Plural societies and imperatives of development: religions, communities, citizenship

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Introduction

Notwithstanding criticisms and condemnations from diverse quarters, 'development' continues to be an important and attractive idea in the world today. It remains an important component of state policy in most of the developing world. It also continues to be invoked in the political rhetoric of populist mobilization, and is a source of hope to the large masses of poor and deprived people in countries of the Third World. International funding agencies and charities in the developed North also continue to spend a significant proportion of their resources on development-related activities.

However, over the years, the concept and its practices have undergone some profound changes. The old notion of modernization and the evolutionist theories of social change based on binaries of tradition/modern, in which the process of economic development was seen as inevitably linked with a process of cultural change and the emergence of a secular civil society, have slowly lost their appeal. Development is also no longer seen as being inevitably tied to, or premised on, a process of secularization. It is now widely recognized that cultural tradition and religious belief do not simply disappear from public life. Religious identity or belief can be important constitutive elements of the notion of well-being that people may have in a given context. Similarly community identities are not always based on "irrational" collectivist ideologies - they can be a source of security and sustenance for individuals. Moreover, a closer view of the West reveals that the ideas of community and religious identity have never disappeared from the "developed" Western world, as the classical theories of social change made out.

This change in the attitude of the social sciences towards religion can also be seen in shifting trends in empirical research on the subject. Over the last two or three decades, we have seen a steady shift towards treating religion as a "normal" sociological phenomenon, without any teleological presupposition about its pasts or futures. This shift has been reinforced by social and political trends in countries like India, where issues relating to citizenship are raised by identity movements of historically deprived collectives, such as the Dalits and Adivasis, or religious minorities, such as the Muslims. Interestingly, while such groups often critique mainstream notions of development, they are not against the idea of development. On the contrary, the core thrust of many of them has been for more inclusive and just development.

There has also been a perceptible shift in state policy towards questions concerning religion and religious communities. With grass-rooting of democracy and a gradual shift in the social profile of the political elite in countries like India, the old secular-communal dichotomous way of thinking seems to be increasingly meaningless. Social policies dealing with issues of marginality and exclusion are invariably framed using "social group" variables at their core. At the global level also, much of the recent research and policy dialogue has centered on questions of citizenship and entitlements in relation to cultural and group identities. With growing movements of people, nation-states are everywhere becoming ethnically and culturally diverse and plural, making it difficult to dispense with religious and communitarian identities.

While questions of development and citizenship in relation to culture and religious beliefs or communities have become important in the public and political spheres, social science research on the subject is still at a nascent stage. It was in this broader perspective that the India chapter of the 'Religions and Development' research organized a two day seminar at which some of the research carried out by researchers in the programme was presented, along with presentations on related subjects by other scholars.

The seminar (April 19th and 20th 2010) was spread over eight sessions, with a total of 17 presentations, out of which 7 were based on the work done by scholars under the RaD programme. The seminar was organized on the campus of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

State, religion and civil society

The inaugural session was on the theme of 'Religion and Civil Society' with two leading social scientists of the country as plenary speakers, Ghanshyam Shah and Dipankar Gupta. Professor S.K. Thorat, Chairman of the University Grants Commission, Government of India, chaired the session. In his introductory remarks, Thorat pointed to the critical gaps that still exist in social science research in India, particularly in relation to social policy. This is doubly true with respect to the subject of religion and development, a subject of critical significance in a country like India. He expressed a hope that the work being done by RaD programme would be an important step toward filling this crucial gap.

The two plenary speakers tried to open up the theme of the seminar through their presentations. While Ghanshyam Shah looked at the historical trajectory of the evolution of the category of civil society in India, with specific focus on the regional context of Gujarat, Dipankar Gupta spoke on the idea of citizenship in relation to religion and religious communities in contemporary India.

Working with a classical notion of the concept, Shah defined civil society as a space between the private sphere of individuals and communities on the one hand and the state on the other. Civil society thus consists of all those who try to articulate public opinion and intend to influence the state, he argued. Intellectuals, educationists, writers, voluntary groups and social movements are all components of civil society. However, he also contended that civil society is not a homogenous category: there are always differences/disagreements and struggles between the mainstream and the periphery on what needs to be done for the good of a society.

