

HINDUISM: **NOT CAST IN CASTE**

Seeking an End to Caste-based Discrimination

Hindu American Foundation. Promoting Understanding, Tolerance, and Pluralism.



Hinduism: Not Cast in Caste
Seeking an End to Caste-based Discrimination
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The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) is an advocacy group providing a progressive voice for over two million Hindu Americans. The Foundation interacts with and educates leaders in public policy, academia, media, and the public at large about Hinduism and global issues concerning Hindus, such as religious liberty, the portrayal of Hinduism, hate speech, hate crimes, and human rights. By promoting the Hindu and American ideals of understanding, tolerance and pluralism, HAF stands strong against hate, discrimination, defamation and terror.

The Hindu American Foundation is not affiliated with any religious or political organizations or entities. HAF seeks to serve Hindu Americans across all *sampradayas* (Hindu religious traditions).

Dedication

To All Those Who Have Suffered From Caste-based Discrimination Over The Centuries -
Our Apologies That Hindu Society Failed To Live Up To Its Highest Teachings
To Those Who Remained Committed Hindus Despite this Failure -
Our Deepest Respects and Admiration

All beings are equal to Me. There is none especially hateful to Me, nor one who is especially dear to Me. But all those who worship Me with devotion are in Me, and so am I in them.

- The Bhagavad Gita 9.29

The Lord resides in the hearts of all beings.

- The Bhagavad Gita 18.61a

“Follow, therefore, noble Prince, the teachings of the Vedanta, not as explained by this or that commentator, but as the Lord within you understands them. Above all, follow this great doctrine of sameness in all things, through all beings, seeing the same God in all. This is the way to freedom. Inequality, the way to bondage. No man and no nation can attempt to gain physical freedom without physical equality, nor mental freedom without mental equality. Ignorance, inequality, and desire are the three causes of human misery, and each follows the other in inevitable union. Why should a man think himself above any other man, or even an animal?....This is the bane of human nature, the curse upon mankind, the root of all misery — this inequality. This is the source of all bondage, physical, mental, and spiritual.”

**- Collected Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol IV
Reply to the Address of the Maharaja of Khetri**

“I speak with a due sense of my responsibility that this untouchability is a curse that is eating into the vitals of Hinduism, and I often feel that unless we take due precautions and remove this curse from our midst, Hinduism itself is in the danger of destruction.”

- Mahatma Gandhi (Young India, 1927)

There is no nation of Indians in the real sense of the word, it is yet to be created. In believing we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. How can people divided into thousands of castes be a nation? The sooner we realise that we are not yet a nation, in a social and psychological sense of the world, the better for us.

- Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, speaking in the Indian Constituent Assembly, Dec 17, 1946

Foreword

For nearly 35 years, I have been studying, working with, and getting close to the Harijan/Schedule Caste community of central Chhattisgarh. Over the decades, it has been frustrating to see how caste prejudice has negatively affected the lives of individuals there, both the abused and the abusers. Although the situation has definitely improved during that time, there is still much work to do.

The Hindu American Foundation's (HAF) pivotal *Hinduism: Not Cast in Caste - Seeking An End to Caste-Based Discrimination* report is an important contribution to that process. It is the first major study to be done by a Hindu organization to try to understand the problems of caste prejudice from within and attempt to take concrete steps to help ameliorate them. Caste began as a Hindu concept but the negative side of it has become an Indian issue, influencing all the religious traditions in the country today. HAF is taking the lead in addressing the issues at hand. One can only hope that this report can inspire like-minded Hindus and non-Hindus to work together to bring justice and a sense of equality to all Indians irrespective of caste or religion.

- Ramdas Lamb, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Religion, University of Hawaii,
President of the Sahayog Foundation

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HAF offers our deepest respect and gratitude to the following religious and spiritual leaders and organizations for contributing their very important statements and scriptural quotes for the report (in alphabetical order, [Section 8](#)):

1. Swami Bodhananda, Spiritual Founder and Director of the Sambodh Foundation, which has numerous social service projects.
2. Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami of the Kauai Adheenam, Hinduism Today and Saiva Siddhanta Church which do not adhere to any caste-based discrimination or birth-based hierarchy.
3. Swami Chidananda Saraswati, President and Spiritual Head of Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh (Himalayas), India, which has numerous social service projects throughout India. He has represented Hinduism at many international fora.
4. Chinna Jeeyar Swami, who leads a traditional Hindu sect in India and has many social service projects in India.
5. The Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, an apex body of Hindu leaders, has raised social issues such as caste-based discrimination to the leaders many of Hinduism's traditional sects. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, its convenor, has spoken against caste-based discrimination. He has for over 50 years taught Vedanta to seekers of Truth, and is a Guru to many. He started All India Movement (AIM) for Seva in 2000 as an initiative of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha. AIM for Seva, an integrated community development program serving people in need irrespective of religion, community, and nationality, has reached over 10 Million rural and tribal people across 15 states of India.
6. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), founded by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, has fought against discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy since its founding close to 50 years ago and has many projects to help the needy.
7. Swami Parmanand Giriji Maharaj of the Akhand Paramdham, which has numerous social service projects.
8. Swami Prabhananda is the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, Belur Math, India. Ramakrishna Mission, founded by Swami Vivekananda, was one of the first major Hindu sampradayas in the modern age to work for social reform and their affiliated organizations have many social service projects around the world.

9. The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha under the guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj has done tremendous work around the world, particularly in Gujarat, India. The sect, since its founding by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has fought against caste-based discrimination.
10. The Art of Living Foundation has done tremendous work helping people around the world, including the downtrodden in India, through the leadership of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.
11. Swami Tejomayananda, Chairman and spiritual head of Chinmaya Mission, which has centers around the world teaching Hinduism, has active social service projects in key, affected areas through Chinmaya Organisation for Rural Development.
12. Pravrajika Vrajaprana of the Vedanta Society of Southern California.
13. Swami Varadananda, a Trustee Emeritus of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions and a senior sadhu (monk) of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society – Chicago

Ramdas Lamb, Ph.D. - Associate Professor of Religion at the University of Hawaii and President of the Sahayog Foundation, provided much inspiration and guidance throughout all stages of this report, wrote parts of it, and gave HAF extensive feedback. Bhagwati Charan Bhatpare, a school principal, Ramnami and Satnami member, a civil rights activist, and Board Member of the Sahayog Foundation of Chattisgarh, through his personal story printed in this report, inspired the report and also served as a reviewer. The Sahayog Foundation is a U.S. based non-profit, charitable organization established to provide support for the educational and health needs of rural poor in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh.

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1. Executive Summary

Caste-based discrimination is a serious human rights issue in the Indian sub-continent. Over 160 million people fall under the category of Scheduled Castes (SCs), the erstwhile untouchables, and still suffer from terrible discrimination. And, while untouchability has been outlawed, abuse and discrimination of SCs persist, particularly in rural areas of India. In 2008, the Government of India (GoI) recorded 33,615 human rights violations of various types affecting SCs.

Hindus must acknowledge that caste arose in Hindu society, that some Hindu texts and traditions justify a birth-based hierarchy and caste-bias, and that it has survived despite considerable Hindu attempts to curtail it. Caste-based discrimination represents a failure of Hindu society to live up to its essential spiritual teachings and is not an intrinsic part of Hinduism itself. It represents a lamentable gap between the Hindu teaching of divinity inherent in all beings, and the failure of society to put that precept into practice in its dealings with fellow Hindus.

While many in Hindu society may have failed the SCs in the past, it is critical for Hindu leaders and the larger community to own up to the problem and address it. While we recognize, and salute, that much work is already being done in this regard by many Hindu religious leaders, organizations, and individuals, there is a need for a more forceful, coordinated, and concerted approach than has been undertaken thus far, given the sheer magnitude of the problem. In this connection, HAF presents [statements from 13 prominent Hindu religious and spiritual leaders](#) categorically denouncing caste-based discrimination as having no part of their teachings and practice of Hinduism. Several more leaders support our effort, but were unable to provide us with written statements in time for this publication.

HAF supports the reanalysis and subsequent rejection of any and all teachings that promote caste-based discrimination and birth-based hierarchy. Most such teachings are found in texts called *Smritis*, or books of ancient Hindu social law, which by their very nature and intent, are recognized to change with space and time and do not necessarily teach Hinduism's eternal spiritual truths. Hindu religious and spiritual leaders must take the lead in ensuring that those parts of the various scriptures that promote notions of caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy are explicitly denied any authority in the minds of their followers. We hope that they work more actively to end discrimination, promote equality, and end birth-based hierarchies by ensuring that their followers put Hindu spiritual teachings into practice.

At the same time, traditional power structures in the caste hierarchy have undergone a substantial change, and any solution to the problem of caste-based discrimination must incorporate the new dynamic that has emerged in India. The urbanization and economic development of the country, the Government of India's (GoI) reservation policies, and the sheer dynamics of representative democracy have wrought a sea change in caste dynamics since India's independence in 1947. These factors have also led to dramatic improvements in the social status of numerous erstwhile "lower" castes. Thus, while much remains to be done, especially for the SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs), the significant progress in the six decades since India's independence must also be acknowledged and built upon.

We must also recognize that caste violence in India today is significantly driven by political and economic considerations and occurs not between "upper" castes and SCs but rather largely between the erstwhile "backward" castes and the SCs. For this reason, eradicating caste-based discrimination not only places a religious responsibility on Hindus, but also a secular responsibility on civic and business institutions, and a political responsibility on the GoI as well as state and local government and law enforcement. Effective implementation of police reforms and stringent law enforcement are critical in combating caste-based discrimination.

The movement for the emancipation of SCs is an important one. HAF is fully committed to the end of discrimination against all SCs, Hindu or otherwise. We are supportive of the vibrant Harijan and Dalit movement that have taken root in India today, are working with such groups today and seek to work with more in the future. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's greatest legacy consists not only in his authorship of the Indian Constitution but also the self-empowerment that he has inspired among the Dalits, as seen in the large number of secular, Dalit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are engaged in improving the lot of SCs in various parts of the country today.

The modern Dalit movement has been joined in the last decade or two by many Christian organizations, often supported financially from Europe and the U.S. HAF lauds those organizations involved in mitigating or eliminating human rights abuses, but is wary of the motives of those that seek to exploit the situation through anti-Hindu propaganda and that are driven primarily by conversion agendas. The presence of caste-based discrimination in Hindu society is one of the reasons that provides missionaries the ability to "fish in troubled waters." This is why we argue that Hindu society has a great moral burden to act in a more determined and concerted fashion to end caste-based discrimination.

Missionaries are correct about the prevalence of caste-based discrimination in India, but their claims about caste-based discrimination being intrinsic to Hinduism, and that conversion to other religions is the only way to eliminate this problem, must be seen in the light of their vested interests of “harvesting souls.” Tellingly, conversions to Christianity have not led to an improvement in the situation of SC converts, who continue to suffer discrimination at the hands of “upper” caste Christians. We also present testimonials from a Hindu SC community leader in Chattisgarh affirming his pride in Hinduism and only demanding for an end to social discrimination, as well as an article on the plight of Christian Dalits by a well-known Christian interfaith activist.

2. Introduction

Social stratification has been a reality in societies throughout history. There have been a variety of methods used to determine one's placement within these hierarchies, including economic status, educational level, occupation, and birth. Birth-based hierarchies, including those by tribe or clan, race or ethnicity, and gender, as examples, have led to some of the worst forms of discrimination and subjugation. UNICEF estimates 250 million individuals worldwide suffer from caste-based discrimination,¹ including individuals throughout South Asia and in developed countries such as Japan.²

The caste system, as it has developed in the Indian subcontinent, is a birth-based hierarchy. What makes this caste system unique is that (i) its hierarchical and discriminatory presuppositions have pervaded and permeated very deeply in Indian society to an extent not seen anywhere else in the world; and (ii) it has withstood most attempts aimed at ending the practice right up until now. For centuries, religious, spiritual, political and social leaders, and organizations have worked to eradicate it, and while great strides have been made, especially in post-independent India, much more needs to be done.

Unlike most social hierarchies, the caste system positioned the priests at the apex of the societal pyramid, even above the kings and princes, and has had the support of some of Hinduism's numerous religious texts, especially those that dealt with rituals, law, and social organization. This functioned to embed it into the more orthodox elements of the belief system and in a way that has allowed it to survive to present day. However, many Hindu saints, teachers, and leaders have fought against caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy for hundreds of years, and Hindu scriptures are filled with statements extolling equality and fairness, and specifically commenting against caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy.

This report presents a Hindu perspective on the problems of caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy by introducing what the problem is; explaining why caste is not intrinsic to Hinduism; analyzing the current dynamics in India that make eradication of these problems challenging; listing efforts being undertaken for the mitigation and eradication of caste-based discrimination; providing statements from leading Hindu spiritual and religious leaders and

¹United Nations, Unite for Children <http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_discrimination.html>

²See The Buraku Liberation League <<http://www.bl.gr.jp/>>

organizations; and providing Hindu scriptural statements and teachings against caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy.

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF), a human rights and advocacy organization, opposes caste-based discrimination and a birth-based social hierarchy. The key goals in this report are to:

1. Articulate the views of HAF, as a prominent Hindu advocacy group that is concerned about the issue;
2. Highlight the fact that caste-based discrimination represents a failure of Hindu society to uphold the highest ideals proffered by Hinduism's essential teachings, and that caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy are not intrinsic features of Hinduism as some critics contend;
3. Show that the solution to the problem can and should be found from within Hinduism's essential teachings, including scriptures, commentaries and other texts; and that many Hindu leaders and organizations have been working to address this problem for centuries;
4. Influence Hindus to recognize the critical nature of the issue; encourage them to actively voice opposition to caste-based discrimination; inspire active efforts to end discrimination predicated on caste over and above those existent today; and promote equality and an end to birth-based hierarchies;
5. Provide a professional, articulate, and progressive Hindu perspective on the understanding of caste, caste-based discrimination, and the complex realities and obstacles to solving this problem today.

2.1 What is caste in Indian society?

The word "caste" itself is derived from the Portuguese "casta", for lineage, breed, or race. There is no exact equivalent for caste in Indian society, but what does exist is the dual concept of *varna* and *jaati*. Ancient Indian society was divided into four broad *varnas*, conceived as a system of division of labor between:

- priests/scholars (*brahmins*)
- kings/soldiers (*kshatriyas*)
- businessmen, traders, agricultural and dairy farmers (*vaishyas*)
- laborers/artisans (*sudras*)

A subsequent fifth category, now known as the "untouchables," emerged to categorize those who, for various reasons, did not fit into the four-fold *varna* structure. Many of them performed tasks seen to be ritually impure or physically defiling. In contemporary times, the Government of India (GoI) refers to this latter grouping as Scheduled Castes (SCs), so called because of a list, or schedule, of such castes first created by the British and updated over time

by the Gol. The term “Other Backward Castes (OBCs)” is also a term coined by the Gol to refer to the individuals of the *shudra varna* and some of the *kshatriya* and *vaishya varnas*, based on traditional occupation and economic backwardness.

Historically, the *varna* system was more of a normative concept with little basis in social reality.³ The more relevant social organization was always that of *jaati*. In theory, numerous *jaatis*, the occupation-based, endogamous, social units with which people actually identified, belonged to each of the four *varnas*. They exist as complex sub-groups within the four-fold *varna* system. Today, an individual’s occupation in life often bears no connection to his or her *varna* or *jaati*.

In this report, the term “caste” should be understood to mean *jaati*, as we will commonly refer to the existence of numerous castes, not just four. However, it would be fair to also understand that castes can generally be mapped to a certain *varna*. Thus, we also use terms such as *Brahmin* castes or *Shudra* castes.

The critique of the caste system ascribes to it the following characteristics:⁴

- It means not simply a division of labor based on *varna*, but also that *jaati* is determined purely by birth and therefore does not permit occupational and social mobility. This is what distinguishes caste from class -- while the former is always hereditary, the latter is not, at least in principle.
- It is a hierarchical system in ritual (or purity) status (although notably not in terms of wealth or political power) with the *brahmins* at the top and declining successively with *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas*, *shudras*, and outcastes or untouchables being considered the most ritually polluted.
- It is a rigid system, separating individual castes, with restrictions on inter-dining and inter-marriage.
- The whole system, along with its taboos and restrictions, is authenticated by religion or canon, thus implicating Hinduism in the eyes of many.

All of the above have been and still are social realities in India to varying degrees. While certain orthodox sections of Hindus believed and continue to believe in such a birth-based hierarchy, HAF and many Hindu leading *sampradayas* (Hindu religious traditions) condemn all caste-based discrimination, and assert that such discrimination represents a failure of Indian society rather than an intrinsic feature of Hinduism.

³See, for example:

1. Nicholas B. Dirks. 2001. *Castes of Mind*. Princeton University Press: Princeton (New Jersey) and
2. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that Was India* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1988), p. 148 [quoted in Arvind Sharma, *Classical Hindu Thought, an Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, p. 132].

⁴P. V. Kane. *History of the Dharmasastra - Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India*, Vol II.1. Page 23

2.2 Caste-based discrimination is a serious human rights issue

Caste-based discrimination is a serious civil and human rights issue in India. The worst affected are individuals and groups officially referred to by the Government of India (GoI) as Scheduled Castes (SCs, but also known by other names, including Dalit and Harijan) and Scheduled Tribes (STs - these are a diverse group of communities scattered around India, largely living in rural and remote areas). SCs and STs comprise a large part of Indian society (about 22% as per the 2001 census) and, while untouchability has been outlawed, abuse and discrimination of SCs and STs persist, particularly in rural areas of India. In 2008, the GoI recorded 33,615 human rights violations of various types involving SCs.

It is important to note that much of the discrimination and many of the human rights violations occur between OBC and SC groups and that SCs sometimes also discriminate amongst themselves. Section 7 of this report provides descriptions of various types of atrocities commonly perpetrated against SCs and STs along with several specific examples.

HAF believes that this human rights problem requires more concerted and coordinated action from all parts of Indian society, including religious leaders, civic leaders, non-governmental organizations, and the GoI than is being undertaken at present. Many Hindus of the Diaspora, and some even in the urban areas of India, are unaware of the magnitude and depth of the problem.

There have been numerous attempts to eliminate caste-based discrimination. As we discuss further in Sections 3 and 8 of the report, many Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and social reformers throughout history have opposed, and continue to oppose, the inequity and cruelty based on caste. Reforms by Hindu spiritual and religious leaders over the ages have resulted in the creation of many new *sampradayas* that have been preaching against caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy. Many *sampradayas* now promote SC and ST sadhus⁵ and swamis,⁶ and Hindu religious organizations now train SC temple priests, as examples.

⁵From <http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/styleless>: A Hindu ascetic who has renounced advancement in the material world and has dedicated his or her life to the search for wisdom, devotion, God, truth or enlightenment. There are many different types in India, grouped into orders according to their beliefs and practices. They may live in monasteries (ashrams) or as hermits and wanderers. They often live on alms, or provisions and gifts they are given.

Though their efforts have made tremendous progress in promoting human rights in some parts of the India, the problems still exist in other parts of the country, particularly in the rural areas. With its origins in ancient Hindu society and continued prevalence today across all religious communities, the unconscionable practice of caste-based discrimination presents an urgent responsibility for Hindus to take greater action towards eliminating it and an opportunity to demonstrate a proper application of Hindu teachings.

Similarly, several laws passed in independent India (see Appendix C) outlaw caste-based discrimination and also create a robust system of “reservations,” which establish quotas in education and government employment for those who were traditionally the victims of discrimination. These have resulted in significant economic and social upliftment for many SCs. However, Indian laws against caste-based discrimination have not always been rigorously implemented because of the notoriously slow Indian bureaucratic and judicial system, and also because the bureaucratic machinery is sometimes influenced by politicians who countenance caste-based discrimination.

Many of the initial laws passed by the Indian Parliament were the result of the efforts of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, an “untouchable” who overcame considerable social prejudice to become the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. Dr. Ambedkar’s struggles and efforts to eliminate untouchability and caste-based discrimination in Hindu society are well known, and ultimately, he converted to Buddhism, to escape casteism. Many SCs who idolize Dr. Ambedkar have since organized themselves into diverse groups, and this movement is often called “the Dalit movement” with his prescription of, “Educate. Organize. Agitate” as their guiding motto. The Dalit movement has made substantial contributions to the improvement of the living conditions of SCs, aided by reservations and the political empowerment of SCs in many parts of India.

In recent decades, Christian missionary organizations have devoted considerably exorbitant resources to conversion programs targeting SC and ST Hindus, mostly financed by Christian churches in developed nations, with the ostensible aim of converting them to a religion in which caste does not exist. There have also been conversions to Ambedkar’s Buddhism (sometimes called *Navayana* Buddhism), and a few to Islam. However, caste is no longer

⁶From <http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/styles:> In Hinduism, a title of respect and reverence conferred on a religious teacher and, in particular, one who has taken vows of celibacy and renunciation. It literally means one who has self-control.

confined to Hindus in India. Converts to Christianity,⁷ Islam,⁸ and Buddhism continue to practice caste-based discrimination and caste-based discrimination is also to be found among Sikhs in India, making caste a South Asian rather than merely a Hindu problem.

There are also attempts to fight caste-based discrimination through the spread of Marxist (commonly referred to as Leftist in the Indian context) ideology that denies all notions of God and religion. There are several Maoist and Marxist terrorist groups within India that premise their terror on a class struggle paradigm eschewing religion and the Indian state.

None of these have yet succeeded in completely eradicating the problem of caste-discrimination. However, traditional power structures in the caste hierarchy have undergone a substantial change, and any solution to the problem of caste-based discrimination must incorporate the new dynamic that has emerged in India. The urbanization and economic development of India, the Govt's reservation policies, and the sheer dynamics of representative democracy in India have wrought a sea change in caste dynamics since India's independence in 1947. These factors have also led to dramatic improvement in the social status of numerous erstwhile "lower" castes. Thus, while much remains to be done, especially for the SCs and STs, the significant progress in the six decades since India's independence must also be acknowledged and built upon.

2.3 Hindus cannot ignore the subject of caste

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) rejects explanations for the current situation that are occasionally proffered to gloss over caste-based discrimination: that India has laws in place that impose penalties on those who practice such discrimination, as well as laws that promote a robust system of caste-based affirmative action; that stratification of society existed, and continues to exist, in various forms in other countries besides India; that caste is likely a corrupted form of what was intended as a system of division of labor in ancient India and that this fact alleviates collective responsibility; that the much-maligned *Manusmriti* (one of the many ancient texts of Indian social law) was never the law of the land; and that caste-based discrimination exists even amongst Christian, Muslim and Sikh religious communities in India.

⁷<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/115071/Christian-caste> Even within Indian Christian society, caste-discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy persist; see also Section 5.2.

⁸<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/38357/ashraf> In South Asian Muslim society there exist two major caste groups -- that of *ashraf* or those believed to be descendants of Muslim Arab immigrants, and the non-*ashraf*, who are Hindu converts. The *ashraf* group is further divided into four subgroups.

While these arguments may have some validity to them, they cannot justify the apathy towards ongoing caste-based discrimination by Hindus.

HAF believes that all Hindus should acknowledge that caste-based discrimination has a long history within Hindu society, despite considerable Hindu attempts to curtail it. As Hindus are the majority community in India, HAF urges Hindu organizations, leaders and individuals there to play an even greater role to eliminate the practice within Hindu society. Accepting such a responsibility to do more for the caste problem does not require the denial of the much documented reality that a plethora of other factors have substantially contributed to the complexity and persistence of the the caste system -- Islamic invasions, British colonialism, aggressive proselytizing, political pandering. Rather, it simply requires being true to the fundamental precepts of Hinduism -- that divinity is inherent in every individual; that the ultimate purpose of Hindu spirituality and religion is to experience this divinity; and that all physical differences (e.g. caste, gender, race, etc.) have nothing to do with one's ability to do so. Further, the recognition of divinity as inherent in every individual naturally makes it incumbent upon every Hindu to treat everyone with equal dignity and respect.

To state, as a prominent leader of an international Hindu organization did recently, that "untouchability is a bygone problem in our country (and that) ...it is only the Church which has been harping on this signature tune of their proselytization agenda," ignores a very real social evil that affects not only those Hindus suffering this terrible discrimination, but also Hindus worldwide, whose sense of justice revolts against this practice and who must live with the knowledge that the ancient Hindu teachings of equality, love, compassion, and especially that of divinity being inherent in all humans, are at odds with the actions of many Hindus. The reality is that untouchability and caste-based discrimination are major problems in India that numerous Hindu spiritual leaders throughout history have fought and continue to fight against, and which countless conscientious Hindus have dedicated their lives to eradicating.

The problem of untouchability did not end with calls from Swami Vivekananda for its elimination; nor when Swami Dayananda Saraswati and his Arya Samaj rejected untouchability and caste-based discrimination as non-Vedic; not even after Mahatma Gandhi led by example to treat everyone as equals; and when, after India gained independence from the British, and adopted a constitution that made such discrimination illegal. Yet, there are still some Hindus who continue to ignore the numerous studies, first-hand stories, and media accounts of caste-based discrimination, and who refuse to pay heed to on ground realities. Such attitudes hamper the strengthening and renewal of Hindu society as a result of indifference. They also arguably prevent Hindu unity. Thus, we urge all Hindus to look at the situation objectively, realistically, and compassionately, in spite of the exploitative roles of foreign rulers, predatory proselytizers,

and current Indian politicians that have also contributed to the complexity and persistence of caste.

While human dignity comes first and foremost, eradication of caste-based discrimination in India is also important for other reasons. Often, India's social problems, such as caste-discrimination, are conflated with Hinduism. Because of this negative connotation, Hindu contributions such as *Yoga* and *Vedanta* are often disassociated from Hinduism by practitioners in the West who choose not to identify as Hindu because Hinduism has "too much baggage"⁹ - a great loss to diasporic Hindus and to the worldwide understanding of Hinduism.

2.4 Why a separate report on this topic?

Caste-based discrimination has gained international attention in recent years, including the attention of the United States government, the European Union, and the United Nations.¹⁰ However, a notable feature of the debate on caste, particularly in international fora, has been the complete absence of a credible and organized Hindu voice. With the increasing internationalization of the issue, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) considers it imperative that any discussion on caste must be balanced by also considering the Hindu perspective of the problem, since the debate currently tends to be dominated by non-Hindu and often, anti-Hindu views, such as those of Marxists and Christian missionaries - both of whom often malign Hinduism.

This report seeks to fill a void and offer a Hindu voice on the issue of caste-based discrimination. The target audience for this report includes the public, media, policymakers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and interfaith organizations. It is appropriate to note here that this report is not meant to be an academic treatise on the subject of caste, which is a vast and complex subject, and where scholars provide argument and counter-argument for almost any and every facet of the issue. Our report does indeed draw upon scholarly works and has also been reviewed by a number of academics.¹¹ However, it is primarily targeted at a

⁹Hindu American Foundation, Take Yoga Back, 2010: <http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/takeyogaback>

¹⁰See the World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2001 in Durban, South Africa <http://www.un.org/WCAR/>

¹¹These include:

1. Prof. Ramdas Lamb , Associate Professor of Religion, University of Hawaii. Prof. Lamb is an expert on the traditions and social condition of the *Ramnamis* and other SC Hindu groups in the Indian state of Chattisgarh.

2. Prof. Anantanand Rambachan, Chair and Professor of Religion, Philosophy and Asian Studies at Saint Olaf College, Minnesota

general audience and is written from HAF's perspective as an advocacy organization. HAF also seeks to influence change among Hindus, highlighting the nature and magnitude of the atrocities against SCs and STs. HAF hopes to spur greater action by Hindus, including Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and Hindu organizations, as well as by the GoI against caste-based discrimination.

HAF's decision to publish this report also reflects other considerations. First, the Foundation's annual [Hindu Human Rights Report](#) (HHR)¹² focuses purely on human rights violations perpetrated on Hindu minorities by people of other religions and, except for the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, primarily focuses on the plight of Hindus outside of India. However, with the notable exception of Japan, the issue of caste-based discrimination is mostly confined to South Asian communities, and is generally one where Hindus are both the perpetrators and victims. Second, there has not been a similar report from a credible Hindu institution in India. Third, because Hinduism has no single central religious authority, individual *sampradayas* and Hindu organizations do not, and have never, spoken for Hindu society as a whole, although, as we will see later, many of them have indeed done admirable work in eliminating caste-based discrimination among their followers and within the affected communities with which they work. And lastly, Hindu temples cannot effectively serve as a Hindu voice in social matters because of the non-congregational nature of Hinduism. More importantly, under India's skewed application of secularism, many major Hindu temples (unlike places of worship of other religions) are managed by state governments rather than by Hindus.

3. Prof. Christopher Key Chapple, the Navin and Pratima Doshi Professor of Indic and Comparative Theology at Loyola Marymount University

4. Prof. V.V.Raman, Emeritus Professor of Physics and Humanities, Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), scholar of Hindu Scriptures & Senior Fellow, Metanexus Institute

¹²http://www.hafsite.org/resources/human_rights_report

3. Not Cast in Caste: Why caste is not intrinsic to Hinduism

A key purpose of this report is to provide a Hindu perspective on caste in a contemporary context. Much of the debate on caste-based discrimination has depicted caste, and discrimination based on caste, as being integral to the teachings and practice of Hinduism. “There is no caste without Hinduism and no Hinduism without caste,” goes a sentiment that can often be heard from critics of Hinduism who dominate the debate. Whether deliberate or ignorant, this understanding is based on an inadequate or biased reading of the facts. The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) and prominent Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and organizations assert that caste-based discrimination is a social phenomenon and a failure, by and large, of Hindu society to live up to Hinduism’s essential teachings; that it is not an intrinsic part of Hinduism itself; and that a lasting solution to caste-based discrimination can and must come from within Hinduism.

If caste was actually intrinsic to Hinduism, then the religion could not exist without it. However, today there are tens of millions of individuals living a casteless Hinduism in India and in the Hindu Diaspora, in which their worldview and spiritual practices are not at all defined by caste (real or imagined). Indeed, millions of people of non-Indian descent in other countries around the world, including millions in the West, have absorbed the Hindu teachings of reincarnation, yoga and meditation, and practice the spiritual teachings found in scriptures, such as the *Upanishads*¹³ and the *Bhagavad Gita*¹⁴ without any caste consciousness. Many such non-Indians identify as practicing Hindus.

The history of India does not fit the simplistic narratives purveyed by some of a religion entirely controlled by a small Brahmin priestly caste which demanded caste-based discrimination as an integral part of the faith. While such a dynamic existed, it is important to understand why it does not define and encapsulate the entire faith. This is not to rationalize the existence of

¹³<http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/styleu>: **Upanishads** (oo-PAAN-ish-ud): The Upanishads are the final sections of each of the four Vedas, or Hindu scriptures. These texts are spiritual dialogues in which teachers and students discuss ultimate questions of human existence.

¹⁴<http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/styleb>: **Bhagavad Gita** (BAH-gah-vahd GEE-tah): One of the most popular Hindu scriptures, it literally means “Song of the Lord.”

It is in the form of a conversation between Lord Krishna (an avatar of Lord Vishnu) and Arjuna on the great battlefield at Kurukshetra just before the famous war in the Mahabharata. In the conversation, Lord Krishna illuminates Arjuna on righteous action that is conducive to the well-being of the world and spiritual liberation (moksha), and instructs him on karma yoga (the path of self-transcending action), samkhya yoga (the path of discerning the principles of existence correctly), jnana yoga (the path of wisdom), raja yoga (the path of knowledge) and bhakti yoga (the path of devotion).

caste-based discrimination, but rather to inform any debate on this issue with a clearer understanding of the tradition. Several reasons are listed below. The tragedy is the continued survival of caste-based discrimination despite these reasons.

3.1 Hinduism has a long history of anti-caste movements

While Abrahamic religious traditions such as Christianity and Islam, and even some of the Dharmic traditions such as Buddhism and Sikhism, have specific founders or messengers and a single scripture that defines and sets the parameters of beliefs, Hinduism¹⁵ has neither a single founder or messenger, nor a single defining scripture. As a consequence, it cannot be defined and categorized as these other traditions. Instead, Hinduism has evolved in India over a substantial period of time from widely diverse and varied sources. In the process, although Hinduism has developed a core set of values, many of which are unique to the tradition, the individual beliefs and practices of various *sampradayas* are highly diverse. Within this diversity there are the inevitable, contradictory elements as well. Among these are views about the caste system, and its origins and basis.

It is important to note there are myriad religious texts, movements, teachers, leaders, and *sampradayas* throughout Hindu history that have not supported the caste system as it existed, and that clearly rejected caste-based discrimination, a birth-based hierarchy, and untouchability -- the last being the most regrettable aspect of the system.

The most important of these is the *Bhakti* (devotional) movement, which is generally considered to have lasted from the 4th century CE until the end of the 18th century. This was not a centralized or organized movement, but rather a spontaneous rise of a form of Hindu religious practice led by saints who lived all over India and who practiced their own individual mode of devotional expression. The *Bhakti* movement emphasized devotion and the practice of a direct and personal relationship with God, as opposed to a central role for rituals, which were dominated by an intermediary priesthood. The movement was initially considered unorthodox, as *Bhakti* saints rebelled against caste distinctions, and regarded rituals as unnecessary for salvation. In the course of time, however, owing to its immense popularity among the masses, it became mainstream and continues to be one of the most important modes of religious expression in modern India and among Hindus worldwide. A large number of the saints of the *Bhakti* movement, though not all, hailed from the “lower” castes, although their followers included people from all castes, including *brahmins*, and people of other religions. This period was also characterized by a profusion of devotional literature in the various regional languages

¹⁵For “Short Answers to Real Questions” on Hinduism, visit http://www.hafsite.org/resources/q_a_booklet

of India as opposed to the scriptures of the Vedic age, which were mainly in Sanskrit. The *Bhakti* movement has been subject to extensive study.¹⁶

Many other modern Hindu movements have also rejected hierarchical caste distinctions, asserting the inherent divinity of all beings, as stated in Hinduism's holiest scriptures such as the the Vedas,¹⁷ the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. Prominent examples include the Arya Samaj (established in 1875),¹⁸ Brahma Samaj (established in 1828),¹⁹ Ramakrishna Mission (established in 1897 and well known in the U.S. as the Vedanta Society),²⁰ and Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP was founded in 1898),²¹ which succeeded in significantly transforming the social structure of the Indian state of Kerala. Many modern Hindu religious leaders in the 20th century have also preached against caste-based discrimination and birth-based hierarchies and have stressed the inherent spiritual equality of all beings. In Section 8 of this report, we provide statements from several of today's leading Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and organizations about their views on caste.

3.2 "Lower" castes have contributed enormously to Hinduism

Many of the greatest Hindu saints and teachers have hailed from the "lowest" castes or have been from mixed parentage, including castes that would be considered SC today. Many of the most important scriptures of Hinduism belong to them. It is also important to note, that despite the existence of caste-based differences in society, Hindus have always revered their saints irrespective of the caste in which they happened to be born.

¹⁶For a scholarly perspective of the movement and its impact, see also:

- *The Way and the Goal - Expressions of Devotion in the early Sri Vaisnava Community* (1987) by Vasudha Narayanan, Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University
- *Medieval Indian and Hindi Bhakti Poetry* (1996) by Savitri Shobha, Har Anand Publications
- *Medieval Bhakti Movements in India* (1999) by N.N Bhattacharyya, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers
- *Philosophy of Bhakti* (1990) by Chhaganlal Lala, South Asia Books

¹⁷<http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/stylev>: **Vedas** (VEH-daas): Hinduism's most ancient scriptures. There are four: Rig Veda, Atharva Veda, Sama Veda and Yajur Veda. The Vedas include more than 100,000 verses and additional prose. The term *Veda* stems from a Sanskrit word meaning knowledge. Many Hindus believe that the Vedas were revealed by God and/or realized by ancient sages.

¹⁸Guyana Central Arya Samaj, *Universalization of Vedanta*. <<http://www.aryasamaj.org/aryasamaj.html>>

¹⁹World Brahma Council, *Adi Brahma Samaj and caste*. <<http://brahmo.org/adi-brahmo-samaj-caste.html>>

²⁰Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, *Vedanta and Indian Culture*, <<http://www.belurmath.org/vedantaindianculture.htm>>

²¹Dr. S. Omana, *Biography of Sree Narayana Guru*, <<http://www.sndp.org/Html/BiographyByDrSOmana.html#CASTE IN KERALA>>

Numerous *rishis* (sages or seers) associated with the Vedas, the revealed scriptures of Hinduism, came from the “lower” castes of society. Indeed, Veda Vyasa, the saint who is traditionally said to have compiled and organized the four Vedas of Hinduism, composed the *Mahabharata*²² and *Srimad Bhagavatam* (two of Hinduism’s most popular scriptures), and wrote the most authoritative summary of *Upanishadic* teachings (the *Brahma Sutras*), was of mixed birth. He was born to a fisherwoman (today usually amongst SC), and his father was the sage Parashara. Veda Vyasa is easily the principal *rishi* of classical Hinduism. Vyasa’s father, Parashara, was also likewise of mixed parentage. Following the strict rules of some of the Hindu codes of dharma²³, they would be considered of low or mixed caste, but the general Hindu tradition honors them as *brahmins* and as the most respected of sages.

