

RETHINKING RELIGION IN INDIA I

GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST CONFERENCE

As most of you know, the five-year conference cluster Rethinking Religion in India aims to start developing an alternative framework to understand religions and traditions in India. Research has shown that a new theoretical framework is a precondition if we want to develop alternatives to the existing descriptions of the Indian traditions. As the first in a series of five, this conference was crucial to test the grounds for the possibilities of achieving this aim in the framework of an academic conference: are the Indian and international academia open to address the problems in religious studies? Which topics resonate with the audience? Can we go beyond the common conference format of plenary sessions and parallel paper sessions and what kind of an alternative format works best?

During the first conference, we realised that the need and urgency to develop an alternative theoretical framework for the study of the Indian traditions is acknowledged by many scholars of religious studies. More than anything else, we felt an intellectual enthusiasm among the participating scholars and a willingness to engage in extensive discussions on this topic. Most participants felt part of a larger project that needs to be supported and extended beyond the confines of a conference.

REPORT OF THE FIRST CONFERENCE

In what follows, we have extracted some of the most important threads and themes that came up during the first conference. Many of the discussions circled around the idea that the conceptual framework, through which the Indian traditions have been studied so far, is determined by Christian theology. It was quite widely agreed upon that its concepts do not make sense in the Indian context. Another central question that came up was 'what exactly are we talking about when we speak about 'Hinduism as a construction?' Is 'Hinduism as a construction' a phenomenon, a concept or a theory? Most agreed that this question needs to be seriously addressed before one can speak about the construction of Hinduism in an intelligible way.

If you want to know more about the presentations and discussions, you can watch a number of (extracts of) conference sessions and interviews with participants at www.youtube.com/cultuurwetenschap.

PLATFORM SESSIONS

In the Platform sessions three speakers (Timothy Fitzgerald, David Lorenzen and S.N. Balagangadhara) and two respondents (Naomi Goldenberg and Laurie Patton) compared and discussed their respective answers to the question 'Are there native religions in India?' The Platform question introduced the main theme and theoretical approach of the conference, and therefore, the Platform sessions provided a sense of coherence to the conference. The aim of the Platform was to come to a decision about which of the answers could best address the Platform question. This aim was not entirely met, even though a number of animated discussions followed the speakers' presentations.

Platform session 1

Based on his book *Who Invented Hinduism?* **David Lorenzen** challenged the idea of a British construction of Hinduism and argued that Hinduism existed as a religion in India prior to the British colonisation. His main argument was based on the idea that the (medieval Indian) poetry of *Kabir* and *Gorak* referred to distinctions between 'Hindu' and 'Turk' or 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'. Lorenzen argued that the distinction which these poets made indicates that Indian culture already recognised the existence of a distinct Hindu religion or Hinduism, long before British colonisation. Thus, he concluded, the answer to the Platform question "Are there native religions in India" should be "a qualified yes," for there were already Indian religious institutions of indigenous origin at the time of the Muslim rule.

Fitzgerald linked the question “Are there religions in India?” with the wider question “Are there religions?” He argues that, if by ‘religions’ one means things that exist in the world independently of their discursive construction in a specific language by specific people in specific moments of history, then there is no such thing. Fitzgerald based his argument on historical research in his recent book *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: a Critical History of Religion and Related Categories*, where he identified some analytically distinguishable Anglophone discourses on ‘religion’ and ‘religions’ which indicate radically changed meanings. For example, he shows how the dominant discourse on Religion as Christian Truth was transformed in the 17th century into a fundamentally different alternative configuration with radically different ideological implications set in the context of the growth of Euro-American colonial power. Since there is no essential meaning, but rather a contestation and appropriation of meanings by agencies with specific interests (including universities and university professors) then the category ‘religion’ cannot act as a neutral descriptive and analytical concept. His argument is that ‘religions’ are a product of the rhetorical imagination (not unlike ‘societies’ or ‘nation-states’). The Anglophone or more generally Europhone category has been framed historically by competing concepts of Christian Truth, which have then been projected onto non-European peoples and their practices as though ‘religion’ is a natural human phenomenon defined by some universal and essential core experience and type of practice or institution, but with various empirical exemplifications. Fitzgerald further argued that it may be the invention of the *non-religious* (today called ‘the secular’) which is the more important domain made possible by the modern myth of religion and religions.

