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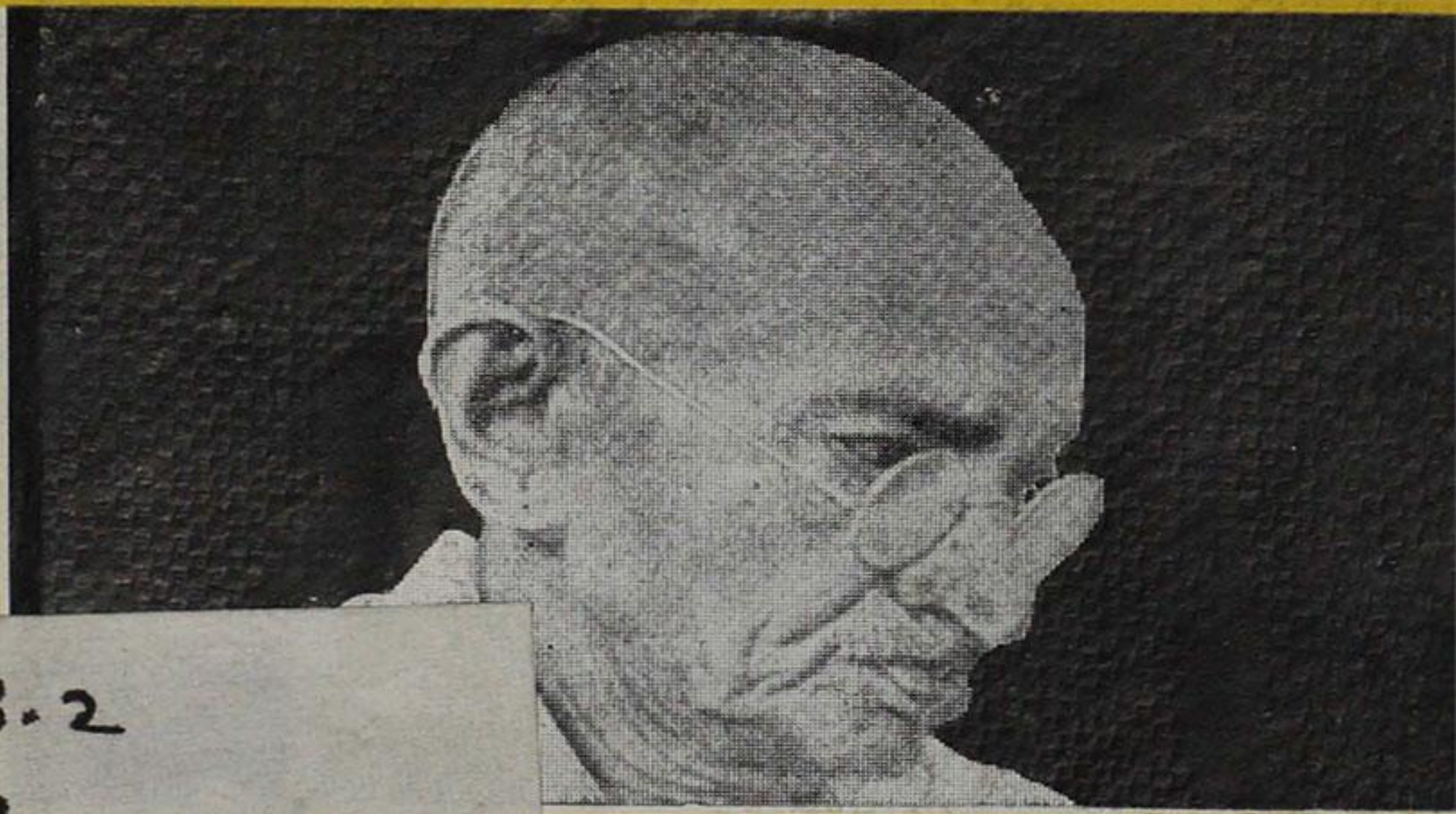
# MY VARNASHRAMA DHARMA



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*refuses to bow the head before the greatest potentate on earth, but my* Varnashrama *compels me to bow down my head in all humility before knowledge, before purity, before every person where I see God face to face."*

M K Gandhi

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY 7

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## A GIFT OF HINDUISM

"I have not hesitated to consider *Varnashrama* as a gift of Hinduism to mankind. Acceptance of that *Dharma* is, so far as I have been able to see it, a condition of spiritual growth. But I may make this admission that to-day this *Varnashrama Dharma* is not being observed in its purity. There is an utter confusion of *Varna* and, if Hinduism is to become a living force in the world, we have to understand its real purpose and revive it; but we cannot do so unless the canker of untouchability is destroyed.

"The idea of inferiority and superiority has to be demolished. The four divisions are not a vertical section, but a horizontal plane on which all stand on a footing of equality, doing the services respectively assigned to them.

"A life of religion is not a life of privileges, but of duty. Privileges may come, as they do come to all, from a due fulfilment of duty. In the book of God, the same number of marks are assigned to the *Brahmin* that has done his task as well as to the *Bhangi* who has done *likewise*."

—*M. K. GANDHI*

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I like Anand Hingorani's idea of collecting my writings under suitable heads. The reader will not fail to appreciate the labours he has given to securing attractive printing & binding.

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# MY
# VARNASHRAMA DHARMA

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*"Pocket Gandhi Series" No. 12*

# MY
# VARNASHRAMA DHARMA

BY

M. K. GANDHI

•

EDITED & PUBLISHED

*BY*

ANAND T. HINGORANI

1965

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

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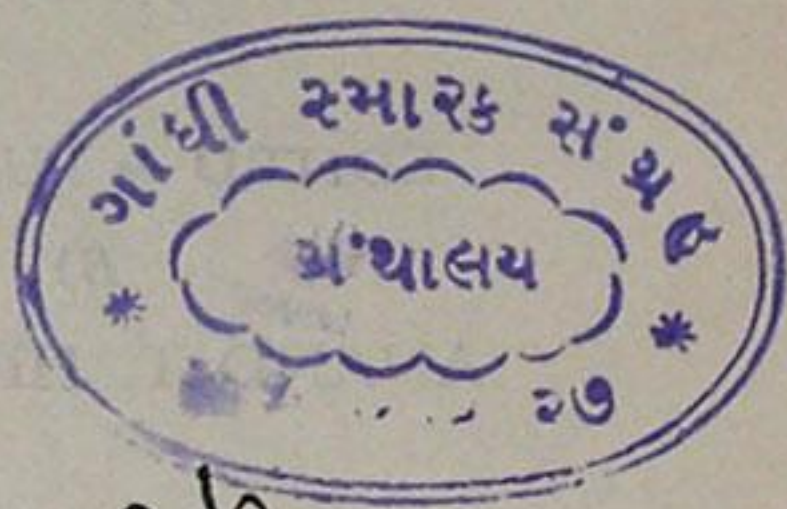


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## PREFACE

IN this title are given, as exhaustively as possible, Gandhiji's views on *Varnashrama Dharma* which he regards as Hinduism's unique gift to the world. *Varnashrama Dharma,* according to him, is the Law of Our Being which, no matter howsoever much we may deny, cannot be abrogated. It is a universal law, like the Law of Gravitation, and equally inexorable. It governs the entire human family. Our ancient seers and sages discovered this law after incessant experiment and research. Indeed, it is a marvellous discovery of which we Hindus especially should feel particularly proud.

This Law of *Varna* defines man's mission on this earth, that is, to know his Maker. For the realization and fulfilment of this mission, it is imperative that man must not devote the chief part of his life, as Gandhiji says, "to making experiments in finding out what occupation will best suit him for earning his livelihood. On the contrary, he will recognize that it is best for him to follow his father's occupation, and devote his spare time and talent to qualifying himself for the task to which mankind is called." Thus the Law of *Varna* means that a man should follow the calling of his forefathers and, in this sense, it is the Law of Heredity as well.

Human society all the world over, consciously or unconsciously, is mainly divided into four classes according to the four ways of earning one's livelihood—one being the repositary of knowledge (*Brahmin*), the other that of power (*Kshatriya*), the third that of wealth (*Vaishya*) and the fourth that of service (*Shudra*). In

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obedience to the Law of *Varna*, each class has to discharge its functions and obligations in a spirit of duty and for the advancement and well-being of the society as a whole. These four fundamental divisions merely prescribe duties of men belonging to different vocations, they confer no privileges. All the occupations are equal and honourable. There is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. The scavenger enjoys the same status as a *Brahmin*. "All are born," says Gandhiji, "to serve God's creation—a *Brahmin* with his knowledge, the *Kshatriya* with his power of protection, the *Vaishya* with his commercial ability and a *Shudra* with bodily labour". But a *Brahmin* who prides himself upon his knowledge, looks down upon others with a contemptuous eye and refuses to labour with his hands, ceases to be a *Brahmin*. Similarly, others who claim a higher status by virtue of their special qualities and characteristics, also fall. All the classes stand on a basis of perfect equality. And because there is an essential identity and oneness of all that lives, the acceptance of this fact alone rules out the very idea of superiority and inferiority. "All men and women are born equal", says Gandhiji.

Elucidating further his conception of *Varnashrama Dharma*, Gandhiji declares: "Whilst I have said that all men and women are born equal, I do not wish, therefore, to suggest that qualities are not inherited; but, on the contrary, I believe that just as everyone inherits a particular form, so does he inherit the particular characteristics and qualities of his progenitors; and to make this admission is to conserve one's energy. That frank



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admission, if he will act up to it, would put a legitimate curb upon our material ambitions, and thereby our energy is set free for extending the field of spiritual research and spiritual evolution. It is this doctrine of *Varnashrama Dharma* which I have always accepted."

Gandhiji holds the present practice and understanding of *Varnashrama Dharma* as "a monstrous parody of the original", for it has given rise to numerous class distinctions and social ills like castes, sub-castes, untouchability, etc., which are responsible for the present-day degeneration of Hinduism. All these ills are nurtured upon the spirit of high and low, of 'touch-me-not'-ism, artificial restrictions in the matter of eating, drinking and marriage, and mere empty ceremonials. "Before the Throne of Almighty", says Gandhiji, "we shall be judged, not by what we have eaten nor by whom we have been touched, but by whom we have served and how. Inasmuch as we serve a single human being in distress, we shall find favour in the sight of God."

Just as *Varna* to-day has become distorted, so also *Ashrama* has altogether disappeared. "There is to-day", avers Gandhiji, "a travesty of *Varna*, no trace of *Ashrama* and a misrepresentation of *Dharma*". Hinduism has laid down four *Ashramas* or stages—the life of a *Brahmachari* (continent student), the life of a *Grihastha* (householder), the life of a *Vanaprastha* (who has retired) and the life of a *Sannyasi* (renunciator)—through which every Hindu has to pass to fulfil his purpose in life. Showing how the Law of *Ashrama* is extinct alike



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in profession and observance, Gandhiji points out: "The first and the third are practically non-existent to-day, the fourth my be said to be observed in name to a small extent. The second is professed to be observed by all to-day, but it is observed in name, not in spirit... As the four stages represent a ladder of growth and are interdependent, one cannot leap to the stage of a *Vanaprastha* or a *Sannyasi*, unless he or she has fulfilled the law of the first two *Ashramas*—*Brahmacharya* and *Grihastha*. The Law of *Ashrama*, therefore, is a dead letter to-day. It can be revived only if the Law of *Varna*, with which it is intimately interlinked, is revived."

Gandhiji's attempt to hold up *Varna* as the Law of Life in an age when everyone feels oneself free to follow any calling he likes, may well be considered as an idle dream or even a folly. But it is his firm conviction that it is true socialism. "In the language of the *Gita*," he says, "it is equality of the spirit, without which no other equality is possible." And he adds: "The moment we have restored real living equality between man and man, we shall be able to establish equality between man and the whole creation. When that day comes, we shall have peace on earth and goodwill to men." One does not know when it will be possible for us to revive true *Varnashrama Dharma* of Gandhiji's conception, but its real revival would certainly mean true democracy.

ANAND T. HINGORANI

7, EDMONSTONE ROAD,
ALLAHABAD.
*June* 8, 1965.

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## 1. NOT A HARMFUL INSTITUTION

I AM one of those who do not consider caste to be a harmful institution. In its origin, caste was a wholesome custom and promoted national well-being. In my opinion, the idea that interdining or intermarrying is necessary for national growth, is a superstition borrowed from the West. Eating is a process just as vital as the other sanitary necessities of life. And if mankind had not, much to its harm, made of eating a fetish and indulgence, we would have performed the operation of eating in private even as one performs the other necessary functions of life in private. Indeed, the highest culture in Hinduism regards eating in that light and there are thousands of Hindus still living who will not eat their food in the presence of anybody. I can recall the names of several cultured men and women who ate their food in entire privacy, but who never had any ill-will against anybody and who lived on the friendliest terms with all.

Intermarriage is a still more difficult question... I hold strong views on religion and on marriage. The greater the restraint we exercise with regard to our appetites whether about eating or marrying, the better we become from a religious standpoint. I should despair of ever cultivating amicable relations with the world, if I had to recognize the right or the propriety of any young man offering his hand in marriage to my daughter, or to regard it as necessary for me to dine

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with anybody and everybody. I claim that I am living on terms of friendliness with the whole world. I have never quarrelled with a single Mahommedan or Christian, but for years I have taken nothing but fruits in Mahommedan or Christian households. I would most certainly decline to eat cooked food from the same plate with my son, or to drink water out of a cup which his lips have touched and which has not been washed. But the restraint or the exclusiveness exercised in these matters by me has never affected the closest companionship with the Mahommedan or the Christian friends or my sons.

But interdining and intermarriage have never been a bar to disunion, quarrels and worse. The Pandavas and the Kauravas flew at one another's throats without compunction, although they interdined and intermarried. The bitterness between the English and the Germans has not yet died out.

The fact is that intermarriage and interdining are not necessary factors in friendship and unity, though they are often emblems thereof.

—*Young India*: Feb. 25, 1920.

## 2. THE CASTE SYSTEM

MY correspondents argue that the retention of the caste system spells ruin for India and that it is caste which has reduced India to slavery. In my opinion, it is not caste that has made us what we are. It was our greed and disregard of essential virtues



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which enslaved us. I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration.

But like every other institution, it has suffered from excrescences. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural, and essential. The innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion, the better. The silent destruction and reconstruction of sub-castes have ever gone on and are bound to continue. Social pressure and public opinion can be trusted to deal with the problem. But I am certainly against any attempt at destroying the fundamental divisions. The caste system is not based on inequality, there is no question of inferiority; and so far as there is any such question arising, the tendency should undoubtedly be checked. But there appears to be no valid reason for ending the system because of its abuse. It lends itself easily to reformation. The spirit of democracy, which is fast spreading throughout India and the rest of the world, will, without a shadow of doubt, purge the institution of the idea of predominance and subordination.

## The Spirit of Democracy

The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires change of the heart. If caste is a bar to the spread of the spirit, the existence of five religions in India—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Zorastrianism, and



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Judaism—is equally a bar. The spirit of democracy requires the inculcation of the spirit of brotherhood, and I can find no difficulty in considering a Christian or a Mahommedan to be my brother in absolutely the same sense as a blood brother, and Hinduism, that is responsible for the doctrine of the caste, is also responsible for the inculcation of the essential brotherhood, not merely of man but even of all that lives.

## Law of Heredity

One of my correspondents suggests that we should abolish the caste but adopt the class system of Europe —meaning thereby I suppose that the idea of heredity in caste should be rejected. I am inclined to think that the Law of Heredity is an eternal law and any attempt to alter that law must lead, as it has before led, to utter confusion. I can see very great use in considering a *Brahmin* to be always a *Brahmin* throughout his life. If he does not behave himself like a *Brahmin*, he will naturally cease to command the respect that is due to the real *Brahmin*. It is easy to imagine the innumerable difficulties if one were to set up a court of punishments and rewards, degradation and promotion. If Hindus believe, as they must believe in reincarnation, transmigration, they must know that Nature will, without any possibility of mistake, adjust the balance by degrading a *Brahmin*, if he misbehaves himself, by reincarnating him in a lower division, and translating one who lives the life of a *Brahmin* in his present incarnation to *Brahminhood* in his next.



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## Unity in Diversity

Interdrinking, interdining, intermarrying, I hold, are not essential for the promotion of the spirit of democracy. I do not contemplate under a most democratic constitution a universality of manners and customs about eating, drinking and marrying. We shall ever have to seek unity in diversity, and I decline to consider it a sin for a man not to drink or eat with any and everybody. In Hinduism, children of brothers may not intermarry. The prohibition does not interfere with cordiality of relations, probably it promotes healthiness of relationships. In *Vaishnava* households, I have known mothers not dining in the common kitchen, nor drinking from the same pot, without their becoming exclusive, arrogant, or less loving. These are disciplinary restraints which are not in themselves bad. Carried to ridiculous extremes, they may become harmful, and if the motive is one of arrogation of superiority, the restraint becomes an indulgence, therefore, hurtful. But, as time goes forward and new necessities and occasions arise, the custom regarding interdrinking, interdining and intermarrying, will require cautious modifications or rearrangement.

## Crime against Humanity

Thus, whilst I am prepared to defend, as I have always done, the division of Hindus into four castes, I consider untouchability to be a heinous crime against humanity. It is not a sign of self-restraint but an arro-



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gant assumption of superiority. It has served no useful purpose and it has suppressed, as nothing else in Hinduism has, vast numbers of the human race who are not only every bit as good as ourselves, but are rendering in many walks of life an essential service to the country. It is a sin of which the sooner Hinduism purges itself the better it is for itself, if it is to be recognized as an honourable and elevating religion. I know no argument in favour of its retention, and I have no hesitation in rejecting scriptural authority of a doubtful character in order to support a sinful institution. Indeed, I would reject all authority if it is in conflict with sober reason or the dictates of the heart. Authority sustains and ennobles the weak when it is the handwork of reason, but it degrades them when it supplants reason sanctified by the 'still small voice' within.

—*Young India*: Dec. 8, 1920.

## 3. CASTE v. CLASS

MAN being a social being has to devise some method of social organization. We in India have evolved caste; they in Europe have organized class. Neither has the solidarity and naturalness of a family which perhaps is a God-ordained institution. If caste has produced certain evils, class has not been productive of anything less.

If class helps to conserve certain social virtues, caste does the same in equal, if not greater, degree.



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The beauty of the caste system is that it does not base itself upon distinctions of wealth possessions. Money, as history has proved, is the greatest disruptive force in the world. Even the sacredness of family ties is not safe against the pollution of wealth, says Shankaracharya. Caste is but an extension of the principle of the family. Both are governed by blood and heredity. Western scientists are busy trying to prove that heredity is an illusion and that *milieu* is everything. The solid experience of many lands goes against the conclusion of these scientists; but even accepting their doctrine of *milieu*, it is easy to prove that *milieu* can be conserved and developed more through caste than through class.

## The Spirit Behind Caste

The spirit behind caste is not one of arrogant superiority; it is the classification of different systems of self-culture. It is the best possible adjustment of social stability and progress. Just as the spirit of the family is inclusive of those who love each other and are wedded to each other by ties of blood and relation, caste also tries to include families of a particular way of purity of life (not standard of life, meaning by this term, economic standard of life). Only it does not leave the decision, whether a particular family belongs to a particular type, to the idiosyncracies or interested judgment of a few individuals. It trusts to the principle of heredity, and, being only a system of culture, does not hold that any injustice is done if an individual or a



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family has to remain in a particular group in spite of their decision to change their mode of life for the better. As we all know, change comes very slowly in social life, and thus, as a matter of fact, caste has allowed new groupings to suit the changes in lives. But these changes are quiet and easy as a change in the shapes of the clouds. It is difficult to imagine a better harmonious human adjustment.

Caste does not connote superiority or inferiority. It simply recognizes different outlooks and corresponding modes of life. But it is no use denying the fact that a sort of hierarchy has been evolved in the caste-system.

—*Young India*: Dec. 29, 1920.

### Best Remedy against Pauperism

From the economic point of view, its value was once very great. It ensured hereditary skill; it limited competition. It was the best remedy against pauperism. And it had all the advantages of trade guilds. Although it did not foster adventure or invention there, it is not known to have come in the way either.

Historically speaking, caste may be regarded as man's experiment or social adjustment in the laboratory of Indian society. If we can prove it to be a success, it can be offered to the world as a leaven and as the best remedy against heartless competition and social disintegration born of avarice and greed.

—*Young India*: Jan. 5, 1921.



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## 4. INTERDINING AND INTERMARRIAGE

VARANASHRAMA is, in my opinion, inherent in human nature, and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his *Varna* by choice. Not to abide by one's *Varna* is to disregard the law of heredity. The division, however, into innumerable castes is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine. The four divisions are all-sufficing.

I do not believe that interdining or even intermarriage necessarily deprives a man of his status that his birth has given him. The four divisions define a man's calling, they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties, they confer no privileges. It is, I hold, against the genius of Hinduism to arrogate to oneself a higher status or assign to another a lower. All are born to serve God's creation, a *Brahmin* with his knowledge, a *Kashatriya* with his power of protection, a *Vaishya* with his commercial ability and a *Shudra* with bodily labour. This, however, does not mean that a *Brahmin*, for instance, is absolved from bodily labour, or the duty of protecting himself and others. His birth makes a *Brahmin* predominantly a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart it to others. There is nothing, again, to prevent the *Shudra* from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes. Only, he will best serve with his body and need not envy others their special qualities for service. But a *Brahmin* who claims superiority by right of knowledge falls and has no knowledge. And so



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with the others who pride themselves upon their special qualities. *Varnashrama* is self-restraint and conservation and economy of energy.

