

[MY TURN](#)

Category : [October 1988](#)

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Hindu Pride Or Hindu Arrogance?

Rambachan, Anantanand Every religious tradition which has been subjected to the ignorance, arrogance and exploitation of colonialism has emerged bruised with distortion. The colonial experience has also conferred a very low sense of self-esteem and value in our Hindu identity. The recognition of this tendency towards self-rejection and denial resulted in a concern among many Hindu movements, from the late nineteenth century onwards, to restore pride and self-respect in the Hindu identity and heritage. This concern with pride building continues to be aim of many contemporary Hindu movements.

But some words of caution are necessary about the preoccupation with pride building. It is a reaction to a colonial past and should not dominate our thinking and thus allow attitudes of the past the power to define the Hindu future. By diligent inquiry into the Hindu tradition, we will discover that the most important Hindu affirmation is self-sacrificing love and compassion which excludes no one. These ideals of love and compassion will then become more important than pride, for these are the ideals which reflect the heart of Hinduism.

Unfortunately, an exclusive focus on pride is often accompanied by an uncritical evaluation of the Hindu inheritance. Not everything in the history of the Hindu past is glorious or worthy of preservation into the future. Every religious tradition has to continuously reassess and reinterpret itself as the conditions of the society in which it thrives change. Values and practices which were developed in particular historical circumstances, and which may even be justified in those circumstances, cannot always claim universal and timeless validity.

For example, in spite of considerable progress in recent years the spiritual and social status of women in many strands of Hinduism leaves much to be desired. The persistence of the dowry system continues to contribute to the view that the birth of a daughter is due to bad karma. It debases millions of women by equating

their worth with the dowry price they can muster. In my homeland of Trinidad, the preference for a son continues to be demonstrated in the practice of ritually placing a male child in the lap of the bride soon after her arrival at her husband's home, even when there are dozens of beautiful baby girls available. And, paradoxically enough, it is the women who take the lead in a ritual which reinforces their inferiority.

Hindu pride without Hindu compassion and love can easily degenerate into Hindu arrogance. Arrogance, besides its spiritually weakening effects in our lives, can be a very disruptive force in a religiously pluralistic world. If there is one resource in the Hindu tradition which is recognized for its potential value to our emerging world society, it is understanding, interpreting and accepting diversity. One of the lamentable effects of arrogance would be our inability to offer this precious and relevant insight to a world which is becoming increasingly pluralistic but, in many places, less tolerant.

Also, when the restoration of pride becomes the only motive governing Hindu organizational activity, the vision often tends to become narrow. The wider relevance and potential contribution of the Hindu heritage gets overlooked and its voice becomes sadly parochial. The Hindu of the future must be confident about the worth of the Hindu heritage, but dedicated to the idea of an active, self-sacrificing love.

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