Naomi Goldenberg’s response focused largely on Fitzgerald’s point that religion is a theological category and whether or not we should retain the category ‘religion’ to study certain phenomena in the world. **S.N. Balagangadhara** took up David Lorenzen’s interpretation of the ‘Hindu – Muslim’ distinction in medieval poetry. He asked: how could one know that the distinction ‘Hindu/Turk’ or ‘Hindu/Muslim’ referred to a distinction between religious groups rather than to a distinction between ethnic groups? This question throws doubt upon the conclusion that Lorenzen draws, namely that it shows that Indian culture had a distinct Hindu religion. What is more, Balu argued, such an analysis is an instance of the *petitio principii* fallacy, namely to presuppose what one has to prove. David Lorenzen could not answer the question adequately, and referred back to the verses to ‘establish’ that Hinduism existed.

Platform session 2

Linking his presentation to the discussion that had taken place in the first Roundtable session about the nature of the construction of Hinduism, **S.N. Balagangadhara** (a.k.a. Balu) addressed the Platform question ‘Are There Native Religions in India’ by answering with a straightforward “no”. He argued that Hinduism does not exist in India, and has never existed in India, neither today nor before colonialism. His presentation was focused on two problems that arise when one gives such an answer: (1) what then is it that western intellectuals talk about when they talk about Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism etc.? And what is it that they saw when they talked about these entities? (2) Why do Indian intellectuals speak as if such entities exist and make sense to them? (Listen to [Balu’s presentation](#) on YouTube)

Balu answered the first problem in the following way: when people brought up in a culture that has religion go to another culture, they are compelled to see religion. They are compelled to bring together discrete phenomena into a coherent unit, which do not actually belong together. This unit does not exist in reality as a phenomenon, but only exists in the experience of the Europeans and Muslims who came to India. In other words, Hinduism is a construction only in the sense that it is an *experiential entity* (to the Europeans and the Muslims). Therefore, in order to understand why only some isolated phenomena were brought together in the concept of Hinduism and not others, we need to study and understand the Western culture. About the second question as to why Indian intellectuals have taken over a story that could not have made sense to them, Balu put forward the hypothesis that they have taken over a *way of talking*, which makes their experience of their own traditions inaccessible to them. In other words, by taking over the Western way of talking about religion they are not able anymore to access their own experience.

In the discussion that followed, several questions came up with regard to the possibility of studying the Indian traditions outside of the Western framework and whether it is possible to do this in the English language. Balu answered that, whether we like it or not, we live in the 21st century where English is the main medium of communication, even among Indians. Pragmatically speaking any attempt to redescribe the Indian reality will have to take place in English. If we do not have the words today, we have to coin new terms in the same way as it happened in other scientific domains. Apart from that he also pointed to

the fact that most people today no longer know the meaning of many Sanskrit words that are used in the Indian languages. For instance, today, hardly anybody in India knows the difference between *chitta* and *manas*, or knows what it means to say 'I have *atman*'. Just because people are familiar with these terms doesn't mean they have a privileged access to their meaning. Thus, if we want to redescribe the Indian traditions, we have to do this in a language that is understandable in the 21st century.

Platform session 3

The third Platform session was meant to assess the different answers to the Platform question and to decide which one of them was best, or which questions could be formulated to work towards such an answer.

Laurie Patton said that with her response, she mainly wanted to generate new ideas for future projects. Then she outlined four different possible kinds of answers to the question 'Are there native religions in India': (1) theoretically the answer would be a straightforward "no" in so far as religion refers to a protestant category that was strategically applied in a variety of colonial contexts. Here she also referred to various papers and discussions that had taken place during the conference; (2) institutionally the answer would be a pragmatic "yes," if one wants to persuade commissions and deans to provide funding; (3) legally and politically the answer also has to be pragmatically "yes," as long as this is the general consensus; (4) by reflecting upon the term 'native' and turning to indigenous terms of thinking, we could encourage a change of vocabulary.

