

## **REVIEW**

by Prof. Milena Bratoeva, PhD

of the research output of Assoc. Prof Gergana Ruseva, PhD regarding the selection procedure for the academic position of “Professor” at the Department of Classical East, Sofia University, in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Sanskrit – Language and Culture), promulgated in State Gazette, issue 86 from 13.10.2023

The application documents are in order and are in line with the legal requirements. The reference for the national requirements for application shows that the applicant’s achievements exceed the minimal requirements along all three criteria (G, D, E).

### **The applicant’s background**

In the period 1995-2000, Assoc. Prof. Dr Gergana Ruseva attends the Program of Indian studies at the Department of "Classical East" of Sofia University and receives her master’s degree in 2000. Prior to that, in 1997, she graduated at the Faculty of Physics of Sofia University, where she studied "Physics of the nucleus and elementary particles". In the period 2002-2005, Assoc. Prof. Ruseva is a PhD-student at the Department of “Classical East”, where in 2005 she defended her Doctoral thesis. It can be said that since the beginning of her full-time doctoral study, her professional path has been closely connected to the Indology section and to the Department of Classical East, where she worked as a part-time lecturer in Vedic language and Sanskrit until 2009, although between 2000 and 2009 Gergana Ruseva was working as a physicist-specialist at the Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy of the Bulgarian Academy of Science. In 2009, Assoc. Prof. Ruseva become a full-time lecturer at the Department of "Classical East", after winning a competition for the academic position of senior Assistant-Professor in Sanskrit. In 2012 she was appointed as “Associate Professor” in Sanskrit at the same Department. Assoc. Prof. Ruseva has been a Head of the Indology Section for 10 years (2009-2019), and from 2019 and at present – Head of the Department of "Classical East". Since the same year, she has been a member of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology.

### **Evaluation of the applicant’s teaching experience**

Assoc. Prof Gergana Ruseva has taught at all levels of university education. At BA level her main course has been *Sanskrit* (Parts I and II). But additionally her teaching activity covers

the following compulsory courses: *Hindi Morphology and Syntax*, and since 2022 – *Hindi Lexicology and Syntax, Academic Writing, Darśana – Indian worldview* and the optional one *Dyotiṣa: Traditional Indian Astrology*. She also teaches *Sanskrit* in the MA programmes *Indian and Iranian Cultural and Social Studies* and *Buddhism: Languages, Literatures and Cultures (with Eastern Language)*. Ruseva's main courses in the last master's programme are: *Early Buddhism in texts, Seminar for the preparation of MA-thesis, Introduction to Pāli Language according to Dhammapada*. Assoc. Prof Ruseva also taught the optional course *Sanskrit for non-Indologists* at the Department of "Classical Philology". Assoc. Prof Ruseva also delivers courses at the Doctoral School of the Faculty (2). She was supervisor/consultant of doctoral theses (4 in total, of which two were successfully defended), as well as of master's theses (3). She is the author of reviews and opinions in competitions for the acquisition of PhD-degree (6) and participates in juries for the academic position of "senior Assistant-Professor" (4). She worked as a supervisor or team member within a total of 11 projects, of which 2 were of EU, 5 are Scientific and Research Projects. It is worth to note that in some of the projects Ruseva has initiated, participated also students of the Indology.

**Evaluation of research publications and contributions in the works of Assoc. Prof. Dr Gergana Ruseva**

For the present selection procedure for the academic position of “Professor” Gergana Ruseva has submitted two monographs, 5 studies and 4 articles, published between 2018 and 2023. Two of the publications (No. 3, 8 in the list of publications for the selection procedure) are indexed in the *Web of Science* database, one (No. 9) – in ERICH PLUS. Assoc. Prof Ruseva's publications after her appointment as Assoc. Professor in 2012, however, are many more, which is evident from the attached list of all publications. All of her publications showcased her scholarly productivity and research passion. But more crucially, they revealed her to be a serious and thorough scholar with innovative ideas, who rigorously substantiates her hypotheses.

Since I have known Gergana's professional career from the very beginning, I will allow me to state that over the years, she has established herself as a highly regarded expert in the field of Sanskrit and Vedic studies, who has garnered recognition among her colleagues in the indological community, which is also evident from the number of quotations of her publication. However, I would note, that not all of her quotations are included in the attached list.

