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**RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN INDIA. BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY:
RELIGION AND UNIVERSAL HUMAN VALUES**

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Abstract: The lack of academic religious studies in India has several causes: the choice of the secular University of London as model for the first universities in India in 1857, the secular constitution, the secularist approach of the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the explosive relation between major faith traditions. However, with the waning of the Indian secularist framework and the continued power and influence of Hindutva ideology, there is a need to discuss different models for religious studies in India. In this article, the point of departure is Banaras Hindu University (BHU), one of the few universities in India that has religious studies, but also a faculty of Hindu theology. The focus is on the history of BHU and the recommendations of several educational commission from the 1930s to the 60s, with a note on recent attempts at BHU of renewing value education. The aim is to highlight one alternative for developing religious studies in India, whose primary goal is the formation of good citizens enabled by a set of universal human values instantiated in local traditions.

Key words: Banaras Hindu University, Religious Studies, Human Values, India

1. Introduction

The lack of academic religious studies in India has several causes: the choice of the British of the secular University of London as model for the first universities in India in 1857, the secular constitution, the secularist approach of the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the explosive relation between major faith traditions. With the waning of secularism and the rise of Hindu nationalism, there is, however, high time to discuss ways of promoting religious studies in India (Llewellyn 2008; Narayanan 2015; Sander, Cavallin, and Kumar 2016).

One approach is to choose sociology of religion as the paradigm, thus reinforcing a secular agnostic framework and understanding of religious beliefs and practices as dependent upon social socio-cultural structures and forces. This is the case, for example, in the newly established Centre for the Study of Religion and Society at Jadavpur University (CSRS 2018).

If sociology of religion is close to enlightenment critiques of religion, a religious humanist approach instead looks to religious traditions for inspiration in the formulation of values and the promotion of human development. It connects creatively to scriptures and probes them for a universal humanism underlying the bewildering plurality of religious traditions. One such example is Rabindranath Tagore's use and understanding of religion that influenced the constitution of comparative religion at Vishva Bharati University in West Bengal (Mukherjee 2014, 2015). Another example, also closely connected to the struggle for Indian independence, is Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi (BHU).

In the following, we will present the history of BHU and relate it to the reports of several education commission between the 1930s and 60s, and present some recent examples at BHU of a renewed focus on value education, which are connected to the continued power and influence of Hindutva ideology.

With this article, we want to stimulate the discussion of different models for developing religious studies in India. At present we are working on a book on the same theme together with both Indian and Western scholars. The material presented here is some chips from that workshop.

2. History of Banaras Hindu University

Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861–1946) was a man of many talents: schoolteacher, lawyer, journalist and prominent leader in the Indian independence movement (Maini, Pandey and Chandramouli 2011). One of his major projects during the struggle for Indian self-rule was to found a modern Hindu university, which would combine the best of the Sanskrit tradition with the best of western science.

In 1835, the English colonial powers had decided that higher education in India should be in English with the aim of creating an indigenous elite “English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.” (Macaulay [1835] 1965; Datta 2017, 33). Education in the most modern of subjects, technology and natural sciences, was low priority as the aim was to educate civil servants for the colonial administration (Fjällsby 2013, 155).

Such an internalized colonialism had to be replaced by an Indian cultural framework, if self-governance would be possible not only politically but also in a spiritual and cultural sense. Malaviya’s idea was that a Hindu University should, “seek not only merely to turn out men as engineers, scientists, doctors, merchants, theologians, but also men of high character, probity and honour whose conduct through life will show that they bear the hall-mark of a great university. Such character can be most securely built upon the solid foundation of religion” (quoted in Maini, Pandey and Chandramouli 2011, 103).

