


British created Hinduism and Brahmins created the myth that India is Bharat: G Aloysius

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What I have done here is to historically trace how the earlier and very localized brahmanical svabhava through the operations of colonialism, orientalism, and nationalism, has become the nationalized, naturalized and accepted brahminical svabhava with control over everything. It is a historical development. At a national level, colonialism helped brahmanism. But this was also taken advantage of by a few people saying it is the British who developed caste. That is why I stick to the geographical entity: Brahmin influence was exerted in certain areas only, that means it existed prior to the coming of the British, but not everywhere. British took up the localized dominance (as general dominance) and this became the modern Indian nationalistic and universal. And today it is experienced as the brahmanical svabhava. Many of the middle-class values are brahmanical values for us, not necessarily limited to brahmins. Everyone, including Dalit Bahujan are influenced by it, middle class life is a brahmanically expressed life.

Q1) There is a reference in Brahminical scriptures to what they call ‘brahmin svabhava’. Is there such a thing as ‘brahmin svabhava’? What is the inherent essence that sets the brahmin to be separate?

This is a brahmanical view of life in general, where humans are differentiated in the very essences, *guna* or characteristics, humans are divided as brahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas, shudras, and so on. And these different groups refer to different svabhavas, having very definite characteristics, which lead to their location in the hierarchy. And the power they exercise over others and also the power exercised on them. Now the point is, it has been discredited and given up with the emergence of modernity. Enlightenment and modernity say human beings are all the same in spite of the differences in the circumstances of birth.

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So, humans are the singular category and there are no separate things called brahmin svabhava, kshatriya svabhava, shudra svabhava and so on.

Instead of explaining the present supremacy of the brahmins through this idea of svabhava, I would suggest the supremacy of the brahmins as being maintained through history, through their historical and political actions, the circumstances which led to that, by human, conscious, collective actions. The actions they did, and actions they did not do. Also, the actions which others did and did not do, taken together can explain how and why the brahmins are supreme today.

Q2) *We see brahmin svabhava as ‘uninterrupted access to surpluses, labor, and property over the ages.’ This also translates to ‘uninterrupted access to power’, in our view. Could you share your views on that?*

I said it is their conscious historical actions which matter. It is through history, which means changeable, as opposed to svabhava which they posit as non-changeable, the root of explanation for understanding the present day can be found. Because the problem is the present-day supremacy of the brahmins. If the brahmins were not supreme today, we were not going to sit and talk about brahminical svabhava. Because it is sitting on top of us and is torturing us, we want to understand this, how it is being maintained, how they came to this supremacy, and how it is perpetuated.

I would only say, that their coming to the top, their present supremacy, is through the concrete working of men and women, individuals and collectives operating in history, with certain circumstances of history going in favor of the group of brahmins, and certain things going against others and the omissions and commissions of others and theirs put together will explain why their supremacy is maintained. Svabhava is a brahmanical myth; it is a myth they could propagate and perpetuate in premodern times, through religion, religious scriptures, religious practices, religious customs, festivals, prescriptions, customs, traditions, in a camouflaged way. But with the dawn of enlightenment, modernity, and rationality everywhere, it is now being exposed as a myth. There is nothing that says brahmins are naturally superior.

Q3) *How did the brahmin svabhava, which in essence is a claim on rest of society, gain acceptance wherein the brahmin is able to write rules and laws for the rest of the society safeguarding the brahmin interests in all and any situation?*

Words such as uninterrupted access to surplus, labor, property, are modern words. How did brahmins come to power? In pre-modern times, the primary means of remaining on the top was through religion, in a very broad sense; religion and the caste system and caste specific practices, location of all castes in a particular ranking order--all these being reinforced and reproduced continuously through sacred writings. There is no sacredness about those writings; those are mythical and kind of obscene and superstitious writings, celebrating the brahminical svabhava and certain festivals; certain caste specific practices requiring brahmins to be present at crucial times in an individual's life - birth, marriage, death and so on. That is the main way brahminical supremacy was maintained.

And this I tell you, was not prevalent everywhere, this has to be remembered. The moment you talk about India as one, this becomes part of the idea. (When you say) India is one, it gets reinforced by singular idioms like this. Brahmins were dominant and their svabhava and supremacy were maintained in extremely select pockets in the subcontinent. It was not from the beginning that India was brahmanical, but that is what lovers of brahmanism would like to say and even haters of brahmanism would also like to say. They like to say we have been slaves to the brahmins for 10000 years or something like that. It is not true, not true at all.

India is a geographical entity and also a historical entity. If brahmanism is a force of uninterrupted access to various things, it started in history, it had its rise and fall, and now it looks kind of naturalized in all corners of India, so that from now we take the whole movement backward and say originally too it was like this.

As I said, in pre-modern times, the primary weapon was religion. That's why you could find brahminical svabhava in the sacred writings of the brahmins, but they are not sacred writings for me. Now, this was found only in certain pockets where the brahmanical way of life was practiced: which means brahmins would sit, relax and eat the surplus while others produce it.

Economically it has to be viable, and that viability was available only in certain pockets of the subcontinent, river valleys. In all the plains and many parts of Telangana, the Deccan plateau and these desert-like places in Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand and in several other places where life is very difficult, survival is extremely difficult, and everybody has to labour in order to produce what everybody has to eat, brahmanism cannot survive.