Throughout her extensive body of work, including the publications presented in this selection procedure, it is evident that Ruseva's scholarly pursuits have consistently centered on the fundamental mythological, proto-philosophical, and metaphysical concepts that underpin the worldview of ancient Indo-Aryans and their manifestations in Vedic language and Sanskrit. Possessing a remarkable fluency in Old Indian languages, Ruseva has masterfully delved into the minds (to borrow Witzel's apt phrase) of the composers of these profoundly metaphorical, polysemous, and often enigmatic texts, meticulously piecing together the thought processes of Vedic poets, ritual specialists, and epic bards. While primarily a Sanskrit scholar, Ruseva's work transcends the realm of mere linguistics. She approaches her research with a broader, more encompassing perspective that incorporates cultural, psychological, and philosophical dimensions, demonstrating her commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry. In recent years, her attention has been drawn to the methodologies of cognitive linguistics, a field that has proven instrumental in illuminating Vedic mythology. Ruseva's wide-ranging academic interests are complemented by an equally impressive erudition, extending not only to specialized Indological literature but also to diverse fields of humanities, particularly psychology. This breadth of knowledge is reflected in the extensive bibliographies that accompany her publications.

Recently the focus of Assoc. Prof Ruseva's in-depth interest is the notion of time in Indian culture, which is also evident from the publications presented in the selection procedure (No. 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11 ). Her reflections on the subject find their most comprehensive expression in her monograph *Forward to the Past, Backward to the Future: Ideas of Time in Ancient India*, which stands out as the most significant contribution among her scholarly works, submitted to the selection procedure. Therefore, I will delve into this publication with greater detail. As the author herself acknowledges in the preface, her interest in this topic stems from her fascination with the interpretation of the "sense of time" in Patañjali's seminal treatise *Yogasūtra*, as well as the understanding of memory within various Buddhist traditions (p. 1). In pursuit of answers to these inquiries, she tries to trace the genesis of these concepts in the very foundational texts of Indian culture – the Vedas and the epic *Mahābhārata*, and if possible to uncover certain directions in the development of the ancient Indo-Aryan ideas concerning the notion of time and space as they are encoded in the language of the sacred scriptures and in the epic. The monograph covers 224 pages and includes the following five chapters: *Time as Revealed in Language, The Year and the Wheel of Time. Primacy and Pervasiveness of Time, On Fate and Time in the Mahabharata – The*

*Wheel, the Thread and the Loom, All-pervasive Time, Calendar*. Each of them consists of several sub-chapters and sub-parts, following the logic of unfolding author's reasoning. At the end of the monograph are indicated the source-material, on which the research is based and a respectable number of bibliographical references. Ruseva also prepared three Indexes (of Sanskrit terms, of the authors, and of quoted Vedic and Sanskrit texts), which have an indisputable pragmatic value. The illustrations in the book are also very cleverly chosen, and they effectively visualize the author's reflections.

The notions of time held by ancient Indo-Aryans have captivated the attention of numerous scholars, whose interpretations and conclusions are well-known to Ruseva, as evident from her numerous citations of their work. This highlights her profound expertise in this area of study. However, what truly sets her monograph apart is her innovative approach, which lends it remarkable significance. A prime example of this is her unconventional starting point – a re-evaluation of her own translation of a stanza from the Kaṭha Upaniṣad (1.6) from Sanskrit into Bulgarian. This introspective exercise leads her to contemplate the cultural variations in the perception of time between India and Bulgaria.

Drawing upon the well-established methodology of cognitive linguistics, particularly the examination of spatial cognitive metaphors for expressing time in various languages, Ruseva traces the diverse conceptualizations of time in ancient Indian mythology. In a logical progression, she initially delves into the cognitive metaphors embedded within the *R̥gveda*, where time is vividly portrayed along the spatial dimensions of forward-backward and up-down axes. Here, I will highlight one of Ruseva's observations in the paragraph of the monograph, devoted to the forward-backward axis (1.4.2. *Representation of time by means of space along the forward-backward horizontal axis*).

Examining the distinctive employment of adjectives and adverbs in Vedic and Sanskrit with the overarching connotations "first," "before," "earlier," "eastern" and, conversely, "next," "after," "later," "western," the author, referring to the unique phonetic arrangement of the Sanskrit alphabet, formulates the very interesting, at least in my opinion, conclusion that "The first vowels are those that are pronounced in the parts of the mouth where the breath first reaches, followed by their long counterparts (starting with the pharyngeal sound 'a', the palatal sound 'i', and then the labial sound 'u'). Subsequently, consonants are arranged according to the places where the breath reaches first during pronunciation. This arrangement, therefore, is not determined by the external observer or the speaker themselves, but rather by the motion-filled breath, *prāṇa*, or *ātman*, the force that

generates sound. The arrangement of the vowels and consonants reflects the sequential progression of places reached by the breath during articulation" (c 33-34 ).

