1. 'Community religions' at the University of Leeds.

Kim Knott, 1984

A series of research papers produced in conjunction with the 'Community Religions Project in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds.

The papers in this series are working documents only, some having been given at seminars and conferences, and some having been published. They may be cited freely, but quotations from them may be published only with the written permission of the Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, The University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT.
The Community Religions Project (CRP) was first initiated as a research group within the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds in 1976 (see Appendix 1). Its raison d'être was the apparent diversity of religious groups, and the variety of their beliefs and practices, in Leeds and neighbouring cities. There seems nothing odd about this diversity now - or indeed the fact of being interested in this diversity - as scholarly works, conferences, newspaper articles, and so on have begun to deal seriously with the issue of religious and cultural pluralism. However, despite the work of the Institute of Race Relations and the Community Relations Commission in the 1960s, and the growth in interest amongst educators in the teaching of religion in multi-faith schools, the academic study of 'ethnic minority religions' in Britain has been slow to develop. The reasons for this are many, and we need not go into them here, but certainly in 1976 and 1977 the case for such study at the university level had to be urged imaginatively. Addressing a senior seminar group at Leeds, Michael Pye - who until leaving the department in 1982 was responsible for the day-to-day running of the project - considered the question of studying 'what is nearby':

Since the writer himself is prone to study what lies thousands of miles away or hundreds of years ago it may seem odd for him to urge the study of what is near at hand. Yet it is the experience of observing and reflecting on real-life phenomena the very existence of which is hardly known to one's contemporaries which sets up strain in the way one views the world. Presumably this is a common experience in principle, for perhaps all specialisms are equidistant from each other. Yet our views of the world are disturbingly if interestingly diverse. What is self-evident to one is recherché or exotic to another.

By now the City of Leeds itself contains population elements from south and east of the Hindu Kush. In addition the hymns of Martin Luther are sung in German, the Catholic mass is celebrated by Poles, and Greek Orthodox perform their exits and entrances in the Church of the Three Hierarchs directly beside the main West Indian and Sikh communities of Chapeltown. Moreover, Yorkshiremen are interesting too, and so is the Church of England in its mysterious empirical forms.
This diversity of religious forms encouraged a wealth of ideas for their investigation, and many of these were reflected in the schemes of study and research initiated by the 'CRP' between 1976 and 1978, and the working papers and research papers produced at that time.\(^3\) The CRP schemes were varied. They included a photographic study of religion in Leeds, a bibliography on religions in West Yorkshire, a study of Hinduism in Leeds and another of Bengali Muslims in Bradford, and an investigation of 'inner city religion'. Most of the files opened during this period are now shut: all but three of the fifteen schemes of study have been completed (see Appendix 2). In addition to these schemes, the CRP also produced papers. Some were no more than notes on ideas, future directions, advice for users and so on. These were entitled 'working papers' (see Appendix 3). Those that presented the findings from empirical studies were distributed as 'research papers' (see Appendix 4).\(^4\) These included studies of the religious practices of the Hindus and Sikhs in Leeds, a manual for the computer based CRP bibliography, and two statistical analyses of South Asians by religion and ethnicity. This collection of working and research papers was produced between 1976 and 1980.

In the early years the aim of the project was not only to stimulate independent research interest but to establish both a bibliographic base, and a local 'data-base' which might support this interest. Thus the main day-to-day work, which was conducted voluntarily (particularly by Michael Pye, Richard Toon and myself), was concerned with collecting references and names of contacts, gathering local ephemera, writing letters requesting materials, and indexing those materials collected. It was not until 1979 that a substantial grant was given by the SSRC to continue and develop this work.\(^5\) 'Religion and Religions in Leeds', as the one-year project was called, was set up to provide 'a detailed portrait of religion in a modern British city'. During this period the work of locating and mapping religious institutions in the city was continued, references were gathered and indexed using the University's computer facilities, and local and national religious groups were contacted by letter and asked to contribute
materials to the CRP collection. An end of year report and an atlas of religious institutions in Leeds records the results of this project. In addition, an index of assorted books, articles and ephemera is housed in computer files, and the material itself is located in the CRP collection.

To some extent the end of this project marked the end of an era. Those people who had been most involved in the day-to-day running of the project moved on to other work commitments. Michael Pye spent a year in Japan, and then in 1982 left Leeds to take up a chair at Marburg. Richard Toon moved over to the Department of Sociology to continue work on religion in Leeds which, while developing some of the interests and issues stimulated by the CRP, demanded a full commitment that left very little time for the task of maintaining the CRP bibliography or data collection (see Appendix 5). I concentrated on completing my Ph.D. thesis, and in early 1982 began work on a project on religion in the media in the Department of Sociology. The Community Religions Project was kept alive during this period by the efforts of Dr. Ursula King, with secretarial help provided by Jill Killington. They continued the process of collecting relevant material and indexing it, gathering names and addresses of contacts, and so on.