Through a brief introduction to the intellectual history of modern India, Shah argued that religion has always remained central to Indian civil society. Perhaps the first modern intellectual engagement with the idea of civil society was through the idea of "Indian civilization" during the 18th and 19th centuries. Morality and religion were central to this discourse on Indian civilization. The idea of morality in the Indian context did not have universalistic or secular contours. Its source was religion. During the later period, when Gandhi and other reformist groups began to work with the marginalized, Dalits (the ex-untouchables) and the Adivasis (the tribal population), they invoked the idea of 'seva' or service and continued to use the religious (Hindu) idiom, as if it were synonymous with nationalism. Expressing his dismay at this, Shah argued that this sectarian intellectual history continues to shape the so-called civil society discourse in the state of Gujarat even today. Mainstream intellectuals, educational institutions and creative writers continue to invoke Hindu idiom in their discourse on civil society. However, in his view, such a discourse provides legitimacy *to* the sectarian state and its exclusionary policies.

Extending the arguments presented by Ghanshyam Shah, Dipankar Gupta, in his presentation on 'Religion, Communities and Citizenship', focused more on the contemporary context. Working with the category of citizenship, he offered a useful framework for understanding the question of religious minorities in the present day Indian context. Gupta underlined the point that the evolution of the modern nation state requires institutionalization of citizenship as a universal ethic. In contrast, pre-modern societies or local level communities worked with particularistic moralities, he argued. This process of evolution is indeed a complicated and complex process in countries like India, which are marked by a variety of pluralities and primordialities. However, not all primordialities are critical or threatening to the nation state. For example, primordial identities based on language, caste and region/territory are rarely seen as anti-national. In contrast, religious diversity and any demands put forward by religious minorities are invariably seen as anti-national and hence illegitimate. He attributed this to the religious violence that accompanied partition of the sub-continent in 1947.

Drawing from his empirical studies of religious violence in independent India, he argued that the discourse of communal violence has differed across communities. Those doing violence in the name of Hindu majority have always invoked the notion of 'Indian people' and justified their attacks on members of religious minorities on the grounds that they were all potentially anti-national. In contrast, those from the minorities have spoken the language of citizenship, arguing that they too are equal members of the nation state and hence need to be protected and treated equally by the nation state. It is in the language of citizenship, as against the discourse of "Indian people", that we need to work for more just and inclusive development in India, he concluded.

Religion, politics and the marginalities of caste

Discussion on the theme of religion, politics and governance continued in the second session, during which Gurpreet Mahajan presented the work done by her along with Surinder S. Jodhka for the RaD programme in the states of Punjab and Maharashtra. The focus of her presentation was however a little different.

Mahajan began by commenting on the specific nature of the Indian democratic regime, which allows religious communities a certain amount of freedom with regard to their community lives and permits them to do things that in liberal democracies are normally seen as being in the domain of the secular state. Another important point she made was that religious communities in India are not coherent wholes: they are differentiated on the basis of caste, language and region.

The states of Punjab and Maharashtra are useful cases because of the active presence of religion-based political parties and their mobilization across communities. In the case of Punjab, the Akali Dal played an important role in mobilizing the Sikh community on the question of creating a state based on a Punjabi linguistic identity. Despite it playing this crucial role in congealing a Sikh identity, support and votes from a section of the Sikhs for the secular Congress Party continued, because it targeted marginalized caste communities among the Sikhs, passing legislation that sub-classified the Scheduled Castes on religious community lines.

Similarly, in the case of Maharashtra, the Muslim communities subdivided themselves on caste lines with the rise of an OBC (Other Backward Classes) Muslim movement during the late 1980s. Through this movement, marginalized Muslim caste groups sought quotas in government jobs on a par with the Hindu OBCs, thus invoking a discourse of citizenship through communitarian mobilizations. This enabled them to engage with the political process as religious communities while still using the language of rights. Such political tactics also neutralized the communal rhetoric of right-wing Hindu parties like the Shiv Sena. Ultimately, even the latter had to concede to the development-oriented demands of “backward Muslims”.

Questions of marginality, caste and religious community also appeared in some other presentations. Surinder S. Jodhka’s presentation of his work on Dalit religious movements (also a part of the RaD research work) extended the arguments put forward by Gurpreet Mahajan in her presentation. Spelling out the framework of his study, Jodhka argued that caste had for long been an important aspect of India’s social order, shaping structures of opportunity and access in the subcontinent. For the Hindu majority population, it has also been an important aspect of their cultural and religious life, shaping notions of differences and divisions in society. However, caste was not simply a question of cultural difference. The ideas of “purity” and “impurity” produced a hierarchical social order marked by rigid social inequalities and the humiliating practice of treating some groups as “untouchables”. Caste-based cultures privileged some social groups and produced deprivation and poverty among others.