Brahmanism simply means, *we are not here to soil our nails, physical labour is contemptible, we are meant for, our svabhava is given for something very spiritual, transcendental and it is your duty, 'shudra' svabhava to feed us, to serve us. That is why the shudras should not accumulate wealth, but they should give the wealth to us. The Brahmin has the right to grab anything from them.*

Now as I said, it is only possible where the harvest is rich, where if five people work, ten people can eat, because the brahmanical way of life is an indolent, lazy way of life. There is no physical labor for brahmins. His duties are supposed to recite Vedas while somebody else plants and reaps and cooks and gives them.

That was physically not possible in many places. In those places where it was possible, they maintained their supremacy, camouflaging it as their svabhava, distinct from the svabhava of others, through enjoying the surplus of the labour of the non-brahmin masses. Now, of course, the whole struggle was to extend their area of influence and bring more areas under their control and for this purpose, the so-called kings were very useful. Because, where they were dominant, that is the river valley areas where harvest was rich, they legitimized the kings through their ceremonies, slokas and their things. The kshatriya was legitimized by the brahmins. So, the nexus developed between the brahmins and kshatriyas, and the kshatriyas would go on conquering places and so on. So, the kshatriyas would tell the brahmin, *'we will go and conquer some place, will you come and occupy the place?'* *'Yes, you go and conquer first, because in the process of conquering we will*

not support you, that is your problem, because your svabhava is to go to war, establish varnashram dharma where nobody will contest our supremacy and then we will come and we will crown you and anoint you as a king and the kingdom will be living in subiksha, harmony and wellbeing.'

While this was the process through which it was going on, this enslavement of the masses under the dominance of the brahmins and the kshatriyas in those areas was always resented. In the Gangetic valley, today we understand this (as the cause) for the rise of Buddhism, it is from the caste oppression that the caste revolt also started. Both happened only in the river valley areas.

People found that they are producing so much of surplus, labour, but they are surrendering it to somebody else, it was being appropriated. Eventually, it is a question of self-respect. *What is this, I work and somebody else eats?* So, caste as well as the anti-caste (revolt) rise in those areas while the other vast masses were amorphous, there was no brahmanism in those areas. That doesn't mean it was utopia outside, people fought each other for various kinds of issues. Like access to water which was a scarce commodity in those areas, owning of lot of cattle and occupying strategic places, highways vs interiors, and your service to the local or the distant king that enables you to become aggressive--on those bases, which Nicholas Dirks points out in 'The Hollow Crown'.

The dominance in the rest of the country was based on pure exercise of power, circumstantial or opportunistic power, power because of access to water, access to the main road where the travelers pass or the ownership of useful properties and so on. And this was not very permanent, some group in some places was dominant and at other times, they lose their dominance.

Now, how come today we experience universal, apparently universal, brahmanical supremacy so that we are constrained to talk about svabhavas? They are there on top of everybody because of their svabhava. It is a re-feudalization, going back to pre-modern times where not only the whole exercise of power, access to uninterrupted supply etc., is being maintained by brute force, political force, mobilizational force, institutional force, education, employment, and political representations which are modern realities. In addition to all these, the older means of exercising their svabhava--that is the writings and the religion, in the broad sense, including what I mentioned have come back today, so much so that the brahmanical svabhava, brahmanical dominance/supremacy in India is maintained both by politics and by the so-called religion.

In most countries, the historical process has been, with the dawn of modernity, religion withdraws in many areas of life, many forms of religion disappear, it changes its form and takes certain other forms. Also, religion is democratized, secularized, individualized and the strict ideal of separation of religion from politics takes place. On the contrary, what happened in the recent history of India are processes that were entirely counter to those which I mentioned, the normal processes which we find everywhere in the world.

Indian scholars/social scientists decry modernity. Modernity for them is westernization. 'Westernization has to be rejected as it is alien and against our ethos, against our original genius which our ancient saints discovered long back.' When that rejection of modernity is no longer possible then the scholars took to plan B. That was to suggest that there are multiple modernities. 'Your modernity may be like that but ours is like this.' Now when that also was difficult to defend

these philosophers became more defensive and said that 'it is our modernity, you have no right to question anymore.'

Modernity as basic common aspirations, positive ideals in human lives, cannot be accepted by all. That was their understanding.

Svabhava is peculiar to brahmins, svabhava for kshatriya is different, svabhava for shudra is different. The shudra svabhava is, 'they cannot accumulate, it will go against their svabhava, they have to surrender it to me. And if I for example rape, I a brahmin rape a non-brahmin girl, it is for her good.'

All this is svabhava, brahmanical privilege, brahmanical separatism. Life is singular, you cannot distinguish it between secular and sacred. All these are mythologies, producing a certain way of life, directly or indirectly going to maintain, perpetuate, reproduce and reinforce this brahminical svabhava, which is basically a pre-modern entity.

