

A Critical Review of Kancha Ilaiah's *Post-Hindu India*

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Survival of the fittest?

“Fittest (Herbert Spencer) is not one who is strongest physically or psychologically or emotionally, but one who is most readily responsive to change.”

Post-Hindu India: A Discourse on Dalit-Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution (Sage, 2009) is an interesting book authored by Kancha Ilaiah. But as any good piece of writing comes with its fair share of shortcomings in its road to perfection, this book too is not free of such deficiencies. This book looks at Hinduism through the lenses of caste. This thought-provoking book makes a vehement criticism of the Brahmanical caste system while strongly anticipating the death of Hinduism as a result of multiple factors, though majorly because of its ‘anti-scientific’ and ‘anti-nationalistic’ temper. From what occurs after further dissection of his arguments and towards the culmination of this book published by the Sage, in chapter 12, the ‘non-adaptability’ of Hinduism is, according to Ilaiah, a major premise for the heralding of an imminent ‘civil war’ (glimpses of which in varied forms can be seen even in the recent times), thereby leading to its ‘inevitable’ demise.

This work is a virulent attack on the dominant Brahmanical discourse and wider meta-narratives of Hinduism which Ilaiah calls propagandist in the sense that they have always worked to preserve and guard the self-interests and to maintain the hegemony of the Brahmans in India while very conveniently and effectively otherising, subjugating and invisibilising the ‘real’ history of the ‘Indians’. Thus, in the manner of a true post-

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Structuralist², he not only challenges Hinduism's interpretation of history but also meticulously strikes at the very roots of the Brahman hegemony by raising the debate of who a real 'Hindu' and 'Indian' is.³ He, thus, demonstrates the role of ideologies in knowledge manoeuvring and in influencing ideas.

Although his radicalism seems to be inspired by the likes of Phule and Periyar, he does not just leave the discussion at open questions but in the spirit of a true Ambedkarite, attempts to give answers to these questions as well through the use of basic logical reasoning and common sense. In fact, the whole point of this book is to open up new vistas into an alternate reality (Interestingly, while Ambedkar employed the tactics of critiquing the system from within the system itself, his follower Ilaiah takes it a step further and discards the entire system as illogical and based on false premises before using a bottom-up approach to establish an entirely different, new framework for analysis.) which has been omitted from the pages of history from the days of yore as the Brahmins gained monopoly and control over all intellectual resources. His is a very fresh perspective of looking at wider social realities which he uses to build a plinth from the discarded rubble. The necessity of encouraging indigenous scientific thought for the sake of national progress which he discusses in the very well-argued second chapter "Subaltern Scientists" is just one of the many subtle logics that he highlights within the wider rubric of the 'civil war'.

The book also attempts to establish Hinduism as a backward religion that suppresses the latent scientific and productive potential of the Dalit-Bahujan communities. In chapter 10, the author argues that this 'oppressive system' inculcated and propagated by 'spiritual fascism' is like a rotten apple in the lot. It is detrimental not just for the rotten apple but the others in the basket too. In other words, it is problematic

² Since in poststructuralist theory, language has been seen as central to the circulation of discourses—systems of power/knowledge that define and monitor social institutions, practices and, disciplines.

³ In chapter 1, Ilaiah refers to the contributions of the historically indigenous tribals (some of who were later made part of the Hindu caste system) who imparted the 'Indianness' (personality wise) to India through the preservation of their tribal customs and traditions. The advent of Hinduism not only led these masses towards self-negation, according to him, but also annihilated the very systems of ancient knowledge and production that they once took pride in, through avid Brahmanical cultural conditioning. As pitted against 'suicidal' Hindu Brahmanism, essentially 'Indian' tribal culture is not just culturally but also spiritually as well as ethically far more evolved. Thus, Ilaiah calls the communitarian tribals 'our true (unpaid) teachers' while tracing the historical roots in the tension prevalent between the 'real' Indians (the 'Hindu' Dalit-Bahujans; here, an additional caveat is that they were not originally Dalit-Bahujans) and the 'self-proclaimed', "self-aggrandizing and propagandist" Indians (Brahmins) (chapter 1).