It is important to note that this focus on technology and natural sciences, and, at the same time, Hindu cultural and religious traditions constituted a combined challenge to the colonial idea of higher education. Malaviya was attempting to forge a form of Hindu modernity, combining tradition and western style science. His vision of Hindu civilization was revivalist; true greatness lay in the distant past and had to be recreated through the study of Sanskrit texts. But he read into the mythical Golden Age modern ideas of rationality and science. For Malaviya reform was thus a way of recapturing what had been lost, while at the same time Vedic wisdom was adapted to the needs of a modernizing India.

Already in 1875, a Muslim institution of higher education had been founded, Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College. Its founder Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, wanted as Malaviya to combine western education (his model was Oxford and Cambridge) with an Indian religio-cultural identity, in this case Islam. Instead of *ulama*, that is, traditional Muslim scholars, his ideal was “educated Muslim gentlemen” (Lelyveld 1982, 93). The college became a central university in 1920 under the name Aligarh Muslim University and developed into an important location for the Pakistan movement (Abbas 2014).

Moreover, in 1892, the Singh Sabha Movement (then only two decades old) established the Khalsa College in Amritsar to strengthen Sikh identity. The main threat for young Sikhs was to be absorbed into the Hindu background and lose their Sikh distinctiveness; especially troublesome was the neo-Hindu organization Arya Samaj (*A History of the Khalsa College* 1949, 9). From the beginning, religious instruction was, therefore, part of the curriculum, and in 1905 a chair in Divinity (Sikhism) was established (*A History of Khalsa College* 1949, 64).

In Varanasi, there was already a Hindu institution of higher education, the Central Hindu College, founded in 1898 by the British

Theosophist Annie Besant (1847–1933) (Taylor 1992, 280). The theosophical idea of Indian education was similar to that of Malaviya, described by Per-Olof Fjällsby in the following way, “The first task of a national education is therefore to re-connect itself to one’s own religious traditions (note the plural) in order to create the pupils’ self-confidence.” (Fjällsby 2011, 170). The accusation was, however, that behind the Hindu veneer lay hidden an esoteric worldview, according to which all religions were only outer trappings of a hidden wisdom. These suspicions developed into a crisis when Besant launched her protégé, Krishnamurti as the new world savior and supported another leader of Theosophy, Charles Leadbeater, despite him being accused of improper sexual behavior toward boys (Tillett 1982, 279f.).

After launching a competing university project, the University of India in 1907, Besant joined forces with Malaviya in 1911, as she failed to find support for her own idea. The agreement was that Central Hindu College would merge with the planned BHU (Fjällsby 2011, 199). And it functioned as a college within BHU until 1966 when it was transformed into the Faculty of Arts.

To Malaviya the Hindu religion (which included Buddhism and Jainism) was the very foundation of his project of uplift of India through education; in the same way as it had been the vital power behind the ancient glory of Hindu civilization, and its neglect, according to him, had been the cause of nine hundred years of decline (Malaviya [1904] 2012, 104). To revive religion and its medium the Sanskrit language, Malaviya believed, was to give a firm basis for those virtues and ethical principles necessary for higher education and eventually self-rule. As he wrote in his proposal for a Hindu University, “The morality inculcated by the sages of India comprehends all the virtues which are necessary for the unmolested existence and harmonious cooperation of mankind” (Malaviya [1904] 2012, 101).

The cooperation of BHU with the British authorities led Mahatma Gandhi, who had delivered his first political and controversial speech in India as part of the opening of BHU in 1916, the so-called Benares Incident (Tidrick 2006, 116f.), to lay the foundation stone in 1921 for Kashi Vidyapith, an independent university in Varanasi (Renold 2005, 91). There teaching was in Hindi and it accepted no money from the government, thereby staying outside the control of the colonial power, while BHU had been instituted by a government charter. Kashi Vidyapith was, however, in a sense not a Hindu university, at least not in the same meaning as BHU, but based itself on a secular vision of national education. On the campus, there was a temple to mother India (*Bharat Mata*), who was present in the form of relief map of South Asia on the floor, but there was no faculty of theology, or a department of religion. Moreover, also science and technology were largely missing. As Leah Renold writes, “The goal of the

vidyapiths was not to produce well-educated men, but freedom fighters (Renold 2005, 102).