Valmiki, a thief-turned-*rishi* credited with having composed the *Ramayana*,²⁴ another of Hinduism’s great epics and among its most popular, is believed by Hindus to have been born into what would today be considered an SC family. Vishwamitra, another *rishi* who was originally a *kshatriya*, bequeathed to Hindus the *Gayatri Mantra*, the most well-known among all Hindu *mantras*²⁵ (a word or formula, chanted or sung as an incantation or prayer). Lord Krishna,²⁶ one of the most popular representations of God in Hinduism, was raised (in his human form) in a community that would be considered backward caste today. Lord Shiva,²⁷ worshipped as the primary manifestation of the Divine by a quarter of all Hindus today, is

²²<http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/stylem:> **Mahabharata** (Ma-haa-BHAA-ra-ta): The world’s longest epic poem is longer than the Iliad and Odyssey combined. The Bhagavad Gita is one section of it. Known as the “Great Epic of India,” the Mahabharata was written by the sage Ved Vyas and revolves around the conflict between two kingdoms and their great battle more than 3,000 years ago.

²³http://www.hafsite.org/resources/q_a_booklet#Dharma

²⁴<http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/stylr:> **Ramayana** (Raa-MAY-yah-nah): One of the two Hindu epics; the other is the Mahabharata. Originally written in Sanskrit, it is the story of God taking a human form to destroy evil and teach the path of righteous behavior. The most popular telling of the story was written by Tulsidas in Hindi and is called the Ramcharitmanas. It is the predominant scripture in North India and in the Hindu diaspora.

²⁵From <http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/stylem:> A syllable, word or phrase with spiritual power, it is chanted or held in the mind in connection with meditation or ritual.

²⁶<http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/stylek:> **Krishna** (KRISH-na): One of the most popular representations of God in Hinduism. He is worshipped as the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu and is best-known as the teacher in the Bhagavad Gita. For most Krishna devotees, his name refers to the unqualified absolute, or Brahman.

²⁷<http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/stylss:> **Shiva** (SHEE-vah): A popular representation of God in Hinduism. He is worshipped as the lord of time and change. Brahma is the name used for God when God’s role as creator of the universe is described. God is referred to as Vishnu when God’s role as preserver is emphasized. The divine is always understood to be one. Shiva’s consort has the names of Parvati, Kali and Durga. Also spelled Siva (SEE-vah).

termed as a ‘Kirata’ or hunter in ancient Hindu scriptures. He would be classified as an ST today. These are but a few prominent examples of individuals and deities, ostensibly born into a “lower” caste, who not only contributed enormously to the founding and shaping of Hinduism in fundamental ways, but are viewed as being amongst the most notable seers and even *avatars*²⁸ of the Divine.

A large number of Hindu saints of the historical period as well as modern-day saints with millions of followers worldwide such as Mata Amritanandamayi²⁹ or Ammachi, and Satya Sai Baba, were born into communities that would be considered “lower” caste or SC. This reality, which has remained true throughout history, of all Hindus, including *Brahmins* revering and following saints irrespective of the caste in which they were born, is indicative of the bifurcation of social and spiritual realities that has always existed. Many of these saints were also part of the *Bhakti* movement. A few prominent examples include a number of the *Nayanars* (the 63 *bhakti* saints of the *Shaivite* tradition who lived in what is today the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu between the 5th and 10th centuries CE); *Bhakti* saints of Maharashtra such as Chokhamela, Soyrabhai, Karamamela, Nirmala and Banka; and North Indian saints such as Raidas, Ravidas and Rohidas.³⁰

3.3 Hinduism has no single scripture, no central religious authority and limited role for priests

Hinduism as a religious tradition is organized very differently from the Abrahamic traditions with respect to the role of scriptures, priests, and centralized religious authorities. Thus, although scriptural references to caste-based discrimination do exist and society did enforce this over the centuries, the features of Hinduism, which we describe further below, make it possible to appreciate why caste is not intrinsic to the tradition.

In purely scriptural terms, although some Hindu scriptures contain passages that sanction the caste system, there are many others that indicate otherwise. Moreover, the most problematic and widespread references to caste are generally found in the *Smritis* (e.g.: *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkya Smriti*), ancient books that lay down laws of social conduct to guide society but which are numerous in number and which Hindu tradition holds must change with time, place and circumstance. In contrast, the *Shrutis* (e.g.: *Vedas*, *Upanishads*), or books that articulate eternal spiritual truths, are replete with statements that extol the equality of, and divinity inherent in, all beings. A selection of such verses is provided in Section 9 of this report. Thus,

²⁸<http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/stylea>: Avatars are incarnations of God, who Hindus believe come to Earth at various times to promote dharma and righteousness and to alleviate suffering.

²⁹www.amma.org

³⁰See “Untouchable Saints”, edited by Eleanor Zelliot and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar, Manohar Publications, 2005

the presence of a scripture that sanctions caste alone means little in terms of what the majority of Hindu scriptures advocate or what Hindus themselves choose to follow, and in fact, most of the popular Hindu scriptures do not extol caste-discrimination or a birth-based hierarchy.

Additionally, Hinduism also does not have, not did it ever have, a single central religious authority to enforce any set of doctrines or any exclusive interpretation of its scriptures. Indeed, depending upon which *sampradaya* they followed, all castes or groups of castes, including SCs and STs, have always had their own spiritual leaders and religious and social practices distinct from those of others. An example is the Ramnami Samaj, an SC spiritual and religious community based in the Indian state of Chattisgarh.³¹ Bhagwati Charan Bhatpare, a key community leader and member of the Ramnamis writes later in this report providing a Scheduled Caste individual's perspective on caste and Hinduism.

Most *sampradayas* also draw their followers from many different castes. This is because Hindus are free to, and often do, pick whichever *sampradaya* appeals to them as their chosen system of faith tradition and spiritual practice, rather than even the one that their parents followed. This has become even more common in modern India, due to the greater mobility and access to information that were more limited in past centuries. The significance of this is that Hindus across the caste spectrum are constantly evolving - they reinterpret their scriptures, redefine their beliefs and modify their practice over time, and therefore, there is a marketplace in Hinduism that is working to fulfill the religious and spiritual needs of all Hindus, regardless of caste.

Also important to understand is that the role of priests in Hinduism has been of the role of ritual specialist and limited to matters of temple worship and some household rituals. While this did provide them with substantial influence over day-to-day life, making caste-based discrimination possible, priests were not, nor have they ever been, a major authority or provider of spiritual teachings, which come, rather, from *sadhus* and *sannyasins* (renunciant monks). In the Hindu tradition, monks give up the worldly and householder life and all of its conventions to focus solely on the attainment of *moksha* (salvation). Since distinctions of caste are associated with the body and not the soul (*atman* or *jivatman*), and as monks are devoted to the soul alone, they explicitly renounce caste as part of their vows. In other words, Hindu *sadhus* and *sannyasins* do not belong to any caste and are not bound by its rules. The real leaders of Hinduism are its *sadhus* and *sannyasins*, not the priests.

Each Hindu *sampradaya* has orders of *sannyasins* dedicated to preaching its teachings and Hindu saints are usually members of one of these orders or go on to create *sampradayas* of their own. These *sampradayas* and their *sannyasins* are institutionally independent of Hindu temples, although *sannyasins* are often called to oversee or bless the conduct of temple rituals. *Sannyasins* have hailed from all castes historically, although it is true that some *sampradayas*

³¹An excellent treatise on the community and their religious practices can be found in "*Rapt in the Name: The Ramnamis, Ramnam, and Untouchable Religion in Central India*" by Ramdas Lamb, Ph.D, SUNY Press 2002

that advocated for the practice of birth-based caste in society would reject certain “lower” castes from joining their orders.

3.4 Birth-based varna and untouchability as later developments: Dr. B.R.Ambedkar and his views on Hindu scriptures

In the context of this report, it is worth citing the views of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian constitution who is a revered leader of India’s SCs and one of the trenchant critics of the caste system. According to Dr. Ambedkar,³² there were originally only three *varnas* in Vedic society,³³ with the fourth -- *shudra varna* -- coming into existence over time. A specific Vedic verse³⁴ that refers to this fourth *varna* was an interpolation, added much later after the caste system was established. As Dr. Ambedkar wrote, “Particular attention has to be paid to the fact that this (the varna system) was essentially a class system, in which individuals, when qualified, could change their class, and therefore classes did change their personnel.”³⁵

He also rejected the colonialist Aryan invasion theory that postulated that *shudras* and untouchables were originally non-Aryans who were defeated by Aryan invaders (who, as per this theory, composed the Vedas) around 2000 BCE, and the defeated non-Aryans taken into Vedic society with a lower status. Dr. Ambedkar further considered untouchability a post-Buddhist phenomenon, when many Hindus began to move away from meat-eating and looked down upon those who continued to eat meat, especially beef. This view of a *varna*-system based on birth being a post-Vedic feature, and untouchability a post-Buddhist phenomenon, are both widely shared by scholars today³⁶, which by itself raises questions as to whether caste can be intrinsic to Hinduism.

³²See Dr B R Ambedkar's two books - “*Who were the Shudras? How They Became the Fourth Varna in Indo-Aryan Society*” (1947) and “*The Untouchables - Who were They, and Why They Became Untouchables*” (1948).

³³The Vedic society refers to the period when the Vedas, the foundational scriptures of Hinduism, were composed.

³⁴Rig Veda, Purusha Sukta in the Rig Veda (X 90); v 11-12

³⁵Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1, p.18.

³⁶For instance, “The Rgveda shows no knowledge of people who must not be touched. Neither do the later Vedic texts give any indication of untouchability, although tribal groups of Candalas and the Pulkasas are mentioned with malice and revulsion. In the second phase, extending up to AD 200, certain tribal groups like Candalas and the Pulkasas emerge clearly as untouchables. The third phase being a continuation of the second, throws up some more ethnic groups as untouchables, but the peak is attained in the fourth phase from AD 600 to 1200 AD, when a number of occupational groups such as the carmakaras and the rajakas are degraded to the untouchable status and several new ethnic groups are added to the list.” Jaiswal, Suvira,. *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change*. Manohar Books: New Delhi (1998), Pp. 86-87

These opinions are offered here to illustrate that as trenchant a critic of the caste system as Dr. Ambedkar was, he believed that caste-based discrimination was not a feature of early Vedic society. Of course, Dr. Ambedkar has also written about the prominent feature of caste-based discrimination in the later *Smriti* texts which began to shape and influence Hindu society over the centuries. He squarely blamed the *Brahmin* castes, who as priests occupied the top of the hierarchy and maintained vested interests that sustained for centuries a system of birth-based discrimination and spiritual privileges. HAF decries these later additions and practices as morally repugnant and unacceptable. In a well-known speech called “The Annihilation of Caste”³⁷ prepared (but never delivered) for the 1936 conference of the “Jat pat todak mandal”, a liberal Hindu group of caste-reformers, Dr. Ambedkar questions whether *Brahmins* can ever truly support caste reform given their vested interests, and whether Hindu society can be rid of caste-based discrimination given the support for it found in the scriptures, especially the *Smritis*.

However, as discussed in more detail later in the report, the dynamics of caste in India have changed in ways that Dr. Ambedkar probably never imagined, with a large majority of *Brahmins*, and most Hindus, no longer supporting the kind of discrimination that Dr. Ambedkar fought. Further, HAF supports his call for Hindus to completely reject all teachings of birth-based caste and a discriminatory caste-based hierarchy found in the Hindu scriptures, mainly the *Smritis*. The key teachings of Hinduism that focus on the relationship between the individual and God, the various methods of spiritual practice available to attain salvation, and various techniques of yoga and meditation that are found in the *Smritis* and in the teachings of Hindu saints constitute what is worth preserving and propagating.

'It is evident then that the shudras appear as a social class only towards the end of the period of Atharva Veda [chronologically the last of the Vedas], when the Purusha Sukta version of their origin may have been inserted into the 10th book of the Rg Veda.' R S Sharma - “*Sudras in Ancient India*”, p 29, as cited in Arvind Sharma (2000) *Classical Hindu Thought*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, p 142.

"It was well after the Vedic period, after even the period of Mauryan empire, that the notion of untouchability came into being. In Satapatha Brahmana, the chief or the noble is advised to eat from the same vessel as vis, and commoner. ...In the Rg Veda there is no mention of untouchable either.it was only around second century AD that the stratum of untouchables and the notion of untouchability became evident for instance in Apasthambha Dharmasutra." Dipankar Gupta, “*Interrogating Caste - Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*”, (2000), Sage, New Delhi, p 190.

³⁷ Ambedkar, “*The Annihilation of Caste*” <http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/Dr.B.R.projects/mmt/ambedkar/>

3.5 The role of today's Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and organizations to end caste-based discrimination

Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and organizations have a major role in eliminating caste-based discrimination given that caste was formulated and practiced first in Hindu society; that much of the support for caste-based discrimination was present in some portions of later Hindu religious texts; that India remains a Hindu majority country that is still deeply religious; and that Hindu institutions have tremendous reach across communities, castes, and regions of India including into the rural areas where the problem is worse.

One of the baffling aspects of the problem is that the *Smritis* (Hindu law codes), including *Manusmriti*, the most famous of them all, are studied by few Hindus and are today the exclusive preserve of history and religion scholars. This was likely the case throughout history, since the study of Sanskrit and the *Smritis* was the preserve of the *brahmins*. Thus the *Smritis* are, and have always been, largely irrelevant to the personal spiritual practices of Hindus.

Yoga and *bhakti*-based spiritual approaches that are central to this practice have always been open to all Hindus through their spiritual leaders. Yet another aspect of this issue is that, while there are a large number of *Smritis*, it is unclear whether any one of them ever held sway across the country³⁸. Social laws and practices were mainly local in nature. However, it is clear that the injunctions of the *Smritis* have been, and often still are, reflected in the behavior of Hindus. Thus there has been and often still lies a disconnect between the spiritual teachings that Hindus believe in, based on the principle of divinity being inherent in all beings, and their actual manifestation in their interactions with fellow beings. It is this gap that religious leaders must exert greater effort to eliminate. The solution to caste-based discrimination does indeed lie within Hindu teachings.

While many Hindu religious and spiritual, organizations and movements have, over the past several centuries, taken the lead in rejecting casteist teachings, some have not made this a priority. Therefore, we hope that Hindu leaders and organizations not only continue to promote the universal and egalitarian spiritual teachings of Hinduism, but that those parts of the various scriptures that promote notions of birth-based caste and caste-based discrimination are

³⁸Madhu Kishwar, *Manusmritis and Madhusmritis: Flagellating a Mythical Enemy*. http://www.manushi-india.org/pdfs_issues/issue117/2.%20From%20Manusmriti%20to%20Madhusmriti.pdf

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explicitly denied authority in the minds of their followers. We hope that they work more actively to end discrimination, promote equality, and end birth-based social hierarchies by ensuring that their followers put these precepts into practice. Heads of Hindu institutions should proactively induct more low-caste and SC and ST Hindus in positions of responsibility and power within their organizations.

Only Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and organizations are capable of performing the task of rejecting verses in scriptures that support caste-based discrimination. First, there is a link between caste and notions of “Hindu tradition” in the minds of many ordinary Hindus, given its presence in some scriptures and the position of priests at the top of the traditional hierarchy. Only religious and spiritual leaders can break that link by emphasizing the eternal teachings of Hinduism. Only they can adequately bring home the concept that the practice of the essential teachings of Hinduism will in no way suffer, and will in fact be enhanced, by the eradication of caste-based discrimination.

However, in HAF’s view, while the role of Hindu religious and spiritual, and Hindu organizations described above is absolutely necessary, it is not sufficient to achieve the eradication of caste-based discrimination. This is because of the vast changes in the dynamics of caste identity and practice in modern India. We discuss caste in today’s India in [Section 4](#) of the report and we highlight why the Gol, state institutions, the courts, the education system, and the private sector must play a complementary role to that of Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and organizations. We also identify key aspects of what we feel the Gol’s role should be.

While we have highlighted the role that is desired of Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and Hindu organizations, we do not wish to convey the impression that nothing is being done by them. What we wish to highlight is that given the magnitude and persistence of caste-based discrimination, more forceful and concerted action is necessary, especially in renouncing references to caste-bias found in some scriptures. As the statements from Hindu leaders in [Section 8](#) of this report shows, many of today’s leading Hindu religious leaders have taken a clear stance against caste-based discrimination. Many of them have also been working to address the problem of caste-based discrimination in various ways, through charitable institutions that provide education, medical services and disaster relief to the poor, who are often SCs and other oppressed castes. The list of entities providing such services is simply too long to reproduce here. However, it is perhaps more relevant to show a few examples, all chosen from the past decade, that provide anecdotal evidence of changes in the religious status of SCs and other “lower” castes, which is where Hindu religious leaders have influence. These

changes include prominent Hindu religious leaders reaching out to promote equality for SCs,³⁹ as well as the appointment of SCs as temple priests.⁴⁰

3.6 Statements against caste-based discrimination from leading Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and organizations - A Summary

[\(Click here to go to full statements in Section 8\)](#)

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) believes that most major Hindu religious or spiritual leaders and organizations do not support caste-based discrimination and birth-based hierarchy. Nevertheless, Hinduism is often blamed as a major cause of the caste problem in India. Therefore, from 2007 to 2010, the Hindu American Foundation asked prominent Hindu spiritual and religious leaders to provide the following:

³⁹1. "Dalits: Kanchi Leads The Way"

<http://www.hvk.org/articles/1102/135.html> reporting an article from The Pioneer, November 19, 2002 (archives not available)

2. "'Kalyanamastu' breaks barriers", The Hindu, Jan 7, 2007

<http://www.hindu.com/2007/01/07/stories/2007010705080200.htm>

3. "Sri Sri to bring Dalits, Others Together", The Mangalorean, Mar 6, 2007

<http://www.artoflivingap.org/index.php?act=aolnews&id=29>

4. "'I have resolved to eliminate untouchability", The Hindu, Sep 9, 2010

<http://www.hindu.com/2010/09/09/stories/2010090952960300.htm>

⁴⁰See, for example:

1. "The New Holy Order", Farzand Ahmad, India Today Magazine, September 28, 2007, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/Story/1438/STATES/The+new+holy+order.html>

2. "Bihar temple comes of age with Dalit head priest", June 30, 2007

http://www.bihartodayonline.com/2007_06_01_archive.html

3. "RSS for Dalit head priests in temples", Times of India, Oct 30, 2006

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/238039.cms>

4. "Tirupati temple reaches out to Dalits", Press Trust of India, June 19, 2008

<http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/jun/19Dalits.htm>

5. "Kali Mata temple Lakhna, Etawah - where upper castes bow to Dalits", Indo-Asian News Service, Mar 25, 2010

<http://www.weeksupdate.com/2010/03/kali-mata-temple-lakhna-etawah-where.html>

1. A clear statement against caste-based discrimination and against a birth-based hierarchy;
2. Material from Hindu scriptures that support this position;
3. Efforts they are involved with to promote the integration and upward mobility of SCs/Harijans/Dalits within society;
4. Additional explanation about the origins of, present status of, and solutions to the caste problem today.

HAF is pleased to present in [Section 8](#) of this report, statements from 13 prominent Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and organizations who responded to HAF's request. Some of them preferred to submit a statement representing their organization or a statement from their guru or spiritual mentor. Many of them submitted excerpts from Hindu scriptures to support their position and their perspective on the origins of, present status of, and solutions to the caste problem today. All of them are clearly against caste-based discrimination and against a birth-based hierarchy and believe that Hinduism, when followed properly, can be a solution to the problem of caste-based discrimination, inequality and injustice anywhere in the world.

These Hindu leaders are also involved in social service projects in India, America, and other parts of the world, including projects focusing on socially and economically underprivileged members of society; we have included that material elsewhere in this report.

HAF is tremendously appreciative of the following prominent Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and organizations for contributing to this part of the report and taking time out of their very busy schedules to support HAF's initiative (in alphabetical order):

- Swami Bodhananda, Founder and Spiritual Head, Sambodh Foundation
- Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Spiritual Head of the Kauai Adheenam, Publisher of Hinduism Today magazine, and President of the Hindu Heritage Endowment
- Swami Chidanand Saraswati, President and Spiritual Head, Parmarth Niketan Ashram
- Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swami, Pontiff, Vishishta Advaita Tradition of Sri Ramanujacharya
- Swami Dayananda Saraswati as Convenor, Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha
- International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) Office of Communications
- Swami Parmanand Giriji Maharaj, Spiritual Head, Akhand Paramdham
- Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Order
- Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Spiritual Head of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS)
- Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder and Spiritual Head, the Art of Living Foundation
- Swami Tejomayananda, Chairman and Spiritual Head, Chinmaya Mission
- Swami Varadananda, Monk, Vivekananda Vedanta Society - Chicago
- Pravrajika Vrajaprana, Nun, Vedanta Society of Southern California

It is the hope of HAF that these statements will, in addition to the scriptural material provided, do the following:

- Show people concerned about India’s social problems that caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy are not integral parts of Hinduism, as supported by Hindu spiritual and religious leaders and organizations and by Hindu scriptures.
- Encourage Hindus to do more work in the realm of eradicating caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy.

3.7 Spiritual and anti-caste teachings of Hindu Scriptures - A preview

[\(Click here to view scriptural references in Section 9\)](#)

Numerous studies and reports on caste quote from Hindu scriptures, especially the *Smritis*, highlighting verses that define, support, and affirm a birth-based hierarchy, and which support discriminatory treatment of SCs, STs, and *shudras*. HAF acknowledges the existence of passages in some of the scriptures, especially the *Smritis*, which propose and defend discrimination. As a result, popular knowledge of Hinduism in the West is often limited in its understanding of Hinduism, including the conclusion that caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy are intrinsic to Hinduism. In this section we seek to provide a broader perspective of Hindu scriptures. We emphasize again that the purpose of this section is not to “whitewash” Hindu scriptures. No one can deny the extensive prevalence of caste-bias and detailed rules of inter-caste interactions and ritual performances that can be found in the *Smritis* and *Dharmashastras*. Our objective here is only to demonstrate that caste-based discrimination is not in any way intrinsic to Hinduism.

We shall begin with a brief explanation of the various classes of Hindu scriptures:

1. *Shrutis* or the *Vedas*, are considered divinely revealed scriptures. The most important portion of these scriptures, namely the *Upanishads*, deal with eternal truths such as the relationship of individuals to God, *moksha* (liberation or self-realization) as the purpose of human life, and various techniques of yoga and meditation to attain *moksha* (release from the birth-death cycle, and therefore suffering).
2. *Smritis* make up the second category. In a limited sense, it includes ancient texts called *Dharmashastras* that deal with social, civil, and criminal law codes that govern daily life. It is these *Dharmashastras* that contain the descriptions, definitions, and the vast majority of pronouncements on the caste system, its rules of functioning, and its

relevance and applicability to the daily life of Hindus. The details of the law codes in these *Dharmashastras* are varied and numerous. In the list of *Dharmashastras* are to be found the *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkya Smriti*, *Apastamba Smriti*, and many others. Hindu tradition explicitly recognizes that the *Dharmashastras* are subject to change with time and even place. Indeed most social rules in India were actually local in nature, given the incredible diversity of cultural practices across the sub-continent.

In a broader sense, the *Smriti* category also includes the great epics such as the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Puranas* (The *Bhagawad Gita*, while technically a part of the *Mahabharata*, is easily the most popular Hindu scripture and is considered to be equal to a *Shruti* text by many). Evidence for caste-based discrimination can be found in these as well, although one can also find evidence to the contrary. The *Shruti/Smriti* distinction, however, is not water-tight. Certain *Shrutis* do have verses that speak to social issues, including caste, while some *Smritis* also contain some verses that speak about *moksha*.

3. A third class of scriptures, the *Agamas*, are of several types and are considered as revealed texts only by their respective followers. The *Agamas* are sectarian writings dealing primarily with worship of specific forms of the divinity and these *Agamas* form the basis of temple worship in Hinduism. Each *Agama* consists of four parts: the first includes philosophical and spiritual knowledge; the second covers yoga and the mental disciplines; the third specifies rules for the construction of temples; and for sculpting and carving the figures of deities for worship in the temples; and the fourth part includes rules pertaining to the observance of religious rites, rituals, and festivals.
4. There is a fourth class of sacred writings, what may be termed vernacular literature, that are records of the spiritual experiences, devotional compositions, and teachings of numerous *sants* (saints). These writings have been accumulated over the period of Hindu history up to modern times. They reinterpret the *Shrutis* and provide new methods of spiritual practice that are adapted to the needs of the times and, hence in many ways, are more relevant to the needs of the people than methods adopted by saints who lived millennia ago. This shows that Hinduism is very different from the Abrahamic traditions in that it has no identifiable beginning in history, does not have a single founder, nor does it have a central religious establishment or sole authoritative scripture.

This last class of literature also contains biographies of saints, records of dialogues with the saints, poetic works, and commentaries on the *Shrutis*, which are often a greater

source of daily spiritual inspiration and practice for Hindus than even the *Shrutis* themselves. Since the *Shrutis* themselves consist of the spiritual experiences of *rishis* who lived during the Vedic age, the words of these “modern *rishis*” who have attained self-realization are also considered holy scripture and reflective of eternal spiritual truths. Devotional songs in temples and homes, and religious music and drama are suffused mainly with the poetic outpourings of saints throughout history. The number of scriptures that belong to this third class, in a variety of Indian languages, are simply too numerous to enumerate.

In [Section 9](#) of the report, we provide two classes of quotes from Hindu scriptures. The first focuses on the eternal teachings of the tradition, which contain the essence that needs to be preserved and propagated. These are drawn both from the *Shrutis* and from works of saints. One will not find a single reference to caste in these verses, perhaps raising a question as to why these verses find a place in a report on caste. In our view, these verses are important because they illustrate the irrelevance of caste to the eternal spiritual teachings of Hinduism; nor is caste relevant to what Hinduism teaches is the purpose of human life -- that each soul is potentially divine and that the purpose of life is to manifest this divinity. Nowhere in these verses does one find that “lower” castes are ineligible for *moksha* or that only *brahmins* are eligible. These teachings represent the real Hinduism that HAF is proud to represent, and which is worth preserving and propagating. Readers of this report who are generally unaware of Hindu teachings should understand clearly that caste is entirely irrelevant to the practice of Hindu spirituality.

It is a tragedy of Hindu history that during medieval times, if not during the Vedic period, systematic access to the study of the *Shrutis* was denied to SCs, STs, and *shudras*. Their religious rights were interpreted and enforced through an overtly obscurantist interpretation of the *Dharmashastras*. The SC’s and ST’s lack of familiarity with the Sanskrit language hampered their ability to acquire knowledge. Their religious practices during these times were guided mainly by the teachings of wandering ascetics, saints, and by traditional customs. A key success of modern Hindu movements such as the Ramakrishna Mission, which is one of the largest and most respected, lies in enabling access to all *Shrutis* to all Hindus, irrespective of caste.

The second set of scriptural quotes consists of verses drawn from various sources, but mainly the *Smritis*, that provide an alternate interpretation of caste. They either suggest that it is not purely birth-based but rather based on character, or they speak out directly against caste-based discrimination. The events of history, however, bear out that these verses eventually had less influence on society than those that sanctioned a discriminatory caste system. Therefore, in response to those who claim that caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy are

somehow intrinsic to Hinduism, it is important to show that numerous verses that condemn discrimination exist as well as part of Hindu sacred literature.

Another general note on caste in Hindu scriptures is relevant here. The caste system, as we see it today, is absent in the oldest of Hindu scriptures. Untouchability is absent in the Vedas and, as mentioned earlier, is a later development. Statements to the effect that the caste system is hereditary are rare, and are more than counterbalanced by contrary statements that state that one's character determines one's caste. In the core scriptures of Hinduism, the caste system has a very minor presence. For example, the *Bhagavad Gita* has 700 verses of which not more than 30 (or 4%) mention caste, including the peripheral references. The *Rigveda* has 10,552 verses but only one mentions all the four *varnas*, and not more than 20 (0.2%) mention castes. The *Yajurveda*, in all its recensions, has very few (less than 3-4%) verses dealing with caste. The *Samaveda* (1,875 verses), and the *Atharvaveda* with almost 6,000 verses (or 8,000 in the *Paippalada* version) likewise have very few references to caste⁴¹. Thus, caste finds minimal reference in the most authoritative spiritual and devotional scriptures of Hindus.

It could, however, be argued that frequency of mention is not the best yardstick and that “what is said” often means far more than “how often it is said”. Even from this perspective, in the most ancient Hindu texts, viz. the Vedas and the Upanishads, caste makes a very peripheral appearance in the later Vedic scriptures in the context of ritual worship. Where caste does play an important role is in the *Smritis* and in portions of other non-*Sruti* texts of classical Hinduism. The quotes provided later in this report are by necessity selective in nature, but they are representative of the two classes mentioned above. Some additional scriptural verses are also provided by Hindu spiritual and religious leaders and organizations as part of their statements included in this report

⁴¹The source of these statistics is Mr. Vishal Agarwal, a lay scholar of Hindu scriptures and traditions. He has a several publications on Hindu scriptures and history to his credit in various academic journals.

4. Caste in today's India - Political and economic forces both fuel and oppose caste-based discrimination

In contemporary India, the issue of caste is far more complex than most people outside of India know or understand. Whatever the history of caste, any attempt at reform today must take into consideration that the motives, drivers, and social power structures have changed substantially. Caste has not been a frozen system. Studies⁴² have shown that even historically, caste boundaries were fluid rather than static and frozen, with entire *jaatis* moving from a “lower” status to a “higher” one regularly (sometimes even to a higher *varna*), a process termed “Sanskritization.” This term was made popular by the Indian sociologist M. N. Srinivas in the 1950s, although an earlier reference to this process can be found in *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. As Srinivas writes⁴³:

“The caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and especially so in the middle regions of the hierarchy. A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by Sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites and beliefs of the Brahmins, and the adoption of a Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden.”

Indeed, actions of the British colonial regime had a profound influence on the nature and functioning of the caste system in India, foremost through the British institution of a decadal census. The enumeration of the population into rigid categories for census purposes (the creation of the “schedule” or list of depressed castes was the origin of the term Scheduled Caste, as we have mentioned earlier) froze the relative position of various castes across the country and the Indian social system into a written schematic in a manner never before in the past. Further, the assignment of social status to many castes was based on British interests

⁴² 1. Srinivas, M.N. (1952) *Religion and Society Amongst the Coorgs of South India* Clarendon Press, Oxford.

2. Srinivas, Mysore Narasimhachar (1962) *Caste in Modern India: And other essays* Asia Publishing House, Bombay

⁴³ M.N. Srinivas A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization, *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Aug., 1956), pp. 481-496

rather than any existing social reality⁴⁴. HAF, however, is choosing not to delve into these issues deeper here because, while both Sanskritization and British influence are important factors that shaped the evolution of caste, caste-based discrimination did exist before the arrival of the British and we do not seek to make this an academic treatise on the history of caste. However, the tremendous changes in caste dynamics since India's independence, and the ground realities today are important to discuss in greater detail. Any solution to the problem of caste-based discrimination that does not factor these is doomed to fail.

In modern India, many castes have moved up the hierarchy through the capture of political power, accumulation of wealth and migration -- all of which have been made possible by the emergence of a modern, democratic, and open society. This, along with India's policy of reservations, guaranteed in the Constitution, and extended regularly beyond the initial ten years assured in the Constitution, has significantly benefited the castes of the *shudra* varna (known in India as the 'Other Backward Classes' or OBCs). Few groups in independent India have made as much progress as the OBCs.

The SCs and STs, unfortunately, continue to suffer substantial discrimination in society, and are the focus of this report. Some OBCs, it should be noted, are still very poor and relegated to a status close to that of the SCs and STs. However, as will be discussed further below, politics and economics have today replaced religion as the primary driver behind caste-based discrimination of the SCs. Some of these political and economic drivers continue to perpetuate discrimination while others work to eliminate it. Importantly, the caste hierarchy has changed dramatically and *brahmin* castes are no longer the primary or major oppressors of the SCs and STs.

4.1 Urban/rural and age divides in matters of caste

In many villages, there have been relatively very few changes in caste dynamics over the past several centuries. For example, there are reports of SCs still being prohibited from entering some temples, dining with caste Hindus, or drawing water from wells used by other Hindus. Violence and threats are still used to enforce such restrictions and/or to prevent the reporting of atrocities against SCs. At the same time, there are also many Hindu religious groups and teachers (as there have always been) in rural areas who ignore traditional caste boundaries.

⁴⁴For a more detailed discussion, see Kevin Hobson, "*The Indian Caste System and The British - Ethnographic Mapping and the Construction of the British Census in India*", http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/h_es/h_es_hobso_caste_frameset.htm

In urban India, the situation has changed much more. While caste has certainly not disappeared, caste identity, discrimination, and the importance of caste in social interaction have all declined dramatically. The increasing urbanization of India, and the migration of SCs from villages to cities to better their lives portend well for the eventual elimination of caste-based discrimination. A similar change in behavior patterns can also be found across age boundaries, with the younger and better educated Indians increasingly ignoring caste identity in social and professional interactions.

4.2 The relevance of land and economics

Today, caste identity in rural India mainly serves as an economic function. Studies conducted by the Govt's National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have shown that most SC victims of abuse are landless agricultural laborers. According to the 2001 census, 77% of the SC workforce is in the agriculture sector of the economy. SCs who own land are often only marginal landowners. Poor SCs are thus largely landless laborers, and their subsistence and livelihood also often makes families put children to work in order to make ends meet. This prevents SCs from owning land or receiving an education -- a vicious cycle and exploitative economic arrangement which the modern legal system of reservations in educational institutions as well as in government employment seeks to break. Violence in rural India between landowning castes (for whom SCs constitute cheap and sometimes even bonded labor) and SCs is easily the largest source of caste-based violence in India today. Politics also plays a crucial role, and is discussed below.

In the absence of land-ownership, many SCs see education and a job in India's manufacturing or service sector as the way out from exploitation, and to a life of dignity and progress. This often implies migrating from their ancestral villages to larger cities. While life in the slums of cities is hard, given the lack of sanitation and other public services (a completely separate problem arising from a lack of proper governance, town planning, and provision of infrastructural services in India), it is still a choice that millions of SCs have made to improve their lives. Indeed, education has been and will be a powerful force in liberating SCs, as it provides a route to a career and financial security in an urban milieu, removed from the traditional spheres where caste-based discrimination is most acute.

4.3 The rise of the "backward castes": politics as a major driver of caste-based discrimination

A great irony of Indian politics is that its modern, secular, multi-party, parliamentary democracy has enhanced rather than reduced the importance of caste identities and affiliations. Indeed, a

central theme of modern Indian politics has been the rise of “lower” castes, including SCs, through a process of asserting their own interests and capturing political power by exploiting a strengthened caste identity.

For the first few decades after independence, politics in India was entirely dominated by the Congress Party with its Nehruvian-socialist ideology. The only other political parties that were electorally material were Marxist and Communist parties (in a few states), and ethnic and regional parties such as those representing Sikhs in Punjab, and Dravidians in Tamil Nadu. The only times the Congress Party lost power in New Delhi were in 1977, in response to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s brief imposition of martial law and suspension of democracy, and in 1989 in response to the then unprecedented corruption allegations against Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi himself. Although caste remained a major factor in Indian society, the narrative of caste was largely absent from political discourse, and individuals from upper castes generally remained in charge of the government.

Affirmative action benefits for SCs and STs were instituted at the time of the adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1950. The Constitution laid down that 15% and 7.5% of vacancies (for SC and ST candidates, respectively) would be reserved in both government aided educational institutes and for jobs in the government/public sector for a period of 10 years, after which the situation was to be reviewed. This period has been routinely extended by succeeding governments. There is also a reservation in the Indian parliament, with 79 and 41 seats⁴⁵, respectively, reserved for SCs and STs.

However, the watershed moment for caste in Indian politics was the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report⁴⁶ in 1990. Initiated in 1978 by a non-Congress government, the Commission, under the stewardship of B.P. Mandal -- a socialist leader from a “backward” caste -- was charged with analyzing the backwardness of certain castes and suggesting remedies. The report, submitted in 1980, lay in cold storage after the Congress Party returned to power and was not implemented until 1990, and that too under extremely contentious circumstances by another non-Congress government. Its main recommendations included a 27% quota or “reservations” in public employment for OBCs, the

⁴⁵Election FAQs: Delimitation of Constituencies, Indian Elections, <http://www.indian-elections.com/electionfaqs/delimitation-of-constituencies.html>

⁴⁶Mandal Commission, *II Backward Commission Report*, <http://www.socialjustice.in/documents/Documents/II%20Backward%20Commission%20Report%20%20-%20Recommendations.pdf>

middle layer of the old caste hierarchy, mostly belonging to the *Shudra varna*, although beneficiaries also include some *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya* castes⁴⁷.

With hindsight, perhaps more important than the Mandal Commission recommendations themselves was the legitimacy that the report bestowed on caste as an organizing principle of politics in India. The last two decades have seen an explosion in the number of caste-based political parties that draw votes exclusively from one or a few local castes, as well as a rise in their political power. Even non-caste-based parties, such as the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which grew in popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, are today forced to select candidates based on the caste distribution of the people in the constituency they seek to represent. With OBCs and SCs constituting about 60% and 16% of the population, respectively, their votes almost always determine winners as long as people vote along caste lines. With caste conflict being more severe between OBCs and SCs, the rising political power of OBCs has worsened conflict in some places. On the other hand, SC political parties have also gained in prominence and power, notably the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), whose leader Ms. Mayawati is currently the Chief Minister (akin to the Governor of a U.S. state) of Uttar Pradesh (U.P), the largest state in India⁴⁸.