In many respects, Ruseva's approach to mythological images and symbols that have been repeatedly studied and analyzed in Indology, such as the sacrificial horse (in the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*), the *śyenacit* altar constructed during the *agnicāyana* ritual, Śiva's cosmic dance, the Rāhu-Ketu axis, and the god Prajāpati, is particularly innovative. She views them not merely as isolated symbols but as figurative and mythological expressions of the intricate interweaving of space and time (p. 38).

I would like to highlight another particularly insightful passage from the monograph – Section 4.5: The Tree of Life (158-174). In particular, Ruseva's analysis of the image of the tree-hanging *brahman* from the *Mahābhārata* parable (11.5–6) and its conceptual connection with a crucial moment in the Vedic *vājpeya* ritual is particularly noteworthy. During this ritual, the patron of the ritual and his wife ascend the sacrificial pillar (*yuparohana*), a central symbolic representation of the cosmic tree in Indo-Aryan ritual practice. Ruseva emphasizes the pivotal role played by the upward movement of the ritual participants, as well as their circular circumambulation of the sacrificial fire, as integral components of the ritual performance. This analysis serves as just one of myriad examples that demonstrate Ruseva's profound understanding of the images, narratives, and symbolism employed by the Indo-Aryans to express their conceptions of time. It also underscores her scholarly acumen and her ability to synthesize diverse elements from various strata of ancient Indian culture into a cohesive conceptual framework.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize the ambitious nature of this monographic study, which aims to extract, interpret, and, to the best of its ability, summarize the notions of time embedded in various texts of ancient Indian culture. As Ruseva herself acknowledges, the Vedic texts do not present a unified and cohesive perspective on time, with distinct chapters or hymns dedicated to its exploration (p. 51). The only notable exception are two hymns in the *Atharvaveda* (XIX.53–54), which Ruseva examines in this monograph. Having read this monograph multiple times during my review process, I can confidently assert that Ruseva has masterfully tackled this challenging task.

To my knowledge, there exists no other study in Indology that offers such a comprehensive, cohesive, and detailed examination of the notions of time in ancient Indian culture, spanning such a vast array of original texts. Ruseva's exploration of these concepts is particularly commendable, as the translation of these texts into Bulgarian significantly enhances the value of her research.

Here, I will highlight a point that also applies to the author's second monograph, *Tasting the Sweetest Fruit of Immortality: Ideas of Death, the Path to the Hereafter and Dream in Ancient India*. Ruseva has translated numerous works or excerpts from works into Bulgarian from Vedic and Sanskrit for the purpose of her research. This should also be considered a commendable aspect of the proposed monograph, even though translations are generally not regarded as a significant scholarly contribution. However, in this case, we are dealing with texts that have been translated into Bulgarian for the first time, texts whose translation is, in many respects, a challenge for the interpreters. At the very least, these translations have practical value for Sanskrit teaching.

In two studies (No. 7 and 11) and in an article (No. 8), Assoc. Prof Ruseva examines the conceptualization of time in Buddhism. Her provocative study, entitled *On the Personal Experience of Momentariness in Buddhism*, stands out for its unconventional approach, drawing inspiration from the first-hand accounts of schizophrenic patients experiencing their first year of the illness. Ruseva contends that these experiences bear striking resemblances to the descriptions of the momentariness found in the texts of Yogāchāra school of Buddhism. From this perspective, Ruseva interprets the concept of momentariness in Buddhism primarily as a meditative practice. This study exemplifies Ruseva's unique ability to approach complex issues from an interdisciplinary and unconventional angle. Her thought-provoking conclusions regarding the manipulative nature of the meditative techniques employed by Yogāchāra adherents echo her examination of time in early Buddhism in her second "Buddhist" publication, *The Moment in which the River Rests: Time in Early Buddhism*.

Tracing the diverse perspectives on the nature of time presented in canonical Pāli literature, Ruseva highlights how these views aim to fundamentally alter the perception of time among Buddha's followers. By cultivating this altered perception, practitioners gain the ability to experience the world around them and themselves in a holistic manner, to recognize the illusory nature of time as a mental construct, and ultimately to attain liberation (nibbana/nirvāṇa). This approach echoes Ruseva's exploration of similar themes in her study *Some Buddhist Notions on Time and on the Sense of Time*, which examines concepts of time as linear, cyclic, and imperative as they are articulated in the Pāli Canon and the *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*.

