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This is AHAD's response to the Southern Poverty Law Center Series: Hindu Supremacy in the United States interview of Roja Singh and Prachi Patankar.

Published Jan 5, 2025

Understanding the Multifaceted Nature of Hindu dharma, Hindutva, and the Diaspora

The world's oldest living religion, Hindu dharma is a profound tapestry woven with diverse philosophies, spiritual teachings, and cultural traditions. Rooted in pluralism, inclusivity, and timeless wisdom, it offers a framework for understanding life, the self, and the universe. However, in modern discourse, Hindu dharma is increasingly subjected to misrepresentation, with socio-political movements like Hindutva often equated with supremacist ideologies. This narrative has been amplified by organizations like the Dalit Solidarity Forum (DSF) and individuals such as Prachi Patankar and Dr. Roja Singh, who critique Hindu dharma through the lens of caste oppression and alleged supremacism.

This blog delves into the essence of Hindu dharma, addresses its social challenges, and counters mischaracterizations of Hindu advocacy as exclusionary or extremist. It also examines the role of organizations, legal cases, and narratives that contribute to this perception while highlighting the constructive efforts of Hindu reformers and advocates.

Abstract

Hindu dharma's pluralistic ethos and spiritual depth have inspired generations, yet it faces increasing scrutiny in global discourse. A recent Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) article titled "Hindu Supremacy: Roja Singh and Prachi Patankar" critiques Hindu dharma, associating it with caste oppression and alleged far-right alliances. While acknowledging the need to address social challenges, this blog challenges the reductionist portrayal of Hindu dharma as supremacist. By exploring the philosophy of Hindu dharma, the contributions of Hindu organizations, and the nuances of caste-related issues, this comprehensive analysis seeks to present a balanced narrative.

The Philosophical Essence of Hindu dharma

At the heart of Hindu dharma lies the concept of *Sanatana Dharma*—the eternal duty or order—which emphasizes universal truths guiding ethical and moral living. Unlike many religions that follow a single

scripture, Hindu dharma encompasses a vast array of texts, including the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita, each offering unique insights into existence, self-realization, and interconnectedness.

The Rig Veda's proclamation, *"Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti"* ("Truth is one; the wise call it by many names"), epitomizes Hindu dharma's pluralistic ethos. This inclusivity has allowed Hindu dharma to absorb and harmonize diverse beliefs and practices over millennia, creating a spiritual framework that transcends singular interpretations.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: The World as One Family

Hindu dharma's universalist worldview is beautifully captured in the Sanskrit phrase *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* ("The world is one family"). This principle advocates for compassion, empathy, and mutual respect and reflects the interconnectedness of all beings. It is a guiding force behind Hindu dharma's inclusivity and is celebrated globally through festivals like Diwali and Holi, which transcend religious boundaries and foster unity.

Addressing Social Challenges: Caste and Misconceptions

The SPLC article features Dr. Roja Singh, president of the Dalit Solidarity Forum, and activist Prachi Patankar. Both criticize Hindu dharma for its association with caste-based discrimination. While caste-related issues are a serious societal challenge, they are often erroneously attributed to Hindu philosophy rather than historical and colonial contexts.

Scholars like Nicholas Dirks in *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* argue that the rigid caste system as we know it today was institutionalized during British colonial rule, which sought to categorize Indian society for administrative purposes. This colonial codification distorted the original concept of *Varna*, which was based on qualities and duties, not birth.

Prominent Hindu reformers like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar have long opposed caste discrimination. Vivekananda emphasized the spiritual equality of all beings and called caste distinctions "a later distortion," while Gandhi and Ambedkar advocated for social reforms to uplift marginalized communities.

The Misrepresentation of Hindu Advocacy as Supremacism

The SPLC interview draws parallels between Hindutva and white supremacist ideologies, portraying Hindu advocacy as exclusionary and hierarchical. However, such comparisons oversimplify the historical and cultural contexts of Hindutva, which emerged as a response to colonialism and the marginalization of Hindu identity.

In *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, Koenraad Elst explains that Hindutva is a cultural and political movement that seeks to preserve Hindu heritage and self-determination. Labeling it as supremacist ignores the complexities of postcolonial identity assertion. Furthermore, organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), often cited in critiques, focus on cultural preservation and community service rather than exclusionary agendas.

Dalit Solidarity Forum and Perceptions of Anti-Hindu Bias

The DSF's focus on caste inequities and its collaborations with advocacy groups like Equality Labs have contributed to perceptions of anti-Hindu bias. While addressing caste-related challenges is commendable, the DSF's tendency to frame caste oppression as intrinsic to Hindu dharma alienates practicing Hindus and overlooks reformist efforts within the community.

Additionally, the DSF's support for cases like the Cisco caste discrimination lawsuit reinforces stereotypes of Hindus in the diaspora as carriers of caste bias. Critics argue that such narratives generalize the experiences of Hindu communities and fail to acknowledge their diversity and reformist ethos.

Legal Cases and Broader Narratives

The **Cisco caste discrimination case**, which garnered significant media attention, involved allegations that a Dalit employee faced bias from colleagues of so-called "upper-caste" backgrounds. While the case became a focal point for debates on caste dynamics in the Silicon Valley tech industry, its legal outcome challenged the foundational premise of systemic caste discrimination in this context. A California state court dismissed the case, ruling that the allegations lacked sufficient evidence to prove that caste bias was a pervasive issue tied to Hindu or Indian practices in the workplace.

The dismissal underscored the need for caution in generalizing cultural or religious stereotypes about Hindu communities within professional environments. The outcome also highlighted that Silicon Valley's corporate policies, centered on diversity and inclusion, already prohibit discriminatory behavior without necessitating culturally specific framings of bias. This decision marked a significant step in countering the narrative that caste is an inherent export of the Hindu diaspora while reinforcing the importance of evidence-based approaches to addressing workplace discrimination.

CISCO case has fueled a narrative that unfairly stereotypes Hindu communities. This narrative is amplified by organizations like Equality Labs, whose reports on caste have faced criticism for methodological flaws and for conflating caste discrimination with Hindu dharma.

The Constructive Role of Hindu Organizations

Hindu organizations worldwide play a critical role in promoting education, advocacy, and community service. For example:

- **Sewa International:** Focuses on disaster relief, poverty alleviation, and community service, embodying the principle of *Seva* (selfless service).
- **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS):** Runs programs to uplift marginalized communities in India and fosters a sense of cultural identity among Hindus.

These organizations exemplify Hindu dharma's inclusive and service-oriented spirit, challenging the notion of supremacism.

Hindu Dharma's Global Relevance

Hindu philosophy offers timeless insights that resonate universally. Concepts like *Dharma* emphasize balance and sustainability, aligning with modern environmental movements. Teachings from the Bhagavad Gita on selfless action and resilience guide ethical living and personal growth, transcending religious boundaries.

Conclusion: Celebrating Hindu Dharma's Legacy

With its pluralistic ethos and profound spiritual teachings, Hindu dharma remains a force for unity in a divided world. Its foundational principles of inclusivity, compassion, and interconnectedness offer valuable lessons for fostering global harmony. While addressing social challenges is crucial, it is equally important to celebrate Hindu dharma's contributions to humanity.

Efforts to misrepresent Hindu dharma as supremacist or exclusionary undermine its rich legacy and the positive contributions of its global community. By promoting accurate representations, engaging in interfaith dialogue, and collaboratively addressing societal challenges, the true spirit of Hindu dharma can continue to inspire and guide future generations.

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