

Chapter 4

The Other Invisible Hand: How Freedom of Religion or Belief Fosters Pro-Social and Pro-Developmental Outcomes for the Poor*

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1 Introduction

At 3.30 in the afternoon the stench from the abattoir across the road from Gita's³ tiny vegetable shop hangs heavy in the warm and humid mid-monsoon air. Even as passers-by quicken their pace and reach for their handkerchiefs or *sari pallus* to cover their noses, Gita smiles as she acknowledges our discomfort. 'It stinks most of the time', she says 'but I never have to worry about customers. People come to buy meat from the *dhoddi* (abattoir) and stop here to get their vegetables. It's a good spot to have a shop.' Gita settles herself on a plywood crate and begins to talk about her husband:

You ask me about my husband. Yes, he lives with me. By that I mean he sleeps in the house. I don't know much about where he is or what he does. Fifteen years ago, almost as soon as we got married, he started drinking and seeing other women. I poured kerosene oil on my body and set it alight. I did not want to live. I wanted to die.

She then pulled aside her *dupatta* to reveal a body overwhelmed with burns and puckered scars. Her hands are so badly burned that her fingers are bent out of shape:

I am alive because of God. He saved me. My neighbour broke down the door and rescued me. My church paid for my treatment and I was saved. I have three children today and my daughter wants to be a teacher. My husband continues to do bad things but God's grace gives me the strength to live. Whenever things get me down, I remember that I have to rely on God's strength and not my own.

The implications of Gita's story – that what animates a person at the deepest level and gives meaning to life is motivation, spirit and strength of will – has profound implications for the ways in which the intersection of development and freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) should be understood, and it is the goal of this chapter to unpack these implications. The fact that

well-established development institutions and agencies such as the World Bank, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) now actively include FoRB in their programming tells us something important about the notable shift in the landscape of development organisations, which a few decades ago either shunned religious issues or confronted religious practices as obstacles to economic progress and social uplift. This global reconfiguration of the relationship between development agencies, religious organisations and communities in the latter part of the twentieth century has laid the groundwork for successive humanitarian and development interventions over the next few decades (Barnett 2011).

In 2014, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were announced to 'complete the unfinished work' of the Millennium Development Goals formulated by the United Nations in 2000 (Moon 2014). The SDGs included explicit plans for wide-ranging 'global partnerships' (*ibid.*) with religious leaders and institutions across the globe. More recently, there have been efforts by a range of development and donor agencies, particularly in Europe and the United Kingdom, to explore the impact of FoRB on various dimensions of development, such as gender equality. However, the ultimate test of whether FoRB can contribute to the simplified goal, 'leave no one behind' is if both donors and development practitioners cease perceiving it as a narrow human right understandable in primary legal categories and, consequently, an issue with little direct connection to the wider social and economic issues of poverty and development.

Moving ahead to include FoRB in development and humanitarian interventions at international, national and local levels will require key stakeholders to protect all dimensions of FoRB. These dimensions include interior dimensions of belief, thought and conscience, as well as exterior dimensions of religious practice, behaviour and belonging. This study examines how FoRB in all these robust dimensions – individual and private as well as communal and public – are systematically related to key dimensions of development and particular SDGs for one significant cross-section of individuals: religiously marginalised, poor Dalit women in Bangalore, India.

Specifically, this chapter focuses on ways in which the protection of FoRB for these doubly marginalised Dalit women might: (a) empower and equip them to build resilience and reduce exposure and vulnerability to economic shocks (SDG 1.5); (b) enable them to negotiate better wages and working conditions (SDG 5.4.5a); and (c) ensure they live in peaceful and inclusive societies where individuals can freely exercise and express their religion or belief in private and in public, and if they choose, change their religion without the threat of coercion, violence or death (SDG 16).

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The first three sections introduce our basic approach and methodology. Section 1 provides a brief overview of the context in which the study was conducted, as well as a short description of the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the individuals and households in this sample. Section 2 sets out the methodology adopted for the study and provides an overview of the data used to explore the relationship between FoRB and a few key dimensions of development. Section 3 introduces a tripartite framework for understanding the capacity

of the poor to sustain shocks and challenges in order to overcome poverty, i.e. in terms of adaptive, anticipatory, and absorptive capabilities. It also briefly describes the scope of our case study; defines our key terms, including FoRB; summarises how we measure religiosity; and identifies the indicators we use to assess the wellbeing of respondents in light of the SDGs.

The next three sections contain our analysis and substantive findings. Section 4 analyses our data to show how the protection and promotion of FoRB among the most vulnerable individuals – poor Dalit women – can improve the day-to-day lives of these individuals and, in particular, enhance the overall economic and social health of their families. Section 5 analyses and summarises our data on the relationship between religious participation and religious tolerance, and concludes that for all communities higher religious participation is associated with higher levels of religious tolerance. This supports the conclusion that FoRB can set in motion a virtuous cycle in which FoRB makes it possible for people to participate in religious communities and institutions in the first place, and that this participation, in turn, generally tends to strengthen religious tolerance and support for the freedom of religion or belief of others. Greater FoRB begets greater participation, in other words, and greater participation begets greater FoRB, and so on. Section 6 concludes by summarising FoRB's potentially transformative and pivotal role in development. In our study of a South Asian context in which FoRB is gravely under threat and global development indicators have seen very slow improvement, it is evident that FoRB can help activate and unleash a variety of religious, moral, and social resources that can significantly enhance the capacity of poor Dalits to manage and even overcome a variety of intersecting inequalities.

Furthermore, these cases and data present a story that is not simply one of adopting FoRB in the service of development and humanitarian initiatives. Rather, in each of the case studies and in the data presented, we see the crucial pro-developmental significance of adopting a more realistic and expansive understanding of FoRB that includes, among other things: freedom to choose one's religion; freedom to exit from one's religion; freedom to worship without hindrance and restraint; and freedom to enjoy non-discrimination and equal treatment relative to religion or belief. While economic and social uplift is a laudable objective for development agendas such as the SDGs, the ultimate goal – and the one that promotes what people value – is an expansive and multidimensional freedom that is at its core a freedom of mind, will and spirit. Thus, FoRB ought not to be considered a mere means to development objectives narrowly conceived, but as a crucial development objective in itself.

1.1 Technology parks and tarpaulins: slums in India's Silicon Valley

Following the financial deregulation policies of the Indian National Congress government in 1991, Bangalore established a large number of special economic zones for IT and electronics companies to attract federal funding and government subsidies. In the early 1990s, Bangalore opened its first 'Electronic City' on 330 acres of prime land on the highway linking the state of Karnataka with the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. Electronic City became a hub for over 200 of India's top IT companies, including many

large international firms such as Bosch and General Electric. Bangalore developed a reputation as the ‘Silicon Valley of South Asia’, drawing thousands of highly trained engineers to the city. The growing IT industry led to a dramatic increase in house prices. Lower- and middle-income wage earners were asked to leave their homes so large-scale apartment complexes could be erected to house the growing numbers of workers arriving in the city from across India.

Spurred on by a booming global IT-driven economy, Bangalore has seen a dramatic rise in land prices and an acute lack of affordable housing. Since 2001, the population living in tenement housing in Bangalore has tripled, with at least 200–300 large slums dotted across the city. This rapid increase in the slum population in Bangalore is also a result of increased rural–urban migration from northern Karnataka. A study conducted by Duke University in 2018 found that Bangalore had over 2,000 slums, while the government only recognised 597 (Raj 2018). Most of the slums exist on prime real estate in the centre of the city and risk being demolished if the government decides to sell the land to developers.

Our examination of the three large slums in our sample area reveals that the majority of dwellings are a mix of informal shelters where families live under blue plastic tarpaulin roofs and one-room hutments with mud floors and asbestos roofs. Most families in Bangalore’s slums spend their entire lives living under tarpaulin roofs, mainly because of the very high cost of housing in areas in the city where people can find well-paid jobs and where the slums are now established. The Duke University study found that 40 per cent, or four out of every ten people living in Bangalore’s slums, had lived there for more than one generation.

