

Sacred activism through *seva* and *khidmat*: Contextualising management and organisations in South Asia

EDWINA PIO* AND JAWAD SYED†

Abstract

What if our actions were imbued with the sacred? What if activism in organisations evokes better local society and responsible global community? What if sacred activism signals the performance of a deeper understanding and mindful actions for contextualising management and organisations in South Asia? These are some of the questions we pose to scholars and practitioners as we seek to present the multiplexities and singularities that epitomise South Asia. We address the braided realities and opportunities presented by religion, culture, ethnicity, gender and governance to contextualise organisations and management among the 1.67 billion people who constitute South Asia. We calligraph our interpretations and future possibilities based on historical traditions and extant data, mindful that some parts of this vast region are grappling with religious radicalisation, East–West tensions, underdevelopment, low literacy rates, violence against women, and international debts and handouts. This heterogeneous region also has a major BRICS country (i.e., India), provides CEOs to the world, scientists to NASA, outsourcing facilities to global corporations, has a young population, a huge middle class, and is actively participating in mergers and acquisitions in the global corridors of commerce. Our poignant hope is to inform and suggest possibilities for constructing enriching engagements and research in this region.

Keywords: management and organisation, *khidmat*, sacred activism, *seva*, South Asia

INTRODUCTION

South Asian CEOs include Indra Nooyi of PepsiCo, Anshu Jain of Deutsche Bank, Ajay Banga of MasterCard, Francisco D'Souza of Cognizant, Vinod Khosla of Sun Microsystems, Abdul Sattar Edhi of Edhi foundation, Mian Muhammad Mansha of Nishat Group, Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank, Vinod Dham of the Pentium processor, Omar Ishrak of Medtronic, Sumaya Kazi of Sumazi, Kumaramangalam Birla of the Birla Industrial House, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw of Biocon, Ratan Tata of the Tata Group and Lakshmi Mittal of ArcelorMittal, the world's largest steel making company. South Asia is a region of wide disparities with some of the world's richest and poorest people. It comprises of countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This region of 1.671 billion people, with life expectancy at birth being 67 years, has a GDP (USD) of \$2.355 trillion, a Gross National Income per capita (using the Atlas method) of \$1,474, and an urban population of 32% (World Bank, 2014). Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, Telugu, Marathi, Sinhala, Tamil, Sindhi, Pashto, Saraiki, Urdu and English are some of the languages

* Department of Management, School of Business & Law, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

† Department of People, Management and Organisations, The Business School, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK

Corresponding authors: edwina.pio@aut.ac.nz, j.syed@hud.ac.uk

spoken in South Asia. Often, though not always, the linguistic diversity in South Asia also represents ethnic diversity and identity found in this region. Moreover, faith diversity in the shape of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity and other religions is an integral part of South Asian societies.

So culture matters, but how does it matter is a question raised by Amartya Sen (2006) in his book *Identity and violence: The illusion of destiny*. Through lucid arguments and informative critiques, this Noble Laureate from South Asia encourages us to take responsibility for our choices and reasoning. He challenges conventional Western wisdom and reminds us that our differences do not lie on only one dimension, for if we only look through one-dimensional frames we miniaturise human beings and organisations. Such one-dimensional frames can extract a very heavy price and become a foundation for degradation, since our differences do not lie on merely one dimension. In our mind's eye, we need to move away from solitary identities which often stereotype and rubricise consciousness putting people and organisations into boxes which become impenetrable. Sen (2005) notes that South Asia over the centuries has been known for its encouragement of heterodoxy. This diversity of thought and action is epitomised by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BC, who as a Buddhist, delighted in the richness of heterodoxy with rock edicts which boldly proclaimed the need for toleration of difference and who brought into the Indian subcontinent skilled workers from the Persian Empire. Universities such as Taxila (now in Pakistan) from around the 6th BC and Nalanda (in India) from the 5th century AD, and Vikramsila (in India) from the 8th to 9th century hosted scholars from Tibet, China, Greece and Persia, and were centres of learning and housed the gurus and pundits of South Asia. It is a salutary reminder of difference that when the Mughal Muslim Emperor Akbar in the late 16th century encouraged multiculturalism and the path to reason or *rabi aql* with policies on religious toleration of all, that the Inquisition was at its height in Europe (Syed, 2011).

Sen (2006: 183) notes that 'there is also the issue of intellectual fairness in dealing with global history, which is important, both for a fuller understanding of the past of humanity... and for overcoming the false sense of comprehensive superiority of the West'. The Indian subcontinent over many centuries encompassed large tracts of land and has served as a shared home for multiple religions and a polyphony of voices expressing myriad epistemologies, heterodoxies and ontologies. Thus, for example, there already existed in the 4th century a large Christian community in Kerala, in the southern part of India, Jews from Persia, Arabia in the 5th and 6th century landed on the Indian subcontinent, and Zoroastrians in the late 7th century fled persecution in Persia.

