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## How Casteism Affects Churches in India

### What is Casteism?

Throughout human history, societies have separated people into hierarchical groupings. European countries determined kingship based on having royal blood. In Jesus’ time, the Jewish religious group, the Sadducees, lawyers, et al., were the upper class, while the majority were ‘the unwashed multitude.’



Those hierarchies of Jesus’ time hindered the people’s spirituality through arrogance and legalism so much that when their humble Messiah appeared, the nation ultimately rejected Him.

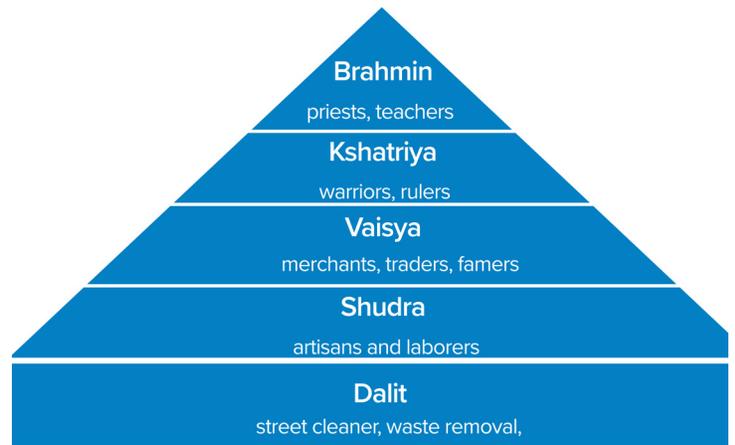
The Hindu casteism in India is very complex and deeply rooted. It’s based on writings thought to date back three thousand years, and Hindus believe the caste system was originated by the Hindu god, Brahma.

Listed below are the caste groups arranged from highest to lowest:

1. **The Brahmins were priests and teachers.**
2. **The Kshatriyas were warriors and rulers.**
3. **The Vaisyas were the merchants and traders.**
4. **The Shudras were laborers and servants.**

The Dalits (the untouchables) were viewed as even lower and outside the caste system. They would be similar to the lowest of the unwashed of Jesus’ time. In society, Dalits live in separate areas, and crimes against them are common. People rarely marry outside of their caste, and when they do, there may be violence and rejection.

The upper castes have greater access to education and employment opportunities. They often resist the Gospel, viewing it as something for the lower classes. Those who do become Christians dominate the seminaries, while the lower classes face barriers to Bible training.



Barriers between Christian brothers and sisters persist within India’s churches. Believers are sometimes separated by levels for worship and celebrating communion. Dalit Christians are often excluded from leadership roles.

James criticizes these attitudes: “Listen, my beloved brothers. Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him? But you have despised the poor” (James 2:5-6 MEV).

## The Gospel and Casteism

Casteism distorts the truth found in the Gospel, turning it upside down. Jesus' teachings do not permit Christian casteism.

**He said, "Those who ... rule over the Gentiles lord it over them.... Whoever among you would be greatest must be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42, 44-45).**



The Apostle Paul echoed the same thoughts, stating, "Fulfill my joy and be like-minded, having the same love... in humility let each esteem the other better than himself" (Philippians 2:2-3).

James warned his Christian brothers against showing partiality based on employment and dress (James 2:1-3). He said that those who do so become judges with evil thoughts (James 2:4).

When the caste mindset moves into the church, it distorts the image of Jesus. As facilitators, we teach the Bible through our words and, perhaps more importantly, through our actions. We need to apply the Bible's teachings to our own lives, or else we risk teaching hypocrisy instead of genuinely supporting our humble brothers and sisters.

## Overcoming Casteism Through Biblical Education

iTEE Global is actively working to eliminate the Caste structure in churches by training ministry leaders with our required first course, Galatians.

This course teaches the students about the Judaizers' poisonous legalism and how it threatened the essence of the gospel, requiring a powerful response from Paul to demonstrate that legalism adds rules to God's grace. Students examine issues of legalism that they observe in their own culture. We challenge them to consider what they can do in their own lives and churches. This helps students recognize such teachings.

Pastors in India are starting to challenge their church members to set aside the Caste system and demonstrate acts of love and kindness to others outside their caste.

All iTEE Global courses emphasize the transformation of believers' mindsets to resemble the thinking of our Lord and Savior.

## Student Testimony

### Sister Saraswathi – A Journey from Tradition to Transformation

Sister Saraswathi, a student of ITEE, shares a powerful testimony of how Jesus radically changed her life. Born in 1981 in Tamil Nadu, she was raised in a Vanniyar caste family deeply rooted in Hindu traditions. Despite the strong cultural and religious barriers that surrounded her, God was at work, leading her on an extraordinary journey of faith and freedom in Christ.

