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Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap
(Ghent University, Belgium)

Centre for the Study of Local Cultures
(Kuvempu University, India)

India Platform UGent
(Ghent University, Belgium)

Karnataka Academy for Social Sciences and Humanities
(Karnataka, India)

“ Rethinking
Religion
in
India ”

10 - 13 JANUARY 2009

NEW DELHI, INDIA

INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSIS (IDSA)

www.cultuurwetenschap.be/conferences/RRI

“ Rethinking Religion in India ”

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Rethinking Religion in India Blog via
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During and after the conference, short reports and reflections about the conference will be posted here by several invited speakers and participants. We invite you to actively contribute by posting comments on this blog.

If you have any questions or suggestions about this initiative, please contact the blog administrator, Raf Gelders: rafgelders@gmail.com

“ Rethinking Religion in India ”

Organising Team §

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Inaugural Committee §

- Prof. B.S. Sherigara
(Vice-Chancellor, Kuvempu University)
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- Prof. S.N. Balagangadhara
(Director, Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University)
- Prof. J.S. Sadananda
(Director, Karnataka Academy of Social Sciences and Humanities)
- Prof. Rajaram Hegde
(Director, Centre for the Study of Local Cultures, Kuvempu University)

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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

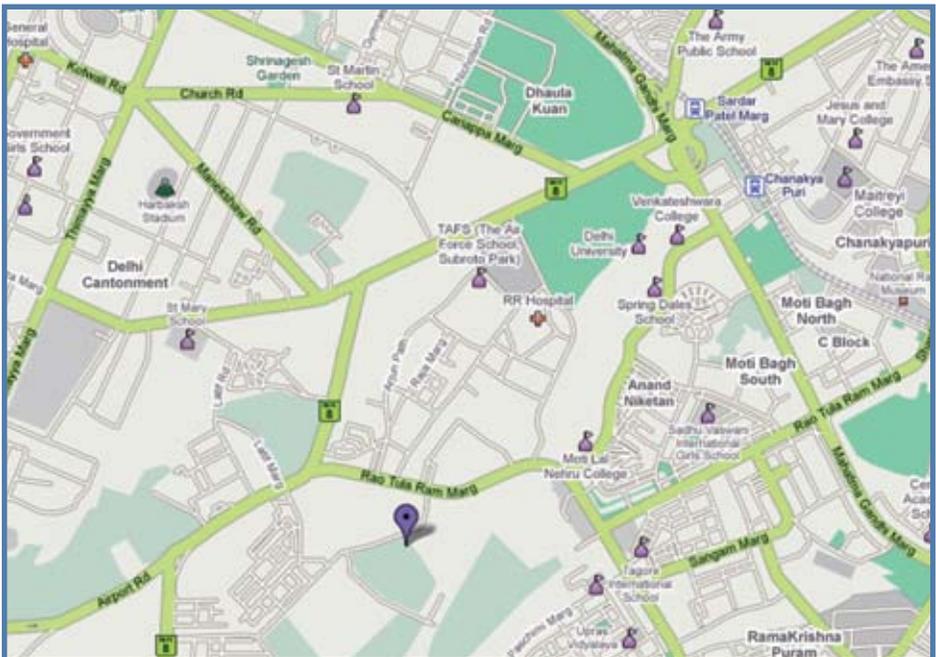
§ Conference venue

Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA)
1, Development Enclave (near USI)
Rao Tularam Marg
Delhi Cantonment
New Delhi - 110 010
(opposite Subroto Park)

§ Lunch and refreshments

A simple vegetarian and non-vegetarian lunch, as well as morning and afternoon tea with light snacks, is served for all conference participants.

§ Map of the area



INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Rethinking Religion in India II will be inaugurated by **Prof. B.S. Sherigara** (Vice-Chancellor, Kuvempu University). **Prof. S.N. Balagangadhara** (Ghent University, Belgium) will give a keynote address, introducing the main idea behind Rethinking Religion in India II.

Room: Main auditorium

10 January 2009, 12.00 – 13.30

WELCOME

In January 2008, Rethinking Religion in India I initiated the five-year conference cluster by questioning the current theoretical framework for the study of religion and tradition in the Indian context. This first conference was crucial to test the grounds for the possibilities of developing such a new approach in an academic conference. It became clear that many acknowledge the need to develop an alternative framework for the study of the Indian traditions. Most striking were the intellectual enthusiasm among the participating scholars and the willingness to engage in extensive discussions on this topic.

The second conference proceeds from the conclusions of the first: If the theoretical framework of religious studies is inadequate in the Indian context, what are the implications for our understanding of certain conflicts and problems in India that are generally related to religion? More specifically, the different sessions revolve around questions such as: is secularism the solution to these problems or does it play a role in aggravating them? Can we develop

new insights into the debates about conversion, Indian history and the Aryan invasion, or fundamentalism?

Today, most discussions on these issues have taken the form of an ideological struggle between two opposing political positions, viz. secularism and Hindutva. This struggle has hijacked reflection and debate on the nature of Indian culture and society, making an academic debate almost impossible. Under the motto of ‘Rethinking Secularism,’ this conference intends to go beyond the limitations of the conceptual framework – shared by Hindutva and secularism – in a theoretical and scholarly way.

Like last year, the different formats of the conference are meant to create a space for in-depth reflections and analyses. To make this possible there are strictly moderated Platform debates, Roundtable sessions where several experts are brought together, Parallel Paper sessions focused on a clear theme, and guided workshops.

In the course of three **Platform sessions** two speakers defend and elaborate their respective answers to the question ‘Is secularism the solution to communal conflict in India?’ in a one-on-one debate. Each speaker is assisted by a fellow advocate of his position.

The **Roundtable sessions** take up three different themes: (1) Freedom of Religion and Religious Conversion; (2) Secularism, Hindutva and the Aryan Invasion Theory; and (3) Liberal Secularism and Religious Fundamentalism: Opposites or Alter Egos? In each session one or two presentations introduce the theme after which the discussion among the Roundtable participants is initiated by two expert respondents.

In the **Parallel Paper sessions** scholars from different parts of the world share their research findings and reflections on the following themes: (1) Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion; (2) Colonialism and Religion in India; (3) Religion and Law in India and (4) Rethinking Secularism in India.

Finally, a number of ‘**How to...?**’ **workshops** provide all conference participants with the opportunity to actively contribute to the discussions. These workshops take up very concrete questions and try to work towards a number of notes, guidelines, suggestions, etc.: (1) How to Teach About the Indian Religions and Traditions? (2) Rethinking Values, Well-Being and Faith: Braiding Psychoanalysis and Social Action (3) Self-Presentation of Hinduism in the Modern Context (4) How to Launch and Develop the Academic Study of Religion in South Asia: Does the University of Dhaka Provide a Model?

The programming and organizing committee of Rethinking Religion in India welcomes you for four days of joint reflection upon these pressing and contemporary themes.

Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism

Edited by Esther Bloch, Marianne Keppens and Rajaram Hegde,
Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University, Belgium
and the Centre for the Study of Local Cultures, Kuvempu University, India
Hb: 978-0-415-54890-8 - 240pg - £75.00 – Dec 2009 (Routledge, in press)

Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism critically assesses the recent debates about the colonial construction of Hinduism. Increasingly scholars realize that the dominant understanding of the Indian culture and its traditions is unsatisfactory. In the current paradigm, the Hindu traditions are conceptualized as a religion characterized by distinct beliefs, doctrines, sacred laws and holy texts. However, many scholars have started arguing that this conception is a colonial 'construction,' which does not correspond to any empirical reality of 'Hinduism.' Others have shown that conceptions of 'Hinduism' very similar to those of the British colonials were in existence long before the nineteenth century. The volume gives an overview of the different positions on the colonial construction of religion in India, in

the words of the original authors in the debate.

Several historical and empirical analyses presented in the book are new or improved reflections on the nature of the construction of religion in India.

The first part of the book focuses on the historical arguments and counter-arguments for the claim that Hinduism was constructed by the British colonials. The different authors state their position in the debate on the colonial construction of religion and assess the debate in terms of the available data. They provide new analyses of historical and empirical data or give a different perspective on the debate.

The second part addresses some of the theoretical questions that have over

the years emerged from the debate on the 'construction of religion': Is the category of religion adequate to understand the Indian traditions? Is religion still a Christian theological concept, embedded in a background theological framework? What does it

mean to say that Hinduism is a 'construct' resulting from the colonial encounter? What is the relationship between the construction of religion, Orientalism and the social sciences in general?

Chapters:

1. David Lorenzen

A Challenge to the British Construction of Hinduism: the Muslim use of 'Hindu'.

2. Geoffrey Oddie

Hindu Religious Identity with Special Reference to the Origin and Significance of the Term 'Hinduism'.

3. John Zavos

Representing Religion in Colonial India.

4. Sharada Sugirtharajah

The Colonial Motives behind the Construction of Hinduism.

5. Laurie L. Patton

Notes on Religion and Colonialism: A View from the Gendered Sanskrit Present.

6. Richard King

The Christian Logic of the Discourse of Religion.

7. Timothy Fitzgerald

The Inadequacy of the Category of Religion.

8. S.N. Balagangadhara

Orientalism, Postcolonialism and the 'Construction' of Religion.

9. Jakob De Roover & Sarah Claerhout

The Colonial Construction of What?

CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

Saturday 10 January

9.00-12.00 : *Registration*

Tea, coffee and snacks available

Registration hall

12.00-13.30 : *Welcome and inauguration*

Main auditorium

13.30-14.30 : Lunch

14.30-16.00 : *Platform session 1*
'Is secularism the solution to communal conflict in India?'

Main auditorium

16.00-16.15 : Tea break

16.15-17.00 : *Platform session 1*

Main auditorium

Sunday 11 January

9.00-11.00 : *How to...? Workshops*

Workshop 1

Seminar hall 1

Workshop 2

Main auditorium

Workshop 3

Seminar hall 2

Workshop 4

Seminar hall 3

11.00-11.15 : Tea break

11.15-13.15 : *Roundtable session 1*

'Rethinking Secularism: of Religion and Religious Conversion'

Banquet hall

13.15-14.30 : Lunch

14.30-16.00 : *Platform session 2*
'Is secularism the solution to communal conflict in India?'

Main auditorium

16.00-16.15 : Tea break

16.15-17.00 : *Platform session 2*

Main auditorium

17.00-17.15 : Tea break

17.15-19.15 : *Parallel Paper sessions 1*

Rethinking Secularism in India 1

Seminar hall 1

Secularism, Conversion and Law. Case Studies from India

Seminar hall 2

Religion and Law in India 1

Seminar hall 3

Rethinking Religion in India II, 10-13 January 2009

Monday 12 January

09.00-11.00 : *Parallel Paper sessions 2*

Rethinking Secularism in India 2

Seminar hall 1

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 1

Seminar hall 2

Religion and Law in India 2

Seminar hall 3

Colonialism and Religion in India 1

Main auditorium

11.00-11.15 : Tea break

11.15-13.15 : *Roundtable session 2*

'Rethinking Secularism: Secularism, Hindutva and the Aryan Invasion Theory'

Banquet hall

13.15-14.30 : Lunch

14.30-16.00 : *Platform session 3*

'Is secularism the solution to communal conflict in India?'

Main auditorium

16.00-16.15 : Tea break

16.15-17.00 : *Platform session 3*

Main auditorium

Tuesday 13 January

9.00-11.00 : *Parallel Paper sessions 3*

Rethinking Secularism in India 3

Seminar hall 1

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 2

Seminar hall 2

Colonialism and Religion in India 2

Seminar hall 3

11.00-11.15 : Tea break

11.15-13.15 : *Roundtable session 3*

'Rethinking Secularism: Liberal Secularism and Religious Fundamentalism: Opposites or Alter Egos?'

Banquet hall

13.15-14.30 : Lunch

14.30-16.30 : *Closing workshop*

'Towards the future of rethinking religion in India'

Banquet hall

16.30-16.45 : Tea break

16.45-17.30 : *Closing address*

Main auditorium

PLATFORM SESSIONS

'IS SECULARISM THE SOLUTION TO COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN INDIA?'

Speakers:

- Achin Vanaik (Delhi University)
with the support of Neera Chandhoke (Delhi University)

Vs.

- Jakob De Roover (Ghent University)
with the support of S.N. Balagangadhara (Ghent University)

Moderator • J.S. Sadananda (Kuvempu University)

Platform session 1:

10 January 2009, 14.30-17.00

Platform session 2:

11 January 2009, 14.30-17.00

Platform session 3:

12 January 2009, 14.30-17.00

Room: Main auditorium



Platform debate

The platform debates occupy a central place in the conference cluster on ‘Rethinking Religion in India’. Therefore, we would like to spell-out some of its key-elements in this note to the speakers and the public.

The Platform question

In the last six decades, whenever India faced violent conflict between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, intellectuals and politicians have called for more secularism. The liberal secular state has been presented as the neutral arbiter needed to control the communal strife between the religious communities. Secularists have theorized ‘communalism’ as the use of religion for political purposes or secular reasons, while ‘secularism’ as the separation of politics and religion is its antidote.

More and more thinkers are questioning this account. From the 1980s onwards, Ashis Nandy and T.N. Madan have pointed out that the implementation of secularism in India appears to have led to the rise of communal conflict, rather than having countered it. More recently, a group of scholars has joined them with the argument that the political theory of secularism is derived from the theologies of the Protestant Reformation. There is nothing neutral about the liberal secular state, they argue. Rather, this political model provides a normative theological straitjacket that transforms the relations between communities in the Indian society into religious conflict.

The Platform sessions consist of a one-on-one debate between representatives of two different positions towards this question. Both speakers are assisted by a fellow advocate of their position, who can be requested to take over the task of developing a particular argument or countering an argument of the opponent, in the midst of the debate.

PLATFORM SESSIONS

'IS SECULARISM THE SOLUTION TO COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN INDIA?'

