
The ISFNR Belief Narrative Network

Conference in Guwahati, India, 6th-8th February 2019

***Belief Narratives in Folklore Studies: Narrating the
Supernatural***

Call for Papers

Organisers: The Anundoram Borooh Institute of Language, Art and Culture, Guwahati, Assam, India, and the ISFNR Belief Narrative Network.

The Setting: Guwahati is famous for several ancient Hindu temples, such as Kamakhya and other temples dedicated to the Goddess, while the Navagraha temple in Guwahati is an ancient centre of astrology. Participants who would like to spend some extra days on the site might also like to visit the Assam State Museum, make a boat trip on the Brahmaputra or visit the nearby historical town Hajo which has a number of other ancient temples. The nature reserve in Pabitora, home of a number of wild rhinos, is also close to Guwahati. For those interested in travelling around the area, the famous Kaziranga wildlife sanctuary is around 4-5 hours away. The same applies to Shillong, the capital city of the neighbouring state of Meghalaya, a site which, along with its neighbourhood, has often been called Scotland of the East because of its natural beauty and colonial architecture.

Theme: Belief Narratives in Folklore Studies: Narrating the Supernatural

One of the earliest genres in folkloristics has been the belief narrative in which traditional folk beliefs in the supernatural are given shape (and often credence) in popular narratives that (in the past) tended to be passed on in oral form. (Over time other forms of transmission have naturally evolved, ranging from the broadsheet to the internet and social media). This material, found in numerous archives and collections of folk legends, and still evolving and coming into being around us in daily life, has been used as source material for a range of investigations. In recent years, folklore scholars have underlined the way in which such narratives commonly reflect the psyche of individuals, groups and society as a whole at a deeper level. These narratives, as Elliott Oring has shown (Oring 2012), draw on a rhetoric of truth, and are designed to provoke discussion. For those who

are convinced, they commonly evoke or strengthen beliefs and have the potential to affect behaviour and even change society.

Belief narratives can take the form of migratory narratives moving between countries and even continents. Others are naturally more localized. In the case of the legend, most contain a universal pattern of event followed by individual and/or social interpretation and an aftermath (see Lauri Honko's famous article on the nature of the memorate (Honko 1989), and Tangherlini's definition of the legend in Tangherlini 1990). Narratives of this kind are naturally found in early epics and medieval narratives of saints, demons, trolls and nature spirits, and still occur in our own time attached to the new "gods" that have come into being with the help of the modern forms of media. They are nonetheless not limited to the sphere of the folk legend, but can also result in new forms of behaviour such as rumour-spreading, prejudice, witch-hunts and/ or activities (even sacrifices) designed to protect people from the influences in question, even in our own time. This conference aims at giving researchers worldwide the opportunity to share, discuss and engage with a range of aspects relating to the nature and role of belief narratives past and present.

Scholarly presentations on any of the following topics are particularly encouraged:

- Beliefs and the supernatural
- Beliefs, faith and fear
- Beliefs and the lore of saints
- Beliefs and sacrifice
- Beliefs and witch-hunting
- Beliefs and vernacular practices
- Contemporary belief narratives (urban legends, the play on belief narratives by politicians and so on).

Language of the Symposium: English

Length of Presentation: Presentations should not exceed 20 minutes followed by 10 minutes of discussion.)

Submission of Abstracts: Those interested in attending the conference should send abstracts by e-mail to: bnnguwahati@gmail.com

Deadline for submission of the abstracts: 15th July 2018

Please include the following information:

- full name, e-mail address, and institutional affiliation
- ISFNR membership status
- the title of your proposed paper
- a 300 word abstract in Word
- a brief 150-word biography

Proposals will be reviewed by the committee of the ISFNR Belief Narrative Network in cooperation with the organisers of the conference. The committee will then send notification of acceptance or rejection for the conference by **August 30, 2018**. An online preliminary programme schedule will then be published in **October 2018**.

Registration Once the abstract is accepted the participants will have to fill in a registration form. Limited number of participants will be provided with modest free accommodation for the conference days on first come first serve basis. Meals will be free for the conference days.

Travel and accommodation: Guwahati is the largest city in Northeast India and the gateway to the whole region. It is thus well connected by air to the major cities in India. International participants might consider traveling to Guwahati via Delhi, Kolkata or Mumbai. Further information on specific transportation guidance and booking of accommodation will be notified in the next circular to be published by 15th of March, 2018.