not just for the future of the Hindu religion, but of the entire nation-state of India of which Hinduism is but just a part. Here, he delineates the perils of compliance with mainstream Hinduism which leads to reproduction of “images” of the Brahman-self, which are exact replicas or not far from them. This phenomenon results in further exclusion of lowermost castes from potentially democratic public spheres and spaces. For attaining this democratic liberty, Ilaiah calls attention to English education as a tool for language and self-expression by the marginalized sections of the society. Ambedkar himself paved the way for this empowerment, he argues, by learning English- the ‘language of liberation’, and by discarding usage of the Brahmanical, ‘discriminatory’ language of Hindi (chapter 3).⁴

Ilaiah (chapter 10 and Conclusion) thus addresses the wide inequality present in the Indian society in terms of caste, and highlights spiritual inequality as the emanating point of all social injustices, thereby, arguing for the need of spiritual democracy for development. The narrative is built around an analysis of the productive knowledge systems of the Dalit-Bahujan non-mainstream masses of Andhra Pradesh (Introduction) and provides a detailed reflection of their innovativeness, scientificity, skills and creativity even in the mundane lives of the community-members, on a micro level while simultaneously arguing for the greater practicality and better negotiating abilities of the other religions of the world than Hinduism on the macro level.

He makes a strong argument for the need to re-write history⁵ by overturning the existing Brahman-centric myths which have been plaguing the country and discusses the importance of recognizing orality (P. 16, P.33) as a valuable source of history in doing so

⁴ Young author and first-generation Dalit scholar Suraj Yengde has a far more nuanced take on the usage of English by Dalits in his 2019 book *Caste Matters*, wherein, he brings to fore the various complexities and dilemma involved in using English, a language of external colonialists, for self-expression, and at the cost of Dalit languages and identities. Here, he leans on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o arguments about the imperial imposition of English on the colonized and the resulting ‘cultural bombarding’ of their languages, struggles, unities, capacities, and ultimately, of their selves (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London.) in the context of colonized Africans.

⁵ The justification is derived from the assertion that Brahmanical spirituality indulged in writing texts that negated the rightful personal space to the “productive cultural and civilizational ethic of the Shudras”. This led to an erasure of their self from history and in their own psyches, thereby, converting them to “spiritual slaves”- fully capable economically yet, spiritually and emotionally starved of self-assertion (P.142). Ilaiah argues that symbolic assertion is most crucial to defeat the seeming ‘permanence’ of this socio-economic glass ceiling which caste permeates through untouchability and dehumanization of lowered caste professions (as also discussed in Gopal Guru’s pioneering 2009 work *Humiliation: Claims and Context*).

(given the fact that pen and paper have been utilised and monopolised as tools for exclusion by the Brahmans for centuries, thus, denying any privileges of recording their experiences to the Dalits). Commenting on present-day pseudo-Nationalists and Gandhi, who have time and again inflated nationalism with Hinduism, Ilaiah argues,

“...the Indian nation is on the course for a civil war, a civil war that has been simmering as an undercurrent of the caste-based cultural system that Hinduism has constructed and nurtured for centuries.” (P. ix)

“The different tribes fight between themselves since they cannot face the real enemy—and you can count on colonial policy to keep up their rivalries; the man who raises his knife against his brother thinks that he has destroyed once and for all the detested image of their common degradation....of their own accord they will speed up the dehumanization that they reject. Under the amused eye of the settler, they will take the greatest precautions against their own kind by setting up supernatural barriers, at times reviving old and terrible myths, at others binding themselves by scrupulous rites. It is in this way that an obsessed person flees from his deepest needs—by binding himself to certain observances which require his attention at every turn.....in other words the colonized people protect themselves against colonial estrangement by going one better in religious estrangement,This is a defense, but it is also the end of the story; the self is disassociated, and the patient heads for madness.”

