

LECTURE SERIES ON INDIAN RELIGIONS

11 OPEN LECTURES
ON
**HINDUISM: PHILOSOPHY
AND PRAXIS**

*DOES RELIGION MATTER TODAY?
NEW THEOLOGY AFTER THE ANTHROPOCENE?
What can India offer?
Religion as dialogue?*

Thinking with

Ankur Barua

Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge University

Interlocutors to Think Ahead

Aminah Mohammad-Arif, CNRS-EHESS, Paris
Dietrich Reetz, ZMO, Berlin
Sumaira Nawaz, NLSIU, India
Imran Visram, Oxford University, UK
Saad Ismail, Aligarh Muslim University, India
Sarah Ahmad, Banaras Hindu University, India
Soumen Mukherjee, Presidency University, India
Nazimuddin Siddique, Jamia Millia Islamia, India
Inamur Rahman, Presidency University, India
Amara Ali, University of California, Berkeley
Asim Siddiqui, Azim Premji University, India
Anindya Purakayastha, ILSR Kolkata
Mursed Alam, Gour College, India

STARTING ON 4 APRIL 2026

EVERY SATURDAY AT 7 PM IST

PSAGS INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE FORUM

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AMBEDKAR CENTRE FOR SOCIAL & CULTURAL STUDIES, GOUR COLLEGE

([HTTPS://GOURMAHA.AC.IN/AMBEDKAR-CENTRE/](https://gourmaha.ac.in/ambedkar-centre/))

Register at: psagsindia@gmail.com





Concept Note

ONE OF THE GREAT IRONIES OF OUR POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION IS THAT WHILE INDIA IS SAID TO BE THE HOME OF RELIGION, THERE ARE VERY FEW ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS WHERE RELIGION IS DISCUSSED IN A HISTORICALLY INFORMED, CULTURALLY SENSITIVE, AND PHILOSOPHICALLY REFLECTIVE MANNER THAT DOES NOT DIRECTLY REQUIRE RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION. IF YOU WANT TO LEARN ABOUT HINDUISM, YOU MAY HAVE TO GO TO A HINDU INSTITUTION WHICH IS ONLY CONCERNED WITH MAKING THIS DECLARATION: "HINDUISM IS THE QUINTESSENCE OF SPIRITUALITY". IF YOU WANT TO LEARN ABOUT ISLAM, THE DESTINATION MAY BE AN ISLAMIC INSTITUTION WHICH ONLY SEEMS TO DEFEND THIS CLAIM: "ISLAM IS THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH". IN MY ESTIMATE, THERE IS NO PROBLEM PER SE WITH SUCH INSTITUTIONS. I WOULD EVEN SAY THAT WE NEED PEDAGOGIC SPACES WHERE A SCRIPTURE-BASED PERSPECTIVE IS ARTICULATED, DEVELOPED, AND DEFENDED. HOWEVER, WHAT IF SOMEONE WHO IS A MUSLIM SAYS: "NEVER MIND WHETHER OR NOT HINDUISM IS THE MOST WONDERFUL VISION OF SELF AND SOCIETY; WHERE CAN I LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT THE KEY VALUES, IDEALS, AND PRACTICES OF A HINDU WAY OF LIFE?" THIS QUERY POINTS TO A GREAT LACUNA IN OUR SYSTEMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: AN ABSENCE THAT IS SHAPED BY OUR POSTCOLONIAL INHERITANCES RELATING TO ANXIETIES ABOUT DISCUSSING RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE.

As a result, there seem to be only two highly polarised ways of addressing the "religion question". According to the first, religion is nothing but the undiluted transmission of primordial tradition: whatever a Hindu or a Muslim says about their religious life is the final word and any attempt to contest it will be met with violent retaliation. According to the second, religion is the regressive force par excellence that is pulling us back into a medieval darkness. Even to whisper the word "religion" is to run the risk of being denounced as an unreflective reactionary. So, Indian institutions lack a third space where religion can be studied through multidisciplinary lenses such as anthropology, sociology, philosophy, political theory, and theology.