The Platform logistics

The Platform discussions will be plenary in nature and conducted over three days. The first session starts with a short presentation by the speakers of their respective standpoints, which will be followed by a debate in which they will defend and elaborate their position. This debate will be continued in the second session. The third session will attempt to bring together the different arguments and to come either to a clear formulation of the opposing standpoints or to an agreement. In this session, there will also be the opportunity for the audience to join in the discussions.

One-on-one debate

The debate will be rigorously moderated and will be held according to the principles of reasonable discussion or rational dialogue. These have been conveniently summarised in the 'ten commandments' of reasonable discussion by the pragma-dialectical school of argumentation theory:

- (1) Parties must not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from casting doubts on standpoints.
- (2) A party that advances a standpoint is obliged to defend it if asked by the other party to do so.
- (3) A party's attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party.
- (4) A party may defend a standpoint only by advancing argumentation relating to that standpoint.
- (5) A party may not disown a premise that has been left implicit by that party or falsely present something as a premise that has been left unexpressed by the other party.



(6) A party may not falsely present a premise as an accepted starting point nor deny a premise representing an accepted starting point.

(7) A party may not regard a standpoint as conclusively defended if the defence does not take place by means of an appropriate argumentation scheme that is correctly applied.

(8) A party may only use arguments in its argumentation that are logically valid or capable of being validated by making explicit one or more unexpressed premises.

(9) A failed defence of a standpoint must result in the party that put forward the standpoint retracting it and a conclusive defence of the standpoint must result in the other party retracting its doubt about the standpoint.

(10) A party may not use formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous and a party must interpret the other party's formulations as carefully and accurately as possible.

(F. van Eemeren et al. (1996) *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory: A Handbook of Historical Backgrounds and Contemporary Developments*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 283-284.)

PLATFORM SESSIONS

‘IS SECULARISM THE SOLUTION TO COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN INDIA?’

The two positions

Achin Vanaik

1. Communal conflict in religiously plural societies takes varying forms: from referring to different levels of inter-community tensions and strife to the extreme of communal violence expressed in riots and pogroms. The connections between such violence and the nature of the state – communal or secular – is always a complexly mediated one, defying any simplistic reading off or ‘logic’ of one leading or not leading to the other. Indeed, communal violence is invariably organized (not spontaneous) and contextually and geographically specific and must be understood in all its specificities. Therefore, the very title given to this debate and the polarizing of argumentative positions it demands is unfortunate and unhelpful and detracts from the need to understand the complex and subtle ways in which secularism, secularization and state secularity connect to issues of communalism, let alone communal violence. Secularism is no solution to communal conflict or to communalism but secularism, secularization, the secular state are inescapable and necessary, though in no way sufficient, inputs into the long-term struggle to overcome communalism and move towards a progressively more humane, democratic and just Indian society. The real debate then is about the value and worth and responsibility to be attached to secularism/secularization/the secular state. So let us try and grapple with these key terms precisely in order to clarify the relations between religion, secularism/secularization and communalism.

2. Secularism originated as an ideology of ethics centring morality on the good of humans in this life rather than on a notion of the religiously transcendent. As such it was very much a part of the Enlightenment discourse. Secularism’s separation of morality and religion has as its obvious corollary the call for a substantial separation of religion from political life, in particular from the state where the latter demand was stricter and stronger than the call for separating religious injunction and influence from all politics. Many have claimed that secularism is an alien Westernized concept with no historical roots in India and therefore the secular state and secularism is an unfortunate import that makes matters worse rather than better. Instead there is the claim that the religiously suffused character of India from time immemorial provides the indispensable foundation for the existence of a deep sense



of toleration that itself constitutes a considerably superior basis than modern secularism for creating and sustaining religious-communal harmony.

3. This understanding does not recognize the great differences between pre-modern and modern concepts of tolerance, justice, pluralism and of acceptable forms of social harmony and even of notions of the good life. Both the evils and the virtues of modernity are of a much higher order than those of the past and this means that the strongest commitment must not be to the defence of the exaggerated virtues of the past or indeed of the present, but to the pursuit of a modest and self-critical modernity in which both secular arrogance and contempt for what religion has to offer and religious arrogance and contempt for what secularism and secularization has to offer must be eschewed.

4. The struggle to greatly weaken communalist forces has both a shorter-term and longer-term dimension and operates on two terrains – the state and civil society. Hindu communal forces must be prevented from stabilizing their control of the Indian state and from eroding its legally secular character. But the longer-term more crucial struggle is to secularize civil society. So what do we mean by secularization? The secularization process takes place both outside of and within religious systems. Within means a process of rationalization that introduces modern concepts of equality and liberty. Outside means a many-sided process that involves a significant decline in influence, relative to the past, of religious beliefs, practices, personnel and institutions in social life as also the declining importance of religious identity. Only an unbalanced culturalism would deny such relative secularization in India. To endorse secularization is not to claim that an atheistic Utopia is either feasible or desirable but only to insist that the terms of coexistence between the secular and the religious must be renegotiated, not that one or the other be eliminated. But the terms of this coexistence will have to be different from that of the past and one in which the religious cedes ground to the secular. The more complex life of modernity must be lived more complexly and its balancing mechanisms and norms cannot be those of the past.

5. If one myth is that Indian society has been characterized by an unchanging and continuous permeation by the religious, the second myth is that there is no connection between religion and communalism beyond the superficial fact that the religious identity is merely

PLATFORM SESSIONS

'IS SECULARISM THE SOLUTION TO COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN INDIA?'

a convenient boundary-marker for political mobilization by communal forces whose purposes are wholly secular, namely capture and control of the state. The intrusion of a religious language is not in itself communal but does enhance the likelihood of communal constructions. While in two domains – family and education – religiously inspired doctrines are all too often dangerous.

6. Is communalism best confronted on the terrain of religious discourse and activity itself? Certainly, to be non-secular or anti-secular or to be equivocal about the importance of secularism/secularization is not the same as being communal or even equivocal about communalism. Yes, we need all the resources we can gather and yes this does mean fighting on the terrain of the religious against communalism. But do not mistake what is at best a tactical resource with certain positive attributes for a strategic line of march in the hugely difficult and longer-term struggle to slay the communal beast through a deepening of secularism/secularization, and much more.

It should be obvious that to fight against communalism we need to fight against much more than communalism since its sources are multiple and connect beyond matters of the secular and religious to wider and deeper issues of socio-economic-political-cultural-social inadequacies and injustices. Similarly, to fight for secularism/secularization requires us to fight for much more than that. It requires us to fight for ever greater democratization, popular empowerment and justice in all its domains and forms. A dual strategy is required. We need to aggressively defend and promote a secular Indian state. We need to subsume the issue of secularization under the more encompassing issue of ever greater democratization, popular empowerment and justice in all domains, which then needs to be aggressively advocated and pursued.



Jakob De Roover

My answer to the question of the Platform debate will be: ‘No, secularism is not the solution to communal conflict in India.’ There are a number of reasons why I think this is the case:

1. At the empirical level, the implementation of secularism in India since 1947 has not led to the diminishing, let alone disappearance, of conflicts between different religious and cultural communities. Instead, the frequency and intensity of riots and tensions between these communities appears to have risen significantly. Naturally, one could argue that this has to do with the fact that genuine secularism was never properly implemented by the Indian state.

2. However, there is a more general problem. The belief that the model of the secular state, which was originally formulated in post-Reformation Europe, is the solution to communal conflict in India is based on the unwarranted assumption that the conflicts occurring in India are of the same nature (or at least have a similar structure) as the wars of religion in Europe. Both are taken to be instances of religious conflict. However, it is unclear which properties are characteristic of religious conflicts as opposed to other kinds of conflicts (ethnic, political, economic, etc.). Furthermore, no one has ever demonstrated that the conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India indeed has a structure similar to that between Protestants and Catholics in Europe. In fact, the *prima facie* evidence shows that these conflicts are of a completely different nature. In so far as the normative theory of the secular state intends to provide a universal model to solve the problem of diversity in society, it is bound to fail, for it suffers from a profound ignorance of the structure of plural societies other than those of the West.

3. This becomes clear especially in the Indian case, because here the diversity in society encompasses two very different kinds of cultural phenomena: Semitic religions like Islam and Christianity, on the one hand; and the variety of Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh traditions, on the other hand. These two kinds have very different properties. Semitic religions, on the one hand, view religion as a matter of truth and falsity. Fundamentally, they view religions as doctrines or sets of beliefs and attribute truth predicates to these different doc-

PLATFORM SESSIONS

'IS SECULARISM THE SOLUTION TO COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN INDIA?'

trines. Therefore, they also view different religions as rivals over religious truth. The many Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and Sikh traditions, on the other hand, do not approach religion as an issue of truth and falsity. They do not view different traditions as competing doctrines, but as the ancestral practices that characterize a community. Because of this difference, the neutrality of the secular state becomes extremely problematic in certain situations of conflict between these two kinds of traditions/religions. Most notably among these is the clash over religious conversion in contemporary India. I will argue that the secular state and its principles cannot provide a solution to this clash.

4. There is another problem in transplanting the models and principles of secularism from Western Europe to India. These principles were originally formulated within a particular conceptual framework. When one talked of 'religion,' 'freedom of religion,' 'separating the state from religion' in modern Europe, there was a common theoretical background that allowed one to identify what one was talking about: one knew what religion was, what its characteristic properties were, and what distinguished the political sphere from the sphere of religion. This background consisted of Christian theology. From the seventeenth century onwards the theological conceptual structures went through a dynamic of secularization, but not in the sense that the model of the liberal secular state and its normative principles have become truly secular or non-religious. Rather than a rational Enlightenment extending its secular values to humanity, it concerns an internal religious dynamic of secularization, which spreads Christian principles in secular guise. Consequently, the principles of secularism do not make sense in India, because the theoretical framework required to interpret such principles is not available. Here, it is completely unclear which properties make, say, Hinduism, Jainism or Sikhism into a religion and how to distinguish what is religious from what is secular/political. Therefore, claims that 'politics and religion ought to be separated', that 'the state should be neutral towards religions', or 'that freedom of religion has to be safeguarded' become extremely difficult to interpret and even unintelligible, precisely because they need the original theological background in order to make sense.

5. Apart from such conceptual issues, secularism also faces problems in its actual implementation in India. The secular state, modeled after the liberal democracies in the West, is the harbinger of religious conflict in India because of its conception of toleration and state



neutrality. More of 'secularism' in India will end up feeding what it fights: the so-called 'Hindu fundamentalism'. In colonial India, this model of secularism and toleration lay at the origin of the rise of 'Hindu fundamentalism'. The colonial state demanded that, if traditional practices were to be tolerated in the name of religion, they ought to be sanctioned by the doctrines and laws from 'the Hindu scriptures'. In response, several Hindu movements began to defend their traditions in terms of such 'Hindu doctrines and principles', while this strategy had been non-existent before the late 18th century. In postcolonial India, liberal secularism also reinforces 'Hindu fundamentalism' and the Hindu-Muslim strife: the secular state both transforms the relations among these communities into a conflict between competing religions and tries to represent itself as a neutral power, impartial to this conflict of religious truth claims.

The Platform participants

Achin Vanaik is currently TNI Fellow and Professor International Relations and Global Politics at the Political Science Department of Delhi University. He has done extensive research and published several books on Indian communalism, religion and secularism.

Neera Chandhoke is Professor of Political Science, University of Delhi, and Director of the Developing Countries Research Centre, University of Delhi. Her main teaching and research interests are political theory, comparative politics, and the politics of developing societies with a special focus on India.

Jakob De Roover is a Post-Doctoral Fellow of the Research Foundation (FWO) Flanders at the Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University, Belgium. His research concerns the cultural history of toleration and secularism in the West and the impact of western political thought on colonial and postcolonial India.

S.N. Balagangadhara (a.k.a. Balu) is Professor in Comparative Science of Cultures and Director of the Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University, Belgium. In recent work, he analyses the dominant accounts of India as descriptions of the western cultural experience.

ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

RETHINKING SECULARISM

Room: Banquet hall

Chair • Naomi Goldenberg

Permanent Respondents • Akeel Bilgrami, Geoffrey Oddie, Jasdev Singh Rai, S.N. Balagan-gadhara, Timothy Fitzgerald, Vivek Dhareshwar

Roundtable session 1:

Freedom of Religion and Religious Conversion

11 January 2009, 11.15-13.15

Speaker • Winnifred Fallers Sullivan

Expert respondents • Sarah Claerhout, Dunkin Jalki

Roundtable session 2:

Secularism, Hindutva and the Aryan Invasion Theory

12 January 2009, 11.15-13.15

Speakers • Dilip K. Chakrabarti, Edwin Bryant (paper read *in absentia* by Esther Bloch)

Expert respondents • Rajaram Hegde, Martin Fárek, Marianne Keppens

Roundtable session 3:

Liberal Secularism and Religious Fundamentalism: Opposites or Alter Egos?

13 January 2009, 11.15-13.15

Speakers • Ashis Nandy, Pratap Bhanu Mehta

Expert respondents • A. Shanmukha, J.S. Sadananda



Session 1: Freedom of Religion and Religious Conversion

The secularism-fundamentalism framework dominates the current interpretations of the twentieth-century debate on religious conversion and of the contemporary success of anti-conversion legislation in India. The classical account tells us that this debate results from the clash between Hindu fundamentalist groups (defending Hindu interests) and the secular forces in Indian society (aiming to safeguard religious freedom for all Indians).