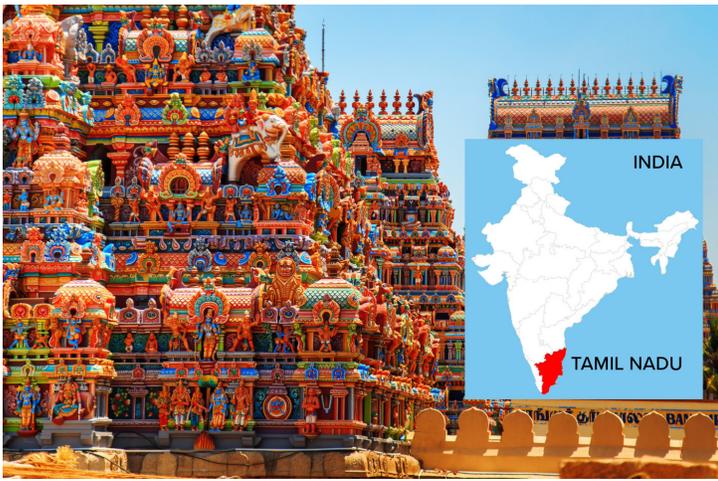


### A Seed of Faith

Saraswathi first heard about Jesus through a classmate when she was in seventh grade. Her curiosity led her to secretly read Gospel literature—an act of quiet defiance in a home where Christianity was unwelcome. Her elder sister strongly opposed her interest in Jesus, but the seed of faith had already been planted. Soon, it would take root and grow.

### Trials and Divine Encounters

Life took a difficult turn after Saraswathi completed eighth grade. She moved in with her aunt, where she suffered mistreatment and hardship. Seeking relief, she started working in a garment factory. There, a kind coworker noticed her struggles and handed her a New Testament Bible. In her loneliness and pain,



she would sneak away to the restroom to read the Bible and pray, finding the peace and strength she desperately needed. Each time she opened the Bible, she felt a deep peace she had never known before. God was drawing her closer, even in the midst of her suffering.

While working as a tailor in Paranur, she visited a local church for the first time. At that moment, she was carrying a heavy burden—her father had fallen critically ill. Desperate for a miracle, she prayed with the church members, placing her trust in Jesus. To her amazement, her father’s condition improved, reinforcing her belief that Christ was not only real but also intimately involved in her life.

## Choosing Christ Against All Odds



Saraswathi’s growing faith soon led her to make a life-changing decision—to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. However, this choice came at a great cost.

Her family, deeply devoted to Hindu traditions, was furious. She faced rejection, isolation, and pressure to abandon her newfound faith. Yet, nothing could shake the conviction that Jesus had rescued her and given her true freedom.

Determined to grow in her understanding of God’s Word, Saraswathi sought out biblical training. Through ITEE, she found a community that nurtured her faith and equipped her for ministry. The lessons she learned strengthened her confidence in Christ and gave her the tools to share the Gospel with others facing similar struggles.

## A Life Transformed

Today, Saraswathi stands as a living testimony to the power of God’s love and grace. Despite the trials she endured, she remains steadfast in her calling to serve the Lord. She continues to deepen her knowledge of Scripture, eager to disciple others and lead them to the same freedom she found in Christ.

Her story is a powerful reminder that no barrier—cultural, religious, or personal—is too great for God to overcome. He is still calling people from every background into His marvelous light. And just as He was faithful to Saraswathi, He remains faithful to all who seek Him.

## Odisha State, India Lacks Training Materials



In March of 2024, while presenting at a Loaves and Fishes banquet, an iTEE Global staff member was introduced to Dr. S, the president of a Bible College in Odisha State, India.

Odisha, a Hindu-dominated State, is known for two things:

1. Its large number of tribal groups
2. Its intense persecution of Christian leaders.



According to Operation World, Hindu extremists often force Christians to recant and reconvert to Hinduism. Of the 799 people groups in the state, 709 have no Christian witness. Most people are illiterate, so audio Bibles are more effective than paper Bibles.

Despite the threat of persecution, Dr S. desires to train pastors in the local official language of Odia (also known as Oriya), but he cannot, because the only course material available to him is in English.

According to the Joshua Project there are also many Odia-speaking people in Myanmar, another country where iTEE Global has an active presence. iTEE desires to provide course materials in the Odia language, but unfortunately we currently lack the funds to do the translation.

Training pastors in Odisha State would also help to touch unreached people groups in the State, like the Bakati people whose population is 100% Hindu.