Historically, three major forces have influenced the current shape of South Asian culture including management and organisational culture. These are: (1) Brahmanic/Hindu and Buddhist traditions, (2) Islamic influences in the shape of commerce with Arab countries and Central Asia, Mughal rule, and interactions and invasions from the North Western border, and (3) European colonisation. Clearly these historical influences can be associated with three major religious orientations currently dominant in South Asia, that is, Hinduism (India and Nepal), Islam (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives and Pakistan) and Buddhism (Bhutan, Sri Lanka). In the postcolonial era, there is also a sizeable Christian minority and more importantly an all pervasive influence of English language and Westernisation. Given the historical and cultural context, particularly the relatively higher religious orientation of South Asian peoples as compared with Westerners in general, religion has an important role in everyday life including in approaches to work, careers and organisations. Therefore, what is strictly treated or/and perceived as secular in a Western context may not be isolated from sacred in a South Asian context. For example, due regard for vegetarian and halal food requirements of practicing Hindus/Buddhists and Muslims, respectively, provision of religious holidays, and accommodation of religious and cultural norms are common practices in organisations.

A pluralistic and contextual approach to management and culture can reflect real world operations, particularly in a global village of international business, beyond paradigms which are solely North American (Tsui, 2007), and which can involve an ambicultural mode of management which avoids the

extremes of East and West and where there is integration and balance (Chen & Miller, 2011). This approach is also supported by Rudolf Heredia (2007: 348) who writes: 'Today we need a global pluralism that will allow space not just for diversity, but beyond it for a postcolonial sensitivity that will decolonise our mind and free our imagination. We need to be able to cope with multiple identities and to accept a radically new hybridisation'.

In the present paper, we offer an interdisciplinary and contextual hybrid perspective on management and spirituality in South Asia, and use insights from business ethics, management and religion. We argue that the mainstream management paradigm is heavily materialistic, without much in the way of offerings that are holistic through the blending of economic profits and spirituality in organisations while at the same time serving society (Pio et al., 2013). Our approach is consistent with recent scholarship in this direction, for example a study on spirituality-driven businesses by Zsolnai and Bouckaert (2012). In their study of integration of business and spirituality, they identify a number of values for a post-materialistic view of management: frugality, deep ecology, trust, reciprocity, responsibility for future generations and authenticity. Within a post-materialistic view, profit and growth are not treated as ultimate organisational aims but elements in a wider set of values (Soltani, Syed, Liao, & Iqbal, 2014).

By incorporating contextual, cultural and spiritual insights, management can be made socially responsible to the benefit of all, addressing the material and spiritual needs in a holistic manner. In our explanation of the South Asian context, we use the notion of sacred activism, interpreted through *seva* and *khidmat*, which we argue is infused in the tapestry that is South Asia. We contextualise this region within its layered history, recognising that such an approach to work and organisation may also be seen as a way forward from the contemporary financial value-oriented approaches to more socially responsible approaches to management. By sacred activism, we refer to an approach in which the inner happiness of compassionate service is intertwined in a practical and pragmatic drive to transform economic or/and social institutions. In the context of South Asia, where ancient faith traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism and other faiths are rooted deep in the everyday life, culture and worldview of most people, the sacred cannot be separated from the secular, hence sacred activism in the shape of faith, spirituality and culture finds space in the realm of management and organisations. A spiritual ethos is an active lived experience for the people of South Asia and to some extent also evident in how they do business. A sacred activist can be described as someone who experiences the inner happiness and outer effectiveness of her work which she undertakes as a compassionate service, who knows that the profound crisis the world is in needs everyone to act with deepest compassion and wisdom, and who in the face of growing injustice, suffering and violence is committed to being, a source of hope, energy and change (Harvey, 2009).

The next sections consist of an expose of polarizing and pluralistic practices in a South Asian context, *seva* and *khidmat* for sacred activism, and business history. That is followed by implications for management and organisations and some concluding thoughts.

POLARISING AND PLURALISTIC PRACTICES

Edward Said (1993: 332–333) once argued that the intellectual's duty was 'first distilling then articulating the predicaments that disfigure modernity – mass deportation, imprisonment, population transfer, collective dispossession and forced immigration'. The predicament that currently faces the not yet *modernised* South Asian countries including the emerging economic giant India is unique because these countries are simultaneously influenced by their ancient history, cultural and spiritual traditions, colonial influences of the British Raj, the neo- or post-colonial influences of Westernisation and globalisation. These simultaneous influences have resulted in the hybridity of approaches to knowledge and management – polarised between Anglo-American values and management styles and the local

Indian or South Asian values and styles. However, characterised by excessive economic and employment gaps as well as immense potential for development and growth, South Asia presents a picture of hope and despair at the same time.

In his debut novel *In the light of what we know*, Zia Haider Rahman (2014), a British novelist of Bangladeshi origin, invites us to critically reflect about connections among class, knowledge and belonging in the context of Western structures and processes of knowledge and their relevance to society. Through a neatly woven story that stretches from London, Oxford and New York to Kabul and Islamabad, Haider suggests that knowledge, the way it is taught, received and presented at elite Western institutions, may be seen as nothing more than 'a social act' where people speak confidently about everything but are merely inflating what they know 'to fill the voids'. and 'the root of true, rightly guided power, the essence of authority, is not learning but the veneer of knowledge'. This thin veneer of knowledge is not a complete fiction. Instead it seems to be real and relevant to the South Asian recipients and consumers of British and American knowledge of management and organisations. The dilemma of hybridity, the focus on Western ways of doing and managing businesses, with occasional token or legitimate attention to local values or issues, seems to be a persistent phenomenon and an ongoing challenge facing South Asian managers and employers. Sen (2006) writes that we have to overcome 'the limited horizons of the colonised mind and its fixation with the West – whether in resentment or admiration' (p. 88) and therefore it is vital to 'recognise our mutual commitments and affiliations...decolonisation of the mind demands a firm departure from the temptation of solitary identities and priorities' (p. 99). In the current postcolonial era where management practices of modern organisations and employers are clearly influenced by Western education and practices, one can still find traces and shades of ancient sacred activism, for example, in the shape of philanthropic initiatives within and without workplaces.

