

Panel 41 Religious Reform Movements in South Asia from the Nineteenth Century to the Present

Abstracts

1. Anna Bochkovskaya (South Asian Studies Department, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Lomonosov Moscow State University)

Sacha Sauda's Contribution to 'Dera Culture' of Present-Day Punjab

Representing a blend of religious and mystical ideas, Sikhism always claimed a status of a uniting faith that stood above all dividing frames and boundaries typical for other religious systems. From the very origin Sikhism was ready to absorb various religious, philosophic and social ideas and concepts, and simultaneously formed a perfect medium – due to its original universalism – for further development of its own ideological components. The latter often manifested themselves in versatile 'alternative' movements either within the framework of Sikhism or exceeding the latter.

Administrative reorganization of Punjab's borders along with visible social changes that took place in the 20th century boosted the activity of already existing and newly emerging religious and pseudo-religious communities (often called *deras*) in the state. Since the 1990s there has been an unprecedented growth of such communities in Punjab and neighboring states. Sacha Sauda ('True Deal') ranks among the largest and most powerful *deras* of the region. It positions itself as a universal, spiritual institution not representing any 'new' religion, cult, sect or wave. The *dera* boasts lakhs of followers, mostly dalits, and is actively involved in social and relief work. It has an undoubted affiliation with Punjab's politics. In the presentation I am going to focus on Sacha Sauda's vast propaganda efforts that have greatly contributed to its current success and on the attitude of mainstream Sikhism to this particular *dera*.

2. Swapna Bhattacharya(Chakraborti), Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies, University of Calcutta

Contribution of Kripasharan Mahasthvir, founder of Bengal Buddhist Society, in the world of Buddhist Reform and Buddhist scholarship of 19th century India and beyond

It is indeed difficult to distinguish between 'social' and 'religious', especially in the context of Bengal. Bengal's religious tradition is an extremely intriguing and complex world. Buddhism of Bengal (Pre-British) somehow got 'lost', 'obscured' or 'transformed' into tantric tradition, into Vaishnavism, into cult of Bauls and Natha tradition. Nevertheless, from this much complex and 'compromised' situation emerged in the in the 19th century a distinct consciousness among Bengalis (including Brahma Bengalis) about their Buddhist past, and thus an urge to draw from Buddhism necessary inspiration for the then urgently needed social reform. The proposed paper takes up the most eminent figure, Kripasharan Mahasthvir (1864-1926): widely revered monk-scholar, originally hailing from Chittagong, who founded in Calcutta Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha and Bengal Buddhist Association in 1892, and Dharmankur Vihar in the year 1903. The Dharmankur Vihar was the first Vihar established in 20th century India. The proposed paper has four distinct parts: first part will address the contribution of Dharmankur Vihar and its founder,

Kripasharan Mahasthvir, from the viewpoint of religious reform movement in the 19th century India. The second part will address the active role of Bengal Buddhists of Theravada school. This part will, among other aspects, uphold the role of Calcutta University in the spread of Pali and Buddhist scholarship. After all, introduction of this academic discipline contributed in its own way in the field of social and intellectual advancement. The third part will place Bengal beyond the map of Bengal, showing how the founding of Viharas by this great monk inspired people from northern and other parts of eastern India. If we include colonial Burma (modern Myanmar) in the fold of South Asia, enthusiasts will get a perspective of the Bengal-Arakan network that came to play a significant role in the revival of Buddhism in 19th century India. The fourth part will deal with developments in the later period, stretching up to the present.

3. T. Dharmaraj (Department of Folklore, St. Xavier's College (autonomous), Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu)

‘Tamil Buddhism’: Constructing a grand discourse from ‘excluded’ narratives

‘Tamil Buddhism’ is a concept developed by a Tamil scholar, Iyothee Thass Pandit during the early decades of twentieth century. He formulated this thought as an emancipatory tool for the uplift of the socially oppressed section of our nation. The paper will endeavour to introduce and explore the concept ‘Tamil Buddhism’ by contextualising it within the socio-political context. Iyothee Thass (1845-1914), a person of multiple talents, plays the roles of literary critique, editor of a weekly magazine, leader of a religious society, native physician, etc. The magazine he published from 1907 to 1914, as *Oru paisa Tamilan* earlier and *Tamilan* later, is rich with his articles and occasional notes. The concepts such as Dravidian, self respect, rationality, Tamil Buddhism, were conceived by him during those active years. He is considered as the first modernist of the twentieth century Tamil Nadu.

