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# Center for Indic Studies

## Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture

**Date:** Wednesday, October 10, 2007  
**Place:** Woodland Commons (Parking Lot 10)  
**Time:** 12 – 1:30 PM  
**Refreshments:** 11:45 AM

**Topic:** Should an Academic Be an Advocate?  
The Intersection of Scholarship and Social  
Action

**Speaker:** Ramdas Lamb



**Abstract:** The traditional approach that Humanities scholars and researchers working in India are supposed to take with respect to the people and cultures they study is to be unattached, objective observers. We are not supposed to become involved with the subjects of our research, since this will cause a loss of objectivity. Fortunately, I had little higher education prior to going to India, so I was not burdened with academic paradigms and assumptions to restrict my understanding of what I experienced. I did not know I was not supposed to identify with the people I met, their lives, their problems, and their passions. Fortunately, I got involved. As a consequence, I have sought to approach the issue of academics from the point of view that Mahatma Gandhi inspired in many: to be passionate about your beliefs and to reflect them in your actions. My academic career has involved study of both ascetics and Harijans, one group above the caste hierarchy, the other at the bottom. My talk will focus on the problems and possibilities that arise when there is an intersection of academic study and social involvement with those being studied. I will use my own experiences in academics, asceticism, Harijan advocacy, and rural education as the basis for my comments and observations.

**Bio:** Ramdas Lamb is an Associate Professor of Religion at the University of Hawai'i. He first came into contact with the Ramnamis while living and studying in India (1969 to 1978). After returning to his home in Hawai'i, he continued his academic education, which culminated with a doctoral degree in Asian Religions from the University of California, Santa Barbara. In 2002, the State University of New York Press published his study of the Samaj, entitled "Rapt in the Name." The text contains the most comprehensive research ever done on the Samaj, its origins, development, and present day status. Since that time his research has focused primarily on asceticism and on low caste religious movements. His non-academic work has focused on Harijan advocacy and rural education, especially with respect to females and less advantaged youth. Two web sties that contain some information on his work are: [www.ramnam.net](http://www.ramnam.net) and [www.sahayogfoundation.org](http://www.sahayogfoundation.org) .

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