

WHY I AM NOT A HINDU: A STUDY OF RESISTANCE TO SPIRITUAL FASCISM OF UPPER CASTE HINDU CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

It is problematic that being born in a particular religion one cannot identify oneself with that religion because of disparity prevailed therein. It obstructs to the healthy growth of psyche of the individual. In a country where we have been given equal rights, it is torturous to see some being availing facilities and other on dead ends. Mandal recommendation and Dalit Panther revolt even did not succeeded in this regard. Before birth, nobody knows that he is going to take birth in a particular religion and community. Why does community choke his/her growth for being born in a lower caste? Where our works should be based on production, it is based on caste and our economic status in social strata. Why does one hate that community even one is born in that community? Even our constitution maker Babasaheb Ambedkar said – I am born Hindu but I will not die Hindu. He changed his religion and converted himself with numbers of his follower into Buddhism. Why did he do so? Natural living without any bigotry is called Hinduism as it has been claimed. But it is not so as claimed. The religion in due course of time changed in a kind of orthodoxy and bigotry full of hatred and violence on the downtrodden people. The text *Why I am Not a Hindu* (2012) by Kancha Illaiah has been described in the term of spiritual fascism. The paper will focus on resistance to spiritual fascism of Hindu identity.

Key Words – Spiritual Fascism, Cultural Terrorism, Post Mandal recommendation, Neo-Kshatriya, Ideological Hegemony, Intellectual Untouchability.

Ilaiah starts his book with the very first idea about childhood formation. He claims that he is not a Hindu because his parents were unknown that they were Hindu. His parents were illiterate who lived in a remote south Indian village. He describes how his parents were ignorant of the customs and rituals that were celebrated in the Hindu community. They only knew that they belonged to a production based community called Kurumaas. They were from a sheep-breeding community and land farming people. Even they never went to a temple in which they could meet villagers belonging to all castes. Ilaiah describes in details about the contemporary scenario of that place. He says,

“I was not born a Hindu for the reason that my parents did not know that they were Hindus. This does not mean that I was born as a Muslim, a Christian, a Buddhist, a Sikh or

a Parsee. My illiterate parents, who lived in a remote south Indian village, did not know that they belong to any religion at all. People belonged to a religion only when they know that they are part of the people who worship that god, when they go to those temple and take part in the rituals and festivals of that religion. My parents had only one identity and that was their caste: They were Kurumaas. Their festivals were local, and sometimes these were even specific to one village. No centralized religious symbols existed for them. My ancestors took to life on the plain about 500 years ago. They were integrated into the village economy, paid taxes to the village panchayats or to the state administration in whichever form the administration required. In the year before I was born, they shifted their occupation from sheep-breeding to agriculture and paid land rent to the local landlord and to the Tehsil office (Ilaiah: 01).

Ilaiah takes us to their village where we notice the existence of their caste groups. The village constitutes of a number of castes. In the village economy, Kurumaas, Gollaas, Goudas, Kapuus, Shalaas, Chakaalies, Mangalies and Maadigaas formed the majority in terms of numbers. The entire village economy was governed by the daily operations of these castes. He narrates how his childhood was shaped. He claims him to be grown under the culture called the culture of kurumaa caste. Occasionally his friendship extended to Goudaa and Kappu boys. Those were friends who belonged to the same caste. Kappu and Goudaa viewed themselves to be the upper caste. While eating we were not supposed to sit together. Whenever a goudaa friend came to our home he sat at some distance. It was a kind of mindset formation in which they grew. Ilaiah takes us to the caste and cultural training of boys and girls. As he belonged to sheep-breeding caste, he was made aware about names of different sheep and their diseases. How a delivery should be mid-wifed, How young one should be handled, which was the best grass for rearing the sheep, how to cure diseases of sheep and shearing of sheep were the matter pertaining to their training.

Girls were trained to handle the younger ones when woman folk went to work in agrarian fields. The household works like powdering chilies, husk the paddies, sweep the home, clean the eating bowls, how to separate wools from the thorns that stick to it and prepare it for thread-making. The house-hold works are also given to learn. The works need skills in their performance. The girls are given training for different performances according to their caste. Quite a lot of explanations by the adults go into the teaching of these activities to the young ones. Invariably, experts are noticed in each and every activity who acquires names for themselves.