Iyothee Thass started his dynamic socio-political career by instituting Sakya Buddhist society at Chennai as a result of his experimentation with the truths of Buddhism. With the effect of these experiments he conceived the idea, ‘Tamil Buddhism’. The idea of modern Tamil Buddhism burgeons to construct an alternative discourse on Indian culture. According to him, the 'untouchables' are the real inhabitants of this part of the peninsula; also they were the Buddhists. In the series of articles he wrote under the title 'History of *Indirar thesam*' in *Tamilan* weekly, he promoted the idea, 'original inhabitants' or 'ancient Buddhists'. The thoughts of Iyothee Thass orbit around a sole trait, reinterpretation; reinterpreting the history, religion, literature, tradition, etc. In this context, his illustriousness in literature, linguistics, and history supports him in the construction of a grand discourse called Tamil Buddhism. His expertise in languages other than Tamil, like Pali and Sanskrit, dispenses radically interesting vestiges for this project.

The methodology of Iyothee Thass can be classified into two in broader sense – writing the history of words and deconstructing the myths and rituals. His scholarship in three major Indian languages assisted him in interpreting conceptual terms in order to pronounce new dimensions to the Indian epistemological tradition. The second discursive tool applied by Iyothee Thass is the deconstruction of Indian myths and rituals. Likewise he interpreted the festivals and celebrations, mother goddess

worship, etc. in detail. At the third level, he engaged in an exercise of rationalising the life cycle ceremonies. By deconstructing all these cultural materials he fabricated a master discourse, Tamil Buddhism.

4. Gwilym Beckerlegge (Department of Religious Studies, The Open University, UK)

An examination of the category of 'religious reform movements'

The use of the category of 'religious reform movements', although convenient and commonly used, poses a number of problems in the context of its application to the context of South Asia. These go beyond the implicit distinction between what is and what is not 'religious', which many scholarly commentators have argued largely reflects the imposition of a European Protestant framework of assumptions on South Asian traditions. More specifically, the use of the category 'religious reform movements' begs the question of what constitutes 'reform' and who judges what needs to be 'reformed'. By examining these and other related questions, this paper is intended to heighten critical awareness of the panel's use of this category. It will include reference to earlier publications by this panel and the presenter's own research into a range of contemporary Hindu movements.

5. Sharada Sugirtharajah (University of Birmingham)

Nineteenth-century Hindu attitudes to image worship

Most nineteenth-century studies of Hindu attitudes to image worship have mainly focused on Rammohan Roy (1772/74-1883) and Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883). The paper seeks to widen the debate and to include the often overlooked nineteenth-century Shaivite 'reformer', Arumuga Navalar (1822-1879) from Jaffna (Sri Lanka), who took a very different stance on the issue of image worship. While Roy and Dayananda rejected image worship, Navalar affirmed it. Situating these three 'reformers' in their respective historical and cultural contexts, the paper will draw attention to the significant differences between Navalar and the two Indian Hindu responses to the Protestant missionary critique of image worship. The paper seeks to go beyond the conventional approach which situates the debate on image worship within the narrow confines of the tradition versus modernity paradigm.

All three 'reformers' used scriptural sources to argue their case. Whilst Roy and Dayananda argued that image worship had no place in the Vedas, Navalar used Hebrew scriptures to challenge the missionary denunciation of Saiva worship. Unlike Roy and Dayananda who gave little importance to devotional Hinduism, Navalar was engaged in revitalizing Shaiva devotional practices. Roy and Dayananda saw ritual acts as futile exercises and as an obstacle to true worship, whereas Navalar argued that Shaiva rituals, performed with devotion, sanctified worship and purified the devotee of all vices.

