

**International Conference on  
Interface between East and West: Multiculturalism and Identity: What  
Can Sociology and Religious Studies Contribute to the Making of a Better  
Society**  
**Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University(JU), Kolkata & Department  
of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion (LIR),  
University of Gothenburg,Sweden**  
**in collaboration with  
NSS, JU and IFSSR, Kolkata**  
**June 10 -12, 2009**  
**Venue: Anita Banerjee Memorial Hall,UG Arts Building, JU.**

**Wednesday,**  
**10.06.2009**

10.00 – 11.00	Registration
11.00 – 11.10	Inaugural Session Opening Song Chair: Prof. P. N. Ghosh, Vice Chancellor, JU, Kolkata. Welcome Address: Dr. Ruby Sain, Head, Department of Sociology, JU, Kolkata
11.10 – 11.20	Guest of Honour: Prof. Biswajit Chatterjee, Dean, Faculty of Arts, JU, Kolkata
11.20 – 11.30	Special Guest: Prof. S. Dutta, Pro- Vice Chancellor , JU, Kolkata
11.30 – 11.45	Inaugural Address: Prof. P. N. Ghosh, Vice-Chancellor, JU, Kolkata. Vote of Thanks: Dr. Dalia Chakraborty, Reader, Department of Sociology, JU, Kolkata.
11.45 – 11.50	
11.50 – 12.00	Coffee Break
12.00 – 13.00	<u>Academic Session - I</u> Chair: Prof. Asoke Bhattacharya Key Note Address: Prof. Ake Sander, Goteborgs Universitet Topic: ' <b>Sociology of religion, its main topics and its social and political relevancy</b> '.
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 15.00	<u>Academic Session - II</u> Key note lecture: Prof. Gavin Flood, Oxford University, U.K. Topic: ' <b>Religion, Text and World</b> '.
15.00 – 15.15	Discussion
15.15 – 15.30	Coffee Break
15.30 – 16.00	Lecture: Prof. Bijoy Mukherjee, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal. Topic: ' <b>Interpreting Tradition: Opening- Up Sociology of Religion.</b> '
16.00 – 16.15	Discussion

**Thursday,**  
**11.06.2009**

10.00 – 10.30	<u>Academic Session - III</u> Chair: Prof. Gavin Flood. Oxford University, U.K.
---------------	--

	<i>Special Lecture:</i> Ferdinando Sardella, Goteborgs Universitet, Sweden Topic: ' <b>Individual and Society between East and West: Bhaktisiddhanta and the Gaudiya Math, a case study</b> '.
10.30 – 10.45	Discussion
10.45 – 11.15	Coffee Break
11.15 – 12.00	<i>Special Lecture:</i> Prof. N. Singh, Center for Exact Humanities, IIIT, Hyderabad Topic: ' <b>Ontic Embodiments of Twice-Born: Quest to Recast Sovereignty, Identity and War</b> '
12.00 – 12.15	Discussion
12.15 – 12.45	<i>Lecture:</i> Prof. Bijoya Goswami, JU, Kolkata. Topic: ' <b>Origin of Religions and Antagonism: Ancient Indian Mode</b> '
12.45 – 13.00	Discussion
13.00 – 14.15	Lunch.
14.15 – 15.00	<i>Academic Session - IV</i> Chair: Prof. Bipul Kumar Bhadra <i>Special Lecture:</i> Dr. Michael Dusche, University of Erfurt, Germany Topic: ' <b>Identity Politics in India and Europe</b> '.
15.00 – 15.15	Discussion
15.15 – 15.45	<i>Lecture:</i> Prof. Tridib Chakraborty, JU, Kolkata Topic: ' <b>Ethnic unrest in South East Asia : Role of Religions</b> '
15.45 – 16.00	Discussion
16.00 – 16.15	Tea Break
16.15 – 16.45	<i>Special Lecture :</i> Prof. Måns Broo , Åbo Akademi University , Finland. <b>Topic: Sociology of Religion in Finland: A Case Study.</b>
16.45 – 17.00	Discussion
17.00 – 17.15	Vote of Thanks: Dr. Mridul Bose, JU, Kolkata.

**Friday, 12.06.2009**

10.00 – 10.45	<i>Academic Session – V</i> <i>Chair:</i> Prof. . Ake Sander, Goteborgs Universitet, Sweden <i>Special Lecture:</i> Prof. Goutam Bhadra, Centre for Social Studies, Kolkata. Topic: ' <b>Inversion as a way of cultural cognition: " Ultabasiya" in religious tradition.</b> '
10.45 – 11.00	Discussion.
11.00 – 11.30	<i>Lecture:</i> Dr. Mridul Bose, JU, Kolkata. Topic: ' <b>Religion and Society</b> '
11.30 – 11.45	Discussion.
11.45 – 12.00	Coffee Break.
12.00 – 12.30	<i>Lecture:</i> Dr. Ramanuj Ganguly, M.K. College, Calcutta University, West Bengal. Topic: ' <b>High Salience of Inter-Caste Intersection in the Jagannath Temple at Puri in Post-colonial India.</b> '
12.30 – 12.45	Discussion.
12.45 – 13.45	Lunch.
	<i>Academic Session – VI</i> Chair: Prof. Pradip Bose
<u>Paper Presentation</u>	
13.45 – 14.00	<b>Saibal Ganguly.</b> Topic : Balaram Hari: A Rebel against Baishnavism and Brahminism

