

Call for Papers!

Madras University Post-centenary Diamond Jubilee International Seminar on

Pilgrimages and Social Capital: Experiences in ‘Bonding’ or ‘Bridging’?

*Jointly organised by the Departments of Christian Studies and Vaishnavism,
University of Madras*

Concept Note:

Social Capital

‘Social capital’ has become subject of discussion in areas related to sociology, religious studies, civil society, people’s governance, democracy, theory and practice of development, etc. The remote origin of the idea is traced to Adam Smith and Alexis de Toqueville.¹ Smith’s idea of ‘social passions’ (*A Theory of Moral Sentiments*) having power to induce sympathy and willingness to cooperate, and Toqueville’s idea of ‘associational experience’ to create ‘trust and influence others’ are considered the root having the potential ideas that inspired latter-day theorists such as James Coleman and Robert Putnam to theorise on social capital.

Pierre Bourdieu, one of the influential sociologists of the twentieth century, elaborated upon the discourse further. Taking *capital* to be the *species of power* that operates in a given *field*, Bourdieu treated social capital along with economic and cultural capitals as one of the *fundamental species* of capital² and invested the concept with the force analogous to economic capital. He spoke of it as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.”³

Today, it has become one of the important discourses of the present day social sciences, popularised by James Coleman (1990) and Robert Putnam (1993). Coleman, who gave the term a wider currency, sees it as a “set of institutionalized expectations that lead other social actors to reciprocate by making collaborative moves.”⁴ Putnam speaks of social capital as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action.”⁵ Francis Fukuyama, yet another well-known sociologist of our time, speaks of it as “an instantiated informal norm that promotes

¹ Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, “Is Civil Society the Answer?” in *Social Capital – Comparative Perspectives on Civil Society, Participation and Governance*, ed. Sanjeev Prakash and Per Selle (New Delhi: SAGE, 2004), 64-68.

² Cf. Pierre Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 97ff.

³ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 119.

⁴ Rudolph, “Is Civil Society the Answer?” 68.

⁵ Rudolph, “Is Civil Society the Answer?” 68.

cooperation between two or more individuals.”⁶ And he opines that “social capital will occupy center stage”⁷ in the days to come.

Based on these insights, we can come to an understanding of social capital as social trust and reciprocity, which are operative in a given context of social relationships, as a norm, a value, an attitude, etc., on the one hand, and as a structure, an institution, a system, etc., on the other. Both the dimensions are integral to the constitution of social capital, and these are manifest in the number of associations, social networks, and collective efforts for common good.

Social Capital and Religion

Can religion serve as social capital? Would it contribute to social trust and structures of solidarity? What would be the kind of externality it would produce, especially in traditional societies, like India? – are some of the relevant questions to be explored into.

Corwin E. Smidt is confident to say that, “...participation in religious life tends to promote certain beliefs, values, or norms that could contribute to the formation of social capital.”⁸ Religious motivation for social trust is reinforced through religious rituals, spiritualities, customs, habits, etc., and there emerges a sustained social capital out of religious sociality. As Christopher Candland points out, “a community of believers need not have repeated face-to-face interactions to place trust in one another. A shared faith may allow believers to trust in each other...”⁹

However, one of the serious limitations that attend the social capital generated by religions is what scholars call in various terminologies as ‘closure’, ‘negative externality’, ‘bonding’, ‘in-group trust’, ‘organisational encapsulation’, etc. These terminologies point to that reality which obtains when the social trust is circumscribed or bounded rigidly by such identities as kinship, caste, religion, language, and the like. This bounded trust constricts the associational sphere.

As Francis Fukuyama points out, “many groups achieve internal cohesion at the expense of outsiders, who can be treated with suspicion, hostility, or outright hatred.”¹⁰ He is of the opinion that social capital, by its very nature, in comparison to physical or human capital, tends to produce negative externality as against the other two capitals, because human solidarity, oftentimes, is achieved at the cost of building up hostility against the out-groups.

⁶ Francis Fukuyama “Social Capital and Civil Society.” (A paper prepared for delivery at the IMF Conference on Second Generation Reforms), <http://www.imf.org/External/Pubs/FT/seminar/1999/reforms/fukuyama.html>.

⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (London: Penguin, 1995), 362.

⁸ Corwin E Smidt, ed., *Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good* (TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 11.

⁹ Christopher Candland, “Faith as Social Capital: Religion and community development in Southern Asia,” *Policy Sciences*. 33 (2000): 370.

¹⁰ Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, 2.

And, he thinks that social capital, created out of such resources as traditions, norms, religions, kinship, etc are not a good ally of economic development.¹¹

Thus we have scholarly opinion on both sides of the interface between religion and social capital, i.e., there are those who are confident and others skeptical of religion's potential to serve as social capital.

Pilgrimages and Social Capital

In this context, we witness to the global resurgence of religion today. One of the salient and resurgent religious activities that we witness to is religious pilgrimages. Every religion has its own honoured beliefs, practices and revered sacred places. Pilgrimage is an important religious practice, observed in all religious traditions. Indian subcontinent is known for sacred places, spread across the country.¹² Pilgrimages / *theertayatra* to prominent sacred places¹³ have been practised for many centuries. To date they are widely being practised by major religions in India and other South Asian countries too.¹⁴ Traditional forms of pilgrimage to sacred places both on-foot and by transportations are on the increase today aided by modern facilities. In addition, virtual pilgrimages,¹⁵ aided by internet access and web hosts, have surfaced as yet another major form of pilgrimage in the contemporary modern world.

The proposed international conference intends to explore pilgrimages for their potential of social capital. Do pilgrimages generate wider open structures of social trust ('bridging') or inward looking spaces and dynamics ('bonding') with negative externalities?

Studies on pilgrimage show that strong ideological underpinnings with fundamental and communalistic incline, as Vasudha Narayanan,¹⁶ Bryan Pfaffenberger,¹⁷ and Peter B.

¹¹ Cf. Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, 2-3.

¹² Eck argues in her book that it is the sacred places intertwined with similar myths across the country that has helped retain its identity as one country rather than the political. Diana L. Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2012).

¹³ This includes places of rivers, forests, scene of natural beauty and mythological significances.

¹⁴ Rana P. B. Singh, a prolific writer on pilgrimage (108 research articles and 9 book chapters), says that around 250 million people make pilgrimage every year in India. Rana P. B. Singh, ed., *Hindu Tradition of Pilgrimage: Sacred Space and System* (New Delhi: Dev Publishers and Distributors, 2013), 7.

¹⁵ It is being understood as "an important religious phenomenon for understanding the new ways of being spiritual in the postmodern world." "Virtual Pilgrimage on the Internet," accessed October 30, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248593551_Virtual_Pilgrimage_on_the_Internet.

¹⁶ She highlights how politicisation of rituals can make a sacred territory also a contested territory. Vasudha Narayanan, "Sacred Land, Common Ground, Contested Territory: the Healing Mother of Velankanni Basilica and the Infant Jesus Shrine in Bangalore," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, 17 (March, 2013):20-32, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org>.

¹⁷ He refers to the annual pilgrimage practice at Katragama in which an intersection of major traditions-Hinduism and Buddhism, and other traditions participate. He argues that at a superficial level, everyone seems to be well-knitted without any problem, but a deeper level of enquiry shows that there is contrasting views and motives maintaining the social divide. Bryan Pfaffenberger, "The Kataragama Pilgrimage: Hindu-Buddhist Interactions and its Significance in Sri Lanka's Polyethnic Social System", *Journal of Asian Studies* 38, no .2 (1979): 253.

Anderson¹⁸ argue, tend to foreground ‘bonding’ identities, straining the possibility of relationality and interreligious harmony. This way, religious identities are seen to be problematic.

On the contrary, organised¹⁹ and voluntary-interfaith pilgrimages²⁰ are shown to promote relationality and bridging identities, as Sarah Thorley,²¹ Francis X. Clooney²² and others highlight, which show a character of openness to the other - to learn and relate- laying thus the road for harmonious co-existence and harmony, which is necessary in a country like India which has multi-religious identities. These views underscore the point that pilgrimage could promote inter-religious harmony and could disrupt it as well.

