

**10-POINT PLAN TO FIGHT INDIA'S
SANCTIFIED RACISM**

Liberation from Brahminism



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FOREWORD

This is a reprint of the *Dalit Voice* guest editorial of April 16, 2006 in which Brother Joseph D'Souza, a noted Christian leader engaged in international levels to liberate Dalits, brings out a horrifying picture of the cruelties of the caste system in India, the original home of racism.

It is because of this one person's painstaking efforts that Dalits for the first time were able to go to Washington and unmask the ugly face of racist "Hindu India" (DV Nov.1, 2005 p.5). But India's Brahminical monopoly media hit back and there was a tremendous backlash. D'souza was dubbed a Christian agent out to convert India's poor Dalits. The Govt. of India was mum. Except *Dalit Voice* perhaps none came to the defence of Brother D'souza.

We had talked to D'souza a couple of times about the need for our own media without which we cannot make any progress in our liberation struggle. He fully agreed with us but did nothing. A great mission that will catapult D'souza into pages of history will be lost for want of a media.

India is the original home of racism. But outsiders know very little about the persecution of Dalits, who form the single largest victims of racism in the whole world.

In this paper, he very effectively sums up the problems the Dalits are facing and prescribes a 10-point plan to fight the world's deadliest sanctified racism sanctioned under its reigning religion of Hinduism.

We congratulate the author for speaking the *Dalit Voice* language and putting the entire Indian church leadership to shame for its failure on its core mission.

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V.T. Rajshekar

10-point plan to fight sanctified racism

JOSEPH D'SOUZA, INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT, DALIT FREEDOM NETWORK

A major debate has erupted in Indian political and civil society circles after the Oct.6, 2005 Congressional sub-committee hearings in Washington on the issue of caste discrimination in India. Some questions raised as a result of this hearing are:

“Why has it taken so long for the world to hear about the persistent problem of caste discrimination in India ? We thought the caste system was abolished in India ? Why is it that we have not been told about the connection between caste discrimination and the 25 million bonded child laborers, the girl trafficking, the prostitution trade, the illiteracy and poverty, the constant rape and abuse of women and the plight of the landless laborers ?”

Following the US hearings, there was also an extensive debate on the Dalit issue in the British Parliament on Nov.22, 2005 (DV Dec.16, 2005 p.9). For the Christians around the world the issue is:

“Why is it that we have not heard about the serious nature and scope of caste discrimination within the church in India — no matter the denominational affiliation, whether Catholic, mainline Protestant or Evangelical?”

Know caste to know India

The blunt answer to the above questions is that until now the Indian reality has been interpreted and articulated within India and around the world through the world view of the dominant castes in larger society and also in the church. For all practical purposes, the dominant (upper) castes rule, control and articulate the Indian reality.

The ruling upper castes have been quite content with a “class analysis” of India (focusing attention on the rich, the new middle-class and the poor), knowing very well that it is only a “caste analysis” of India that can uncover the true but hidden reality at the heart of India - the India of the majority masses. One cannot understand India without understanding the complete nature and scope of the caste system in Indian life. Caste considerations dominate people’s lives from birth to death. This understanding of the caste system and how it controls and regulates social, economic, political and religious life is absolutely essential to interpret the Indian reality.

Add to this the “corruption factor” in Indian society and the Dalits and other oppressed people who are poor are left in a completely hopeless situation. India is not a homogenous society where there is a level playing field on which everyone can prosper.

Racism against Dalits

Caste continues to dominate Indian society despite the fact that the draftsman of the Constitution, the redoubtable Dalit thinker and lawyer Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, wrote his prophetic work, *Annihilation of Caste*, to reveal the world the brutal stranglehold of the caste system. The Indian Constitution taking the best out of American and British statutes, outlawed untouchability one of the manifestations of caste discrimination, but stopped well short of abolishing caste.