- 14.00 – 14.15      **Debasish Konar**  
Topic: Faith and Healing in the era of globalization
- 14.15 – 14.30      **Payel Sen**  
Topic: Terrorism: A Dysfunction of Religion in the wake of Multiculturalism
- 14.30 – 14.45      **Oindrila Mukherjee**  
Topic: Accommodation versus confrontation: An Exploration of the issues of Multiculturalism and Identity
- 14.45 – 15.00      **Shebanti Chatterjee**  
Topic: Fleeting Currents of Religion and Identity in a Multicultural Society
- 15.00 – 15.15      **Debarati Guha**  
Topic: Banning Yoga for the Muslims, the Om syndrome.
- 15.15 – 15.30      Tea Break
- 15.30 – 16.00      . Special Lecture: Prof. Swapan Pramanik, Vice Chancellor, Vidyasagar University, Midnapur  
Topic: **Religion in a Pluralistic Society**
- 16.00 – 16.15      Discussion
- 16.15- 16.45      Closing Session  
Prof. Piyali Palit  
Prof. Ake Sander  
Prof. Asoke Bhattacharya
- 16.45 - 17.00      Vote of Thanks: Dr Ruby Sain.

## **REPORT ON CONFERENCE**

The International Conference on *Interface between East and West: Multiculturalism and identity: what can Sociology and religious studies contribute to the making of a Better Society* organized by Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University and Department of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion (LIR), University of Gothenburg, Sweden in collaboration with National Social Studies Scheme, Jadavpur University and *International Forum for the Study of Society and Religion (IFSSR)* was held at Jadavpur University 10-12 June 2009. The conference was made possible by a generous grant from *the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT)*.

The following is an account of the academics sessions and lectures presented in the conference:

FIRST DAY

### **Academic session I**

Chaired by Prof Piyali Patil

Key note address: Prof. Gavin Flood, Oxford University U.K.

Topic: *'Religion Text and the World'*

Prof. Flood elaborated on the phenomenology of religion (influenced by the works of Ninian Smart and Edmund Husserl) and the phenomenological approach to the study of religion, stating that such a study of religion follows a third order discourse of reasoning and it offers accounts and 'corrective' readings about human behaviors, religious texts and about the world.

### **Academic session II**

Chaired by Prof. Ashoke Bhattacharya

Lecture: Prof. Bijoy Mukherjee, Vishva Bharati, Shantiniketan.

Topic: *'Interpreting Tradition: Opening up Sociology of Religion'*

Prof. Mukherjee presented a case study on Dharmapuja of Golpara highlighting the peculiarities of marginal religious practices, which connote a rift between religious textual prescriptions and actual practice. Local practices are not exempt from influences from other religions and folk traditions and do not exclude tensions between dominant and marginal groups.

Key note address: Prof. Åke Sander, university of Gothenburg.

Topic: *'Sociology of Religion, Main Topics and Socio-Political Relevancy'*

Prof. Sander asserts that the sociology of religion as an academic enterprise is not involved in establishing the truth claim of God's existence (or its lack thereof), rather it treats all religions as human social phenomena researchable through empirical enquiry. Sociology of religion, he states, understands religion in terms of social communities, social activities, social institutions and structures and aims

at elucidating its manifold influences on individual and collective behavior, while at the same time it questions stereotypical views of religious life.

SECOND DAY

### **Academic session III**

Chaired by Prof. Gavin Flood

Special lecture by Ferdinando Sardella, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Topic: '*Individual and Society between East and West: Bhaktisiddhanta and the Gaudiya Math. A case study*

Sardella provided an account on the encounter between the Bengali revivalist Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati (1874-1937) and his movement the Gaudiya Math in the 1930s with Nazi Berlin, exploring the way it resisted ideologies of nationalism, racism and Aryan political identity. This paved the way for long-term interactions of theistic religious ideas stemming from Bengal with Western societies, which found expression among others in a number of independent Gaudiya Math movements such as ISKCON, popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement, after the Second World war.

Special lecture by Prof. N Singh, Center for Exact humanities, Hyderabad

Topic: '*Ontic Embodiments of Twice-Born Quest to Recast Sovereignty Identity and War.*'

Prof. Singh presented a formal theory of ontic embodiments by stating that all individuals are twice born since they are endowed with motor organs and they are also simultaneously trans-temporal entities/persona. He then spoke about trans-jural principles, jural omniscience and jural autonomy and their relationship with individual and collective sovereignty.

