

**International Seminar**

**On**

**The Public Representation of a Religion called Hinduism:  
Modern Gurus, Sampradayas and Media Hinduism**

**(8-9 July 2009)**

**Venue: University of Manchester, Manchester UK**

**Call for Papers**

This seminar is part of a two year network project on the 'public representation of a religion called Hinduism', funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK.

The focus of the Manchester session is on ways in which Hinduism is represented firstly through the ideas and practices of modern gurus and Sampradayas, and secondly, through the full range of modern media and communications technology. These two themes frequently overlap and one of our objectives is to investigate the relationship between traditional Hindu modes of organisation (sampradayas, living gurus and their disciples) and the multiple possibilities provided by media and communications technology. We are interested in exploring how and why certain sampradayas such as the Swaminarayan Sanstha, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness and the Saiva Siddhanta Church have developed as organisations with a resonance in modern institutional contexts and transnational spaces. Modern Gurus such as Mata Amritanandamayi, Sathya Sai Baba and Mata Nirmala Devi have also developed formidable followings, particularly amongst middle-class Indians both in India and the diaspora. The seminar provides the space to examine and compare these developments as particularly significant in the context of modern Hinduism. One common feature of the success of such gurus and sampradayas is their ability to represent themselves using a variety of media. The seminar aims to explore these representational strategies and their implications for the idea of Hindu-ness. Our focus on 'media Hinduism' also seeks to extend recent work which has focused on the ways in which Hinduism is represented in film and television, print media and digital technology, and the policing of Hindu imagery within these contexts by a range of organisations.

By focusing on these overlapping themes, the network seeks to encourage research which explores the relationship between Hindu traditions and issues related to globalisation, such as the commodification of religious ideas, objects and practices, and the impact of time/space compression on the construction of community identities and postmodern spiritualities. The

seminar also seeks to encourage the presentation of research which examines these phenomena both in India and the diaspora, recognising the increasingly dynamic flow of information and ideas through the institutional channels both of contemporary communications technology and the transnational scope of modern sampradayas and guru-organisations as a challenge to the homeland/diaspora divide.

This seminar is the fourth in the project series. Previous seminars have examined modern temple building and public forms of worship, Hindu nationalist organisations in social and political context, and umbrella organisations and ecumenical Hinduism. The overall aim of the project is to examine ways in which Hinduism has asserted and maintained a public presence in a range of contemporary contexts. The network builds on recent work that recognises the operation of religion as a modern discourse, and the 'construction' of Hinduism within this discursive framework ('a religion called Hinduism'). It also builds on recent work focused on organisations or institutions that project the 'public face' of Hinduism, either in India or in those areas of the world in which significant numbers of Indians have settled. The network seeks to bring together researchers in several disciplines who are interested in these themes in order to build a nuanced, context-sensitive analysis of the various ways in which Hinduism is represented as a religion in modern societies. Our focus is on the representation of Hinduism in a range of public contexts, in three countries where it has a prominent role: India, the US and the UK.

Please send a paper proposal for the Manchester session to John Zavos at [john.zavos@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:john.zavos@manchester.ac.uk) by March 30, 2009. The conference will schedule discussion of research papers and brief presentations of work in progress. Publication of selected research papers as part of the project output is planned.

The network is in a position to offer some financial assistance to potential paper givers in order to enable them to attend this meeting. Please contact John Zavos at [john.zavos@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:john.zavos@manchester.ac.uk) to discuss possibilities.

Meetings of the research project are held at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, Wabash College, Crawfordsville IN, the University of Manchester, UK and University of Houston-Clear Lake, TX.

**Please visit the project website at <http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/hinduism/>**