

Workshop Report: Multiculturalism and Religious Identity: Perspectives from Ottawa and Delhi.

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This workshop, "Multiculturalism and Religious Identity," funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Aid to Workshops Program, Carleton University's Centre for Values and Ethics and The Religion and Diversity Project (SSHRC Major Collaborative Research Initiative), brought together scholars from India and Canada to explore the ways in which religious diversity is imagined and practised in their respective countries. It is increasingly being recognized that the place of religion within the multicultural political model urgently requires greater attention than it has received to date. We need to consider more carefully, whether, how and to what extent religious identities should be included within political practices designed to allow citizens to retain and express their distinct cultural identities while participating in the common public life of a wider society. Our interdisciplinary workshop takes up this issue in relation to two nations, Canada and India, both of which have struggled to find viable political frameworks for governing religious diversity. Leading scholars from India and Canada, whose research engages with questions of multiculturalism and religious diversity and aims to facilitate comparative discussions connecting theoretical analysis with policy considerations, met at the University of Ottawa in September, 2010.

The workshop opened with three papers on the theme of "Adjudicating Religious Identities." Lori Beaman (University of Ottawa) presented a paper entitled "Laws of General Application: A Retreat from Multiculturalism and its Implications for Religious Freedom." Beaman argued that recent Supreme Court of Canada decisions in cases about religious freedom signal a shift away from multiculturalism within Canada. Avigail Eisenberg (University of Victoria) followed with a paper, "Authenticity and Religious Practices," in which she argued that sincerity is not sufficient grounds upon which public institutions can fairly assess the authenticity of religious belief. Deepak Mehta (Delhi University) rounded out the discussion with his paper "Law, Culture and the Documentary Practices of the State: The Case of the Babri Mosque," in which he recounted the history of legal discourse of the Babri Mosque, viewing the mosque as property. Mehta described court decisions in the case of the Babri mosque which maintain the "status quo," as in "bad faith."

The session "The Place of Religion in Multicultural Theory" included papers by Gordon Davis (Carleton University), Ashwani Peetush (Wilfrid Laurier University) and André Laliberté (University of Ottawa). Davis' paper, "The Normativity of Inclusion and Exclusion: Should Multiculturalism Encompass Religious Identities?" suggested that religion is a problematic

identity category. He identified especially those religions with an "exclusionary soteriology" as inherently divisive and therefore disruptive to the inclusionary Canadian model of multiculturalism. Peetush, in his paper titled "Justice, Multiculturalism and Dialogue", challenged the assumptions underlying the Rawlsian model of multiculturalism which uncritically privileges liberalism and excludes metaphysical doctrines from public dialogue. He argued that metaphysical doctrines underlie all voices engaged in political discourse and, further, that the distinctions between politics and metaphysical doctrines are not at all clear. Laliberté in "Tradition is not Destiny: Chinese Approaches" expanded the national horizons of the conference, offering observations about the different trajectories in the management of religious diversity in the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. The former is moving in the direction of French *laïcité* while the latter has adopted a more American model with elements of management from Germany. He also suggested that India and China have much in common and, although they could learn much from each other, political competition will make cooperation unlikely.

Rajeev Bhargava (Centre of the Study of Developing Societies) presenting his paper "Should Western States Learn from India?" in the public session of the day, proposed that India's model of "principled distance" offers an alternative to the more ideological driven French and American models of multiculturalism. The Indian approach is more pragmatic, incorporating religion as an element inherent in any society and asserting that state and religious organizations can be partners in achieving social goals. Peter Beyer (University of Ottawa) examined "Multiculturalism, Religious Pluralism and the Secularization of the Canadian State" in the historical context he described as "post-Westphalian." There is something new on the global scene, he suggested, which no longer fits within the arrangements created by the Treaty of Westphalia. This emerging reality needs much more research in how identity is constructed in a global age.

Bindu Puri (Delhi University) further explored the Indian experience by revisiting the political philosophy of Gandhi, challenging the misconception that that he was "anti-secular" with the assertion that his embracing all religions was separate from matters of state. In Gandhi's thinking religion provided the basis for individual moral frameworks in which the state had no part to play but that, in a multicultural society, the state was necessarily secular. Anil Bhatti (Jawaharlal Nehru University) argued for patience and respect in accepting historical processes and time necessary for people in an environment of high global mobility. People embedded in a "life world" and a landscape will resist change, something evident in the Swiss banning of minarets, a decision for which he expressed respect. The state has a limited role to play in generating understanding between people groups and Bhatti called for lowered expectations and effective management, allowing time for understanding and respect to develop.