Now, incidentally the same thing was present in Europe, it is not our peculiarity as they claim. This Aryan way of life spread not only in India, but it was spread originally outside, only then it came to India, the notion that people are divided according to the functions they do. One is to pray - the bishops, priests, church people - second is the rajjas, nobles, knights, and warriors - third is the ordinary people who slog in the fields. This was the pre-modern Europe. And they also had mythologies like this because the value of ten serfs was equal to one warrior and the value of ten warriors was equal to one clergyman. So unequal worth, which is typical of our caste system, it was also over there but then, of course, modernity, the transformations, transition to urbanization and industrialization came and the idea that human beings are all the same, each one should be considered as an equal human, and they are of equal worth irrespective of the difference in their appearance, in their characteristics, color, height, and weight (emerged). That is enlightenment.

The pre-enlightenment idea said, people are different, some are strong, some are weak, some are white, and some are black. These differences are what should determine social/cultural/political organizations. Somebody muscular and strong is to become a warrior, and naturally he is the one to lead the country. Somebody who is weak, he is fit for nothing, so he should do some ordinary work. Now the enlightenment idea is that people, though different in appearance, are the same everywhere and they should be given equal opportunity. That is there in the enlightenment era. Now that did not happen in India during the colonial period.

Now going back to brahmanical svabhava which was supreme, and which was kind of dominant in pre-modern days in select areas, how did it become universal? It was purely through colonialism and orientalism.

Q4) How does the brahmin become the intercessor of God and the masses in the absence of any centralized religious institution such as the papal structure in Christianity and other organized religions?

It is purely a historical transformation. This is the story of the last 300 years of our history in the subcontinent. So, analyzing, understanding interpreting that history is what will explain the supremacy of the brahmins today. That is the story which I have partially explained in my 'Nationalism without a nation'. But concentrating a little more on the brahmanical svabhava, I have explained it in my booklet called 'The Brahminical Inscribed in Body-politic'.

Now the actual history of how brahmins became dominant in entire India in all walks of can be done through reading and interpreting the colonial role, rise of nationalism and the orientalist understanding of subcontinental life.

This way of explaining the past 300 years of history is totally against what has been done by communists, Cambridge historians, nationalist historians, by subaltern historians, the whole entire range. The vantage point of how we debunk and demolish the brahminical domination through history is: how the British came and what they did, what they did not do, how they did and finally how they handed it all over to brahmins and when, that is the story.

You want it in a nutshell, it is not possible to say it in a nutshell, but I will give you a few hints. You see when the British came, they were looking for revenue and where was money to be found? Where there is a surplus and where there was the surplus? Only in the river valleys. All the others moving around half dressed, trying to survive by hunting-gathering. What will they have to do with the Britishers? Britishers found that only the river valley areas were rich and that is where the revenue was to be had and in the process of bringing them under their control, they finished up the rajas. And they were the modernizer, bringing modernity to India, they said you should not wield the sword, wielding swords becomes the monopoly of the state. And the state will wield sword only as a last resort and governance is now through pen pushing. Writing and not by sword-wielding. So, the strong hefty fellows who demonstrated their ability in the war by killing people, the whole race of rajas and senas, they lost importance.

Another group who sat and wrote, thought--they became enormously important. Clerks, the rule of clerks. And they were the ones found more organized, very stuck to oneself, selfish, enclosed, maintaining dominance already in the area, the most fit instrument for the British. With that idea, only the so-called zamindari settlement in the north and the ryotwari settlement in the south took place, with those people, the dominant people in the river valleys who were mostly brahmins. Either brahmins or mostly brahminized people immediately below them. The compact was, *I am not interfering with your dominance or anything, in return please see to it, you continue to give without interruption money, revenue, land revenue.* All other activities of the state, so-called emerging colonial state were subjected to this basic compact. *You give revenue, I don't interfere in your dominance. And if there is some problem for you, I will come and support you because revenue should not stop.*

So, the principle of governance was this compact, not simple revenue collection. The entire governance came under this idea that land revenue collection is the supreme activity which will be defended and protected and secured by the presence of the colonial state, which means mostly armies and warriors. Now that was the protective umbrella under which the brahmanical elements in the valley areas enriched themselves, as partners in this collaboration and extended their dominance, not only in extent but in intention and depth also. Their view of India became the official colonial state's view of India. So, it is a sectarian and select view of life that became the way and view of the life of entire India.

If asked, what is this problem? The brahmins will explain, the problem is that according to Indian tradition, this fellow is superior, and that fellow is inferior. But that (tradition) was only in select areas. But the British got the idea that it was the same everywhere. Because they are everywhere. And there is a very concrete example how that particular way of life becomes the universal way of life. Tirunelveli is a district in the South which has a very clear distinction between these two (geographic) areas, the valley rich Thamirabarani area and the rest is terrible. The rest you cannot even walk in those areas, thorns will be there, what you call karuvelam - dark huge thing which will pierce. So arid that nothing will grow in that area. People are living there collecting some fruits, this and that.

