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IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FAIR EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING, an agency of the State of California,

Plaintiff,

vs.

CISCO SYSTEMS, INC., a California Corporation; SUNDAR IYER, an individual; RAMANA KOMPELLA, an individual,

Defendants.

Case No.: 20CV372366

DECLARATION OF LAURENCE SIMON, Ph.D., IN SUPPORT OF DEPARTMENT OF FAIR EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING'S MOTION TO PROCEED USING A FICTITIOUS NAME

I, Laurence Simon, Ph.D., hereby declare:

1. I am a Professor at Brandeis University in the South Asian Studies Program and in The Heller School for Social Policy and Management. I teach International Development and am Director of the Center for Global Development and Sustainability at Brandeis University. I am also the Joint Editor-in-Chief of Brandeis University's journal CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion. If called as a witness, I could competently testify from my personal knowledge to the facts stated herein.

2. In my career, I was Director of Policy Analysis for Oxfam America, and the World Bank/ United Nations Development Programme advisor to the Managing Director of the Janasaviya Trust Fund (a national poverty reduction program in Sri Lanka). My work on poverty in India began at Oxfam

America in the late 1970s and continued when I was the Founding President of the American Jewish World Service in 1985. I was also recruited by Google in 2007 to help organize and hire senior staff for "google.org", the philanthropic foundation of Google, Inc. On leave from Brandeis, I served as Senior Advisor on Global Poverty.

3. My specific knowledge of the caste system in India and several other South Asian cultures began when I was with Oxfam America and deepened during my leadership of the American Jewish World Service. In both instances, our work and funding on poverty brought me face to face with the lived experience of low caste and Dalit communities. Over the years since, my familiarity with the structure, history and tragic impacts of India's caste system has grown to be my central area of research.

4. This research has led to numerous invitations to deliver lectures at universities in India as well as major Non-Governmental Organizations in Bangladesh (BRAC) and Sri Lanka (Sarvodaya). I have served as an Adjunct Professor with the National Law School of India University located in Bangalore (now Bengaluru). My research on the social teachings of major religions led to an invitation to write the lead chapter for volume 5 (Religious and Cultural Justice) of the forthcoming *B.R. Ambedkar: The Quest for Justice* about to be released by Oxford University Press. That chapter ("Searching for a Theology of Liberation in India") best summarizes my current research on anti-caste efforts throughout the history of Indian religious practice. A true and correct copy of the current proof for the pending chapter, "Searching for a Theology of Liberation in India," is attached hereto as **Exhibit 1**.

5. My research also led me to my position as Joint Editor-in-Chief of CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion. This open-access Journal, hosted by the Brandeis Library, has an Editorial Advisory Board of 30 prominent scholars in 10 countries including the former Chief Economist of the World Bank, leading sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers and legal scholars from respected universities in the United States, Europe and South Asia. This Journal publishes peer-reviewed scholarship across disciplines into caste systems in South Asia, including India, and beyond, and considers the marginalization and inter-generational oppression of religious, racial and cultural minorities throughout the world.

6. In 2019, Brandeis University incorporated caste into the institution's non-discrimination policy by explicitly adding it to the list of protected characteristics. We did so after the administration formed a Task Force to inquire into anecdotal reports of low caste and Dalit students, both undergraduate and graduate, being ostracized and socially excluded by high caste students from India. I co-chaired the Task Force with Dr. Mark Brimhall-Vargas, the university's Chief Diversity Officer and Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The majority of the Task Force members (students, staff, faculty and administrators) were persons of Indian nationality or descent. Not one of them was Dalit. After nearly a year, the Task Force unanimously recommended the inclusion of caste into our non-discrimination policies. This recommendation was reviewed by our General Counsel and approved by the University President.

7. I know this from personal experience. During the years I was Associate Dean of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management and director of the school's Masters Program in Sustainable International Development, I made a concerted effort to direct some scholarship funding to increase student diversity at the school. I made trips to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and to India to recruit students with low caste, Dalit and Tribal backgrounds. Over the next few years Dalit students came to talk with me about the experiences they were having with other Indian students elsewhere in the university. Characteristic behaviors included persistent efforts to learn surnames of our students (surnames are very often an identifier of caste) or touching a student's shoulders to try to feel the sacred thread, the social marker especially of Brahmins. The resulting social exclusions and derogatory remarks might be considered petty by those not from South Asia, but these were Dalit students brought up in the rigid and deep discriminations of their homeland. These students knew the price that Dalits often pay in employment and housing discrimination; in an estimated thousand rapes of Dalit women annually by high caste men; of lynching Dalit men for trivial transgressions in rural villages; of suicides of Dalit students in Indian universities.

8. The emotional toll, and perceived dangers felt by these students convinced our Task Force that in addition to the non-discrimination policy, the university needed to educate our whole community about the caste system, much as we do about racism and other discrimination. I knew that in our efforts to educate and protect students against caste-based harassment, we needed to be clear that the

university supports the right of all students to peacefully practice and celebrate their faith traditions on campus and off. Hindu students celebrate all major Hindu holidays and festivals of their choosing utilizing campus facilities and with support from the university. Holi and Diwali celebrations are attended by the broader Brandeis community. Our staff at the Center for Spiritual Life maintains a Dharmic prayer space for Buddhist, Hindu and Jain students. The student-run club Namaskar is a group established to educate and promote Hindu, Jain and Sikh culture and spiritual heritage. Of the six university chaplains, two are Hindu Spiritual Advisors (Ms. Anjum Biswas and Dr. Partha Biswas). This support for our Hindu students is consistent with our efforts to create an environment of mutual respect between and within all faith traditions. Our incorporation of caste into the university's non-discrimination policy does not mention Hinduism and is not limited to India's caste system, as other countries and faiths have grappled with caste also—Dalits in some Christian churches in India sit in separate sections, and while Buddha welcomed people of all castes to become part of the Sangha (the community of monks), there are caste identities in Buddhist families today (albeit with fewer documented cases of caste-based violence and overt acts of caste-based discrimination).

9. While, to the best of my knowledge, we have not received any direct criticism of Brandeis for making explicit "caste" in the protected categories, a recent article in Religion News Service quotes the Hindu American Foundation as saying that the Brandeis policy is "deeply problematic" and is aimed "at remedying a largely nonexistent problem." Religion News Service, in the same article, states: "A former engineering student at a nearby school, requesting anonymity for fear of retribution, told Religion News Service that his college roommates excluded him from future housing when they learned of his low-caste status." Attached hereto as **Exhibit 2** is a true and correct copy of the referenced Religion News Service article.

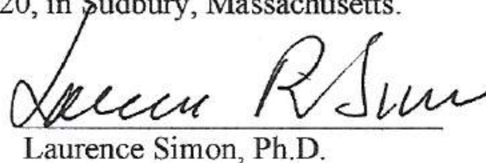
10. Casteism in the United States manifests itself in much the same way as in India. Like racism in the U.S., casteism is an equivalent of white supremacy here. It is a reaction to Dalits, who used to be called Untouchables, coming into the corporate workforce as trained engineers, eating in the same corporate cafeterias, or having the audacity to use the same toilets or coffee machines. Dalits in America who are brave enough to complain of their treatment can be subjected to retribution. Many Dalits in India and Nepal have changed their surnames to hide their Untouchable identity. It is entirely reasonable

for a Dalit family, even in the U.S., to fear their extended family back in India could be targeted for their relatives in the U.S. rising above their pre-destined status in their reincarnation. It is a reasonable fear that a Dalit in America taking legal action against caste prejudice may expose his family to neighborhood shunning and his children to emotional and psychological harm.

11. The Constitution of India outlaws Untouchability. Laws throughout India ban caste discrimination. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 of Parliament was an effort to check cruel and inhumane crimes that were commonplace. While progress has been made in India, the stigma of Untouchability remains powerful. Casteism has been brought to the United States from India and there is no greater target than Dalits who move in next door, or whose children socialize with high caste friends, or whose professional qualifications are rejected merely because of prejudice.

12. Based on my studies and experience, I believe that forcing the complainant to reveal his name would create a chilling effect on others who experience caste-based discrimination or harassment. For example, Brandeis University's Task Force did not hold public hearings because the Task Force members of Indian background felt that people wouldn't come out in public to say they thought they'd been discriminated against on the basis of their caste for fear of retribution. If some of our students felt so intimidated by speaking out, it is entirely reasonable to protect the name of the complainant from possibly far more egregious retribution by an antiquated but deeply entrenched system that is two millennia old.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed this 25th day of October 2020, in Sudbury, Massachusetts.



Laurence Simon, Ph.D.

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B.R. Ambedkar

The Quest for Justice

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B.R. Ambedkar
The Quest for Justice

VOLUME V

Religious and Cultural Justice

Edited by
Aakash Singh Rathore

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Preface

This book forms part of a five-volume publication entitled *B.R. Ambedkar: The Quest for Justice*, an ambitious project that originated during the B.R. Ambedkar International Conference, 'Quest for Equity', held at Bengaluru, India, in July 2017, with some 350 speakers and thousands of participants. The conference took place keeping in view that the values of social, political, and economic justice that were so vigorously championed by Dr B.R. Ambedkar are now under attack at several levels: constitutional norms and public institutions created to fight against dominance and subservience have proved inadequate or have been subverted; norms and policy often merely pay lip service to egalitarian considerations; and the rise of social intolerance and exclusion tends to effectively whittle down and even sabotage an inclusive conception of polity and citizenship. The complexity of the social, political, and economic environment in which the value of social justice has to be envisaged too has undergone significant changes: we understand social inequality and diversity to be layered and multidimensional; and the State has to reckon with several competing centres of religious, communal, and cultural allegiances. Despite these serious challenges, new sites for social and political assertions have re-emerged, renewing the call for justice. These five volumes are very much part of that engagement.

Today, social activism in India is inspired to a great extent by Dr Ambedkar's insightful lifework analysing complex social and political challenges and proposing daring and radical policy measures in response. His approach to critical intellectual and policy

challenges may inspire similar interventions elsewhere in the world, particularly throughout the Global South. Thus, in the light of the conference, this five-volume collection emerged as an invitation to scholars and policymakers to substantially rethink current political, social, legal, economic, gender, racial, religious, and cultural paradigms, motivated by Dr B.R. Ambedkar's imaginative and creative work.

