

# THE SPIRITUAL SCIENTIST

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## CASTE SYSTEM – SPIRITUAL EQUALITY AMIDST MATERIAL DIVERSITY

Caste system is probably among the most talked and most misunderstood current social controversies; misunderstood because it is based on a false premise – caste determination by birth.

The Bhagavad-gita (4.13) declares that this social division, known as varnashrama, was based on qualities and activities (guna-karma) – not birth. The Rig Veda ( 10.90.12) compares society to the human body. The brahmanas (thinkers and teachers) are compared to the head of the social body, the kshatriyas (governors and protectors) to the arms, vaishyas (producers and traders) to the belly and shudras (workers and general assistants) to the feet. In our body, one part may be positioned higher than the other, but that is just to facilitate its optimum contribution to the body. Similarly, in the social body, brahmanas (determined by qualities, not birth) are higher in the social hierarchy, but that is just to ensure optimum social utilization of their intellectual abilities. Interestingly, we find similar divisions in a modern MNC – researchers, managers, financiers and workers. This division is not discriminatory, but fair, because people are classified not forcibly, but as per their abilities. Intriguingly the Greek philosopher Plato in his The Republic recommends classifying people as per their innate psychophysical natures. No wonder American author Gerald Heard in his book Man, The Master calls the caste system as an "organic democracy" because it:

- Provided individual job satisfaction and security
- Avoided needless competition and maximized social productivity

All people in Vedic society knew that they were all spiritual beings, souls, children of God, and that real happiness lay not in transitory material positions, but in

everlasting devotion. The lower castes would serve the upper castes, but the upper castes would serve God – visibly. People would thus see, "Our masters are as much servants as we are, albeit serving in a different role." This overarching sense of subordination to God integrated people spiritually despite their material differences.

Mark Tully, former BBC correspondent in New Delhi, states in his book *No Full Stops in India*, "The alienation of many young people in the West and the loneliness of the old show the suffering that egalitarianism inflicts on those who do not win, the superficiality of an egalitarianism which in effect means equal opportunities for all to win and then ignores the inevitable losers. For all that, the elite of India have become so spellbound by egalitarianism that they are unable to see any good in the only institution which does provide a sense of identity and dignity to those who are robbed from birth of the opportunity to compete on an equal footing – caste."

In medieval times, characterless power-hungry people born in brahmana families started falsely claiming that caste was hereditary and unchangeable. And thus began the sad history of casteist discrimination. And thus began the unfortunate history of casteist discrimination. Discrimination has victimized the underprivileged, wherever the socially powerful sections became materialistic and exploitative. For example, Native Americans in USA or aborigines in Australia were isolated and crowded into reserves, where they could only atrophy and disappear.

Hence to uproot caste conflicts, we need to cure materialism with the antidote of spirituality, which provides inner fulfillment and eradicates the exploitative mentality. Srila Prabhupada, the founder of ISKCON states, "Unless there is awakening of divine consciousness in the individual, there is no use of crying for world peace." We need to certainly correct the casteist wrongs of the past; the deprived sections of society need to be helped. But merely increasing reservations without curing the materialism that spawned discrimination may well lead to a reverse discrimination against the upper castes with an attendant backlash. Therefore let us ourselves individually reserve more of our time, energy and intelligence to understand and apply the timeless spiritual principles that will unify us despite our material diversities.

## **The Spiritual Scientist**

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**Dedicated to**

**His Divine Grace A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada,**

**The Greatest Spiritual Scientist of the Modern Times**

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