These developments have had the positive outcome of providing political power to castes that have historically lacked such power, enabling the diversion of resources to those segments of society along with the benefits of the quotas provided by the Mandal Commission. The trade-off, however, has been the strengthening of caste identification among the erstwhile “lower” castes and the election of legislators largely based on caste, rather than merit. It would be accurate to state that a long-term goal of a post-caste society where one’s caste is an irrelevant moniker is impeded by the very same politicians that vilify the caste-system as a grotesque relic. Caste is alive today in the Indian political system only because people see its utility in social and economic upliftment on the one hand, and in political mobilization on the other. Political violence and caste-based violence have thus become inextricably intertwined as opposing political parties represent the interests of various castes, for instance landlords and

⁴⁷The Mandal Commission identified 3473 castes as belonging to the OBC category, and estimated that they constituted 52% of India’s population in 1980, based on the 1931 census which was the last to record caste. An exhaustive list of OBC castes today, as well as the criteria for qualifying as an OBC, can be found on the website of the GoI’s National Commission for Backward Classes at <http://www.ncbc.nic.in/>

⁴⁸Some other prominent SC leaders include: K.R.Narayanan, the tenth president of India (July 25, 1997 - July 24, 2002); K.G.Balakrishnan, former Chief Justice of India (Jan 14, 2007 - May 11, 2010); Babu Jagjivan Ram, former Deputy Prime Minister of India (Mar 23, 1977 - Aug 22, 1979); G.M.C. Balayogi, former speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Indian parliament (Mar 24, 1998 - Mar 3, 2002)

landless laborers. Caste tension in India today often increases around election time as politicians exploit the issue to get votes.

It is unclear whether the rise of the OBCs, and now the SCs, will lead to the eventual emergence of a casteless society; but it is clear that the dynamics of caste have changed permanently. By virtue of the workings of democracy, political power often grows hand-in-hand with social and economic power, and the OBCs have benefited enormously. On the other hand, reservations and the rise of political consciousness aided by democracy have also benefited SCs, although not yet to the same extent. In any event, any solution to the caste problem that does not recognize and incorporate this changed dynamic, along with the importance of politics and economics, is doomed to fail.

4.4 The fallacy of the “upper caste” label

Many discussions of caste routinely and loosely refer to the “upper” castes as the oppressors, and the “lower” castes as the oppressed. However, such terminology serves more to obfuscate than clarify the issue as it exists today. *Brahmins*, traditionally considered to be at the top of the caste hierarchy, and the ones with presumably the greatest incentive in sustaining it, have been rendered largely marginal by the political paradigm in India with the emergence of caste-based politics. Higher ritual status has not translated into political power for *brahmins* in today’s India, although numerous *brahmins* undoubtedly remain top political leaders in India’s major political parties. Most of them established themselves before the caste-based revolution in Indian politics. Further, while *brahmins* maybe political leaders, their politics and their policies are thoroughly determined by the caste calculus, inclusive of other castes.

Brahmins have always constituted only a small percentage of the Indian population (just 4.32% according to the 1931 census, the last one to record caste), and *kshatriyas* have also been a very small percentage. This has largely made them irrelevant in electoral dynamics. Real political and social power in India has moved to the OBCs who dominate the caste-driven polity in India, with a different OBC caste dominating in each region of India.

Much of the caste violence between landowners and landless laborers in rural India is between SCs and the now powerful OBCs, who were “lower” castes under the old paradigm but who ought to be seen as the “upper” castes today. The OBC incentive to oppress SCs today is not driven by *brahmins* and certainly not by Hinduism, but rather by economic and political interests. Even as far back as 1980, the National Police Commission report noted this trend in caste conflicts between OBCs and SCs, saying that “there is greater tension between structural

neighbours in this hierarchy than between the top level and the bottom level.”⁴⁹ This pattern has since solidified such that caste clashes are far more prevalent between SCs and OBCs than they are between SCs and “upper” castes.

A majority of *brahmins* have, in the decades since India’s independence, migrated from villages to cities to take up secular professions or emigrated abroad, especially to economically developed nations. Today’s *brahmins* largely fall into three groups – those who have emigrated abroad, those who are in well-paid secular professions in India, and a group of poor *brahmins* (which ironically includes priests, since their incomes from Government-run temples are far below that of secular government workers and often needs to be supplemented with income from performing religious services outside temples). These *brahmins* suffer from many of the same disadvantages as do India’s poorest people, but without the benefits that come from the Govt’s reservation policies. Indeed, poverty has driven some *brahmins* to take up jobs that they would never have traditionally performed.⁵⁰

These arguments are not an attempt to draw sympathy for *brahmins* as a caste or to imply that *brahmins* as a caste should be provided the benefits of reservations. These arguments are simply to illustrate that traditional notions of caste have undergone a sea change. The stupendous electoral success of the BSP (a caste party of the SCs whose major political opponent is a caste party of the OBCs) in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh is attributable to its ability to attract the electoral support of *Brahmins*.⁵¹ This development perhaps best illustrates the new dynamics of caste in India, with priesthood and religion ceasing to be the major driving factors; economics and politics being most influential; and power and control being concentrated in the hands of OBCs who were the erstwhile “lower” castes.

4.5 India’s economic reforms: an enormous boon for SCs

The economic reforms launched by India in 1991 have resulted in spectacular growth for the country as a whole, and led to the emergence of India as a major economic power. However, an underlying expectation of the reforms, which sought economic growth as the best way to eliminate poverty, has always been its ability to provide new economic paradigms that would improve the lot of marginalized sections of Indian society, especially the SCs. Four well-known

⁴⁹National Police Commission, “Police and the Weaker Sections of Society,” Chapter XIX, *Third Report of the National Police Commission* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1980), p. 3.

⁵⁰“Work is worship” <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?234780>

⁵¹See “Brahmin Vote Helps Party of Low Caste Win in India”, *New York Times*, May 12, 2007
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/12/world/asia/12india.html? r=1>

researchers recently published a significant study on how economic reforms have impacted caste-based discrimination since 1990⁵². The study used a survey constructed and implemented by SCs and administered to all SC households in two districts of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, one of the poorest in the country and one with some of the most entrenched caste equations.

The authors showed that certain other studies, which solely used economic indicators like consumption expenditures, to conclude that inequality has increased since 1990 are flawed because they do not consider signs of social inequality, such as servility, humiliation, and lack of self-respect, which are even more critical indicators of equality and progress in rural India. The study showed not only tremendous improvements in material consumption patterns but, more importantly, substantial changes in accepted behaviors between castes, with a rapid erosion in discriminatory processes that stigmatised SCs. The quality of the changes observed, and the promise of India's economic reforms for SCs and STs are very well summarized by the authors in the conclusion of their report, which we reproduce verbatim below.

Conclusion: Freedom from Social Inequality as Development

The results of this unique survey reveal very substantial shifts in Dalits' lives, consistent with a growing sense of empowerment and opportunity and declining ability of others to impose social inequalities. Changes in grooming and eating are both consistent with a deliberate attempt to shed consumption patterns that reflect and reproduce social exclusion and inferiority, through the rapid adoption of "elite" consumption patterns – much faster than can be explained by economic variables alone. Traditional stratification in social life within the village has also rapidly eroded. No one would argue that Dalits have achieved anything akin to equality, but it is certainly the case that many practices that reflected social subordination and routine humiliation of Dalits have declined considerably. In a large majority of the villages in this survey, Dalits no longer lift non-Dalits' dead animals; Dalit babies are often delivered by non-Dalit midwives; Dalits are rarely seated separately at weddings; and it is no longer uncommon for non-Dalits to accept foods in Dalit homes. Economically, there has been a rapid shift out of traditional Dalit economic relationships into local occupations and professions, migration and changed agricultural practices.

⁵²Devesh Kapur, Chandra Bhan Prasad, Lant Pritchett, D Shyam Babu; "Rethinking Inequality: Dalits in Uttar Pradesh in the Market Reform Era", *Economic & Political Weekly*, august 28, 2010 vol xlv no 35

This is not to suggest that caste has disappeared as a social construct. It is very much alive. Nor is this to suggest that tensions and atrocities have completely disappeared. But rather than viewing atrocities as a sign of unchanged repression, Chakraborty, Babu, and Chakravorty (2006) show that the atrocities themselves could be the result of the very rapid improvements for Dalits which unsettle existing relationships.

Our analysis suggests that for the surveyed Dalits, the description of the market reform era should come with an “and”, not a “but”. Prosperity raised the standard of living, and the social and cultural fabric of the village has changed, largely for the better. Debates about the effects of economic reforms on inequality in India based on changes in consumption inequality have so far completely missed these much larger changes in social and cognitive inequality. The good life, as Hegel argued, is fundamentally dependent on being held in high regard by others. Approval and recognition are crucial to this. The arrival of modernity in western societies ruptured existing social hierarchies, replacing them with a universal language (even if not practice) of dignity and self-respect. In India, questions of dignity, self-respect and humiliation were at the core of the nationalist discourse. But as Gopal Guru (2009a:4) has perceptively argued, while Indian nationalists were deeply cognizant of the racial humiliations resulting from colonisation, they were much less aware of caste-based humiliations. Thus, Indian nationalism was “Janus-faced” – externally radical but internally conservative. This was something Ambedkar (1979: 263) clearly saw in Congressmen⁵³ when he called them “political radicals and social Tories.”

We stress not over-interpreting these results. As the experience of caste is localized, our results certainly do not speak to all of India. Still, even limiting the implications of this study to just the state of U.P., where there are approximately 32 million Dalits, provides valuable insight. That is comparable to the scope of the civil rights movement for African-Americans in the United States, where the “black alone” population in 2004 was 36 million, or the end of apartheid in South Africa, where the “black” population is roughly 38.4 million.

⁵³HAF’s note: The authors here are referring to members of the Indian National Congress, the party led by Mahatma Gandhi that fought for freedom from British colonialism.

Moreover, in the present research, we make no attempt to distinguish among the potential driving causes of these shifts by disentangling the political (the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party in U.P.), economic (market-oriented reforms and rapid growth), exogenous social (for example, exposure to media), or technological (introduction of tractors and irrigation) explanations. What needs emphasis is that during this period, as per their own self-assessment, the social well-being of large numbers of Dalits advanced even faster than their material well-being. Certainly this additional human freedom should count as an “and” in assessing the achievements of the market-reform era.

4.6 Caste endogamy as a persisting phenomenon

Perhaps the most widespread aspect of caste consciousness that permeates Indian society today is caste endogamy. Pick up any newspaper in the country and matrimonial ads explicitly specify the caste requirement of the bride or the groom (including among Sikhs, Christians and Muslims). Although inter-caste marriages are becoming more common, especially among educated Indians and in urban areas, caste preference in marriage is a major factor. There are both neutral and negative aspects of the phenomenon of caste endogamy.

The neutral aspect arises from the fact that caste is also culture. Every caste has its own unique cultural practices, which may include matters of worship, cuisine, clothing, dialects, social networks, and even home design patterns. Indeed castes may maintain uniqueness in virtually every aspect of life. Such variety contributes to the incredible cultural diversity of India and also causes people to choose a marriage partner from within their own caste, without necessarily implying discrimination against others.

The dark side of caste endogamy becomes evident where young couples are sometimes murdered or driven to suicide on account of their inter-caste marriage⁵⁴. The mixing of caste and politics often interferes with the proper rendering of justice for such crimes. No reliable statistics are available about whether other motives besides caste may have been the motive for these crimes, such as differences in wealth between the families or expectations that marriages will be “arranged” by parents. The occurrence of such crimes also highlights the

⁵⁴“Recent case of Ms. Nirupama Pathak” <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1991195,00.html>
HAF’s reaction to this news can be found here: <http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/onfaithjuly12>

growing gap between generations, with the young, especially the educated, increasingly rejecting caste distinctions and choosing their own partners.

With an individual's profession or vocation being increasingly linked to modern educational qualifications and less and less to his or her caste, lifestyles and living standards are becoming increasingly independent of caste in modern India, especially in urban areas. This has led to a rise in inter-caste marriages in the last few decades. A change in attitude towards caste from all perspectives -- religious, social and political -- is essential before caste ceases to be a consideration in marriage.

4.7 The role of the government in ending caste-based discrimination

Given the evolution of the dynamics of caste, and its deep connections with politics in modern India, Hindu spiritual and religious leaders, and Hindu organizations by themselves can no longer drive or influence societal change. Theirs is a necessary role but not sufficient in the absence of actions the GoI must undertake. While it is apparent that much needs to be done to eliminate the injustices of caste-based discrimination, the progress achieved in recent decades must also be acknowledged. Key elements of such progress includes the political empowerment of lower castes, especially the SCs and OBCs, and the GoI's reservation policies in education and employment, which have dramatically improved the economic and social status of millions of erstwhile "lower" castes. But in the context of further necessary improvement, especially for SCs and STs, the legal and executive responsibilities of the GoI need to be highlighted.

The most important responsibility of the GoI, and the state and local governments, is law enforcement. The Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955), the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995, together provide powerful tools for the GoI to fight and eliminate discrimination against SCs and STs⁵⁵. However, poor law enforcement is a key impediment to providing justice. Effective enforcement of laws could also prove a major deterrent against future crimes. At issue is not just the extremely low conviction rate associated with crimes against SCs/STs but the difficulty that SCs and STs have even in filing police complaints in rural areas, and complaints being ignored by police without due investigation. Entrenched caste equations and corruption in politics, local government and even in the police force (documented in the National Police Commission report) have been a prime reason for this state of affairs. Stringent enforcement of other laws, such as those against child labor, can also have the positive effect of increasing school attendance among SC children. This

⁵⁵See Appendix C - Indian Laws and Legislation regarding caste-based discrimination

is important in that we view education as being as important as, if not more than, the actions of religious leaders and the government in the emancipation of SCs.

4.7a. Police Reform – A Key Concern

In 1979, the Government of India constituted the National Police Commission (NPC) to analyze and report factors behind the dismal performance of the police throughout the country. The need for reform is particularly acute as the archaic Police Act of 1861 still continues to govern policing in the country. The Police Act of 1861 was legislated by the British colonial government in the aftermath of the First War of Indian Independence in 1857. The British wanted to establish a police force that would suit the purpose of crushing dissent, and suppressing any movement for Indian independence. In many parts of India, the police are perceived as the handmaiden of the rich and the powerful rather than as an organization that supports a democratic society by maintaining a climate of law and order in which people feel secure in the exercise of their rights and the protection of their freedoms. More importantly, the influence of politics in the police force is seen as being all-pervasive and vitiating the ability of the police force to function with integrity. As India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in an address to senior police officers in early 2005, "*We need to ensure that police forces at all levels, and even more so at the grassroots, change from a feudal force to a democratic service.*" The NPC's eight reports analyze various facets of the problem and makes recommendations⁵⁶. The third report titled, "Police and the Weaker Sections of society" is especially relevant in this context.

The NPC report has yet to be implemented. In 2006, the Supreme Court delivered a verdict in a Public Interest Litigation case, *Prakash Singh vs. Union of India* (filed in 1996 by two retired Director Generals of Police), which demanded implementation of the NPC recommendations, directing the GoI to proceed with police reforms. In October 2005, even as the Supreme Court was considering the matter, the GoI set up a Police Act Drafting Committee tasked with drafting a new model Police Act. The committee submitted its report shortly after the Supreme Court verdict⁵⁷. The model Police Act 2006 enumerates mechanisms through which the directions of the Supreme Court can be effectively implemented. The Supreme Court required all governments, at the center and state levels, to comply with seven directives, in the twin areas of functional autonomy for the police, and enhanced police accountability, by March 31, 2007 and file affidavits of compliance by April 10, 2007. However, even as of today, compliance remains scanty. Of the 28 states and seven union territories of India, only three have achieved "partial compliance" on an overall basis, with the rest being non-compliant⁵⁸.

⁵⁶Search for "National Police Commission," <http://police.pondicherry.gov.in/>

⁵⁷http://www.mha.nic.in/uniquepage.asp?Id_Pk=530

⁵⁸State Compliance with Supreme Court Directives, Human Rights Initiative.

Many states, as well as some independent observers have questioned the feasibility of some of the Supreme Court's recommendations, including having a police machinery that is independent of the elected state Government and potentially not answerable to the electorate or the Legislatures. The poor compliance of the various states has been attributed to this concern and some of the states have passed their own state-level police acts to satisfy their needs but are still considered "non-compliant". Critics have suggested that what is important is not necessarily the independence of the police force but strict implementation of existing laws and the removal of corruption at the grass roots, besides economic empowerment of the SCs. It is not HAF's place or intent to take a stand on the exact nature of police reforms in India. However, it is universally held that the lack of stringent law enforcement is a key stumbling block in tackling caste-based discrimination, especially in rural areas, and against SCs and STs.

4.8 Modern Dalit movements

A short note on Nomenclature In this report, HAF has used mostly the terms Scheduled Castes (SCs) to denote those in the lowest rungs of the caste hierarchy. It is also the official term of the Govt. Two other terms used are Harijans and Dalits. In the early part of the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi strove to eliminate untouchability. He popularized the term "Harijan" (children of God) to refer to SCs, and to highlight the inherent divinity of all humankind propounded by Hindu scriptures. In recent decades, many Dalit activists and human rights campaigners, have considered the term Harijan to be patronizing, and have thus rejected it in favor of the term "Dalit". We sympathize with those who consider the term Harijan as patronizing. "Dalit", which means "broken people", is used to refer to the plight of the discriminated SCs, and gained popularity from the late-1990s onwards. The term was first popularized as a proper noun by the militant Dalit Panther's Party (modeled after the Black Panthers) in the 1970s to denote the untouchable community. Before the term Dalit gained broad currency, it was considered radical, politically loaded, with militant overtones, and not representative of the majority of SCs who live in rural areas⁵⁹. These views, however, have largely disappeared today, although the term Harijan also remains in use as a term of self-reference among some SCs, such as, for instance, the Ramnami SC community in Chattisgarh. One of its key leaders, Bhagwati Charan Bhatpare, writes [Section 5.1](#) of this report.

http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/india/initiatives/chri_state_compliance_with_supreme_court_directives_chart.pdf

⁵⁹See

1. Robert Deliege, *"The Untouchables of India"*. Berg (1999), p.x and Oliver Mendelsohn;
2. Marika Vicziany, *"The Untouchables"*, Cambridge University Press (1998), p. 4 and
3. Alan Marriott, *"Dalit or Harijan?"*, Economic and Political Weekly, September 6, 2003

The Dalit Movement - All historic movements against the caste system have been religion-based. Whether one considers Buddhism and Jainism as new religious traditions that opposed caste-based discrimination, the Hindu Bhakti movement, or movements such as the Arya Samaj, Sri Narayana Guru's reform movement in the Indian state of Kerala, and the Ramakrishna Mission, opposition to caste-based discrimination was expressed primarily in the religious realm. However, beginning in the 19th century, and especially in the 20th century, we saw several caste reform movements that were social and political in nature. The first prominent social reform leader from the "lower" castes was probably Mahatma Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890), from the Indian state of Maharashtra. He was not only active in caste reform but Jyotiba Phule and his wife were also pioneers of women's education in India, and opened the first school, exclusively for girls, in August 1848. Jyotiba Phule argued that education of women and the lower castes was a vital priority in addressing social inequalities, and formed the '*Satya Shodhak Samaj*' (Society of Seekers of Truth) to help liberate SCs and other oppressed castes. The organization waned after his death but his legacy was an inspiration to many others.

Another prominent reform leader who had an enormous impact in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu was "Periyar" E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker (1879-1973). His organization, the Dravidar Kazhagam, which mainly represents the *shudra* castes of Tamil Nadu, preaches vehement atheism along with social reform, and is enormously influential in Tamil Nadu politics even today. This despite Tamil society generally remaining deeply religious. His primary legacy is as a reformer who successfully transferred social, political, and economic power to the numerically dominant *shudra* castes of Tamil Nadu. These castes, however, continue to have their conflicts with the SCs of Tamil Nadu, along with the attendant politics, and the state has witnessed numerous caste clashes between *shudras* and SCs in recent decades.

Among those inspired by Jyotiba Phule was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), chief architect of the Indian Constitution and easily the most influential leader of the SCs. To him goes the credit of inspiring a vibrant network of grassroots Dalit movements across India, which use his prescription "Educate. Organize. Agitate" as their motto. After his failure to influence social change in Hindu society, Dr. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism along with about 500,000 followers on Oct 14, 1956. Dr. Ambedkar also formed the Republican Party of India (RPI), a political party that he hoped to use to gain political power for SCs. Ambedkar hoped that Buddhism and the RPI would emerge as twin forces for the religious and socio-political emancipation of the SCs. However, both Buddhism and the RPI's influence remain limited to certain sub-castes among the SCs. Ambedkar himself lost two elections -- in 1952 and 1954 -- as a result of opposition from other SC communities. While he has clearly emerged as a hero for

all SCs today, the RPI is electorally irrelevant as a political party, and the vast majority of SCs continue to remain Hindus⁶⁰.

The Dalit movement has not had a major all-India leader since Dr. Ambedkar, and has evolved into a multi-faceted and decentralized movement. There are several political parties now representing SCs in various parts of the country. Ambedkar's Buddhist Society of India continues to convert SCs to Buddhism. But Ambedkar's greatest legacy consists of his authorship of the Indian Constitution and the self-empowerment that he has inspired among the Dalits, as seen in the large number of secular, Dalit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are engaged in improving the lot of SCs in various parts of the country today.

The movement for the emancipation of SCs is an important one. HAF is fully committed to the end of discrimination against all SCs, Hindu or otherwise. In this report we have highlighted actions that we believe are necessary both from Hindu spiritual and religious leaders, Hindu organizations, and the GoI. The modern Dalit movement has been joined in the last decade or two by anti-Hindu religious organizations, such as the Dalit Freedom Network (DFN)⁶¹, which is funded almost entirely by Christian missionary groups in the United States, and whose president Dr. Joseph D'Souza is a past office bearer of the All-India Christian Council. Such groups, which often profess to speak on behalf of all SCs, are non-Hindu and often have an explicit anti-Hindu agenda. We acknowledge that Hindu society has historically failed the SCs, and the the Dalit movement is merely reaching out for allies in its quest for emancipation. We also do not mean to imply that groups such as the DFN are major representatives of the Dalit movement. There are also other Christian organizations involved in the movement solely to address the human rights abuses.

HAF lauds those organizations involved in mitigating or eliminating human rights abuses, but is wary of the motives of those that seek to exploit the situation through anti-Hindu propaganda and driven primarily by conversion agendas. The presence of caste-based discrimination in Hindu society is one of the reasons that provides missionaries the ability to "fish in troubled waters". This is why we argue that Hindu society has a great moral burden to act in a more determined and concerted fashion to end caste-based discrimination. Missionary groups are correct about the prevalence of caste-based discrimination in India, but their claims about caste-based discrimination being intrinsic to Hinduism, and that conversion to other religions is the only way to eliminate this problem, must be seen in the light of not their vested interests. These concerns are relevant for advocacy in the U.S. The lack of recognition of the complexities

⁶⁰According to the 2001 census, there are currently 7.95 million Buddhists in India, less than 1% of the total population of India in comparison with SCs being 16% of the total population of India

⁶¹ Dalit Freedom Network, <http://www.Dalitnetwork.org/>

of the caste problem, and the general ignorance about Hinduism and of India are meaningful stumbling blocks for U.S. lawmakers, human rights organizations and others grappling with the issue of caste-based discrimination.

Below are some of the more troubling issues in this context:

- Christian missionaries with an evangelical agenda in India usually refer to all SCs as Dalits and as non-Hindus. They often claim that SCs converting to Christianity should not be seen as conversion from Hinduism because SCs were not Hindus to begin with. In reality, most SCs remain committed Hindus and only want the end of discrimination. In support of this claim, we present in [Section 5.1](#) of this report an article titled “Why I am a Hindu” by Bhagwati Charan Bhatpare, a key community leader of the Ramnami SC Community in Chattisgarh, India.
- While HAF welcomes social services rendered without any ulterior motives by Christian missionaries, evangelism in India can take the form of predatory proselytism, and exploiting the poverty of the SCs to convert them to Christianity. This is accomplished with the aid of economic allurements such as free education, medical assistance, promise of jobs, and loans for businesses. Churches have well established lobbying efforts in the U.S. and Western European nations to raise large amounts of money to support proselytism agendas and activities. Such predatory conversions, which are not inspired by purely spiritual motives, are effectively coercive, and often fraudulent and unethical. Most tellingly, conversions to Christianity have not led to an improvement in the situation of SC converts, who continue to suffer discrimination at the hands of “upper” caste Christians. [Section 5.2](#) of this report offers an article “The Plight of Dalit Christians”, by P.N.Benjamin, a lay Indian Christian leader and coordinator of the Bangalore Initiative for Religious Dialog (BIRD). Benjamin discusses the issue of caste among Indian Christians as well as the phenomenon of predatory conversions. Leading SC intellectuals in India have also increasingly embraced capitalism and economic reforms, rather than religious conversion, as the solution to the discrimination that SCs face⁶².
- Communists, Marxists, and those with similar political agendas, who consider religion, and in the Indian context, Hinduism, an "opiate of the masses" and interpret history in terms of

⁶²See

1. “Crusader Sees Wealth as Cure for Caste Bias”, The New York Times, Aug 29, 2008

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/30/world/asia/30caste.html?ref=asia>

2. “In an Indian Village, Signs of the Loosening Grip of Caste”, The Washington Post, Aug 31, 2008

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/30/AR2008083002299.html>

class struggle, use the Dalit issue to discredit and demonize Hinduism and Hindus. A combination of Marxist and missionary interests have also sought to scuttle US-India relations using caste as a distraction. HAF firmly believes that, since caste-based discrimination is outlawed in India and given India's status as a vibrant democracy, the matter should be treated purely as an internal matter of a sovereign state. Attempts to equate caste-based discrimination with apartheid should be firmly rejected. Not only is caste not the same as race⁶³, but caste-based discrimination is certainly not the policy of the Government of India as racial discrimination was in apartheid South Africa. The problem in India is one of lack of adequate law enforcement, not discrimination by the GoI. Appendix A lists all laws and regulations that explicitly prohibit caste-based discrimination, and those that seek to create a network of affirmative action programs to support the advancement of previously oppressed castes.

⁶³Scientific studies have shown fairly consistently that caste distinctions are not observed or replicated in the genetic analyses of Hindu populations. See

1. http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/01/0110_060110_india_genes.html

and

2. Sahoo, Sanghamitra et al. (2006-01-24). "A prehistory of Indian Y chromosomes: Evaluating demic diffusion scenarios". *Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences of United States of America* **103** (4): 843–848.

<http://www.pnas.org/content/103/4/843.full>

Also see Dr. B.R.Ambedkar in "The Annihilation of Caste" <http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/ambedkar/>

"Some have dug a biological trench in defence of the Caste System. It is said that the object of Caste was to preserve purity of race and purity of blood. Now ethnologists are of opinion that men of pure race exist nowhere and that there has been a mixture of all races in all parts of the world. Especially is this the case with the people of India. Mr. D. R. Bhandarkar in his paper on *Foreign Elements in the Hindu Population* has stated that "There is hardly a class, or Caste in India which has not a foreign strain in it. There is an admixture of alien blood not only among the warrior classes—the Rajputs and the Marathas—but also among the Brahmins who are under the happy delusion that they are free from all foreign elements." The Caste system cannot be said to have grown as a means of preventing the admixture of races or as a means of maintaining purity of blood. As a matter of fact Caste System came into being long after the different races of India had commingled in blood and culture. To hold that distinctions of Castes are really distinctions of race and to treat different Castes as though they were so many different races is a gross perversion of facts. What racial affinity is there between the Brahmin of the Punjab and the Brahmin of Madras? What racial affinity is there between the untouchable of Bengal and the untouchable of Madras? What racial difference is there between the Brahmin of the Punjab and the Chamar of the Punjab? What racial difference is there between the Brahmin of Madras and the Pariah of Madras? The Brahmin of the Punjab is racially of the same stock as the Chamar of the Punjab and the Brah of Madras is of the same race as the Pariah of Madras. Caste System does not demarcate racial division. Caste System is a social division of people of the same race..."

5. Grassroots Reflections

5.1 *Why I am a Hindu?* By Bhagwati Charan Bhatpare

Bhagwati Charan Bhatpare is a school principal, a leader of the Ramnami community, a Satnami member, a civil rights activist, and Board Member of the Sahayog Foundation of Chattisgarh. Below is a short introduction to Bhagwati (in italics) written by Prof. Ramdas Lamb, followed by Bhagwati Charan's article. Prof. Ramdas Lamb is Associate Professor of Religion at the University of Hawaii, has studied the traditions and practices of the Ramanami community for over three decades and is a personal friend of Bhagwati. Dr. Lamb is also the President and co-founder of the Sahayog Foundation, a U.S. based non-profit, charitable organization established to provide support for the educational and health needs of rural poor and SC community in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh.

When I first began to visit Matiya, Bhagwati's village, in the mid-1970s, he was about 12 years old and used to come to see me regularly. He had been raised to be interested in the world and in spirituality and saw me as someone from whom he could learn something. His father, Ram Lal, was one of the only educated residents, and the only one who was Harijan. His father was also the principal of the school and the village postman. In addition, he was the person in the village with the most knowledge of medicine and served as its "doctor." Whenever any of the caste Hindus were ill, he would be called upon, would go to their homes and treat them. When they were well, he would not be allowed into their homes for any reason. Ram Lal was also a scholar of the Ramcharitmanas⁶⁴ and would give talks on it several times a year when his caste group would hold nine-day Manas readings and discourses called "katha". Caste Hindus would go to listen to him, but he would not be allowed to participate in any of their religious rituals. It was in this environment that Bhagwati and his four brothers were raised.

While his oldest brother works in the coal mines, Bhagwati and his next brother

⁶⁴From <http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/stylar: Ramayana> (Raa-MAY-yah-nah): One of the two Hindu epics; the other is the Mahabharata. Originally written in Sanskrit, it is the story of God taking a human form to destroy evil and teach the path of righteous behavior. The most popular telling of the story was written by Tulsidas in Hindi and is called the Ramcharitmanas. It is the predominant scripture in North India and in the Hindu diaspora.

followed in the footsteps of their father and became school teachers. The fourth brother died of leukemia as a teenager, and the youngest brother works the family land as a farmer. Bhagwati earned a Bachelor's and a Master's degree at a university about 100 kilometers from their village and has been teaching since the late 1980s. Currently, he is the principal at a village school in which half the students are tribal youth. He is also on the board of Sahayog Foundation in the U.S. and serves as the primary overseer of Sahayog's work in Matiya and the area. He has two sons, both of whom attend college. Bhagwati is highly respected in his village, both by his own caste group as well as by many caste Hindus. In fact, many caste Hindus will secretly share food with him at his own home but will not do so publicly for fear of being ostracized by the rest of their respective caste group. Others might see this as hypocrisy and be upset with it. Bhagwati understands the complexity of the situation and accepts the difficult situation of his caste Hindu friends. For him, his relationship with Lord Ram allows him to have patience with others without judging them. -- Prof. Ramdas Lamb

Today I want to write something that has been in my thoughts for a very long time, but that I have been previously unable to accurately express. I have pondered the reality of the physical world, religion, the various *devis*⁶⁵ and *devatas* (various forms of God that Hindus worship). I also thought about many of the religions that exist in my country, such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. Because my own Guru knows about all these belief systems, I have learned about them as well from spending time with him. He looks for the essence in all of them and reflects it in his own life and religious experience. What I have gained in this regard is due only to him, and I bow my head to his feet for this. All my religious knowledge comes from the blessings of my Guru.

When I was in a deep reflection, one question would arise in my mind, and that is "Why I am Hindu?" To answer this question I sought deep within. In the process, I reflected on my life when I was a student. I had learned that the Persians used to pronounce the River "Sindhu" as "Hindu," and they called our land (Bharat) as "Hindustan." Also, they called the people of Hindustan as "Hindu." It means all Indian people were called Hindu by them. Later on, the word "Hindu" came to refer to the religious beliefs that originated in the country.

⁶⁵From <http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/styled>: **Devi** (DEE-vee): In Hinduism, the female aspect of the divine. For some, she is the power of Brahman, the unqualified absolute. Typically translated as "goddess."

I was born in a Hindu family and when my understanding of life grew, I began to take part in religious and social activities. My father was both a school teacher and a very religious person. He had a great influence on me. Later on, I began to study the myths and beliefs of other religions as well and would try to compare one religion to another. I did not find what I was looking for in any of the other religions that are present in my area. The more I searched inside for what was right, I came to realize why I am Hindu. It was an answer that came from my heart and from my experiences.

Today, the recognition and understanding of life that I have is due to my Hindu religion, and I feel myself very grateful and happy for many reasons. I am free to undertake my religious practices as I wish and there are several ways of worshipping God. This is a unique feature of Hinduism. This freedom is there from the time of birth. Respect is given to everybody - even the animals and other creatures of this world are given respect, because we believe there is godliness in every living thing and in nature.

The 'Vedas' tell us the reason for creation, but they give only one particular view. There are so many other holy books of literature, poetry and stories in the Hindu religion as well. In them, each and every topic is mentioned about life and its requirements. In one of our most sacred books, "Ramcharitmanas," it is clearly explained how we should live our lives. In the "Mahabharata"⁶⁶ we get moral teachings that war should be fought only when necessary to save dharma⁶⁷ and not for any other reason. The Puranas⁶⁸ teach us that we should adore God every day, and this will lead us toward immortality in life. One of the more special things about my religion is that it has the capacity to respect all other religions. We don't always find this attitude in other religions. There is no narrow mindedness in the foundation of Hinduism, although there are some Hindus who are narrow minded.

Today, I feel great inner peace being a part of Hindu society, and I also feel very happy. In it, I feel freedom in body, mind, and actions on the path towards finding God in my life. The Hindu emphasis on truth and non-violence are very important to me. Hindu Dharma also teaches various types of yoga for gaining health of body and strength of mind, both of which are very

⁶⁶From <http://www.religionwriters.com/tools-resources/religionstylebook/stylem>: The world's longest epic poem is longer than the Iliad and Odyssey combined. The Bhagavad Gita is one section of it. Known as the "Great Epic of India," the Mahabharata was written by the sage Ved Vyas and revolves around the conflict between two kingdoms and their great battle more than 3,000 years ago.

⁶⁷http://www.hafsite.org/resources/q_a_booklet#Dharma

⁶⁸http://www.himalayanacademy.com/resources/books/dws/dws_mandala-27.html: The *Puranas* are popular folk narratives, teaching faith, belief and ethics in mythology, allegory, legend and symbolism.

essential. Concentration of the mind creates a foundation to help one gain spiritual strength in our lives.

There are so many religious persons born within Hinduism who have dedicated their lives for the welfare of all humanity and of Hindustan. Their lives were devoted to ridding the world of spiritual ignorance and promoting world peace. This shows the greatness of the Hindu religion.

Dharma and righteousness are the highest values in one's life, influencing the past, present, and future. They affect our lifestyle and thoughts and guide us. I have no problem following the paths and customs of Hinduism. I can take part in each and every religious activity. Most people have to struggle and have to face many difficulties to live up to their religious beliefs and doctrines. I do not see such problems in Hinduism. My religion gives me the freedom to choose my path and my doctrine to knowing God. I can see what is the right path for myself and what is not. To be a complete person, one has to adhere to some belief system. For me, Hinduism is the only religion that clearly teaches the path to knowing myself and knowing God. So I have accepted the path of Hinduism. It has influenced my life very much. I believe in its spiritual practices and I follow the path of Hinduism.

The Hindu American Foundation asked me to write this article for this report specifically because my family belongs to a scheduled caste. My community and other scheduled castes have suffered great discrimination for centuries. The Hindu community is divided into many castes, creeds, and other types of groups. Some high caste religious persons have spread the feeling of partiality and superiority of their caste, but this only destroys the reputation of the Hindu community.

Casteism is not good for the Hindu community. Its appearance has been deformed and defamed by those upper caste persons who are taking advantage of their caste status by belittling others. Many religious texts were manipulated and changed by upper castes to justify their acts. All religions have faults in them, so I do not say that Hinduism is at fault, only that casteism is a problem that needs to be removed.

I belong to the Ramnami Samaj, and our main purpose in life is to practice devotion to Lord Ram by chanting Ramnam. We are not concerned too much about casteism. The Hindu religion has cared for and nurtured our existence, so we have much to be thankful for.

The Hindu religion is our protector, and it has taught us the lesson of equality and ideal life. Some people think that the Hindu religion is not good for us Harijans (SC), but I disagree. This is only the hypocrisy created by some people to spread enmity among people of my caste. They

don't understand the real Hindu Dharma. It seems that they only want to weaken the Hindu religion. It is only the conspiracy of those who want us not to be Hindu. In the Hindu religion that I know, there is only fraternity, peace and humanist ideology. That is why I am Hindu.

--- Bhagwati Charan Bhatpare

Matiya, Chattisgarh, India

May 19, 2010

5.2 “The Plight of Dalit Christians” By P.N. Benjamin

P.N. Benjamin is Founder-Trustee, President and Coordinator of the Bangalore Initiative for Religious Dialogue (BIRD). A former Associate Treasurer of the Karnataka Central Diocese of the Church of South India (CSI), Mr. Benjamin is a pioneer in interfaith dialogue in India. He is also a senior freelance journalist and columnist who has contributed hundreds of opinions, interviews and feature articles to many of India's leading newspapers and magazines and often serves on government-appointed fact finding teams that probe incidents of violence among religious communities in India. He was also a delegate at the one-week consultation on “An Ethical Code of Conduct for Religious Conversion” organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican in Toulouse, France in 2007.

As per the 2001 census, there are 24.2 million Christians in India of which the Christians of South India constitute 12.5 million, more than half the total Christian population of India, and those of the North-east, 5.4 million. The total population of Tamil Nadu Christians is 3.8 million, Karnataka one million, Kerala six million, Andhra Pradesh 1.2 million and Goa 0.4 million. Dalits constitute 65% of the total South Indian Christian population. Some Christian groups even claim that Dalits constitute 70% of the Christians of Tamil Nadu.