The project has succeeded in encouraging a wide interdisciplinary engagement among academics, scholars, activists, and policymakers on each of these themes, which are treated across the five volumes. This is apparent from a review of their tables of contents:

B.R. Ambedkar: The Quest for Justice

(in five volumes)

Volume I: *Political Justice*

1. Bhikhu Parekh *The Intellectual and Political Legacy of B.R. Ambedkar*
2. Cosimo Zene *B.R. Ambedkar and Antonio Gramsci: Justice for the Excluded, Education for Democracy*
3. Anand Teltumbde *Ambedkar and Democracy: Critical Reflections*
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5. Pradeep Gokhale *Dr Ambedkar and the Trio of Principles: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity*
6. Vidhu Verma *Discrimination, Colonial Injustice, and the Good Society*
7. Scott Stroud *Communication, Justice, and Reconstruction: Ambedkar as an Indian Pragmatist*
8. J. Daniel Elam *Of Castes and Crowds: B.R. Ambedkar's Anticolonial Endosmosis*
9. Pushparaj Deshpande *A Constellation of Ideas: Revisiting Ambedkar and Gandhi*
10. Shaunna Rodrigues *Self-Respect as a Primary Political Ideal: Ambedkar's Challenge to Political Theory*

Volume II: *Social Justice*

1. Martin Fuchs *Ambedkar's Theory of the Social: The Universal Condition of Recognition*
2. James Manor *B.R. Ambedkar: Visionary and Realist*
3. G.C. Pal *Caste and Delivery of Social Justice: Revisiting Ambedkar*
4. Meena Dhanda *'Made to Think and Forced to Feel': The Power of Counter-Ritual*
5. David N. Gellner, Krishna P. Adhikari, and Arjun Bahadur B.K. *Dalits in Search of Inclusion: Comparing Nepal with India*
6. Navyug Gill *Ambedkar, Labour, and the Political Economy of Dalit Conversion in Colonial Panjab*
7. Shailaja Menon *The Fractured Society of the Republic*
8. Karen Gabriel and Prem Kumar Vijayan *Whose State Is It Anyway? Reservation, Representation, Caste, and Power*
9. Jagannatham Begari *Reclaiming Social Justice and Deepening Democracy*
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1. Upendra Baxi *Lawless Law, Living Death, and the Insurgent Moral Reason of Babasaheb Ambedkar*
2. R. Sudarshan *B.R. Ambedkar's Exemplary Adherence to Constitutional Morality*
3. Arvind Narrain *Radical Constitutionalism: Towards an Ambedkarite jurisprudence*
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5. Umakant *The Significance of Rights and Rule of Law under the Indian Constitutional Framework*
6. Anupama Rao *B.R. Ambedkar and Indian Democracy*

Part Two: Economic Justice

7. Vijay Gudavarthy *Development through Informalization and Circulation of Labour: The Emerging Anatomy of an Uncivil Society*
8. Joseph Tharamangalam *India's Paradox of 'Hunger Amidst Plenty' Has a Name: Caste-Based Discrimination and Exclusion*
9. Aseem Prakash *Dalits Enter the Indian Markets as Owners of Capital: Adverse Inclusion, Social Networks, and Civil Society*
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2. Mushtaq Ahmad Malla *The Shame of India: Stigma and Shame among Dalit Women in Rural Agricultural Relations*
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4. Sunaina Arya *Ambedkar as a Feminist Philosopher*
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Volume V: *Religious and Cultural Justice*

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2. Kanchana Mahadevan *Ambedkar's Critical Hermeneutics of Religion*
3. Debora Spini *Civil Religion, Uncivil Society: A Reflection on Baba Sahib Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Conception of a 'Religion for Civil Society'*
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10. Raju Sakthivel *Education in a Hierarchical Culture*
11. Jadumani Mahanand *Ambedkar in/and Academic Space*

Despite the wide range of themes spread across these five volumes, the collection as a whole is oriented towards articulable specific aims and objectives. These aims and objectives are inspired by and fully consistent with the life and legacy of Dr Ambedkar, a man who was, on the one hand, a scholar of indubitable genius, and on the other hand, a dynamic agent of social and political action.

1. *B.R. Ambedkar: The Quest for Justice* seeks to explore the multifaceted idea of justice in dialogue with Ambedkar's 'opus' for a society that encompasses manifold social inequalities, deep diversities, exclusion, and marginality.
2. In dialogue with Ambedkar's writings, the contributions to the collection aim in a holistic way to suggest constitutional, institutional, and policy responses to the concerns of justice, and to reformulate the conceptual and policy linkages between social justice and other related norms and concerns.
3. Through high-level scholarship, this collection aims to help identify modes of thought and agency and social and political practices inimical to the pursuit of justice, and to delineate social and political agency and modes of action conducive to the furtherance of justice in line with Dr Ambedkar's own writings and mission.

Thus, in sum, Dr Ambedkar's conception of justice and his life's work shaping the idea of India offer this collection the vantage points for sustained reflection on concerns of justice and its relation to other human values. This is particularly relevant, indeed urgent, today, not only in India but also across the world.

As convener of the organizing committee of the Dr B.R. Ambedkar International Conference, 'Quest for Equity' held at Bengaluru, India, in July 2017, where many of the chapters included in this volume were originally presented, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the people and institutions that made the conference a success and helped to make these volumes possible.

First and foremost, I must acknowledge the Government of Karnataka with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at the helm, which hosted and funded the conference. Many put in extraordinary time and effort: Dr H.C. Mahadevappa, convenor and hon'ble minister for Public Works Department (PWD); H. Anjaneya, hon'ble minister for Social Welfare Department; Dr G. Parameshwara, hon'ble minister for home affairs; Sri T.B. Jayachandra, hon'ble minister for the departments of law and minor irrigation; Sri R. Roshan Baig, hon'ble minister for infrastructure development and information; Sri Basavaraja Rayareddy, hon'ble minister for higher education; Smt. Umashree, hon'ble minister for women and child welfare development; Priyank M. Kharge, publicity convener and minister of information technology and biotechnology; Krishna Byre Gowda, logistics convener and minister of agriculture; and Captain

Manivannan, secretary, Social Welfare Department. Thanks also to Dr M.C. Srinivasa, joint director, Social Welfare Department, and Dr H. Nataraj, secretary, State Safai Karmachari Commission, both nodal officers attached to Captain Manivannan, for taking care of the logistics of the conference organization. I would also like to thank Dr Nagalakshmi and Mehroz Khan, who were the coordinators for the conference; Shri Srinivasulu, managing director, Ambedkar Development Corporation, attached to Krishna Byre Gowda; and Dr Nandan Kumar, officer on special duty to Priyank Kharge, must also be acknowledged for their hand in making the conference a success. I must also thank Luthfulla Ateeq, principal secretary to the chief minister; Shri Venkataiah, special advisor to Social Welfare Department; M.V. Savithri, commissioner, Social Welfare Department; and numerous other officials and staff of the Social Welfare Department, who worked so diligently.

Special thanks are due to the Scheduled Castes Department team of the All India Congress Committee: Shri. K. Raju, head of the Congress President's Office, for his ideation and immense political support, and Pushparaj Deshpande, in-charge of the Quest for Equity website and other logistical support. I cannot fail to mention Oum, Navil, Deepika, and the rest of the Phase I team, who worked tirelessly.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the members of the various committees, especially members of the academic committee: Professors Sukhadeo Thorat, Valerian Rodrigues, G. Haragopal, Aakash Singh Rathore, Rachana Bajapai, Sudhir Krishnaswamy, S.G. Siddaramaiah, K. Marulasiddappa, Siddalingaiah, L. Hanumanthaiah, Mallika Ganti, and K.B. Siddaiah. My special thanks are also due to the editorial advisory board for their invaluable advice and assistance throughout, including the aforementioned members from the academic committee, as well as Dr Anand Teltumbde, Dr Suraj Yengde, Dr K. Kannabiran, Dr Laurence Simon, and Dr Meena Dhanda. My heartfelt thanks to Professor Aakash Singh Rathore for taking the responsibility of editing these volumes.

Of course, I cannot fail to mention the support of Shabin John and Chandrashekar for their office and logistics support and Dr Ramkhok Raikhan for research assistance to the editor.

S. Japhet
Professor and Vice Chancellor,
Bengaluru Central University, India

Foreword

This volume, *Religious and Cultural Justice*, is an important addition to the existing literature on religion and culture in India. Religions in India suffer from two main cultural problems that religions in other countries do not. They are injustices related to caste and untouchability. Though caste and untouchability are constructions of Hinduism, these two anti-God institutional practices have spread into every religion operating on Indian soil. Hinduism does not allow even the richest Shudra to become a priest in a Hindu temple, leave alone Dalits and Adivasis.

Because of Ambedkar's carefully drafted Constitution, all political rights, including the right to become the president or the prime minister of India, are achieved by people of all castes and religions, both men and women. However, the right to become a priest in the temple of Tirupathi or Jagannath is unthinkable for any Hindu Shudra, Dalit, or Adivasi. As of now, A. Ramnath Kovind, a Dalit, is the president of India; Venkaiah Naidu, a Shudra, is vice-president; and Narendra Damodardas Modi, an OBC, is the prime minister. They are all strong Hindus trained in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is a proponent of the idea of a Hindu Rashtra. However, neither of them have the right to become a priest, even by undergoing the required training, in any temple of Hinduism. This is among the greatest spiritual injustices in human history. Without the right to priesthood to all members of a given religion, the attainment of moksha or Swarga is unthinkable. In other words, the Shudras, Dalits, and Adivasis who are claimed to be Hindus have no basic spiritual justice in Hinduism. In other religions such

as Islam and Christianity, all caste men have the right to be a mullah or a pastor, but no woman has this right. The women in these religions, world over, do not have a way to equally realize their moksha or heaven.

All religions must grant their members all religious rights without taking cognizance of their gender, caste, or race. In India, Muslim women, more than the women of any other religion, are denied the right to dress as they like and to have the control of their own body. We must oppose such practices in all religions.

The right to religion, to have the freedom to embrace any religion that one wants, has come under threat since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power at the Centre and in many other states. The anti-conversion laws pose a major threat to the right to religion of millions. These laws must be repealed in all states forthwith. Another sad development is the growing attack on some communities' food culture in the name of the protection of cows. This takes away the right to life itself. This is a problem created by the Hindu right, with an unusual spiritual definition of food culture: that vegetarianism is spiritually valid, and meatarianism, beeferianism, and fisharianism are not. Such a definition of food centred on caste and racial purity is a dangerous spiritual principle. This link between food and spiritual purity (or impurity) must be opposed very firmly. Food preference must be left as an individual's personal matter.

I hope this volume serves a positive purpose in educating people on all these issues.

Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd
Director, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion
and Inclusive Policy,
Maulana Azad National Urdu University,
Gachibowli, Hyderabad, India

Abbreviations

AIBSF	All India Backward Students Forum
AIIMS	All India Institute of Medical Sciences
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CABE	Central Advisory Board of Education
DU	University of Delhi
FIR	first information report
GCPI	General Committee for Public Instruction
GDP	gross domestic product
GNP	gross national product
HAF	Hindu American Foundation
HCU	Hyderabad Central University
IIDS	Indian Institute of Dalit Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISKCON	International Society for Krishna Consciousness
IT	information technology
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
LGBTQ	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer
LSE	London School of Economics
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PROBE	Public Report on Basic Education
RGNF	Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe

PROOF

TPDK	Thanthai Periyar Dravidar Kazhagam (Elder Periyar Dravidian Group)
TTB	top twice born
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientifi c, and Cultural Organization
UNO	United Nations Organization

Introduction

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Like the previous two volumes in this collection, this volume includes two themes—religious justice and cultural justice. They are treated in two different parts of the book.

Religious Justice

The first part, religious justice, covers terrain that was dear to Dr Ambedkar throughout the entire length of his life. This terrain is not uncontested; indeed, much of it is controversial in various respects. During the final decade of his life, Ambedkar was hard at work on a book manuscript that would eventually prove to be one of his most controversial publications, *Riddles in Hinduism*. Although critics often take this work as nothing more than a motivated attack on Hinduism, what they fail to understand is that Ambedkar turned his razor-sharp rationalism to Buddhism just as much as he did to Hinduism. Ambedkar's monumental *Buddha and His Dhamma* stands testament to his relentless demand that religion be rational.

Beginning around 1948, Ambedkar had decidedly turned to Buddhism as his personal faith as well as an ideology that offered an alternative to Hinduism. On 14 October 1956, he formally converted to Buddhism, alongside hundreds of thousands of his followers. In doing so, he finally fulfilled his vow that he had made publicly at Yeola, Maharashtra, in 1935, that although he was

born a Hindu, he would not die a Hindu. To the Navayana, or new Buddhists, now numbering in the millions, Ambedkar was nothing less than a Bodhisatta, leading all on the path to liberation.

Sometime around 1935, Ambedkar had written about 30 pages of an unfinished autobiography, now known by the title *Waiting for a Visa*. It consists of a series of brief stories about the profound discrimination and humiliation that he was forced to suffer throughout his childhood and early years. Several of these motifs (for example, inability to find drinking water, exclusion from school) would eventually transform into major issues that the mature Ambedkar would address structurally and nationally. But *Waiting for a Visa* is not the only autobiographical writing of Ambedkar's that we have.