**Highest Limit of Self-Restraint**

Though, therefore, *Varnashrama* is not affected by interdining or intermarriage, Hinduism does most emphatically discourage interdining and intermarriage between divisions. Hinduism reached the highest limit of self-restraint. It is undoubtedly a religion of renunciation of the flesh, so that the spirit may be set free. It is no part of a Hindu's duty to dine with his son. And by restricting his choice of a bride to a particular group, he exercises rare self-restraint. Hinduism does not regard a married state as by any means essential for salvation. Marriage is a 'fall' even as birth is a 'fall.' Salvation is freedom from birth and hence death also. Prohibition against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul. But this self-denial is no test of *Varna*. A *Brahmin* may remain a *Brahmin*, though he may dine with his *Shudra* brother, if he has not left off his duty of service by knowledge. It follows from what I have said above, that restraint in matters of marriage and dining is not based upon notions of superiority. A Hindu, who refuses to dine with another from a sense of superiority, misrepresents his *Dharma*.

**Aids to the Evolution of the Spirit**

Unfortunately to-day, Hinduism seems to consist merely in eating and not eating. Once I horrified a



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pious Hindu by taking toast at a Mussalman's house. I saw that he was pained to see me pouring milk into a cup handed by a Mussalman friend, but his anguish knew no bounds when he saw me taking toast at the Mussalman's hands. Hinduism is in danger of losing its substance, if it resolves itself into a matter of eleborate rules as to what and with whom to eat. Abstemiousness from intoxicating drinks and drugs, and from all kinds of foods, especially meat, is undoubtedly a great aid to the evolution of the spirit, but it is by no means an end in itself. Many a man eating meat and with everybody, but living in the fear of God, is nearer his freedom than a man religiously abstaining from meat and many other things, but blaspheming God in every one of his acts.

—*Young India*: Oct. 6, 1921.

## 5. DEGRADING RELIGION

IN the name of religion, we Hindus have made a fetish of outward observances, and have degraded religion by making it simply a question of eating and drinking. *Brahmanism* owes its unrivalled position to its self-abnegation, its inward purity, its severe austerity,—all these illumined by knowledge. Hindus are doomed if they attach undue importance to the spiritual effects of foods and human contacts. Placed as we are in the midt of trials and temptations from within, and touched and polluted as we are by all the most untouchable and the vilest thought currents, let us not, in our arrogance, exaggerate the influence of contact with people whom



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we often ignorantly and more often arrogantly consider to be our inferiors. Before the Throne of the Almighty we shall be judged, not by what we have eaten nor by whom we have been touched, but by whom we have served and how. Inasmuch as we serve a single human being in distress, we shall find favour in the sight of God. Bad and stimulating or dirty foods we must avoid as we must avoid bad contact. But let us not give these observances a place out of all proportion to their importance. We dare not use abstinence from certain food as a cover for fraud, hypocrisy, and worse vices. We dare not refuse to serve a fallen or a dirty brother lest his contact should injure our spiritual growth.

—*Young India*: Jan. 5, 1922.

## 6. PREJUDICE AND INSOLENCE

A CORRESPONDENT from the Tanjore District writes, saying that he and his brother though *Brahmins* felt that rather than lead a lazy life, they should do some work and they 'turned their hands to the plough.' So they began agriculture. Thereupon their fellow-villagers became disgusted and excommunicated them. They, however, remained firm in their resolve. When the Shankaracharya of Kumbakonam visited their part of the district, they went with their offering which was rejected, because they had committed the sin of labouring for their livelihood. My correspondent tells me he is not at all put out by the Shankaracharya's action. I congratulate the brothers on their public spirit. Excommunication from a tyrannical society is indeed a re-



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ward of merit and should be welcomed. To say that a *Brahmin* should not touch the plough is a parody of *Varnashrama* and a prostitution of the meaning of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Surely, the qualities predominantly ascribed to the different divisions are not denied to the others. Is bravery to be the prerogative only of the *Kshatriya* and restraint only of the *Brahmin?* Are *Brahmins, Kshatriyas* and *Shudras* not to protect the cow? Can anyone remain a Hindu without readiness to die for the cow? Yet, strangely enough, I have a letter from the Madras Presidency seriously telling me, that cow protection has nothing to do with any but the *Vaishyas*. When there is so much ignorance combined with insolence, the best thing to do is to incur all risks and pursue the path of reform, expecting time to prove the truth of one's position.. If we combine love with firmness, we shall disarm all opposition in the end. Reformers may neither relent nor become angry.

—*Young India*: Nov. 17, 1921.

## 7. WHAT IS VARNASHRAMA ?

WHAT is this *Varnashrama?* It is not a system of watertight compartments. It is a recognition to me of a scientific fact, whether we know it or not. A *Brahmin* is not only a teacher. He is only predominantly that. But a *Brahmin* who refuses to labour will be voted down as an idiot. The *Rishis* of old who lived in the forests, cut and fetched wood, tended cattle and even fought. But their pursuit in life was pre-eminently search after Truth. Similarly, a Rajput without learn-



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ing was good for nothing, no matter how well he wielded the sword. And a *Vaishya*, without divine knowledge sufficient for his own growth, will be a veritable monster eating into the vitals of society as many modern *Vaishyas*, whether of the East or the West, have become. They are, according to the *Gita*, 'incarnations of sin who live only for themselves'.

—*Young India*: July 17, 1924.

## 8. CLASS DISTINCTIONS

I WANT to uplift Hinduism. I regard the untouchables as an integral part of the Hindu community. I am pained when I see a single *Bhangi* driven out of the fold of Hinduism. But I do not believe that all class distinctions can be obliterated. I believe in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the *Gita*. The *Gita* teaches us that members of all the four castes should be treated on an equal basis. It does not prescribe the same *dharma* for the *Brahmin* as for the *Bhangi*. But it insists that the latter shall be entitled to the same measure of consideration and esteem as the former with all his superior learning. It is, therefore, our duty to see that the untouchables do not feel that they are despised or looked down upon. Let them not be offered leavings from our plates for their subsistence. How can I accord differential treatment to any person, be he *Brahmin* or *Bhangi*, who worships the same God and keeps his body and soul pure and clean? I, for one, would regard myself as having sinned if I gave to a *Bhangi* unclean food from the leavings from the kitchen, or failed to render him personal assistance when he was in need.



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Let me make my position absolutely clear. While I do hold that the institution of untouchability, as it stands to-day, has no sanction in Hinduism, Hinduism does recognize 'untouchability' in a limited sense and under certain circumstances. For instance, every time that my mother handled unclean things, she became untouchable for the time being and had to cleanse herself by bathing. As a *Vaishnava,* I refuse to believe that anyone can be regarded untouchable by reason of his or her birth, and such untouchability as is recognized by religion is by its very nature transitory,—easily removable and referable to the deed not the doer. Not only that. Just as we revere our mother for the sanitary service that she renders us when we are infants, and the greater her service the greater is our reverence for her, similarly the *Bhangis* are entitled to our highest reverence for the sanitary service they perform for society.

**Not Essential**

Now, another point. I do not regard interdining and intermarriage as essential to the removal of untouchability. I believe in *Varnashrama Dharma.* But I eat with *Bhangis.* I do not know whether I am a *Sannyasi,* for I seriously doubt whether in this *Kaliyuga* it is at all possible for anyone to fulfil the conditions prescribed for a *Sannyasi.* But I am moving deliberately in the direction of *Sannyasa.* It is, therefore, not only not necessary for me to observe these restrictions, but their observance may be even harmful for me. As regards the question of intermarriage, it does not arise in cases like mine. Sufficient for me to say that my



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scheme does not include intermarriage. Let me tell you that in my own clan all the members do not interdine. In certain cases among our *Vaishnava* families, they do not use each other's utensils or even cook food on fire fetched from other's kitchens. You may call this practice superstitious, but I do not regard it as such. It certainly does no harm to Hinduism. In my *Ashram*, Dudhabhai, one of the 'untouchable' inmates, dines with the rest without any distinction. But I do not recommend anybody outside the *Ashram* to follow this example. Again, you know the esteem in which I hold Malaviyaji.* I would wash his feet. But he would not take food touched by me. Am I to resent it as a mark of contempt? Certainly not, because I know that no contempt is meant.

—*Young India*: Jan. 22, 1925.

## Breaking Down the Restrictions

Personally, I am not sure that interdining is a necessary reform. At the same time, I recognize the tendency towards breaking down the restriction altogether. I can find reasons for and against the restriction. I would not force the pace. I do not regard it as a sin for person not to dine with another, nor do I regard it as sinful if one advocates and practises interdining. I should, however, resist the attempt to break down the restriction in disregard of the feelings of others. On the contrary, I would respect their scruples in the matter.

—*Young India*: Mar. 19, 1925.

* Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya.



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## 9. PERTINENT QUESTIONS

**Q.** Are you a believer in the efficacy of *Varnashrama Dharma?*

**A.** Yes. But there is to-day a travesty of *Varna*, no trace of *Ashrama* and a misrepresentation of *Dharma*. The whole system needs to be revised and brought in unison with the latest discoveries in the field of religion.

**Q.** Do you advocate intermingling of castes?

**A.** I would abolish all castes and would keep the four divisions.

**Q.** Would you not be interfering with the religions and caste-system (*Varnashrama Dharma*) of India, whatever may be the bad or good points of the above systems and religions, if you advocate the removal of untouchability?

**A.** How do I interfere with anything or anybody by mere advocacy of a reform? Interference there would be, if I were to advocate removal of untouchability by the use of force against those who retain untouchability.

**Q.** Would you not be guilty of doing *himsa* to the orthodox *Brahmins*, if you interfere with their religious beliefs without convincing them in the first instance?

**A.** I cannot be guilty of *himsa* to the orthodox *Brahmins* as I do not interfere with their religious beliefs except through conviction.



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**Q.** Are not the *Brahmins* guilty of untouchability, when they do not touch, dine with or marry the various other castes, leaving alone the untouchables?

**A.** *Brahmins* are guilty of the sin if they refuse to 'touch' the other castes.

**Q.** Do you advocate that all should become equal, without any distinction of caste, race, creed or avocation?

**A.** Such should be the case in the eye of the law in the matter of elementary human rights, even as, irrespective of caste, race, creed or colour, we have certain things in common, *e.g.* hunger, thirst etc.

—*Young India*: Feb. 5. 1925.

## 10. A POLITICIAN?

MR. ANDREWS sends me for answer a letter he has received from an English friend. This is the friend's puzzle:

"I was surprised to read in a recent article Gandhi's repudiation of intermarriage between touchables and untouchables. That seems to me the test question. Not that I would have him advocate marriage between any particular caste and any other, any more than between any person and any other person. But surely the right marital relations, and the right children, are found whenever man and wife are of one mind, in the fullest sense. And is that not Gandhi's aim in India? In proportion as it is reached, will not intermarriage between castes not become as natural as in Ephesus was intermarriage between Jew and Greek?

"I know Gandhi is a politician and can guess he wrote the words to avoid offence. But surely the *political* price of such a statement is sure to be fatally injurious to his central aim? How can he expect the European farmer in Kenya to treat the Indian shopkeeper as he should, if *Brahmins* are to deny equal privileges to sweepers *on the sole ground of caste?*"



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I have repeatedly expressed my view of caste and intermarriage. With me, marriage is no necessary test of friendship even between husband and wife, let alone their respective clans. I cannot picture to myself a time when all mankind will have one religion. As a rule, there will, therefore, be the religious bar. People will marry in their own religion. Similarly, there will persist the territorial restriction. The caste restriction is an extension of the same principle. It is a social convenience. An English nobleman's son does not, as a rule, marry a grocer's daughter. She would, as a rule, be rejected on the sole ground of her birth. I am opposed to untouchability because it limits the field of service. Marriage is not an act of service. It is a comfort man or woman seeks for him or herself. And I see no harm in restricting the circle of comfort or being selective in regard to such a life-change as marriage. If a Kenya settler will not tolerate my presence in Kenya because I will not give my daughter in marriage to him or receive his for my son, I should be sorry for him but would content myself with exclusion from Kenya rather than be compelled to contract an incompatible tie. I would only add that the Kenya settler would not permit me even to think of any such relation. And if I put forth any such claim, it would be regarded as an additional reason for excluding me from his preserve. Though the point is absolutely clear, as it seems to me, and though marriage is restricted in practice all over the world to classes, clans etc., Mr. Andrews' correspondent is not likely to be satisfied with my answer. But I can give



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him the assurance that I have not evaded the issue for fear of giving offence. I am not a politician in the narrow sense given to the word by the correspondent. I have written as I have believed. I have sacrificed no principle to gain a political advantage. Probably, I would gain greater reputation in the circles I move in, if I did not accept the Hindu restraint on intermarriage. And what is my central aim? It is equal treatment for the whole of humanity and that equal treatment means equality of service. The duty of service may be denied to none. The privilege of marriage presupposes temperamental and other affinity. It would be no crime for a woman to reject the hand of a red haired man, but she would be guilty of a gross sin if she neglected the duty of serving him because of his red hair. Marriage is a matter of choice. Service is an obligation that cannot be shirked.

—*Young India*: Mar. 12, 1925.

## 11. UNTOUCHABILITY AND CASTE

I DRAW a sharp distinction between untouchability and *Varna* or caste. The former has no scientific basis. It cannot be supported by reason. It denies man the privilege of service to fellow-beings and deprives the 'untouchables' in distress of the right of receiving service from their kind. The caste system has, in my opinion, a scientific basis. Reason does not revolt against it. If it has disadvantages, it has also its advantages. It does not prevent a *Brahmin* from serving his *Shudra* brother. Caste creates a social and moral restraint. The doctrine of caste cannot be extended. I would restrict it to four



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divisions. Any multiplication would be an evil. I would reform the castes and rid them of undoubted abuses, but I can find no reason for their abolition. For me, there is no question of superiority or inferiority. *Brahmin*, who regards himself as a superior being born to look down upon the other castes, is not a *Brahmin*. If he is first, he is so by right of service.

—*Young India*: Mar. 12, 1925.

## 12. VARNASHRAMA AGAIN

A CORRESPONDENT writes:

"In your recent Madras speech, you have restated your faith in the four *Varnas*. But should the *Varnas* be strictly hereditary? Some people think that you favour rigid adherence to the hereditary principle; others that you do not. From a perusal of your writings, I am inclined to agree with the former. For instance, what else does your dictum that the 'untouchables' should be classed with '*Shudras*' and that they should enjoy all the rights of '*Non-Brahmins*', indicate? Why this constant reiteration of the old arbitrary distinction between *Brahmin* and *Non-Brahmin*, as if the two belonged to biologically different species? If an 'untouchable' can become a '*Non-Brahmin*', can he not also become a *Brahmin* in this very life? Again, if it is possible for an 'untouchable' to become a '*Shudra*', how is it impossible for a *Shudra* to become a *Vaishya*, for a *Vaishya* to become a *Kshatriya* or for a *Kshatriya* to become a *Brahmin* in this very life? Why do you hurl the Law of *Karma* in the face of those who believe it to be possible? Is there a better *Brahmin* than Sri Narayana Guru Swami, the *Ezhava*? I know no better *Brahmin* than Gandhi, the *Bania*. I know also of hundreds of other '*Non-Brahmins*' who are better *Brahmins* (in the best sense of the term) than most birth-*Brahmins*.

"If you did not favour strict application of the principle of heredity, you would not seek to prohibit intermarriages between people of the same race, professing the same religion and following the same customs as are several members of the three *Dwija* castes. Nor would you so strenuously oppose inter-



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dining between, say, vegetarian *Brahmins* and vegetarian *Non-Brahmins*.

"Of course, heredity is a great law of life, but there are even greater laws controlling its mysterious processes. One of them is the Law of Variation in the phraseology of Evolutionary Biology. Heredity is the *static* and variation is the dynamic principle of the universe. The latter it is that holds the key to what we call 'Progress' for want of a better name. No social system can ignore the Law of Heredity with impunity; neither can a social system ignore the Law of Variation except at its peril. The history of the caste system in India affords enough proof of this. It proves above all that the worst form in which the Law of Heredity can be applied in any social organization is to create a hereditary clergy to be the sole custodians of its intellectual and spiritual affairs and trustees in perpetuity of its religion.

"Even Babu Bhagwan Das, than whom there is no more orthodox *Brahmin* and who has done some hard thinking on the subject of social reconstruction in India, conceded some years ago that the hereditary principle in *Varnashrama Dharma* must be considerably relaxed. It would be, indeed, strange if you of all men championed rigid adherence to it. As a great many people do not know what exactly you think of it all, I hope it will be possible for you to publish this letter with your reply in your esteemed journal."

I fancy that I have answered all the arguments advanced by the correspondent against *Varnashrama*. But evidently readers have short memories or only those who are concerned for the moment read what is written for them. Thus, for instance, I have often shown the distinction between *Varnashrama* and untouchability. I have defended the one as a rational scientific fact, and condemned the other as an excrescence, an unmitigated evil. It may be that my denseness sees a distinction where none exists. It may be, too, that I see science where there is ignorance or superstition. But I do regard *Varnashrama* as a healthy division of work based on birth. The present ideas of caste are a perversion



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of the original. There is no question with me of superiority or inferiority. It is purely a question of duty. I have indeed stated that *Varna* is based on birth. But I have also said that it is possible for a *Shudra*, for instance, to become a *Vaishya*. But in order to perform the *duty* of a *Vaishya*, he does not need the label of a *Vaishya*. Swami Narayan Guru does not need to be called a *Brahmin* in order to enable him to be, what he is reported to be, a Sanskrit scholar. He who performs the duty of a *Brahmin* will easily become one in the next incarnation. But a translation from one *Varna* to another in the present incarnation must result in a great deal of fraud. The natural consequence must be the obliteration of *Varna*. I have seen no reason to justify its destruction. It may be a hindrance to material ambition. I must be excused from applying material considerations to an institution that is based on religious considerations.

**Confusion**

Nor is the correspondent happy in his analogy. I have asked that a *Panchama* should be regarded as a *Shudra*, because I hold that there is no warrant for belief in a fifth caste. A *Panchama* does the work of *Shudra* and he is, therefore, naturally classified as such when he ceases to be regarded as a *Panchama*. I do believe that this contant confusion between untouchability and *Varnashrama* and attack on the latter in the same breath as the former, retards the progress of reform regarding untouchability.

It is not clear that the Law of Variation is left untouched by *Varnashrama*. Nay, it is provided for. Only, types



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do not vary in a few years or even in a few generations. There is no fundamental difference between a *Brahmin* and a *Pariah*, but he who runs may see that, class considered, there is a marked and noticeable difference between *Brahmins* and *Pariahs* or, for that matter, all the four castes. What I would like my correspondent to join me in is a fight against an arrogant assumption of superiority, whether it is assumed by *Brahmins* or others. It is the abuse of *Varnashrama* that should be combated, not the thing itself.

—*Young India*: Apr. 23, 1925.

## 13. INTERDINING AGAIN

A CORRESPONDENT writes:

"You have answered at length an Englishman's 'puzzle' on the question of intermarriage. But what about interdining which is a much less vital affair; but more frequent in life? Suppose, some men of goodwill organize, as one means of promoting goodwill amongst all classes, an inter-caste, inter-communal and international dinner on purely vegetarian and non-alcoholic lines; would you from your own *Sanatana* point of view object, if any Hindus, say, some members of your caste—or, of your own family—wished to join that dinner on invitation (and not, of course, on compulsion) and asked your opinion on it? Similarly, may a *Brahmin*, with your view of the *Sanatana* or *Maryada Dharma*, accept a clean dish of rice and a pure cup of water which a *Chandala* or a Mussalman or a Christian has offered him (and not, of course, forced on him), finding the *Brahmin* wayworn, hungry and thirsty (and almost on the point of fainting, let us say) in a lone wild place? In fine, the question is: Does such a demonstration of goodwill as the 'cosmopolitan dinner or the offer of a dish by a supposed untouchable to a touchable Hindu and acceptance thereof, square with your idea of the *Sanatana Varnashrama Dharma* or *Maryada Dharma*, or does it not?"



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If a *Brahmin* is in distress he would take, if he wishes to hold on to his body, clean food by whosoever offered. I would neither object to nor advocate participation in an international or cosmopolitan dinner, for the simple reason that such functions do not necessarily promote friendship or goodwill. It is possible to-day to organize a dinner party between Hindus and Mussalmans, but I dare to say that such a dinner will no more bring the two communities together than the absence of it keeps them apart. I have known deadly enemies dine and chat together heartily, and yet remain enemies. Where will the correspondent draw the line? Why does he stop at vegetarian and non-alcoholic meals? A man who regards flesh-eating a virtue and wine bibbing a harmless and pleasurable refreshment, will see nothing but promotion of goodwill in dividing with the world his beef steak and exchanging with it the sparkling cup? On the argument underlying the correspondent's querry, there can be no dividing line. I, therefore, rule out interdining as the means of promoting goodwill. Whilst I do not myself observe these restrictions and take food that I do not regard as forbidden at the hands of anyone so long as it is cleanly dressed, I respect the scruples of those who observe the restrictions. Nor do I pat myself on the back for my 'liberal' practice as against the other's 'narrowness'. I may be narrow and selfish inspite of my apparently liberal practice, and my friend may be liberal and unselfish notwithstanding his apparently narrow practice. Merit or demerit lies in the motive. Insistence upon interdining as part of the programme of



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promotion of fellowship, in my opinion, retards the growth of goodwill by raising false issues and even false hope. What I am trying to remove is the idea of pollution and superiority. These self-imposed restrictions have a sanitary as also a spiritual value. But non-observance no more doomes a man to perdition than its observance raises him to the seventh heaven. A man who observes the dining restrictions in a most punctilious manner may be veritable blackguard fit to be shunned by society, and a cosmopolitan omnivorous man may be one ever walking in the fear of God, whose society it would be a privilege to cultivate.