Now, one Collector from this select rich fertile area, is transferred to the other arid and desert-like area. His agenda is to build a road in that particular place. So, he goes on horseback to the villages and then says that, *tomorrow we have to build a road, so you all come*. He goes to the Paraya settlement. And they said, *Huzur, if you want to build a road you build a road and you call for labour and some of us may come and some other people from over there, they also may come*. The Collector says, *you are a Paraya no, so you have to do Begari*. The person who told British official about the tradition of Begari had experience of the river valley area where Parayas were supposed to do *Begari*, because they are untouchables, they have to give free labour, they have to accept the caste system and they have to accept it as their svabhava, they are born like this, they should be like that only. With that idea this Collector comes here and says, *you are a Paraya no, then you have to do Begari*. So, the villager in the arid region says, *'Sir, we have no Begari system here, we are independent communities, we are doing whatever is possible here and if you want some work done you call people and you better pay them.'*

But this person, a British officer, is the ruler, he says, 'Are you Parayas or not?'. They reply, 'Yes, we are Parayas.', so the officer repeats, 'then better come for free labour.' Then the people understood that this guy has got his idea from that other place. Then they explained, *look, in the time of famines when there is not much to eat which was frequent in the pre-modern times, or the rains fail, people have to eat, and some people who could not get anything, they will start traveling towards the rich area where food is available. Now entry to the food available areas is through the acceptance of varnashrama dharma*. 'You are welcome into our villages but as an untouchable Paraya, you should do free labour' and so on, *this is the order here, you have to accept that*. They said, *we have to eat, survive, so people went there and accepted the rules there but those who could afford not to go, held their own ground with the meager resources they had, they didn't come under this. So, if your experience is of the Parayas over there, then it is limited to that place*.

But by that time this officer had not only the idea of concrete experiences of that river valley area, he had filled his mind with all the mythologies and stories and superstitions of the brahmins on how the universe is constructed, about categories of people - some are pure, some are polluted, some are high, some are low. This applies not only to human beings, it applies to birds, dogs, and the universe. The sun is bigger than moon, all that kinds of crap, cosmological brahmanism. So, this fellow has got the universal idea that India is supposed to be only like this.

How did the entire area come under the principle of brahmanical svabhava which was obtained only in a very few places? That was spread by colonial rule. Along with the colonial fellow (Collector) riding on horseback there would usually be some *chaprasi* also running behind him. The *chaprasi*, also a Brahmin, was from that side (the fertile river valley). Iyothee Das very clearly shows they were the ones teaching Tamil to the officers. So, they will begin with what is caste, who is Brahmin, who is a non-brahmin, telling him, *we will not eat the food that your cook makes because for us as he is an untouchable Paraya*. After giving a wide introduction they will start Tamil lessons. So, this is how the new rulers got enrolled in all these things and eventually when they set up some dominance in the desert like areas also, these Brahmins who trained under him in negotiations in select areas became part of the establishment there. Bureaucracy expands, and they also become dominant there.

Now brahmins in those desert-like areas in modern times could survive not on the local product but on the salary given to them in the bureaucracy. Brahmanical dominance becomes possible in the earlier times only because of productive land, and the land was not productive in some areas and so their dominance was not possible. Now, even if the land doesn't produce, the all-encompassing colonial state has become dominant and the state will pay them. So, the brahminical dominance becomes possible in all the areas. The extension of the colonial rule in all the areas along with their retinue of *chaprasis* and all, who were mainly brahmins, brahmanical dominance spread everywhere. Parallel to this is orientalism, orientalist discovery of India. So, these fellows, they have become the rulers, they have to also act as judges between disputes of people. Then they found how do we decide between disputes, what are the legal principles. Legal disputes between Christians they can decide by the Bible with the priest interpreting it. Legal disputes between Muslims can be interpreted with the help of Quran and mullah/maulvis will do that. But most of these people are non-Muslims, in fact, non-Muslim was the first category used for these people.

Muslims were the rulers and those rulers were defeated, and the others, who were they? The non-Muslims. Iyothee Das Sir very beautifully explained this too. The British asked, *I have the Bible, the Muslim has the Quran, what do you have?* The Brahmins fellows scratched their *chunthi* and went home and collected all their stupid writings which nobody ever read, moth-eaten, and produced them and kept them in bundles and bundles. Those are the religious, legal, philosophical principles of the non-Muslims! So, with all the reverence, which the Brahmins never paid to that rubbish, the British collected them and took them to the School of African and Oriental Studies, London.

There was this great savior of modern India - Max Muller. Max Muller read through them, just as if they got some biblical manuscript, old manuscripts they got, these were to be handled very carefully. And a lot of scholars worked on them, which was all totally new to these fellows, and

they produced 56 volumes of Sacred Books of the East. They not only legitimized them, they created them and then they brought all that here and said, *this is yours*. You should see the pride around it. The Bible is only this big, the Quran is thin. Ours is the entire world's knowledge. And along with that, they discovered the Aryans. Some Aryans went to the West, some came to the East, those who went to West developed science, the ones who came to the East developed spirituality and now we have the Sangam of these two long lost brothers in the British rule. British rule is the providential government, godsend government, we were nothing and we are everything now. And the ground pact was the land pact, economics, culture, religion, everything is over.

