

Holy Cow and Enlightenment for Idiots

Modern travel fiction representing spiritual tourism in India

Readers and movie goers from all over the world followed Liz Gilbert in *Eat Pray Love* through Italy, India and Bali on the way to finding herself. This is only one of the most recent – and one of the most commercially successful – examples for travel fiction about spiritual tourism.

In my presentation, I would like to explore the genre of spiritual travel fiction about India, most of which is dedicated either to Yoga tourism or to young Westerners on a spiritual quest. Concentrating on several recent publications, I will argue that this topos is a meeting of entertainment and self-help books, equally committed to both of these aspects: While the readers seek pleasure in the exotic imagery and often humorous style and plot, they also tend to escape reality and try to solve their own problems by identifying with the main character – one of the most important features and functions of fiction.

Drawing on my Master's thesis in Religious Studies about spiritual tourism in southern India, the findings will contribute to the conference by providing valuable information on the relationship of fictional literature and religious tourism.