Naomi Goldenberg took the opportunity of her role as respondent to extend the discussion into ways that were unexplored in the conference, namely 'gender', by asking the Platform speakers to engage with this topic for 15 minutes. She introduced the topic by saying that the work on gender preceded the deconstruction of the category 'religion'. She argued that as the Christian category of religion becomes more popular in India, the Christian attitude towards women (and women goddesses) will also be reproduced.

The aim of this last Platform session was not fully achieved: there was no clear decision on which of the presentations formed the best answer, nor were questions formulated that need answering in the future if we want to develop a solution to the Platform question. Nevertheless, the responses and ensuing discussion emphasised the importance of thinking about the question "Are there native religions in India". They also emphasized and outlined some of the possible implications of answering this question for the domain of religious studies.

ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

In the Roundtable sessions a group of ten scholars discussed the issue of religion and colonialism in India. Six scholars, two in each session, briefly presented their standpoint in the debate after which a discussion took place among all the participants of the Roundtable. The aim was to formulate a set of themes and questions to be taken up in future discussions and research.

Roundtable session 1

Presentations – Geoffrey Oddie and Richard King

In the first Roundtable session, **Geoffrey Oddie** talked about the history of the notion of Hinduism and placed it in the Christian conceptual framework of the European missionary descriptions of India. The Christian notion of paganism, he argued, played an important role in the way the European missionaries described the Indian traditions. He also emphasised the influence of the Brahmin informants on the way the Indian traditions had been described. He said that the Brahmins had endorsed the picture that the missionaries and other Europeans gave of their traditions. Geoffrey Oddie also made the important point that the way in which English terms about religion have been translated into Indian terms, and vice versa, have distorted the meaning of both.

Richard King, in line with the presentation of Timothy Fitzgerald, challenged the notion of religion as something that is clearly distinguishable from other phenomena in the world, and thus as something that can be studied in all cultures. Because of European colonialism, European assumptions about religion have been universalised, he argued, and religion came to be seen as part of a universal history. Richard King pointed to the 'Eurocentric logic' that frames the rest of the world as variations on a Western Christian theme, and said that the Indian traditions do not employ this Christian logic of the discourse of religion. To describe the Indian traditions in terms of the concepts of 'religion' and the 'secular' thus entails a distortion. Instead we need to go back to the Indian traditions themselves and find out the Indian conceptual framework of looking at their own traditions.

Responses from the Roundtable

In the ensuing discussions, some interesting threads came up that recurred in the course of all the Roundtable sessions. A first thread developed around the question of the nature of 'Hinduism as a construction': is it an entity that *only* exists in the Western descriptions of India, or did it come into being as an actual religion as well? Does the fact that today people in India themselves speak about Hinduism as their religion indicate that this religion actually exists, or is it merely a way of talking that does not reflect a reality? Another related thread concerned the translation of concepts from the Western conceptual framework into the Indian conceptual framework: Did the Western terms make sense to the Indians who translated them? Did these terms, and the inquiries of the Europeans into the 'Indian religion,' make sense to the Indians? Or did the latter simply learn how to use these terms in answer to the European questions?