The legitimacy of a caste-based hierarchical social order has been questioned historically, particularly by religious movements during “medieval” times. However, it began to be attacked politically and more systematically during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Interestingly, anti-caste movements have invariably taken a religious form, even though they directly engage with “secular” questions of development and social change. Their explicit objective is the empowerment and uplift of the historically excluded and marginalized sections of the Indian/ Hindu population.

Jodhka gave a brief introduction to the history of two Dalit religious movements on which he conducted case studies: the Ad Dharm/Ravidasi movement among the Chamars of the Doaba sub-region of Punjab and the movement for Neo-Buddhist conversion among the Hindu Mahars of Maharashtra.

Looking at these movements from a development perspective, he argued that the two caste groups' emergence as strong and autonomous communities in their respective regions can be attributed to their religious mobilization. The movements helped to produce a set of motivated leaders, who worked hard for the social and economic development of their community members. Along with building autonomous symbolic or cultural resources for their fellow Dalits, such as ritual practices and sacred places, they also invested in structures to facilitate the social and economic development of their communities. In particular, the Ravi Dasis and Neo-Buddhists raised awareness of the value of education and today, through a network of community-based organizations, run a large number of schools, cooperative banks and other support institutions for community members. The newly developed community networks and resources give members of the communities a sense of confidence and pride about their identity. The investments they have made in developing educational institutions and other support systems have enabled them to progress economically, diversify into different livelihood activities and improve their well-being.

Their mobilization as communities has also empowered them politically in their respective regions. Where the movements are powerful, it is no longer easy for the traditionally dominant or "upper castes" to practise untouchability and discriminate against the Dalits. B.R. Ambedkar, the pioneering leader of one of the movements, has also emerged as an important political and cultural icon for Dalit communities across the country.

Socially excluded and marginalized groups struggle not only for equity and entitlements, but also for cultural and symbolic resources, of which religion is an important part. Even when they mobilize against dominant religious ideologies, such as ex-untouchables questioning the practice of caste and untouchability in Hinduism, they do not reject religion *per se*. It remains an important component of their notion of well-being. Thus, instead of turning to 'secular modernity' or 'moving out of religion', they mobilize their communities to achieve autonomous religious identities which offer them a dignified mode of self-representation and a way out of what they view as a degrading and humiliating status within the dominant religious tradition.

Development activities of the Ravi Dasi movement in Punjab were also a subject of study by Gurharpal Singh, Darshan Tatla and Charlene Simon as part of the RaD programme. Darshan Tatla and Charlene Simon jointly presented the ongoing work at the seminar.

Their focus revolved around the transnational links of the Ravi Dasi Dera at village Ballan (Jalandhar, Punjab) and how the involvement of the Ravidasi Diaspora has played a role in re-articulating the religious identity of the Ravi Dasis. The continuous flow of donations from the diaspora has also been critical for the running of social development project. The Dera at Ballan has been quite successful in attracting Punjabi Dalits settled outside India, especially those in the United Kingdom, where Ravidasis are the largest Punjabi Dalit community, as well as migrants from the Doaba region where the Dera is located. Ravisdasis' engagement with the Dera has helped them to articulate a separate religious identity for themselves in their country of residence and, in turn, strengthened the Deras in Punjab.

Tatla and Simon's presentation described some of the development initiatives taken by the Dera, including schools and hospitals being run by them in Punjab, mostly with support of diaspora philanthropy. The research showed that pride in these institutions increased the

community's self-confidence and raised its self-esteem. The Ravi Dasi leaders often mentioned the fact that even members of dominant caste communities accessed services operated by these Dalit-run institutions, drawing attention to this as evidence of the "dominant caste" recognising them as their equals.

Yet another paper on an overlapping theme was by Navtej Purewal. Based on the work she has been doing with Virinder Kalra in the Indian and Pakistani Punjab, her paper focused on **'**Vicissitudes of Religion and Inequality in Relation to Gender and Caste in the Two Punjabi Contexts'. Her paper underlined the point that, despite claims to the contrary and the emergence of a political boundary, lay believers continue to look at their identities in complex and diverse ways. She noted that the complex relationships of religion to gender and caste vary between classes and social contexts, suggesting that syncretic traditions have not disappeared from either side of Punjab.

