



SWEDISH
COLLEGIUM
for ADVANCED STUDY

PLENARY SESSION # 5

Saturday, 18 February. 09:00 – 10:30. Room: IHC – Stein Auditorium

Session: Transformations of World Religions

Chair: Shail Mayaram, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi

Developmental Patterns in the Islamicate Civilization and Contemporary Islamism

Said Arjomand, Stony Brook State University of New York

Globalization, Civilizations, and World Religions

Jose Casanova, Georgetown University, Washington DC

Traditions, Transformations, Transcreations: The Making and Unmaking of "Modern Hinduism"

T.N. Madan, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi

ABSTRACTS

Developmental Patterns in the Islamicate Civilization and Contemporary Islamism

Said Arjomand, Stony Brook State University of New York

The paradigm offered for civilizational analysis in Max Weber's sociology of world religions will be examined as framework for the study of the contemporary politicization of Islam. To use the terms of current civilizational analysis, we need to historicize the process of crystallization of the premises of a civilization around the nucleus of axial religious beliefs. I will argue that the Weberian paradigm needs to be historicized much more rigorously, and that this historicization requires, firstly, determining when a religion becomes, typologically speaking, a 'world religion,' and secondly, a fundamental distinction between the religious and the civilizational patterns and processes of civilization. Within this broad framework for understanding the distinctive differentiation of religion and politics in Islam and its transformation beyond the formative period of the development of the Islamicate civilization, I will consider the emergence of Islamism and its ongoing development and variations. From this perspective, current radical Islamist political ideologies will provide a startling contrast to the staunch conservatism of traditional Islamic political thought. The vicissitudes of Islamism will appear in a new light in the context of the distinctively Islamicate pattern of differentiation of religion and politics. The goal of the analysis is to explain the impact of modernization, as an intercivilizational encounter, on the intracivilizational developmental patterns of legitimation and contestation of power in the Islamicate civilization.

Globalization, Civilizations, and World Religions

Jose Casanova, Georgetown University, Washington DC

Processes of globalization are contributing to the formation of a world system of religions which is in many ways related to the historical civilizations and religions that trace their origins to the Axial Age. But processes of globalization are also contributing to the de-territorialization of the world religions, which are being constituted as competing global imagined communities detached from their civilizational territorial bases. Throughout history, at least since the Axial Age, civilizational, geo-political and religious mappings have not always superimposed easily on one another. This is becoming even more evident in our Global Age. The paper will analyze some of the dissociations and tensions between the Christian West and global Christianities, between the Islamicate and the emerging global Muslim ummahs, between Indic civilization, India as a nation and globalized Hinduism, and between Sinic civilization, China as a nation, Chinese religions and the revival of Confucianism.

Traditions, Transformations, Transcreations: The Making and Unmaking of "Modern Hinduism"

T.N. Madan, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi

The Address will argue that Traditions are not static but processual in nature; they are continuously being changed either deliberately from the inside by innovators or by unfolding events which have unforeseen consequences, or under the impact of assertive /internalized external forces. Routine changes that leave the basic structure of the Tradition intact will be distinguished from Transformations which either rearrange available cultural materials and/or incorporate new materials in what has been received through transmission from the past. Occasionally, attempts may be made to go well beyond the existing boundaries of the Tradition to construct something new. How durable such Transcreations may be is an open question. In past, they have both succeeded and failed. These ideas will then be applied to the relatively recent history of Hinduism (during the last 200 years). An early openness to some forms of Christianity (eg Unitarianism) early in the 19th century in the nature of Transformations

were followed by a more critical assessment of the impact of the West, which was seen as being broader than merely religious -- as moral and intellectual. This led to the use of Western insights to critique what the West itself had to offer and a restatement of the Hindu religious tradition. Such transformations were multiple, some of them stressing the doctrinal content and some of them, the practical aspect.

The processes of critical examination of Hinduism and attempts to selectively retrieve or radically reform it continued in the 20th century. Gandhi will be presented as an imaginative innovator who, however, asserted his personal location within the Tradition even as he questioned it in unprecedented ways, setting up Moral Reason as the monitor, as it were, of scriptural Tradition. His junior contemporary, Ambedkar, from lower caste background mounted another radical, sociologically grounded attack whose logic eventually led him to leave the fold of Hinduism and embrace Buddhism. What is more significant is that in embracing Buddhism he really constructed a new faith which he called Navyayana, the New Vehicle which is more than a transformation.

The Address will conclude by, first, mentioning the transformations in Hinduism resulting from the diaspora, and then bringing in a recent assertion by a Dalit scholar that Hinduism is dead or dying, and that we can anticipate the emergence of a post-Hindu India.