Then, in 1983, an application was made to the University Research Fund for a three-year grant to support a study of 'Ethnic Minority Religions in Britain'. The main thrust of this study was to continue the work of the CRP by compiling national information relating to particular minority faiths. From the many applications submitted this proposal was selected with a number of others to receive financial support from the University.

As a consequence of this, full-time work began anew on the Community Religions Project, and it no longer had to depend on sporadic voluntary help. I was employed on a three-year contract from October 1983 as Research Fellow with a brief to undertake,
a national survey of the religions of ethnic minority groups recently settled in Britain with particular emphasis on Asian and West Indian communities. This would include the collection of geographical, historical and statistical information (on the geographical location and numerical distribution, ethnic composition, history of immigration, religious affiliation, beliefs and practices of the members of ethnic minority groups), the production of maps, and an analysis of the religious dynamics of ethnic minority groups within British society as well as of indigenous reactions to the presence of religious beliefs and practices originating from different cultures.  

Thus the emphasis of the Community Religions Project shifted from an exhaustive concern with religious institutions and groups in the local area to an interest focussing on particular groups at the national level, on the Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Afro-Caribbean communities. Work on the religions of Leeds and its environs, of necessity, became no more than a contribution to a much wider survey of ethnic minority religions in Britain.

Within this broad aim - to conduct a national study of these four religious communities - a number of practical objectives were proposed:

(a) the production of a handbook on the religions of ethnic minorities in Britain for use by students, teachers, and those working in the field of community relations, education and social work;

(b) the production of research papers and monographs on research related to particular ethnic groups, methodological considerations, etc.;

(c) the provision of information sheets and education packs;

(d) the provision of advice and material for the course on the religions of ethnic minorities now running in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies;

(e) the establishment of a resource base for the provision of information on bibliographical and audio-visual materials, minority contacts, parallel studies, etc.
Since the beginning of the study in October last year it is the last of these objectives which has claimed most attention. The Community Religions Project does not masquerade as a 'resources centre' for the study of ethnic minority religions in Britain. The factors of money, time and space loom as insurmountable obstacles to this goal. Instead, we hope to establish a data-base from which we can provide interested individuals and institutions with information on relevant materials and contacts. For example, we hope to be able to issue lists of references to works on particular religious groups, their beliefs, practices, social divisions, art, historical traditions, and so on. The same kind of resource information will eventually be available on relevant national associations, researchers, religious leaders, community relations agencies, etc. Both the bibliography, and the guide to who's who in the world of ethnic minority religions are to be open-ended, computerised indexes which can be sorted and searched either by author, title (or contact-name, and address), or 'keyword'.

This information will probably begin to be available for enquiries later in the year, although the process of gathering relevant references will be far from complete at that stage. Of the other objectives, the production of research papers and monographs might well begin in the near future, although the handbook, in which the project's findings will be compiled, will not be produced until the final year of study (1985-6).

The one notable absence from this short historical report on the work of the Community Religions Project is any substantial mention of the religions themselves or the people who adhere to them. There is quite simply no room to discuss the settlement background of the Sikhs, the domestic rituals of the Hindus, the question of the education of Muslim girls, or the multiple adherence patterns of West Indian churchgoers, despite the fact that these are some of the very issues which will be considered in the coming months. Above and beyond these particular issues however, are two over-arching questions with which we cannot but be concerned:
What is the relationship between religion and ethnicity, and what religious changes have taken place for minorities as a result of their migration to this country? South Asians and West Indians, in settling in Britain, have had to come to terms with a new geographical and social location in which, as minorities, they have sought to establish themselves and to maintain their traditions. For some groups religious and ethnic identity are co-extensive: the turban, for example, represents to some extent the social and religious cohesion of the Punjabi Sikhs. More often, several different ethnic enclaves, like the Punjabi and Gujarati Hindus with their various caste divisions, share a common religious identity. In religious groups where this occurs tensions are often felt, and religion sometimes becomes subordinate to other interests in the search to find a distinctive social and political identity. Religion remains important, but in association with such things as culture, language, caste, and business activity. The process of the transplantation of a religion from one place to another, and the subsequent need to maintain that religion effectively in its new location are not without influence on the content of the religion itself: collective ritual practice may well become more significant; children's language classes may develop; new religious groups and sects may become popular; folk practices may fall away. Such issues as these, indicative as they are of the dynamics of any religion either through time or place, will demand our attention over the next three years.

