

Plural Societies and Imperatives of Development: Religions, Communities, Citizenship

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I

Introduction

Notwithstanding its 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 the state policy in most of the developing world. It also continues to be invoked in political rhetoric of populist mobilization, a source of hope to the large masses of poor and deprived 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, where 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, the process of secularization. It is now widely recognized that cultural tradition and religious belief do not simply disappear from the public life. Religious identity or belief could 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 could be a source of security and sustenance for individuals. Moreover, closer view of the West also reveals that the idea of community or religious identity had never disappeared from the “developed” Western world as the classical theories of social change had made it out to be.

This change in attitude of the social sciences towards religion could 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 fact, without any teleological presupposition about its pasts or futures. This shift has also been reinforced by the emerging 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 the Adivasis, or the religious minorities, such as the

Muslims. Interestingly, while they often critique the 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 a more inclusive and just development.

There has also been 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 political elite in countries like India, the old secular-communal dichotomous way of thinking seems to be increasingly becoming meaningless. Social policies dealing with issues of marginalities and exclusions are invariably framed using “social group” variables at the core. At 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 where religious and communitarian identities are difficult to dispense with.

While questions of development and citizenship in relation to culture and religious belief 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 days seminar where some of the research carried out by the researchers in the programme was presented along with presentations on related subjects by other scholars.

The two days 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.

II

State, Religion and the 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 so in relation to social policy. This was doubly true about the subject of religion and development, a subject of critical significance in a country like India. He hoped that the work being done by RaD programme would be 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 the 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. The intellectuals, educationists, writers, voluntary groups and social movements were all components of the civil society. However, he also contended that civil society was not a homogenous category. There were always differences/disagreements and struggles on what needed to be done for the good of the society, between the mainstream and the periphery.

Through a brief introduction to the intellectual history of modern India Shah argued that religion had always remained central to the Indian civil society. Perhaps the first modern intellectual engagement with the idea of civil society in India was through the idea of “Indian civilization” during the 18th and 19th century. 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 also 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, Shah argued that this sectarian intellectual history continues to shape the so-called civil society discourse in the state of Gujarat even today. The mainstream intellectuals, educational institutions and creative writers continue to invoke Hindu idiom in their discourse on the civil society. 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 evolution of modern nation state required institutionalization of citizenship as a universal ethic. In contrast, the pre-modern societies, or local level communities, worked with particularistic moralities, he argued. This 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 seen to be critical or threatening to the nation state. For example, the 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 differed across communities. Those doing violence on the name of Hindu majority always invoked the notion of ‘Indian people’ and justified their attacks on members of religious minorities on the ground that they were all potentially anti-national. In contrast, those from the minorities spoke the language of citizenship, arguing that they too were equal members of the nation state and hence

needed 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 a more just and inclusive development of India, he concluded.

III

Religion, Politics and the Marginalities of Caste

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

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

The states of Punjab and Maharashtra were useful case studies because of active presence of religion based political parties and their mobilizations across communities. In 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. In spite of this crucial role in congealing the Sikh identity, the secular Congress Party also kept getting support and votes from a section of the Sikhs. This was possible because the Congress Party targeted marginalized caste communities among the Sikhs and passed legislations that sub-classified the Scheduled Castes on community lines.

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

Question of marginalities, caste and religious communities also appeared in some other presentations as well. 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 and it had shaped structures of opportunity and access in the subcontinent. For the majority population of the Hindus it has also been an important aspect of their cultural and religious life and shaped the notion of differences and divisions in society. However,

caste was not simply a question of cultural difference. The ideas of “pure” and “impure” 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 deprivations and poverty among others.

The legitimacy of caste-based hierarchical social order had been questioned in the Indian history, particularly by religious movements during the “medieval” times. However, it was during the colonial and post-colonial period that the caste system began to be attacked politically and more systematically. Interestingly, the 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.

He gave a brief introduction to the history of the two Dalit religious movements, his case studies for the component. These movements were the Ad Dharm/ Ravidasi movement among the Chamars of the Doaba sub-region of Punjab and the movement for Neo-Buddhist conversions among the Hindu Mahars of Maharashtra.