One of the striking and major points of departure between these two Indian reformers and Navalar is that, while Roy and Dayananda subscribed to the orientalist thesis of original purity and decadence of Hinduism, Navalar did not see Shaivism as a decadent religion needing purification. On the contrary, Navalar drew analogies

between Shaiva and Biblical ritual practices in order to offset the missionary critique of Shaiva worship. Roy and Dayananda were divesting Hinduism of what they saw as 'idolatrous' practices, whereas Navalar was defending and reviving Shaiva devotional practices. All three were demonstrating in different ways that Hinduism was not 'deficient' in any way, and redefining it in their own terms.

6. Peter Heehs (Pondicherry)

'Not a question of theology?' Religions, religious institutions and the courts in India

Court decisions have played an important role in defining the relationship between religions and the state in India. Litigations by or against religious institutions have obliged the judiciary to engage in quasi-theological reasoning to determine what is 'religious', and therefore beyond state control, and what is 'secular', and therefore subject to government regulation. In pre-colonial India, religious conflicts were settled by means of local arbitration or by the threat or fact of violence. After British legal institutions were established, groups and individuals learned to make use of the courts to settle such conflicts. This tendency to seek legal solutions for religious disputes has continued in independent India. Since the state tends always to seek an increase of its powers, the courts frequently have decided such cases to the detriment of the litigants. Examples studied include the Maharaja Libel Case (1862), the Ramakrishna Mission Case (1995), and the Sri Aurobindo Society Case (1982).

7. Thomas K Gugler (Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin)

Marketing Muhammad and Madina: The Islamic Project of the Barelwi Tablighi Jamaat Dawat-e Islami

The Muslim missionary movement Da'wat-e Islami (www.dawateislami.net, www.trueislam.info) was founded 1981 in Karachi by the Memon business man and Barelwi Shaykh Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Qadiri Attar (born 1950) to confront the Deobandi affiliated Tablighi Jama'at in spreading Sunnah, the lifestyle of the Prophet and the Salaf, in Pakistan and abroad. Since 2008 Da'wat-e Islami uses its own television channel "Madani channel" (www.madanichannel.tv) to advertise Sunnaization, the Islamization of the individual dress, speech and behaviour, with its slogan: "I have to rectify (islah) myself and the people of the whole world!". The paper strives to understand how highly rational market logic shapes strategies of retraditionalization in the production and marketing of South Asian symbolic Sunnah-systems, i.e. image- and behaviour-systems of an "ideal Muslim", applying the metaphor of Religious Economics.

8. Bart Klem (PhD Candidate, Political Geography, University of Zurich) [possibly with Shahul Hasbullah, Geography Department, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka]

Islamic reform and violent conflict in Sri Lanka: Multiple trajectories in Akkaraipattu and Kattankudy

This article inquires whether there is anything special about Islamic reform movements and the antagonism around them when they occur in the context of violent,

identity conflict. How do reform and intra-Islamic strife connect and disconnect from the conflict that has tormented Sri Lanka for decades? The limited literature on Sri Lankan Muslims has erroneously attempted to reduce militant Islamic movements to a side effect of the Tamil-Sinhala conflict. We argue for a more differentiated perspective by comparing two predominantly Muslim towns on the east coast – Kattankudy and Akkaraipattu. Whilst very similar at first glance, the differences with regard to Islamic reform are remarkable. Kattankudy has undergone a sequence of violent clashes between reform movements, mainly Thouheed, on one hand and two Sufi sects on the other. In Akkaraipattu, however, Thouheed is marginal. Tableegh Jamaath is the dominant reform movement and its relations with Sufism are largely unproblematic.