This excerpt from the Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), on racial encounters and tribal colonisation by the Westerners, aptly describes the processes which are at play in the Indian context of caste. Shooting a sharp and distinct critique on Dwija empowerment at the cost of the self-respect and rights of the underprivileged Dalit-Bahujans, Ilaiah argues that the tribal culture was self-constructed in the image of the mainstream Brahmanic popular Hindu imagination and in the negativism typical of mainstream Brahmanism, the tribals were denied not just the right to self-identify and describe but also classified as ‘outsiders’ to settled agrarian societies and implicitly and consequentially, to civilization (they were perceived as ‘Vanavasis’ and subjected to spatial-segregations and humiliation). Umbrella terms were used to attribute socio-

cultural identity markers to them by the privileged upper caste Hindus and politicians such as Gandhi (P.4). Thus, like Fanon, Ilaiah identifies the problem statement: "...the act of naming is as ideological as one's very being, and accepting a negative appellation is indicative of a process of silent suffering." "The revolt begins with inverting that process of naming—in the rejection of the other's language, identities and idiom—and in the adoption of new names, vocabulary, language and identities which challenge the constructions of the oppressors", he suggests.

Narrative style and positivist yardsticks of academic writing

The thing that may strike one as most odd is that there is absolutely no use of footnotes, citations or bibliography in this book. Despite the fact that the author has given a disclaimer right at the onset of the book about the unique 'narrative' style used (which is the Achilles heel of this eccentric piece of writing- beautiful yet, most vulnerable), this very fact leaves scope open for criticism. To some readers, it may also make the narrative less convincing, since oral history, memory and narratives, even though vast reservoirs of information and repositories of culture, have still not been recognized in India as credible academic (primary) sources to write past and contemporary histories of communities. The choice of the narration-style seems conscious as it may cater to a much wider audience due to the sheer fact that human beings have a natural and unalienable proclivity for stories and also because the language is quite easily-apprehensible. Here too, the narrative style of writing is often at loggerheads with the Positivist notion of mapping academic works through footnotes and measuring veritability in the length of bibliography. This obsession is so much so that any scholarly work without proper citations and footnotes to cite these sources is often disregarded as 'un-academic' or worse yet, purely a work of fiction. The sad truth is that even though we have been following in the footsteps of the West, we have never really attempted to free ourselves of the Euro-centric notions and paradigms. The paradox is that the shift towards narrative trends is much more pronounced today in the West than in the decolonising nations.

Keeping this in mind, Ilaiah's work can be ridiculed as too bold by some conservatives while being commended by others. It can even achieve immense controversy or unpopularity given these limitations. In the process of critiquing the elite-centric intellectual imagination of the dominant communities and inspiring the

marginalized, the author crafts a work of immense socio-political interest which appeals to academics (again, a limited section), and to those who are actually concerned about contemporary India's polity and social fabric. This work written in 2009 holds more relevance and truth today, as is evident from the current political scenario. The temporal relevance of his arguments and predictions shows his eminence as a true socio-political scientist and author-activist.

To strike at the very roots of a huge cultural iceberg that is Hinduism, and to convince people of the façade of equality that it has been creating would require more detailing and elaborating by going into the basics of the religion like Ambedkar did. The author has, at times, tried to render credibility to his arguments through repetition, thereby, leaving several accusations and allegations unexplained and unaccounted for in his attempt to bring out eclipsed truths. But in order to do justice to this book as readers, we need to go beyond its glaring limitations when measured against normative social science paradigms of objective research (which is based out of a Eurocentric conception of objectivity). In this regard, this work can be regarded as an innovation in Social Anthropology wherein, as opposed to the norm in Indian social sciences, Ilaiah starts his narrative from tribal communities and works his way upward. His is a robust attempt to inverse the Hindu caste hierarchy with each chapter bringing out something novel in terms of methodology and pedagogy. He enunciates that he himself is a 'source' in this narrative, and uses his own understanding of intra-caste conflicts and cultural clashes- insights accumulated from a lifetime of research in Andhra Pradesh- to map a unique venture for caste studies in the future. In doing so, he brings to fore the "everydayness" of caste and the numerous 'unfounded' labels and categories it has laden both upper and Dalit-Bahujans with- which could not be further away from the reality and which beget further scope for caste-based discrimination.⁶ Through the use of catchy phrases ("intellectual goondas" and "spiritual fascists" to name a few) for the scheming Brahmans and their overtaking of the knowledge systems of the minorities (both, gender and caste), Ilaiah then tries to unravel the upper caste agenda behind the making of such categories and what it is that sustained and ingrained such stigmatisation of Dalit-Bahujans and women as normative 'ways of life' in the Indian society today. Problematizing the Hindu

