

HOPE AND RESILIENCE:

The Application of Spiritual Principles
to Community Life



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Water ignores all separations and boundaries...[I]t offers a vehicle to bring those who share it together. Since it touches all we do and experience, water creates a language through which we may discuss our common future.

— Aaron T. Wolf (2017)



Introduction

The following study seeks to contribute to the broad discourse on social and economic development some insights into the dynamic interplay between the spiritual and practical dimensions of community life, in this case in the context of urban informal settlements. Carried out by the Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development at Devi Ahilya University in Indore, India in collaboration with the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, this study is part of a series of the Institute's research publications called *Occasional Papers on Insights from Practice*. The series examines patterns that are emerging as groups, communities and organizations strive to apply unifying and constructive principles to their everyday lives, endeavor to solve the challenges they face and build a desirable society.

The informal settlements described in this case study—situated along the banks of the Saraswati and Khan Rivers in Indore—are representative of thousands across the globe that draw upon spiritual principles to improve the conditions of their communities. The study explores the meaning and implications of applying

spiritual principles to everyday relationships and decisions from the perspective of community members. Particularly, it strives to capture the voices of local residents with regard to how they engage with concepts and principles—such as the oneness of humankind and humanity’s interconnectedness with nature—to build strong networks of social support at the neighborhood level and to address the pressing issues they face, such as the management of scarce water resources.

The research for this qualitative case study was conducted by the Bahá’í Chair in 2018 with the participation of some 300 community members from the two settlements in Indore, India. Data was gathered primarily through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. The study sought to examine the following questions:

- How do community members apply their convictions and beliefs to the social relationships within their neighborhoods?
- How do community members understand principles such as the oneness of humankind and the interconnectedness of humanity with nature in relation to the challenges and opportunities encountered in their communities?
- In what ways do these spiritual principles and beliefs inform personal decisions regarding water usage? How do these principles affect collective efforts to manage water shortage and flooding?

The findings of this study explore from the perspective of community members, how the principles of the oneness of humankind and humanity’s interconnectedness with nature are applied to social relations, the relationship of people with nature and their efforts

to address water-related challenges. Community members in this study, from mainly Hindu and Muslim backgrounds, identified the expression of these principles as being central to their religious tenets. In discussing the application of the oneness of humankind to their social relations, they described this principle as an affirmation of a common humanity and the interconnectedness of all members of the human race. The findings of this study also indicate how communities are striving to apply the principle of humankind's interconnectedness with the natural environment in their use of shared resources in the context of limited access to potable water, a crucial resource for the inhabitants of the settlements in this study.

The overall aim in preparing this document is to contribute to the efforts made by groups, communities, and organizations around the world to engender a new consciousness of how science and religion can work together to create a more humane and just world.

A Discourse on Science, Religion and Development

This study builds on a growing body of research related to development thought and practice that explores the constructive influence that spiritual principles have on endeavors aimed at the empowerment of grassroots communities to become the protagonists of their own progress. Notwithstanding the critique of academics and practitioners who may not be in agreement with incorporating spiritual principles into development policies and plans, there is growing recognition amongst many researchers and planners that failure to account for the spiritual, cultural and religious aspects of human life and society will impede the realization of collective wellbeing and prosperity for humankind.

Over the years, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity has dedicated its attention to introducing into the broad discourse

on development a stream of thought and practice that emphasizes a spiritual dimension to the advancement of civilization. The Institute's efforts have been inspired by the work of like-minded institutions such as the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). One study prepared by the IDRC entitled *The Lab, the Temple, and the Market: Reflections at the Intersection of Science, Religion and Development*—which brings together the views of scientists from four religious systems of belief (Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith) on topics connected to development—has helped lay a foundation for the Institute's work in advancing a discourse on science, religion and development.

The present research builds upon concepts discussed in *The Lab, the Temple, and the Market* and three other papers authored by the Institute. The first is a concept paper entitled *Science, Religion and Development: Some Initial Considerations* and the second *Science, Religion and Development: Some Aims and Challenges*. The first paper captures insights from a year-long conversation held with development thinkers and practitioners in India on the state of development thinking and action. The concepts and principles outlined in this paper have informed the discourse on science, religion, and development that the Institute has pursued in a number of countries around the world. The second paper was developed in response to the desire expressed by several organizations engaged with the discourse in India to better articulate their experiences in drawing on spiritual principles in their daily interactions and work. The five statements contained in the paper helped participating organizations describe how they apply spiritual principles and scientific methods in their work and reflect on their common aims and the challenges they encounter in their efforts to translate their ideals into action.

The third paper, *May Knowledge Grow in our Hearts: Applying Spiritual Principles to Development Practice*, is an account of a development organization in India named Seva Mandir whose efforts are aimed at contributing to the common good through programs focused on areas such as forestry, health, and education. The study strives to capture, from the perspective of Seva Mandir's staff, field workers and the villagers involved in its programs, how the spiritual principle of interconnectedness is applied to the activities of the organization. In this study the interconnectedness of all things—considered to be the organizing principle of Seva Mandir's activities—was approached as a principle that transcends the physical and visible relationships which exist among phenomena to embrace a spiritual connection.

Whereas the study on Seva Mandir aimed to describe the nature of the actions undertaken by a development organization, this research conducted in Indore is focused on how community members from informal settlements draw on spiritual principles in their everyday lives and in their informal collaborations. The choice of informal settlements provided a rich setting for this study, as it enabled the link between beliefs and interactions among community members to be intensively observed within a shared geographical space. The settlements in this study are comprised of inhabitants who belong to two religious communities, Hindu and Muslim. This representation of the two religions predominant in India brought depth to the discussion on various spiritual concepts, as they could be viewed through the lens of different faith traditions. It also provided an opportunity to explore how spiritual principles are expressed across religious lines and their impact on inter-religious harmony, in light of the history of conflict between these two religious communities in India. Given its central role in the life of these communities, the issue of water provided a context in which to examine how principles are translated into action. Apart

from its significance as a component of the natural world vital to human life, this study highlights the spiritual, social, and cultural significance of water for the residents of these localities.

Introduction

This study expands upon research related to the spiritual dimension of development endeavors, generating further insights into how communities make use of spiritual concepts and principles in their efforts to contribute towards the common good. Within this context, it places special attention on the creation of strong networks of social support and the management of water-related challenges.

Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity



Research Setting – Urban Informal Settlements in Indore

Located in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, Indore is the region's most populous city with some two million residents.¹ The city, which is central India's commercial capital, is situated on the western part of the Malwa Plateau on the banks of the Khan and the Saraswati rivers. Over the past several decades, urbanization in India has led to a large-scale influx of migrants from villages and towns to cities like Indore.



Figure 1:
Location of
Indore within
India

1. Government India Census 2011 (Census of India, 2011)

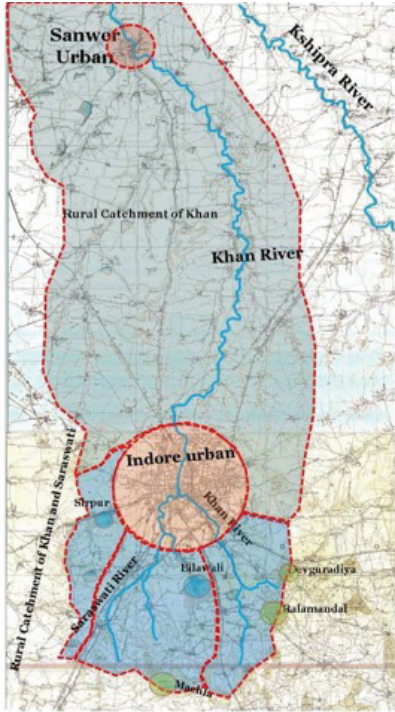


Figure 2:
Course of the Khan
and Saraswati Rivers

Some 27% of Indore's population lives in designated slum, or informal, settlements.² Residents of these settlements often lack access to public services, amenities and infrastructures. In Indore, many such settlements have historically burgeoned on the littoral areas of the city's rivers. These areas on the banks of the rivers serve as seasonal floodplains and were thus kept vacant, but migrants as well as local families unable to afford housing in the city settled in these areas given the availability of river water and land. Haphazard urbanization, and its concomitant industrialization, has at the same time turned the city's rivers into an outlet for domestic and industrial waste, turning them

2. (Chu, 2018).

into foul-smelling drainage channels.³ Moreover, encroachment on the catchment area of these rivers has adversely affected the flow of the rivers. The many attempts that have been made over the past three decades to clean these rivers have been hindered by the complexity of the challenge.⁴ Although various government schemes and projects by civil society organizations have attempted to rehabilitate Indore's informal settlements, these interventions have mostly had limited benefits for the settlement dwellers.⁵ The most recent development intervention of the government includes a plan for riverside development along the Khan River. River and municipal clean-up efforts over the past several years, especially in the area of solid waste management. According to residents, these efforts have resulted in cleaner settlements, less waterlogging and a reduction in vector-borne diseases.⁶ The Smart Cities Mission, which in addition to city-wide introduction of internet-enabled technologies, focuses on redevelopment of a compact area along the river in the heart of Indore's old city, affects Kabutar Khana as well as areas adjacent to North Toda.⁷ This project was slated to require demolition of some homes of families in Kabutar Khana and North Toda and their resettlement in public housing on the outskirts of the city.⁸

Kabutar Khana and North Toda

The research project was carried out in two settlements on the banks of the Khan River located diagonally opposite each other—Kabutar Khana and North Toda. Kabutar Khana has a largely Muslim population whereas North Toda is predominantly Hindu. Both settlements are located in the old city near the historic Rajwada Palace, erstwhile seat of the Holkar kings who ruled large parts of

3. *Sewage Pollution in Water Supply in Indore* (Tahir & Visaria, 2017).

4. Indore" (Dhar, 2017).

5. (Chu, 2018; Parikh, 1996; Patel & Mandhyan, 2014; Verma, 2000).

6. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 June 2018.

7. <https://www.smartcityindore.org/smart-city-indore/>.

8. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 3 August 2018.

the Malwa region, in which Indore is situated, for more than two centuries prior to the independence of India.⁹ Also within sight of the two areas are the Krishnapura *Chhatris* (the Cenotaphs of the Holkars), which were built around this area since it is located at the confluence of the Saraswati and Khan Rivers. Such river confluences are considered auspicious in Hindu mythology.¹⁰ The rivers meet at this spot and flow together for 50km to Ujjain, traditionally considered one of the major holy cities of India. A large area surrounding this confluence, including both North Toda and Kabutar Khana, is flood prone. At times of heavy rain, entire homes lying on the banks of the Khan and the Saraswati in these two settlements have been inundated in flood water. Both neighbourhoods are situated in Ward number 60 (Ranipura), with populations of approximately 10,000 in North Toda and 1,600 in Kabutar Khana.¹¹

According to one account, many of the early inhabitants of Kabutar Khana migrated to Indore from the Holkar Queen Ahilya Bai's village Chandol to work as household staff and guards for the Holkar kings in the nearby Rajwada Palace. This was also a place where sadhus (Hindu mendicants) and fakirs (Muslim ascetics) settled. As residents of this area practiced pigeon keeping, and

9. The Holkar dynasty ruled large parts of the Malwa region in which Indore is situated for more than two centuries prior to the independence of India.

10. Rivers themselves are rich with religious significance in Hindu cosmology. A confluence of rivers is especially auspicious. The area around the cenotaphs used to be known as a pilgrimage site (tirth sthal), with the word for pilgrimage in Hindi, 'tirth' meaning 'crossing over (to the spiritual realm)' and religious festivals would be celebrated on its banks (Eck, 2012).

11. Interview with municipal representative, 21 June 2018, Kabutar Khana social mapping, 7 August 2018, Interview with son of local leader in North Toda, 12 June 2018. In 2013, government records listed the population of Kabutar Khana as 2,182. Since then, the population may have decreased, as a number of homes of ragpickers on the riverbanks were removed in 2017. The North Toda population, however, was listed as being only 3,670 in 2013: http://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/52Ind_MP_sfcp_Vol_I-min.pdf.

pigeons are considered a symbol of peace, one of the Holkar kings named this area Kabutar Khana ('Abode of Pigeons').¹²

Elderly participants in this study recalled a very different landscape in their childhood. They recollected that the Khan River had clean water in those days. Many remembered bathing in it and watching boats drift by. Trees used to grow along the riverside, which were cut down over time.¹³

Research Setting

During the Holkar times, the residents of Kabutar Khana obtained their drinking water from six wells that were dug in various parts of the neighbourhood. One of the wells was known throughout the area for its sweet water. However, all but two of these wells are no longer functional.¹⁴ Agricultural fields by the riverside were watered by one of these wells.¹⁵

Around 40 years ago, migrants of limited means began to settle on the land by the riverside due to its proximity to the main city centre and the market where they could obtain work. They erected huts and informal dwelling structures.¹⁶ Later, in 1983, the informal residents were given land titles (*pattas*), despite the area being flood prone. The population growth in Kabutar Khana in the last few decades was paralleled by the rapid pollution of the river and the encroachment of its catchment area by various forms of construction.¹⁷

12. Interview with elderly resident whose ancestors were among the first to settle the area, 22 April 2018.

13. See, for example, interview with elderly resident, Kabutar Khana, 2 June 2018; interview with elderly resident, North Toda, 6 June 2018; interview with local leader, Kabutar Khana, 3 July 2018; longtime residents, North Toda, 21 July 2018.

14. Interview with head of neighbourhood committee, Kabutar Khana, 3 July 2018.

15. Interview with local resident, Kabutar Khana, 5 July 2018.

16. Interview with elderly resident, Kabutar Khana, 26 June 2018.

17. Interview with elderly resident, Kabutar Khana, 26 June 2018.

Kabutar Khana is today a bustling neighbourhood with a predominantly Muslim population and a small population of Hindus.¹⁸ The majority of the inhabitants of this neighbourhood live under precarious conditions. The riverside is lined with small huts and ramshackle structures housing large families. The area is plagued by foul odours from the river.¹⁹ The sloping topography of the neighbourhood leads from an elevated section further from the river to lower-lying areas along the riverbanks. Narrow lanes and by-lanes crisscross in what resemble a maze of concrete that developed haphazardly as the settlement expanded. The most visible landmark of the area is the Noori Mosque. There are three Sufi shrines (*dargahs*) in the neighbourhood, to which the population is deeply attached.

North Toda, like Kabutar Khana, is spread along a cluster of steep, winding lanes alongside the Saraswati River, but on the opposite bank. The Khan River flows on the other side of North Toda and meets the Saraswati at one of its edges. People from various regions of India and from different marginalized groups such as tribal and lower caste groups settled in North Toda, a predominantly Hindu neighbourhood.²⁰ A small cluster of Muslim families also live in the settlement, and many of them run workshops and small stores along the main commercial lane.

There are four major temples in North Toda. The Kherapati Temple is the most notable among them.²¹ According to a local legend, the king Tukoji Rao Holkar gave the priest of the Kherapati Temple the responsibility for not just the temple but also the land around it which forms what is today North Toda. He made the

18. Kabutar Khana social mapping, 7 August 2018, notes from transect walks, April-August 2018.

19. Notes from transect walks, April-August 2018.

20. Interview with Banjara residents, North Toda, 1 August 2018.

21. Interview with local religious leader, North Toda, 21 July 2018.

priest a landlord responsible for this large area. The landlord and his descendants later sold the land to local people.²² Apart from these temples, there are innumerable small wayside shrines built informally by diverse individuals and groups.

The people of North Toda have a great attachment to the Krishnapura *Chhatris* (cenotaphs), which can be viewed standing on the bank opposite the neighbourhood. Residents of North Toda associate the cenotaphs with the memory of the 18th century Holkar Queen Ahilya Bai who is much loved throughout the city due to her reputation as a just and compassionate ruler.²³ Ahilya Bai used to engage in worship at the steps next to the river along the Krishnapura *Chhatri*. Residents claim that she would pray by the riverbanks at dawn and dusk each day.

Research Setting

North Toda has two disused wells. Open step wells were also present in the area before they were filled in to construct a riverside road.²⁴ Developments in the area aimed at slum upgradation and rejuvenating the river have had mixed results.²⁵ Residents recall that the construction of a retaining wall along the Khan River changed the course and flow of the river and reduced its width.²⁶

Both North Toda and Kabutar Khana bustle with activity. On a visit on any given day, a wedding reception could be seen on a decorated street next to the mosque, or a throng of devotees of Shiva dressed in saffron could be seen waiting to head on their sacred journey to Ujjain, or one might witness a feast given in the name the saint Sai Baba in front of the shuttered storehouse of a scrap dealer. Clusters of women frequently sat together as part of

22. Interview with North Toda resident, 1 August 2018.

23. As a tribute to her saintliness she is referred to as a '*Devi*' (goddess).

24. Interview with longtime resident, North Toda, 6 June 2018, Interview with residents, North Toda, 9 August 2018.

25. <https://architexturez.net/doc/az-cf-21706>.

26. Interview with longtime residents, North Toda, 21 July 2018.

micro-credit groups while circles of people from the Banjara tribe gathered together in a lane to sing devotional folk songs. Youth and children could be seen everywhere playing on the streets, riding bicycles, or playing with toys made from repurposed scrap materials.²⁷

Research Setting

Men from these settlements are commonly employed as daily wage labourers in the nearby markets in Indore's old city; a handful run small businesses. Many women are employed domestic workers in the homes of the middle class. Some women have small home-based businesses on the side.²⁸ In both neighbourhoods, numerous small workshops were being run either inside or adjacent to people's homes. Family members of all ages, from children to the elderly, even some ill or impaired, could be seen helping with the work. There was a lot of variety in the types of trades being carried out locally, including furniture making, aluminium sectioning, bag making, rope making, vegetable selling, scrap recycling of metal, woodwork, shoe making, basket making, mattress making, toy making, carpentry, goat herding, butchery, and tailoring. Many things were being made or processed by hand around the neighbourhoods all the time.²⁹ Evidences of the creativity and industriousness of the residents of the neighbourhoods were ubiquitous.

Water crisis

Given the scarcity of water in both North Toda and Kabutar Khana, containers storing water could be found outside almost every home, as well as packed into interior courtyards, living

27. See for instance, Field Note, Kabutar Khana, 22 April 2018; Field Note, North Toda, 2 August 2018; Field Note, North Toda, 9 August 2018; Field Note, North Toda, 1 August 2018; Field Note, Kabutar Khana, 3 August 2018.

28. Social mapping, Kabutar Khana, 7 August 2018; Social mapping, North Toda, 9 August 2018.

29. See, for instance, Field Note, Kabutar Khana, 11 June 2018; Field Note, Kabutar Khana, 26 June 2018; Field Note, North Toda, 24 August 2018.

rooms, and kitchens. Containers of all shapes, sizes and materials were turned into storage vessels, a testament to both the strained financial circumstances of the residents and their ingenuity.³⁰ People often hoarded water out of uncertainty about when they would next be able to access water.³¹ In the early morning and in the afternoon, when water was being supplied through the taps on the street, a large throng of people gathered around each tap, patiently waiting their turn to fill their four containers of water.

Drinking water was supplied to parts of the neighbourhoods via a pipeline from the Narmada River at a distance of 70 km from Indore, purified by the government, and provided through a few select taps in these neighbourhoods (although residents found that on some days the water supply was polluted and not fit to be used).³² Bore wells pumping up ground water were the other principal source of water for the neighbourhoods. The water pumped from these wells was brackish and polluted due to which it could only be used for washing and bathing needs. Due to the lack of access to reliable drinking water, however, many people were forced to drink the water from the bore wells. This caused various ailments in the population. A resident explained that she drank the dirty water that she obtained from the bore well, even though she knew it was adversely affecting her health because she had no other option.³³

Some residents used traditional methods of filtering water, such as filling water in clay pots or putting turtles in their well to eat

30. Field Note, North Toda, 8 August 2018; Kabutar Khana photos, 28 June 2018.

31. Field Note, North Toda, 8 August 2018; Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 24 July 2018.

32. However, many residents claim the water often is polluted and undrinkable.

33. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 2 June 2018 and 23 August 2018; interview with local doctor, North Toda, 21 June 2018.

insects and impurities.³⁴ Residents could not recall any tests being done to officially check water quality.³⁵

Since most homes lacked indoor plumbing, most residents were compelled to obtain drinking water from the outdoor common taps during the two hours that they supplied water every alternate day. The number of shared water outlets were insufficient for the needs of the total population of the settlement—each outlet served anywhere between twenty and seventy families.³⁶ Frequently the ‘drinking’ water provided was in actuality unpotable. Other times, water flowed for a shorter duration than scheduled, or the pressure was insufficient, and families would be compelled to walk a long distance to fetch water from taps further away using bicycles or push carts.³⁷ The implications that struggles for water have for gender disparity was evident in the disproportionate burden placed on the shoulders of women in these neighbourhoods, who had primary responsibility for fetching water. For the Muslim residents the challenge became particularly difficult during the years when the period of Ramadan fell during the hot season and they would have to haul heavy water buckets home while fasting.³⁸ The situation became particularly critical during the summer months when the supply of municipal drinking water typically becomes more erratic.^{39 40}

34. Interview with local residents, Kabutar Khana, 24 July 2018.

35. Interview with local doctor, North Toda, 21 June 2018.

36. Interview with neighbourhood tap coordinator, North Toda, 8 June 2018; Interview with residents of IDA building, North Toda, 8 June 2018.

37. Interview with residents, Kabutar Khana, 29 April, 26 June and 23 August 2018; Interview with residents, North Toda, 8 June and 6 July 2018.

38. Interview with North Toda residents, 25 April 2018; Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 2 June 2018 and 13 August 2018; Interview with North Toda residents, 6 July 2018; interview with women of Kabutar Khana, 12 July 2018.

39. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 11 June 2018; Interview with North Toda residents, 6 June 2018.

40. Some households did not have access to Narmada water because their homes were too high up the hill and the water could not be pumped up to where they live. Some residents mentioned that since filling water in the daytime takes too long and they

The residents sometimes relied on illegal connections to meet their water needs in such dire conditions.⁴¹ In Kabutar Khana, it was found that the residents had made their own unauthorized connections to the municipal pipeline by cutting holes in it and connecting it to their own PVC pipes,⁴² which would often break.⁴³

One of the informal arrangements for water access and distribution that worked well for the residents of Kabutar Khana was a regular supply of water from a private well located in a shoe warehouse in Kabutar Khana and given to the people at no cost.⁴⁴

In this context, cooperation as well as conflict over water has been reported in informal settlements in various cities of India and it can be tempting to focus on conspicuous instances of conflict.⁴⁵ As commonly occurs in many cities in India, the stresses involved in meeting a household's water needs sometimes tested residents' patience. In the hot season in North Toda and Kabutar Khana, water sometimes ran out before everyone had a turn to fill their

need to go to work, they ended up filling water twice a day, often quite late in the night, from the bore well when others were not filling water, as they would obtain better water pressure at that time. One of them reported that residents could be seen filling water even at 2.30am in the hot season. (Interview with North Toda residents, 6 June 2018, 17 July 2018; Interview with member of a neighbourhood committee, Kabutar Khana, 3 August 2018).

41. Interview with local residents, Kabutar Khana, 2 June 2018, 7 August 2018; Interview with official, 11 July 2018; Interview with official, 21 June 2018; Interview with local residents, North Toda, 25 April 2018.
42. Photos of Kabutar Khana pipe, 17 April 2018; transect walk, Kabutar Khana, 22 April 2018; social mapping, Kabutar Khana, 7 August 2018.
43. Interviews with Kabutar Khana residents, 23 June 2018.
44. Interview with well owner, Kabutar Khana, 2 June 2018; Interview with residents, Kabutar Khana, 16 June 2018; interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 3 August 2018.
45. <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20181011-how-to-solve-delhis-water-crisis>, accessed 22 July 2019; <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2016/07/delhi-slums-affected-by-water-crisis/>, accessed 23 July 2019; Sharma, Kalpana. "Waiting for Water: The experience of poor communities in Bombay". https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/drivers_urb_change/urb_infrastructure/pdf_public_private_services/W_SPARC_Kalpana_waiting_water.pdf, accessed 21 July 2019.

containers. Water quality issues reduced the amount of supply that was useable, and residents—commonly women—grew weary of standing for long periods to fill their buckets from a common tap.⁴⁶

Residents explained that the occasional conflicts that had occurred in North Toda and Kabutar Khana have not turned into permanent enmity. They were temporary and quickly resolved. As will be discussed in the findings section in Chapter 4, given the capacity of community members to draw on spiritual principles in their social relations they were able to overcome interpersonal challenges that arose from time to time. Residents reported the existence of informal mechanisms that the community developed over time to resolve conflicts that may arise. For instance, some taps had an informal coordinating group that supervised water filling. This group ensured equitable distribution and counselled parties that were having disagreements.⁴⁷ In some cases, influential individuals within localities played this role.⁴⁸ Some lanes had an agreement that the water pump would be shut off if there was a conflict, compelling everyone to resolve their differences in the interest of the common good.⁴⁹

Flood damage

Both Kabutar Khana and North Toda are affected by floods, which typically occur once every few years during the monsoon season.⁵⁰ Residents reported that dirty, sewage-laden water would inundate their homes “up to the rooftops” and it would take them weeks

46. Interview with North Toda residents, 25 April 2018; Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 2 June 2018 and 13 August 2018; Interview with North Toda residents, 6 July 2018; interview with women of Kabutar Khana, 12 July 2018.

47. Interview with members of group of 20, North Toda, 8 June 2018; interview with woman leader in Kabutar Khana, 22 April 2018.

48. Interview with residents of Kabutar Khana, 13 August 2018.

49. Interview with residents of Kabutar Khana, 13 August 2018.

50. Interview with residents, Kabutar Khana, 16 June 2018; Interview with residents, North Toda, 12 June 2018.

to clean up in the aftermath.⁵¹ The presence of stagnant water led to an increase in water-borne diseases.⁵² The worst damage was done to the homes of the families already living precariously in semi-permanent structures near the river. For instance, a woman living in a hut under a bridge in North Toda for thirty years recounted how all her meagre belongings had been inundated time and again by floods. She was the sole breadwinner of the family, so it was difficult for her to find the means to relocate elsewhere. She instead would keep putting her home back together after each flood.⁵³

It has not only been belongings that have been lost in the floods. Past floods have also resulted in deaths. For instance, a middle-aged man who was living in a public housing complex on the banks of the Khan River in North Toda died in the flood several years ago when his home was inundated. Residents recounted that, another year, an entire family had perished.⁵⁴ The floodwaters often gush in suddenly, and all—whether young or old—are compelled to run, clinging to their loved ones and their belongings. The flood waters often rush in at night when families are sleeping, so neighbours must quickly warn each other.⁵⁵

Apart from the loss of possessions and damage to their homes, during the floods, residents face an immediate crisis due to the loss of access to food and clean water. At times, residents reported having to go for a few days without food. The situation becomes

51. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 June 2018, 12 June 2018 and 6 July 2018; Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 24 July 2018, 7 August 2018 and 23 August 2018.

52. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 June 2018.

53. Field note, North Toda, 17 April 2018; Interview with woman living under bridge, North Toda, 6 July 2018.

54. Interview with North Toda residents, 6 July 2018 and 21 July 2018.

55. Interview with North Toda residents, 6 July 2018.

particularly distressing for young children endure prolonged hunger and thirst.⁵⁶

Research Setting

As is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, the residents and institutions in both neighbourhoods come together to help those in need through the provision of shelter, food, water, and care for the young and the vulnerable.

It is within the social, cultural, religious, economic, and environmental context of these informal settlements that the research for this study was carried out.

56. Interview with North Toda residents, 6 July 2018.



Methodology

The methodology for this research employed a case study approach to generate qualitative data in two riverside settlements: Kabutar Khana and North Toda. The field research took place over a period of five months between April and August 2018, during the hot season when water scarcity is most acute and during the monsoon season, which frequently results in flooding in this area. Research methods included focus group discussions, interviews, participant observation, and a variety of tools to engage the community in participatory inquiry.

The study involved the participation of a total of 323 community members—150 from Kabutar Khana and 173 from North Toda.

The study sought to understand how residents draw upon spiritual principles to strengthen social relationships in their settlements in the context of addressing the challenges of water scarcity and flooding. Therefore, to gain insight into the connection between residents' understanding of spiritual principles and their motivation and behaviour, the project employed interpretive research

methods such as interviews and focus group discussions. The interview and focus group discussion questions centred around spiritual principles to bring to the fore participants' ideas related to principles that orient their relationships with each other and with nature and the role these beliefs play in their sociocultural context. As facilitating a discussion with participants around these spiritual principles required a clear articulation of these principles themselves, a theme statement was developed during the early stages of the project. This statement can be found in the Appendix.