Table 1 presents a snapshot of South Asia, clearly displaying trends as well as wide diversity. The World Bank (2013) ranks countries based on how they do business. This ranking of 185 countries, with one being the highest rank, is an aggregate ranking on the ease of doing business with indicators such as starting a business, getting electricity, paying taxes, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency. A high ranking means that the government has created a regulatory environment conducive to operating a business. Corruption Perception Index 2013 measured the perceived levels of public sector corruption in 177 countries and territories (Transparency International, 2013).

South Asian countries are quite similar in terms of the objectives, structures, functions, attitudes and standards of governing bodies despite variations in forms of government. An administrative system characterised by centralisation, formalism, secrecy, elitism, rigidity and social isolation seems to be common to all South Asian countries (Zafarullah & Haque, 2003). This is mainly because modern administration and governance in South Asia had by and large evolved under British colonial rule. Constraints include: lack of rule of law, poverty, corruption, nepotism, societal divisions and frictions, extremism and violence, militarism, and limited capacity of state and non-state institutions (Jabeen, 2007).

Gender in the South Asian context is not necessarily based on a male female binary as is often presented or/and practiced in Western contexts. The roles of women and men in South Asian context are historically perceived as complementary instead of competing. Although certain patriarchal traditions within Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and other faiths are known to have adverse implications for women in terms of employment choices and opportunities, there is also evidence of informal and formal positive action in support of women (Pio & Syed, 2013). The emphasis in almost all South Asian communities is on a traditional family where the woman or mother has a key role, at times a major role in important decisions about the home and family. The World Economic Forum (2013) ranks 136 countries around the world to capture the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities with one being the highest rank. Among the South Asian countries, Sri Lanka ranks the

TABLE 1. DOING BUSINESS IN SOUTH ASIA

Country	Income level	GDP (in USD)	Population	GNI per capita (in USD)	Corruption Perception	Ease of doing business
					Index (CPI) range (very clean 90–100, highly corrupt 0–9)	
Afghanistan	Low	20.72 bn	30.55 m	700	0–9	168
Bangladesh	Low	129.9 bn	156.6 m	900	20–29	129
Bhutan	Lower middle	1.884 bn	753,900	2,460	60–69	148
India	Lower middle	1.877 tr	1.252 bn	1,570	30–39	132
Maldives	Upper middle	2.300 bn	345,000	5,600	CPI unavailable due to lack of information	95
Nepal	Low	19.29 bn	27.80 m	730	30–39	108
Pakistan	Lower middle	236.6 bn	182.1 m	1,380	20–29	107
Sri Lanka	Lower middle	67.18 bn	20.48 m	3,170	30–39	81

Source: Transparency International (2013), World Bank (2013, 2014).

highest at 55, followed by Bangladesh at 75. Next we have Bhutan at 93, the Maldives at 97, India at 101, Nepal 121 and Pakistan at 135. Yet, true to form in terms of what is totally true could also be totally false in diverse South Asia, this region has a number of women prime ministers, who have included Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Sheikh Hasina Wajed and Khaleda Zia, while at the same time a significant number of women may be illiterate, live on <2 USD a day and live to serve her menfolk with limited agency of her own. Again in keeping with its sharp contrasts, when one looks at carbon dioxide emission ratio (metric tonnes per capita) for this region, it is at 1.4 whereas, for example, it is 17.56 for the United States, and 7.86 for the United Kingdom – a reminder of our ecological selves (Rogers, 2014), and the need for sacred activism for profits and the planet.

SOUTH ASIAN VALUES OF SELFLESS SERVICE: *SEVA* AND *KHIDMAT*

The South Asian notions of *seva* and *khidmat* emanate from religious traditions and an understanding of their praxis-in-action can suffuse organisations with sacred activism. *Seva* denotes selfless service and civic virtue in the organisation and within society. In Hinduism, people are encouraged to engage in community service as a transformation practice, without personal recognition or publicity. The underlying Vedic philosophy is that service to human beings is service to God (Bhargava, 2011). *Seva* is ‘service which is given without consideration of anything in return, at the right place and time to one that is qualified, with the feeling that it is one’s duty, is regarded as the nature of goodness’ (Bhagavad Gita 17.20). The purpose is to dissolve the ego through service which is performed without any expectation of result or award for the person performing it. Detachment from personal gains and material outcomes means purity and sincerity in work. Work in this approach becomes worship, or ‘workship’, where workers are aware of, dedicated to, and responsible for each and every detail. This workship is not only an integral part of Hindu spirituality but is also found in the Islamic notion of work as a form of worship (*ibadah*). Workers find purpose and meaning in what they are doing; their efforts in a union with the divine lead them to higher state of consciousness, happiness and well-being. Meera and Bonin (2014) have drawn similar lessons for management from their study on the Mata Amritanandamayi Math and Indian wisdom. According to the Hindu notion of *Nishkama karma* or the meritless deed, one performs actions because they are the right things to do, and not because of a reward.

