

Abstracts Panel 31

Participants:

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1. The Resurgence and Reinvention of Religion in the Indian Middle Class as reflected in the Growing Popularity of New Religious Movements (Prof. Dr. Hans-Jürgen Findeis, University of Bonn, Germany)

With regard to the dynamism of economical progress and changes in the Indian society it is discussed whether the significantly spiritual dimension of Indian culture and life will get weakened, transformed, lost or rather reinvented. The historical experience provides various models of renewal, reforms, reinvention or recreation of religion in which particular classes and segments of the society, the economical order and the composition of religions played an important role. Several inventions since 19th century had and have still an impact on the development not only of religiosity in the distinguishable religions, societies, castes, classes and groups but also on politics, culture, social awareness and living within the system of social and religious diversity.

Within the broader historical context the paper will focus on new religious movements attracting particularly Indian Middle Class. It will reflect on potentials of resurgence and reinvention of religion within this sector of society and discuss the contribution to new chances and problems arising out of the changing life style and priorities supported by economic prosperity. In this context it seems relevant to consider not only the Hindu Indian Middle Class but also the comparable social and economic sectors of the other societies or communities defined by their religious traditions.

2. Impact of Religious and cultural transnationalism on the Indian middle class (Kamala Ganesh)

One of the much focussed upon changes in the contemporary Indian middle class is its expanding size. The other has been its change of character into an avidly and unabashedly consuming class. Less attention has been given to its status as an aspirational model. Fourthly, and this is the least examined aspect, with the growth of India's diaspora, and the Indian government's recognition and wooing of it to harvest its economic and political clout, Indian and diasporic middle classes have developed multiple and mutual linkages. Some sort of a transnational middle class is emerging, via institutions and organizations involved in business and investments, higher education, philanthropy, religion and culture. This paper explores some of the new linkages between the Indian and diasporic middle class, particularly in performing arts and in guru based charismatic Hindu sects, and reflects on the nature of transnationalism that is emerging.

3. The expanding middle class in India and the culture of consumerism (A. R. Momin, Dept. of Sociology, University of Mumbai)

One noticeable development that has come about in recent years is that the boundaries between the different segments of India's middle class are becoming increasingly fluid and porous. The upper segment of the middle class is acting as a reference group for the middle and lower segments.

The culture of consumerism entails a certain value orientation, which is exemplified by conspicuous consumption, individualism, heightened status consciousness and competitiveness.

There seems to be a significant linkage between the culture of consumerism and certain trends in contemporary Indian society, including increasing geographical and social mobility, growing individualism, the nuclearisation of family, the discontinuities with the traditional value system and the fraying of the traditional bonds of kinship and community.

As a result of continuing migration from urban to rural areas, increasing travel and transportation and growing exposure to TV, the culture of consumerism is slowly penetrating into the country's smaller towns and villages.

Globalisation has greatly impacted the culture of consumerism not only in India but also across large parts of the world. It will be interesting to investigate the bearing of globalisation on the culture of consumerism in a comparative, cross-cultural perspective.

4. "The Great Bazaar and its class" (Prof Dipak Malik, Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varansi)

The paper is an attempt to sketch the evolution of Indian middle class starting from colonial middle class cum upper caste, nehruvian middle class, social justice led middle class cum backward castes and scheduled caste and then the most latest Globalisation – liberalisation produced metropolitan middle class. The middle class formation has crossed the three stages and moved to the fourth.

Since these new draftees in the renovated middle class are still fresh, the enthusiasm and initiative of theirs can be infectious, the classical formations of course have made retreat.

Our focus will be on educational institutions; how universities have changed as well as the making of rural middle class. We would take Varanasi district as our universe which would include both villages as well as urban areas.

We would also focus on certain events in history and the kind of response they gathered from this middle class. Class formation is an important requisite of nation building and gives a profile to political economy.

The axis of Capital, media and middle class would be matter of investigation in this paper.

5. The Success of Indian Middle Class: Indian Business Class in Post-Independence (Sojin Shin, South Asian Studies Programme, National University of Singapore)

An important aspect of the democratic transformation of India over the last half century has been the development of private enterprise and the movement of private surplus from agriculture to industrial enterprise. This study purports that how Indian middle class in business and industrial sectors developed their status in Indian society and market.