What could such a third space look like? In these 11 lectures on dimensions of Hindu philosophy, culture, and social imagination, I will gesture towards some possibilities. The duration of each lecture is 1 hour; it will be followed by a response offered by a scholar or scholar-practitioner from an Islamic background.



Structure of the Lecture Series

These 11 lectures do not presuppose any acquaintance with Hindu beliefs and practices, and are open to anyone who may be interested.

Lectures 1–3: An introduction to (a) the methodology of critical empathy in the study of religion; (b) the sociocultural and the socioreligious meanings of the word “Hindu”; (c) Vedic ritual imaginations of the world as a sacrificial order (yajña, dharma); and (d) the motif of self-knowledge (jñāna, vidyā) in the Upaniṣads.

Lecture 4: An introduction to the central themes of the Bhagavad-gītā.

Lectures 5–6: An introduction to Vedāntic notions of the human self (jīva, ātman) and its relation to the divine reality (brahman, īśvara).

Lecture 7–8: An introduction to the divine feminine (devī, śakti), and an exploration of the locations of Hindu spirituality on everyday landscapes structured by distinctions of caste (varṇa, jāti) and gender (strī-dharma).

Lectures 9–10: An introduction to the multiple styles of post-1757 Hindu modernity, which have sought to rework premodern scriptural texts and practices in active engagement with the idea of the West.

Lecture 11: An exploration of how the symbolic languages of loss, longing, lament, and love have acted as sites of translation across some Hindu and Muslim socioreligious spaces.

Every Saturday at 7 PM IST

Schedule

LECTURE – 1 : INTRODUCING THE SERIES & THE METHODOLOGY OF “CRITICAL EMPATHY”
IN THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF RELIGION

04 APRIL

INTERLOCUTOR: IMRAN VISRAM, OXFORD UNIVERSITY, UK

LECTURE-2: VEDIC RITUAL IMAGINATIONS OF THE WORLD AS A SACRIFICIAL ORDER (YAJÑĀ,
DHARMA)

11 APRIL

INTERLOCUTOR: ASIM SIDDIQUI, AZIM PREMJI UNIVERSITY

LECTURE-3: SELF-KNOWLEDGE (JÑĀNA, VIDYĀ) IN THE UPANIṢADS.

18 APRIL

INTERLOCUTOR: MURSED ALAM, GOUR COLLEGE & ANINDYA PURAKAYASTHA, ILSR KOLKATA

BREAK

LECTURE-4: BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ: THE SONG OF THE BEAUTIFUL LORD

2 MAY

INTERLOCUTOR: SOUMEN MUKHERJEE, PRESIDENCY UNIVERSITY, INDIA

LECTURE-5: VEDĀNTIC NOTIONS OF THE HUMAN SELF AND THE DIVINE GROUND

8 MAY

INTERLOCUTOR: AMINAH MOHAMMAD-ARIF, CNRS, PARIS

LECTURE-6: VEDĀNTIC NOTIONS OF THE HUMAN SELF AND THE DIVINE GROUND

16 MAY

INTERLOCUTOR: SAAD ISMAIL, ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY

BREAK

LECTURE-7: SOCIORELIGIOUS CONTEXTS OF CASTE AND GENDER

30 MAY

INTERLOCUTOR: NAZIMUDDIN SIDDIQUE, JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA, INDIA

LECTURE-8: SOCIORELIGIOUS CONTEXTS OF CASTE AND GENDER

6 JUNE

INTERLOCUTOR: INAMUR RAHMAN, PRESIDENCY UNIVERSITY

LECTURE-9: MULTIPLE STYLES OF POST-1757 HINDU MODERNITY

13 JUNE

INTERLOCUTOR: DIETRICH REETZ, LEIBNIZ-ZENTRUM MODERNER ORIENT, BERLIN

LECTURE-10: MULTIPLE STYLES OF POST-1757 HINDU MODERNITY

20 JUNE

INTERLOCUTOR: SUMAIRA NAWAZ, NLSIU, INDIA & AMARA ALI, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
BERKELEY

LECTURE-11

SITES OF TRANSLATION ACROSS HINDU AND MUSLIM SOCIORELIGIOUS SPACES

27 JUNE

INTERLOCUTOR: SARAH AHMAD, BHU, INDIA



Our Thinkers



Ankur Barua

After a B.Sc. in Physics from St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi, Ankur read Theology and Religious Studies at the Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge. His primary research interests are Vedāntic Hindu philosophical theology and Indo-Islamic styles of sociality. He researches the conceptual constellations and the social structures of the Hindu traditions, both in premodern contexts in South Asia and in colonial milieus where multiple ideas of Hindu identity were configured along transnational circuits between India, Britain, Europe, and USA. Some of these narratives are re-imagined in his work of historical fiction, *The Harvest of Time* (2023). An integral dimension of Ankur's research is the comparative philosophy of religion. He studies the theological and the sociopolitical aspects of Hindu-Christian engagements. In recent years, his research focus has moved to an exploration of the intersections between the idioms of bhakti, yoga, tawhīd, and taṣawwuf on the multiply-stratified postcolonial landscapes of South Asia. He is a trained singer of the devotional songs of Śaṅkaradeva (1449–1568) and Rabindranath Tagore – he frequently resources these sonic streams in his academic research and public lectures.

Sumaira Nawaz is a scholar of Global Intellectual History and Islamic Studies. Her dissertation, "Muslim Periodicals between Worlds, c. 1876–1919," examines how Muslim periodicals in Persian and Urdu, circulating across the Ottoman Empire, Afghanistan, and South Asia, crafted a deeply located and contested sense of cosmopolitanism. Focusing on Istanbul's *Akhtar*, Lahore's *Watan*, Aligarh's *Ma'arif*, and Kabul's *Sirāj ul-Akḥbār*, I ask how these "worldly" periodicals re-oriented their locations of reference to the Muslim East. In doing so, she argues that these periodicals, despite their claims of addressing united Muslim publics, evolved in response to the many print-spheres they moved through, even allowing adverse and hostile voices to circulate on their pages.

Dietrich Reetz is a senior research affiliate at Leibniz Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin, and external faculty member of the Department of Political Science and PI, Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies, Free University Berlin. He has researched and widely published on Islam and Muslims in South Asia, including their global entanglements. He covers South Asia in his monograph "Islam in the Public Sphere: Religious Groups in India, 1900–1947" (Oxford University Press, 2006). His research can be found at <https://dietrichreetz.academia.edu/>.

Amara Ali is a Lecturer in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies. Her research centers on the interplay of Urdu, Hindi, and Kashmiri literary traditions and Islam in South Asia. Her doctoral dissertation provides a literary examination of the Kashmiri marsiya (an elegiac poem), analyzing how this local form articulates a unique Kashmiri aesthetic, while remaining in critical dialogue with the broader Urdu, Persian, and Arabic literary traditions. Earlier, she completed her master's studies at the University of Cambridge, focusing on the celebrated Urdu poets Mirza Ghalib and Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

Aminah Mohammad-Arif is Research Director at France's CNRS (Centre national de recherche scientifique), and an affiliate member of the Centre d'études sud-asiatiques et himalayennes (CNRS-EHESS). She is the author of numerous journal articles, and of books including *Politique et Religions en Asie du Sud. Le sécularisme dans tous ses états?* (co-edited with Christophe Jaffrelot).