Looking at them from a development perspective, he argues that it was due to their religious mobilizations that the two caste groups have emerged as strong and autonomous communities in their respective regions. The movements helped produce a set of motivated leaders who have worked hard for 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 have also invested in laying down structures for social and economic development of their community. Through a network of community-based organizations, the Ravi Dasis and Neo-Buddhists today run a large number of schools, cooperative banks and other support institutions for community members. The movements also significantly raised their awareness about the value of education. The newly developed community networks and resources give them a sense of confidence and pride about their identity. The investments they have made in developing educational institutions and other supporting systems makes it easier for them to move ahead economically and diversify into different activities for livelihood and well-being.

Their mobilization as communities has also empowered them politically in their respective regions. It is no longer easy for the traditionally dominant or “upper castes” to practice untouchability and discrimination against them in the pockets where these movements are powerful. B.R. Ambedkar, the pioneering leader of one of these movements, has also emerged as an important political and cultural icon for Dalits communities across the country.

The 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 the 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 for 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 for another component of the RaD programme. Darshan Tatla and Charlene Simon jointly presented the ongoing work on this component 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 played a role in re-articulating the religious identity of the Ravi Dasies. The continuous flow of donations from the diaspora was also critical for the running of social development project of the community. The Dera at Ballan has been quite successful in attracting Punjabi Dalits settled outside India, especially those in the United Kingdom and migrants from the Doaba region where the Dera is located. Ravidasis are the largest Punjabi Dalit community in the United Kingdom. Their engagements with the Dera helped them articulate a separate religious identity for themselves in their country of residence and, in turn it also strengthened the Deras in Punjab.

Tatla and Simon also presented their case study of development initiatives taken-up by the Dera, the schools and hospitals being run by them in Punjab, mostly with support of the diaspora philanthropy. These institutions instilled a sense of pride in the community and gave them confidence and raised their self-esteem. The Ravi Dasi leaders often mentioned the fact that even members of the dominant castes communities accessed services from these Dalit run institutions, which was an 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 emergence of political boundaries, the lay believers continue to look at their identities in complex and diverse ways. The syncretic traditions had not disappeared from either side of Punjab. Purewal also argued that the relationship of religion with gender and caste was quite complex and varied across class and other social contexts.

The question of religion and caste related marginalities of Dalits was also the subject of Zara Ramsey’s presentation. Based on the research she has been doing along with Tamsin Bradley for RaD programme, she compared the attitude of two Buddhist communities toward religion, viz. the Dalit converts to Buddhism in Pune (Maharashtra) and the Tibetan refugees of Dharamshala in the northern hills of Himachal Pradesh. For the Mahar Dalits of Pune who had 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 towards Buddhism was largely instrumental as it helped them confront the caste question and offered an alternative religious ideology. Here religion turns into practical ethics *since* it was used as a coping mechanism. The Buddhist Mahars of Pune invariably invoked a discourse of justice and rights while campaigning for Buddhism. It was a mode of political mobilization that provided them psychological resources to a build positive self-esteem. It was also a source of conveying a political message, of being opposed to the domination of upper caste Hindus over them and the injustices of caste system. For poorer members of the community, Buddhism was also a way of accessing resources from the Buddhist FBOs.

Dharamshala presented a different picture. In case of Tibetan refugees religion worked more as a source for spiritual strength. Though they too had a political concern, viz. independence of Tibet and they also had problems of food and shelter, they did not instrumentally link them with Buddhism. They were all migrants who had fled from their homeland because of their religious beliefs. The solidarity due to their sociopolitical situation helped them in mitigating the impact of social hierarchy. Everyone came to Dharamshala as a migrant and had to struggle to build up a life in a new country and faith was strengthened in context of exile.

Apart from all these presentations looking at mobilizations of religion and caste for a positive social change we also had a presentation on the nature of contexts of the neo-religious movements by Manindra Thakur. He offered a broad mapping of the so-called neo-religious movements and underlined the point that though the term had become popular with some scholar, it referred to something which was too diverse in content and form. This diversity made it difficult for social scientists to conceptualize them as a distinct reality and understand their social and political effects.

IV

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. They have also been victims of prejudice and frequent cases of communal violence targeting them.