Ilaiah claims that caste language is structured by its own grammar. It is designed for production-based communication. These words are orally repeated. Ilaiah produces a kind of contrast between Brahmanical Telgu language and their production based- languages. He says,

“The specialization that one acquires in communicating these caste occupational tasks is as much or more sophisticated than that possessed by a Brahmin who utters the several names of his god while reciting a mantra. What is ironical is that the recitation of several names of Gods while reciting a mantra. What is ironical is that the recitation of several names of one God or many Gods is construed as wisdom, whereas knowing the language of production and the names of productive tool is not recognized as knowledge. The Brahmanical culture has defined knowledge in its own image. But the facts still remains that each caste has built a treasure house of its own language and its own vocabulary... This consciousness has nothing to do with organized religion. Further language here is a social instrument of communication and of the expression of that particular consciousness (Ilaiah: 06).

Ilaiah takes our attention to the consciousness of god formation. The concept of God comes in our mind when we enter school. The Social system which is essential Brahmanical penetrates the law of religion in our mind. We carry thousand of gods in our mind. Love for God is not developed, but fear has a perennial place. Talking about ups and downs of society, Ilaiah claims to the fact that our education system is not up to mark. It has been also claimed by our Government that education in our schools is only based on preaching, not production based teaching. The concept of god has been used for a kind of hegemony to be imposed on lower caste Hindus and marginalized beings. Sudras have their own different Gods. They are Pochamma, Maisamma, Ellamma etc. In respect they are understood backward to the upper-caste Gods. They worship the god of production. If the abdomen will remain empty, the concept of god will be out from their mind. In Dalitbahujan families Pochamma, Maisamma and Ellamma are the goddesses revered in their own capacity. It does not strike an average Dalitbahujan consciousness that these Goddesses do not have husbands and hence need not to be spoken of derogatorily. It is a concept in our Indian tradition that Gods are in couple. Goddesses cannot be respected until and unless Gods are not with them. Hinduism has created a spiritual ideology which has resulted in gender subordination as well. The image of Goddesses Laxmi and Sarawasati are great example in this respect. Our Goddesses Laxmi, Sarawasati and Kali are created in such image as subordination to their male counterpart.

Ilaiah, in this way, puts his ideas of internalization of religion in coherent way. The concept of language formation and conceptualization of superiority of gods in this way takes place in the mind of a child during his childhood. They learn the process the concept of cultural terrorism here. The sense of superiority runs through their young and immature mind.

It is also observed that attitude of teachers depends on the caste group to which the student belonged to. If teacher is Brahmin, he feels sad that due to effect of the kaliyuga, he is having to teach that sudra boy. There is no good relation between teacher and student. Productive works, according to these communities, is understood as dirty and filthy. They dislike these lower sections and believed that they are not made for teaching works. According to him only dirty and Filthy people work in mud, they are not made to take education. They have no right to assimilated in the upper caste culture, otherwise it may be defiled. Thus society is man- made. It's not god- gifted.

Ilaiah takes us to the marriage solemnized in our society. For different people marriage has different connotation. For people like Ilaiah marriage is a human and worldly affair that performs the human functions of production and procreation. For him, without a couple there cannot be production of crop. There is a common belief In Hindu culture that there cannot be freedom to the soul until there is not a male child. It has been the result of Hinduism that from the very beginning male child considered the instrument to pave the way to heaven for their parents. In upper-caste, where marriage accounts for handsome dowry, in writer's community it demands for bride-price. Ilaiah assert that the focal point of his community is production based marriages. It is the hallmark of an agrarian family.

Ilaiah now takes us into prerogatives of brahminic culture. The contact between Brahmins and Sudras comes only at the time of marriage and ceremonies. This is not because of love and affection but because of getting money and alms. They come to collect the money and sacrificed matters on the altar during the ceremony. Ilaiah has described it in full lenth description as,

“The priest comes into contact with the Dalitbahujan only on such occasions as marriage and death. And then he comes not to educate them about the spirit that he visualizes as embodied in God; not to talk in a language people can understand. No mantra is

understood by anyone present there - not a word. A priest who treats his subject as part of his religion must explain the relationship between the divinity and the people, make them conscious about the spirit of the divine. But during the brief contact between them and the priest the people do not feel that he had come to educate them. Each mantra that he murmurs is in a language that none around can understand. The people do not know whether the priest is calling on a divine spirits to bless the couple or curse them (Illaiah: 21) .

Illiaiah has taken our attention to the religious nature of our social set-up in which religious activity determines our status. The *DAKSHINA* demanded by Brahmins at the time of rituals makes the downtrodden to be in worse condition. The way of behavior at the time of rituals shown by Brahmin community is humiliating. By inviting the priest they do not invite pleasure, but invite a pain. He does not treat them as ‘Children of God’ in home he believes. He believes and treats them as outsider because the audiences of his mantras are his enemies. In his views they are objects from whom dakshina can be extracted. In their eyes untouchables are only the people who can be taught the lesson of perpetual obedience. Even barbour touches them on such occasion, only to get the money from these people.