Our Thinkers

Soumen Mukherjee (Dr.phil. University of Heidelberg, 2010) teaches history at Presidency University, Kolkata. He is the author of two monographs: *Religion, Mysticism, and Transcultural Entanglements in Modern South Asia: Towards a Global Religious History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024) and *Ismailism and Islam in Modern South Asia: Community and Identity in the Age of Religious Internationals* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), and an array of scholarly articles and book chapters in the fields of religious and intellectual history of modern South Asia. His other publications include three edited collections, viz.: (with Toshio Akai) *Esotericism, Mysticism and the Politics of Transcendence in Modern South Asia* (Anthem, 2025); *Empire, Religion, and Identity: Modern South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (Brill, 2024); and (with Christopher Harding) a special issue titled 'Mind, Soul, and Consciousness: Religion, Science and the Psy-Disciplines in Modern South Asia', *South Asian History and Culture*, 9, 3 (2018), subsequently reprinted as an edited collection (Routledge, 2019). Mukherjee's most recent fellowships include the Smuts Visiting Research Fellowship in Commonwealth Studies at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom (2025); the Charles Wallace India Trust Visiting Fellowship, also at the University of Cambridge (2024); and the Annemarie Schimmel Fellowship awarded by the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London (2023).

Dr. Asim Siddiqui is a faculty of Philosophy and Development Studies at the Azim Premji University India. His research interest lies in anti-caste Liberation philosophy for deepening democracy and creating a compassionate society. He collaborates with several youth focused organisations to facilitate critical thinking and emotional capacity building workshops while engaging with issues of social justice. His PhD research was in Philosophy of Education to interrogate the praxis of transformative pedagogy for addressing discriminatory action. He has also advised and trained many non-profit & for-profit sector organisations in leadership and development, as well as designing their strategy & programs. Earlier he had got a B. Tech from IIT Delhi and was involved in business and social entrepreneurship by setting up a software startup and the youth campaign Jaago Re!.

Sarah Ahmad is a cultural geographer whose research explores Muslim pilgrimage, gendered ritual practices, and interreligious encounters in South Asia. She received her PhD in Geography from Banaras Hindu University, where her work examined Sufi shrines as lived spaces of affect, healing, and vernacular pluralism. Her scholarship engages debates in cultural geography, Islamic studies, and the study of religion, with particular attention to shared devotional landscapes and everyday forms of interfaith coexistence. Her current research extends to questions of digital mediation, sacred space, and transnational religious publics.

Md. Inamur Rahman currently serves as an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Presidency University, Kolkata. He earned his Doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Delhi, where he also completed his M.Phil. in Philosophy. Dr. Rahman teaches a range of courses, particularly in ethics and social and political philosophy. His work generally addresses contemporary moral concerns and key issues in political philosophy. Deeply committed to critical inquiry, his work reflects a sustained engagement with social and political thought, the entanglement of it with metaphysical and epistemic questions, issues of justice and pluralism, alongside an ongoing exploration of alternative frameworks for understanding our engagement with the world.

Saad Ismail, MBBS, MD, is a Senior Resident at the Department of Physiology, Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Aligarh Muslim University. He is the founder and editor of Project Noon, a forum for exploring Hindu-Muslim Studies. He was the recipient of the Cambridge-Hamied Visiting Lecture grant in 2024. His writings and reviews have been published in journals such as *The Journal of Hindu Studies* and *Critical Muslim*.



Our Thinkers

Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha, currently with the Institute of Language Studies and Research (ILSR), Kolkata has been professor of English at Kazi Nazrul University, India. He was the 2025 Global South Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CRASSH), University of Cambridge. He also held a visiting position in 2025 for his research at the École Normale Supérieure, Paris and in 2026, he will be a visiting fellow at the Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg, Germany for his research on global cultures of the Enlightenment. He was a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (2018-19) for his archival research work on W.E.B DuBois. Prof. Purakayastha has been awarded the British Library Endangered Archive Project Grant for a major project on digitization and research on a 19th century archive of Indian knowledge systems and literary-cultural texts, situated in Calcutta, Bengal. He has been a Leibniz Fellow (2023) at the Leibniz Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt and a Visiting Fellow (2022) at the Forschungskolleg Humanwissenschaften, Goethe University Frankfurt. His jointly authored new book, *Beyond Subaltern Studies* is forthcoming from Bloomsbury Academic. He was the Charles Wallace India Trust Translation Fellow (2021) at the British Centre for Literary Translation, University of East Anglia, UK. His research focuses on critical theory, vernacular literary traditions, public humanities, decoloniality studies and the question of violence. He is interested in the fields of “Engaged Literature” and cultural politics. His previous edited and authored books have been published by Edinburgh University Press, ILSR Press, Palgrave Macmillan and Routledge. He co-edits *Kairos, A Journal of Critical Symposium* and is one of the founding members of the Postcolonial Studies Association of the Global South (PSAGS).

