



*The James Barnett Lecture Series on Religious
Cultures and the Ethnographic Research Colloquium*

Present

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Advanced Study, Harvard University**

April 3, 2017

2:00-3:30 pm

Beach Hall, Rm 404

Towards an Anthropology of Wonder

Why are we here? What is a “good” life? Can we imagine a different future? These are the most enduring and bewildering of existential questions. I tell the story of an unexpected creativity through the everyday practice of Hindu priests and their congregations in Bangalore who co-create new wondrous experiences through creative temple rituals. I offer an ethnography of this wonderment which seeks a new conceptual framework to deal with contemporary religious practice and ethical claims in a modern megacity. Vitaly, acknowledging wonder as a religious imperative has significant repercussions on our interrogation on the nature of the real of non-western religions as well as our understandings of the place of religion in our world. I argue that for Hindu ritual participants in Bangalore the attunement to wonder is cast as imperative, to resist, appropriate and recast modern capitalism giving them agency to express their futures in their own practices and theologies. Ritual creativity allows for an extension of the virtual horizons of imagination—of perceptions, actions and affections—towards an unseen, yet boldly imagined, wondrous ethical futurity.

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