To corrupt George Orwell's famous aphorism: "All Indian Christians are equal, but some are more equal than others." By embracing Christianity, the Dalits have not found themselves emancipated from economic and social inequalities. Conversions have neither offered the Dalits a way of escape from the bondage of caste nor have they fostered the social transformation of the Dalit Christians. They still live under the same conditions of discrimination, exploitation and oppression.

Bishop Dr D.K. Sahu, a former general secretary of the National Christian Council of India (NCCI) once said: "The Indian church has to make a confession first. If you are alienated in society and you become a Christian, you are alienated again. We tell them, 'if you become Christian then there is no discrimination', but once they become Christian they are looked down upon by Christians of higher castes. A higher caste Christian will never marry a Dalit Christian, yet we say we are all one."

By embracing Christianity the Dalits have not found themselves emancipated from economic and social inequities. On the other hand they even find themselves to be victims of double discrimination in their new religion. Jesus himself has said that those who proselytize end up

making their "victims" twice as miserable⁶⁹. That is what is happening in the case of Dalits, regardless of whether they seek refuge in Christianity, Islam or Buddhism. Their initial caste identity persists unless they relocate and live in areas where no one knows their antecedents. But, then they become caught up in a quandary when they would like to access the benefits of affirmative action programs such as admissions to educational institutions, and government jobs by reclaiming their Dalit status. It becomes a CATCH-22 situation.

The Church has sinned more than others in perpetuating social injustices against Dalit Christians. Casteism is rampant in the Church. Caste discrimination takes many forms among Indian Christians. In rural areas they cannot own or rent houses, however well placed they may be. Inter-caste marriages are frowned upon and caste tags are still appended to the Christian names of high caste people. Humiliating discrimination on the basis of caste does not spare the Dalit Christians even in death. Separate places are marked out for them in the parish churches and burial grounds.

Charity begins at home -- but, the home (Church) where it begins, the Dalits Christians do not belong. According to a study, if one combines all the landed properties of churches in India put together, the church is the second biggest landlord in the country, next only to the Government. In addition, the Church - Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal and all other denominations- its institutions and Church-led NGOs receive millions of dollars worth of foreign financial support every year. However, there is no transparency with regard to these funds as well the massive income accruing from the elite schools, colleges and hospitals and also shopping complexes built all over the major cities in the country.

“Christians are a mere 2.5 per cent of the Indian population. But the Church in India suffers from a case of plenty”, says Remy Denis, All India Catholic Union President. According to him, “Church authorities control funds equivalent to the Indian Navy’s annual budget. But, the poor Dalit Christian does not even get the crumbs, leave alone participation in Church matters. The Indian Church has failed miserably to take care of Dalits converted to Christianity.”

Besides, indiscriminate conversions have ruined the spirit of Christianity into savagery. Christianity is a path paved with suffering and service. Christ said: "If any one wants to follow me, let him take up the Cross and follow me." But Indian Church leaders want the Government to carry the cross of Dalit Christians. That’s why they have been demanding reservation to Dalit Christians in education, Central and State Government jobs and social welfare schemes.

⁶⁹Mathew 23:15 (King James Bible version): Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves

Church leaders have tamed the Dalit Christians and reduced them to eternal slaves of organized Church bodies. On the one hand, the Church demands reservation for Dalit Christians from the government while on the other, it opposes and refuses to provide them reservation in the Church structure.

Thus, the Church's call for redistribution of national resources in favor of Dalit Christians will be heeded only when its own resources are re-allocated and used with a clear partiality for Dalits in its own fold. The Church's fearless stand for justice will no longer let it remain silent about the discrimination within the Church - a matter of shame to its members and an embarrassment to its friends.

Dalit Christians have been used as cannon fodder by Church leaders and Dalit NGOs. These leaders have grown fat and powerful and enjoy better standards of living and greater prestige than the poor and ordinary Dalit Christians. Their eyes are turned westward even more than during the Pax Britannica, and they draw their inspiration not so much from the poverty, inequality and indignities faced by the Dalit Christians within the Church but from the next seminar in Geneva or other western capitals.

It is time Dalit Christians stood united and fought for their rights in the Church until they are equals in the Christian fraternity first before seeking equal treatment from the government. It would be futile to expect others to give them support with a real change of heart. This goal can be achieved by following intelligently Ambedkar's exhortation: "Educate, Organize and Agitate".

Dalit Christians' plight calls for a deeper analysis of the problem so that Christian leaders do not throw stones at the caste system prevailing in Hinduism but look to something more meaningful and constructive. Without going into details of how enlightened Hindus have dealt with the unconscionable practice of untouchability, the Church in India must audit its own record with regard to the Dalit Christians.

P.N.Benjamin
Coordinator, Bangalore Initiative for Religious Dialogue
Bangalore
July 15, 2010

6. Hindu American Foundation's Position on Caste

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) does not believe in caste-based discrimination or a birth-based hierarchy. We believe in equal religious and spiritual rights for all Hindus, including a priesthood that is open to all Hindus⁷⁰. We believe that caste-based discrimination is a failure of Hindu society to live up to its highest teachings and not an intrinsic part of Hinduism itself. Indeed, we believe that Hinduism can be the solution to the problem if Hindus follow key Hindu scriptures and the teachings of Hindu saints. Nevertheless, with its origins in ancient Hindu society and continued prevalence today across all religious communities, the unconscionable practice of caste-based discrimination presents an urgent responsibility for Hindus to take greater action towards eliminating it and an opportunity to demonstrate a proper application of Hindu teachings.

Within Hindu society, HAF supports the reanalysis and subsequent rejection of any and all teachings that promote caste-based discrimination and birth-based hierarchy. Most such teachings are found in texts called *Smritis* or books of ancient Hindu social law, which by their very nature and intent, are recognized to change with space and time and do not necessarily teach Hinduism's eternal spiritual truths. While many Hindu spiritual and religious leaders, organizations and movements have courageously, over the past several centuries, taken the lead in rejecting such teachings, and in ensuring that those parts of the various scriptures that promote notions of caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy are explicitly denied any authority in the minds of their followers, some have not.

Hindu institutions can particularly play a crucial role in social reform because they have the authority and following of nearly all members of all communities and castes. In addition, various Hindu institutions have significant influence and reach into rural communities, where caste prejudices are prevalent. Hindu leaders and organizations should continue to work more actively to end discrimination and promote equality by ensuring that their followers practice the higher ideals of Hinduism. We hope that Hindu institutions pro-actively induct more "low" caste and SC and ST Hindus in positions of responsibility and power.

On the other hand, any efforts towards this end must incorporate the changed dynamics of the caste system and the fact that caste violence in India today is significantly driven by political and economic considerations. For this reason, eradicating caste-based discrimination not only places a religious responsibility on Hindu spiritual and religious leaders and organizations, but

⁷⁰ Hindu American Foundation, "*Hindu American Foundation Comments On Anti-Casteist Tamil Nadu Order*," May 29, 2006. <<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/anticasteist-tamil-nadu-order>>

also a secular responsibility on civic institutions, and a political responsibility on GoI as well as state and local government and law enforcement. Ultimately, every Indian has a responsibility to this end given the involvement of every religion and every community in the history of caste in India. Effective implementation of police reforms and stringent law enforcement are critical in combating caste-based discrimination, especially those in rural areas and against SCs and STs. In particular, the GoI should fully implement the provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995.

The movement for the emancipation of SCs is an important one. HAF is fully committed to the end of discrimination against all SCs, Hindu or otherwise. We are supportive of the vibrant Dalit movement that has taken root in India today, are working with some Dalit groups today and seek to work more in the future. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's greatest legacy consists not only in his authorship of the Indian Constitution but also the self-empowerment that he has inspired among the Dalits, as seen in the large number of secular, Dalit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are engaged in improving the lot of SCs in various parts of the country today.

The modern Dalit movement has been joined in the last decade or two by many Christian organizations, often supported financially from Europe and the U.S. HAF lauds those organizations involved in mitigating or eliminating human rights abuses, but is wary of the motives of those that seek to exploit the situation through anti-Hindu propaganda and driven primarily by conversion agendas. The presence of caste-based discrimination in Hindu society is one of the reasons that provides missionaries the ability to "fish in troubled waters". This is why we argue that Hindu society has a great moral burden to act in a more determined and concerted fashion to end caste-based discrimination.

Missionaries are correct about the prevalence of caste-based discrimination in India, but their claims about caste-based discrimination being intrinsic to Hinduism, and that conversion to other religions is the only way to eliminate this problem, must be seen in the light of not their vested interests. Tellingly, conversions to Christianity have not led to an improvement in the situation of SC converts, who continue to suffer discrimination at the hands of "upper" caste Christians and leading dalit intellectuals have opined that education and economic advancement are key to dalit emancipation, not conversion to other traditions.

HAF firmly believes that caste-based discrimination in India should be treated purely as an internal matter of a sovereign state and that India's caste problem should not become internationalized by NGOs who want secondary gain.. Attempts to equate caste-based discrimination with apartheid should be firmly rejected because caste not the same as race and because caste-based discrimination is not the policy of the Government of India as racial discrimination was in apartheid South Africa.

The history of caste and its reality in India today is complex. In this report we have not even delved into how external factors have also influenced the caste system in India, because caste-

based discrimination has a long history in India and because we do not intend for this report to be an authoritative academic treatise on the history and evolution of caste. The report provides a Hindu perspective that caste is not “intrinsic” to Hinduism and that Hinduism can continue to be a part of the solution to the caste problem in India. This report also describes why any efforts to eradicate caste-based discrimination, as well as the international understanding of the issue, must incorporate an accurate knowledge of Hinduism and the realities of caste in modern-day India. Today, most of the prominent Hindu spiritual and religious leaders and organizations reject caste-based discrimination, untouchability and a birth-based hierarchy, and there are many Hindu individuals and groups actively working to overcome it. HAF vigorously supports efforts to eradicate untouchability and the unfair treatment of anyone based on caste identity. To further this process, HAF has joined with GHRD⁷¹ and Sahayog Foundation⁷² to present an annual award to individuals or groups that show progress in the efforts toward reaching this goal.

⁷¹Global Human Rights Defence, <http://www.ghrd.org/>

⁷²Sahayog Foundation, <http://www.sahayogfoundation.org/>

7. Human rights violations against the Scheduled Castes - A summary

7.1 Human rights violations in the form of caste-based discrimination

Human rights violations against Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) occur on a daily basis throughout India and South Asia, and primarily in rural communities. The Government of India (GoI) is cognizant of these atrocities. The National Crime Records Bureau, mandated by the Ministry of Home Affairs of the GoI, releases annual reports on nationwide crimes and trends, with a special section dedicated to crimes against SC and STs. In the latest report covering the year of 2008, there were 33,615 such incidents reported. Not all of these incidents are motivated by caste biases -- many are motivated by economic differences, while others have intertwined factors.⁷³ Crimes against SCs are perpetrated by people of all religious and caste backgrounds - Hindu (both high-caste and low-caste), Muslim and Christian, and between SCs themselves.

This section will cover human rights violations in five major categories: crimes against women, caste related social ostracization, economic exploitation, and discrimination against scheduled castes, violence, and bias and discrimination by government institutions. We have attempted to provide an overview of the types of violations, illustrated by incidents, as reported by mainstream media outlets. This report has been a long running initiative of the Hindu American Foundation. As a result, the majority of the incidents cited are from 2006. Because the situation for most SCs has not drastically improved, though these incidents are over four years old now, they are representative of the issues faced by SCs today. Furthermore, incidents included for 2006 are only a selected sample and by no means are intended to be comprehensive.

Nearly all of the incidents are reports of alleged crimes as reported by the press. We have not verified the information reported. As a result, for individual incidents, the names and identities of the suspected perpetrators should be viewed as suspects only, rather than convicted guilty parties. However, regardless of the actual veracity of any individual incident, the underlying trends with regards to human rights violations against SCs still remain.

⁷³Government of India, National Crime Records Bureau, 2008 Report <<http://ncrb.nic.in/>>

7.2 Human rights violations against Scheduled Caste women

SC women are particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses because of their vulnerable economic, political and social status. Modern-day human rights violations against SC women can be categorized as follows: rape and sexual assault, abduction and kidnapping, prostitution and flesh trade, and public humiliation.

Many of these incidents tend to cut across multiple categories. For example, in February 2006, three SC women, Amarjit Kaur, Virpal Kaur and Rani, from the village of Johar, Punjab, reported to have been abducted by police officers. While in police custody, they were stripped, beaten and electrocuted. The women reported that their abduction was linked to pressure from their local politicians who wanted the women to join the flesh trade.⁷⁴ This incident involves abduction, sexual assault and prostitution.

In this section, illustrative incidents for each of these categories of human rights violations against women included, but they are not meant to comprehensively capture the violence that occurs regularly.

7.2a. Rape and sexual assault

Most rapes against SC women and girls are crimes of opportunity. Many rapes and sexual assaults occur not because of caste, but rather because the perpetrators leverage the underprivileged societal and economic standing of the victims to escape prosecution.

In some occasions, rape is also used as a form of retribution over other issues, such as property disputes. In June 2006, in Beldih, Gopalganj District, Bihar, upper caste men attempted to rape a SC woman after she refused to withdraw a complaint against them relating to a property dispute.⁷⁵

SC women often do not report attacks in fear of reprisal due to threats of violence, coupled with the social humiliation of being a rape victim. Also in February 2006, in the Solan District of Himachal Pradesh, police registered charges against a village schoolteacher who had raped one

⁷⁴"BJP Picks Up Issue of 'Police Atrocities' on Dalit Women"
<<http://news.webindia123.com/news/showdetails.asp?id=253127&cat=India>>

⁷⁵"Dalit woman molested in Bihar." Times of India. 22 June 2006.
<<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1671556.cms>>

of his 13-year-old female students. He also threatened to kill the girl if she told anyone about the incident.⁷⁶

Furthermore, even if a victim chooses to report a crime, government officials and police sometimes refuse to register the crime. In February 2006, a SC woman lodged a petition in a Bihar court accusing Ramswaroop Prasad, a politician and legislator, of attempted rape. The woman reported that Prasad, his son and his bodyguard forcibly entered her home and tried to molest her. She also reported that the local police refused to take the case when she approached them.⁷⁷

While most perpetrators are higher caste Hindu men, men of other backgrounds have taken advantage of SC women as targets of sexual assaults. For example, in June 2006, in Pettah, Kerala, a 48-year-old music teacher, Stellus, and a 45-year-old Christian pastor, Lear, were accused of raping an 18-year-old SC girl.⁷⁸

A sample of other incidents from 2006 include:

1. January 2006, Nellikuppam, Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu: 20-year-old Kamatchi, a SC woman, was found hanged from a tree. Her father, Gnanasekaran, reported that she was raped and then murdered.
2. January 2006, Hasanpur, Muzaffarnagar District, Uttar Pradesh: Four youths reportedly attempted to rape two SC girls while the girls were returning from the farm fields where they worked as laborers. The two were injured while resisting the rape.⁷⁹
3. January 2006, Bhilwara District, Rajasthan: A SC girl accused police officer Motiram Chaudhary of rape, assault and threatening her into having a forced abortion. The accused, who was married, reportedly coaxed the victim into having an illicit relationship and later forced the girl to have an abortion.⁸⁰

⁷⁶"Teacher Rapes Minor Dalit Girl in Himachal Pradesh"

<<http://www.newkerala.com/news2.php?action=fullnews&id=8444>>

⁷⁷"Dalit Woman Accuses Bihar Legislator of Molestation Attempt"

<<http://www.newkerala.com/news2.php?action=fullnews&id=10393>>

⁷⁸"Two held on rape charge." The Hindu. 30 June 2006.

<<http://www.hindu.com/2006/06/30/stories/2006063022270300.htm>>

⁷⁹"Two Dalit Girls Injured in Rape Attempt" <<http://www.zenews.com/znnew/articles.asp?aid=272313&sid=REG>>

⁸⁰"Constable Accused of Raping Dalit Woman in Rajasthan"

http://news.webindia123.com/news/showdetails.asp?id=236142&n_date=20060131&cat=India

4. January 2006, Godavarru, Kankipadu, Andhra Pradesh: A 13-year-old SC girl was raped in the village police station by 52-year-old Dhana Prasad, a local farmer. Rape charges were not filed until the girl's mother Saraswati noticed physical abnormalities on her daughter's body.⁸¹
5. February 2006, Achalda Village, Auraiya District, Uttar Pradesh: Anju, a 15-year-old SC girl, fought off four men who were attempting to rape her in fields near her village. The rapists, however, cut off the victim's right arm in frustration. Police resisted opening a case for the victim but were eventually forced to do so by the victim's father. The victim named Veeresh Yadav, OBC, as the prime suspect.⁸²
6. February 2006, Haridwar, Uttranchal Pradesh: Ashok was arrested for abducting an 18-year-old SC girl at gunpoint and then proceeding to forcibly intoxicate her with alcohol, burn her with cigarettes and rape her multiple times.⁸³
7. March 2006, Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu: A 17-year-old girl was raped by two men, Muniyasamy and Muthu, near her home. The two accused were not prosecuted initially because the girl did not directly admit that she was raped when she was first examined at a local hospital. Local groups felt that the police should have conducted the examination when the girl first reported the molestation.⁸⁴
8. November 2006, Sahalwada , Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh: Asha Katiya, a 15-year-old SC girl, was burned to death by a youth after she refused to withdraw a complaint of rape against him. Asha was sleeping in her house when the accused, Chotte Singh Rajput, reportedly poured kerosene on her and set her on fire.⁸⁵

⁸¹"Man charged with raping a minor." NewIndPress.com. 4 June 2006.

<<http://www.newindpress.com/NewsItems.asp?ID=IEA20060604004608&Page=A&Title=Southern+News+-+Andhra+Pradesh&Topic=0>>

⁸²"Frustrated Rapists Chop Off Dalit Girl's Arm" <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1412491.cms>

⁸³"Dalit Teenager Raped, Brutalised in Haridwar" <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1416163.cms>>

⁸⁴"Dalit Girl, Father Seek Justice"

<<http://www.newindpress.com/NewsItems.asp?ID=IET20060309033716&Topic=0&Title=Southern%20News%20-%20Tamil%20Nadu&Page=T>>

⁸⁵"Dalit girl burnt to death by man accused of rape", Zee News.

<<http://www.zeenews.com/articles.asp?aid=337515&sid=REG&ssid=>>

9. November 2006, Tewra, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh: A 26-year-old pregnant SC woman was reportedly raped by two upper caste youths in front of her three-year-old child and threatened with death if she reported the crime.⁸⁶

In all of 2008, the National Crime Records Bureau registered 1,457 rapes of Scheduled Caste women nationwide. However, the actual number of rapes is likely far higher because SC women are reluctant to report these incidents due to threats of violence and humiliation in their communities, and because police may intentionally not record the incidents as well.

7.2b. Prostitution/Flesh trade

Due to their distressed economic plight, SC women are particularly susceptible to becoming involved with prostitution. Bhoomika Vihar, an NGO based in Bihar, released a report that reported 98% of women being trafficked in the flesh trade in Bihar belonged to SC and ST communities.⁸⁷ A study by the Gram Niyojan Kendra, conducted by interviewing 10,000 people across India, concluded that growing migration and poverty, political instability, erosion of traditional values, desire to earn easy money, globalization and declining job opportunities for uneducated and unskilled youths were contributing factors to the rise in prostitution. The study noted that prostitutes were mainly SC women.⁸⁸

In one incident in Pipariya, Hoshangabad District, Madhya Pradesh in June 2006, two SC sisters lodged a complaint with the State Women's Commission after upper caste villagers ransacked their house, tore their clothes, beat them and threatened to kill their brother for their refusing to enter the flesh trade.⁸⁹

As another form of prostitution, in the Surat and Vadodara districts of Gujarat, tribal and low caste girls were reportedly being sold to higher caste men as brides. Married low caste women were being rented to higher caste men as temporary wives on a monthly basis for Rs. 8,000 (approximately USD \$150) per month.⁹⁰

⁸⁶"Dalit woman raped in Muzaffarnagar",
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/NEWS/India/Dalit_woman_raped_in_Muzaffarnagar/articleshow/574403.cms>

⁸⁷"Trafficking of SC, Dalit Girls" <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1420827.cms>

⁸⁸"Prostitution growing in most states, says survey." Gulf Times. 3 July 2006. <http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=95291&version=1&template_id=40&parent_id=22>

⁸⁹"Dalits won't join flesh trade, tortured." IBN Live. 1 June 2006. <<http://www.ibnlive.com/news/dalit-sisters-tortured-over-flesh-trade/12014-3.html>>

⁹⁰"Rent wife for Rs 8,000 a month in Gujarat." Times of India. 18 June 2006.
<<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-1657309,curpg-2.cms>>

The *devadasi* system is another form of prostitution, under which SC girls continue to be exploited as village prostitutes. The system originated with the dedication of girls, known as *devadasis*, to Hindu temples as official dancers, under the patronage of the local king. However, with the onset of the Islamic invasions, the empires of the patron Hindu kings, and temples were destroyed, forcing *devadasis* into a life of poverty and sometimes prostitution.

As of 2004, the *devadasi* system is still practiced in 14 rural districts of Andhra Pradesh and 10 rural districts of Karnataka.⁹¹ While many *devadasis* rely on manual labor and agricultural work as their primary source of income, a significant portion are prostitutes. As of 1998, it was estimated that 5,000 to 15,000 girls are trafficked into brothels every year via induction as *devadasis*.⁹² In some areas, *devadasis* are available as prostitutes to men from all segments of society ranging from the temple priest, to migrant truckers, to SC men. Though the practice is outlawed in many states, existing legislation is not sufficiently enforced, and national legislation is non-existent.⁹³

7.2c. Public Humiliation

The stripping and parading of women publicly is a form punishment that is employed in some rural areas. SC women in particular have been the victims of this form of public humiliation.

The parading of naked women was brought to the attention of the general public in August 2010, after the surfacing of a video of a tribal woman being paraded naked as punishment for engaging in an illicit relationship.⁹⁴

The following are selected instances of the naked parading of tribal and scheduled caste women from 2006:

- February 2006, Karion Nangal Village, Amristar, Punjab: Police arrested Sukhdev Singh, age 40, for reportedly publicly stripping and parading a 14-year-old SC girl around their village. The accused reported committing the act to take revenge on the victim's brother who had teased his sister. Other upper caste women encouraged Sukhdev and others to rape the victim but were prevented from doing so by village elders.⁹⁵

⁹¹"'Project Combat' launched to eradicate 'Devadasi' system". The Hindu. 2006-01-30.

⁹²Yogesh Varhade, Yogesh Varhade, "International Advocacy and the Role of the United Nations and Civil Society," Ambedkar Centre for Justice and Peace, June 6, 1998, p. 3

⁹³Smita Narula, Broken People: Caste Violence Against India, Untouchables p. 151.

⁹⁴"India probes tribal woman 'forced to walk naked'", <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10938729>

⁹⁵"Dalit Girl Paraded Naked in Amristar," NDTV,

- March 2006, Telgoan Village, Maharashtra: A SC woman was stripped in front of her son and paraded around her village by members of the upper caste, including the head of the village, for protesting against the liquor lobby.⁹⁶
- March 2006, Kutchheri Bustee, Padampur, Bihar: Manju Devi, a SC woman, filed a complaint against Bahadurganj Congress MLA Mohd Tousheef, his brother Faiyaz and 63 others, for stripping, abusing and even threatening to kill her. Devi's husband was in prison on charges of rape and she had approached fellow villagers to seek justice on his behalf.⁹⁷
- April 2006, Kendrapara, Orissa: A 36- year-old SC woman was beaten and paraded naked through her village by four inebriated assailants. The four also severely beat her husband when he protested.⁹⁸
- June 2006, Arakera, Devadurga, Karnataka: Parents of a SC man who married an upper caste woman were stripped, tied to an electricity pole and beaten.⁹⁹
- June 2006, Mahoikala, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh: Indira Kushwah, a 45-year-old SC woman, was beaten, stripped and paraded naked by two upper caste men, Lakhna Shukla and Santosh Shukla, for failing to pay Rs. 50,000 (approximately USD \$1000) for the village development fund. Her children were also assaulted in the incident. The police initially did not lodge an First Information Report (FIR), until four days after the incident under the instruction of a local politician.¹⁰⁰

<<http://www.ndtv.com/template/template.asp?category=National&template=Womencrime&slug=Dalit+girl+paraded+naked+in+Amritsar&id=84806&callid=1>>

⁹⁶Michael Gonzalez "Dalit Woman Paraded Naked for Speaking Up Against Liquor Lobby"

<http://sify.com/news/fullstory.php?id=14164172>

⁹⁷"Dalit Woman Stripped by Villagers" Times of India.

<<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1457523.cms>>

⁹⁸"Dalit Woman Beaten Up, Paraded Naked"

<<http://www.newindpress.com/NewsItems.asp?ID=IEQ20060425035423&Topic=0&Title=ORISSA&Page=Q>>

⁹⁹"Atrocities on Dalits: CPI(M) to stage dharna in Bangalore." The Hindu. 22 June 2006.

<<http://www.hindu.com/2006/06/22/stories/2006062210810400.htm>>

¹⁰⁰Gupta, Suchandana. "Dalit sarpanch paraded naked in MP village." Times of India. 22 June 2006.

<<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1672518.cms>>

7.3 Caste related social ostracism

Many SCs in rural areas face daily social ostracism by being denied access to public facilities, such as temples and village wells, and by being banned from marrying members of higher castes. The popularized Western term for SCs, “Untouchables,” stems from this form of persecution whereby SCs are considered impure or polluted by other villagers and shunned from the use of public facilities.

7.3a. Denial of access to public facilities

In some rural areas, access to two of the most common resources, water and temples, have been consistently denied to SCs. Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, famously launched campaigns against both these practices in 1927. Some villages continue to practice these forms of untouchability. The following describes some incidents from 2006 relating to social ostracism.

Access to Temples

1. June 2006, Danapur, Gangavathi, Koppal District, Karnataka: SCs were not allowed to enter a temple and were attacked by upper caste Hindus.[xxvii]
2. July 2006, Velayuthapuram, Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu: 200 SCs of the Arunthathiyar sub-caste from 43 families were deprived of access to water sources, shops, schools and jobs at local match factories after they celebrated a local Hindu festival without seeking permission from caste Hindus. SCs in the village were also not allowed to visit the main temple, enter caste Hindu localities while wearing footwear, ride bicycles or scooters, be served tea from the same tumblers as caste Hindus or apply for government jobs. [xxviii]
3. March 2006, Melur, Tamil Nadu: Five SCs, including Mohanambalam of Melur, won a High Court decision to gain entry to the Mandaiveeranan temple in Melur from which they had previously been denied entry. The SC community also filed petitions to gain membership to the temple administrative board.
4. March 2006, Gulbarga Village, Karnataka: Gonal Bheemapa, an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer who was a member of a SC community, was denied permission to use the community hall of his village temple for the wedding of his family members. Despite being a donor to the temple, the upper caste members of the temple board disapproved his request.

5. January 2006, Keraragadh, Orissa: Sebati Muduli, a SC, was denied access to her village temple. She faced ridicule and also a fine for requesting to worship in the temple. The chief priest said that it is the tradition of the temple to not allow members of the lower classes inside and for upper castes to offer prayer for them instead.

Access to Water

1. July 2006, Gummanahalli, Mandya District, Karanataka: SCs reported they were not allowed to enter the village temple or use water from a tank during a local festival.
2. July 2006, Jaishinghpura, Rajasthan: Upper caste families did not allow a government owned water tanker to supply water to 18 SC families for days, forcing them to drink from a hand pump with high levels of fluoride.
3. February 2006, Dhobini Village, Giridih District, Jharkhand: Rajkumar, a SC, was beaten to death by a group of upper caste men after he attempted to take water from a well. At the time of the crime, caste tension had been running high in the village.
4. June 2006, Chotiche, Madhya Pradesh: A SC man, Pradip, who requested more water than rationed for lower castes from the village tube well, was beaten and reported missing. 250 SC families in the village were then denied access to the well and were forced to walk five kilometers to the next closest water source.

Access to Common Food Areas

1. March 2006, Budhasi VDC-3, Nuwakot, Nepal: SC students in the Annapurna Primary School were forced to receive their food in separate areas from the upper caste students. Though only 15 students belonged to non-SC castes in the school, administrators pandered to this minority regarding the schools food service policies.
2. January 2006, Ranchi, Jharkhand: Police kitchens in some Jharkhand precincts were under scrutiny because of the practice of separating cooking areas based on caste. Some departments had as many as eight separate kitchens for various castes. The cooks in each kitchen get paid different rates based on the kitchen in which they cooked.
3. July 2006, Bhagwanpura, Bhilwara District, Rajasthan: Two children from the Valmiki (sweeper) caste who bought ice cream were beaten by the store owner. After

hearing about the incident, higher caste villagers ransacked SC homes on the night of July 2, 2006, leaving several injured.

Other Access

1. January 2006, Ahmedabad, Gujarat: SCs in Gujarat protested the denial of lands given to them to bury their dead, which is customary for some Hindu SCs. Over 1,000 leaders from ten districts gathered in Ahmedabad to discuss the issue. They report that denial of burial sites was a problem for SCs in 90% of villages in Gujarat.[xxvi]
2. January 2006, Sinnar Taluka, Nashik District, Maharashtra: Subhash Gavli, the headmaster of Zilla Parishad primary school, was suspended for not allowing Sunita Ghoderao, a member of a 'backward' caste, to hoist the Indian flag during Republic Day celebrations.
3. June 2006, Amarpura, Udaipur, Rajasthan: A SC bridegroom, Bansi Lal Meghwal, was forcibly dismounted from a horse after attempting to ride it during a wedding procession. Upper caste villagers also prevented loud celebratory music from being played at the wedding. After filing a police complaint, upper caste villager stopped supplying water and selling rations to SCs.
4. June 2006, Gunjalli, Karnataka: A SC youth bidding farewell to a friend was beaten after upper caste Hindus objected to his presence at a bus stop. The accused perpetrators were arrested by the police three days after a complaint was filed.
5. June 2006, Dodda Ullarthy, Challakere Taluk, Chitradurga District, Karnataka: SCs were not allowed to enter hairdressing saloons in the village for the past ten years. Hindu seer Shivamurthy Murugharajendra Sharana of Basavakendra Murughamutt criticized the village's boycott of SCs including denial of service at restaurants and at hairdressing saloons.
6. July 2006, Haswadih, Bihar: A SC village leader, Sughar Ram, was manhandled and abused by upper caste men for sitting on a chair in their presence. Police refused to lodge a complaint despite two attempts by Ram.
7. June 2006, Kothapally, Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh: SC families were exiled from a village and threatened with fines of Rs. 5,000 (approximately USD \$100) and beatings with shoes if they or their cattle entered the village. The families were

evicted after complaining about discrimination by upper castes. After complaining to the police, 80 SC families were attacked.

8. November 2006, Narottampur, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh: A SC woman's nose was reportedly chopped off by a landlord and his son for defiling their land by cutting grass from there.

7.3b. Inter-caste social relations

Marriages and romantic relationships between SCs and non-SCs are often a cause of strife in rural communities. Societal taboos sometimes lead to exile from the village, suicides (murder-suicides) and, in some cases, outright violence. The victims are not always SCs -- their spouses and their families who support such relationships are often times targeted as well. The following are notable incidents from 2006 involving romantic relations between SCs and members of other castes.

1. January 2006, Ranchi, Jharkhand: Tribal elders shaved the heads of and banished a woman and her husband because she married below her caste.
2. March 2006, Dateli Village, Uttar Pradesh: Eight members of a SC family, 55-year-old Ram Kishan, 50-year-old Savitri, 70-year-old Ram Kali, 25-year-old Vinay, 20-year-old Vineet, 10-year-old Chote, 16-year-old Mohini and 8-year-old Rajni poisoned themselves with pesticide after facing defamation and social ostracism in their village. Only Rajni survived despite being rushed to a local hospital. The family faced conflict after Ashok Shukla of the same village was accused of having an illicit relationship with Mohini.
3. April 2006, Uppal, Andhra Pradesh: Three suspects linked to the kidnap and murder of N. Ashok, a SC, were arrested. N. Ashok's mother-in-law, Shakuntala, was among those arrested and believed to have paid Maruthi Ramulu Rs. 45,000 (approximately USD \$900) to kill Ashok. She had opposed the marriage of her daughter to Ashok and seemed to have hired his murderer in response.
4. July 2006, Kathalbari, Kishanganj District, Bihar: Seven people were seriously injured after an acid attack incident after a SC youth eloped with another person.
5. August 2006, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh: Chandra Bhan Singh Yadav, shot his wife and then himself. They had secretly married as the girl's father opposed the match since the boy was from the Yadav community (an OBC) and the girl belonged to a SC. They reportedly decided to commit suicide, as they were afraid to announce that they had got married.

7.4 Economic discrimination and exploitation against Schedule Castes

As a perpetuation of their status as untouchables, SCs in some rural areas are denied employment in professions involving the preparation of food to be consumed by upper castes, and involving services in village temples.

For example, in the village of Uchale, Maharashtra, in March 2006, women of the SC castes were denied a yearlong contract to cook mid-day meals in their village due to their caste. Fellow villagers refused to eat meals cooked by “lower” caste women, and therefore, the village panchayat denied the contract to the women.

In a particularly outrageous example, in October 2010, three men in the Malikpura village of Madhya Pradesh declared their dog to be “untouchable” and banished it from their home after they discovered a SC woman had fed it. Following the incident, the three accused were arrested and refused bail by a local court.

Manual scavenging

Since the advent of British rule and the large scale organization of municipalities, many SC women were consigned to manual scavenging, the manual removal of excrement from public toilets without flush systems. Despite the the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act of 1993 which targets employers of manual scavengers and the construction of such toilet latrine systems, this practices continues to exist all over India. In cities, scavengers are actually lowered into filthy underground sewage pipes in order to perform maintenance. They are immersed in the waste with no protective gear. It is one of the most degrading and horrifying forms of untouchability. The GoI estimates that about one million Dalits are manual scavengers who clean public latrines and dispose of dead animals; unofficial estimates are much higher. Members of these castes are invariably placed at the very bottom of the caste hierarchy, even among SC sub-castes. Th existence of such a profession clearly reflects a failure of governance in providing for a well developed sewage system and mechanical maintenance methods.

Bonded labor

In other cases, many impoverished SCs hold professions that make them victims of economic exploitation through bonded labor. For example, in March of 2006, the SC barber community in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, organized a rally to protest the system of bonded labor that was prevalent in the area. Upper castes were paying a mere 15 kilograms of rice for an entire year of labor.

In Pakistan, much of the remaining SC Hindu population are victims of bonded labor in the areas of agriculture, brick-making, carpet-weaving, mining, tanning, cotton seed production, handicraft production, production of glass bangles, and domestic work.¹⁰¹ The U.S. Department of Labor maintains that the debt bondage system in Pakistan operates by, “giving advances of *peshgi*” (bonded money) to a person. As long as all or part of the *peshgi* debt remains outstanding, the debtor/worker is bound to the creditor/employer. In case of sickness or death, the family of the individual is responsible for the debt which often passes down from generation to generation. In the case of children, the *peshgi* is paid to a parent or guardian who then provides the child to work off the debt. Notwithstanding these efforts by human rights organizations and the passage of the Bonded Labor (Abolition) Act, the practice of debt labor continues to thrive and plague poor Hindus and other marginalized segments of Pakistani society.¹⁰² The exploiters in this case are wealthy Muslim landowners.

Predatory proselytization

Often, marginalized and victimized populations including children are converted by force, fraud or coercion. Because SCs are economically disadvantaged, they are highly vulnerable targets for predatory proselytization by well-funded Christian missionary organizations, financed mainly by donors from Western countries. Many of these organizations entice SCs to convert by providing aid, or in some cases, withholding aid unless they attend church services.

Following the 2004 tsunami, several reports of forced conversion were reported in mainstream news publications. As an example, in 2005, the Chicago Tribune reported that evangelist aid workers from the Texas-based Gospel For Asia and Believers Church transported hundreds of villagers of Akkaraipettai to a location 6 miles away. Away from village officials, the aid workers distributed relief supplies in a bag labeled “Believers Church Tsunami Relief” – including sleeping mats, plates, saris, 55-pound bags of rice and a book of Biblical verses against alcohol and abortion. A 35 year-old Hindu woman, Muthammal, commented on the pressure to convert to Christianity “What do I do? They are asking us to come all this way. It is so difficult.”¹⁰³ Gospel For Asia continues to target economically vulnerable SCs with a large portion of their website “The Dalit Awakening”.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹International Dalit Solidarity Network, “Dalits and bonded labour in Pakistan”, <http://idsn.org/caste-discrimination/key-issues/bonded-labour/pakistan/>

¹⁰²Prof. Ramesh Rao., *Hindus in South Asia and Diaspora: A Survey of Human Rights 2009*, p. 88. Hindu American Foundation

¹⁰³Barker, Kim. “Critics say some Christians spread aid and Gospel”. Chicago Tribune., January 22, 2005.

