

Panel 30: The public representation of South Asian religions in the postcolonial world

1. John Zavos, University of Manchester

The Public Representation of a religion called Hinduism

This short introductory paper will reflect on the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded network project which provides the impetus for this panel. The network has been running for two years, following an initial panel session at the 20th ECMSAS at Manchester. The paper will review the progress of the project in addressing issues related to the representation of Hinduism both in India and the diaspora, in multiple public contexts. The project is seeking now to open up these themes to researchers working on the full range of South Asian religious identities and practices, and the paper is designed to set some initial agendas which it is hoped will be explored as the panel progresses.

2. Sean McLoughlin, University of Leeds

Muslims, Multiculturalism and the State in the UK

In this paper I examine the changing relationship between (mainly South Asian heritage) Muslim organisations and the State in the United Kingdom. The first part of my analysis presents an overview of the ways in which the structure of the British State, in terms of legislation, policymaking and the existence of an established church, has provided the framework within which Muslims have organised themselves since the 1960s. In particular, my account examines the New Labour government's emphasis on civic renewal and the related emergence of what I call the 'faith relations industry' at a time of greater securitisation since '9/11' and '7/7'. I also trace a shift in the main focus of Muslim leaders' engagement with the State, from more ethnically-oriented grassroots networks at the local level from the 1960s, to a more 'professionalized' national focus for representation of Muslims as 'Muslims' at the national level since the Rushdie Affair in 1989. My paper culminates with an examination of the rise and fall of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), a Muslim umbrella organisation which was inaugurated in 1997. Despite being courted by New Labour prior to '9/11' as a likely solution to the stated longstanding problem of finding a single Muslim interlocutor for UK government, since '7/7' especially the MCB has fallen out of favour with government. Indeed, because of its position on UK foreign policy and uncertainties about the Islamist heritage of many of its affiliates, as well as its willingness and ability to challenge the rhetoric of radicalisation, the State has recently sought to engage more plural platforms for Muslim representation.

3. Rafaela Eulberg, University of Lucerne

The public face of Tamil Hindu traditions in Switzerland: The establishment of a South Asian religious tradition in Europe

Until now Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu traditions are almost invisible in the religious landscape of Switzerland and have rarely attracted the attention of the majority population. But the religious life of the nearly 30,000 Tamil Hindus from Sri Lanka, who have been living as civil war refugees in Switzerland since the 1980s, is characterized by vibrant and dynamic processes. Tamil Hindus claim to present their traditions and to participate in the public sphere of the residence country.

In my paper, I want to exemplify the public representation of Tamil Hindu traditions in Switzerland and the claims for public recognition with two samples:

1. Performative religious practices in public

Various religious practices performed during the annual temple festival processions are at present the only occasions where Tamil Hindu practices are visible in the public sphere. Carrying the *tēr* around the temple building, hook swinging and *kāvati* dance are performative practices that are noticed by the majority population and are discussed in the Swiss media.

2. A publicly visible temple

The desire and claim for a temple in traditional South Asian architecture is expressed by various religious actors of the Tamil Diaspora in Switzerland.

Due to the fact that the temple rooms of the Tamil Hindus are located until now in converted rented rooms in industrial areas, they have scarcely been noticed by the majority population. All the same, the temples are of crucial importance for the religious actors in the diasporic context. There are ambitions of various actors to construct “visible” temples in Switzerland and to establish Tamil Hindu traditions publicly through these sacred buildings. The opening of the first temple, the Aruḷmiku Sri Maṇḍōnmaṇi Ampāḷ Ālayam, is planned for 2010. This public temple forms a symbolic and social resource for the Tamil migrants because they hope it will lead to acceptance and importance within the religious field. The building process of a visible temple marks the beginning of public Tamil Hinduism in Switzerland.

Both examples, performative religious practices and the construction of temples, also uncover areas of conflict in processes of the public incorporation of migrated religions in Switzerland. The public discourses on non-Christian religions, especially Muslim sacred buildings, in recent Swiss political debates prove to be highly influential on the processes of public representation of Tamil Hindu traditions. In my presentation I will demonstrate the effects of the local power structures on the public face of Tamil Hindu traditions in this European country.

4. Shandip Saha, Athabasca University

Gurus, Globalization, and Entrepreneurship

The successive waves of gurus that went to the West during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ensured that Hinduism would become a part of the global religious landscape and that terms like ‘yoga’, ‘karma’, and ‘reincarnation’ would enter the vocabulary of Western popular culture. This paper will focus upon three gurus who have enjoyed global popularity because of their ability to frame Hinduism within a context that addresses the issues of modern urban professionals. The first two gurus, Swami Parthasarathy of the Ramakrishna Mission and Swami Sukhabodhananda, are international management and spiritual gurus who lecture business and corporations on the compatibility between Hindu religious thought and corporate culture. The third of these gurus is Anandamurti Guruma whose use of modern marketing and the Internet has successfully cultivated her image as the well-rounded and informed guru for the modern age who is in touch with issues ranging from sex to stress management. This paper will examine the manner in which Guruma, Parthasarathy, and Sukhabodhananda have reinterpreted Hinduism to address these very contemporary issues as well as examine the organizational structure and technology they have used to bring their message to Hindus and non-Hindus worldwide. This analysis, in turn, will provide the foundation upon which to determine the degree to which these religious teachers either exemplify or radically depart from the historical patterns one sees when tracing the globalization of Hinduism by gurus since the nineteenth century. In doing so, this paper will finally attempt to address two issues. The first issue is whether or not the transformation of gurus into globetrotting religious entrepreneurs is a modern phenomenon in Hinduism that can be explained by the effects of transnational capitalism. The second and final issue that this paper will address is the effect that the globalization of Hinduism by gurus has had upon the definition of Hindu identity in India and abroad.