All the three publications demonstrate Ruseva's permanent interest in the Buddhist interpretation of time, the specificity of which is presupposed by the soteriological essence of Buddhist teaching.

Gergana Ruseva's second monograph, *Tasting the Sweetest Fruit of Immortality: Ideas of Death, the Path to the Hereafter and Dream in Ancient India*, synthesizes and expands upon the themes explored in her earlier publications, offering a comprehensive and insightful examination of death, afterlife, and dream in ancient Indian thought. It is to a great extent related conceptually to the first monograph, because the theme of death and immortality links logically to that of time and the ways by which one can overcome the limitations of time and space.

The monograph, spanning 160 pages, introducing author's observations and conclusions, is divided into two principal sections. The first part explores the intricate and multifaceted concept of the afterlife in ancient Indian thought, acknowledging its inherent heterogeneity, as the author herself has aptly noted. The second section revolves around the profound connection between dreams and death, particularly highlighting the significance attributed to dreaming and its transformative impact on the waking state within the ancient Indian tradition. Ruseva's interpretations are grounded in a remarkably diverse range of sources, encompassing the sacred texts of the Vedic canon, non-canonical ritualistic literature, the grand narratives of the epic tradition (the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas), Ayurveda treatises, and Buddhist narrative literature.

The book shows that its author knows in detail the specialized literature on the subject. In this monograph, as well as in the first one, Ruseva focuses on themes constructing the ancient man's worldview – death and immortality; dreaming and waking; here (on earth) and there (in the afterlife) and so on. In this monograph, as well as in the first one she demonstrates her ability to "see" the bigger picture and the place of every one individual component in it, which enters into certain relationships with the others.

I would like to highlight the particularly valuable conclusion Ruseva draws regarding the narrowing of the gap between waking and dream states and the recognition of both as expressions of consciousness. As she observes, "Very early, Indians discovered the dream as a philosophical and psychological mode of self-reflection, and in the Upaniṣads, the interpretation of dreams evolved into a means of philosophical insight and world-understanding" (p. 101).

The book's content is remarkably coherent and systematic, weaving together a comprehensive analysis of how the concepts of death, afterlife, journey of the soul, and dream are uniquely interpreted within the Indian thought paradigm while simultaneously identifying their underlying universal characteristics that make them an immanent part of the Indo-European conceptualization.

The article *Prāṇá in the Atharvaveda* is an exceptionally valuable contribution to our understanding of one of the most fundamental Vedic concepts, *prāṇá* ("breath," "life force"). Based on an analysis of Hymn XI.4 of the *Atharvaveda* and of other Vedic texts, Ruseva constructs a semantic map of the concept (following Haspelmath's definition) and delineates the semantic chains within which it is embedded. The article traces the remarkable process of semantic generalization through which the concept evolves from "breath" to encompass "spirit" and "essence that merges with the wind," providing compelling evidence for the deep-rooted connection between the act of breathing and the notion of the divine. Equally noteworthy is Ruseva's construction of a semantic map of the Bulgarian word "breath"/"breathing" and her comparative analysis of the two semantic chains.

Assoc. Prof. Ruseva's article, *Creating the Cosmos from Oneself – on Dismemberment and Rebirth*, takes an innovative approach to the universal motif of the world's creation from the dismembered body of the primal being (Puruṣa, Prajāpati), a central theme in the cosmogonic myths of the ancient Indo-Aryans. Ruseva examines this cosmogonic idea from the perspective of the individual's transformative experiences during initiation and purification rituals. She explores the profound connection between the myth's genesis and the personal experience, illuminating the significance of achieving a specific mental state during the ritual reenactment of the myth.

### **Conclusion**

Assoc. Prof. Dr Gergana Ruseva's research activity introduces her as a promising scholar with an original thinking, combined with a profound knowledge in the field of Sanskrit and Vedic studies. Her impressive scholarly output, notable both in quantity and quality, and her successful teaching activity provide ample grounds for a categorically positive evaluation of her academic contributions. That is why I strongly recommend to the esteemed jury to appoint Assoc. Prof. Dr Gergana Rumenova Ruseva as **Professor in the professional field 2.1.Philology (Sanskrit - Language and Culture)**.

21.01. 2024

Reviewer:  
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