¹⁰⁴Gospel for Asia: Dalit Awakening. <<http://www.gfa.org/dalit/>>

Several Indian states have attempted to enact legislation against predatory conversion and aid-based exploitation, particularly against economically vulnerable sections of the population such as SCs. However, the proposed legislation have largely failed to protect SCs, in part due to heavy opposition from Western-funded missionary organizations such as the Colorado-based Dalit Freedom Network that have opposed these bills by lobbying the United State government, European nations, and the United Nations under the guise of Dalit rights and religious freedom.¹⁰⁵

7.5 Violence against Scheduled Castes

As with other human rights violations against SCs, violence tends to occur primarily in rural regions. The motivation for these attacks is diverse, ranging from intercaste marriages to property disputes to retribution for theft to accusations of witchcraft. Underlying these attacks is a trend of use of excessive violence:

1. January 2006, Ruchang, Nawalparasi District, Nepal: A 76-year-old SC woman, Doblani Pariyar, was accused of practicing witchcraft and was beaten to death by Dhanbir Nepali. Pariyar's nine-year-old granddaughter, Limbu Pariyar, reported the murder was over a land dispute.
2. March 2006, Amristar, Punjab: An 11-year-old SC girl, who was providing domestic help, was beaten to death with a wooden rod by her employer. Allegedly, the girl had over-baked the chapatis she had been cooking for her employer which triggered the incident.
3. April 2006, Bhaishahiya Raja Village, Uttar Pradesh: A SC boy was shot to death and three other members of his families injured by members of another caste. Villagers said the incident was sparked by a minor dispute which grew into murder. Some SC villagers were reported to have left the village after the incident.
4. April 2006, Basudeo Dehri Village, Rohtas District, Bihar: A SC woman was beaten to death and five others locked in a room and severely assaulted after a conflict arose over the woman picking up fallen grain in a field.
5. April 2006, Annasagar, Medak district, Andhra Pradesh: Villagers attacked SCs in their community as they believed that the SCs were practicing sorcery which was the cause of mysterious illnesses afflicting the community and also the death of a girl who fell out of a tree. The villagers also attacked two police constables who were on the scene to prevent the attacks on the SCs.

¹⁰⁵ Dalit Freedom Network: Anti Conversion Laws. <http://www.dalitnetwork.org/go?/dfn/news/C149/>

6. August 2006, Dulena, Haryana: Five SCs were lynched to death by a furious mob for skinning a cow while the police looked on. A rumor had been spread they had killed the cow, which were normally brought to them after death for skinning.
7. August 2006, Patna, Bihar: People in a small Bihar village gouged out the eye of a SC as punishment for allegedly stealing two bottles of liquor.

7.6 Bias and discrimination by government institutions

Though the national and state governments in India have stringent laws against caste-based discrimination and violence, in many rural areas without sufficient oversight, the local governmental authorities sometimes are complicit in crimes committed against SCs.

In some cases, the elected village officials use their authority to directly persecute the SC community. For example, in August of 2006, in Khusropur village, Punjab, nearly 50 SC students stopped attending school for several days after being threatened by the elected village head. The parents of these children said they would not send their children to the Government Elementary School Khusropur as it was not safe for them. In another example, in Gangauli, Bara Banki, Uttar Pradesh, after the village council cancelled ration cards for SCs, Shankar, a 45-year-old SC farm worker, died of starvation on June 14, 2006. Local authorities attempted to cover up the cause of death.

Furthermore, while the government may not be involved with the crime itself, they use their power to cover up crimes and avoid, delay or prevent prosecution. As an example, in a case that finally surfaced in 2006 in Sarosa Bharosa, Uttar Pradesh, Guddu Bajpai, along with Ravindra Kumar Bajpai, Arvind Kumar Bajpai, Rajesh, Girdhari Lal, Nand Kishore and Vansh Gopal, was accused of murdering three SCs, Santpal Raidas, Shambhu and Putthi Singh, in Kakori in 1991. Bajpai reportedly managed to avoid prosecution through connections with police officials and politicians.

7.6a. Police custody

Among various human rights violations involving the government, many occur while in police custody. In these cases, police use excessive force and/or torture or unnecessarily detain SC suspects. The following are notable examples from 2006:

1. January 2006, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh: 35-year-old Nanavati Bujji was found dead in police custody three days after being arrested for selling illicit liquor.

2. January 2006, Basti Shekhan Wali, Ferozepur, Punjab: A 20-year-old SC male, Madan Lal was arrested after being accused of theft by shop owner Joginder. Lal died within half-hour of the arrest in police custody. Police said the cause of death was suicide, but Lal's family reported the police killed Lal.
3. February 2006, Nabha Jail, Patiala, Punjab: Police registered criminal charges against jail staff for reportedly branding a Narinder Singh, a SC inmate facing trial for murder, with the word "choora", a casteist slur, on his back.
4. February 2006, Batala, Punjab: Four police inspectors were dismissed from service after the custodial death of a young SC boy. Kirpal Singh, Paramjit Singh, Satnam Singh and Naresh Kumar, the four dismissed constables, stood accused of torturing Harjeet Singh to death and subsequently cremating his body to prevent further inquiry. A inquiry into murder charges against the ex-constables was to follow.
5. March 2006, Vidisha district, Madhya Pradesh: The Madhya Pradesh state assembly discussed the recent death of SC youth while in police custody. The opposition party demanded that the assembly resolve to take action against the rising atrocities being committed against the SCs in the state.
6. March 2006, Moga, Punjab: Ten SCs, including three women and an eight-month-old boy, were released from prison after being imprisoned for six months on charges of electricity theft and non-payment of power bills. Judicial Magistrate B.K. Bhatia found that the ten had been wrongfully confined as no evidence was provided to substantiate the charges filed.
7. June 2006, Kuttiwal, Ajnala Tehsil, Punjab: Children of landlord Dalbir Singh, Kala, Pinda, Mandip and Soni, and police officers from the Lopoke police station beat nine-month-pregnant Raj, a SC woman. Raj subsequently gave birth to a dead male baby.

7.7 Continuation of human rights violations

A survey of modern day human rights of SCs reveals two different worlds. In the urban world, an overarching pattern of human rights violations against SCs is not as prevalent.

However, in many parts of the rural world, SCs do continue to face a litany of human rights abuses. SC women are more prone to rapes, sexual assault, induction into the flesh trade and

public humiliation as a result of their vulnerable societal and economic status. In some rural communities, due to belief in untouchability, SCs are denied access to common public facilities such as temples and village wells, denied employment for certain professions, and shunned from marrying outside of their caste. When human rights violations do occur, local government and police are sometimes complicit in these human rights abuses and subsequent cover-ups.

Going forward, to improve the condition of SCs in the rural world, two changes must occur. First, there must be better enforcement of existing state and national laws against caste discrimination and violence at the local village level. Secondly, there must be social change such that caste-based discrimination becomes a taboo.

The removal caste based discrimination places a religious responsibility on Hindu spiritual leaders and a secular responsibility on the Government of India. Hindu institutions can particularly play a crucial role because they have the authority and following of nearly all members of all communities and castes. In addition, various Hindu institutions have significant influence and reach into rural communities, where caste prejudices are prevalent. Because many individuals justify their caste based prejudices based on religious practices and beliefs, Hindu religious institutions must effectively counteract those such beliefs and ensure that those parts of the various scriptures that promote notions of caste-based discrimination and a birth-based hierarchy are explicitly rejected. They must also work more actively to end discrimination and promote equality by ensuring that their followers put these precepts into practice.

8. Statements on caste from leading Hindu religious and spiritual leaders and organizations (In alphabetical order)

8.1 Swami Bodhananda, Founder and Spiritual Head, Sambodh Foundation

Swami Bodhananda is highly respected in America and India as an accomplished teacher of Vedanta, meditation and Management and has delivered thousands of lectures on the above topics, especially on the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras and their relevance in the modern world. Presently, Swami Bodhananda is the Spiritual Founder and Director of 12 organizations and ashrams under the umbrella of the Sambodh Foundation, New Delhi, India (1991); the Bodhananda Research Foundation for Management and Leadership Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India (1994); and, The Sambodh Society, Inc. (1997), his American organization. Swami Bodhananda is the author of several books: Meditation: The Awakening of Inner Powers, The Gita & Management, Self Unfoldment In An Interactive World, Irreverent Spiritual Questions, Dialogues-Philosopher Meets The Seer, Indian Management And leadership, and a monograph titled, "Rishi Vision". Swami Bodhananda began his mission in America in 1997 and, at the end of his first tour he, along with a group of devotees, established The Sambodh Society, Inc. for the purpose of teaching Hindu Dharma, Meditation and Vedanta.

Statement

1. As a student of Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, I firmly believe that all human beings are expressions of the same DIVINITY and hence no discrimination based either on birth, color of the skin or socio-economic status is allowed by the Hindu Scriptures. Bhagavan Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita that humanity is created with a fourfold division based on each individual's disposition and affinity to given pursuits like knowledge, power, wealth and sense pleasures. But, even though one is born (janmana) with a given disposition, one can create ones destiny by self effort (karmana). I believe that every individual should get the same opportunity to explore and express his/her potential and be responsible for his/her future. Caste determination and discrimination based on birth has no sanction in the Hindu scriptures. More over this practice is unlawful and punishable under the Indian Constitution.
2. The basic Hindu Scriptures are the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavatam and the Ramayana. If there are any internal contradictions the Vedas are taken as the

ultimate authority. The Vedas see people with different dispositions as different limbs of the same cosmic person (Purusha Sukta). The Upanishads say that God/Brahman pervades and lives in all manifestations (Isavasya and Taittiriya Upanishad). The Gita says that one who sees God in all, indeed lives in God (Chapter 6). One of the qualities of Rama as described by Valmiki is 'sarvabhuta hite ratah', engaged in the well being of all. The Bhagavatam indiscriminately invites one and all to the Divine.

3. My organization, the Sambodh Foundation, has adopted a Dalit village in Srya Gaon, Sattal in the Nainittal district of Uttarakhand. Forty Dalit families live in an isolated village overlooking a lake. The overall population of the village is 140, males and females included. There are no health facilities, no toilets, no roads, no drinking water and no shops in this hapless Dalit village. There is only a primary school with one teacher and a ram- shackle building. Large families live in one-room tenements, cooking, eating, sleeping, mating and birthing, and, sometimes under the same roof, jostling with domestic animals for space. Seventy five percent of the people are suffering from tuberculosis. Our volunteers went from house to house talking to the members to assess their immediate needs. What they badly wanted was drinking water facility. Sambodh Foundation talked to devotees in Delhi and collected about 12 lakhs. One villager made the land available and bore wells were dug, tanks were built, pipes laid and now the Dalits are getting drinking water. But that was only the beginning. A lot more is to be done to create self-awareness among the Dalits – about their potential as human beings, their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and the power of collective efforts, importance of education, sanitation, health care, productive work etc.

4. Every sensible Hindu agrees that the existence of caste system and discrimination based on caste are blots on Hindu society. Caste hierarchy is ethically, morally and spiritually wrong. It is against enlightened social and political principles. Keeping 25 percent of people outside the mainstream is economic suicide. The four-fold type casting of people based on inner dispositions has psychological reasons, and division of people into many groups and guilds based on vocations has sound economic reasons. When education and transfer of skills took place within family confines, from parents to children, birth played an important role in educational status and skill levels. There were little movement of people and competition was unheard of and unviable in a subsistant economy. The accident of birth was the singular determinant of status, power, vocation and community in such a static fossilized society. During the long Islamic and British rule (lasting almost 1200 years) the Brahmins, custodians of knowledge and values, and Kshatriyas, protectors of the value system abdicated their duties and went over to the side of alien masters, subserving colonial interests. The rudderless masses withdrew into their caste shells and caste based

superstitions for security and survival. Blind unquestioned adherence to caste rules and traditions was the survival strategy of the masses in the absence of native intellectual and political leadership. This survival strategy went so deep into the Hindu psyche that getting out, in spite of 60 years of independence, seems difficult. Now, Dalits are organizing politically, making smart moves in the Indian political chessboard. In India's divisive politics, any party with 32 percent of popular vote can come to power at the center. The shrewd Mayavati, daughter of a Dalit, proved it in Uttar Pradesh by cobbling a coalition of 25 percent Dalits and 13 percent Brahmins, and capturing absolute majority in the assembly election. Caste based on birth, like language and class, will continue in India at least as long as poverty remains, but soon its sting will go. Caste will no longer be seen as a tool of oppression and exploitation, but will be used as a vehicle of entitlement, collective bargaining and emancipation.

7th August 2008

Swami Bodhananda

Sambohd Centre for Human Excellence

Kalamazoo, Michigan

8.2 Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Spiritual Head of the Kauai Aadheenam, Publisher of Hinduism Today magazine, and President of the Hindu Heritage Endowment

Bodhinatha Veylanswami is the Guru Mahasannidhanam of Kauai Aadheenam, a traditional Saivite monastery/temple complex located in the state of Hawaii. He became the spiritual head of the Aadheenam, which is also known as Kauai's Hindu Monastery, in November of 2001 after the mahasamadhi of the Aadheenam's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. Bodhinatha had been Gurudeva's disciple for 37 years, having received sannyas diksha in 1972. Most of the year finds him on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, where he oversees the varied publications of Himalayan Academy, guides the spiritual lives of hundreds of families around the globe, serves as publisher of the international magazine, Hinduism Today, and is president of the \$10 million Hindu Heritage Endowment which strives to "strengthen Hinduism worldwide." His monastery is building a \$16 million white granite temple in Hawaii, carved in India. At the 363-acre monastery-temple complex, he trains twenty monks from five nations in both their service duties and spiritual practices.

Statement

When asked about this topic, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami offered the words of his guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami:

Living With Siva, LESSON 258 - The Caste System

I am often asked about varna dharma -- the social structure of four classes and hundreds of subgroups -- commonly known as the caste system, established in India in ancient times. Is the caste system still valid today? Caste -- or at least discrimination on the basis of caste -- has been thrown out of the culture of India, but people still hang on to it as an ego structure. The high caste people love to hurt the low caste people, so to speak, by ignoring them, treating them roughly. That's not the way it should be. In many areas of the world the caste system is distorted, and also very strong. If you find the high caste people in your society ignoring and not wanting to speak with and associate with the lower castes, those are nasty people, and those are people you should avoid. Spiritual people, even ordinary kindly people, would never think of behaving that way.

The original caste system was based on behavior, as it is now in countries where there is no overt caste system in effect. Those who beat their children, those who become angry and jealous, those who live in fear and those who feign humility are all of the lowest caste. Those who value memory and reason and use their willpower to benefit others -- who control themselves and run an orderly home, support the temples and are respected by the lowest

castes -- are of the business caste. Those who protect the dharma and preserve the scriptures -- who protect the temples and all the people, those who are respected by the other castes -- are of the princely caste. Those who commune with the Gods and are priests in the temples -- who are the disseminators of the highest knowledge and respected by all the other castes -- are the priestly caste. These four groups make up a complete society anywhere in the world and at anytime in history.

The original caste system had these four divisions. The divisions were all based on the ability of the individual to manage his body, his mind and his emotions properly. If he stopped fulfilling the dharma of his caste, society would recognize that he had moved from one caste and was now in another. The original caste system was based on self-discipline through education and through personal sadhana. The original caste system was based on the unfoldment of the consciousness within each individual through the fourteen chakras.

People everywhere naturally divide themselves up into castes. We have the workers. You go to work, you work under somebody else -- that happens all over the world -- that's the shudra caste. We have the merchants, who are self-motivated. That's the vaishya caste. We have the politicians and the lawmakers and the law-enforcement people. That's the kshatriya caste. And then you have the priests, the ministers, the missionaries. That's the brahmin caste. Every society has these four castes working within it in one way or another. In today's world, if one is not fulfilling the dharma of his born caste, then he changes castes. For instance, if a brahmin husband and wife are working eight to fifteen hours a day in a hospital under others, they are no longer of the brahmin caste, because they are not performing the duties of the dharma of that caste. They are workers, in the shudra caste.

We can see around us the deterioration of the system which has been abused beyond the point of recognition. Members of the brahmin caste are now beating their children, abusing their wives. Members of the kshatriya caste disrespect the laws of the land. Members of the business caste are deceptive and dishonest. All are confused, living in anger and in jealousy. No wonder their families break apart and their businesses fail. In the eyes of the Gods, most of those who adhere to the caste system that exists today are low caste. This is because they live in lower consciousness. They look at the world through the windows of the chakras below the muladhara. These undeveloped humans are struggling through the lower chakras, trying to get out of the dark worlds of the mind. Let us not be deluded about what the sapta rishis had in mind when they casted humans according to the soul's unfoldment in one or more of the fourteen chakras. We should totally ignore the Hindu caste system as lived in India today and, through example, show a better and more wholesome path for modern society.

Living with Siva, SUTRA 230 - CASTING ASIDE THE CASTE SYSTEM

Siva's devotees are forbidden to perpetuate the restrictions and abuses of the Indian caste system. Instead, they base respect and status on attainment, knowledge, behavior and spiritual maturity. Aum Namah Sivaya.

8.3 Swami Chidanand Saraswati, President and Spiritual Head, Parmarth Niketan Ashram

Pujya Swamiji is President and Spiritual Head of Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh (Himalayas), India, one of the largest spiritual institutions in India and is the Founder/Chairman of India Heritage Research Foundation (IHRF), an international, non-profit, humanitarian foundation engaged in a wide variety of charitable activities including free schools, women's empowerment programs, vocational training centers, orphanages/gurukuls, medical care programs, rural development, environmental and ecological preservation as well as the monumental project of compiling the first Encyclopedia of Hinduism which was blessed and previewed by H.H. the Dalai Lama. IHRF has also constructed the first ashrams in the holy land of Mansarovar and Mt. Kailash. Pujya Swamiji is the recipient of innumerable awards, including the Mahatma Gandhi Humanitarian award, Hindu of the Year Award from Hinduism Today magazine, Devarishi Award, Bhaskar Award, Prominent Personality Award, by Lions' Club, and Best Citizens of India Award. His humility and simplicity combined with his profound wisdom, deep understanding and boundless love for all of humanity, make him one of those rare saints who touches, uplifts and inspires audiences all across the globe.

Statement

Our scriptures teach that all souls are part and parcel of the Divine, that we are all drops in the Divine, Universal ocean. Nowhere does it say that any group or any caste is superior to the others. Nowhere does it say that some drops are more divine than others. In the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagawan Krishna describes the best of everything – out of mountains, I am the Himalayas; out of the rivers, I am the Ganga; out of religious rituals, I am japa; out of the trees, I am the pepal. He goes on and on defining truly the “best” of everything on Earth. But He doesn't say anything such as “out of the castes, I am a Brahmin.” If one caste were superior to others, certainly He would have mentioned it. Nowhere in any of our scriptures does it place one of the castes qualitatively higher than the others. Rather, Bhagawan Krishna says that He created all 4 departments of a society; the system was a system of ‘varna vyavastha’ or a functionally organized civilization. He describes each caste as a different part of the body, all playing individual crucial roles.

So, nowhere is it said or written or taught in our scriptures that the system is either hierarchical or hereditary. This is a misunderstood, misinterpreted and misappropriated aspect of social living. It is definitely not scripturally sanctioned. The time has come, actually the time is already past, for this social anachronism to be abandoned, for any and all oppression and suppression

on the basis of caste or creed to be discarded, and for Indians of all castes to move forward into a bright future, hand in hand.

Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji

President & Spiritual Head, Parmarth Niketan Ashram (Rishikesh, India)

Founder/Chairman, India Heritage Research Foundation

Caste-System In Today's Context

1. *All His creation is universally one and the same to Almighty God, and even then, today, Hindu religion appears to be losing its direction by remaining so grossly divided in terms of 'castes and their sub-divisions'. What, according to you, would be the way to bring about unity under one umbrella?*

The Caste system as you see it today is not was originally simply a division of labor based on personal, talents tendencies and abilities. It was never supposed to divide people. Rather, it was supposed to unite people so that everyone was simultaneously working to the best of his/her ability for the greater service of all. In the scriptures, when the system of dividing society into four groups was explained, the word used is "Varna." Varna means "class" not "caste." Caste is actually "Jati" and it is an incorrect translation of the word "varna." When the Portuguese colonized parts of India, they mistakenly translated "varna vyavasthaa" as "caste system" and the mistake has stayed since then.

The varna system was based on a person's characteristics, temperament and their innate "nature." The Vedas describe one's nature as being a mixture of the three gunas – tamas, rajas and sattva. Depending on the relative proportions of each of these gunas, one would be classified as a Brahmin, Kshetriya, Vaishya or Shudra. For example, Brahmins who perform much of the intellectual, creative and spiritual work within a community have a high proportion of sattva and low proportions of tamas and rajas. A kshetriya who is inclined toward political, administrative and military work has a high proportion of rajas, a medium proportion of sattva and a low proportion of tamas. A Vaishya who performs the tasks of businessman, employer and skilled laborer also has a high proportion of rajas but has relatively equal proportions of sattva and tamas, both of which are lower than rajas. Last, a shudra who performs the unskilled labor in society has a high proportion of tamas, a low proportion of sattva and a medium proportion of rajas.

These gunas are not inherited. They are based on one's inherent nature and one's karma. Therefore one's "varna" was also not supposed to be based on heredity, and in the past it was not. It is only in relatively modern times that the strict, rigid, heredity-based "caste" system has come into existence. There are many examples in the scriptures and in history of people

transcending the “class” or “varna” into which they were born. Everyone was free to choose an occupation according to his/her guna and karma.

Further, according to the scriptures, there is no hierarchy at all inherent in the varna system. All parts are of equal importance and equal worth. A good example is to imagine a human body. The brain which thinks, plans and guides represents the Brahmin caste. The hands and arms which fight, protect and work represent the kshetriya caste. The stomach which serves as the source of energy and “transactions” represents the vaishya caste, and the legs/feet which do the necessary running around in the service of the rest of the body represent the shudra caste. No one can say the brain is better than the legs or that hands are superior to feet. Each is equally important for the overall functioning of the body system. They just serve different roles.

The way to unite people now is education. We must bring awareness that all people are equal and that there are no small or big people or superior or inferior people. Spiritual leaders and other teachers can teach the truth of the scriptures and help eradicate this prejudice.

Look at Bhagwan Ram and Bhagwan Krishna. Both show the example of taking their food from even people of the lowest caste and going to the homes of the lower caste people. It is devotion, purity and commitment which make us great or small, not our caste.

2. Gujaratis living abroad, even today, observe firm rules and regulations restricting themselves within one’s own caste and community whenever it comes to organising their children’s marriages. Is this a proper procedure to continue these days? Should these practices be liberalised? How would you advise our community leaders on this matter?

These regulations should be loosened. Parents’ focus should be on encouraging their children to marry Indians rather than being so stuck in a particular caste. The important thing is that our children marry Indians so that the culture and tradition are passed on. Ideally they should marry people from a similar culture/language background within the Indian community (for example, Gujaratis marrying Gujaratis, Punjabis marrying Punjabis) because then the tradition, language, culture, etc. will be familiar and similar. This makes it easier to travel down the journey of life –if our partner shares a similar background, language, culture, and tradition. However, this is not essential. Parents should be flexible about marriage partners as long as they are within the Indian, Hindu community.

Also, though, this tendency should be inculcated in our children from a very young age. We should infuse our culture, traditions, rituals and heritage in them so beautifully that they automatically look to marry someone who shares this same culture.

3. *Caste based social organisations are formed strictly on the basis of caste by Indians living in foreign countries. Do you think this is a welcome and necessary trend in the 21st Century? Should such organisations be allowed to continue? Should these be replaced by other alternatives? If so, how?*

No. We should overcome these things. They are outdated. Particularly, living abroad Indian Hindus should be focused on being Indian Hindus rather than being so concerned with being a part of their particular caste. Being Indian should be our identity living abroad. In that way we can be united.

Organizations can certainly exist within the Indian Hindu community, but they should be based on language and culture rather than caste. So for example, there is the Gujarati Samaj or the Punjabi association, etc.

4. *Caste-system was at the root of the differences in the social levels among Hindus as individuals. Narsinh Mehta, great poet and devotee of Lord Krishna, Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi, Sahjanand Swami Maharaj and many other social reformers struggled during their lifetime to rid society of the evils of the caste-system. And yet, these evils do persist even today. What do you think could be done to eradicate this evil?*

Yes, the problems exist, but these great souls have also had an effect. The effect is there. Change is there. People are changing. However, more has to be done. We must keep working to eradicate this problem.

One of the reasons that it has not yet been eradicated within India is that politicians have used the caste divisions for their own sake. But this must stop. The time has come for everyone to realize that it is weakening our communities.

5. *'What caste do you belong to?' is the first question many Gujaratis believing in the caste-system ask whenever they happen to meet one another! Would you consider this kind of questioning appropriate in these days? We shall appreciate to know of a 'strong rebuttal' to the questioner so that he would refrain from asking such questions in future!*

This is not a good question at all. Originally, as I mentioned, the caste was just a division of labor, a division of jobs. So, really it would be more proper and more in keeping with the true meaning of “caste” if we ask each other “what is your job?”

Nowadays caste doesn't bare any relation to jobs. Brahmins who are supposed to be the teachers and priests are running shoe companies. Vaishyas are taking care of temples and being the teachers. Kshetriyas are rarely serving as soldiers of America, UK, Africa, Canada, etc. Everyone is doing everyone else's job now. So, the question bares no connection to its original meaning and is used only to give us a way of judging others and putting them into a box of “superior” or “inferior.” Therefore it should not be used. These prejudices are simply bringing disease to our community.

A good rebuttal is simply to say, ‘I am Indian.’ Or ‘I am Hindu.’ Or ‘I am Gujarati.’ Or ‘I am a child of God.’

Or, if you really want to answer the question in its true meaning, then you can say, “I am a businessman.” Or “I am a teacher.” Or “I am a doctor.”

6. At the government levels, also, we have not been able to do away with the class differences like ‘Savarnas and Scheduled/Backward Classes’. They have continued to offer protection under the ‘system of reservations’ in the areas of education and employment. What is your opinion on this subject?

The System of Reservation and the special protection and services should remain but they should be based on need not caste. They should be based on poverty levels and socio-economic status, not on caste. Anyone – of any caste – living below a certain standard should be helped.

7. Do you think a day will dawn when all Hindus unitedly would say: ‘WE ARE ALL ONE AND UNITED’? What should be done by social, political and religious reformers in order to achieve this?

Yes. I am very positive and optimistic. I do think that the day will come when we are all united. Bhagwan Ram built bridges between men and men, animals and men, animals and animals. He even built bridges to the demons! We should take this example and the communities should start building bridges between different castes and different communities.

Our problem is our ego. That is the only thing inhibiting our unity. Look at the “I”. Wherever it is, it always stands capital, whether at the beginning of a sentence, the middle of a sentence or

the end of a sentence. “I” is always capital, and “I” represents our ego. This capital “I” is a border, a boundary, a wall between us. Our egos stand in the way of our unity. Whether it is our personal egos, or egos about the superiority of our particular caste or society. The key is to bend our egos. We must bend the “I” and turn it from vertical to horizontal. When the “I” becomes horizontal, then it can serve as a bridge between people, families, communities and nations.

The spiritual leaders can teach people to build bridges and to unite. That is why we are doing this Vishwa Dharma Prasaar Yatra. We have travelled across the globe, through USA, Canada, the Caribbean, Europe, Russia, Africa, South East Asia and the Pacific, spreading the message of Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam – the World is One Family.

We have seen that everyone wants to unite. Everyone wants to be together. Everyone wants to be in peace. I am confident that this message and mission will blossom and flourish, and that people across the world of all religions (not only Hindus) will join together as one united family.

8.4 Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swami, Pontiff, Vishishta Advaita Tradition of Sri Ramanujacharya

His Holiness Sri Sri Sri Tridandi Srimannarayana Ramanuja Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji was born on Diwali day in 1956 Andhra Pradesh, India to pious parents. He had his early education in the Oriental School, Gowthama Vidya Peetam Rajahmundry. It was the call of the Divine that made the young Srimannarayana Ramanujacharyulu to take up the ascetic order of JEEYAR (Lion) at a very young age of 23 years. He has inspired many to follow a spiritual life and runs many charitable institutions that schools for Vedic teaching, schools for children of tribals and fishermen, and a school, junior college and a degree college exclusively for blind children furnished with laptops.

Statement

In Hinduism's puranas and other scriptures there has always been acceptance of all people by Vedic scholars. Showing discrimination basing up on birth-based qualities is a social crime. Our Vedic scriptures have accepted all castes, races and other human differences and wanted them to live together, for which Vedic Sages have created many activities. The respect given always to all these sections was really amazing. So, we talk about caste based discrimination, as and how it was not allowed by our sages. Those Vedic Sages wanted the whole society to lead a life where they need to feel oneness through the relationship from God and thus respect each other as different member playing different role in the same family.

As we know basically that in the Vedic Society people are classified into 4 sections i. Bramhin, ii. Kshathriya, iii. Vysya, and iv. Sudra. All other sections were included into the 4th one. Chanda:la (harijan was not the translation for this word) was the word used to a person who was spoiled in all respects and ex-communicated by doing *mean* activities. Such people were existing in all the 4 castes. This should be kept in mind.

Now here we are quoting some slokas denying the discrimination based on caste (wherever we use “ : “ indicates a long vowel) :

1) Sri Para:sara Samhitha, Visishta Parama Dharma Sa:sthra, 3rd Adhya:ya -
“Jna:na:th na suddhihi, da:syam sya:th sarva tha:nthrika bhe:dathaha,
Sada: **prapanna su:dra:na:m sarve:sha:m** mo:ksha ka:nkshina:m,
Mathsa:yujya:di siddhyartham dwija dharmo:kthavad bhave:th ||”

Meaning – Purity can be attained by **anybody** not just by acquiring great knowledge, it should be attained by doing unconditional service to God, as a bra:mhin practices. This service is recommended to all the dedicated devotees, *even* born in 4th class and seeking mo:ksha (release from karmic bondages), a divine union with God. This sort of practice is recommended by a:gama scriptures according to the capability of the individuals in different ways.

2) “yah pasyathi subha:cha:ram vyshnavam vi:tha kalmasham, **yasmin kasmin kule: ja:tham** dandavath prename:th bhuvi ||”

Meaning – One has to fall prostrating, like a stick, before a Vaishnava, whose practices are good and who is free from all sorts of ego etc., let that Vaishnava be born in any caste.

3) Ha:ri:tha Smruthi- 8th adhya:ya
Bhagavad bhakthi di:ptha:gni dagdha durja:thi kilbishah, **swapa:ko:pi** budhais
sla:ghyah na ve:da:dhyayana:d dwijaha ||

Meaning - Even if one was born a dog-eater (a very low caste person), but later turned a Vaishnava, he should be praised by scholars. Even a bra:mhin need not be praised by his virtue of being born as bra:mhin or learning all the Vedas, when he was not having any devotion towards the Lord; then, what about the caste of that dog-eater which came by his birth? The dreadful caste was burnt in the fire of devotion on Lord Vishnu.

4) Maha: Bha:rath –
Na su:drah bhagavad bhaktha:h vipra:h bha:gavatha:s smrutha:ha |
Sarva varne:shu **the: su:dra:h** ye:hi abhaktha:h jana:rdane: ||

Meaning - Those who are dedicated to the Lord Vishnu, should not be called as su:dras, but they should be considered as bhagavad bhathas, vipra:s or bha:gavathas. They are sudras from any caste, who are not blessed with the devotion on Lord Vishnu.

5) Sriranga Ma:ha:tmyam 2nd chapter –

Avaishnava:th ve:davith yo: **ve:da hi:nas** cha vaishnavaha . jya:ya:nsam anayo:r vidhi yasya bhakthis sada: mayi ||

Bhagavad bhakthi hi:nasya ja:thi sa:sthram japam thapaha , apra:nasye:va de:hasya mandanam lo:ka ranjanam ||

Meaning – One is a Vedic Scholar but not dedicated to Lord Vishnu, the other one is a Vaishnav but not a Vedic scholar. I consider that the non-Vedic Vaishnava is greater than the scholarly non-Vaishnava. All the qualities like caste, knowledge, meditation, penance etc., are of a person who is not devoted to the Lord Vishnu, are like decorations done to a corpse, to please the world.

6) pra:ja:pathya smruthi -Varna ru:pa:sraya:va:sa pu:rva vrutthi niru:panam , **sri:vaishnavasya** thattwe:na maha: pa:pa samam vidhuhu ||

Meaning - Trying to prove and recognize a Sri Vaishnava devotee through his i. caste, ii. form, iii.

place, iv. home, v. profession etc., is considered as the greatest of the sins.

7) su:dram va bhagavad bhaktham nisha:dam swapacham thattha, i:kshathe: ja:thi sa:ma:nya:th sa ya:thi narakam dhruvam ||

Meaning – One, who is a devotee of Lord Vishnu, should not be recognized just by virtue of his physical qualities, who is born in the 4th class, a hunter or a dog-eater (very mean class). Whoever do such mistake they definitely go to miserable hell.

8) Bramha:nda Pura:na, Kuruka Ma:ha:thmya 2nd chapter

Su:dro:pi mama bhakthas cheth vipra:dapi **adhiko**: mathaha, vipro:pi mayyabhakthas cheth **su:dra:dhama** uchyathe: ||”

Meaning – Even the one born in the 4th class of the society and dedicated unto Me, he is considered greater than a Vipra, i.e., a Bramhin. Even one born as a bramhin but not devoted to Lord Vishnu, such person is worse than a su:dra.

9) In 3rd Chapter - aja:nantham thada:ya:ntam da:ntam drushtwa:khila:s sura:ha, su:dras su:dra ithi pro:chuhu...

Attha the: puruhu:tha:dya:h vishnu bhaktha:vama:nathaha, niru:pana:ccha thath ja:the:h, sura:h nashte:kshana:h kshana:th |

Thatho:ganthum asaktha:s the: do:sho:sma:bhisthu kah kruthaha, ithi chintha: para:s sarve:, harim saranam a:gatha:ha ||

Attha:sari:ra vag a:si:th yushma:bhir adhuna:sura:ha, Ja:thim niru:pya:vamatho: vishnu bhaktho: divowkasaha ||

Pu:jyas se:vyas sada:chinthyah ka:ryo:thra na hi samsayaha |
Tham pra:pyo:chur maha:bhaga! Vishnu bhaktha! Vimatsara! Kshamaswa:jna:na rachitham amho:sma:bhir mahattharam ||

Meaning - Divowkasa a great devotee of Lord Vishnu born in 4th class of the society. During some occasion all the devathas assembled at one place and called 'kuruka:puri'. This devotee Divowkasa also went there to pay his obeisance to the Lord. While he was arriving all the Devathas as if avoiding his presence there, loudly said "he is a su:dra, he is a Su:dra...". Surprisingly they lost their vision within no time. They did not understand why did they lose their sight, approached Lord Vishnu and sought for their vision. Invisible Vishu's voice was heard by them, "oh! De:vathas, you discriminatively identified a great devotee of mine, with his physical status like caste, colour and creed and thus insulted him. Go to him and undoubtedly surrender to him. He was worshipable & approachable." Following the instructions of Lord Vishnu all those devathas keeping Indra in the front, approached Divowkasa and pleaded before him to save them. As he was very humble and innocently consoled them, they got their vision back.

8.5 Swami Dayananda Saraswati as Convenor, Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha

Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha is the apex forum comprising more than 130 Hindu religious leaders heading Mathas and Peethas in India (institutions of Hindu religious learning and practice) that are more than a few hundred years old, with an unbroken lineage from their founding, and with a huge, large current following. The Sabha covers virtually all the sampradayas (ancient Hindu religious denominations propounding diverse traditional expressions of Hindu spirituality and practice). In its periodic conferences, the Sabha considers issues and concerns of Hindu society and matters of religious and spiritual nature in Hindu faith and practice. Swami Dayananda Saraswati is the founder-convenor of the Acharya Sabha. He is a greatly respected and admired scholar and traditional teacher of Vedanta. The teachings and prolific writings of this profound thinker are widely known for their impeccable logic and lucidity. His deep concern for matters of contemporary relevance to Hindu society is reflected in Aim for Seva, a large voluntary charitable organization that he heads and which he founded. Besides imparting value-based education and health services to poor rural children and their families throughout India, the organization teaches good personal and social ethics. Swami Dayananda believes that social harmony is contingent on acceptance, not only tolerance, of cultural and religious diversities among people in society.

Statement Released to the Hindu American Foundation on Behalf of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha on Caste Issues in India

There is no Vedic scriptural sanction for any act of cruelty or oppression or unfair discrimination based on anyone's birth. Many non-Vedic scriptures as well as devotional texts in our country's regional languages are replete with verses extolling the essential oneness of all humanity and rejecting unjust or unfair discrimination based on difference in gender, creed, or caste, as the word is currently understood. The most widely used Hindu tradition of greeting anyone, including strangers, is with the term, "Namaste," which is the same as that used in worshiping Ishwara, the Divine Almighty incarnate.

Birth-based discrimination and cruel treatment of individuals and families which developed in Hindu society over time as socially sanctioned practices are in gross violation of ancient Hindu teachings and philosophy. Many people that revere and owe allegiance to our ancient Dharmic teachings and philosophy have suffered over the years as a result of such discriminatory practices. Such suffering continues even today, despite the law of the land and enlightened social and religious leaders having continued to make, over the centuries, major and effective contributions to diminish the depth and extent of these discriminatory practices, which have nothing to do with Hindu Dharma.

HDAS is aware that what started as rural kinship, creating a sense of security and identity in communities, developed over the centuries into entrenched social practices, particularly in deep rural areas. Consequently, complete elimination of such practices will take time. Therefore, concerted, sustained and proactive action at the grass roots is required to rid our society of these birth-based unfair discriminations.

HDAS is also aware of the nefarious role played over the years by missionaries of Abrahamic Faiths seeking to swell their strength, by ascribing what belongs to the social realm, to our Hindu Dharma *per se*. More unfortunate is the fact that after Independence of our country from alien rulership, political parties in our democracy have consistently exploited caste affiliations in constructing and sustaining their vote banks. Lack of education at the grass roots, income-earning capabilities and poor basic health in the poor and deprived communities have been exploited to the hilt in this regard.