The other main autobiographical work of Ambedkar's that is extant is the Preface to *Buddha and His Dhamma*. Ambedkar's autobiographical narration in the Preface explains how he came to prefer Buddhism over all of the other world religions that he had been studying, as he states, 'for the last 35 years'. Since the Preface is dated April 1956, it suggests that Ambedkar began the study of religion assiduously in 1921, dating back to his goal of learning Sanskrit at the University of Bonn, Germany. The origin of his interest in Buddhism is described by Ambedkar in a detailed account of his sceptical and rationalistic reading of Hindu works (specifically the Mahabharata and the Ramayana), However, the important point here is not his sceptical attitude against Hindu writings (for example, his deep aversion to Rama's treatment of Sita, which he refers to as 'beastly behavior'), but that he carries precisely that same attitude where Buddhist writings are concerned. Ambedkar subjects Buddhist scripture to the identical sceptical inquiry that he had subjected Hindu scripture to. The rejection of the four noble truths is a result precisely of this scepticism. The four 'Aryan' truths, as he opted to call them, just as the Brahmanical rendition of *kamma* and rebirth, failed Ambedkar's hermeneutic test regarding religious doctrine consistent with human reason. Ambedkar sketches this test in *Buddha and His Dhamma*.

> As the Buddha was nothing if not rational, if not logical, anything, therefore, which is rational or logical, other things being equal, may be taken to be the word of Buddha. The second test is that the Buddha never cared to enter into a discussion which was not profitable for man's welfare. Therefore anything attributed to the Buddha which did not relate to man's welfare cannot be accepted to be the

> word of the Buddha. There is also a third test. This is that the Buddha divided all matter into two classes, viz. about which he was certain and about which he was not certain. On matters which fell into the first category he had stated his views definitely and conclusively; and on matters which fell into the second category, he had expressed his views that they are only tentative views. (Ambedkar 2011, xxxi)

Beyond Ambedkar's position on conversion, his exposé of the riddles of Hinduism, and his similar analysis and solution to numerous riddles in Buddhism (that is, debrahmanizing Buddhism), other controversies also abounded with respect to Dr Ambedkar's thought and practices on pressing issues of religious justice. The entire episode of the Hindu Code Bill is another of many such examples. But it is not only controversy that abounds; it is also inspiration and hope, feelings of empowerment and liberation. It is especially these latter aspects that are canvassed in the chapters of part one of this volume. A perfect example is the opening chapter by **Laurence R. Simon** ('Searching for a Theology of Liberation in India'). Simon compares Ambedkar's mission with others who have inspired movements against a social pathology that breeds endemic and acute poverty rooted in social injustice. Evoking the words of such social visionaries as Fr Gustavo Gutierrez, W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin, and Paulo Freire, the author places the work of Ambedkar in a global context and shows the epoch-changing potential of his rejection of a psychological state of mind that trapped Dalits in the delusion of birth-based hierarchy. Ambedkar, like Moses, the author contends, did not reach the Promised Land, for they both died in the wilderness. However, concepts of justice and human dignity prevailed and are evident in the new-found assertiveness of the oppressed.

The next chapter by **Kanchana Mahadevan** ('Ambedkar's Critical Hermeneutics of Religion') explores Ambedkar's reading of the Gita as a practice of critical hermeneutics. Mahadevan attempts to situate Ambedkar's interpretation of the Gita within the hermeneutic tradition by comparing it to Juergen Habermas's project of critical hermeneutics. The author argues that Ambedkar develops his own perspective to the Gita by scrutinizing interpretations that were politically nationalist (such as Tilak's) and psychological (such as Gandhi's). Ambedkar critiques both interpretations as rooted in the violence of varna. The latter can be critiqued and transcended only through a socially and historically responsible

interpretation. Moreover, for Ambedkar, readings of texts are often intertextual, whereby an egalitarian reading of the Gita becomes possible through its relation to Buddhism.

Debora Spini ('Civil Religion, Uncivil Society: A Reflection on Baba Sahib Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Conception of a "Religion for Civil Society"') next hones in on a particular idea mentioned by Mahadevan, and pursues a reflection upon it in the fourth chapter. That is, her chapter critically reconsiders some aspects of Ambedkar's thoughts on religion—specifically, whether only the form of religion such as that which Ambedkar espoused, which is more concerned with creating social bonds than with a quest for a transcendental God, can be fully compatible with a democratic public sphere. Spini elucidates the reasons for discarding the transcendental hypothesis while appreciating Ambedkar's legacy in the contemporary debate on religion's role in political conflict.

In the fourth chapter, **Priyanka Jha** ('The Gaze on Justice: A Genealogy from Anagarika Dharmapala to B.R. Ambedkar') traces a genealogy of innovative and unorthodox reinterpretations of Buddhism. Jha takes up four thinkers—Anagarika Dharmapala, Dharmanand Kosambi, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and Rahul Sankrityayan—who dynamically drew from Buddhism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These forerunners initiated discourses of dignity and self-worth based on the life and teachings of Buddha. In this respect, they can be seen as sources of foundation or inspiration for the unique approach of Ambedkar in Navayana Buddhism.

Next, **Bansidhar Deep** ('B.R. Ambedkar's Philosophy of Religion') discusses how Ambedkar engaged religions from the perspective of philosophy. According to Deep, this approach was necessary to unshackle the dogmas of the Hindu social order, responsible for oppression, domination, and discrimination of the 'lower castes' and women. According to the author, Ambedkar delved into epistemology in an effort to replace Hindu dogma with an alternative knowledge system. For Ambedkar, philosophy was meant to reconstruct the world, not just to explain it. Just as for Buddha, for Ambedkar too religion is meant to bring happiness to the world, but not to explain its origins. Ambedkar's philosophy changes the narrative of religion, evolving from dogmatism to a rationalistic conception of religion that thus paves the way for equality.

In the final chapter of Part One on religious justice, **Matthew H. Baxter** ('Two Concepts of Conversion at Meenakshipuram: Seeing

through Ambedkar's Buddhism and Being Seen in EVR's Islam') insightfully adds texture to the question of conversion. Baxter uncovers, he argues, two different concepts for understanding the relationship between mass conversion and democracy. Taking issue with the standard assumption that Ambedkar's notion of conversion is as a psychic process of changing ones principles in order to see the world differently, Baxter proposes that the historic 1981 conversion at Meenakshipuram is better framed with reference to E.V. Ramasami's (EVR) notion of conversion as an exterior somatic process of changing appearances, so as to be seen differently in the world. These two concepts of conversion—seeing differently versus being seen differently—raise alternative ways of engaging with issues of text, force, foreignness, time, and Marxism.

These latter aspects of Baxter's impressive work take us from religious justice to cultural justice, or the second main part of this volume.

Cultural Justice

Part Two of the present volume turns to cultural justice, about which Dr Ambedkar was often puzzled and concerned. Ambedkar was aware that culture was a double-edged sword. On one hand, culture nurtures the individual and provides the environment for the exercise of liberating human agency. But on the other hand, culture can also undermine human agency and sustain subservience and marginality. Thus, culture is yet another sphere within which we must be ever-attuned to the dictates of justice.

Earlier in this Introduction we looked at autobiographical expression in relation to Ambedkar's particular experiences and aspects related to religious justice, such as conversion. There is also a great deal in these writings that bears an impact upon cultural justice, which is explored here. In particular, we should draw attention to the idea of dignity, because this is a concept that several essays in Part Two, on cultural justice, focus upon. In Ambedkar's own story we find the intertwining of dignity and self-respect with the cultural dimensions of caste. This would prove in later years to become a recurring theme throughout Dalit autobiography as a genre of its own, and Dalit literature more broadly.

There is no doubt, for example, that self-respect is one of the most recurring motifs in Eknath Awad's powerful autobiography,

Strike a Blow to Change the World (Awad 2018), which is heavily infused with reflections on the cultural logic of caste, especially in terms of the psychology of violence. Worth recalling here is Frantz Fanon's masterpiece, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon [1961] 2004), on the necessity of violence for decolonization, as it seems to resonate well with Eknath Awad's own experiences. According to Fanon, violence righteously exercised by the oppressed has an emancipatory and cathartic power that allows a colonized (read caste-oppressed) subject to physically and psychologically liberate herself. It allows her to recreate herself with a new, positive identity grounded in essential equality, ultimately laying the ground of self-respect.

Awad's book, right along these same lines, is peppered with episodes of sacrifices that had to be made toward the crucial end of self-respect. For example:

> When the Dalit begins to discover selfhood and self-respect, she begins to speak out. When she speaks out, there's always a backlash and atrocities happen. … For four wounds inflicted, only one may be returned, but even this change is very significant. (Awad 2018, 209)

Or:

> At every festival or village event, the Mangs would play the *haalki* [a simple percussion instrument] and *shehnai* [a double-reed Indic oboe]. … The Mangs were not paid for their Mangbaajaa. … And so, the bonfire of [a] village's musical instruments was set alight. When those beautiful *shehnais* were burning, I felt bad but it was the self-respect that I could see generated in the Mangs through these flames that was of prime importance. (Awad 2018, 182–3)

In a certain sense, Awad's autobiography functions as a guide for achieving self-respect. The term itself appears dozens of times throughout the book, and always within the most poignant of events—for example, in passages describing families suffering from hunger but refusing to eat carrion; in numerous descriptions of the coerced shaving of the heads of institutionalized religious Mang beggars (the *potraj*); and whenever the question of education arises.

Indeed, Awad even saw his long years of development work and social activism as geared ultimately toward helping Dalits to attain this immaterial, but priceless value.

> It is not possible to solve the problem of untouchability by providing the Dalit with food and building a few cement houses for them. It is much more important to awaken their sense of self-respect. (Awad 2018, 118)

Another early and famous autobiography—entitled *Baluta*—by the activist, poet, and writer Daya Pawar, confirms precisely all of these same motifs. Pawar records how Ambedkarites would go from village to village 'urging the Mahars … to refuse demeaning labour, to live with self-respect' (Pawar 2015, 95). Interestingly, throughout Pawar's book, Dr Ambedkar himself is represented as the perfect incarnation of self-respect.

> As long as Babasaheb was alive, he was a vital force in politics. … 'Maharki is slavery. We won't do this work!' was the slogan of self-respect that resounded in our world. We now had the power and the courage to bring down mountains. (Pawar 2015, 213)

Part of this was because, as Pawar points out, Dalits everywhere were inspired by the Mahad agitation that Ambedkar had led—the great Dalit revolt for dignity and self-respect. Another big component was, of course, his role in shaping the egalitarian Constitution of India (Pawar 2015, 133).

We find that a parallel cultural logic unfolds in another explosively powerful work of Dalit literature, Baburao Bagul's *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (When I Hid My Caste). Unlike *Baluta*, Bagul's book is not an autobiography, but a collection of short stories, each of which is eruptive, disruptive, and cathartically poignant. Originally published in 1963 when Bagul was a feisty 32-year-old (that is, a decade before the launch of the revolutionary Dalit Panthers, in which he played an inspirational role), *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* shocked the Marathi literary community, which had been dominated by the formalist style of 'high-caste' authors. It shocked because of the explicit, anti-romantic representation of violence, penury, rape, and caste humiliation, and because its protagonists consisted of a motley cast of pimps, prostitutes, gangsters, and outcastes. Decades on, all of these are the hackneyed staples of contemporary fiction, but Baburao Bagul's work continues to move the reader in other, even more reflective ways.

One such way is the light that Bagul's fiction throws upon our cultures of systemic exploitation—whether it be in terms of the reliance of 'upper-caste' people living in the centre of villages upon

the crucial, multifaceted services of destitute residents of the Maharwadas, the reliance of townships upon the dehumanizing sanitation system imposed on Methars and Bhangis, or the stifling patriarchal system, a pillar of which rests upon Dalit prostitutes. Several of the chapters on cultural justice in this volume will make mention of these very phenomena.

