

## Where Science Fails, *Outdated* Religion Provides Clues

### Gdzie nauka zawodzi, *niemodna* religia daje szansę

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#### Abstract

Solutions to challenges, and answers to questions are often to be found in what we normally overlook, downplay and reject and deny. The *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you* of the Holy Bible refers to seeking there where one normally would not expect to find anything. The caste-system which prevailed in ancient Hindu society (and still does, though not as prominently as before) does have some hidden lessons for the modern Hindu (in India or in the wider Indian diaspora), which could be very valuable for sustainable development.

**Key words:** science, religion, Holy Bible, Hindu caste-system, sustainable development

#### Streszczenie

Rozwiązania problemów i odpowiedzi na pytania można odnaleźć w tym, co się zwykle pomija, odrzuca, lub czemu zaprzecza. Wskazania Pisma Świętego *Proście, a będzie wam; szukajcie, a znajdziecie, kołaczcie, a otworzą wam* odnoszą się do poszukiwań tam, gdzie zwykle nie spodziewamy się niczego znaleźć. Także system kastowy, który przeważał w starożytnym społeczeństwie hinduskim (i nadal odgrywa istotną rolę, choć mniejszą niż niegdyś) zawiera ukryte przesłanie dla współczesnych Hindusów (w Indiach lub szerzej w diasporze indyjskiej), które są niezwykle wartościowe z perspektywy rozwoju zrównoważonego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauka, religia, Pismo Święte, Hinduski system kastowy, rozwój zrównoważony

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#### Introduction

Biofuels powered the very first automobiles that plied on the surface of the Earth. When gasoline and fossil-diesel flooded the global marketplace, they were forgotten. Before the First World War, Frank Shuman demonstrated the efficacy of concentrated solar power in the Sahara Desert. The war broke out and the idea was buried. Coal, oil and gas got well-entrenched. Coal, as readers know, had replaced wood as a source of fuel, when rapid deforestation motivated the switchover to coal. Forward-thinking scientists and mathematicians who never got to be in the limelight when they were alive, suddenly became very prominent posthumously, when their theories and theorems were found to be useful and applicable. Now, poised on the brink of undeniable climate change, we are harking back to biofuels, the Sun and bio-based alternatives to just about everything. And just as has been written in Innventia AB (2016),

Homo Sapiens is going back to where he came from – at least mentally; to the forests and the biosphere that is. He is remembering his Homo Sylvanus days nostalgically, almost with an atavistic urge to understand his roots. And he is of course going further... transcending beyond the terrestrial realm and understanding the indispensability of the Sun to everything on the earth. The Sun has been revered as a God (or a deity) in pagan times – as Apollo, Helios, Ra, Surya etc. Modern man is being compelled to get back there, to the Basics, and learn the history he seems to have conveniently rejected as outdated (literally so), and irrelevant to life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Time* for man is certainly not the same as *Time* for the Universe or for God for that matter! History when studied seriously into the long-bygone past, has religion as a necessary component. Even though many in the present-day world would like to dismiss the role of religion and spirituality in sustaining the well-being of humans: socially, economically and

