

Obituary

Dr Tuvia Gelblum, 1928–2007

Tuvia Gelblum, who was born in 1928 in Tel-Aviv and died in London on 13 January 2007, was Emeritus Reader in Indian Philosophy in the University of London, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and a distinguished scholar of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Hebrew. He was thus uniquely qualified to make a most original and valuable contribution to knowledge: a marathon 25-year study, in collaboration with Professor Shlomo Pines of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, of the one surviving manuscript of al-Bīrūnī's Arabic translation of *Pātañjala Yogasūtra*, the basic Sanskrit text of classical Indian Yoga philosophy. The Persian al-Bīrūnī, in the early eleventh century, was the first Muslim to study Indian culture, and the first scholar to bring to the Western world a direct translation from Sanskrit written and oral tradition, recording these at a time when the orthodox Hindu philosophies were still in a considerable state of flux.

Doubtless more active than al-Bīrūnī's presence in the train of Maḥmūd's invasion of India in AD 1030 was Gelblum's involvement as a Jewish settlements officer in the Palestine police force and as a youthful and valiant soldier in the Arab–Israeli conflict of 1948. His linguistic prowess, equalling al-Bīrūnī's reputed grasp of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Greek, was fostered by an unsought opportunity to learn Arabic, as a prisoner of war of the Arab Legion in Jordan, one of the few who, reportedly by the intervention of the King of Jordan, survived the elimination of the Israeli enclave Etzion. His teaching and organization skills were developed in the course of lectures and seminars arranged by the prisoners.

After achieving postgraduate distinction in Arabic and Biblical Studies at The Hebrew University in 1952, Gelblum studied languages and culture as an Indian Government scholar in Santiniketan and Delhi. As such he was treated by Jawaharlal Nehru and Ben Gurion as an unofficial ambassador between the two recently independent countries, befriended by leading Indian writers as a fellow-enthusiast, and adopted as neophyte by ascetics to whose cave-dwelling lifestyle he could equally readily adapt himself.

He proceeded to postgraduate study of Sanskrit in London (1957–60). Inspired by the pioneering work of Daniel Ingalls in Harvard, and that of his mentors John Brough and Frits Staal in London, he completed his doctoral thesis "Perception and inference in the *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī*", a landmark analysis of Navya-nyāya, the "new" epistemology and logic that evolved *c.* AD 1100 in Bengal, a technique of abstract and truth-functional analysis no less precise than the symbolic logic that was eventually formulated in nineteenth-century Britain. Gelblum's skill in devising accurate translation equivalents for Indian philosophical concepts, as well as his boundless enthusiasm and infectious humour, were to enable his students to gain insight even into this most abstruse aspect of his subject.

From 1962–66 he was involved, as Lecturer and Senior Lecturer, in introducing Indian studies to the curriculum of The Hebrew University, establishing it as a discipline which included close ties with Arabic and Islamic studies on the one hand, and with philosophy on the other. He was appointed in 1968 to a Lectureship in Sanskrit at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and eventually to its University of London Readership in Indian Philosophy (1972). His analyses, with Shlomo Pines, of Al-Bīrūnī's Arabic Yogasūtra were published serially in *BSOAS* between 1966 and 1989. Based on critical comparison of the printed edition with the highly defective original Köprülü manuscript, it established that Al-Bīrūnī's work was no direct translation of any now extant Sanskrit text, but rather a digest of current commentatorial exegesis bearing on a version of Yogasūtra that was shorter than the known text by a score of sūtras. Though tinged with a measure of Hellenization of presentation and involuntary "islamization" of ideas, it serves as a corrective beside surviving Sanskrit works that are slightly older in conception, but may have been altered in the course of transmission.

Apart from his regular contributions to the BA Sanskrit course, and besides serving as a long-standing member of the School's principal academic committees, he had also, in a period of retrenchment, to assume responsibility for its teaching in Indian religions as well as philosophy, then still located in the Department of the Languages and Cultures of South Asia. For this he was well equipped, having amassed a very large private library of recent South Asian and Western publications on Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism, and he engaged especially, in lectures and in the pages of *BSOAS*, with the innovative approaches of R. C. Zaehner and B. K. Matilal to comparative religion and philosophy.

That Gelblum made a hobby of collecting and comparing the world's endless stream of publications on Yoga and translations of *Bhagavadgītā* was an aspect not only of his boundless good will, but also of his impish sense of humour. Retirement in 1993 gave him scope for renewed visits to India, to him a spiritual and intellectual home. Increasingly plagued by Parkinson's Disease, he found joy in music, solace in the loving care of his wife Anat, his sons Ben and Daniel and their families, and relief in the Ayurvedic treatments which Daniel learned in India to continue at home in London.

J. C. Wright