Seva can be done in three ways, *tan, man, dhan*, that is, through one’s body, mind and wealth. *Seva* remains incomplete unless not done in these three ways. Service through one’s body, that is, making all

physical efforts to help a suffering being. Service through one's mind, for example, thinking about the mitigation of sorrow and suffering, motivating others to do *seva*, and expressing *seva* feeling through art, literature and other means. Service through wealth, for example, sharing one's own resources – money and material – with others. Charities of all kinds are good but the best of them is that of imparting knowledge, for it is through knowledge that one achieves happiness in this world and salvation for oneself (Satyanarayana, n.d.).

There are several key dimensions of *seva* in Hinduism (Hindu American Foundation [HAF], 2014). The *Bhumi Seva* (Serving the Planet) deals with how individuals and communities should pay attention to the service of the planet. A daily prayer is recited by practising Hindus upon rising that asks Mother Earth's forgiveness for stepping on her throughout the day. This denotes respect for the environment, and is consistent with the principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence), vegetarianism and reduction of activities that could hurt the planet. The *Loka Seva* (Serving the Humanity) is in line with the Hindu concept of service through, for example, holding a food drive in an effort to alleviate hunger locally. *Atma Seva* (Serving the Soul) pertains to serving one's own inner-self through positive reflection and meditation. This can also be implemented through Yoga. *Kutumba Seva* (Serving the Family) deals with the spending time with family and working for their well-being. While *Dharma Seva* (Serving the Righteousness) deals with the service of the community in the righteous path of spiritual perfection and salvation.

In Sikhism, there can be no worship without *seva*, this can be in the form of *Guru ka Langar* (the Guru's free community kitchen) and serving the congregation by preparing food, feeding them, washing their used dishes, serving them and so on. Sikhs are specifically urged to direct *seva* at the poor (Sikh.co.uk, 2009). By performing *seva*, Sikhs serve God and the world (BBC, 2014).

In Buddhism, the concept of *bodhisattva* is consistent with the notion of *seva*. A bodhisattva is a being someone who makes a true and solid vow in their heart to become enlightened and along the way to help all beings. A related notion is that of the four *brahmaviharas* or divine abodes which urge individuals to focus on love (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), empathy (*mudita*) and equilibrium (*upekkha*) for themselves and others (Pio, 1986).

In Zoroastrianism the notion of *asha* or a holy world order with truth and righteousness parallels *seva* and in South Asian Christianity related notions are those of *metanoia* or opening of the heart and *kenosis* or joyous emptying of oneself to be of compassionate service to others (Pio, 2014).

Khidmat (*Khidmah* in Arabic) is an Islamic concept which denotes service, assistance and kindness. The concept is enshrined in multiple verses in the Quran and also in the traditions (*Hadith*) of the Prophet Muhammad. According to the Quran (5:2): 'Help one another to virtue and God-consciousness and do not help one another to sin and transgression'. The notion of selfless service is also enshrined in the following Quranic verses (76:8–9) that illustrate the virtues of the righteous ones 'who feed the poor, the orphan and the captive for the love of God, saying: "We feed you for the sake of God Alone; we seek from you neither reward nor thanks"'. According to a Hadith (reported by Al-Tabarani): 'The best of people is the most beneficent of them to others'. In another Hadith, the Prophet said (reported by Muslim): 'Do not underestimate any kindness even if that should be meeting your brother with a smiling face'. Here is yet another *Hadith* (reported by Bukhari): 'There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a human or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift for him'.

Seen from a managerial ethics perspective, a number of key principles can be identified in Islamic teachings, that is, an emphasis on goodness (*khair*), consultation (*shura*), justice (*adl*), honesty (*sidq*) and well-being (*rifah*). The Quran instructs Muslims to persistently work whenever and wherever it is available, while permitting trade and forbidding usury and unfair earnings. Prophet Mohammed preached that merchants should perform tasks that are not only essential for economic growth and survival but also morally and socially useful for the society. He declared, – I commend the merchants

to you, for they are the couriers of the horizon and trusted servants on earth, and – the honest, truthful Muslim merchant will stand with martyrs on the Day of Judgment (Ali, 2005). To varying extents, these principles are also reflected in the normative or practical approach to life and work by many practising Muslims.

Both *sewa* and *khidmat* exemplify the hope for thoughts and actions based on sacred activism in a world where inequities, asymmetries and greed persist in the management of many organisations. Examples in South Asia which seem to reflect sacred activism include LAUGFS Holdings, a Sri Lankan diversified business conglomerate such as power and energy, retail, industrial/manufacturing, service and hospitality whose vision states that ‘we share the same world to live in, with care and concern for a common future’. LAUGFS promotes strong community engagement through financial contribution to the deaf, dumb and blind to mark white cane day, contribution for the supply of drinking water to schools, providing gas and maintenance of gas line and cookers for the benefit of pilgrims (LAUGFS, n.d.). In Pakistan, Bahria Town, Pakistan’s largest real estate developer, has provided huge sums of money for famine relief in the region of Thar (Haider, 2014).