The British created Hinduism. What is the language? At that time, they had discovered Greek and Latin and their relationship to European languages. So, when they discovered Sanskrit here, they thought all the Indian languages should be similarly related to Sanskrit in the same way as present European languages are related to Greek. So, 'we have brought a language to your continent, (created a) religion and who are the people to be administrated by this religion and so on.' They're not Christian, they're not Muslim. What are these people to be called? The Hindus. And who are the priests for them? The Mullahs and Maulvis are priests for the Muslims. And these Christians, they have their own priests. What are you? 'We are the ones', the Brahmins said. See, the guys who had nothing to do with other people, because they never allowed their writings to be read by others, they never allowed others to practice their practices, now, when they found out that modernity is emerging, and they need power of numbers and areas and so on, they said, '*yeah, we are the priests for all of them,*' which is not true. Most castes have their own priests, every caste has its own kind of practices. The Brahmins said, '*No, as Hindus we are there (for everyone).*'

'So, we have given them their Bible, we have given them the language, we have given them the priests, we have given them community, thus Hinduism is the natural religion of the majority people of the country.' This was created by the British. Orientalism saw India as a brahmanically structured society. Now this is the contribution of the brahmins, colonial bureaucrats, scholars and missionaries to a large extent, and also the orientalist scholars.

Now half the damage has been done. The different view of India which was multiple, diverse, with many languages--India was like Europe with so many languages. The other fifty percent of damage, of creating brahminical svabhava, this became the template for nationalism. They were having a honeymoon with the British. And they were being educated slowly to be integrated within the emerging bureaucratic system. Now at that time, what happened in history was, revolts happened all over the place. The non-brahmin people, whether they are known as untouchables in their select areas, whether they are not known as untouchables in other areas, they lost their land because these fellows had *pattas*. Plaints of '*we have been cultivating these lands for so many generations,*' (was countered with) '*no, I have a paper now, a piece of paper now for the land,*'. The paper regime. In court, '*paper stands above all evidence so I will decide what seeds to sow in this land, I will sow what is profitable to me. I will sow rice to keep you engaged in activities throughout the year. I will start peanuts, I will start something else that is in demand in the market. So, I have the power of eviction over you. Changing the crops, I don't need your labour.*'

So, a lot of evictions happened in the traditional areas, and the autonomy of the people of those regions was lost. Whatever religio-cultural life each community had some time back



not of a highly developed nature, but it was some autonomous religion, this was lost. They said *you are all Hindus only*. They lost religious autonomy, and they were all treated as Hindus. The remaining half was they were not allowed to access the new opportunities: education, employment, political representation, and emerging new things. They lost the old world and they couldn't gain the new world either.

Now in that crisis, what happened was, on the one hand, you had a small number of brahmanical, brahmanized groups, attached to the British, and on the other hand, vast area of masses of people who were deprived of all kinds of things, struggling in various ways. Then the British felt this has become problematic, if we continue like this, the masses will rise against us and they will finish us, our rule will not be safe. So, they have to change their strategy of non-interference, 'we may not do much good for these guys, but we should appear to be doing good at least.'

So, the compact the brahminical groups of valley areas established with the British for the sake of land revenue came to be slightly disturbed. Because in the meantime, the British were also developing their industries. Manchester was developing and the British, who first came as buyers, now transformed themselves into sellers. Cheap cotton and that kind of thing. Now sellers require large markets, not just a small group of Brahmins. So, the whole compact which they had developed under the company rule came to be seen as a constraint. They got trapped with this brahminical group of fellows, they were unable to get out of that, and all those other guys were revolting. So, they had to throw some crumbs at the rest of the people.

That is the period when they started special regulations and the tenancy protection laws come. You cannot throw out the tenants. And Muslims started rising, 'you guys took the whole regime from us and now we are nothing.' *Okay, give some concession to the Muslims in education.* And when the South Indian non-brahmins saw Muslims were given some concession in education, they said, 'why should we also not get that.' South Indian non-brahmins were much more developed than the north Indian non-brahmins. Many of the rajas and maharajas and the local guys, big zamindars in south India were non-brahmins and Tamil and other languages were highly developed. So, they had a different view of life, the so-called Dravidian view.

So, then they started demanding. And then there was the demand by the depressed classes which had become separate by that time, they also started demanding. Now the British said, *ok, you throw some crumbs here and there for these fellows*. So, for the first time they started talking with them, which was something new, the British never talked to these people. If they wanted to talk, it was only through the local dominant people. So, it became an insult to the local dominant classes that the British went over their heads and started talking to the masses, bypassing the brahmin interlocutor. They were going against custom, tradition, religion. Hence, the birth of Indian nationalism.

Now the point for us is, the entire nationalism (discourse) used the colonial, orientalist picture of India, their empowerment of the brahmin to a sub-bureaucratic level: that is why they were so eager to tell the British, 'just leave it and go; we will manage the rest.' And they were in such a hurry to do that. So, the nationalist myth of history became brahminical svabhava, the national myth of Indian population became Hindus. They redeployed the brahmanical svabhava which you

find referred to in the brahmanical sacred writings in order to justify, legitimize, reinforce the present dominance, predominantly created and stabilized by the colonial and orientalist view. The colonial orientalist view became legitimized by nationalism.

Periyar explains it beautifully, ‘these fellows, they memorize and vomit, so they were employed and because they were providing the British with all they asked for. British made memorizing and vomiting itself a criterion of merit for everything’.

Post-independence India has completely naturalized this brahmanical dominance which was achieved through collusion with the colonial orientalists and other scholars earlier. The historical fact became a meta-historical one, i.e. essentializing as a svabhava. In a country like India, all kinds of skills are needed. But in India today, the only skill you need is to memorize and vomit.