In his opening speech at Kashi Vidyapith, Gandhi said that he was sad that Malaviya had declined to participate, but his intention was either that BHU was to become his, that is, conform to Gandhi's idea of struggle for national independence, or he was to destroy it. This was not empty words. Gandhi tried to make the students boycott BHU; and, in the early 1930's, he almost succeeded to shut down BHU as part of the Non-cooperation Movement, but Malaviya managed to keep the doors of the university open (Renold 2005, 91). And, later, during the BHU silver jubilee in 1942, Malaviya and Gandhi sat beside each other peacefully (Dwivedi 2011, 1093). In hindsight, Malaviya's serene and cautious approach seems more realistic with its balance between tradition and modernity, while Gandhi, in a sense, rejected both, the first for a radical political ideal and the second for the humble technology of the traditional Indian village.

BHU was different also in another way compared with the first three universities established in 1857 by the British in India (Calcutta, Bombay and Madras), which were based on the model of London University founded in 1826 as a more open alternative to Oxford and Cambridge, which at that time only admitted Anglican students (Datta 2017, 44). Consequently, the three first Indian universities were secular and focused on examining students, while all teaching was carried out within affiliated colleges (Narayan 2015, 12). In contrast, BHU was residential as Oxford and Cambridge, with both teaching and examination taking place on campus. For Malaviya the formation of the moral character of the students was crucial.

In a similar way as at Kashi Vidyapith, Malaviya wanted to have a Hindu temple at the center of the BHU. But it is telling that, instead of making the nation into the principal god as at Kashi Vidyapith, he built a variant of the famous Vishwanath Mandir in Varanasi and also named it Shri Vishwanath Mandir. The foundation stone of the temple was laid in March 1931, but the building was finished only in 1966, due to that few donors wanted to give for this specific purpose (Renold 2005, 135).

The delayed building process is in a way symbolical for the fate of Malaviya's vision. In her book on the pre-independence years of BHU, *A Hindu Education*, Leah Renold describes how the grand plan of Malaviya with Hindu theology as a central force at the university largely failed. The students were primarily interested in western subjects that made a career possible, while traditional Sanskrit studies, though offered for free, only attracted poor students with few alternatives. Moreover, during this period only Brahmins were allowed to teach at the faculty of theology, and women were not accepted as students.

The same fate befell other initiatives toward making a Hindu religious identity and not only a loose cultural ethos central. For example, obligatory religious instruction for Hindu students became optional. This

had been a central idea for Malaviya: “Objection has also been taken to the provision for compulsory religious education in the proposed University. My Lord, to remove that provision would be like cutting the heart out of the scheme” (Malaviya [1915] 2012, 109).

And in a 1929 address to students, he said: “Remember that the whole creation is one existence, regulated and upheld by one eternal, all-pervading intelligent power, or energy, one supreme life without which no life can exist” (Malaviya 2012 [1929], 137); “Do not discard religion” ([1929] 2012, 139).

His vision was, however, not a narrow religious identity, but a broad understanding of what it meant to be Hindu. “My Lord, the University will be a denominational institution but not a sectarian one. It will not promote narrow sectarianism but a broad liberation of mind and a religious spirit which will promote brotherly feeling between man and man” (Malaviya 2012 [1915], 109).

Also the Sunday Gita lecture series that started in 1932 did not attract students in great numbers, even if he himself gave the lectures in the beginning. After his retirement in 1939, Malaviya continued to come to the Gita discourse every Sunday, but he “would get disheartened by the poor interest shown by the students” (Pandey 2013, 43). The venue shifted to the Arts College Hall and finally to Malaviya Bhavan, the former on-campus residence of Malaviya; now a cultural center, offering among other things yoga classes.