A number of Indian business leaders, such as Vineet Nayar CEO of Indian IT services giant HCL, Ratan Tata former chairman of the Tata Group, a business conglomerate, Prathap Reddy founder of Apollo Hospitals, say that the source of their competitive advantage, lies within their companies, in their people, with a commitment to social goals fuelled by enlightened self-interest (Capelli, Singh, Singh, & Useem, 2010a). In the *India Way: How India’s top business leaders are revolutionizing management*, Peter Cappelli from the Wharton School, United States and his colleagues found that Indian leaders priorities the following four key responsibilities: first, chief input for business strategy; second, keeper of the organisational culture; third, guide, teacher or role model for employees; and fourth representative of owner and investor interests. In contrast, most US companies are likely to put shareholder interest as their number one concern. In skills, what Indian leaders value most based on their exercise of leadership, 61% of Indian leaders said envisioning and articulating a path to the future, and 57% said being inspirational, accountable and entrepreneurial was critical. Despite the intense focus on culture and human capital, strategy was the top priority, similar to many US organisations. Yet, Indian leaders saw their role in strategy as a set of general principles with a focus on internal issues involving taking the long view, embracing social purpose and developing competencies. In contrast, many of the more Western style focused organisations tend to focus on planning and analysis with attention to external demands such as regulatory concerns, the board and shareholders. Indian CEOs seem adept at weaving strategy with social mission.

It is also worth noting that Bhutan utilises a Gross National Happiness (GNH, 2014) Index to measure progress, based on four pillars: fair socio-economic development (better education and health), conservation and promotion of a vibrant culture, environmental protection and good governance. It is meant to serve as an aspirational set of guiding principles for a sustainable and equitable society providing a balance between material and non-material values.

BUSINESS HISTORY

South Asia’s history is as heterogeneous and complex as are its various regions and cultures. However, while there are a number of mega-narratives right through its history and current realities, it is possible to invoke the notion of diversity in how management and organisations were shaped right from the time of early agrarian civilisations such as those of Mohenjodaro and Harappa in 3300–1300 BC. An historical perspective is helpful in eschewing binaries in terms of a patriotic narrative where poverty and poor economic growth are exclusively attributed to colonisation, as also that of the British Empire and colonisation being the civilisation and industrialisation of natives (Roy, 2004). Through the ages, India traded with various parts of the world, including China, Persia, Greece, Rome, Sri Lanka and Egypt.

Trade often involved the sending of missionaries along with merchants as is evidenced in the history of Sri Lanka. In the medieval period, trade with Indonesia, Cambodia and other parts of South-East Asia also involved a transfer of skills pertaining to sculpture and architecture as evidenced in the religious shrines and cultural practices of these regions. Undoubtedly, skilled artisans and religious preachers crossed the ocean on ships as also via land routes such as the Silk Road, in order to spread knowledge available in India and also profit from trade and commerce.

Organisations were community based in both production and skills, and the village formed the centre of daily life. There was a high degree of specialisation, which in many ways has been attributed to the caste system which is hereditary. Therefore, knowledge both explicit and implicit was passed on from one generation to another resulting in highly skilled artisans and craftspeople. Based on division of labour, there was both backward and forward integration of products and processes, so that each group could cater to the next. Thus, for example, in the case of the production of cotton cloth, there were cotton growers, cleaners of raw cotton, spinners of yarn, weavers of yarn and dyers who utilised the famous indigo and madder for which India was famed. Merchants and mercantile communities moved the goods along. Indian handicrafts were also highly sought after such as jewellery, carved ivory, wood work and stonework. The silk route passed through India on its way to China and other parts of Europe and was a route for the transference of various texts and narratives including information on trigonometry, medicine, astronomy, mathematics and literature. The role of the various kings was to keep peace, maintain law and order, collect taxes, provide work, encourage mercantile communities, build places of worship and rest houses for travellers and maintain some degree of harmony in their province or empire. The *sreni* or guild was often the cornerstone around which revolved mercantile enterprise and both literary and epigraphic sources attest to the prosperity of these guilds and their socio-economic relevance (Mahapatra, 2012). The *sreni* was often a legal entity, served as a bank, engaged in charitable acts, regulated products and services, functioned as a court of law with judicial authority over its members, ensured their safety when travelling for trade and also had a code of conduct or *sreni dharma* (Basham, 2004; Mahapatra, 2012).

While the caste system is alive (Pio, 2010), it is possible that in its early versions it was meant primarily as a way to develop specialisation. However such specialisation also resulted in a negative outcome for with the passing of time, the caste system became ossified and prevented social mobility. Such ossification also resulted in the higher castes such as the Brahmins or priestly class, the Kshatriyas or warrior class gaining large tracts of land as grants from the kings. The Vaishya caste was the merchants and they thrived and in more recent times have founded business houses. The lowest caste the Shudras were primarily labourers and they eventually became landless and tenanted, often with huge loans resulting in a stranglehold on their lives through moneylenders.

Under the Muslim rule of the Mughals, 16th–19th century in most of the Indian subcontinent, trade continued to be encouraged along with the building of efficient systems of transport for moving goods, protection and security for foreign traders and their transactions, while at the same time welcoming them into the country. The textile sector was well established and cotton cloth was exported to many parts of the world. The caste guilds continued to play an important role in commerce as they had done before the arrival of the Mughals.