The classical framework of secularism faces a number of puzzles, which will be scrutinised during this session: (a) Both champions and opponents of religious conversion claim to be the true defenders of the freedom of religion. However, they have mutually exclusive interpretations of what 'freedom of religion' means: according to the first it is 'an inalienable human right, necessarily including the freedom to convert'; according to the second it is 'freedom from external interference in one's traditions and practices.' How can we explain that these two interpretations co-exist in the Indian debate? (b) M.K. Gandhi and many Indian intellectuals of the early twentieth century were very much opposed to conversion. In the classical framework, one can only come to the conclusion that these people were Hindu fundamentalists. However, this interpretation does violence to the views of these 'moderate Hindus.' How can we account for the attitude of some of India's great thinkers and leaders without making them into religious fundamentalists? (c) A central problem of the principle of religious freedom that has emerged in the recent debates in the U.S.A. and India is that it is completely unclear what is and what is not religion. In the absence of a secular scientific theory of religion or a consensual definition of 'religion,' how can we ever come to a consistent interpretation of the principle of religious freedom?

ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

Session 2: Secularism, Hindutva and the Aryan Invasion Theory

One of the heated debates in the recent historiography of India has been about the Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT). This theory describes the coming into being of Indian culture and religion as the result of the interactions between two people: the conquering or immigrant Aryan people who brought along Sanskrit, Vedism and the Brahmin priests on the one hand and the indigenous Dravidians with their own languages and religions on the other hand.

The debate about the AIT today revolves around the question of the geographical origin of the Aryans. One side of the debate argues that the Aryans entered India around 1500 BCE, the other side claims that the Aryans have always been indigenous to India.. Scholars who challenge the standard version of the AIT are most often branded as Hindutva. At the same time, the standard version of the AIT is dismissed by many scholars on the basis of its colonial origins and its supposed relation to colonial motives. A scholarly debate about the cognitive value of this theory or its alternatives seems to be difficult.

At the same time it has become increasingly unclear what the controversy is actually about: What is so controversial about the fact that some of the Indian languages originally came from a geographical region outside of the current boundaries of India? Or, what is so controversial about the claim that the Indian culture came into being over a period of thousands of years, as a result of the interactions between different groups of people from different regions, speaking different languages? However, these important questions seem to be entirely absent in the current debate.

This session will examine the theoretical framework in which both the defenders and the opponents of the AIT make their claims, against the background of the following questions: (a) Is there any conclusive evidence for the existence of an Aryan Sanskrit-speaking people and its Vedic religion as opposed to Dravidian peoples with their own religions? (b) Is the framework of discussion still determined by western Christian theology and the biblical chronology? (c) Where does the presupposition of a link between nation, language and religion come from?



Session 3: Liberal Secularism and Religious Fundamentalism: Opposites or Alter Egos?

Liberal secularism views itself as the opposite and necessary antidote to religious fundamentalism. Recently, this view has been challenged. Several authors point out that fundamentalism and secularism are not self-contained opposites, but are intertwined in significant ways. In India, this not only takes the form of suggesting a causal link between the elitist and statist imposition of secularism and the rise of the Hindu right, but has also given rise to historical analysis of the relation between colonial secularism and native fanaticism.

By contrast, the advocates of secularism argue that neither conceptually nor historically satisfactory evidence has been provided for the claim that secularism and fundamentalism are two faces of the same coin. The rising Hindu-Muslim conflict in India could have many other causes, independent of the workings of the liberal secular state. It may as well be blamed on the failure of the Indian state to be truly secular and neutral. A genuine liberal secularism in India would still lead to the decline of religious revivalism and fundamentalism.

This session will examine the hypotheses and arguments on this relation between liberal secularism and religious fundamentalism: (a) Are they cultural and political opposites or are they really two faces of the same coin? (b) Do liberal secularism and religious fundamentalism feed on each other, or do they neutralize each other? (c) What is the historical and conceptual evidence for both positions?

ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

THE ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

Roundtable chair:

Naomi Goldenberg is Professor at the Department of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa, Canada, and has been very active in the American Academy of Religion. Her teaching and research are in the fields of women and religion, popular culture and religion, and psychology of religion

Roundtable speakers:

Ashis Nandy is Senior Honorary Fellow at the Centre for Developing Societies, New Delhi, India. Trained as a sociologist and clinical psychologist, Nandy is known for his work in political science, political psychology, mass violence, nationalism, culture and future studies. During the last three decades, he has also travelled through some of the less familiar territories of social knowledge, such as scientific creativity, post-developmental and post-secular visions, etc.

Dilip K. Chakrabarti is Professor of South Asian Archaeology at Cambridge University. He has contributed significantly to the study of the ancient historical geography of India and to the debate on the Aryan Invasion Theory. He is currently working on the ancient routes of the Deccan and the South; the geo-political orbits of ancient India; and the archaeological sites in Haryana.

Edwin Bryant is Associate Professor of religion at Rutgers University, New Jersey. He has published important books in the debate on the Aryan Invasion Theory.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta is currently the President and Chief Executive of the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. As an Indian political scientist and constitutional expert he has published widely in a variety of fields including political philosophy, intellectual history, constitutional law, international politics, society and politics in India.



Winnifred Fallers Sullivan is Associate Professor at the University at Buffalo Law School, The State University of New York. She has published several works and articles on the intersection of religion and law in the modern period, particularly the phenomenology of modern religion as it is shaped in its encounter with law.

Roundtable respondents:

Akeel Bilgrami is Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy and Director of The Heyman Center for the Humanities at Columbia University, USA. His areas of specialization range from philosophy of language, through philosophy of mind, to political philosophy and moral psychology. He relates these subjects to broader social and cultural issues such as the problem of secularism in India, Gandhi's philosophy, and the Muslim cultural identity.

Dunkin Jalki is Doctoral Researcher at the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore, India. His research concerns the Virashaiva movement, and the interaction between colonial stereotypes and Indian stories.

Geoffrey A. Oddie is Honorary Research Associate at the Department of History of the University of Sydney, Australia. His research experience on Hinduism and Christianity, and missionary movements, especially in South India, has led to a series of important works on religious and social developments in nineteenth and twentieth-century India.

Jasdev Singh Rai is a medical doctor with an MA in politics and a long interest in human and political rights issues, particularly in South Asia. He is Director of the Sikh Human Rights Group and has written on the pluralistic multicultural society, Sikh philosophy, human rights, and contemporary affairs and is active in human rights and social work.

J.S. Sadananda is Professor in Political Science at Kuvempu University and Director of the Karnataka Academy for Social Sciences and Humanities (Karnataka, India). His research is focused on questioning contemporary political theory in the Indian context.

ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

Marianne Keppens is Doctoral Researcher at the Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University, Belgium. Her research concerns the debate on the Aryan Invasion Theory.

Martin Fárek is Lecturer at the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, University of Pardubice, Czech Republic. He has published on the Western descriptions of the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition. In his research, he also takes up the problem of defining Hinduism, the western constructions of the caste system, and the issue of transplanting the Indian traditions to the West.

Rajaram Hegde is Professor at the Department of History and Archaeology and the Director of the Centre for the Study of Local Cultures, Kuvempu University (Karnataka, India). Presently, his research focuses on Indian pluralism and on the colonial discourses on Indian history, culture and society.

Sarah Claerhout is Research Assistant at the Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University, Belgium. Her research concerns religious conversion and the conversion debates in India.

Shanmukha A. is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science and Deputy Director of the Centre for the Study of Local Cultures, Kuvempu University (Karnataka, India). His research focuses on the problem of untouchability in Indian society and on theories about the caste system.

S.N. Balagangadhara (a.k.a. Balu) is Professor in Comparative Science of Cultures and Director of the Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University, Belgium. In recent work, he analyses the dominant accounts of India as descriptions of the western cultural experience.



Timothy Fitzgerald is Reader at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Stirling, Scotland. He has published important works that question the legitimacy of the academic study of other cultures using concepts like ‘religion,’ ‘politics,’ ‘the secular,’ ‘the sacred’ and ‘the profane’.

Vivek Dhareshwar is Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore, India. His research interests include the reconceptualisation of the human sciences, caste, and democracy. His current work explores the possibility of transforming the human sciences by rethinking the Indian intellectual traditions.

Parallel Paper sessions

DETAILED SCHEDULE

The presenters of the Parallel Paper sessions have been selected on the basis of the submission of abstracts. Even though the number of abstracts was high, the number of Parallel Paper sessions has been kept limited so as to ensure the possibility of having focused and qualitative discussions. In total there will be ten Parallel Paper sessions on the following themes:

- (1) Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion;
- (2) Colonialism and Religion in India;
- (3) Religion and Law in India; and
- (4) Rethinking Secularism in India.

Sunday 11 January 17.15-19.15

Parallel Paper sessions 1

Rethinking Secularism in India 1

EVAN HAEFELI, *Toleration and Pluralism in the US: Origins and Global Implications*. SAM HASELBY, *The Emerging of Secularism in the US*. PETER GOTTSCHALK, *Western-Originated Science and the Classification of Religions*.

Chair: Akeel Bilgrami

Room: Seminar Hall 1

Secularism, Conversion and Law. Case studies from India

SIPRA MUKHERJEE, *Questioning Conversion: A Case Study from Bengal*. VIBHA ARORA, *Rethinking Secularism in India. A Case Study from Sikkim*. NAVTEJ PUREWAL, *Rethinking Secularism in India: Popular Practices Challenge the Notion of Fixed Religious Boundaries*. ÜLO VALK, *Acts of Deities or Acts of Men? Karma and Causality in the Folk Legends of Tamil Nadu*.

Chair: Maya Burger

Room: Seminar Hall 2

Rethinking Religion in India II, 10-13 January 2009

Monday 12 January 9.00-11.00

Tuesday 13 January 9.00-11.00

Parallel Paper sessions 2

Parallel Paper sessions 3

Rethinking Secularism in India 2

Rethinking Secularism in India 3

T.S. SATYANATH, *Contentious Harmonies: Depiction of Hindu-Muslim Relationships in Medieval Kannada Representations*. HANNA H. KIM, *Post-Colonial, Post-Liberal Gujarat: The Discourse on Secularism and its Alternatives*. RAJARAM HEGDE & J.S. SADANANDA, *A Fight for Harmony: Secularism and its Problems in the Bababudangiri Hill*.

KARMANYE THADANI & VARUN CHABLANI, *'Tolerance'/'Secularism' in India – Is It Perceived Differently?* SARADINDU MUKHERJI, *Re-Examining the Terminology, Logic and the Indian Media: Another Look at the Hindu-Muslim Relations in Recent Times*. GAUTAM CHAKRABARTI, *From 'Diasporic' to 'Glocal': 'Indic' Manoeuvres and 'Western' Perceptions*.

Chair: A. Shanmukha

Room: Seminar Hall 1

Chair: Martin Fárek

Room: Seminar Hall 1

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 1

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 2

SHRUTI RAVI, *Explaining Conversion and the Dichotomy of Anti-Conversion Laws in India*. MATT BAXTER, *Conversion, Marx, and the Dravidian South*. VISHAL MANGALWADI, *Conversion as Revolution*.

ANUJA PRASHAR, *Invisible 'Chains of Memory' Targeting India, Through Joshua Project 2000 and Beyond*. KOENRAAD ELST, *Secularist vs. Christian Accounts of Hindu Resistance to Conversion*. AKSHATA SHRINATH & ALISHA MALIK, *Right to Freedom of Religion or the Right to Conversion*.

Chair: Dunkin Jalki

Room: Seminar Hall 2

Chair: Rajaram Hegde

Room: Seminar Hall 2

Parallel Paper sessions DETAILED SCHEDULE

Sunday 11 January 17.15-19.15

Parallel Paper sessions 1

Religion and Law in India 1

SHASHI PRIYADARSHINI, *Protecting Human Rights under Religious Laws, National Laws, and International Law*. BARNIK GHOSH & ADITYA CHATTERJEE, *Religion and Law in India: The Possibility of a Common Code for all Indians Irrespective of Religion*. NAREN B.S. & NAYANA UDAYASHANKAR, *Law and Religion in India: An Attempt to Build Cohesiveness and Nurture Secularism through the 'Uniform Civil Code'*.

Chair: Jasdev Singh Rai

Room: Seminar Hall 3

Rethinking Religion in India II, 10-13 January 2009

Monday 12 January 9.00-11.00

Tuesday 13 January 9.00-11.00

Parallel Paper sessions 2

Parallel Paper sessions 3

Religion and Law in India 2

Colonialism and Religion in India 2

MATHEW JOHN, *The Indian Constitution: Religious Freedom and Toleration for India's Diverse Religious Traditions?* GEETANJALI SRISKANTAN, *Colonial Legality and Indian Custom: Challenges in the Making of Hindu Law.*

SUFIYA PATHAN, *The Emergence of the Category of 'Communalism' from Colonial Discourse.* RAF GELDERS, *From Anticlericalism to Anti-Brahmanism. The Indian Religion of the Priest in Protestant Polemics.* ESTHER BLOCH, *Diversity in Hinduism, What Is the Problem?*

Chair: Winnifred Fallers Sullivan

Room: Seminar Hall 3

Chair: Geoffrey Oddie

Room: Seminar Hall 3

Colonialism and Religion in India 1

TINJU V. THOMAS, VINITA JONES & PRERNA SINGH, *A British Construction of Religion?* POLLY HAZARIKA, *Investigating Hinduism* BRAINERD PRINCE, *Hinduism as Religion: To Be or Not to Be*

Chair: Vivek Dhareshwar

Room: Main auditorium

PARALLEL PAPER SESSIONS

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF ABSTRACTS

Vibha Arora

Rethinking Secularism in India. A Case Study from Sikkim

SUN 11 January 2009, 17.15-19.15

Secularism, Conversion and Law. Case studies from India

SEMINAR HALL 2

Matt Baxter

Department of Political Science, University of California (Berkeley, USA)

Conversion, Marx, and the Dravidian South

MON 12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 1

SEMINAR HALL 2

Esther Bloch

Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University (Ghent, Belgium)

Diversity in Hinduism, What Is the Problem?

