

## **Indian Political Thought Conference, National Law School of India University**

**Keynote Address:** Prof. Madhavan K. Palat on “Nehru’s Democracy”

**Date** – Jan 8, 2025

**Time** – 6.30 pm

**Venue** – Bangalore International Centre (BIC)

### **DAY ONE | Jan 9, 2025**

**Venue** – Allen and Overy, NLSIU

#### **PANEL I – LAW**

**Time** – 9.00-11.00am

#### **MODERATOR: Sidharth Chauhan**

**Bio:** Sidharth Chauhan is an Assistant Professor of Law at the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru. Before joining NLSIU, he served as a faculty member at NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, for 11 years. His teaching and research focus on Indian Constitutional Law, Legal Philosophy, and Comparative Public Law.

#### **PANELISTS:**

##### **1. Prof (Dr.) Sudhir Krishnaswamy**

**Bio:** Prof (Dr.) Sudhir Krishnaswamy is the Vice-Chancellor of NLSIU, Bengaluru and the Secretary-Treasurer of the Consortium of National Law Universities. He is a Member of the Independent Oversight Board that makes content moderation decisions on Facebook and Instagram platforms. His current research focuses on constitutional law, the empirical analysis of the legal, political and governance systems and the regulation of new and emerging technologies including artificial intelligence and automated decision systems.

##### **2. Dr. Moiz Tundawala: (online)**

**Bio:** Dr Moiz Tundawala is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights and Faculty of Law in the University of Oxford. Moiz researches in the areas of public law, legal and constitutional theory, intellectual

history and global political thought. Moiz is currently on leave as an Associate Professor of Law at Jindal Global Law School in Delhi NCR India.

**Title:** “*Constituent Power versus Constitutionalism in Hindu and Muslim Political Thought*”

**Abstract:** The key intellectual fault line driving constitutional theory today is the tension between the limits of constitutionalism and the illimitability of constituent power. My paper situates this debate within Hindu and Muslim political thought in South Asia, recasting it as a clash between the prohibitive authority of law and the acquisitive force of sovereignty. I argue that the ethno-nationalist and socio-religious movements of Hindutva and Islamism have shaped the state in postcolonial India and Pakistan through two radically divergent trajectories: Hindutva reconfigures Hinduism substantially as a religion of sovereignty, while Islamism reinterprets Islam essentially as a religion of law. This marks a striking yet regrettable departure from the anticolonial moment, when modernist renditions of Hinduism and Islam treated the two concepts as inextricably entwined. Drawing upon the political thought of Savarkar, Maududi, Gandhi and Iqbal, and putting them in conversation with Kelsen and Schmitt, I establish that only by reckoning with law and sovereignty together can we sustain the political world as a collective space for a life in common.

### 3. Dr. Sandipto Dasgupta

**Bio:** Dr. Sandipto Dasgupta is an Assistant Professor of Politics at The New School for Social Research. His research focuses on the history of modern political and social thought, with particular emphasis on the political theory of empire, decolonization, and the challenges of postcolonial societies. He is the author of *Legalizing the Revolution: India and the Constitution of the Postcolony* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), which examines the institutionalization of emerging postcolonial futures through a historical analysis of India's constitution-making process.

**Title:** “*Property v. Sovereignty in the Postcolonial World: How to read the debates over property rights after independence*”

**Abstract:** The extensive debate about property rights following independence – especially around nationalization and land reform – has generally been understood in terms of practical compromise or middle path, between a market economy and socialism. In its place I will suggest a different framework – property v. sovereignty. The central question is to what extent the newly acquired postcolonial sovereignty is able to challenge and reshape the regime of property inherited from the colonial past. This framework allows us to do two things that I believe is important to a history of Indian political and social thought: locate it within the larger intellectual currents of the newly decolonized world of mid-twentieth century, and delineate the relationship between political thought and political economy.

## PANEL II – AUTHORITY

Time – 11.30am-1.30pm

### **MODERATOR: Aishwarya Birla**

**Bio:** Aishwarya Birla serves as an Assistant Professor of Law at NLSIU.

### **PANELISTS:**

#### **1. Prof. Shruti Kapila**

**Bio:** Shruti Kapila is a Professor of History and Politics at the University of Cambridge, where she also serves as the Director of Studies at Corpus Christi College and Co-Director of the Global Humanities Initiative. Currently, she is a visiting professor at the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore.

#### **2. Dr. Karthick Ram Manoharan**

**Bio:** Dr. Karthick Ram Manoharan is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru. Previously, he held the position of Marie Sklodowska-Curie Actions Individual Fellow at the University of Wolverhampton.