—*Young India*: Apr. 30, 1925.

## 14. VARNASHRAMA AND UNTOUCHABILITY

A CORRESPONDENT writes:

"I fully appreciate the distinction between *Varnashrama* and untouchability and agree that there is no sanction whatsoever for the latter in Hinduism. But is it not clear that, if the principle of 'division of work based on birth', which you approve, continues to be the basis of our social organization, the untouchables will be always with us? What is more reasonable than to suppose that in that case those members of society who hereditarily perform such social duties as scavenging, corpse-bearing and grave-digging will continue to be looked upon as too unclean to be touched by the rest of the community? In all other countries, scavengers, cobblers, barbers, washermen, grave-diggers, undertakers etc., are not considered untouchable, either as individuals or as a class, for the simple reason that in those countries these occupations are not hereditary and any member of any of the classes can at any time become a soldier, trader, teacher, lawyer, politician or priest. It seems to me, therefore, that the root of the evil of the untouchability, so peculiar to our country, lies in our peculiar social system exclusively based on the principle of heredity. And, it also seems to me that so long as we adhere to that principle, we cannot hope



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to get rid of untouchability. It is just conceivable that under the influence of mighty reformers like Ramanuja, or under the stress of a strong political passion, its virulence may abate from time to time, but the evil cannot be wholly eliminated. I am afraid that every attempt to end untouchability without ending the caste idea will prove as futile as attempting to cut off a tree at its top."

The letter is very plausible and unless the reformer takes care, the danger which the correspondent fears may become a stern reality. There is, however, a clear confusion of thought in the argument. Does untouchability in the case of a cobbler or scavenger attach to birth or to occupation? If it attaches to birth, it is hideous and must be rooted out; if it attaches to occupation it may be a sanitary rule of great importance. It is of universal application. A collier, whilst he is engaged in his work, is practically an untouchable. He, himself, refuses to shake the hand extended to him and says: "I am too dirty." But his work finished, he takes his bath, changes his dress, and very properly mixes with the highest in the land. Immediately, therefore, we remove the taint of birth, *i.e.* the idea of superiority and inferiority attaching to birth, we purify *Varnashrama*. The scavenger's children may remain scavengers without being or feeling degraded, and they will be no more considered untouchables than *Brahmins*. The fault does not, therefore, lie in recognizing the Law of Heredity and transmission of qualities from generation to generation, but it lies with the faulty conception of inequality.

### Not Conceived in Narrow Sense

*Varnashrama*, in my opinion, was not conceived in any narrow spirit. On the contrary, it gave the labourer,



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the *Shudra*, the same status as the thinker, the *Brahmin*. It provided for the accentuation of merit and elimination of demerit, and it transferred human ambition from the general worldly sphere to the permanent and the spiritual. The aim of the *Brahmin* and the *Shudra* was common—*Moksha*, or self-realization—not realization of fame, riches and power. Later on, this lofty conception of *Varnashrama* became degraded and came to be identified with mere empty ceremonial and assumption of superiority by some and imposition of degradation upon others. This admission is not a demonstration of the weakness of *Varnashrama* but of human nature which, if it has a tendency under certain circumstances to rise to the highest point, has also a tendency under certain other circumstances to go down to the lowest. What the reformer seeks to do is to end the curse of untouchability and to restore *Varnashrama* to its proper place. Whether *Varnashrama* thus transmuted will survive the reform or not, remains to be seen. It will surely depend upon the new *Brahmin* class that is imperceptibly coming into being, namely, those who are dedicating themselves, body, soul and mind, to service of Hinduism and the country. If they have nothing of worldly ambition, it will be well with Hinduism; if they have, Hinduism, like any other ism, coming into the hands of ambitious men, will perish. But I have an immutable faith in the capacity of Hinduism to purge itself of all impurities from time to time. I do not think that that capacity is now exhausted.

—*Young India*: Aug. 13, 1925.



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## 15. THE CANKER OF SUPERIORITY

IN my opinion, he who claims superiority by the very nature of the claim forfeits it. Real, natural superiority, comes without the claiming. It is recognized ungrudgingly and ever refused not pompously, not out of a false sense of modesty, but because the superiority is not even felt, and because the superior man knows that there is no distinction whatsoever between the soul within himself and the soul within one who regards himself as his inferior. Recognition of the essential identity and oneness of all that lives, excludes the very idea of superiority and inferiority. Life is duty, not a bundle of rights and privileges. That religion is doomed to destruction which bases itself upon a system of gradations, high and low. Such is not the meaning for me of *Varnashrama*. I believe in it because I imagine that it defines the duties of men belonging to different vocations. And *Brahmin* is he who is the servant of all, even of the *Shudras* and the 'untouchables'. He dedicates his all to such service and lives upon the charity and sufferance of his fellow-beings. He is no *Kshatriya* who puts forth pretensions to rank, power and privileges. He alone is a *Kshatriya* who uses the whole of himself for the defence and honour of society. And a *Vaishya* who earns for himself only, and believes in merely amassing wealth, is a thief. A *Shudra*, because he labours for hire on behalf of society, is in no way inferior to the three classes. According to my conception of Hinduism, there is no such thing as a fifth or 'untouchable' class. The so-called untouchables are as much privileged labourers



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of society as *Shudras*. *Varnashrama* seems to me to be an ideal system conceived for the higest good of society. What we see to-day is a travesty and a mockery of the original. And if *Varnashrama* is to abide, Hindus must sweep away the mockery and restore *Varnashrama* to its pristine dignity.

—*Young India*: Nov. 5, 1925.

## 16. A VITAL QUESTION

**Q.** You regard the four divisions of castes as based on birth. You also believe that a man's caste does not prevent him from doing the duties attaching to other castes and that any man, irrespective of his birth, may have the qualities of a *Brahmin*, or a *Kshatriya*, or a *Shudra*. If this is the case, where is the use of maintaining this division, and consequently, an order of superiority and inferiority? Why should the accident of birth make a man a *Brahmin* or a *Kshatriya* or a *Shudra?* Why attach so much importance to birth?

**A.** In accepting the four-fold division, I am simply accepting the laws of Nature, taking for granted what is inherent in human nature and the Law of Heredity. We are born with some of the traits of our parents. The fact that a human being is born only in the human species, shows that some characteristics, *i.e.* caste is determined by birth. There is scope enough for freedom of the will inasmuch as we can, to a certain extent, re-form some of our inherited characteristics. It is not possible in one birth entirely to undo the results of our past doings, and, in the light of it, it is in every way right and



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proper to regard as a *Brahmin* who is born of *Brahmin* parents. A *Brahmin* may, by doing the deeds of a *Shudra*, become a *Shudra* in this very birth, but the world loses nothing in continuing to treat him as a *Brahmin*. Caste, as it exists to-day, is no doubt a travesty of the original four-fold division which only defined men's different callings. And this trifling with it has been its undoing. But how can I, for that reason, discard the Law of Nature which I see being fulfilled at every step? I know that if I discard it, I would be rid of a lot of trouble. But that would be an idle short-cut. I have declared from the housetops that a man's caste is no matter for pride, that no superiority or inferiority attaches to any of the four divisons. A true *Brahmin* will feel it an honour to serve the lowliest of *Shudras*. In fact, a *Brahmin*, to be a *Brahmin*, should have the qualities of a *Kshatriya*, a *Vaishya* and a *Shudra* plus his own. Only he should predominantly be a man of divine knowledge. But caste to-day is in the crucible, and only Heaven knows, or perhaps the *Brahmins* know, the final result.

—*Young India*: Jan. 21, 1926.

## 17. CASTE

**Q.** Do you believe in caste? If so, what do you consider to be its value?

**A.** I do not believe in caste as it is at present constituted, but I do believe in the four fundamental divisions regulated according to the four principal occupations. The existing innumerable divisions, with the attendant



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artificial restrictions and elaborate ceremonial, are harmful to the growth of a religious spirit, as also to the social well-being of the Hindus and, therefore, also their neighbours.

—*Young India*: Feb. 25, 1926.

**Q.** You have always written with force against that accursed system. Yet, so far as I remember, you have also written that interdining and intermarriage are not necessary accompaniments of this reform.

Please do make clear whether taking some food cooked by, or from the hands of, or in the close presence of, an untouchable (at least when so necessitated by chance, if not intentionally) is included within the reform or not. If not, it requires to be made clear why it should not be. Its not being included in the reform would be a sure indication of a sense of their inferiority as regards personal cleanliness; and as long as they remain unclean, removal of untouchability cannot be termed a reform in the minds of even highly cultured people.

**A.** All I have advocated is abolition of the fifth *Varna*. The reorganization of the four divisions, the abolition of artificial inequalities and of sub-divisions is a separate branch of reform. Interdining means dining off the same plate. If I eat a biscuit cooked by Vishnu, Solomon, Ismail and Company, I do not interdine.

—*Young India*: Oct. 14, 1926.

### Caste and Untouchability

Hinduism must be poor stuff, if it requires to be protected by an artificial wall of untouchability.



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If untouchability and caste are convertible terms, the sooner caste perishes, the better for all concerned. But I am satisfied that caste, if it is another word for *Varna,* is a healthy institution. The modern caste with its arrogant exclusiveness is as good as gone. The innumerable sub-divisions are destroying themselves with a rapidity of which we can have no conception.

—*Young India*: Mar. 25, 1926.

## 18. TO BRAHMINS AND NON-BRAHMINS

YOU have drawn my attention to the existence of the dissensions between the *Brahmins* and the *Non-Brahmins,* and asked me to find out a solution. As a *Non-Brahmin* myself, if I could remove the dissensions by forfeiting my life, I should do so this very moment. But God is a very hard taskmaster. He is never satisfied with fire-works display. His mills, although they grind surely and incessantly, grind excruciatingly slow, and He is never satisfied with hasty forfeitures of life. It is a sacrifice of the purest that He demands, and so you and I have prayerfully to plod on, live out the life so long as it is vouchsafed to us to live it. . . .

### Counsels of Perfection

But I have for both the parties two counsels of perfection which I can lay before you. To the *Brahmin* I will say: "Seeing that you are repositories of all knowledge and embodiments of sacrifice and that you have chosen the life of mendicancy, give up all that the *Non-Brahmin* wants and be satisfied with what they may leave



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for you." But the modern *Brahmin* would, I know, summarily reject my *Non-Brahmin* interpretation of his *Dharma*. To the *Non-Brahmin* I say: "Seeing that you have got numbers on your side, seeing that you have got wealth on your side, what is it that you are worrying about? Resisting as you are, and as you must, untouchability, do not be guilty of creating a new untouchability in your midst. In your haste, in your blindness, in your anger against the *Brahmins*, you are trying to trample under foot the whole of the culture which you have inherited from ages past. With a stroke of the pen, may be at the point of the sword, you are impatient to rid Hinduism of its bed-rock. Being dissatisfied, and properly dissatisfied, with the husk of Hinduism, you are in danger of losing even the kernel, life itself. You, in your impatience, seem to think that there is absolutely nothing to be said about *Varnashrama*. Some of you are ready even to think that in defending *Varnashrama*, I am also labouring under a delusion. Make no mistake about it. They who say this have not even taken the trouble of understanding what I mean by *Varnashrama*.

—*Young India*: Sept. 22, 1927.

## 19. MY VARNASHRAMA DHARMA

IT is a universal law, stated in so many words by Hinduism. It is a law of spiritual economics. Nations of the West and Islam itself unwittingly are obliged to follow that law. It has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. The customs about eating, drinking and



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marriage are no integral part of *Varnashrama Dharma*. It was a law discovered by your ancestors and my ancestors, the *Rishis* who saw that if they were to give the best part of their lives to God and to the world, and not to themselves, they must recognize that it is the Law of Heredity. It is a law designed to set free man's energy for higher pursuits in life. What true *Non-Brahmins* should, therefore, set about doing is not to undermine the very foundations on which they are sitting, but to clean all the sweepings that have gathered on the foundation and make it perfectly clean. Fight by all means the monster that passes for *Varnashrama* to-day, and you will find me working side by side with you.

My *Varnashrama* enables me to dine with anybody who will give me clean food, be he Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi, whatever he is. My *Varnashrama* accommodates a *pariah* girl under my own roof as my own daughter. My *Varnashrama* accommodates *Panchama* families with whom I dine with the greatest pleasure, to dine with whom is a privilege. My *Varnashrama* refuses to bow the head before the greatest potentate on earth, but my *Varnashrama* compels me to bow down my head in all humility before knowledge, before purity, before every person, where I see God face to face. Do not, therefore, swear by words that have, at the present moment, become absolutely meaningless and obsolete. Swear all you are worth, if you like, against *Brahmins* but never against *Brahmanism*, and even at the risk of being understood or being mistaken by you to be a *pro-Brahmin*, I make bold to declare to you that whilst



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*Brahmins* have many sins to atone for, and many for which they will receive exemplary punishments, there are to-day *Brahmins* living in India who are watching the progress of Hinduism and who are trying to protect it with all the piety and all the austerity of which they are capable. Them you perhaps do not even know. They do not care to be known. They expect no reward; they ask for none. Their work is its own reward. They work in this fashion because they must. It is their nature. You and I may swear against them for all we are worth, but they are untouched.

## Sweep Your Own House Clean

Do not run away with the belief that I am putting in a plea for *Brahmins, Vakils* and Ministers and even Justices of the High Courts in India. I have not thought of them in my mind at all. What, therefore, both *Brahmins* and *Non-Brahmins* and, for that matter everybody who wants India to progress has to do, is to sweep his own house clean. I, therefore, suggest to *Non-Brahmins*, who have not yet lost their heads, to think out clearly what it is that they are grieved over, and make up their minds and fight for all they are worth to remove those grievances. I recognize, however, that I have entered upon an academic discussion. Not knowing the merits of their quarrels, I do nothing else. But, in my own humble opinion, I have indicated the lines of action for both and within the limits of your capacity, it is open to you to make use of it in any manner you like.

—*Young India*: Sept. 22, 1927.



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## 20. MY MEANING OF VARNASHRAMA

I WOULD gladly explain my meaning of *Varnashrama* more fully than I have done in order to remove the slightest misunderstanding as to this question of superiority. In my opinion, there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. I believe in the rock-bottom doctrine of *Advaita* and my interpretation of *Advaita* excludes totally any idea of superiorty at any stage whatsoever. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All—whether born in India or in England or America or in any circumstances whatsoever—have the same soul as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves. I have fought this doctrine of superiority in South Africa inch by inch, and it is because of that inherent belief that I delight in calling myself a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver, a farmer and a labourer. And I have fought against the *Brahmins* themselves, wherever they have claimed any superiority for themselves either by reason of their birth or by reason of their subsequently acquired knowledge. I *consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow-being.* And there is the amplest warrant for the belief that I am enunciating in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and I am, therefore, through and through with every *Non-Brahmin* when he fights this monster of superiority, whether it is claimed by a *Brahmin* or anybody else. He who claims superiority, at once forfeits his claim to be called a man. That is my opinion.



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## True Varnashrama Dharma

But in spite of all my beliefs that I have explained to you, I still believe in *Varnashrama Dharma*. *Varnashrama Dharma,* to my mind, is a law which, however much you and I may deny, cannot be abrogated. To admit the working of that law is to free ourselves for the only pursuit in life for which we are born. *Varnashrama Dharma* is humility. Whilst I have said that all men and women are born equal, I do not wish, therefore, to suggest that qualities are not inherited; but, on the contrary, I believe that just as everyone inherits a particular form, so does he inherit the particular characteristics and qualities of his progenitors, and to make this admission is to conserve one's energy. That frank admission, if he will act up to it, would put a legitimate curb upon our material ambitions, and thereby our energy is set free for extending the field of spiritual research and spiritual evolution. It is this doctrine of *Varnashrama Dharma* which I have always accepted. You would be entitled to say that this is not how *Varnashrama* is understood in these days. I have myself said times without number that *Varnashrama,* as it is at present understood and practised, is a monstrous parody of the original; but in order to demolish this distortion, let us not seek to demolish the original. And if you say that the idealistic *Varnashrama,* which I have placed before you, is quite all right, you have admitted all that I like you to admit.



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**Brahmin and Non-Brahmin Question**

I would also urge on you to believe with me that no nation, no individual, can possibly live without proper ideals. And if you believe with me in the idealistic *Varnashrama*, you will also strive with me to reach that ideal so far as may be. As a matter of fact, the world has not anywhere been able to fight against this law. What has happened and what must happen in fighting against the law, is to hurt ourselves and to engage in a vain effort; and I suggest to you that your fight will be all the more successful if you understand all that our forefathers have bequeathed to us and engage in fighting all the evil excrescences that have grown round this great bequest. And if you accept what I have ventured to suggest to you, you will find that the solution of the *Brahmin* and *Non-Brahmin* question also, in so far as it is concerned with the religious aspect, becomes very easy. As a *Non-Brahmin*, I would seek to purify *Brahmanism* in so far as a *Non-Brahmin* can, but not to destroy it. I would dislodge the *Brahmin* from the arrogation of superiority or from places of profit. Immediately a *Brahmin* becomes a profiteering agency, he ceases to be a *Brahmin*. But I would not touch his great learning wherever I see it. And whilst he may not claim superiority by reason of his learning, I myself must not withhold that meed of homage that learning, wherever it resides, always commands.

**Sovereign Remedy**

After all, I must fall upon one sovereign remedy which I think is applicable for all the ills of life. And



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that is, in whatever fight we engage, the fight should be clean and straight, and there should not be the slightest departure from Truth and *Ahimsa*. And if we will keep our carriage safely on these two rails, you will find that our fight, even though we may commit a thousand blunders, will always smell clean and will be easier fought. And even as a train that is derailed comes to a disastrous end, so shall we, if we be derailed off these two rails, come to a disaster. A man who is truthful and does not mean ill even to his adversary, will be slow to believe charges even against his foes. He will, however, try to understand the view-points of his opponents and will always keep an open mind and seek every opportunity of serving his opponents. I have endeavoured to apply this law in my relations with Englishmen and Europeans in general in South Africa as well as here, and not without some success. How much more then should we apply this law in our homes, in our relations, in our domestic affairs, in connection with our own kith and kin?

—*Young India*: Sept. 29, 1927.

## 21. VARNA AND ASHRAMA

SO far as I know anything at all of Hinduism, the meaning of *Varna* is incredibly simple. It simply means the following on the part of us all the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers, in so far as that traditional calling is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics, and this only for the purpose of earning one's livelihood. I regard this as the Law of Our Being,



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if we would accept the definition of man given in all religions. Of all the animal creation of God, man is the only animal who has been created in order that he may know his Maker. Man's aim in life is not, therefore, to add from day to day to his material prospects and to his material possessions, but his predominent calling is from day to day to come nearer his own Maker; and from this definition it was that the *Rishis* of old discovered this Law of Our Being. You will realize that if all of us follow this Law of *Varna*, we would limit our material ambition, and our energy would be set free for exploring those vast fields whereby and wherethrough we can know God. You will at once then see that nine-tenths of the activities, that are to-day going on throughout the world and which are engrossing our attention, would fall into disuse. You will then be entitled to say that *Varna* as we observe it to-day, is a travesty of the *Varna* that I have described to you. And so it undoubtedly is; but just as we do not hate truth because untruth parades itself as truth, but we sift untruth from truth and cling to the latter, so also we can destroy the distortion that passes as *Varna*, and purify the state to which the Hindu society has been reduced to-day.

### A Necessary Corollary

*Ashrama* is a necessary corollary to what I have stated to you; and if *Varna* to-day has become distorted, *Ashrama* has altogether disappeared. *Ashrama* means the four stages in one's life. The *Brahmacharya Ashrama* enjoins that only those who live the life of a *Brah-*



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*machari*, at least up to 25 years, are entitled to enter upon the second *Ashrama, i.e.*, the *Grihastha Ashrama*. And because the whole conception of Hinduism is to make man better than he is and draw him nearer to his Maker, the *Rishis* set a limit even to the *Grihastha Ashrama* stage and imposed on us the obligation of *Vanaprastha* and *Sannyasa*. But to-day you will vainly search throughout the length and breadth of India for a true *Brahmachari*, for a true *Grihastha*, not to talk of a *Varnaprastha* and *Sannæyasi*. We may, in our elongated wisdom, laugh at this scheme of life, if we wish to. But I have no doubt whatsoever that this is the secret of the great success of Hinduism. The Hindu civilization has survived the Egyptian, the Assyrian and the Babylonian. The Christian is but two thousand years old. The Islamic is but of yesterday. Great as both these are, they are still, in my humble opinion, in the making. Christian Europe is not at all Christian, but is groping, and so, in my opinion, is Islam still groping for its great secret; and there is to-day a competition, healthy as also extremely unhealthy and ugly, between these three great religions.

**Varnashrama and Caste**

As year go by, the conviction is daily growing upon me that *Varna* is the Law of Man's Being and, therefore, as necessary for Christianity and Islam, as it has been necessary for Hinduism and has been its saving. I refuse, therefore, to believe that *Varnashrama* has been the curse of Hinduism, as it is the fashion nowadays in the South on the part of some Hindus to say. But that does not mean that you and I may tolerate for one moment



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or be gentle towards the hideous travesty of *Varnashrama* that we see about us to-day. There is nothing in common between *Varnashrama* and caste. Caste, if you will, is undoubtedly a drag upon Hindu progress, and untouchability is as I have already called it or described it an excrescence upon *Varnashrama*. It is a weedy growth fit only to be weeded out, as we weed out the weeds that we see growing in wheat fields or rice fields. In this conception of *Varna*, there is absolutely no idea of superiority and inferiority. If I again interpret the Hindu spirit rightly, all life is absolutely equal and one. It is, therefore, an arrogant assumption on the part of the *Brahmin* when he says: 'I am superior to the other three *Varnas*." That is not what the *Brahmins* of old said. They commanded homage not because they claimed superiority, but because they claimed the right of service through and through without the slightest expectation of a reward. The priests, who to-day arrogate to themselves the function of the *Brahmin* and distort religion, are no custodians of Hinduism or *Brahmanism*. Consciously or unconsciously, they are laying the axe at the root of the very tree on which they are sitting.

—*Young India*: Oct. 20, 1927.

## 22. THE LAW OF OUR BEING

*VARNASHRAMA DHARMA* is one of the foundations on which Hinduism is built... I hold it as a Law of Our Being and whether we know such laws of our being or whether we do not, we have to obey them even as our forefathers obeyed the Law of Gravitation before



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it was discovered by a master mind. Nature's laws are inexorable. We may not disobey them and escape punishment. The conviction is daily forcing itself upon me that this India of ours and the rest of the world are suffering because of our breach of the Law of *Varnashrama Dharma*. If Hinduism to-day seems to me to be in a fallen state, it is not because of *Varnashrama Dharma*, but because of its wilful disobedience of that *Dharma*.

*Varnashrama Dharma* defines man's mission on this earth. He is not born day after day to explore avenues for amassing riches and to explore different means of livelihood; on the contrary, man is born in order that he may utilize every atom of his energy for the purpose of knowing his Maker. It restricts him, therefore, for the purpose of holding body and soul together, to the occupation of his forefathers. That and nothing more or nothing less is *Varnashrama Dharma*, and it is not possible nor desirable nor necessary, that I should ignore *Varnadharma* because the majority of Hindus seem to deny it in their lives. Thus conceived, *Varnashrama Dharma* has nothing in common with castes as we know them to-day. *Varnadharma*, therefore, can never mean, and has never tolerated, untouchability. *Varnadharma*, therefore, has no idea of superiority or inferiority. Because many people or millions of people take the name of God in vain and even insult God and man in the name of God Himself, shall we disown our God and find another name for Him?

—*Young India*: Oct. 27, 1927.



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## 23. SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY

A FEW young men sought an interview with Gandhiji for a discussion on *Varnadharma*. They were troubled as to how the *Brahmin* could shed his superiority so long as he continued to be a *Brahmin*. "Even Sita," said Gandhiji, taking an extreme case to drive the matter home, "even Sita is not superior to a prostitute. Are you satisfied?"

"No," said the friends quite shocked.

"I am," said Gandhiji, "for Sita had no sense of superiority. Had she been proud of her purity, she would have been nowhere. But she was not even conscious of it. She was pure, because it was impossible for her to be otherwise. Are the Himalayas conscious of their supreme heights? Not a bit of it. But if they were, they would crumble to pieces. Even so, *Varna*, if it becomes synonymous with superiority and an expression of egotism, will be nothing better than a halter round the neck. Max Muller put the spirit of Hinduism in a nutshell when he said: 'India considers life as only one thing—DUTY—whereas others thought of enjoyment-*cum*-duty.' *Varna* is nothing more than an indication of the duty that has been handed down to each one of us by our forefathers. In the West, when they talk of the amelioration of the lot of the masses, they talk of raising their standard of life. In India, we need not talk of raising the standard of life. For, how can an outsider raise the standard, when the standard is within every one of us? We can only strive to increase



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man's opportunities of realizing and fulfilling his duties and of getting nearer to God. But you are to-day attempting the impossible task of uprooting the tree. Some of the branches and leaves, I admit, are rotten. Let us have the pruning knife and lop off those diseased branches, but let us not lay the axe at the root. You will be bad gardeners, and destroy the tree under which you have lived and grown. Cut off the unnecessary excrescences, even if in the end the trunk with the root appears like a stubble, but if you keep the root intact and then fondly water it, it will some day grow into a fine big tree.

"But, as I said, the tree cannot be destroyed, for the true *Brahmin* will stand all blows and yet stand erect in his sacrificial dignity. I will admit that there are few *Brahmins* to-day, few *Kshatriyas*, few *Vaishyas* and even few *Shudras*. For, the *Shudra*, too, has an individuality... Let us all aspire to fulfil each one of us his calling. Most of us will have to be *Vaishyas*, for it is the *Vaishyas* who hold us under their heels.

"We will revere the *Brahmin*, not because of his superiority, but because of the superior service that he renders to us. It is because we are degraded to-day that one cannot think except in the terms of superiority and inferiority."—M.D.

—*Young India*: Nov. 3, 1927.

## 24. VARNASHRAMA AND ITS DISTORTION

*VARNA* and *Ashrama* are two different words. The institution of four *Ashramas* enables one the better



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to fulfil the purpose of life for which the Law of *Varna* is a necessity. The Law of *Varna* prescribes that a person should, for his living, follow the lawful occupation of his forefathers. I hold this to be a universal law governing the human family. Its breach entails, as it has entailed, serious consequence for us. But the vast majority of men unwittingly follow the hereditary occupation of their fathers, Hinduism rendered a great service to mankind by the discovery of, and conscious obedience to, this law. If man's, as distinguished from lower animals', function is to know God, it follows that he must not devote the chief part of his life to making experiments in finding out what occupation will best suit him for earning his livelihood. On the contrary, he will recognize that it is best for him to follow his father's occupation, and devote his spare time and talent to qualifying himself for the task to which mankind is called.

In this conception of the Law of *Varna*, no one is superior to any other. All occupations are equal and honourable in so far as they are not in conflict with morals, private or public. A scavenger has the same status as a *Brahmin*. Was it not Max Muller who said that it was in Hinduism more than in any other religion that life was no more and no less than Duty?

There is no doubt that at some stages of its evolution Hinduism suffered corruption, and the canker of superiority and inferiority entered and vitiated it. But this notion of inequality seems to me to be wholly against the spirit of sacrifice which dominates everything in Hinduism. There is no room for arrogation of supe-



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riority by one class over another in a scheme of life based on *Ahimsa* whose active form is undefiled love for all life.

Let it not be said against this Law of *Varna* that it makes life dull and robs it of all ambition. In my opinion, the Law of *Varna* alone makes life livable by *all* and restores to ambition the only object worthy of it, namely, self-realization. To-day, we seem to think of, and strive for, material pursuits which are in their very nature transitory, and we do this almost to the exclusion of the one thing needful.

### Codes of Conduct

If I am told that the interpretation put by me upon *Varna* is not supported by anything to be found in the *Smritis* which are codified Hindu conduct, my answer is that the codes of conduct based upon fundamental invariable maxims of life vary from time to time as we gain fresh experience and make fresh observations. It is possible to show many rules of the *Smritis* which we no longer recognize as binding or even worthy of observance. Invariable maxims are few and common to all religions. The latter vary in their application. And no religion has exhausted the varieties of all possible applications. They must expand with the expansion of ideas and knowledge of new facts. Indeed, I believe that the contents of words grow with the growth of human experience. The connotation of the words sacrifice, truth, non-violence, *Varnashrama* etc. is infinitely richer to-day than it was during the known historic past. Applying



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this principle to the word *Varna*, we need not be bound, it would be foolish and wrong to be bound, by the current interpretation, assuming that it is inconsistent with the requirements of the age or with our notions of morals. To do otherwise will be suicide.

### Prohibitions

*Varna*, considered in the manner above indicated, has nothing in common with caste as we know it to-day, nor is prohibition as to interdining and intermarriage an essential part of the recognition of the Law of *Varna*. That these prohibitions were introduced for the conservation of *Varnas* is possible. Restrictions against promiscuous marriage are necessary in any scheme of life based on self-restraint. Restraints on promiscuous dining arise either from sanitary considerations or differences in habits. But disregard of these restrictions formerly carried, or what is more, should now carry no social or legal punishment or forfeiture of one's *Varna*.

### Four Varnas

*Varnas* were originally four. It was an intelligent and intelligible division. But the number is no part of the Law of *Varna*. A tailor, for instance, may not become a blacksmith although both may be and should be classed as *Vaishyas*.

The question, too, arises how the law is to be worked in these days when all the four *Varnas* or sub-*Varnas* break asunder all the restrictions, seeking by all means lawful and otherwise to advance their material welfare, and when some arrogate superiority over others, who



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in their turn are rightly challenging the claim. The law will work itself out even if we ignore it. But that will be the way of punishment. If we will escape destruction, we will submit to it. And seeing that we are just now engaged in applying to ourselves the sub-human rule of survival of the fittest, meaning the strongest (physically), it would be well to recognize ourselves as one *Varna*, *viz.* *Shudras*, even though some may be teaching and some may be soldiering and some others may be engaged in commercial pursuits... It is the so-called superior that has to descend from his heights, if the reform is to be peaceful. Those who for ages have been *trained* to consider themselves as the lowest in the social scale, cannot suddenly have the equipment of the so-called higher classes. They can, therefore, rise to *power* only by bloodshed, in other words, by destroying society itself.

### No Place for Untouchability

In the scheme of reconstruction I have in view, no mention has been made of the untouchables, for I find no place for untouchability in the Law of *Varna* or otherwise in Hinduism. They, in common with the rest, will be absorbed in the *Shudras*. Out of these, the other three *Varnas* will gradually emerge purified and equal in status, though differing in occupations. The *Brahmins* will be very few. Fewer still will be the soldier class who will not be the hirelings or the uncrestrained rulers of to-day, but real protectors and trustees of the nation laying down their lives for its service. The fewest will be the *Shudras*, for, in a well-ordered society, a minimum



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amount of labour will be taken from fellow-men. The most numerous will be the *Vaishyas*—a *Varna* that would include all professions—the agriculturists, the traders, the artisans, etc. This scheme may sound Utopian. I, however, prefer to live in this Utopia of my imagination to trying to live up to the unbridled licence of a society that I see tottering to its disruption. It is surely given to individuals to live their own Utopias, even though they may not be able to see them accepted by society. Every reform has made its beginning with the individual, and that which had inherent vitality and the backing of a stout soul was accepted by the society in whose midst the reformer lived.

—*Young India*: Nov. 17, 1927.

## 25. THE LAW OF VARNA

**Q.** We do not understand your emphasis on *Varnadharma*. Can you justify the present caste system? What is your definition of *Varna*?

**A.** '*Varna*' means pre-determination of the choice of man's profession. The Law of *Varna* is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. Every child naturally follows the 'colour' of his father, or chooses his father's profession. *Varna*, therefore, is in a way the Law of Heredity. *Varna* is not a thing that is superimposed on Hindus, but men who were trustees for their welfare discovered the law for them. It is not a human invention, but an immutable Law of Nature—the statement of a tendency that is ever present and at work like Newton's Law of Gravi-



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ation. Just as the Law of Gravitation existed even before it was discovered, so did the Law of *Varna*. It was given to the Hindus to discover that law. By their discovery and application of certain laws of Nature, the peoples of the West have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irresistible social tendency have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the world has achieved.

### Nothing to do with Caste

*Varna* has nothing to do with caste. Caste is an excrescence, just like untouchability, upon Hinduism.* All the excrescences that are emphasised to-day were never part of Hinduism. But don't you find similar urgly excrescences in Christianity and Islam also?

Fight them as much as you like. Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the guise of *Varna*. It is this travesty of *Varna* that has degraded Hinduism and India. Our failure to follow the Law of *Varna* is largely responsible both for our economic and spiritual ruin. It is one cause of unemployment and impoverishment, and it is responsible for untouchability and defections from our faith.

But in quarrelling with the present monstrous form, and monstrous practices to which the original law has been reduced, do not fight the law itself.

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* "*Varnadharma* is not caste. I hold that there is nothing in common between caste and Varna. Whilst *Varna* gives life, caste kills it."

—*Young India*: Dec. 15, 1927.



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## The Fourfold Division

**Q.** How many *Varnas* are there?

**A.** Four *Varnas*, though it is not a rigid division inherent in *Varna* itself. The *Rishis*, after incessant experiment and research, arrived at this fourfold division—the four ways of earning one's livelihood.

**Q.** Logically, therefore, there are as many *Varnas* as there are professions?

**A.** Not necessarily. The different professions can easily be brought under the four main divisions—that of teaching, of defending, of wealth-producing, and of manual service. So far as the world is concerned, the dominant profession is the wealth-producing, just as *Grihastha Ashrama* is the most dominant amongst all *Ashramas*. *Vaishya* is the keynote among the *Varnas*. The defender is not wanted if there is no wealth and property. The first two and the fourth are necessary because of the third. The first will always be very few because of the service and discipline required for it, the second must be few in a well-ordered society, and so the fourth.

## Professions

**Q.** If a man practises a profession which does not belong to him by birth, what *Varna* does he belong to?

**A.** According to the Hindu belief, he belongs to the *Varna* in which he is born; but by not living up to it, he will be doing violence to himself and becomes a degraded being—*Patita*.



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**Q.** A *Shudra* does an act which belongs to a *Brahmin* by birth. Does he become a *Patita?*

**A.** A *Shudra* has as much right to knowledge as a *Brahmin,* but he falls from his estate if he tries to gain his livelihood through teaching. In ancient times, there were automatic trade guilds, and it was an unwritten law to support all the members of the profession. A hundred years ago, a carpenter's son never wanted to become a lawyer. To-day he does, because he finds the profession the easiest way to steal money. The lawyer thinks that he must charge Rs. 15,000 as fees for the exercise of his brain, and a physician like Hakim Saheb* thinks that he must charge Rs. 1,000 a day for his medical advice!

**Q.** But may not a man follow a profession after his heart?

**A.** But the only profession after his heart should be the profession of his fathers. There is nothing wrong in choosing that profession; on the contrary, it is noble. What we find to-day are freaks, and that is why there is violence and disruption of society. Let us not confound ourselves by superficial illustrations. There are thousands of carpenters' sons following their fathers' calling, but not even a hundred carpenters' sons who are lawyers. In ages gone by, there was not the ambition of encroaching on others' profession and amassing wealth. In Cicero's time, for instance, the lawyer's was an honorary profession. And it would be quite right for any

* Hakim Ajmal Khan of Delhi.



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brainy carpenter to become a lawyer for service, not for money. Later, ambition for fame and wealth crept in. Physicians served the society and rested content with what it gave them; but now they have become traders and even a danger to society. The medical and the legal professions were deservedly called liberal when the motive was purely philanthropic.

### Highway Robbery

**Q.** All that is under ideal conditions. But what do you propose to-day when everyone is hankering after paying professions?

**A.** It is a sweeping generalization. Put together the number of boys studying in schools and colleges and determine the percentage of boys going in for the learned professions. Highway robbery is not open to everyone. The present seems to me to be an agitation for highway robbery. How many can become lawyers and Government servants? Those who can be legitimately occupied in earning wealth are *Vaishyas*. Even there, when their profession becomes a highway robbery, it is hateful. There cannot be millions of millionaires.

**Q.** You have been saying that the Law of *Varna* curbs our wordly ambition. How?

**A.** When I follow my father's profession, I need not even go to a school to learn it, and my mental energy is set free for spiritual pursuits, because my money or rather livelihood is ensured. *Varna* is the best form of insurance for happiness and for real religious pursuit. When I concentrate my energy on other pursuits, I sell



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away my powers of self-realization or sell my soul for a mess of pottage.

**Q.** You talk of releasing the energies for spiritual pursuits. To-day those who follow their father's professions have no spiritual culture at all—their very *Varna* unfits them for it.

**A.** We are talking with crooked notions of *Varna*. When *Varna* was really practised, we had enough leisure for spiritual training. Even now, you go to distant villages and see what spiritual culture villagers have as compared to the town-dwellers. These know no self-control.

But you have spotted the mischief of the age. Let us not try to be what others cannot be. I would not even learn the *Gita*, if everyone who wished could not do it. That is why my whole soul rises against learning English for making money. We have to re-arrange our lives so that we ensure to the millions the leisure that a fraction of us have to-day, and we cannot do it unless we follow the Law of *Varna*.

### Back to the Same Question

**Q.** You will excuse us, if we go back to the same question over and over again. We want to understand it properly. What is the *Varna* of a man practising different professions at different times?

**A.** It may not make any difference in his *Varna* so long as he gains his livelihood by following his father's profession. He may do anything he likes so long as he does it for love of service. But he who changes profes-



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sion from time to time for the sake of gaining wealth, degrades himself and falls from *Varna*.

**Q.** A *Shudra* may have all the qualities of a *Brahmin* and yet may not be called a *Brahmin?*

**A.** He may not be called a *Brahmin* in this birth. And it is a good thing for him not to arrogate a *Varna* to which he is not born. It is a sign of true humility.

**Q.** Do you believe that qualities attaching to *Varna* are inherited and not acquired?

**A.** They can be acquired. The inherited qualities can always be strengthened and new ones cultivated. But we need not, ought not, to seek new avenues for gaining wealth. We should be satisfied with those we have inherited from our forefathers so long as they are pure.

**Q.** Do you not find a man exhibiting qualities opposed to his family character?

**A.** That is a difficult question. We do not know all our antecedents. But you and I do not need to go deeper into this question for understanding the Law of *Varna* as I have endeavoured to explain to you.

If my father is a trader and I exhibit the qualities of a soldier, I may without reward serve my country as a soldier but must be content to earn my bread by trading.

### Restrictions on Interdining and Intermarriage

**Q.** Caste, as we see it to-day, consists only in restrictions about interdining and intermarriage. Does preservation of *Varna* then mean keeping these restrictions?



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**A.** No, not at all. In its purest state, there can be no restrictions.

**Q.** Can they be omitted?

**A.** They can be, and *Varna* is preserved even by marrying into other *Varnas*.

**Q.** Then, the mother's *Varna* will be affected.

**A.** A wife follows the *Varna* of her husband.

**Q.** Is the doctrine of *Varnadharma*, as you have expounded it, to be found in our *Shastras*, or is it your own?

**A.** Not my own. I derive it from the *Bhagavad Gita*.

**Q.** Do you approve of the doctrine as given in *Manusmriti?*

**A.** The principle is there. But the applications do not appeal to me fully. There are parts of the book which are open to grave objections. I hope that they are later interpolations.

**Q.** Does not *Manusmriti* contain a lot of injustice?

**A.** Yes, a lot of injustice to women and the so-called lower castes. All is not *Shastra* that goes by that name. The *Shastras* so called, therefore, need to be read with much caution.

### Varna in Bhagavad Gita

**Q.** But you go by the *Bhagavad Gita*. It says *Varna* is according to *Guna* and *Karma*. How did you bring in birth?



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**A.** I swear by the *Bhagavad Gita* because it is the only book in which I find nothing to cavil at. It lays down principles and leaves you to find the application for yourself. The *Gita* does talk of *Varna* being according to *Guna* and *Karma*, but *Guna* and *Karma* are inherited by birth. Lord Krishna says, all *Varnas* have been *created* by me— चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टम् ।— *i.e.*, I suppose by birth. The Law of *Varna* is nothing, if not by birth.

**Q.** But there is no superiority about *Varna?*

**A.** No, not at all, though I do say *Brahmanism* is the culmination of other *Varnas*, just as the head is the culmination of the body. It means capacity for superior service, but no superior status. The moment superior status is arrogated, it becomes worthy of being trampled under foot.

**Q.** Kural you know. Do you know that the author of that Tamil classic says there is no caste by birth? At birth, he says, all life is equal.

**A.** He says it as an answer to the present-day exaggerations. When superiority was claimed by any *Varna*, he had to raise his voice against it. But that does not cut at the root of *Varna* by birth. It is only the reformer's attempt to cut at the root of inequality.

**Q.** The present practice is so distorted, that may it not be the best thing to give it up altogether and begin on a clean slate?



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**A.** Only if we were creators. We cannot by a stroke of the pen alter Hindu nature. We can find out a method of working the law, not destroying it.

**Q.** When authors of *Shastras* created new *Smritis*, why not you?

**A.** If I could create a new creation! My state then would be far worse than *Vishvamitra's* and he was far greater than I.

**Q.** So long as you do not destroy *Varna*, untouchability cannot be destroyed.

**A.** I do not think so. But if *Varnashrama* goes to the dogs in the removal of untouchability, I shall not shed a tear. But what bearing has *Varna*, as defined by me, on untouchability?