Community Religions Project.
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Footnotes

1. The 'steering committee' consisted of Michael Pye, Ursula King and William Weaver. In addition, there were three advisers (Roger Ballard, Owen Cole and Robert Towler), and two research students (Richard Toon and Kim Knott) who participated in the running of the group.


3. The report produced for the project by Richard Toon in 1979 lists fifteen schemes of study, thirteen working papers, and seven research papers. In 1980 a religious atlas of Leeds and a further research paper were added to this material and in 1981 and 1982 two research theses were completed and housed in the CRP collection.

4. These materials are available for consultation in the CRP collection in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

5. In 1979 funding for a one-year project was made available by the Social Science Research Council to Robert Towler. This project was the first of three in which outside funds were awarded to the Department of Sociology (in association with the Department of Theology and Religious Studies) for the study of contemporary British religion. Richard Toon was research assistant on this one-year project.

6. These can be consulted in the CRP collection.

7. Richard Toon was employed for two years nine months on the SSRC project 'Conventional religion and common religion in Leeds'. The project ran from January 1981 to September 1983. A series of religious research papers chart the development of the project (and of the project referred to in footnote 8), and can be consulted in the CRP collection.
8. 'Media portrayals of religion and their reception' was funded by the Christendom Trust for a period of eighteen months from January 1982 to June 1983.

9. This application was compiled by Dr. Ursula King, and proposed by Professor David Jenkins.

10. From the proposal to the University Research Fund, 1983.

11. The material collected over recent years on the local area is still housed in the CRP collection, and is available for consultation in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

12. 'Keywords' are given to every bibliographical or contact reference in order that we might later search our computer files for works pertaining to such topics as young Hindus in Britain ('Hinduism', and 'Youth'), or statistical studies of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in Britain ('Statistical', 'South Asian', 'Hinduism', 'Sikhism', 'Islam'). (As the index makes primary reference to Britain it is not designated as a keyword: studies of a similar nature undertaken elsewhere are cited 'Parallel', and given a keyword which corresponds to their country of reference, eg. 'Norway'.)
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

1981-1983

'Conventional religion and common religion in Leeds'. (SSRC funded project, HR7720)

1982-1983

'Media portrayals of religion and their reception'. (Project funded by the Christendom Trust)

1979-1980

'REligion and religions in contemporary Leeds'
(SSRC funded project, HR6914)

1977-1979

Various schemes of study and research, and the production of working papers and research papers.
(Funded by the D.S.S., the Spalding Trust, Kodak and the University Research Fund)

1980-1983

Continuation and completion of existing schemes of study, design of undergraduate option courses, etc.
(Funded by the Department of Theology, the University Research Fund, and the Spalding Trust.)

1983-1986

'Ethnic minority religions in Britain'.
(Project funded chiefly by the University Research fund, with additional help from the Department of Theology, and the Spalding Trust.)
APPENDIX 2

CRP Schemes 1977-1979


6. Initial funding for minor expenses of CRP.


12. Computerised subject index for CRP bibliography.  
   Richard Toon, Harry Wykes.

13. Bibliography of religion in West Yorkshire (Phase 2).  

   Advisor: Richard Toon.

   Richard Toon (Robert Towler).

In 1983 the following schemes had been completed:

1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15. Schemes 1, 12 and 13,  
though completed, provide a framework for continuing work in these  
areas. Scheme 7 is in abeyance, and schemes 4 and 11 are still in  
progress.
APPENDIX 3


1. Proposals for formation of a research group, 1976.

2. Indication of the kind of work the CRP may initially undertake, 1976.


4. Provisional list of religious groups found in and around Leeds, 1977.


This series of working papers was discontinued after 1980. Copies of these papers are held in the CRP collection, and are available for consultation.
APPENDIX 4

CRP Research Papers 1977-1282


In recent years the following three titles have also been produced in association with the Community Religions Project:

'Interim atlas of places of worship in Leeds', Richard Toon, 1980. (See CRP Scheme 15.)

'The Bengali Muslims of Bradford: a study of their observance of Islam with special reference to the function of the mosque and the work of the imam', Stephen Barton, M.Phil thesis, 1981. (See CRP Scheme 10.)
(See CRP Scheme 9.)

All these titles are available for consultation in the CRP collection.
APPENDIX 5

Religious Research Papers, Department of Sociology, 1981-84

A series of research papers was initiated in 1981 with the onset of the SSRC project, 'Conventional religion and common religion in Leeds'. Some later CRP contributions (1981-83) were produced in this series. They are available for consultation in the CRP collection.


Other research titles produced in association with 'Conventional religion and common religion in Leeds', and 'Media portrayals of religion and their reception' to date are as follows:
