

The Conscience of a Realist

India's ancient caste system prevents it from becoming a modern power

By Joseph Cotto, Communities Digital News

Commentary Politics May 6, 2014



India's caste system

OCALA, Fla., May 6, 2014 — India is an emerging power often overlooked by America. It is the former British colony which has surged to prominence not so much for cheap manufacturing as for information technology. From product support centers to software development, American corporations have seen the promise of India's high-aptitude yet low-paid workforce.

Such an almost unbelievable combination has led no small number to conclude that India will someday leave America in the dust. While class-transcendent social mobility may have made this the case in China, India plays by its own age-old set of rules.

These rules have provided a sense of stability over the years, but have proven incompatible with contemporary Western values. How this conflict is sorted out during the years ahead will determine India's ultimate place in the global community.

READ ALSO: Standing against illegal immigration isn't 'conservative,' it's American

At the heart of this conflict is the caste system; a traditional cornerstone of India's dominant Hinduism. Simply put, the caste structure calls for rigid separation between social classes. The concept of laws applying equally to all people or broad-based possibilities for economic prosperity are laughingstocks if mentioned at all.

Fortunately, some Indians are trying to change this setup. One of them is Yogesh Varhade, the longtime president of the Ambedkar Centre for Justice and Peace. Born to impoverished cotton mill laborers at the caste system's ground floor, he went on to receive a college education and pursue human rights work. He now lives in Pennsylvania, and despite being of retirement age, has no intention of slowing down with his work.

Perhaps the most important question for him is this: How can the caste system still function in today's world?

Varhade says that "(i)t is the only dehumanizing system in the world nearly 3000 years old, benefitting so called upper caste Hindus in the caste pyramid with cheap child labour, agricultural labour, child prostitution and trafficking of girls and women that" allows this high echelon to "make money on [the] blood sweat and tears" of poorer people.

"The will of the government to implement the protective laws," Varhade continues, "has been missing since India's independence in the last 60 plus years even though Dr. Ambedkar, the Chief Architect of Indian Constitution made it a criminal offence.

"No where exists in the world such cunning, cruel, degrading, anti-democratic system. It was invented, practiced and maintained in the name of Hindu religion, [supposedly] divinely created, to rule one class over other. It punishes millions of low caste helpless children, creating poverty and perpetuating it, using them as slave labour and total destruction of human personality".

How might India's problems with child labor and human trafficking impact its future as a developing world power?

"India being a home of half of the global child labour and trafficking of girls and women as per United Nations Reports....has a huge impact on India's image as a future superpower," Varhade explains. "Many global civil society forums like WSJ, NY Times, Guardian Weekly....and many European civil societies have come to conclusion that India can never become a superpower unless it addresses social justice issues in India.

READ ALSO: Obama and the Left's equal rights for some

"International democratic societies are unable to accept India on par with China for China has a class system and not a rigid caste system by birth. Hence China could move much faster in its progress".

India has laws to prevent the officially disestablished caste system from returning to prominence. Don't these help the downtrodden?

"India is governed by caste," Varhade states. "Less than 15% of the high caste Hindus control 85% of wealth, power, education, police, administration, as well as 99% of the media and judiciary. This privileged class, having controlled India for the last three thousand years, are still holding the power and do not want to share the pie with the marginalized. Corrupt police and administrators help to keep the status quo so that the caste system pyramid remains intact.

"This status quo is maintained through keeping the marginalized illiterate, ignorant, and half starved....So even though any discrimination including caste is banned, the implementation of the law is totally missing. This is known as the hidden apartheid of South Asia."

In the past, Varhade has shared fears that India might have a civil war on its horizon. Just exactly how did this worry come about?

"In the history of the world, one finds that the downtrodden only take the beatings so long and at a certain stage they revolt with full power to destroy the unjust system," Varhade tells. "The American Civil War took place after nearly 100 years of independence at the time of President Lincoln to free the blacks who were used as slaves for hundreds of years. Similarly in India a left wing Maoist guerilla movement was started by Maoists and Tribals against oppressors in very few districts. Now they control about 26 districts in 10 plus states.

"This can explode with the uprising of [low-caste] Dalits and Tribals. Democracy will be in danger if it happens. This is a ticking time bomb of social unrest and it needs to be defused before it explodes or this will dissolve billions of dollars of foreign investment of Western democracies including the USA. Bloodbath would be of enormous proportion and impossible to stop. Millions of refugees

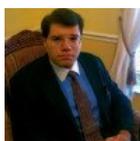
will be at the doors of the West overloading their economy.”

Generally speaking, how does Hinduism’s ancient culture relate to India today?

Varhade mentions that“Hinduism’s culture is based on the foundation of ‘All human beings are not born equal!’

“India’s Constitution and the UN says ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.’ This creates a contradiction for modern Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution, while giving his final speech on the making of the Constitution on 26th November 1949 to the Indian Parliament, stated that “after 26th January 1950 India will be a Sovereign Republic with one man, one vote , one value. We will have equality in politics but social inequality in daily life. We should remove this contradiction as early as possible or those suffering from social inequality will throw away this political democracy.....”

This article is the copyrighted property of the writer and Communities Digital News, LLC. Written permission must be obtained before reprint in online or print media. REPRINTING CONTENT WITHOUT PERMISSION AND/OR PAYMENT IS THEFT AND PUNISHABLE BY LAW.



Joseph Cotto

Joseph F. Cotto is a social journalist by trade and student of history by lifestyle choice. He hails from central Florida, writing about political, economic, and social issues of the day. In the past, he was a contributor to Blogcritics Magazine, among other publications. He is currently at work on a book about American society.

