

ISAS Public Lecture Series



Secularization with Hindu Characteristics

a talk by

Ajay Verghese

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University of California, Riverside**

ABSTRACT: In India, the world's largest democracy, the symbiotic relationship between Secularization theory represents one of the most bitter, contentious, and long-running debates in social science. This thesis – broadly construed, the argument that modernization weakens religion – has led to claims, counterclaims, and counter-counterclaims that probably go back three centuries. However, one area of agreement among both proponents and opponents of the theory is that secularization is a distinctly western process. Theoretically, scholars have narrowly defined the terms “religion” and “secularization” in ways that effectively exclude nonwestern traditions like the Eastern religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shinto. And empirically, scholars have been preoccupied with the same small coterie of western countries in their analyses while almost no attention has been paid to nonwestern cases. This talk tries to reinvigorate the study of secularization by examining Hinduism in India, the world's largest Eastern tradition with over one billion followers. India should be considered a “crucial case” for secularization theory as a deeply religious and fast-developing country. Dr. Verghese developed an ethnographically-informed survey measure of Hindu secularism, and conducted an original survey of 900 Hindus in the north Indian state of Bihar, along with participant observation and follow-up interviews. He shows that rising education and income have mixed effects on Hindu secularization, but rising health is the most consistent predictor of secular attitudes.

SPEAKER BIO: Ajay Verghese is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Riverside. He received a BA in 2005 from Temple University and a Ph.D. in 2013 from The George Washington University. His research interests are focused on South Asian Politics, Political History, Ethnicity, Political Violence, Secularism, and Methodology. He was a post-doctoral fellow from 2012-13 at the Asia-Pacific Research Center at Stanford University, and an Assistant Professor of Political Science from 2013-15 at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. He has a book, *The Colonial Origins of Ethnic Violence in India*, forthcoming at Stanford University Press, and an article forthcoming at *Modern Asian Studies*

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3-4:30 Pm

**10 Stephens Hall, (For directions look up “Institute for
South Asia Studies” on Google Maps)**

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