During pilot visits to these neighbourhoods prior to the commencement of the project, the research team realized that the residents perceived these spiritual principles intuitively and they were deeply ingrained in their everyday culture and practices. To prompt participants to go beyond merely superficial statements of these principles and to more consciously and profoundly reflect on these convictions that shaped their motivations and actions required that these principles be conceptualized and elaborated at greater depth. It was for this reason that the statement in the Appendix was drafted. Effort was made to ensure that the description of these spiritual principles in the statement were universal in character and did not contain references that would be identified solely with one particular religion. As these statements were being drafted, the content was shared verbally with individuals among both Hindus and Muslims living in these neighbourhoods. The statement was finalized when it was found to be effective in stimulating discussion on these principles.

In addition to the articulation of these principles, the statement included a set of questions related to each principle. These were not used as a questionnaire. Rather, researchers adapted and used these questions slightly differently for each research participant or group depending on the context, as in the approach used in

semi-structured interviews. Using the vocabulary and framing provided by the theme statements and questions helped the researchers and participants to communicate more readily across different traditions as well as to relate the seemingly abstract concept of spiritual principles to concrete developmental challenges concerning water and maintaining harmonious community relationships. Efforts were made to find a language that would have enough specificity and clarity to be able to relate it to practical and social issues in the community, while not being reductive or eclipsing the mystical and transcendent reality to which spiritual principles ultimately refer.

Methodology

The following limitations of this study are a necessary preface to the findings. A limitation of the methodology was that the study focused more on the participants' articulation and interpretation of their beliefs rather than exhaustively studying how participants apply these convictions in responding to water-related or other social challenges. Although participant observation in the two neighbourhoods was carried out extensively so as to provide basic triangulation and confidence that residents' statements had a basis in social reality, an opportunity exists for future studies to focus on more detailed and technical observation of the application of these principles in various settings of community life. Such studies could provide a basis for specific policy suggestions for incorporating beliefs in the oneness of humankind and interconnectedness with nature into water management systems and institutions in urban informal settlements. Further, the relationship between people's spiritual beliefs on a subject and their attitudes, motivations and behaviour related to that subject merits a more careful examination than was possible in this study. Spiritual beliefs interact with other beliefs and values in a particular socio-cultural context and they influence motivation and behaviour in ways that are not always predictable. The complex interplay between spiritual beliefs

and other beliefs and between these beliefs and motivation and behaviour is a subject that merits further study.

The Research Process

Methodology

Given the aim of this research, which was to gain insights into how communities in specific riverside urban informal settlements apply spiritual principles to address their water-related challenges, theoretical sampling was used as a method to carry out sampling through an iterative process based on the relevance cases have for providing new insights into the emerging theory. Instead of fixing a quota in advance for the number of focus group discussion participants and interviewees from predetermined categories, the structure of the sample—in terms of how many participants will come from each group—was developed alongside the research process as experience shed light on which groups would be able to provide more insights.

The research process began with residents who professed to face water-related challenges, and based on the discussions with them, the further groups to be contacted and integrated into the research were identified. Initial efforts were made to involve participants from diverse groups—i.e. women as well as men, water users, water suppliers, individuals from Hindu, Muslim, and other religious backgrounds—without specifying an exact number for each. The focus was initially to cultivate relationships with at least a few key individuals who could serve as research collaborators, to enable the researchers to gain access to an initial population from which to begin making connections to groups that will be able to offer insights relevant to the role spiritual principles play in collectively addressing issues of water scarcity and quality. The research continued incorporating participants from various groups and backgrounds until it was felt that a point of theoretical saturation was reached where the number of new insights being

gained was negligible. The research was carried out by a team from the Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development (Devi Ahilya University) and a small number of research collaborators from each neighbourhood who assisted with the research on an informal basis.

Interview and focus group participants April-August 2018

Methodology

Neighbourhood	# women	# men	Total # people
Kabutar Khana	82	68	150
North Toda	98	75	173
Total for both neighbourhoods	180	143	323

Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

Efforts to carry out interviews usually attracted groups and effectively became focus group discussions. The general shape of the themes and questions in the theme statement were followed in these discussions but using vocabulary and follow-up questions tailored to the participant's circumstances. It was generally not effective to arrange focus group discussions in advance, but residents were for the most part very obliging in participating in impromptu focus group discussions. Some carried on with activities such as filling water, washing clothes, or craft work during the discussion, but most were able to pause for at least 20 minutes or longer. Many families invited researchers in for tea, and generally the culture of the neighbourhoods is very inviting.

Participant Observation

The research team carried out participant-observation by being present in some of the activities of daily life in the community to better understand the context and to triangulate the findings from the focus group discussions and interviews. The team members were on occasion present when the tap of the Narmada pipeline

was in operation, as well as during filling from bore-well taps, to see the interactions that take place as residents—typically women—take turns filling their buckets and drums. Research team members were present during some of the community festivals such as Eid-ul-Adha (Islamic festival of the sacrifice), Ramadan (month of Fasting in Islam), Sawan/Shravan (holy month and month of fasting in Hinduism), Raksha Bandhan (Hindu festival celebrating brother-sister bond), weddings, worship services at the mosque and temples, and even a funeral. Time was spent around any activities taking place at the riverside, such as washing, preparation for Kanwar Yatra (pilgrimage to carry sacred water to the holy city of Ujjain), riverside worship in temples, Sufi shrines (*dargahs*) and rest houses (*dharamshalas*), recreation, and dredging of the river and other construction activities, as well as witnessing demolition of the Indore Development Authority buildings that were in danger of collapse and seeing parts of the resettlement process taking place.

Transect Walk/Social Mapping

A transect walk is a systematic walk along a defined path (transect) across the community/project area together with the local people to explore the social as well as water and sanitation conditions by observing, asking, listening, looking and sometimes producing a transect diagram. Several transect walks were conducted during the initial phase of fieldwork and enabled us to meet many new people and make a mental map of the neighbourhood. The questions discussed during the walk included the location and conditions of different population groups and social institutions, features of community life, the existing places of worship and religious practices, the water sources and quality, water purification and distribution arrangements, water use habits, wastewater collection, sanitation facilities, and associated challenges. The transect walks familiarized the research team with the overall conditions of each

settlement and its social reality. It also creates a foundation on which the community members involved can begin to read and analyze their social reality in relation to water issues. On two separate occasions, after the transect walks, researchers gathered research collaborators and other community members together to make a social map. An enlarged printout of the aerial view of the neighbourhoods was used and community members discussed and drew different features of their neighbourhoods on the maps, including pipelines, taps, institutions, and gathering places, along the lines of the topics discussed during the transect walk. The transect walks generated more discussion than the maps, however. Both the transect walks and maps were helpful in triangulating the data obtained through interviews and focus group discussions.

Data Analysis

The interviews and discussions that took place in the field were audio recorded and then transcribed in Hindi to preserve the original, colloquial expressions used. The resulting hundreds of pages of transcripts were coded by researchers and the categories and patterns arising from the data were noted and analyzed in relation to the conceptual framework of the project. This process of analysis yielded the narrative in the ‘findings’ section, which draws liberally from carefully translated quotations from the transcripts.



Findings

This study aimed to examine the following three questions in the context of two informal settlements in Indore:

- How do community members apply their spiritual convictions to the social relationships within their neighbourhoods?
- How do community members understand the spiritual principles of the oneness of humankind and the interconnectedness of humanity with nature in relation to the challenges and opportunities encountered by their communities?
- In what ways do these spiritual principles and beliefs inform personal decisions regarding water usage? How do these principles affect collective efforts to manage water scarcity and flooding?

The findings of this study are focused on relationships—social relationships among people at the neighbourhood level, and relationships between people and the natural environment.

Participants of this study discussed their perceptions of these relationships within the context of their communities and the challenges they face with water scarcity and flooding. The comments and observations of residents about these relationships drew upon their understanding of spiritual principles rooted in their religions which were mainly Hinduism and Islam.

Findings

The findings of the study are organized under the following two main themes: (1) beliefs about spiritual principles governing social relationships with community members and how they are applied at the neighbourhood level, and (2) beliefs about spiritual principles governing relationships with nature, and how residents apply these principles in interactions related to water.

1. Social relationships at the neighbourhood level

This study found that community members' efforts to apply the principle of the oneness of humankind found concrete expression in their relationships at the neighbourhood level. Social bonds of solidarity, friendship and trust among the community members allowed them to address the pressing issues that they faced in a spirit of reciprocity and mutual support.

a. Relationships built on the principle of oneness

In their comments, residents of Kabutar Khana and North Toda frequently referred to the purpose of their lives in terms of being of service to the community and, in particular, to their immediate neighbourhood. Many residents expressed their conviction that to be true to one's humanity requires being conscious of one's interconnectedness with other human beings and living a good life by strengthening that connection. As a woman in North Toda said, "If a person cannot be of service to another, then of what use is that person?"⁵⁷ "The purpose of life," commented a man from

57. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 August 2018.

North Toda, “is to do some good to those who are less fortunate than us, to be of some use to them, to be a source of happiness to them... Living for ourselves—this is something anyone can do, even animals do it. But to live for others—that is the key to life.”⁵⁸

Findings

A building contractor in North Toda, who often helps people in the neighbourhood, shared the following about his motivation for serving people:

This body that God has given us, is not only for ourselves. It should be useful to others as well. A true human being should be of help to others. I see the neighbourhood as my life-long companion. I will never leave it and go anywhere else... I have money. I could live elsewhere [more affluent parts of the city]. But because of my struggle to improve this neighbourhood, I will never leave and go. If we leave, who will look after the neighbourhood? We all live here like a family. Whenever there is a function in someone’s house—a birth somewhere or a death—people invite me. They share their sorrows with me, and I share mine with them. This is how we live.⁵⁹

When residents discussed their views on interconnectedness, the most commonly referred to context after that of the family was the relationship with neighbours. A number of residents mentioned that in times of crises, it is a neighbour to whom one would turn for help. As one resident put it, “Our moral duty is to be a true and constant companion to our neighbour. They naturally depend on us. We share in their sad and happy moments and participate in their weddings and festivals.”⁶⁰

58. Interview with North Toda residents, 12 July 2018.

59. Interview with community leader, 21 June 2018.

60. Interview with Kabutar Khana resident, 3 July 2018.

Some Hindu participants in this study highlighted that the *dharm* (or ‘moral duty’) of a neighbour is to be a source of strength and support during difficulties and a joyful companion during all the happy occasions of life. The implications of this sense of duty towards one’s neighbour was discussed by a shopkeeper in Kabutar Khana: “Even if my neighbour wakes me up in the middle of the night, I will get up and go to help him. Whatever his difficulty may be—whether he has got into trouble with the police or has to be taken to the hospital—it is my duty to support him and help him.” Muslim participants in this study commented that a similar sense of duty is enjoined in the Islamic scriptures. A Muslim woman mentioned that according to an Islamic *Hadith*, “until you know that your neighbour has had food to eat and is not going hungry, you should not eat.” The Mullah (Muslim religious leader) of Kabutar Khana explained that according to the Quran, each person is responsible not only for their immediate neighbours but also for up to 40 families in their vicinity. He expressed concern over the increasing disparity between the rich and the poor:

The remedy for this is to turn to the purpose for which we have been created. We have not brought ourselves into this world, we have not made ourselves. Someone has made us. For every act, there is an aim. ... For instance, this mobile phone was made by humans, and it has an aim. The purpose is to be able to speak to one another from a distance. ... In the same way, we [human beings] have been created for the purpose of engaging in worship [and we do this by helping others] ... [It means that] if we have 10 *rotis* [flatbreads], then we eat some and share them with those who are weaker than us. Our Prophet has said that we should consider up to 40 houses around ours as our neighbours [and care for them].

[He said that] when you cook meat in your home make the gravy with an extra glass of water to increase the quantity so that it can be shared with your neighbours. He was asked, ‘Why should we do this, what is the benefit?’ In response He said if you eat meat alone, that food is not going to be good for you. If you cook it with an extra glass of water so that you can give some of the food to your neighbours, then your food really becomes wholesome for you.⁶¹

Another resident of Kabutar Khana had the following to share on this theme: “The fundamental principle of Islam is brotherhood... with people of any religion. The meaning of brotherhood is if someone has a physical handicap, we help him or her. If they have any difficulty, their difficulty is my difficulty, whoever they are.”⁶²

Discussing how neighbours come together in North Toda to help the poor who have inadequate financial or family support, one woman shared the example of a friend whose mother died and who had no money to pay for her cremation. “We, her neighbours, decided to pool together ₹15 or ₹20 from each of us and to somehow give her mother a decent cremation. We took care of the expenses although we ourselves are poor. But we cannot bear to see others in pain! I think of how we would want to be treated if we were in that situation. What if my body was lying there and nobody were there to attend to it?” She added that when someone very poor falls sick in her lane, the neighbours get together to organize a donation fund to raise money for the person.⁶³

Most residents earn enough money to meet their basic daily expenses. Their earning, however, is not enough to meet other

61. Interview with Mulla, Kabutar Khana, 19 June 2018.

62. Interview with Kabutar Khana resident, 22 April 2018.

63. Interview with group of women in North Toda, 21 July 2018.

contingencies, such as an illness in the family or some other unanticipated expense. If it is not a major expense, residents know that they can rely on their neighbours for assistance. “We live on the basis of ‘*kal ka kal dekhenge*’ (we will take care of tomorrow when it comes). If there is a need for, say, ₹50 or ₹100, I know I can take a loan from my neighbour. We are constantly supporting each other all the time in this way.”⁶⁴ Major expenses, however, can push a family into a deep financial crisis.

Participants in this study from both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds did not speak of this sense of duty towards others as being burdensome or being actuated by guilt or fear. They referred to bonds of friendship and solidarity with their neighbours as a source of joy and security in an increasingly apathetic world. A *yogi* (Hindu ascetic) residing in Kabutar Khana went so far as to say, “I have never thought of anyone as just a neighbour. I have made them a *humdard*, someone who shares the same pain.... I take the pain of others and give them back happiness.... [W]e have the capacity...to share the sorrows of others and receive happiness from it.”⁶⁵ What brings emotional resonance to these relationships is a worldview where the community becomes a natural extension of the family. Individuals are seen to belong to the community. By extension, the community—and not just the immediate family—is considered to have a responsibility for the individual.

While the residents describe their motivation behind being committed to the well-being of each other in terms of a common conviction in the oneness and interconnectedness of the members of the community, their convictions were also grounded in their specific faith traditions, whether Hindu or Muslim. As

64. Interview with group of women, Kabutar Khana, 3 August 2018.

65. Interview with yogi, Kabutar Khana, 28 June 2018.

the following section will elaborate, however, their affiliation to a specific religion did not become an obstacle in their friendships with those of other religions in their neighbourhoods.

b. Interreligious harmony

Findings

Tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India have a history going back to the partition of the country in 1947, which led to the creation of India and Pakistan as separate nations. The process of partition involved a massive movement of Muslims across the border to Pakistan and Hindus into India, with attendant violence.