TUE 13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Colonialism and Religion in India 2

SEMINAR HALL 3

Gautam Chakrabarti

RLA College, University of Delhi, India

From 'Diasporic' to 'Glocal': 'Indic' Manoeuvres and 'Western' Perceptions

TUE 13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Rethinking Secularism in India 3

SEMINAR HALL 1

Koenraad Elst

Secularist vs. Christian Accounts of Hindu Resistance to Conversion

TUE 13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 2

SEMINAR HALL 2



Raf Gelders

From Anticlericalism to Anti-Brahmanism. The Indian Religion of the Priest in Protestant Polemics

TUE 13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Colonialism and Religion in India 2

SEMINAR HALL 3

Barnik Ghosh & Aditya Chatterjee

Religion and Law in India: The Possibility of a Common Code for all Indians Irrespective of Religion

SUN 11 January 2009, 17.15-19.15

Religion and Law in India 1

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Peter Gottschalk

Western-Originated Science and the Classification of Religions

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Rethinking Secularism in India 1

SEMINAR HALL 1

Evan Haefeli

Tolerance and Pluralism in the US: Origins and Global Implications

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Rethinking Secularism in India 1

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Sam Haselby

The Emerging of Secularism in the US

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Polly Hazarika

Investigating Hinduism

MON 12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Colonialism and Religion in India 1

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Rajaram Hegde & J.S. Sadananda

A Fight for Harmony: Secularism and its Problems in the Bababudangiri Hill

MON 12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Rethinking Secularism in India 2

SEMINAR HALL 1

Mathew John

The Indian Constitution: Religious Freedom and Toleration for India's Diverse Religious Traditions?

MON 12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Religion and Law in India 2

SEMINAR HALL 3

Hanna H. Kim

Post-colonial, Post-Liberal Gujarat: the Discourse on Secularism and its Alternatives

MON 12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Rethinking Secularism in India 2

SEMINAR HALL 1

Vishal Mangalwadi

Conversion as Revolution

MON 12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 1

SEMINAR HALL 2



Sipra Mukherjee

Questioning Conversion: A Case Study from Bengal

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Secularism, Conversion and Law. Case studies from India

SEMINAR HALL 2

Saradindu Mukherji

Re-Examining the Terminology, Logic and the Indian Media: Another look at the Hindu-Muslim Relations in Recent Times

TUE 13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Rethinking Secularism in India 3

SEMINAR HALL 1

Naren B.S. & Nayana Udayashankar

Law and Religion in India: An Attempt to Build Cohesiveness and Nurture Secularism through the 'Uniform Civil Code'

SUN 11 January 2009, 17.15-19.15

Religion and Law in India 1

SEMINAR HALL 3

Sufiya Pathan

The Emergence of the Category of 'Communalism' from Colonial Discourse

TUE 13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Colonialism and Religion in India 2

SEMINAR HALL 3

Anuja Prashar

Invisible 'Chains of Memory' Targeting India, Through Joshua Project 2000 and Beyond

TUE 13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 2

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PARALLEL PAPER SESSIONS

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Hinduism as Religion: To Be or Not to Be

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Shashi Priyadarshini

Protecting Human Rights under Religious Laws, National Laws, and International Law

SUN 11 January 2009, 17.15-19.15

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Navtej Purewal

Rethinking Secularism in India: Popular Practices Challenge the Notion of Fixed Religious Boundaries

SUN 11 January 2009, 17.15-19.15

Secularism, Conversion and Law. Case studies from India

SEMINAR HALL 2

Shruti Ravi

Explaining Conversion and the Dichotomy of Anti-conversion Laws in India

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Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 1

SEMINAR HALL 2

T.S. Satyanath

Contentious Harmonies: Depiction of Hindu-Muslim Relationships in Medieval Kannada Representations

MON 12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Rethinking Secularism in India 2

SEMINAR HALL 1



Akshata Shrinath & Alisha Malik
Right to Freedom of Religion or the Right to Conversion
TUE 13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00
Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 2
SEMINAR HALL 2

Geetanjali Srikantan
Colonial Legality and Indian Custom: Challenges in the Making of Hindu Law
MON 12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00
Religion and Law in India 2
SEMINAR HALL 3

Karmanye Thadani & Varun Chablani
'Tolerance'/'Secularism' in India – Is It Perceived Differently?
TUE 13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00
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SEMINAR HALL 1

Tinju V. Thomas, Vinita Jones & Purna Singh
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Ülo Valk
Acts of Deities or Acts of Men? Karma and Causality in the Folk Legends of Tamil Nadu
SUN 11 January 2009, 17.15-19.15
Secularism, Conversion and Law. Case studies from India
SEMINAR HALL 2

Evan Haefeli

Columbia University (New York, USA)

Toleration and Pluralism in the US: Origins and Global Implications

The United States has a reputation as a beacon of religious freedom and diversity. Authors in Europe and America have expounded on and celebrated this since the 18th century. The peaceful co-existence of a wide range of competing faiths has elicited admiration, condemnation, surprise, amusement, and wonder. In the intervening centuries American pluralism has evolved, been challenged, theorized, theologized and naturalized. Consequently it has become impossible for Americans to imagine democracy existing without religious freedom and pluralism, a matter of no small consequence to American relations with foreign nations. Advocates of democracy and liberalism around the world appeal to America's peculiar combination of religious, political, and economic freedoms as if they naturally, necessarily, and inevitably go together.

This paper sets America's experience with religious freedom and diversity in the context of their origins in the struggles over empire and toleration in seventeenth-century Europe. England, let alone English imperial policy, is conspicuously absent from accounts of the rise of American religious pluralism. At best, England serves as the persecutor driving religious dissidents to seek freedom in America. That the colonies then successfully claimed their independence from the British Empire only seems to reaffirm this narrative of progressive freedom. However, reference to Native American and African American religion demonstrates that the liberating effects of American toleration were far from universal, even in North America.

This historical and analytical account will both provide vital information on the British domestic and imperial background to ideas and policies of religious toleration in India and allow scholars to assess the degree to which America can in fact serve as a model for other nations, and what the implications of adopting the 'American way' might be.

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SEMINAR HALL 1

Sam Haselby

Harvard Society of Fellows (Cambridge MA, USA)

The Emerging of Secularism in the US

The United States of America is both the first modern republic founded on a legal separation of church and state and the Western political democracy in which religion is most central to public life. The currently dominant explanation for this seeming paradox of United States history comes from Roger Finke and Rodney Stark's *The Churching of America, 1776-1990*. Influenced by the Chicago school economists' 'consumer-choice' theory, Stark and Finke have argued that the absence of a state church leads to a more competitive 'religious marketplace' which in turn ensures the proliferation of diverse religious belief and activity. My work provides a more historical account.

After the Revolution, the new republic faced two formidable nation-building challenges, the future of the Native Americans (and their land claims) and the establishment of U.S. sovereignty over the frontier. The state was unable to address either crisis. Its organization by Spartan Federalist principles, inspired by the consensus-building needs for a broad protection of religious freedom and property rights, left it constrained from taking effective nation-building measures. In short, the U.S. began a vast and unique continental colonization project without (in the centuries-old European senses of the terms) either 'a church' or 'a state.'

In the absence of either a national religious or sufficient state authority, two distinct and antagonistic Protestant movements arose. By the early 1830s, this fight within evangelical Protestantism had led to the formation of some distinct features of American religious nationalism. One of these features is the celebration of secularism as a cardinal virtue of liberal political life. In the American context, the practice of secularism preceded its theorization. My paper shows how the American pioneering of secularism was a defensive measure, invented by elite agents of previously dominant sects whose religious and spiritual lives had been transformed by the emergence of modern nationalism.

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SEMINAR HALL 1

Peter Gottschalk

Wesleyan University (Middletown CT, USA)

Western-Originated Science and the Classification of Religions

Overlooked in investigations into the impact of British imperialism on Indian ‘religions’ and ‘secularism’ (including the imposition of those terms) has been the role of Western-originated science. Certainly, Protestant commitments of British missionaries, scholars, and officials influenced perceptions of Indians, but at least equally important was the influence of scientific ideals. Indeed, the soon-to-be-globalized conceptualizations of both ‘religion’ and ‘science’ came to their culmination in the context of nineteenth century European imperialism. Imperialism relied upon the development of scientific disciplines that promised to explain humanity according to characteristics purportedly organic to all communities using ideals from a supposedly secularized science.

In the period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, before European social sciences had appeared, Britons sought human universals by which they could compare and categorize the myriad communities of which empire brought them into contact and control. ‘Economy,’ ‘antiquities,’ and ‘culture’ were among the universals posited and around which scientific disciplines would coalesce. ‘Religion’ was also considered near universal, but it remained tied until later to the pre-existing discipline of theology. Because many scientists – even devout Christians – believed that science operated beyond theological influence, they unreflectively mixed the categorical imperatives of science with Protestant views of religion to create Christian-normative, scientific disciplines that fixed religion as India’s primary social quality. At a time when Protestants defined themselves as part of a systematized religion, they perceived other cultures using the same template while alluding to the authority of science to validate their conclusions. Since the sciences required the phenomena they studied to fit mutually exclusive taxons, they sought to rigidly slot religions into classificatory pigeon holes. The terms ‘Hinduism,’ ‘Muhammadanism,’ and ‘Buddhism’ – all originating at this time – thus became naturalized categories for the supposedly secular disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and comparative religion.

Sipra Mukherjee

Bhairab Ganguly College, West Bengal State University (West Bengal, India)

Questioning Conversion: A Case Study from Bengal

I will explore the idea of conversion using as case study the work of the Christian missionaries in the Nadiya-Burdwan area of colonial Bengal. While many conversions to Christianity occurred here in the nineteenth century, the numbers dwindled within a decade. I will attempt to set these cases of conversion, and the later decline, in the context of the history and culture of this region.

This area had experienced a long tradition of Vaishnavism and seen the development of religious sects not explicitly allied to mainstream faiths. Thus, religion in a plurality of forms was known and recognized here. I will take up two of these religious sects to show how Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, came together in their teachings. Though one sect is rumoured to have been begun by a Muslim and the other by a lower caste Hindu, the first is seen as a Vaishnava sect and the second includes upper caste Hindus. No strict observance of membership rituals was followed, and consequently no need was felt for any overt conversion. This fluidity of religion was present here among mainstream believers too: Muslims participated in Hindu festivities, and Hindus flocked to Muslim pirs. While the lines of division between the religions were clearly drawn, a religious pluralism existed which made communication possible between disparate groups on lines other than the assertion of their separate identities.

Without simplifying such phenomena as an acceptance of, or easy movement between, religious creeds, the paper argues that what was happening here can be explained by an overarching culture of religiosity. This needs to be recognized as constituting a culture distinct from the prevailing view of religiousness as adherence to a well-defined set of beliefs which sees itself as the only true way. Contrary to the usual context where a community is adherent to one religion, the behaviour of the people here may be explained as reflecting a belief in religion itself, thus making conversion irrelevant.

Vibha Arora

Indian Institute of Technology (New Delhi, India)

Rethinking Secularism in India. A Case Study from Sikkim

A divorce between religion and politics is impossible in the Indian situation. Yet, secularism is essential to the viability of the Indian state given its multi-ethnic and multi-religious diversity. It is often asserted that the most distinctive property of Indian secularism is its firm neutrality towards religion and its opposition to communalism. Secularism does not imply the negation of religious beliefs or inculcation of religious scepticism among the Indian citizens. It implies state impartiality between all religions and neutrality towards religion. It was construed in terms of religion being excluded from the political domain and largely the private concern of individuals and social groups. Depending on the meaning attributed to 'being secular,' the relationship between religion and politics can be imagined in terms of separation or intimacy, exclusion or inclusion.

Certain demographic, political and historical factors make the former kingdom of Sikkim unique. Nevertheless this state of the Indian republic furthers our comparative understanding of the interpenetration of religion and politics and the functioning of 'secularism' within India and other South Asian contexts such as Bhutan and Sri Lanka that have large immigrant populations of a different religious faith. Sikkim's democratic polity does not have secular roots and some continuity with the theocratic rule of the Namgyal dynasty is provisioned in the Indian Constitution under Article 371F and certain political safeguards that institute representation to the Buddhist monasteries in its legislative assembly in the form of the sangha seat while ensuring the continued administration of monasteries and their preservation by the Ecclesiastical department of the state government. The idea of a defiled sacred landscape was the chief argument used by the Lepchas, Bhutias and Buddhist activists protesting against the implementation of Rathongchu hydroelectric project in West Sikkim during 1993-97. It's impossible to understand Sikkim by divorcing religion from the polity, as politics and culture interpenetrate each other in almost all realms of the social, the cultural and the ideological. The Sikkimese polity did not have secular roots in the past and neither does its current route indicate any movement in that direction.

Navtej Purewal

University of Manchester (Manchester, UK)

Rethinking Secularism in India: Popular Practices Challenge the Notion of Fixed Religious Boundaries

In the region of Punjab (which spans India and Pakistan), the religious identities Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Christian are ostensibly treated as separate traditions with their own unique textual sources, rituals and practices. The state ideologies of India and Pakistan, in requiring religious distinction for managing their societies, rely upon tools of enumeration and labelling to perpetuate religious difference. Thus, formal religious identities, which are backed by institutions and techniques (such as the census and state categories) affirm their official status. Such formal categories, however, fail to take into account the plethora of practices, performances and expressions of religiosity that are often difficult to hinge upon a singular religious identity or category. This paper will explore how, despite hegemonic formal religious identities which attempt to fix and present exclusive notions of belonging, 'popular' spiritual practices in Punjab present a backdrop of multiplicity and complexity of spirituality through practices which are shared or 'common' in the manner in which sacred spaces are used, texts are interpreted, and mysticism is engaged with. One argument which the paper will develop is to what extent the formal religious categories actually reflect the notion of 'religion' in Punjab, or whether it is the popular, intersecting practices which deserve more recognition as representing how spirituality is broadly conceived in the region. By drawing upon examples from east and west Punjab, the paper will highlight the manner in which popular practices can challenge the notion of fixed religious boundaries through overlapping and intersecting idioms and references, while simultaneously presenting a pluralistic terrain of religious practice.