In focusing on the British imperial or colonial period, it is important to note that there was uneven development and uneven inequality based on global, colonial and social variables with greater attention to structural variables like resources and markets (Roy, 2004, 2010, 2012a). India was the jewel in the crown of the British Empire and her resources were repeatedly tapped into for consolidation of British hegemony (MacLeod, 1975). Thus, while a few port cities (e.g., Bombay, Calcutta) thrived based on trade, commerce and unorthodox partnerships, many other areas and industries suffered (Roy, 2012a). Furthermore indentured labour from South Asia was transferred to outlying posts of the British Empire with the ban on slavery. Therefore, management and organisation of indentured labour was lucrative

for the British; tens of thousands South Asian individuals were sent to Fiji, Maldives and the West Indies.

In South Asia, ‘consolidation of colonialism led to an impoverishment of the formerly ruling elite and a fall in aristocratic consumption of luxuries’ (Roy, 2010: 62). Roy (2010) opines that mechanical inventions were a cause of the decline of crafts and resulted in changes in the nature of the workforce who moved from artisanship to agriculture. There was a great interest by the East India Company in the cotton produced in India and this was sent to the big factories in Britain to be woven into cloth and then sent back to India for sale. ‘Between 1875 and 1931, agricultural labourers consistently earned an income below the amount needed to purchase the basket of goods required to be above the official poverty line’ (Roy, 2007: 74), and there was wage stagnation with more people joining the ranks of the poor (Roy, 2007).

Marx (1853) notes that till 1813 India had been chiefly an exporting country, while under exploitation of Great Britain’s East India Company it became an importing one in a quick progression. India, the world leader in cotton manufacture became inundated with English twists and cotton stuffs. ‘After its own produce had been excluded from England, or only admitted on very cruel terms, British manufactures were poured into it at a small and merely nominal duty, to the ruin of the native cotton fabrics once so celebrated. In 1780 the value of British produce and manufactures amounted only to £386,152, the bullion exported during the same year to £15,041, the total value of exports during 1780 being £12,648,616, so that the India trade amounted to only 1–32 of the entire foreign trade. In 1850, the total exports to India from Great Britain and Ireland were £8,024,000, of which cotton goods alone amounted to £5,220,000, so that it reached more than 3/5 of the whole export, and more than 1/4 of the foreign cotton trade’ (Marx, 1853: para. 18).

It is possible that the British replicated the high inequality during the Mughal period when a very niche elite such as the *mansabdars* or high-rank military officials received fabulous incomes, and during the British raj a few hundred European civil/military officials earned salaries 200–300 times higher than that of the poorest wage earners (Roy, 2007). Roy (2007, 2012) attributes the persistence of inequality into the 21st century to be based on earlier history and he uses three illustrations – that of peasant agriculture (transportation of goods, irrigation of land as well as a movement of land surplus to land shortage with more or less unchanging land yield), industrialisation (artisans moved to factories) and women’s work (women lost artisan work and became low paid agricultural workers coupled with early marriage and lack of acceptance of mixed men–women work sites, meant that women did not have the same mobility as men to enter more lucrative labour markets such as urban textile mills or tea plantations, in other words a built-in gender bias with migration displaying a male bias). As Roy (2012b: 65) notes ‘...globalisation has made some winners and left many other untouched. If we look closely at those whom economic growth left behind, we are likely to meet, in the present times as in the past, poorly endowed agricultural regions, towns and cities where cosmopolitan business culture have been slow to develop, and unskilled women workers’.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONS

The discipline of management can be seen as a product of industrial revolution and is, clearly, capitalistic and Western-centric in its origins and nature. Though initially rooted in engineering and economics, the discipline was subsequently influenced by human relations school drawing on insights from psychology, sociology and other related disciplines. In recent decades, spiritual and cultural insights have also started to influence the field of management (Sharma, 2006). Since the 1990s, there is an increasing interest in formulating spirituality-based theories and approaches to management (Rojas, 2005).

With the emergence of India as a global economic giant and a vibrant market of consumers, multinational corporations are locating their offices and factories to that country to benefit from

economies of scale, and human and other resources. This means that Western styles of management are also to deal with and understanding Indian approaches to management and broader society. The traditional Indian style takes a holistic approach under its ambit the whole organisation, systems, people and culture. Such an approach can bring better results for modern organisations to deal with complex issues in global environment (Abbasi, Rehman, & Bibi, 2010). Mitroff and Denton (1999) suggest that companies that have a spiritual dimension and allow the whole person to come to work have employees with higher loyalty, lower absenteeism, and greater creativity.

For a management system to be effective, it has to be contextualised in the country where it is practiced (Syed & Omar, 2012). Many communities and countries in the world are now trying to discover and explore their own system of management, which includes accounting, and financial management, human resource management, corporate governance, and also corporate social responsibility (Muniapan, 2007). All major religions currently practiced in India encourage serving the society, promoting the people's well-being and safeguarding the natural resources. Buddhism lays emphasis on ethics, virtuous behaviour, morality and precept. It advocates purity of thought, word, and deed. Similar approach to work and well-being is enshrined in Hinduism. For example, several business schools in the West have introduced self-mastery classes using Indian philosophy to help students improve their leadership skills (Rarick & Nickerson, 2009; Kaur & Ubha, 2013).