**Title:** “*Commissarial Plus: The Indian Emergency and its Implications for (Schmittian) Political Theory*”

**Abstract:** Carl Schmitt argues that emergency situations give rise to an exercise of sovereign power, which further results in the elimination of internal pluralism in states. After the declaration of the Emergency, Indira Gandhi repeatedly emphasized that the Emergency would protect Indian democracy from falling prey to anti-pluralist forces, accusing chiefly the Hindu Right and the extreme left of posing a threat to Indian pluralism. And the sovereign “political” in 1975 saw these formations as challenges to its power and marked them as enemies. Indira Gandhi affirmed that India will not be a one-party state and that the rule of law will not be abandoned. She further claimed that the change of the Constitution’s Preamble to include “socialism” and “secularism” was done to protect diverse interests and marginalized groups. This poses considerable conceptual challenges to Schmittian theory where the question of internal pluralism or diversity are seen as obstacles to the realization of sovereignty.

#### **3. Dr Arun Thiruvengadam**

**Bio:** Dr. Arun Thiruvengadam joined NLSIU in September 2021 as a Professor of Law. His teaching and research interests lie in the areas of Constitutional and Administrative law in India; Comparative constitutional law; Law and Development; Law and Politics in South Asia; and Welfare Rights.

**Title:** “*Exploring the changing dynamics of ‘Authority’ and ‘Separation of Powers’ in the Indian Regulatory State (1950-2025)*”

**Abstract:** I will use my presentation to set out some preliminary thoughts on a larger research project which seeks to explore how traditional concepts of authority and Separation of Powers are at play in the evolution of Regulation in India. Regulation in India is generally understood as extending across three phases: Phase I, lasting from 1950- 1990/91 ('The Dirigiste State'); Phase II, lasting from 1990/91 to 2014 ('The New Regulatory State'); and Phase III, lasting from 2014 to the present ('The Modi State'). While tracking the working of these two allied concepts across this long time period will be impossible in a short presentation, I will lay out the contours of the project and use a few examples to highlight some puzzling and contradictory trends.

### **PANEL III – VISIONS OF GEOPOLITICS**

**Time** – 2.30-4.30pm

#### **MODERATOR: Dr. Anindita Adhikari**

**Bio:** Dr. Anindita is an Assistant Professor of Social Sciences at NLSIU. A political sociologist, her research focuses on social movements, bureaucracies, the politics of welfare provisioning, and the processes of democratic deepening.

#### **PANELISTS**

##### **1. Prof. Faisal Devji**

**Bio:** Prof. Faisal Devji is professor of Indian history and fellow of St Antony's College at the University of Oxford, where he is also the director of the Asian Studies Centre. His research focuses on the intellectual history and political thought of modern South Asia, the emergence of Islam as a global category, and the cultural and philosophical meanings of violence and non-violence as political projects. He also explores how the concept of humanity gains political significance in the context of globalization, with recent work examining post colonial alternatives to the nation-state and the legacy of anarchism.

**Title:** *"From Revolution to Civil War"*

**Abstract:** History only comes to define the political imagination in modern times, when we start thinking of the future in terms of trajectories, genealogies, and teleologies that can be made or predicted in advance. For Arendt this shift can be seen in the transition from civil war to revolution as the crucial political event. Today we are faced with the decline of revolution and the global return of civil war to the political imagination. And this move is matched by the collapse of history's defining role in structuring such an imagination. How can we think about the joint career of history and civil war? I shall argue that India and the non-Western world more generally has played a crucial role in this history and now come to define it.

##### **2. Rahul Sagar**

**Bio:** Rahul Sagar is a Laurance S. Rockefeller Visiting Professor at Princeton University and Global Network Associate Professor at NYU Abu Dhabi. His most recent books include *The Progressive Maharaja: Sir Madhava Rao's Hints on the Art and Science of Government* (2022) and *Krishna Kumari: The Tragedy of India* (2024).

**Title:** “*Is Chanakya the Past or the Future?*”

**Abstract:** For a millennia and more, India was home to a thriving tradition of commentary on the principles of statecraft, or *niti shastra*. However, about two centuries ago, discussion of *niti shastra* suddenly retreated from the public sphere into the relatively obscure world of Indology. This presentation identifies the causes behind this dramatic change, and argues that as some of these causes now begin to wane, the *niti shastra* tradition may wax again.

## DAY TWO | Jan 10, 2025

Venue – Allen and Overy, NLSIU

### PANEL I – LIBERALISM

**MODERATOR:** Atreyee Majumdar

**Bio:** Dr. Atreyee Majumdar, an Associate Professor of Social Sciences, is an anthropologist specializing in South Asia. Her research explores themes of late capitalism, hinterland urbanisms, time, space, scale, and, more recently, religion through the lens of Krishna worship traditions in northern India, commonly referred to as Bhakti.