India is like this simply because after 70-80 years you find so few people who are literate. Because of statistical constraints, they have to raise the percentage of people who are literate every year. Actual literacy levels are nothing like that. This has been proved by a study by Ahmedabad IIM. Actual literate people in India may be 22-25 percent - that is their study. If it is a question of education, some will have CBSE, others will have state boards, panchayat schools, night schools, bridge schools, and tuition classes. If it is a medical college, they will have the most highly specialized centers and there will be district hospitals and the primary health centers. If it is higher education, you will have central universities, state universities, and private colleges. This is a simple reproduction of varnashrama dharma way of life in all spheres of human existence. And these are called post-independence state policies. They are not affected by whatever the govt is, BJP or AGP, there is no difference.

Q5) How does this essence keep the brahmin in full control of the material world – property, labor, and production?

This also includes the communist parties--actually the capitalists and proletariats are the same in India. Because they deal only with the organized groups, there is no serious action, the brahmins will go and negotiate. They are the representatives of the union and their cousins and counter cousins are sitting on the other side as employers and they will negotiate and reach a conclusion on that. In all areas of life, if any opposition comes in, it should not challenge the fundamentals. It could challenge concrete empirical activities, otherwise, it will be seen as a dead democracy. This is what is called the commandeered opposition. They say, 'you should come, come to Jantar Mantar, please come, I will give railway concession.' And this is my experience, I go to Jantar Mantar looking around just to see how this place is, then one policeman comes towards me and says, 'Huzur'. I looked like a Huzoor! He says, 'Kuch dharna chalana hai? I will organize the pandal, I will organize the water tank, I will organize the permission. If you want to add procession also, we will say this is the route, please keep to it as police find it comfortable to control this. Don't worry sir, we will organize the whole thing and if you are hard up for the masses also, we will bring the masses too. There are regular local masses who are waiting for this.'

Now such opposition is there, a showpiece for foreigners to come and see that you are free. So much democracy, police protects you and so on. But anybody who does not want to play the game,

who simply keeps his mouth shut when the other fellow is trying to convince you, which is a sign that you have your own thinking going on, is a threat to the state. And anybody who is seriously challenging caste is an anti-national. Challenging caste is anti-national. You claim benefits, definitely, it is a valid claim and we are willing to give it to you, but we will make you struggle for that. So, emancipatory demands are responded to by empowerment benefits. And that distinction we don't make. For us, and the leaders, it is comfortable to have more and more power over our own people.

Legitimize your view and you get a consultation in London, you are taken to Geneva, taken to this and that, of course, we are all discriminated against, so against discrimination we give you lot of perks and privileges and so on. So, we are all kept quiet. But if you stick to Babasaheb's goal, annihilation of caste, debunking caste in nationalism, within nationalism, within nationalist history, within state policies and that kind of thing you are obviously an anti-national. Because the nation is caste, the nation is run by a brahmanical svabhava.

This Hindu religion today for example is celebrated more, which engulfs the senses more and more. What was celebrated for one day, now three days are used to celebrate the same. What used to be celebrated for three days, now a whole week is used. Earlier there were ten now there are a hundred festivals. And now there are more and more what you call nationalistic festivals, and everywhere people are required to celebrate. Diwali is to be celebrated, any opposition to diwali is anti-national. (If anyone says) *we have Pongal, Sankranthi, we have nothing to do with anything else*, then those are anti-national people. So, the religion is not separated, and academia is ever ready to justify this, they say 'secularism is a western concept, how can you separate human life which is encompassed with secularity and religiosity together? Why do we have to be like French people... and all. This is our own unique modernity, this is how we are, this is how we will be, now don't bring it under any social science.'

So, it is a collusion of academia mainly, collusion of the media, all these go together to create brahmanical svabhava. And within that overall hegemonic thing, all the other counter articulations, counter demands are accommodated. You open your mouth; some bread is pushed into your mouth and you keep it shut. And the condition of our people is so low, survival becoming a real problem, so they try to acquire something at any cost. And along with that, people are kept in a very pre-modern social scenario, because as far as I understand the present level of urbanization and industrialization is between 15 to 20 percentage. Which is the size of the brahminized class.

The whole effort is *about how to appropriate modernity and modern benefits for ourselves and not allow it to spill over to the others*. The anti-modern rhetoric, the anti-globalization rhetoric is mainly intended to say, 'see I have to be modernized, I have to be globalized, but why are you asking? We cannot produce one principle for all. Our svabhavas are different. My svabhava is to fly from Geneva to Amsterdam to Paris to New York. If every Indian wants to fly how can it be allowed?' That is the basic principle by which governance is made and our people's lives are controlled. It is basically under this brahminical svabhava.

I am afraid I am the only fellow who keeps talking about brahmanism and all that in academics. In the course of a lecture, if you use the word brahmin for a second time, you can be sure somebody

will come and beat you up. Which happened in HCU. I was giving a lecture to the staff college, administrative staff college, they called me for a talk and I was talking on Nationalism without a Nation and a few people came and beat me up. And then somebody said, *no, this is an academic talk and we are discussing things*. 'Why he is taking the name of brahmins', they said, 'take the name of capitalism.' *Brahmins are enjoying privileges through brahmanism, why can't we talk?* 'We are not enjoying privileges, we are working under the constitution made by Babasaheb Ambedkar', the same Brahmin is telling me, 'where everybody is equal, you are saying something else'. So, there is a kind of silent collusion in all this. And also, in all these institutions, if you challenge Brahmanism, you will not be allowed to survive, you will be marginalized.