Jakob De Roover argued that terms like religion, worship or priests are all embedded in a background framework of Christian theology. As this framework has shaped our language use, it is impossible to just take these terms out of their framework and give them a separate and 'secular' meaning. In response to Geoffrey Oddie's stance that the Western educated elites of India did change the meaning of certain Indian terms, he asked whether these elites really understood what the Westerners said, or rather just learned to give pragmatic answers that made the questions go away. **Geoffrey Oddie** responded that this could indeed have been the case. In fact, the often odd and puzzled replies from ordinary people to the census questionnaires when asked about their religion could be an indication of this. **Akeel Bilgrami** emphasised that the European concepts were embedded in a very specific framework, very different from the Indian framework, which would have stood in the way of a proper understanding of these terms. Speaking in terms of a 'credalised' or 'textualised' of Hinduism may thus not make much sense. **Richard King** said that it is an interesting way to look at the answers that Indians gave, but that the constant reiteration in the Indian languages may actually have created a certain solidity of these frameworks over time. **Vivek Dhareshwar** brought back the discussion to one of the basic questions of the Roundtable: When we talk about the construction of Hinduism, are we talking about a word, a concept, or a thing? It seems that the discussion often comes down to a discussion about words, whether the Indians used the word religion or not. They may very well have been using the word, but the question is whether they refer to the same thing as the Europeans did (or do)? In other words, when we speak about the fact that there can be no such a thing as religion in India, then we are not talking about the term 'religion' but about the actual existence or non-existence of such a religion in India. This, he said, is what we should be focusing our attention on in these Roundtable discussions.

Roundtable session 2

Presentations – Akeel Bilgrami and Laurie Patton

Akeel Bilgrami took up the questions of the previous day: he addressed the claim, put forward by some of the other speakers, that a textualised, unified, and credal form of Hinduism emerged out of the colonial encounter during British rule in India. For such a Hinduism to emerge, Bilgrami said, the native people would have had to understand the concepts and methods by which this process took place. From this, a set of questions arises: (1) Are there problems of translation? Can we conceive of this as a standard problem of translation, or is it rather a problem of translating 'concepts'? (2) What is it exactly that was invented when we speak of the 'invention of Hinduism'? Was it invented as an 'object,' a 'concept,' or merely as a 'term'? To conclude his presentation, Akeel Bilgrami also argued that in order to understand the changes of colonial modernity we need to understand the changes that took place in Western Europe and its Christian theology. Secularism, he said, is then merely Protestant Christianity going through Christianity's internal modifications.

Laurie Patton spoke about a study she has undertaken about the changing role of women in the study of Sanskrit in India. The first group of respondents in her study belonged to the generation that experienced the Independence of India and the second consisted of younger women, ensconced in postcolonial liberal economy. She concluded that the older women, who used Sanskrit, did not regard Sanskrit as religious in nature, but saw it as the vehicle of freedom. In contrast, the younger women of Postcolonial India regard the learning and teaching of Sanskrit entirely as 'Hindu'.

Responses from the Roundtable

The main part of the discussion again focussed on the issue of translation and experience. **Geoffrey Oddie** pointed out interesting research material of dictionaries developed in the Bible societies. On the basis of these dictionaries, the problems of translation can be studied and it can be seen how Christian concepts were translated into the Indian languages, and vice versa. **Jakob De Roover** said that experience is always structured. Because of this, he argued, the Europeans structured their experience of the local traditions through the conceptual framework of religion. They saw these traditions in terms of religions, worship, doctrines, gods, etc. and in terms of the relations between these concepts. We can generally agree that the Indians themselves experienced their traditions through quite a different conceptual framework. Yet, during colonialism Indians started to adopt some of the European terms and descriptions. However important the impact that this has had, it does not mean that the Indians also adopted *the framework* in which these concepts made sense and were interrelated. **Vivek Dhreshwar** endorsed this last point and gave a contemporary example of the Lingayat community. Today, this community is demanding to be recognised as a religion. However, Dhreshwar argued, classifying this tradition as a religion does not make it into a religion. Nevertheless, he said that in the process of representing themselves as a religion, the experience of their traditions would slowly become inaccessible to them. **Laurie Patton, Martin Fárek, Sharada Sugirtharajah** and **John Zavos** all picked up this question and elaborated on these points.