In many parts of the country, a new generation of industrial entrepreneurs has emerged since Independence and has begun to successfully challenge established business houses as well as foreign capital, many of which had merchant capitalist origins and came into being in the earlier part of this century.

There has been considerable change in the structure of ownership in the private corporate sector, the ranking of business houses, their control over various markets and industries, the nature of their operations, and so on – especially, the nature of Indian capitalism.

Based on this historical trajectory, an attempt to analysis will be made here (a) to give a narrative analysis about the transformation of Indian middle class in terms of empirical and historical perspective, (b) to compare the status of middle class in selective states with each other, and (c) to lighten the similarities and differences among them.

6. Aesthetics of the self: Creation of new cultural spaces by urban middle-class women in India

(Yumiko Tokita-Tanabe, Global Collaboration Center, Osaka University,Osaka)

This paper looks at how middle-class women are exercising agency to create a new cultural space by negotiating, improvising and forming new codes of behaviour by reflecting upon modes of self-perception and identity in the context of contemporary post-colonial urban condition in India.

There is no defined or standardized model for appropriate behaviour for middle-class women who are going out of their homes to study or work in public spaces. In the absence of clearly defined role models and frameworks for action, there are only negative models of what urban women do not aspire towards available as shared referential points. That is to say, these women contrast their behaviour and identity against imagined rural women who represent the backwardness of the past as well as against imagined women in the metropolis and the West who represent the rootless uncertainty of the future.

In this context, for urban middle-class women in India, modernity is an ambivalent state which cannot be evaluated entirely negatively or positively. Modernity as opposed to being backward is positive, while modernity is seen in negative terms when it is identified with individualism and/or absence of cultural ethics. The women are expected to conduct themselves appropriately in the contemporary setting without falling to either what is considered unsophisticated backwardness or over-advanced indecency.

The women's practices that I talk about are a part of “aesthetics of the self” in which the desire of the self merges with expectations that others have about urban women. I say “aesthetics” in order to distinguish it from a process by which the individual internalises social norms. The process of internalisation of social norms assumes that the individual first exists separately from its surroundings and then becomes incorporated into the social environment through the process of socialisation.

I would rather say that the individual body-person does not exist separately from its surroundings and it only exists as itself within network of relations with others. Here, the construction of self already implicates the existence of relationships surrounding a person. Therefore, it is not that the self internalises social norms by desiring to be what those around them expect it to be.

I say “aesthetics of the self” because these are not structural rules or social norms that determine behaviour but they are applications of bodily practices which seem right and/or beautiful, which somehow fit or seem right under particular circumstances and contexts.

In this paper, I discuss how urban middle-class women are working out certain aesthetics of the female self. This can be said to be an attempt to create a new cultural space that goes beyond the dichotomy of opposed and substantialised distinction of modernity and tradition.

7. The Emerging Middle Class in India: Shifting Locations, Values and Identities as reflected in some of the Indian Literatures
(Prof. Dr. Annakutty V.K. Findeis, University of Mumbai, India)

The paper tries to locate the emerging Middle Class caught in the grip of Migration and Globalisation as depicted in some of the Indian Literatures. With the help of a few selected literary works, and Media representations the paper attempts to measure and to point out the changing values and identities. The study comes to the conclusion that notable changes are happening in the society as far as values and identities are concerned. The widening communication gap between the older and younger generation is obvious. Many other aspects of the emerging middle class the talk attempts to underline

8. Forbidden Memories. The Ambiguities of the Past in the Making of a Modern Middle Class in Kerala
(Ester Gallo, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh)

