

[The Future of Hindu Children Enrolled In Christian Schools](#)

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The Future of Hindu Children Enrolled In Christian Schools

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Of all the many choices to be made in the raising of children, none may have more influence than the decision of where education will occur. Think of the breadth of time spent in schooling--how many life transitions are lived through, how many relationships begun and ended and how many uncontrolled influences students are exposed to during these most impressionable years--and you begin to sense the significance of this delicate decision.

One might therefore think it self-evident that a Hindu parent would choose not to send their child to a Christian school. It would seem a natural decision, destined to preserve the child's Hindu identity. Consider the reverse, for a moment. Would you expect a Christian, a Muslim, Buddhist or Jew to send their child to a Hindu school? Setting aside the fact that they may hardly find one, I, for one, would not expect it.

Strangely though, many Hindus in India are confident that their child's Hinduness will not suffer in the environment of a

"convent school," the common term for the many Christian schools throughout India. In fact, the majority of those who manage to gain their child admittance to such a school consider it a great achievement for the family, even a cause for festive celebration.

Can they be right? Though these schools are not seeking converts, they are predisposed to promote Christianity, and they certainly have no intention to teach Hinduism. Can Hinduism survive years of education in even the most liberal Christian environment? Hinduism Today enlisted me to investigate.

Minority Schools Preferred

Often, for social and religious institutions in India, official minority status is preferred far over that of a majority. In the unique manifestation of India's secularism, minority organizations generally have more autonomy in the governing of their affairs and administration, whereas "majority" Hindu groups fall under varying degrees of government control.

Over the years, minority religious groups, such as Muslims and Christians, have established educational-cum-cultural institutions. Muslims have a large number of such institutions, which cater primarily to Muslim needs. But with Urdu, rather than English, being the medium of teaching, they do not attract a broad spectrum of students, even from the elite section of Muslims.

On the other hand, the Christian educational institutions have

become very popular, even among Hindus. All over the country there are large numbers of Christian convent schools and colleges. The spread of such schools dates back to the British Raj, when the British government encouraged local Churches to create such institutions. Besides well established convent schools in the mega-cities, there are innumerable convent schools in the hills and tribal areas throughout the country.

Convent schools have become India's most sought-after educational institution. The modern study materials, English language medium and modern way of living (including dress and food choices) have led these schools to become status symbols among Indians. The affluent, neo-rich and the vast middle-class parents do their best to prepare their children to gain admission. In cities like Delhi and Bombay, parents plan for this right from the child's birth. The admission into kindergarten at a convent school is a great event for the family.

I attempted to study the daily function of the convent schools in the capital city, New Delhi. I visited nearly all the major convent schools in the city, namely: 1) Mater Dei school on Tilak Lane near India Gate, 2) St. Columbus school near Gol Dak Khana, 3) Convent of Jesus and Mary, Gol Dak Khana, 4) Don Bosco, at Greater Kailash-II, 5) Carmel Convent on Malcha Marg, Chanakyapuri, 6) Mt. Carmel School at Anand Niketan and 7) Presentation Convent near Red Fort. I found the teaching program and courses of all the schools to be similar.

My investigation focused on moral education and its impact on students from other faiths. It was a remarkable experience for

me, taking nearly eight months to complete. I began to feel it would have been easier to write a story on the Indian Intelligence and interview high-ranking officials than to reach and interview the principals, teachers, staff and students of these convent institutions--as you will see. Only one principal among all the seven schools consented to an interview.

The Education of Values

According to the principal Mr. V.K. Williams, the Mount Carmel School curriculum includes a value education department. The task of this department is to unlock the individuality of each student, which they describe as developing a child physically, socially, mentally and emotionally as well as spiritually. The department conducts weekly classes to impart value education by giving special lectures. The teacher gives historical examples, including the life of Jesus Christ. In the morning assembly classes, students and teachers share daily life experiences with each other for moral development. Williams asserts that they do not celebrate any religious festivals in the school. The value education department does not preach Christianity, he stated. Rather it works as a counseling center for the all-round development of the students.

The Mount Carmel School was established in 1972. It is run by the Mount Carmel School Educational Society, which is a Protestant Church based organization. The school spans the grades from nursery to the 12th standard. The school prospectus clearly states, "The educational aims of the school are taken from the Bible, from Luke 2:52: 'And Jesus increased in wisdom (mental and emotional development) and in stature (physical development) and in favor with God (spiritual

development) and man (social development).' Thus every child entering Mount Carmel is looked upon as a gift from God in the hands of His stewards." The prospectus contains many other Biblical quotes as well.

Don Bosco is an English-medium Catholic boys' school conducted by the Salesians of Don Bosco. It is an unaided, minority Christian school, open to children of all communities "with a special responsibility for the education of Christians and the economically and socially weaker sections of society" (school prospectus 1995-96).

The aims of the Don Bosco school are officially stated as: 1) the all-round formation of Catholic students to understand, appreciate and live their faith, and to impart to all students sound education by forming habits of study, discipline, self-reliance and moral values during their student years so as to make them worthy citizens of the country, and 2) to implement the Don Bosco system of education which is based on conviction, prevention of faults, paternal correction, loving kindness and the fear of God.

John Bosco was born in Becchi in Italy. In October, 1835, he entered the Ecclesiastical Seminary at Chieri. On the 5th of June, 1841, he was ordained a priest and thence called Don Bosco. The society he founded now numbers 18,400 members in 110 countries. In India alone, there are 1,800 Salesians serving the educational needs throughout the country. The children educated by the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are a legion (prospectus).