This study interviewed individuals from two of the main slums in north Bangalore, New Lingarajapuram and Sait Palya, both of which have more than 10,000 residents who have lived in the slums for over three decades. Like most slums in Bangalore, the boundaries of New Lingarajapuram and Sait Palya keep changing and expanding. Most of the homes in these slums are semi-permanent dwellings with flimsy asbestos or tin sheet roofs, with a few two-storey concrete structures built by people able to get their housing and identity documents finalised, and who found the funds to be able to construct a home. New Lingarajapuram is home to a large group of migrant workers from northern Karnataka who arrived in the mid-1990s during a period of drought and stayed on to find work in the city. Sait Palya is one of the largest Dalit Muslim slums in north Bangalore. Dalit Muslims who live in Sait Palya are either employed in the local markets or work in the nearby abattoir and tannery.

1.2 The Covid-19 pandemic: a natural experiment

By 2030, build resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations, and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.

(SDG Target 1.5, UNDP 2020)

Building resilience is explicitly mentioned in a variety of proposed SDG targets. In particular, target 1.5, quoted above, is clear about the pivotal role resilience will play in addressing persistent and entrenched poverty. In addition, target 13.1 states that it aims to ‘strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries’ (UN Stats 2020).

The current Covid-19 pandemic is perhaps the greatest test of countries’ resilience. It has challenged almost all areas of sustainable development, including health, economic empowerment, finance, inequality, gender-related violence and climate control. A recent report by the special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights warns that the Covid-19 pandemic is ‘projected to push more than 70 million additional people into extreme poverty, and hundreds of millions more into unemployment and poverty’ (Alston 2020). The report continues, stating that ‘poor people and marginalised communities have been the hardest hit in almost every country, both in terms of vulnerability to the virus and its economic consequences’ (*ibid.*).

The disastrous fallout from the pandemic has exposed a crucial message for development policymakers and practitioners: sustainable development is multidimensional, and any effort to reduce vulnerability and build resilience among the poor must move beyond the narrow focus of economic and social deprivations. It must come to appreciate that FoRB is a valuable resource that could limit and even reverse the consequences of persistent poverty for millions of vulnerable people living on the margins of society.

This study began in March 2020 to collect data on the intersection between FoRB and key dimensions of development, including economic empowerment and gender equality. But within a few weeks of conducting our case study interviews, the Covid-19 pandemic prompted Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to impose a countrywide lockdown for almost three months, from the end of March until the middle of June. The pandemic has precipitated one of the worst economic downturns in generations, in India and across the globe. In rural and urban India, the nationwide lockdown has affected vulnerable and marginal populations, particularly unsalaried daily wage labourers and migrant labourers in major cities who lost their jobs due to protracted curfews and the continued closure of many businesses, including construction projects.

Thus, the exogenous economic shock of the Covid-19 pandemic, which occurred in the middle of our data collection process, served as a natural experiment. From this, we hope to draw conclusions on the role of various dimensions of FoRB in affecting the capacities of the individuals in our sample to absorb and adapt to the shocks, stresses, risks and uncertainties caused by the pandemic. We identified whether individuals were able to enjoy freedom of non-discrimination and equal treatment regardless of their religious tradition; and what difference this made in terms of their resilience in the face of the massive, unanticipated shock of Covid-19, subsequent lockdowns, and all their associated economic, social and spiritual repercussions.

In addition, at a time of profound uncertainty and deep economic and social loss, the Covid-19 pandemic provides an unprecedented opportunity to examine whether the protection of FoRB among the poorest and

most marginalised communities in the slums of Bangalore contributes to building resilience and reducing the vulnerability and exposure of individuals and families. In addition to the role of individual dimensions of FoRB on economic and social uplift, the pandemic enabled us to assess ways in which religious institutions, particularly Christian and Muslim organisations, provided a much-needed safety net for the poor. The government's public distribution system either excluded certain minority groups or was inadequate to meet the essential needs of the poor in the slums in our sample.

Our assessment, albeit basic and limited at this stage, might provide a quantifiable and observable metric of the ways in which religious communities and institutions take immediate and tangible economic burdens off the state and local communities. Our tentative conclusion is that it is difficult to exaggerate what the Indian economy might lose if religious communities and institutions are limited or prohibited from providing valuable and often indispensable services for Indians, particularly for the poor and those living on the margins of society.

2 Methodology and data

2.1 Definitions

According to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, FoRB is designed to cover all aspects of religious (and belief-oriented) life, including the believing, belonging, and behaving of individual and community persuasions and practices. Heiner Bielefeldt, the UN special rapporteur for FoRB from 2010 until 2016, declared that the right to FoRB 'empowers human beings in the entire sphere of religious and non-religious convictions, conscience-based positions and religious practices which may be exercised by individuals alone and/or in community with others' (Bielefeldt 2016). Furthermore, like all human rights, the right to FoRB is intimately connected to core dimensions of the human person and the needs of human personality, and thus should apply to all human beings equally.

In this chapter, we explore the importance of FoRB for development based on the premise that FoRB is more than the freedom to hold interior religious convictions or of individuals to worship (or not) in private. Rather, as international documents and norms suggest, we include dimensions of FoRB that go beyond the private believing (or non-believing) of individuals: (1) the freedom to participate privately or publicly without hindrance in a religious community of one's choice; (2) the freedom to adopt, change or exit a religion of one's choice; and (3) the freedom to enjoy non-discrimination and equal treatment relative to religion or belief.

2.2 The sample

The data for this study is drawn from two main sources. The first set of data comes from 30 case studies of Dalit women entrepreneurs from Hindu, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant religious traditions who live in two adjacent urban-poor areas (shanty towns) in north Bangalore. The second section of the data is drawn from a longitudinal study of 9,575 randomly selected individuals from the same geographic area, who are part of the Religion and Economic Empowerment Project (REEP)⁴ panel study funded

by the Templeton Religion Trust (Templeton Religion Trust 2020). This panel study conducted two waves of data collection to clarify and quantify the pro-social and pro-developmental effects of religion and religious freedom on the lives of Dalits in five sample areas.⁵ In this chapter, we use the second wave of data collected in 2018. Unfortunately, due to religiously motivated violence in four villages in one of our sample areas, we had to drop data collection in these locations. This reduced our panel sample by 1,000 respondents. We also excluded surveys following a thorough cleaning and coding of the data set. In this chapter, we use the REEP data set with 7,637 respondents (79.7 per cent).

The REEP data set includes over 1,200 respondents from the two slums in north Bangalore. Additionally, the 30 women interviewed in early 2020 were part of a longer panel study on microcredit entrepreneurs that Rebecca Supriya Shah began in 2011 (Shah 2013b)⁶ The female Dalit microcredit entrepreneurs were folded into the larger REEP panel study and 30 of these women were interviewed for the current research.

2.3 Why employ a case study approach to study religion and religious freedom in Bangalore, India?

We chose to employ a case study method in this chapter because case studies are often robust precisely where formal statistical methods and models are weak. In most contexts, but especially in pluralistic contexts such as South Asia, it is a challenge to speak of religion or religious traditions such as Hinduism, Christianity, or Islam as single, monolithic realities. In South Asia, the difficulty of clarifying and quantifying the potential impact of religiosity on social uplift is compounded by the ways in which the main faith traditions have interacted with and been influenced by Western concepts of religion. After all, many today think of Hinduism as a single, easily identifiable ‘world religion’⁷ that we read about in school textbooks and see represented in the media.

