

University of Oslo

Professor Robert Frykenberg' will lecture about "Hindutva as a Political Religion: An Historical Perspective", at Georg Sverdrups hus in room BL27.

Time 14.15-16.00

15 October 2007

Summary of the presentation:

"Hindutva as a Political Religion: An Historical Perspective"

Whether viewed from an analytical or an historical perspective, the question of whether the ideology of "Hindutva" is a melding of Hindu fascism and Hindu fundamentalism, is debated. That "Hindutva" is a profoundly religious and profoundly, even aggressively political, form of nationalism, is not disputed. From its earliest glimmerings, supporters seem to have combined ambiguity with confrontation, compromise and contradiction -- as devices for achieving long range corporatist designs and for gaining paramount power and imposing a totalistic agenda upon all of India. Its agenda of Ram Rajiya has aimed to forge One Nation (in One State), One Culture, One Religion, and One Language. In Lord Rama's Name, a single 'Hindu Nation' for the whole Indian Continent and ruled by precepts of Arya Dharm, or Sanātana Dharma, has been trumpeted. Sanskriti icons, norms, and symbols, invoking cosmic and eternal verities of Vedic Tradition reflect principles on which this Nation stands. Under this regime, eternally changeless elements of social structure (varnshrāmadharma)-- as found in the primordial "Four Colours" (Chatur Varnya), -- must preserve each birth-group or caste (jāti) community within its rightful rank, status, and strata of ritual purity or impurity. By such thinking, Birth and Earth, Genomes within Sacred Blood and Molecules of Sacred Soil, determine every person's place within an all-encompassing and cosmic "World Order" (Vishwa Dharma). How this ideology originated and played itself out during the past century is worthy closer scrutiny.

Professor Frykenberg, born and reared in India and trained in America and Britain (Ph.D., London [SOAS], 1961), has been at Wisconsin in 1962. His Guntur District, 1788-1848: A History of Local Influence and Central Authority (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), initiated localistic, "bottom-up", Indocentric approaches to India's history. Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History (Madison 1969; New Delhi 1978), Land Tenure and Peasant in South Asia (Madison, New Delhi: 1977, 1981), and Delhi Through the Ages (New Delhi, Oxford 1986, 1993), also broke new ground in the historiography of India. In recent years, beside work on religious fundamentalisms, with special reference to 'Hindu' movements, he has completed a comprehensive Oxford History of Christianity in India (now in press).