The second round of papers on day two centred around the theme of "Producing Identities: Processes of Recognition and Exclusion." Anne Vallyly (University of Ottawa) delivered a paper on the identity politics operative in contemporary Jainism, titled "The Difference Difference Makes", in which she explored the exclusionary ideological discourse through which Jains seek to define themselves today. Sipra Mukherji (West Bengal State University) presented a paper called "Questioning Majority: An Exploration of the Hindu Identity within Secular India," which explored the dynamics between small, break-away sects of Hinduism and popular religion. The third paper rounding out the series was presented by Prasenjit Biswas (North

Eastern Hill University) entitled "Recognizing Religious Identities: Moves Beyond Difference and Recovery" which focused on the shortcomings of constitutional secularism in India for minority religious identities.

The session titled "Religion, Nationalism and Ethnicity" featured papers by Shail Mayaram (Centre for the study of Developing Societies), Solange Lebevre (Université de Montréal) and Elke Winter (University of Ottawa). In her paper "Multiculturalism, Interculturalism and (De)cosmopolitanism: A Phenomenological View of the Indian State Positing the Limits of Multiculturalism and Secularism". Mayaram looked at the coercive elements in state driven social policies which are destroying indigenous peoples through the language of pain in art and literature. Using research on Kashmir and the tribal areas of India she demonstrated that multicultural policies protect groups whose religious expression does not include land claims and who fit within a free market economy. Lefebvre in "Religion and Canadian Identity as Broached by the Québec Case" examined the critical reassessment of the traditional overlap between religion and nationalism in Québec which has been overshadowed by the Rawlsian liberal model. The Bouchard-Taylor Commission on Reasonable Accommodation in Québec reflects "open *laïcité*" raising questions about the role of religious symbols, the role of religion in education, as well as other issues of managing religious diversity in a society once dominated by the Roman Catholic Church. Winter's paper "Revisiting the Concepts of Identity and Religion in Max Weber's Theory of Ethnic Relations" observed that religion has become the flashpoint for debates about multiculturalism. She suggested that Weber's dynamic and relational view of religion in identity formation would serve well to replace the essentialized and static views which have lead to much misunderstanding of religion as dangerous and disruptive.

Day two culminated with a public lecture delivered by Gurpreet Mahajan (Jawaharlal Nehru University) entitled "Religious Diversity and Multicultural Accommodation." Mahajan suggested that the principles recognized as necessary to secularism by the Bouchard-Taylor report for the just accommodation of minorities in Québec are not easily balanced with one another. She argued that Canada has had greater problems accommodating minority groups than has India because of its strong commitment to individual liberalism. Mahajan emphasized the need to abandon the search for a single principle of accommodation upon which to base accommodation in Canada and instead explore what makes accommodation necessary, and use this as a basis.

Day three of the workshop opened with a paper on the topic of "Religious Equality and Gender Equality" presented by Gopika Solanki (Carleton University) entitled "Making and Unmaking the Hindu Wife: Juristic Diversity and Constructions of Conjuality in Hindu Law." Solanki argued that in caste law, Hindu women can be seen to actively help to construct the family and conjugal relations and in way that challenge gender hierarchy institutionalized in Indian state law.

The workshop closed with presentations on the topic of the "Role of Education." Sonia Sikka (University of Ottawa) delivered a paper entitled "Religious Education in a Multicultural Society: Does Québec's 'Ethics and Religious Culture Program' Provide a Good Model?" Sikka argued that the Ethics and Religious Culture Program mandatory within Québec schools holds promise to help to dispel the misconception that religions are static, homogeneous, discrete

systems of belief unaccommodating of change and thus provides a good model for religion education. Mihaela Vieru (Carleton University) concluded the talk with a paper "Addressing Religious Identities and Difference - A Matter of Civic Culture and Education in Secular Multicultural Context." Vieru argued that education about religions is a promising alternative to the symbol-based citizenship education currently and increasingly cultivated in multicultural Canada for fostering inter-cultural relations.