However, it was not until the propagation of a reconstructed ‘neo-Hinduism’ in the nineteenth century that the term ‘Hinduism’ came to signify a unified and inclusive religious entity in India and the West. Yet the modern Hinduism we see today, and the one that took shape over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, does not necessarily correspond neatly with the vast diversity and dynamism of religious traditions in India. This is especially true given that the subcontinent has witnessed elaborate forms of devotion to thousands of deities, and has seen followers of Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity trace their spiritual ‘ancestry’ back thousands of years.⁸

Another challenge in studying the causal effect of religion and FoRB on economic and social uplift is that in South Asia in general, and in India in particular, an individual’s religious identity, religious beliefs and religious behaviour (or practices) may be tightly interrelated – and constitute a coherent package – but in other cases they may diverge in highly idiosyncratic and unpredictable ways. An individual might self-identify as a Hindu but also believe in the healing power of Christian saints and regularly pray at a Muslim holy shrine. It is also common to find individuals who identify as having more than one religion.

When a woman is interviewed in her home, she is asked, 'Who is the main god you worship?' In most cases, the women will respond that they worship 'all gods'. To which one may need to ask, 'Who is the main god?' or 'Who is the house god?' These questions, while important to gather statistics on religious affiliation, may sometimes limit or inaccurately categorise adherents as worshipping one god over another. This is particularly problematic when using words such as 'believe', 'affiliation', 'belonging', 'identity' or 'identification', which are categories and instruments based on a monotheistic idea of the transcendent and might not apply to faith traditions such as Hinduism, Jainism or Buddhism.

For example, some of the women I interviewed 'believed' in the power of Saint Anthony to heal their sick children but 'belonged' to the Hindu faith. Unpacking affiliation in a pluralistic context such as India is challenging because traditional measures of private prayer, religious service attendance, belief in God, and whether or not one gives money to a religious organisation might not capture the 'shared religiosity' of individuals, especially in the case of the poor who seek help from whatever 'transcendent being' is able to deliver assistance. In India and in our sample area of Bangalore, significant numbers of women have multiple religious identities, beliefs and practices. It is difficult to situate a woman in one camp when she resides at the intersection of many different camps.

Despite the many advantages of a case study approach to analysing the potential impact of FoRB on dimensions of development, we realise that all methods have assumptions and weaknesses. We admit that using only case study data might not provide the kind of statistical data to demonstrate the level of impact FoRB might have on various dimensions of development. Therefore, we have included some selected statistics from the REEP study to demonstrate that, for the most part, the case studies in our study are consistent with the preliminary findings from the larger, randomly selected household survey also conducted in the same geographic area.

Furthermore, we do not believe or propose that religion or FoRB are a necessary or sufficient condition for sustainable development among the poor, whether in Bangalore, in South Asia or in any other context. We are not proposing a deterministic relationship between FoRB and sustainable development, just a probabilistic one. There are many factors that influence sustainable development for the poor in general and for vulnerable populations in particular. Our goal here is to try to identify plausible causal pathways by which the protection and promotion of FoRB might significantly influence key dimensions of development.

3 Harnessing adaptive, anticipatory and absorptive capability for poverty alleviation

This section of the chapter is organised along three main dimensions of sustainable development that could explain if and how FoRB might foster economic and social wellbeing for poor and vulnerable Dalit individuals. These dimensions have been borrowed from the growing literature on strengthening resilience capacity in the face of climate-related extreme events and other hazards and shocks (Shepherd *et al.* 2013; Bahadur *et al.* 2015).

In particular, we have adopted the conceptual framework of resilience literature – which includes adaptive capacity, anticipatory capacity and

absorptive capacity – to frame our exploration of the potential causal impact of FoRB on building resilience and reducing vulnerability among the urban poor in Bangalore. However, instead of using the term ‘capacity’, we have chosen to use the term ‘capability’ instead. Thus, the three dimensions we will examine in the rest of the chapter are the three crucial capabilities of individuals – adaptive capability, anticipatory capability and absorptive capability – to absorb shocks and to deal with poverty and deprivation.

We have chosen to use the term ‘capability’ – which is rooted in the concept of ‘human capabilities’ that was introduced by Nobel-prize winning economist Amartya Sen – to focus on both the ability (capacity) and the freedom of individuals to choose what they value and have reason to value. Capacity is interconnected with capability, since a person’s ability to deal with adverse events influences their capability to enjoy and pursue what they value and have reason to value, such as providing food and shelter for themselves and their family. Furthermore, the term ‘capability’ goes beyond the fulfilment of basic needs and provision of income, taking into account the intrinsic significance and value of human choice and freedom.

Adaptive capability, for the purposes of our analysis, might be defined as the ability of an individual to adjust to changing circumstances, take risks, take advantage of changing opportunities and maintain one’s desired state or standard of living, even if the surrounding conditions have changed or are about to change. Again, drawing heavily on environmental studies, we define anticipatory capability as the ability of individuals to predict, and prepare and plan for particular shocks that might adversely affect their ability to run their business or feed their families. Anticipatory capability demands that individuals are flexible enough to engage with sudden shocks and reduce the impact of these risks on their lives and livelihoods.

Finally, we examine the role of an individual’s absorptive capability to bear and even endure persistent disasters and deprivations. An individual’s ability to absorb the impact of an exogenous shock, such as the sudden illness of a family member, might be because religious networks, communities or groups of which they are a part help them manage the risk by providing access to low-cost services, advocating to the government on their behalf, or providing financial and other resources to smooth their consumption.⁹ A person’s capability is directly tied to their freedom, which is in turn inextricably linked to the inherent dignity of all members of the human family.

3.1 The case study and survey respondents

All the surveys, including the case study interviews, targeted Dalit women aged 18 years or older. We employed purposeful sampling for the 30 case studies in our sample. We actively selected the cases to explain the role, if any, of FoRB on economic and social uplift. We chose women who were deeply involved in their faith community as well as financially stable, by which we mean the women had jobs. In most cases (28 out of 30), they were the main breadwinners of the family and were able to support their families before and after the exogenous shock of the Covid-19 pandemic. By selecting the 30 cases in our sample based on the dependent variable (economic empowerment and social uplift), we risk being accused of selection bias. However, we take the position outlined in Stuart and

George (2005) that ‘cases selected on the dependent variable can help identify which variables are not necessary or sufficient conditions for the selected outcome’ (*ibid.*: 23).

In addition, we selected the cases based on the dependent variable to help us identify potential paths and other variables that might help explain how the outcome was achieved. Given the paucity of micro-level research on the potential contribution of FoRB to sustainable development outcomes for the poor, we chose to select the case studies based on the dependent variable to help identify what variables contribute to the outcome, as well as the magnitude of their contribution to the outcome. Our approach seeks to empirically explore the role of FoRB on sustainable development to see whether our evidence warrants a more rigorous and ambitious assessment of the causal relationship.

In other words, we aim for a ‘plausibility probe’ in an effort to make an empirically informed judgement on whether we need to conduct a deeper and more intensive investigation of certain variables that might be associated with a person’s ability to adapt to, anticipate and absorb the effects of poverty and deprivation over time.

3.2 Our understanding of FoRB

We define FoRB as meaning the following:

- 1 The freedom to participate privately or publicly without hindrance in a religious community of one’s choice;
- 2 The freedom to adopt, change or exit a religion of one’s choice; and
- 3 The freedom to enjoy non-discrimination and equal treatment relative to religion or belief.

3.3 Measuring religiosity

We measured religiosity by asking respondents in our case studies and in the larger REEP survey about the **frequency of religious service attendance** with the question, ‘How often do you attend religious services?’ Individuals could choose to answer: never; occasionally; once a week; a few times a week; once a day; several times a day; or refuse to answer. The scores were recoded to a continuous variable ranging from 0 (less than once a week) to 1 (once or more a week).

To measure the salience (Stark and Glock 1968) of religion or **the specific attachment of religion to an individual in their daily lives**, we asked, ‘How important is your religion in your life?’ Individuals could choose to answer: the most important thing in my life; very important; important; somewhat important; not important; don’t know; or refuse to answer. Here again, the scores were recoded to a continuous variable ranging from 0 (somewhat and not important) to 1 (most important, very important and important).