3. Education Commissions in India

It is interesting to contrast the situation at BHU with the recommendations of several education commissions from the 1930s to the middle of the 1960s. The Zakir Hussain Committee (1938), which was influenced by the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, focused on elementary education and in its so-called Warda Scheme it advised against obligatory religious education in schools, but recommended that such education would be provided after school and arranged by the religious organizations themselves (Faruqi 199, 166f).

On the other hand, in 1948, the first commission of independent India, the University Education Commission, also known as the Radhakrishnan Commission as it was chaired by the philosopher and statesman S. Radhakrishnan, recommended studies of religion for all students in each of the three undergraduate years. “During the first year such a course might well treat of the lives of great religious leaders of all faiths; the second year may be used for presenting the most universal elements of the great religious scriptures; and the third year class may be engaged in a study of the problems of philosophy of religion” (*The Report of the University Education Commission* [1950] 1963, 113).

The idea of the commission reflected the neo-advaita reformist philosophy of Radhakrishnan and argued for the teaching of comparative religion based on a perennialist understanding of religious traditions. That is, beneath the bewildering variety of rituals, myths and ethical principles was a common core, which could be of help in the reform of Indian religions and to form “a new civilization from our own history” (*Report* 1963, 135). This entailed a creative reading of the world’s religions, and a sifting of good and evil elements. “Religious problems are a challenge to our universities. It is their duty to discriminate between the elements that give strength, dignity and meaning to human life and those that are degrading to our dignity, to apply rational methods of criticism to narrow and intolerant sectarianism and thus turn religious fanatics into scholars. By emphasizing the high summits of knowledge where the truths of all religions converge, they can dispel the shadows of the errors and follies of the past, and infuse into the minds and tempers of future generations Mahatma Gandhi’s ideals of truth, tolerance and nonviolence” (*Report* 1963, 135).

Under the heading of “Religious Education,” in relation to paragraph 28 (which then carried the number 22), the commission refers to the opinion of Ambedkar, the Dalit leader known as the Father of the Indian constitution, and quotes him as saying, “My own view is this, that religious instruction is to be distinguished from research or study.” And the commission draws the conclusion: “Religion can be studied critically, as part of a course in general culture. There is a difference between the preaching of dogma and a philosophical study of religion. While the former is precluded, the latter is permitted. There shall be no sectarian indoctrination in State institutions. But history of religion and of religious institutions, comparative religion, philosophy of religion can all be studied even in institutions maintained wholly out of State funds” (*Report* 1963, 255).

The commission, however, took one further step. It defines religion not as creed (that is, dogmas) nor emotions or rituals, but as a changed life (*Report* 1963, 257). The conclusion was that “religion” is realized through “spiritual training.” What is then such a non-sectarian training as distinct from the comparative study of religions highlighting their unchanging common core? First, it is not found within theology, from which the commission distances itself with strong words. “To introduce these studies [confessional theology] in a University is to make a sharp break with the critical methods of inquiry followed in other disciplines of the curriculum. To prescribe dogmatic religions in a community of many different faiths is to revive the religious controversies of the past. To turn the students over to theologians of different denominations for instruction in the conflicting systems of salvation is to undermine that fellowship of learning which defines a college or a university” (*Report* 1963, 258)

Unsurprisingly, considering Radhakrishnan's own disciplinary identity, the path forward is instead a "philosophical attitude," that "lifts us above the wrangling of dogmatist[s]" (*Report* 1963, 258). And, as described above, the three tiered religious studies curriculum reaches its culmination in the philosophy of religion. The goal is described with almost poetic inspiration, "When we step above the creeds and enter into the truth we will find that there is a common universe of discourse transcending the differences of tongues" (*Report* 1963, 260).

And in harmony with the focus on spiritual training, beside the three-year curriculum of the study of universal religion, the commission recommended that each educational institution begins the day with a few minutes of silent meditation (*Report* 1963, 265).

