

For the 17th Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions in Tartu (25th-29th June, 2019) we invite all interested scholars to contribute to the following panel:

Moving Beyond „Hinduism“ – but How?

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Criticisms of the World Religions Paradigm and particularly the problematic concept of “Hinduism” by now have become a well-established and accepted part of the discipline. “Hinduism” has been found lacking in historical applicability, descriptive usefulness, explanatory reliability and is more often distinguished by what it is not. The rise of the modern Hindu right nationalist movements has also evidently contributed to the essentialisation and reification of this confusing concept by building the all-inclusive, global version of “Hinduism”, even in a form of “Hindutva”. Of course, no one is denying the wide-ranging religious diversity present in India, rather scholars have argued over different conceptual and methodological solutions. But, oftentimes these discussions have remained largely methodological, theoretical and critical, without actually showing what kind of alternatives one could adopt to still pursue devotedly empirical, but also conceptually and methodologically credible research as well as communicate that research to the wider public.

Here we would like to a step further and look beyond such historical, theoretical, postcolonial and deconstructive criticisms of the concept. We are in demand of finding practically applicable solutions, which would enable the study of religiosity in India to move forward without the dangers and pitfalls of the particularly problematic concepts of earlier scholarship. The idea behind this panel is to explore the variegated ways in which this could be done (or has already been done) in actual academic practices. All conceptual tools, regardless of their supposed theoretical virtues, need to be usable in concrete, empirical research situations, otherwise they cannot become part of the standard scholarly vocabulary of the discipline.

Thus, we invite scholars to present how they have worked towards moving beyond this label “Hinduism”. Has a particular set of alternative conceptual tools worked in one or another specific empirical research project especially well? Or, how has one solved the issue of teaching courses about the variety of Indian religiosity without falling back on the umbrella term of “Hinduism”? How can one communicate in a more accurate manner the religious situation in India? Can we escape our own cultural and intellectual biases? Or is there a way how to salvage that term by infusing it with a new semantic description? Can we separate religious and spiritual domain from social and political one? Should we take into consideration the perspectives of Dalits, anticaste activists and other oppressed/subaltern groups of Indian society and if so, in what way? Finally, what conceptual impact such reconsiderations could make on continuously shifting descriptions of the vague meaning of “religion” itself?

Papers submitted to this panel could include:

- (1) challenging experiences and evidences from the original anthropological fieldworks dealing with the diverse and often marginalized local, indigenous Indian religious practices, doctrines and cults,
- (2) historical and philological studies related to the religious diversity in India and the conceptual solutions utilized,
- (3) more general, comparative studies and the conceptual choices made therein,
- (4) descriptions of pedagogical strategies used in educational settings,
- (5) communicative practices used in the public sphere, in the media, or elsewhere.

Conference website: <https://easr2019.org/>

Detailed information about the call for individual papers: <https://easr2019.org/call-for-individual-papers/>

Abstract submission portal: <https://www.conftool.com/easr2019/>