Lecture: Prof. Bijoya Goswami Jadavpur University

Topic: '*Origin of Religion and Antagonisms: Ancient Indian Mode*'

Prof. Goswami equated religion with the principle of *Dharma* and argued that the concepts of *dharma* and *karma* that developed in ancient history privileged some social groups to the exclusion of others and as a result dissenting voices and schools began to emerge.

### **Academic session IV**

Chaired by Prof. Bipul Kumar Bhadra

Special lecture: Dr. Michael Dusche University of Erfurt Germany

Topic: '*Identity Politics in India and Europe*' discussed formations of nationalism and mobilization of religions in India and Europe

In his presentation Dusche derived a notion typical of Identity Politics from the example of German Romantic nationalism. Romantic, cultural, or ethnic nationalism as it emerges in the anti-Napoleonic wars in German speaking territories, was largely serving the ends of activist elites (Prussian, Austrian). Despite its popular pretensions, it did not translate into an increase in democratic participation for those it purported to represent. On the contrary, with Identity

Politics participation remained largely symbolic. In Romantic nationalism, the individual in totality is seen as part of an organism and not as a party to a social contract, which constitutes, and limits, any liberal democratic polity. Dusché showed how the organicist image of society promoted by Romantic nationalism rendered it inapt to handle inner conflict in a rational, non-coercive manner. The notion of Identity Politics derived from the German example was then brought to bear on India (among other contexts). The Hindutva movement was analysed as fitting this category as well.

Lecture: Prof. Trideb Chakra Borty, Jadavpur University

Topic: *'Ethnic Unrest in South East Asia: Role of Religions'*

Prof. Borty argued that conflicts in South East Asia have religious connotations and provided case studies from Indonesia, Malaysia Vietnam Philippines and South Thailand to show that majority/minority conflicts are a result of internal problems within various religious groups. He pointed to some instances where arabization has enlarged the pool from which global terrorism and religious fundamentalism are growing.

Lecture by Dr. Måns Broo Abo akademi university Finland

Topic: *Sociology of Religion in Finland a Case Study*

Dr. Broo spoke about the scope of the sociology of religion in understanding, explaining, and critically studying religious phenomena. He presented a case study of religious trends in Finland in terms of religious affiliation, religious identity, changing moral values, changing participation patterns and depth of belief. The overview pointed towards an increase in secularization and religious pluralism.

THIRD DAY

### **Academic section V**

Chaired by Prof. Ake Sanders, Goteborgs Universitet, Sweden

Special lecture by Prof. Gautam Bhadra

Topic: *'Inversion as a way of cultural cognition: 'Uttabasiya' in religious tradition'*

Prof. Bhadra offered examples of the transformative process of symbolic and factual inversion of social and religious hierarchies within the Hindu tradition, and exemplified them by quoting a number of religious texts.

Lecture by Prof. Mridul Bose, Jadavpur university

Topic: *'Religion and Society'*

Dr. Mridul Bose argued for the positive implications of religion largely adopting a functional approach. He linked religion with marriage, family relations, mental and physical health and education, and suggested that religion constitutes a cohesive force in society. It can also be an effective antidote to increasing levels of stress and depression among the population, which he attributed among others to unsettling processes of globalization.

The final lecture of this session was provided by Dr. Ramanuj Ganguly.

Title: *'High Salience of Inter-caste intersection in the Jagannath temple at Puri in Post colonial India'*

Dr. Ganguly presented an inversion of the rigid ritual hierarchy that characterizes the traditional caste system. Dr. Ganguly presented a case where priests in the Jagannath temple with low ritual status perform religious functions essentially considered to be the exclusive right of high caste Brahmins.

Concluding session

The session was chaired by Prof. Pradip Bose.

Students of Jadavpur university and guest speakers presented papers on different aspects of religion and their impact on society. These included: Saibal Ganguly *Balaram Hari: A Rebel against Baishnavism and Brahmanism*; Debasish Kumar *'Faith and Healing in the era of globalization'*; Payal Sen *'Terrorism: A Dysfunction of religion in the wake of multiculturalism'*; Oindrilla Mukherjee *'Accommodation versus confrontation: an exploration of the issues of multiculturalism and identity'*; Shebanti Chatterjee *'Fleeting currents of religion and identity in a multicultural society'*; Debarati Guha, a journalist from Deutsche Welle, presented a paper titled *Banning yoga for the Muslims, The Om syndrome*.

A special lecture titled *'Religion in a pluralistic society'* was offered by Prof. Swapan Pramanik, Vice Chancellor of Vidyasagar University. He gave an overview of the development of sociology of religion in India.

Finally Prof. Dipak Malik gave a overview of the life and legacy of Mahatma Gandhi and his thoughts about religion in society.

The conference ended with a panel in which Prof. Piyali Palit, Prof. Åke Sander, and Prof. Ashoke Bhattacharya summarized and discussed main issues raised during the conference.

Dr Ruby Sain ended the three day conference with a vote of thanks.