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This is the published version of a paper published in *Journal of Beliefs and Values*.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Niemi, K. (2018)

Drawing a line between the religious and the secular: The cases of religious education in Sweden and India

Journal of Beliefs and Values, 39(2): 182-194

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2018.1450806>

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To cite this article: Kristian Niemi (2018) Drawing a line between the religious and the secular: the cases of religious education in Sweden and India, Journal of Beliefs & Values, 39:2, 182-194, DOI: [10.1080/13617672.2018.1450806](https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2018.1450806)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2018.1450806>



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Published online: 06 Apr 2018.



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Drawing a line between the religious and the secular: the cases of religious education in Sweden and India

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ABSTRACT

Religion as a school subject – Religious Education (RE) – is handled differently in various national contexts. This article discusses two different systems of managing (or avoiding) RE: those used in non-denominational Swedish and Indian schools. The article focuses particularly on what is allowed in the classroom with regards to religion. Both countries are secular, but where is the line drawn between the secular and the religious? Allowing the two contexts to meet reveals the particularities of each. The impact of Protestant Christianity, specifically Lutheranism, is evident in Swedish RE: religion is to be defined through beliefs and words, and religious actions should be excluded from classrooms. The Swedish context highlights ‘knowledge of’ religions, but avoids religious action. In India, there is no explicit RE, but Indian education does include learning from religion as well as ‘doing religion.’ The Indian approach is very inclusive, to the point of emphasising, as teachers put it, a common core of all religions. Both systems of RE offer particular opportunities and face certain difficulties in dealing with the contemporary globalised world.

KEYWORDS

Religious education;
secularism; didactics of
religion; comparative studies

Introduction

Religious education (RE) looks very different in various countries. The legal and national tradition of a particular country shapes the way RE is (or is not) organised (Franken and Loobuyck 2017, 2, 3). RE would typically be absent, and be organised as confessional teaching in religion, or as non-confessional teaching about religion (Durham 2013, 4). However, even when religion is nominally absent it can hardly be avoided altogether, but is instead integrated into other school subjects (Franken 2017, 113). An underlying assumption in this schematic is that ‘religion’ and ‘confessionality’ are understood similarly across the board. This article argues that this is not the case, through looking at two examples: Sweden and India.

Sweden is often claimed to be one of the most secular countries in the world (cf. von Brömssen and Rodell Olgaç 2010, 121; Dalevi and Niemi 2016; Zuckerman 2009). India,

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on the other hand, is a country associated with a multitude of religious traditions. While both states are secular, the meaning of secularism varies in the two contexts. The Swedish interpretation is informed by the French notion of *laïcité* (exclusion of the religious), whereas secularism in India does not entail separation from, but equal respect towards all (Buchardt 2015; Chandhoke 2015, 26; Mahajan 2015; Pettersson 2011). This is also, as we will see, reflected in their respective school systems. Eva Pförtl (2015, 136) notes that the multicultural reality of India is considered by its legal framework in a way that Europe could learn from. Peter Losonczi (2015, 95, 96) has a similar argumentation, for an inter-contextual approach regarding questions of secularism, religion, and politics. This article takes such an approach to issues secularism, religion, and education.

Viewing the cases of India and Sweden alongside each other and examining how the line between the religious and the secular is drawn in these two contexts, reveals the particularities of both countries. Although the two approaches might seem diametrically opposed, India and Sweden have similar aspirations with regards to religion in the educational system – yet that goal is realised in very different ways. The contexts and histories of the two countries have led to distinct interpretations of secularism and different views of the religious. It is furthermore argued that there might be lessons to learn for both.

Some theoretical and methodological considerations

Comparison by contrast

Oddrun Bråten (2014, 35; 2015, 139) discusses the comparison of RE in different national contexts and argues that the purpose of a comparative approach is to study the impact of supranational processes on national processes: that is, how the global and international can have different effects on the national and the local. I would like to emphasise that a comparative approach also can fulfil a contrastive function (cf. Niemi 2016, 335). That which was previously been taken for granted is no longer self-evident when we see that there are viable alternatives. Furthermore, a reaction is possible when two horizons meet (cf. Gadamer 1994, 302). There can be friction, as I propose is the case here. When considering the two contexts alongside each other, the particularities of each are revealed. The contexts of India and Sweden are similar enough to make a comparison possible, but different enough for friction to arise (Niemi 2016, 335, 336).