Many of Bagul's characters are engaged in defying the social roles thrust upon them, and some of them are triumphant (the story 'Bohada'—about 'the village Mahar' who irrepressibly asserts himself and ends up dominating a village festival, to the awe and astonishment of everyone—is probably the best example). But, for the most part, such revolutions end tragically ('Revolt'—about a brilliant boy forced to give up his studies to inherit his father's job of cleaning dry toilets with his bare hands, may be the most agonizing example). Bagul's stories thereby dramatize the lesson of all reform movements: it takes more than a solitary individual, no matter how gifted, to overturn a hydra-headed system of oppression. It is within this backdrop that the chapters in Part Two explore cultural justice.

While Ambedkar eschews violence, there is no question that Eknath Awad and Ambedkar meet with one voice on the crucial importance of awakening self-respect, an idea confirmed by numerous Dalit activists and authors, such as Daya Pawar and Baburao Bagul. Ambedkar summed up this conception of dignity and self-respect beautifully in an essay condemning the patronizing attitude that leaders of the nationalist movement had with regards to Dalits. In it, Ambedkar points out that the impoverishment of Dalits, which they have been forced to endure for centuries, is of less consequence than the 'insult and indignity' that it has been their misfortune to bear.

> I have no doubt that what [Dalits] expect to happen in a sovereign and free India is a complete destruction of Brahmanism as a philosophy of life and as a social order. If I may say so, the servile classes do not care for social amelioration. The want and poverty which has been their lot is nothing to them as compared to the insult and indignity which they have to bear as a result of the vicious social order. Not bread but honour is what they want. (Ambedkar 1991, 212–13)

In Part Two of the present volume, each of the contributors, often in dialogue with the writings of Ambedkar, take up issues

of central relevance to explore the nature and destiny of cultural justice, either as such or specifically in terms of their interpretation of Dr Ambedkar's own position. In the first chapter of Part Two, **Pramod K. Nayar** ('Marginality, Suffering, Justice: Questions of Dalit Dignity in Cultural Texts') turns to the question of dignity. According to Nayar, Dalit dignity is organized around caste-determined labour that fits them into hierarchies of social dignity but which, in savage irony, renders them undignified as humans through social death. He also argues as a corollary, however, that the self-conscious, agential narrative enactment of life-as-death and the performance of death enables the Dalit text to establish the dignity of the Dalit body.

Y. Srinivasa Rao ('Asura: Myth into Cultural Reality') then takes the reader into the fascinating landscape of culture and counterculture. He concentrates on the cultural construction of subalternity, and the resistance of this process by counter-narratives. According to Rao, Ambedkar, Periyar, and Phule created counter-narratives, but in order to sustain counter-narratives subalterns have to also popularize the hegemonic narratives of their ideological masters. Rao speaks of this and related processes as demythicalization. The author's burden is to begin to historicize and demythicalize the mythical *asura* [demigod], in order to support the spreading and longevity of counter-narratives such as Ambedkar's.

In the next chapter, **John Clammer** ('Cultural Rights in the Context of Ambedkarite Social Justice') addresses cultural rights. In particular, he tries to reframe the question of cultural rights in relation to human rights, which he then broadens out to questions of social justice, and then places that, in turn, within questions of peace and sustainability. The author introduces these topics at a theoretical level, after which he roots them in the context of Indian culture, and in the nature of Ambedkar's thought. As such, Clammer attempts to justify the concept of cultural rights and argue for an expansive notion of social justice that includes cultural rights and which provokes new thinking about policies designed to alleviate the situation of marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

Raju Sakthivel ('Education in a Hierarchical Culture') then changes the orientation towards the interface of pedagogy and culture. The author argues that the post-colonial state in India is itself embedded into the culture of caste-grid values of Hinduism, and thus the State has failed in its role to ensure human dignity.

Relying on Ambedkar's own position on the issue, and supplementing this by documentary evidence, Sakthivel critiques the contradictory nature of the Indian state, which has invested more in 'silicon valleys' than in slates, the symbolic expression for universal primary education.

The final chapter of the volume also addresses issues of pedagogy and culture, but not pedagogy at the level of primary education; rather, that of academia. **Jadumani Mahanand** ('Ambedkar in/and Academic Space') takes up the issue of Ambedkar's radically egalitarian ethos and thought and how it is included and/or excluded from the university curriculum in order to problematize our idea of academic space. Mahanand asks: Why is Ambedkar's work not as visible as compared to other figures such as Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, or Tagore? The author suggests that Ambedkar's political thought becomes reduced to a form of identity politics, and, in the process, becoming a zone of contestation in university spaces, whether inside or outside the classroom (for example, in student politics, seminar presentations, discussions in library canteens, and so forth). This reduction serves to protect the interests of certain social strata that dominate academia. Indeed, the author suggests that exclusion of Ambedkar's political thought protects privileged knowledge systems in the university setting. Mahanand links this privileging of certain social strata and knowledge systems that support their dominance to the current crisis of higher education in India, as well as the phenomenon of student suicides.

With Mahanand's chapter, volume five comes to a close.

Where, then, do we go from here? Action is required, beyond only study and scholarship, if we are to effect change. Thankfully, we are not left without guidance and knowledge about what it is exactly that we each ought to be doing. That work was perfectly well captured in the Conclusion of the Bengaluru Declaration (2017). Citing that text would seem to be a fitting way to bring to a close this Introduction to the final volume of this five-volume collection.

> India's founders consciously chose to create a society where each individual—irrespective of caste, gender, ethnicity, region, religion, income capacities or ideological inclination—was to be recognised, by both the State and by every other citizen, as possessor of equal value and inalienable dignity. They sought to ensure that every

person had equal access to the promise of this nation. In the last 70 years the leaders of modern India have strived to ensure that every citizen—especially SCs, STs, OBCs, Women and Minorities—enjoyed equal rights and that no one gets left, or held behind.

Regressive social and political forces have consistently resisted and tried to undermine both the constitutional idea of India and the efforts of the State in the last 70 years. These forces also seek to homogenise India and restore the principles of hierarchy, patriarchy and fundamentalism that Babasaheb Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Jagjivan Ram, Vallabhai Patel, Maulana Azad and other founders rejected at the birth of the nation. Now that they enjoy State power, they are systematically dismantling the institutions that are the foundations of our society, by undermining India's holistic welfare and affirmative action architecture and by destroying the pluralistic fabric of our nation. This poses a grave threat to the idea of India espoused by the freedom movement and spelt out in the Constitution.

We need to address these concerns urgently, and resist these attacks boldly. India needs to return to its noblest ideals, the spirit of its Constitution. It is time for the Indian people to recognise the constitutional path we chose 70 years ago and dedicate ourselves to protect and enhance this legacy. In this quest, the Bengaluru Declaration hopes that all progressive forces, collectively and across party lines, will adopt and implement these recommendations to fulfil Babasaheb Ambedkar's dream of an equitable, just and egalitarian society.

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PROOF

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Part One

Religious Justice

PROOF

1

Searching for a Theology of Liberation in India

LAURENCE R. SIMON

A caste system is an ancient form of social distinction among hereditary classes with some inheriting exclusive privileges sanctioned by law, custom, or religion. While belief in the purity of lineage may be a source of pride in a cultural heritage, it may also lead to illusions of superiority, or even to genocide, as in the Holocaust that befell the Jews of Europe at the hands of the 'Master Race'. The indigenous peoples of the Americas were subjected to such concepts of purity of race and suffered genocide at the hands of European settlers. The English word 'caste' derives from the Latin *castus* meaning being cut off or separated, and the Portuguese *casta* carried that further into purity of lineage, race, or breed, thus separating the colonial Portuguese from the indigenous and mixed races. This concept of purity can evolve into rigid social hierarchies of privilege and pseudospeciation, a term first used by the American psychologist Eric Ericson to describe marginalized groups considered so inferior that they have become distinct and subpar species in the eyes of the oppressors. They become the 'other'. The Rohingyas of Myanmar have lived under threat of expulsion. Blacks in apartheid states of Africa lived as a pseudospecies providing cheap labour, forced off arable lands. The Jews of Imperial Russia were confined to the Pale of Settlement, where most lived in the poverty of their little towns known as *shtetls*, subjected to routinized violence and limited to Jewish quotas for education. The Roman

Catholic Church turned a blind eye or worse to the persecution of Jews even during the Holocaust. Resurgent communal violence against Muslims in Sri Lanka, as in Myanmar, is today led by radical Buddhist clergy and laypeople. The Roma people of Europe and the African Americans may live in multi-faith democracies, but racism against them persists. These are all caste-like social oppressions often based in the origin myths of diverse peoples and faiths.

Among Savarna Hindus, a birth-based hierarchy has survived millennia into the modern world. It hinders the lives of millions of Dalits in India and South Asia and even into far-flung diaspora communities. It remains a leading cause of horrendous acts of violence including gang rape and lynching often for the smallest transgression from rigid norms of conduct. And while caste is more muted in urban spaces, discrimination in some of India's finest universities continues to torment low caste students. Despite reformist movements and affirmative action policies, the stigma of untouchability exists. Despite being outlawed in the Constitution of India, caste discrimination is deeply embedded in culture derived from ancient scripture. Poverty in India disproportionately affects low caste and tribal peoples.[1]

In countries with caste-bound poverty and inequality, social movements with religious leaders in the forefront have been an essential part of societal change for inclusive development. The Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu may have been the most recognizable and beloved figure internationally, yet many members

[1] India has one in three of the world's poor population, with 30 per cent of its people living below the international USD 1.90 per day poverty line. Incomes of the poorest are growing slower than average in India (World Bank 2016b). Poverty in India affects not only material well-being but also rights of the poor. Educational access has expanded dramatically for primary and secondary education and across castes and income groups (Marmolejo and Beteille 2017). Yet tertiary education as well as effective job training absorb a relatively small percentage of the 270 million Indians who are poor by World Bank standards. Twenty-seven per cent are poor in India's small villages, which also have the highest percentage of poverty in the country. While only 28 per cent of Indians belong to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (that is, those recognized by the government), they represent 43 per cent of the nation's poor. Forty-five per cent of India's poor are illiterate (World Bank 2016a). India's poverty profile is dismal, especially in caste-bound rural areas.

of the South African clergy risked their lives to oppose apartheid. Rabbi Ben Isaacson was a modern-day prophet who, as an early anti-apartheid leader, lived under death threat, police harassment, and then a long but vocal exile in Zimbabwe. For others, such opposition came slowly out of fear of retribution or in the case of the Dutch Reformed Church (the major church of the Afrikaner population), it required a soul-searching overhaul of their beliefs.

> Some of the major Christian churches gave their blessing to the system of apartheid. And many of its early proponents prided themselves in being Christians. Indeed, the system of apartheid was regarded as stemming from the mission of the church. ... Religious communities also suffered under apartheid, their activities were disrupted, their leaders persecuted, their land taken away. Churches, mosques, synagogues and temples—often divided amongst themselves—spawned many of apartheid's strongest foes, motivated by values and norms coming from their particular faith traditions. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998: vol. 4, 59)

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr, marched and went to jail with Christian and non-Christian faith leaders of the United States of America (USA). He carried in his pocket *The Prophets*, a book written by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Clergy and theologians have been among the leadership of almost all social movements for equality in the USA: from the abolitionists against slavery in the mid-1800s, to the anti-poverty Moral Revival Movement today led by the charismatic Rev. William J. Barber II. This author witnessed first-hand the rise of the most sweeping social justice movement in Latin American history, that of Liberation Theology, involving thousands of Roman Catholic priests, sisters, and lay leaders working with village-based Base Christian communities in the study of the Bible. Across many nations, often illiterate peasants and workers sat together to reflect on the social gospel of Jesus in the context of their inter-generational poverty, increasing landlessness and oppression, and in contrast to the hereditary privilege of landed elites.

