

Kancha Ilaiah: Post-Hindu India A Discourse on Dalit –Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2009

Review By Rinju Rasaily

The author critiques and compares how Hinduism as a religion did not call forth scientific and technological development unlike Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. He states that the merger of creativity, spirituality, science and technology was never allowed in the Hindu caste system. Hinduism as a religion did not evolve into spiritual democracy and always remained clogged in spiritual fascism. He points out how Hinduism rooted in superstition and caste structures did not allow the English language, a medium of scientific thinking, to take a mass base in India. He reiterates the conflict of religion with science across all the four major world religions.

Through a case history of Andhra Pradesh, a south Indian state, he argues vehemently the nature of negligence of various forms of scientific knowledge on production and technology of 'the other' by the upper castes. He reiterates that the Dalit- Bahujan and tribal societies are engrained with creativity, technology and rational thinking. He illustrates these by positing them as 'social doctors', 'unpaid teachers', 'subaltern scientists', 'productive soldiers', 'unknown engineers' and the upper castes as 'spiritual fascists', 'social smugglers' and 'intellectual goondas'.

He has examined the role of various castes like the Magidas, a community from where culture, technology and innovation were brought to practical use. For example, through the creation of leather products like chappals, water bags, leather ropes and so on. He states how the Brahmins never promoted sale of such products and gave less importance to its use. Likewise another caste, Malas, shouldered the responsibility of the defence of the rural communities unlike the Kshatriyas who took responsibility of protecting only the royal kingdom. The Malas according to the author were skilful in understanding the nature and requirement of food cultivation and production. The practice of untouchability on these communities was the worst form of segregation witnessed in history. The author also highlights the hegemonic nature in which 'colour', 'wearing' and 'washing' of cloth are construed by the Brahmins vis-à-vis castes such as Chakalis who are engaged in clothes washing. He mentions how the act of clothes washing is done by both Chakali men and women that permit an element of feminism to be entrenched in the social system. The Chakali men, as the author argues because of undertaking such tasks have their 'sensibilities feminised'. In other words, they have learnt to give more space to female sexuality. Whereas, the Brahminical patriarchy that constructed the "female body pollution" and the "male body purity" remained.

Another example that he notes are the Mangalis or barbers, who were involved in introducing few scientific methods of treatments, surgeries by the skilful use of their instruments. But this knowledge was accorded a low status. Dignity of labour as the author sees through the religions like Christianity was absent in Hinduism. He illustrates through the case of the shepherd community in India, the Yadavas and goes further to discuss how Rama took prominence over Krishna in the Hindutva ideology.

The contribution of the subalterns, he says has always been neglected as reflected in academic textbooks and in understanding the process of nation building. He points out how the subaltern communities have contributed to technology, development and in the overall nation building. The varied aspects of creative production and engineering skills by the subalterns was never translated into literature and written records. Their knowledge was 'socio-spiritually undignified'. They

were interpreted and construed with a Brahminical lens. The Brahmanic hegemony continues to operate in India even after years of freedom. The non-admission of tribal knowledge systems into the Brahminical fold of Hinduism has been strongly articulated by the author. Purity and pollution as dictated in the Hindu scriptures, were well entrenched in all aspects of daily lives, reflected through the culture of consumption as opposed to production. Food production as created by the Shudras lends a more scientific meaning to survival. He notes for example, the untouchability of a menstruating woman as practised among Brahminical households was not present among the Shudras, engaged in cultivation, as the female body was viewed as both productive and reproductive.

The creation of a caste of Baniyas, as a business caste resulted in enormous wealth accumulation, 'guptadhana' that was granted a religious practice and used for tax evasion. The Baniya – Brahmin exploited the economy which continued even after Independence. Worshipping of certain gods was used to justify wealth accumulation. He further discusses with the emergence of Gandhi as a national figure for the Baniya community brought about discomfort and fear of losing their Brahminical hegemony. However, Gandhi was never revered by the Baniya households across the nation as he preached simple living and frugality and feared by the Brahmins because of his anti-untouchability campaign. Brahmins as 'spiritual fascists' and 'intellectual goondas' used and controlled through the instrument of education. The author describes their exalted and exceptional self to be superimposed in Hinduism. Hinduism is therefore what Brahminism is.

He reiterates that the Baniya-Brahmin nexus exploited the economy that continued during the post independent period. Spiritual fascism got percolated into politics, labour relations and so on. They operate in exclusion unlike the subalterns as collective. Another interesting euphemism used by the author is 'intellectual goondas' that control the modern democratic state under the aegis of such fascism. The tools used by them were to negate the existence of the other productive masses, by not recording their contribution to economy, science and technology and avoid 'dewriting their self'. They propagated more fiercely the theory of karma and gave greater importance to word power for example 'Om'. This he says has not helped in evolving India as a democratic and powerful nation as the 'intellectual goondas' operate through three major institutions vis-à-vis education, bureaucracy and judiciary. It is only by creating a body of intellectuals with egalitarian views from the Dalit –Bahujan community can counter such Brahminical hegemony. He argues that the Shudra community need to strive to achieve spiritual equality to rid them from the bondage of spiritual slavery.

The book strongly critiques on the Shudra community who despite being the first to receive education and having accumulated property and status from among the Shudras, Dalits and Adivasis, did not proceed beyond fights for worshipping Hindu gods and temple entry. He calls them 'philosophically underdeveloped' and therefore a 'social mass constituting of blissful ignorance' and who are unaware about their own historical contribution to scientific knowledge. And it is this condition he says that is now under the leadership of the Dalits. He cites the need for a transformative discourse by Dalitism. With historical evidence he argues the importance of a civil war that would create an egalitarian society and system. The author argues that through a civil war on the markers of purity can bring about a radical change in order to reach social plurality. The cultural confidence of the diwija community needs to be broken. An emergence of a civil war was always prohibited by the upper castes who clandestinely did not allow unity of the Dalit Bahujan and tribal societies. Hinduism as a religion did not permit human equality and even after sixty years of freedom, caste and religion based inequalities continue to exist. He procrastinates what he calls the 'end of Hinduism' as it does not call for spiritual equality. To

what extent is Hinduism dying, requires much deeper analysis given the burgeoning debates around caste; that seeks to restate its existence.

The book is extremely useful and encouraging for academics, scholars and students interested in such a discourse. It allows the reader to reimagine and rethink the existential realities on issues of human inequality and the need for spiritual democracy to filter in Hinduism. The myths and realities of Hindu casteism are traced historically in this book. It positions the significance of strengthening the Dalit -Bahujan base over the Brahmanic- Baniya superstructure in the discourse on Dalit Bahujan Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution. A re-examination and rewriting of history, society and polity with the understanding of the so-called productive masses is called forth in this book. The book however calls for in the Indian context, a comparative analysis of all four dominant religions on the practice of human equality.