



# (un)Making the Nation: Religious (un)orthodoxies, Secular (un)certainities and Minorities

Young Researchers' Conference

Postcolonial secularism legitimises itself around the figure of the minority, construed as it often tends to be, by a selective assembling of colonial experiences. The procedures of selection often coincide with the postcolonial national moment, which inevitably pays homage to the majoritarian national imagination. Such national formations extant in South Asia, where religion is accommodated (rather than dispensed with), lead to secularist positions that subject the minority figure to sustained State regulation. The minority is thus produced at the intersections of religious dogma, postcolonial nationalism and secularist narrative. It becomes imperative therefore that we ask the question: Who or what is a minority? Is the minority manufactured by a set of identity markers that is forced into periodic negotiations with the dominant national imagination? For instance, is the “minority” like features of a Parsi, a Christian and a Muslim similar or equitable within the Indian national imagination.

A religious way of imagining the nation represents a longer tradition of collective belonging which may be traced to the European Enlightenment. Such conventions of collective belonging draw our attention to the historical production of minorities, making the figure of the minority as duplicitous as it is contentious. It thus leads us to ask: when a model of secularism is adopted within the national imagination, should the terms of engagement with the minority be defined in terms of *principled distance* or *overlapping consensus*? With the slow but steady resurfacing of majoritarian sensibilities across South Asia, what is the fate of the minority that is caught between religious orthodoxy and secular uncertainties? If, as Talal Asad states, secularism is a range of sensibilities, how much agency does the minority have in the expression of such sensibilities?

In a nation constituted by discourses of secular and religious orthodoxies, the minority figure is the perpetual outlier. This is reinforced when the chief precondition to undermining secularist thought is an articulation of violence against the minority figure. This occurs despite the legitimisation of minority identity in the constitutional narrative and its conscious dissemination in the public sphere. In many ways the contentious relationship between religious orthodoxy and secular nationalism may be ascribed to the treatment of religion as both un-evolved and hence antithetical to the principles of the modern nation-state. Are minorities then the collateral fallouts of this contentious relationship? Is it true that a minority community bereft of agency cannot articulate itself and is thus relegated to the periphery? Do all minorities (within a national imagination) suffer the same experiences of peripheralisation or rather, are all minorities equidistant from the majoritarian centre?

Centre de Sciences Humaines (CSH, Delhi) and Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud (CEIAS - EHESS, Paris) have come together to host this young researchers' conference to investigate the contentious and evolving nature of religion and secularism through the figure of the minority as it has come to be classified within the South Asian national imagination. In a discursive paradigm shaped by religion and secularism, the conference intends to raise the question: does the nation determine its minority or do minorities determine the nation?

In addition to the issues raised, the conference is largely designed to examine the slippages that sustain the continued peripheralisation of certain groups — ethnic/religious/sexual — within a South Asian national imagination. It is intended that we can all come together as scholars to engage in a sustained scrutinisation of religious (un)orthodoxies, secular (un)certainities and the increasingly precarious position of the minority within national imaginations.

This is an online event and is aimed at registered **doctoral scholars** (even scholars who have submitted their thesis) and **postdoctoral scholars**. Even if you are an independent researcher and do not fall within the eligibility bracket we will definitely facilitate a slot for your paper if we find it compelling. We strongly encourage all interested candidates to send in their abstracts.

Paper proposals can engage with but are by no means restricted to the questions below:

Secularism as sensibility and/or principle

Forms of secularity in nation-states that produce and consume the language of religion

Conversion and historicity

Majoritarian politics and the negotiations of secularity

Communalism, majoritarianism and compromise

Public intellectuals, religion and the dialogue on minority identity

Religious accommodation in the secularist imagination

Secularist accommodation in the religious imagination

Secular orthodoxy and the state

Religious orthodoxy and the state

Nation (in spite) of minorities

Interested scholars may email their 300 word abstracts to [unmakethenation@gmail.com](mailto:unmakethenation@gmail.com). All queries may be directed to the same email.

## Important Dates

Submission of abstracts: **15th June, 2021**

Date of notification of selected abstracts: **30<sup>th</sup> June, 2021**

Submission of papers: **20<sup>th</sup> August, 2021**

Conference date (tentative): September, 2021