

1. E. G. Kahrs: A Bibliography

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sthāṇur ayaṃ bhārahāraḥ kilābhūd
adhītya vedaṃ na vijānāti yo 'rthaṃ |
yo 'rthajña it sakalaṃ bhadram āsnute
nākam eti jñānavidhūtapāpmā ||
Nirukta, i.18

“MUST a name mean something?” Alice asked doubtfully. “Of course it must,” Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: “MY name means the shape I am – and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost.”
LEWIS CARROLL, *Through the Looking Glass*

This edited volume brings together fourteen essays on Sanskrit, Pali, and Tamil literature from South and Southeast Asia in honour of Eivind Georg Kahrs, former Reader in Sanskrit at the University of Cambridge and a lifelong fellow of Queens' College. Throughout a research career spanning more than forty years (and counting), Eivind Kahrs changed the direction of the study of South Asia's traditional language sciences, particularly in the field of *nirvacana* or “semantic analysis.” His monograph, *Indian Semantic Analysis* (CUP, 1998), remains a monumental work of scholarship and erudition more than twenty years on. It continues to be a touchstone for anyone who studies Yāska's *Nirukta* (c. 7th–3rd BCE) and the exegetical practice of semantic analysis that was so important for all pre-modern South Asian writing.

Eivind Kahrs' engagement with traditional Indian hermeneutics began remarkably early during his formative years at the University of Oslo. His undergraduate degree was in Indian Studies with a specialisation in Sanskrit. There, he had the good fortune to be mentored by Nils Simonsson (1920–1994), whose work fo-

cused on the traditional translation methods between Sanskrit and Tibetan.¹ After graduating in 1975, Eivind pursued a Magistergrad in Indian Philology (1980, equivalent to a Ph.D.) at the University of Oslo and wrote his dissertation on the methods of word analysis in Yāska's *Nirukta*. For his subsequent Doctor philosophiae (Oslo, 1996, equivalent to the German Habilitation), Eivind expanded his interests to explore the fundamental concepts of 'substitution' and 'change' within traditional Indian philology, paying particular attention to Sanskrit grammar or *vyākaraṇa*.

After finishing his Magistergrad at the University of Oslo, Eivind took up the position of University Lecturer in the History of Religion in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Bergen from 1980–1981. He returned to Oslo in 1981 and was awarded a NAVF (Norwegian Research Council) research fellowship back at the Indo-Iranian Institute, his *alma mater* in the University. In 1982 he was awarded a Michael Coulson Visiting Research Fellowship in Indology at Wolfson College, University of Oxford. He met James W. Benson and Alexis Sanderson in the year he spent there, two scholars who remained important interlocutors throughout Eivind's career. In 1983, Eivind took up the position of Vitenskapelig assistent (Assistant Professor) in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Oslo. During the six years he spent in this role, Eivind was elected to the General Board of the University of Oslo (1986), was appointed Vice President of the Norsk orientalsk selskap (Norwegian Oriental Society) (1985–1986), and served as editor of *Chaos*, the Danish-Norwegian Journal for the History of Religion (1986–1990).

Eivind left Oslo in 1989 when he took up the position of Lecturer in Indian Studies (Sanskrit) in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Cambridge. This vacancy had arisen due to the retirement of K. R. Norman, Professor of Indian Studies and one of the world's foremost scholars of Pali and Middle Indic languages. At that time in Cambridge, retiring faculty could overlap with their replacements for three years to foster continuity. Eivind benefited greatly from K. R. Norman's learned guidance. In those years, they read all of Aśoka's inscriptions together (twice!), and they remained close until Prof. Norman's death in 2020. Eivind was also fortunate to work in Cambridge with fellow Sanskritist John D. Smith, who remained an important source of support and friendship throughout his career. It was under the influence of K. R. Norman that Eivind turned his attention to traditional Pali grammar, specifically the *Saddanīti*, a twelfth/thirteenth-century Burmese work. Eivind lectured to and led a reading group on the *Saddanīti* at Cambridge, and these sessions resulted in his monograph on the work (1992).