**Q.** But the opponents of reform quote you in support.

**A.** That is the lot of every reformer. He will be misquoted by interested parties, but you also know that some of them want me to relinquish Hinduism. Others would banish me if they could from the Hindu fold. I have gone nowhere to defend *Varnadharma*, though for the removal of untouchability I went to Vykom. I am the author of a Congress resolution for propagation of *Khadi*, establishment of Hindu-Muslim unity, and removal of untouchability—the three pillars of *Swaraj*. But I have never placed establishment of *Varnashrama Dharma* as the fourth pillar. You cannot, therefore, accuse me of placing a wrong emphasis on *Varnashrama Dharma*.



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**Q.** Do you know that many of your followers distort your teaching?

**A.** Do I not know it? I know that I have many followers only so called.

## Buddhism

**Q.** Buddhism was driven out of India because *Brahmins* dominated the organization. Similarly, they will drive Hinduism out, if it does not serve their end.

**A.** Let them dare. But I am certain that Buddhism has not gone out of India. India is the country that imbibed most of the spirit of the Buddha. Buddhism must be distinguished from the spirit of the Buddha, as well as Christianity from the spirit of the Christ. They were successful in driving out Buddhism, because they had assimilated the central teaching of the Buddha.

**Q.** The same *Brahmin* who assimilated the good things of Buddhism has committed the worst crimes, worse than the Amritsar wrong, by not allowing untouchables entry into temples and imposing on them cruel disabilities.

**A.** You are right to a certain extent. But you are wrong in fixing the guilt on *Brahmins*. It is the whole of Hinduism that is responsible. *Varnadharma*, having become distorted, gave rise to untouchability. There was no deliberate wickedness, but the result was a human tragedy.



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**Q.** But so long as you use the word '*Varnashrama Dharma*', it brings in with it the evil associations of to-day.

**A.** The moral is, destroy the evil association and restore *Varnadharma* to its purity.

### My Programme for You

**Q.** There is an utter state of confusion. How shall we go back?

**A.** All I have to say to you is: Do not destroy the foundation, let us try to purify. Instead, you are trying to deliver a new religion to receive which no one is prepared. *Brahmanism* is synonymous with Hinduism. That is to say, the only term we had for Hinduism was *Brahmanism, i.e., Brahma Vidya,* and in trying to destroy that, you are trying to destroy Hinduism. Fight the *Brahmin* inch by inch, when he encroaches on your right and try to reform him. But it is no use blackguarding every *Brahmin*. There are *Brahmins* and *Brahmins*. One is an out and out reformer, the other is an opponent of reform. You must range the best of the reformer *Brahmins* on your side, and with their help carry out the constructive part of your programme, which can bring about the salvation both of *Brahmins* and *Non-Brahmins*.

Fight the opponents of reform and tell them: 'We shall not call you *Brahmins* if you pursue wealth and power, and if you are not learned and are not able to teach us the true religion.' Then, you will not evoke any opposition from them. You will carry on a fierce



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agitation to bring about reform, you will boycott the schools and temples which distinguish against any *Non-Brahmins*. You will insist upon priests of pure character, of learning and without worldly ambition. You may build new temples, if the old ones refuse to admit the so-called untouchables.

Then, there is the question of interdining. I should not make that a ground for quarrel with anybody. But I should boycott a function where there was a dividing line.

Then, I would fraternise with untouchables and try to deal by them as I should with a blood brother, and break to pieces all little castes and sections. And, therefore, when I marry my boy, I will go out of my way and seek a girl from other sub-sections. We are really so hide-bound to-day by wretched custom that you will not give me a girl to domicile in Gujarat, and you will not take a girl from Gujarat to settle in Tamil Nad.

Then, I would give the untouchables religious education, a grounding in the principle of Hinduism and morality. They are leading a purely animal life to-day. I would induce them to refrain from eating forbidden food and live a pure and clean life. You can easily expand these questions and work out a big constructive programme.

### What Has Hinduism Done for Us ?

**Q.** We see you swear by Hinduism. May we know what Hinduism has done for us? Is it not a legacy of ugly superstitions and practices?



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**A.** I thought I had made it clear already. *Varnashrama Dharma* itself is a unique contribution of Hinduism to the world. Hinduism has saved us from *Bhaya*, *i.e.*, peril. If Hinduism had not come to my rescue, the only course for me would have been suicide. I remain a Hindu because Hinduism is a leaven which makes the world worth living in. From Hinduism was born Buddhism. What we see to-day is not pure Hinduism, but often a parody of it. Otherwise, it would require no pleading from me in its behalf, but would speak for itself, even as if I was absolutely pure I would not need to speak to you. God does not speak with His tongue, and man, in the measure that he comes near God, becomes like God. Hinduism teaches me that my body is a limitation of the power of the soul within.

**Contribution of Hinduism to the World**

Just as in the West they have made wonderful discoveries in things material, similarly Hinduism has made still more marvellous discoveries in things of religion, of the spirit, of the soul. But we have no eye for these great and fine discoveries. We are dazzled by the material progress that Western science has made. I am not enamoured of that progress. In fact, it almost seems as though God in His wisdom had prevented India from progressing along those lines, so that it might fulfil its special mission of resisting the onrush of materialism. After all, there is something in Hinduism that has kept it alive up till now. It has witnessed the fall of Babylonian, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian civilization. Cast a look round you. Where is Rome and where is Greece?



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Can you find to-day anywhere the Italy of Gibbon, or rather the ancient Rome, for Rome was Italy? Go to Greece, where is the world-famous Attic civilization? Then come to India, let one go through the most ancient records and then look round you and you would be constrained to say: 'Yes, I see here ancient India still living.' True, there are dung-heaps, too, here and there, but there are rich treasures buried under them. And the reason why it has survived is, that the end which Hinduism set before it was not development along material but spiritual lines.

**Identity with the Dumb Creation**

Among its many contributions, the idea of man's identity with the dumb creation is a unique one. To me, cow worship is a great idea which is capable of expansion. Its freedom from the modern proselytization is also to me a precious thing. It needs no preaching. It says: 'Live the life.' It is my business, it is your business to live the life, and then we will leave its influence on ages. Then, take its contribution in men: Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, not to speak of the more modern names, have left their impress on Hinduism. Hinduism is by no means a spent force or a dead religion.

Then, there is the contribution of the four *Ashramas*, again a unique contribution. There is nothing like it in the whole world. The Catholics have the order of celibates corresponding to *Brahmacharis*, but not as an institution, whereas in India every boy had to go through the first *Ashrama*. What a grand conception



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it was! To-day our eyes are dirty, thoughts dirtier and bodies dirtiest of all, because we are denying Hinduism.

There is yet another thing I have not mentioned. Max Muller said, forty years ago, that it was dawning on Europe that transmigration is not a theory, but a fact. Well, it is entirely the contribution of Hinduism.

To-day, *Varnashrama Dharma* and Hinduism are misrepresented and denied by its votaries. The remedy is not destruction, but correction. Let us reproduce in ourselves the true Hindu spirit, and then ask whether it satisfies the soul or not.

—*Young India*: Nov. 24, 1927.

## 26. NOT INCONSISTENT WITH NATIONALITY

**Q.** Do you think that the principles of *Varnashrama Dharma* are inconsistent with the formation of Indian nationality?

**A.** In the first place, *Varnashrama* has nothing to do with untouchability or with castes as we know them to-day. In the second place, *Varnashrama*, as I know it, is in no way inconsistent with the growth of Indian nationality. On the contrary, if it has the meaning that I have given to it, it is calculated to promote a truly national spirit.

**Q.** Do you think that sins of touch and sight are of *Vedic* origin?

**A.** Though I cannot speak with authority based on first-hand knowledge, I have full confidence in the purity of the *Vedas*, and, therefore, have no hesitation



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in asserting that the sins of touch and sight have no support in the *Vedas*, but scholars can speak with much greater authority than I can lay claim to. I would, however, add, that no matter what is credited with *Vedic* origin, if it is repugnant to the moral sense, it must be summarily rejected as contrary to the spirit of the *Vedas*, and perhaps what is more, as contrary to fundamental ethics.

**Karmakanda**

**Q.** Don't you think that the *Karmakanda* is based upon a knowledge of the laws of magnetism, and that the rules regarding touch and sight, birth pollution and death pollution are intended for the purification of the mind?

**A.** In so far as they are so intended, they have a certain relative value, but the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and all the other *Shastras*, as also the other religions of the world, proclaim in no uncertain terms, that purification of the mind is an inward process, and that the magnetism produced by the inter-action of physical bodies is nothing compared to the other subtle magnetism of mind upon mind, and the outward purificatory rites become soul destroying, when they result in making man arrogate to himself superiority over fellow-human beings and in making him treat them virtually as beasts or even less.

**Q.** Do you think that the procedures adopted by *Jivanmuktas*, that is those who have in the present body attained salvation, who are above the rules of do and



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don't, are conducive to the spiritual growth of ordinary folk?

**A.** I do not think that anybody, however highly evolved he may be, who lives on the earth and among earthly beings, can be himself above the obligations binding on common mortals, and, therefore, these rules have to appeal to reason and must never be allowed to crush the spirit within. The rules about untouchability have been demonstrated and can be demonstrated to be injurious to the growth of the spirit, and they are wholly contrary to all that is best and noblest in Hinduism.

**Q.** Do you not believe in *Varnadharma?*

**A.** I do in the manner often explained in these pages. In my opinion, *Varnadharma* has nothing to do with untouchability or one division over another.

—*Young India*: Oct. 3, 1929.

## 27. CASTE AND VARNA

I DO not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap on progress. Nor do I believe in inequalities between human beings. We are all absolutely equal. But equality is of souls and not bodies. Hence it is a mental state. We need to think of and to assert equality because we see great inequalities in the physical world. We have to realize equality in the midst of this apparent external inequality. Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against God and man. Thus caste, in so far as it connotes distinctions in status, is an evil.



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I do, however, believe in *Varna* which is based on hereditary occupations,—imparting knowledge, defending the defenceless, carrying on agriculture and commerce and performing service through physical labour. These occupations are common to all mankind, but Hinduism, having recognized them as the Law of Our Being, has made use of it in regulating social relations and conduct. Gravitation affects us all whether one knows its existence or not. But scientists who knew the law have made it yield results that have startled the world. Even so has Hinduism startled the world by its discovery and application of the Law of *Varna*. When Hindus were seized with inertia, abuse of *Varna* resulted in innumerable castes with unnecessary and harmful restrictions as to intermarriage and interdining. The Law of *Varna* has nothing to do with these restrictions. People of different *Varnas* may intermarry and interdine. These restrictions may be necessary in the interest of chastity and hygiene. But a *Brahmin* who marries a *Shudra* girl or *vice versa* commits no offence against the Law of *Varna*.

## A Class Apart

The untouchables are a class apart—a standing reproach to Hinduism. The castes are a handicap, they are no sin. Untouchability is a sin, a grievous crime, and will eat up Hinduism, if the latter does not kill the snake in time. 'Untouchables' should no longer be the outcastes of Hinduism. They should be regarded as honoured members of Hindu society, and should belong to the *Varna* for which their occupation fits them.



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According to my definition of *Varna*, there is no *Varna* in operation at present in Hinduism. The so-called *Brahmins* have ceased to impart knowledge. They take to various other occupations. This is more or less true of the other *Varnas*. In reality, being under foreign domination we are all slaves, and hence less than *Shudras*—untouchables of the West.

—*Young India*: June 4, 1931.

The removal of untouchability means the removal of all distinctions of superiority and inferiority attaching to birth. *Varnashrama Dharma* is a beautiful institution, but if it is used to buttress up social superiority of one section over another, it will be a monstrosity. Let removal of untouchability result from a living conviction that all are one in the eyes of God, that the Father in Heaven will deal with us all with even-handed justice.

—*Young India*: Aug. 6, 1931.

## 28. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF HINDUISM

FOUR *Varnas* and four *Ashramas* are an arrangement not peculiar to Hinduism but capable of world-wide application, and a universal rule, the breach of which has involved humanity in numerous disasters. The four *Ashramas* are *Brahmacharya, Garhasthya, Vanaprasthya* and *Sannyasa*. *Brahmacharya* is the stage during which men as well as women prosecute their studies, and should not only observe *Brahmacharya* but should also be free from any other burden except that of studies. This lasts till at least the twenty-fifth year,



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when the student becomes a householder if he wishes. Almost all the students thus become householders. But this stage should close at the age of fifty. During that period, the householder enjoys the pleasures of life, makes money, practises a profession and rears a family. From fifty to seventy-five, wife and husband should live apart and wholly devote themselves to the service of the people. They must leave their families and try to look upon the world as a big family. During the last 25 years, they should become *Sannyasis*, live apart, set to the people an example of ideal religious life and maintain themselves with whatever the people choose to give them. It is clear that society as a whole would be elevated if many carried out this scheme in their lives.

**Unknown Outside India**

So far as I am aware, the *Ashrama* arrangement is unknown outside India; but, even in India, it has practically disappeared at present. There is no such thing now as *Brahmacharya*, which is intended to be the foundation of life. For the rest, we have *Sannyasis*, most of them such only in name, with nothing of *Sannyasa* about them except the orange robe. Many of them are ignorant, and some who have acquired learning are not knowers of *Brahma* but fanatics. There are some honourable exceptions, but even these well-conducted monks lack the lustre we love to associate with *Sannyasa*. It is possible that some real *Sannyasis* lead a solitary life. But it is obvious that *Sannyasa*, as a stage in life, has fallen into desuetude. A society which is served by able *Sannyasis* would not be poor in spirit, un-



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provided even with the necessaries of life, and politically dependent, as Hindu society is at present. If *Sannyasa* were with us a living thing, it would exert a powerful influence on neighbouring faiths, for the *Sannyasi* is a servant not only of Hinduism but of all the faiths of mankind.

But we can never hope to see such *Sannyasis* unless *Brahmacharya* is observed in the country. As for *Vanaprasthya,* there is no trace of it. The last stage we have to consider is that of the householder. But our householders are given to unregulated self-indulgence. Householders, in the absence of the other *Ashramas,* live like brutes. Self-restraint is the one thing which differentiates man from beast, but it is practised no longer.

**Plight of the Varnas**

If the *Ashrama* scheme has broken down, the plight of the *Varnas* is equally bad. At first, there were four *Varnas* (classes); but now there are innumerable sections or only one. If we take it that there are as many *Varnas* as there are castes and sub-castes, their name is legion; on the other hand, if as I think *Varnas* have nothing to do with caste, there is only a single *Varna* left and that is the *Shudra.* We are there not finding fault with anybody but only stating the facts of the case. *Shudras* are those who serve and are dependent upon others. India is a dependency; therefore, every Indian is a *Shudra.* The cultivator does not own his land, the merchant his merchandise. There is a hardly a *Kshatriya* or a *Brahmin* who possesses the virtues which the *Shastras* attribute to his *Varna.*



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## Idea of High and Low

My impression is that there was no idea of high and low when the *Varna* system was discovered. No one is high and no one is low in this world; therefore, he who thinks he belongs to a high class is never high-class, and he who believes himself to be low is merely the victim of ignorance. He has been taught by his masters that he is low. If a *Brahmin* has knowledge, those who are without it will respect him as a matter of course. But if he is puffed up, imagines himself to belong to a high class, he directly ceases to be a *Brahmin*. Virtue will always command respect, but when the man of virtue thinks much of himself, his virtue ceases to have any significance for the world. Talents of all kinds are a trust and must be utilized for the benefit of society. The individual has no right to live unto himself. Indeed, it is impossible to live unto oneself. We fully live unto ourselves when we live unto society.

No matter what was the position in ancient times, no one can nowadays go through life claiming to belong to a high class. Society will not willingly admit any such claim to superiority, but only under duress. The world is now wide awake. This awakening has perhaps given rise to some licence, but even so public opinion is not now prepared to accept any distinctions of high and low, which are being attacked on all sides. There is ever increasing realization that all are equal as human souls. The fact that we are all the creatures of one God, rules out all ideas of high and low. When we say that no one is high-born or low-born, it does not mean



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that all have or ought to have equal talents. All have not equal talents, equal property or equal opportunities. Still, all are equal like brothers and sisters of different dispositions, abilities and ages.

If, therefore, the *Varna* system is a spiritual arrangement, there cannot be any place in it for high and low.*

Thus, there are four *Varnas*, all equal in status, and they are determined by birth. They can be changed by a person choosing another profession, but if *Varnas* are not, as a rule, determined by birth, they tend to lose all meaning.

**Ethical and Economic**

The *Varna* system is ethical as well as economic. It recognizes the influence of previous lives and of heredity. All are not born with equal powers and similar tendencies. Neither the parents nor the State can measure the intelligence of each child. But there would be no difficulty if each child is prepared for the profession indicated by heredity, environment and the influence of former lives; no time would be lost in fruitless experimentation, there would be no soul-killing competition, a spirit of contentment would pervade society and there would be no struggle for existence.

The *Varna* system implies the obliteration of all distinctions of high and low. If the carpenter is held to

* "It is a sin to believe that anyone else is inferior or superior to ourselves. We are all equal. It is the touch of sin that pollutes us, and never that of a human being. None are high and none are low for one who would devote his life to service. The distinction between high and low is a blot on Hinduism, which we must obliterate."

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 286.



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be superior to the shoemaker, and the pleader or doctor is superior to both of them, no one would willingly become a shoemaker or carpenter and all would try to become pleaders or doctors. They would be entitled to do so and to be praised for doing so. That is to say, the *Varna* system would be looked upon as an evil and abolished as such.

But when it is suggested that every one should practise his father's profession, the suggestion is coupled with the condition that the practitioner of every profession will earn only a living wage and no more. If the carpenter earns more than a shoemaker, and the pleader or doctor more than both, everyone would become a lawyer or doctor. Such is the case at present, with the result that hatred has increased and there are more lawyers and doctors than are necessary. It may be that society needs the lawyer or doctor, even as it needs the shoemaker and the carpenter. These four professions are here taken only as illustrations and for comparison. It would be irrelevant to stop to consider whether society has particular need or no need at all for this, that or the other profession.

### Learning is Not a Trade

This principle, then, is an integral part of the *Varna* system that learning is not a trade and may not be used in order to amass riches. Therefore, in so far as his ministrations may be necessary, the lawyer or doctor ought, by practising his profession, to earn only a living wage. And such was actually the case formerly. The village *Vaidya* (physician) did not earn more than the



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carpenter, but only a living wage. In short, the emoluments of all crafts and professions should be equal and amount to a living wage. The number of *Varnas* has no sanctity about it; their value is due to the fact that they define the duties of man. *Varnas* may be supposed to be one or more, just as we like. The scriptures enumerate four of them. But when once we have assigned equal status to all, it makes little difference whether we think that there are four of them or that there is only one.

Such is the *Varna* system which we are trying to resuscitate. It is like Dame Partington with her mop, trying to push back the Atlantic Ocean. I have already mentioned its two fundamental principles, namely that there are no high and low, and every one is entitled to a living wage, the living wage being the same for all. In so far as these principles win acceptance, they will render a positive service to society.

**Acquisition of Knowledge**

It may be objected that if such a plan is accepted, there will be no incentive for the acquisition of knowledge. But the object with which knowledge is acquired nowadays tends to corrupt it, and, therefore, the absence of an incentive will be entirely beneficial. Knowledge, truly so called, is intended for one's salvation, that is to say, service of mankind. Whoever has a desire to render service will certainly try to equip himself with the requisite knowledge, and his knowledge will be an ornament to himself as well as to society. Again when the temptation to amass riches is removed, there will be a change for the better in the curriculum of studies as



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well as in the methods of education. There is much misuse of knowledge at present. This misuse will be reduced to the minimum in the 'new order'.

Even then, there will be scope for competition in trying to be good and helpful. And there will be no discontent or disorder as all will receive a living wage.

*Varna* is wrongly understood to-day. That wrong understanding must make way for the principles outlined above. Untouchability must go, and *Varnas* should have nothing to do with interdining or intermarriage. A person will dine with and marry whom he likes. But, as a rule, he will marry someone who belongs to the same *Varna* as himself. But if he marries a person belonging to another *Varna*, his act will not count as a sin. A person will be boycotted not by the *Varna*, but by society at large when his conduct justifies such a measure. Society will be better constituted than it is at present, and the impurity and hypocrisy which infest it now will be disloged.

—*Ashram Observances in Action*: P. 81-90.

## 29. CASTE SYSTEM AND UNTOUCHABILITY

**Q.** Why not do away with the caste system altogether? If there is a difference between caste and caste, and caste and untouchability, is it not one only of degree?

**A.** Untouchability, as it is practised in Hinduism to-day, is in my opinion, a sin against God and man and is, therefore, like a poison slowly eating into the very



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vitals of Hinduism. In my opinion, it has no sanction whatsoever in the Hindu *Shastras* taken as a whole. Untouchability of a healthy kind is undoubtedly to be found in the *Shastras*, and it is universal in all religions. It is a rule of sanitation. That will exist to the end of time; but untouchability, as we are observing to-day in India, is a hideous thing and wears various forms in various provinces, even in districts. It has degraded both the untouchables and the touchables. It has stunted the growth of nearly 40 million human beings. They are denied even the ordinary amenities of life. The sooner, therefore, it is ended, the better for Hinduism, the better for India and, perhaps, better for mankind in general.

### Difference of Kinds

Not so the caste system. There are innumerable castes in India. They are a social institution. They are so many trade guilds, as was well said by the late Sir William Wilson Hunter. And at one time they served a very useful purpose, as, perhaps, they are even now doing to a certain extent. This institution has superadded to it restrictions which, in my opinion, are undesirable and are bound to go in course of time. There is nothing sinful about them. They retard the material progress of those who are labouring under them. They are no bar to the spiritual progress. The difference, therefore, between caste system and untouchability is not one of degree, but of kind. An untouchable is outside the pale of respectable society. He is hardly treated as



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a human being. He is an out-caste hurled into an abyss by his fellow-beings occupying the same platform. The difference, therefore, is somewhat analogous to the difference between heaven and hell.