Figure 1. Life-cycles; understanding with analogies, source: Venkatesh, 2017

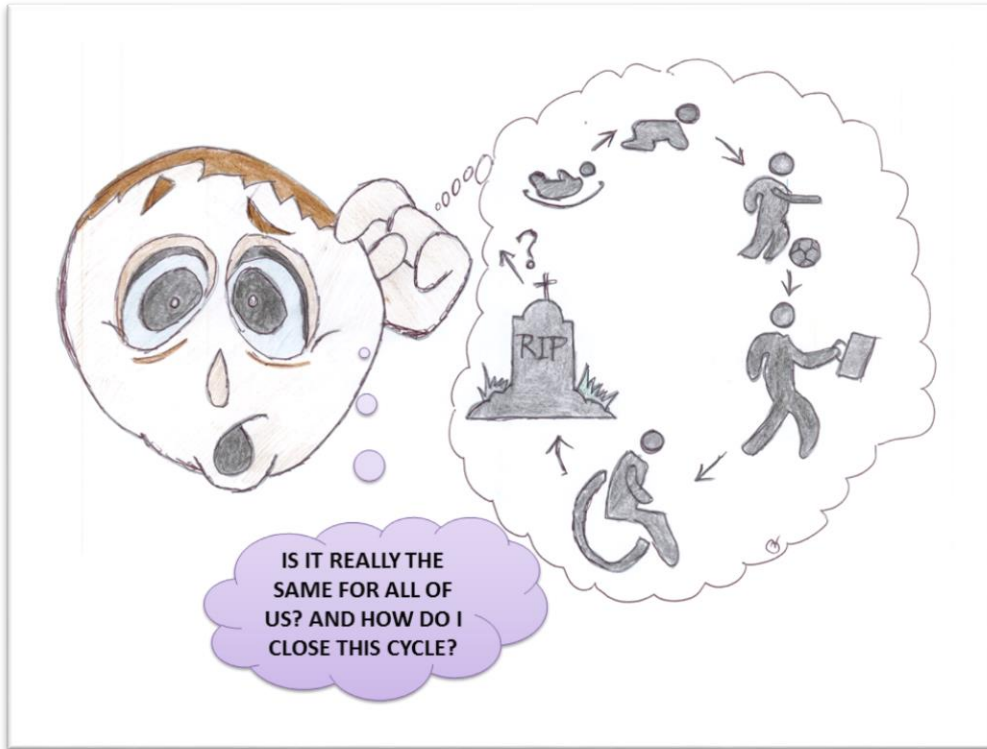
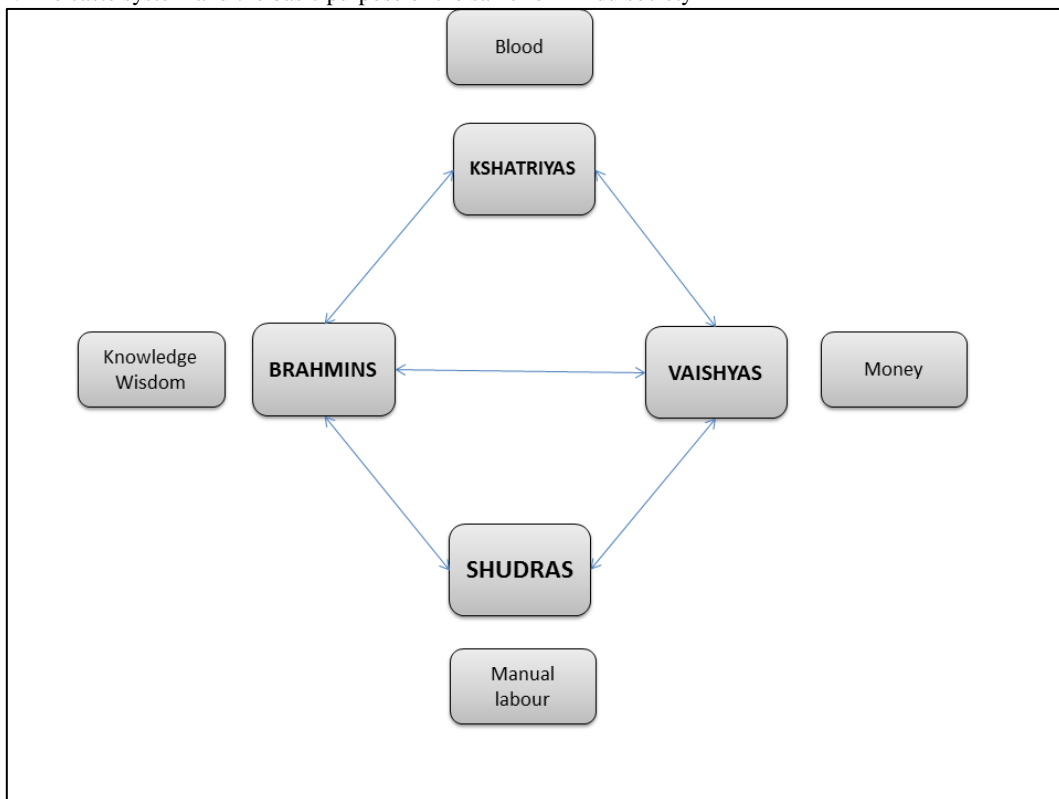


Figure 2. The caste system and the basic purpose of the same for Hindu society



environmentally; and thereby physically, mentally/emotionally/intellectually and spiritually (Venkatesh, 2010) solutions to challenges, and answers to

questions are often to be found in what we normally overlook, downplay and reject and deny. The 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will

*find; knock and the door will be opened to you'* of the Holy Bible refers to seeking there where one normally would not expect to find anything.

### Life-cycle thinking and deeper insights

We read about *circular economy, closing the loop, life-cycle thinking* and appreciate the indispensability of these for what we call and understand as sustainable development. *Ashes to ashes, dust to dust*, is what the priest says, when the coffin is lowered down beneath the soil. Closing the loop? Here is an interesting analogy to religious practices, which at once will make one realise that the way we handle and understand our own life-cycles is the same as what we ought to know about the life-cycles of resources we consume – the stock and fund resources which Mother Earth has blessed us with (Refer Figure 1).

Recall that no two human life-cycles can be exactly the same, have never been and will never be. But, the end-of-life handling is dictated by religion and is similar to people professing the same faith. *Cradle-to-grave* thinking – a common term in environmental life-cycle analysis – has its origins here. We also talk of *cradle-to-cradle* and *recycling / reuse* and interestingly even that has a parallel with the way proponents of a religion handle their dead. Now, the Muslims and Christians bury their dead. Think of land-filling. The Hindus and Buddhists cremate their dead. Think of incineration. The Parsis (or Zoroastrians) leave their dead as food for vultures. Think of recycling. Now, interestingly, these are three ways in which we handle products in the anthroposphere at the end of their lifetimes! If burying merges the mortal remains with the soil, cremation followed by the way in which the ashes are disposed, merges mortal man with the pedosphere (and indirectly with the biosphere), atmosphere and hydrosphere. Leaving the dead to be eaten by vultures, recycles a substantial portion back to the biosphere directly, leaving the remaining to eventually become a part of the pedosphere. Now, what about the *immortal remains*? Different religions have different viewpoints but none knows for sure. This is a significant known-unknown which must make man pine for transcendental knowledge to understand the purpose of his existence and his real role among living beings on earth.

