

RaD India Evening Function
Book Series Launch and Book-Release
India International Centre, Date: 19th April, 2010

RELIGION AND CITIZENSHIP, RaD Book Series from Routledge

Book Launch: *Religion, Communities and Development: Changing Contours of Politics and Policy in India*. Eds Gurpreet Mahajan and Surinder S. Jodhka, Routledge India, New Delhi



On behalf of the Religions and Development Research Programme in India, the country coordinator, Surinder S. Jodhka has signed an agreement with Routledge India to publish the research finding of the programme under a special book-series on 'Religion and Citizenship'. The first book under the series, *Religion, Communities and Development: Changing Contours of Politics and Policy in India*, eds. Gurpreet Mahajan and Surinder S. Jodhka (2010) is already out. To launch the book-series and release the first book, a function was organized at the India International Centre, New Delhi, on April 19, 2010. The function was attended by participants of the seminar, several Delhi-based senior academics of the country, media persons, policy makers and good number young scholars from Delhi. Around 130 persons attended the function.



The chief guest of the function was Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission, Government of India.

Shammi Manik, Managing Director, Routledge South Asia welcomed everyone and invited attention to the need for openly discussing religion as a development category in the light of the Sachar Committee Report. He said that the book addresses this task and opens up further questions as well. He introduced the panelists and invited Dr. Syeda Hameed to preside over the function.

Three panelists, Professor Ghanshyam Shah, a well known political sociologist, formerly at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Professor Mukul Kesavan, a historian at Jamia Milia Islamia and Professor Ujjwal K. Singh, a political scientist at the University of Delhi, led the discussions.



In his brief presentation, Professor Ghamshyam Shah noted that the book was timely and it addressed some of the emerging questions in relation to communities and their development, or lack of it.

The group specific policies in India had so far been implemented on the lines of caste. However, religious groups have not been looked at the way caste groups have been in policy interventions, he added. Referring to the reservation policy, he opined that it has to be re-looked in the context of deprivations experienced by some of the religious groups as well. He then posed question of specific policies and affirmative action for Muslims in India, drawing attention to the report of Sachar Committee. He noted that though Sachar Committee report has highlighted the question of development deficits of Muslims in India, it has not clearly addressed issues such as discrimination and affirmative action for Muslims. He argued that the Sachar committee failed to deal with the question of Muslim reservation. He further noted that there is an immense need for government's intervention on the Muslims question and their growing aspiration for development and inclusion.



In his presentation, Prof. Mukul Kesavan commended the editors and authors. The book, he argued tries to make a case for looking at religious communities as an analytical category for research and policy making. He also appreciated the Sachar Committee report for accepting religious community as a category of analysis. However, religious communities were internally differentiated, a point repeatedly underlined by contributors to the book.

Though caste, which is also a communitarian has been in use for policy and affirmative action. But when it came to the Muslim question, the prejudice was much stronger. However, the public affirmation of Sachar committee report shows that the Indian society was undergoing a change. He also pointed to wider perception on treating non-indic religions as foreign.



The third discussant, Professor Ujjwal Kumar Singh commented that the essays in the book were all empirically grounded, conceptually very rich and dealt with complex issues confronting the Indian society today. He looked at the questions discussed in the book from the perspective of human rights. Over the last decade or so the question of religion and development had become an important issue in India. It is also being articulated by those fighting for human rights. This, in a way, had also become an important question in the post 9/11 in counties of the West. In the United States, for example, the rights of religious groups are being discussed in a very different language today.



Dr. Syeda Hameed congratulated the Editors Gurpreet Mahajan and Surinder S. Jodhka for their excellent effort in bringing out the book. She also congratulated Routledge South Asia for publishing the book, which discusses an often less discussed subject – religions, community and development. She also mentioned that the book will be of great help to her in providing a perspective on the subject and the work she is doing in the Planning Commission.

Invoking her personal experience of working with the Planning Commission, she pointed to the fact that development bureaucracy invariably referred to regions and communities as monoliths. The book will surely help the policy makers in understanding the internal structures and intricacy of religious communities in India. It will perhaps help us recognize that the “one size fit everything” approach will be futile, she added.

She observed that in the absence of reliable data on different dimensions of deprivation, we need sensitivity towards deprivation of different sections of our society. We needed to change the mindsets of policy makers and bureaucracy. There is a strong resistance to any kind of paradigm change.



Vote of thanks from Professor Surinder S. Jodhka

Before expressing words of thanks, Prof. Jodhka gave a brief background to the Religions and Development Research Program. He underlined the point that getting the messages of our research across to the relevant audiences was given a high priority by the programme. He admitted that Social scientists are not used to engaging with policy makers. He too initially felt that the work of social scientists was to do research but over the years he has realized that we needed to put in a little extra effort to reach out and communicate our researchers to people who can use it and may not notice it otherwise.

While concluding, Prof. Jodhka thanked Dr. Syeda Hameed, for her valuable observation on the book and hoped that they would keep interacting in future on the research work coming out of the RaD programme. He also thanked Prof. Shah, Prof. Kesavan, and Prof. Singh for commenting on the book.

The book release function was followed by dinner at Rose Garden, India International Centre.