Dipankar Gupta's research work for RaD programme looked at the process of rehabilitation of the Muslim minority communities after devastating violence in two cities of western India, Mumbai and Ahmedabad, and the manner in which they have struggled and sought "a new normal". Both these cities have been witness to anti-Muslim riots in the past and in both the cities Muslims had been the main victims of the "communal violence". The riot victims also had similar concerns in the post-riot situation. Restoration of normal life was the main concern with all of them. Their priorities were also similar and quite predictable. They wanted security and shelter. They

wanted restoration of their economic life and they wanted their children to go back to schools.

However, the process of rehabilitation in the two settings had been quite different. The nature of violence, 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 them 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 it had facilitated.

This contrasted with Ahmedabad's dependence on a declining textile industry, the lack of strong civic leaders and the absence of 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 were rarely available to them. Generally employed as artisans or labourers in local informal economy, once the violence died down, most of the Muslims were able to access similar jobs, with similar low incomes, although often in a different part of the city. Some but not all of those with businesses were able to raise 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, and actively coordinated their work with secular NGOs for the task.

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

In his presentation on 'governing the others: politics of culture and challenges of citizenship', Bimol Akoiyam also explored the question of Muslim citizenship in India from a critical and theoretical perspective. Akoiyam challenged the juridico political notion of citizenship and nation state by calling to question the fact that the nature of entitlement that a visible minority/majority divide entails is often partial and couched in unequal terms of participation. Commenting on how the relationship between the nation and the state has been played out historically one sees a continuing tendency to conflate the two within the concept of nation state. Citizenship now gets played out not in absolute terms but in the context of this all encompassing nation state. In this context he also invoked the concept of the cultural unconscious. It is the cultural unconscious that leads to the emergence of a liminal cultural space within the contours of modernity, which in a way goes against some of its core assumptions. This can be seen time and again in the way the idea of India has been conflated with the idea of the Hindu, as well as in

numerous other instances. While this works to produce exclusions of their kind what is significant is the way they get played out within the existing frameworks of development.

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

One of India's leading Muslim intellectual and activist Asghar Ali Engineer touched upon some of the issues raised by 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. The attempt to link them with the larger Islamic identity at the global level was mischievous and ill-founded. The Muslim labour in countries of the Gulf was treated as badly as the Hindu labourers were. The local Arab population did not identify with them because of religion but looked at them as migrants from India. Boundaries between culture and religion have always been fuzzy.

He also put emphasis on the uniqueness of Muslim tradition in India. Sharia had evolved in the context of medieval Arab culture and it made no sense in the present day social and cultural context of India. We should not forget the socio-cultural and historical context while dealing with religious communities, their texts and practices. We also need to recognize diverse cultural traditions amongst the Indian Muslims. It would be dangerous to club them together and think of them as a monolithic identity. The Muslim traditions vary in their everyday practices and they come together only in the realm of *ibadat*, the relationship between Allah and the human beings. Religious practices also undergo change when the social needs and contexts change.

He also called upon the Indian state to fulfill the promise it has made to the Indian Muslims and pursue the agenda of their development. Sachar Committee had given hope to the Indian Muslims. However, the action on the recommendations of the Report has been rather slow.

In another presentation Chandan Gowda also commented on the policy implications of the Sachar Committee Report for the Indian Muslims. He argued that the Indian secular state was rife with institutional contradictions that made the Muslims vulnerable as they were marked with double labels of being an appeased minority and at the same time being anti-national. Though SCR recognizes that the Muslim minority faced the problems of identity, equity and security and they were interlinked, it still tried to isolate the question of 'equity' as though it can be dealt with in isolation. It only suggests that welfare of Muslim population was intrinsic part to the idea of Indian diversity. However, it fails to deal with the cultural and ethical questions. It is perhaps operating with the premise that the majority population is likely to accept the agenda of 'equity' at the cost of identity, thus undermining the diversity question.

In a more detailed and critical presentation on ‘Minorityism or Minority Rights: Interrogating Post-Sachar Strategies of Intervention’, Tanweer Fazal focused on the substantive policy related issues in relation to the 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 dominant discourse on minorities during the pre-SCR period was dominated by questions of cultural and community identity. Such a perspective did not look at the internal differences within the communities and almost always ended-up addressing the needs of the dominant within the community.