This chapter raises the author's concerns for an apparent dearth of religious leadership against caste in India that would be necessary for a theology of liberation to address the causal relationship between caste and poverty.

We begin then with the creation of the essential metaphor underpinning theologies of liberation and that has been carried through

the ages and across cultures—from Moses of the Old Testament to the American slave spiritual 'Go Down Moses, Way Down in Egypt land, Tell all pharaohs to Let my people go'. For centuries, the Exodus story has been recited in Jewish homes for the annual Seder dinner commemorating Passover:

> This is the bread of affliction
> which our ancestors ate in the land of Mitzrayim.
> All who are hungry, let them enter and eat.
> All who are in need, let them come celebrate Pesah.
> … Now we are enslaved. Next year we will be free. (Rabinowicz 1982, 31)

Identification with the Oppressed: The Prophetic Tradition

The story of Exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land was a defining moment in the development of Western political history and thought.[2] Given the rule of oligarchy in the history of Latin America, the Argentine theologian Severino Croatto said, 'If we take the Exodus as our theme, we do so because in it Latin American theology finds a focal point … and an inexhaustible light' (Croatto 1981, iv). That light emanated from the covenant of Exodus and continued through Christianity, 'drawing its meaning and logic from the history of a two-stage alliance: the first between God and Israel, and the second between God and mankind at large' (Lessay 2007, 243). Political implications of covenantal theology seeded not only the Protestant Reformation but the erosion of feudalism itself. It seeded the stirrings of discontent among peoples indoctrinated to accept their fated lowly place. It shown a light on a path that, though haltingly, led Moses to climb the mountain and to bring a higher purpose to his people.

The story has taken on such life for it is more than an escape from slavery. It is a story of being lost far deeper than the boundaries of a desert. It is a story of a people without a guide, without a vision

[2] There is an extensive scholarship on the influence of Exodus and covenantal theology to political thought as well as social movements. For a few, see Boyarin (1992), Brett (2018), Coffey (2013), Berman (2008), Winnett (1949), Walzer (1985), and Lessay (2007).

of authentic freedom that can only be achieved by the breaking of the shackles of the mind. It is a story of a journey from dissolution to peoplehood, connected by the eternal values of obligation and responsibility—not in a graded hierarchy but in radical equality. This was the story very much in mind when Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar likened his own journey to that of Moses.

In the story of Exodus, God did not deliver the people to the Promised Land, for it is said they wandered the desert for 40 years. They engaged in a long and arduous march; a march far longer than reason dictates, into a wilderness far beyond physical geography. God gave them an opportunity for freedom and self-affirmation. Yet deliverance meant struggle, doubt, and despair. Before they could enter the land of Israel, they had to shed the conditioning of slavery, overcome the confines of oppression, and find within themselves the possibility of a new kind of community. That community was based on a code of conduct, commandments that discarded the master–slave dialectic of the pharaohs, and one that ushered into history a society based on mutual obligations superior to the laws of man and beast.

Moses began his own life journey unaware of his humble origins as a baby hidden from the pharaoh's genocide of all new-born Hebrew males. Found in a basket floating in the reeds of the Nile, the daughter of the pharaoh named him Moses, meaning one drawn from the water, and though she must have known he was a Hebrew, brought him up in the splendour of wealth and privilege. For many, that would have blinded them to the injustice inflicted on slaves. Yet Moses felt compassion for their misfortune.[3] Perhaps it was at the beginning nothing more than pity but the story attributes a growing consciousness to Moses, for over time he identified with these people thoroughly and bonded with their longing, as yet unformed but palpable in their anguish.

Freud, in *Moses and Monotheism*, contrasts the birth story of Moses with prior myths of the birth of heroes. 'Following Rank[4] we

[3] The biblical account in the Torah, the Jewish Bible, is that the Pharoah's daughter unbeknownst hires the boy's mother to nurse the child and that she cares for him at home for three months with his sister and brother. The implication is that they maintained some contact with Moses into adulthood.

[4] See Rank (2004). Otto Rank, original name Otto Rosenfeld, was an Austrian who extended psychoanalytic theory to the study of legend.

reconstruct ... an "average myth" that makes prominent the essential features of all these tales, and we get this formula. "The hero is the son of parents of the highest station, most often the son of a king." During his mother's pregnancy or earlier an oracle or a dream warns the father of the child's birth as containing grave danger for his safety' (1939, 16). The father 'orders the child to be killed or exposed to extreme danger; in most cases the babe is placed in a casket and delivered to the waves' only to be saved by animals or people of humble birth (Freud 1939, 16). These origin stories end with the son rediscovering his noble parents and, by taking vengeance on his father, attaining greatness.

> It is very different in the case of Moses. Here the first family—usually so distinguished—is modest enough. He is the child of Jewish Levites. But the second family—the humble one in which as a rule heroes are brought up—is replaced by the Royal house of Egypt; the princess brings him up as her son. This divergence from the usual type has struck many research workers as strange. (Freud 1939, 20)

Freud presents the case that the original form of the myth adhered to the usual pattern. Moses was an Egyptian whose father, the Pharaoh, indeed was told his infant son would someday lead the Jews to rebel against him. He was put adrift in the Nile and taken in by the Jewish people and brought up as their own. He argues that the myth could not have originated with the Egyptians for they surely had no reason to glorify Moses. But why would the Jews glorify their leader as an Egyptian? The birth story of Moses was flipped over time. 'What good is a legend to a people that makes their hero into an alien' (Freud 1939, 21).

Either way then, the first triumph of the Exodus story is not the plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians, nor even the fantastic parting of the Red Sea. The triumph was compassion and love for the stranger. For if Moses was an Egyptian brought up by Hebrews, the triumph of the Exodus was an affirmation of Jewish compassion and love for a discarded child. If Moses was a Hebrew brought up in Pharaoh's home, the triumph was that of a mind shedding the adornments and baggage of his upbringing to act upon the oppression of another.

The story of Exodus ultimately is about the covenant. More than a contract with God, it is a covenant among God's people to

expect justice, to give justice, and to live by that code of conduct in all relations within the community. The story of Exodus begins with the denial of justice and reaches its apex with the giving of the law. Thereafter, the story of liberation for the Jewish people becomes one for all humanity. We call that *tikkun olam*—to heal creation, to heal the world. This is done through acts of *mitzvah*—usually translated as charity; but it has a deeper meaning—to be close to God, not because you are commanded to do *mitzvah* but because its real meaning is to emulate God's goodness in everyday acts on earth.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar and the Search for a Religion of Liberation

The story of Exodus was not foreign to B.R. Ambedkar.[5]

> The story of the Jews told in the Old Testament is a moving tale. It has few parallels. ... The pathos inherent in the subjugation and ultimate emancipation of the Jews cannot, but affect the emotions of those who are as depressed as the Jews were in Egypt in the days of Pharaoh. But the heart of everyone who is working for emancipation of a depressed people is bound to go to Moses, the man who brought about the emancipation of the Jews. ... I confess that if anything sustains me in my efforts to emancipate the Depressed Classes, it is the story of Moses undertaking the thankless but noble task of leading Jews out of their captivity. (Ambedkar 2014: vol. 17, part 1, 342, 344)

[5] While a student at Columbia University in New York, Ambedkar studied with Jews and others who were deeply influenced by Judeo-Christian ideas of religion and social justice. In addition to John Dewey, Ambedkar studied with Edwin R.A. Seligman, the progressive economist whose German–Jewish family encountered anti-Semitism in the USA; James Shotwell of Quaker parents, whose 1913 book *The Religious Revolution of Today* spoke of the secularization of religion as the keynote of modern development and who was one of Ambedkar's mentors; James Harvey Robinson, the influential proponent of a new history incorporating perspectives on culture and social reform; the cultural anthropologist Alexander Goldenweiser, who became fascinated with Ambedkar's paper 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development' and arranged for its publication in *Indian Antiquary* (published as Ambedkar 1917).

On 14 August 1931, Ambedkar had his first meeting with Mahatma Gandhi. After speaking frankly about the Congress Party's insensitivity to the problem of untouchability, he said: 'Gandhiji, I have no homeland' (Ambedkar 2014: vol. 17, part 1, 53). Gandhi mildly rebukes him and says 'you have a homeland. ... I know you to be a patriot of sterling worth' (Ambedkar 2014: vol. 17, part 1, 53). And like Moses, Ambedkar pleads the case of his people: 'How can I call this land my homeland and this religion my own wherein we are treated worse than cats and dogs, wherein we cannot get water to drink? No self-respecting Untouchable worth the name will be proud of this land' (Ambedkar 2014: vol. 17, part 1, 53).

For Moses, the promised land could only be found through an awakening to a covenantal community. Ambedkar had a similar task to bring his people out from the subalternity of submissive consciousness to awareness of their full humanity. Only then would they know a homeland. The story of Exodus and the Laws of Moses stand in stark contrast to the laws of Manu and to the ages that followed and justified the social divisions of caste as a recurring reality in a cosmic scheme of birth and rebirth that only allows a corruption of justice as life-long punishment or reward.

Many religions in their histories have been both the oppressor and the oppressed. The early Christians were fed to the lions in Rome. Roman Catholic priests rode into South America with the Conquistadors that unleased centuries of genocide and slavery. And today Israeli Jewish settlers appropriate Palestinian land in a quasi-religious fervour. There are terrorists who kill in the name of Allah. Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka and Myanmar lead violent attacks on Muslims in the name of Buddha. There are Hindus in India who still enforce untouchability despite constitutional safeguards and laws against caste-based atrocities.

In Latin America, the hierarchy of a conservative, calcified Church reinforced the privileges of a feudal system of separation of classes in an ever-deepening divide between the powerful and the poor. With few exceptions and not until the early twentieth century did the Latin American Church begin a deep reflection on its own teachings.

These were reinforced by the series of Papal Encyclicals on poverty and human dignity. Pope John XXIII issued the *Pacem in Terris* in 1963. The encyclical opens with 'Peace on Earth—which man throughout the ages has so longed for and sought after—can never

be established, never guaranteed, except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order' (John XXIII 1963). Yet the divinely established order of the encyclical is not the division of men and women into qualities that determine their rights and obligations. In contrast, Pope John XXIII gives guidance to the faithful on safeguarding the personal freedom, dignity, and potential of all people on earth. He speaks of the inadequacy of institutions and customs and calls for the integration of faith and action based on love of all people.

This teaching continues today. In *Caritas in Veritate* of 2009, Pope Benedict XVI expounds on the obligations of charity and truth on which all Christians should base their social interactions.

> A Christianity of charity without truth would be more or less interchangeable with a pool of good sentiments, helpful for social cohesion, but of little relevance. In other words, there would no longer be any real place for God in the world. Without truth, charity is confined to a narrow field devoid of relations. It is excluded from the plans and processes of promoting human development of universal range, in dialogue between knowledge and praxis. (Benedict XVI 2009, Para. 4)

For Pope Benedict XVI, truth is not relative to one's culture or upbringing. It is the careful application of God's love in the receiving of grace which enables us to judge man's actions, and our own, against the common good for the covenantal community, a community based on universal good without exception.

Francis, the first Pope from Latin America and deeply steeped in the liberation theology of his continent, continues the teaching on love and truth in social relations. In 2013, Pope Francis issued the *Lumen Fidei.*

> [Paragraph] 27. The truth we seek, the truth that gives meaning to our journey through life, enlightens us whenever we are touched by love. One who loves realizes that love is an experience of truth, that it opens our eyes to see reality in a new way, in union with the beloved. In this sense, Saint Gregory the Great could write that '*amor ipse notitia est*', love is itself a kind of knowledge possessed of its own logic (*Homiliae in Evangelia*, II, 27, 4: PL 76, 1207.) It is a relational way of viewing the world, which then becomes a form of shared knowledge, vision through the eyes of another and a shared vision of all that exists.

