Thinking Religion Regionally: Hindu Institutions in Contemporary South India

Ramesh Bairy

Thursday, March 15th
4:30- 5:30 pm
UVic, David Strong Building, Room C118

The ‘Hindu’ institution of the ‘matha’ (often glossed as ‘Hindu monastic order’) has had an extraordinary life in the 20th Century in the south Indian state of Karnataka. Beginning from the last decades of the 19th Century, the matha emerges as perhaps the most significant mediator between caste communities, economy and democratic polity. The puzzle here is: Why and how does this institution radically re-invent itself in response to the modern problems of governmentality, community-making, and understanding of caste as a political identity? This is particularly interesting because mathas in other ‘regions,’ encountering similar demands, appear to recede into a purely ‘religious’ space. Attending to such regional accounts of religion may yet again alert us to the significance of downsizing Big Categories such as Hinduism, Colonialism, and Caste.

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