For reasons best known to them, all five teachers I met preferred not to go on record. However, one teacher, on condition of strict anonymity, admitted that naturally the Christian students are given preference. Several teachers and students told me that although it is a convent school, Christianity is not being taught here, even indirectly. The principal of the school, a priest, commented only that nowadays not many people are becoming priests. Earlier, he explained, in each and every Christian family at least one person would become a priest.

At the Carmel Convent of Chanakyapuri, the students are not taught about God at the morning assembly class. According to Sister Nirmalani, the main objective of the school is to make the students capable of responding to the challenges of life with joy and to develop a deep faith in God. Yet she declined to divulge the pattern of teaching of the school, and I was refused permission to take photographs of the school buildings and to interview any students or teachers.

The Convent of Jesus and Mary is one of the most prestigious convent schools in New Delhi. But the principal of the school declined to speak with me. When I tried to talk to some of the students, the teachers ordered them to go to their classrooms and told me not to disturb them. One of the teachers called the guard on duty and asked me to quit the premises immediately. I had no choice but to leave. I had several such unusual occurrences at the other schools I visited.

The Hindu Experience

In the absence of any cooperation from the management,

staff and teachers from various schools, I sought to augment my findings with first-hand accounts from Hindus. I first interviewed Shri Jagdish Sharma, a noted industrialist and active president of the Indian Society for Public Awareness. Three of his daughters have been educated in a convent school. He says that one of the main things Britishers did to turn Indians away from their own culture was to corrupt the educational system; namely the guru-sishya parampara, teacher-student tradition, and the gurukula centers.

The British system gave preeminence to the English language, which became compulsory for a government job, which in turn became a symbol of status and authority. The convent and other English-medium schools thus acquired high regard in India. But, he laments, the British system of education had an ulterior motive--to create human instruments through which to rule the country. Those who took the helm after British rule chose to continue the same British ethos, he concluded.

Sharma explained that the Presentation Convent School where his three daughters studied is an all-girls' school. He rates it highly, where girls are trained to find a place in modern society and yet not to be rash. He resolved that the education has not affected his daughters' outlook towards their own Hindu faith. He stressed that they are more affected by the modern, glamorous restaurants, fashion shows and other inroads to Western ways. He endeavors to institute in them the basic values of Hindu culture. Although they are receptive, he admits, they don't take it very seriously.

As a parent, he had to visit the school often. He recalls the

distinctive feeling of Christianity in the hallways and classrooms. There is a church in the compound of the school, and most of the teachers are Christian. Many times (though not compulsorily) the general student body was expected to make contributions to benefit poor Christian students. Sharma also made such contributions. He admits that at heart he and some of the other Hindu parents asked themselves why such donations should go only to Christian students? But he concluded that, being a Christian institution, the distinction was natural.

One of his daughters, Miss Prerana Sharma, says that Presentation Convent has no bias toward any particular religion. She says that in her school they never tried to denigrate Hinduism. They used to tell her that God is one, although paths are different. They never tried to influence her choice of religion. She admitted to having visited the church several times because it was attractively decorated and peaceful.

Some Regret Upon Reflection

We interviewed Mr. Leimpokapam Khogen. He studies in St. Columbus School of Jiribam in Churachardpur district in Manipur state in the Northeast part of the country. In his school, about 80% of the students were Christian, 15% Hindu, 2% Muslim and 3% Sikh. Khogen divulged that the Sisters never said anything against Hinduism directly, but their approach was more or less against it. He claimed he could feel this bias. His teachers used to tell him to recall Jesus for every mistake, so that Jesus would forgive him. All the Christian festivals were celebrated, but Hindu students were not permitted to celebrate their festivals. He regrets being "forced"

to take a special drink from a common bowl on Christmas day. He asserts that the school promotes Christianity in many ways. As a boarder, Khogen used to get a Bible and other books on Christianity as gifts.

Another student, Mr. Thounaojam Dijendra, who studied at St. Mary's school of Imphal, now a top student in history at Manipur University, expressed similar feelings, saying that he was deeply influenced by his teachers and their teachings, which were drawn mostly from Christianity.

Dr. J.N. Puri, a retired civil servant, revealed, "My granddaughter goes to a convent school. These days it is a status symbol. Her parents want her to get the best modern education. I have noticed that after bathing she salutes the photo of Lord Ganesha in a Christian manner. At home, after doing something wrong she often says, 'Oh Jesus.' Others don't seem to notice this behavior, but I do."

The Future of Hinduism

Teachers and administrators of the many Christian schools around the world have, perhaps, a more realistic understanding of the effects of their education on non-Christians than many Hindus do. They generally do not hold to the illusion that "all religions are one." This was strikingly revealed to Hinduism Today several years ago when we asked a Catholic priest and teacher how many of the Hindus enrolled in his school he thought would convert to Christianity. He replied quite frankly, "The majority may never fully convert to Christianity. But they will never fully be good Hindus either," he predicted. Thus the future of Hinduism could

well lie in the classrooms to which we send the children to learn.

Certainly there is no blame to be laid on the schools mentioned herein. They are, in fact, fulfilling their own dharma by providing exceptional education for their congregation. They are also meeting their obligation to society by opening their doors to the general public. The success of these schools can be a shining example to the Hindus of India to somehow follow suit. But in terms of overall environment and religious loyalties, the fact remains that convent schools are unmistakably Christian. They make no effort to deny it, nor is there any reason that they should. Hindu parents considering to enroll their children, who also want their children to be good Hindus when they become adults, would be wise not to deny it either. nthe request of Hinduism Today, I did my best to find out.