Buddhism (not only including its Indian trends) but also of Vedic and Hindu cultures in general.

The area of the study of Indian religions, so we have shown, is also addressed in Argentina and Brazil as a supplementary aspect of the more specific discipline of Sanskrit, which, in its turn, is approached as a subsidiary area in the field of linguistics. In Mexico, in contrast, the fields of Sanskrit and Indian religion studies seem to be in a more balanced situation, acting as complementary activities which count with their respective institutionalized courses and spaces. These distinct spaces seem to be, nevertheless, well articulated between them. In Brazil, on the contrary, though both Sanskrit and Indian religions count with distinct institutionalized courses and spaces, they do not appear to be so well articulated.

It is worth noting, in addition, that as far as we know there is no specific regional association devoted to the study of Indian religions. We saw, in this regard, that its study is included in regional associations dedicated to Asian (and African) studies (as ALADAA) or even, more recently, to India studies (as the Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios sobre India). In a local scale, mainly in Brazil, we could appreciate that the field is incorporated in associations devoted, once again, to religious studies and, more recently, to international relations. It is also important to point out that a regional association dedicated to Sanskrit studies is also nonexistent. Despite the fact that in the past such an association did exist, the Asociación Latinoamericana de Sanscritistas (ALAS), gathering specialists from the different countries of the region, it has been

<sup>41</sup> See also Cattedra (2016: 229-239).



inactive since the decade of the 1980s.<sup>42</sup> We believe that, given the current state of the areas of Sanskrit and the study of Indian religions in LA, a scholarly association dedicated to articulate the production of the scholars in the region, to promote the collaborative production of knowledge among them, and to foster the inclusion of this corpus of knowledge in the international academic circuit, would be most propitious for both areas.

Our bibliographical survey, on the other hand, has allowed us to appreciate some of the main trends of research that are being developed in the region. We pointed out, in the previous section, those subjects that were currently under study by LA scholars. We could now mention, on the contrary, those that are overlooked by regional specialists. A notorious absence is that of Jainism, an ancient Indian religious tradition which seems to be not at all studied in our region. Sikhism is also almost ignored, although in Mexico Dr. Muñoz articulates the study of this tradition with his research on medieval Indian yogic currents. In the specific context of Hindu studies, there are also many topics that remain unaddressed, at least according to our survey of recent bibliography. The Purāṇas, vast areas of systematic thought related to Vedic literature, such as mathematics and astronomy, and numerous aspects of vernacular Indian religious literatures,<sup>43</sup> just to mention a few, are topics entirely or almost completely disregarded in the region.<sup>44</sup> In the field of (Indian) Buddhist studies, vast areas also remain unstudied by LA scholars who, for the moment, seem to focus their attention on few figures and texts.<sup>45</sup>

In the field of the study of contemporary expressions of Indian religions in LA, a notable level of activity can be appreciated in the present decade. Several works are being undertaken to understand the processes of incorporation and adaptation of Dharmic religions into the predominantly Christian religious landscape of the region. Much remains to be achieved, however, in this field, above all regarding the institutionalization of this area of study and its inclusion both in the larger field of international religious studies and in the regional arena of the study of Latin American religions.

We begun our work asserting that the study of Indian religions in LA is neither an isolated phenomenon nor an issue disregarded by all social scientists working in the region. This assumed, on the one hand, that the region counts with institutions and scholars who actually develop their activity on this field and whose works play an important role in mainstream academy. But we claimed, on the other hand, that LA seems not to be completely perceived, neither internationally nor by LA scholars, as an integrated region of research activity in relation to the study of Indian religions. We believe, indeed, that the international image of the area as a scattered activity undertaken by a few, and the fact that it tends to be overlooked by mainstream social sciences in the region, goes hand in hand with several decades of

<sup>42</sup> See de Mora (1983: 615-616).

<sup>43</sup> In this regard, see the works of MA. Uma Thukral, teacher of Hindi and researcher at CEAA, COLMEX.

<sup>44</sup> As one of the anonymous reviewers of the paper correctly suggested, the list can easily be expanded to include much more areas in urgent need of attention in the LA context, for instance, the philosophical schools of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Mīmāṃsā; Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata studies; classical Sanskrit belles lettres (poetry, drama, and prose narrative), along with traditional reflection on the essence of literature (Alaṃkāraśāstra); the medical and legalistic traditions (Āyurveda and Dharmaśāstras); epigraphy, iconography, architecture, and sculpture; and the presence of Islam in India, among other topics.

<sup>45</sup> We are not taking into account, in this appraisal, the work of Dr. Fernando Tola and Dra. Carmen Dragonetti, who have researched and published on many and different aspects and periods of Indian Buddhist thought.

fluctuating articulation between its main protagonists.<sup>46</sup> We consider, nonetheless, that in the present moment there are more than favorable conditions for the area to achieve a significant degree of cohesion and for it to accomplish a greater level of integration among the institutions and the scholars involved in it. There is an important ground of previous and successful efforts made in the region with the purpose of integrating larger fields such as Asia studies and religious studies. In the broader frame of these disciplines, the study of Indian religions has been able to (re)grow, (re)develop, and (re)institutionalize after long decades of regional instability. It seems to be just a matter of time for the field to attain the necessary vigor to walk on its own. Some of the most recent initiatives we pointed out in our paper are certainly signs of the first steps the discipline is taking in this direction. We hope the present work helps encouraging this process.

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<sup>46</sup> Political and financial factors, both regional and international, could certainly be adduced as causes of this situation. Such a discussion, however, is far beyond the scope of our present analysis.

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