The commonalities between the towns direct us to the connections between violent conflict and the turbulence around Islamic movements. Both settlements lie in a region riven with ethnic boundaries and a long history of violence and indeed, identity politics, a siege mentality and the presence of militias have blended with the way discourses and practices of modern Islam were imported from abroad. This does not, however, resolve the puzzle why we find a more political, puritan Islam in Kattankudy and the apolitical and relatively harmonious Tableegh in Akkaraipattu. That difference tallies with the literature that connects Islamic reform to processes of socio-economic development and urbanisation. Akkaraipattu is an agro-town with resilient clan structures. Public education and labour migration to western countries are common and highly valued. Kattankudy is a more urban, trade-oriented place where clan structures have demised. Madrassa education prevails and labour migration tends to be to the Middle East. Narrative detail from both Tableegh and Thouheed followers indeed confirms patterns of class, education, labour migration and social structures.

Our ethnographic findings thus suggest that the turbulent process of intra-Islamic reform encompasses the clash of two trajectories in eastern Sri Lanka: the violent trajectory of ethno-political conflict and unsettling trajectory of socio-economic change. Intra-Muslim violence in Kattankudy is not a spill over effect of the ethicised rebel war or an offshoot of contagious lawlessness. It has its own roots and dynamics, not dissimilar to tensions between Sufis and revivalists or Wahabis that scholars have reported from elsewhere in Asia. However, the wider context of ethno-politics and armed conflict affects and transforms the meanings, anxieties and practices associated with these intra-Muslim tensions.

9. Sarit K. Chaudhuri (Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh) & Sucheta Sen Chaudhuri (AITS & Director, Women's Study and Research Centre, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh)

Institutionalisation of tribal religion: relocating reformist movements in a frontier state of India

Arunachal Pradesh, the erstwhile NEFA, is the homeland of large number of tribes with distinctive identities who spread over sixteen districts. This state is sharing boundaries with Tibet, China, Burma and is known for its cultural diversity reflected by variegated tribes, though some elements of commonalities can also be traced on

the basis of which some scholars tried to have some broader classification of the tribes. In spite of the presence of Buddhist tribes, majority of the tribes have subscribed to the animistic faiths which again reflect tremendous heterogeneity evident in the nature of deities, spirits, religious specialists, festivities and oral tradition. However, like many other tribes of the region the tribes of Arunachal are passing through a phase of transition, and undoubtedly Christianity is gradually becoming one of the dominant forms of faith practiced by many tribes of this state, like Adi, Nyishi, Apatani, Galo, Tagin, Wancho, Nokte, Tangsa, Sulung etc. In order to counter such alien faiths and practices new reformist movements emerged which are gradually gaining ground among some of the tribes in order to protect and preserve their indigenous religious beliefs and practices. Such reformist movements generated new taxonomies to contextualize tribal faiths such as, *Donipoloism*, *Intyaism*, *Rangfraism* etc. And all these have tried to institutionalize tribal religion by inventing images of Gods and Goddess, constructing temples, textualising religious chants or oral traditions which are very similar to another major religion called Hinduism. The present paper is an attempt to contextualize various reformist practices taking examples from various tribes in order to understand the contested domains of religious transformation by giving a thick description which ultimately may bring into focus the emerging postcolonial realities of a frontier state in India.

10. M.T. Kamble (Dept. of History and Archaeology, Karnatak University)

The Theosophical Society: A study of a major socio-religious movement of the Renaissance period in Karnataka

Neo-religious movements like Brahma Samaj and the Theosophical Society influenced Karnataka people's life by starting their activities in the Karnataka State. Theosophical Society under Mrs. Anne Besant also helped in popularizing national ideas in Mysore State. She first devoted herself to the cause of the social and educational uplift of the people of Karnataka. Theosophy has its first foothold in the State of Karnataka when the very first Lodge in Bangalore city and the next the Cantonment Lodge were consecrated during July 1886 by the President – Founder Colonel H.S. Olcott. The Bangalore City Lodge of the Theosophical Society is thus one of the oldest Lodges in the Indian section. Soon it had its branches in all important cities and towns. In Mysore, the Deewan of Sri. K. Sheshadri Ayar joined Theosophical Society on 1st August 1886 and supported the establishment of Theosophical Society of Bangalore City and Cantonment Lodges. Presently 85 Lodges and Centres are actively functioning in Karnataka. Among these centre, Bangalore, Dharwad, Mangalore, Kolar, Chitradurga, Bellary, Davangere, Hassan Districts etc., are the prominent ones.