Bahujan leaders across India refer to caste discrimination as “India’s silent apartheid” of 3,000 years against its majority peoples — a full 70% of the population. It is a religiously sanctioned racism that has maimed, dehumanized and destroyed hundreds of millions of people through the ages. The horrendous fact is that we continue to destroy millions of people through this system even today in the 21st century.

President K.R. Narayanan said of caste:

“An empowered India bereft of the respect of women, values of civilized existence and morality will collapse in the face of the disaffection and discontent of those who have suffered for centuries. Day in and day out we take pride in claiming that India has a 5,000-year-old civilization. But the way the Dalits and those suppressed are being treated by the people who wield power and authority speaks volumes for the degradation of our moral structure and civilized standards.

“Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Constitution, had said political equality devoid of economic and social equality would bring about contradictions in our democratic set-up which if not rectified will lead to its doom. In the dark cloud of inequality and social injustice the silver lining represented by the assertion of the hitherto suppressed and exploited sections for their rights inspire confidence for their future empowerment. Their struggle for empowerment represents empowerment of India.

“As the struggle gains momentum and gets accentuated, there is bound to be reluctance and resistance on the part of the high and mighty to accept their upward rise. The killing of Dalits, their exploitation and the brutality

they face is a negation of the empowered India.”

Who are Bahujans ?

The Bahujans make up what are known in India as the (1) Scheduled Castes, (2) the Scheduled Tribes and (3) the Backward Castes. Together these groups constitute the slave/“vassal” castes. (“Scheduled” means they are listed in a special “index” appended to the Constitution. “Backward Castes” are those whose rank and occupation status are above that of Dalits, but who still remain socially and economically depressed). The SCs were until recently also known as the Untouchables because they were deemed literally untouchable by the upper castes. The STs were defined as criminal tribes because they occasionally challenged with arms the dominance of the local landlords.

The word “Dalit” means “broken” or “crushed” and the word “Bahujan” indicates membership in the majority people or the larger population.

Combined, these groups make up 67% of the population of India.

Among this suffering humanity of Bahujans, it is the SC/STs who continue to bear the brunt of caste discrimination and oppression.

Caste discrimination has an immediate impact on 250 million Dalits. It also affects hundreds of millions more from the BCs.

Caste turmoil and upheaval fully exploded on the national scene when the recommendations of the Mandal Commission were implemented in the mid-1990s. The Mandal Commission indicated that the BCs were no better socio-economically because of the consequences of the caste system. The Govt. of India supported the view of the Commission and granted affirmative action benefits to the BCs. Upper caste mobs resisted the govt. move and anarchy prevailed in major cities for many weeks. Indian politics changed dramatically after the Mandal issue hit the national consciousness.

Religious revolt

Caste politics became a dominant factor in Indian society, and caste loyalties began to determine elections across the nation. The North Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar saw dramatic movements of the political empowerment of the BCs. Dalit politics too was established with the emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party as a major player in UP and the surrounding North India states in the so-called “cow belt”. Consistent with the larger caste assertion by the BCs, Dalits also began to increasingly

assert themselves.

Caste had the sanction of religion and as the Hindu terrorist party made a bid for political power in federal India, open calls were given to Dalits to quit the caste-based Hindu society and go over to more egalitarian religions.

Dalit and BC ideologues launched a full-fledged attack against the caste system and Brahminism maintaining and pushing forward the movement first launched by Mahatma Phule, fine-tuned by Periyar in the South and finally polished by Dr. Ambedkar.

These anti-Brahminical movements kept the Hindu terrorists from expanding in the Northern bases of UP and Bihar even at a time when the arch-Hindu Ayodhya Temple movement was at its zenith.

Gandhi's mistake

Increasingly the Dalit-Bahujan emancipation movement began to gather more strength across the nation. Dr. Ambedkar's true contribution to the nation, his work for the depressed castes was progressively more greatly understood and appreciated. Even the upper caste movements and political leaders began to co-opt Dr. Ambedkar's legacy and brand name as their own.