What I have done today is to historically trace how the earlier and very localized brahmanical svabhava, through the operations of colonialism, orientalism, and nationalism, has become the nationalized, naturalized and accepted brahminical svabhava with uninterrupted access to all these and control over everything. It is a historical development. At a national level, colonialism helped Brahmanism.

Q6) *There is one reference of your writing which says that mythical construction of nation around the pre-existing culture becomes reality when it goes along with the interest of all or maximum member of people from an area, this may be from Nationalism without a Nation, and how could brahmin prevent the mythical construction of pre-existing realities of the more plausible sites like various linguistic regions in India, into nations and nation-states and supplant them with the idea of one India?*

That precisely is the answer, because of the colonial attachment to the brahmanical, the colonial brahmanical imaginary became the actuality for most people. And the dominant agenda was the equality basis. There are different caste systems in India, linguistic regional caste systems, the accommodation between brahmins and other castes is different from region to region. Give and take is different, the method of dominance is different, and the linguistic and cultural practices are different. Now all these differences were collapsed into the single agenda of absolute equality, reducing all the peoples to lower caste - shudra or ati-shudra - kind of realities.

So, they cut off that problem and neutralized the non-brahmins. Periyar was raising hell but he himself refused to participate in the state making bodies and so on. Ambedkar was adamant on the Scheduled Castes issue, so grant Ambedkar what he wanted, deploy him in the state making process, and put on his shoulder all the guns and fire at others. It is Ambedkar who made the constitution and how dare you challenge that. And so, the backward classes lost the whole thing, Muslims were put aside. They chose some *dalals*, some priest in Madras to represent the state, which is a very interesting story. The name of the priest was Jerome D'Souza. And in the same college, Loyola College, Madras, there was Professor Ratnaswamy who was a non-brahmin leader and a professor of political science. He used to be articulate in political mobilization, and he was also a Christian. But Rajaji, when they wanted a Christian representative, he went to the priest. So, he came and very magnanimously he said, 'Christians trust the magnanimity and liberality of the Congress party, we withdraw our demand for minority status.'

With the partition, the Muslims went away, our local Muslims and some dalals were there, and they put one of them there and they said, *we also withdraw our demand for minority status*. Like this, they neutralized that too and with the co-option of the Dalits and others we passed on to the Indian nation-state with the unquestioned dominance of brahmanical svabhava, camouflaged of course with the secularity and the constitution and equalities promised.

Even before that, Nagaland wanted separation, they conducted a referendum, invited United Nations and Delhi never bothered. They said, 'what do they want? Separation? Send the army'. Vallabhbhai Patel sent the army and they finished up the demand. Manipur wanted separation. Manipur had already established a democratically elected assembly before India got independence. They air-lifted the raja and showed him the gun. And said, *put your signature*.

In South India, they demanded separation. Tamil Nadu demanded separation. Then some of them were co-opted and DMK became part of the 'we don't want any more separation' project. So, in India nationalism, there is only one India. If you say India is not one, they will say, *you are anti-national*. Why did it become anti-national? Because one India is also caste India, as well as corrupt India.

Any fragmentation is anti-national. That is how the linguistic sites could not be empowered, though it has not been a settled question. The Indian brahmanical svabhava is not enjoying peace and harmony, it is still being challenged continuously. The Indian nationalism question, in other words, brahminical svabhava dominance in the subcontinent is not a settled question. Though it looks like all the odds are against us increasingly, because language is becoming increasingly important, because people are articulating in their own languages, there is no common language. There is resistance to a common language and resistance to Hinduism as such, there is development of Buddhism and Veera Shaivites, Lingayats claiming that they are not Hindus, Shaivite Tamils claiming we are not Hindus, these kinds of things keep coming up.

Q7) Perry Anderson says: 'Of the three larger empires it witnessed, none covered the territory of Nehru's Discovery of India. Maurya and Mughal control extended to contemporary Afghanistan, ceased much below the Deccan, and never came near Manipur.' How did India, the empire, become a 'nation'?

It is to be remembered that equality, the struggle for equality in India, that is the struggle of the Dalit Bahujan, it historically needs to be combined with diversity. India is a diverse country. If you look at the history of India, the last 5000 years history of India, moments in which it was one political entity were extremely short and very tentative and very shaky. Maurya empire, Gupta empire, Mughal empire, and the British empire, but in the period between these empires, regional kingdoms and regional languages, regional realities became dominant and regional languages, cultures, arts, architecture developed, is a very large period. Simply because after the succession of Mauryas, Guptas and Mughals, each empire came together and became fragmented.

But when it came to the last empire, the British empire, it got caught in modernity and it could not be disintegrated and that is what is inherited as the nation-state. So, the historical compulsions of Dalits and others who are claiming equality, if they have to succeed, they have to combine with

the forces of equality in the country. I am not referring to post-modern differences, I am referring to the concrete formation of languages and linguistic territories in the sub-continent which very closely parallels the developments in Europe. Modernity entered Europe, Christendom that was Europe broke up and nation states emerged. Modernity entered the Indian subcontinent where the existing differences were suppressed, and it emerged as one empire.

