

First “World Conference on Untouchability” Is Truly Global (Correction)

Source: www.iheu.org

LONDON, UK, June 10, 2006: Government representatives, activists and experts from around the world will address the first “World Conference on Untouchability” at Conway Hall Humanist Centre, London, UK, on June 9 and 10, 2009. The conference is organized by the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) to explore a problem that afflicts nearly 250 million people in countries from Japan to Nigeria.

“Untouchability” - the social exclusion of people because of the population they are born into - is a problem in diverse cultures. Some examples are less known than others; the list includes Bangladesh, Burma, India, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Nigeria and Pakistan. This is the first conference of its kind to explore untouchability in many different cultures and to bring together activists to share strategies.

Speakers include political leaders Lord Desai of St. Clement Danes, from the British House of Lords, and Mahendra Paswan, Nepal’s Minister for Land Reform, as well as grassroots campaigners against untouchability, including Babu Gogineni in India and Leo Igwe in Nigeria.

“The international community seems to want to ignore the dehumanizing discrimination experienced by ‘untouchables’ across the world,” says Sonja Eggerickx, president of IHEU

The Exalted Role of Women According to Hindu Scriptures

Source: www.al.com

HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA, May 29, 2009: Mahatma Gandhi wrote that the way we treat our women is an indicator of our barbarism. The ultimate and the only authority on the practices of Hinduism are the four Vedas. That women and men are equal in the eyes of dharma is made explicit in a beautiful verse from the Rig-Veda: “O women! These mantras are given to you equally [as to men]. May your thoughts, too, be harmonious. May your assemblies be open to all without discrimination” Many seers were women in the Vedic period. Indeed, several of them authored many of the verses in the Vedas. The Rig-Veda lists the names of some of the well-known women seers: Ghoshsha, Godha, Vishwawra, Apala, Sri, Laksha and many others.

The Manu-smriti, an ancient text that contained the law codes for ancient Hindu society, extols the virtues of women: “Women are worthy of worship. They are the fate of the household, the lamp of enlightenment for all in the household. They bring solace to the family and are an integral part of dharmic life.” The fact of Hindu scriptures honoring women is testimony to the enlightenment of the Vedas and the Vedic period. Many common social issues such as remarriage of women, widow remarriage, ownership and inheritance of property by women and so on were permitted in the Vedic period

VHP of America Voices Concern About “Religious Freedom” Expedition to India

Source: www.vhp-america.org

UNITED STATES, June 6, 2009 (Press Release): On behalf of the Hindu American community, The Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) would like to voice its disappointment with the US Congress-backed panel “United States Commission on International Religious Freedom’s (USCIRF)” expedition to India in June 2009, to investigate and gain perspective on Indian government’s response to recent disturbances.

It is incomprehensible that of all the countries in the world, USCIRF is visiting India to examine Religions Freedoms. India, the largest functioning democracy in the world with an independent judiciary, a statutorily constituted Human rights Commission, an independent press and other supporting organizations would appear to be quite capable of taking care of the religious freedoms and human rights of its citizens. India not only offers freedom of religion under its constitution, but does not discriminate based on religion. Similar freedoms are not available in its neighboring countries which do not have Hindu majorities.

California Education Board to Compensate Hindus

Source: www.rediff.com

CALIFORNIA, USA, June 9, 2009: An organization of Hindu-American parents, which had filed a law suit against California education board alleging that information about Hinduism was distorted in the school text books, has decided to withdraw its litigation in an out of court settlement.

The California Department of Education and the State Board of Education have agreed to pay US\$175,000 to the California Parents for the Equalization of Educational Materials (CAPEEM) to fight the case against the California State.

“Believing that its points had been clearly understood by the defendants, CAPEEM opted not to prolong the litigation,” CAPEEM said in a statement.

CAPEEM had filed a lawsuit in the US District Court of Eastern District of California in 2006. It had challenged the process by which religious claims were incorporated into the textbooks used by public school students, as well as some of the religious claims, themselves, which had made their way into those texts.

“CAPEEM looks forward to participating in a review process free from biases, and to work with the State to approve textbooks that do not favor or disfavor any religious doctrines,” the statement said “We are a group of parents residing in the state of California. We are deeply concerned about the indoctrination of Abrahamic religions and the negative descriptions of Hinduism in the History and Social Science textbooks of our state,” the CAPEEM website said.

“For decades, the California public school system has presented insufficient, inaccurate and misleading information about various religions to young Americans. These issues must be addressed urgently,” it said.

CAPEEM said Hindu parents in California participated in the adoption process and conveyed that the proposed textbooks contain factually incorrect information about ancient India and Hinduism while repeating derogatory, colonial-era

cliches and perpetuating Eurocentric and Biblical views.

Rather than consider the viewpoints of Hindu parents and experts on ancient Indian History and Hinduism, the California Board of Education, solicited the advice of hostile academics who carry political and ideological baggage against Hinduism and India and whose knowledge of ancient Indian history and Hinduism is both limited and prejudiced, it alleged. Consequently it filed a law suit in 2006.

In its lawsuit CAPEEM charged that Hinduism is not treated on par with other religions in these textbooks. Positive aspects of ancient India and Hinduism are ignored, while Euro-centric, colonial and Biblical views are given prominence in the textbooks, it said. Whereas Christianity, Islam and Judaism are presented from the believers’ perspective, Hinduism is presented from the non-believers’ perspective, CAPEEM alleged.

In its lawsuit, CAPEEM said the civil rights of Hindu school children are violated by advancing an inaccurate and derogatory picture of Hinduism in sixth grade school textbooks. The California Department of Education and State Board of Education meetings on the matter failed to address Hindu concerns. Hindus are being discriminated against, it alleged.

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