Roundtable session 3

Presentations – John Zavos and Sharada Sugirtharajah

John Zavos talked about the colonial construction of Hinduism, the rise of the Nationalist movement in India and about the impact of colonialism on religious identity formation. He started with the question of *who* invented Hinduism and proposed that we should talk about power relations. In the course of colonisation, he said, religion came to be abstracted, universalised and objectified. Finally, he spoke about Hindu nationalism and the lack of fit between the emerging discourse and the original ideas, objects, and practices that began to be organised as 'Hinduism' in that period. From this lack of fit, Zavos argued, anxiety developed that fed into the emergence of Hindutva.

Sharada Sugirtharajah argued in her paper that colonialism was not an innocent activity, and that besides a territorial expansion, it was also an intellectual and cultural form of expansion. The colonised were thought to be lacking in maturity and colonisation was seen as a civilising activity. **Pointing out that the link between colonialism and religion was a complex one, she went on to say that orientalist and missionary approaches to Hinduism were not free from colonial and Protestant theological assumptions.** However, she went on, colonialism did not begin or end in the colonial era and cuts across time and space. Rather, colonialism still determines our current understanding (theorisation, classification) of Hinduism. Sharada's concern was not so much about whether European scholars invented or created a new concept to describe and classify what they encountered, but rather to look at their own hermeneutical strategies/presuppositions in understanding India and its traditions. She focused on what Western orientalists and missionaries themselves had to say about their own methodology and their own experience of what has come to be called 'Hinduism'.

Responses from the Roundtable

Raf Gelders responded that, even though no-one would deny that the colonial period had an important impact on solidifying certain images of Hinduism, there is no direct link between 18th and 19th century modernity and the invention of Hinduism. Rather, the structural outline of the descriptions of Hinduism that we find in the 18th and 19th century is already present in the European descriptions of India at the end

of the 17th century and even earlier (e.g. in the Church Fathers). **Jakob De Roover** responded to Sugirtharaja's paper and asked to what extent motives could determine the structure of the descriptions of Hinduism. Both supporters and opponents of colonialism, he pointed out, have produced the same structure, independent of the motives of the author. Another question one could ask is what would happen if the colonials produced a perfectly valid description of the Hindu traditions, while having imperial or colonial motives? Jakob De Roover asked whether we should then reject this description. **Richard King** supported this point and provided some more examples, referring to the German Romantics for instance. **Vivek Dhareshwar** responded that he thought it was indeed not useful at all to look at motives of the coloniser. He argued that we should disregard the fact that they spoke about the "infantile Indian" or in other negative terms, as such an emotional way of talking moves us away from the real issues. We should also avoid speaking in terms of "religion as a problematic category," as in fact a category cannot be problematic. A category is just there. Rather, we should try to find out how, given their background culture, the coloniser's descriptions were rational and made sense. **Balu** picked up this point and said that a substantial issue had been touched upon: problematising a category does not make sense as categories are part of sentences in natural language. He also picked up Raf Gelders' point that Hinduism cannot merely be a *colonial* production, since the way westerners have talked about India shows a consistent structure over the centuries. Important for this conference to realise, he emphasised, is that translating this problem into a mystifying language of 'problematising categories' cannot help us to solve it.

PARALLEL PAPER SESSIONS

The Parallel Paper sessions provided an opportunity for young scholars to share their research results related to the conference themes with a smaller audience. These sessions were well received by most conference participants. It was felt that the panels had a clear focus. Most of all, the panels on caste and religion in India, and especially the research results of the Kuvempu University panel that challenged the established notions about the caste system, were found to be very interesting and innovative. They were considered important for giving a concrete idea about what innovative research into the Indian traditions could look like. The only theme that did not resonate much with the (largely Indian) audience was the theme of evolutionary explanations of religion. Therefore, we have decided to postpone the sessions on this theme, originally planned for 2009, to the conference that will be held either in the US or in Europe (in 2010 or 2011).