⁶ Here, Ilaiah comments at the notions of purity and pollution, and how the Dalit-Bahujans have been termed unruly, uncivilized, unintelligent, unproductive and unskilled.

logic behind such nomenclatures and reflecting upon his deep knowledge of the “productive” lived realities and ways of life of the ‘lowered’ castes and highlighting the varied forms of productive technologies, modes of production, skills and intellect hidden in plain sight or obfuscated due to imposition of upper caste taboos (such as, terming the nutritious non-vegetarian tribal meals ‘impure’) as opposed to the non-evolutionary, self-defeating and limiting nature of Hindu beliefs, customs, spiritual-social practices, the author predicts a soon-to-come social revolution from the “lowered” echelons of the society which he deems inevitable.

By savagely critiquing the existing ideologies and definitions of power, Ilaiah suggests the presence of alternate sources of strength (in Dalit-Bahujans’ resilience) which are yet to be recognized by the masses, as is evident from the Madiga narratives of Jambhvantha, the ancient Madiga god, in the second chapter. The Madigas or Chamars, for instance, have remained traditionally involved in the peeling of skin from the dead bodies of animals. In doing so, they fall back on what Jambvantha says- that this very hide, later transformed into leather through powerful scientific skills known only to the Chamars, protected all human bodies from not just natural hazards but also dishonours (P. 29). With the advent of a new system of capitalism, however, the Madigas could not but survive without participating in the dominant networks of production and trade, and this is where the Brahmans found scope for their discrimination by the construction of “a philosophy of superstition that legitimizes the survival instinct to live without working, to eat without involving oneself in the process of the production of that very food itself.” Ilaiah adds that in a fresh attempt to construct new power relations in the society, the Brahman caste “constructed for itself a genetical self, which saw everything upside down. It saw knowledge (here, of the Madigas) as ignorance and ignorance as knowledge. It branded what was divine as that of the devil and embraced devilishness as divinity.” As a response to such limiting prejudices of the lowered castes by the Dalit-Bahujans, Ambedkar had waged an intellectual war against the Brahman ideology to ideate a mass self-consciousness movement which established a revolutionary relationship between reason and faith, and heralded the demise of Hinduism as a strong, albeit, distant possibility. It is this “war” that Ilaiah, as his ardent follower, attempts to take forward.

Thought-provoking and provocative

While he argues that Brahmans are politically and intellectually superior (given their historical monopoly over educational resources), Ilaiah argues logically and quite convincingly that Dalit-Bahujans are scientifically, culturally, spiritually, morally, philosophically superior. He assigns a primary role to these communities of productive labourers who have been called only facilitators. While the 'pseudo-intellectual' Brahmans are said to possess only theoretical knowledge, the Dalits are more efficient in terms of practical knowledge and know-hows, as mentioned in the previous section.