Another measure of affective religious beliefs that we use is whether an individual ever prays alone. However, as we mentioned earlier, some measures of religiosity may not easily be applied to Indic religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. For example, Hindus and Buddhists might not leave their home to visit a religious place of worship as frequently as devout Catholics or Protestants. Therefore, to

identify measures of religiosity that could be more religion specific, we asked individuals who self-identified as Hindu, Buddhist or Sikh if they maintained a strict vegetarian diet. Hindus were also asked if they ever conducted *puja* (devotions and prayers to the deity) at home.

3.4 Dimensions of sustainable development

3.4.1 Asset accumulation and business ownership¹⁰

To assess the association of FoRB with particular religious beliefs, practices, and networks, and their impact – if any – on asset accumulation, we include productive goods, financial wealth, and networks that might enable individuals to negotiate and access positive economic outcomes and positions in the market. In particular, we examine data on bank accounts and washing machines to illustrate the importance of having and harnessing productive assets to enable the poor to reduce exposure to risks and reduce their vulnerability to falling into persistent poverty.

In our sample area in Bangalore, we also asked individuals if they had a bank account. Individuals who did have a bank account were also asked if the account was their own account, a joint account with their spouse (if they were married), or if they and their spouse both had separate bank accounts. Women who were part of the case study interview research were asked if they were members of a credit or savings group (known as a *sangam*) of any organisation. If a woman is part of a credit or savings group she is more likely to save and have access to small loans from the revolving credit in the group.

3.4.2 Interest rate

The informal credit markets in the slums of Bangalore and elsewhere in India are often the only recourse to finance where formal credit institutions do not exist. In places where formal financial institutions do exist, they may be less willing to lend to borrowers with little or no collateral. Informal moneylenders who operate in close proximity to their borrowers reduce or raise interest rates based on what they know about the behaviour, job status and reliability of a potential borrower or any other factors that could influence the level of risk of lending to that individual. In other words, the ‘price’ of the loan is not fixed but depends on many factors, including the ‘reputational capital’ of the would-be borrower.

3.4.3 Living with diversity

To examine the impact, if any, of the religious commitment and practice of individuals from a variety of religious traditions on tolerance and religious pluralism, we asked respondents to respond to the two following statements: (a) ‘I would not object to a person of a different religion moving next door’; and (b) ‘Everyone should have the freedom to convert to whatever religion they want to.’ Individuals in our sample were asked to answer by using the following responses: strongly agree; agree; disagree; strongly disagree; don’t know; or ‘refuse to answer’.

4 Data collected at individual and household levels

4.1 Religiosity and FoRB in Bangalore, India

Data on FoRB among different religious groups and for all Dalit individuals in our sample area reveals a deep and active commitment of

the most disadvantaged groups to their religious traditions (Table 4.1); 74 per cent of our purposively selected sample of women entrepreneurs in the area reported that they prayed at least once a day. What begins to emerge from our case study data and our survey data is a picture of some degree of protection of FoRB in Bangalore city. However, recent reports (Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India 2020) suggest that the state of Karnataka, of which Bangalore is the capital city, has experienced a spate of religiously motivated attacks on minority communities in rural and northern parts of the state. This intersection of religious minority status and FoRB identifies, to some extent, if and how FoRB can influence social and economic wellbeing.

We see that our data from Bangalore displays a significant degree of churn in the type of religious changes that take place in our sample. While over 5 per cent of our sample switched to a Christian religious tradition, 14 per cent of individuals switched out of non-Hindu religious traditions to become Hindus. Religious changes occur as a result of a voluntary decision to switch, because of marriage, or due to pressure from external agents including the government. Unlike other states in India (which total at least nine, including Gujarat and Jharkhand), Karnataka does not have a state-level freedom of religion law to regulate the conditions under which an individual may change her religion. Freedom of religion laws penalise attempts to convert people from one religion to another using force, fraud or inducement, and require any individuals who wish to formally change their religion to seek the prior permission of local district officials. In order to secure this permission, the burden of proof is on the individual seeking to convert to demonstrate that they are converting of their own free will.

Although there is no formal freedom of religion law in the state of Karnataka, Christian and Muslim Dalits are still subject to restrictions on affirmative action benefits, including official exclusion from government jobs and seats in legislatures and higher education institutions. This restriction is administered under Presidential Order of Article 3 of the Constitution on Scheduled Castes. Under this order, Christians and Muslims are excluded from these benefits because they are not Hindu and officially reject the caste system (though caste prejudice still affects both communities). Under Article 25 of the Constitution, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism are considered sects of Hinduism, even though members of these religious communities consider the religions distinct from Hinduism and with the government's blessing maintain their own, separate personal law codes.

4.2 Deeply held beliefs

My daughter wants to be a policewoman. Look at me! I clean houses and my daughter wants to be a policewoman. I worked for four years to get this land to build a home so we can have the security we need. It will cost me 4 lakhs to build. The government will give me 2 lakhs but I will need to find the rest of the money. I know it is a lot of money. I will borrow from four or five people. I know I will get a good rate. I've been looking around to find a good interest rate. I asked the goddess to help me. I did puja for four days. She gave me this land and she will give me the money to

Table 4.1 Select indicators of religiosity and FoRB among case study participants (n = 30)

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Prays alone at least once a day	74.05
Religion is important, very important, or most important	99.90
Attends religious services once or more a week	68.40
Muslims who fasted during Ramadan	99.38
Hindus who performed <i>puja</i> at home	88.32
Hindus who pray to the goddess Yellamma	29.76
Individuals who enjoyed the freedom to switch religion from a non-Christian religion to a Christian religion*	5.40
Individuals who enjoyed the freedom to switch religion from a non-Hindu religion to Hindu	14
Individuals who enjoyed the freedom to switch religion from a non-Muslim religion to Muslim	0

Note: * This data is for individuals who switched from any non-Christian religion to become a Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox Christian.

Source: Authors' own.

build on it. I don't want my daughter to marry until I have a house for her to live in.

(Sujatha, worshipper of goddess Yellamma)

We assume, because of the lack of availability of access to credit for the poor, that there is a dearth of moneylenders in poor neighbourhoods. We also assume that most, if not all, moneylenders charge high interest rates and operate as a monopoly. This is not the case. In reality, there are many different moneylenders who are available to provide credit. The slums in our case study sample have over 30 informal moneylenders in a 0.25 square mile block.

In most cases, the moneylender fixes the rate of interest to cover both the cost of lending to a risky individual and the cost of monitoring them. In doing so, the moneylender fixes a price for each individual based on their risk of paying back the loan. Once the 'price' of lending to an individual is fixed it might be difficult for them to switch lenders. The poor borrower then becomes accustomed to a few lenders who have done their 'due diligence' on the risk of lending to that individual.

Also, once the lender identifies a 'price' for the loan it will be difficult for the borrower to switch to another lender and restart the process of being 'evaluated.' Furthermore, if the borrower decides that they wish to switch to another moneylender this might arouse suspicion with other lenders. They might not wish to lend to someone who was 'having issues' with a moneylender and adverse selection comes into effect. Therefore, since the poor are often 'locked' into a relationship with a moneylender, they might

have to pay the interest rate set by the lender and not be able to negotiate a lower rate.

Individuals who are aware of the various prevailing interest rates might be able to identify a moneylender who could offer them a lower interest rate than the one offered by their 'regular' lender. This knowledge might prompt them to escape the monopoly pricing charged by their moneylender and switch to another lender who might charge a lower interest rate. Unfortunately, in most cases, the poor borrow under conditions over which they have little control, such as the sudden death of a family member or a natural disaster that decimates their savings and assets.

Also, if an individual knows the interest rate, they might be better able to plan their expenditure. An individual who is either unaware of what interest rates they are paying, or who does not understand what an interest rate really is, risks being charged a higher interest rate by unscrupulous moneylenders than those who are able to understand the system. It is not uncommon for a poor individual to pay moneylenders 5–8 per cent interest daily.