While the focus of the Western model of management is on knowledge worker, the South Asian approach may be seen as focused on the notion of wisdom worker, where wisdom is has a holistic meaning in terms of work and wider society (Pio, 2005, 2007a). Whereas the western model has a narrow definition and focus on material or economic success entailing stress, competition and tension, and possibly unethical conduct, the *seva*-based Indian approach defines success as achieving goals accompanied with harmony, well-being and happiness, not only for leaders but for team members and wider society.

In the Gita, two types of work culture have been explained, that is, *daivi sampat* or divine work culture and *asuri sampat* or demonic or toxic work culture. *Daivi* work culture – involves fearlessness, purity, self-control, sacrifice, straightforwardness, calmness, absence of fault-finding, absence of greed, modesty, absence of envy and pride. *Asuri* work culture involves egoism, delusion, personal desires, improper performance, work not oriented towards service (Bhattathiry, 2004). In Sikhism, one's salvation lies not only in one's faith, but also in one's character and eagerness to do active good (Kaur & Ubha, 2013). Hinduism, Islam and other faiths offer a unique value proposition with a focus on spiritual progress, to have material progress too in a very balanced and holistic way. There is a greater promise and potential for much larger perspectives in ancient Indian wisdom and much greater propensity to draw out of it and apply in a variety of situations (Mahadevan, 2009; Kaur & Ubha, 2013).

The collective wisdom of *seva* calls for a manager to be selfless and his style to be the one which is drenched with virtues and shared values with the general well-being of all as the core concern. The notion of *seva* has a universal appeal and message of truth, benevolence, compassion, tolerance, humility, selfless service, love, welfare unto all, liberty, equality, fraternity and meditation. The wisdom enshrined in *seva* can transform the mankind from ordinary to extraordinary, propounding a complete lifestyle and demolishing away the walls of falsehood, othering, ignorance and ego. The *seva*-inspired style of corporate managers is naturally democratic and participative. Such managers are more likely to respect and trust their employees and subordinates encourage their participation in managerial decision making and motivate them to bring their creativity and innovation in the organisation. The *seva*-oriented approach is likely to have a positive bearing on managers' behaviour making them effective, ethical and socially responsible managers (Kaur & Ubha, 2013). Through her analysis of the political landscape in the Uttar Pradesh, an Indian state, Ciotti (2012) argues that there exists an interlocking relation between the resurgence of *seva* and the process of upward class mobility. Ciotti also maps the impact of *seva* on women's political participation. Ciotti notes that women activists appropriate and re-

enact gender idioms and models coined in colonial India, refashioning them for the exigencies of contemporary politics. Overall, this suggests the presence of shared structures of gendered political agency cutting across time, class, and caste among Dalit/low-caste communities.

Reflecting sacred activism, a number of organisations in India, focus on social mission rather than shareholder value, with a mission that goes beyond money to also ensure that employees find meaning in their work (Cappelli et al., 2010a; Gulati, 2010; Sastry, 2011). This is often in stark contrast to a number of organisations in the west as for example in the United States where importance is attached to business strategy, re-structuring and financial incentives for top management who then manage the rest of the workforce (Cappelli et al., 2010a). Many large Indian organisations are examples of thriving businesses such as Reliance, ICICI, Infosys, Tata Consultancy, Godrej group, Mahindra group, Tata Steel and Dr Reddy's laboratories. Indian companies are also in the game of acquiring overseas companies such as the acquisition of Jaguar and Land Rover by Tata Motors, and a stake in Dreamworks by Reliance Entertainment.

The term *juggad* or *juggar* has been used to represent engaged employees who are also innovative despite scarce resources; in other words creative adaptation and adjustment rather than weary resignation (Cappelli et al., 2010a). Frugal innovation (Tiwari & Herstatt, 2014) describe the resource-efficient paradigm of frugal innovation which is similar to *juggad*. They also use the term Indovations for such innovations as GE's hand-held electrocardiograph Mac 400; the world's cheapest car the Tata Nano, Vortex's solar powered automatic teller machines or ATM's the Gramateller, and Mangalyaan the recently launched Mars mission which cost US\$ 75 million and was less expensive than a passenger plane, as examples. Tiwari and Herstatt cite India's innovation friendliness, capacity for technology absorption and the human resources available for often disruptive innovation which is also prudently price sensitive without compromising on quality. India has a competitive advantage in services such as IT and drug trials. It is pertinent to note that rapid technological change and IT leadership in India was probably due to India not being locked into older generation technologies and therefore it could quickly become dominant in the back office and services sector (Kapur & Ramamurti, 2001). Furthermore, India is also an attractive site for conducting clinical trials of new drugs and drug trials generally make up one-third of the cost of the introduction of a new drug (Kapur & Ramamurti, 2001).