Ülo Valk

University of Tartu (Tartu, Estonia)

Acts of Deities or Acts of Men? Karma and Causality in the Folk Legends of Tamil Nadu

In Western Indology the law of karma is regarded as one of the pan-Indian corner-stones of the Hindu religion. The Upanishads say that one's actions are supposed to determine the conditions of this life and of the next rebirth. The Brahmanic doctrine of karma explains human suffering as a consequence of one's former deeds. However, the law of karma is different from causality, as described in the folk traditions of India. In his article, 'Towards a Counter-system: Women's Tales' (1991), A. K. Ramanujan showed that Vidhi (deity of fate) and the offended deities appear in Kannada folklore as causes of suffering, whereas the concept of karma, with its sense of individual responsibility and ethical judgment, belongs to another tradition. Legends, recorded in 2006 by Dr. S. Lourdasamy in the villages of Northern Tamil Nadu show a similar understanding of causality. Village deities shape the human life span; sometimes innocent people suffer because of the rage of deities or demons. Moral causality in folk narratives is generally confined to a single life, reward and punishment is not postponed until the next rebirth but dispensed by the village deities immediately after the actions. Distance from the pan-Indian deities and a different understanding of human destiny was expressed by one of the informants as follows: 'Every village has temples for Munieshvaran, Aiyanar, Mariamman, Murugan, and others, but there will be no temple for Brahman because he is the one who writes our destiny and therefore people do not build temples for the man who is like a killer.' The paper analyses some legends about success and misfortune, discusses causality in these narratives and questions the validity of the 'law of karma' in vernacular religion.

Shashi Priyadarshini

A.N. Sinha Institute Social Science and Research Centre, Gandhi Maidan, Chanakya National Law University (Patna, India)

Protecting Human Rights under Religious Laws, National Laws, and International Law

The study of human rights and how certain human rights are protected under religious law, national laws and international laws exemplifies the tensions that can arise if different legal systems confront each other. On the one hand international law is supranational and, arguably, could be considered the dominant legal system with global or universal standards. However, international human rights law is also sometimes called ‘soft’ law as the implementation and application of international human rights laws falls within the responsibility of the state and is therefore often undermined.

The neutrality of international human rights law, that is the assumption that international human rights law is not infused by certain cultural values and notions, has been contested several times – amongst others from an Islamic perspective – arguing that international human rights are, in fact, based on Western concepts of human dignity and that according to the Western tradition the source of human dignity is secular in nature.

This can create inherent tensions for the application of ‘secular’ international human rights in countries where Islamic law (shari’ah) is applicable as Islam makes no distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘law’. One country where these tensions between obligations under international human rights law, national laws and religious laws can be observed is Malaysia. Malaysia has tried to absorb Islam within the framework of the modern secular state. This uneasy compromise that has been forged in the process can be illustrated through a case study of freedom of religion in the Malaysian legal context. Freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed, but in practice this freedom is severely restricted.

The paper will analyse the legal context in which freedom of religion is framed focusing in particular on the tension between the two different legal court systems, state and religious, that are dealing with cases of freedom of religion.

Barnik Ghosh & Aditya Chatterjee

Gujarat National Law University (Gandhinagar, India)

Religion and Law in India: The Possibility of a Common Code for all Indians Irrespective of Religion

The Indian legal system is a mixture of not only statutes and codes which have been in existence from the pre-independence era, but it is also ridden with the personal laws for specific religions like Hindu Laws and Mohammedan Laws. India has been declared as a secular country in the Constitution. But the legal system proves otherwise. The very existence of such personal laws defeats the concept of secularism as has been laid down by the Apex Court in the country in the case of S.R. Bommai v Union of India. This concept of personal laws is causing a conflict of feelings between the two major religions in the country and is the root cause of some of the riots that have taken place. Besides, when these laws are judged by placing them at the touchstone of the Preamble and also Article 25 to 28 of the Indian Constitution, it is seen that they lack the constitutional validity proclaiming freedom of religion to everyone. This paper looks into the addressing of conflicting identity issues as regards the much used phrases – ‘freedom of religion’ and ‘personal laws’, both from the constitutional perspective and otherwise. This paper aims at analyzing the possibility of applying a common code for all the citizens of India regardless of their religion. This paper will also recommend some suggestions to include certain provisions so as to make the Article 44 a reality in the near future. Besides dealing with law, the authors would also be handling the sociological condition in India so as to study the possible reactions of people to the Common Code. This paper will be aimed at studying this problem from four perspectives: legal, political, social and economical. But the authors stress the fact that merely framing a uniform civil code is not enough to make the country secular. In India, leaders are being governed by vote bank politics more than true service to the nation. Minority appeasement has become a farcical democratic practice. But the judiciary should be far sighted so as to understand that the implementation of a uniform civil code is as important as its adoption. India is a multicultural country with a great diversity of religious practices. This paper will not only suggest a practical and empirical manner of implementation, but it will also criticize the aspects regarding secularism and juristic approaches.

Naren B.S. & Nayana Udayashankar

Gujarat National Law University (Gandhinagar, India)

Law and Religion in India: An Attempt to Build Cohesiveness and Nurture Secularism through the 'Uniform Civil Code'

The need for a Uniform for Civil Code in India has for long been harped upon. The introduction of colonial secularism to filter practices of the native communities as lawful and not lawful created the problem of every religion proclaiming its practices to be supreme and therefore their right to exercise it.

The Constitution makers tried to amend this apparent discontent by proclaiming the Constitution to be 'Secular' and also by planting the seeds of Uniform Civil Code in the Directive Principles of State Policy. They envisaged a day when every man will be ruled by the same law and when there will be no animosity among people.

The majoritarian Hindu law is not allowed by a plurality-conscious Constitution to become the law of the land. But what is uniformity really? Would it be M.K. Gandhi's model emphasizing the local cultures leading to legal plurality, focused on the self-controlled systems, all following traditional Hindu dharma, or that of Dr. Ambedkar preferring a strong central state with codified laws and as much legal uniformity as possible? Prudence would say that both these models are extremities and neither will allow uniformity while preventing arbitrariness.

We intend to explore the very meaning of the term Uniform Civil Code and as it should be perceived in the Indian context, the possibilities of a Uniform Civil Code, and the present state of personal laws in India. Possibly, a gradual improvisation of the present Indian legal system, which exists as jungle of separate personal laws for the various social groups hinting at diversity, could be developed to accomplish uniformity, wherein the substance of the various laws would seek to achieve globally recognized rights.

T.S. Satyanath

University of Delhi (Delhi, India)

Contentious Harmonies: Depiction of Hindu-Muslim Relationships in Medieval Kannada Representations

An attempt has been made in this paper to understand the medieval Indian sectarian traditions as pluralistic and coexisting systems. At the same time, this is not to suggest that there is no possibility for permeability among these systems. In fact, indigenous sectarian traditions are highly syncretic, suggesting the possibility for movement of ideas in multiple directions. The fact that multiple versions of the R m yan a and Mah bh rata traditions, Buddhist, Jain, Hindu etc., coexisted together and absorbed materials from each other is a characteristic feature of Indian literature.

As medieval Indian sectarian communities did not perceive the world around them in terms of dichotomous and binary oppositional categories like the modernist paradigm does, in which the logic of imperialism operates, there are high probabilities of seeing convergences, syncretism and pluralistic epistemologies in the narratives from the medieval period. Taking instances from medieval Kannada representations, constituting temporal, spatial and societal dimensions, an attempt has been made in this paper to demonstrate the presence of pluralistic epistemologies and the coexistence of communities through accommodating each other. Such an epistemology not only strongly maintains its own beliefs, practices and identities, but also shares and respects the existence of other's beliefs and practices and identities. A court level royal inscription of Adi Adil Shaw I, the Stalapurana of a Sufi-Nagesi saint from Vadaval in Sholapur district of Maharashtra, a popular narrative of Arjuna-jogi and the folk narrative and ritual of Kumararama held at Kummatadurga near Hampi have been considered to understand the modes of depiction of Hindu-Muslim relationships.

Rethinking Secularism in India 2

12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

SEMINAR HALL 1

Hanna H. Kim

Department of Anthropology, Adelphi University (New York, USA)

Post-Colonial, Post-Liberal Gujarat: the Discourse on Secularism and its Alternatives

As one of the last major areas of the subcontinent to be placed under British colonial rule, the Western part of India was often associated with unstable social and political systems. Hence, early nineteenth century colonial administration in Western India was preoccupied with the dual agendas of sovereign control and social reform. For groups such as the original Swaminarayan community, whose founder acquired the distinction of being able to 'subdue' difficult communities, the reputation for being a 'reforming sect' became a recursive motif and one that was arguably beneficial for the early community's own growth. While accommodating but never capitulating to the influences of colonial authority, the Swaminarayan community was able to sustain its devotional traditions. This colonial location is relevant to understanding what leadership and devotional roles the contemporary Swaminarayan community might play today in Gujarat, particularly at a time when the manipulation of religion, nationalism, and political power has fostered some of the worst human tragedies in India's post-Independence history and correspondingly threatened the existence of conservative non-Hindutva groups. This paper explores the seeming divide between possibilities for non-violent living that particular devotional communities, such as the Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), have demonstrated and the panicked charge of others who argue that without secularism, all of India might follow the path of Gujarat's recent history. I argue that the concept of secularism and its liberal assumptions of personhood, freedom, and rights are inadequate for informing or reforming post-colonial Gujarat. Against the background of re-thinking the category 'religion' for the Hindu Indian context, this paper problematises the category 'secularism' and argues that the suspicion and discomfort of academics and others towards BAPS provides a location for examining both the discursive context of secularism and its aporias. The realities of Gujarat confirm that neither religion nor secularism as they are dominantly conceptualised and theorised have reduced the anxieties and prejudices of majority and minority Gujarati communities towards each other. This paper considers the strategies of BAPS to live within and yet transcend the constraints of 'secularism' by sustaining an alternative and indigenous framework for sociality, ethical living, and political action.

Rajaram Hegde & J.S. Sadananda

Centre for the Study of Local Cultures, Kuvempu University (Shimoga, India)

A Fight for Harmony: Secularism and its Problems in the Bababudangiri Hill

Bababudangiri, in Karnataka, has recently been brought in the limelight in Karnataka politics, due to the protest movements launched by the Hindutva proponents on the one hand and the secularists on the other hand. This place is supposed to be the seat of one Dada Hayat Khalandar, a Sufi, which is attended by Hindus and Muslims alike. This place is also deemed to be the seat of Dattatreya, whom the puranas account for as an incarnation of the trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara). The Hindutva proponents claim that this was a Hindu centre that was occupied by the Muslims during the late Medieval period and that, at present, it is dominated by Muslim practices which offend Hindu sentiments. As such, their argument goes, Muslims have violated the principles of religious harmony and the secular spirit of the state. The Hindutva proponents are launching a movement to liberate this place from Muslim clutches. In order to oppose the Hindutva movement, a secular front was formed out of diverse progressive organizations like leftists, socialists, etc. The secularists argue that this place is a spot of Hindu-Muslim syncretism, which is being violated by the Hindutva people, because the latter are introducing Brahmanical rituals on this hill that uphold the caste system and oppression. Some of them also insist that we should recognize the fact that both sufi and Datta traditions are in fact advocates of the oppressed classes. In this way, this debate, instead of achieving harmony, ends up introducing new kinds of imaginary divisions among the followers of this cult. The state and its legal system, grounded on secular principles, have also added their share to aggravate the problem. There have been a couple of court and administrative decisions, that are based on the assumption that this place is a spot of religious harmony to be cherished at all cost. This has ended up in sanctioning non-traditional claims and practices of the so-called Hindus in this place which have aggravated the problem further. Significantly, both the secular and the Hindutva sides share certain common apprehensions about Indian culture. Each of the conflicting parties argues in name of religious harmony, secular principles and historical facts. This paper will examine the limitations that are shared by both the secular and the Hindutva arguments. It is also intended to probe deeper into some questions regarding their presuppositions about Indian society and culture.

Shruti Ravi

Gujarat National Law University (Gandhinagar, India)

Explaining Conversion and the Dichotomy of Anti-conversion Laws in India

Ratilal Parachand, in the case of *Gandhi v State of Bombay* (AIR 1958 Bombay) opined that, 'Religion is that which binds a man with his creator', thus underscoring the very individualistic and personal nature of a man vis-à-vis the faith he may adopt and choose to practice. In our world of college quotas, casteism and vote-bank politics though, one's religion is a personal choice only on paper and has achieved the dimensions of a civic commodity. The State now has a right to disallow conversion to any faith on the basis of vaguely formulated legislation(s). The anti-conversion law in India goes by the ironic misnomer of The Freedom of Religion act, but robs the citizen's freedom of conscience and has even resulted in ludicrous actions where Christian priests have been prosecuted on charges of 'conversion' on account of their performing the ceremony of baptism. Notwithstanding the unconstitutionality of such acts, the fact that the provisions of these acts state that no formalities need to be followed in a case of reconversion is testimony to how most arguments mooted against conversion in India are more political than theological.

This paper aims to throw light on conversion; seen from the eyes of the convert and the people around him, primarily (but not just) in India; the relevance of conversion to and for the milieu in the present day and times. The paper shall further go on to discuss the glaring duality of the anti-conversion laws in India and the effect it may have on intra-national and inter-communal conflicts faced by India today and what may be done to avert future strife and bloodshed.