### An Answer to the Social Need

There is one thing more to be remembered about the caste system. For me, it is not the same as *Varnashrama Dharma*. Whilst the caste system is an answer to the social need, *Varnashrama* is based upon the Hindu scriptures. Not so the cate system. While there are innumerable castes (some dying out and new ones coming into being), the *Varnas* are, and have always been, four. I am a firm believer in *Varnashrama*. I have not hesitated before now to consider it as a gift of Hinduism to mankind. Acceptance of that *Dharma* is, so far as I have been able to see it, a condition of spiritual growth. But I may not here elaborate my view of these four famous divisions in Hinduism. Their consideration is irrelevant to the present purpose. But I may make this admission that to-day this *Varnashrama Dharma* is not being observed in its purity. There is an utter confusion of *Varna* and, if Hinduism is to become a living force in the world, we have to understand its real purpose and revive it; but we cannot do so, unless the canker of untouchability is destroyed. The idea of inferiority and superority has to be demolished. The four divisions are not a vertical section, but a horizontal plane on which all stand on a footing of equality, doing the services res-



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pectively assigned to them.* A life of religion is not a life of privileges, but of duty. Privileges may come, as they do come to all, from a due fulfilment of duty. In the book of God, the same number of marks are assigned to the *Brahmin* that has done his task as well as to the *Bhangi* who has done likewise.

—*Harijan*: Feb. 11, 1933.

## 30. CASTE SYSTEM AND VARNA

I DO not believe the caste system, even as distinguished from *Varnashrama,* to be an 'odious and vicious dogma.' It has its limitations and its defects, but there is nothing sinful about it, as there is about untouchability; and, if it is a bye-product of the caste system, it is only in the same sense that an ugly growth is of a body, or weeds of a crop. It is as wrong to destroy caste because of the outcaste, as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth in it, or a crop because of the weeds. The outcasteness, in the sense we understand it, has, therefore, to be destroyed altogether. It is an excess to be removed, if the whole system is not to perish. Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this 'high-and-low'ness. The moment untouch-

* "*Varnashrama* is not a vertical line, but it is a horizontal plane on which all the children of God occupy absolutely the same status, though they may be engaged in different pursuits of life and though they may have different qualities and different tastes."

—*Harijan*: Feb. 18, 1933.



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ability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true *Varnadharma*, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other.

—*Harijan*: Feb. 11, 1933.

## 31. A SANATANIST'S CONCLUSIONS

A *PANDIT* writes:

"Humanism is admittedly the highest form of religious idealism, but, for all practical purposes, it must remain the private property of the saints and *Siddha Purushas*. There are inequalities in the society, both in natural endowment and personal habits. No amount of love or legislative efforts will do away with these inequalities between man and man.

"According to the abstract theory of justice, we cannot condone invidious distinction between man and man for the mere accident of birth or the mistaken choice of profession. But in dealing with men, we must face the stern reality and admit the necessity of differential treatment between different castes and classes of people.

"The Hindu law-makers were not insensible to the theoritical rights of men, nor were they actuated by the pride of caste or racial hatred. As eminently practical men, they pocketed their superior philosophy of universal brotherhood and cosmopolitan sympathy, and laid down different laws for different castes and classes of people.

"According to the *Shastras*, a *Sannyasin* has no caste. Likewise, in practice, a truly pious man is always revered irrespective of his caste. This shows the true spirit of Hindu religion. The best way, therefore, of rising superior to the stigma of social inferiority is not enfranchisement, but emancipation from the snare of the dark forces of Nature".

The *Pandit* has summarily dismissed the ideals of Hinduism about equality and justice, by regarding them



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as the private property of the saints, forgetting that ideals and saints become perfectly useless if the practice of the poor sinners can never approach the ideals and their repositories, the saints. What is that justice "which will not condone invidious distinction between man and man, but will make us face the stern reality and admit the necessity of differential treatment between different castes and classes of people"? Who are the different castes and what is the differential treatment between them? For instance, among the *Banias*, whom I should know best, there are about 50 castes. I know of no differential treatment between them. Nor do I find any authority for the formation of these castes in the *Smritis*. There are as many castes among the *Brahmins* as there are leaves in the little tree under which I am sitting, but I do not find any *Smriti* which enumerates these castes and the differential treatment. I have a shrewd suspicion that these gentlemen will fight to the last ditch any attempt made to mete out differential treatment to them, and some of them may even, like my *Non-Brahmin* friends, consign to the flames Sanskrit verses printed and stitched together and passed off as divinely inspired *Smritis*.

## My Humble Prescription

The *Pandit* says:—

> "The best way, therefore, of rising superior to the stigma of social inferiority, is not enfranchisement, but emancipation from the snare of the dark forces of Nature."

Who is to be emancipated from the snare of the dark forces of Nature? Evidently, the *Pandit* means



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that it is not the *Brahmin* who has to emancipate himself from the snare of superiority, but the poor *Harijan* has to disengage himself from the snare of inferiority. Unfortunately, that is precisely what the modern *Sanatanist Brahmin* is resisting, and that is precisely what Dr. Ambedkar demands almost at the point of the bayonet. For, he says "the dark forces of Nature shall no longer hold me in their snare. I shall rise to the same height that the *Brahmin* occupies, even though I may have to demolish both him and myself in the attempt." Yet, that is the net result of the *Pandit's* prescription.

As against the *Pandit's*, my humble prescription is that it is the *Brahmin* whose privilege and duty it is to disentangle himself from the snare of superiority and himself become a '*Harijan*'—man of God. Then only will he vindicate the glory of *Varna Dharma* and the true message of Hinduism, for which he is supposed "to live, move and have his being." I invite the *Pandit* to appreciate this very simple prescription.

—*Harijan*: Feb. 25, 1933.

## 32. CONFUSING THE ISSUE

I AM one of those who think that the caste system, in so far as it is the English equivalent for *Varnashrama*, is nothing but a division of labour or duty. Anyone, who will take the trouble of looking at any religious book, must find this out for himself. In that sense, the divisions or classes are four and no more, and these classes are known all the world over. One is the repository of knowledge, the other is that of power, the third



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is that of wealth and the fourth is that of service. All these four labours are regarded as duties to be discharged by every one of them for the protection and advancement of *Dharma,* and everyone who performs his duty to the best of his knowledge and ability gains equal merit with the rest, if the latter, too, do likewise. The merit, therefore, consists, not in being one or the other, but in the performance of the duty assigned to it. Here, there is no untouchability. There is no superiority. And this is the essence of *Varnadharma.* It may be non-existent to-day and it is so. That, however, in no way diminishes the force of my argument that there is no superiority and inferiority in the original conception of *Varnadharma* and that untouchability can never be a necessary outcome of this pure division of duties. If this *Varnashrama* cannot be revived in its original simplicity and purity, persons like me would consider it to be a calamity. Others may welcome it, but let *Varnadharma* and untouchability stand or fall on their own merits or demerits. Confusing the two can only add to the difficulty of removal of untouchability, which all reformers and even many *Sanatanists* desire. The caste-abolitionists must, therefore, hold their souls in patience and join the battle against the common and admitted evil of untouchability.

### Varnashrama of My Conception

*Varnashrama,* as I interpret it, satisfies the religious, social and economic needs of a community. It satisfies the religious needs, because a whole community accepting the law is free to devote ample time to spiritual per-



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fection. Observance of the law obviates social evils and entirely prevents the killing economic competition. And if it is regarded as a law laying down, not the rights or the privileges of the community governed by it, but their duties, it ensures the fairest possible distribution of wealth, though it may not be an ideal, *i.e.*, strictly equal, distribution. Therefore, when people in disregard of the law mistake duties for privileges and try to pick and choose occupations for self-advancement, it leads to confusion of *Varna* and ultimate disruption of society. In this law, there is no question of compelling any person to follow the parental occupation against his or her aptitude; that is to say, there can be no compulsion from without as there was none for, perhaps, several thousand years, during which the Law of *Varnashrama* worked without interruption. By training, the people had recognized the duty and the justice of the law, and they voluntarily lived under it. To-day, nations are living in ignorance and breach of that law and they are suffering for it. The so-called civilized nations have by no means reached a state which they can at all regard with equanimity and satisfaction.

**Interdining and Intermarriage**

It is easy enough to see that this conception of *Varnashrama* has nothing to do with restrictions as to interdining and intermarriages. The *Vedas* and the *Mahabharata* are filled with illustrations both of interdining and intermarriage. But these are matters of choice, not a matter of religious regulation. No one can be compelled or required to dine with any other or con-



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tract marital relations. No doubt, social habits will grow up and regulate these things more or less rigidly. But it would be wrong to dignify them by the name of religious observances. Therefore, interdining and intermarriage can form no part of the campaign against untouchability.* In so far as they are a matter for reform, they must be treated, in my opinion, as an absolutely separate subject, unconnected either with untouchability or even with *Varnashrama* reform. So far as the multiplicity of castes, apart from *Varnadharma,* are concerned, they are essentially trade-guilds or societies, with intermarriage and interdining restrictions of a more or less rigid character super-imposed upon them. Castes are as numerous as the leaves of the famous banyan tree, whose every branch becomes a trunk for shooting out more branches. They are undergoing a perpetual transformation. Many have disappeared and new ones are appearing. Surely, they have nothing to do with *Varnashrama,* nor have they anything to do with religion. That to-day they are regarded by *Sanatanists* as an integral part of Hinduism arises, in my opinion, from an utter ignorance of the working of these trade guilds. There are undoubtedly many undesirable practices that have crept into these corporations, but that is only because Hindu-

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* "Marrying and dining are matters of individual concern. No one has a right to ask another to choose a girl for wife or to dine with anybody against his will. But if a person refuses to take food touched by another person on the ground of untouchability or inferiority, he is observing untouchability. In other words, untochability cannot constitute any ground for resraint on interdining or marriage."

—*Harijan*: Mar. 23, 1934.



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ism as a religion has ceased to be a living, vitalising force. We are to-day living upon capital which is itself being fast exhausted.

—*Harijan*: Mar. 4, 1933.

## 33. 'RISE IN THE SOCIAL SCALE'

**Q.** Does not your *Varnadharma* deprive people of all chances of rise in social scale? Should not everyone have the permission to follow what occupation he likes?

**A.** According to my conception of *Varna*, all inequality is ruled out of life. Inequality of intellect or in material possessions ought not to mean inequality of social status. I do most emphatically maintain that man is not made to choose his occupation for 'rising in the social scale'. He is made to serve his fellow-man and earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. And since the primary wants of all are the same, all labour should carry the same value.

This law Hinduism discovered and called the Law of *Varna*, and carried it out in practice, more or less perfectly, with amazing success. What we see to-day in Hinduism is its caricature. It is my certain conviction that obedience to that law alone can save the perishing world. Its conscious recognition means contentment and consequent freeing of human energy for the moral uplift. Its disregard spells unhealthy discontent, greed, cut-throat competition and moral stagnation ending in spiritual suicide. This law, as I understand it, is not,



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and never has been, a mere ceremonial rule regulating the restrictions on eating and marrying.

—*Harijan*: Mar. 11, 1933.

As I have interpreted *Varnadharma,* there is no bar in any shape or form to the highest mental development. The bar altogether moral is against change of hereditary occupation for the sake of bettering one's material condition, and thus setting up a system of unhealthy and ruinous competition which is to-day robbing life of all its joy and beauty.

—*Harijan*: July 29, 1933.

## 34. THE MUCH-MALIGNED BRAHMIN

I BELIEVE *Brahminism* to be unadulterated wisdom, leading one to the realization of *Brahma,* that is God. If I did not hold that view, I should no longer call myself a Hindu. *Brahmins,* however, like all the other members of the human family, are not all true representatives of *Brahminism.* But I have to believe that, of all the classes in the world, the *Brahmin* will show the largest percentage of those who have given up their all in search of knowledge, that is Truth. I know of no system other than Hinduism under which a class has been set apart from generation to generation for the exclusive pursuit of divine knowledge and consigned to voluntary poverty. That *Brahmins* could not keep up the high standard that they had imposed upon themselves, is no special fault of theirs. Their imperfection merely proves that they were as fallible as the rest of mankind, and so corrup-



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tion crept into the so-called sacred books, and we have the spectacle of the most selfless rules governing *Brahmins* side by side with the selfish rules also made by them in order to help their breed. But it was the *Brahmins* who rose against the corruptions and selfish interpolations into the sacred texts. It was they who, time and again, strove to purge themselves and society of evil.

### Degradation of Brahminism

But I admit that *Brahmins*, as a class, have suffered degradation. If they had not, if they had lived up to their profession, Hinduism would not be in the degraded state in which it is. It would be a contradiction in terms to suggest that Hinduism is what it is, in spite of the correct life of the *Brahmins*. That could not be, because the *Brahmins* themselves have taught us to believe that they are the true custodians of the divine wisdom and that, where there is divine wisdom, there is no fear, there is no grinding pauperism, there is no high and low state, there is no greed, jealousy, war, plunder and the like. Because *Brahminism* went down, it drew down with it all the other classes of Hindus, and I have not a shadow of doubt in my mind that if *Brahminism* does not revive, Hinduism must perish; and for me the infallible test of the revival of *Brahminism*, that is Hinduism, is the root and branch removal of untouchability.

### Confusion of Varna

The more I study the Hindu Scriptures and the more I discuss them with all kinds of *Brahmins*, the more I



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feel convinced that untouchability is the greatest blot upon Hinduism. This conviction is amply supported by many learned *Brahmins* who have no axes to grind, who are devoted to the pursuit of Truth and who receive nothing, not even thanks for their opinion. But to-day *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas, Vaishyas* and *Shudras* are mere labels. There is utter confusion of *Varna* as I understand it... and I wish that all the Hindus will voluntarily call themselves *Shudras*. That is the only way to demonstrate the truth of *Brahminism* and to revive *Varnadharma* in its true state. Because all Hindus may be classed as *Shudras*, wisdom and power and wealth will not disappear, but they will be all used for the service of not a sectional religion, but the service of Truth and Humanity. Anyway, in battling against untouchablity and in dedicating myself to that battle, I have no less an ambition than to see a complete regeneration of humanity. It may be a mere dream, as unreal as the silver in the sea-shell. It is not so to me while the dream lasts, and in the words of Romain Rolland: "Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it."

—*Harijan*: Mar. 25, 1933.

## 35. MERE BIRTH COUNTS FOR NOTHING

THE following three verses from Madame Wadia's instructive address delivered the other day will bear reproduction:

"Listen to these words of Yudhishthira in the *Vanaparva* of the *Mahabharata*:



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'Truth, charity, forgiveness, good conduct, gentleness, austerity and mercy, where these are seen, O King of the Serpents, there is a *Brahmin*. If these marks exist in a *Shudra* and are not in a *Dvija*, the *Shudra* is not *Shudra*, nor the *Brahmin* a *Brahmin*.'

And in the *Vishnu-Bhagvata* we read:

'What is said as to the marks of conduct indicative of a man's caste, if those marks are found in another, designate him by the caste of his marks (*i.e.* not of his body and birth).'

But some of you would prefer *Manusmriti*. Well, here you are:

'As a wooden elephant, as a leathern deer, such is an unlearned *Brahmin*; these three bear only names. The *Brahmin*, who, not having studied *Vedas*, labours elsewhere, becomes a *Shudra* in that very life together with his descendants.'"

These and numerous other verses from the *Shastras* unmistakably show that mere birth counts for nothing. A person must show corresponding works and character to establish his claim by birth. —*Harijan*: Apr. 15, 1933.

## 36. INCONSISTENCIES ?

A CORRESPONDENT, who is a diligent student of my writings, finds it difficult to reconcile my recent writings about intercaste dining and intercaste marriage and corresponding writings of some years ago. He quotes from my article on 'Hinduism' contributed to *Young India* of 6th October 1921.* I give the quotations below with his omissions:—

"Though, therefore, *Varnashrama* is not affected by interdining and intermarriage, Hinduism does most emphatically discourage interdining and intermarriage between divisions. Hinduism reached the highest limit of self-restraint. It is undoubtedly a religion of renunciation of the flesh, so that the spirit may be set free...By restricting his choice of a bride to a particular group, he exercises rare self-restraint...Prohibition against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul."

* See *Interdining and Intermarriage*, P. 9.



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And then he quotes from my statement dated the 4th November last year, which was circulated to the Press. I give the quotations again with his omissions:—

> "Restriction on intercaste dining and intercaste marriage is no part of Hindu religion. It is a social custom which crept into Hinduism when perhaps it was in its decline...To-day these two prohibitions are weakening Hindu society, and emphasis on them has turned the attention of mass mind from the fundamentals which are vital to life's growth...Dining and marriage restrictions stunt Hindu society."

As I read them with a detached mind, I find no contradiction between the two statements, especially if they are read in their full context. In the statement of 1921, I wrote on Hinduism and gave the briefest outline of it. On the 4th of November, I had to apply myself to the innumerable castes and caste restrictions. The mode of life in the *Ashram* in 1921 was absolutely the same as it is now. Therefore, my practice has undergone no change. I still believe that restriction imposed by oneself upon interdining and intermarriage is an act of renunciation of the flesh. There is one word that perhaps I would change if I was writing the article of 1921 to-day. Instead of 'prohibition', I should repeat the expression used in the same article just a few lines before and say 'self-imposed restriction against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul.'

In spite of my statement of 4th November last, I would say that interdining and intercaste marriage are in no way essential for the promotion of the spirit of brotherhood or for the removal of untouchablity. At the same time, a super-imposed restriction would undoubtedly stunt the growth of any society, and to link these restric-



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tions to *Varnadharma* or caste is undoubtedly prejudicial to the freedom of the spirit and would make *Varna* a drag upon religion.

### To the Diligent Reader

But having said this, I would like to say to this diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth, I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

—*Harijan*: Apr. 29, 1933.

## 37. CASTE AND VARNA

**Q.** Do you wish the caste system to remain or to go?

**A.** If untouchability goes, the castes, as we know them to-day, go. I talk of the extreme form of untouchability. But the evil is so widespread that, in some form or other, it runs through the whole Hindu social system and corrupts it. The distinction of high and low is at the bottom of untouchability. If the extreme form goes,



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the rest is bound to go. If it does not, our movement will be a mere camouflage. So long as the idea of high and low is not abolished, untouchability cannot be said to have been abolished.

**Q.** What, then, of the *Varna* which you seek to defend?

**A.** I do. But you must know my definition of it. It is as different from the present caste system as chalk is from cheese. *Varna,* as I undertand it, is an economic law which operates, whether we know it or not. Conformation to it will bring happiness to mankind. Disregard for it is disrupting society to-day all over the world. *Varna* is the antithesis of the doctrine of 'might is right.' It abolishes all distinctions between high and low.

**Q.** But nobody gives the meaning you give to *Varna?*

**A.** That may be. Evolution of human thought is evolution of the meaning of words. I have no difficulty in seeing my meaning in the original *Mantra* from which the theory of *Varna* is derived, nor in the *Gita* verses referring to *Varna.* Regulations about dining and marriage have no direct connection with *Varna.* The distinguishing feature of *Varna* is occupation.

### Not a Man-Made Law

**Q.** Then, you will restrict everyone to his father's occupation?

**A.** Neither I nor anybody else can impose the restriction on anyone. *Varnadharma* is not a man-made



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law to be imposed or relaxed at his will. It is natural to man in his regenerate state. He may disregard it to his cost. Everyone is free to follow or disobey it. It was discovered in India and followed more or less faithfully and knowingly for centuries. It is being followed ignorantly and helplessly even now by the bulk of the people. In the eye of that law, *Brahmin* and *Bhangi* are absolutely on an equal footing. A *Bhangi* who does his work willingly and faithfully will find favour with God. A *Brahmin* who, no matter how learned he may be, does not follow his calling, will incur divine displeasure. The law does not confer privileges, it defines duties. Truest democracy can be evolved only by a due recognition of, and obedience to, the law. Thus, in my opinion, there is no evil in *Varna*. The evil consists in considering the *Varna* as higher than another.

### Difference Between Caste and Varna

**Q.** Surely, the *Varna* that you describe exists only in your imagination! What we see around us is the solid fact of hundreds of castes, each claiming to be higher than some other.

**A.** That is unfortunately so. I am simply answering your question and showing you the vital difference between caste and *Varna*. Castes are a human manufacture, are daily weakening and have to go. *Varna*, as defined by me, may be said to exist in my imagination. Its definition is not imaginary. It is inherent in the *Mantra* on which it is based and is given in so many words in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

—*Harijan*: Jan. 12, 1934.