In the light of the above discussion, this seminar seeks to explore the “lived-in experiences” of the two-fold dynamics of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’, especially in relation to Indian pilgrimages with an enquiry- ‘are they promoting bonding of traditional ascriptive identities or a relational identity?; are they encouraging a closure and enclosure of identities, or are they setting in motion religious conflict or harmony?; do they in anyway engage with Indian specific issues like caste, linguistic divisions, regional differences, social discriminations, etc.?’

The seminar will have presentations by a select group of invited speakers who are experts in this field, and by those who respond to call for papers. Following are the major sub-themes of the main topic:

- ❖ Pilgrimages Today – Phenomenological Explorations
- ❖ Pilgrimages and Social Capital: Are they Experiences in Social Trust and Bridging?
- ❖ Pilgrimages and Social Capital: Are they Experiences in Bonding and Negative Externality?

¹⁸ In a comparative analysis, he highlights the varying degrees of openness, and its corresponding effect as regards ‘bridging and bonding’ aspect of pilgrimage. Peter B. Anderson, “Processions and chariot festival in Tharmgambadi and Velankanni: Cultural encounters and marking,” *review of development and change*, 15, no. 1-2 (2009): 271-288.

¹⁹ Pilgrimages are organised with the aim to foster interreligious understanding and harmony. A Popular inter-faith activity- a walk round places of worship had been jointly organised by Bishop’s committee for Interreligious Dialogue and Ignatian spirituality, accessed 1.4.2017,

www.interfaithscotland.org/app/.../Interfaith+Scotland+Newsletter+Spring+2014.pdf

²⁰ Individuals on their own or with familiar groups make pilgrimage to sacred places other than one’s own.

²¹ She points out to the an organised inter-faith pilgrimage endeavour about which pilgrims share their experience in which they show openness to learn from others, from their rooted identity. Sarah Thorley, “Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: Interfaith pilgrimage-Journeys Across Boundaries, 187, accessed April 1, 2017, <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/40Thorley.pdf> Also, a similar point is highlighted in the popular inter-faith activity- a walk around places of worship, organised jointly by Bishop’s committee for Interreligious Dialogue and Ignatian spirituality.

²² He highlights the experience of Abishktanada, who experienced deeply the grace of Arunachala, almost a longing to cross over from his rooted identity. This shows that interreligious pilgrimages, in some ways, could contribute to openness to the other, reducing the possibility of friction and misunderstanding. Francis X. Clooney, “On the Holiness of Holy places: Some reflections on the inter-religious possibility and problem,” in *Shrines and Pilgrimages: Philosophy and Practice*, ed. Lawrence S. Fernandes (Chennai: Vijay Nicole Imprints Private Limited, 2016): 9-12.

- ❖ Pilgrimages and Potentials for Interreligious Harmony
- ❖ Pilgrimages and Civil Society today
- ❖ Pilgrimages, Religious Tourism and Global Civil Society

Note:

- ❖ Proposals for individual papers or panels must contain not more than 300 words, and it must reach the organisers by 30th December 2017. The decision of the review committee will be communicated to the applicants by 3rd January 2018. Please send your proposal to: Mr. Ulagaraja on ulagaraja@yahoo.com, or the office on xtianstudies@gmail.com
- ❖ Select articles will be published in peer reviewed journals, after the conference
- ❖ Accommodation and travel expenses will have to be spent by individuals themselves. However, a few travel subsidies will be made available to Indian paper presenters who will be selected on a competitive basis. Meals and snacks during both the days, and a seminar kit will be provided to all participants
- ❖ Registration fee: Foreign paper presenters / participants - \$ 50; Indian paper presenters – Rs. 800; Student and other participants – Rs. 400.
- ❖ For further query, please contact Mr. Ulagaraja on 95 9781 3114

Dates of the Seminar: 13 & 14 March 2018

Venue: University of Madras

Conference Committee

- *Convener: Dr. G. Patrick (Dept of Christian Studies)*
- *Co-convener: Dr. K. Dayanidhi (Dept of Vaishnavism)*
- *Co-ordinator: Dr. James K. Ponniah*
- *Organising Secretary: Mr. Ulagaraja (Research Scholar, Dept of Christian Studies)*