

ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

MIGRATION, RESILIENCE, RELIGIOSITY AND COMMUNAL OUTCOMES: BHUTANESE COMMUNITIES IN BHUTAN AND AUSTRALIA

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In the wake of the Covid pandemic, developing countries like Bhutan are experiencing paradigmatic shifts in their socio-economic and political structures causing unprecedented anxiety and conditions of precarity. It is also exacerbating existing migration patterns from rural to urban Bhutan, and of emigration of working professionals from Bhutanese urban centres to global metropolises, particularly in Australia and the USA. In this paper, I study how these social changes are also producing changes in the spiritual practices of the people in rural and urban Bhutan, and among new overseas Bhutanese migrant communities with a particular focus on the Australian capital city, Canberra. Drawing on extensive fieldwork conducted in Bhutan and Australia, this lecture contends that Buddhist spiritual and cultural practices adapt to localized circumstances, and become enablers of new social aspirations of the people experiencing precarious living conditions.

Even though Buddhist economics is often conflated with ideals of asceticism and frugality, the lecture describes and analyses the conditions of vibrant social and economic outcomes that Buddhist communal practices generate among the Bhutanese communities. Buddhist ritual practices are geared towards aiding material prosperity through removing obstacles and increasing competencies. In turn, generous patronage of Buddhist causes creates social capital, and set aspirational people on the path towards this-worldly success thereby entangling Buddhist Lamas and their adherents in a cause of mutually overcoming existing hardships towards a more secure way forward.



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