Dr. Ambedkar's bitter disagreement with M.K. Gandhi was no longer locked in archival documents. Suddenly, Dr. Ambedkar's opposing sentiment became common knowledge. Dr. Ambedkar wanted the abolition of caste system itself which then would result in abolishing untouchability and the inhuman discrimination against the Dalits. Gandhi's proposal to simply deal with the symptom of untouchability and not touch the issue of the caste system was a major mistake and has marred his otherwise great legacy. Perhaps he was influenced by the upper caste people (Hindus) who surrounded him, telling him that Hinduism as they knew it would not survive the demise of caste system, its foundation, steelframe and bonding force.

Cow more precious

Fifty years after "independence", caste prejudice and discrimination continue as a persistent disease. Dr. Ambedkar was correct in his thinking that caste system must be "annihilated" if untouchability is to be genuinely eliminated.

He also concluded that conversion was the ultimate solution if Hinduism was not able to reform itself and annihilate caste. He did not see much hope that this cataclysmic reformation would take place.

Again, 50 years later nothing of the needed reformation has taken place. If anything with the emergence of the extremist Hindu terrorist movement caste discrimination and oppression have increased.

The modern-day increase of caste-based oppression is the reason why the Vice-President of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) announced that the life of a cow is more valuable than the lives of five Dalits after five Dalit young people in North India were lynched near New Delhi when they were found skinning the carcass of a dead cow.

Intellectual giant

A Shankaracharya said that Dalits should learn to live in the position in which they were born. He was more brutal in his statement than was Gandhi who simply said people must be happy and perform to the best of their ability in their given occupation — scavenging, tanning, sweeping etc.

The movement for emancipation of the depressed classes kept pace with the freedom movement Gandhi led. While Kabir and Phule's folk teachings influenced the masses Dr. Ambedkar made a frontal assault on caste using the brilliance of his legal training and his access to the political negotiating tables in London and New Delhi in the days preceding the transfer of power from imperial Britain to independent India.

Dr. Ambedkar was an intellectual giant and India's great reformer. Born a Dalit in Maharashtra, he had experienced caste's depravity first-hand. He bitterly disagreed with Gandhi's cosmetic solution to the problem of untouchability.

History has proved Dr. Ambedkar right. The Indian Constitution should have banned the caste system along with the problem of untouchability. Trying to remove untouchability without removing the caste system was like dealing with mere symptoms rather than combating the root disease.

Dr. Ambedkar championed religious freedom for the Dalits thereby leading hundreds of thousands of Dalits into Buddhism (1956) providing an exit to egalitarian faiths as a way out of caste-based bondage. Religious freedom and spiritual rights remain a fundamental component of the Dalit struggle for emancipation.

Anti-conversion laws

In a counter-move, upper caste political leaders have devised and passed several anti-conversion laws during the past few decades in the dubious name of "freedom of religion". These laws have been a deliberate move to keep the Dalit-Bahujans locked in the dehumanizing caste system.

With the rise and the destructive spectre of Hindu terrorism (which advocates a return to a so-called Hindu India where the caste structure dominates and rules), Dr. Ambedkar's struggle and thoughts become hugely relevant, not only for the oppressed sections of India but also for Indian nationalism itself.

During the recent rule of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Hindu terrorist groups distributed huge quantities of the book, *Manusmriti*, which codified and imposed the caste system on the Indian masses. This book was written by the law-giver, Manu, whose statue is installed in the premises of the Rajasthan High Court. This is the same book which states that if a low caste person hears the word of god, he should have molten lead poured into his ears. Articulating the name of the god invites having his tongue cut off. Other infringements of caste laws carry the death penalty. Is it any wonder that the powerful upper castes perpetuate violence against Dalit women, Dalit men, and Dalit children with such impunity?

Hence the need to liberate Dalits.

