The ECMSAS is a South Asian Studies workshop held every two years in a different European university. This year the conference was held in the University of Manchester. This 4 day conference includes panels on a wide range of topics related to South Asia spanning all of the disciplines in the humanities and social sciences including history, sociology, political science, geography, literature and film studies, art history and religious studies. Several RaD team members were present at the conference this year including Nida Kirmani, Emma Tomalin, Mohammed Waseem, Sarah White, Joe Devine and Dipankar Gupta. Although there were few panels in which development-related topics were discussed, and there were several panels related to religion in South Asia, the themes of religions and development were rarely connected in any of the panel presentations. I will briefly outline the contribution of some of the RaD team members to the ECMSAS as well as drawing attention to some of the papers in which themes related to religions and development were explicitly addressed.

Several other panels dealt with issues related to religion or development, although these panels did not connect religion with processes of development. Panels related to religion included, ‘Religion, Literature and Film in South Asia and the South Asian Diaspora,’ ‘Social Exclusion, Social Legislation and Religious Freedom: The Relevance of Ambedkar in India Then and Now,’ ‘Religion and Governance in India,’ ‘Christians, Cultural Interactions, and South Asia’s Religious Traditions,’ ‘The Management of Development Projects in South Asian Countries,’ and ‘Pakistan in Transition.’ Although some of the themes addressed by these panels overlapped with some of the interests of the RaD Programme, few papers explicitly connected religion and development.

The paper presented by Ian Copland, ‘The Production and Containment of Communal Violence: Scenarios from Modern India,’ is of particular relevance to researchers working on religion in post-conflict situations. This paper examined the notion that states
often orchestrate or produce communal violence in India for their own political gain. Copland argues that states actually have more to lose than to gain from some scenarios and demonstrates this through a discussion of a communal riot that occurred in the 19th century and one that occurred in the 1970s.

Another paper that may be of interest to the RaD programme was presented during the ‘Pakistan in Transition’ panel. Maleeha Aslam presented a paper on ‘Gender-based Violence and Islam in Pakistan.’ Using qualitative data collected in the province of Sindh, Aslam argues that religion is often used as a tool by power-holders in order to justify violence in order to further their own interests. She found this to be particularly true in the case of gender-based violence. Similarly, Raffat Hussain presented a paper entitled, ‘Violence against Women in Pakistan: Illegitimacy of the Legitimisation of Sexual Abuse’ where she looks particularly at the Zina (adultery) Ordinance and the ways it has been used in order to subjugate women.

Summaries of all of the panels as well as abstracts of the papers presented can be found at: http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/ecmsas/