Cappelli, Singh, Singh, and Useem (2010b) cite seven priorities for Indian business leaders as: chief input for business strategy, keeper of organisational culture, guide or teacher for employees, representative of owner and investor interests, representative of other stakeholders; civic leadership within the business community and civic leadership outside the business community. 'The India Way offers a compelling example of a model that succeeds financially while succeeding socially' (Cappelli et al., 2010a: 22), or the sacred activism of praxis-in-action through *seva* and *khidmat*.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Future research can examine how Indian companies have been shaped by a country's own 'tortuous business history' (Gulati, 2010), and can also conduct deeper research into the Indian way to build a 'useful template for all the great emerging markets of the future' (Gulati, 2010: 27). We concur with Khatri, Ojha, Budhwar, Srinivasan, and Varma (2012) call for context specific management research, and urge all researchers, not only Indian researchers, to strive for indigenous scholarship which is relevant while at the same time learning from Western paradigms and positivist research. The South Asian diaspora and their management practices is another promising avenue as also, survival inequality and the many faces of eve in investigating the nuanced lives of working women and men of South Asia.

In a globalised world characterised by economic and social inequalities with disparities in employment and development, alternative possibilities suggest that one looks beyond the dominant or

mainstream Western approaches to management and organisation to engage with and understand non-mainstream, sometimes referred to Eastern and Oriental approaches and perspectives (Pio, 2007b; Syed & Pio, 2013). In a world where business organisations are generally driven by a desire to create and add value, where the notion of value is more often than not defined by the financial bottom-line, and unethical corporate practices are not uncommon, it is important to explore alternative views of work, organisation and management. In mapping the landscape of management and organisations in South Asia, our lens of sacred activism stimulates the possibility of multiple frames of reference, with multiple identities that bring peace and prosperity to all. Such multiplicity would mean that ‘...global identity can begin to receive its due without eliminating our other loyalties’ (Sen, 2006: 185). Sacred activism through *seva* and *khidmat* echoes the words of Arundhati Roy (2003: para. 31), winner of the Man Booker Prize and a world citizen, who said ‘another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing’.

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About the Authors

Edwina Pio, PhD, is Aotearoa/New Zealand's first Professor of Diversity. She works at the Business & Law School of Auckland University of Technology (AUT), is Visiting Professor at Boston College USA and a Fulbright alumnus. Edwina is a thought leader and knowledgeable interpreter in the area of diversity in business and education, through her trans-disciplinary scholarship, research, publications and international presentations. She seeks to change the parameters of the debate on the lived-through and lived-in experience of diversity initiatives through her constant and unyielding focus on marginality, specifically with respect to ethnicity, gender and religion. She has been invited to present her research at ESADE (Spain), Jonkoping International Business School (Sweden), Cambridge University (United Kingdom), Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration (Austria), and Radboud University (The Netherlands).

Edwina is a Board member of the Australia New Zealand Academy of Management (ANZAM) where she is Chair of the Education Committee. She was responsible for initiating the first Special Interest Group in Indigenous Issues at ANZAM. She is a member of the first Working Group of the South Asian Academy of Management (SAAM), a professional association for scholars dedicated to creating and disseminating knowledge about management and organizations in South Asia. She is an Associate

Director on the New Zealand India Research Institute, a national center of Indian studies in New Zealand.

Edwina was involved with the Human Rights Commission in developing guidelines for religion in the workplace, is a registered counselor who does pro-bono work with migrants and is a Board member of Mixit, a Not-for-profit organization involved with creative projects for young people from refugee backgrounds. Edwina has numerous publications in internationally ranked journals, as well as books such as 'Sari: Indian Women at work in New Zealand' (released by Hon John Key Prime Minister of New Zealand), 'Longing & Belonging, Caste Away? Unfolding the Maori Indian, and Work & Worship'. Edwina is a judge for the ANZ & EEO Trust New Zealand Diversity Awards 2014.

Jawad Syed, PhD, is Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Diversity Management at the Business School, University of Huddersfield, UK. With a professional and academic career that spans over 22 years in academic institutions and business organisations in the United Kingdom, Australia and Pakistan, Jawad examines diversity, OB and HRM from relational, contextual and interdisciplinary perspectives, and focuses on critical integration of theory with practice. He has widely written on this topic in scholarly journals, books and research volumes. He has co-edited three books namely 'Managing Cultural Diversity in Asia: A research companion' (Edward Elgar, 2010), 'Managing Gender Diversity in Asia: A research companion' (Edward Elgar, 2010), and, 'Human Resource Management in a Global Context: A critical approach' (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). His next book 'Managing Diversity and inclusion: An international perspective' (Sage publishers) is due for publication in 2015. Jawad is currently a member of the Editorial Review Boards of British Journal of Management, Academy of Management Learning and Education, amongst a few others.

In August 2010, Jawad co-founded and became coordinator of the first Working Group of the South Asian Academy of Management (SAAM), a professional association for scholars dedicated to creating and disseminating knowledge about management and organizations in South Asia. Since 2011, Jawad is a program chair of "Gender, Race and Diversity in Organizations" Strategic Interest Group (GRDO SIG) of the European Academy of Management Conference. Jawad also is currently a part of the Academy of Management (AOM) Gender and Diversity in Organizations (GDO) Division's 5-Year review and strategy planning to incorporate new contexts into the Division's domain statement and activities.

On Pakistan's 65th Independence Day (14 August 2011), President Asif Zardari conferred the honour of Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Star of Excellence) on Jawad. He was awarded the civil decoration for his contributions and public service in the field of equality and diversity management in Pakistan. This is one of the nation's highest awards.