The Vedas: Texts, Language, and Ritual

The Vedas form the oldest elaborate corpus of texts (from c. 1500 BC) in an Indo-European language. They are the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism, and are connected with a ritual system that has partly survived to the present day. In the almost one-and-a-half century of its history, the study of the Vedas has stimulated major developments in disciplines such as linguistics, the comparative study of religions, and cultural anthropology. The workshop ‘The Vedas: Texts, Language, and Ritual’ enabled leading scholars and young researchers to take stock of recent developments and explore new directions of research.

During exercises, the students had to present themselves either as scholars or as journalists, not only improving their presentation skills and experiencing how to respond to the demands of journalism, but also learning first-hand about the journalist’s difficulty in evoking interesting stories from scholars. For the symposium on daily life and free time in Tokyo and Vienna at the turn of the nineteenth century, the students produced multi-media documentation, which has been published on www.4a1.at. Their work included research on the topics, reading abstracts, choosing persons to be interviewed, conducting the interviews, editing on the computer, and writing the story. The challenging task was the creation of a radio programme on the topic of ‘Vienna through Japanese Eyes’, which was produced at a newly established radio studio of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation in close collaboration with the centre of the director and under the direction of students and broad cast on Austrian public radio on 12 September 2002.

Obstacles and rewards

We would like to go even deeper into the differences between scholarly and journalistic work, we purposefully built up time pressure to simulate a real work situation. Most importantly, the group – eight very competent and motivated young people – seems to have enjoyed the course. They liked the idea of creating something to be shown to other people and enjoyed collaborating with each other. Several students discovered radio as a fascinating medium and subsequently listen more carefully to feature stories and documentaries.

Some found special delight in cutting interviews with the editing software. Finally, we learned something useful and developed new abilities”, they remarked. Still others found it interesting and challenging to experience the cultural differences between academia and journalism, particularly in the ways that they approach their topics and their specific methodologies for investigation.

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The Eighth Conference of the European Society for Central Asian Studies (ESCAS VIII) attracted a large regional and international audience. Most notable was the large presence of scholars from Central Asia, above all from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

By Tauraj Atabaki

ESCAS VIII was organized by Prof. Vincent Fournier, Prof. Cathrine Pouget, Prof. François Rillon, and was hosted by the University of Bordeaux.

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