

International Training Program (ITP)

On-site Education of Practical Languages for Area Studies

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Graduate School of Asian and African Areas Studies

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About the Research Theme and Language Training

The purpose of my study is to investigate how female ascetics, ‘*sādhvī*’, who live in Hindu pilgrimage places, in North India, create their lived spaces and identities, through intensive fieldwork and ethnographic description. Previous studies have focused on the Hindu *sādhu*, or the male ascetic, of Hindu world, and most of them have emphasized the aspect of strict asceticism or life-styles of wandering and seclusion from the world. Contrary to such studies, the focus of my research is on the aspect of care in everyday lives, especially ‘*sevā*’ practices, or (devotional) service. *Sevā* practices are generally seen among *sādhus* (including *sādhvī*), pilgrims, and local people in various contexts, and for some people as ‘*karma yoga*’, which is a part of *yogic* asceticism. I will consider how *sādhvīs* create relationships with others through practices of *sevā* and how they are related to means of achieving of their livelihood and at the same time to ways in which they construct their selfhood, living as ‘*mātā*’ or Mother.

I spent 6 months in North India to learn Hindi through ITP. In the first 3 months, I was engaged in improving my Hindi literacy and grammar in Vārānasi, and in the latter half, I tried to practice Hindi through communication with *sādhvīs* and local people in Haridwār.

In Vārānasi (in the state of Uttar Pradesh), I learned Hindi through the language classes of 3 private teachers. One of them, called Pinkū jī, gave me a room in his house for 2 months and daily classes of about 2 hours, with conversation and reading classic literature like *Māhābhārata*. During my free time, I visited some *sādhus* and *sādhvīs* who stayed in the neighborhood to talk with them, or went to some famous temples or nearby *āśrams* (hermitage). It was a precious experience for me to stay in Vārānasi, which is called a spiritual capital and has many religious centers attracting -various spiritual masters and seekers.

After that, I stayed in Haridwār (in the state of Uttarākhanda), where *Kumbh Mēlā*, one of biggest Hindu festivals, was taking place for about 3 months and many *sādhusants*, pilgrims and tourists had gathered. To practice Hindi, I visited some camps where *sādhusants* stayed during the festival and local *āśrams*, and conducted interviews with *sādhvīs* about their actual life-styles, social relationships, how they had renounced the world, and so on. By having conversations with *sādhvīs* and living in *āśrams*, I made good relationships with some of them, as friends, or as *guru śiṣya* (teacher-disciple). I came to understand the various kinds of *guru- śiṣya* relationships and *sādhvīs*’ practice of care, including *sevā*, through the research.