Individuals who take time to learn about interest rates, who actively seek a competitive interest rate based on their study of the market, and who are able to switch to moneylenders with lower interest rates exhibit the adaptive capability to make deliberate and planned decisions in the face of fluctuating conditions. An individual's adaptive capability is formed and strengthened during periods when there are no emergencies. During these times, individuals can diversify their risk profiles, build resilience and reduce vulnerability to extreme events by identifying moneylenders who are able and willing to provide loans at competitive rates.

We find that deeply held religious beliefs and practices are generally associated with positive social and economic outcomes. We find that religious commitment – including religious belief, behaviour and belonging – that is deeply held and personally appropriated is generally associated with positive and social economic outcomes. Such intense commitment to one's religion is in contrast to one that is less personal and creedal and more ritual, practice and community oriented. To be clear, we are not saying that personal religiosity and formal religiosity are contrasting or contradictory, or privilege a Western, Protestant and individualistic form of religious commitment and practice.¹¹ Instead, we wish to distinguish deeply and personally held forms and levels of religious commitment from those that are relatively formal, routinised and external.

Our data finds stronger statistical support for the story of Sujatha who plans to hunt around her slum neighbourhood to find the best interest for the loans she must take to build her house. Respondents such as Sujatha who have particular and deeply held religious commitments are more likely to know the interest rate they pay. This is not so for all religion-specific commitments, but we find that under certain conditions, and for some measures of religion-specific measures of religiosity, there is a strong causal association between religiosity and knowing the interest in one's immediate neighbourhood.

We are not saying that all types of deeply held religious beliefs are associated with a better knowledge of the prevailing interest rate. Rather, we are suggesting that based on our data, certain types of affective religious commitment and practices are associated with a reasonably good knowledge

of interest rates that are available if and when an individual needs to borrow money. Additionally, we find that in general, and under certain conditions, respondents for whom religion is important are more likely to know the interest rate they pay.

Our survey data finds that praying to the goddess Yellamma is consistently associated with respondents knowing their interest rates. The association remained strong after we controlled for caste, age, marital status, years of school and survey location. Three out of the seven Hindu women in our sample who openly admitted to being worshippers of the goddess Yellamma (including Sujatha) were also successful businesswomen who, when interviewed, knew the exact interest rate they were paying on their loans.

But worshippers of the goddess Yellamma are not alone in being experts on the prevailing interest rates in our sample. Muslims who are more affectively attached to their religion, as indicated by their commitment to fast for Eid al-Fitr every year and who are strict about how they fast (they do not consume water or even spit during their fast), are also more likely to know the interest rate they pay. All the respondents in our sample from all religious traditions were drawn from most Dalit scheduled caste backgrounds.

In India, there is an increasing suspicion of Muslims who appear devout in their beliefs and practices. However, we see that when certain religious beliefs and practices are more salient, there is a strong association with positive economic and social outcomes. This might be a good argument for ensuring that marginalised individuals and groups enjoy adequate space to foster and develop their own deep and personal religious commitments. In addition to the intrinsic value of their religious commitment, we see the quantifiable positive outcomes of their capability to anticipate and adapt to adverse economic events and outcomes.

Unfortunately, worship of the goddess Yellamma is under threat in parts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Devotion to the goddess,¹² whose rituals include regular animal sacrifices and, in some cases, worship in the nude, does not sit well with Hindu religious leaders, including those who have been influenced by *Hindutva* teachings. These leaders have now engaged in efforts to revise the structure, beliefs and practices of this ancient multifaceted faith, and infuse them with a political and nationalistic emphasis. In short, these reformers wish to create a 'sanitised' version of Hinduism that scrubs out of existence and recognition the worship of deities such as Yellamma, which is regarded as superstitious and ignorant.

In a context where credit is expensive and moneylenders control the market, Sujatha and women like her demonstrate efficacious agency and a willingness to invest the time and effort to understand the market. Could it be that when people like Sujatha are free to be entrepreneurial in religious matters they are empowered to be entrepreneurial in other areas?

5 FoRB, pluralism, and inclusive societies

We find that respondents with higher self-reported levels of religious commitment and practice (based on several distinct metrics) were more likely to be tolerant of people from other religious communities than respondents with lower levels of religiosity. For example, we find that individuals, regardless of religious tradition, who attended religious

services weekly or more were more tolerant of having a neighbour of a different religion. And again, as we have seen across the data, in general and under certain conditions, individuals for whom religiosity is deeply held and who self-report that their religion is important in their lives are also more likely to say that it is acceptable to live with neighbours from different religious traditions.

Additionally, we find that respondents who rate highly on religious service attendance and religious commitment are more open to the idea that people should have the freedom to convert if they wish. This same basic causal finding – that higher religiosity correlates with higher religious tolerance – holds for almost every religious community sampled, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Protestants, and Catholics.

An earlier study by Yogendra Yadav, Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz, based on the National Election Study in India and the State of Democracy in South Asia Survey, supports the same broad conclusion. For the 2004 National Election Study, Yadav, Stepan and Linz constructed an index of religious intensity, from low to medium to high, to determine if growing religious intensity correlates with ‘growing undemocratic attitudes and practices’ (Stepan 2010: 41). It turns out that for Hindus, as well as other religious groups they studied (Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians), the ‘exact opposite’ is true. Specifically: ‘For **all** four major religions in India, for each increase in religious intensity, there is an increase in support for democracy’ (*ibid.*: 41; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and VanAntwerpen 2011).

Every religion in India has some version of expressing respect and admiration for other religious traditions. The religious texts and practices of Indic religions preceded modern Indian civil law and addressed the importance of living in harmony with people who were different from oneself. Not all of this can be understood from polling or census data. The world’s great faiths, many of which originate on the Indian sub-continent, teach their adherents to be generous, temperate and optimistic, to remain calm in the face of trouble and to be tolerant of ‘the Other’.

Most interfaith engagements take place in a local context – in somebody’s home. Protecting and promoting religious structures and defences drawn from India’s rich Indic tradition have the potential to transform warring communities and instil core character virtues of tolerance, trust and respect that are deeply ingrained in Indic religions and culture. Then, and only then, will the millions of Indians from majority and minority religious communities be able to recover their history of pluralism, religious freedom and tolerance, and replant it in the soil of their own indigenous spiritual and cultural traditions.

6 Analysis: What does the intersection between FoRB and key dimensions of development tell us?

Caste disparity in India, like its ugly counterpart racial disparity in the US, is a stubborn reality of our twenty-first century world, both having survived being outlawed for decades on both continents. This section of the chapter discusses our findings and is primarily undertaken with a view to understanding how concepts such as inequality, deprivation, persistent poverty and exclusion entail not just economic or social, but also spiritual and moral dimensions.

Multidimensional deprivations between and within groups defined and disaggregated in terms of social, economic, cultural, and political factors have become a central feature of national and international poverty alleviation policies and programmes. It has also become clear that the very definition of deprivation – multidimensional or otherwise – influences how indicators of poverty are framed as well as how data on poverty are collected and analysed. These indicators are often the only means by which governments, policymakers and people in general come to know ‘what matters’, and thus how to shape policies to end poverty.

Let us for a moment consider that concepts of caste are in fact the predominant marker of deprivation in India. We see from studies such as the ground-breaking Sachar Committee Report (Prime Minister’s High Level Committee Cabinet Secretariat 2006) that caste and religion play significant if not primary roles in the persistent and entrenched poverty of marginalised religious minorities in India. The report documents extensive inequities between majority Hindu Dalits and Muslim Dalits. The report also found that government programmes since Indian Independence have mainly benefited some Hindu Dalits and tribal communities but not religious minorities.