In 2002 a well known Malayali weekly journal - *Mathrubhumi* - addressed the question of modern changes among Nambudiri Brahmins with a thought-provoking title: 'Is the Nambudiri community falling back into the abyss of the hell?'. The writer underlined the objectionable tendency among modern Nambudiri youths to abandon the renaissance idealism of their 'revolutionary' ancestors - embodied in the personality of E.M.S. Nambudiripad and V.T.Bhattathiripad - to retreat into a narrow communalism via the glorification of exclusive religious knowledge and high-profile culture. According to the author, this attitude not only contrasted with the critical questioning of Nambudiri's superiority pursued by past generations, but proved to be inadequate and anachronistic for an aspiring modern middle class. The article raised fervent discussions among my Brahmin acquaintances and people from other communities that addressed, among other themes, the role of the past in forging renewed status as modern persons within a highly differentiated and competitive social landscape. Whilst, in the eyes of Brahmin youths, the rediscovery of past traditions and classical knowledge constituted a desirable project - that perfectly matched with the ambitions of modernity and of the renewed life-styles that this entails - many Nambudiri seniors looked at the journal's position with disenchanted favour. The former condemned past generations' lack of strong community ties and shared exclusive horizons, and aimed at forging a modern Brahmin culture as a way to middle class empowerment. The latter believed that, especially for Nambudiris, past privileges, histories and experiences could not constitute a source where to draw on in order to construct a legitimate position as middle class. That mixing and 'corrupting' Nambudiri culture and society with other communities was the only way to achieve modernity. To what extent, and with what degree of success, can genealogical pedigree assure to Nambudiri youths modern privileges in contemporary Kerala? What histories are considered legitimate and which ones have to be obliterated in order to disentangle modern identities from the 'hell of the past'? Which life-styles are 'appropriate' for the Malayali middle class, and which not? Based on 15th months fieldwork in Central Kerala (Ernakulam District, City of Kochi) the paper explores the *nexus* between caste and class in the progressive Brahmins' transformation from traditional elite to modern middle class. Through the analysis of three key topics - education, migration and occupation - and the role they occupy in family histories and contemporary memories, the paper highlights the ambiguities of elites' modern changes and the uneasy making of middle class status among the community. A comparative and dialogic perspective with Hindu Nayar and Syrian Christians - the well established middle class in urban Kerala - will be developed. Rather than assuming that being a Brahmin is intrinsically connected to a proud acceptance of a collective and unquestioned history, the paper

underlines how Nambudirithan (the privilege of being Nambudiri) is today an arena of ‘dialogized heteroglossia’, where different meanings of Brahmin identity have been negotiated and subverted across generations, and are today asserted in ways not always reconcilable with the past and with present social expectations.

9. Punjab’s New Capital City Chandigarh. Le Corbusier’s Ideal of Centering onto the Social Middle: Aims and Reality

(Prof. Dr. Marc Cluet, University of Strasbourg, France)

Le Corbusier, who knows his Rousseau well, idealistically starts his work from the premises of Natural Law theory. He conceives in his mind “dwelling units” which are for Man as such, “just as he must have come from the hands of Nature”. These dwellings aim at a “Generic Man” who enjoys “natural rights” and natural physical and mental integrity, that is to say is undeformed by a life of hardship or (excessive) luxury. The central question is: How can these ideas be carried over into the real world, especially into post-Independence Indian society with its social stratification and persistent caste structure? Le Corbusier’s solution was of devastating simplicity: As the city of Chandigarh was to be an intellectual and administrative centre, with many people holding clerical, administrative and intellectual jobs, he decided to narrow the scope of house-types around medium standards, suitable to the “old” (European) middle class. Difficulties were due to arise: the tops-down and bottoms-up policy, not only fenced out the poorly skilled workforce, all the building and road workers on site, but also forgot the “needs” of professionals and entrepreneurs who were to become the “money-makers” in town. The paper goes into the disjunct and fundamentally incommensurable problems of these two sections. Yet, more important a topic is the strain that was put on Chandigarh, down into the very substance of the city (in terms of architecture), by the rise of a “new” middle, upper middle and upper class. “IT-led development” from the 1990s on has made of Chandigarh “the Silicon Valley of the North [of India]”. The corbusian dream of a homogenous society and town has become remoter than ever. Yet, the Administration’s better acceptance of the city’s disparity and the display of efforts to address (of course with varying eagerness) the needs of the different sections could foster a new feeling for identity among Chandigarhians. The local cult vowed to the “Master Architect” could help them doing so. My theory is that Le Corbusier, in despite (or perhaps just because) of his problematic “enlightened” assumptions, was and still is a good tutelary spirit to Chandigarh.