1 SIMONSSON 1957.

Eivind continued teaching Sanskrit at Cambridge for twenty years until his retirement in 2019. He was promoted to Senior Lecturer in Sanskrit in 2000 and then to Reader in Sanskrit in 2003. Throughout his time in Cambridge, Eivind continued to play a leading role in Pali studies in Britain. He was elected as a Member of Council of the Pali Text Society and its Honorary Librarian in 1994. In 1995 he became a Director of the Pali Text Society and from 2003 held the role of Honorary Secretary until his retirement. He remains a lifelong fellow of Queens' College, University of Cambridge.

The essays in this volume focus on the interpretation of classical South Asian texts, both from a modern, philological perspective and from the emic standpoint of traditional South Asian forms of textual interpretation, such as commentarial exegesis, grammar, and etymology. This dual focus encompasses Eivind Kahrs' own pioneering approach to South Asian philology. When we consider Eivind's scholarship, it is apparent even in his earliest works from the 1980s that his philological interests were somewhat different from those of many of his contemporary Indologists. Indological philology (in Britain especially) when Eivind arrived in Cambridge was still largely subsumed within the general field of historical and comparative linguistics. Despite specialising in South Asia's traditional language sciences, Eivind's interests lay less in the linguistic side of philology and more in the cultural history of ideas about language. This meant that Eivind set to one side linguistic problems about what things meant and turned to what he saw as the more compelling cultural question of how things were ascribed meaning.

Eivind's cultural, philological approach focused on primarily understanding indigenous modes of interpretation to explain a textual culture rather than using concepts and ideas imposed from the outside. He endeavored in his early works to derive general models that underpin traditional South Asian philology and to use those models as a basis for understanding broader patterns in South Asian intellectual culture. This approach deeply impacted the field and represented a shift in the study of South Asian philology. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the field of modern linguistics was particularly influential, and its ideas regularly framed how scholars were interpreting traditional Sanskrit grammar and other language sciences. Eivind's call to study these indigenous sciences on their own terms to recover cultural meaning gave new relevance to studying these works beyond the narrow lens of contemporary linguistics. As a result, Eivind demonstrated the value and importance of studying subjects that scholars had previously disregarded as unscientific, such as nirukta and non-Pāṇinian *vyākaraṇa*.

This interest in understanding South Asia's traditional language sciences from an emic perspective led Eivind to offer some of the first critical analyses of nineteenth-century European philology and its lasting impact on how South Asia's

cultural history has been studied. Beginning with his early article, “Yāska’s *Nirukta*: the quest for a new interpretation” (1984), in several works, Eivind has traced the nineteenth-century Orientalist origins of the dominant approaches to the *nirvacana* tradition and their legacy in modern scholarship. In describing the method and logic of the *nirvacana* tradition, Eivind revealed the inadequacy of earlier interpretations of the discipline as a primitive ancestor to modern, historical linguistics. Despite disagreeing with some of his predecessors’ approaches, Eivind has always expressed his debt to and deep respect for pioneering Indian scholars of the *Nirukta*, such as, Lakshman Sarup, Vaijanatha Kasinatha Rajavade, and Madhukar Anant Mehendale (to whom he dedicated his 2003 K. V. Abhyankar Memorial Lectures).

This brief overview of Eivind Kahrs’ career and intellectual approach would not be complete without mentioning his character. When I began studying under Eivind, I was struck by how sincerely he cared about his students and our ideas. I soon realised, however, that this was not simply because of a sense of pastoral duty but rather was the way Eivind went about everything, especially his scholarship. Reading the *Nirukta* with Eivind was to enter Yāska’s world, care sincerely about what Yāska was thinking, and know deeply that it mattered. This approach to South Asian intellectual history left a lasting impression on all of us and continues to guide our work. In recognition of how much we have all benefited from Eivind’s care, as students, friends, and colleagues, we offer this volume in gratitude. May we continue to enjoy the fruits of Eivind’s journey as a *nairukta* for many years to come.

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