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 1
12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00
SEMINAR HALL 2

Matt Baxter

Department of Political Science, University of California (Berkeley, USA)
Conversion, Marx, and the Dravidian South

Towards the end of his life, the Keralite EMS Namboodiripad, the first communist leader in the world to lead a democratically elected government, wrote: 'One of the forms of class struggle in which the Indian people were engaged in history was mass conversions—from Hinduism to Buddhism and Jainism to begin with and to Islam and Christianity later.' His suggestion that religious mass conversions in India can be understood through a Marxist lens may sound peculiar, especially given post-Marxist critiques of Marxism's inability to accommodate religion at all. In my paper, I take Namboodiripad's suggestion to understand mass conversion as class struggle seriously while retaining a focus on the Dravidian South through an examination of the first Tamil translation of *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 1931. I argue that EV Ramasami 'Periyar' Naicker and S. Ramanatan, in their collaborative effort to translate the *Manifesto*, refigured 'the spectre of communism' to suit their own project of liberation focused on the eradication of Brahminism. Periyar's understanding of Brahminism as a part of the religious domain blurs the distinction between class mobilization and mass conversion in the emancipation of a non-Brahmin Proletariat from Brahminical Capital.

Vishal Mangalwadi

Nivedit Good Books Pvt. Ltd. (Mussoorie, UA, India)

Conversion as Revolution

The Hindu leadership is worried: their party line that ‘Pseudo-Secularism’ is the crux of India’s problem and ‘Hindu Nationalism’ is the panacea has failed to counter the liberal idea that Hinduism is the problem and secularism is the solution. But secularism hasn’t emerged stronger either: an increasing number of opinion leaders from Backward and Scheduled Castes are coming around to accepting Dr. Ambedkar’s thesis that oppressive Hinduism is the chief cause of their socio-economic backwardness and therefore, there can be no emancipation without conversion.

Twentieth century ideas that colonialism or capitalism caused India’s decline no longer convince these leaders. Nor do they find the nineteenth-century belief compelling that a Protestant Hinduism would eradicate social evils and create an egalitarian society. Right or wrong, the oppressed in India are coming around to a conviction that conversion out of Hinduism is the socio-spiritual revolution they need.

The proposed paper will survey the major religious and intellectual movements in modern India from the Western missionary movement to the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party that popularized the belief that India’s #1 problem is Hinduism. It will delve into Prof. Kancha Ilaiah’s thesis that in order to build a genuine democracy India has to go beyond Dr. Ambedkar’s vision of ‘social democracy’ to a ‘spiritual democracy’ of ‘Priesthood of all believers.’

Mathew John

London School of Economics (London, UK)

The Indian Constitution: Religious Freedom and Toleration for India's Diverse Religious Traditions?

Expositions on the Bhagavad Gita and aspects of 'Hindu' philosophy brought Chief Justice Gajendragadkar to judgement in the widely cited temple entry case, *Sastri Yagnapurshdasji v. Muldas Bhudardas Vaishya*. Disallowing the claims of the Satsangi community that they were not subject to temple entry legislation on grounds that they were religiously distinct from the 'Hindu' community, Chief Justice Gajendragadkar pronounced them 'Hindus' and therefore bound by the demands of temple entry legislation. However to do so he found himself waist deep in disputations on the nature of the 'Hindu' religion. In disputing the Satsangi claims to their religious practices he even argued that the Satsangi claims were 'founded on superstition, ignorance and complete misunderstanding of the true teachings of Hindu religion.'

Oddly the *Sastri Yagnapurushdasji* case is one of the clearest expressions of the strong reformist, and some would argue even secular, character of the Indian constitutional framework. That is, the Indian constitution's secular character is defined equally by a commitment to steward social reform of India's religious traditions, as it is to liberal democratic principles of individual autonomy and state neutrality towards religions. As the *Sastri Yagnapurushdasji* case demonstrates, these two techniques of governing Indian religious traditions are not necessarily congruent with each other and additionally it is far from being conceptually clear why and on what grounds the state's reformist conception of the Hindu religion should trump that of the Satsangis. This paper examines the manner in which these apparently contradictory pulls in the Indian constitution play out in Indian case law and their implication for religious freedom and toleration for India's diverse religious traditions.

Geetanjali Srikantan

Centre for the Study of Culture and Society (Bangalore, India)

Colonial Legality and Indian Custom: Challenges in the Making of Hindu Law

The discovery of 'Hindu law' by the British forms an important event in the history of colonialism in India. Such a discovery of 'Hindu law' was marked by various efforts by British administrators to identify the law of the Hindus and translate such laws using the vocabulary of a Western legal system.

This paper seeks to understand the making of Hindu law in the context of decision-making in the Anglo Saxon legal system, wherein legal doctrines such as the doctrine of precedent played an important role. It tries to identify the basis for codification, i.e. whether scriptures and law texts sanctioned such practices. It also seeks to investigate the legal enforcement of custom vis-à-vis written sources. It argues that structures and frameworks in the Western legal culture shaped the basis for colonial legality, particularly its notion of custom and customary law. It further argues that a comprehension of the processes involved in the making of Hindu law, involves an understanding of the nature of the Western legal culture, which is intimately tied to its origins in religion.

Colonialism and Religion in India 1

12 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

Main auditorium

Tinju V. Thomas, Vinita Jones & Prerna Singh

Christ College of Law, Christ University (Bangalore, India)

A British Construction of Religion?

Colonial India was characterized by the presence of a multitude of social, economic and religious diversities. Owing to these diversities, and particularly the religious multiplicity, India was divided by the colonizers for the purpose of governance. This adoption of specific strategies of classification sowed the seeds of communalism. Some scholars contend that religious assemblages like Hindus and Muslims in India was a product of a colonial construction of history. 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' politics, with all their divergent aspects, became from the 1920s the chief flogging horse of Indian nationalism – divisive, primitive and, in a far more general nationalist judgment, the product of a colonial policy of Divide and Rule. It is thus evident from past communal conflicts that in any debate on the role of secularism and the proposals to adopt a Uniform Civil Code for all the people of India, one is required to take a second look at the real nature of the colonial experience and derive lessons from it. During the period of Indian colonization, the world was divided on the basis of religion (Shintoism in Japan, Islam in the Middle East etc.). The European colonizers were, further, conversant with the usage of religion as a tool for governance. The formation of Catholicism and the colonizers' acclimatization with the Canon influenced their minds. Their personal experiences helped them to relate India to their self image. They, perhaps, assumed the presence of religion in every country and endeavoured to identify the same in India. The historical records prove that when Muslims and other foreign travellers visited India they were amazed by the traditions, cultures and other practices followed by the inhabitants. These daily chores and rituals followed by the people convinced them about the existence of a common faith and they inferred it as a religion. However, it was only with the advent of the British that this way of leading their lives by the Indians was recognized as a religion and was thus termed as 'Hinduism'. This was constructed as an idea by the colonizers to facilitate governance which eventually turned out to be a real phenomenon. The 'Hindus' adhere to this notion without contesting as it did not harm them. Hinduism can be best understood as a way of life with a set of traditions, rather than a religion. From the ancient texts, it was inferred that Hinduism was a mode of attaining moksha. However because of its extreme flux and fluidity, ample complications have crept in, in interpreting Hinduism and thereby changing the ancient concept of the term.

Polly Hazarika

SNDT University (Mumbai, India)

Investigating Hinduism

The evaluative framework of normative Western culture encounters the non-normative Indian culture and generates the normative discourse of Orientalism. Historically, the discourse of Orientalism is entwined with the phenomenon of Colonialism. Early Colonial writings on the non-normative Indian culture created discursive entities such as 'Hinduism'. A reconstruction of the discursive entity of 'Hinduism' reveals that concepts like 'idolatry', 'paganism', and 'scripture' etc. play an important role in the western understanding of Indian practices. To make use of these concepts, equivalent elements from Indian culture, such as 'pooja' and 'vedas' etc. are identified and assumed to relate to each other as their western counterparts do. Reconstructing these concepts and the equivalent elements they identify helps us to understand the nature of the western moral judgement on Indian practices. Diverse Indian practices understood in this way become a single entity that is both immoral and in need of reform. Contemporary writings on Hinduism do not support this moral judgement. And yet, its discourse is heavily dependent on the early writings in order to get a hold on the (discursive) object. A reconstruction of contemporary debates on the colonial 'construction' of Hinduism reveals that they usually begin with the assumption that some 'real' entity was created. Debates in the field of Hinduism studies often mistake the assertion that religion is absent in India to mean that the phenomenon now identified as religion are absent. Most constructivist positions reach this dead end in analysis, since the phenomena are, now as then, clearly present. These later studies of Hinduism criticise the use of earlier concepts such as idolatry and paganism suggesting that they come from a limited moral judgement. However, the role of these concepts in first creating the discursive entity of Hinduism is not examined, as the presence of the phenomena seems to 'obviously' signal the presence of the domain. This paper traces the thread of conceptual continuity which ties the writings of the early colonialist and the most contemporary scholars on Hinduism. It suggests that rendering non-normative cultures into a normative framework results in such discursive entities as 'Hinduism'.

Brainerd Prince

Oxford Center for Mission Studies (Oxford, UK)

Hinduism as Religion: To Be or Not to Be

This paper aims to argue that the concept of Hinduism as a monolithic religion has its origins definitely in colonial times. However, the notion of 'the Hindu' was not created by the colonialists but has existed in the Indian sub-continent for millennia. The question is if 'religion' with its western historical baggage is the right conceptual tool to be used to analyse and theorise the Hindu phenomena. This paper will argue that the terms 'religion' and its species 'Hinduism', though limited in representing the phenomena comprehensively, continue to be useful in distinguishing different worldviews of life. However, in light of the contemporary communal violence, it would propose that in the multi-culturo-lingual context of India identities should not be reduced merely to the religious.

In order to achieve this task the paper will flow in the following manner: firstly, a discussion on the concepts 'religion' and 'Hinduism' to enable us to understand what 'thing(s)' they are? Once the nature of 'religion' is clarified, secondly, the term 'religion' will be problematised to show that it has a particular history within the western tradition and hence cannot be used uncritically in cross-cultural contexts such as India. Thirdly, it will be argued that though the category 'religion' was used cross-culturally, the construction of 'Hinduism' was not ex nihilo by providing evidence for the existence of pre-colonial Hindu consciousness in medieval India. Fourthly it will be argued that the concept Hinduism has currency today even among the Hindus primarily because its construction was not of purely European descent but was done in partnership with Indians and furthermore it came into common parlance and public consciousness because of the Hindu revivalists, reformers and nationalists who uncritically took Hinduism as a given and universalised it as the 'Other' of the Judeo-Christian faiths. Finally the paper will end by exploring how one can go beyond religion especially in light of contemporary communal violence and propose a more nuanced understanding and use of identities.

Karmanye Thadani & Varun Chablani

Gujarat National Law University (Gandhinagar, India)

'Tolerance'/Secularism' in India – Is It Perceived Differently?

Secularism or religious tolerance is normally meant to imply that one is not treating religion as a mark of social identity in public, and believes in the principle of 'live and let live' with respect to religion. However, the Indian position is different. In India, the sufis asserted that all religions are true (Nizamuddin Auliya performed yogic meditation and Aamir Khusrao compared the Hindu religious scholars to Aristotle), just as the Brahma Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission. We have Hindus visiting dargahs or shrines of sufi saints like Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer with utmost reverence, and on the other hand, a Muslim writing the screenplay for a Hindu mythological serial and another in history (Raskhan) writing hymns in praise of Krishna. The prominent religious figure, Swami Vivekanand declared that those not open to new religious views are like a frog in a well. Muhammad Iqbal and Maulana Azad held Ram, Krishna and Buddha to be prophets of Allah like Muhammad. We have had saints like Kabir and Shirdi Sai Baba, respected by both Hindus and Muslims.

Hindu homes have a picture of Jesus with Hindu deities. In urban Hindu homes, Christmas trees are decorated and Muslims and Christians light earthen lamps and burst crackers on Diwali. In Kerala, on Onam, which is a Hindu festival, even Muslims and Christians prepare the traditional feast, some Muslims doing so even during the month of Ramzan, which is their fasting month. There are cases of even Hindus fasting during Ramzan. In India, tolerance or secularism, to a large number of people, means acceptance of other religions.

Our paper shall examine the difference between the Eastern and Western approaches and the reasons for the same. We shall also examine if communal tensions in India have more to do with intolerance of a religion or outrage against a religious community (the two are different and actually not even connected).

Saradindu Mukherji

University of Delhi (New Delhi, India)

Re-Examining the Terminology, Logic and the Indian Media: Another look at the Hindu-Muslim Relations in Recent Times

The paper is based on the treatment by the Indian media of the following developments relating to Hindu-Muslim relations in the preceding two decades. Keeping in mind the conceptual problem such a project spanning a limited time-frame poses – this paper by keeping the partition of India in the background – will take another look at the mass exodus from the Kashmir valley (1989 onwards), the debate on the communal violence in Gujarat - and a few incidents of Hindu Muslim ‘riots’ in recent times.

Terms such as ‘secularism’, ‘fascism’, ‘majority and minority’, ‘sense of injustice’, ‘perceived grievances of a community’, and ‘genocide’ etc. will be analysed in light of the above incidents, so as to see if these categories are adequate in explaining the communal violence and whether they offer any solution in mitigating the divide. The paper would traverse through the corridors of time to offer a comprehensive view of the problem.

In the process, an attempt is also made to see whether the media’s use of these terms could provide a solution to the problem or rather keeps it alive. It is suggested that an objective study of the fault-lines of our society and avoidance of a narrowly political approach might save the civil society from further troubles. Only by the collective propensity to come closer to the reality and offer some tentative suggestions, a further deterioration in the communitarian relations may still be prevented. A cross-country perspective will provide the theoretical grid to this paper which is to be based both on archival and secondary source materials.