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## 38. ANTI-BRAHMINISM

TO undermine *Brahmanism* is to undermine Hinduism. This does not mean endorsement of the claim that the *Brahmins*, so called, may put forth to-day. No man can be accepted as a *Brahmin* by society merely by reason of his birth. The *Shastras* themselves say that a born *Brahmin*, who does not act according to the requirements of *Brahmanism*, will forfeit his right to be called a *Brahmin* by the people in general. There are *Brahmins* themselves to-day who say that they cannot be called *Brahmins* unless they carry out the precepts of the *Shastras* referring to them. I believe that the *Brahmin* is the corner-stone of Hinduism, as of every other religion. But there you must understand the meaning of the word *Brahmin*. The *Brahmin* is the person who has realized *Brahma*. If he has not that realization in every act of his, he shows that he is ever after it and nothing else. Such a *Brahmin* demands my ten thousand prostrations every morning, but not the *Brahmin* who is dictated to by self, who is multiplying himself day after day and thinks mostly of himself, rarely of others; nor even the *Brahmin* who smears himself with ashes from top to toe and can punctiliously and correctly recite the *Vedas*. It may be necessary for him to smear himself with ashes. It is necessary for him to translate the *Vedas* in his own life. It is necessary for him to exhibit *Brahma* in every act of his life. It is necessary for him to be pure and to impart that purity to all his surroundings. It is necessary for him to be



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ever ready to die that others may live. Now you understand what regard I have for the true *Brahmin* and *Brahmanism*.

—*Harijan*: Jan. 26, 1934.

## 39. CASTE DISTINCTIONS

**Q.** I represent a brotherhood which is out to break caste distinctions and to preach harmony between religions. Sri Narayana Guru advocated one God, one religion, one caste. What is your message for me?

**A.** I wish you all success. I do believe in harmony between all religions. I have myself worked at it in my humble way. Caste distinctions, in so far as they imply superiority of one over another, have to be abolished altogether. That is merely a phase or a grade of untouchability. But in so far as caste in the sense of *Varna* fulfils Nature's law of conservation of human energy and true economics, it is good to recognize and obey the law. You may deny the existence of any such law. I can then only refer you to the few proofs I have given in the columns of *Harijan* in support of it.... Belief in one God is the corner-stone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same and identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions. But I can clearly see the time coming when people belonging to



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different faiths will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own. I think that we have to find unity in diversity. I need say no more about caste beyond this—that, in so far as abolition of distinctions of high and low are concerned, there is but one caste. We are all children of one and the same God and, therefore, absolutely equal.

—*Harijan*: Feb. 2, 1934.

The forms are many, but the informing Spirit is one. How can there be room for distinctions of high and low where there is this all-embracing fundamental unity underlying the outward diversity? For, that is a fact meeting you at every step in daily life. The final goal of all religions is to realize this essential oneness.

—*Harijan*: Dec. 15, 1933.

## 40. INSTITUTION OF THE DEVIL

CASTE, in so far as it is based on untouchability, is an institution of the devil, and we must get rid of it at any cost. But I have explained repeatedly that caste expressed as *Varnadharma* is an eternal law which we may not break except at our own risk. There are many laws of Nature, which are still hidden from us. That does not mean that they are not in existence or that they do not operate in our lives. The Law of *Varna* was discovered by our ancestors ages ago; and, as I have understood and interpreted it, it has appeared to me a wholly beneficent law. But like many laws and institutions of Nature, this Law of *Varna* has been distorted, and we see it to-day in its hideous form. Man



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—Hindu man—has disfigured it and made it doubly hideous by tainting it with untouchability. *Varnadharma* is an economic law. It is my certain conviction that, if the whole world followed that law, the strife that we see around us would cease at once. It is pre-eminently a law of concord, never of discord.

—*Harijan*: Feb. 9, 1934.

## 41. A REFORMER'S DIFFICULTY

A CORRESPONDENT writes:

"In the course of your drive against untouchability, you make some remarks which seem to be inconsistent with your previous writings. For instance, you wrote some years ago that the rule about restraint of interdining was intended for the evolution of the soul but was no part of *Varnadharma*. Now, if you grant the necessity or the advisability of restraint upon interdining for the evolution of the soul, how can you say, as you have now-a-days been saying, that for anyone to object to dine with an 'untouchable' on the ground of untouchability is a sin? I agree with you that restraint upon interdining is no part of *Varnadharma;* but I do not understand why interdining retards the evolution of the soul."

Here there is a double confusion. In the first instance, restraint upon interdining on the ground of untouchability is wholly different from the restraint based on the ground of the evolution of the soul. The first restraint excludes a whole class whose very existence is challenged, the second excludes nobody on the ground of his birth in a particular class, but it may exclude those individuals who are addicted to particular habits. Thus, restraint on the ground of untouchability will persist without reference to the person's habits, while that on the ground of evolution of the soul will abate immediately the person excluded sheds his objectionable



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habits. There is, therefore, no inconsistency between the *Young India* writing referred to and my present position. Secondly, even if my opinion as expressed in *Young India* is indefensible, the correspondent's doubt is solved by my showing, as I have shown, that my condemnation of objection to interdining on the ground of untouchability has nothing to do with the restraint referred to in *Young India*, of which I have approved.

—*Harijan*: Apr. 13, 1934.

## 42. THE TRUE BRAHMIN

ACCORDING to the *Shastras, Brahmins* are expected to spend themselves in the service of religion by *tapas*, social service and the quest of *Brahma* or Truth. It is a pity that modern *Brahmins* not only pay no attention to the duties which have been laid upon them and do not serve religion, but follow all manner of professions to enrich themselves. A true *Brahmin* should be the very image of humility, and not be proud of his knowledge or wisdom. A *Brahmin* would cease to be a *Brahmin* if he considers himself superior to others, as it is his duty to teach people to look upon a *Brahmin* and a *Bhangi* with an equal eye. Again, a *Brahmin* is hardly worth the name, if he does not have the courage of his own convictions. We must fear the Lord and none else. Cowardice is incompatible with divine wisdom.

—*Harijan*: May. 18, 1934.



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## 43. VARNASHRAMA DHARMA

AS a reformer of Hinduism, I want to restore the ancient *Varnashrama Dharma* to its pristine purity. *Varnashrama Dharma* lays down the functions and duties of various classes according to their special aptitudes and gifts, and has nothing to do with questions of marriage and food and drink.

The four *Varnas* do not exist to-day, and, therefore, it is the duty of those who believe in the *Varnas* to restore them by observing the sovereign principles of purity and self-restraint. Even assuming that *Varnas* exist, instances are not wanting in *Mahabharata* and other works of inter-*Varna* marriages. After all is said and done, the laws and codes governing personal conduct apply to the times in which they were framed. The ruling principle is self-restraint.

There are, besides, numerous texts in our *Smritis* which contradict one another, and hence we cannot blindly accept every text as gospel truth. We have to prove them on the touchstone of Truth and Non-violence. There are things, for instance, in *Manusmriti* which no author believing in *Ahimsa* could ever have written and which run counter to the precepts in the same great work, precepts which would do credit to the spiritual genius of any race or clime. I must expunge those texts as apocryphal, as we do in the case of many verses of doubtful authenticity which have crept into a much more recent work like, for instance, Tulsidas' *Ramayana*. For me, the text of Manu defining *Sana-*



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*tana Dharma*—Eternal Religion—is all sufficing: "That *Dharma* is eternal which is always observed by saintly men of learning, free from ill-will and passion, and which appeals to one's *Hridaya* or sense of right and justice."

As regards my own practice in matters of food and drink, everyone knows that I eat food from the hands of any human being, provided it is clean and pure. It is a purely personal question and not a social question at all. I am not out for reform in the matter, as I know that it can take care of itself, and I, therefore, do not seek to air my views in public. My own sister would not eat food cooked by many, certainly not food touched by a Harijan. But I would not strive with her. It should be enough for me that she discards untouchability and refuses to regard a human being an untouchable because of his birth.

—*Harijan*: Aug. 24, 1934.

## 44. SOME CONUNDRUMS

**Q.** What is the distinguishing characteristic of a *Sanatani* Hindu? Why do you claim to be a *Sanatani* Hindu?

**A.** Belief in, and practice of, *Varnashrama Dharma* may be said to be the distinguishing characteristic of Hindu *Dharma*. I regard myself a *Sanatani* Hindu, because I try to the best of my ability to obey the eternal precepts of the faith as embodied in *Shastras* as I understand them.

**Q.** You have said that when a man forsakes his hereditary calling, he creates confusion of caste. How



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far is this consistent with the meaning inferable from the use of the expression in the First Chapter of the *Gita?*

**A.** That a person creates confusion of caste when he leaves his hereditary calling is obvious. When a *Brahmin* begins to earn his bread by, say, following the profession of a barber or engineer, he does create confusion of caste, as much as when a barber or an engineer begins to impart religious instruction as a means of livelihood. In the *Gita*, the adjective used in refer ence to women is 'wicked'. It has, therefore, reference probably to promiscuous intercourse rather than the off-spring born of the sacred tie of marriage.

**Q.** What have you to say to the verses in the *Smritis* on the marriage of a *Brahmin* woman with a *Shudra* man?

**A.** I do not regard as revelation the collection of verses printed under one cover as *Smritis*. I have no doubt that there are many interpolations in the *Smritis* and the other scriptural books. As I have said often enough, I reject as interpolations everything in the *Smritis* or other writings that is inconsistent with Truth and Non-violence or other fundamental and universal principles of ethics. There is abundant testimony in the ancient writings to show that such marriages were permitted.

### Superiority and Inferiority

**Q.** You say there is no superiority or inferiority among the four *Varnas*. I believe in what you say, but is it



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consistent with many texts one can quote from the *Shastras* which clearly enunciate the opposite? See, what the *Smritis* have to say of *Shudras*.

**A.** The idea of superiority and inferiority is repugnant to the most elementary principles of morality.* A *Brahmin* who considers himself superior to any single creature of God, ceases to be a knower of *Brahma*. If we are children of the same God, how can there be any rank among us? The very first mention of *Varna* in the *Vedas* likens the four *Varnas* to the four main parts of the body. Is the head superior to the arms, the belly and the feet, or the feet superior to the other three? What will happen to the body, if these members began a quarrel about rank? The Law of *Varna* is one of absolute equality among all the creatures of God. It is the basis of all the religions of the world. The verses in the *Smritis* about *Shudras* deserve to be summarily rejected as being contrary to the spirit of humanity.

## Swadharma

**Q.** You say that *Varna* or caste is determined generally by birth. You also say that a *Brahmin*, who does not show in his conduct the marks of one, falls.

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* "Birth and observance of forms cannot determine one's superiority or inferiority. Character is the only determining factor. God did not create men with the badge of superiority or inferiority, and no scripture which labels a human being as inferior or untouchable, because of his or her birth, can command our allegiance; it is a denial of God and Truth which is God."

—*Harijan*: Aug. 31, 1934.



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To what *Varna* does he belong? What about a *Shudra* who shows the mark of a *Brahmin*?

**A.** Both the *Brahmin* and *Shudra* who forsake their *Swadharma* are fallen. In their fallen state, they belong to no *Varna*. They can repair their mistake by resuming *Swadharma*—their own calling.

**Q.** It is said that a man becomes what he eats and that he is corrupted if he takes food or even water prepared or even touched by a corrupt person. And you say that prohibition against interdining is not an integral part of *Varna* or caste rule. Is that so?

**A.** It is insolence for any person to regard a fellow-being as corrupt and, therefore, untouchable. A man is corrupted by harbouring corrupt thoughts, making corrupt speech and doing corrupt acts, never by taking water or food at the hygienically clean hands of fellow-beings. I do believe that a man has to choose the ingredients of the food he eats. —*Harijan*: Sept. 28, 1934.

## 45. THE LAW OF VARNA AND ASHRAMA

I HAVE never made a fetish of consistency. I am a votary of Truth and I must say what I feel and think at a given moment on the question, without regard to what I may have said before on it. It is for the reader to find out how far my present views coincide with those formerly expressed. Wherever he finds that what I have said or written before runs contrary to what I am writing now, he should without hesitation reject the former. As my vision gets clearer, my views must grow clearer



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with daily practice. Where I have deliberately altered an opinion, the change should be obvious, only a careful eye would notice a gradual and imperceptible evolution.

*Varnashrama Dharma* is a compound word known to all our vernaculars, and, though the word *Dharma* (law) is related to both the components *Varna* and *Ashrama*, the words are rarely used in separation. Hinduism is but another an imperfect name for *Varnashrama Dharma*. The word 'Hindu' was apparently coined by foreigners and has more a geographical than any other content. The *Dharma* (religion or law) that Hindus have professed to observe is *Varnashrama Dharma*. To say that the *Dharma* of the Hindus is Aryan does not carry us very far. It simply means that the Hindus or those who lived in the east of the Indus called themselves Aryas and others non-Aryas. To give our *Dharma* this kind of ethnic label is, in my opinion, misleading. It should have a name that declares its predominant characteristic, and everyone will admit that Hinduism is nothing without the Law of *Varna* and *Ashrama*. It would be impossible to find any *Smriti* work of which large part was not devoted to *Varnashrama Dharma*. This Law of *Varna* and *Ashrama* is to be traced to our most ancient scriptures—the *Vedas*, and so no one, who calls himself a Hindu, may ignore it. It is his duty to study it in all its bearings and to reject it if it is an excrescence, and to foster it and restore it to its pristine purity, if it represents a universal law.



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## The Four Ashramas

So far as the Law of *Ashrama* is concerned, it is extinct, alike in profession and observance. Hinduism lays down four *Ashramas* or stages—the life of a *Brahmachari* (continent student) the life of a *Grihastha* (householder), the life of a *Vanaprastha* (who has retired) and the life of a *Sannyasi* (renunciator)—through which every Hindu has to pass to fulfil his purpose in life. But the first and the third are practically non-existent to-day, the fourth may be said to be observed in name to a small extent. The second is professed to be observed by all to-day, but it is observed in name, not in spirit. *Grihasthas* or householders of a kind we all are, inasmuch as we eat and drink and propagate our kind, like all created beings. But in doing so, we fulfil the Law of the Flesh and not of the Spirit. Only those married couples who fulfil the Law of the Spirit can be said to observe the Law of *Grihastha Ashrama*. Those who live the mere animal life, do not observe the law. The life of householders of to-day is one of indulgence. And as the four stages represent a ladder of growth and are interdependent, one cannot leap to the stage of a *Vanaprastha* or a *Sannyasi*, unless he or she has fulfilled the law of the first two *Ashramas—Brahmacharya* and *Grihastha*. The Law of the *Ashrama*, therefore, is a dead letter to-day. It can be revived only if the Law of *Varna*, with which it is intimately interlinked, is revived.



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## The Four Varnas

That brings us to a consideration of the Law of *Varna*. *Varna* can certainly be said to exist, though in a distorted form. There are four *Varnas*, but the distortion that passes as *Varna* to-day is divided into countless castes. All the four *Varnas* are divided into numerous castes and sub-castes, but whilst those who belong to the first three are not ashamed to declare that they belong to them, those who belong to the fourth, *viz. Shudra*, prefer to declare the sub-caste as their label rather than their *Varna*, which they regard as a badge of humiliation.

But labels never reveal a man's character, nor does the fact that a man clings to a label show that he deserves it. A black man will not be red, no matter how repeatedly he calls himself red. In the same way, one does not become a *Brahmin* by calling oneself a *Brahmin*. Not until a man reveals in his life the attributes of a *Brahmin* can he deserve that name. Considered in this light, *Varna* may be said to be extinct. If we may, indeed, claim a label, we can call ourselves *Shudras*, though really we are not entitled to that name either, inasmuch as we do not observe the law of that *Varna*. The law is the Law of One's Being, which one has to fulfil. The fulfilment should be spontaneous and no matter of honour or shame. How many are there who are fulfilling the law as law, *i.e.*, spontaneously? We fulfil it because we cannot help it, we are all serfs, whether we will it or no. Let no one contend that *Varna* exists to-day, because all the functions of the different *Varnas* are being performed by someone or other and some-



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how or other. *Varna* is intimately, if not indissolubly, connected with birth, and the observance of the Law of *Varna* means the following on the part of us all the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers in a spirit of duty. Those who thus fulfil the Law of their *Varna* can be counted on one's finger's ends. This performance of one's hereditary function is done as a matter of duty, though it naturally carries with it the earning of one's livelihood. Thus, the function of a *Brahmin* is to study and to teach the science of *Brahman* (or spiritual truth). He performs the function, as he cannot do otherwise, as it is the Law of His Being. That secures him his livelihood, but he will take it as a gift from God. A *Kshatriya* will perform the function of protecting the people in the same spirit, accepting for his livelihood whatever the people can afford to give him. A *Vaishya* will pursue wealth-producing occupations for the welfare of the community, keeping for himself enough for his own maintenance and rendering the balance to the community in one shape or other. A *Shudra* will perform physical labour in the same spirit of service.

*Varna* is determined by birth, but can be retained only by observing its obligations. One born of *Brahmin* parents will be called a *Brahmin*, but if his life fails to reveal the attributes of a *Brahmin* when he comes of age, he cannot be called a *Brahmin*. He will have fallen from *Brahminhood*. On the other hand, one who is born not a *Brahmin* but reveals in his conduct the



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attributes of a *Brahmin* will be regarded as a *Brahmin*, though he will himself disclaim the label.

### Law of Life

*Varna*, thus conceived, is no man-made institution but the Law of Life universally governing the human family. Fulfilment of the law would make life livable, would spread peace and content, end all clashes and conflicts, put an end to starvation and pauperisation, solve the problem of population and even end disease and suffering.

But if *Varna* reveals the Law of One's Being and thus the duty one has to perform, it confers no right, and the idea of superiority or inferiority is wholly repugnant to it. All *Varnas* are equal, for the community depends no less on one than on another. To-day *Varna* means gradations of high and low. It is a hideous travesty of the original. The Law of *Varna* was discovered by our ancestors by stern austerities. They sought to live up to the law to the best of their capacity. We have distorted it to-day and have made ourselves the laughing stock of the world. No wonder that we have to-day amongst the Hindus a section which is bending its energies to a destruction of the institution which in their opinion spells the ruin of the Hindus. And certainly one need have no mercy for the hideous distortion, which means nothing but destruction of Hinduism.

### Restrictions about Food and Drink

I do not for a moment suggest that there should be no restrictions about food and drink or about marital



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relations. I do not myself regard it a duty to eat whatever is offered and in whatever company I should chance to be, and I regard it as nothing short of self-indulgence to marry according to one's fancy. Strict restraint is the Law of Life and must, therefore, govern these relations no less than others. I hold that there are rules about diet. Man is not an omnivorous animal, nor may he pick up his mate wherever he likes. But restrictions on marital or social relations have nothing to do with *Varnadharma*, which is a different thing altogether. I can conceive blameless marital relations between different *Varnas*, and people of different *Varnas* seated together to eat food permissible to all. There is evidence enough to show that in ancient times there were no watertight compartments between *Varnas*, so far as marital and social relations went, and I have no doubt that, in making *Varna* a mere matter of restrictions about food and drink and marriage, we have done Hinduism grave harm.

Though the Law of *Varna* is a special discovery of some Hindu seer, it has universal application. Every religion has some distinguishing characteristic, but if it expresses a principle or law, it ought to have universal application. That is how I look at the Law of *Varna*. The world may ignore it to-day, but it will have to accept it in the time to come.

### My Definition of the Law of Varna

I would define the law briefly thus: The Law of *Varna* means that everyone shall follow as a matter of



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*Dharma*—duty—the hereditary calling of his forefathers, in so far as it is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics. He will earn his livelihood by following that calling. He may not hoard riches, but devote the balance for the good of the people.

The four *Varnas* have been compared in the *Vedas* to the four members of the body, and no simile could be happier. If they are members of one body, how can one be superior or inferior to another? If the members of the body had the power of expression, and each of them were to say that it was higher and better than the rest, the body would go to pieces. Even so, our body politic, the body of humanity, would go to pieces, if it were to perpetuate the canker of superiority or inferiority. It is this canker that is at the root of the various ills of our time, especially class-wars and civil strife. It should not be difficult for even the meanest understanding to see that these wars and strife could not be ended except by the observance of the Law of *Varna*. For, it ordains that everyone shall fulfil the Law of One's Being by doing in a spirit of duty and service that to which one is born. Earning of livelihood is the necessary result. But the law has to be fulfilled for its own sake. Its due observance by a large part of mankind will end the conflicting inequalities and give place to an equality in diversity. All callings would be equally reputable—whether that of the minister or of the lawyer, of the doctor or the leather-worker, of the carpenter or the scavenger, of the soldier, of the trader, of the farmer, of the spiritual teacher. In this ideal



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state of things, there would be no room for the monstrous anomally of the three *Varnas* lording it over the *Shudra,* or of the *Kshatriya* and the *Vaishya* enjoying themselves in their places and the *Brahmin* contenting himself with a cottage and the *Shudra* toiling for the rest and living in a hovel. This chaotic state of things indicates that the Law of *Varna* has become a dead letter.

## The Ideal State

When, if ever, the ideal state of things, as indicated above, had been reached in India, I do not know. But I do hold that it is the only ideal state that is easy enough to approach and that it is not only for the Hindu but for the whole of humanity.

Under such a dispensation, all property will be held by its respective holders in trust for the community. No one will claim it as his own. The king will hold his palace in trust for his people, and will collect the taxes only to be used for the benefit of the people. He has the right to have no more than is enough to keep him, the rest belongs to, and shall be spent only for, the people. Indeed, he will, by virtue of his resourcefulness as a ruler, add to what he collects from the people and return it to them manifold. The *Vaishya* likewise is such a trustee. The *Shudra* is made so. Indeed, if one may have preference, the *Shudra,* who performs body-labour in a spirit of service and duty, who has nothing to call his own and who has no desire for ownership, is worthy of the world's homage; he is the lord of all, because he is the greatest servant. The dutiful *Shudra*



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will, of course, repudiate any such claim, but the gods will shower their choicest blessings on him. One may not say this of the proletariat of the present day. They certainly own nothing, but I expect they covet ownership. The calling of labour and service is no pleasant duty to them. It is a painful task, for it does not satisfy even the cravings of the flesh. My praise is for the ideal labourer. It is the estate I have longed to attain.