Aim of liberation movement

1. Worldwide alliance: It is the process of building a broad-based, pan-Indian alliance of individuals and groups to bring an end to caste discrimination and exploitation. It is a national and global struggle for the human rights of the Dalits and other oppressed sections of our society. The movement seeks to build both a national and global union against the caste system and the ensuing inhuman oppression and discrimination.

The movement works with everyone who is committed to ending the dehumanising caste system. Caste, creed, nationality and economic standing are no bar in building this alliance for ending India's silent apartheid of 3,000 years. We believe in a better future for all Indians.

2. Ending caste discrimination: It is the process of building a global alliance to end caste discrimination around the world. Caste discrimination is not limited to India alone. It is rampant in South Asia and extends to

wherever the people of the sub-continent live. It is present among Indians living in the UK, USA, Canada and other places.

The Hindu terrorist movement has now spread across the world with offices in all of the major Western nations including North America, the Caribbean, the UK and the nations of the European Union. These organizations in the West have financed the violent, caste-based, right-wing Hindu terrorists in India.

Caste discrimination should be a legitimate item on the UN agenda and on the agenda of global human rights movements and organizations. Without the active collaboration and support of all global entities that believe in the intrinsic dignity of all humans, caste discrimination will not end.

3. *Eliminating caste-based violence:* It is a movement seeking to end caste-based violence against people of depressed castes. The constant rape of Dalit women, the burning of Dalit homes and the blatant physical attacks on Dalits is not acceptable. Year after year physical attacks against Dalits are reported and documented but fewer than 2% ever reach conviction in a court of law. According to one conservative estimate there are over 50,000 major atrocities committed against Dalits every year. We work towards applying the rule of law to those who perpetrate these crimes.

Muslims Christians not enemies of Dalits

4. *Eradicating child labour:* It is a movement designed to deliver the vast majority of Dalit children who make up the bonded child labour market in India. Bonded child labor is a crime against humanity. Estimates report that at least 15 million bonded Dalit children work in inhuman conditions for a paltry sum. Most bonded laborers in India are from Dalit and other backward communities.

5. *Gender-based oppression:* It is a movement seeking to end girl prostitution, trafficking of women in the sex trade and other violence against women. There is a huge inter-state trafficking of girls in the sex trade. Dalit and other Backward Caste girls from Nepal are brought and sold into the sex trade which draws its victims from the Dalits, Tribals and other oppressed castes.

6. *Cultural nationalism:* It is a movement that rejects the “cultural nationalism” (a direct acquisition from nazi nationalism) of the extremist

Hindu right. The right-wing groups and their silent subscribers have used the idea of "external" enemies like "minorities" to try and cover up caste discrimination and unite the oppressed castes in violence against Muslims and Christians in the name of "nationalism".

Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Budhists are not the enemies of India, nor are they enemies of the Dalits and other oppressed peoples.

In fact, most Christians, Muslims, Budhists and Sikhs were Dalits and Backward Caste people who turned to these religions to escape the tyranny of the caste system. True nationalism is not separating India along false divisions in society but instead it should be uniting and integrating the peoples of India. True nationalism must see the larger Dalit-Bahujan population delivered from caste oppression and discrimination. Their children, their girls, their women and their men must be delivered from modern day slavery.

7. Authentic spirituality: It is a movement that deplores the religious exploitation of Dalits and other oppressed groups by any religious entity. It is a movement that categorically rejects pseudo-spirituality even as it champions religious freedom for the oppressed masses. On the one hand, Dalits have been enslaved by one religious system that denies them any spiritual rights and privileges - such as rights of spiritual equality, access to the temple priesthood, and access to all temples and all religious rites. On the other hand, other religious systems have offered them a place in a "heaven" of the future while continuing to practice caste discrimination within their religious communities.

