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Topic: Fluid Faith, Rigid Religion: In the Framework of South Asia

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ABSTRACTS

Santosh Kumar Singh, Dev Nath Pathak, *Introduction: Fluid Faith, Rigid Religion: In the Framework of South Asia*, pp. 7-13.

Complex dynamics of fluid faith and rigid religion is a mainstay in the essays in this special issue of the *International Journal on Humanistic Ideology*. While we admit the significance of utopias we don't give into some of the politically constructed socio-religious atavism. And hence, the essays seek to present manifold reasons for celebration and lamentation at once. After all in the complex socio-cultural and political situation it is unjustifiable to be content with linear formulations. We tend to be optimally critical of linearity that dominates official imagination of religions. Ours is not a census-concern to count religion, nor are we inclined to settle with the simpler text book idea of unity in diversity. We endeavor to understand the becoming and unbecoming in the same breath, and that renders the narratives complex, and analyses nuanced.

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Yogesh Snehi, *Resisting Fluidity, Territorializing Practice*, pp. 15-40.

Abstract: This paper focuses on an understanding of sacred shrines in South Asia. Predominant historical debates on religion in South Asia have situated sacred shrines through the polar lens of either 'antagonism' or 'shared' spaces. Both communalist and secular historiography have utilized these narrative tropes to assign meaning and decode ritual practice at sacred shrines. Historical debates on shrines are thus embroiled in the polarity of such ideological debates. This is despite the intrinsic fluidity of popular sacred spaces in South Asia. Paradoxically, it is this fluidity that has also been violently resisted in recent times. What kind of threat does fluid faith practices pose to expression of fundamentalist beliefs? These kinds of resistances offer us an opportunity to understand the worldview of fluid faiths, and the contours of ritual and bodily practices. Through select case studies, this paper attempts to situate popular Sufi shrines and demonstrates that despite continued resistance, fluid sacred shrines and practices continue to proliferate and offer a critical window to the 'modern' worldview of 'great' religious traditions.

Keywords: sacred shrines, Fundamentalism, popular veneration, territoriality, practice.

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Ratan Kumar Roy, Dev Nath Pathak, *In the Land of Lalon: Enigmatic Interface of Religion and Politics in Bangladesh*, pp. 41-62.

Abstract: The cultural history of Bangladesh gives prominence to Lalon Shah, the renowned Bengali mystic. The shrine of Lalon attracts pilgrims and religious tourists. The mystic sang his vision of the world through songs resembling the bardic style and Baul tradition. The poetic imagination depicted a worldview critical of religious chauvinism, Islamic as well as Hindu. Lalon may have joined the official Bangladeshi heritage value today. But the contradictions that the mystic-singer faced in the colonial times have not disappeared. Even though the Liberation War promised a unity of all Bengali speaking populace in the former Eastern Pakistan, there were prominent quarters of support to the Pakistani army on the religious grounds. The famous Shahbag mobilization, with its precursor and aftermath, underlined that the War criminals, the Bangladeshi supporters of Pakistan, shall be punished. The state did respond to it. But the responses are well within the pale of contradictions. The state in Bangladesh can afford to ignore the importance of ever more aggressive Jamaat-e-Islam.

While the textbook celebration of unity and diversity may count various religious minorities, such as Hindus and Buddhists, along with the majority of Muslims, as amicably coexistent in Bangladesh, one cannot deny the presence of contradictions. Far from the realization of the Lalon's dream of an awakened spiritual self, Bangladesh today is inclined to the ideology of religious majoritarianism.

This essay seeks to delve into the details of the contradictions, spanning historical trajectory, starting from the time of Lalon Shah, the Liberation War, to clarion call for the punishment of the war criminals in the wake of the Shahbag. The objective is to understand the possibility and limits of dealing with the interface of religion and politics in Bangladesh. The essay in implication revisits the idea of secularism in the context of Bangladesh, asking: Was Bangladesh ever secular?

Keywords: Secularism, Bangladesh, Islamic, Lalon Shah, Shahbag, Baul tradition.

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Shiva Rijal, *Rituals, State and Legitimacy: A Study in the Context of Political Power Shifts in Nepal*, pp. 63-77.

Abstract: Culturally significant rituals whether they are conducted in Kumari Ghar (abode of the virgin goddess) of Kathmandu or in Ram Janaki Mandir of Janakpur among others, offer roles for the state head of Nepal to perform. With the 2006 peoples' uprising leading to the declaration of Nepal as a republican state in 2008, such rituals have become sites of contestation for legitimacy between the former king and the president. The first president of the Republic of Nepal, a Madhesi intellectual and the erstwhile senior Nepali statesman, Dr. Ram Baran Yadav, and the second president Ms. Bidhya Devi Bhandari, a widow of the late Communist leader and a senior politician herself, performed rituals that were considered sole prerogatives of the Hindu monarchs for centuries. It is expected of the future Presidents and Prime Ministers to have their own castes, religions and gender in Nepal too. But the fact that rituals need to be given continuity and the state heads need to participate in them for the sake of cultural legitimacy is bound to promote liberal and pragmatic notion of rituals in Nepal. This sociocultural reality of Nepal, the paper argues, demonstrates important facets of rituals that they may not be as strict and closed as they were in religious practices.