HDAS is strongly committed to promoting the dignity of the human being and social harmony. It considers that the Hindu religious leadership in the country, including the venerated members of the Acharya Sabha, must play a strong proactive role in condemning and discouraging such birth-based rigidities. They need to do so, not only within the precincts of their Mathas and Peethas, but in the society at large, in their Pravachans. In this regard, enlightened Hindu activists must also set up more entities to educate and empower, socioeconomically, the vast mass of poor and lay population.

Anaikatti
26.05.2010

---Swami Dayananda, Convener, Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha

8.6 International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) Office of Communications

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), also known as the Hare Krishna movement, belongs to the Gaudiya-Vaishnava sampradaya, or denomination, a monotheistic tradition within Hindu culture. Today ISKCON has over 400 temples, dozens of rural communities and eco-sustainable projects, and nearly 100 vegetarian restaurants world-wide. ISKCON's Hare Krishna Food for Life program has grown to become the world's largest vegetarian food relief project, feeding millions of free meals daily in India and other countries around the globe. ISKCON was founded in 1966 by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, a highly respected Vaishnava scholar and monk, who at the age of 70 journeyed from India to New York City to bring the bhakti tradition, or Krishna Consciousness, to the west. In the 11 years before his passing in 1977, Srila Prabhupada translated, with elaborate commentaries, 60 volumes of Vaishnava literature; established more than 100 temples on six continents; and initiated 5,000 disciples. Today his writings are studied in universities around the globe and are translated into nearly 100 languages.

Statement

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), a worldwide movement representing the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya* within the broad Hindu family of faiths, unequivocally opposes a birth-based caste system, and strongly condemns the use of such a system to discriminate against any person or group, or to preclude their participation in any aspect of religious or secular life.

ISKCON's Founder-Acharya, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, was an outspoken critic of the erroneous belief that one's birth in a particular "caste" determined one's occupation or station in life. Prabhupada boldly offered a more forward-thinking reading of references to *varna* in Vedic, or Hindu scriptures, arguing that such passages describe a system of natural social stratification intended to help people find the opportunities best suited to them, not to prevent them from making religious or secular progress. Prabhupada stressed that a person's qualities and activities, not a person's birth, determined one's *varna*. He strongly condemned discrimination based on a birth-based caste system as a harmful and unauthorized misinterpretation of Vedic scriptures and tradition.

In speaking out against caste, Prabhupada followed a venerable tradition, within the Vaishnava

fold, of opposing caste-based discrimination. Prabhupada's own guru, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura, challenged prominent Hindus of that day who claimed that the scriptures supported such caste-based discrimination. Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati argued against this spurious view in public debates (for which his life was later threatened). He also demonstrated his practical opposition to such discrimination by offering the ceremonial sacred thread and the opportunity to become a Brahmin priest to anyone, regardless of caste. Prior to Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati and Prabhupada, other Vaishnava teachers and saints had similarly opposed a birth-based caste system. These include, for instance, the poets Kabir and Mirbai, and such renowned scholars as Sripada Ramunuja and Sripada Madhvacharya.

Perhaps most significantly for members of ISKCON and the Gaudya Vasihnava sampradaya, Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu# (1486-1533) himself demonstrated his opposition to caste: among his inner circle of confidential, trusted associates and followers are counted Haridasa Thakura, Rupa Goswami, and Sanatana Goswami—all considered untouchables, by birth or circumstance, according to the prevailing caste system of their day.

Following the example set by his predecessors, Srila Prabhupada was unfaltering in his belief that no one should be denied opportunity on the basis of birth or caste. At the same time, Prabhupada was also critical of some efforts to eradicate caste-based discrimination through political slogans and shallow calls for equality, or by attempting to expunge the Hindu tradition of any mention of *varna*. He rejected such efforts, well intentioned as they might be, as superficial remedies that failed to address the underlying disparity of educational opportunities that lay at the heart of the issue.

For his part, Prabhupada sought to attack caste-based discrimination at its root. He worked tirelessly to share the keys to spiritual upliftment and self-realization with all. Not only did he offer such opportunities to those downtrodden by caste-based discrimination within India, but he also extended those opportunities – arguably for the first time in history on such a massive scale – to men and women not born into Indian families (also considered “untouchables” by defenders of a birth-based caste system). In doing so, Prabhupada practically demonstrated that anyone, whatever their caste or status, could achieve the highest spiritual and secular success promised in the scriptures, without bar or restriction.

ISKCON devotees strive to follow in Prabhupada's footsteps and to build upon the work he began. ISKCON continues to initiate and foster opportunities designed to give all people the tools needed to access a dynamic and rewarding spiritual life. ISKCON's educational and

religious activities are open to all, irrespective of caste, creed, race, gender, or background. Some ISKCON projects, particularly grass-roots food distribution and educational work, also specifically reach out to those routinely neglected because of their socio-economic status. In promoting *Sanatan Dharma* through the proper understanding of the Vedic sacred texts, ISKCON devotees strive to replace the divisive and restrictive misapplication of caste based on birth with a renewed appreciation that every soul in every status of life should be afforded respect and dignity, and be given every opportunity to cooperatively serve God and his creation.

International Society for Krishna Consciousness,
Office of Communications

APPENDIX

The following excerpt, from an interview that Srila Prabhupada gave to the Bhavan's Journal in 1976, offers a striking look into his view of a birth-based caste system and caste-based discrimination. It demonstrates his critique of both those who would uphold such a system, and those who would attempt to solve the problem by eradicating the notion of varna (social division) altogether.

This excerpt has been edited for space and clarity.

Question: Will the fundamental values of the Hindu religion be in any way affected by the eradication of the caste system, toward which a concerted effort is now being made at all levels?

Srila Prabhupada: The Vedic system of religion we have been describing—the *varnashrama* system created by Krishna—is not to be confused with the present-day caste system—determination of social divisions by birth. But as to eradication of all social divisions, it cannot be done... But the difficulty is that this so-called caste system has come in, on account of the false notion that in order to be a Brahmin, one must be the son of a Brahmin. That is the caste system. But Krishna does not say that. He says “according to quality and work.” He never says “according to birth.” So this so-called caste system in India is a false notion of *catur-varnyam*, the system of four social divisions. The real system of *catur-varnyam* means *guna-karma-vibhagasah*, determination of the four social divisions according to quality and work. One must be qualified.

So people who want to become Brahmins must be educated to acquire these qualities. It is not enough simply to abolish the caste system, which is contaminated by the false conception of qualification by birthright. Certainly, this wrong caste system should be abolished. Also, educational centers should be opened for teaching all people how to become genuine Brahmins and Kshatriyas.

According to their qualities and work, people naturally belong to different social groupings. So you cannot avoid it, but because you have created a false caste system, that should be abolished, and the actual system recommended by Krishna—that should be adopted.

Q: You're saying the natural system is to classify a person and train him for a particular duty, according to his particular inner qualities and his particular propensity to act.

Prabhupada: Yes. That classification is wanted. That must be there.

SELECTED QUOTES FROM the works of HIS DIVINE GRACE A.C. BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI PRABHUPADA

Guest: "Being a Brahmin by birth, does it mean anything?"

Prabhupada: "No, they [disciples coming from non-Brahmin families] are not born of Brahmin father. Now they are Brahmins."

Guest: "But you were saying about Brahmins, so I..."

Prabhupada: "Brahmins means qualified Brahmins. When you say engineer, that means qualified engineer, not born engineer. An engineer is not born. "Because his father is an engineer, he is an engineer." What is this? You become an engineer. *Guna-karma-vibhagasah. Catur-varnyam maya srstam* (Bhagavad Gita 4.13). There must be qualification and work; otherwise what kind of Brahmin?"

(Sri Prabhupada, conversation with guests; September 1972)

"It is the quality, not the birth. They have made it now like that. That has caused the downfall of Hindu culture in India, when it came to the caste system. It is not [supposed to be] the caste system by birth. In Bhagavad Gita it is said, 'By quality...'"

(Sri Prabhupada, conversation with banker; September 1973)

"So *shastra* says if these qualities are *anyatrapī drsyeta*, if these qualities are found somewhere else.... Suppose a [so-called] Shudra or a Chandala [Harijana], if these qualities are found there,

then he should be accepted by those qualities, not by birth.... So, this is *shastric* injunction. Then later on this caste “Brahminism,” “Shudraism” made the whole thing, the whole Hindu culture, Vedic culture, spoiled.”

(Srla Prabhupada, room conversation; November 1974)

“This has killed the Indian, I mean Vedic culture when they began to claim superiority simply by birth without any qualification. That killed the whole civilization.... How you can simply say that because I'm born in such and such family, therefore I have also the same thing. Because my father was high-court judge, therefore I am high-court judge. Is that very good logic?”

(Srla Prabhupada, morning walk conversation; December 1973)

8.7 Swami Parmanand Giriji Maharaj, Spiritual Head, Akhand Paramdham

Acharaya Mahamandaleshwar Yug Purush Shri Swami Parmanand Ji Giri Maharaj received sanyas diksha from revered Swami Akhandanand Ji Maharaj from Chitrakoot in 1956 after completing secondary education. Today in India and abroad, hundreds of thousands of people have recognized him as a Vedant scholar and enlightened being. Aside from his spiritual teachings Maharaj Ji fosters numerous social projects through the non-profit organization Akhand Paramdham (APD). His vast array of social projects include residential programs for underprivileged children and those who are physically and/or mentally challenged, 13 hospitals that serve those in need, 15 schools, colleges and universities which are mostly in remote areas. Entire villages that are alternatives to orphanages, women's shelters and old age homes are in successful operation and are being implemented in every state in India. These are but a few of the many programs APD is operating that uplift those in need. The organization provides programs to support those who are on a dedicated spiritual path, so that they may truly awaken. His premise is that once we are awake it is natural to assist others in need. Swami Paramanand Ji says that unless someone has their basic needs taken care of it is difficult to focus on one's spiritual development. Today he has hundreds of thousands of devotees around the world. Over 100 books have been written about his teachings and techniques and 25 have been translated in other languages. 40 ashrams in India and abroad have also been established to assist those on a spiritual path.

Statement

We should meet and be able to live with all human beings. We need to give special training to those who are socially deprived in our community. I preach and believe that clay is same in all pots irrespective of their shapes and colors. This is what we need to understand. The Gita, Upanishads and many other scriptural references are available to support the above.

Varnaashrama system accepts that an individual may belong to a specific Varna by birth because one can learn the necessary knowledge from ones parents and family. Varnaasrama system also accepts that one can choose to belong to a specific Varna by ones own choice and put effort to learn the required skills and knowledge. Today science has proven that peoples genes make them inclined to acquire a specific nature. But this can change depending on the person's education, environment and spiritual practices. One's developed inclinations can be totally opposite than their families. The parents genes do not necessarily mean that a child will be ruled by those genes. Day by day our Varnaashrama system is going corrupt because of ego. Many do not want to accept what the system was originally made for. Due to ego some

people do not want to do what they have the ability to do and they go to another caste for self esteem. One day this system will collapse.

There are many examples of people who have changed their ways i.e.: pandit to shudra and visa versa. According to the Upanishads in the story of Satyakam, he went to a rishi who asked him about his caste & inquired as to who his father was. Satyakam said he really didn't know but would ask his mother because he did not know who his father was. His mother told him she had a lot of sexual relationships with many men so she did not know who his father was, so he went back to the rishi and told him what his mother had said. The rishi said, "You are speaking the truth therefore you are Brahman and are able to know Brahmn Gyan and I accept you as a shishya." In another story a man goes into the army and gets selected as a soldier. He was asked what his caste was and if he was a Kshatriya, he was told only he would only be accepted if he was of the warrior cast. So to prove he was he shot himself. The Gita says that caste is not defined only by birth. It is necessary to take into consideration a persons nature.

There are many examples of misuse of the caste system. For example, in Australia there are only 1 crore people but they are doing very good in cricket as the team players are chosen on ability. In India however there are over 100 crore of people but we have fewer that play well. Why is this? Because here there is so much corruption. People are transferred to the wrong caste due to their ego problems. Some people think they will get more happiness by being in another caste but it may not be suitable for them and they may not have the full potential for that. In foreign countries, participation in big sports competitions is dependent on ability.

8.8 Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, Belur Math, India

Statement

We are glad to know about HAF and the noble work you are doing. Swami Vivekananda was one of the first religious leaders in India to speak for the downtrodden masses of India, and the first leader to plan and execute long-range social service schemes for their uplift.

Swamiji's exhortations awakened and energized the whole nation. It is a living tradition in the Ramakrishna Order. Our individual and collective lives provide a living testimonial to the practical way the problems of caste, especially untouchability, can be solved. Following Swamiji's instructions, we believe not in talking or newspaper blazoning but in silent, sincere, respectful serve - service to man as service to god.

During Swamiji's time caste was only a social scourge. But now it is also inextricably linked to politics in India. Following Swamiji's instructions, our Sangha has all through its history kept aloof from political involvements and controversies. We do not want to break this noble tradition. And so we are sorry to inform you that we are unable to give verbal support to your efforts in rousing public opinion about social atrocities.

However, if anybody wants to know how the problem of caste can be actually solved, he may visit any centre of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and how people without any distinctions of caste, race or religion live together, how everyone from the untouchable to the Brahmin live together, work together, eat together and worship together like children of the same Divine Parents, which indeed they are. Ours is not the way of social protest; ours is the way of social enlightenment through actual transformation of life and consciousness in a spirit of service to the Lord.

8.9 Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Spiritual Head of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS)

His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has inspired millions of people across the world to lead a God-centered, moral life guided by Hindu principles. As the present leader of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), Pramukh Swami Maharaj travels from village to village, continent to continent, emphasizing the importance of family harmony, community service and spiritual progress. His compassion for humanity, universal wisdom and striking simplicity have inspired many, as has his quiet, undisturbed love for God which rises beyond all borders of nation, race and religion. BAPS, a worldwide socio-spiritual organization in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, is dedicated to community service, peace and harmony. Motivated by Hindu principles, BAPS strives to care for the world by caring for societies, families and individuals. Through a number of social and spiritual activities, BAPS endeavors to produce better citizens of tomorrow who have a high esteem for their roots - their rich Hindu heritage. Its 800 mandirs and 3,300 international centers support these activities of character-building. Under the guidance and leadership of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS aspires to inspire people towards spiritually-elevated and addiction-free living.

Statement

The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha is against discrimination based on caste and birth-based social hierarchy since it devalues human dignity. We are guided by Bhagwan Swaminarayan's teachings that the spiritual ideals of Hinduism (the concepts of Atma and Paramatma) assert that human dignity and spiritual equality are meant for all members of society. As people of the Hindu way of life, we find caste-based discrimination morally unacceptable and urge everyone to collectively bring an end to it.

History of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha's efforts against caste-based discrimination
Historians have noted that Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830) was among the first Hindu leaders to crusade against caste-based discrimination in society. Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed a way of life based on the Vedas and Upanishads that taught that everyone is the divine atma (soul). Thus, there was no legitimate spiritual basis for caste-based discrimination. This spiritual perspective of Bhagwan Swaminarayan helped people develop love and reverence for all humanity without any discrimination.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's efforts to remove caste-based discrimination were sustainable and effective because he did not resort to coercion or violence. Instead, he inspired a change in people's hearts through his love, teachings and personal example. In his discourses and scriptures he taught that those who promote discrimination based on caste cannot be called virtuous. He inspired people of all backgrounds to incorporate the moral values and righteous living taught by spirituality, thus levelling the man-made differences between caste groups. His teachings and their positive effects were documented by contemporary British officials, Christian missionaries and the scholars of the Sampraday.

However, as a result of his revolutionary teachings, Bhagwan Swaminarayan was opposed by orthodox groups. Despite the opposition, he continued his work in breaking caste barriers from society and from people's hearts. This tradition continues today with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Like Bhagwan Swaminarayan, he dissolves caste-based discrimination in society through his work and teachings. His efforts include visits to dalits' homes, holding spiritual discourses in dalit areas and holding conventions for dalit advancement at BAPS mandirs and other venues. It is also noteworthy that while priests who perform ritual worship in Hindu temples have customarily come from upper-castes, Pramukh Swami Maharaj initiates sadhus irrespective of caste. Today, in the true spirit of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's views on breaking down caste barriers, BAPS sadhus of dalit backgrounds are indistinguishable from sadhus of any other caste. For example, in BAPS mandirs, even pujari sadhus come from all caste backgrounds. Moreover, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's second spiritual successor, Bhagatji Maharaj, who is today venerated in all BAPS temples and homes, came from a so-called low-caste background. Today, at BAPS mandirs and festivals, devotees of all castes take meals together, worship together, offer voluntary services together, participate in spiritual rituals such as yagnas together, and sit together to listen to spiritual discourses.

Supporting Material on BAPS efforts against caste-based discrimination

The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha has published a book (in Gujarati) explaining in detail its stance on caste-based discrimination and outlining its efforts over the last two centuries in removing caste barriers. (Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas. *Antyoday*. Swaminarayan Aksharpath. 2nd Ed, (2002). (English translation currently in press)) A few passages from this book have been excerpted below:

Kishorelal Mashruwala says, “Swaminarayan was the first to religiously develop the Shudras of the Gujarat – Kathiawad region. He did such work among the low-caste people that people belonging to the Kadia, Darji, Suthar, Kharva, Mochi caste, etc. became his followers. And that became the main reason for many to oppose this Sampraday.” (Kishorelal Mashruwala, *Sahajanand Swami and Swaminarayan Sampraday*. Navjivan Publishing House. Ahmedabad. Second Edition, (1940) p.63 and 64.)

K.K. Datta, another historian, notes, “The sect did splendid work in the field of social reform. It eliminated caste distinction, gave a sympathetic and humane treatment to low caste people and bestowed on them all the rights, which were till then denied to them. Most of the artisan class, manual labourers and the people of the lower strata joined this sect. Under the influence of Sahajanandji, they gave up the habits of drinking, gambling, eating meat, smoking and raised their moral standards. Sahajanandji exhorted people to live in simple ways, to have restraint on their passions and to lead a pure, God-fearing life. Influenced by Sahajanandji, some criminal tribes even gave up their vocation of stealing and committing dacoities, and became good citizens.” (K.K.Datta (ed) *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol.XI, p.848)

The famous Christian writer M.C. Parekh writes: “Even the untouchables were not excluded from the Satsang... they were made disciples, and in one or two places they built temples of their own. The attitude of Swami Sahajanand towards these unfortunate people in those early days, when neither reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy nor Christian Missionaries gave any thought to them, is found in many stories.” (M.C. Parekh, *Shri Swaminarayan*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1980, p.194)

The Asiatic Journal paid tribute to the great change in caste-based discrimination brought about by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in his lifetime, “The most intelligent people in the province, while they regretted (as Hindus) the levelling nature of his system, acknowledged their belief that his preaching had produced great effect in improving the morals of the people.” (*Asiatic Journal, First Series*, London, 1823 XV P.348-349.)

The scriptures of the Sampraday also highlight Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s effective efforts to fight caste-based discrimination through loving persuasion. Bhagwan Swaminarayan was very opposed to the notion of untouchability. He repeatedly urged all to fore-go feelings of superiority or inferiority based on the caste system. One such incident documented in the sacred texts of the Samprady follows:

“When Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited Loya, a woman from Chuda village, called Ganga belonging to the Dhedh (untouchable) community, came for darshan. Shri Hari asked her to

sit in the women's assembly in the midst of high-caste women. The high-caste women started murmuring, 'Why has Maharaj allowed her to sit with us?'

On hearing this, Maharaj asked the wife of Sura Khachar (a Kshatriya), 'If a bullock dies in your verandah who comes to get it?'

The Kshatriya woman replied, 'A Dhedh comes to get it.'

Bhagwan Swaminarayan continued, 'Who removes the carcass, if a bullock dies in your courtyard?'

The woman replied, 'A Dhedh hauls off the carcass.'

Then Maharaj rebuked, 'If a Dhedh enters your house to fetch the carcass, and you have no objection to it, then how is it that you feel polluted if Ganga sits with you!' (*Sadguru Nirgundas Swamini Vato*, Publisher: S.G. Swami Jagatprakashdasji, 1996, P.242, talk-358.)

It should be noted that Bhagwan Swaminarayan's 2nd spiritual successor, Bhagatji Maharaj was a so-called low-caste by birth. European scholar Rachel Dwyer observes, "Because of the stress placed on asceticism, leadership in the Sanstha is much more a matter of spiritual merit than hereditary descent. As a result its leaders have been drawn from a wide range of castes, which has undoubtedly contributed to its popularity. In a similar fashion, since 1981 the Sanstha has accepted members of all castes as sadhus, excluding Dalits, formerly called 'untouchables', and more recently Pramukh Swami has given full initiation to both tribals and Dalits, not restricting recruitment to this role solely to Brahmins. The movement's strong commitment to asceticism, as well as its careful maintenance of the rules of ritual purity has ensured that this has not been achieved at the cost of a lowered status." ('The Swaminarayan Movement'. Rachel Dwyer, in *South Asians in the Diaspora : Histories and Religious Traditions*)

Be it a colony of Harijans or Wagharis or the huts of Adivasis, the resonant voice of Pramukh Swami Maharaj speaks out, "There is no distinction of high and low in God's house. The distinction has been created by man." In order to remove this distinction, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has undertaken many trips to the homes of Harijans, Wagharis and Adivasis. He often quotes the scriptural passage, "Janmanā jāyate shudra, sanskārāt dvija uchyate" i.e. Everyone is born a 'shudra' (lacking virtues). As he develops virtues, he becomes a 'Brahmin'. Everybody can acquire virtues."

On 6 July 1987, while addressing a harijan society in Ahmedabad, he explained, "In the eyes of religion, all are equal. There is no high and low. Those who do not understand the nature of true religion play up the differences. But we have to remove this in a united manner."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj organized a Dalit convention on 13 Nov 1992, on the occasion of the inauguration of Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar. A dalit guru, Pujya Baldevdasji Maharaj, who came to the gathering remarked, "It is said, 'Nobody should feel he is alone as the saint is constantly by one's side.' These words apply aptly in the case of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He is moving from street to street in Dalit villages and bringing about their uplift."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj addressed the convention saying, "You may be born in any caste, however, when you worship Paramatma, you are great. God makes no distinction. This caste or that caste, untouchability... these things go away. We are concerned with the qualities and conduct of a man. Everybody is born according to his karma and we should not foment hatred by making distinctions. Bhagwan Swaminarayan respected everybody. He elevated people by developing their virtues. If you have virtues, you are great, irrespective of your family and place of birth. Such people are pure. Through this spiritual perspective, untouchability can be removed. See Paramatma in all creatures. Muktanand Swami said in his kirtan, 'Wherever you look, see God there, and nothing else.' If we cultivate this attitude we will not look down upon anybody."

8.10 Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder and Spiritual Head, the Art of Living Foundation

His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is a renowned spiritual leader and multi-faceted humanitarian whose mission of uniting the world into a violence-free family has inspired millions of people worldwide. The icon of non-violence and universal human values, Sri Sri seeks global peace through service and dialog. In 1981, Sri Sri started the Art of Living Foundation, an international nonprofit educational and humanitarian organization. The Foundation, now active in more than 140 countries, offers educational and self-development programs designed to eliminate stress and foster a sense of well-being. While his self development programs have popularized traditionally exclusive ancient techniques, Sri Sri's social initiatives address an array of issues such as conflict resolution, disaster and trauma relief, prisoner rehabilitation, youth leadership, women's empowerment, female foeticide, child labor, and access to education which have reached more than 30,000 rural communities. Sri Sri travels to more than 40 countries a year to share his message of social responsibility, and that all great spiritual traditions share common goals and values. His teachings of love, practical wisdom, and service promote harmony among people, and encourage individuals to follow their chosen spiritual path, while honoring other paths.

Statement

A time to heal – Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

Despite being banned by law, there have been countless incidents of violence and oppression against the Dalits, many of which have gone unreported. Laws have failed to change the attitude of people, and contemporary religious leaders have done precious little to remove the prejudices and bring about reconciliation. Unless the upper caste and the Dalits effect reconciliation, society will suffer from cycles of revenge and counter-revenge.

We need to make people realize that being born in any a particular caste is a curse and that discrimination is not sanctioned by religion. Every Hindu should be educated to the fact that many of the sacred texts he or she reads were written by Dalits.

Historically, many of the revered rishis were Dalits. Dalit contribution to sanatan literature is commendable. For instance, the narrator of the Puranas, Soot Maharishi, was a Dalit. Shaabara Rishi, born into an 'atishudra' family, was highly revered as a rishi. His seminal commentary on the Vedas is a highly regarded reference book for the most learned of Vedic scholars. The current generation of upper castes is not exposed to this information and that is the reason why, in the villages, people continue to indulge in inhuman practices.

Every morning, the first puja of the day in the Tirupati temple is offered by the scheduled caste Banjara community. It would be good to start this practice in other temples where there is discrimination. The oppressors need to be taught that what they claim to be their own has major contributions from the Dalits. As Maharishi Dayanand, Sri Aurobindo and many others have rightly pointed out; religious practices have drifted away from their philosophy.

It is unfortunate that people without proper knowledge of the scriptures simply quote from the Manu Smriti, which is only a code of conduct given by a king and has nothing to do with the Shrutis, Vedas or the Upanishads. It is time to honour the philosophy and discard the unscrupulous practices. Instead, people have discarded the philosophy and allowed the unscrupulous practices to continue.

The greatest of the epics — the Ramayana — was written by a Dalit. How can Dalits drop the precious lore and allow a few orthodox narrow-minded people to dominate? It's not only Dalits who are fighting for their rights; many upper caste people are working and fighting for their cause. Let us not forget that the name Ambedkar was given to Bhimrao saheb by his mentor who was a Brahmin. Not all upper caste people are oppressors and religion certainly is not. The vicious cycle of hatred and revenge is being promoted for political gains.

For justice and progress, there has to be reconciliation.

ENDING CASTE DISCRIMINATION

His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji is continuously engaged in bridging the social and religious divides in society. He has been tirelessly championing the cause of the oppressed and the downtrodden and working to build a discrimination-free India. Sri Sri has always stood up strongly against any design that could damage the social fabric in the country.

On March 9, 2007, he hosted a landmark conference aimed at ending the distorted practice of social discrimination on the basis of one's birth. Sri Sri has maintained that being born in any a particular caste should not be a curse and that "caste by birth is not sanctioned by religion". Responding to the call of reconciliation by Sri Sri, a large number of Dalit and caste Hindu leaders vowed to end untouchability. They adopted a seven-point action plan to this effect at the 'Truth & Reconciliation Conference' hosted by the Art of Living. The leaders took a pledge to implement the same.

The action plan, which is aimed at spreading the spirit of reconciliation to every corner of India, focuses on ensuring temple entry for Dalits, organising collective celebrations including community feasts, abolition of the practice of keeping separate utensils for Dalits, empowerment of women from economically weaker sections, providing educational facilities especially to weaker sections, providing spiritual and religious education to Dalit children and ensuring equality and justice for all.

Addressing the gathering, Sri Sri said, “We need to make people realise that discrimination is not sanctioned by religion. It’s time to move forward and not to reel in past mistakes. The anger of the past should not engulf us and divide the country. Fear and communication gap between communities are what is keeping us apart. We must accept the reality and reconcile the differences.”

Sri Sri has been articulating in his public appearances that many of the revered rishis were Dalits and highlighting their enormous contribution to Indian civilisation. For instance, the narrator of the Puranas, Soot Maharishi, was a Dalit. Shaabara Rishi born into an ‘atishudra’ family was highly revered as a rishi. His seminal commentary on the Vedas is a highly regarded reference book for the most learned of Vedic scholars. The greatest of the epics - the Ramayana - was written by a Dalit.

In the process of reforms, people from all castes and communities have to be involved. A reform is a social phenomenon where people from all caste and communities will have to be motivated to join. In this context, Sri Sri has been impressing upon politicians and policy-makers to bring in measures that will unite the country and remove inequality at all levels.

“Reform can’t happen out of anger or hatred; we need a sane mind and a loving approach. Without the whole-hearted participation of the upper caste people, Dalit empowerment will remain a dream. If a section of society starts hating the upper caste and blaming them; how can they participate in the empowerment of the Dalits?” he said in one of his recent public appearances.

In 2002, Sri Sri hosted a three-day conference on Dalit heritage at the Art of Living International Centre in Bangalore which brought together several leaders and put in public domain the rich heritage of Dalits.

Sri Sri has also kept a strong focus on the education of Dalit children in all the schools run by the Art of Living. Sri Sri says caste discrimination is a social problem and needs to be addressed through social reforms. He has often regretted attempts by lobby groups to politicise it and

present a distorted picture of social atrocities to the world community. He is of the view that such attempts will only weaken the national resolve to end such social menace.

“Caste discrimination can be solved only through reforms and by educating people in human values, not by creating hatred between the communities. Hatred will only polarise the society and create civil wars,” he wrote in a signed article in a leading national daily.

It's not only Dalits who are fighting for their rights; there are thousands of committed soldiers of justice and equality from the upper caste and NGOs who are working for the betterment of the Dalits. Not all upper caste people are oppressors and the religion certainly is not. Sri Sri firmly believes that only a genuine understanding of each other's contribution can put an end to the age-old division between Dalits and caste Hindus. “The oppressors need to be taught that what they claim to be their own has major contributions from the Dalits. At the same time, Dalits should be encouraged to take pride in their rich heritage.”

Reform, not revolt, only way to end social discrimination

In the village adjacent to the Art of Living ashram, the garbage truck dumps the waste of Bangalore city along the road. When the village youth realised that this was a major health hazard, they decided to stop this. When the garbage truck came, instead of sending it away they punctured all the tyres and all the garbage had to be dumped on the roadside in order for the tyres to be repaired. The purpose was to chase the truck away but what they ended up with was just the contrary.

Many times our actions do not bring the desired goal. Instead of taking us towards the goal they take us away from it. Similarly, the actions of self styled leaders such as Udit Raj and Kancha Illiah have done more harm than good to the cause of Dalit upliftment. It's unfortunate for India that they have taken the issue to the US Congress. In the name of Dalit upliftment, they are pursuing their own personal agenda and damaging the image of the country.

If they are really interested in the betterment of the Dalits, they should work in villages, instead of going to the US Congress. The only solution to the problem of caste discrimination is to educate people and make them realise that caste by birth is not sanctioned by religion. This can happen only through grassroots social reforms, not through foreign interventions. History abounds with instances of reformist movement to address the caste menace in society. Several saints such as Basavanna from Karnataka, Narayana Guru from Kerala, Swami Dayananda Saraswati of Arya Samaj are shining example of this. Instead of highlighting such reforms, these people are maligning Hinduism for personal gains.

Rather than converting people to other faiths and running away from Hinduism, the most potent action would be to create Dalit Purohits. Brahminism as understood some decades ago doesn't exist anymore. Today, there are innumerable instances of Brahmins serving under Dalit bosses. No doubt, there are instances of atrocities, but these are not confined to the Dalit community alone. Often the members of upper caste have also been the victims of social conflicts. There are several instances of *sadhus* being attacked. For instance, last year in Uttar Pradesh alone 20 *sadhus* were brutally murdered. When the human consciousness is loaded with tension and mistrust, violence can erupt under any pretext. There are atrocities against women and children because of lack of ethics and morality. Similarly, oppression of the poor is a global problem, not confined just to the Dalit community. It's not just Dalits who are poor; poverty is there among people of all castes.

Caste discrimination is a social problem and needs to be addressed through social reforms. Politicising the issue and presenting a distorted picture of social atrocities to the world community is not going to solve the problem. It will only weaken the national resolve to end such social menace.

There are thousands of committed soldiers of justice and equality from the upper caste and NGOs who are working for the betterment of the Dalits. Also the Indian Parliament and state assemblies have a large representation of Dalits. By taking the matter to the US Congress, these so-called community leaders are denigrating the Dalit lawmakers.

Udit and Kancha will do well to learn a few things from the US. They have to learn a few things about national pride and progressive attitude from the Americans. There are three million homeless beggars in America, little over one per cent of the population. But the American media never publicise it. No blacks, or the native Indians and minorities have ever asked another country to interfere in their internal matter.

Caste discrimination can be solved only through reforms and by educating people in human values, not by creating hatred between the communities. For sure, a Hindu hater can never bring the needed reform in the Hindu society. Hatred will only polarise the society and create civil wars. Without the whole-hearted participation of the upper caste people Dalit empowerment will remain a dream. The younger generation of upper castes can not be held responsible for the discrimination practised by people of previous generations. If a section of society starts hating the upper caste and blaming them, how can they participate in the empowerment of the Dalits.

It is time to change the strategy. Sixty years ago during Ambedkar's time when people were not open to change a revolt was essential. But today, a reform is necessary as a revolt will not work. In the process of reform, people from all castes and communities have to be involved. To bring about reform we need a sane mind and a loving approach, not anger and hatred.

Caste System in Ancient Age

This age was characterized by wisdom and sensitivity. It was a period when the light of knowledge shone brightly through the seers of the Self. Knowledge and principles of all facets of life – from family life to town planning to astronomy to human physiology to spirituality, the epics viz. Ramayana and Mahabharata – were revealed.

This was also the period when *Varnaashrama Dharma* came into existence. The caste system as we know it today is but a corrupted derivative of this social system. The guiding principle was to allow the man to do what he did best. Based on individual aptitude and conduct, society was organized into four Varnas (castes) as follows:

- **Brahmins** – those with an aptitude for philosophy and dissemination of knowledge. They were the advisors, the upholders of knowledge in society.
- **Kshatriyas** – those with an aptitude for organization, administration and defense. They were the rulers; responsible for protection and welfare of society.
- **Vaishyas** – those with an aptitude for commerce and finance. They were responsible for the economic welfare of society. They were also responsible for charity.
- **Shudras** – those with an aptitude for service and maintenance. They were the support and maintenance system for society. Without them, the brahmins, kshatriyas and vaishyas would not have been able to successfully perform their respective duties.

Welfare and progress could result only with total co-operation and interaction between all the classes. There was no concept of 'upper' and 'lower' classes and each role was considered important and essential. It was neither birth nor monetary status that decided one's caste; it was only one's aptitude.

Maharishi Valmiki – a hunter and robber, who later created the epic Ramayana

Maharishi Veda Vyasa – a fisherwoman's son who gave us the Vedas, Puranas, Mahabharata and Shrimad Bhagavatam lived in this age. In fact most of the Rishis mentioned in the Hindu traditions hail from dalits

8.11 Swami Tejomayananda, Chairman and Spiritual Head, Chinmaya Mission

Swami Tejomayananda, a devoted disciple of Swami Chinmayananda, has served as the Chairman and spiritual head of Chinmaya Mission worldwide since Swami Chinmayananda's mahasamadhi in 1993. He is an outstanding teacher of Vedanta and an accomplished poet, author, and composer. Swami Tejomayananda joined the Vedanta course at Sandeepany Sadhnalaya, Mumbai in 1970 and was initiated into the sanyasa in 1983 by Swami Chinmayananda. Swami Chinmayananda founded Chinmaya Mission in 1953. Not satisfied with degrees in literature and law or with other worldly aspirations, Swami Chinmayananda pursued the spiritual path in the Himalayas under the guidance of Swami Shivananda and Swami Tapovanam. He taught the logic of spirituality, while emphasizing the balance of head and heart. Selfless work, study, and meditation are the cornerstones of spiritual practice, he said. He is credited with the renaissance of spiritual and cultural values in India and with awakening the rest of the world to the ageless wisdom of Vedanta. His legacy remains in the form of books, audio and video tapes, schools, social service projects, more than 300 full-time Vedanta teachers whom he taught and inspired and more than 300 Chinmaya Mission centers around the world serving the spiritual and cultural needs of local communities.

Statement

When asked about this topic, Swami Tejomayananda, offered the words of his guru Swami Chinmayananda:

Chapter 4, Verse 13 of the Bhagavad Gita:

Chaatur varnyam mayaa srstam guna-karma-vibhagashaha
Tasya kartaaram-api maam viddhya-kartaaram-avyayam

The fourfold caste has been created by Me according to the differentiation of Guna and Karma; though I am the author thereof, know Me as non-doer and immutable.

This is a stanza that has been much misused in recent times by the upholders of the social crime styled as the caste system in India.

On the basis of temperamental distinctions, the entire mankind has been, for the purpose of spiritual study, classified into these four “castes” or Varnas. Just as, in a metropolis, on the basis of trade or professions, we divide the people as doctors, advocates, professors, traders, politicians, drivers, etc., so too, on the basis of the different textures of thoughts entertained by the intelligent creatures, the four “castes” had been labeled in the past. From the standpoint of the State, a doctor and a driver are as much important as an advocate and a mechanic. So too, for the [erfectly healthy life of a society, all “castes” should not be competitive but cooperative units, each being complementary to the others, never competing among themselves.

However, later on, in the power politics of the early middle ages in India, this communal feeling cropped up in its present ugliness, and in the general ignorance among the ordinary people at the time, the cheap pundits could parade their assumed knowledge by quoting, *in bits*, stanzas like this one. The decadent Hindu Brahmin found it very convenient to quote the first quarter of this stanza, and repeat “I created the four varnas” and give this tragic social vivisection a divine look having a godly sanction. They, who did this, were in fact, the greatest blasphemers that Hinduism ever had to reckon with. For Vyasa, in the very same line of the couplet, as though in the very same breath, described the basis on which this classification was made, when he says, “By the differentiation of the mental quality and physical action (of the people).”