> … [Paragraph] 46. Similarly important is the link between faith and the Decalogue. Faith, as we have said, takes the form of a journey, a path to be followed, which begins with an encounter with the living God. It is in the light of faith, of complete entrustment to the God who saves, that the Ten Commandments take on their deepest truth, as seen in the words which introduce them: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt' (*Ex* 20:2). The Decalogue is not a set of negative commands, but concrete directions for emerging from the desert of the selfish and self-enclosed ego in order to enter into dialogue with God, to be embraced by his mercy and then to bring that mercy to others. (Francis 2013)

The encyclicals throughout the ages show an evolution of thought on theological and social issues. They were opportunities for the Church to remain relevant, to warn society when it moved in directions contrary to the core teachings, and to persuade and at times cajole recalcitrant Cardinals and give guidance all the way down to parish priests, nuns, and monks.

Even before the 1968 Medellin Conference of Bishops issued the revolutionary break between the Latin American Church and the landed oligarchs, a movement of priests and sisters bolstered by Latin American theologians called for solidarity with the outcastes of their societies (CELAM 1973, 29).

They sought to bring the social gospel of Jesus back into the Church and to confront the stark poverty and injustice sustained by oppression of the masses. They sought to counter the dispossession of the *campesino* from their lands and sought to empower rural leadership for social change. Some of the many thousands of these Base Christian communities in Latin America preferred a low profile by meeting in village homes to study the social gospel. Others were more assertive. Figure 1.1 shows the church in Dominican Republic in the 1970s of Father Lou Quinn of the Scarboro Fathers from Canada who painted murals on the facade identifying Jesus with the quest for liberation of his impoverished parishioners. One of the murals proclaims:

> So Jesus was born
> Like this poor Dominican
> Child from the countryside
> To teach us
> To free us from misery

The Catholic theologians of social liberation had a different challenge than the reformers of Hinduism. First, they believed

Figure 1.1 The Iglesia Nuestra Señora De La Altagracia, in San José de Ocoa, Dominican Republic, 1973.

Source: Author.

fervently that the teachings of Jesus were consistent with the values of Exodus and the teachings of the Torah, the Jewish Bible. There were several versions of the Old Testament at the time of Jesus and an oral tradition that recited the scriptures. Liberation theologians believed that Jesus followed in the tradition of Jewish prophets with compassion for the poor and the hungry and righteous disdain for an uncaring rich.

Second, Jesus' own words were definitive about human obligation. He spoke to his disciples at the Last Supper saying:

> For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. (Bible 1853, Matthew 25: 34–40)

Then the disciples answered,

> Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or

> naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (Bible 1853, Matthew 25: 34–40)

For a theology of liberation, this is the authentic meaning of the Eucharist. It is more than a ritual for the everyday person who comes to take the sacrament of bread and wine to embrace the presence of Jesus. For Jesus called the bread he lifted at the Last Supper the bread of affliction harking back knowingly to the Exodus when the slaves hurriedly baked unleavened bread for their journey to liberation. The sacrament is a reminder of sacrifice and social justice. *As you did it for the least of these my brethren you did to me.*

Hindu reformers have had a harder challenge. The foundational scriptures that shaped Hindu culture and society remain an impediment. Manu described the structure of Hindu society through four varnas (social classes) descending from Brahmin (as priests and academics), Kshatriya (as warriors and administrators), Vaishya (as merchants and landowners), and Sudra (as commoners, peasants, and servants). The very bottom of the social pyramid, below the lowest caste, were Untouchables who traditionally performed occupations such as removal of carcasses, as in Figure 1.2, or manual scavenging. Thousands of years into the twenty-first century and despite being outlawed under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, the practice still exists.

> Manual scavenging has been called the worst surviving symbol of untouchability. The International Labour Organisation defines it as the removal of human excreta from public streets and dry latrines, and cleaning septic tanks, sewers and gutters. … The people engaged in carrying out this act are usually from the lower castes: namely, the Dalits. The Supreme Court found in 2014 that there were over 9.6 million dry latrines in India which required manual emptying. … Deaths arising from manual scavenging are commonplace in India, and there has been press attention turned to the scavengers' dangerous conditions of work in the National Capital. (Tripathi 2017)

Notable efforts at reforms within Indian history have inspired some to believe in their possibility today. Yet Mark Juergensmeyer

PROOF

Figure 1.2 *Untouchable with Dead Cow-II* by Savi Sawarkar, depicting the responsibility assigned to Untouchables to clear away animal carcasses.

Source: Used by the permission of the artist.

cautions us for the difficulties ahead that need to be considered. He writes of the complexity of religious identity in India seen even among the Punjabi sweepers in Delhi.

> As one might expect, they felt that their poverty was to blame for their limitations—that and the social stigma of untouchability that linger still, despite the government's concerted efforts at reform. But then, with a surprising vehemence, they turned to religion. Because the concept of untouchability is a religious one, they explained, a

> change in religious concepts would have to accompany economic and social progress. 'Besides,' they continued, 'Hinduism is not ours. It is the religion of the rich people and the upper castes.' (Juergensmeyer 2009, 1)

Asking what their own religion was, a cacophony of responses included other religions, caste names, occupations, and family involvement in the Ad Dharm religious movement of the Punjab. Juergensmeyer tested his Western notion against the lived experience of the people and found that religious identity and cultural affiliations are more complex in the Indian context. (Juergensmeyer 2009, 2).

This complexity is compounded by the overwhelming dominance of a religious culture derived from Hinduism. As the street sweepers tried, one can remove oneself from Hinduism, but the age-old attitudes of caste still affect one's life. Even in a Western nation, cultural legacies are hard to change. Even after 250 years of slavery in the USA, a constitutional amendment, another 100 years of discriminatory laws in many southern states, federal civil rights acts, and Supreme Court decisions overturning laws of separation of races, racism exists still.

Complicating reform in India, Louis Dumont notes, 'Hygiene is often invoked to justify ideas about impurity. In reality, even though the notion may be found to contain hygienic associations, these cannot account for it, as it is a religious notion' (Dumont 1980, 47).

Attempting to reform religious notions gets at the heart of the difficulty faced by Hindu social reformers. We turn our attention briefly to a few reforms that could be described as early formulations of liberation theology. However, despite being brave and inspired, they have not transformed the larger culture.

Jainism broke away from Hinduism's structure of caste and Brahmin priesthood. Jainism dates back well before the mid-sixth century BCE when Prince Vardhamana of the Kshatriya caste left his palace for ascetic life. Upon attaining enlightenment, he was called Mahavira (great hero); he codified for his age the ancient vows of Jainism. The highest of these was *ahimsa*, a creed of nonviolence that for the Jain extended toward all the world's living beings. Jainism is today small with somewhat over four million in India.

The Ad Dharm in the Punjab of the 1920s was an early Dalit assertion movement to create a religious identity independent of

Hinduism. The movement aimed to nurture a new consciousness as a people seeking to free themselves from social domination through cultural transformation, spiritual regeneration, and political assertion (Ram 2004, 329–49).

Jyotiba Phule, from a low-caste background, felt the injustice of caste discrimination in 1848 when he was accused by his friend's parents of crossing caste boundaries to attend his friend's wedding. His hurt brought into focus his determination to reform religious cultural attitudes. Phule permitted Untouchables to use bath tanks and drink water from his wells and is remembered today for leading a movement for empowerment of low castes and schooling for girls. When the fear of retribution gripped local teachers, Phule's own wife became the first female teacher in India. Their compassion extended to upper-caste widows and opened a school for them to counter the dismal custom of widows living alone and descending into poverty.

Earlier, Guru Nanak founded the Sikh faith towards the end of the fifteenth century, distinct from Hinduism, that believed in the worship of one creator, equality of all people, and life-long striving for social justice. Though Guru Gobind Singh, in 1699, abolished caste inequality in the community of faith, debate over caste still surfaces. One view is that castes exist but all castes are equal, while a second view is that caste should not exist at all. Despite this, marriages are often arranged between members of the same caste grouping with mobility mostly within sub-castes. Inter-caste marriages, particularly within the middle castes, are increasingly occurring among higher educated and professional Sikhs.

The Sikh worship service concludes with the sharing of the *karah prasad*, a warm sweet dough, which, among many interpretations, demonstrates equality of all and the rejection of caste. People of all faiths and classes are welcome to enter the 'gurdwara', a Punjabi word meaning the residence of the Guru. Free food is served here, kept purposefully simple and vegetarian so that people of all social classes and dietary customs share together. The four doors to the gurdwara are said to represent peace, livelihood, learning, and grace, and symbolically welcome people from the four corners of the earth and from the four varnas.

Of interest too is the founding of the Lingayat faith in twelfth-century Karnataka by social reformer Basavanna. Lingayat emerged within the Bhakti movements that 'swept across South India from the eighth century CE onwards. The Bhakti tradition was a social

reform movement that developed around Hindu gods and goddesses but split away from the Hindu fold by offering a path to spirituality regardless of their caste and creed' (Roychowdhury 2018). Today, Lingayats continue to protest against Hindu notions of caste.

In the vast landscape of Indian spiritual movements, one that drew this author's attention in the late 1960s was that of Sri Aurobindo. Born in Kolkata in 1872 and educated at Cambridge, he was imprisoned by the British for a year after he started the 'Go Home British' movement. His vision evolved to the need for a spiritual awakening of India. He developed the method of Integral Yoga to enable the human mind to achieve a higher consciousness and an integration into the unfolding of a universal spirituality that otherwise would take many births to achieve. A French admirer of his, Mirra Alfassa, took his philosophy to create Auroville in 1968, a utopian community near Pondicherry where the community would be free of government, religion, and social distinctions including caste. Like nineteenth-century utopian communities in the USA, Auroville could not sustain its vision as a place of spiritual growth unimpeded by the exigencies of the larger society. At one time the most famed countercultural experiment in the world, Auroville remains more a remnant of its ambition than a burgeoning spiritual hub for a new India and a new world.

These are very few efforts at reforming and envisioning a more egalitarian India. However inspiring they may be, no religious or spiritual awakening has occurred on the scale necessary to finally rid India of its original sin. Ambedkar's social movement in the first half of the twentieth century remains the most enduring of these efforts. His movement was benefited by and contributed to the emerging norms of human rights throughout the world and their articulation in high-level political forums such as the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Nevertheless, his work was met with the resistance of an entrenched culture; and while the movement he led hoped beyond hope for a reformation of Hinduism, he called for its demise. Ambedkar used the tactics of radical social movements to challenge political and Hindu leaders to annihilate the very concept of caste as India approached independence and democracy. And there is no figure in modern Indian history who did more to create a covenantal community among the oppressed.

For Dr Ambedkar, a transformation was needed within the Hindu worldview, or Hinduism risked alienation from modern society. Yet it remains the dominant culture of India and has morphed into a political ideology. To tame it in the name of freedom requires a personal and social transformation of Wagnerian proportions, affecting not only the oppressed but the oppressor in a quest for a common humanity. Both Ambedkar and the Latin American theologians of liberation believed that their societies exhibited a social pathology. That pathology was found not only in the obscene attitudes of the oppressor but was also seen among the poor in whom the weight of oppression had created a veil of piousness. The phase of the anti-caste movement today called Dalit assertion is a dramatic result of Ambedkar's mission, for it challenges the piousness and humility forced upon and conditioned by the overwhelming pressure of subaltern dependency within a dominant culture that dehumanizes and subjugates.

Secondly, they believed that religions must confront their past in order to heal society. Peruvian theologian Fr Gustavo Gutierrez, O.P., often called the father of liberation theology, said: 'The denunciation of injustice implies the rejection of the use of Christianity to legitimize the established order' (Gutiérrez 1973, 69).