5. Hanna Kim, Adelphi University

Public Entanglements: the BAPS Community and its Juggling of Different Imaginaries

This paper explores several persistent imaginaries of the BAPS Swaminarayan community, its middle-classness and its commodification of religion, in light of its temple publics, in particular the Delhi Swaminarayan Akshardham complex and the Atlanta Swaminarayan temple. Paying close attention to several sources of public discourse that have appeared following the construction of these temple sites, this paper considers how BAPS practices produce citizens whose embodied qualities are desirable in modernizing post-colonial contexts. BAPS temples are rich sites for exploring this imbrication and for probing the consequent disruption of imaginaries of Hinduism and “religion”. While BAPS, a non-liberal devotional movement, provides a distinct “brand” of Hinduism, it seems that the unease this provokes underscores a larger issue of what a Hindu “religion” should look like. This paper interrogates these outsider imaginaries alongside BAPS efforts to negotiate its publics. Because some of BAPS’s means of cultivating ideal devotees are complementary to an increasingly universalized conception of

neo-liberal citizens, there is a need to analyse this overlap. The main argument is that while BAPS clearly endorses brand consistency, control, and efficiency, these are strategies that both engage its publics and allow the maintenance of its devotional traditions in local and transnational contexts.

6. Jacob Copeman, University of Edinburgh

'Guru Stunt': Parody, Charity and Devotion Online

This paper will analyse a devotional 'critical event' and its aftermath. In early 2007 the guru presiding over the Dera Sacha Sauda (DSS) devotional order, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Ji, provoked sustained civil unrest in north India after he appeared in public dressed as the (according to orthodox Sikhs) final living Sikh spiritual master, Guru Gobind Singh. The ensuing clashes between Sikhs and DSS devotees recalled the violent events of the late 1970s which culminated in the assassination of the Sant Nirankari guru, Gurbachan Singh. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted at the DSS spiritual headquarters in Sirsa, Haryana, and analysis of voluminous and visceral online debates, this paper will frame these dramatic events within the recent tumultuous political history of Sikhism, both in India and worldwide. Further, it will elaborate concepts of 'guru mimesis' and 'devotional realism' in order to help shed light on an unfolding politics of public virtue enacted by the two sets of devotees. The extreme, vituperative Sikh accusations against the DSS guru – which allude to an extraordinary array of alleged misdemeanours including but certainly not limited to his imitation of Gobind Singh – are countered by DSS devotees through reference to the prolific feats of supercharity he is said to instigate. The performance of public service, in other words, is central to the public self-representation of the DSS, and is used to deflect attention away from the accusations against its controversial presiding guru. That the strategy is at least partly successful is suggested by orthodox Sikh bodies' attempts to counter it by organising competing public service programs – in February 2009 Sikh organisations celebrated Holla Mohalla by attempting to set a new blood donation world record. The previous world record has been established in 2005 by the DSS.

7. Sipra Mukherjee, West Bengal State University

The Non-Hindu Status Sought by Ramakrishna Mission in Bengal

The Ramakrishna Mission, one of the most famous Hindu religious organisations, sought the status of a non-Hindu religious organization in West Bengal in 1985. The case continued from 1985 to 1995, when the Supreme Court ruled that the Mission could not be granted the status of a minority organization in India.

My paper will use this court case to explore the public representation of Hinduism in relation to the minority faiths in India. The case highlights the following issues:

- the intriguing fact that both the Mission and the Court used the parameter of 'inclusivism' to decide whether they were Hindu or non-Hindu: the Court decided that the Mission was Hindu *because* it was an inclusive organisation; the Mission decided that they were non-Hindu *because, unlike* the Hindus, they were inclusive.
- how Hinduism is defined by Indian judicial discourse, which in turn shapes the concept of Hinduism in the public mind.
- how such a delineation of Hinduism opens up to question the equations between the majority and the minority communities.

The context, significantly, is the rise of the Hindu Right who used Vivekananda, the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission, as one of their patron saints.

8. Pralay Kanungo, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Hindutva and the Changing Contours of Christianity in Orissa

This paper seeks to explore why Hindutva has been successful in its mission against Christianity in Orissa. First, it shows how Christianity emerged in this 'Hindu Province' during the colonial period, and asks whether the encounter between Hinduism and Christianity left a bitter legacy which still remains alive in popular memory. Secondly, it examines how, during the

postcolonial period, different Church denominations not only invited the wrath of caste Hindus by questioning their hegemony and throwing up religious, social and political challenges, but also antagonized many middle and lower caste Hindus and even a section of Adivasis by pursuing an aggressive agenda of proselytization. Third, it attempts to understand how Hindutva has profited from this anti-Christian resentment by projecting itself as the sole protector and defender of Hindu religion, thereby deriving legitimacy for a campaign of anti-Christian violence. Finally, it argues that Orissa's Hindu public sphere has been converted into a Hindutva public sphere, celebrating religious intolerance and violence and deeply communalizing civil society.

9. Round table discussion

The public representation of South Asian 'religions' in the postcolonial world

This discussion will be led by the members of the project steering group: **Professor Pralay Kanungo, Professor Madhu Kishwar, Dr Deepa Reddy, Dr Maya Warriar, Professor Raymond Williams, and Dr John Zavos**. It will seek to reflect further on key themes of the project in relation to the papers presented in the panel. These themes include the building of institutions and innovative forms of worship; religious leaders, organisations and networks in national and transnational contexts; umbrella organisations and the projection of 'ecumenical' forms of religious identity; religious organisations and public service, with particular emphasis on the development and education sectors. These themes have been explored throughout the life of the 'Public Representation of a Religion called Hinduism' network; we hope to contribute to the development of research agendas which will build on the experience of the network.