The report also treats both Banaras Hindu University and Aligarh Muslim University in special sections. The commission notes that BHU is obliged to give religious instruction to Hindu students, something which is permitted by the Indian constitution as the university is an endowed institution. Nevertheless, the commission recommends that the university adopts the policies in the commission report and, "and give to their students instruction in the essential principles of other religions and the unity of all religions" (*Report* 1963, 406).

It is important to add that Radhakrishnan at that time actually had been Vice Chancellor of BHU from 1939 until 1948, that is, up to a year before the report was published. And whenever he was in Banaras, he would deliver the Sunday Gita lecture (Murty and Vohra 1990, 100).

The next commission to raise the question of religious studies was the Committee on Religious and Moral Instruction, the so-called Sri Prakasa Commission (1959). Similarly as the Radhakrishnan report, its conclusion was a recommendation to introduce comparative studies of religious leaders and their teachings with the aim of "good manners, social service and true patriotism" and that every day at the university should start with a short silent meditation, and perhaps a non-denominational prayer (*Report of the Committee on Religious and Moral Instruction* [1959]1960, 16). And it added the suggestion of a post-graduate course in comparative religion.

However, as Eugene Smith comments, it did not propose comparative religion as a way to a universal religion, but to knowledge and tolerance of other religions (Smith 1963, 356). "By knowing in broad outline the beliefs of our countrymen in all their variety, we shall add to the fund of our knowledge, and with this knowledge and understanding, ignorance which breeds prejudice and bigotry will give way to tolerance and sympathetic appreciation of the religious life of our fellow citizen" (*Report* 1960, 11).

Interestingly for our purposes, in the beginning of the report, there is a rather lengthy discussion of the concept of religion, which is included in the name of the commission, while in the instruction from the ministry of education "religion" was exchanged for "spirituality." The report states,

“We think that these words [moral and spiritual values] are more appropriate for they are non-controversial, for one thing, and also because the word “religion” has, in the course of time, come to have certain unfortunate associations (*Report 1960*, 2–5).” It is especially the divisive nature of religion that is emphasized, but later in the text, the report makes clear that the wording of the constitution also poses a problem. “In order to avoid constitutional difficulties arising out of Article 28 of the Constitution, as mentioned in paragraph 3, the terms of reference laid down for us, speak of “moral and spiritual values in educational institutions”, and not religious education as such” (*Report 1960*, 10).

The commission includes in the term spiritual values: inner peace and happiness, unselfishness, and patriotism. The basis is the belief in a spiritual soul but the direction of the values derived from it is toward a harmoniously functioning society, not individual salvation. The opposite of spirituality is, therefore, selfish individualism, “Anything that takes us out of our self, and inspires us to sacrifice for the good of others or for a great cause, is of spiritual value (*Report 1960*, 15).

However the next installment of this story, the so-called Kothari Commission (1964–1966), states that the bold suggestions by the Radhakrishnan and Prakasha commissions have had little effect on higher education. The response had been, “neither active nor enthusiastic” (*Report of the Education Commission 1966*, 19). And the commission tries to add more weight behind the recommendations and says that central and state governments should introduce teaching in “moral, social and spiritual values” in all institutions (*Ibid*). Once again, the combination of a three-year study of comparative religion and establishment of departments of comparative religion responsible for this is put forward (*Report 1966*, 20, see also 206f., 615).

The question is, however, what the cause of the inertia was that has made this so difficult in the Indian system. Was it parallel with the failure of Malaviya’s vision at BHU? Almost as an answer, the next paragraph deals with secularism and religion. A secularist policy is defined as that no religion will be favoured or discriminated and that no instruction in religious dogma will be provided in State schools” (*Report 1966*, 20). However, this is qualified as not being hostile against religious faiths but as geared toward tolerance and “active reverence toward all religions” (*Report 1966*, 20).

Then the report distinguishes between “religious education” and “education about religions.” The first is the self-reflection of a particular tradition, while the second is a broad study of many religious traditions. The first is not possible at Indian universities while the latter is a necessity for tolerance. The commission recommends a syllabus of the major religions as part of a course in citizenship or as part of general education. The course should focus on similarities and broad moral and spiritual

values. Once again, it is stated that textbooks suited for such courses should be written.