Within this context, the expression of interreligious harmony and peaceful co-existence between people of both religious communities in Kabutar Khana and North Toda is considered in this study.⁶⁶ Participants in this study often mentioned that even during the most testing times in Hindu-Muslim relations, such as the nationwide riots that took place in the early 1990s, they could not recall having witnessed any case of violence on the basis of religion in their settlements.⁶⁷ Religion plays an important role in the lives of the residents and yet, for most, their religiosity seemed to provide the motivation for living in harmony with those of the other religious community.

In their comments, residents frequently sought to downplay the assumed divide between Hindu and Muslim communities and to emphasize the long history of interreligious harmony that is part of the heritage of both neighbourhoods. The narrative of irreconcilable differences between Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent is challenged by harmonious relations between religious communities in these neighbourhoods and the many

66. 80% of the population of Indore are Hindu and 14% are Muslim.

67. Interview with longtime residents, Kabutar Khana, 11 June 2018, 26 June 2018 and 3 July 2018; Interview with North Toda residents, 6 June 2018, 21 July 2018 and 27 August 2018.

instances of cooperation and participation in one another's culture and traditions.⁶⁸

Many residents described the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in both neighbourhoods in terms of vibrant exchange, genuine friendship and loving co-existence. One woman living next door to Muslims in Kabutar Khana explained that although she is a Hindu, there is no social divide between her and her Muslim neighbours. They live together helping one another. "We believe we are all human beings, so we should help each other. The purpose of life is to live by moral principles and to learn to do good," she mentioned. She said that she even observes the Muslim fast on some days out of solidarity with her female friends, and her Muslim friends make sweets during Hindu festivals.⁶⁹

Findings

Such eagerness to accommodate the other and to be accepting of their beliefs and practices is underpinned by a broad-minded reading of their religious scriptures where the oneness of humankind is emphasized. Muslims in Kabutar Khana spoke of the Islamic teaching that all human beings are the children of God, that all religions are one in purpose and that the duty of a true Muslim is to serve all of humanity. As one resident put it, "Islam teaches us to work for the betterment of all. So, we all try to help each other. We have a sense of brotherhood."⁷⁰ Similarly, a member of a handful of Sikh families who lived in Kabutar Khana, emphasized, "Guru Nanak, our divine teacher, tells us that all humanity is one. There are no real differences between human beings. We have to learn to ignore the worldly differences between people based on caste or creed and serve all human beings."⁷¹

68. Brass, P. (1991): 'Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity among the Muslims of South Asia,' (Brass, 1991), p69-108; (Burman, 1996).

69. Interview with women in North Toda, 13 August 2018.

70. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 26 June 2018.

71. Interview with Sikh resident, Kabutar Khana, 3 August 2018.

Participants in this study mentioned that helping people learn to live together harmoniously and with mutual understanding was one of the main aims of religion.⁷² They observed that in order to strengthen unity, the communities have learned to practice religion in a way that avoids dogmatism and sectarianism. A long-time resident of Kabutar Khana said that, in the context of Islam, “problems arise when people impose their own interpretation and ideas on the scriptures. We need to go back to the core of religion which teaches us brotherhood and selflessness.”⁷³

Residents recounted how people in the neighbourhoods joyously join in the celebration of religious festivals from both communities. During the festival of Navratri, Muslims join Hindus in the traditional *garba* folk dance program in the public square. On *Bakr-Id* (*Id-ul-Adha*, commemorating Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice), goat meat would be distributed to Hindu households as well as Muslim ones.⁷⁴ During *Raksha Bandhan* (a festival celebrating the brother-sister relationship), Hindu and Muslim girls tie talisman bracelets on the wrists of their ‘brothers’ of the other background.⁷⁵ On the days of *Eid*, for example, a steady stream of Muslim visitors from Kabutar Khana could be seen at the local medical shop belonging to a Hindu resident, wishing him on the festive occasion and celebrating together. On the fasting days of *Ramadan*, Hindus would join in the *iftaar* parties (gatherings for breaking the fast after sunset), some even occasionally observing parts of the fast.⁷⁶ An elderly Hindu woman in Kabutar Khana

72. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 7 August 2018.

73. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 22 April 2018.

74. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents during Bakr-Id, 23 August 2018; interview with North Toda residents, 20 August 2018.

75. Interview with North Toda residents, 27 August 2018; interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 3 August 2018.

76. Interview with proprietors of medical shop, Kabutar Khana, 16 June 2018; interview with local leader, North Toda, 21 June 2018; interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 13 August 2018.

mentioned, “See, on their *Eid*, *Sevai* [the traditional milk-based sweet served on *Eid*] comes to all our houses. During our *Diwali* festival, sweets are distributed to everyone’s houses. Everyone is invited to one another’s weddings and no one bothers about what others eat—whether vegetarian or not.”⁷⁷

Findings

Many Hindus in Kabutar Khana offer prayers at the shrine (*dargah*) of Bharmadar Shah Baba, the Sufi saint.⁷⁸ The keys to the shrine are kept by a Hindu family that lives next door.⁷⁹ Similarly, a family of craftspeople in Kabutar Khana, who are devout Muslims, have a tradition of making artifacts for various Hindu festivals. For instance, they build the effigy of the demon god *Raavan* that is burned during the festival of *Dussehra*, make kites for the festival of *Makar Sankranti* and craft amulet bracelets for the festival of *Raksha Bandhan*.⁸⁰ A government official serving the area, though himself a Muslim, was widely respected for having donated the statue of goddess Durga that stands in the central square of North Toda.⁸¹

This practice of openness to each other’s religious beliefs and practices in the two neighbourhoods is complemented by a tightly woven social fabric where people constantly depend on one another in carrying out everyday tasks. The reality of mutual dependence in social and economic life makes cooperation and peaceful coexistence an imperative for well-being. A temple custodian and owner of a small grocery shop in North Toda explained, “The unity between us is a result of us growing up together, side by side. We have become used to one another. We love each other. If we

77. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 19 July 2018. Typically, Muslims tend to eat meat and a larger proportion of Hindus favor vegetarianism, so living in harmony means refraining from politicizing these differences in dietary preferences.

78. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 26 June 2018.

79. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 5 July 2018.

80. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 3 August 2018.

81. Interview with local leader, North Toda, 21 June 2018.

don't get along with each other, where else are we going to go? If something happens to me at night, I am not going to go looking for a person of my religion to help me. I turn to my neighbour for help—whatever his religion may be.”⁸²

Findings

A member of the neighbourhood committee of Kabutar Khana, whose family was one of the first settlers in the area, felt that the close bonds of friendship between people in the neighbourhood irrespective of religion, caste and regional background, had become a tradition that is practiced and passed down from one generation to the next. As he put it, “In the past, Hindus and Muslims would live unitedly with a lot of interaction and sharing. Those who belong to that generation are still alive. The mutual love between them is still alive and it has set the tone for inter-religious harmony in the neighbourhood.”⁸³ One resident explained that there are strong bonds of love between Hindus and Muslims in the neighbourhood which makes it easy for people to overlook their differences: “There haven't been interreligious riots here because of love between different groups. It's just love. If you say ‘*Ram*’ [a greeting in the name of Lord Rama], I will say ‘*Ram*’. If you say ‘*Salam*’, I will say ‘*Salam*’.”⁸⁴

There have been various examples in these neighbourhoods of residents going out of their way to help those of the other religious community out of a sense of empathy and compassion. In one case, when the Mahadev Temple in Kabutar Khana was in a state of collapse, the Hindus of the area sought permission from the police to rebuild it. They were denied permission on the grounds that building a temple in a Muslim-majority area might stir religious tensions. In response to this, the group went back to the police, this time accompanied by their Muslim friends, who reassured the

82. Interview with North Toda residents, 21 July 2018.

83. Interview with member of neighbourhood committee, Kabutar Khana, 3 July 2018.

84. Interview with Kabutar Khana resident, 12 July 2018.

police that not only did they have no objection to the construction of the temple, they also felt a sense of ownership towards it as they had participated in many programs at the Temple in the past. The police agreed and the Muslims in the neighbourhood contributed funds to the construction of the temple. They also help with its maintenance.⁸⁵

Findings

In another example, during the Hindu-Muslim riots that swept throughout India in 1992 after the demolition of the Babri Mosque in the North Indian city of Ayodhya, a curfew was imposed in Indore and the police had issued shoot-at-sight orders, strictly forbidding anyone from leaving their homes. A young Muslim mother in North Toda had just given birth to a still-born child. She was desperate to inform her parents living on the other side of the city about this tragedy and to give the child a proper burial. It was a time when telephone connections in Indore were rare. At such a time of grief, when she had no hope of being able to fulfil her wishes, her Hindu neighbour decided to come to her aid by driving her on his moped at considerable personal risk, through the police checkpoints, to the home of her parents on the other side of the city. The roads were blocked with police stationed at every corner. "The police had orders to shoot anyone who broke the curfew," explained the now middle-aged man. "When they saw me driving my moped with her, they hit me with a baton as a warning. They asked our names and became more surprised when they found out that one of us was Hindu and the other Muslim. I explained to them the situation and they understood that our intentions were good, and they let us pass. We could have been killed that day. But I had to do it. I couldn't see her suffer like that!" The man today serves the community as a social worker in

85. Interview with Mahadev Temple supporters, Kabutar Khana, 13 August 2018.

North Toda. The woman, who is now a grandmother also lives in the same house she did in 1992.⁸⁶

Findings

The cooperative relationship between Hindus and Muslims in these neighbourhoods is evident not only in the celebration of festivals and social events, but also in addressing community problems such as dealing with water shortage or flooding. People help each other in meeting their needs for water. When it floods, they provide shelter and food for each other and help one another carry their belongings to safety.⁸⁷ The well that is located in the Noori Mosque in Kabutar Khana provides water to Hindus and Muslims when the need arises.⁸⁸ Similarly, the *yogi* in Kabutar Khana provides water from his bore well to Muslims in his neighbourhood particularly during the holy month of Ramadan when they are fasting and they need more water at certain times of the day.⁸⁹ In Kabutar Khana the doors of the mosque and madrasa are opened to all inhabitants irrespective of religion—for shelter and food⁹⁰ similar to the *Dharamshala* (rest house) in North Toda.⁹¹ Theirs is a friendship cemented by living together and sharing together common challenges.

In this regard, some participants reflected that by focusing on the spiritual essence of religion it was possible not only to inspire people to overcome differences but also to work for positive social change. Commenting on this, a youth from North Toda who is studying to become a mechanical engineer observed that religion could go even further than creating tolerance, laudable as this is, and inspire people to participate in the development of society

86. Interview with North Toda residents, 21 July 2018.

87. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 19 June 2018; interview with North Toda residents, 12 June 2018.

88. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 11 June 2018.

89. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 28 June 2018.

90. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 29 April 2018.

91. Interview with North Toda residents, 25 April 2018.

as a whole. As he put it, “India is a very religious country. Those promoting the country’s development should take the people’s spiritual convictions into account. The common man finally must carry out development work because governments and their officials keep changing...the responsibility for change is with the people. It’s their lives.”⁹²

Findings

The people of both neighbourhoods noted that the growing divisiveness in the discourse about Hindu-Muslim relations in India has made them vigilant to prevent religious prejudices and hateful propaganda from creeping into their communities. In this regard, some residents expressed concern about partisan political agendas in society that sought to divide people based on their religious identities.⁹³ As one of the members of the mosque committee in Kabutar Khana, said, “We have a sense of brotherhood. People here think this way because our community leaders have avoided getting involved in politics. In the past, someone tried to start talking about *jihad*, but the population stopped him. Similarly, a Hindu extremist leader tried to instigate hatred over here but nobody picked up on her ideas and so she hardly ever visits us.”⁹⁴

Yet, inhabitants of these neighbourhoods were also conscious that they could not take this tradition of interreligious harmony for granted and that they had to constantly work on preserving and strengthening it. Some of the elderly members of North Toda were concerned that the spirit of fellowship between Hindus and Muslims that existed in the past seemed to be lessening among the present generation of youth. “We need to protect this spirit by teaching our youth these values and demonstrating them

92. Interview with North Toda residents, 12 June 2018

93. Interview with North Toda resident, 12 June 2018.

94. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 26 June 2018.

through our own example. Otherwise we may soon lose it,” an elderly resident cautioned.⁹⁵

Findings

A retired police officer who is also a member of a neighbourhood committee in North Toda discussed the need to promptly address issues which might create disunity and to keep a watch on mischief makers: “We all live in harmony, don’t we? We all rely on one another. If there is an issue, the ones from over there [Hindus] come over here, we go over there. We try to be balanced. There are troublemakers in every community and every religion. There will definitely be some who try to break the peace.”