The activities of the Theosophical Society have been categorized on different lines, namely; (i) Serving the disabled (ii) Helping the blind with aids and programmes for prevention of blindness (ii) Education, book-bank, and moral instructions to students (iv) Other activities like help to orphanages, health care, old age care, etc. The involvement of the youth in the programmes of the Theosophical Society is one of the vital necessities for the spread of the message of Theosophy and the development of activities of the Theosophical Society. The Youth Lodge in Bangalore city named The Lotus Youth Lodge was started in early forties. This paper article offers an

account of quantitative development of Theosophical movement in Karnataka and the motives of those involved.

11. Varija R. Bolar (Department of History and Archaeology, Karnatak University)

The role of the Arya Samaj in shaping the Renaissance Movement in Karnataka

From the spirit of 'Renaissance' the great awakening was spread throughout India during the 19th century because of many factors. As a result many socio-religious reform movements like Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj emerged. Among these, the Arya Samaj (Noble-Society), founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875, is noteworthy. Karnataka sought light from the North in creating its 'Renaissance', borrowing the ideas from Dayananda Saraswati, one of the reformers. Arya Samaj started functioning in Mysore by the early 1880s. Later on its branches were opened in different parts of Karnataka.

The investigator attempts to document the impact of Arya Samaj on the Kannada speaking regions (Karnataka State) in South India. Karnataka has many branches of Arya Samaj in places like Bangalore, Mysore, Mangalore, Bidar, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Raichur, Bellary. Arya Samaj was highly responsible for awakening national values and virtues in Hyderabad-Karnataka area. It had a strong footing in Hyderabad-Karnataka region and played a prominent role in the freedom movement.

Arya Samaj is spreading its principles through its missionaries. Its main call is '*Go Back to the Vedas*'. Dayananda Saraswati's *Satya Prakash* has been translated into Kannada language. At present, Bangalore, the capital city of Karnataka state, has its own headquarters known as *Sraddhananda-Bhavan*. As Arya Samaj is still playing its active role in religious reform movements in Karnataka, the main focus of the paper is to critically examine its present status, its activities and its impact on the people of various regions of Karnataka. The findings may help the people to synthesize the factors contributing to the religious reforms.

12. Shailaja Menon (Dr. K.R.Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi)

The Harvest of Exclusive Souls: The Swaminarayan Sampradaya

It is now fairly well established that religious movements with strong social content originate and flourish generally during large scale changes in the established social order and accepted value system. The pre-British India was characterised by a profusion of linguistic and ethnic communities, distributed across various territories enjoying different levels of development. A hierarchically segmented society (caste system) was the chief feature of the social structure of these communities, the tribal groups being the only exception. However, throughout history there were numerous protests and revolts against the hierarchical structure. Nonetheless, the argument that individuals are not the same and that there is a hierarchy of classes each with its separate duties and distinctive way of life has held its ground from the end of the Rig Vedic period to the present day. The religious and cultural ideology based on

exclusive privileges for the chosen few, created social cleavages and denied access to intellectual and physical resources to the vast majority. Thus, religion continues to play a central role in public life and religious movements of various hues and vintage continue to offer vital sources of personal and collective identity in India.

The Swaminarayan sect emerged in the early nineteenth century in Gujarat as a powerful protest against the current social and religious problems and with a distinct agenda of social reform. The sect carried out a sustained campaign against female infanticide and sati. However, the religious superstructure was made extremely rigid by imposing strict regulations on its members. The supremacy of the Hindu shastras was left virtually unchallenged. While the sect attracted the lower sections of the people, who form the backbone of the sect's rise to power and public esteem, the decision-making authority is highly brahminised. Needless to say the Dalits have no place in this fastest emerging sect in Gujarat. This paper explores the emergence and expansion of the Swaminarayan *sampradaya* in Gujarat and the ritual exclusion of women and depressed classes within its ranks. What is more worrying is the collusion of the sect with the rightist elements and its gradual ascendancy in sacralizing civil society.