### Caste-system of early Hindu society

This has often been looked upon as a blot or a shame on a great religion – and the oldest one at that! Older a religion and its tenets are, the more outdated one would consider them to be. Let us try to debunk this natural attitude which modernists assume for the sake of toeing the 'modern line'. Many Hindus would not wish to label Hinduism as a religion (as one cannot be proselytised to become a *Hindu*, for

that matter), but rather cite *Vedanta* as the philosophy they adopt. Well, be that as it may, the caste system was conceived by man for a purpose, which was degraded over time, misinterpreted and ended up as a scar on the face of a profound religion. Think of *jihad* from the Quran being misinterpreted so badly in recent times. Of course, anything and everything which is anthropogenic – religion included – gets degraded over time just like economic assets depreciate in value and need some *refurbishment* from time to time to uphold the value. If the caste system scarred Hinduism, is that all to it? Can we learn something by going *back to godhead*, as they say? Perhaps yes, if we heed apostle Mathew's advice to *Seek, Ask and Knock*. One would, in the olden days, depict the castes hierarchically – vertically in other words – from *mouth to feet* of God, as it stands in the Manusmriti (1500 BC). However, let us cast aside this hierarchy in the interest of equality of human beings in the eyes of God, and depict them horizontally as interacting and interdependent sections of Hindu society (refer Figure 2).

According to the Manusmriti, *But for the sake of the prosperity of the worlds, He caused the Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra to proceed from his mouth, arms, thighs and feet*. The *He* refers to the Infinite God... and of course, you will all agree that what originates from His feet is as precious as what originates from His mouth, thighs and shoulders! So, how can one say that one caste is superior to the others? But sadly, that was what happened over time, and the true purpose and the hidden significance was conveniently forgotten by the interpreters, though there were several spiritualists in India who strove hard to make Hindus understand the real import. If the caste system is followed today, the Brahmins who originated from God's mouth, would be expected to contribute to the world through speech – as priests, preachers, scientists, writers, lecturers and journalists. The Kshatriyas would be expected to protect society from crimes – as soldiers, watchmen, policemen, gatekeepers and security guards, while the Vaishyas would be expected to keep the economy chugging along by being good traders, shopkeepers and businessmen and as they originate from God's thighs, they represent the comfort a child feels seated on his father's lap. The Shudras would be entrusted the responsibility of keeping society clean and commit themselves to jobs requiring hard manual labour – sanitation, solid waste management, etc. Tracing their origins back to God's feet, they represent the very pillars of human society. Now, knowledge, security, health and safety, and a thriving economy are all essential for sustainable development. Would any reader wish to disagree with this? And if the Shudra is looked down upon, as that is what the corruption of the caste system led to eventually, will not that mean that we are razing the pillars of our society to the ground, and handicapping ourselves?

There are four types of generosity (or giving without expecting anything in return) prescribed by the sacred Hindu texts of yore. These are represented in Figure 2: Knowledge/Wisdom, Money, Blood and Manual Labour. At once, readers will realise that these are also the roles prescribed by the Manusmriti to the four castes! Now, in the modern world, a Brahmin may become a businessman, a Kshatriya may decide to work in the solid waste management sector, a Shudra may become a school teacher and a Vaisya may get recruited in the army. Yes, by choosing the callings of their choice, they are earning their livelihoods and supporting their families and also contributing through their work. But if the individual would hark back to the caste system, he/she may be prompted to devote himself/herself in his/her spare time to the role assigned by the age-old caste system. The businessman Brahmin may opt to conduct evening classes for free, to educate some of those left out of the formal education system and contribute to the education aspect of the dimension of social sustainability. The Kshatriya who, in olden days, would have considered spilling his blood and martyring himself to defend his fellowmen, could decide to donate blood to blood banks on a regular basis, thus contributing to the health aspect of the dimension of social sustainability. The Vaishya would donate some money to charitable causes/projects and contribute to socio-economic development, while the Shudra could organise campaigns to keep cities/towns clean and motivate fellow-citizens to close the loop and support recycling and contribute to environmental sustainability. Thus, the fact that Brah-

mins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras form the soul, heart, mind and body of the corpus of Hindu society can be understood from the Manusmriti for those who would care to *see and not just look and read and listen and not just hear*.

### Closing note

It would be apt to close with a message from that great 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian philosopher and spiritualist – Swami Vivekananda, *We have to bear in mind that we are all debtors to the world. The world does not owe us anything. It is a privilege for any of us to be able to do something for the world*. That sums it all up.

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