Imran Visram recently completed his DPhil in Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford. His research focuses on Islam in South Asia, with particular emphasis on Indo-Ismaili devotional literature. His broader scholarly interests include the role of sonic artistic forms in processes of interreligious engagement and encounter.

Nazimuddin Siddique is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Prior to joining Jamia Millia Islamia, he held academic positions at several institutions. His scholarly work has been published in leading journals such as *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Comparative Migration Studies*, and *Social Scientist*, as well as in prominent media platforms including *Al Jazeera*, *The Wire*, *The Quint*, and *The Indian Express*, among others.

His research interests include social theory, citizenship, democracy, policy and governance, Northeast India, and the study of discrimination.

Mursed Alam is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Gour College, University of Gour Banga, India. He was a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH), University of Edinburgh (2023); a Fellow at ICSI, New School for Social Research, New York (2024) and the Charles Wallace India Trust Fellow (2018). His areas of research include subaltern studies, Bengali Muslim literary and cultural history, indigenous health epistememes in India, Islamic traditions in South Asia, and decoloniality studies. He is the managing editor of *Kairos: A Journal of Critical Symposium* and one of the founding members of the Postcolonial Studies Association of the Global South (PSAGS). His translation of the short stories of Lutfor Rahaman is published by YODA Press in November, 2025. He recently signed a contract with Bloomsbury for his jointly written book on *Beyond Subaltern Studies*. He is currently involved in a Government of West Bengal-sponsored project on the ‘minor’ intellectual traditions from Bengal.

Our Thinkers



AMINAH MOHAMMAD- ARIF



ANKUR BARUA



SARAH AHMAD



ASIM SIDDIQUI



Amara Ali



DIETRITCH REETZ



SOUMEN MUKHERJEE



SAAD ISMAIL



SUMAIRA NAWAZ



IMRAN VISRAM



NAZIMUDDIN SIDDIQUE



ANINDYA PURAKAYASTHA



MURSED ALAM



INAMUR RAHMAN

Postcolonial Studies Association of the Global South (PSAGS) is conceptualised as a forum for critical debate on issues pertaining to postcolonial societies. The forum actively encourages theorising from the Global South, while also promoting critical dialogue and engagement with theories from the Western tradition.

Web Link: (<https://psags.wordpress.com/>)

PSAGS Interfaith Dialogue Forum pursues research and dialogue on religious traditions from and in South Asia, fostering inter-cultural dialogue and co-living for a just and harmonious future society.

Ambedkar Centre for Social and Cultural Studies (ACSCS), Gour College is built on the earlier Ambedkar Study Centre of Gour Mahavidyalaya, which the University Grants Commission funded under the scheme called Epoch-Making Social Thinkers of India. The objectives of the Ambedkar Centre for Social and Cultural Studies can be summed up in the following way:

- To promote research on Ambedkar and other important Indian thinkers on social justice and cultural empowerment
- To organise seminars, workshops and occasional talks on topics related to its stated objective of mainstreaming the minor discourses in the academic circle
- To study and critically analyse the existing social and cultural policies of the country
- To spread awareness about Ambedkar's social thinking among the students.

Convenors

(Web Link: <https://gourmaha.ac.in/ambedkar-centre/>)

Mursed Alam, Gour College, University of Gour Banga

Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha, ILSR Kolkata

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Subhendra Bhowmick, Research Lead, PSAGS

Academic Cohort

Swati Guha, Director, ILSR

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Dhritiman Chakraborty, IQAC, Gour College

Arup Roy, Gour College

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