First, this research attempts to shed light on Indian education, as seen from a particular perspective. Second, the article claims that new insights are gained about this starting perspective, when seen in the light of the results from the first research question.

The Swedish context is examined through recent public debates (2011–2016) and official guidelines. An analysis of arguments in the material illustrates a certain view on religion, and on the line between the religious and the secular. My perspective hails from Sweden, and the Swedish case is discussed first. This is followed by an examination of the Indian context through ethnographic material consisting of interviews, observations, and texts gathered in Vārāṇasī, India, during the spring of 2016. Interviews were conducted with 23 teachers from 11 different schools. Three of these schools were affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE); three to the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE); five to the state board of Uttar Pradesh (UP). Observations were conducted in four schools: one each affiliated to UP and CISCE school boards, and two affiliated to CBSE board. There are schools throughout India affiliated to CISCE and CBSE, so results

related to them may arguably be generalised nationally, whereas statements about the UP board only pertain to the state of UP. Syllabi, textbooks, and other relevant materials were collected from all of the aforementioned schools. As in the Swedish material, the material shows where a line has been drawn between the religious and the secular in a school context.

Handling the religious

In Sweden

Sweden has traditionally been a Protestant country (Pettersson 2011), and Christianity used to be a confessional subject in Swedish schools. Indeed, it was arguably the original subject of Swedish education, and can be traced back to the Swedish Church Law of 1686. Up until 1882, biblical history and Catechesis formed the core of the curriculum (Dalevi and Niemi 2016; Hartman 2000, 212, 214). Gradually more content was added, and Church teaching decreased (cf. Buchardt 2015). In 1919 the subject became about Christianity in general, and in 1962 it changed into a general subject about religion. As the new subject searched for an identity (and content), ‘life questions’ emerged as a topic, together with ethics and knowledge about the ‘world religions’, defined as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Since then, ‘Religionskunskap’ [Knowledge of religion] has been a compulsory subject for all students (Dalevi and Niemi 2016, 63–64; Hartman 2000; Osbeck and Skeie 2014; Swedish National Agency for Education [SNAE] 2011, 2012a).

In 1962, the principle of objectivity was introduced. Similar to how the French concept of *laïcité* entails a separation of state and religion, the Swedish principle of objectivity has resulted in schools avoiding direct contact with religious content (Hartman 2000; Olivestam 2006, 22, 23). In 2010, objectivity with regards to religion became not only a part of school prescriptions, but was inscribed in law. According to the government’s proposal (2009–10–165), ‘non-confessional’ does not mean ‘no religious content’, but rather that education should be such that ‘pupils are not affected one-sidedly in questions of faith’ (The Swedish Government 2010, 636; The Riksdag [Sveriges Riksdag] 2010, Ch. 1, §6–7; Osbeck and Skeie 2014). Teaching should be non-confessional, and ‘shall have a scientific foundation and be unbiased and comprehensive’ (Swedish Government 2010, 227). Teaching may not include any confessional elements.

This article argues that the understanding of what confessionality would entail is shaped by a particular understanding of religion, informed by the majority tradition of Lutheran Protestantism (cf. Buchardt 2015; Niemi 2016). The tradition specifically emphasises orthodoxy; the right beliefs (Esposito, Fasching, and Lewis 2008, 10; Beyer, 2013). There is a focus on words and creeds (cf. Taylor 2007, 4). This can be compared to the historical use of the Christian creed: we believe this – not that. Religion becomes something intellectual and theorised; actual lived religion is thus underemphasised (cf. Skeie 2015). Teaching would deal with religion ‘from the outside’, and there would be talk about religion. Yet nothing should be included that could be interpreted as confessional. It has even been argued that the general discourse could be described as atheistic (cf. von Brömssen 2017; Kittelmann Flensner 2015). Adherents of religions do not recognise themselves in the subject’s content (Holmqvist Lidh 2016).

In what follows, I give two examples, using official guidelines and a public debate to illustrate how the line between the sacred and the profane is drawn in Sweden. The examples of closing assemblies in church and yoga in school are two occasions when, it seems,

Swedish schools venture too close to the religious. There is a more or less annual debate on whether the closing assembly in church is a religious tradition (thus constituting ‘doing religion’ in school that should be avoided) or cultural (and thus acceptable, even laudable). In addition, through official guidance given by authorities we can fairly clearly discern the arguments vis-à-vis religion and non-confessionality in school. The latter can also be said about yoga in school, as it was investigated by the Swedish School Inspectorate. Both these examples (closing assembly in church and yoga in school) illustrate a particular view of what is considered religious, why, and how one can remain secular without crossing over to the religious.