The SCR was able to go beyond this identity-centric discourse and presented facts about the development deficit among Muslims. However, response of the Indian government to the suggestions made by the SCR has been quite disappointing, both in terms of policy and fund allocation. One of the major problems encountered by SCR was the lack of data on ‘religion variable’ in the available data sets. However, no serious attempts are being made to collect such data despite a strong recommendation of the Committee. Similarly the SCR stress on modern education seems to have been ignored by the state governments. There are also no concrete efforts in pipeline for increasing Muslim representation in legislative bodies.

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

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

Another presentation by Kamala Sankaran examined the technical aspects of law and understanding of backwardness for the purpose of affirmative action in favour of Muslims. She pointed to the possible legal difficulties that are likely to emerge when the affirmative action policy is extended beyond the realm of caste. For the legal system and the courts, “backwardness” and “minority status” were two different concepts. While “backwardness” was understood in qualitative terms, the “minority status” has mostly

been viewed in quantitative terms, the numerical minorities. The intermeshing of two has not been an easy process and is likely to create legal issues of different kinds.

The question of Muslim education acquires political sensitivity also because of the perceived popularity among Muslims of traditional system of educating children in Madrasas, or Islamic schools. SCR had broken this myth by pointing to the fact that only 4 percent of Muslim children studied in Madrasas.

As part of the RaD research work in India Padmaja Nair conducted a study on the nature of relationship of the Indian state with “faith based” institution of schooling. In her empirical study carried out in Bihar and West Bengal, she found that over the years Madrasas had undergone several changes and so had their relationship with the state. At present, state-madrassa relationships, as well as the institution itself, appear to be at 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-madrassa 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-madrassa relationship has been influenced by three inter-related factors. These are the constitutional obligations of the government towards minorities; political party’s need to mobilize Muslim communities for political power and electoral support; and the internal identity crisis of the madrasa system, their need to survive as traditional institutions of instruction that impart useful education while keeping their religious identity intact.

Finally, the seminar also had a presentation of another component of RaD research work, which had a rather different focus. Based on their empirical work in Punjab and Andhra Pradesh among Sikhs and Hindus, Vinod Pavarala and Kanchan Malik presented their paper on ‘religion, ethics and attitudes towards corruption’. Their work is based on the assumption that religion was 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 was to understand the key interpretations and deliberations among social groups regarding the terms ‘religion’ and ‘corruption’ and what do people mean when they categorize themselves as ‘being religious’ or others as ‘being corrupt’. Religion coexisted with liberal, cosmopolitan values in the lives of the people. Their research showed that ‘most of the professionals derived their conviction to follow service rules from the values imbibed at home and upbringing’. Both the Hindu and Sikh respondents said that if the religious texts were understood properly there would be no conflict between personal life and professional life. However, they also underlined that ‘religiosity was not a guarantee for virtuosity’. Similarly, most of their respondents also had a cynical attitude towards the priestly class, who, they felt were as much amenable to corrupt behaviour as any other lay person.

Though different people could interpret nuances of corruption or corrupt behaviour differently, they all understood it as being a part of the public domain, misuse of ‘public office’ for personal gain. Their respondents also mentioned that certain characteristics of religion could provide scope for tolerance for corruption. Their respondents repeatedly

attributed increased corrupt behaviour to the growth of 'consumerist' and 'materialistic' cultures.

Most presentations were followed by fairly good amount of discussion. The seminar was attended by a good number of people and attracted attention of different kinds of audience. On both the days we started at 10 AM and continued until around 5:30 PM. More than 140 people registered at the venue on the morning of the first day and we hardly had any seats vacant throughout the day, except during the closing session. We had a few seats vacant when we started off on the morning of the second day, but the seminar hall again filled-up by the second session. We had around 120 to 140 people present through the second day. The audience consisted of fellow academics, Ph.D. research students and representatives from civil society organizations among others. It was particularly encouraging to see the enthusiasm of younger scholars in the theme of the seminar. A large number of students participated in the seminar on both days. On the whole it was a highly instructive and interesting engagement for students and academics alike.

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