



Centre for the Study of Comparative Religions and
Civilizations (CSCRC)
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-110025

CALL FOR PAPERS

Research Scholars' Conference

*Studying Religions in South Asia:
Contestation, Protest and Reform*

3rd - 4th February 2015

Last date for submission of abstracts: 10th December, 2014

Mail your abstracts at: conference.csrc@gmail.com

- Note: (i) Papers are invited from registered M. Phil. and Ph.D. Scholars
(ii) Word limit for abstracts: 300 words

Prof. G.P. Sharma
Honorary Director

For details visit
<http://www.csrc.org/events>

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JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA, NEW DELHI

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Studying Religions in South Asia: Contestation, Protest and Reform Second Research Scholars' Conference

3-4 February 2015

The Centre for the Study of Comparative Religions and Civilisations, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, initiated in 2013, a conference cluster on *Studying Religions in South Asia*. The initiative is to bring together and provide an exclusive platform to young research scholars—pursuing research in various universities and institutions—to showcase and share their research and enrich from the academic exchanges and in the process hone their understanding, ideas and acumen as well as sharpen skills as a researcher.

The first conference, *Studying Religions in South Asia: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (2013) discussed diverse religious phenomenon in a pluralistic society like India which is fundamental to the historical understanding of cultural identity. The conference focussed on the study of religion as the basis for the interpretation of Asia's cultural history. The underlying theme being that earnest and objective academic investigations must be carried out so as to foreclose and dispel misrepresentations and misinterpretations of religious concepts and ideas. And one of the concerns of this conference was its interdisciplinary context to provide insight into newer ways of perceiving and understanding religions in South Asia in general and India in particular.

CONCEPT NOTE:

South Asia has been the birth place of diverse religious faiths; Hinduism's genesis in the Vedic period was followed by the emergence of Śramanic traditions, viz., Buddhism and Jainism. The religious milieu was further enriched during the medieval period by the appearance of Islam, and other sectarian traditions within what is now known as Hinduism—Bhakti, Tantra and Agama—besides the mushrooming of multiple regional cultures. Other religions such as Sikhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism further added to the complexity of the religious and cultural milieu.

In addition to the sheer diversity of religious traditions in South Asia is the fact that religious ideas, doctrines, practices, discourses, institutions, etc., are seldom static and are subject

to continuous processes of change and evolution; more so in societies that are plural. Together, these factors have created a vital history of contestation within religions and between them.

Within one religious tradition, such contestations have been expressed in the growth of new cults and the movement of particular deities from the periphery to the centre of the religious landscape. The presence of alternate versions of the same myth testifies to a rich history of protest by subaltern groups, which, even if sidelined, have never ceased to claim their due.

When religion has served as a vehicle for challenging the ubiquitous hierarchies of class, it has ceased to remain only a personal quest and become not only the primary determinant of identity but also the most potent tool for altering this identity. The carefully recorded process of Sanskritisation is one example of such changes in Indian religious history.

While class conflicts form one part of the contestations we speak of, conflicts of gender form another. Religion has been implicated in the oppression of women across cultures. However, in our times the feminist re-interpretation and re-appropriation of religious texts and practices has brought a new twist in dominant religious narratives of all religions. Further, even without the influence of modern feminism, there have been instances of women using indigenous knowledge traditions to make a claim to rights and justice.

The struggle between local identities and central institutions has also stimulated a creative tension which has given birth to new forms of religiosity. Often, this struggle between the local and the central has expressed itself in the dichotomy of orality and textuality.

In all these struggles, be they of class, gender, or of the indigenous people, a key issue is the representation of the self versus the other, and the mutual co-construction of both. The self is often defined in stark distinction to the other and the maintenance of this distinction invariably motivates a concretization of religious forms, including social norms, rituals and aesthetics over the centuries.

Contestation, protest and reform in religion have been part of religion since ancient times. While each religion has a healthy tradition of reform within it, modernity throws forward particular questions for the religions. The challenges of the European Enlightenment and the presence of immense plurality invite the religious to reformulate what it means to be a believer in our times. As is evident, religious people all over the world are grappling with these challenges, at times through creative dialogue with modernity and at others through frank hostility.

This conference will bring together academic papers on the above themes and hence, create a platform for discussing how the struggle for change expresses itself in the life of a religion. The conference will be open to a plurality of methodologies and academic perspectives in the study of religion. The juxtaposition of varied perspectives is expected to

throw light on the multi-dimensional phenomenon that reform is.

CONFERENCE THEMES

The following themes will be taken up in the conference. The list is not exhaustive and may include many more themes.

Archaeology of Religion
Historical Perspectives on Religion
Oral Cultures and Tribal Religions
Practices and Discourses
Philosophy of Religion
Pilgrimage: Concepts, Centres, Historical and Cultural Practices
Religion and Politics
Recovery, Conservation and Preservation of Religious Sites
Religion and Civilizational Dialogue
Religion and Ecology
Religion and Ethics
Religion and Ethnicity
Religion and Gender
Religion and Media
Religion and Trade
Religion, Art and Architecture
Religion, Conflict and Peace
Religion, Ritual and Symbolism
Religious Communities: Continuities, Adaptations and Transformations
Religious Identity: Faith and Negotiation
Religious Pluralism
Religious Trends and Patterns of Life in South Asia
Sacred Texts and Literature
Sociology of Religion

Venue: Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

Dates: 11—12 November, 2014.

Please e-mail your abstracts by 17 October to: conference.cscrc@gmail.com

Abstracts Word Limit: To be strictly within 300—350 words.

Kindly mention your full name, and academic and institutional references (viz., name, research degree registered for, academic institution registered at).