Christianity broke up when Europe entered modernity. National churches emerged. There were only regional religions present in India but when modernity entered, Hinduism became a fact covering all this. This is a contradictory, contrary movement. Through this, the brahminical svabhava is back in operation. Through both religion and politics.

What Anderson is referring to is the historical reality. Even the Mughal empire never had any southern thing. Even the Ashokan empire did not include Tamil Nadu. We were out of it and were never part of any other empire. We had our own Cheras, Cholas and all those myths. It is only in the British time that we have got into this India, which is the subject of discovery by Nehru. So, once you got the reality of discovery, Nehru's India, you extend it back to past history and say *India is Bharat* imaginary. It was never so, it was always *aryavarta* only, *brahmana varta/aryavarta*. Other places were anathema; they were not to be accepted because brahmin was not dominant there.

Now, the brahmin is dominant everywhere, *India is Bharat*. It was a nationalist imagination. When you are dealing with questions of nationalism and the public imaginary, the public has very limited value. If the myth--for example, Nehru's discovery is a myth--finds resonance with the majority of people, then only it becomes national imaginary.

Hobsbawm wrote that book called *Invention of Tradition*. That is what is being referred to here. How we rediscover our tradition and reconstruct our (reality). My own addition is if that imaginary doesn't find resonance with most of the people it becomes a forgery of the nation. If it finds resonance, then it becomes forging of a nation. The difference between forgery and forging! So, the fraud is, it looks like forging, but it is actually a forgery, on which Ernest Gellner, another sociologist wrote. Now, the other book which is very commonly referred to is Benedict Anderson's book - which is *Imagined Communities*. That is what they tried to create in Ayodhya. 'My imaginary is Ram was born here. I politically mobilized the whole gang to say, yes, we assert.' So, it becomes a nationalist imaginary and it becomes the truth. Actual history, that is the problem with JNU historians, Romila Thapar says actually there was no Ram temple there. What is actuality, actuality is what we as a nation assert. That is nationalist history. Prabhakaran may be a terrorist, if he had succeeded in dividing Eelam, he would be a great nationalist imaginary and hero. So, it is power that makes that.

Q8) For the bahujans, what could be the way forward, to progress towards a future where Brahmin svabhava isn't such an overwhelming, ubiquitous presence?

Today the Dalit Bahujan means those who are struggling against brahminical hegemony. Dalit means oppressed by caste and the principle by which they are oppressed by, is brahminism, though the practitioners include non-brahmins. That is the very sympathetic way of putting Dalit

oppression. Now Bahujan also say brahmin is the one oppressing us. Now the single point fight in today's context only tends to reinforce the brahmanical dominance because it doesn't challenge the hegemony of the Indian imperial presence. It is not doing justice to the thousands of years of the diversity of India.

You have an all India resistance, All India Scheduled Caste Scheduled Tribes Federation etc, all these will be welcomed by these Brahmin groups. Because that doesn't challenge their hegemony. And all demands are for some concessions, *that our Rajiv Gandhi fellowship should be expanded, it should be made equal to the JRF fellowship*. And of course, we never demand that elementary education should be spread, villages should be given all facilities, our demand is only this. So. The Brahmin groups are quite confident, pleased, they themselves will finance these schemes.

Part of this was, what Anu mentioned yesterday, the term Dalit is substituted for the term caste. What is the title of the book by Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question* - second title is – *Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*. She says she is handling the caste question in the book; the subtitle is the *Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*. Reduce the caste problem to Dalit problem and Dalits, reducing the whole problem to getting some empowerment benefits, is an acceptable position for the Brahmins. They will celebrate them, they will give occasions for people to travel abroad, do this in the name of, 'all kinds of people should be represented in bodies' and so on and so forth.

That is definitely welcome but that has nothing to do with the abolition of caste. That is because the agenda is interpreted and actualized by gaining more benefits for these groups. While what are called backward classes in different parts of the land are fighting for diversity, expressing diversity, diverse religions, diverse trends, language questions, and these two factors have to be united if we have to move forward in the whole fight. You are terming them as Bahujan, I am terming them as Tamil, as Telugu as Malayali. And who is the first Keralite, who is the first Telugu, who is the first Tamil? It is the Dalit. It is they who created the bloody language. In the course of working among themselves with nature, the language develops. And they are the monolingualists. That means they have commitment and stake only in that language. While others, as you go higher, they are plural, they are multilingual. So, it is their property.

And it is much easier to fight the brahmanism of Tamil variety within Tamil Nadu. But if you leave them to gang up with Kashmiri brahmin, this brahmin that brahmin and all that, and that becomes the state and policies, we can't do that. The best we can gain is some concession. Now combining these two, diversity as well as equality, as a strategy for struggle will definitely be a threat to the Indian hegemony and brahmanical hegemony. Of course, a sensitive academic will say, *Oh Dalits participate in that hegemony, 25 percent are there, 80 MPs are there and all that*. All these are a formal thing, but the substantial question is, who rules and not only who rules, but how they rule. All policies are characterized by brahmanical nature.