Closing assemblies

In Sweden, the traditional way of ending the school year involves gathering in the local church, giving speeches and singing hymns – not least the traditional hymn *Den blomstertid nu kommer* [Now Comes the Time of Blossoming, author’s translation]. The question, discussed in the annual debate, is whether this contravenes the principle of objectivity in the Swedish Education Act.

The closing assembly in church is explicitly mentioned in the legal guidelines published by the SNAE (2012b), and is allowed, if ‘designed to emphasise traditions, solemnity and fellowship and if no religious elements such as prayers, blessings or creeds are included’ (2012b, 1; author’s translation and emphasis). Following the ‘better safe than sorry’ principle, some schools have chosen not to hold the closing assembly in a church to be sure they are not breaking any laws (Swedish Radio 2012, 2013). Others have continued the practice of having the assembly in church. Sometimes a priest has been allowed to speak; sometimes not (cf. Arevik 2012; Rudhe 2012; Salö 2013; Swedish Radio 2011). If a priest is allowed to speak, he or she would not, following the guidelines above, be allowed to pray for or bless the children in order to keep within the confines of the secular – though some priests do it anyway; ‘The church does not want to follow the Education Act and still includes prayer and blessings,’ a principal wrote in a survey mentioned by Salö (2013, author’s translation) (cf. Swedish Radio 2011). Another example is the aforementioned hymn *Now Comes the Time of Blossoming*. Given the premises described above, specifically that: (1) confessional aspects are not allowed; but (2) aspects of traditions and solemnity are permissible, some have interpreted the guidelines to mean that it is possible to sing verses one and two of the hymn – but not the third, because that verse includes the word *God* (Olsson 2016). Recently, the Swedish Parliament decided to review the Education Act and add exceptions to allow confessional aspects in certain instances – such as during closing assemblies and major religious holidays, but not in class teaching (The Swedish Parliament [Sveriges Riksdag] 2016 item 10, p. 7; cf. Olsson 2016; ‘Skolavslutning i kyrkan lagfästs’ 2016).

What is interesting to note, is how being in the church building itself is seen as neutral. A gathering in a church does not automatically become religious, even if a priest is present. Nor is singing a hymn necessarily regarded as religious. It depends on the words used. If the priest were to pray for the pupils, it would be a religious act. If the hymn contains the word *God*, then singing it is a religious act. This is a very particular Christian Protestant view of what is and what is not religious, as discussed above. Religion is defined as words and beliefs; it is intellectualised and theorised. Without particular keywords, actions are not seen as religious – regardless of what is done, who the agent is, or where it happens. Our second example shows similar traits.

Yoga in school

On at least two occasions, yoga in school has become the focus of public debate. In 2012, a public school in Stockholm was reported to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate because yoga was used in teaching. According to the report, the complaint was that yoga was a religious element, and that the word ‘aum’, used in the practice, is a mantra with religious significance (Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2012, 1). The Schools Inspectorate did not, however, find anything to criticise. The report includes a statement from the defending party (the municipality of Stockholm) where they distinguish between ‘yoga’ and ‘Hinduism’. According to them, the purpose of yoga is ‘to strive for balance in body, mind and soul’ (Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2012, 2, author’s translation). Curiously, the Schools Inspectorate does not deem the stated purpose of yoga problematic, despite it being described by the municipality of Stockholm as ‘affecting the soul’, which arguably is a religious aim. The Schools Inspectorate notes that ‘aum’ does not have the same connotations in Hinduism as it has in yoga, but does not describe its purpose in Hinduism, nor the differences between the meaning of ‘aum’ in Hinduism and yoga. In the report, the Schools Inspectorate concludes that yoga can be practised (including saying ‘aum’) without it being a religious or confessional act, and that this was the case in this particular school (Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2012, 3; cf. Thorén 2012). However, some evangelical Christian circles continue to criticise yoga in school (Adolfsson 2016; cf. Thorén 2012). In the municipality of Askersund, all forms of yoga have been prohibited in schools since 2014 (Carlsson and Strengbom 2016). In Rydaholm, yoga in school was cancelled in the spring of 2016 after protests from parents (Adolfsson 2016; Fransson 2016; Nilsson and Selldén 2016).