He felt that instances of violence in these informal settlements are more due to factors such as alcoholism that is prevalent among both Hindu and Muslim men than to deep-rooted religious prejudices. He reflected that in cases where antagonism or hostility in the name of religion existed in the past, it has been on account of political leaders playing with religious sentiments. By itself, he felt, religion teaches people to have a good heart and to not give importance to differences: “Brother... There is no bad in anyone’s religion. All religions are good. If you go to a great person, he will not ask you whether you are Muslim, Christian or Sikh, ‘What is your name, which caste and religion are you from?’ He will only ask you, ‘What is your sorrow? What is your difficulty? What illness do you have? Tell me this. We will pray for you, give you medicine.’... They don’t say ‘Kill this one or kill that one, stab this one’. Who will say this? This is the poison that has been spread by politicians.”⁹⁶

The spirit of oneness among the residents was reflected even in the language they used to describe their neighbourhoods. Residents

95. Interview with elderly man in North Toda, 21 July 2018.

96. Interview with Kabutar Khana resident, 24 July 2018.

referred to the neighbourhood as an extension of their families. When speaking about the challenges they faced as inhabitants of these neighbourhoods, residents always used the third person pronoun 'we' and 'us' which emphasized a sense of solidarity with the whole neighbourhood rather than identifying 'we' solely with their particular religious, caste or ethnic identities.⁹⁷

Findings

What the study made evident was that people of Hindu and Muslim backgrounds living in both neighbourhoods were conscious that their tradition of interreligious fellowship was a precious resource to be preserved from negative forces and to be passed on to future generations. While the majority of the participants in this study spoke with conviction about their ties of fellowship with those of the other religious community, the research team did find evidences of suspicion and mistrust towards the other in the comments of some residents, especially among the youth and those who had recently moved to these neighbourhoods. Yet, these expressions of lack of trust or prejudice were few and relatively mild in comparison with the near unanimity with which both neighbourhoods averred their commitment to interreligious harmony. What seemed to cement these bonds of interreligious fellowship in the neighbourhoods were the practices of reciprocity and collaboration in social and economic relations that undergirded the fabric of their shared community life.

c. Networks of trust and reciprocity

While the field research for this study was being conducted, participants in this study living next to the river in Kabutar Khana and North Toda were informed by municipal authorities as part of the implementation of certain urban development schemes, that their homes would be demolished and they would be resettled in dwellings on the outskirts of the city. This unexpected

97. Field note, North Toda, 27 Aug 2018.

development opened up a conversation with the residents about the connection they have to their community. Faced with the likelihood of dislocation, many of them spoke passionately about their bonds with the community and what it meant to them. “The most important question is how much do you love your land,” said a dealer in recycled materials in Kabutar Khana. “What is a country to me? It is the home I live in, the place where I was born and grew up, the place where I live, those who are and have been my neighbours, my people—all of this together is what the country is to me. Today, I have grown to love this place. Then why are you [the authorities] forcing me to leave it?”⁹⁸ A woman standing to fill her bucket by a tap on the riverside in Kabutar Khana expressed her sorrow while watching bulldozers dredging the riverbed: “through this demolition they are not just breaking buildings. They are breaking relationships. Is it right to break our hearts like this? We love this land that we live on.”⁹⁹

Residents spoke about the employment that they would lose by being dislocated. Since many of them worked in the informal sector carrying out domestic and daily-wage labour with no formal contracts and without being covered by labour laws or formal contracts, they relied greatly on the personal relationships that they had built with employers. “People give us work because they believe they can trust us. This trust has developed over decades of living in this settlement next to the main markets of Indore. Those who employ us know that we live here, our families are here. When we move to a new place, people don’t know us and so they won’t give us work so easily.”¹⁰⁰ A Gujarati woman from North Toda who was employed as a domestic worker explained that the issue of trust is particularly important for women in the neighbourhood who work as domestic helpers. “People won’t let

98. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 3 August 2018.

99. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 7 August 2018.

100. Interview with North Toda residents, 2 August 2018.

you into their homes until they feel they know they can trust you.”¹⁰¹

Apart from this, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood relied greatly on the support of each other to carry out the work. One of the women in North Toda said, “We do small jobs involving tailoring or craft-making for shops in *Rajwada* [the main open-air market in the old city]. But many times, our husbands will not allow us to go to the market by ourselves. We go with other women or, when one of us gets work, she informs others.”¹⁰²

Findings

A woman from North Toda who worked as a domestic helper described the support that neighbours extend to one another in their precarious working conditions. The woman explained that she is not granted sick leave or holidays because people’s homes need to be cleaned and dishes washed every day. Whenever she had to travel to her village, or someone at home fell sick, she would send one of her female friends as a substitute to cover for her for the days she was not able to work. When these women went to work, they felt confident about being able to leave their children at home to play in the neighbourhood since all the residents knew each other. The woman from North Toda explained, “There will be many eyes watching over our children.”¹⁰³ Thus, to be able to earn a living, people in slums rely on a complex network of relationships which are based on non-economic factors such as trust, friendship and reciprocity.

Poverty similarly compelled many families who struggled for subsistence with little savings, to rely heavily on informal credit (loans from family and friends)—which was possible only in the context of long-term relationships where a high degree of trust is

101. Interview with North Toda residents, 17 July 2018.

102. Interview with North Toda residents, 17 July 2018.

103. Interview with North Toda residents, 20 August 2018.

established. A woman in North Toda who ran a small grocery shop explained that most of her customers from the neighbourhood buy on credit. She mentioned that she felt comfortable giving credit to those from the neighbourhood since she knew that they would have to pay her back sooner or later.¹⁰⁴ “We have relationships with everyone here, so it’s natural to trust others. We know people’s circumstances. We aren’t afraid that they won’t pay back. Even if they don’t, we’re happy we helped someone who is in need, and we know who really is in need,” said the proprietor of the medical shop in Kabutar Khana, who was born in this neighbourhood and has known the residents since childhood. He sold them medicines on credit and at times even gave them medicines for free when he knew that they needed the money and could not pay. “When you know the family and you know the story of their lives and there is a relationship, you cannot be indifferent to them. We care about them and trust that we will get the money back,” he explained.¹⁰⁵ A woman from Kabutar Khana commented that one of the reasons she feared leaving Kabutar Khana is that she would no longer have access to a pharmacy that would take care of her family’s medical needs. “How will I survive elsewhere, where they charge you money for everything and no one will care to listen to your difficulty and pain?” she wondered.¹⁰⁶

Even for loans involving larger amounts of money, like the one the *kirana* (grocery) shop proprietor took to start her business, residents found that getting loans from banks is almost impossible because of the difficulties they faced with getting the required paperwork done. “It is easier for us to just borrow from our friends and relatives. We can at least talk to them and explain

104. Interview with kirana (grocery) shop owner, North Toda, 8 August 2018.

105. Interview with medical shop owner, Kabutar Khana, 16 June 2018.

106. Interview with Kabutar Khana resident, 11 June 2018.

our situation to them if something happens and our repayment gets delayed,” she said.¹⁰⁷

The extent to which residents depend on one another becomes particularly evident during the monsoon season when the flood waters from the river inundates the homes of those living by the riverside. When it floods, the general practice in both neighbourhoods is that those living uphill, safe from the flood waters, open their homes to those in crisis.¹⁰⁸ Many such instances were found in which neighbours offered accommodation and food to those whose homes were flooded; helped them shift their belongings, and even saved one another from drowning.¹⁰⁹ Residents come together to make arrangements for cooking and for taking care of the young and the vulnerable.¹¹⁰

Findings

d. Material, social and spiritual wellbeing

The institutions that the residents greatly valued in these neighbourhoods were schools and places of worship (both mosques and temples). Schools were valued for more than just scientific education. In Kabutar Khana, some of the residents mentioned that they did not want to leave the neighbourhood because the private school that their children studied in offered moral education in addition to secular education. They worried that if they moved, their children might be deprived of moral education.¹¹¹

107. Interview with kirana (grocery) shop owner, North Toda, 8 August 2018.

108. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 29 April 2018; interview with North Toda residents, 25 April 2018.

109. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 29 April 2018, 11 June 2018, and 26 June 2018; Interview with North Toda residents, 6 July 2018, 27 July 2018 and 21 July 2018.

110. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 26 June 2018; Interview with North Toda residents, 21 July 2018.

111. Interview with parents, Kabutar Khana, 2 June 2018.

Parents of the students who went to the government school in North Toda praised the commitment of the school teacher, who was known to take a personal interest in the development of children.¹¹² This teacher at the North Toda school was known to have developed a loving relationship with parents and children. She would visit the homes of children who had been absent and encourage the parents to continue sending their children to school. The teacher commented that one of the common reasons for children missing school was alcohol abuse at home. She would often counsel the parents on this matter.¹¹³

There was another reason parents looked forward to sending their children to the school. In government schools, students were given a free mid-day meal, which was a source of nutrition for children and a relief from domestic work for the mother, allowing her more time to work during the day. The school also kept children in a relatively safe space where they were fruitfully occupied till evening. When a structurally unsound building housing low-income residents was being demolished by municipal authorities and the families were being relocated to another part of the city, the teacher regretted that she was going to lose many students in the middle of the academic year. She wasn't sure if they would be able to continue their school education immediately in the new location where they moved. She worried for them.¹¹⁴

Like the school, religious institutions in both neighbourhoods performed multiple social functions for the community. In addition to their primary religious function, the mosque, and the Sufi shrines (*dargahs*) in Kabutar Khana and the temples and monastery (*akhara*) in North Toda served as shelters for the poor when their homes were flooded. Those associated with these

112. Interview with North Toda residents, 2 August 2018.

113. Interview with North Toda teacher, 2 August 2018.

114. Interview with North Toda teacher, 2 August 2018.

institutions quickly organized relief work—such as provision of food, water and shelter—for people of all religions from the neighbourhood.¹¹⁵ In addition to this, places of worship such as the Durga shrine and the Gujarati temple in North Toda, along with the mosque in Kabutar Khana, provided water to the inhabitants of both localities during the summer from their bore wells. For the people of both neighbourhoods, these places of worship thus became important centers providing for their material, social and spiritual wellbeing.¹¹⁶

When some residents in these neighbourhoods were asked what they saw as their purpose in life, they mainly talked about it in the context of their attachment to the community and their desire to see it progress. One resident of North Toda spoke about the whole neighbourhood lovingly as his family: “Home is your own place... It is part of who you are. You are proud of it, and you try hard to make it better,” he declared. Where others saw deprivation, poverty and stagnation, he saw untapped potential and the opportunity to make a difference.¹¹⁷

Similarly, many others saw their life’s purpose not merely in terms of advancing their personal interests but also in helping the children in their community to advance. For a middle-aged resident of Kabutar Khana, “the purpose of life is to help others and to try to improve the world for the next generation. My life is already made and done. But now I try to think of the next generation.”¹¹⁸ A mother of two in North Toda, who works as a domestic helper, spoke of her aspiration to give her children the education she was not able to receive as a child:

115. Interview with North Toda residents, 25 April 2018; Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 11 June 2018.

116. Interview with North Toda residents, 21 June 2018; Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 11 June 2018.

117. Interview with North Toda residents, 21 June 2018.

118. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 12 July 2018.

The purpose of life is to try to teach our children to advance. I feel so much remorse that I did not get a proper education. My parents didn't understand the importance of educating girls. I studied only up to 4th standard. Today when I look at the piece of paper, I cannot read it properly. I have to run behind people who are literate to get them to read it for me. I tell my children that they should study and become someone capable in this world. We parents do a lot for our children. We don't do anything for ourselves. We work so hard and don't take even a day off from work. We don't spend money on buying nice-looking clothes for ourselves in order to save money so our children can study and progress.¹¹⁹

e. Creating and sustaining environments of unity

In their comments, residents from these neighbourhoods reflected on some of the qualities and conditions that made it possible for relationships based on harmony and unity to flourish. Their comments have been organized in this section under the following sub-headings—love and empathy, consultation, education, justice and conflict resolution.

Love and empathy

An important condition for sustaining environments of unity in these settlements was possessing love and empathy for others. As one woman from North Toda mentioned, “We are one because of love. ... Our wealth lies in our relationships... There is a sense of empathy. You know after all, that the person next to you is suffering like you.”¹²⁰

119. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 August 2018.

120. Interview with North Toda residents, 21 July 2018.

Expressing love through service entails sacrificing short-term desires, self-interest and personal comfort for the wellbeing of the whole. Participants in the study expressed that the warmth of love ensures that sacrificing self-interest is a joyous process. As one man stated, “When we are motivated by love, we don’t think of our own benefit. We think about each other like a family.”¹²¹ Another resident mentioned that there is a beauty and joy in selfless giving. She gave the example of the selfless love that parents shower on their children to illustrate this concept:

Parents sacrifice in so many ways for their children. In doing this, they do not think, ‘When my children grow up, they will serve me in turn, so I am investing in my own future.’ They don’t think like this. They think, ‘My son has a growing family. He has his own children. ... We educated him and now he is raising his children. He has got his own home to take care off. If we go to stay with him, we will add to his burden. How will our poor son manage? We should think about how we can help him.’ When we meet him, we ask him whether we can be of any assistance to him. We say to ourselves, ‘When we die whatever we have will go to him. So why don’t we give our wealth to him now? Why wait till we die if he needs it now?’ When we meet his family, we take sweets for his children, take them out to have a good time, buy good clothes for them. They become happy and this gives us great joy. We don’t mind the expense. We do it because it brings joy to our children and when they are happy, we become joyous. But we don’t do it for ourselves.’¹²²

121. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 12 July 2018.

122. Interview with North Toda residents, 21 July 2018.

A building contractor from North Toda, who decided to continue residing in the neighbourhood despite being able to afford accommodation in more affluent localities, spoke of his motivation to stay in terms of joy and love. The love he felt was apparent in the animated way in which he talked about North Toda and its people. “The neighbourhood is my childhood...it is my life-long companion. I will not leave it. I will stay here and watch it grow.” He spoke with great pride of the youth from the neighbourhood who developed successful careers and rose out of poverty.¹²³ People in the neighbourhood often referred to him as someone to whom they take their problems—whether it be a lack of water, difficulties in processing paperwork with government departments, or a personal crisis.¹²⁴

A similar love for the neighbourhood was evident in the experience of a medical doctor who set up a small clinic inside North Toda. He had a successful practice in a civil hospital which he gave up to establish his small clinic in North Toda, where he has been serving its people over the past 29 years. He often did not charge his patients consultation fees and sometimes, when needed, he gave them medicines for free. He also oversaw a government program in the locality to monitor tuberculosis patients and to ensure that they take the full course of their treatment. Carrying on his practice elsewhere would have been more remunerative for him. But he chose to stay because of his commitment to the wellbeing of the people of North Toda. As he explained:

I wouldn't say that I don't care about making money. That is important. But what motivates me is to be of service to a patient who is poor. I have many such poor patients who come to me from whom I don't take any

123. Interview with community leader, 21 June 2018.

124. Interview with North Toda residents, 25 April 2018, 12 June 2018.

fees. I try to prescribe medicines that they can afford and for those who I charge consultation fees, it is less than what they expect.¹²⁵

Another condition for unity that participants in the study talked about was consultation among people in order to reach a common understanding about issues facing the neighbourhood. “I need to understand you and how you think. And you need to understand me. We need to be able to communicate about serious issues that affect our locality and to arrive at a common understanding,” said a local resident. He continued, “Unity is not just a theoretical concept that we read about and then apply in our everyday lives. When we face a challenge together as a community, we need to understand that issue well in order to be able to respond to it unitedly. Otherwise, each one has his own thoughts on the matter.” For this reason, he felt building and maintaining unity of thought required people to gain an accurate understanding of the issues they face and be able to think of reasonable solutions. Without such a capacity, he felt, people can be easily manipulated by others.¹²⁶

Findings

Education

In one of the focus group discussions, participants mentioned that to maintain unity of thought and purpose in a group required the kind of education that would foster social consciousness, and the desire to promote community wellbeing.¹²⁷ They felt that due to the lack of education among many of the residents, people were easily manipulated. “Today they think one thing and they are all together. Tomorrow someone comes along and creates fear in them, and they are ready to abandon their earlier views,” he

125. Interview with doctor, 21 June 2018.

126. Interview with local resident, Kabutar Khana, 7 August 2018.

127. Interview with local resident, Kabutar Khana, 7 August 2018.

lamented.¹²⁸ Another resident felt that what was needed was a kind of education that would create in the residents a heightened social consciousness. “I think we need to have a heightened sense of responsibility to society, to the nation to the world and to feel we are part of the present situation,” he said.¹²⁹ In this context, some of the residents commented on the relevance of religious teachings for finding moral solutions to the problems of today’s society. Another added that unfortunately in the present world religious teachings are not properly understood or applied. When their true implications are understood, they can generate the consciousness and will to transform the community.¹³⁰

A number of residents commented on the importance of education as a means through which people in these neighbourhoods could promote unity and address conditions of economic poverty. As a resident of Kabutar Khana put it, “We are all equal. We all have the same blood. But the only differences are from education.”¹³¹ Yet, the path towards educating the next generation is often cut short by social ills such as neglect of the girl child, alcoholism and poverty itself. Another resident of Kabutar Khana, who belongs to what is considered one of the most socially disadvantaged castes, explained that he could not go to school because his family needed him to work even as a child to make ends meet.¹³² Alcoholism, especially among fathers, can mean that to support the family the women and children have to work. Alcoholism also results in various kinds of domestic abuse which deprives children of a healthy home environment in which they would develop a positive attitude to their education. A woman from North Toda said that sometimes she feels bitter about her parents not letting her study

128. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 3 August 2018.

129. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 3 August 2018.

130. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 3 August 2018.

131. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 26 June 2018.

132. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 29 August 2018.

beyond primary school because she is a girl. “Today I want to read something, or get to know about a government scheme, I have to go around looking for someone to read it for me and tell me what it says. I feel so small,” she said. Learning from her own experience, she has made it her mission in life to educate both her children as well as possible, no matter how much sacrifice it requires from her.¹³³

Findings

Justice

Participants in the study stressed how unity would not be easy to establish until some level of justice prevails in that community. One commented,

For a community to be united, certain basic facilities need to be provided for all. If you make available only one tap for 50 homes—say two people want to fill water to meet their needs and they know the flow is going to stop soon—obviously out of desperation they start to raise their voices and fight. You cannot think about peace when the basic needs for the survival of your family are not being met. Similarly, they may fight because there is not enough space for the number of people living there. In most cases the underlying cause is that there is a shortage of basic facilities that people need to survive. For people to be able to be united we have to ensure that at least their basic needs are met.¹³⁴

This resident mentioned that without establishing just conditions, unity is constantly tested.¹³⁵ The significance of just arrangements for the distribution of water in maintaining harmony was most

133. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 August 2018.

134. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 August 2018.

135. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 August 2018.

vividly evident during periods of acute water scarcity. Some residents mentioned that while the community does not fight over other issues, the question of water supply can sometimes cause tensions:

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When you are desperate and you know that your whole family depends on the bucket of water you need to get and you cannot walk for five kilometers to get it from elsewhere, you cannot be calm and peaceful. We are desperate and so we raise our voices sometimes. But we understand because everyone is in the same situation. Everyone here is poor.¹³⁶

While there are at times arguments over water sharing, however, residents were of the opinion that this is usually temporary and superficial, and that the underlying relationship is not broken.

A discussion on the role of justice in strengthening unity within these settlements would be incomplete without observations on the caste and gender relations within the neighbourhoods. Most of those identified as Hindu residents in these informal settlements belonged to castes and tribal groups considered to be at the lowest rungs of the caste hierarchy. They maintained their distinct cultural, religious and artistic heritage. Residents frequently emphasized that caste did not pose a barrier to social interaction and the research team did observe inter-caste friendships and warm and cordial interactions.¹³⁷ Yet, residents were quite conscious of their caste-based and tribal identities and in some cases there seemed to be an underlying stigma towards certain groups. For example, in Kabutar Khana a cluster of homes by the riverbank belonged to those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy

136. Interview with North Toda residents, 17 July 2018.

137. Visit to Kabutar Khana, 11 June 2018; Visit to North Toda, 21 July 2018.

whose caste-ordained profession was manual scavenging. Their homes were at the edge of the settlement separate from other homes. The research team observed people from this caste group interacting in cordial terms with the other residents. Yet although residents spoke of not discriminating against this group, the stigma associated with this group was subtly evident in the thoughts and words of the residents. Members of this caste group were identified primarily by their caste identity. They were called by the term '*bhangi*' which is employed by upper caste people in India to refer to the untouchable castes. When some residents in the neighbourhood wanted to emphasize their openness to helping people of all backgrounds, they would remark that even though some of the residents belonged to this caste group they would still help them and interact with them.¹³⁸ Such statements while emphasizing the eagerness to overcome discrimination seemed to carry over the prejudicial perceptions related to the particular caste identity. They seemed to be saying that their interaction was despite caste identities and not based on a denial of the basis of caste. Comments such as this reflected the fact that although the spirit of oneness did ensure that cordial and friendly relations were maintained with people of all backgrounds in the neighbourhood, in some cases underlying caste-based prejudices associated with them were not sufficiently questioned or uprooted.

Another area where consciousness and action related to the principle of the oneness of humankind in these neighbourhoods clearly needs to advance is with gender relations. The equality of women and men is one of the implications of the oneness of humankind. Yet to manifest this principle in personal relations and in social and economic life proved to be a complex and difficult challenge.

138. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 11 June 2018; interview with North Toda residents, 21 July 2018.

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Women in these neighbourhoods were seen to play a largely traditional role in the families and in the community. They usually carried the double burden of engaging in paid work to support the family as well as having the entire responsibility of domestic care work. It is usually women in these neighbourhoods who are worst affected by water scarcity. They are forced to travel long distances or stand for hours in long queues for water. This leaves them with much less time for attending school, childcare, or income-generating activities.¹³⁹ Alcoholism was widely prevalent among men in these neighbourhoods, which had an adverse impact on the physical and psychological well-being of women and children.¹⁴⁰

A woman who runs a small grocery shop in North Toda explained that women in the neighbourhood were much distressed since their husbands would often use their day's wages to buy alcohol from a shop located at the entrance of the neighbourhood. She narrated that at one point in time a group of women in the neighbourhood who were organized as part of micro-credit groups decided to stage a protest outside the liquor shop and demand that it be closed or moved out of the neighbourhood. "We tried to raise consciousness about the problems we face due to alcoholism. We did our best to put pressure on the shop owner and to get him to close the shop or to move its location. But we could not stop them," she said.¹⁴¹ The shop still stands at the same location and is usually crowded with customers in the evening hours.

This issue brought to light the complexity of overcoming challenges that women face in such neighbourhoods. It required not only change in attitudes and the economic structures of society but

139. Visit to Kabutar Khana, 13 August 2018; Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 12 July 2018; Visit to North Toda, 8 August 2018.

140. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 August 2018.

141. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 August 2018.

also laws to check social ills such as alcoholism especially among residents of urban informal settlements who were more vulnerable to its damaging influence. This episode narrated by the woman also shed light on the potential for residents of such settlements to initiate steps towards change by organizing themselves in groups to mobilize their energies for the common good. Although the particular intervention of the women to prevent alcoholism did not have the desired effect, it demonstrated the capacity of women in the neighbourhood to exercise agency and to take meaningful action to bring about change.

Conflict resolution

Due to the scarcity of water in the neighbourhoods especially during the hot season, there were at times arguments and heated exchanges between the residents who had gathered to collect water from the shared tap at the street corner. The research team visited a lane in North Toda in the immediate aftermath of one such fight over water. One of the women residing in the lane, who runs a small home-based food catering business, mentioned that arguments such as the one that had just taken place were common during the months of summer when water is scarce. She explained that her lane was situated on a steep slope and there were two shared taps allocated for residents—one for the homes at the lower end of the slope and the other for those at the upper end. During the summer months, since the water pressure was low, the tap meant for the homes at the upper end would remain dry and those living there were forced to collect water from the tap meant for the residents at the lower end. “Since water flows for only a short period and there are many who want to get a share of it, invariably someone says or does something that makes tempers flare,” he said. Yet, she emphasized that these arguments were temporary, and residents involved in the quarrel would soon resume cordial relations. “We understand each other,” she commented. “We know that when

people shout or lose their temper, it is because they are desperate. We don't take it to heart.”¹⁴²

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Another group of women sitting outside their homes at the upper end of the lane mentioned that sometimes quarrels over water happen because one particular resident has a bad temper and uses harsh language. “At such times,” one of the women in the group explained, “we understand that this is the particular individual's nature. We accommodate this person's limitations and we ignore what they say. This is necessary to keep the peace.”¹⁴³

In the case of water scarcity, putting in place some of form of structure to coordinate the use of water from a shared tap helped to avert conflict and maintain unity at the community level. A number of different individuals or groups in each neighbourhood helped organize and coordinate the efforts of people to collect water. Their spirit of service enabled them to gain the trust and respect of the residents and allowed them to exercise a leadership role in the community without formally holding any position. Conscious of the value of maintaining peaceful cooperation around water in the neighbourhood, residents highlighted the various ways in which they had learned put faith in the underlying nobility of one another as a means of avoiding conflict. For example, one resident shared a scenario of two people filling water at a shared tap. If the first person fills four buckets, and the water supply stops before the second person gets a chance to fill water, then it is expected that the person who did receive water would share some with the person who did not.

If it is someone who is selfish and only thinks of their own needs, then how do we treat him or her? Well, we

142. Interview with women in North Toda, 27 August 2018.

143. Interview with women in North Toda, 27 August 2018.

adjust. If not today, then tomorrow, the one standing in front of you [who is being self-centered] will improve. Why? Because we behave lovingly with him, help him and say, 'Go ahead and take some [water], brother.' This person is a human being, so we fill him with love. If not today, he will respond positively tomorrow. Today we all live together and there is no 'mine' and 'yours'; we live together. His wedding took place in front of our eyes. We understand each other. They respect us and we respect them.¹⁴⁴

An example of transformation of conflictual attitudes came from a man who is a professional player of the *dhholak* (a small two-sided Indian drum which is played on religious and festive occasions). He recounted an incident involving his neighbour:

In the past, I used to keep the key to the community bore well and I would not easily share it with others. I would mainly use it for my family and a few of my neighbours. At one point, [my neighbour] came to me asking for the key and I refused to give it to him despite his requests. He went to the police. The police inspector asked me if this was my personal bore well and I replied that it was not. He then gave the key to [my neighbour] and it has stayed with him since then. However, I noticed that after [my neighbour] got the key he would share it with everyone, including me. This behaviour of his changed my heart.¹⁴⁵

Today, these two men are part of a circle of twenty friends who carry out acts of service in the neighbourhood such as resolving

144. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 22 April 2018.

145. Interview with North Toda residents, 8 June 2018.

disputes, encouraging parents to educate their children and helping youth and adults overcome their addiction to alcohol.

Findings

In thinking deeply about the nature of unity among people, residents commented that the most enduring and profound connection was a spiritual bond. As the *yogi* put it, “our moral duty is to bring souls together” in such a way that physical separation “will not break the spiritual bond between us.”¹⁴⁶ Further, in discussing unity, residents frequently spoke about their motivation in striving to maintain it. Although being united clearly had practical benefits, residents did not refer to these as their motivation for striving to be united. Nor did they talk about unity as a mere absence of conflict. Rather they referred to it as a state of being that brings joy to the heart when the needs of the community as a whole are met. This state of joy was what motivated them.

2. Relationship between Humankind and the Natural World

The second core theme of this research sought to explore how residents in these neighbourhoods understood the principle of humanity’s interconnectedness with nature, particularly in the context of their efforts to address the common challenges of water scarcity and flooding. Many of the comments that residents made on this theme were in the context of the state of the Saraswati and Khan rivers which had a palpable influence on their lives. When describing their relationship with nature, many residents discussed water as a practical necessity of life and others reflected on the principles of the oneness and interconnectedness of existence that it symbolized. “Water is life... it is a God-given elixir”, stated a resident of Kabutar Khana¹⁴⁷. Another resident of the locality who lives by the riverside and is recognized for her leadership in solving community problems, described water as “everything for

¹⁴⁶. Interview with *yogi*, 28 June 2018.

¹⁴⁷. Interview with residents of Kabutar Khana, 12 July 2018.

a human being. Life begins with water and ends with water. As soon as you wake up in the morning you need water, and before sleeping again you need water.”¹⁴⁸ A woman standing beside her, waiting to fill her buckets from the common tap related, “When there is water at home, the home feels full, secure and safe. When there is no water, we feel very unsafe in the house. It is as if there is nothing in the house without water!”¹⁴⁹

Findings

A Kabutar Khana resident reflected on how water embodies the principle of oneness: “Water like air and fire cannot be made into parts or divided. Water that flows... doesn’t know whether it is now in Pakistan or in Hindustan. Nobody can divide it. It is a bestowal of God. It never separates itself from what it is with... As the saying goes, ‘O water, what is your color? With whatever we mix you, you take on its colors!’... This is very true. You throw red in water, it looks red. You throw green in it, the same thing!”¹⁵⁰ A resident from North Toda also stressed, “Water does not consider differences. It does not ask, ‘Whose water am I?’ or, ‘Who is drinking me or using me?’ Neither water, nor the air, nor the sky or the rain or the earth give any regard to differences between people. It [water] doesn’t differentiate—it flows for all”.¹⁵¹

To some of the more spiritually perceptive, the connection between different elements of nature seemed to be a beautiful symbol of the qualities of love and service. A grandmother and resident of North Toda, reflecting on the reciprocal bonds of love between all parts of nature, said, “Everything is constantly expressing love—whether it be plants, trees, ... or stones... Think about it: the way we plant a sapling and water it every day, are we not serving and showing

148. Interview with women filling water near the riverside, Kabutar Khana, 12 July 2018.

149. Interview with women filling water near the riverside, Kabutar Khana, 12 July 2018.

150. Social mapping, Kabutar Khana, 7 August 2018.

151. Interview with Kabutar Khana resident, 28 June 2018.

love to the plant? Later on, does not the plant shower its love on us and serve us by giving us its flowers and fruits?”¹⁵²

Findings

When participants in the study discussed the relationship between humanity and nature, reference was often made to the interconnectedness of different entities in existence and the need for a respectful and reciprocal relationship between human beings and the natural world. A salesman in North Toda explained this reciprocity with regard to the connection with trees: “What they exhale (oxygen), we inhale, and what we exhale is absorbed by them. How can we survive without them? Trees, air and water are very important for us.”¹⁵³ Residents of both neighbourhoods commented in their reflections that the human being is not a passive link in the chain of life—humankind has extraordinary power over the environment with the ability to tilt the balance of nature, at times with adverse consequences.