#### PANELISTS:

##### 1. Rajeev Bhargava

**Bio:** Rajeev Bhargava has been at the CSDS since 2005 and is currently the director of its newly launched Institute of Indian Thought. He was the Director of the centre from 2007- 2014. He has been a Professor at the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (1980-2005), and between 2001 and 2005 was Head, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi.

**Title:** “*The fragile past and the shattered present of Indian secularism*”

##### 2. Rochana Bajpai: (online)

**Bio:** Rochana Bajpai is a Professor of Politics with research interests spanning liberalism and minority rights, constitution-making, political representation, comparative political thought, political ideologies, and modern Indian politics. She is currently the Principal Investigator for the Pluralist Agreement and Constitutional Transformation (PACT) project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

**Title:** *“Pluralizing pluralism: Diversity in the Indian Constitution”*

**Abstract:** How do states deal with claims for group differentiated rights? What effects do state policies have on societal plurality? Influential post-colonial approaches have argued that state policies and practices (enumeration, classification etc) lack the resources to accommodate diversity, and entrench boundaries and differences between groups. My presentation challenges and complicates this view. I argue that the Indian Constitution embodies multiple approaches towards diversity and is a leading example of what might be termed political pluralism. It is integrationist in some policy areas (eg. representation provisions), and multicultural in others (eg. family laws). The multiple state approaches to diversity it contains vary not only across different groups (eg religious minorities and Dalits), but also importantly, with respect to the same group (eg tribal minorities). Scholars have tended to see political pluralism as desirable both from the standpoint of the accommodation of diversity and the endurance of democratic institutions. Indian constitutional history however also suggests that political pluralism is not always pluralist in the sense of respecting cultural difference from a standpoint of equality. While political pluralism can promote the survival of democratic institutions, it also offers opportunities for the expansion of state power which is the key threat to democracy across the world today.

### **3. Dr. Salmoli Chaudhuri:**

**Bio:** Dr. Salmoli Choudhuri, Assistant Professor of Law at NLSIU and Affiliated Faculty with the M.K. Nambyar Memorial Chair, is an intellectual historian specializing in the evolution of legal and political concepts. Her research focuses on how ideas of sovereignty, freedom, and law were redefined in global South Asia by anticolonial thinkers who challenged conventional ideologies, shaping modern and contemporary thought.

**Title:** *“After Liberalism: Tagore and a New Idea of Freedom”*

**Abstract:** Though persistently asked, the question whether Tagore is a thinker of liberalism often yields an inadequate answer. This is because it depends on what one means by liberalism and their orientation towards Tagore himself. I argue that Tagore’s critical stance against nationalism and certain versions of the state may not be reducible to doctrinal liberalism. And yet, until his last year, he continued to repose faith in the rule of law, equality before the law, and liberal education. What is crucial to reckon with is the retreat of old-style liberal politics in the twentieth century, not just in India but worldwide. As sacrifice and death formed the horizon of subjective experience globally, Tagore powerfully offered a new idea of freedom, one that radically called for the reimagination of the human subject on the universal basis of creative surplus. Rather than being a heroic enterprise of the romantic artist, freedom in creation was inseparably tied to the question of collective belonging.

## **PANEL II – CASTE**

**MODERATOR: Aniket Nandan**

**Bio:** Dr. Aniket Nandan is a sociologist and Assistant Professor at the National Law School of India University, Bangalore. He teaches in the BA LLB and MPP programs and also serves as the Assistant Director of the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy at NLSIU.

### 1. Chandan Gowda

**Bio:** Dr. Chandan Gowda is a distinguished academic and currently serves as the Shri Ramakrishna Hegde Chair Professor of Decentralization and Development at the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bengaluru, a position he has held since April 2021. Dr. Gowda has previously served as an Associate Professor of Sociology at the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore, and as a Professor of Sociology at Azim Premji University, Bangalore.

**Title:** “*Caste in Lohia’s Thought*”

**Abstract:** In the public imagination, the figure of Rammanohar Lohia is closely tied to the policy pursuit of caste equality in the country. Lohia's writings on caste, including those found in his influential book, *The Caste System*, reveal however the multilayered nature of the socialist leader’s thinking on caste. This talk attempts to recuperate Lohia’s distinctive elaborations on the issue of cast

### 2. Dr. Suraj Yengde:

**Bio:** Dr. Suraj Yengde is a DPhil candidate at the Faculty of History. He is the author of the bestselling book *Caste Matters* (2019) and the co-editor, alongside Dr. Anand Teltumbde, of the award-winning anthology *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections* (2018).