In other words, this is another instance when schools have arguably come ‘too close to the religious’. What seemed problematic was the use of religious rituals (yoga) and terminology (aum). The Schools Inspectorate found that yoga was not a religious ritual, not because of the action in itself, but because of the reason for doing yoga. This is a rather Protestant way of framing the situation, similar to our previous case; the focus is on beliefs, not on actions. Despite the fact that the municipality claimed they wanted to affect the souls of the pupils, it was decided that the line had not been crossed in this instance, and that neither the actions nor the words used were religious.

In summary, the Swedish approach to religion in schools seems to be a result of the combination of an understanding of secularism informed by *laïcité* (exclusion of the religious) and a Protestant understanding of religion (the religious is words and beliefs) (cf. Buchardt 2015; Niemi 2016). Swedish RE focuses on learning about religions. In classrooms, the religious is to be avoided.

In India

Indian education: the common core

Given the size of the country and its large population, there are several organisational layers which together shape Indian education. First and foremost, there is the Indian Constitution, which stipulates that all children between the ages of six and 14 have to be educated (Constitution of India 1950, articles 21-a and 51-a). The National Policy of Education (Indian Parliament 1992) describes the overall purposes of education and how the system is to be organised practically. In addition to these general policies, subjects to be taught are listed in the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (National Council of Educational

Research and Training [NCERT] 2005a), which also specifies their content and the competencies and values to be learned. The National Council of Education Research and Training ([NCERT] 2005b, 2006) publishes syllabi for Elementary and Secondary levels. Together, the NPE and NCF could be said to form ‘a common core’ for the Indian educational system.

The next organisational level consists of various Educational Councils in the different states of India, which each adapts the common core to their specific circumstances (Indian Parliament 1992). Schools affiliated to state school boards are known as government schools. In addition, there are three national school boards which make similar adaptations, with affiliated schools found throughout India. These are the aforementioned CBSE, CISCE, and the National Institute of Open Schooling [NIOS] (Cheney, Ruzzi, and Muralidharan 2005). Schools affiliated to these national school boards are referred to as private schools. School boards might add content to subjects found in the common core, or include additional subjects, but may not exclude anything from the common core described by the NPE and the NCF.

By and large, schools would thus be considered either government schools or private schools, although there are other local school boards too (such as denominational school boards, mentioned below) and unrecognised schools which do not belong to any board (Thapan 2014, 3). Several publishers offer textbooks explicitly written for the specific boards. Government schools would, as a rule, teach in the vernacular whereas private schools often are English-medium schools.

Religion in Indian schools

The Indian Constitution is firmly secular, although it does not take an anti-religious stance, separating state and religion, as in the French concept of *laïcité*. The Indian approach is usually summed up with the statement *sarva dharma sambhāva*, which could be translated as ‘all religions treated equally’. Religion should not necessarily be avoided, but all religious traditions should be treated the same (Chandhoke 2015, 26; Mahajan 2015, 36; Mahmood 2013, 144). Indeed, the Education Commission of 1964–66 (Ministry of Education 1970) distinguished between confessional teaching in religion, on the one hand, and non-confessional teaching about religion, on the other. The Commission (1970, para. 1.79) recommended that the latter type of education should be introduced throughout Indian schools. This recommendation has not been implemented (Sodhi 1998, 54, 56); the common core does not include a subject called religion. There are, however confessional schools in India, affiliated to local school boards. These schools include Hindu *patshalas*, Muslim *madrasas*, and institutions run by Sikh, Jain, and Christian communities – to name but a few (Mahmood 2013, 148). They are not considered in this article, as my focus is on non-denominational schools.

None of the schools studied offer a subject called religion, and neither does school boards they are affiliated to. Yet there arguably is content which might be described as religious not only throughout the school subjects, but also in the school context in general (cf. Niemi 2016). Of interest here is how such religious content is handled, and where the line between the religious and the secular is drawn. The results were very similar across the examined schools, and thus I do not make clear distinctions between them below.