The question of religion and the caste-related marginality of Dalits was also the subject of Zara Ramsay's presentation. Based on the research she has been doing along with Tamsin Bradley for the RaD programme, she compared the attitudes of two Buddhist communities toward religion, viz. Dalit converts to Buddhism in Pune (Maharashtra) and Tibetan refugees in Dharamshala in the northern hills of Himachal Pradesh. For the Mahar Dalits of Pune, who converted to Buddhism under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar as part of their struggle against the practice of untouchability and caste-based inequalities in Hinduism, religious faith was primarily a political question. Their approach to Buddhism was largely instrumental, as it helped them to confront the caste question and offered an alternative religious ideology. . The Mahars of Pune invariably invoked a discourse of justice and rights while campaigning for Buddhism, which provided a basis for political mobilization and a way of conveying the political message that they were opposed to the domination of upper caste Hindus and the injustices of the caste system. In addition, it provided them with the psychological resources to build positive self-esteem and enabled poorer members of the community to access resources provided by Buddhist FBOs.

Dharamshala presented a different picture. In the case of Tibetan refugees, the research found that the Buddhist religion was essentially a source of spiritual strength. Though they too had a political concern, viz. the independence of Tibet, and problems of food and shelter, they did not instrumentally link these or their solutions to religion. The refugees had fled from their homeland because of their religious beliefs. Everyone had come to Dharamshala as a migrant and had had to struggle to build up their lives in a new country. Thus their religious faith was strengthened in the context of exile and the solidarity associated with their sociopolitical situation helped to mitigate the impact of social hierarchy.

In addition to these presentations looking at mobilizations of religion and caste for positive social change, Manindra Thakur discussed the nature of neo-religious movements. He offered a broad mapping of so-called neo-religious movements, underlining the point that, although the term has become popular with some scholars, it refers to such diverse phenomena that it is difficult for social scientists to conceptualize such movements as a distinctive reality or understand their social and political effects.

Religious minorities and development discourse: the Muslim question

Muslims are the largest religious minority of India. According to the 2001 Census they were 13.4 percent of India's total population. However, for various historical reasons, the pace of their development has been slower than most other communities. In addition, they have been the victims of prejudice and frequent targets of communal violence.

Dipankar Gupta's research work for the RaD programme looked at the process of rehabilitation of Muslim minority communities after devastating violence in two cities of western India, Mumbai and Ahmedabad, and the manner in which they have sought and struggled for "a new normal". Both these cities have witnessed anti-Muslim riots and in both, Muslims were the main victims of the "communal violence". In the post-riot situation, victims had similar concerns and priorities. Restoration of normal life was their main concern, and their priorities were, predictably, security, shelter, restoration of their economic lives and their children to recommence attending school.

However, the process of rehabilitation in the two settings has been quite different. The nature of the violence, the extent of damage and the process of rehabilitation were all influenced by the attitude of the local state and the strengths and weaknesses of the communities in the two settings. In other words, the strategies open to victims differed depending on the context, which reflects the different social histories of the two cities. In particular, Mumbai's history of trade unionism, secular activism, economic diversification and greater prosperity was mirrored not just in city politics and the composition of its elites, but also in the presence of a Muslim bourgeoisie whose emergence this history had facilitated.

This contrasted with Ahmedabad's dependence on a declining textile industry, the lack of strong civic leaders and the absence of a self-confident Muslim elite. The Muslim community in Ahmedabad was mostly poor, and so the political and economic support provided to victims in Mumbai by affluent Muslim business people was rarely available to its members. Generally employed as artisans or labourers in the local informal economy, once the violence had died down, most Muslims were able to access similar jobs, with similarly low incomes, although often in a different part of the city. Some but not all of those with businesses were able to raise the funds to repair or replace lost property, stock and equipment.

This difference of context also conditioned the role of faith-based organizations in the two cities. Given the alternatives, the Muslim faith organizations in Mumbai remained confined to religious or cultural activities. In Gujarat, on the other hand, they played a very active and constructive role in the process of rehabilitation, coordinating with secular NGOs for the purpose.

Gupta concluded by stressing that the victims of the riots did not simply want physical rehabilitation in terms of housing and jobs. They also wanted dignity. Their foremost demand was the restoration of their status as citizens, which in their view was possible only if the perpetrators of the violence were punished and justice was done.