Residents highlighted some of the principles that should guide the use of the resources of nature. Many referred to the difference between genuine needs and desires which are unlimited. The Mullah in Kabutar Khana, explained, “the Quran says that everything is made for our benefit. Trees, animals, water—all of creation is there for our use and to fulfil our needs.”¹⁵⁴ He added, however, that the Quran also warns that when driven by desire, human beings are prone to profligacy: “Extravagance is a sin. It is forbidden. It makes us heedless of the impact we are having on the world and on others.”¹⁵⁵ Continuing in this vein, an elderly artisan in Kabutar Khana, expressed the following in the context of water: “This water—is it ours or is it God’s? It is God’s. Water is God’s. Everything belongs to God. Nothing is owned by us.

152. Interview with North Toda residents, 21 July 2018.

153. Interview with Kabutar Khana residents, 23 August 2018.

154. Interview with mulla, Kabutar Khana, 26 June 2018.

155. Interview with mulla, Kabutar Khana, 26 June 2018.

Every drop of water belongs to God and if we waste water, we will be answerable to Him for it.”¹⁵⁶

In discussing nature’s resources, many participants referred to the intrinsic value of these resources, associated with an ineffable spiritual reality that transcends the natural world. Many talked about nature as an object worthy of reverence, a sign of the grandeur, majesty, beauty and perfection of its creator and a revealer of divine qualities or of divinity itself. A Hindu priest (*pandit*) in North Toda mentioned that in the Hindu scriptures, nature is considered sacred, and is related to the goddess Parvati, the wife of the God Shiva. “To keep nature clean and pure is our responsibility”, he said.¹⁵⁷ A resident of Kabutar Khana explained: “The tree, the plant, the mountain... each little bit, each piece, each leaf of the tree, ... it exists by God’s will and it is by God’s command that they bless us. Harming them is then a grave offense, that’s why we should protect the environment.”¹⁵⁸

Findings

a. Communities as trustees of the environment

Trusteeship is a key concept that emerged when the residents spoke about humanity’s relationship with nature. They stressed that the natural world is a trust and that human beings are responsible for its preservation. In the words of a Kabutar Khana resident, “Nature is not only there for us to use; we also have to preserve and adorn it. We have received it as a trust. It doesn’t belong to our family. We are responsible for keeping it clean and pure. When you take care of trees and plants, you provide the basis for all life.”¹⁵⁹ Elaborating on the idea of trusteeship, participants in the study commented that one cannot claim to own the resources of nature such as water. It is the heritage of humanity as a whole.

156. Interview with artisan, Kabutar Khana, 22 April 2018.

157. Interview with pandit, North Toda, 16 August 2018.

158. Interview with resident, Kabutar Khana, 2 June 2018.

159. Interview with recycled material dealer, Kabutar Khana, 2 June 2018.

“The idea of brotherhood in our scriptures means that if you have water and someone else in the community is having difficulties due to not having it, it is your duty to share water with him.”¹⁶⁰ A mattress dealer in Kabutar Khana expanded on this idea: “The idea is that everyone should possess well-being, not only me. If anyone is sad, everyone should arise to help. If anyone has any problem with water, Islam teaches that you must help.”¹⁶¹

Participants in the study emphasized that this ideal, though widely preached and understood, is not practiced at all times in the neighbourhoods. A young resident of North Toda expressed his concern at the selfishness and short-sightedness of many residents in their use of water. “Those who only think about water for themselves, they think that if they get it [water], that in and of itself is a lot. ‘We ourselves should at least get water tomorrow’, they think. They don’t think about the community or about what will happen in the future. For them it is enough that there is a pipe in front of their house, and they get some [water] today.”¹⁶²

Residents highlighted that the social obligations implied in the principle of trusteeship transcend the boundaries of space and time. The impact of the pollution of water and air cannot be confined to a particular neighbourhood. Similarly, the decisions that those in the present make with regard to the use of natural resources have a direct impact on the well-being of future generations. Those living today have an obligation to care for future generations and to not leave them a contaminated and depleted natural world. A youth from North Toda shared, “The more we save water at this time, the more the next generations will benefit. ... We will have to [care about the coming generation]. If we waste it, there will

160. Interview with mattress dealer, Kabutar Khana, 26 June 2018.

161. Interview with mattress dealer, Kabutar Khana, 26 June 2018.

162. Interview with youth in North Toda, 6 June 2018.

be no water left. And then there is so much pollution of water. If water runs out then what will they [the next generation] do?”¹⁶³

Underlying this way of understanding nature is the recognition that nature has an intrinsic value that cannot be commodified. As one resident explained, “This water—it is invaluable! It has no price, it cannot be sold.”¹⁶⁴ He questioned the thinking behind the prevalent tendency to assess the value of a resource by its monetary price and, by extension, consider resources that are not bought or sold as having no value: “Do we waste vegetables in our homes or do we waste the flour we use to make bread? We don’t. Then why do we think we can waste water?”¹⁶⁵

Findings

b. Sharing access to limited water resources

As previously discussed, faced with limited access to water, residents of both communities, motivated by a spirit of service, found various ways to share water with each other.

In Kabutar Khana, one of the main sources of water that the community relied on was a privately-owned well located within the confines of a shoe warehouse. The well, which was over 100 years old, dating to the time of Holkar rule in Indore, existed long before the warehouse was built around it. It continued to be a source of water. The owner of the warehouse who ran a shoe business in a market near Kabutar Khan, shared water from his well with the residents of the neighbourhood, out of a sense of empathy for them. Towards this end, the water from the well was pumped into a tank on the roof of the warehouse. An informal system of distribution was created to distribute the water to homes by fitting together inexpensive plastic hoses and passing them through the doors and windows of residents’ homes to reach

163. Interview with youth in North Toda, 6 June 2018.

164. Interview with Kabutar Khana resident, 26 June 2018.

165. Ibid.

various corners of the neighbourhood. Although the water was hard, it served the washing and bathing needs of many of the residents. In speaking about his motivation to share water from his well with the community, the warehouse owner stated, “I feel that people here are also human beings like me. They also need water.... Where else can they go for their water needs? We cannot reach everyone, but as much as we can, we try to benefit others.”¹⁶⁶

The water from this well was provided to the neighbourhood for an hour each day. A woman who lived on the river bank and helped coordinate the distribution of water to the neighbourhood discussed how the act of sharing water is taken forward by the residents who, while using it for their own purposes, tried to remain conscious of the needs of others. While sitting on a chair holding a hose, filling the buckets of women in a long line one by one with water from the warehouse well, she said: “Look here, you can see for yourself how women help each other with filling water. They go home to home to remind other families to come fill water. This summer passed off quite well for us without many difficulties because of this helping spirit.”¹⁶⁷

Of the two principles that were the focus on this study—the oneness of humankind and interconnectedness with nature—participants had significantly more to share about the first principle. There could be various reasons for this. One reason could be that relationships with neighbours mediate every aspect of life, including the bond residents have with nature. Thus, the responses to many questions related to nature were answered with comments on residents’ relationship with other people or with institutions. Responses were also made in the context of the degradation of the environment in the settlements, such as the pollution of the river

166. Interview with warehouse owner, 21 June 2018.

167. Interview with women filling water, Kabutar Khana, 12 July 2018.

and the urban sprawl, which made it hard to see the beauty and vastness of nature beyond all of the concrete. A mother running a small catering business from her house in North Toda captures in these words the struggle that she and her fellow residents face in striving to stay connected to nature: “Trees are being cut down and everywhere [the ground] is being cemented. There are no trees around us. Also, water cannot percolate into the earth. ... Rain-water flows away and gets wasted.”¹⁶⁸ Another resident mentioned that while they yearned to work for the improvement of the natural environment around them, their circumstances often left them with little time or opportunities to do so:

It is necessary to preserve nature and to work for its improvement by doing things like planting trees. But how will this happen? We people are so entangled in our own problems. We don't have a free mind to think about improvements. We are constantly struggling to find work, to survive. We want to plant trees. But where is the space?¹⁶⁹

These comments highlighted that while residents had a profound appreciation of the importance of preserving natural resources, to translate these convictions into palpable change was a complex process that required, among other things, a conducive policy environment that would stimulate grassroot participation in natural resource conversation and institutional support from the state and non-state actors to channel grassroots initiatives. Indeed, the need for institutions that represent the voices of the people in these settlements and for changes in the structures of society to allow for their genuine participation in decisions that affect their lives, has been one of the main insights emerging from this study.

168. Interview with mother, North Toda, 8 June 2018.

169. Interview with mother, North Toda, 8 June 2018.



Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe how residents of two riverside informal settlements in Indore draw upon spiritual principles in their social relationships and in their efforts to cope with water-related challenges. The broader objective was to generate empirically grounded insights into how spiritual principles advance the social and economic well-being of both individuals and communities. Previous research carried out by the Institute has explored how development organizations apply spiritual principles, derived from religion, in the context of their work. The present study took the question of the application of spiritual principles further by focusing on how they find expression in the context of communities.

To conceive of development in terms of material and spiritual progress as posited in the introduction of this study suggests the need for greater understanding of the interaction between the spiritual and material aspects of life. This study can be viewed as an exploration of this relationship carried out not in the abstract but, rather, in the empirical context of the efforts of common

people to respond to some of the most pressing developmental challenges that they face. How does the spiritual aspect of life manifest itself in thoughts, motives and actions? How does it influence people's vision for their own lives and their communities in concrete ways? How does it enable individuals and communities to overcome everyday challenges? How does it influence their relationships with each other and with nature? How does it unite people despite their differences and inspire them to strive together towards a moral purpose? The insights contained in the findings of this study respond to these and other such questions. Through metaphors, stories, analogies, reasoned arguments and even songs, the people whose voices are heard in these pages articulate how spiritual principles are manifested in consciousness and culture, and the way they serve as a source of guidance, motivation and inspiration in thought and in action.

Conclusion

The findings from this study show that the principle of the oneness of humankind and its manifestation in the imperative to preserve and maintain unity within the community informed every aspect of the lives of the residents of these neighbourhoods.

This principle, while anchored in the particular religious traditions of each community, set the tone for the open and inclusive way in which the inhabitants interpreted their religious scriptures and practiced their particular faiths. While the people in both neighbourhoods were deeply religious, they strove to make their festivities, observances and charitable activities open to people of all faiths. They consciously avoided dogmatic and sectarian interpretations of religious beliefs and practices which would emphasize differences.

Similarly, practices of reciprocity and mutual support informed every aspect of their social and economic lives. This sense of

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interdependence was confirmed and deepened during times of individual and collective struggles. As marginalized urban groups, residents of informal settlements lived precarious lives with limited access to social protection provision from the State. In such conditions, they have learned to rely increasingly on one another for help—whether it be in the form of shelter at times of flooding, urgently needed loans or help in securing a means of livelihood.

The neighbourhoods were not free of cases of conflict among the residents. Yet, these seemed to be aberrations to the overall spirit of unity and oneness in the neighbourhoods. The attitude to cases of conflict among the residents was that they needed to be speedily resolved by the parties involved or through the mediation of other residents so that the cordial relations that characterized the state of normalcy could be restored. The value of oneness seemed to have become a fundamental element of the culture of the people and it was upheld and reinforced by cultural and religious institutions in these neighbourhoods.

As the findings reveal, it was clear that the motivation to apply the principle of oneness in their social relationships did not come from external conditions or practical considerations alone. Joy was a term participants often used when referring to why they were moved to build bonds of unity. It was the word that was used to describe the sense of fulfilment and inner happiness derived from behaviour directed towards the well-being of others. Yet, it was also clear that for the harmonious relationships within the community to be secured on firm foundations there was the need for broader structural transformation to address various social and economic injustices. Among the most urgent interventions that were needed were the provision of social protection and secure and remunerative livelihood opportunities, gender specific policies for the economic and social empowerment of women, building

the capacity of residents through scientific and spiritual education and the need for effective participatory governance that will allow residents to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Social and economic justice provided the conditions in which oneness could be realized and unity could thrive.

Conclusion

The concept of the oneness of humankind that these neighbourhoods had applied in their social and economic lives is undoubtedly a greatly valued resource in maintaining the well-being of individual and community life. Yet, as the findings indicate, in an ever-changing world there was the need for the implications of this principle of the oneness to be understood more deeply and broadly through education and through critical and consultative discourse in order to make the conception and practice of it more internally consistent and to address ever-changing contemporary challenges and situations. It will also require changes in policies and laws that perpetuate injustices.

Examples of cases where a fuller expression of oneness will require the identification and elimination of injustices could be seen in the discussion on the subtle and overt ways in which caste-based and gender-based discrimination is embedded within the social structure in these neighbourhoods. Overcoming these injustices will require a change not only in the attitudes and perceptions of people but also in the legal codes and the economic and social structures of society. Unless, for example, profound changes are made to the way labour markets are segmented based on gender and caste identities which limits the ability of people to change their economic prospects, efforts to bring about change will have limited effect.

The findings also illustrated the significance of the principle of universal participation which is closely linked with establish-

Conclusion

ing conditions of oneness based on justice. People in these neighbourhoods have the capacity to take charge of their own destinies through working together in groups to achieve common challenges. Although the incipient efforts of the residents to work together in achieving common goals did not always bear the desired fruit, it did reveal the potential in these neighbourhoods for exercising agency and unitedly engaging in collective action. For these fledgling efforts to become a powerful force for change the capacities of the residents to engage in systematic and structured social action would need to be enhanced through building their ability to apply scientific methods and spiritual principles in action. It would also require institutional support from the state and civil society organizations and a conducive policy environment that recognizes the capacities of the masses to take charge of their own progress. Such a sense of ownership could be fostered through educational processes at the grassroots and through collective decision-making mechanisms that not only involve the full participation of the residents but also allow diverse viewpoints to be heard and harmonized into a collective vision for progress.

Thus, building relationships that reflect to ever greater degrees the principle of the oneness of humankind remains a promising yet unfinished project in these neighbourhoods requiring conscious and constant effort. The question of how justice and unity can both be strengthened in a community in a mutually reinforcing manner is one that could be further explored in future research in the context of such populations.