The Constitution of independent India set the stage for an appropriate set of policies and laws concerning caste discrimination, including outlawing ‘untouchability’ in 1955, regulating temple entry to allow historically restricted groups the freedom to enter, and even designing a set of recommendations for public employment and public education. However, although the Indian Constitution allows for positive forms of discrimination akin to affirmative action on behalf of India’s lowest-caste groups (‘Scheduled Castes’ (SCs))¹³ and tribes (‘Scheduled Tribes’ (STs)), those who are favoured cannot be members of Muslim or Christian minority communities. A presidential order in 1950 stipulated that ‘no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of a scheduled caste’. A later ruling further clarified that Sikhs and Buddhists were, for these purposes, to be considered ‘Hindu’. No such stipulations were placed on ST identity.

The argument in favour of the presidential order has been that officially, at least, Christians (and, to some extent, Muslims as well) do not recognise caste and, therefore, low-caste Christians or converts to Christianity (or Islam) cannot be considered low caste. Opponents of the order, including the author of the Sachar Committee Report, have maintained that Dalits or members of SCs suffer inherited discrimination for many reasons but most particularly because of an entrenched belief that a Dalit is permanently impure and suffers a kind of inherited defilement. A Christian or Muslim Dalit still suffers prejudice because of their low-caste state at the hand of both Hindus **and** their co-religionists.

What this means in practice is that Dalit Muslims and Christians do not have access to affirmative action policies and programmes that are designed to help people with their social and economic deprivations. In addition, Dalit Hindus who switch religion to become either Muslim or Christian lose their low-caste benefits. In addition to perpetuating group inequity, the Indian reservation system constitutes a disincentive for Dalit Hindus who wish to exercise their freedom to change their religion. In a way, the

system that purports to help Dalit Hindus in fact significantly restricts and constrains the free exercise of their religion or belief.

All this goes to support the point that focusing on economic and social deprivations cannot fully address the root cause of persistent poverty, and material solutions cannot fully address group inequality of the kinds we see in the lives and experiences of marginalised Dalits in India today. Additionally, when group inequities are present, being persistently poor generation after generation cannot be fixed with a narrow and limited understanding of inequalities and discrimination. What is urgently needed is a more expansive understanding of individual freedom rooted in a robust view of the human person. According to development scholar Denis Goulet, the true freedom that must be the goal of human development is achieved when human beings are able to 'be more' rather than simply 'have more' (Goulet 1996). For Goulet, therefore, there can be 'authentic development' only when there is a 'societal openness to the deepest levels of mystery and transcendence'.

Such an understanding of individual freedom and sustainable development, which above all recognises the connection with FoRB, has radical implications. Without such an understanding, why do we see inequity as unjust or even unequal? What is our exogenous standard that compels us to want all people to be treated equally? Is it because economic disparities and social marginalisation have become major topics for discussions of intersecting inequalities, even from the perspective of human rights (UNCESCR 2009)? Or is it, as philosopher Simone Weil wrote in 1943, because we have an unconditional 'obligation' to the dignity and humanity of the human being? Human beings, Weil argued, are designed with an 'eternal destiny' in mind. And it is this eternal destiny that must compel us to have an 'eternal obligation to the human being not to let him suffer from hunger when one has the chance of coming to his assistance' (Weil 1955).

From the data and the analysis above, three findings emerge that are informed and shaped by the seminal work of economist Glen Loury on group inequality and racial disparities among black people in the US (Loury, Modood and Teles 2005). The first finding is that FoRB can help the poor limit and possibly even overcome the effects of enduring and entrenched discrimination. Like black people in the US, Dalits face persistent group inequality that has been sustained over long periods, where individuals from these groups have faced unequal opportunities and systematic discrimination. In India, caste-based hierarchies based on notions of purity and impurity have been in place for centuries (Kolenda and Madan 1981). We suggest that deleterious effects on a person's capability to improve, arising from centuries of sustained exclusion and discrimination, might be overcome by promoting individual freedom that fosters an authentic vision of sustainable development, building on traditional values, particularly religious beliefs and practices that are intrinsic to individuals in these communities. Unfortunately, Dalits, like black people in the US, remain segregated and excluded despite anti-discrimination and untouchability laws. After all, these laws do not undo the legacy of historic discrimination, but merely serve to ensure equal treatment under the law.

It is in the context of such persistent and stubborn patterns of stratification and marginalisation – which laws alone cannot undo – that the poor turn to religious resources. Religious beliefs and practices provide meaning in their lives, a sense of identity, and cultural integrity rooted in religious tradition and community. In the absence of FoRB, there is a danger that segregated and excluded groups such as Muslim Dalits will resort to what Loury refers to with respect to black people in the US as ‘racial sorting’ (Loury 2007). Here, out of fear and a primal need for safety, individuals resort to associating with members of their own kind. This segregation of friendships, networks, neighbourhoods, workplaces, and schools could place a marginalised community at a disadvantage, because it limits people’s social world in a way that has a powerful and enduring impact on the information they receive, the attitudes they form about themselves and others, and the interactions they experience within their community and with the outside world.

Our data illustrates that individuals for whom religious beliefs and practices are an intrinsic and fundamental part of who they are, are more likely to break out of their ‘sorted’ groups, take risks, and develop adaptive and anticipatory capabilities by owning a business and enquiring about the most competitive rates of interest. We find that in general the adverse effects of enduring discrimination do not end when legislation begins. Rather, the consequences of years of segregation and social stratification continue, often unabated, years after they are outlawed. Additionally, as Loury (2007) finds with respect to black poverty in the US, individuals are socially situated and a person’s location within a network substantially influences their access to resources. A Dalit woman’s social network may never hear of a moneylender who is willing to offer an unsecured loan at 8 per cent instead of the usual 12 per cent. A Dalit woman’s inherited social position as someone who must live on the periphery of society plays a key role in determining whether or not she will be able to build resilience and reduce her vulnerability to economic shocks and other extreme events.

In their seminal work on race and ethnicity, with particular reference to the black community in the US, political scientist Sidney Verba and his co-authors Kay Schlozman and Henry Brady find that, on average, individuals who are engaged in the workplace and in non-political organisations have more civic skills, but that these skill sets are more stratified. In other words, minorities such as black people or Latinos who work in low-paying jobs have less of an opportunity to participate in activities that build civic skills (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 2002). However, in cases where black people are active in church, they have a greater chance of gaining civic skills. At the time of writing, religious participation of black people in churches, particularly Protestant churches, was about 60 per cent compared to 48 per cent for white people of comparable socioeconomic status. Thus, as black people spent more time in church, they had a greater chance to acquire civic skills during that time.

Verba’s findings for the black community strengthen and support our findings concerning the importance of communal and particularly religious resources – that is, social and spiritual capital – in determining an individual’s capability to lift themselves and their families out of persistent poverty. Like the black people in Protestant churches who were

able to acquire civic skills in spite of their systematic and long-standing deprivations, Dalits who are actively and personally engaged in their religious communities – as worshippers of the renegade goddess Yellamma, or devout Muslims who choose to fast all through the holy Ramadan season – are empowered and strengthened to seek change and overcome some effects of systematic discrimination.

The findings of Verba *et al.* on the pro-developmental association between black participation in Protestant churches and attainment of civic skills confirms our finding on the vital and even indispensable role of FoRB for individuals, as well as for religious communities, groups and institutions in social contexts such as poor black neighbourhoods in the US and slums in India. Economic development, early childhood development and the attainment of key skills occur mostly in social contexts – within a family or in a neighbourhood or among peers.

However, in contexts where the deleterious effect of historical segregation and social stratification have constrained opportunities for development for Dalits and other marginalised minorities in India, or for black people in the US, religious institutions such as the black Protestant churches in Verba *et al.*'s study of faith-based organisations operating in slums, could enable individuals to gain the civic skills and capabilities they need to help them in their professional and personal lives. Their input could mean the difference between ending up in jail, or owning a business.

Loury argues that social and economic disparities for marginalised minorities are less likely to be understood as a social problem when people see inequity as something that is part of the intrinsic deficiency of the group – as something biological or deeply cultural. For example, a Dalit man who lies drunk on the pavement in his slum, despite numerous attempts to help him overcome his alcoholism, is regarded as someone who is part of a group for whom such visibly disadvantageous activities are taken to be systemic or intrinsic to the group. While discrimination has to do with how minorities are treated both by the law and by society, stigma is concerned with how disadvantaged and excluded minorities are perceived.