In his presentation on 'governing the others: politics of culture and challenges of citizenship', Bimol Akoijam also explored the question of Muslim citizenship in India from a critical and theoretical perspective. Akoijam challenged the juridico-political notion of citizenship and the nation state by calling into question the nature of entitlements that a visible minority/majority divide entails, which are often partial and couched in terms of unequal participation. Commenting on how the relationship between the nation and the state has been played out

historically, he asserted that one sees a continuing tendency to conflate the two within the concept of a nation state. Citizenship now gets played out not in absolute terms, but in the context of an all-encompassing nation state. In this context he also invoked the concept of the cultural unconscious, which in his view leads to the emergence of a liminal cultural space within the contours of modernity, a space that in some ways contradicts some of modernity's core assumptions. This, he suggested, can be seen time and time again in the way that the idea of India has been conflated with the idea of the Hindu, as well as in numerous other instances. While such ideas produce exclusions, what is significant is the way they get played out within existing frameworks of development.

The question of Muslim marginality has recently been recognized by the Indian state. The Government of India has initiated some special schemes for Muslim development after a high level committee submitted its report in 2006 (Sachar Committee Report, the SCR). Publication of the SCR has in many ways transformed the discourse on the subject, bringing the question of development into the foreground. Several presentations directly addressed this subject.

One of India's leading Muslim intellectuals and activists, Asghar Ali Engineer, touched upon some of the issues raised by the SCR in his presentation on the 'Changing Contours of Muslim Marginality in India'. He underlined the point that the Indian Muslims were as much Indian as they were Muslims. Any attempt to link them with a larger Islamic identity at the global level is mischievous and ill-founded. Muslim labour in countries of the Gulf is treated as badly as Hindu labour. The local Arab population did not identify with them because of their shared religion, but looked at them as migrants from India. Boundaries between culture and religion have always been fuzzy.

Engineer also emphasised the uniqueness of the Muslim tradition in India. Sharia law evolved in the context of medieval Arab culture and makes no sense in the present day social and cultural context of India. We should not forget the socio-cultural and historical context when dealing with religious communities, their texts and practices, he argued. We also need to recognize that there are diverse cultural traditions amongst Indian Muslims. It is dangerous to club them together and think of them as a monolithic identity. Muslim traditions vary in their everyday practices and come together only in the realm of *ibadat,* the relationship between Allah and human beings. In addition, religious practices undergo change when social needs and contexts change. Finally, Engineer called upon the Indian state to fulfill the promise it has made to the Indian Muslims and pursue the agenda of their development. The Sachar Committee has given them hope, he commented, but action on the recommendations of the Report has been rather slow.

Chandan Gowda also commented on the policy implications for Indian Muslims of the Sachar Committee Report. He argued that the Indian secular state is rife with institutional contradictions that make Muslims vulnerable, because they are marked with the double label of being an appeased minority and at the same time being regarded as anti-national. Though the SCR recognizes that the Muslim minority faces problems of identity, equity and security, which are interlinked, it still tries to isolate the question of 'equity', as though this can be dealt with in isolation. Further, he asserted, the report only suggests that the welfare of Muslim population isintrinsic to the idea of Indian diversity, failing to deal with cultural and ethical questions. In his view, it perhaps adopted the premise that the majority population is likely to accept the agenda of 'equity' at the cost of identity, thus undermining the recognition of diversity.

In a detailed and critical presentation on 'Minoritysm or Minority Rights: Interrogating Post-Sachar Strategies of Intervention', Tanveer Fazel focused on substantive policy issues relevant to Muslims. He began with the contention that in many ways the Sachar Committee Report represented a paradigm shift in the state's attitude towards the development of religious minorities. The discourse on minorities during the pre-SCR period had been dominated by questions of cultural and community identity, but such a perspective did not look at internal differences within communities and almost always, in his view, ended up addressing the needs of the dominant within a community.

The SCR was able to go beyond this identity-centric discourse and present facts about the development deficit among Muslims. However, the response of the Indian government to the suggestions made by the SCR has, according to him, been disappointing, both in terms of policy and allocation of funds. One of the major problems encountered by the SCR was the lack of data on the 'religion variable' in the available data sets. However, no serious attempts are being made to collect such data, despite a strong recommendation by the Committee. Similarly, the SCR stress on modern education seems to have been ignored by state governments. Nor are there any concrete efforts to increase Muslim representation in legislative bodies.

Three more presentations dealt with issues emerging out of the recent public debate on the SCR and the developmental concerns of Indian Muslims.