This complete definition of Varna not only removes our present misunderstanding but also provides us with some data to understand its true significance. Not by birth is man a brahmana (Brahmin); by cultivating good intentions and noble thoughts alone can we ever aspire to brahmana-hood; nor can we pose as brahmana merely because of our external physical marks, or bodily actions in the outer world. The definition insists that he alone is a brahmana whose thoughts are as much Sattvik as his actions are. A Kshatruiya is one who is Rajasik in his thoughts and actions. A Shudra is not only one whose thoughts are Tamasik, also he who lives a life of low endeavors, for satisfying his base animal passions and flesh-appetites. The scientific attitude in which this definition has been declared is clear from the exhaustive implications of the statement: “According to the differentiation of ‘guna’ and karma.”

8.12 Swami Varadananda, Monk, Vivekananda Vedanta Society - Chicago

Swami Varadananda is a Trustee Emeritus of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions and is a senior sadhu (monk) of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society - Chicago.

Statement

The Ramakrishna Mission is against all forms of discrimination based on birth or caste. According to Vedanta all beings are manifestations of the one universal life, and we are all united through that connection. Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission on the ideal of the service of all people, without regard to caste or social distinctions, seeing them as veritable manifestations of the Divine. He did not teach mere social service but taught that service was an actual worship of the Divine within each being. It is only through the recognition of our common divine heritage that we will be able to live in harmony with each other.

8.13 Pravrajika Vrajaprana, Nun, Vedanta Society of Southern California

Pravrajika Vrajaprana has been a nun at the Sarada Convent of the Vedanta Society of Southern California in Santa Barbara since 1977, taking her sannyasa vows in 1988. She is the author of *Vedanta: A Simple Introduction* (1999) co-author (with Swami Tyagananda) of *Interpreting Ramakrishna: Kali's Child Revisited* (2010), and has authored other books, book chapters and articles on the Hindu traditions. Her writings have been translated into a number of European and Asian languages. A frequent lecturer, she has presented papers at the American Academy of Religion, the East/West Philosophers' Conference, and Boston University's Institute for Philosophy and Religion.

Statement

It is a tragic irony that Hinduism, whose scriptures contain soaring evocations of the unity of existence and the oneness of all life, should also have been the locus of caste-based discrimination. Since its inception, the Ramakrishna Order has stood against such discrimination, serving all people without distinction of caste, religion or race. The Hindu traditions assert that the divine dwells within the heart of every being. Knowing this to be true, those in the Hindu traditions should join together to remove the stain of this long-standing injustice.

Pravrajika Vrajaprana
Vedanta Society of Southern California

9. Spiritual and anti-caste teachings of Hindu scripture

(This listing is by no means exhaustive)

9.1. Spiritual teachings of Hindu scripture

The purpose of Religion and Spirituality

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy — by one, or more, or all of these — and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details. - **Swami Vivekananda, in Raja Yoga**

The Nature of God or Truth

Truth is one, the wise call it by different names. - **Rig Veda 1.164.46**

Brahman¹⁰⁶ is that from which the universe originates, that which sustains the universe and that into which the universe dissolves - **Brahma Sutras I.1.2¹⁰⁷**

Prajnanam Brahma - "Consciousness is Brahman" - **Aitareya Upanishad 3.3**

Ayam Atma Brahma - "This Self (Atman) is Brahman" - **Mandukya Upanishad 1.2**

Tat Tvam Asi - "Thou art That" - **Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7**

Aham Brahmasmi - "I am Brahman" - **Bhahdaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10**

¹⁰⁶ *Brahman* is a term that is used to denote God as the immanent and transcendent spirit that animates and sustains this universe. It is not to be confused with the caste term *brahmin*.

¹⁰⁷ The Brahma Sutras, written by the Rishi Veda Vyasa, is technically a *Smriti* text. However, it is the most authoritative summary of the spiritual teachings of the Upanishads and is widely held to be equal in authority to the *srutis*

9.1a. Chandogya Upanishad

This Self who gives rise to all works, all desires, all odors, all tastes, who pervades the universe, who is beyond words, who is joy abiding, who is ever present in my heart, is Brahman indeed. To him I shall attain when my ego dies. - **Chandogya Upanishad 3.14.4**

Like strangers in an unfamiliar country walking over a hidden treasure, day by day we enter the world of Brahman while in deep sleep but never find it, carried away by what is false. - **Chandogya Upanishad 8.3.2**

As bees suck nectar from many a flower and make their honey one, so that no drop can say, 'I am from this flower or that,' All creatures, though one, know not they are that One. There is nothing that does not come from Brahman. Of everything he is the inmost Self. He is the truth; he is the Self supreme. And That thou art, Shvetaketu; That thou art - **Chandogya Upanishad 6.9.1 - 4**

9.1b. Taittiriya Upanishad¹⁰⁸.

Now this is an enquiry regarding the Bliss of Brahman:

Suppose there is a young man—a noble young man—versed, the best of rulers, firm in body and strong and the whole world, full of wealth, is his: that is one measure of human bliss.

This human bliss, multiplied one hundred times, is one measure of the bliss of the human gandharvas, as also of a man versed in the Vedas and free from desires.

This bliss of the human gandharvas, multiplied one hundred times, is one measure of the bliss of the celestial gandharvas, as also of a man versed in the Vedas and free from desires.

This bliss of the celestial gandharvas, multiplied one hundred times, is one measure of the bliss of the Manes, who dwell in the long—enduring world, as also of a man versed in the Vedas and free from desires.

This bliss of the Manes who dwell in the long—enduring world, multiplied on hundred times, is one measure of the bliss of the devas born in the Ajana heaven, as also of a man versed in the Vedas and free from desires.

¹⁰⁸Source: "The Upanishads - A New Translation" by Swami Nikhilananda

The bliss of the devas born in the Ajana heaven, multiplied one hundred times, is one measure of the bliss of the sacrificial devas who have attained to divinity by means of sacrifices, as also of a man versed in the Vedas and free from desires.

The bliss of the sacrificial devas, multiplied one hundred times, is one measure of the bliss of the devas, as also of a man versed in the Vedas and free from desires.

The bliss of the devas, multiplied one hundred times, is one measure of the bliss of Indra, as also of a man versed in the Vedas and free from desires.

The bliss of Indra, multiplied one hundred times, is one measure of the bliss of Brihaspati, as also of a man versed in the Vedas and free from desires.

The bliss of Brihaspati, multiplied one hundred times, is one measure of the bliss of Prajapati, as also of a man versed in the Vedas and free from desires.

The bliss of Prajapati, multiplied one hundred times, is one measure of the bliss of the knower of Brahma, as also of a man versed in the Vedas and free from desires.

- Taittiriya Upanishad, Part II, Chapter 8

9.1c. The Bhagavad Gita, Hinduism's Most Popular Scripture¹⁰⁹

The Blessed Lord Krishna Said:

[GOD IS THE SUPREME BEING]:

I am the final Destination (Goal), the Provider, the Master of all, the Witness of everything, the Abode (in which the whole universe resides), worth seeking shelter of, and the friend of all. And I am the origin and the dissolution, the foundation of everything, the resting place and the immortal cause of everything. **Gita 9.18**

¹⁰⁹ HAF would like to acknowledge Mr. Vishal Agarwal for his suggestion of organizing verses under specific themes indicated by the Captions, which also he created. Mr. Agarwal is a scholar of Hindu scriptures and traditions. He has several publications on Hindu scriptures and history to his credit in various academic journals. He selected many of the verses below. Verse translations are drawn from the following sources:

1. The Bhagavad Gita, by S. Radhakrishnan, Harper Colophon Books, 1973
2. Bhagavad Geeta, by Swami Chidbhavananda, published by the Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam
2. Bhagavad Gita As It Is, by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

I am the Supreme Spirit abiding in the heart of all beings. I am alone the creator, maintainer, and destroyer - or the beginning, the middle, and the end - of all beings.

Gita 10.20

[OUR TRUE NATURE IS DIVINE]:

An eternal portion of My own Self becomes the soul of creatures in the world of living things. It attracts the five senses and the mind as the sixth (which lords over these senses) – all these six being comprised of non-living matter. **Gita 15.7**

[SEE DIVINITY AND EQUALITY IN ALL CREATURES]:

The wise see the same (Brahman) with an equal eye in a learned and humble brāhmaña, in a cow, in an elephant, in a dog, and even in a dog eater (outcaste). **Gita 5.18**

A person is considered supreme who looks at companions, friends, enemies, neutrals, arbiters, haters, relatives, saints, and sin-ners with the same eye. **Gita 6.09**

For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me. **Gita 6.30**

He is considered the best yogi who regards every being like oneself, and who can feel the pain and pleasures of others as one's own. **Gita 6.32**

[WE ARE THE ETERNAL SOUL, NOT THIS PERISHABLE BODY]:

The soul is never born and it does not ever die. The soul is not something that exists at one time and then vanishes the next. The soul is not something that did not exist at one time and then took birth and came into being subsequently. It is unchanging, eternal and primeval and it is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. **Gita 2.20**

Weapons cannot cleave the soul, fire cannot burn it. Water does not wet (or drown) it not does wind dry it. **Gita 2.23**

[DOCTRINE OF REBIRTH – WE NEVER DIE]:

Just as a human casts off worn out clothing and puts on new, the soul too casts off old bodies and enters into new ones. **Gita 2.22**

Just as the soul dwelling in the body passes through childhood, youth and old age, in a similar manner, it travels from one body to another. Therefore, the wise do not get deluded over these changes. **Gita 2.13**

When the soul enters a body, it becomes the master of that body. And when it leaves the body (at death), it takes the mind and senses along with it, just as the wind takes fragrances from their sources (the flowers). **Gita 15.8**

[GOD IS IMPARTIAL]:

All beings are equal to Me. There is none especially hateful to me, nor one who is especially dear to me. But all those who worship me with devotion are in Me, and so am I in them. **Gita 9.29**

[THERE IS HOPE FOR EVERYONE]:

Even if a person of the vilest conduct starts worshipping me with single-minded devotion, he too must be counted amongst the good, because he has resolved well. **Gita 9.30**

[TRUE DEVOTION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EXTERNALS]:

Whosoever offers to Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or even water – that offering of love, of the pure of heart, do I accept eagerly. **Gita 9.26**

[MANY WAYS TO REACH GOD – FREEDOM OF WORSHIP]:

In whatsoever way men approach Me, even so do I bless them. For whichever path that men make take in worship, they will all come to Me. **Gita 4.11**

[WHOM DOES GOD LOVE?]

He who has no hatred for any living being, who is friendly and also compassionate instead, who is free of the feeling of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, even minded in pleasure and pain and ever forgiving and forbearing. **Gita 12.13**

He who is alike to enemy and friend, also to good or bad reputation; He who is the same in pleasure or pain, in heat or cold and who is free from all attachments. **Gita 12.18**

He who considers insult and praise alike, who is silent (restrained in speech), content with whatever comes his way (through his own effort), has no abode (i.e., is not tied to home or family) and is firm in mind and full of devotion – that man is extremely dear to me. **Gita 12.19**

[LIVING ETHICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY]:

Absence of fear, purity of mind, steadfastness in the path of meditation, Charity, control over one’s sense organs, performance of Vedic sacrifices, study of Holy Scriptures, austerity and straightforwardness... **Gita 16.1**

Ahimsa, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, absence of backbiting or crookedness, compassion towards all creatures, absence of covetousness, gentleness, modesty (decency), absence of fickleness (or immaturity).... **Gita 16.2**

Vigor and energy, forgiveness, fortitude, cleanliness, absence of hatred and no exaggerated self-opinion – These belong to the One who is born to achieve Divine Wealth, O Bhaarat. **Gita 16.3**

Ostentation, arrogance, excessive pride and a tendency to demand respect, anger, harshness and indeed ignorance – these are the endowments of him who is born with the demoniac wealth. **Gita 16.4**

[LAW OF KARMA, FREEDOM IS OUR TRUE DESTINY]:

Divine wealth leads to Freedom, whereas the demoniac wealth results in bondage. Do not grieve, because you are born naturally with the divine wealth (and therefore destined for freedom). **Gita 16.5**

[CONTROL YOUR DESIRES TO ATTAIN PEACE AND HAPPINESS]:

He attains peace into whom all desires enter as waters enters the ocean, which filled from all sides, remains unmoved; but not to him who wants to have (more and more) desires. **Gita 2.70**
The knowledge of the scriptures is better than mere ritualistic practice; meditation is better than scriptural knowledge; renunciation of selfish attachment to the fruits of work is better than even meditation; because peace immediately follows renunciation of selfish motives. **Gita 12.12**

[PRACTICE MODERATION IN ALL THINGS]:

Meditation (Yoga) becomes the destroyer of sorrow for him whose food (eating habits) and recreation are temperate, whose efforts and activities are controlled, and whose sleep and waking are regulated. **Gita 6.17**

[ENGAGE WITH GOOD, DISENGAGE FROM EVIL]:

Arjuna, without doubt, the mind is difficult to discipline because it is restless. But it can be restrained through constant engagement in good things (abhyāsa) and constant detachment from bad things (vairāgya). **Gita 6.35**

[SCRIPTURAL TEACHINGS SHOULD BE OUR GUIDE IN OUR ACTIONS]:

Let scripture be the means by which you determine what should be done and what should not be done. After knowing the commands of the scripture, it is your obligation to perform your duties while you live in this world. **Gita 16.24**

[GOD SETS AN EXAMPLE THROUGH DIVINE INCARNATIONS]:

Whenever there is a decline of Dharma and ascendancy of Adharma, I bring Myself into being, i.e., I assume a physical body. **Gita 4.7**

To protect the virtuous, destroy the evil doers and to re-establish the rule of Dharma, I come into being in every age. **Gita 4.8**

[WE TOO SHOULD SET AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHERS]:

Whatsoever a great man does, the same is done by others. Whatever standard he sets, the world follows. **Gita 3.21**

[DO YOUR DUTY WITH A HIGHER PURPOSE]:

The unlearned performs their duties from attachment to their work. Therefore, the wise and learned too should perform their duties, but without any attachment and only with the desire to promote harmony and welfare in the world. **Gita 3.25**

[BE STRONG, BELIEVE IN SELF-HELP]:

A man must elevate himself by his own mind, not degrade himself. The mind is the friend of the every soul, and his enemy as well **Gita 6.5**

[DO YOUR DUTY SELFLESSLY, WITHOUT EXPECTING REWARDS]:

You have control over doing your duty alone, and never on the fruit of your actions. Therefore, do not live or do your duty that is merely motivated by fruits of your actions. And do not let yourself get drawn into the path of non-action. **Gita 2.47**

[CORRECT MENTAL ATTITUDE IN DOING OUR DUTY]:

Treating pleasure and pain, gain and loss, and victory and defeat alike engage yourself in your duty. By doing your duty this way you will not incur any sin. **Gita 2.38**

Be steadfast in yoga, O Arjuna. Perform your duty and abandon all attachment to success or failure. Such evenness of mind is called yoga. **Gita 2.48**

Therefore, dedicating all your actions to me with your mind fixed on me, the self of all, do your duty freed from desire, attachment and grief. **Gita 3.30**

One who does all work as an offering to God — abandoning selfish attachment to results — remains untouched by Karmic reaction or sin as a lotus leaf never gets wet by water. **Gita 5.10**

The one who performs all his duties for my sake, and to whom I am the supreme goal; who is my devotee, who has no attachments or selfish desires, and is free from malice toward any creature; reaches Me. **Gita 11.55**

[WHEN WORK BECOMES WORSHIP]:

(For a person who is immersed in spirituality) The act of offering is Brahman. The offering itself is Brahman. By Brahman is it offered into the fire, which is Brahman too. He who realizes Brahman while performing all actions, indeed reaches Brahman. **Gita 4.24**

[CONTROL OVER MIND AND SENSES LEADS TO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS]

Therefore, having controlled the senses and collecting the mind one should sit for meditation, devoting oneself heart and soul to me. One's intellect becomes steady when one's senses are under complete control. **Gita 2.61**

The one who has faith in God, is sincere in yogic practices, and has control over the mind and senses gains this transcendental knowledge. Having gained this knowledge, one quickly attains supreme peace or liberation. **Gita 4.39**

A person is called yogi who has both the knowledge of Self as well as the manifest divinity, who is unmoved under all circumstances, who has control over the mind and senses, and to whom a mud, a stone, and gold are the same. **Gita 6.08**

[MANY FORMS OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE DEPENDING ON ONE'S INCLINATION]

Therefore, focus your mind on Me, and let your intellect dwell upon Me alone through meditation and contemplation. Thereafter you shall attain Me. There is no doubt about this. **Gita 12.08**

If you are unable to focus your mind steadily on Me, then long to attain Me by practice of any other spiritual discipline; such as a ritual, or deity worship that suits you. **Gita 12.09**

If you are unable even to do any spiritual discipline, then dedicate all your work to Me, or do your duty just for Me. You shall attain perfection by doing your prescribed duty for Me — without any selfish motive — just as an instrument to serve and please Me.

Gita 12.10

If you are unable to dedicate your work to Me, then just surrender unto My will, and renounce the attachment to, and the anxiety for, the fruits of all work by learning to accept all results as God's grace. **Gita 12.11**

[WE ARE INSTRUMENTS OF GOD]:

The Lord resides in the hearts of all beings, causing them to revolve (i.e., go about their tasks) through his Māyā as if they were mounted on a machine. **Gita 18.61**

[GOD'S PROMISE TO US]:

There is no fall for him, who strives to realize me either here or hereafter. None who strives to realize me ever meets with evil destiny. **Gita 6.40**

I personally take care of both spiritual and material well-fare of those ever-steadfast devotees who always remember and adore Me with single-minded contemplation. **Gita 9.22**

Seek refuge in Me, the Supreme Lord, alone with loving devotion. By My grace you shall attain supreme peace and the Eternal Abode. **Gita 18.62**

Always think of Me and become My devotee. Worship Me and offer your homage unto Me. Thus you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend. **Gita 18.65**

Abandoning completely all duties (i.e., dedicating them to Me), seek refuge in Me alone. I will liberate you from all evil, therefore do not grieve. **Gita 18.66**

Those whose mind and intellect are totally merged in me, who are firmly devoted to me, who have me as their supreme goal and sole refuge, their sins are destroyed by wisdom. **Gita 5.17**

9.1d. The Yājñavalkya Smṛiti¹¹⁰

Just as many sparks of fire fly out of a red hot orb of iron, so do numerous individual souls originate from the Supreme Soul. - **Yājñavalkya Smṛiti 3.67**

Just as a mirror covered with layers of dust is incapable of showing the form of objects placed in front of it, likewise the mind which is tainted with imperfections (such as attachment and delusion) is unable to acquire the knowledge of the soul. - **Yājñavalkya Smṛiti 3.141**

¹¹⁰Translations by Mr. Vishal Agarwal.

Just as space is one but appears divided into several segments in different parts, and just as the sun is one but appears multiple in reflections in several vessels of water, likewise the soul is one but appears as many. - **Yājñavalkya Smṛiti 3.144**

Teachings in accordance with Vedas, Yajna, Brahmacharya, austerity, control over sense organs, faith, fasting and keeping one's soul from sensual pleasures – these are means of spiritual knowledge. - **Yājñavalkya Smṛiti 3.190**

9.1e. The Daksha Smṛiti¹¹¹

The Yoga of yogins is attained by perseverance, repeated practice, conviction in Yoga, and continuous detachment of the fruits obtained by studying the Vedas or performing Vedic rituals. - **Daksha Smṛiti 7.7**

Yoga is attained by one who rejoices in spiritual contemplation, maintains purity (external and internal), revels in the Atman alone and who sees all creatures with the same eye. **Daksha Smṛiti 7.8**

The true Yogin is awake even when he is asleep. Such a Yogin who is always persevering is the best of Yogins, and is also the best amongst the knowers of Brahman. - **Daksha Smṛiti 7.10**

He is not a truly a brave person who has conquered other nations. He alone is brave who has conquered the community of his sense organs. - **Daksha Smṛiti 7.19**

Free from all emotions or mental activities, he should then merge his soul into the Supreme Soul – this is true meditation, this is true Yoga; rest is just explanation. - **Daksha Smṛiti 7.21**

9.1f. The Garuda Purāna¹¹²

Seeing that collyrium and ink, used though very little every day, become exhausted after some time, and that the anthill flourishes day by day, one should be careful in not wasting one's time. One should engage oneself in activities of charity or self-study. - **Garuda Purāna 1.113.8.**

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² The Garuda Purana (3 vols). 1978-1980. Translated and Annotated by a Board of Scholars. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited. New Delhi

So long a man has the sense of pleasure, he is called a possessor. But when [sense of] possession is lost, he remains his true self. The individual soul associated with Maya identifies himself with the body but when Maya withdraws he realizes his reality as Brahman. - **Garuda Purāṇa 1.236.29-30**

People praise a rich man with great respect wishing for some monetary profit. If they were to praise the creator of the world with the same zeal, is there any doubt that they would be released from bondage? - **Garuda Purāṇa 1.230.50**

9.1g. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras¹¹³

Yoga is stilling the movement of thought - **Yoga Sutra 1.2**

Thought patterns are stilled through regular practice and non-attachment - **Yoga Sutra 1.12**

Complete surrender to God in profound meditation brings union - **Yoga Sutra 1.23**

That indwelling omnipresent sole reality is verbally alluded to as OM - **Yoga Sutra 1.27**

With burning desire reflect upon and understand the self, understand the sacred text and surrender all actions to God. - **Yoga Sutra 2.1**

Afflictions causing disturbance are lack of spiritual awareness, misapprehension, ego, desire, passion, greed, hate, jealousy, attachment to life, fear, anxiety and sorrow.

- **Yoga Sutra 2.3**

Meditation removes these disturbances. - **Yoga Sutra 2.11**

¹¹³Source: <http://www.patanjalisutras.com> Translated by Mark Guibarelli with special thanks to Kausthub Desikachar. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are one of the foundational texts of Yoga. Yoga asanas practiced for physical and mental fitness in the West are only one limb of a comprehensive Hindu spiritual practice outlined in the Sutras. For more information, see <http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/takeyogaback>

Our very being is rooted in karma. It affects the place of birth, quality of life and its span. We experience joy or suffering and vice or virtue as a result of Karma. - **Yoga Sutra 2.13-14**

There are seven limbs of Yoga that must be practiced before we reach a state of absolute truth. - **Yoga Sutra 2.27**

These seven limbs are self restraint (yama), universal morality (niyama), sacred posture (asana), regulation of breath (pranayama), restraint of the senses (pratyahara), concentration (dharana) and meditation (dhyana). With their practice comes samadhi, the eighth limb of Yoga. This is a state of being absolutely absorbed in the source of life. - **Yoga Sutra 2.29**

The five restraints (Yamas) are Ahimsa (non-violence), Truthfulness, Non-Stealing, Celibacy and Non-Hoarding of material goods. - **Yoga Sutra 2.30**

These five Yamas are great vows, and universal, not limited by considerations of *Jaati (caste)*, *Kaala (Time)*, *Desha (Location)* and *Samaya (Custom)*. - **Yoga Sutra 2.31**

The second limb is Niyama. This is Cleanliness and purity, contentment, deep spiritual faith, spiritual practice and surrender to god. - **Yoga Sutra 2.32**

The ability to perceive ones true self manifests further when the senses are controlled and the mind and consciousness reach purity. The practitioner becomes filled with joy.

- **Yoga Sutra 2.41**

Happiness, steadiness and firmness must be felt in the sacred postures (asanas).

- **Yoga Sutra 2.46**

With this mastered one then begins vital breath exercise to control energy flow (pranayama). -

Yoga Sutra 2.49

Breath then becomes stable, rhythmic and natural - **Yoga Sutra 2.51**

The mind becomes capable of concentration. - **Yoga Sutra 2.53**

One then draws inwards removing oneself from external and internal distractions. The senses will no longer obstruct one from the path (pratyahara). - **Yoga Sutra 2.54**

Concentration (Dharana) is focusing the mind on something and remaining fixed. - **Yoga Sutra 3.1**

Meditation (Dhyana) is moving closer to this without distraction - **Yoga Sutra 3.2**

Samadhi is becoming perfectly absorbed in stillness and union with that which is concentrated and meditated upon - **Yoga Sutra 3.3**

Again there is a rise and fall in and out of this state. It is similar to before. Practice must be maintained to remain one pointed and for transformation to continue. - **Yoga Sutra 3.12**

Then a visible transformation occurs in body and senses, character, behavior and actions. - **Yoga Sutra 3.13**

Profound meditation will set us free from desires and distractions with the proper use of discriminative thinking. Then supreme intelligence rains upon us. We now have the knowledge necessary to remain in union with the source of life. - **Yoga Sutra 4.29**

When the qualities of a person resolve themselves back into their source, there comes liberation, wherein one becomes established in pure consciousness, which is one's true nature and the source of life. - **Yoga Sutra 4.34**

9.1h. Panchadasi¹¹⁴

53. The finding out or discovery of the true significance of the identity of the individual self and the Supreme Brahman with the aid of the great sayings (like Tattvamasi) is what is known as sravana (hearing or receiving spiritual instructions). And to arrive at the possibility of its validity through logical reasoning is what is called manana (reflection on spiritual teachings).

¹¹⁴ Sri Vidyananya Swami's Panchadasi, Translated by Swami Swahananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai

54. And, when by sravana and manana the mind develops a firm and undoubted conviction, and dwells constantly on the thus ascertained Self alone, it is called unbroken meditation (nididhyasana).

55. When the mind gradually leaves off the ideas of the meditator and the act of meditation and is merged in the sole object of meditation. (viz., the Self), and is steady like the flame of a lamp in a breezeless spot, it is called the super-conscious state (samadhi).

56. Though in samadhi there is no subjective cognition of the mental function having the Self as its object, its continued existence in that state is inferred from the recollection after coming out of samadhi.

57. The mind continues to be fixed in Paramatman¹¹⁵ in the state of samadhi as a result of the effort of will made prior to its achievement and helped by the merits of previous births and the strong impression created through constant efforts (at getting into samadhi).

58. Sri Krishna pointed out the same idea to Arjuna¹¹⁶ in various ways e.g., when he compares the steady mind to the flame of a lamp in a breezeless spot.

59. As a result of this samadhi millions of results of actions, accumulated in this beginningless world over past and present births, are destroyed, and pure dharma (helpful to the realisation of Truth) grows.

60. The experts in Yoga call this samadhi 'a rain cloud of dharma' because it pours forth countless showers of the bliss of dharma.

61. The entire network of desires is fully destroyed and the accumulated actions known as merits and demerits are fully rooted out by this samadhi.

62. Then the great dictum, freed from the obstacles (of doubt and ambiguity), gives rise to a direct realisation of the Truth, as a fruit in one's palm – Truth which was earlier comprehended indirectly.

Panchadasi I.53-62

¹¹⁵ Lit., "The Supreme Self". Another term for "Brahman"

¹¹⁶ This conversation is the Bhagavan Gita, selections from which are quoted above

9.2. Anti-caste Teachings of Hindu Scripture

There are only two kinds of human beings in this world: The divine, or the wise, who are devoted to me; and the demonic, or the ignorant. - **Bhagavad Gita 16.06**¹¹⁷

9.2a. Shukranītisāra

No one is a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, a Vaishya, a Shudra or a Mleccha (barbarian) by birth. Qualities and deeds alone decide division of humans into these categories. - **Shukranītisāra 1.38**¹¹⁸

All humans have originated from Brahmā, but are all of them called Brahmanas? (This shows that) Varna and parentage do not automatically give Brahmateja (spiritual splendor) to anyone. - **Shukranītisāra 1.39**¹¹⁹

There are no distinctions among such pure devotees in terms of social class, education, bodily beauty, family status, wealth, occupation, and so on. Pure devotees are not distinguished by externals like social class, for they belong to the Lord. - **Nārada Bhakti Sutra 72, 73**¹²⁰

“If one is convinced firmly, that he is that very Soul which manifests itself in all the conditions of sleep, wakefulness and dream, in all the objects from the great Brahma (the creator) to the tiny ant and which is also the vibrant, but invisible, witnesser of all, then as per my clear conclusion, he is the great teacher/preceptor, be he a twice-born (i.e higher castes) or an outcaste.

I am quite convinced that he is the great Master, be he a Brahmin or an outcaste, who, dwelling on the pure and infinite Brahman thinks of himself as that very Brahman, of whose manifestation the whole Universe is, though apparently the Universe is assumed to consist of different things, due to ignorance and the three Gunas (Satva, Rajas and Tamas).” - **Shankaracharya’s Manisha panchakam, verses 1-2**¹²¹

¹¹⁷Source: Bhagavad Gita As It Is, by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

¹¹⁸Source: Vishal Aggarwal

¹¹⁹Ibid

¹²⁰Ibid

¹²¹http://sanskritdocuments.org/all_pdf/manishhaa5.pdf

9.2b. The Vajrusuchika Upanishad¹²²

"I expound the 'Vajrasuchi' which is a doctrine that dispels ignorance, Brings disrepute to those who are devoid of (spiritual) knowledge and is an ornament to those who see with the eye of (spiritual) knowledge". || 1 ||

"Brahmin (priests), Kshatriya (soldiers and kings), Vaishya (merchants and agriculturists) and Shudras (artisans and farmers)- these are the four castes. Amongst these castes, Brahmins indeed are the supreme (pradhana)- this accords with the statements of the Vedas and is stated by the Smritis also.

In this regard, the following enquiry is made: Who indeed has the designation 'Brahmin'? Is he the individual soul (jiva)? Is he the body? Is it the class based on birth or one's lineage (that is responsible for Brahminhood)? Is it the (spiritual) knowledge (that is responsible for Brahminhood)? Is it the ritualistic karma or fruits thereof (that is responsible for Brahminhood)? Is he the performer of meritorious acts (dharmika)?" || 2 ||

"Of these options, if the first i.e. 'the designation Brahmin applies to the Jiva' is considered, then no (i.e., this cannot be true) because the nature (rupa) of the Jiva remains the same in the bodies it assumed in previous lives and also in the future bodies. Impelled by the fruit of its actions, the Jiva attains numerous bodies (in different births) and in all these bodies, the nature of the Jiva remains the same. Therefore, the designation 'Brahmin' cannot apply to the Jiva." || 3 ||

"Then, if it is said that the body has the designation 'Brahmin', then no (i.e., this cannot be true), Because the bodies of all human beings down to the chandalas (=outcastes) have the same nature since they are composed of the same 5 elements; Because features like death, birth, vice and virtue are seen in all bodies; Because of the absence of the rule that Brahmins are white, Kshatriyas are red, Vaishyas are yellow and Shudras are black. Because upon cremating the corpses of their fathers/elders and others, one would get tainted with the sin of Brahminicide. Because of these reasons, the body cannot bear the designation 'Brahmin'." || 4 ||

¹²²Vishal Agarwal with reference to The Principal Upanishads. 1953. S Radhakrishnan. Harper & Brothers Publishers. New York. This is a unique Upanishad in that seems to address the single question - "Who is a brahmin?" and proceeds to give an answer in stark contrast to the caste system as practiced and in line with Hindu spiritual teachings.

"Then, if it is said that the class by birth (or familial lineage or genus) bears the designation 'Brahmin', then no (i.e., this cannot be true), because there are several non-human species from whom numerous great Sages emerged.

We hear from the sacred texts that¹²³

- Sage Rsyasrnga was born of a deer,
- Sage Kausika of the Kusa grass,
- Sage Jambuka from a jackal,
- Sage Valmiki from white termite hill,
- Sage Vyasa from a fisher woman,
- Sage Gautama from the back of a hare,
- Sage Vasishtha from Urvashi- the celestial nymph
- Sage Agastya from a pitcher.

Amongst these, there have been many Sages who have been amongst the foremost of men that have demonstrated spiritual realization. Therefore, it is not one's class by birth that can be taken as (the determinant of the designation) 'Brahmin'." || 5 ||

"Then, if it be said that spiritual knowledge is (the cause of) Brahminhood, no (i.e., this cannot be true), because amongst Kshatriyas and others, there are many who have realized the Supreme Reality and have attained Wisdom. Therefore knowledge does not determine Brahminhood." || 6 ||

"Then, if it is said that performance of karma or the fruits thereof (makes one) a Brahmin, no (i.e., this cannot be true), Because association with karma that has been commenced, karma done in the past and karma that will be done, is seen common to all creatures. (Moreover) good men perform karmas, impelled by (the effects) their past karma. Therefore, karma does not (make) one a Brahmin." || 7 ||

"Then, if it is said that (performance of) meritorious deeds (makes one) a Brahmin, no (i.e., this cannot be true), because there have been many Kshatriyas and others (Vaishyas and Shudras)

¹²³The passage takes recourse to several unscientific, popular fables about the origin of Sages. Other texts provide the true story of the birth of many of the above saints. However, the logic of the verse is that many of Hinduism's greatest sages have had humble, non-brahmin, origins.

who have (done meritorious deeds like having) gifted gold (to Brahmins, to religious institutions etc.). Therefore, the performer of meritorious deeds is not (automatically) the Brahmin.” || 8 ||

“Who indeed then bears the designation Brahmin?

He (indeed) who, after having all his desires fulfilled as a result of perceiving (realizing) directly, as an amalaka fruit in one’s hand-- The Atman that is One without a second (or is beyond compare), (That is) bereft of (distinctions of) clan and (is not composed of) the constituents of Prakriti (guNa-hInaM), and actionless, (That is) free of all defects like the six infirmities (viz. old age, death, sorrow, delusion, hunger and thirst) and the six states of existence/transformations (viz. birth, existence, growth/development, transformation, waning and perishing), (That is) of the nature of Immutable Reality, of Consciousness, Blissful and Infinite/Eternal, (That is) an Independent Entity (not deriving its existence and properties from anything else), (That is) devoid of determinations, but (itself) the support of infinite determinations, (That is) present in all living and non-living beings as the immanent Soul, (Who) pervades the interior and envelopes the exterior of everything as ether, (That is) possesses the attribute of perfect and complete (akhanda) Bliss, (That is) incomparable, (That is) known only through one’s own (spiritual) experience (and not through reading of books or teaching by others) and is inferred only indirectly (because of It cannot be perceived by the senses); Becomes free of the defects of desire, attachment and the like, becomes endowed with the (positive) qualities like tranquility etc., becomes free of (negative) behaviors like jealousy, greed, expectations, delusion etc., and leads a life in which the mind is not tainted pretensions, ego and the like.

He alone, who possesses the aforementioned characteristics, is a Brahmin- such is (indeed) the import of Sruti, Smriti, Itihasa and the Puranas. There is no other way of attaining Brahminhood.

Meditate upon Brahman, the Atman, (That is) of the nature of Immutable Reality, of Consciousness, Blissful and One without a second (or is beyond compare! Meditate upon Brahman!

Such is this Upanishad (secret/exalted) doctrine!” || 9 ||

9.2c. The Mahabharata¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Source: Vishal Agarwal

Nahusha asked: There are four Varnas in this world – Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shūdras. All the four of them accept the authority of the Vedas. If a Shūdra exhibits qualities of character such as truth, charity, forgiveness, refined behavior, ahimsa and compassion, then will he become a Brahmana? -**Mahabharata 3.177.18**

Yudhishtira replied: If the expected characteristics are not seen in a Brahmana or in a Shūdra, then that Brahmana is not a Brahmana and that Shūdra is not a Shūdra. But the Shūdra in whom these qualities (of a Brahmana) are present is a Brahmana, and in the Brahmana in whom the qualities of a Shūdra are present is a Shūdra indeed. -
Mahabharata 3.177.20-21

Yudhishtira said: O Nahusha, in my opinion, all human beings in this world have an admixture of Varnas in them. Therefore, it is very difficult to determine their true Varna from their lineage. I see that men of all Varnas beget children from women of all Varnas. Speech, sex, birth and death – these are common to all human beings. ‘May we sacrifice to the Devas, whoever we are’ – through the force of this Vedic statement, all humans perform Vedic yajnas. Therefore, the wise consider character alone as the primary factor (in deciding one’s Varna). If, even after the performance of the sacred rites of passage (samskāras), an absence of good character is seen in a person, then consider an admixture of castes to be the strongest cause (of why that person does not conform to the nature of his Varna). Therefore, he who is cultured and has a good character alone has been described by me as a Brahmana. - **Mahabharata 3.177.26-32**

Sage Bhrigu said: He who has been purified by Jātakarma and other rites of passage (samskāras), who is engrossed in the study of the Vedas, who performs the six duties (twilight worship of sandhyā, ablutions, japa or recitation of sacred texts, homa or Vedic fire sacrifice, worship of deities and serving guests and all other living creatures); Who is saturated with purity and good conduct, who eats only the food that is left over after offering to the Deities, who is the beloved of his Guru, always keeps his religious vows and always pursues truth – he is indeed called a Brahmana. - **Mahabharata 12.182.2-3**

Truth, charity, control over senses, absence of enmity, absence of cruelty, forgiveness, compassion and austerity – in whom these characteristics are seen, he alone is called a Brahmana. - **Mahabharata 12.182.4**

He who pursues the duties of protecting masses, is engrossed in the study of Vedas, gives alms and collects taxes is called a Kshatriya. - **Mahabharata 12.182.5**

Agriculture, dairy farming, trade, give charity, study the Vedas and remaining pure – he who has these characteristics is called a Vaishya. - **Mahabharata 12.182.6**

That person who is always engrossed in enjoying material objects, who performs manual tasks, is impure, does not study the Vedas and indulges in inappropriate behavior – such a person is called a Shūdra. - **Mahabharata 12.182.7**

If the characteristics of a Shūdra are not seen in a Shūdra, then he is not a Shūdra. And if the characteristics of a Brahmana are not found in a Brahmana, then he is not a Brahmana. - **Mahabharata 12.182.8**

9.2d. The Atharvaveda

From the Supreme Being (Brahman) arise the Holy Sages

From the Supreme Being (arise) these Kshatriyas

From the very same Supreme Being are born the Brahmins

From the Supreme Being (arise) the food producing third caste (Vaishyas).