Parallel Paper sessions 1

Caste system and Indian religion 1

- *Missionary Constructions of Hinduism and Caste in the Controversy on the Malabaric Rites (XVII-XVIII centuries)* - **Paolo Aranha**, PhD Student – Department of History and Civilization, European University Institute (Florence, Italy)
- *Caste System and Indian Religion* - **Scaria Zacharia**, Professor Emeritus of Malayalam – School of Letters, Mahatma Gandhi University (Changanacherry, India)
- *Hinduism, Caste and the Steps of Christian Conversion* – **Sarah Claerhout**, PhD Student – Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University (Ghent, Belgium)
- *European Descriptions of Hinduism and its Caste System. An Account of the Supposed Survival of a Degenerated Religion* - **Esther Bloch**, PhD Student – Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University (Ghent, Belgium)

Colonialism and religion in India 1

- *Constructions of Hinduism: Understanding the Swarajist Interventions* – **Amitava Chakraborty**, Reader – Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, University of Delhi (Delhi, India)
- *Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinode Thakur; Autobiographic and Hagiographic Imaging of a Vaishnava Reformer in Colonial Bengal* – **Santanu Dey**, Lecturer – History Department, RKM Vidyamandira (Belurmath, India)
- *Kabirpanth during Colonial Period* – **Purnendu Ranjan**, Lecturer – Department of History, Government College for Girls, Punjab University (Chandigarh, India)

Indians are Aryans, so what?

- *Indians are Aryans, so what?* – **Marianne Keppens**, PhD Student – Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University (Ghent, Belgium)

Respondents: Prof. Rajaram Hegde – Centre for the Study of Local Cultures, Kuvempu University (Shimoga, India) and Dr. Martin Fárek, Assistant Professor – The Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, University of Pardubice (Pardubice, Czech Republic)

Parallel Paper sessions 2

Caste system and Indian religion 2

- *Religion and Caste: The Christian and Hindu Gaudde of Goa* – **Cláudia Pereira**, PhD student – Department of Anthropology, University Institute for Social Sciences, Labour Studies and Technologies (Lisbon, Portugal)
- *Caste Divisions in Religious Narratives of Tamil Nadu* – **Ülo Valk**, Professor – Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu (Estonia)
- *Rethinking Animism in India and Japan. A Comparative Perspective* – **Sumio Morijiri**, Visiting Professor – Department of Kannada, Mangalore University (Mangalore, India)

Colonialism and religion in India 2

- *On Mistaking Names for Things: Provincialising 'Post-Westernisms' and Delineating the Function of Imagination in the Study of Religion (or 'Everything can be justified but not everything can be justified by anything')* – **James M. Hegarty**, Lecturer – School of Religious and Theological Studies, Cardiff University (Cardiff, UK)
- *Encountering Islam: Historiography of Caitany in the Gauriya Vaisnava Literature* – **Masahiko Togawa**, Associate Professor – The Graduate School for International Development and Cooperation, Hiroshima University (Hiroshima, Japan)
- *Dindimus and the Indian Priest. Orientalist Tropes in Sixteenth-Century Europe* – **Raf Gelders**, PhD student – Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap, Ghent University (Ghent, Belgium)

Parallel paper sessions 3

Evolutionary explanations of religion

- *Animal Religiosum? Human Evolution and the Universality of Religion* – **Jakob De Roover**, Post-Doctoral Fellow – Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap (Ghent University, Belgium)
- *Scientism and the Evolution of Religion* – **Peter Gottschalk**, Associate Professor of Religion – Department of Religion, Wesleyan University (Middletown, USA)

Caste system and Indian religion 3

Fictitious Connections. Caste system and Hinduism – **Rajaram Hegde**, Professor – Centre for the Study of Local Cultures, Kuvempu University (Shimoga, India)

The Practice of Untouchability and Hinduism – **A. Shanmukha**, Lecturer – Centre for the Study of Local Cultures, Kuvempu University (Shimoga, India)

Stories and their Action Consequences – **Dunkin Jalki**, PhD Student – Centre for the Study of Culture and Society (Bengalore, India)

Caste system and Indian religion 4

The caste system and Indian religion – **Meera Ashar**, Teaching Associate – Department of English, University of Pune (Pune, India)

SPECIAL PANELS

Special IASR panel

Approaches to the Academic Study of Religion from within Contemporary India

Speakers:

- Joseph T. O'Connell, Visiting Professor of World Religions - University of Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Visva-Bharati (India)
- Asha Mukherjee, Professor and Head - Department of Philosophy and Religion, Visva-Bharati Santiniketan (Santiniketan, India)
- Madhu Khanna, Professor of Religious and Indic Studies - Centre for the Study of Comparative Religions and Civilizations, Jamia Millia University (New Delhi, India)
- Amiya P. Sen, Professor - Rabindra Bhavan, Visva Bharati Santiniketan (Santiniketan, India)
- D.A. Gangadhar, Professor - Department of Philosophy and Religion, Banaras Hindu University (Varanasi, India)
- Satyapal Gautam, Professor - Department of Philosophy, Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi, India)

Special IGNCAs panels

Terminologies, Interpretations and Religious Experiences: Perspectives on the Religion of the Self

Speakers:

- K.D. Tripathi, Professor Emeritus - Banaras Hindu University and Honorary Coordinator, IGNCAs branch Varanasi (Varanasi, India)
- Shrivatsa Goswami, Director - Chaitanya Prema Sansthan
- Lokesh Chandra, Director - International Academy of Indian Culture (Delhi, India)
- T.N. Madan, Professor Emeritus of Sociology - Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi University (Delhi, India)
- J.S. Neki, leading Sikh scholar and former director of the All Indian Institute of Medical Science, Chandigarh
- Kapil Tiwari, Secretary - Tribal Folk Art Academy (Bhopal, India)
- G.C. Tripathi, Professor and Head - Kala Kosa, Indira Gandhi National Centre of the Arts (Delhi, India)
- Veena Das, Professor of sociology - John Hopkins University (Baltimore, USA)
- Madhu Khanna, Professor of Religious and Indic Studies - Centre for the Study of Comparative Religions and Civilizations, Jamia Millia University (Delhi, India)
- Molly Kaushal, Associate Professor - Janapada Sampada, Indira Gandhi National Centre of the Arts (Delhi, India)

TOWARDS THE NEXT CONFERENCE

Of course, the first conference did not achieve all the objectives that had been set out: we did not arrive at clearly circumscribed conclusions, nor were we able to clearly formulate which questions need to be addressed in the future in order to take concrete steps in the theoretical study of religion in India. However, we think that we can tackle this problem in the next conference by making some revisions to the conference format.

The most important changes will be tried out in the Platform sessions. The format, as we see it, will be as follows: two speakers, each assisted by another expert in the field, will engage in a debate that will take place according to the rules of reasonable discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst): the speaker must defend his/her position, make explicit his/her unexpressed premises, etc. The presentations will be kept short, the discussion will be rigorously moderated, and each argument and premise will be displayed on a screen. In the Roundtable sessions, each session will focus on a sub-theme. Each session will be closed with the formulation of questions to be taken up, in other sessions. The Parallel Paper sessions will remain largely unchanged in order to provide young and promising scholars a place to actively participate in the conference, and to present and discuss their research results.

In the second conference year, a new set of questions and themes will be taken up in the three modules: (1) In the Platform sessions the different theoretical answers to the question 'Is secularism the solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem?' will be discussed. (2) The Roundtable sessions will also take up the issue of 'secularism'. However, these sessions will address the issue in terms of three different sub-themes: (i) Conversion and the idea of freedom of religion; (ii) secularism and the Aryan invasion; (iii) Secularism: an antidote to religious fundamentalism? (3) The Parallel Paper sessions form an integrated whole with the Platform and Roundtable sessions. The themes for the second conference are (i) 'Indian Religion and the Issue of Conversion;' (ii) the Caste System and Indian Religion; and (iii) Colonialism and Religion in India. The first theme is closely related to one of the sub-themes of the Roundtable sessions, and may become the topic for the Platform sessions of the third year. The second and third themes proved very successful during the first conference and gave rise to interesting discussions, and therefore merit to be taken up once again in the second conference. (4) 'How to' workshop: a workshop around the question of how to teach religion in India.