The element of radicalism

The criticism of Hinduism in the book is so vociferous that even though the good points of other religions are highlighted and enunciated from time to time, not even a single statement in the book seems to recognize the presence of a single laudable point in Hinduism. He might thus give a bone of contention to some critics and theologians. It is interesting to note how he argues for book-based religions as being more open to change and thus spiritually sound and philosophically inexhaustive. But at times, there seems to be lauding of the philosophical and spiritual aspects of Christianity (It is only in his concluding remarks (P.238) that he addresses the more 'political-cultural' problem of Papal orthodoxy besides also talking at length about the good Protestant ethics. Also, while talking about violence as a tool for suppression, he highlights communal Hindu riots, Muslim fundamentalists turning to terrorism but never for once mentions the Christian crusades or other problematic practices in Christianity). While the book gives a comparative outline of the teachings of the major world religions like Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, it does not take into account the other Indic religions like Jainism (except for the parts where Ilaiah's stance puts it in a positive light in ancient India as a revolt against caste and in a slightly more negative light later on, when he argues that Gandhi's conniving "Baniya-Brahmanhood" (chapter 9) and useless veganism were borrowed from Jainism) and Sikhism, perhaps due to the limitations of space.

Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence

Ilaiah argues that it is equally discomfoting as it is moving to see the naturalness that has been accorded to the entire system of caste-based social subordination and otherisation, and how the separate identities of these marginal groups have been blurred to further fetter them into future subordination. The dissent, struggle and agency of the

marginal groups have been very comfortably invisibilised. But the absence of evidence in no way amounts to evidence of absence, which is why instead of invisibilising their struggle, it is important to be cognizant of the other covert modes of resistance they resort to in order to voice their grievances. The watertight labels and layers of contested identities of these backward castes often projected as 'victims', 'indifferent masses', 'acceptors or dissenters', 'silent, helpless propagators', 'conscious receptors' need to be debated and refuted in order to understand the far more murky realities. Just as a dominant idea emanating from the power-wielders in a society becomes an ideology, widely-accepted concepts translate themselves into social theories and evolve over time into social orders dictating frameworks of analysis. They become the ruling paradigms of looking into wider social realities and there is an inevitable tendency to overlook and eliminate the existence of others. But different social groups have different ways of visualising, contextualising and commemorating their own past. They situate themselves differently across spatiality and temporality and have their own hierarchies which sometimes work counteractingly to the existing ones and where the subjugated become the dominating. The presence of humongous stratifications in the Indian society itself points out in the direction of presence of multiple realities, many of which have been subverted. The author thus attempts to write a 'history from below'. But some of the ideas used are debatable such as the use of the Aryan 'invasion' theory to portray the Brahmans as the actual 'outsiders'. This has only recently been archaeologically and historically debated, discredited and revised as Aryan 'migration' by Romila Thapar, Witzel, Menon and Friese in their 2019 book *Which of Us are Aryans?: Rethinking the Concept of Our Origins* (Aleph Pubs).

The foster relationship between memory and history

Unsettling realities and certain loopholes in previous studies are bound to come forth once we focus on the nuanced histories of the exploited. This book is also aimed at unearthing some hidden realities by interpreting cultural symbols which have been veiled consciously and subconsciously in the creation of Brahmanical myths, rituals and oral narratives on and around these marginalised castes. Most of the previous researches on this topic have been quantitative and as Arvind N. Das ((1982). *Agrarian Movements in India: Studies on 20th Century Bihar: 5 Library of Peasant Studies*. Routledge Pubs.) points out, a serious limitation of this methodology is that they have mostly failed to look

into the how's and why's (for instance the role of ideology) of the existing problem and concentrate more on the resulting implications.

Against this academic backdrop, Ilaiah bears the mantle of saving the tribal, Dalit and Shudra social scientists from the gorge of anonymity that awaits them if no conscious effort is made on their part to study the lives and lifestyles of their communities' 'common' peoples. In quoting directly from the lives of these people, and in blunt defiance of academic paradigmatic 'laws' set by the upper caste intellectual elite which often leads to an unfortunate homogenisation of nuanced realities, Kancha Ilaiah commits a blasphemy which ultimately renders his work and its methodology the salvation and the non-Western perception it rightly deserves, and in due course of time. This is made possible because much like Ambedkar, Ilaiah does not confine himself to random, abstract ideas but also works out a solid, systematic framework to express his dissent and to justify the orientations of his epistemological and ontological choices and in the relations that he identifies between the two.