Church betrays Dalits

The church in India is also guilty in this regard. Large sections of the church in India have betrayed the legacy of Jesus, the legacy of Wilberforce and the legacy of William Carey when it comes to dealing with the issue of the caste system and the ensuing inhuman discrimination within society and the church. At the same time, Dalit leaders acknowledge their debt to those Christian missionaries who reached out to them in love and accepted them as fellow human beings. The present movement seeks an end to this exploitation and pseudo-spirituality. It encourages Dalits and other oppressed peoples to seek true and authentic spirituality — spirituality that truly addresses their spiritual, social, emotional and physical needs.

Bahujan ideologues speak of this struggle as one of spiritual democracy

versus the spiritual fascism of the caste system.

8. Empowering Bahujans: The movement is about the economic and social empowerment of the Dalit-Bahujan people through effective economic and educational programs. It aims to build effective micro-enterprise projects along with macro-enterprises.

It also calls for the review of various foreign govt. aid programs which do not reach Dalits. We ask for a proportionate disbursement of all aid money and projects. It also calls for a review of funding coming through NGOs into India and the disbursement of the same among the Dalits and other oppressed sections of society.

We acknowledge the heart wrenching poverty that is prevalent among the Dalit majority coupled with the huge problem of overall illiteracy. We believe economic dignity is a critical part of human dignity and that the oppressed must be freed and empowered to take care of their personal economic needs and prosperity.

English Education for Dalits

It aims to provide Dalit-Bahujan children — the future — access to quality English-medium education to allow them to play their leadership role in an increasingly globalized India.

Thus far Dalit children (and large sections of the Backward Castes) have had no access to such quality education.

English-medium education is the preserve of the upper castes. This movement rejects the hypocrisy of the upper castes whose children are educated in English, while the children of the oppressed castes are encouraged to study in the vernacular in the name of culture and extremist nationalism.

Besides, we are deeply concerned for the lack of medical care and health problems connected with the Bahujans.

We are disturbed that in the battle against AIDS the Dalit and oppressed caste victims of this disease are once again marginalized in the various programs launched to fight this epidemic. The pattern remains the same whether it is the Dalit victims of the Asian Tsunami of 2004 or the Dalit victims of the Gujarat earthquake of 2001. Dalits are marginalized even in the midst of catastrophe.

9. Global security threat: It is a movement that recognizes the huge security threat that ongoing caste discrimination against the Dalit people and other oppressed sections poses to India and the rest of the world. Disenchanted, bitter and angry young men and women drive the extremist violent maoist and naxalite left-wing movements from Nepal to South India. As India increasingly becomes two nations in one — one for whom “India is shining” and the other for whom India is in darkness — these violent movements will only increase and will attack not only local governments but also international institutions they deem as collaborators with the elitist castes who oppress the masses.

The movement also recognizes the threat of the oppressed castes crossing over to other faiths, legitimizing violence and attacking the ruling castes and their institutions. All in all, these facts produce a depressing outlook for the great nation of India if we do not see the abolition of the caste system in this generation and the achievement of authentic Dalit freedom.

10. Tyranny of caste hierarchy: It is a movement that seeks to end the oppression within Dalit and BC groups due to the notion of a superior/inferior caste hierarchy. It acknowledges that in some places, sections of the liberated BCs oppress and discriminate against the Dalits out of a mistaken sense of their better identity or patently at the behest of the upper castes. It also acknowledges that the Dalit groups themselves need to unite to end the tyranny of the caste system. The small number of liberated and well-to-do Dalits must not forget the plight of their brethren who continue to suffer. Restorative reconciliation between castes is an integral part of the emancipation agenda.

Conclusion:

We believe in the truths of human equality, freedom of conscience and equal opportunity for all. We reject all forms of racism, caste discrimination, color prejudice and gender discrimination.

We invite all concerned people everywhere to become part of this struggle for the emancipation of Dalit-Bahujans. Action points have been developed for the above goals of the movement. Remember: our work immediately impacts the 250 million Dalits as well as the hundreds of millions of other oppressed sections of Indian society. ■

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