

**Neilesh Bose**

**Project Title:** *Islam, Buddhism, and Religious Reform in Colonial Bengal*

**Abstract:**

*Universalism, Comparison, and the Meanings and Ends of Religion in Colonial India* proposes a shared global intellectual history between Christianity and Indian religions, inclusive not only of Hinduism, but of sources from Islam, Buddhism, Vaishnavism and Sikhism. Through a detailed study of the colonial reformist organization, the *Brahma Samaj*, the project considers how universalism and conceptions of universal religion grew out of an encounter between these strands of Christian and Christian-inflected traditions and Indian intellectual traditions. The book emerging from this research will feature three sections, each exploring the history of the category of religion as a discrete object in Indian society. The first section will review and explore the various genealogies of religion as a discrete object, and how India and Indian religion has figured into the history of that term vis a vis Christian interlocutors. The second section will focus on research carried out by Indian reformers into Indian religions, with an emphasis on Islam, Buddhism, Vaishnavism, and Sikhism, all traditions that figured centrally into reformist activity, but often left out of mainstream histories of reform. The final section will explore how late colonial figures like Taraknath Das, Mohandas Gandhi, Muhammed Iqbal, and B.R. Ambedkar all drew on variations of universal religion emanating out of this history. My research about Bangladesh during the proposed fellowship period will focus on the second section of my book, with a focus on how the *Brahma Samaj* collected materials about, wrote about, and understood Indian religions, such as Islam and Buddhism and how the particular region of East Bengal figured in the history of those religions in South Asia.