

Such questions would be avoided like the plague by American companies fearful of lawsuits over employment discrimination.

A multinational Indian shoe manufacturing company, for example, looks for merit by assessing family characteristics such as the educational level of the parents, the employment history of brothers and sisters, and whether the applicant lives in the city or the country, says its human resources manager. Because it's impossible to delve very deeply into the character of a job seeker in an interview, "the successes of the rest of the job applicant's family stand in as proof that the individual . . . is reliable, motivated, and worthy," the authors write.

But the new Indian merit principle still makes it nearly impossible for Dalits, once called untouchables, and other disadvantaged applicants to be hired. The majority of India's 160 million Dalits are rural, landless laborers whose parents and siblings have not had access to a good education or stable job in the formal economy.

The new system also discriminates against the scions of the very rich, Jodhka and Newman write. Employers seek workers who are humble. Job candidates from wealthy families "have an inner pride within them which makes them arrogant," says the human resources director of a car manufacturing firm.

The language of meritocracy that has spread around the globe, Jodhka and Newman say, should, at least in India's case, be taken with a "heavy grain of salt."

## OTHER NATIONS

## Hanging Out With Hezbollah

**THE SOURCE:** "Sanctioned Pleasures: Youth, Piety, and Leisure in Beirut" by Lara Deeb and Mona Harb, in *Middle East Report*, Winter 2007.

WHEN THE REAL ESTATE MARKET took a dive in Beirut a decade ago, developers moved to diversify their investments by filling a new market niche. In the city's Hezbollah-dominated southern suburbs, they figured out a way for Shia Muslims to relax, piously.

They are building Internet cafés such as Café.Yet and hotel and restaurant complexes such as the al-Saha Traditional Village in the dense urban precincts where *hala islamiyya*, or Islamic ambience, prevails. Like their Christian counterparts in the United States, Lebanon's Muslim entrepreneurs are erecting summer camps and fitness clubs in hopes of attracting religiously minded young people. They open beaches, public gardens, and amusement parks that comply with Muslim customs. Snack bars and upscale restaurants feature modern décor, high-quality food, coffee, and hookahs, write Lara Deeb and Mona Harb, of the University of California, Irvine, and the American University of Beirut, respectively.

Rising incomes—powered by foreign remittances, high rates of return emigration, better education, and more stable governance in recent years—have created a generation of young, media-savvy consumers in the stronghold of Hezbollah—which is considered a terrorist

organization by the United States but runs municipal governments in parts of Lebanon.

The new shops and cafés forswear alcohol and nonhalal meat, and ban singing that is considered seductive and conducive to dancing. Commonly understood rules prohibit unrelated men and women from touching or sitting too close to one another. Women's beaches are screened from men's. Some women's pools are designed so that views from land, sea, or air are obstructed. A few Internet cafés feature booths where pious women can surf the Web with propriety.

Hezbollah has built "political entertainment" sites in Beirut, showcasing the exploits of its militia.

Hezbollah itself has built "political entertainment" sites, specializing in summer camps and exhibitions showcasing the exploits of its militia, the Islamic Resistance.

The party has tried to keep the Shia leisure industry, which took off between 1998 and the Israeli-Lebanese war of 2006, in line with Hezbollah's notions of correct Islamic behavior. It has encouraged informal boycotts of cafés and restaurants it considers too loose. Shia scholars regularly rule on whether certain establishments comply with religious law—although they often disagree on what is "appropriate." In a surprising number of instances, the authors report, young people have been tougher judges than the scholars.