Marriage for a Dalitbahujan caste is meant only for production of goods, foods and procreation of species. Dalitbahujan married couples can never enjoy a sexual life that is anywhere like Hindu enjoyment as it is narrated by hindu kama Pundit, Vatsyayana. The priest’s family and his whole caste never share productive work with the Dalitbahujan. Illiaiah takes the examples from Kurumaa and Goudaa community and says:

“In these families what they must do every morning is not decided by them but by their masters. The women in these families get up and go to the master’s cattle sheds to clean them, or to sweep the surroundings of the master’s house – but certainly not to sweep the inside of the house. They rush back home only to find empty cooking pots waiting to be washed, hungry children waiting for some food. They do not have time to think about God and prayer... Hence they cook some liquid stuff to swallow. The woman must rush because they must reach the working points in the field much before the dawn breaks. All Dalitbahujan men and women must do this. The work does not start with a morning prayer and a cold water bath (Illiaiah: 25).

Illiaiah says about the work culture of disparity prevailed in the society. He alleges that Brahmins and people from upper caste have accumulated and amassed property. They have grabbed even the means of production. People from low castes have been alienated from their means of production. They believe in a single philosophy that ‘unless the hand works the mouth cannot eat’. Their lives do not confirm to the simplicity that of upper caste people. He says as:

‘You have right to work but not to the fruits.’ I too would not have understood the meaning of this stanza if a foreigner had not translated the Gita into English. It is our people’s misfortune that the priest who extract daksina from them on every occasion that he visits them, never tells them about this sentence contained in the philosophy of the Others. It established the ideology which says that our masses must work, but they must not aspire to enjoy the fruits of that work (Iliaiah: 28).

Illiaiah says Brahmin women to be expert in divine cooking derogatively. Baniya females are well versed to lure Dalibahujan to be their consumers. The males of Baniya do the same. Baniyas deal with them in such a way that the manipulations are not understood by the masses so that they never become a part of mass consciousness. A Hindu Baniya market presupposes a lie

to be the part of its sacred form as well as its business culture. Prices of the food products vary from customer to customer in this market.

Illaiah separates Hindu and non-Hindu production. Buying cattle and beef, selling mutton and sheep, selling and buying fish, selling and buying toddy, selling and buying leather material and some other works of this kind are known as non-Hindu work. These non-Hindu works are supposed to be the work of Dalitbahujan. Sometimes the seller sympathizes with the buyer if his/her economic condition is known to him/her. Payments become possible in installments only. In other words, socially, economically and philosophically the sellers and buyers relate to each other in these non-Hindu market. Perhaps this could be one of the reasons why the non-Hindu, Dalitbahujan market dealers do not become visibly rich. His/her life style rarely becomes significantly different from those of the masses.

Illaiah says about a new kind of caste is emerging on the scene which is neo-Kshatriya. This is the caste which has gained power and pelf in new economic scenario. He says as:

While the Brahmin- Baniya manipulate our consciousness in spiritual and economic domains, The neo-Kshatriya think that by stepping into the shoes of the 'classical' Kshatriyas they can manipulate power relations at various levels. Hinduism believes in the theory of co-optation and exclusion. The Brahman- Baniya are slowly co-opting the neo-Kshatriyas and excluding the caste below them. The surest way of structuring power relations and manipulating hegemony is by acquiring control of cultivable land and land-related means of production. The neo-Kshatriyas have an added advantage in this as they are not yet completely alienated from the agrarian production process and hence are culturally and knowledge-wise rooted in the agrarian arts and agrarian science (Illaiah: 38).

It is well noted that with the neo-Kshatriyas, the notion of power and property changes greatly. The neo-Kshatriyas have slowly given up their caste panchayats. Similarly, hierarchy is slowly entering their home. As their home move from the secular to spiritual domain, their notion of power revolves around divinity, and human being begin to look like nonentities. The homes of neo-Kshatriyas are split between a devine and a brahminized femininity and an aggrandized masculine power structure which appears at times divine and at times secular. Neo-Kshatriyas masculine power hobnobs with Brahmanism as it is perfectly well-suited to the philosophy of casteism. Illaiah talks from the prospective of post Mandal Commission point of view as it gave rise to number of neo-kshatriya community, found an entrenched place in Hindutva. He says as:

In fact post-colonial Hindutva is a Brahmanical modernity which works strategically in the interest of Brahmin, Baniya, and the neo-Kshatriya forces. Its historical aim is to subvert the political assertion of the Dalitbahujan caste which form the democratic and secular social base of India. If the Brahmin-Baniya and neo-Kshatriya combine operates in the secular domain, these democratic forces will not be able to acquire and sustain power... The blend of spiritualism and political power is very much rooted in their casteized patriarchal authoritarianism. Brahmanical authoritarianism can express itself in neo-fascist forms, while also attempting to establish control over the institution of state and civil society by bringing into existence all kinds of classical brahmanical notion of life itself (Illaiah: 43).