The comments of the participants related to the second principle explored in this study, which was the interconnectedness of humanity with nature, consisted of a few common themes: that nature was a shared heritage often described as a divine bestowal or

trust from God, that human beings have a moral duty to draw on nature with a sense of responsibility and respect; that the resources of nature have an intrinsic and not merely instrumental value; and that individuals are responsible not only to other human beings living in other places who share the same resource (in this case water) but also to future generations who will be affected by the choices of those living in the present.

Conclusion

Nature was referred to not only as the source of resources that have a certain utility for human life. Rather it was spoken of with a sense of reverence based on a conception of the interconnectedness of all life and its association with divinity. Nature was also a reminder of the enduring, universal and transcendental aspects of human life and the interconnectedness of all human beings. Through their relationship with nature, all human beings—of past, present and future generations—are one and interconnected. In their references to nature, participants often talked about it as a physical embodiment of the spiritual qualities that they aspired to reflect in their social relationships such as love, generosity, humility and a spirit of service. In the way the diverse elements of nature came together in a system of perfect synergy and harmony, it provided humanity an emblem of a complex, reciprocal and unified system that reflects unity in diversity. Nature also represented to many of them an object worthy reverence since it manifested the majesty and greatness of the power or intelligence that lay behind its creation.

The practical ways in which residents talked about manifesting their respect for nature in everyday life was through conserving water and preventing the pollution of water and of the rivers. To do this effectively, however, will require more than just local residents' efforts. These efforts would need to be supported by government or other specialized institutions that can address issues

at a system-wide level and would require greater capacity building in the community in the area of water management.

Conclusion

The research team found that there was a gap between the convictions of participants about nature in the abstract and the way they used resources of nature, such as water, in their everyday lives. This was because residents had little control over the governance and management of the resources of nature. The individual choices that they made seemed perfunctory when set against the larger forces that were shaping their environment and their access to nature's resources. As it is, the amount of water residents can access is limited. The scope to save water by using it more thriftily is minimal. The amount of water that is wasted from a leaking or broken pipe in the neighbourhood that gets fixed only by a technician sent by the municipal authorities, which could take hours or even days to materialize, makes a mockery of their conservation efforts. It also reflects the lack of meaningful community participation in water management in these neighbourhoods. Similarly, the residents have scant control over the pollution of the river that flows beside their settlement and its degradation into a drain. The highly congested nature of these neighbourhoods and the fact that most people lack proper title to the parcel of land on which their homes are built means that there are not many opportunities to plant trees in these settlements which present an uneven landscape of continuous concrete, metal and asbestos structures.

What is needed is participatory structures of governance that would allow these populations a say in the decisions that affect their lives. In particular, in the governance and management of resources such as water there needs to be increasing representation of residents of informal settlements who are at present restricted to being passive users. The residents would also need to be involved

in efforts to conserve the rivers on the banks of which they live. For their participation in water governance and management to be meaningful, apart from participatory governance structures, residents of such settlements would require greater education on basic hydrological concepts such as the connection between ground water and surface water and the notion of a watershed. They would need to understand their local water system including the particular water resources, issues in their watershed and the local climate.

Conclusion

Beyond this, if the value of the spiritual convictions that the residents hold about nature are to be brought to bear on the development process, there will need to be better integration of the economic, ecological, social and spiritual dimensions of development that relate to natural resource conservation. At present, policies are beset by a fragmentation between these various dimensions. Economic value is taken to be the predominant driver and measure of development. Due to the fragmentation of the spiritual and material dimensions of development, spiritual beliefs of people about nature do not get taken into consideration when policies and plans related to their governance and management are drafted and implemented. Owing to this, people are unable to express their spiritual convictions in ways that would significantly contribute to the conservation of natural resources. Natural resources are treated in an instrumental manner which leads to environmental degradation despite the beliefs that people hold. Thus, a fundamental challenge to be addressed is the fragmentation between the spiritual and the material dimensions of development. It is in this context that the purpose of this study—which is to gain deeper insights into the dynamic coherence between the spiritual and material dimensions of life in the context of a community's efforts to address collective challenges—has particular relevance. It seeks to address this fragmentation in development thought and

policy that has estranged the masses from development processes which are carried out in their name.

Conclusion

The study sought to make more explicit the spiritual dimension of thought that motivates altruistic behaviour in a community setting. Rendering the spiritual dimension visible in relation to everyday decisions of people in the context of community life makes it possible for policy makers, development actors and those in communities to name and call upon this dimension of human life in the planning and implementation of development endeavours. As described in the introduction, this spiritual dimension of development has often been omitted from consideration. Strengthening the capacity of development policy and practice to engage with this dimension would, it is proposed, enhance efforts to amplify popular participation in development and increase the efficacy of development programs.

This study further suggests that state and non-state actors that work with such settlements must recognize the resources which exist in these communities in the form of their beliefs in spiritual principles such as oneness of humanity and interconnectedness with nature and their knowledge of applying these principles in their communities. Efforts must be made to meaningfully draw upon those beliefs and knowledge in the planning and execution of development programs. People in such neighbourhoods should be viewed as resources possessed of knowledge. The perspective that they have about social relationships and their relationship with nature provides a strong foundation on which efforts to promote material and spiritual progress can be built. Care should be exercised that actions carried out in the name of development do not undermine this foundation or sever people's connection with nature or with their neighbours.

To describe the positive impact of spiritual principles on the lives of informal settlement dwellers is not meant to undermine or trivialize the enormous challenges of various forms of deprivation that the people face and the consequent need for concrete material interventions to improve their lives. There is no doubt that these neighbourhoods urgently require better living conditions, infrastructure, educational opportunities, healthcare, and secure employment, among other things. There are also powerful social, economic and political forces such as the segmentation of labour markets and educational opportunities, the ghettoization of people of particular caste and religious backgrounds and the nurturing of informal settlements as political vote banks that keep these populations caught in a cycle of deprivation and inhibit the progress of successive generations. These forces will have to be overcome if these populations are to advance in their material and spiritual lives. Yet, policies and plans for social and economic development have a better chance of eliciting the participation of the people themselves and succeeding if they consider the spiritual convictions of the people and their experience with applying these convictions. What is envisioned is a process by which communities can work towards spiritual and material advancement in a mutually reinforcing manner. This dynamic coherence has been described in the following way in one of Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity's documents: "[M]aterial advancement is properly understood not as an end in itself, but rather as a vehicle for moral, intellectual and social progress. Similarly, any meaningful enhancement of material well-being flows only from the concrete application of spiritual precepts such as equity, trustworthiness, and altruism...."¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

170. Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity. (2008). *Science, Religion and Development: Some Initial Considerations*. Retrieved February 14, 2018, from www.globalprosperity.org/library

Reflections on methodology

Conclusion

It is hoped that the experience from this study could be useful as a source of insight for others in the future who seek to refine a methodology that is capable of drawing out the spiritual dimension of development issues. Certain challenges present themselves when seeking to carry out a scientific study which aims at being rigorous and objective, while focusing on people's spiritual convictions and beliefs as an object of inquiry. The methodology that was used in this study, which drew on interpretive, qualitative case-study research methods, was helpful in terms of capturing how these convictions are perceived and understood by people and the ways in which people apply them to their daily lives. The case study approach allows the researcher to view the entire community as a social unit while at the same time yields deeper insights into individual understanding through individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The ontological perspective of the research laid a foundation for considering the spiritual aspects of reality that participants refer to as objective features of reality, no less than the material aspects that they refer to. At the same time, epistemologically, it was understood that any given individual's ability to know spiritual reality is limited, but that diverse minds and views can offer complementary insights that help in gaining a better overall perspective on spiritual reality as a whole. Consequently, the methodology strove to incorporate an openness to exploring diverse perspectives with participants and to adapting the focus group discussion and interview questions based on each participants' responses. The language used, the nature of questions posed, and the stance of researchers strove to be exploratory rather than pedantic.

Another conviction that was foundational to the methodology was that ordinary people possess a great wealth of insight regarding spiritual principles and their application. It is not only philosophers,

religious leaders, theologians or scholars who have the capacity to reflect on such profound matters as these; people everywhere do this every day, and when given the opportunity, they can share many valuable insights on such matters. An important starting point for this research is believing in this capacity of ordinary people. Then the challenge before researchers, rather than seeking out particularly distinguished respondents, was rather to create an environment in which ordinary people could feel comfortable to share their insights. It proved important for the research team to establish a level of comfort and trust with the participants which encourages their willingness to share. A further challenge was to find a language to discuss spiritual principles which would be meaningful to the residents while being broad enough to cross the boundaries of particular religious communities. Thought had to be given methodologically to how to encourage participants to talk about spiritual principles not simply as axioms, but in terms of how these principles are reflected in practice in everyday scenarios.

Conclusion

Although the present study is limited in its scope to the description of just two informal settlements in a specific social and cultural context, its implications apply to a wider context. To further explore these implications, future studies that seek to advance knowledge about the application of spiritual principles to development could look more closely at the experience of other communities from different geographical, religious, class, caste and ethnic backgrounds, could explore a wide range of different spiritual principles, and a range of development challenges beyond the issue of water. Since spiritual principles apply at a basic level to essential relationships, a number of different relationships could be explored—the relationship between the individual and society, between individuals and the community, between individuals and institutions, and so forth.

It is hoped that this study will inspire further research work of its kind dedicated to developing a scientific understanding of how spiritual principles can be drawn upon to contribute to the means and the ends of development.

Conclusion



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APPENDIX

Theme Statement

This document has been prepared to assist facilitators initiate and conduct focus group discussions with participants from the settlements chosen for this research project. It consists of a brief description of the two spiritual principles that have been chosen as the focus of exploration for this research—the oneness of existence and the oneness of humankind—and a few questions for each principle to stimulate discussion. It is understood that during the course of the discussions, these questions will be added to and refined.

The Oneness of Existence: Our Interconnectedness with the World of Nature

1. Perhaps the most fundamental principle underlying the whole of creation is the oneness and wholeness of the world of existence. Every being that exists is interconnected with other beings in an endless web of life. We human beings, who are only one of the millions of living organisms on the Earth, are entirely dependent

on nature for our survival. When we ignore this principle of interconnectedness with the natural world and plunder and pollute the earth's resources out of greed, arrogance or ignorance, our own well-being and survival is endangered. Damage and disrespect to the Earth's natural resources eventually results in harm to all life on earth including human beings.

2. The major religions of the world have helped humanity to recognize and respect this principle of interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world. They have taught human beings to respect the balance and order in existence and to view the natural world as divine trust to be used with moderation, compassion and humility and preserved for future generations. Respect and humility for nature itself derives from the consciousness that its majesty and grandeur are signs and reflections of the greatness of the power that lay behind its creation.

Suggested questions for participants:

1. How do you view nature? What do you think its purpose is? Do you believe nature is merely there to serve our needs or does it have a higher purpose? Do you think that nature has a spiritual significance? If so, please describe it.
2. As human beings, how would you describe our relationship with nature in present day society? What do you think that our relationship should be like? Do you think we are merely a part of nature or do we have some control over it? Explain why? How do you think we should we use our power over nature?
3. How do your beliefs about the spiritual or symbolic significance of water and of the natural world influence the way you live? How does it influence the way you use water? Is there anything you do to prevent the pollution of water and of nature in general?

4. What is your relationship with the Saraswati river?
5. Do you see any contradictions in your beliefs about the importance of water and of nature and your practices in everyday life? Do you see such contradictions in your community? How can they be addressed?

Appendix

The Oneness of Humankind

Water as a natural resource belongs to all of humanity. All of humanity has equal claim over it—both the people of the present and of future generations who will inherit it—and all are responsible for its preservation.

As a shared resource of nature, water reminds us of our common humanity and our interconnectedness as members of the human race. We have the same needs as others, and we depend on each other to fulfil those needs in a way that does not deprive anyone and that contributes to the wellbeing of all. The spiritual qualities that allow us to reconcile our individual well-being with that of the community or society as a whole are those of selflessness, cooperation, reciprocity, compassion, love, and willingness to sacrifice for others. Our commitment to these qualities comes from our conviction in the principle of the oneness of humankind. This principle helps us see that the well-being of one lies in the well-being of the whole and harm to one is harm to all.

To understand the implications of this principle for society, we find a useful analogy in the human body. Within the body, millions of cells, with an extraordinary diversity of forms and functions, collaborate to make the existence of the human being possible. They give and receive whatever is needed for their individual function as well as for the growth and welfare of the whole. No one would try to explain the life of a healthy body in terms of competition among the parts for scarce resources. Nor would

one argue that in order for the body to function better, all of its cells should become identical—uniformity would make the body incapable of carrying out any of the complex tasks necessary to its healthy functioning. The principle that governs the functioning of the body is unity in diversity. It is possible to conceive of human society in a similar way—myriads of diverse individuals and communities with distinct talents each have the potential to contribute to the health and advancement of human civilization. Moreover, just as in the body, the suffering of any one member of human society results in diminished well-being for the whole.

Suggested questions for participants:

1. What do you believe is the purpose of our lives as human beings?
2. What do your neighbours mean to you?
3. In times of difficulties, who do you turn to for help?
4. Does your community cooperate to address certain challenges it faces? If so, in what ways?
5. Many people believe that ‘might is right.’ What do you think will happen if this approach is adopted for water access and use in your community?
6. Do you help each other to meet your needs for water? If so, how? What do you do if some members of the community are not as willing to cooperate?
7. What motivates you to keep working together with other members of the community, even when it gets difficult?
8. Are there individuals or groups in the community on whom the burden of water problems falls more heavily than others? How have you tried to help lift the burden from these individuals or groups? What motivated you to try to help?

9. Are there groups or individuals different from you whom you have also tried to help, despite your differences?
10. When conflicts or disputes arise due to water, how are they settled? Does the community have a role in this?
11. What do you do if some members of the community are overusing water, wasting it, or polluting it?

Appendix

About the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity

The Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) is a non-profit organization, dedicated to building capacity in individuals, groups and institutions to contribute to prevalent discourses concerned with the betterment of society.

Drawing on both science and religion as two complementary systems of knowledge and practice, learning environments are created where knowledge and experience can be shared and systematized. Principles, concepts and approaches that are relevant to the advancement of civilization are explored through a process of study, reflection and consultation.

Founded in 1999 - and working in collaboration with the Bahá'í International Community - the Institute also engages in learning about the methods, approaches and instruments which can best be employed to contribute to the discourses of society.



About the Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development

The Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development is an endowed Chair at Devi Ahilya University in Indore, India established to promote interdisciplinary research and scholarship on social and economic development from a perspective that regards enduring prosperity as an outcome of material and spiritual progress.

The Chair carries out research, offers educational programs and creates fora for the exchange of ideas and learning on development-related issues.



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