**CALL for PAPERS**

**Conference-Series on Purva-Paksha of Western Indology**

**THE CHALLENGE**

While extensive and intensive studies of the heritage of every country are a natural concern of the respective countrymen, it is a paradox that Indian heritage is being studied too little by Indian scholars themselves, and rather extensively by Western academicians. This is a dangerous imbalance that must be rectified.

While it is true that this atrophy is a fall-out of the continuation of the colonial policy even after Independence, a consequence of this is that traditional learning of the seminal texts of our heritage has only languished and famished. In contrast, the West has continued to provide quality academic infra-structure and steady nourishment for a vigorous pursuit of Indological studies. This has naturally attracted some of the best talent into Western Indology. This is evidenced by the number of chairs/scholars in Western academia, and the continuous scholarly output in journals and books for over a century and a half.

It is not easy to make a general statement about all their academic output. Each case must be examined individually. However, their heavy usage of Western theories, and methods generated by their own multi-disciplinary training, make it hard for traditional Indian scholars to carry out proper purva-paksha and uttara-paksha of such works. Also, the motives and intentions of many a Western scholar can be rather dubious, given their overt and covert political/religious/ideological affiliations. Attention has been drawn to specific instances of the biases and political petitions of specific academic stalwarts of the West. While they have every right to broadcast what they do, whether out of conviction or as mercenaries, Indians ought to get alerted when their heritage is being sabotaged, especially by cultural subterfuge.

**OUR RESPONSE**

In order to nourish an indigenous Indology that naturally cares for the protection of its own cherished and valuable inheritance, a movement has to be started, albeit with humble beginnings. Several scholars and sponsors are coming together to initiate this movement. The plan is to select a specific prominent Western scholar each year for a systematic purva-paksha of some of his important ideas. This will involve one or more conferences each year, culminating in a published volume with a selection of papers.

For the first such conference and volume, Sheldon Pollock has been selected as the scholar whose writings will be studied. His corpus of written works is formidable to tackle in its entirety. His writings are very dense in the use of arcane English, laden with jargon that a majority of Indians are unfamiliar with, unless they have been trained under him or one of his students. Therefore, in order to make the analysis serious and concrete, we have selected **four specific topics** from Pollock’s work, each of which may be examined from specific writings by him. These four topics are summarized below. It is better not to try to be too broad and end up being superficial.

Hence we will begin modestly with these four units of written material, and later we hope to expand to other topics. Each participant must choose a specific topic from these four, and present his analysis.

**ACTION**

The first step being taken is to make a statement of the purva-paksha in a lucid manner in the first workshop. This will be followed up by another workshop wherein the uttara-paksha will be set forth. While a primary requirement for the statement of purva-paksha is **a sound knowledge of English** (given the convoluted and pedantic English of Pollock which has to be figured out, and the need for clarity in expression), the requirement for the uttara-paksha is a good knowledge of Sanskrit and a fair knowledgeable appreciation (not an emotional admiration, that is) of the spirit of our tradition. Public scholars/academicians who are interested in and competent to handle these issues are also welcome to respond to this call.

Links to the writings of Pollock on these four issues will be provided to those who join this project.

Scholars are invited to take part in the workshop, where their travel expenses etc. will be taken care of. The specific details of location and timing of the first workshop are being finalized. But meanwhile, we wish to hear back from those scholars who wish to seriously participate. The undersigned and a committee will select the final participants among those that write to us.

Please send a brief email quickly if you are interested. Include a short biodata and a short abstract (or preliminary thoughts) on the **particular topic out of the four topics discussed below**. You may also propose a different topic than the ones listed below, which shall be considered on merit. Please contact the undersigned no later than April 3, 2016 with your preliminary statement of interest.