In a groundbreaking study on the experiences of Dalit children in school, Bajoria (2014) found that thousands of Dalit Muslim children were not attending school because teachers and students at the school called them 'dirty' (Bajoria 2014). Such discrimination assumes various forms. There is formal, institutional discrimination, which might take the form of refusing a Dalit Hindu woman entry into a temple. Though formally proscribed by the Indian Constitution *de jure*, such institutional discrimination still occurs *de facto*. Caste discrimination also takes the form of pervasive, attitudinal tendencies among members of the religious or cultural majority to regard lower castes or religious and racial minorities as unclean and 'polluting', as well as inferior and with a limited capacity for improvement and development.

When talking about racial disparities among black people in the US, Loury (2007) suggests that biased cognitive processes promote 'an essentialist causal misattribution'. So, when confronted with racial disparity in the US or inequities associated with a religious minority status, observers might be unable to identify with the condition of these groups simply because they believe (wrongly, of course) that this group – these drunken Dalits or

black teenage mothers in southeast Washington DC – are ‘reaping what they have sown’ (*ibid.*).

Here again our data points to the remarkable ways in which individual freedom to access the transcendent – or whatever he takes to be the source or sources of transcendent meaning in the universe (Tollefsen 2018) – can help a broken Dalit man break out of a false narrative about the intrinsic backwardness of his group and seek a different path. Our second finding drawn from our preliminary results shows that under certain conditions, men who belong to significantly disadvantaged and segregated environments, who pray alone privately, who attend religious services at least once a week, and for whom religion is important are less likely to get drunk, smoke, or see women other than their wives or partners.

We found that FoRB may empower individuals to interrogate and transform deep-seated, inherited and socially reinforced beliefs about their identity and belonging, liberating them to move beyond their supposedly predetermined qualities and enabling them to fashion new identities, choices and behaviours. Loury’s work maintains that while it is plausible to hold that material conditions and social institutions can foster certain behaviours in individuals and groups, those behaviours will ultimately depend on what ‘a person takes to be the source of meaning in his or her life’ (Loury 2005).

For this reason, we would suggest that there is significant potential for religious perspectives to provide an expansive and realistic notion of the human person and human development. Denis Goulet, a founder of development ethics, warns that if modern economics – or in our case modern-day development practitioners and policymakers – continue to yield an understanding of human development that ignores how the transcendent powerfully shapes how we act in a situation, then governments and development institutions will persist in acting as ‘one-eyed giants’ who ‘analyse, prescribe, and act **as if** man could live by bread alone, **as if** human destiny could be stripped to its material dimensions alone’ (*ibid.*).

To be clear, we are not suggesting that all religious beliefs and practices are a power for good. Some religious practices, beliefs and networks might operate for ill and might promote inter-group conflict and hatred. Yet, if development practitioners and policymakers continue to regard the marginalised poor as soulless creatures and ignore their freedom to believe in some essential way – their freedom to seek the transcendent and to value what they have reason to value – then our vision of development is unduly limited and narrow; that is, development policies and programmes ought not be formulated in terms that exclude or limit FoRB, even if the targets and instruments adopted and institutions involved in the pursuit of the goal of sustainable development for vulnerable and marginalised communities are themselves religion neutral.

Finally, in the face of growing intolerance and religious restrictions in India, there remains a great opportunity to harness, reawaken, and adapt the rich tradition of religious pluralism. Our third finding points to the powerful way in which higher levels of religiosity are associated with higher levels of religious tolerance and pluralism.

What do Indians lose when they face greater legal restrictions on FoRB through the formulation of anti-conversion laws, or when certain groups of politicised religious nationalists threaten and challenge the deeply held beliefs of religious minorities and restrict their freedom to manifest their religion or belief in teaching, practice or worship? Indians lose a great deal. Indians lose centuries of spiritual and social capital that fostered a powerful pluralising force of religious diversity; that encouraged healthy religious competition where not only Hindus but Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Parsis compared and critiqued each other's traditions, yet in conditions marked largely by peaceful competition. Indians, particularly marginalised Dalits, lose the freedom to 'experiment with truth' – to paraphrase the title of Mahatma Gandhi's great autobiography (Gandhi 1927) – and thus lose the freedom to change, revise and refine their most fundamental beliefs, and thus spur religious reform and challenge traditions and customs that marginalise and exclude them.

There is an opportunity to revive and reawaken the tolerance and freedom that have a long and storied history on the sub-continent. Writing about Muslims in the period before 1915, historian Nile Green describes how distinctive and mutually competitive forms of Islam were produced, nurtured and flourished in Bombay, and in some cases were exported to other parts of the west Indian Ocean. Green (2011) finds that Bombay, which was the industrial epicentre of the Indian Ocean, in 1850 was home to more than 100,000 Muslims from various parts of the region. These included Muslims from Irani, Habashi, Konkan, Pathan, and Bohr communities.

Yet even as a diverse population of Muslims began to grow, the different Muslim groups protected their own distinctive community boundaries. There was no 'single Muslim community, demanding a single formation of their faith' (*ibid.*: 6). Rather, the entrepreneurial Bombay Muslims along with increasing numbers of Hindus, Christian, Jews, and Parsis gathered to create a new kind of religious economy that was 'more pluralistic, competitive, and productive than its pre-industrial predecessors' (*ibid.*: 240). Green maintains that it was around 1915, when Muhammad Ali Jinnah became the president of the Muslim League and promoted a decidedly national and more politicised vision of the community, that Bombay's Muslims 'monopolised' and unified it into a single religious entity.

India is the world's largest democracy and an economic powerhouse. But it is also home to stubborn poverty and some of the world's worst religious persecution, particularly with the rise of a nationalism that adversely affects devoutly religious individuals from the majority and minority religious traditions. Might India's relentless religious repression and stubborn poverty be related? Might an unshackling of the poor to break out of the social straitjackets imposed by caste and certain religious beliefs and practices unleash an economic freedom and dynamism that could lift generations out of persistent poverty? Our preliminary findings indicate how the free exercise of religion or belief can enhance important features of human flourishing among the neediest members of the human family. Through the availability and exercise of religious freedom, the most vulnerable are empowered to exercise self-determination, and become agents of change for the better, with the capability to create opportunities for themselves and their families.

As the Covid-19 pandemic threatens to wipe out decades of progress of poverty alleviation programmes and projects, there could hardly be a clearer case for creating a paradigm shift in development thinking and practice – one that is guided by an invisible hand that ensures that an individual is able to nourish their soul as well as their body.

Table 4.2 Descriptive statistics of all variables

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Knows interest rate	7,637	0.161	0.367	0	1
Owens business	7,622	0.207	3.784	0	99
Gets drunk	7,637	0.110	0.313	0	1
Smokes cigarettes	7,637	0.122	0.328	0	1
Uses violence to control wife	7,637	0.063	0.243	0	1
Religion important	7,612	2.227	1.063	1	8
Attends religious services weekly or more	7,637	0.350	0.477	0	1
Switched religious tradition	7,637	0.035	0.184	0	1
Prays alone	7,637	0.374	0.484	0	1
Fasts for Eid	7,637	0.069	0.253	0	1
Prays to Yellamma	7,560	0.044	0.206	0	1
OK for people to convert	7,637	0.762	0.426	0	1
OK for neighbour to be of different religion	7,637	0.708	0.455	0	1
Female	7,637	0.695	0.460	0	1
Male	7,637	0.304	0.460	0	1
Age	7,634	40.287	12.161	1	98
Married	7,637	0.955	0.207	0	1
Divorced	7,637	0.001	0.030	0	1
Separated	7,637	0.005	0.073	0	1
Single	7,637	0.006	0.078	0	1
Widowed	7,637	0.031	0.173	0	1
Brahmin	7,637	0.006	0.079	0	1
OBC	7,637	0.107	0.309	0	1
Adivasi	7,637	0.142	0.349	0	1
Other caste	7,637	0.014	0.118	0	1
Don't know caste	7,637	0.002	0.043	0	1

Source: Authors' own.