Gautam Chakrabarti

RLA College, University of Delhi (New Delhi, India)

From 'Diasporic' to 'Glocal': 'Indic' Manoeuvres and 'Western' Perceptions

With the growth in increasingly-assertive diasporic empowerment and schematic 'national' consolidation/s, the 'Indic Weltanschauung' is managing to manoeuvre, for itself, incremental space in the era of Globalisation. However, there are issues regarding the capability of this occasionally-protocronistic way-of-life to weather the transmogrifying and homogenising processes of a 'Brave New World'. The Pentagon's quadrennial Defence Review Report, in February 2006, stated that 'India is emerging as a great power and key strategic partner'; and hailed '[s]hared values as long[-]standing, multi-ethnic democracies [that] provide the foundation for continued and increased strategic cooperation and represent an important opportunity for [the] two countries'. Will Indic society be able to fortify its socio-cultural specificities and 'glocalise' pan-Earth trends? Will Indian polity rise up to the challenges of religion-based terrorism, internal unrest, societal churning and generational shift/s, sans a 'paradigm shift' in its constitutional ethos? Will increasing Euro-American support and recognition, both politico-economic and socio-cultural, for the 'Emerging Power' result in India being co-opted into the 'Western' side of the Huntingtonian divide? These are some of the questions that will be discussed in the proposed paper, in the light of the speaker's felt experiences as an academic in India, Finland and Russia; besides, the perceptions, both noetic and experiential, of 'Western' and Russian interlocutors of 'The Continent of Circe' will be taken into account. How are the perceptions, both academic-- as mediated through publications, talks and online-exchanges-- and activism-oriented-- as seen in blogs, e-mail- and internet-lists and press-releases-- of India's socio-political future, as inscribed in religion, impacting the discourse/s of/for India's future? This paper will seek to interrogate the interstices between the contesting prisms of defining India's socio-cultural and politico-religious trajectories. In a nutshell, this paper will attempt to establish a matrix of inter-penetrations between the Indic and Euro-American notions of religion as ideology, both socio-cultural and political; and also to locate a new Indic 'machtpolitik'.

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 2

13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

SEMINAR HALL 2

Anuja Prashar

Goldsmith's College, University of London (London, UK)

Invisible 'Chains of Memory' Targeting India, Through Joshua Project 2000 and Beyond

The evidence of this paper, focusing on the 'caste reinforcing conversion practises' of the 'Joshua Project 2000 and Beyond', suggests that the form and structure of the Evangelical networked movement operating in India today, resembles that of elite multinational corporations based in the Western World. Professor Lesley Sklair suggests that there are three interlocking network structures, made up of the upper class, corporate community and policy-planning specialists. These are the structures and networks through which the operations and processes of globalisation are guided and that shape the future. 'Policy planning networks of corporate experts, charitable foundations and think-tanks complete the interlocking and solidarity of the elite' (Sklair, 2001). Carson and Carroll provide substantial evidence for the formation of a prevailing collection of collaborative global policy boards, that oversee transnational economic and political developments, concentrated around a Euro-American geo-political network (Carroll, 2003). Danièle Hervieu-Léger suggests a theory of religion as a 'chain of memory' which explains the complexities of the relationship between religion and society. As Hervieu-Léger highlights, the leading factors at play in this relationship are the intricate influences of intellectual location of belief, the semantics of the discourse, the individual and community needs for fulfilment and salvation and the historical socio-economic developments resulting from industrialization and the resulting modernity (Hervieu-Léger 2000). Exploratory evidence in this paper illustrates how Euro-American secularism may be in contradiction with itself, because of the invisible, unspoken and unacknowledged ideological paradigms and foundations upon which it stands in its support of the Joshua Project. This ideological foundation rooted in Christianity functions socially, politically and economically through discursive constructions that establish 'differences' based upon signifiers, such as phenotypes, language and cultural practices, economic status, ideology and epistemology. With a focus upon India, this paper explores the linkages between Christian evangelical systems with that of national governance and international funding, and the underpinning discourses that enable 'conversion' to become an effective social practise. The analysis reveals the discursive and systemic constructions, based upon key ideological Christian foundations, which prevail and dominate this particular transnational organised phenomenon in the 21st Century.

Koenraad Elst

Independent research scholar (Belgium)

Secularist vs. Christian Accounts of Hindu Resistance to Conversion

When Pope John Paul II declared in Delhi that the Catholic Church wanted to ‘reap a rich harvest of faith in Asia’, he unwittingly embarrassed his Indian secularist hosts. The latter had denounced as ‘Hindutva hate propaganda’ the fact, which is common knowledge in Christian countries, that the missionaries are in India in order to convert non-Christian Indians into Christians, and that Christian charitable work in healthcare and education is explicitly conceived as instrumental in a conversion strategy. The Pope didn’t mind underwriting this ‘propaganda’ and confirmed openly that it is the Church’s duty to open the hearts of all heathens to the true faith. Let us determine the reasons why the secularists try to shield the missionaries from Hindu criticism with claims that are utterly irreconcilable with the Christians’ own understanding of the mission. While Hindus and Christians agree on the existence of a sharp conflict of interest between them on the conversion front (supported by numerous authoritative statements from both camps), and on this conflict’s being a logical implication of Christianity’s claim to sole truth and sole salvific power, the secularist position is to deny this conflict. Meanwhile, the very approach that should have been natural to the secularists, viz. to consider the tangible sociological effects of conversion instead of its theological aspects, has been captured by the advocates of anti-conversion legislation, who point to the social disruption that allegedly follows conversions in SC/ST communities.

Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion 2

13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

SEMINAR HALL 2

Akshata Shrinath & Alisha Malik

School of Law, Christ University (Bangalore, India)

Right to Freedom of Religion or the Right to Conversion

India is a secular country where people practice a variety of religions. Many people define this belief in religion as a power controlled by the worship of God, such myths and also believing in the divine laws regarding the perception of marriage, relations, children etc. Religion in India was considered to be of utmost importance and for this people follow rules according to their personal laws or from the holy books. The laws made in India after independence made the country secular in nature. In fact, the Constitution of India, which is the law of the land, includes Article 25 and clearly states that people have the fundamental i.e. the basic right to practice and profess any religion through the way of conversion.

Conversion and reconversion comes into the picture when one person out of his benefit converts the other. There is as such no law against religious conversion. There are cases where Tribals are converted into Christians or another religion and then the Hindu people reconvert them. Various issues point to the same conclusion that 'adivasi' groups are not of any religion, they have a symbiotic relationship with nature, they are part of no caste and the religious rituals are integrated into their lives. If the government sits together and declares this group as a separate religion, then only the issue of coercive conversion can be stopped. But the problem comes when the supreme and the highest authority, i.e. the Constitution, agrees to the concept of conversion, then how can this impression be challenged? Is it possible that the law be of unambiguous nature wherein the laws said are properly defined without a question of doubt?

The tribal community in India is of great significance since they follow our culture and they are the ones who actually have preserved the age old appropriate Indian traditions even before the British colonisation. If these people are converted into other religions i.e. both convert and reconvert, then this will lead to utter chaos. There can be seen a clear violation of the right to personal liberty and the right of individual identity. Therefore this paper will mostly deal with the legal aspect of conversion and, the negative effects of conversion or re-conversion including possible suggestions for framing laws which help such groups who are in a dilemma.

Colonialism and Religion in India 2

13 January 2009, 09.00-11.00

SEMINAR HALL 3

Sufiya Pathan

Mahindra United World College of India (Mumbai, India)

The Emergence of the Category of 'Communalism' from Colonial Discourse

While it is fairly well-established that colonialism has had an impact on the categories of understanding we have available to us today, there is not much clear understanding of what that impact is and what relationship we have with colonial knowledge. I propose that our understanding of this question is hinged on a theory of colonialism itself. What is colonialism? How do we characterise colonial knowledge such that we get a grip over the anomalies this knowledge seems to sustain and promote? Concepts like 'Hinduism' and 'communalism' are products of this or allied knowledge systems. Hence, if we are able to define the knowledge system we should be able to understand its products.

Along with an explanation for why these entities have come to be established within colonial discourse, however, we need to establish what our relationship to these entities is. I would like to use the concept of 'communalism' as a test case. I seek to explain why the category of 'communalism' emerges as a product of colonial discourse, as well as to investigate our own relationship with that concept as we have inherited it. Although this does not directly address questions about 'Hinduism', if both 'communalism' and 'Hinduism' are products of colonial knowledge then my analysis of the former may shed light on aspects of the latter as well.

Raf Gelders

Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University (Ghent, Belgium)

From Anticlericalism to Anti-Brahmanism. The Indian Religion of the Priest in Protestant Polemics

Nineteenth-century scholarship identified the Brahmans as the ecclesiastic nucleus or priestly estate that unified a multitude of traditions into a pan-Indian synthesis. The colonial scholars negotiated a variety of Indian traditions by identifying them as the priestly corruptions of a monotheistic core. The agent of religious change was identified as ‘the Brahman priesthood.’ When this imagery was diffused in the colonial sources, unrepentant anti-Brahman sentiments soon became entrenched in the popular imagination, both in India as well as in the West.

There has been some recognition in South Asian scholarship on the moot point that the cultural matrix of the colonisers, and, more specifically, the continued influence of both biblical as well as Protestant thought, defined the colonial attitudes towards India. However, there is as yet little scholarly consensus or indeed literature on the core issues of how and when these attitudes came to be formed. The intention of this paper is to provide a single genealogy, or at least a prehistory, of the strong anti-Brahman sentiments that pervade the colonial archive.

This story is a historical one, grounded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Originally cataloguing the similarities between the Catholic practices and the pagan traditions of ancient Greece and Rome, sixteenth-century Protestant thought soon turned its attention to India. The German, French, Dutch and English polemicists utilised the reports that came back from the East to make visible how Roman-Catholic Christianity and devilish idolatry were each other’s equals. For as long as this confessional battle continued, the Brahman, said to be equal in wickedness to the Catholic priest of Rome, was assimilated in Protestant thought to neutralise theological opponents. Using a wide range of sources—cosmographies, theological treatises, pamphlets—the paper shows that in this interpretative and decidedly anticlerical context, an image of the Brahmans emerges that continued to inform the colonial representation of India.

Esther Bloch

Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University (Ghent, Belgium)

Diversity in Hinduism, What Is the Problem?

For more than 200 years Hinduism has been studied as the religion of India. At the same time, such studies claim that the question 'what is Hinduism?' is extremely difficult to answer because of Hinduism's 'diversity' ('Hinduism has no one creed, no specific doctrine fixed in a holy book, no belief in one god or a fixed series of gods, no common form of worship and no church-like structure or authority'). This paper will try to show that this 'difficulty' is very peculiar in nature: How can diversity be a problem for describing something? The world around us is immensely diverse. Yet, in spite of this, we have acquired extensive knowledge about many phenomena. Moreover, this peculiar problem arises specifically in the context of descriptions of Hinduism. When one looks at for example Christianity, such a problem does not occur: it is clear which differences are relevant for Christianity and which are not.

Postcolonial scholars have noticed the odd character of descriptions of Hinduism. They criticise classical Indology for overemphasising Hinduism's 'unity' and for neglecting its diversity as a result. Instead, some propose, what has been understood as 'Hinduism' is actually a collection of many separate religions or 'Hinduisms'. This, we will argue, merely shifts the problem from one level to another (from the level of the religion 'Hinduism' to the level of 'a type of Hindu religion') and is unable to explain the difficulty in the descriptions of Hinduism. Finally, this paper asks why, if this problem does not make sense in other contexts, does it persist in the descriptions of India? What if the problem of the 'diverse nature of Hinduism' is not a problem of Hinduism itself, but rather a problem of the theories about Hinduism? And if this is so, what are the implications?

'HOW TO...?' WORKSHOPS

In the 'How to...?' workshop sessions a concrete question will be taken up for discussion. The aim of these sessions is to involve the audience in a more active way.

How to Teach About the Indian Traditions and Religions?

11 January 2009, 9.00-11.00

ROOM: SEMINAR HALL 1

Workshop coordinators:

Maya Burger (University of Lausanne) and **Martin Fárek** (University of Pardubice)

Concept

The present workshop provides an opportunity to reflect on and exchange views about how to teach on the Indian religions and traditions. While many panels tackle theoretical aspects of rethinking religion in India, this workshop invites the participants to propose and discuss pragmatic solutions. The organizers will each speak briefly about their experiences in teaching Indian religions and will open up the debate with a series of particularly controversial questions. Teaching about Indian religions in the contemporary world is an epistemological and pedagogical challenge. We shall concretize the task by searching for 'Indian equivalents to the conceptual components of religion'.



Rethinking Values, Well-Being and Faith: Braiding Psychoanalysis and Social Action

11 January 2009, 9.00-11.00

ROOM: Main auditorium

Workshop coordinator:

Manasi Kumar (University College, London, UK)

Concept

Sectarian conflicts, communal tensions and religious violence in India pose enormous challenges in thinking about ‘futures’ of India. Liberal secularism in its repeated dismissal and neglect of ‘differences’ (communal, political, or cultural etc.) that are interiorized and entrenched in one’s cultural psyche, does not sufficiently address the diversity of interests, cultural values, faith that political ideologies and religious structures put forth. The clash of civilizations could then be understood as this polarization between the two opposing camps, liberal secular voices and fundamentalist right wing ideologies. What is at stake here is an appreciation of the complexity of human emotions, problematics of identity and sense of belonging to one’s community, and various human capabilities that a society can nourish in individuals to promote tolerance and empowerment of all sections.

Critical engagement with psychological dimensions and processes such as what fuels emotions and directs emotional behaviour in collectivities, deconstruction of dominant, majoritarian political discourse and ideologies, group identity formation, individual’s (gendered) identification with the group etc. can provide an understanding of how values, needs and faith crystallize and organize thoughts and opinions as we live through variegated moments in life. This workshop attempts to address the value of incorporating a depth-psychological approach in thinking about cultural aporias and traumas association with religious conflicts and politics around an unequivocal secular portrayal of India. It questions the two opposing camps by showing the inadequacy and pathology associated with adherence to extreme opinions and thinking, and points to the urgent need to mull on ‘differences’ and how these differences interpenetrate, reinvigorate the cultural psyche and thinking of Indians instead

‘HOW TO...?’ WORKSHOPS

of ignoring or obliterating these or reaffirming one religious identity over the other. In this context, we also discuss what needs, values and faith mean for individuals and society and if there exists a dialectical relationship between the two. Critical psychological engagement with social reality allows a nuanced understanding of ‘psychic reality’, individual standpoint and specificity of individual action in thinking about violence, religion and social action. Such an engagement allows individual voices, needs and shifting identifications to be retrieved and brought back into the public domain. Subjectivity then opens spaces that were beyond grasp and that might perhaps allow the discourse on rethinking religion, politics, and collective violence to be seen in a new light.