Lessons from religion/s

Respondents would emphatically claim there is no religion in school. This is, I believe, partly due to language, and a matter of translation. In relation to this it is probably apt to remind

the reader that Hinduism, India's majority religion, entails orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy (Esposito, Fasching, and Lewis 2008, 10); it emphasises practice and actions (Flood 1996, 12). There is no direct equivalent to the English word 'religion' in Hindi. When asked to define religion, the teachers would commonly describe it as dharma. However, if dharma would be translated back into English, it would not mean 'religion' but duty. When teachers are asked if religion is taught in school, the question is then, I would suggest, understood as more or less whether the pupils are taught (religious) duties, as if there would be one particular (religious) duty they should follow. This is what the teachers negate:

We don't really teach ... religion ... at the school ... we believe nevertheless in complete secularism. ... So in India when you say secularism it means ... that there is no state religion so for the institution ... there is actually no such school religion (Aadya, March 2, 2016)

However, there is content about religion. 'Saanvi' (March 2, 2016) describes that History, Year 6 includes 'religions like Buddhism and Jainism' as well as 'Brahmanical ideals' (cf. Niemi 2016, 347, 348). The reason why Buddhism is discussed, Saanvi says, is to inculcate values in the students: 'Basically we focus on values.' (A minority of the respondents said they focus on 'facts', not values.) Religions are seen to share common truths and values. This also means that no religion could be described as 'bad'. If there were 'bad' values, it would not be a religion. Or, as a textbook puts it: 'All religions teach truth, honesty, patience, love, devotion, dedication and respect for life' (Joseph 2014, 17). By studying the various religions, one can inculcate good values. In other words, pupils are to learn from religious traditions. Particularly Buddhism is often given as an example by the teachers. None of the teachers mentioned Islam as a religion one could learn from. This might perhaps be compared with Lars Tore Flåten's (2016, 106, 111) remarks on Islam and intolerance and aggression in Indian textbooks.

All teachers interviewed agreed that contemporary religious expressions are not discussed: neither actions, nor groups. What is dealt with is the context of the founding of a religion, the founder, and some basic tenets. For instance, with regards to Islam, Muhammed would be discussed, and the Mughal era in India, but nothing contemporary.

As the above examples illustrate, children's individual duties (dharma) are not instilled through school, but general values are. Moreover, this is explicitly done by using religions as examples. Individual religions are seen to express universal values. These values are to be learned by the students, and this can be done through studying various religious traditions. However, as a consequence, religion is defined as necessarily positive. Religion cannot be criticised. In addition to learning from religion, I show in the following section that doing religion is also prevalent in Indian schools – all in keeping with the Indian understanding of secularism.

Festivals and morning assemblies

In every school, the day starts with a morning assembly. It is mandated by law that the national anthem is sung (cf. Ashok 2016; Kumar 1996, 221, 22), and there is commonly some additional singing and/or prayers. Many of the schools visited had a songbook, or some such item, that included prayers and songs from, for instance, the Sikh, Christian, and Hindu traditions. There did not seem to be much, if anything, from the Muslim tradition. Saying prayers of different traditions is unproblematic, since regardless of the 'religious home' of the prayer, all religions are understood to be of the same origin, expressing the same values, as described above.

In the Indian ‘common core’ subjects, festivals are to be discussed as a part of the subject of Environmental Studies (NCERT 2006, 111). Celebrating festivals, as a part of ‘the cultural and religious diversity of India’, is a part of the subject of Peace (NCERT 2005a, 62; cf. Niemi 2016). Again, we can see consequences of *sarva dharma sambhāva*: respondents describe how every religion ought to be celebrated – in contrast to the Swedish case, where no religion should be. Pupils are on leave during the festivals of the largest religious traditions in the country which include Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Christian, and Jain festivals, as well as holidays related to the state of India (cf. Sarkari Naukri Career 2016). As the deputy director of a cluster of CBSE schools described (April 8, 2016):

We celebrate every festival ... Whether it is Gurpurab which is a Sikh religious festival. ... Or it's Diwali which is a Hindu religious festival. ... All festivals are celebrated. ... And. ... We talk about ... in these celebrations the tenets of ... a particular religion For example if we'll talk about If we celebrate Diwali we'll talk a little bit about the tenets of Hinduism.

Many teachers gave a description similar to the above. One exception, which can be used to illustrate the rule, was at a UP state board school. When asked which festivals were celebrated, the teachers Aarav, Vivaan, and Ayaan (March 31, 2016) started discussing amongst themselves in Hindi (paraphrased): ‘We can't say that,’ one of them said, ‘because then we'd have to say we celebrate all the others, too.’ I interpret this to mean that there is a normative answer: the one Aadya gave, giving equal respect to all religions. No single religion should be emphasised over another. Had the group of three at the UP state board school answered that only Hindu festivals were celebrated in the school, they would not have been within the Indian understanding of secularism; they would have breached *sarva dharma sambhāva*.

