Cluster Seminars

Compassion and Sanskara in the Context of Neoliberalism:
The Role of a Jain Faith-based Organisation in Eradicating Rural Poverty in Gujarat, India
By Dr Bindi Shah

Date : 1 Sep 2015
Time : 16:00 - 17:30
Venue : Asia Research Institute Seminar Room
        Tower Block Level 10, 469A Bukit Timah Road
        National University of Singapore @ BTC

CHAIRPERSON

Assoc Prof Michael Feener, Asia Research Institute and Department of History, National University of Singapore

ABSTRACT

Based on multi-sited fieldwork over a period of 12 months in India, Britain, USA and Singapore, I examine Triple S, a Jain faith-based organisation’s engagement in eradicating rural poverty in India. I argue that its growth as an organisation, its geographic reach and its heightened moral authority within a span of 20 years can be attributed to the appeal of its reformist Jain approach and focus on education to Jain and non-Jains in India and among diasporic Jains. Operating in transnational social fields, the organisation connects to the circulation of economic, social, cultural and symbolic flows resulting from globalisation. At the national level, India’s adoption of a neoliberal logic introduces not only market driven forces but also an emphasis on self-enterprising and educated subjects. Ong (2006) has argued that such pro-talent strategies are necessarily selective and target certain populations and places. Triple S’ provision of education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels does not challenge such exceptions generated by the neoliberal logic. However, the organisation’s adoption of a reformist Jain approach, emphasizing compassion, sanskara and service without regard to caste, creed, religion, and more recently gender, perhaps softens the impact of the neoliberal logic. This widening of access to value-based education and opportunity for the rural poor in India appeals to both Indian and diasporic Jains, many of whom have shown sustained commitment to the organisation through extensive economic and social support. This case study contributes to debates about the comparative advantage of FBOs in development.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Bindi Shah is a Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore. Her research has addressed the ways in which ethnicity, religion and gender construct identity, belonging and citizenship among the children of Asian immigrants in the UK and USA. Her first book “Laotian Daughters: Working toward Community, Belonging and Environmental Justice”, which has received two prizes, focuses on experiences of adaptation and acculturation among second-generation Laotian young women, and their engagement with community politics and Asian American activism. She has begun work on a new book on the role and significance of Jainism and Jain organisations in the lives of second-generation Jains in the UK and USA, titled “Religion, Identity & Belonging in the Diaspora: Young Jains in Britain and USA”. At ARI, she is working on a new pilot project addressing the impact of diasporic and Indian Jain philanthropy and social remittances flowing through a Jain NGO in Gujarat, India.

REGISTRATION

Admission is free. We would greatly appreciate if you RSVP to Ms Tay Minghua via email: minghua.tay@nus.edu.sg