Keywords: Hindu monarchy, cultural legitimacy, state, religious rituals, moral, Nepali politics.

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Sheba Saeed, “Spiritual Begging”: The Dichotomy of *Ziyarat* in Pakistan?, pp. 79-103.

Abstract: The article is based on years of researching begging in the context of South Asia around locations such as traffic intersections, bazaars and shrines. The central idea that it explores is how the practice of *Ziyarat* (Visitation), a contested ritual journey to the shrines of Saints, is actually a form of begging, albeit, on a spiritual level. It elaborates on the novel concept of *spiritual begging* and the relationship between such supplication in a sacred space and internal poverty using supporting notes from the field participants and illuminates the intra-religious pluralistic conflict which exists within Islam on this practice.

Keywords: South Asia, Sufism, Islam, spiritual begging, shrines.

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S. Chaminda Padmakumara, *Minority Perceptions of Majoritarian Religion: Interpreting Symbolism of Sinhala Buddhism in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, pp. 105-116.

Abstract: In every religion, devotees often employ religious symbols and adapt them into their own socio-political and cultural spectrums. This religious symbolism has been mostly identified as a surface manifestation of contested socio-political spheres. In the context of Sri Lanka, Buddhism which is nurtured and fortified with its core doctrinal teaching and majoritarian protection is no exception. Therefore, the devotional practices of Buddhism are interwoven with the texture of devotees’ daily experience and have very intangible manifestation in everyday life. At an analytical level, these popular practices are subjugated by twofold performative domains. One is the *devotional or conventional symbolism* through which the devotees satisfy their devotional and emotional needs by performing various ceremonial and ritual acts. The other is *radical or contemporary symbolism* which manifests a certain religious identity for Buddhists while distinguishing themselves from other religious and ethnic entities. The devotional symbolism largely connected with the use of symbolic objects like Buddhist flag, *Dhamma Chakka*, images of Buddha and his disciples, secret *Bodhi* tree and other audio-visual icons for fulfilling devotional needs. In contrast to the basic rounds of rituals and ceremonies of devotional symbolism in Buddhism, radical symbolism is exposed to a more politicized domain where the conventional Buddhist symbols are being politically reinterpreted and utilized for certain political identity formation. In this line of thoughts, it is evident that contemporary Buddhism is not only fabricated by such ideological and political manifestations but also conceive an active role in politics in Sri Lanka. This turn has significantly transformed conventional Buddhist symbolism into more radicalized and self-styled one.

Keywords: Popular Buddhism, Devotional Symbolism, Radical Symbolism, Sinhala Buddhist Ideology.

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Bidhan Chandra Dash, *Faith, Fluidity and Famine: Mahima Movement and the Subversive Subaltern Politics*, pp. 117-145.

Abstract: This paper argues for an understanding of religion as contested ‘terrain of the political’, where dominance and subversion enter a game of transcendence. While the hegemonic religions attempt to manufacture consent, the fluid faiths of the marginalized emerge as a discursive critique and subversive politics. “Mahima Alekh Dharma”, one of the most fascinating and intriguing religious movements of contemporary eastern India, emerged in the late nineteenth century from the womb of a devastating famine. The rebellious religious

movement decried idol-worship and discarded the position of Brahmins as the mediators between Gods and human. Through the prism of the Mahima Movement, this paper explores the dialectical nature of subordination and subversion in the religious terrain of the political and attempts explain how these contestations sculpt the present emancipatory politics of the Dalits and Adivasis.

Keywords: Religion, Politics, Famine, Social Movement, Cultural Hegemony Dalits, Adivasis.

ORN: [IJHI2018v8n1_7](#)

Review 1.

Priyasha Kaul: John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (Eds.), *The Life of Hinduism*, Delhi: Aleph Group Company, 2017, 324 pp., ISBN: 978-93-86021-08-3.

ORN: [IJHI2018v8n1_8](#)

Review 2.

Divyendu Jha: Sugata Bose, *The Nation as Mother and Other Visions of Nationhood*, New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2017, 272 pp., ISBN: 978-0670090112.

ORN: [IJHI2018v8n1_9](#)

Review 3.

Kamini SHARMA: Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (Eds.), *Modern South Asia: History, culture, Political Economy*, London: Routledge, 2017; 278 pp, ISBN:100815350341.

ORN: [IJHI2018v8n1_10](#)

Review 4.

Ashmeet Kaur Bilkhu: Line Nyhagen and Beatrice Halsaa, *Religion, Gender and Citizenship. Women of Faith, Gender Equality and Feminism*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016, 271 pp., ISBN: 978-1-137-40533-3.

ORN: [IJHI2018v8n1_11](#)