But this duty of labour cannot be imposed on anybody. In fact, the panegyric may be uttered only by those of the three *Varnas* who fulfil the law themselves, *viz.*, the law of regarding and behaving themselves as the servants of the community and holding all the property in trust for it. The three *Varnas* exist to-day only in name, they are supposed to invest one with a higher status than that of the *Shudra* and have ceased to imply any duty to be performed. There is nothing, therefore, to be surprised at, nor to be sorry for, when in such a state of things the *Shudras* should be jealous of the others' possessions and their estate and seek to share them. When the Law of *Varna* was discovered, there could be no compulsion from without. The world can only be sustained by a willing and dutiful observance of it.

## True Socialism

In an age where competition is held to be the Law of Life, and possession in the largest measure of the world's goods the *summum bonum,* and when everyone counts oneself free to follow any calling one likes, this attempt to hold up *Varna* as the Law of Life may well be regard-



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ed as an idle dream, and an attempt to revive it as childish folly. Be that as it may, it is my firm conviction that it is true socialism. In the language of the *Gita*, it is equality of the spirit, without which no other equality is possible. The performance of it, no matter how slight, bodes well both for him who performs it and for the rest of mankind.

I may add that, though the *Varnas* are to be four, the number is not, in my opinion, unalterable. In the future reconstruction, the number may be more or even less than four. What is essential is that one must seek one's livelihood, and no more, from following the vocation to which one is born. —*Harijan*: Sept. 28, 1924.

## 46. WOMEN AND VARNA

AN esteemed friend writes:—

"From your recent writing on *Varna*, it seems that the principle of *Varna* adumbrated by you is intended to apply only to men. What, then, about women? What would determine a woman's *Varna?* Perhaps, you will answer that before marriage a woman would take her *Varna* from her father; after marriage from her husband. Should one understand that you support Manu's notorious dictum that there can be no independence for woman at any stage of her life, that before marriage she must remain under the tutelage of her parents, after marriage under that of her husband and, in the event of her widowhood, under that of her children?

"Be that as it may, the fact remains that ours is an era of woman suffrage and that she has definitely entered the lists with men in the pursuit of independent avocations. It is, thus, the commonest thing now-a-days to find a woman serving as a school-mistress, while her husband is doing business as a money-lender. To what *Varna* would the woman, under these circumstances, belong? Under the *Varnashrama* dispensation, a man would normally take up the avocation and,



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therefore, also the *Varna* of his parents, while a woman would adopt that of her parents; and they may well be expected to stick to their respective avocations after their marriage. To what *Varna* between these would their children belong? Or, would you leave the question to be decided by the children themselves, by their free, independent choice? In the latter case, what becomes of the heredity basis of *Varna* which the *Varnashrama Dharma,* as expounded by you, postulates?"

In my opinion, the question raised is irrelevant in the circumstances prevailing to-day. As I have pointed out in the writing referred to, owing to the confusion of the *Varnas,* to-day there are in reality no *Varnas,* the *Varna* principle has ceased to operate. The present state of Hindu society may be described as that of anarchy; the four *Varnas* to-day exist in name only. If we must talk in terms of *Varna,* there is only one *Varna* to-day for all, whether men or women; we are all *Shudras.*

**Social Equality of All**

In the resuscitated *Varna Dharma,* as I conceive it, a girl before her marriage will belong to the *Varna* of her father, just like her brother. Intermarriages between different *Varnas* will be rare. A girl will, therefore, retain her *Varna* unimpaired even after her marriage. But should the husband belong to a different *Varna,* then, on marriage, she would naturally adopt his *Varna* and relinquish that of her parents. Nor need such a change of *Varna* be understood to imply a slur against anybody or touch anybody's susceptibilities, since the institution of *Varna* in the age of resuscitation would imply absolute social equality of all the four *Varnas.*

I do not envisage the wife, as a rule, following an avocation independently of her husband. The care of



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the children and the upkeep of the household are quite enough to fully engage all her energy. In a well-ordered society, the additional burden of maintaining the family ought not to fall on her. The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to household management; the two thus supplementing and complementing each other's labours.

## No Invasion of Women's Rights

Nor do I see in this any invasion of woman's rights or suppression of her freedom. The saying attributed to Manu that "For woman there can be no freedom" is not to me sacrosanct. It only shows that probably, at the time when it was promulgated, women were kept in a state of subjection. The epithets used in our literature to describe a wife are *Ardhangna*, 'the better-half', and *Saha Dharmini*, 'the help-mate'. The husband addressing the wife as *Devi* or 'goddess' does not show any disparagement. But, unfortunately, a time came when the woman was divested of many of her rights and privileges and was reduced to a status of inferiority. But there could be no question of depreciation of her *Varna*. For, *Varna* does not connote a set of rights or privileges; it prescribes duties or obligations only. And no one can divest us of our duty, unless we ourselves choose to shirk it. The woman who knows and fulfils her duty, realizes her dignified status. She is the queen, not the slave, of the household over which she presides.

I need hardly say after this that, if the position set forth by me with regard to the role of the woman in society



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is accepted, the question of the *Varna* of the children will cease to present any problem, as there will be no more any discrepancy as between the *Varnas* of the husband and wife.

—*Harijan*: Oct. 12, 1934.

## 47. CASTE HAS TO GO

I BELIEVE in *Varnashrama* of the *Vedas* which, in my opinion, is based on absolute equality of status, notwithstanding passages to the contrary in the *Smritis* and elsewhere.

Every word of the printed works passing muster as *Shastras* is not, in my opinion, a revelation.

The interpretation of accepted texts has undergone evolution and is capable of indefinite evolution, even as the human intellect and heart are.

Nothing in the *Shastras* which is manifestly contrary to universal truth and morals can stand.

Nothing in the *Shastras* which is capable of being reasoned can stand if it is in conflict with reason.

*Varnashrama* of the *Shastras* is to-day non-existent in practice.

The present caste system is the very anthithesis of *Varnashrama*. The sooner public opinion abolishes it, the better.

In *Varnashrama*, there was and should be no prohibition of intermarriage or interdining. Prohibition there is of change of one's hereditary occupation for purposes of gain. The existing practice is, therefore, doubly wrong in that it has set up cruel restrictions about inter-



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dining and intermarriage and tolerates anarchy about choice of occupation.

Though there is in *Varnashrama* no prohibition against intermarriage and interdining, there can be no compulsion. It must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual as to where he or she will marry or dine. If the Law of *Varnashrama* was observed, there would naturally be a tendency, so far as marriage is concerned, for people to restrict the marital relations to their own *Varna*.

As I have repeatedly said, there is no such thing as untouchability by birth in the *Shastras*. I hold the present practice to be a sin and the greatest blot on Hinluism. I feel more than ever that if untouchability lives, Hinduism dies.

**Quickest Way to Destroy Caste**

The most effectve, quickest, and the most unobstrusive way to destroy caste is for reformers to begin the practice with themselves and, where necessary, take the consequences of social boycott. The reform will not come by reviling the orthodox. The change will be gradual and imperceptible. The so-called higher classes will have to descend from their pedestal before they can make impression upon the so-called lower classes. Day-to-day experience of village work shows how difficult the task is of bridging the gulf that exists between the city-dwellers and the villagers, the higher classes and the lower classes. The two are not synonymous terms. For, the class distinction exists both in the cities and the villages.

—*Harijan*: Nov. 16, 1935.



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## 48. CASTE AND VARNA

WHEN untouchability goes, untouchables will occupy precisely the same position as castemen. And whatever rule or custom then governs castemen, will govern Harijans who are no longer Harijans. If, therefore, caste remains as it is now, there will be no intermarriage and no interdining between Harijans and castemen. But if caste goes in its present form, as it will some day, there will most undoubtedly be intermarriage and interdining between Harijans and castemen as there will be between castemen and castemen. And if *Varna* remains, as I hope it will, occupations will be restricted as they were in the past, intermarriage and interdining will not be restricted even as they were not in the past.

—*Harijan*: Nov. 30, 1935.

Restrictions on interdining have no vital connection with *Varnadharma*. They were, in my opinion, hygienic rules in origin. Given a proper conformation with the rules of cleanliness, there should be no scruple about dining with anybody. And training Harijan boys and girls as members of a family ensures cleanliness and raises their status and removes in the safest manner the insane caste restrictions on interdining.

—*Harijan*: Feb. 13, 1937.

## 49. VARNA OF MY CONCEPTION

*VARNA* to-day has become a means of arrogating to oneself a higher status. The real *Varna* of my conception does not exist to-day. In the purest type of Hinduism, a *Brahmin*, an ant, an elephant and a dog-



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eater (*Shwapacha*) are of the same status. And because our philosophy is so high, and we have failed to live up to it, that very philosophy to-day stinks in our nostrils. Hinduism insists on the brotherhood not only of all mankind, but of all that lives. It is a conception which makes one giddy, but we have to work up to it. The moment we have restored real living equality between man and man, we shall be able to establish equality between man and the whole creation. When that day comes, we shall have peace on earth and goodwill to men.

—*Harijan*: Mar. 28, 1936.

## No Real Varna To-day

As I have made it clear over and over again, there is no real *Varna* to-day. When we have come to our own, when we have cleansed ourselves, we may have the four *Varnas* according to the way in which we can express the best in us. But *Varna* then will invest no one with a superior status or right, it will invest one with higher responsibility and duties. Those who will impart knowledge in a spirit of service, will be called *Brahmins*. They will assume no superior airs, but will be true servants of society. When inequality of status or rights is ended, every one of us will be equal. I do not know, however, when we shall be able to revive true *Varnadharma*. Its real revival would mean true democracy.

—*Harijan*: Apr. 4, 1936.



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## 50. WHAT THE LAW OF VARNA TEACHES

CASTE has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to 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* 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 callings 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. The callings of a *Brahmin*—spiritual teacher—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 (Sevagram) with its population of 600, I do not find a great disparity between the earnings of different tradesmen, including *Brahmins*. I find, too, that real *Brahmins* are to be found even in these degenerate days, who are living on alms freely given to them and are giving freely of what they have of spiritual treasures. It would be wrong and improper to judge the Law of *Varna* by its caricature in the lives of men who profess to belong to a *Varna*, whilst they openly commit a breach of its only



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operative rule. Arrogation of a superior status by any of the *Varnas* over another, is a denial of the law. And there is nothing in the Law of *Varna* to warrant a belief in untouchability. (The essence of Hinduism is contained in its enunciation of one and only God as Truth and its bold acceptance of *Ahimsa* as the law of the human family).

I am aware that my interpretation of Hinduism will be disputed by many... That does not affect my position. It is an interpretation by which I have lived for nearly half a century, and according to which I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to regulate my life.

—*Harijan*: July 18, 1936.

## 51. NO PART OF HINDUISM

I HAVE endeavoured to show that caste is no part of Hinduism. *Varna* is not caste, it is class. A man may call himself a *Brahmin, i.e.*, a teacher of religion if he is one in fact; or a *Kshatriya, i.e.*, a soldier if he is one; or a *Vaishya, i.e.*, a merchant or a farmer if he is that; or a *Shudra, i.e.*, an employee, if he is one. These divisions are not castes but classes, and have reference to callings. There is no such class as untouchable. Hence, an untouchable is not bound to say he is one. He may say, if he wishes, that Hindu society has regarded him as such, but he does not recognize that distinction. I may say that though I have been classified by Hindu society as belonging to the *Bania* caste, I am not that, as I do not believe in caste. But that if I must call myself anything



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more than mere Hindu, I am a Harijan by choice, having made, so far as in me lies, common cause with Harijans.

—*Harijan*: Oct. 31, 1936.

## 52. AN AMERICAN CLERGYMAN'S QUESTIONS

**Q.** In your Hinduism, do you basically include the caste system?

**A.** I do not. Hinduism does not believe in caste. I would obliterate it at once. But I believe in *Varnadharma* which is the Law of Life. I believe that some people are born to teach, and some to defend, and some to engage in trade and agriculture, and some to do manual labour, so much so that these occupations become hereditary. The Law of *Varna* is nothing but the Law of Conservation of Energy. Why should my son not be a scavenger if I am one?

**Q.** Indeed? Do you go so far?

**A.** I do, because I hold a scavenger's profession in no way inferior to a clergyman's.

**Q.** I grant that, but should Lincoln have been a wood-chopper rather than President of the U.S.A.?

**A.** But why should not a wood-chopper be a President of the United States? Gladstone used to chop wood.

**Q.** But he did not accept it as his calling.

**A.** He would not have been worse off, if he had done so. What I mean is, one born a scavenger must



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earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For, a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President. That, according to me, is Hinduism. There is no better communism on earth, and I have illustrated it with one verse from the *Upanishads* which means: 'God pervades all—animate and inanimate. Therefore, renounce all and dedicate it to God and then live.' The right of living is thus derived from renunciation. It does not say: 'When all do their part of the work, I, too, will do it.' It says: 'Don't bother about others, do your job first and leave the rest to HIM.' *Varnadharma* acts even as the Law of Gravitation. I cannot cancel it or its working by trying to jump higher and higher day by day, till gravitation ceases to work. That effort will be vain. So is the effort to jump over one another. The Law of *Varna* is the antithesis of competition which kills.

—*Harijan*: Mar. 6, 1937.

## 53. HOW TO BREAK THE CASTE

**Q.** How do you propose to break the caste?

**A.** It is already breaking. All it requires is education, and under the education that is being imparted for some time it is breaking. But by education I do not mean literary education, but the spread of true knowledge. Caste has no religious basis, but it is certainly regarded as bound up with religion, though it is not derived from the scriptures. Untouchability is the last word on caste, and as soon as untouchability goes, caste goes. The outcaste has been all over the world. In



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Europe, the Jews were outcastes and confined to the ghettoes where life was much worse than in the untouchables' quarters. The degradation to which the outcastes in India are reduced is bad enough, but what one knew of ghettoes from Israel Zangwill's works, which years ago I read at the instance of a friend, was something blood-curdling. Such a thing cannot happen in India, because of the non-violence of a sort that we are practising. However, though we have no ghettoes, there is nothing to choose between them and untouchability. Take untouchability out and the fabric of caste is destroyed.

—*Harijan*: Mar. 13, 1937.

## 54. VARNA VYAVASTHA

MAN moves either forward or backwards. He never stands still. Such being the universal law, I need scarcely say that I am not to-day where I was yesterday or where I shall be tomorrow.

It is necessary, however, that my utterances or writings should not confuse or mislead anyone; they should not lend themselves to conflicting interpretations. To put it another way, my speech, writing and conduct should always satisfy the tests of Truth and *Ahimsa*. I have striven to keep these observances ever since I took certain vows at my mother's instance on going to England for study, or, so far as Truth is concerned, since as a child I began to understand things.



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## Hinduism's Gift to the World

This does not mean that I have had or have even to-day a full vision of Truth and *Ahimsa*. All that I can say is that my vision of Truth and *Ahimsa* is becoming clearer every day. Therefore, it would not be correct to say that my conception of *Varnashrama Dharma* to-day is just what it has ever been. I have called the institutions of *Varnas* and *Ashramas* the special gift of Hinduism to the world. I still adhere to that view, but to-day neither the *Varnas* nor the *Ashramas* of my conception are in existence anywhere.

*Ashramas* may be said to have disappeared altogether from our midst, while *Varnas* are to be seen only in the corrupt form of exclusive rights and class privileges. All caste feeling, whether in a *Brahmin, Kshatriya* or *Vaishya*, connotes pride, and pride and religion go ill together. Where does the poor *Shudra* stand in this classification? Right at the bottom. And the *Adi-shudra*—the untouchable? He is the meanest of the mean. This is not religion, but its negation.

## Varna and Caste

Where are the four *Varnas* of the *Gita* to-day? *Varna* and caste are two entirely different things. The varieties of the latter are legion. I know of no authority for caste in the *Gita* or any other scripture. The *Gita* has prescribed four *Varnas* based on one's special aptitudes and corresponding duties. The number is only



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illustrative. It may be added to or reduced. I am convinced that to-day there is one *Varna* only, *viz. Shudra,* or, say, *Adishudra,* Harijan, untouchable.

If Hindu society were to be converted to my view, all our internal troubles would come to an end. The communal tension with the Mussalmans, too, would disappear and India would occupy the place of honour which should be hers in the world. Just as all distinctions of high and low are not *Dharma* but *Adharma,* so also all colour prejudice is immoral. If a scripture is found to sanction caste distinction or distinctions of race and colour, it does not deserve that name. The basic assumption, with which to approach the study of scriptural texts, is that they can never sanction anything that is contrary to fundamental ethics.

## No Sanction for Barriers

The caste distinctions have taken such deep root amongst us that they have also infected the Muslims, Christians and followers of other religions in India. It is true that class barriers are also to be found in a more or less degree in other parts of the world. This means that it is a distemper common to the human race. It can be eliminated only by the inculcation of religion in its true sense. I have not found sanction for such barriers and distinctions in the scriptures of any religon. In the eye of religion, all men are equal. Learning, intellect or riches do not entitle one to claim superiority over



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those who are lacking in these. If a person is suffused and sanctified with the purifying essence and the discipline of true religion, he regards himself under obligation to share his advantages with all those who have fewer.

That being so, in our present fallen state true religion requires us all to become *Adishudras* by choice. We must regard ourselves not as owners but as trustees of our wealth, and use it for the service of society, taking for ourselves no more than a fair return for service rendered. Under this system there would be none poor, none rich. All religions would be held equal. All quarrels arising out of religion, caste or economic grievance would cease to disturb peace on earth.

—*Press Report*: Sept. 18, 1945.

## 55. INTERCASTE MARRIAGES

IF an educated Harijan girl marries a caste-Hindu, the couple ought to devote themselves to the service of Harijans. Self-indulgence can never be the object of such a marriage. That will be improper. I can never encourage it. It is possible that a marriage entered into with the best of intentions turns out to be a failure. No one can prevent such mishaps. Even if one Harijan girl marries a caste-Hindu with a high character, it will do good to both the Harijans and caste-Hindus. They will set up a good precedent, and if the Harijan girl is really worthy, she will spread her fragrance far and wide and encourage others to copy her example. Society will cease to be scared by such marriages. They will see for themselves that there is nothing wrong in them. If



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children born of such a union turn out to be good, they will further help to remove untouchability. Every reform moves at the proverbial snail's pace. To be dissatisfied with this slowness of progress, betrays ignorance of the way in which reform works.

It is certainly desirable that caste-Hindu girls should select Harijan husbands. I hesitate to say that it is beter. That would imply that women are inferior to men. In know that such inferiority complex is there to-day. For this reason, I would agree that at present the marriage of a caste-Hindu girl to a Harijan is better than that of a Harijan girl to a caste-Hindu. If I had my way, I would persuade all caste-Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands. That it is most difficult, I know from experience. Old prejudices are difficult to shed. One cannot afford to laugh at such prejudices either. They have to be overcome with patience. And if a girl imagines that her duty ends by marrying a Harijan and falls a prey to the temptation to self-indulgence after marriage, the last state would be worse than the first. The final test of every marriage is how far it develops the spirit of service in the parties. Every mixed marriage will tend, in varying degrees, to remove the stigma attached to such marriages. Finally there will be only one caste, known by the beautiful name *Bhangi*, that is to say, the reformer or remover of all dirt. Let us all pray that such a happy day will dawn soon.

—*Harijan*: July 7, 1946.



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### Interdining

**Q.** Can the members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh refuse to interdine with untouchables? Have your views on this question undergone any change?

**A.** At one time, I did say that interdining was not an essential part of the campaign for the removal of untouchability. Personally, I was for it. To-day, I encourage it. In fact, to-day I even go further.

## 56. UNTOUCHABILITY AND CASTE

**Q.** You have said that caste ought to go root and branch, if untouchability is to be completely eradicated. Then, why do you not make anti-untouchability work part of a wider crusade against the caste system itself? If you dig out the root, the branches will wither by themselves.

**A.** It is one thing for me to hold certain views, and quite another to make my views acceptable in their entirety to society at large. My mind, I hope, is ever growing, ever moving forward. All may not keep pace with it. I have, therefore, to exercise utmost patience and be satisfied with hastening slowly. I am wholly in agreement with you in principle. If I live up to 125 years, I do expect to convert the entire Hindu society to my view.

—*Harijan*: July 28, 1946.

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## THE LAW OF LIFE

VARNA is no man-made institution but the Law of Life, universally governing the human family. Fulfilment of the law would make life livable, would spread peace and content, end all clashes and conflicts, put an end to starvation and pauperisation, solve the problem of population, and even end disease and suffering.

"In an age where competition is held to be the Law of Life, and possession in the largest measure of the world's goods the *summum bonum*, and when everyone counts oneself free to follow any calling one likes, this attempt to hold up *Varna* as the Law of Life may well be regarded as an idle dream, and an attempt to revive it as childish folly.

"Be that as it may, it is my firm conviction t
it is true socialism. In the language of the *G*
it is equality of the spirit, without which no ot
equality is possible. The performance of it,
matter how slight, bodes well both for him who
performs it and for the rest of mankind."

—*M*

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