The Supreme Being are indeed these Shudras serving the Kshatriyas,

The Supreme Being are all they who perceive (i.e. all living creatures).

The Supreme Being are all these benevolent officials

The Supreme Being are all these members of the assembly.

The Supreme Being are the fishermen,

The Supreme Being are the servants,

The Supreme Being indeed are these gamblers.

Man as well as woman originate from the Supreme Being

Women are God and so are men.

- **Atharvaveda (Paippalāda Samhita 8.9.7-11a)**¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Source: Vishal Agarwal

9.2e. Bhavishya Purana¹²⁶

Since members of all the four castes are the children of God, they all belong to the same caste. All human beings have the same Father, and children of the same Father cannot have different castes. - **Bhavishya Purana 1.41.45**

The fruit of a tree are alike in color and shape and alike to touch and taste. Human beings are like the fruits that grow in God's tree. How then can we make distinctions as between the fruit of the same tree? - **Bhavishya Purana 1.41.46**

A horse can be easily told apart from a herd of cows, but a Shudra cannot be so regarded as distinct from the twice-born. - **Bhavishya Purana 1.40.20**

9.2f. Bhāgavata Purāṇa¹²⁷

Vashishtha, born of a dancing girl, became a great Rishi;

Hence, it is tapas that makes one a Brahmin, and not his birth.

Sakti, born of a Chandala woman, became a great Rishi.

Hence, it is tapas that makes one a Brahmin, and not his birth.

Parasara, born of SwapAki, became a great Rishi;

Hence, it is tapas that makes one a Brahmin, and not his birth.

Vyasa, born of a fisherwoman, became a great Rishi;

Hence, it is tapas that makes one a Brahmin, and not his birth.

¹²⁶ Ibid

¹²⁷ Taken from a commentary on the Tamil Epic Nilakesi

9.2g. Quotes from statements of Srila Prabhupada – Founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)¹²⁸

“I created the system of four *varnas*, which are based on one’s qualities and actions. Although I am the creator of this system, you should know that I am yet the non-doer, being unchangeable.” - **Bhagavad Gita, 4.13**¹²⁹

“If one shows the symptoms of being a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra, regardless of which family he was born into, he should be accepted according to those symptoms.” - **Bhagavata Purana 7.11.35**¹³⁰

“A person should not be considered a Brahmin simply because he was born in a Brahmin family, nor need he be a Shudra simply because his parents were Shudras.” - **Mahabharata, Vana Parva 180**

“A man is not qualified or disqualified simply by birth. Anyone can become a fully qualified Brahmin under the direction of a spiritual master.” - **Srila Prabhupada, commentary on Bhagavata Purana 7.4.34**

“The *varnashrama* institution [based on one’s qualities and activities] is constructed to enable one to realize the Absolute Truth. It is not for artificial domination of one division over another. When the aim of life, realization of the Absolute Truth, this institution of *varnashrama* is utilized by selfish men to pose an artificial predominance over the weaker section. In the Kali Yuga, or in the age of quarrel, this artificial predominance is already current, but the saner section of the people know it well that the divisions of castes and orders of life are meant for smooth social intercourse and high-thinking self-realization and not for any other purpose. Herein the statement of Bhagavatam is that the highest aim of life or the highest perfection of the institution of the *varnashrama-dharma* is to cooperate jointly for the satisfaction of the Supreme Lord.” - **Srila Prabhupada, commentary on Bhagavata Purana 1.2.13**

¹²⁸ Courtesy of ISKCON

¹²⁹ The speaker of this verse is Lord Krishna (God). “Based on one’s qualities and actions” translates *guna-karma-vibhagasah* in the original Sanskrit.

¹³⁰ The four *varnas* enumerated here can be understood as a) Priests and intellectuals (Brahmin); b) Administrators and warriors (Kshatriya); c) Merchants and farmers (Vaishya); and d) Laborers and artisans (Shudra).

“Caste designation by birth is strictly forbidden by Narada Muni and all great saintly personalities.” - **Srila Prabhupada, summary of Bhagavata Purana 7.11**

“One should always remember that Brahmin, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas should never be regarded as members of a caste by birth. One is [actually] a Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya never by birth, but by quality.” - **Srila Prabhupada, commentary on Bhagavata Purana 9.2.23**

“The members of the *varnas*, or social orders...must be ascertained by their symptoms, not by birth. Birth is immaterial; quality is essential.” - **Srila Prabhupada, commentary on Bhagavata Purana 9.21.21**

“Those who claim to be Brahmins simply on the basis of birthright do not have the brahminical qualifications. However, even if one is born in a non-Brahmin family, if he has the brahminical qualifications he should be accepted as a Brahmin, as confirmed by Srila Narada Muni and the great saint Sridhara Svami. This is also stated in Srimad-Bhagavatam. Both Narada and Sridhara Svami completely agree that one cannot be a Brahmin by birthright but must actually possess the qualities of a Brahmin.” - **Srila Prabhupada, commentary on Caitanya Caritamrita Adi Lila 7.67**

“There are clear instructions in Mahabharata and Srimad-Bhagavatam stating that a person—be he Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, or outcaste—should be accepted by his personal qualifications and not by birth. One’s position should be established by personal qualifications and not by birth. For example, if a man is born in a Brahmin family but his personal qualifications are those of a Shudra, he should be accepted as a Shudra. Similarly, if a person is born in a Shudra family but has the qualifications of a Brahmin, he should be accepted as a Brahmin.” - **Srila Prabhupada, Teachings of Lord Chaitanya p. 31**

“So not by birth, does one become an engineer or medical man or this or that... No. Everything by culture, by education. Similarly, the Vedic culture means everyone is given the chance to become first-class Brahmin. That is called brahminical culture. Everyone is given.” - **Srila Prabhupada, lecture on Bhagavata Purana 1.3.13**

9.2h. The Vaadhūla Smṛiti¹³¹

Devatas consider him alone a Brahmin, who is fearful of quarrels as he would be of a snake; who is afraid of honor as if it were death; and who is afraid of (sexual relations with) women (other than his wife) as he would shun a corpse, i.e., is celibate. - **Vaadhūla Smṛiti, verse 199**

I consider such a person alone as a Brahmin, who is of a peaceful nature, gentle, who has conquered anger, who has conquered his soul and who has conquered his sense organs. All others are but the Shūdras. - **Vaadhūla Smṛiti, verse 200**

9.2i. The Atri Samhita¹³²

Purity (external and internal), performance of virtuous deeds, abstaining from actions that hurt one's body excessively, absence of ill-will towards everyone, absence of hatred, control of senses, charity and compassion – these are the characteristics of a Brahmana. - **Atri Samhita 1.33**

A Brahmana who studies the Vedanta everyday, who has abandoned all worldly ties and who is knowledgeable in Samkhya and Yoga is called a Twice Born. - **Atri Samhita 1.374**

A Brahmana who sells salt, lacquer, kusumbha, Ghee, sweets, milk and meat is called Shudra. - **Atri Samhita 1.377**

A Brahmana who is a thief, a smuggler, giver of harmful advice, harsh tongued and is always hankering after fish and meat is called a Nishaada. - **Atri Samhita 1.378**

A Brahmana who is ignorant of the Vedas and has no knowledge of God but goes about arrogantly as a Brahmana sporting his sacred thread is a sinner and is called an Animal. - **Atri Samhita 1.379**

¹³¹Vadhula-Smṛiti, Critically edited with Hindi translation. Braj Bihar Chaubey. 2000. Katyayan Vaidik Sahitya Prakashan. Hoshiarpur (Punjab). Translated from Hindi by Vishal Agarwal

¹³²Source: Vishal Agarwal

A Brahmana who feels no guilt in sealing or despoiling wells, ponds, water-holes, gardens etc., is called a mlechha (barbarian). - **Atri Samhita 1.380**

A Brahmana who is bereft of all religious acts (virtuous acts, Vedic sacrifices, worship, charity etc.) and who exhibits cruelty towards all other creatures is called a Chaandaala. - **Atri Samhita 1.381**

The king should punish as patrons of thieves, the residents of those villages who provide alms to Brahmanas who do not study the Holy Scriptures and do not perform any religious austerities. - **Atri Samhita 1.22**

The Brahmana who does not perform the Agnihotra or the Sandhya rites, and who does not study the Vedas is called a Shudra indeed. - **Parashara Smriti 12.29**¹³³

9.2j. The Yājñavalkya Smriti

The King should have a great deal of enthusiasm (he should be energetic), liberality (in distributing wealth), gratitude (i.e., should be optimistic and grateful for what he has and must not keep pondering over his bad luck); he should serve elders, polite and humble, endowed with charisma, of a good lineage, truthful, pure; he should not be a lazy person, should have a good memory, have good qualities, not overtly critical of others, religious, not addicted to bad habits (such as hunting and gambling), intelligent, brave, capable of keeping confidential and classified information to himself; he should be ever vigilant in protecting the entry points to his kingdom; and he should be proficient in all these three branches of knowledge – Analytical Sciences, Criminal Justice and Economics. - **Yājñavalkya Smriti 1.309-311**¹³⁴

Dharmasutras¹³⁵

The Brahmanas who do not do their twilight worship should be employed by a Dharmic King to do the work of the Shudras. - **Baudhayana Dharmasutra 2.4.20**¹³⁶

¹³³ Ibid

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ The Sacred Laws of the Aryas (2 vols). Translated by Georg Buhler. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi (1965)

¹³⁶ Source: Vishal Agarwal

Cultivators, traders, herdsmen, money-lenders and artisans can have their own rules for their respective classes. - **Gautama Dharmasutra 11.21**

Having learned the rules from those in their respective classes who have the authority to speak, the King shall give the final legal decision to resolve disputes. - **Gautama Dharmasutra 11. 22**

Brahmanas who are not learned in the Vedas. Who do not teach the Vedas or who do not maintain the sacred fires of Vedic rituals become equal to Shudras. - **Vasishtha Dharmasutra 3.1**

9.2k. The Rigveda

I am a reciter of hymns, my father is a doctor, my mother a grinder of corn. We desire to obtain wealth in various actions. - **Rigveda 9.112.3**¹³⁷

O Indra, fond of Soma, would you make me the protector of people, or would you make me a ruler, or would you make me a Sage who has consumed Soma, or would you bestow infinite wealth to me? - **Rigveda 3.44.5**¹³⁸

9.2l. Chhāndogya Upanishad

"I do not know this, Sir, of what family I am. I asked my mother. She answered me: 'In my youth, when I went about a great deal serving as a maid, I got you. So I do not know this, of what family you are. However, I am Jabala by name; you are Satyakama by name.' So I am Satyakama Jabala, sir." To him he then said: "A non-brahmin would not be able to explain thus. Bring the fuel, my dear. I will receive you as a pupil. You have not deviated from the truth." - **Chhāndogya Upanishad 4.4.1-5**¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Hymns from the Vedas. 1966. Abinash Chandra Bose. Asia Publishing House. Bombay

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ The Principal Upanishads. 1953. S Radhakrishnan. Harper & Brothers Publishers. New York

Appendix A - Past Hindu American Foundation statements against caste-based discrimination

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) unequivocally believes that caste-based discrimination and a birth based caste system are wrong. The following are short excerpts of HAF's stance from five sources:

- Open Letters
- Letters to media
- Blogs
- Press releases (on HAF's website)
- California textbook lawsuit

Open Letters

[Open Letter: Ignoring Caste-Based Discrimination Is Not The Solution](#), February 25, 2010

"HAF has also been working on its own report on caste discrimination, to not only highlight the reality of the problem, but also to show that while Hinduism is not the cause of the problem, it can be the solution to the problem. This report will be released in several months, and includes statements by prominent Hindu spiritual and religious leaders who acknowledge this problem and clarify how Hinduism can help resolve the social problem of caste discrimination. Ignoring the problem will not resolve it. And so I urge the author of that unfortunate piece to reexamine the realities of India, acknowledge the social evil and use his leadership and prominence to aid in eradicating caste-based discrimination."

-Mihir Meghani, Board Member and Co-Founder, Hindu American Foundation

<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/openlettercaste>

Letters to media

[Unpublished letter to New York Times, August 31, 2010](#)

Re: [A Sikh Temple Where All May Eat, and Pitch In](#)

"Caste divisions are seen among Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs in South Asia, and reformers in each tradition are working to eradicate discrimination. Conflating Hinduism with caste as Polgreen [Article Author] does is unfortunate and misleading."

-Pooja Deopura, Executive Council Member, Hindu American Foundation

<http://www.hafsite.org/HAFWritesNYTimes>

Letter to the Wall Street Journal, September 19, 2007

Re: **The 'Untouchables' In India, 'Untouchables' Convert To Christianity -- and Face Extra Bias**

“...Social discrimination and ostracism based on a caste-system is a historical reality in India, just as racial prejudice is a historical and present day reality in the United States, witness the Jena six incident. Such discrimination demands attention and repudiation, but unfortunately your reporter's foray into the issue in India was remarkable for its factual errors and omissions. Indeed, the only thing that is evident from his reporting is his clear implication that for the poor and downtrodden Hindus, Christianity and Islam represent a means of salvation...”

-Aseem Shukla, MD., Board member & co-founder of HAF

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/letters/haf-responds-untouchables>>

Letter to Metroactive News, San Francisco, February 6, 2006

Re: **Battling the Past: Indian parents and scholars go to war over how Hindu history is taught in California schools**

“...We have condemned fraudulent conversion by evangelists, terrorist attacks by Islamists and caste discrimination by Hindus because we do not believe any community is above blame for human rights abuses. Last year, we released the 1st ever report on the human rights of Hindus in South Asia which has been referenced by human rights groups and government commissions...”

-Mihir Meghani, President of HAF

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/letters/haf-addresses-false-allegations-metro-news>>

Letter to Sacramento Bee, May 4, 2006

Re: **Dictating sanitized history in the classroom a very slippery slope**

“...Women and people of "low" castes did indeed suffer discrimination in India historically. However, the relevant fact is that Hindus are merely seeking parity with the depiction of other faiths in sixth-grade textbooks, where social problems of other religions are not given prominence. Moreover, the textbooks omit redeeming features of Hinduism such as the authorship by "low" castes of some of the holiest Hindu scriptures, the concept of shakti (feminine divinity) and the historical and contemporary existence of female and "low" caste saints. As for Aryan migration, HAF merely desires that the textbooks mention that many scholars have offered alternative explanations for the origins of Indian civilization...”

- Swami Venkataraman, Board Member of HAF

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/letters/haf-writes-parity-religion-education>>

Letter to Siliconeer, February 23, 2006

Re: [History Hungama: the California Textbook Debate](#)

“HAF emphatically does not seek to ‘whitewash’ the history of Hinduism. Women and people of lower castes did indeed suffer discrimination in India historically. However, the relevant fact for the textbook adoption process is that Hindus are merely seeking parity with other religions in sixth-grade textbooks, where social problems of other religions are not given the same prominence, a fact the authors conveniently ignored. The article, and the textbooks, also fail to mention that most Hindu scriptures were written by people from a variety of castes/jatis, including the lowest of them. The textbooks also overlook the concept of shakti or feminine divinity and the historical existence of women and low caste saints in Hinduism.”

- Swami Venkataraman, Board Member of HAF

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/letters/haf-takes-strong-objection-assertions-siliconeer>>

Letter to India Abroad, February 21, 2006

Re: [Defamatory letters to the Editor of India Abroad regarding HAF](#)

“HAF seeks to be objective to external problems facing Hindus such as terrorism and fraudulent conversion while at the same time being honest about problems within Hindu society such as caste discrimination and violence such as that witnessed in Gujarat in 2002. HAF’s track record includes expressing sadness over the death of Pope John Paul II, condemning Indian temples that ban entry of Dalit/Harijan (“untouchable”) Hindus and Hindus of non-Indian descent, and more recently, supporting an accurate and fair portrayal of Islam in European newspapers.”

- Mihir Meghani, MD., President of HAF

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/letters/haf-addresses-defamatory-and-false-statements-india-abroad-letters>>

Letter to Washington Post, March 27, 2005

Re: [For Bride, Dowry is Deal Breaker](#)

“...In calling dowry an ‘age-old Hindu tradition’ in “For Bride, Dowry Is Deal Breaker”, Sunday, March 27, 2005, John Lancaster displays ignorance of both Hinduism and the origins of dowry. Veena Talwar Oldenburg, Professor of History at the City University of New York, shows in her book “Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime”, that ‘these killings are neither about dowry nor reflective of an Indian culture or caste system that encourages violence against women. Rather, such killings can be traced directly to the influences of the British colonial era. In the precolonial period, dowry was an institution managed by women, for women, to enable them to establish their status and have recourse in an emergency. As a consequence of the massive economic and societal upheaval brought on by British rule, women’s entitlements to the precious resources obtained from land were erased and their control of the system diminished, ultimately resulting in a devaluing of their very lives...”

- Swaminathan Venkataraman, Member, Executive Council

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/letters/haf-objects-washington-post-coverage-dowry-and-violence-against-women>>

Blog posts - Washington Post: On Faith

[On Faith: Murder In The Name Of Caste And Honor, July 12, 2010](#)

"...Discrimination against those belonging to the "lowest" castes in India, often referred to as Harijans or Dalits, continues still, exacerbated in rural villages. That people will refuse to eat or sit with their brethren born of a different caste; that Dalits are still banned from some temples, forced into menial and demeaning tasks and treated with contempt because of their birth, is morally reprehensible and criminal. Sadly, the tentacles of this social evil permeate so deeply, that Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and other faiths share in the sin of this system and have distinct caste lines and hierarchies as well in the Asian context.

It was in the earliest Hindu holy texts, the Vedas, that a fluid division of society by one's nature, interests, abilities and talents was conceptualized. The Vedas make no mention of a hierarchical caste system--people moved between groups--and did not to privilege one grouping over another. Society was interdependent and Hindu scripture is replete with examples of priests becoming kings and "untouchables" becoming the most exalted saints, for example..."

-Aseem Shukla, MD., Board Member and Co-Founder of HAF & Featured Blogger

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/onfaithjuly12>>

Press releases found on HAF's website

(*Heading reflects the context of HAF's position on caste and may differ from original title of the press release)

[*HAF Claims "Story Of India" Distorts History Stating Caste is Intrinsic to Hinduism, January 10, 2009](#)

"...The [Aryan Migration Theory] is reviled by many Hindus due to its implicit proposition that a tribe of "Aryans" migrated into the Indian subcontinent, subjugated an indigenous people dispersing them to South India and established a caste system where the highest castes are comprised of "Aryans" and lower castes were indigenous peoples--an ethno-religious apartheid system..."

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/story-india-misses-mark-indias-history>>

[*Hindu Temple Entry Practices Need Reform to Counter Caste-based Discrimination, June 5, 2007](#)

"It is time to revamp these age-old rules, especially as regards to non-Hindus, women or so-called lower castes entering the temple while maintaining all other cleanliness rules,"

Dr. Mihir Meghani, President, HAF said. "Traditions have their place and they provide a culture its shape and essence; however, when these traditions conflict with our modern sensibilities about equality, humanity, justice, and goodness, those rites and rituals which rob individuals and groups of their respect and humanity should be stopped."

<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/temple-entry-practice>

Hindu American Foundation Commends Caste-Reconciliation Efforts March 18, 2007

"The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) voiced its appreciation last week for an initiative of Hindu spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar to improve relations between Harijans (also referred to as "Dalits") and other Hindus. On March 9, 2007 the Art of Living Foundation, founded by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, held a "Truth and Reconciliation" meeting in New Delhi. The event brought together Harijan and other Hindu community leaders for a dialogue to reinforce the mutual goal of ending social discrimination. Over 20 supporting organizations and nearly 5,000 people attended the public meeting and supported the effort..."

<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/caste-reconciliation-efforts>

***Hindu American Foundation Asserts Condemnation of Caste-based Discrimination in Indian Temples, July 14, 2006**

"...HAF also earlier condemned multiple incidents where Harijan devotees were barred from entering temples in other villages in the same state. In one case, the Scheduled Caste Hadi community took a similar approach to Parker and built their own temple in response to the unjust treatment meted out by temple authorities..."

<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/american-devotee-temple>

Hindu American Foundation Comments On Anti-Casteist Tamil Nadu Order, May 29, 2006

"The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) welcomed the a order of the government of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu allowing all Hindus with the required training and qualification to become archakas(priests) in temples regardless of caste. At present, only persons belonging to the Brahmin caste are eligible to become archakas. The order implements a 2002 ruling by the Supreme Court of India which held that a qualified person cannot be barred from priesthood merely on the basis of caste..."

<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/anticasteist-tamil-nadu-order>

***Hindu American Foundation Applauds Hindu Seer for Upliftment of Scheduled Castes, May 4, 2006**

"The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) congratulated Hindu spiritual leader Sri Shivamurthy Murugharajendra Swami for being awarded the prestigious B.R. Ambedkar Award by the State of Karnataka, India. He was honored in recognition of his contributions in the upliftment of members of the Scheduled Castes (referred to by some as "Harijans")

or “untouchables”) in India. The Swami was one of eight honorees to be given the award, which was presented on April 14, 2006 by the Chief Minister of Karnataka, H.D. Kumaraswamy, at a function celebrating the 115th birth anniversary B.R. Ambedkar.”

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/ambedkar-award>>

American Hindus Applaud Decision of Dalits in India to Build Own Temple, April 14, 2006

“The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) today applauded the recent construction of a temple by members of the Scheduled Caste (Dalit) community in Chauriberhampur village in the state of Orissa, India. The Hadi community built the temple in response to the unjust denial of entry into the traditional village temple by Hindus of other castes.

Many Hadis make a living by scavenging, sweeping streets and removing waste. Despite their depressed economic circumstances, the Hadi community was able to raise over Rs. 200,000 (US\$4,000) for the construction of a temple dedicated to Goddess Maa Mangala.”

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/dalit-temple>>

Hindu American Foundation Denounces Temple Entry Ban on Harijans (Dalits) in Orissa, December 19, 2005

“The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) expresses deep disapproval of the barring of entry to Scheduled Caste (Dalit) worshippers of the Jagannath temple in Keraragard, a village in the Indian state of Orissa. Newspaper reports say four Dalit women who entered the temple were beaten and later fined \$22.24 by the village council (“Dalit Women Attacked / Fined for Entering Temple”). “This reprehensible and archaic tradition of disallowing Dalits into Hindu temples should be ended, and the District and State bureaucrats as well as politicians should be held accountable for the continuing practice of such illegal and unconstitutional acts,” said Ramesh Rao, one of HAF's Executive Council members.”

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/orissa-temple-ban>>

***Hindu American Foundation Protests Discrimination Against Caste, Race and Sex, November 7, 2005**

“We hope that the priests will reverse their erroneous actions and ensure that Ms. Fleig is granted full access to Hindu places of worship,” said Aseem Shukla M.D., member of the HAF Board of Directors. “We believe that the multitude of laws that already exist in India to prohibit caste, race and sex based discrimination must be implemented and enforced immediately-and violators must face serious consequences to the full extent of those laws.”

<<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/discrimination-american-born-hindu>>

Hindu American Foundation Appreciates Congressional Hearing On Dalit Rights; Concerned By Biases, October 12, 2005

“Congressman Christopher Smith (R-NJ), Chairman of the Committee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations, held a hearing on October 6th, 2005, to address alleged human rights violations and discrimination faced by underprivileged castes, commonly referred to as Dalits in India. The Hindu American Foundation (HAF), which supports congressional efforts to document and highlight the denial of human rights abuses of all Hindus in South Asia, expressed special concern that the hearings were deliberately biased and misrepresentative of India and Hinduism. HAF specifically pointed to the slate of witnesses that included individuals widely known for their anti-Hindu activism.”

<http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/20051012_dalit_hearing>

California textbook lawsuit

Summary of requested changes: Conflating socio-cultural issues and abuses with religion only in the context of Hinduism

“...Textbooks, while discussing other religions, do not present the historic misuses of religion to perpetuate social evils such as slavery, anti-Semitism or holy wars, all of which are part of the history of other world religions. In contrast, social practices like untouchability and caste discrimination are presented as central tenets of Hinduism. The textbooks fail to mention that these are social customs also prevalent in non-Hindu communities throughout South Asia. They also fail to mention that many Hindu sacred texts were authored by “lower castes.””

<http://www.hafsite.org/issues/academia/california_textbook_summary_of_changes>

Appendix B - Official statements by other Hindu American organizations and leaders against caste-based discrimination

Open Letter: HAF Signs onto Hindu Collective Initiative of North America Letter to the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, February 17, 2010

Re: HAF signed onto the following letter spearheaded by the Hindu Collective Initiative of North America. The following is an excerpt:

“We are proud of our great Hindu heritage and philosophy ...But we are also acutely mindful that the Hindu society as a whole has suffered, and continues to suffer, grievous consequences as a result of the caste-based discriminatory practices. Despite explicit national laws banning such actions, such practices against “Dalits/Harijans” continue to permeate many aspects of daily life, especially in rural communities, and result in segregation in housing, drinking-water wells, and separate sitting arrangements in schools and public events. Even entry is denied them in many places of worship...

It is heartening to witness increasing efforts by social activists and a growing number of religious and spiritual leaders stepping forward to address this social evil, yet there continues to be a deeply rooted attitude of untouchability towards Harijans by the average Hindu family, especially in rural India. A sustained effort must be undertaken to correct this most dehumanizing practice...There is an urgent need to change these long held attitudes and pernicious practices that have no theological justification and are morally repugnant. Indeed, they deny basic human dignity and are antithetical to the repeated declarations in our scriptures that “One Truth is immanent in all living beings.””

<http://www.hafsite.org/sites/default/files/Letter_Achary_Sabha.pdf>

Opinion Editorial: Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, January 24, 2010

Re: “Opening temple doors to all” by Professor Anantanand Rambachan, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Religion Department, St. Olaf College

“A recent report of a study conducted across 1,655 villages in the Indian state of Gujarat, representing 98,000 Dalits, revealed the shocking fact that 97 per cent of them feel that they are unwelcome at Hindu temples, religious gatherings and public discourses on scripture. Researchers did not find a single village that was free from the practice of untouchability. (“No temple entry for Dalits in Gujarat,” Times of India, December 7, 2009). Such exclusion is neither infrequent nor limited to Gujarat. The BBC News (“Fury over south India temple ban,” October 15, 2009) reported an incident of stone throwing to protest Dalits entering a temple near Vedaranyam in the state of Tamil Nadu...

Legal measures can never cause the joyous embrace of all that follows from awakening to God's presence in each heart. Religious vision and wisdom can be the source of such transformed relationships. Hinduism needs an unequivocal theological proclamation that complements constitutional law by repudiating caste injustice and that commits Hindus to the equal worth of all human beings. Opening the doors of all Hindu temples to Dalits is an important step, an urgent religious matter and an opportunity for the Hindu tradition, in our time, to define itself. Let this be our collective Hindu resolution in 2010."

<http://guardian.co.tt/features/life/2010/01/24/opening-temple-doors-all>

Statement of Apology: Navya Shastra, February 15, 2007

Re: Navya Shastra is a US-based Hindu advocacy organization founded in 2002 by Jaishree Gopal and Vikram Masson. The organization speaks out on behalf of marginalized Hindu groups, particularly Dalits, and has lobbied for their inclusion in traditional Hindu ceremonies. It also has taken public stands on behalf of Hindu women and gays. This apology was written under the direction of Sugrutha Ramawamy and Dr. VV Raman, the organization's longstanding advisor.:

"We, at Navya Shastra, deeply regret and apologise for the atrocities committed on the sons and daughters of the depressed communities of India, including the tribals, the "untouchables" and all of the castes deemed as low...

We shamefully acknowledge that the ideals of varna and its practical manifestation in castes (jãtis), promoted and encouraged the notions of inequality, lesser and greater, high and low, superior and inferior among human beings. An ideal that does not aspire for equality of human beings is not worthy of being an ideal."

<http://www.shastras.org/>

Note: This is not a comprehensive list but is representative of the calls to action from within the Hindu Diaspora.

Appendix C - Indian Laws and legislation regarding caste-based discrimination¹⁴⁰

The Indian Constitution provides a framework with a three pronged strategy to improve the situation of SCs and STs.

1. Protective Arrangements - Such measures as are required to enforce equality, to provide punitive measures for transgressions, and to eliminate established practices that perpetuate inequities. This includes a number of articles in the constitution itself as well as a number of laws that have been enacted to operationalize the provisions in the Constitution. Examples of such laws include The Untouchability Practices Act, 1955, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, The Employment of Manual scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993.
2. Affirmative action - Provide positive preferential treatment in allotment of Government posts in the local, state and federal levels, allotment of jobs and access to higher education, as a means to accelerate the integration of the SCs and STs with mainstream society. Affirmative action is also popularly referred to as “Reservations” in India.
3. Development - Provide for resources and benefits to bridge the wide gap in social and economic condition between the SCs/STs and other communities.

This strategy was operationalized in the policies of the Indian State policy and commitment to it has been a consistent feature since independence. The policy has been strengthened and revised and its ambit made wider from time to time. This appendix briefly describes some of the most important such provisions in the Constitution and in laws that implement these provisions.

Part-XVI of the Indian Constitution has a chapter titled “Special provisions relating to certain classes”. Special provisions have also been made for SCs and STs in Part-X of the Constitution. The Constitution provides for protection and promotion of their social, economic, educational, cultural and political interests to remove the disparities and to bring them on par with other sections of the society. In addition, many articles in Parts III, IV, IX, IX- A, and the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution reinforce these arrangements.

¹⁴⁰Much of this section has been summarized from the “Report on Prevention of Atrocities Against SCs & STs”, by KB Saxena for the National Human Rights Commission of India <<http://nhrc.nic.in/Publications/reportKBSaxena.pdf>>

Article 14 provides that States shall not deny any person **equality before law** or the equal protection of laws within the territory of India.

Article 15 - Prohibition of Discrimination

1. The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
2. No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to -
 - (a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or
 - (b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.
3. Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.
4. Nothing in this article or in clause (2) of article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

Article 46 under the Directive Principles of State Policy provides that “The State shall promote with special care, the educational and economic interest of weaker sections of the people and in particular of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation”.

Article 366 (24) defines Scheduled Castes and **Article 341** identifies the process through which such groups will be identified. Similar provisions have been made for Scheduled Tribes in **Article 366(25)** and **Article 342** respectively.

Social Safeguards Social safeguards are contained in Article 17, 23, 24 and 25(2)(b) of the constitution.

Article 17 Abolition of untouchability. **The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955** has been enacted with the objective of providing punishment for preaching and practice of untouchability, in the enforcement of any disability arising therefrom and for matters connected therewith.

Article 23 prohibits trafficking in human beings and forced labour. In pursuance of this Article, **Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976** has been enacted and a special programme created for identification of bonded labourers, their liberation and rehabilitation. While this Act

does not specifically mention SCs and STs, it is of special significance for them because majority of the bonded labourers are SCs/STs.

Article 24 prohibits child labor. There are Central and State Laws to prevent child labour practices and providing relief to those engaged as child labour. The Central law is **The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986**. A large number of child labourers engaged in hazardous employment are SCs/STs.

Article 25(2)(b) provides that Hindu religious Institutions of a public character shall be open to all classes and sections of Hindus. The term “Hindu” includes persons professing Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist religions. This provision strikes against the opinion held by some sects of Hindus that SCs/STs have no right to enter temples.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 seeks to prevent the commission of offences against the members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Economic Safeguards The provisions of Articles 23 and 24 above, and article 46 form part of economic safeguards for SCs/STs

Article 46 provides for the **Promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections**. It is in pursuance of this Article that special programmes for extending educational opportunities for SCs/STs have been implemented. Institutional arrangements such as earmarking of specific percentage of budget funds for various development activities in the form of a Special Component Plan for SCs/STs have also been in operation for a long time.

Educational and Cultural Safeguards

Article 15(4) empowers the State to make **special provisions for advancement** of any socially and economically backward classes and for SCs/STs. This provision has enabled the State to implement **reservations** of seats for SCs/STs in educational institutions including technical, engineering and medical colleges.

Article 29(1) and Article 350(a) provides for the protection of the linguistic heritage of all Indian citizens, including facilities for primary education in the mother tongue. The above Articles have relevance for STs as some of them have a distinct language/dialect.

Political Safeguards Several articles explicitly provide for the reservation of seats for SCs/STs in Governments at the central, state, municipal and village levels. **Article 330** in the Lok Sabha

(India's central parliament); **Article 332** in state legislatures (called Vidhan Sabhas); **Article 243(D)** in reservation of seats in Village level governing bodies called Panchayats and Zilla Parishads and Under **Article 243-T** in municipal bodies. At least one-third of the seats reserved for SCs/STs, have been reserved for SC/ST women.

Article 164(1) provides for a Minister in charge of tribal welfare in specific states

Service Safeguards

Article 16 provides equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment. This article has a special provision which permits Parliament to make any provision for reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which is not adequately represented in the services under the State. It is through this provision that **reservations in appointments and promotions** for SCs/STs and for OBCs in government jobs have been made.

Article 16(4)(a) provides for the benefit of reservations in the matter of promotions while **Article 335** provides for lowering qualifying standards in examinations and evaluations for enforcing reservation for SCs/STs

Watchdog Arrangements

Article 338 of the Constitution provides for a **National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes** to guard against the possibility that safeguards provided for SCs/STs and other laws, regulatory arrangements and policy measures, may not get implemented due to apathy or bias or pressure mounted by vested interests. Created with one special officer for SCs/STs, the arrangement was strengthened and in 1990 the Constitution amended providing for a multi-member National Commission with enhanced powers. The Commission is required to submit a report annually to the parliament.

The Human Rights Act, 1993 provides for the constitution of a **National Human Rights Commission** as well as State Human Rights Commissions to provide a stronger regulatory framework for the protection of rights related to life, liberty, equality, and dignity of all citizens guaranteed by the Constitution. The NHRC is also very active on behalf of SCs/STs.

Section 3 of National Commission for Women Act, 1990 provides for the constitution of a **National Commission for Women** to investigate and examine all matters relating to safeguards provided for women under the Constitution and various laws. SC women, who face some of the worst problems of abuse, including sexual abuse, are defended by the Commission which also submits an annual report to the Parliament.

The **National Commission for Safai Karamcharis** was set up under the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993 on 12th August, 1994 for a period of three years. But its tenure has been extended from time to time. This Commission has a specific programme of liberation and rehabilitation of manual scavengers, most of whom are SCs/STs, and may be wound up after this programme is completed. This Commission also submits a report every year to Parliament.

Developmental Assistance for SCs/STs

The strategy of Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP) which was evolved in 1979 is one of the most important interventions through the planning process for social, economic and educational development of SCs. It is mandatory for all state and central government ministries and departments¹⁴¹. This Strategy entails targeted flow of funds and associated benefits from the annual plans of the Centre, and States/ Union Territories (UTs) at least in proportion to the SC population (16.23% under the 2001 census) in the total population of the country or the particular state. However, despite the extraordinary amount of funds earmarked for this purpose, the plan has been criticized for both not allocating the full amount of funds required in some states and for its lack of efficacy.

India's Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is responsible for implementation of all laws and programs for the benefit of SCs/STs as well as other OBCs. The ministry's Annual Report¹⁴² provides a detailed accounting of the human rights conditions of SCs/STs as well as the functioning of all welfare programs targeted at them. The Ministry also implements several other schemes besides the SCSP to support the welfare of SCs/STs under various laws currently in place. A summary of such assistance for the year 2008 (the latest available) is presented below. Details of each plan is provided in the annual report.

¹⁴¹See India's Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for recent statistics <<http://socialjustice.nic.in/scd7-14.php>>

¹⁴²See <<http://socialjustice.nic.in/ar10eng.php?pageid=3>>

Scheme	2009-10 Budget* (Rs. in Crores)
Special Central Assistance to Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan	480.00 (\$102.1 mill)
National Scheduled Castes Finance & Development Corporation	45.00 (\$9.6 mill)
National Safai Karamcharies Finance & Development Corporation	30.00 (\$6.4 mill)
Assistance to Vol. Organisation working for SCs	35.00 (\$7.5 mill)
Dr. Ambedkar Foundation	1.00 (\$0.2 mill)
Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship for Scheduled Castes	80.00 (\$17.0 mill)
Self employment scheme for the rehabilitation of scavengers	100.00 (\$21.3 mill)
National Overseas Scholarship for SCs	5.00 (\$1.1 mill)
Top class education for Scheduled Castes	20.00 (\$4.3 mill)
Post – Matric Scholarship for SCs	750.00 (\$159.6 mill)
Implementation of Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989	43.00 (\$9.1 mill)
Hostels for SC boys	60.00 (\$12.8 mill)
Hostels for SC girls	40.00 (\$8.5 mill)
Scheduled Castes Development Corporations	20.00 (\$4.3 mill)
Pre – Matric Scholarship for Children of those engaged in unclean occupations	80.00 (\$17.0 mill)
Coaching & Allied for Weaker Sections including SCs and OBCs	8.00 (\$1.7 mill)
Upgradation of Merit of SC/ST Students	2.00 (\$0.4 mill)
Total	1899.00 (\$404.0 mill)

Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Annual Report 2009-2010

* Converted into US Dollars at an average exchange rate of Rs.47/USD for 2009-10 period