

**D. Min. Project Prospectus**  
Basant Shrestha

**I. Title:**

Effective Christian Witness to High Caste Hindus: A Course to Equip the Students of Southern Asia Bible College

**II. The Context:**

Southern Asia Bible College (SABC) is the premium theological institution of the Assemblies of God in Southern Asia. The college began with a vision to prepare men and women for Christian ministry. As the regional ministerial training institution, SABC graduates an average of 100 students each year. The largest percentage of the graduates provides leadership in churches and organizations, and many venture to pioneer new works. Most of the graduates work in predominately-Hindu areas. I serve as the director of Admissions and Academics in the college and teach courses related to ministry and missions.

**III. Problem or Opportunity:**

The traditional Hindu religion is deeply rooted in the culture and lives of the people of India and Nepal. The Hindu community perceives Christianity as a foreign religion of white people. Even educated Hindus find the gospel message as “alien.” The fact that western missionaries, struggling with cultural and language barriers, introduced Christianity to Southern Asia has only compounded the problem. The church at large continues to employ the same traditional methods of evangelism. Despite these obstacles, Christianity managed to establish its presence in India and Nepal as a minority. The challenge to communicate the gospel effectively to high caste Hindus has become more urgent.

In recent years, borderline Hindus of tribal communities and lower castes readily responded to the gospel; the high caste Hindus, however, have not responded enthusiastically. Almost 90 percent of Christians in India today belong to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and 90 percent of today's evangelistic missionary work is being carried out among the receptive tribals and scheduled castes that comprise approximately 26 percent of India's population. Consequently, systematic evangelistic ministry among the high caste Hindus, who form almost 80 percent of the Hindu population, is minimal. Generally, Christians consider high caste Hindus resistant to the gospel. Because of the limited response to the gospel by high caste Hindus, the church neglects this huge block of people.

The gospel has yet to make a significant impact among mainline Hindus. Effective communication of the gospel among Hindus requires a change of attitude and approach. A deliberate change in focus may create genuine interest among Hindu communities toward the message of the gospel. Evangelism will take new strides, ensuring a wider response and, ultimately, securing a lasting and authentic impact.

In the effort to communicate Jesus Christ to Hindus, Christians face the tension between being faithful to the content of the Bible and relating this content to the theological and religio-cultural context of Hindu people. The resolution to this problem lies in the proper use of the Hindu categories and culture in the process of communicating the truth.

#### **IV. The Purpose:**

The purpose of this project is to develop a course for Bible College students that will equip them to communicate the gospel effectively to their Hindu neighbors. Contextualizing the message becomes inevitable if the church desires to reach the majority, high caste Hindus. This project aims to discuss the crucial issue of contextualizing the gospel message when

evangelizing Hindus. I will present a case for the need for a better approach in presenting the gospel message to high caste Hindus who make 80 percent of the total Hindu population in India and 85 percent of Hindus in Nepal. Evaluation and implementation of important practical issues necessary for a breakthrough in communicating the gospel to Hindus will be discussed.

## V. Definition of Key Terms:

**Caste system:** Hinduism groups the human society into four main castes as follows:

1. Brahmins (intelligentsia, priests)
2. Kshatriyas (kings, nobility)
3. Vaishyas (merchants, cultivators)
4. Sudras (artisans, workers and service providers)

The first three castes comprise the high castes, the last one, Sudras, are the low caste, which, usually are treated as contagious and untouchables.

**Scheduled Castes and Tribes:** The Constitution of India recognizes two groups in Indian population as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, previously called the *dalits* by the British, and otherwise known as untouchables.

## VI. Description of Proposed Project:

**a. Scope:** This project will study the current strategies of evangelism among Hindus. A brief historical survey of evangelistic efforts by the church will reveal hindrances and weaknesses of prevalent strategies to reach educated and high caste Hindus. Although the church has worked in India for many centuries, results among Hindus are minimal. This lack of results calls for an urgent evaluation of evangelistic strategies in order to determine the reasons for drawback.

A study of the Hindu scriptures will reveal several references that aid Christians to connect the gospel message with Hindus. Hermeneutics and authority of Hindu scriptures remain out of the scope of this project; use of the scripture as a point of contact and common ground becomes the aim. The research focuses on the high caste Hindus; ministry among the lower castes will not be included.

**b. Phases:**

*Research Phase*

1. Complete research for biblical-theological literature review (by February 2008).
2. Complete research for general literature review (by May 2009).

*Planning Phase*

1. Conduct a survey to ascertain the students' knowledge and attitudes in ministry to Hindus (November 2008).
2. Interview Hindus (December 2008).
3. Interview a section of current Indian and Nepalese leaders to research and evaluate their ministry among Hindus (February 2009).

*Action Phase*

1. Offer a course on *Effective Christian Witness to High Caste Hindus* (November 2008).
2. Conduct field research as students implement witnessing methods (July 2009).

*Evaluation Phase*

1. Evaluate the outcome of the course on Hinduism (January 2009).
2. Evaluate the interview results (March 2009).
3. Assess results of student survey (August 2009).

4. Identify and develop effective methods of witnessing to Hindus (May 2009).

*Writing Phase*

1. Write and submit biblical-theological literature reviews (by May 2009).
2. Write and submit general literature reviews (by July 2009).
3. Write and submit introduction, action, and evaluation chapters (1, 4, and 5) (by October 2009).
4. Submit project for final edit (October 1, 2009).
5. Submit project to coordinator (December 1, 2009).

**VII. Biblical-Theological Literature Review:**

I will review key biblical texts and theological works in the following categories:

- Biblical Basis for Contextualization
- Indigenous Ministry
- Incarnational Principles in Mission
- Spiritual Dimension of Ministry among Hindus

Power Encounter, Exorcism, Healing, and Deliverance

**VIII. General Literature Review:**

I will review key works in the following categories:

- Traditional Evangelism Methods

Historical Survey of Evangelism among Hindus

Evaluation—Strengths and Weaknesses

- Hindu Scriptures

Using Hindu Scriptures as a Point of Contact

- Hindu Culture and Customs—Learning to Respect Good Aspects of Hindu Culture
- Hindu-Christian Relations

**IX. Contribution to Ministry:**

The project should prove helpful on several levels. First, the course will help students better understand the Hindu context. It will equip students to evaluate the present ineffectiveness of the Christian Church in meaningfully communicating the gospel, the first step toward developing remedy.

Second, Southern Asia Bible College graduates an average of 100 students each year in both the bachelor and master's levels. Ninety-nine percent of our graduates work in a Hindu context. This course will promote the use of a more effective and culturally sensitive approach to Hinduism.

Third, it will provide students with tools for effective communication of the gospel. Understanding the Hindu scriptures will enable students to lead Hindus from where they are to a relationship with Christ.

Finally, it will analyze practices that hinder the church in communicating the gospel with Hindu neighbors. Building bridges will ensure better communication by appreciating the rich heritage, culture, and positive aspects of Hindu society.

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