



We are pleased to announce the next Friends of the Kern Institute lecture:

Moments and Voices of Bhakti in Odisha: Confirmation, Contestation and Resistance

by Dr. Pralay Kanungo (Leiden University)

Date: Thursday, October 8, 2026

Time: 16.00h

Venue: Leiden University, Lipsius, room 1.47

The lecture will be followed by drinks in the LIAS common room in Herta Mohr, first floor.

Abstract

This lecture will capture the Bhakti universe of Odisha. Highlighting three genres of Bhakti proponents, discourses and publics, it will present how they evolved relating to the Jagannath cult and impacted the social, religious and cultural landscape of Odisha. First, Jayadeva's Sanskrit invocation *Gita Govinda* (twelfth century) and association with ritualistic and performative devotion in temple and royal court, Dalit Dasia Bauri's rustic Bhakti and legendary coconut offering to Jagannath, and Chaitanya's dissemination of Krishna ecstasy among middle and lower castes, confirmed and consolidated Jagannath Bhakti in multiple ways. Second, the *Panchasakhas* (five friends), despite their devotion to Jagannath and having a close connection with Chaitanya (sixteenth century), creatively offered a syncretic confirmation-contestation paradigm, combining Jagannath Bhakti with the Buddhist idea of *Sunya*, which had a great appeal among the vernacular Bhakti public of Odisha. Third, Mahima Gosain and his follower, the blind saint-poet Bhima Bhoi (late nineteenth century), constructed an alternate paradigm which challenged and resisted the hegemony of the Jagannath cult and taught new Bhakti idioms and vocabulary to the exploited and excluded outcastes. Contemporary Odisha manifests all the three genres of Bhakti—proponents, discourses and publics—although with varying proportions, objectives and accomplishments.

Biography

Dr. Pralay Kanungo, currently a Fellow at IIAS/Leiden University, was former Professor and Chair at Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He was ICCR Chair of Contemporary India Studies at Leiden University (2013-18) and has had a range of international visiting professorships and fellowships (including at Heidelberg, Erfurt, Paris, New Delhi and Chengdu). He has authored *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan* (2002) and co-edited *The Algebra of Warfare-Welfare* (2019), *The Politics of Ethnicity in India, Nepal and China* (2014), *Public Hinduisms* (2012), *Cultural Entrenchment of Hindutva* (2011).