**Title:** “*Ambedkar’s Udarwaad*”

### 3. Shivani Kapoor

**Bio:** Shivani Kapoor is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Writing Studies, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, India. Her work examines the relationship between caste, sensory politics and labour in the leather industry in India. She has published on these ideas in several journals and books.

**Title:** “*Writing as Resistance: Caste, Body and Time in Tulsi Ram’s Murdahiya*”

**Abstract:** The act of ‘writing life’ has played an important role in revealing caste and also in mounting the resistance against the hierarchies and violence of this imposed socio-political order. Given the prohibitions that caste places on knowledge production, voice and inclusion into the public, the very act of writing and its circulation become political acts against caste. Autobiographical literature produced by Dalits has been able to complicate questions of caste experience because of their insistence on recording, memorializing and representing layered and intimate details of lives ordered by caste. This paper examines *Murdahiya* and *Manikarnika*, the two-part autobiography of Tulsi Ram in order to understand how the author deploys nuanced notions of body and time in producing a text of caste resistance.

## PANEL III – RELIGION/SECULARISM

Time – 2.30-4.30pm

### PANELISTS

#### 1. Gitanjali Surendran

**Bio:** Gitanjali Surendran is professor of history at Jindal Global Law School. She is the author of *Democracy's Dhamma: Buddhism in the Making of Modern India, c 1890-1956* (Cambridge University Press, 2024).

**Title:** “*Anagarika Dharmapala and Swami Vivekananda in an Age of Religious Universalism*”

**Abstract:** Anagarika Dharmapala and Swami Vivekananda had similar starts in life and similar goals with regard to their respective faiths. They both had star-making turns at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 following which they were briefly friendly. They had similar afterlives in their countries with both being associated with muscular versions of their religions. In these early years, they served as interlocutors for each other. In this paper, I will compare their ideas and activism on themes of religious universalism, the figure of the renouncer-ascetic and a certain 'spiritualized' politics.

#### 2. Jessica Patterson:

**Bio:** Dr Jessica Patterson is an assistant professor of History and Politics at Trinity College, University of Cambridge. She is a historian of British and South Asian intellectual culture and political thought, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Her work to date has placed a particular emphasis on the politics of enlightenment and empire in the context of the East India Company.

**Title:** “*Religion and the spirit of the Constitution*”

**Abstract:** In his 1748 text *Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu's proposition was that laws were only meaningful in the context of the wider 'spirit' of the body of law to which they belonged. In turn, deciphering this 'spirit' or essence, required a greater appreciation of such laws in relation to the government, physical environment, political economy, social attitudes and religion of a situated time and place. Such an approach was influential among political thinkers engaged in the ex post facto legitimization of the expansion of British power in India from 1750 onward. Contesting versions of Indian history, appeals to Mughal and ancient Hindu constitutional settlements, as well as competing accounts of Indian religion, were all pivotal to the debate. This paper will trace some of these threads in pursuit of a broader intellectual history of how India, and the question of the spirit of its laws,



shaped European political thought in pivotal ways in the century to come.

### 3. Rinku Lamba

**Bio:** Dr. Rinku Lamba, an Associate Professor at NLSIU, previously served for over 13 years at the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her work focuses on state power, multiculturalism, secularism, and conceptions of religion in India, as well as on the political thought of Ranade, Phule, Ambedkar and Gandhi.

**Title:** “*Kabir, Gandhi and Religious Pluralism*”

**Abstract:** MK Gandhi can be assumed to be speaking to a community that was beginning to see itself as a nation. But the ‘poet-saint’ Kabir’s appeals predate national orders. Still, both comment on aspects of social hierarchies. And, arguably, common to both is a bid to draw on *normative religion* to carve out a space through which people with ethical disagreements could nevertheless coalesce around something to, at the very least, comprehend something about the nature of that disagreement. Through attention to normative religion, a diversity of groups seems to be exhorted to discern something that could be of common concern.

But does Gandhi’s location characterise his view as one that is suited mainly to national orders, and Kabir’s to pre-national ones? Or might an analysis of their perspectives demonstrate that for figures like Kabir and Gandhi, who lived centuries apart, normative orders would be ones that prioritised the exercise of political judgment over an emphasis on the domains of rule and legislation? I address these questions in the paper and consider whether a focus on the perspectives of Kabir and Gandhi can highlight conceptual connections, across time periods, in stances on religious pluralism in the ‘Indian’ subcontinent.