> But the poor person does not exist as an inescapable fact of destiny. His or her existence is not politically neutral, and it is not ethically innocent. The poor are a by-product of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible. They are marginalized by our social and cultural world. They are the oppressed, exploited proletariat, robbed of the fruit of their labor and despoiled of their humanity. Hence the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order. (Gutiérrez 1983, 44)

The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, the major church of the Afrikaner people, taught for many years the biblical justification of racial apartheid. As the anti-apartheid movement gained strength, it prompted their religious leaders to look inward, to search their souls and their understanding of their God—and they issued a deeply reflective apology and embraced the liberation of all South Africans.

Pope John Paul II, as the leader of Roman Catholics, asked forgiveness for the sins and crimes committed in the name of his faith

with special reference to 'the persecutions of Protestants, for the crimes of the Crusaders; he has asked forgiveness for the abuses of Europe's colonial-era proselytizing around the world; he has voiced regret at the church's repression of Galileo' (Bohlen 1997). The Pope was the first to visit a synagogue and the Catholic bishops of Germany, Poland, Hungary, and France have apologized for the failure of their churches to oppose the Holocaust (Bohlen 1997).

To find the basis for a theology of liberation within the scriptural foundations and subsequent evolution of Hinduism, a respected leadership would have to emerge to speak directly to the destructive nature of caste and varna. Hinduism is highly decentralized and there is no forum analogous to the Roman Catholic Vatican Councils or the regional Conference of Bishops. Yet the movement for liberation theology in Latin American began with scholars and activist priests and sisters and the nurturing of many thousands of Base Christian communities to study the social gospel of Jesus. Reform in the training of Hindu priests, monks, and other religious vocations would be needed to engage high- and low-caste communities in a similar effort of reflection and spiritual awakening to authentic social justice.

Ambedkar did not believe it would ever happen. Shortly before he died, he converted to Buddhism. Years before, Gandhi was deeply troubled by Ambedkar's talk of conversion, but he poses for us the dilemma faced in India even today. In articles in *Harijan*[6] Gandhi himself voiced the essential challenge to Hindu belief.

> No Hindu who prizes his faith above life itself can afford to underrate the importance of this indictment. Dr. Ambedkar is not alone in his disgust. He is the most uncompromising exponent and one of the ablest among them. He is certainly the most irreconcilable among them. Thank God, in the front rank of the leaders, he is singularly alone and as yet but a representative of a very small minority. But what he says is voiced with more or less vehemence by many leaders belonging to the depressed classes. Only the latter, for instance, Rao Bahadur, M.C. Rajah and Dewan Bahadur Srinivasan, not only do not threaten to give up Hinduism but find enough warmth in it to

[6] *Harijan* (children of God) is the name Gandhi gave to the Untouchables. He changed the name of his newspaper from *Young India* to *Harijan* to emphasize the importance of reducing the stigma attached to untouchability. Many Untouchables rejected the name as a superficial gesture.

> compensate for the shameful persecution to which the vast mass of Harijans [see Figure 1.2] are exposed. (Gandhi 1936, 82)

Gandhi expresses his objection to caste oppression but makes a distinction between caste and varna. The concept of varna comes first from a hymn in the Rig Veda, the oldest of the known Hindu sacred books. The four social classes were presented in this hymn.

'Caste has nothing to do with religion,' Gandhi asserted. 'It is custom whose origin I do not know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth.' Varna and Ashrama (the four stages of life from student to householder, and from retired to renunciate)

> are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of Varna teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It necessarily has reference to calling that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. (Gandhi 1936, 83)

In words that seem to impair more universal notions of democratic ideals, Gandhi puts a gloss on varna that today alienates those in pursuit of social justice.

> The callings of a Brahmin—spiritual leader—and a scavenger are equal, and their due performance carries equal merit before God and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man. Both were entitled to their livelihood and no more. Indeed one traces even now in the villages the faint lines of this healthy operation of the law. Living in Segaon with its population of 600, I do not find disparity between the earnings of different tradesmen including Brahmins. … Arrogation of a superior status by and of the Varna over another is a denial of the law. And there is nothing in the law of Varna to warrant a belief in untouchability. (Gandhi 1936, 83)

A noisy debate still exists about the origin and evolution of caste in Hindu philosophy and belief. The prevailing view of many Dalit activists is that caste was from its origins a rigid and unjust social division. If so, this makes the possibility of reformation enormously harder. This is unlike the Protestant reformation in Europe which rebelled against perceived corruption in the teachings of

the Catholic Church but where Martin Luther held fast to the origins of Christianity. Other views of caste in antiquity are scorned partly for the peril that they may give a measure of legitimacy to a hated system of discrimination in modern times. Yet is it possible for common cause to be found with those who believe that caste originally was not birth-based but merely occupational vocations handed down from one generation to another and that caste as birth-based reflections of *sanchita karma*, the sum of all good and bad works in prior lives, came into Hinduism later.

One such proponent of this view is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), well known in America as the Hare Krishna movement whose adherents, many of them non-Indian, are often seen chanting in parks and airports. ISKCON is an outgrowth of a monotheistic tradition within Hindu culture and is representative of the older Bhakti tradition of devotion to a personal deity. In a statement on caste-based discrimination,[7] ISKCON condemns a birth-based caste system and its concomitant discrimination. Referring to ISKCON's founder, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the statement presents their opposition.

> 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. (HAF n.d.)

Yet like Gandhi's 'ancestral calling', ISKCON defends varna as the social divisions of society based on inner qualities that classify a person's aptitude and hence occupations. In an interview

[7] Oddly, this statement appears only on the Hindu American Foundation website and not on any of the ISKCON's own websites at the when this chapter was written.

with *Bhavan's Journal* in 1976, Prabhupada answers the question whether the fundamental values of the Hindu religion would be in any way affected by the eradication of the caste system?

> 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. (HAF n.d.)

One can see the difficulty of incorporating ISKCON into a broader mobilization of religious leadership against caste. But could they still be a willing ally in a broad enough anti-caste movement?

> 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. (HAF n.d.)

The ambiguities inherent in this view are daunting and would make for uncomfortable coalition against caste.[8]

[8] ISKCON is the prime mover in the Akshaya Patra Foundation which feeds millions of school children in India. An independent evaluation of Akshaya Patra's mid-day meal programme in Lucknow in 2018, conducted

The most formidable intellectual and historian of Hinduism, and perhaps the most disappointing, was Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a Brahmin historian of Indian philosophy and India's first vice president and later president. That Hinduism has survived longer than other cults and creeds, and therefore should be preserved, according to Radhakrishnan, is no solace to Ambedkar. In his reply to Radhakrishnan, Ambedkar offers the moral argument that the question is not whether a community lives or dies but on what plane it lives: 'the gulf between merely living and living worthily' (Ambedkar 2014: vol. 17, part 2, 19).

In his lectures of 1942, published under the title 'Religion and Society', Radhakrishnan defends the importance of world religions. 'Every civilisation is the expression of a religion, for religion signifies faith in absolute values and a way of life to realise them' (Radhakrishnan 1947, 21).

In a hopeful passage, he said: 'The subject I have chosen is social reconstruction in the light of religious ideals' (Radhakrishnan 1947, 9).

> Human roots go deeper than the fibres of race and nationality. … We all have the same mental processes, the same emotional reactions, the same basic impulses and the same longings and aspirations. … One of the recognized tests of an advance in civilization is the gradual extension of the boundaries of the group. Darwin would marvel at the talk of racial purity, the exaltation of one breed of men as the chosen favourites of the gods. (Radhakrishnan 1947, 13–14)
>
> We should not do to others what will be offensive to us. This is dharma in essence; other behaviour is selfish desire. The Hindu dharma gives us a programme of rules and regulations and permits their constant change. The rules of dharma are the mortal flesh of immortal ideas, and so are mutable. (Radhakrishnan 1947, 108)

It is this mutability that is the essence of the debate around ancient Hindu social structures and their friction with norms of human rights and democracy. In his classic two-volume study *Indian Philosophy*, Radhakrishnan presents caste as having mutated over the ages from its origins as a form of racial coexistence.

> The Purusa Sukta has the first reference to the division of Hindu society into the four classes. To understand the natural way in which

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by this author's research for the Center for Global Development and Sustainability, observed no discrimination in the provision of meals.

> this institution arose, we must remember that the Aryan conquerors were divided by differences of blood and racial ancestry from the conquered tribes of India. The original Aryans all belonged to one class, every one being priest and soldier, trader and tiller of the soil. There was no privileged order of priests. (Radhakrishnan 1929, 111)

'In the period of the hymns, professions were not restricted to particular castes. Referring to the diversity of men's tastes, one verse says: "I am a poet, my father is a doctor, my mother a grinder of corn"' (Radhakrishnan 1929, 112). And again the following view is presented:

> The system of caste is in reality neither Aryan nor Dravidian, but was introduced to meet the needs of the time when the different racial types had to live together in amity. It was then the salvation of the country, whatever its present tendency may be. The only way of conserving the culture of a race which ran the great risk of being absorbed by the superstitions of the large numbers of native inhabitants was to pin down rigidly by iron bonds the existing differences of culture and race. Unfortunately this device to prevent the social organisation from decay and death ultimately prevented it even from growing. The barriers did not show any signs of weakening when the tide of progress demanded it. While they contributed to the preservation of the social order they did not help the advancement of the nation as a whole, but this gives us no right to condemn the institution of caste as it was originally introduced. Only caste made it possible for a number of races to live together side by side without fighting each other. India solved peaceably the inter-racial problem which other people did by a decree of death. (Radhakrishnan 1929, 112–13)

Radhakrishnan was influenced by the work of Thomas William Rhys Davids on the hardening of classes into castes.

> It is most probable that this momentous step followed upon and was chiefly due to the previous establishment of a similar hard and fast line preventing any one belonging to the non-Aryan tribes from intermarrying with an Aryan family or being incorporated into the Aryan race. It was the hereditary disability the Aryans had succeeded in imposing upon the races they despised, which, reacting within their own circle and strengthened by the very intolerance that gave it birth, has borne such bitter fruit through many centuries. (Davids 1881, 23)

Davids was a British scholar of the Pali language and a civil servant posted in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). In his Hibbert Lectures of

1881, he continues the narrative that there is no mention of there is no mention of caste in the oldest hymns of the Vedas.

> But the bitter contempt of the Aryans for foreign tribes, their domineering and intolerant spirit, their strong antipathies of race and of religion, are in harmony with the special features of caste as afterwards established. … It is accordingly only in some of the latest Vedic hymns that we find the first mention of those four classes … to which all the later castes have been subsequently traced back. … It seems certain that when the Brahmanas were first composed the barrier between all the higher classes had become impassable, or, in other words, that these classes had been hardened into castes. (Davids 1881, 22–3)

Despite his view of the origins of caste, Radhakrishnan grapples with the balance of continuity and change. 'Nothing is more subversive to society as a blind adherence to outworn forms and obsolete habits which survive by mere inertia' (Radhakrishnan 1947, 113).

Writing in 1947 amidst monumental changes occurring in India—the partition that created Pakistan, the appointment of a drafting committee for a new constitution, Dalit agitation for human rights, and within sight of independence from colonial rule—Radhakrishnan reflects on the promise and challenges of the new India to be a democratic and secular State.