Hilal Ahmed spoke on the ways in which the discourse of affirmative action is popularly understood/interpreted and political played out in relation to the Muslim minority in northern India. He identified two broad perspectives on the subject. First is 'the Muslim unity perspective', in which the entire population of Muslims is presented as socially and educationally "backward", irrespective of class/caste differences. The second perspective is the Pasmenda, or Dalit Muslim perspective, which underlines the significant internal differences of caste and class among the Muslims of north India, which demand a more targeted policy response, focusing on the historically deprived and marginalized sections of the community. He further argued that the two perspectives also articulate the notion of social injustice differently: the Muslim unity perspective seems to be preoccupied with power for elite Muslims while the Dalit perspective foregrounds questions of social exclusion, economic backwardness based on caste, which makes the question much more complicated. However, he asserted, the Muslim Dalit perspective is still quite weak and has not yet been able to counter the hegemony of the former perspective.

Kamala Sankaran examined understandings of "backwardness" and technical aspects of the use of law for the purpose of affirmative action in favour of Muslims. She pointed to the possible legal difficulties that are likely to emerge when affirmative action policy is extended beyond the realm of caste. For the legal system and the courts, "backwardness" and "minority status" are two different concepts - while "backwardness" is understood in qualitative terms, "minority status" has mostly been viewed in quantitative terms, meaning the numerical minorities. Intermeshing the two is not an easy process and is likely to create legal issues of different kinds.

The question of Muslim education is politically sensitivity because of the perceived popularity among Muslims of the traditional system of educating children in madrasas or Islamic schools.

SCR broke this myth by pointing to the fact that only 4 percent of Muslim children study in madrasas.

As part of the RaD research work in India, Padmaja Nair conducted a study on the nature of the relationships between the Indian state and "faith based" institutions of Muslim schooling. In her empirical study carried out in Bihar and West Bengal, she found that over the years madrasas have undergone several changes and so have their relationships with the state. At present, state-madrasa relationships, as well as the institution itself, appear to be at a crossroads, pulled between a state that is focused on 'modernizing' madrasas and debate within the madrasa system itself on the nature of contemporary education and the extent and nature of necessary reforms. Of late, state-madrasa relationships have also been coloured by the larger global political context, which has polarized sentiments about Muslims as a community. She argued that, during the post-independence period, state-madrasa relationships have been influenced by three inter-related factors: the constitutional obligations of the government towards minorities; political parties' need to mobilize Muslim communities for political power and electoral support; and the internal identity crisis of the madrasa system, arising out of madrasas' need to survive as traditional institutions of instruction that impart useful education while keeping their religious identity intact.

Finally, there was a presentation of RaD research work with a rather different focus. Based on their empirical work in Punjab and Andhra Pradesh among Sikhs and Hindus, Vinod Pavarala and Kanchan Malik presented a paper on 'religion, ethics and attitudes towards corruption'. Their work is based on the assumption that religion is an 'essential ingredient in the lives of the people in India, even if the quantity and character of the role it plays varies significantly from person to person'. The focus of their work is to understand the key interpretations and deliberations among social groups regarding the terms 'religion' and 'corruption', ascertaining what people mean when they categorize themselves as 'being religious' or others as 'being corrupt'. Though their research revealed differences between people's interpretations of the nuances of corruption or corrupt behaviour, it also showed that they all understood corruption as being relevant to the public domain - the misuse of 'public office' for personal gain. Religion coexists with liberal, cosmopolitan values in the lives of the people they studied. Their research showed that most of the professionals interviewed had a desire to follow service rules, which was attributed to the values they had imbibed at home and during their upbringing. Both Hindu and Sikh respondents said that, if the religious texts are understood properly, there would be no conflict between personal life and professional life. However, they also underlined that 'religiosity is not a guarantee of virtue', with most of their respondents having a cynical attitude towards the priestly class, who they felt were as susceptible to corrupt behaviour as any lay person. Thus certain characteristics of religion can, in the eyes of their informants, encourage tolerance of corruption, although religion can also be an antidote to the growth of 'consumerist' and materialistic' cultures to which people also attribute the perceived growth in corrupt behaviour.

More than 140 people registered at the venue on the morning of the first day of the seminar, and attendance throughout the two full days of presentations and discussions was close to that figure. The audience consisted of fellow academics, Ph.D. research students and representatives from civil society organizations, among others. A large number of students participated in the seminar and it was particularly encouraging to see the enthusiasm of younger scholars for the theme. On the whole the seminar was a highly instructive and interesting occasion for students

and academics alike. Unfortunately, participation by five UK-based members of the RaD team was prevented at the last minute by an untimely eruption of the Icelandic volcano, which grounded all flights.

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