Illaiah castigates the culture that questions our existence. He raises question over our existential problems. People from Dalitbahujan communities are at top ranks but he does not get attention of these caste Hindus. Their house in the localities remains secluded. Even at the time of taking house at rent, their caste is asked and asked whether they are vegetarian or non-vegetarians. Expressions are always negative for low caste Dalits.

Many dalitbahujans have attempted to sanskritize themselves. They changed their original names into brahminical names. Their sanskritization did not work to beget respect for them. Ilaiah says as:

... no single Sanskritized Dalitbahujan group can claim that their children have the connections to procure a good job without claiming the reservation for which Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar fought their lives. The Sanskritization process did not dilute caste identities and caste based humiliations. Many Dalitbahujans who got Sanskritized later realized the fact that Sanskritization is no solution to Hindu barbarity. This is the reason Why Ambedkar embraced Buddhism to build a counter culture to Hinduism, and Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy attempted to established the hegemony of Dravida culture by attacking Hindu culture and Hindu Gods (Ilaiah: 69).

Ilaiah takes our attention to the mass conversion in which Ambedkar changed himself into Buddhism. In constitution he himself had advocated about reservation which will help Dalitbahujan to develop into a appropriate personality. Ilaiah accepts that there are practical inequalities in both Islam and Christianity. Women, particularly, suffer inequality in many respects in both Chritianity and Islam. The ongoing debate, for instance , about Islam and the problems of Burka and talak are well known. However in the fundamental area of spiritual equality at the level of book reading and spiritual congregation, these religion had granted rights to women at an early period. Ilaiah thinks that the basic difference between Hinduism and other religion is its fascist nature. Religions like Buddhism Christianity and Islam, on the other hand, have basic character of spiritual democracy. They violated that basic essence and got involved in intra-religious wars. These religions do not have political democracies like that of Hindu religion. Spiritual democracy in itself does not resolve all socio-political Problems. But It lays the foundation for Socio-political equality. Spiritual democracy has its own historical contribution towards the overall growth of democracy as a system. No religion except Hinduism built a structure of spiritual fascism to torture members of its civil society who are recognized to be part of that very religion. The hindu religion has either to reformulate itself or Indian society as a whole should embrace religion that can deconstruct the spiritual fascist social structures and establish spiritual democratic structure. In simple word, Islam and Christianity have never prohibited his own fellow beings entering the religious places. They have not hindered in the religious sentiments of their own fellow beings.

In conclusion, we find that Ilaiah is very firm in his determination to expose the fascist attitude of Hindu culture. Hinduism in India has been coloured to suit the powerful caste called Brahmins. The text is a kind of literary resistance to expose the inner conspiracy of cultural terrorism or spiritual fascism. To be born in a pious religion like Sanatana Dharma, later called Hindu Dharma, Ilaiah feels alienated because of its later shortcomings induced by Brahmins. In my opinion to live with natural attitude is Sanatana Dharma. When Sanatan Dharma is tempered it becomes any other religion. Each and every religion supports humanity and for the smooth performance of life on this earth. Dharma in Indian philosophy is known as which we bear and hold. Religion should take step to embrace all its followers without any disparity. Ilaiah is positive to express her view regarding character of intolerance in our hindu brahminical culture. Each and everyone should be given proper environment for development. On this earth, the word which combines us in one thread is ‘development’. In absence of development, through we will retrograde to primitive culture which is meaningless for being ‘Human’.

NOTES:

1. Cultural terrorism is a kind of superiority feeling because of belonging to a religion as we think it to be superior to others. We boost our cultural traits and in this way, we violate the code of conduct and ways of humanity.
2. Neo- Kshatriya denotes to the new emerging power class and castes which have gathered power and pelf like Kshatriya. They negotiated with the powerful classes for their survival and in due course of time they behaved in the same way like political entity.
3. Baniya culture has got prominence after post Mondal Commission recommendation. OBCs got political prominence and confirmed to the rule and regulation of Brahminism.
4. Spiritual fascism is a kind of mind set up in which one cannot support other Gods and Deities and downs to violent activities in the name of religion. They interfere other's religion and they adopt many means to force their own spiritualism.

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