

Rethinking Values, Well-Being and Faith: Braiding Psychoanalysis and Social Action

Workshop coordinator: MANASI KUMAR

University College, London

Sectarian conflicts, communal tensions and religious violence in India pose enormous challenges in thinking about 'futures' of India. Liberal secularism in its repeated dismissal and neglect of 'differences' (communal, political, or cultural etc) that are interiorized and entrenched in one's cultural psyche, does not sufficiently address the diversity of interests, cultural values, faith that political ideologies and religious structures put forth. The clash of civilizations could then be understood as this polarization between the two opposing camps, liberal secular voices and fundamentalist- right wing ideologies. What is at stake here is an appreciation of the complexity of human emotions, problematics of identity and sense of belonging to one's community, and various human capabilities that a society can nourish in individuals to promote tolerance and empowerment of all sections. Critical engagement with psychological dimensions and processes such as what fuels emotions and directs emotional behavior in collectivities, deconstruction of dominant, majoritarian political discourse & ideologies, group identity formation, individual's (gendered) identification with group etc can provide an understanding of how values, needs and faith crystallize and organize thoughts and opinions as we live through variegated moments in life. This symposium attempts to address the value of incorporating a depth-psychological approach in thinking about cultural aporias and traumas association with religious conflicts and politics around an unequivocal secular portrayal of India. It questions the two opposing camps by showing the inadequacy and pathology associated with adherence to extreme opinions and thinking and points to the urgent need to mull on 'differences' and how these differences interpenetrate, reinvigorate the cultural psyche and thinking of Indians instead of ignoring or obliterating these or reaffirming one religious identity over the other. In this context, we also discuss what needs; values and

faith mean for individuals and society and if there exist a dialectical relationship between the two. Critical psychological engagement with social reality allows a nuanced understanding of 'psychic reality', individual standpoint and specificity of individual action in thinking about violence, religion and social action. Such an engagement allows individual voices, needs and shifting identifications to be retrieved and brought back into the public domain. Subjectivity then opens spaces that were beyond grasp and that might perhaps allow the discourse on rethinking religion, politics, and collective violence to be seen in a new light.

Key concerns and objectives to address the following:

- To address whether some or all discourses of ethnicity create a disposition to violence. Are ethnic identities primarily socially constructed? Does the process of ethnic identity construction necessarily entail ethnic violence considering the violent potential of cultural differences?
- What roles do religious leaders and politicians seem to play in ethnic identity construction? Do the political elites in favor extremist positions- intending to construct group identities in more antagonistic and rigid ways? Are leaders also pawns in this discourse or play more a vitiating role?
- How do these elites, leaders convince publics to follow and support them? How do leaders exploit emotions and manipulate, color the opinions and judgments of the public?
- Is psychoanalysis closer to the primordialist position (e.g. Freud, Kakar, also Nandy) because of its inherent determinism? And does social activism resorts to mainly constructionist explanations? How do these two positions explain group divides and mobilization and violence on ethnic lines?
- How does incorporating a discourse on critical subjectivity illuminate us about multivalent and complex interaction between needs, values and faith in understanding cultural differences, formation of ethnic identity and enactment of violence?

Panelists:

- Manasi Kumar (Chair): Rethinking values, needs and faith: Braiding psychoanalysis and Social action
- Dr. Neil Altman: Debating positions of religious fundamentalists and secular liberals: Insights from psychoanalysis.
- Dr. Anup Dhar: The Childhood of Indian Nation state
- Ms Shabnam Hashmi (discussant)
- Prof. Vamik Volkan: Ethnic pride & ethnic violence: the need to have enemies and allies.
- Mr. Anand Patwardhan: Ram ke Naam and construction of militant Hindu identity

Note on panelists:

Anand Patwardhan is a renowned Indian documentary film maker with over 30 films on communalism, corruption, construction of masculinity, nuclear politics, communal violence etc. to his credit. Anup Dhar is Associate fellow at the Centre for Studies in Culture and Society and he initiated CUSP (Culture, Subjectivity and Psychoanalysis, an international working party with research and theoretical interests). Manasi Kumar is writing her thesis on social trauma of child survivors of 2001-02 Gujarat earthquake and riots. She is based at the Psychoanalysis Unit in University College London, UK. Neil Altman is a psychoanalyst based at New York and he has been working on issues around psychoanalytic engagements with issues around race, gender and politics. Vamik Volkan is an emeritus professor of psychiatry and psychoanalysis currently at the Austen Riggs Centre, Massachusetts as a Senior Erik Erikson Scholar and he has been working on issues around violence, political psychology and group psychology for last 40 years. Shabnam Hashmi is social activist earlier associated with SAHMAT and currently associated with ANHAD (Act now for Harmony and Democracy) has been working on several issues by way of protest and intervention against communal hatred after 2002

Gujarat progrom, attacks on Christians in Orissa and Bihar and insurgency in Kashmir.
ANHAD is credited with mobilizing youth to create awareness and promote communal
harmony and democratic values.