IS CONVERSION A HUMAN RIGHT?
A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT RELIGIOUS ZIONISM AND HINDU NATIONALISM

Abstract
Freedom of religion, as understood in modern democratic societies and also in contemporary human rights discourse, is most often defined in terms of individual conscience. In this way, the freedom to change one’s conscience, that is, the freedom to convert, epitomizes contemporary conceptions of religious freedom. But is religious conversion a human right? I do not purport to provide an answer to this question in this lecture but rather to talk about why this question is so difficult to answer. I will consider and compare the deep anxieties about religious conversion shared by religious Zionists and Hindu nationalists as well as the ways in which the respective states of Israel and India have institutionalized these anxieties in their political systems.