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Einladung zum Vortrag

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The Moral and Philosophical Foundations of Reform Hinduism

An Introductory Lecture

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Seminarraum 1, Bereich Tibet- und Buddhismuskunde
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The expression “Reform Hinduism” indicates the new religious, moral and social order that the western-educated intelligentsia in colonial India very purposively attempted to construct in the 19th century. Historically, such attempts were a part of the indigenous counter-discourse that tried to effectively meet the new moral and material challenges emanating in the contemporary West. The order so attempted to be constructed constituted a perceptibly new moral and philosophical outlook and differed in some interesting ways from Hindu responses to non-Hindu communities in the pre-modern era, as for instance the Buddhists or Muslims. “Reformed” Hindus were the first to admit that colonial rule had changed their lives more significantly in the space of a hundred years than had been possible in the several centuries of Indo-Muslim rule. It was in the 19th century, as I shall also argue, that terms like “reform” and “Hinduism” came to be discursively used and to good effect. This discourse employed new conceptions of time and history but focused above all on the moral worth of human intervention in everyday life. In this talk, I also attempt to bring out the heuristic contestations embedded within the very paradigm of “reform”: around ideology, methods, motives or strategy. Finally, this talk also touches upon the question of interrogating the nature of colonial modernity and just what implication this might have had for the self-understanding of the Hindus.