The result of the commission was the 1968 National Policy on Education, but this was silent on the question of religious and spiritual values and the importance of comparative religion. It did once mention “moral and social values” but suggested no policy recommendations even remotely similar to that of the commission in this area, but put it into the context of “ideal of a socialist pattern of society” (National Policy on Education, 1968, §3). The same is true of the next national policy in 1986 which was amended in 1992. It highlights the goals of the constitution as “socialism, secularity and democracy” (National Policy on Education 1986, §2.2).

However, under part VIII “Reorienting the content and process of education,” there is first a section on the “cultural perspective” and then one on “value education.” The threat is here identified as “increasing cynicism.” Education should thus “foster universal and eternal values” but which those are is not specified. Instead, the text enumerates negative values: “obscurantism, religious fanaticism, violence, superstition and fatalism” (National Policy on Education 1986, §8.5), which disregards religion and spirituality in favor of enlightenment values.

4. Present Situation

In the interviews we conducted with lecturers and professors at BHU (2014–2017), a common theme was that the original vision of Malaviya for the university had been neglected in favour of a western idea of higher education – that the university had turned into an instrument for career enabling, and not for character building according to Hindu values. One disillusioned professor of Sanskrit even lamented: “Most of BHU however, has no sense of values, culture or religion. What BHU produce nowadays is not knowledge, it only gives information and degrees. Focus is on the students’ career and moneymaking ability. BHU has been totally Christianized; it is neither Hindu nor Muslim.”

Such critics often blamed this development on the ethos of the growing Indian middle class, which according to professors (especially those in the humanities) was overly influenced by Western ideas such as individualization and materialism.

Another cause frequently mentioned was the form of secularism written into Article 28, Clause 1 of the Indian Constitution, which mandates that there should be “no religious instruction in state educational institutions” (*The Constitution of India*). However, none seemed to know about Clause 2, which exempts endowed universities such as BHU from the requirements of Clause 1 (Smith 1963, 132).

Moreover, none of our informants seemed familiar with the various educational commissions that have discussed the teaching of religion in Indian schools and universities since 1938. It is therefore unsurprising that most of our informants interpreted the constitutional ban on religious education and obligatory secularism in a harder way than the commissions up to the middle of the 1960s did.

Still, the majority of our informants at BHU argued for a return to a stronger focus on character cultivation in the education programs at BHU, but varied to what degree they considered it possible to recapture Malaviya's original vision and thus offering an alternative to the forces of global capitalism.

Some even, as the commissions from 1949 to 1966, advocated comparative religion in order to develop mutual respect for all the world's religions and to curb communitarian tensions. Others endorsed what they claimed to be Malaviya's original ideal: cultivating morally good individuals on the basis of traditional Vedic wisdom — that is, infusing students with human values characteristic of *sanātana dharma*.

One reason for the latter option was that it would not come into conflict with the restriction mentioned in the Constitution and promoted by the UGC, since dharma (according to them) is not religion. Instead, it consists of universal human values of transcendent origin that are applicable to, or even inherent in, all human beings, and thus independent of any given religious tradition in the Western sense.

Many of our informants agreed that of late, especially since the Modi government came to power in 2014, there has been an increased interest in the wisdom of ancient India. But most of the interviewees were cautious and pointed to that despite increased interest and talk about Malaviya's ideas during recent years there has been no policy level changes in teaching and research. The question is whether the agenda of BJP is foremost that of modernisation and catering to the "pecuniary" middle classes with merely a nod to Gita-based value education or if they are sincere about introducing value based dharmic education. A sign that this is not the case was when in October 2017, the Union Minister, Satya Pal Singh, announced that a new education policy was imminent, with the aim to "decolonize' the Indian mind" (*The Hindu* 2017).

