



Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur

RELIGION, SECULARITY AND LAW

A Seminar Report

The seminar on ‘Religion, Secularity and Law’ was hosted by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Kanpur on 15-16 October 2014. Scholars from different universities of India working on sociology of religion came together to discuss the academic developments in the field. Anindita Chakrabarti (Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Kanpur) introduced the theme of the seminar. She dwelled on the latest academic discourse on religion and secularism in India, also pointing out the paucity of ethnographic studies in this domain. Professor J.P.S. Uberoi (Department of Sociology, Delhi University) delineated the theme of the seminar. In his talk titled ‘Why Study Religion?’ he raised the question why social scientists should study religion, despite the latter’s other-worldly concerns. He stated that in the modern era, religion had no great role and after the mid-twentieth century, it was expected to decline still further. Yet religion’s reversal of fortune and its militant mixture with politics came soon after the end of World War II. His paper drew from studies in India as well as Central Asia (Afghanistan). The presentation by Sudha Sitharaman (Department of Sociology, Pondicherry University) followed next. Exploring the historical intricacies of religion and law, Dr. Sitharaman argued how religious practices when regarded merely as markers of religious identity and beliefs lose their essence of piety. Drawing on the work of Roy Bhaskar, Manindra Thakur (Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University) in his paper titled ‘Islam and the Realist Theory of Religion’ argued for a realist theory of Islam. Anindita Chakrabarti and Suchandra Ghosh (Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Kanpur) presented a paper titled ‘Imam, Qazi and the Judge: Sociology of Legal Pluralism in Kanpur City’, a study based on the *shariat* and the district court of Kanpur. Shahul Ameen (Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Kanpur/Ahmedabad University) in his paper on ‘Religion, Civil Society and Democracy: The Jamaat-e-Islami and the Solidarity Youth Movement in Kerala’ mapped

how the youth-wing of an Islamist group by reinterpreting its religious role, engages with civil society initiatives. The paper explored the civil, pluralist and the democratic dimensions of Islamism. R. Santhosh (Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras) in his paper titled 'Religious activism and Secular Ethos; A Study on the Role of Islamic Activism in the Palliative Care Movement in Kerala' dealt with how the Kerala Nadwatul Mujahideen movement through volunteerism and charity associated with palliative care aim at other-worldly rewards. Hashim T. (Department of Sociology, Pondicherry University) expanded the discussion on religious activism in his paper 'The Idea of True Islam: Debates among the Mapilla Muslims in Malabar, Kerala'. He examined the divergent practices of Islam among different traditions of Mapilla Muslims in Kerala who aim at deducing a set of rules for religious conduct to guide their members in resolving the mundane issues of daily life. Aditya Roy Kapoor (Department of Sociology, Hyderabad Central University) in his presentation, 'Being Muslim, Being Secular: Everyday Encounters and Construction of Identities' too discussed the coexistence of the religious and secular in everyday life. He looked at how the members of a religious group preserve their group identity in course of their negotiation with the secular. The seminar brought together a set of ethnographic material and theoretical expositions on the theme of religion and secularity in contemporary India.