13. Hanna H.Kim (Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Adelphi University, Garden City, New York)

Charity and service: The public face of 21st Century Swaminarayan bhakti

Since its founding in 1907 in Gujarat, the BAPS Swaminarayan movement has emphasised *seva*, or voluntary work, as a means by which devotees could cultivate a desired ontological state. Thus, while *seva* could take many forms, for BAPS Swaminarayan devotees, *seva* is both indispensable for and inseparable from Swaminarayan devotional ideals. The longstanding emphasis on voluntary service became formalised in 'BAPS Care International'. Today, under the name 'BAPS Charities', the BAPS community, in addition to disaster response work, continues to sponsor charitable and humanitarian projects, and educational and cultural activities in India and elsewhere.

This paper explores some interesting changes in how voluntary work, always a part of individual Swaminarayan devotional ideals, has today become an international and very public aspect of BAPS's 'socio-spiritual' programmes. BAPS Charities, as its promotional and internet materials make clear, is connected to its "parent organization, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha." Yet, the specific bhakti or Guru-dependent devotional aspects of the parent organisation are not further explicated. Neither is there mention that the ready pool of thousands of volunteers who work for BAPS Charities are among the most committed devotees of the BAPS community. It appears, in other words, that BAPS does not find it necessary to boldly identify its charitable wing as an important arena where Swaminarayan devotees can demonstrate their keen desires to serve and please their Guru.

This paper begins from the premise that BAPS is grappling with how best to interact with increasingly curious and often critical audiences. One development of this self-consciousness is the separate charitable organisation that is less conspicuously a Hindu-sponsored entity and more obviously a non-sectarian philanthropic enterprise. BAPS is trying to present itself in ways that are not overly disruptive of what non-

Hindus or non-BAPS Hindus might associate with 'Hinduism'. I argue that the highlighting of a seemingly non-sectarian social or public service dimension of BAPS is, in part, the consequence of settlement in dominantly non-Hindu lands, including North America and the U.K. Outside of India, BAPS has had to fashion itself into a recognisable 'religion', namely Hinduism, and yet for many non-Hindus, 'Hinduism' remains an alien religion. In orienting its public face towards the 'social', BAPS appears to be acquiring international recognition in ways that do not compromise its bhakti tradition. This paper concludes by recognising that the current strategy of de-emphasising the relationship between the devotional and the social may fuel critics' charges of BAPS's non-transparency. However, at least for now, this strategy allows BAPS to maintain a transnational presence that is not complicated by misinterpretations of its particular bhakti traditions.

14. Alexis Avdeeff (Ph.D. candidate, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, EHESS)

The internationalisation of a contemporary Hindu Movement. Between universalist ambition and nationalist orientations: the case of The Art of Living Foundation and its transnational community

The Art of Living is a new religious movement whose popularity has not ceased to grow in the whole Indian sub-continent, and beyond. Founded and carried out by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the movement promotes a spirituality accessible to all, based on simplified yogic practices and a philosophical teaching of neo-vedantic inspiration. Thus, the guru intends to join together a transnational community around a universal spirituality, transcending individual religious backgrounds.

In this paper I propose to analyse the apparent contradiction between the universalist ambition of *The Art of Living Foundation* and its nationalist orientations, as shown by the political stands of its founder and leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. First, I look at the genesis of the movement in order to understand both its reformist dimension within the Indian sub-continent and its universalist project. Then I will focus on the salient features of the transnational community, as well as its setting up around the figure of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. Lastly, through an analysis of the guru political stands on the Indian scene and its reception by the transnational community, I stress the differences we can trace between European and Indian devotees in their own perception of the guru and his movement's aims.