And at BHU there have been some interesting developments toward renewed attention to value courses with a base in Hindu dharma. One such initiative is the establishment of the Malaviya Moolya Anusheelan Kendra centre for values and ethics in 1991 which offers a three credit value course for engineering students since 1998 and organize various value workshops. Another value course at BHU "Value Education for Integrated Personality Development" is offered at Malaviya Bhavan, the former residence of Malaviya (www.bhu.ac.in/malviya.php). It is also here that the Sunday Gita courses are held.

Professor A. N. Tripathi, former professor at Indian Institute of Technology in Varanasi, who developed the first value course and was a founder of the Malaviya Centre writes in his book *Human Values*: “The crisis situation demands vigorous exploration and generation of new ideas in all dimensions of life values—social, aesthetic, ethical and spiritual. Collectively they can all be put under the umbrella term ‘Human Values’. Its core philosophical concepts would require creative synthesis of the modern humanist and communitarian thoughts on human life and society, and the holistic Indian world view.” (Tripathi 2009 [2006], 16).

In this we can hear an echo of Malaviya’s original attempt to fuse western modernity and Hindu dharma. Tripathi makes a clear difference between religion as a mere outward form of ritual performance and dharma as a moral code and ethical principles which encompasses the whole of life: “Therefore dharma is concerned with all aspects of life – individual conduct, family relations, social life, public administration, political life, etc.” (Tripathi 2009, 13) When Dharma shrinks to mere religion “performing prescribed poojas, rituals, going to temples, observance of fasts etc.” (ibid) then this holistic way of life is lost.

At the IIT in Varanasi, there are presently (since 2014) two compulsory value courses: *Universal Human values 1, Self and Family* and *Universal Human Values 2, Self, Society and Nature*. The reference literature beside one course book on human values which were listed for the courses in 2017 mostly fall within the broader sense of Hindu encompassing both Hinduism and Buddhism, for example, *Autobiography of a Yogi* and *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse.

The model for these courses is the Human Values course introduced at IIT-Hyderabad in 2005 (Kumar et al.) which was based on classroom discussions and not on lectures. That is, “the course does not teach values,” but “encourages students to discover what they consider valuable. Accordingly, they should be able to discriminate between valuable and the superficial in real situations in their life” (Kumar et al., 4).

In the same spirit, the leaders of the Human Value courses at the IIT in Varanasi maintained that human values cannot be taught by means of traditional university pedagogy (lectures, book study, etc.), but instead require a “practical pedagogy” that helps students to discover their innate values (cf. Mahmood, 2005). The main part of the course was conducted through a mentored weeklong workshop consisting of discussions and analysis.

5. Conclusion

The situation at BHU is symptomatic of the general development of religious studies in India. After a period in which secularist and revivalist approaches cooperated in achieving independence, the former gained the upper hand while the latter continued to live on as an ideal as seen in the

education commission until the 1960s. However, the forward thrust of Soviet style modernization, the career ambitions of students, and later Westernization, made this ideal largely impotent. With the waning of secularism and the increasing political power and influence of Hindutva ideology, this is set to change even though teachers at BHU are skeptical if these attempts at value education really can match the forces of the global market economy, the career interests of students, and western science and technology.

Still, if religious studies will be established more widely in India as a result of a rethinking of the secularity of education and in this case especially higher education, a dharmic human values approach directed toward the moral formation of citizens might become the preferred alternative to the often secularist approaches of sociology and psychology of religion. The recent initiatives at human values education both at the IIT in Varanasi, as at other IITs in India, and at BHU, point in this direction. The question is if this can find common ground with a broad study of religious traditions or if it will develop into a set of values suitable part of a Hindu state ideology. That is, will the renewed relevance of Malaviya's vision at BHU contribute to the cultivation of tolerance or will the focus on dharmic values primarily be used to reinforce a strong sense of cultural belonging, in this case Hindu. Or, will it be able to do both, as Malaviya wished.

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