Prof KS Kannan: [ks.kannan.2000@gmail.com](mailto:ks.kannan.2000@gmail.com)

With cc to ShaliniPuthiyedam:[**puthiyedam.shalini@gmail.com**](mailto:puthiyedam.shalini@gmail.com)

**FOUR TOPICS CONCERNING SHELDON POLLOCK’S WORK**

Four issues of interest in the initial workshop concerning a selection of writings of Sheldon Pollock are as follows. The workshop is open to hear contrary interpretations of Pollock’s writings to those summarized below:

1. Pollock’s paper on shastra

His thesis: The relationship between shastra and prayoga (theory and practical activity) is one which is diametrically opposed to what it is in the West. In the West there is progress because new experience and practical considerations inform the thinkers who can change and develop new thought based on such empirical evidence. On the other hand, the Veda-s are deemed as shastra par excellence, and as already containing all the knowledge. The Veda-s are thus opposed to all progress. Shastra-s are frozen in time; hence they hinder creativity, and are inherently regressive. Added to this, shastra-s engender authoritarianism and inspire social oppression. In contrast, Western civilisation is based on freedom. As a result, shastra-s are to be seen as a major cause - of Indian lack of creativity and freedom, and for the existence of oppression.

2. Pollock’s paper that Sanskrit influenced Nazi ideology leading to the holocaust

His thesis: Early India had a pre-form of racism evidenced in the tension it provided between the aryan and the non-aryan. This became adopted by Europeans and was projected in the West as White v/s non-White. Nazi Indologists took recourse to Sanskrit texts to model their racist agenda. The Purva-Mimamsa school championed a high brahminism, and this contributed to the legitimisation of genocide, which found its culmination in the holocaust of Jews by Nazis. Kumarila may hence be styled as a deep Nazi, and by the same token, Hitler may be labelled a deep Mimamsaka.

3. Pollock’s paper on the death of Sanskrit

His thesis: Sanskrit began its career about two millennia after the Indus Valley Civilisation. Right from Vedic times, Sanskrit grammar and literature were a serious cause of social oppression, because Sanskrit was monopolised by Brahmins. Sanskrit was killed by Hindu kings around a thousand years ago; the Muslim kings cannot get any blame for this. The rise of vernaculars too contributed to the killing of Sanskrit, as it had domineered over them for a millennium. Sanskrit ought to be secularized because the ritual uses to which it is put are veritable props of superstition and social exploitation. Sanskrit is after all dead, and recent attempts to revive it go to serve a political agenda, and nothing more.

4. Pollock’s thesis on the Ramayana as a political device

His thesis: The sacredness of the Ramayana is only a smokescreen to cover its essential role as a political instrument of rulers. To a large extent inspired by a Buddhist Jataka tale, it has principally been a tool of safeguarding the exploitative means of social stratification. The major characters of the epic utterly lack free will, and the epic thus inspires fatalism, so detrimental to the future of the nation. Patently oppressing women and marginalising the lower classes, the Ramayana theme is little different from a literature of atrocity. The performance of yajna-s was a way of divinising the kings, who returned the favour to the brahmins who conducted this, by ensuring full and high security to them. The Raja Dharma section of the Mahabharata, twin epic of the Ramayana, issues a stern warning that whosoever turns against the king would soon meet his ruin. The rules of dharma-shastra were wantonly violated by kings, while at the same time were imposed on the citizens. In recent centuries, it has turned out to be the means of inflicting violence against Muslims who have been demonised.

**Preliminary reading list (this will be provided to participants):**

1. Pollock: “The practice of theory and the theory of practice in the Indian intellectual tradition” (topic 1)
2. Pollock: “Deep Orientalism?” (topic 2)
3. Reinhold Grunendahl: A criticism of deep Orientalism
4. Pollock: “The death of Sanskrit” (topic 3)
5. Hannender: A response to death of Sanskrit
6. Pollock: Ramayana and political imagination in India (topic 4)
7. Pollock: The divine king in the Indian epic (topic 4)
8. Pollock: The Ramayana of Valmiki, volume 2 (topic 4)