Key concerns and objectives:

- To address whether some or all discourses of ethnicity create a disposition to violence. Are ethnic identities primarily socially constructed? Does the process of ethnic identity construction necessarily entail ethnic violence considering the violent potential of cultural differences?
- What roles do religious leaders and politicians seem to play in ethnic identity construction? Do the political elites favour extremist positions – intending to construct group identities in more antagonistic and rigid ways? Are leaders also pawns in this discourse or do they play a more vitiating role?
- How do these elites or leaders convince the public to follow and support them? How do leaders exploit emotions and manipulate or colour the opinions and judgments of the public?
- Is psychoanalysis closer to the primordialist position (e.g. Freud, Kakar, also Nandy) because of its inherent determinism? And does social activism resort to mainly constructionist explanations? How do these two positions explain group divides, mobilization and violence on ethnic lines?
- How does incorporating a discourse on critical subjectivity illuminate us about multi-valent and complex interaction between needs, values and faith in understanding cultural differences, formation of ethnic identity and enactment of violence?



Panellists

Anand Patwardhan is a renowned Indian documentary film maker with over 30 films on communalism, corruption, construction of masculinity, nuclear politics, communal violence etc. to his credit. He will speak about ‘Ram ke Naam and the construction of militant Hindu identity’.

Anup Dhar is Associate Fellow at the Centre for the Studie of Culture and Society, Bangalore and initiated CUSP (Culture, Subjectivity and Psychoanalysis, an international working party with research and theoretical interests). He will speak about ‘The Childhood of the Indian Nation state’.

Manasi Kumar is writing her thesis on social trauma of child survivors of 2001-02 Gujarat earthquake and riots. She is based at the Psychoanalysis Unit in University College London, UK. She will chair the session.

Neil Altman is a psychoanalyst based at New York and has been working about psychoanalytic engagements with issues around race, gender and politics. He will speak about ‘Debating positions of religious fundamentalists and secular liberals: Insights from psychoanalysis’.

Shabnam Hashmi, a social activist earlier associated with SAHMAT and currently associated with ANHAD (Act Now for Harmony and Democracy), has been working on several issues by way of protest and intervention against communal hatred after the 2002 Gujarat pogrom, attacks on Christians in Orissa and Bihar and the insurgency in Kashmir. ANHAD is credited with mobilizing youth to create awareness and promote communal harmony and democratic values. She will be a discussant in this workshop.

Vamik Volkan is an emeritus professor of psychiatry and psychoanalysis currently at the Austen Riggs Centre, Massachusetts as a Senior Erik Erikson Scholar. He has been working on issues of violence, political psychology and group psychology for the last 40 years. He will speak about ‘Ethnic pride and ethnic violence: the need to have enemies and allies’.

'HOW TO...?' WORKSHOPS

Self-Presentation of Hinduism in the Modern Context

11 January 2009, 9.00-11.00

ROOM: SEMINAR HALL 2

Workshop coordinator:

Koenraad Elst

Concept

Let us compare a sample of self-introductions of Hinduism, such as school textbook chapters on Hinduism (including the California schoolbook controversy of 2006) and catechism-type course texts used in diaspora Hindu temples' Sunday-school programmes. Then let us identify the elements which an ancient Vedic seer or a medieval Bhakti poet would fail to recognize as reflecting his own tradition, elements which have been introduced in imitation of or in reaction to the colonial and post-colonial impact of modernity, Christianity and secularism. Next, let us distinguish those cases where the innovations fail to convince for being too obviously imitative and insincere (e.g. attempts to present sectarian doctrines as pan-Hindu, such as Christian-borrowed Arya Samaji monotheism) from those where an integration of new elements in the tradition has arguably succeeded. Thus, we may contrast different elaborations of the cherished modernist Vivekananda-ite notion of 'Hinduism as a scientific religion'.



How to Launch and Develop the Academic Study of Religion in South Asia: Does the University of Dhaka Provide a Model?

11 January 2009, 9.00-11.00

ROOM: SEMINAR HALL 3

Workshop coordinators:

Joseph O'Connell (University of Toronto, Canada & University of Dhaka, Bangladesh),
Kazi Nurul Islam (University of Dhaka, Bangladesh), **Eva Sadia Saad** (University of Dhaka, Bangladesh)

Concept

For diverse reasons discussed in a plenary panel of the first of the cluster of 'Rethinking Religion in India', the academic study of religion as an explicit subject of study and research till now has been institutionalized at very few universities in India or elsewhere in South Asia. Visva-Bharati and Banaras Hindu University have had combined departments of Philosophy and Religion for many decades and Punjabi University (Patiala) launched its Guru Gobind Singh Department of Religious Studies in 1967. The University of Madras has small departments or chairs in Christianity, Jainology, Vaisnavism and Islam, though not in religion as such. Jamia Millia Islamia has a Centre for the Study of Comparative Religions and Civilizations which, though not yet a department, offers undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral courses in Comparative Religion and barely a week from now will be hosting a major academic congress on 'Religion after 9/11'.

Looking east across the border we find that in Bangladesh it was only a decade ago (1998) that a major university, the University of Dhaka, launched that country's first Department of World Religions, offering first an M.A., followed by an M.Phil. and then undergraduate Honours programs and within the past year opened a Centre for Interfaith and Inter-cultural Dialogue. The sudden emergence and rapid growth of this department with its new centre is all the more striking in view of the deeply seated polarization in Bangladeshi politics and academia between those committed to secularism and those demanding establishment of a

‘HOW TO...?’ WORKSHOPS

fundamentalist conception of Islam. What we propose to do in this workshop is hear how this Dhaka initiative came into being and how it is faring and ask in what respects, if at all, it might serve as something of a model for universities elsewhere in South Asia that might consider launching programs, centres or full departments for the study of religion.

The core of the workshop consists of three brief presentations. One is by a foreign scholar outlining what in the course of half a dozen annual visits there he has observed of the influence of the environing secular-Islamist tensions in Bangladesh on the study of religion in the University of Dhaka. The next is by the founding chair of that university's Department of World Religions and founding director of its new centre for dialogue, explaining why and how these two pioneering entities could come into existence in the manner and form that they have. The third is a work-in-progress report by the current chair of that department, identifying what policies and procedures she finds to be working well and what frustrations must still be grappled with. Scholars from other South Asian universities where religion is being taught or researched upon through whatever department or discipline will be encouraged to respond to the Dhaka experience from their respective vantage points. Out of the pooled experiences and mutual critiques it may be hoped that insights and guidelines conducive to the development of an academic study of religion in India, Bangladesh and elsewhere in South Asia may emerge.



Joseph O'Connell

University of Toronto, Canada & University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

The 'Secular' and the 'Religious': Implications for the Academic Study of Religion in Bangladesh

As spelled out at some length by a special panel in the 2008 conference on 'Rethinking Religion in India', the issues, theoretical and practical, of highest priority for academic study of religion in India and elsewhere in South Asia do not necessarily coincide with those in the West. That holds true likewise when we consider the category 'secular', again in theoretical as well as practical terms, in relation to the academic study of religion. While there has been for some time no little reflection and debate on the relation of the 'secular' to the 'religious' (especially when construed as 'secularism' vs. 'fundamentalism') in South Asia as pertinent in politics, there has been relatively little attention given to how these categories and the phenomena they attempt to conceptualize impact upon teaching and research about religion as is done and may yet be done in India, Bangladesh and elsewhere in South Asia. This paper (prepared from the perspective of an annual academic visitor) sketches how 'secular' in relation to 'religious' (including the much narrower 'secularism vs. fundamentalism' debate) as understood in Bangladesh impinges upon the nascent academic study of religion in that country, in particular at the University of Dhaka.

'HOW TO...?' WORKSHOPS

Kazi Nurul Islam

University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

How and Why the University of Dhaka Established a Department of World Religions and a Centre for Interfaith and Inter-cultural Dialogue'

Though all the religions of the world teach love, preach sympathy for others and encourage man to exercise utmost self-restraint and at their most profound level have been a source of highest good of mankind, the world today is torn by conflicts, enmity and religious hatred. In this predicament a lasting and peaceful society is impossible if different faiths are not understood in their proper perspectives. Again, there was a time when various religions, precisely because of their convictions, were unable to cooperate and were even antagonistic to each other. But the time has changed to a great extent. Now religions, in spite of historic differences, must seek to unite all men for the attainment of world peace. All these prompted a teacher of the University of Dhaka to embark upon a study of Indian religions at Banaras Hindu University, Judeo – Christian traditions at Birmingham University and Far Eastern religious traditions at Kokusikan University and Tokyo University. After coming back to Bangladesh, he submitted a proposal to the university authority for establishing a Department of World Religions.

Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country, known as a country of inter-religious harmony. As the pioneer university of the country the University of Dhaka has played many historic roles. Quite consistent with its previous history, the university established a Department of World Religions in 1998 with an end in view to promote inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding and also to prepare young men and women to become enlightened citizens of the world.

Again, within a decade, the university authority was convinced that there was a time when we could live in isolation, but today we are forced to live in one world. In fact we are increasingly living in a global village. Today we live in multicultural and multi-religious societies. Because of the tremendous advancement of communication systems and fantastic development of electronic media, no country can remain religiously and culturally isolated. The university authority was also convinced that it is high time that people of different cultural



and religious backgrounds work hand in hand to transform the planet from a discordant house to a harmonious home. Unless people of diverse faiths and cultural backgrounds come closer, the fanatics and racists will gain the upper hand, political opportunists will exploit the situation and this will lead to the breakdown of the moral fibre of human society. Furthermore, in today's world either we go for dialogue or we will face sure confrontation and destruction. Indeed inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue is not an option but a vital need of the hour. And that is why the University of Dhaka played another pioneering role in establishing the Centre for Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue in the beginning of 2008. The programs of the Centre are part of the academic activities of the Department of World Religions.

CLOSING WORKSHOP

TOWARDS THE FUTURE OF RETHINKING RELIGION IN INDIA

13 January 2009, 14.30-16.30

Room: Banquet hall

On the last day of the conference, we want to reflect upon the progress that has been made in answering the questions of the conference: Is the theoretical framework of religious studies adequate in the Indian context? If not, what are the implications for our understanding of certain conflicts and problems in India that are generally related to religion? Is secularism the solution to these problems or does it play a role in aggravating them? Can we develop new insights into the debates about conversion, the Aryan invasion, or fundamentalism? What are the practical consequences for domains such as education?

This final workshop session is meant to allow the participants of Rethinking Religion in India to sit together and reflect on these questions. Jointly, we will try to identify the questions that need to be addressed in the subsequent conferences, think about changes of format to allow more fruitful discussions, and more generally brainstorm about the steps to be taken next. We invite you to actively partake in this session.

The closing workshop will be followed by a **closing address** (16.45-17.30) by **Sarah Claerhout** (Ghent University, Belgium) and **Sri Uday Kumar** (Registrar of Kuvempu University, Karnataka, India).

CONFERENCE OUTPUT AND DOCUMENTARY

Conference output

The proceedings of the Platform and Roundtable sessions will be published either in the form of an edited book or as a special theme issue of a journal.

The papers of the Platform and Roundtable sessions of the first conference will be published with Routledge: *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism* (see p. 8-9)

Conference documentary and audio recordings

A 10-15 minute documentary will be produced of each conference in the conference cluster. The respective documentaries will give an overview of the different sessions and will include interviews with the invited speakers and other conference participants. In the course of the five years, the documentaries should represent the contribution of Rethinking Religion in India to answering some of the main questions in religious studies and in developing an alternative framework for the study of religion in India.

The overall objective of these documentaries is to make the conference themes and results accessible to a wider audience, to promote reflection and discussion about the conference themes and questions in between conferences, and to introduce the conference themes in institutions of higher education in India and abroad. The documentaries will be made available on the conference website.

Besides these 15-minute documentaries some of the discussions, presentations and interviews with speakers and participants can be watched on YouTube (via www.cultuurwetenschap.be/conferences/RRI)

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THE FIVE-YEAR CONFERENCE CLUSTER

Rethinking Religion in India is a five-year conference cluster. The five conferences form an integrated whole, with each conference building on the previous one. Each year the issues and problems to be addressed will get delineated more sharply. It is the objective of this conference cluster to come up with a series of answers and new approaches to this set of questions.

	PLATFORM SESSIONS	ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS	PARALLEL PAPER SESSIONS
YEAR 1	Are there native religions in India?	Colonialism and religion in India	(1) Evolutionary explanations of religion (2) Indians are Aryans, so what? (3) The caste system and Indian religion (4) Colonialism and Indian religion
YEAR 2	Is secularism the solution to communal conflict in India?	Rethinking secularism	(1) Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion (2) Colonialism and religion in India (3) Religion and law in India (4) Rethinking secularism in India
YEAR 3	Religion and law in India	Religious conversion in India	(1) Secularism and tolerance in India (2) Western representations of Hinduism (3) Is religion a cultural universal?
YEAR 4	Evolutionary explanations of religion	Western representations of India	(1) The caste system and Indian religion (2) Does India know of religious rivalry? (3) Inter-religious dialogue & conversion in India
YEAR 5	Hinduism and the caste system	Did Buddhism challenge Hinduism?	(1) The Christian theological framework of the religious studies (2) The construction of Hinduism and colonial consciousness (3) Western representations of India and its religions