> If we are wedded overmuch to the rules of the past, if the living faith of the dead becomes the dead faith of the living, the civilisation will die. We must make rational changes. If an organism loses the strength to excrete its own waste, it perishes. … We cannot restore the practices of the Vedic period, for that would be to deny the dialectic of history. … In the history of every community a time comes when radical changes in the social order are obligatory, if the community is to exist as a living force, and continue to progress. … We must purge society of man-made inequalities and injustices and provide, for all, equality of opportunity for personal well-being and development. Today we will be acting in the spirit of the Hindu tradition if those well-versed in our culture (bahusrutah), and keen on preserving its spirit, bring about radical changes in our social organisation. In India we cannot wipe the slate clean, and write a new gospel on a virgin surface. … We have changed so often in the past that a mere change does not disturb the spirit of the religion. Some of our institutions have become formidable

> obstacles to social justice and economic well-being, and we must strive to remove these obstacles, fight the forces which maintain superstition, and transform the mind of the people. (Radhakrishnan 1947, 118–20)

Perry Anderson takes a dim view of Indian high-caste intellectuals who, despite philosophical opposition to caste, do not walk the muddy path to change Hindu culture. The failure he says lies 'in the tension of the relationship of so many Indian intellectuals to the traditional faith surrounding them. … On the whole, only *dalit* activists have broken ranks' (Anderson 2013, 172).[9]

Yet, I am surprised. I read Radhakrishnan when I was a young philosophy student and imagined him in the vanguard of Hindu reformation. However, his legacy is deeply marred by his standing on the sidelines of social agitation. Christopher Queen writes that Braj Rajan Mani enjoys mentioning that in 1927, while Ambedkar and his followers were being beaten by police for attempting to sip water at the public tank in Mahad, Professor Radhakrishnan was 'waxing eloquent on the Hindu view of life, vindicating and glorifying the caste system at Oxford' (Mani 2005, 356). I remember from those days reading the almost off-hand remark made by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in critique of Ludwig Feuerbach: 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world differently, the point is, to *change* it' (Marx 1947, 199).

Of the reformers of Brahmanism, Buddhism is seen today as the most promising for a theology of liberation for India. Yet, the chances of a massive revival of Buddhism in India seem fanciful. Ambedkar was prescient in creating a new space outside Hinduism for the future anti-caste leaders. Within Hinduism they would remain Untouchable by the larger culture. By conversion to Buddhism, and with 200,000 Untouchables taking the vows with him in a public square, Ambedkar was most visibly the Moses of his people. In the space of 22 vows echoed

[9] E.V. Ramasamy (known as Periyar), the 'great Tamil iconoclast', was an exception to Anderson. A rationalist, and someone against religion, Periyar maintained a militant stand against caste throughout his life, led protests, left the Congress party to join the Justice Party in Tamil Nadu, and started the Self-Respect Movement. Earlier he had quarreled with Gandhi over separate dining for Brahmin and non-Brahmin students at Gurukkulam, a Congress-sponsored school.

by his people, he created that covenantal community as their spiritual homeland.[10]

Born in the sixth century BCE at what is today the frontier of India and Nepal, Buddha may not have led an overt social movement. Yet, his teachings implicitly created the potential for a new social landscape. As we have seen, he was not alone in admitting those of all caste backgrounds into a religious order.

> If any one speaks of a democratic element in Buddhism, he must bear in mind that the conception of any reformation of an ideal earthly kingdom, of a religious Utopia, was quite foreign to this fraternity. There was nothing resembling a social upheaval in India. ... Caste has no value for him, for everything earthly has ceased to affect his interests. (Oldenbert 1882, 153–4)

Nevertheless, renunciation of man's social order and an affirmation of an ascetic brotherhood that transcended the taboos of society would in itself have been a stunning psychological liberation for the postulants, especially as most of the early adherents were from high castes. Moreover,

> The exact extent of the Buddhist protest may be a matter of debate but it would be running counter to the entire historical perspective if the protestant character of the Buddhistic reformation movement is sought to be denied by interpreting Buddha as a democratizer of Upanisadic idealism. It is true that Buddha did not organize a crusade for the liquidation of the iniquities of the caste oppression and slavery but there can be no denial of the fact that he prepared the foundations of a more liberal and critical approach in matters of

[10] Doniger gives the figure at 5 million Dalits who converted with Ambedkar in 1956. Another 50,000 converted to Buddhism in 2001. In 2006, on the 50th anniversary of Ambedkar's conversion, large numbers of Dalits began converting again. 'As a result, the Hindu Nationalist Party reclassified Buddhism and Jainism as branches of the Hindu religion, to prevent the mass conversions of the Dalits from eroding the political fabric, and several states ... introduced laws' requiring State permission for conversion. Thousands of protesters burned the new laws and in November of 2006 the government banned a mass conversion rally in Nagpur that aimed to convert one million Dalits. 'Despite the ban and the barricades, thousands of Dalits from across India gathered at the Ambedkar Bhawan' (Doniger 2009, 634–5).

> metaphysics and sociology. … In the context of Indian society with its deep roots in hoary tradition his words of social wisdom did have momentous value. (Varma 1973, 355)

Buddha was confronted with the problem of caste in both social and religious dimensions and 'condemns the traditional *Varna* system … and controverts the claims of Brahamanical superiority' (Varma 1973, 356).

Dr Ambedkar wrote in the Prologue of *Annihilation of Caste* that 'it is not possible to break Caste without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the Caste system, is founded' (Ambedkar 2014: vol. 1, 27). I have reviewed but a few of the varieties of religious experience in India that have attempted to modify or reject early Hindu notions of caste and varnas and have drawn a stark contrast with the religiously inspired grassroots movement in Latin America that brought Christian teachings back to its origins. The caste system continues to corrode the most sacred endeavour of all—the humanization of all facets of modern society and economy and of all people without distinction. This was the core belief in the revolutionary pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970) to raise a consciousness among the oppressed to reject a state of mind that God created the never-ending poverty of their lives.

For Ambedkar, humanization was an act of conversion to Buddhism and for his followers to reject a state of mind. Ambedkar stands between Buddha and Moses, in this author's view. One represents the teachings of the Metta Sutta, the Buddhist practice of radiating kindness to all sentient beings without distinction; the other represents the giving of the law for a new and just social order. Ambedkar, like Moses, did not reach the promised land. Yet the values of the Exodus are alive in the Ambedkarite movement, insisting on the humanization of the oppressed, and through the building of a new form of a covenantal and Buddhist community in a secular and democratic India.

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EXHIBIT 2

RNS Religion News Service

News

Brandeis University stands by caste-bias ban despite pushback from Hindu activists

A year-old ban against caste bias, says the Hindu American Foundation, is a 'deeply problematic' remedy for a largely nonexistent problem.

A sign marks the entrance of Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, on Aug. 7, 2018. Photo by Kenneth C. Zirkel/Creative Commons

October 19, 2020

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald

(RNS) — Last December, when Brandeis University announced a first-of-its-kind policy banning discrimination based on caste, administrators hoped other institutions would follow suit and adopt similar policies of their own.

But nearly a year later, the policy has not caught on. Instead, it's drawing fire from Hindus who say it's fraught with anti-Hindu bias along with risk of inept and unfair enforcement.

Though caste-based discrimination goes largely unnoticed in Western societies, South Asian immigrants of low- and sub-caste status say they routinely encounter it, according to Dalit activists. Dalits, or "untouchables," rank lowest in Hinduism's caste system.

Suraj Yengde, a Dalit scholar at Harvard University and author of "Caste Matters," said he was twice assaulted as a graduate student in Birmingham, England, in caste-bias attacks by fellow Indian students. But when he reported it to police, they didn't grasp the severity.

"They just couldn't understand it," Yengde said. "If there had been legislation that said 'you cannot exercise caste-based discrimination,' I would have gone and told them that this was basically a hate-filled crime."

People of high caste, such as Hinduism's Brahmins and Kshatriyas, have traditionally enjoyed power and privilege in Indian society. Those of low caste have sometimes left Hinduism for other religions, where they hope to find more promising status and treatment, according to Yengde, who comes from a Buddhist family.

Yengde applauds Brandeis for blazing a trail with its discrimination policy, which already prohibited prejudicial treatment based on race, gender identity and sexual orientation, among other categories. Allegations of bullying or denying opportunities based on caste are now to be referred to Brandeis' Office of Equal Opportunity and could lead to disciplinary action. The ban applies to students, faculty and staff.

"We are going to raise the issue of caste, as we've raised other forms of nondiscrimination, to educate the community about the institution's position," said Mark Brimhall-Vargas, chief diversity officer at the school of 5,500 students in Waltham, Massachusetts, earlier this year. "We want to normalize the ability of people to come forward and press their complaints."

Previously, the school has hosted conferences calling out caste-based social dynamics. A year ago, Brandeis launched a new academic journal, Caste: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion.

But the Hindu American Foundation, a Washington, D.C., advocacy group, is pushing back against what it sees as a "deeply problematic" policy aimed at remedying a largely nonexistent problem.

"In my work with thousands of Hindus and hundreds of Hindu communities throughout the U.S. (predominantly South Asian), caste identity is largely irrelevant in their day to day lives and interactions with one another," said HAF Executive Director Suhag Shukla in an email. Most U.S.-born, second-generation Hindus wouldn't even know how to identify someone's caste, she said.

Because caste is complex and hidden from the naked eye, Shukla said, predominantly white Judeo-Christian administrators with little understanding of its dynamics will be hard pressed to recognize and adjudicate allegations of caste-based discrimination.

"How will they know what questions to ask to ensure that a complaint perceived as caste discrimination is not the result of something else?" Shukla said. "How will those accused of caste discrimination be guaranteed fairness and due process?"

Brandeis investigators will have difficulty ensuring fairness, she suggested.

"Even if Brandeis employs South Asians to assist in the implementation of the policy, or consults with them, the politics of caste and how it is presented by some activist circles is fraught with problems, including deep-seated bigotry," Shukla said.

But the Brandeis administration insists the accused can and will be treated fairly. Allegations of caste bias will be treated no differently than race discrimination, according to Brimhall-Vargas.

"The process is the same," he said. "The only thing that was changed was we added an identity to our non-discrimination policy. So it would be processed in the exact same way that any other form of discrimination would be addressed."

To what degree caste-based discrimination occurs in America is unknown. Anecdotally, those of low caste say it's common enough to warrant institutional policies like the one at Brandeis, if only to ensure that ideas about caste don't take hold in the United States.

A former engineering student at a nearby school, requesting anonymity for fear of retribution, told Religion News Service that his college roommates excluded him from future housing when they learned of his low-caste status.

At Brandeis, the fight against discrimination is woven into the school's identity. Its founders established the school in 1948 at a time when Jews were routinely excluded from top-tier institutions of higher education. The new policy simply builds on that tradition of expanding opportunity, according to Brimhall-Vargas.

As a practical matter, however, Brandeis isn't facing a scourge of caste-based discrimination. The school has in past years learned of social ostracism on campus, but serious infractions such as denying someone a job on the basis of caste are unknown, Brimhall-Vargas said.

"We want to be sure that we head that off before that ever would become a problem," Brimhall-Vargas said.

Meanwhile, Shukla said her organization's members are concerned that they and their faith are being unfairly tarred with the taint of discriminatory practices.

According to HAF, caste categories evolved as a result of European contact and became a catch-all for classifying Hindus; the categories are also a result of colonial racism and religious bigotry, among other factors. Though commonly associated with

Hinduism, caste is such a prevalent concept in Indian society that Sikhs, Muslims and Christians are reported to practice versions of it.

“Caste is predominantly conflated with Hindus and Hindu teachings,” Shukla said in her email. Trying to enforce a ban on caste-based discrimination runs the risk of “singling out, targeting, and inadvertently discriminating against Hindu students and faculty … as presumed perpetrators,” Shukla said.

“Our policy applies non-discrimination protection to people of any caste category,” said Brimhall-Vargas in an email. “It does not contain an a priori assumption that someone bears caste animus based on religious identity alone.”

HAF says it condemns all forms of caste-based discrimination. However, caste is not an inherently discriminatory concept, according to Shukla.

With caste categorization, she said, “to the extent that different group identities gave communities a means to bring out positive qualities, such as compassion, nurture, service and unity, it had value. To the extent it served to limit, divide, discriminate, or harm others, it didn’t. The same holds true today of any community we belong to or create.”

Eradicating social discrimination needs to happen, she said, as an outgrowth of Hindu teachings. “Social reform has come and should continue to come from the community,” she said.