



Max Planck Institute for
Comparative and International
Private Law | Hamburg

AFTERNOON TALKS ON ISLAMIC LAW

Professor Narendra Subramanian

McGill University

“Nation and Family: Personal Law, Cultural Pluralism,
and Gendered Citizenship in India”

Tuesday, 10 May 2016 – 4 pm

Conference Room 1, 1st floor

All employees and guests of the institute as well as
other interested parties are cordially invited to the lecture.

Nadjma Yassari

About the Speaker:

Narendra Subramanian is Professor of Political Science at McGill University and Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. He studies the politics of nationalism, ethnicity, religion, gender, and race in a comparative perspective, focusing primarily on India. Subramanian got his B.A. in Public and International Affairs from Princeton University, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

About the Topic:

A major aspect of Indian multiculturalism and secularism is the distinct personal laws governing the major religious groups. These interpersonal laws reflect specific cultural norms and require the state to adopt different approaches to recognition and family regulation. Furthermore, discourses about the nation, its cultural groups, and its traditions shape the ways ruling elites recognize cultural specificity, the space they give to religion in public policy and public life, and how they regulate the family. On this basis India introduced moderate yet sustained personal law reforms to increase women's rights and individual liberties.

Indian multiculturalism on the other side is shaped by the greater engagement of political elites with Hindu initiatives and the predominant place of certain Hindu motifs in nationalist discourses. These were crucial reasons why policy-makers changed Hindu law earlier and more extensively than the minority laws although support for personal law reform was not clearly higher among Hindus than among Muslims. It is therefore argued that the greater the mobilization of pluralistic and syncretic visions of the nation is, the better the further democratization of families, religious groups, and the nation in India and elsewhere will proceed.