So, religions are not only used in Indian education as something to learn from, but there are also religious actions in school, from singing hymns to celebrating festivals. Crucially, in order to be secular in the Indian context, multiple traditions have to be included. An Indian understanding of religion focuses rather on actions than faith. Moreover, keeping education secular in the Indian context does not entail excluding the religious, but rather respecting all religions equally. That also means celebrating all religions and, arguably, ‘doing religion.’

Conclusion

Both Sweden and India strive to uphold a secular, or ‘neutral’, relation to religion in schools. Through the method of contrast and mirroring, it becomes clear how there, in the Indian context, is an emphasis on treating all religions equally, and a cautiousness about saying anything negative about them. Whereas neutrality in the Swedish context means not affecting pupils, and excluding the religious for the sake of objectivity. An action is deemed improper if it is seen as religious. In the Swedish context, religion is intellectualised and theorised. Attempts are made to define faiths. The Protestant impact is evident in how the secular line is seen to be crossed if certain words are used, or certain acts take place such as blessings or prayers. This is a very particular understanding of religion, as becomes evident when compared to the Indian notion of the religious and the secular.

Franken (2017) discusses different strategies of coping with diversity. At least two consequences of the Swedish approach to teaching RE might be mentioned, which are in line with her arguments (2017, 113) against religion as a separate, integrative school subject: (1) The school subject is so far removed from its content that it might fail to actually do it justice. Believers from different traditions do not recognise themselves in the content; (2)

Given the assumption of and focus on defining the religious and different religious traditions, the boxes thus constructed might not fit what is actually found in the world. The religious traditions are defined theoretically. Actual practices differ, however, and there might not actually be very many people that fit into the World Religion boxes constructed in Swedish RE. On the other hand, in the Swedish context it is possible to discuss characteristics of various religious traditions, and discuss different interpretations and behaviour critically. This is not the case in the Indian context.

In contrast, the Indian way of handling the religious is, I would argue, characteristically Hindu. Or perhaps it is more apt to say: characteristically Indian. Religion is not something one defines, but something one does. Religion is duties, and no single duty ought to be inculcated by schools, but the values expressed by all religious traditions should. Every religion should be respected equally, and a multitude of forms and expressions are accepted. However, a consequence for the school context is that religion is thus viewed as something necessarily good; something which cannot be criticised. Religion is not even discussed as a contemporary phenomenon, but only in historical terms. There is, in one sense, a focus on actions through the space afforded to festivals and the like; on the other hand, these actions are not necessarily explained (there is little, or no, theory). Distinct features of the different religions might be lost because of the focus on the common values. If indeed the individual teacher focuses on them at all, as there apparently are no official guidelines specifying that these common values should be taught through information about these religious traditions or otherwise.

These two ways of understanding the secular, and of handling the religious in schools, are the result of each country's history and context. 'Indian RE', if I may call it thus, is a result of India's cultural plurality. It has been necessary to fashion an education, including RE, which takes this into consideration. However, it is not enough to recognise different systems of handling diversity (of religion) in school, but also the distinct ways of understanding the concepts of religion and secularism as such.

There is, I believe, something each tradition can learn from the other. Swedish RE is founded on a particular notion of religion, not necessarily shared by all, especially as Sweden is becoming more multicultural. Conversely, although a strong case may be made for not defining religions as rigidly as in the Swedish context, it would still be appropriate to at least discuss contemporary religious traditions in India; to talk about different interpretations within religious traditions, and not least the consequences these interpretations might have.

In future research, this question should be further explored using similar ethnographic material from the Swedish context. It is also the ambition of the author to examine the specific topic of moral values, as it is handled rather differently by the Indian school boards. Furthermore, although two of the examined school boards were national, additional Indian school boards should be studied, in locations other than UP. Another line of inquiry would be to compare the denominational school boards in India (Muslim madrasas or Hindu patshalas, for instance) – as well as denominational schools in Sweden. Through a method of contrast new insights are gained; this method will be further developed in future work.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Anita, Raju and Uttam – could not have done it without you. I thank the peer reviewers and editors, as well as a host of colleagues, without whom the article would have been

lacking. If anything is made clear, it is partly thanks to them; what is left muddled and questionable is so despite their best efforts. The article is based on papers presented at the conferences Gender, Activism and Politics in Vārāṇasī, India (April 2017) and the 14th Nordic Conference on Religious Education in Joensuu, Finland (June 2017).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Kristian Niemi is a lecturer in Religious Studies at Karlstad University, and a PhD student in subject-specific education at Stockholm University. This article is a part of his thesis project on the topic of religion and the secular, multicultural state.

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