This brings us to the ambiguous and chaotic relationship between historiographic traditions and popular memory. Pasts have been reimagined and reclaimed across a strikingly wide range of gender and social groups over centuries, mutated, transformed and reutilized according to personal needs. The many community narratives are also persistently employed to mobilize the community for political purposes since the lack of unity has been a major drawback in the past leading to the backwardness of these communities. But mere political empowerment is not enough. This needs to be backed by the creation of a "spiritual democracy" without which, the Shudras can never realise their full intellectual potential and scientific temper (chapter 13). In his own words, by converting the collective action of the "self-respecting Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Castes (OBC) into an intellectual social force" very much along the lines of Ambedkar's call for socio-spiritual liberation of the Dalits, the author attempts to call out the spiritually fascist 'religious Hindus' or the Shankaracharyas for limiting them socially and spiritually and not letting a lowered caste revolution get instigated.⁷

⁷ Through this distinction between political Hindus (RSS, VHP and so on), secular Hindus (Congress, the Communist parties, etc.) and religious Hindus, Ilaiah defines spiritual democracy as a system which stands in stark contrast to the system of spiritual fascism by giving equal social and spiritual rights of

Oral narratives and their social functions have thus been described by the author in the first eight chapters where he discusses how the Madigas (Mochis), Malas (Mahars), Chakalis (Dhobis), Managalis (Naayis) and other Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and tribal communities have a much wider ontologically productive base and a richer cultural understanding. With the narrative turn in history, oral histories and community narratives in origin myths and legends and social memory of commonly-faced events, instead of being passed off as being too loose, unreliable and irrelevant for being used as sources, are getting increasingly recognized as minutely detailed primary evidences and the focal points for studying community self-perception and its cosmological world-view. Just because their modes of resistance are not readily visible or do not fit into the dominant paradigm of what we generally call 'assertion' and 'dissent' due to obvious reasons, we are often guided by our Euro-centric understandings and driven by the desperation of our ruthless labelling and universalising tendencies to term them as primitive communities lacking caste consciousness and historical sense and sensibilities. Their cultural words however, speak otherwise. They show us the inventiveness of such communities in resorting to more subtle and long-lasting forms of organic protest which even though seemingly weak, are more resilient and effective in the presence of several chains that still try to fetter them.

Using the subaltern perspective, and taking the aid of social and cultural anthropology given the serious dearth of literary sources, the author has attempted to delineate how the Dalit-Bahujans have tried to resist and contest inclusion, invert existing social realities, forge counter-hierarchies and construct separate identities for themselves. These lived histories are indispensable constituents of their existence. They showcase the integral components of their everyday life. In spite of contesting narratives there is always a space for shared history and myth in community lives. The contesting narratives are not watertight compartments, but by-products of interactive and dialogical space within various social groups (Narayan, Badri. (2007). "Imagining the past and Reconstructing Histories" in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 35, No. 9/10.)

The author, however, at times, tends to overlook the evils of parasitic colonialism and how the British had actually supported and upheld the 'necessary evil' of the caste

representation, participation and practice to all sections of the society- a feat that other 'proselytizing' religions such as Islam, Christianity as well as Buddhism have been able to achieve (chapters 9, 10 and 11).

system to prevent clashes with indigenous elites and to keep the society hierarchical, divided and backward. This was supposed to ease their rule. They later codified it to suit their convenience of rule (Bayly, Susan. (2001). *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age: 3 (The New Cambridge History of India)*. CUP.) A more cautious choice of words and similes could have helped. It is also important to keep in mind the conflicting notions of 'modernity' while reading Ilaiah's remarks and that modernity should not always be equated with conforming to the standards set by the West and with globalization (Kaviraj, Sudipta. (2002). "Modernity and Politics in India" in Shmuel N. Eisenstadt ed. *Multiple Modernities*. Routledge Pubs).

Hope or confidence?

