



Religions and Development Research Programme

‘The people know they need religion in order to develop’: the relationships between Hindu and Buddhist religious teachings, values and beliefs, and visions of the future in Pune, India.

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People’s understanding of their own situation, ideas about a better life and strategies for achieving their visions is influenced, amongst other things, by religious values, beliefs, individuals and organizations, with implications for the objectives and strategies of state and non-government development actors.

Short term ethnographic research in two slum settlements in Pune, Maharashtra, sought to understand the values and beliefs that influence and shape people’s lives, in terms of how they see the world and negotiate their place in it. The research focused on poor, low caste Hindu and Buddhist communities in two typical slum settlements.

It revealed that religion

- influences people’s understanding of their society and their place in it, in particular their diagnosis of why they are poor and discriminated against: both Hindus and Buddhists see the world through a caste lens and agree that they are discriminated against because of their low caste status.
- informs people’s shared basic ideas of *karma* and *dharma* (roughly translated as destiny and duty)
- provides practical resources for dealing with day-to-day difficulties, including spiritual solace, advice from local religious leaders, and access to material resources and political platforms offered by slum-based religious organizations.
- influences people’s responses to their current disadvantaged situation, with some accepting the status quo and pursuing a better next life through religious practices and good behaviour, and others seeking to improve their wellbeing and prosperity in this life.

- is linked with the emergence of gurus (such as Ambedkar for Buddhists) and nationalist organizations (such as Shiv Sena for Hindus) who articulate people’s experience of caste injustice.
- motivates people to pursue visions of how they think the world should be and provides them with possible strategies for achieving improved personal circumstances and a more equal society.
- supports the constant reshaping of identity, personhood and agency.

The findings demonstrate that development actors need to:

- develop detailed insights into how poor people understand their situation
- support poor urban residents in their daily battles to survive, through tackling immediate problems, as well as recognizing their aspirations for a more just society and a secure and prosperous future.
- explore the potential for working with selected prominent religious gurus, local religious leaders and slum-based religious organizations to strengthen the voices of the poor and motivate and support local people to challenge oppressive social structures.

Source: Tamsin Bradley and Zara Ramsay (2010) *‘The people know they need religion in order to develop’*: The Relationships between Hindu and Buddhist Religious Teachings, Values and Beliefs, and Visions of the Future in Pune, India. Birmingham: Religions and Development Working Paper 51.

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