Table 4.3 Impact of FoRB on dimensions of development (part 1)†

Variables†	Knows the interest rate	Owens a business	Gets drunk	Smokes cigarettes	Uses violence to control wife
	Logistic	Logistic	Logistic	Logistic	Logistic
Religion is important	0.288*** (0.0527)	0.202*** (0.0752)	-0.167*** (0.0423)	-0.178*** (0.0399)	-0.042 0.048
Switched religious tradition	0.498* (0.254)	0.900*** (0.348)	-0.561 0.471	-0.484 0.403	-0.336 0.437
Attends religious services weekly or more	0.525*** (0.086)	0.036 (0.137)	-0.531*** 0.131	-0.220* 0.121	-0.257** 0.130
Prays alone	0.317*** (0.026)	0.162*** (0.039)	-0.902*** 0.176	-1.003*** 0.162	-0.821*** 0.188
Female	0.121 (0.082)	0.032 (0.125)	-1.588*** 0.081	-1.322*** 0.075	
Married	-1.330*** (0.326)	0.575 (0.734)	0.162 0.642	0.344 0.617	
Widowed	-1.041** (0.370)	-0.126 (0.841)	-1.218 0.789	-0.857 0.729	
Age	-0.017** (0.003)	0.003 (0.005)	0.020*** 0.003	0.018*** 0.003	0.025*** 0.004
Brahmin	2.766*** (0.323)	0.567 (0.610)	0.268 0.419	1.721*** 0.319	0.007*** 0.368
OBC (other backward caste)	0.391** (0.126)	0.734*** (0.161)	-0.329** 0.145	0.091 0.124	0.007 0.194
Adivasi (scheduled caste/tribe)	1.325*** (0.094)	0.149 (0.172)	0.567*** 0.111	0.276 0.112	1.554*** 0.122
Other caste	0.054* (0.302)	0.323 (0.433)	-2.401* 1.011	-0.157 0.361	-1.519 1.008
Do not know caste	-1.110** (1.078)	0.418 (1.058)	1.168* 0.637	2.087*** 0.583	3.390*** 0.584
Number of years in school	0.032*** (0.008)	0.044*** (0.012)	0.021* (0.008)	0.037*** 0.007	0.060*** 0.010
Constant	-0.843** (0.397)	-4.344 (0.813)	-2.739*** (0.676)	-3.026*** 0.650	-4.684*** 0.259
Pseudo R ² /R ²	0.1813	0.0439	0.1396	0.1054	0.0719
Observations	7,538	7,498	7,598	7,598	7,261

Notes: † * > 0.1, ** > 0.05, *** > 0.01, two-tailed test, standard errors in parentheses.

† We also control for survey sampling area and survey length. Some variables had to be dropped from the analysis because of insufficient variation on the dependent variable or because the question was only asked to married men.

Source: Authors' own.

Table 4.4 Impact of FoRB on tolerant and inclusive societies (part 2)‡

Variables†	'I would not object to a person of a different religion moving next door'	'Everyone should have the freedom to convert to whatever religion they want to'
	OLS	OLS
Religion is important	0.214***	0.186***
	0.013	0.014
Attends religious services weekly or more	0.065***	0.058***
	0.013	0.014
Prays alone	-0.046***	-0.002***
	0.009	0.010
Married	0.271	0.326
	0.164	0.172
Widowed	0.014	0.107
	0.179	0.188
Single	0.101	0.152
	0.234	0.243
Age	-0.004**	-0.004**
	0.001	0.001
Brahmin	0.606**	0.592**
	0.183	0.195
OBC (other backward caste)	0.975****	0.938***
	0.043	0.045
Adivasi (indigenous caste/tribe)	0.327****	0.954***
	0.039	0.041
Other caste	0.452***	0.823***
	0.109	0.114
Do not know caste	0.142	0.446
	0.297	0.311
Number of years in school	-0.031***	-0.025***
	0.003	0.003
Constant	1.742****	1.604***
	(0.178)	0.198
R ²	0.1529	0.1681
Observations	7,454	7,454

Notes: † * > 0.1, ** > 0.05, *** > 0.01, two-tailed test, standard errors in parentheses.

‡ We also control for survey sampling area and survey length. Some variables had to be dropped from the analysis because of insufficient variation based on the dependent variable or because the question was only asked to married men.

Source: Authors' own.

Notes

- * This book has been produced as part of the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) programme, funded with UK aid from the UK government. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views or official policies of our funder or IDS. This is an Open Access book distributed under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence** (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited and any modifications or adaptations are indicated.
- 1 Rebecca Supriya Shah, Senior Fellow, Archbridge Institute, USA.
 - 2 Timothy Samuel Shah, Distinguished Research Scholar, University of Dallas, USA.
 - 3 All the names in the study were changed to protect the individuals' identities.
 - 4 The Religion and Economic Empowerment Project (REEP) is a large-scale household study conducted under the auspices of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and funded by the Templeton Religion Trust. REEP seeks to clarify and quantify the pro-developmental and prosocial outcomes of religion and religious freedom among randomly selected individuals in India and Sri Lanka.
 - 5 In the interests of our enumerators and to protect our partners in the field, we cannot identify the sample areas in our survey. However, we do collect data in Bangalore, which is one of the five sample areas.
 - 6 To know more about our previous research, which in some cases includes a similar group of women to the ones studied for this chapter, see Shah (2013a, 2016a, 2016b) and Shah and Shah (2011, 2013). The data cited in this chapter is also found in more detail in an unpublished report in the author's possession (Shah 2013b).
 - 7 This categorisation of Hinduism began in 1893 at the first World's Parliament of Religions, which took place in Chicago, Illinois. To explore more on the origins and concept of 'Hinduism' as a single world religion, see King (1999).
 - 8 For more on the rise of neo-Hinduism in India, refer to Shah (2018).
 - 9 Consumption smoothing is an economic concept that describes an individual's desire to maximise their standard of living through alternating between spending and saving throughout different stages of their lives.
 - 10 We draw on the work of Banerjee *et al.* (2014) to identify business ownership as a key dependent variable for our study.
 - 11 By deeply held religious beliefs and practices, we wish to distinguish them from levels and forms of religious commitment that are relatively formal, routinised and external, consisting largely, for example, of religious rituals and practices organised on a family or community basis. Think of a person who goes to church every day versus a person who goes to church only at Christmas or Easter because it is the 'done' thing in their family.
 - 12 There are many stories about the origin of the Yellamma cult. The most prevalent one says that Yellamma was the daughter of a Brahmin, married to sage Jamadagni and was the mother of five sons. She used to bring water from the river Malaprabha for the sage's worship and rituals. One day, while she was at the river, she saw a group of youths engaged in water sports and forgot to return home on time, which made Jamadagni suspect her chastity. He ordered his sons, one by one, to punish their mother, but four of them refused on one pretext or the other. The sage cursed them to become eunuchs and had Yellamma beheaded by his fifth son, Parashuram. To everybody's astonishment, Yellamma's head multiplied by tens and hundreds and moved

to different regions. This miracle made her four eunuch sons and others become her followers, who worshipped her head. According to another version, after Parashuram beheaded his mother he felt guilty and attached the head of a lower-caste woman named Yellamma to Renuka's body. Thus, a lower-caste woman achieved the higher status of being a Brahmin's wife. It is also noteworthy to say that originally Yellamma was a divinity mainly worshipped by the lower castes (mostly Dalits) and did not therefore belong to the Brahmanic deities (Gupta 1983).

- 13 In this chapter we use the term Dalit to include SCs. Dalit means 'broken' and is the preferred term of most people in this community. However, the official government term is 'Schedule Caste'.

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