The author's arguments often dwindle between 'should' and 'would'. Ilaiah sometimes tends to rely more on faith than logic even though he does answer many questions towards the end. But there is a need to contextualise his arguments and read between the lines. The author asks us to imagine a post-Hindu India which seems almost unbelievable at first. But as the book proceeds with its arguments and the descriptions of an alternate world which even many researchers and scholars might be oblivious of, disbelief leans towards faith as we remove our sceptical glasses and witness that it does exist. This book also works wonders in the sense that it talks about a different 'normal' from the normal that we know to be true and thus urges us to broaden our horizons rather than recognizing Brahmanism as the one true culture of India like horses with blinkers on. It opens up new possibilities for exploration and further research as the author becomes a torch-bearer to lead us into the difficult and much-aversed terrain of 'orality and lived histories'. Thus, *Post-Hindu India* is a revolution in itself.

Things must get worse before they get any better: 'Inevitability' of a civil war or the margins of utopia?

Ilaiah argues that in order to bring in spiritual and political democracy, a civil war will have to happen first. For this, he lays importance on often unrecognized Dalit consciousness which is emerging more in the recent times despite vehement oppositions on the part of the oppressors. Referring to the overshadowed historical contributions of the Dalit-Bahujans by the upper caste representatives in the anti-colonial struggle in the

process of nation building⁸, which, according to him are sure to come to light slowly but surely, Ilaiah seems quite confident that it is not too long before a reluctant culture like Hinduism will transform itself (chapter 1). This work is, therefore, not just an innovation of social anthropology but also an invention as it busts various self-professed myths perpetrated by the Brahmans and opens up entirely new debates on the potential strength vested in the Dalit-Bahujans to be able to counter systemic and structural inequalities. As an act of loyalty-exhibition to his preferred title of 'author-activist', Kancha Ilaiah uses the book as a weapon to counter upper caste hegemony while simultaneously bridging the much-debated gap between social-reality and academia.

A point of caution which needs to be observed is that too much generalisation can be problematic. While the author takes care to enlist the technological contributions of individual communities in the starting chapters, he later uses terms such as Dalit-Bahujans, Shudras and Hindus less cautiously by clubbing several communities under single umbrella-terms. This completely mitigates inter and intra caste conflicts which he hardly mentions in this exhausting account. A wide lacuna is thereby posed. The use of the Gramscian term 'subaltern', which the author has used and indiscriminately, has also been debated by many post-colonial revisionists (Ludden, David. (2002). "Introduction." *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*. Anthem Press.) and feminist scholars (Spivak, Gayatri C. (1988). *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*; Spivak, Gayatri C. (1999). "History." *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Harvard UP; O' Hanlon, Rosalind. (2002). *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*. CUP.), in the recent times since the very use of the term 'subaltern' by someone signifies that they themselves are at a more privileged position and because it fails to take into account the narratives of even 'elite' women.

Conclusion

All in all, this brilliantly structured and highly engaging book could easily be one of the most eccentric pieces of academic writing one ever comes across in the recent times. It

⁸ This points to the process of internal-colonisation and otherisation of the "enemy" lowered castes by the upper caste social-intellectual fathers and the erasure of their histories (elaborated in Dirks, N.B. (2001). *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton University Press.

has a vocabulary and a dictionary of its own where derogatory remarks and labels against the powerful and the dominant have been used vehemently. This is also evident from the coinage of terms such as 'meatarianism', 'orature' and so on. Several facts and the author's uncensored mockeries and satirical attacks on dominant Hinduism are hard to digest since each statement seems controversial and can be problematized by many. But Ilaiah makes it clear since the very onset that facts do not need proof to stand correct. The methodology is unique and the narrative structure, highly unconventional. The author appeals to the reason and conscience of his readership as they might find themselves giving in to wonder, dubiousness and finally, accolade at the eminent craftsmanship of the author with each turning page. This book is truly capable of inciting a civil war on the inside of the privileged by attracting a strong mind and offending a weak one.