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| Roll No. A016 | Name: Varun Khadayate |
| Program : B.Tech | Division: CsBs |
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**Why I am not a Hindu**

* Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd

Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd claims that he is not a Hindu,simply because he was never born one. He grew up in a tradition of a different set of Gods, different set of traditions. There were no Brahma Vishnu Maheswar. They were agriculturalists who worshipped the soil from which let them produce the food they could eat.

He was familiar with the Hindu trinity -but this was sort of like how Indians are familiar with Hollywood actors; you can enjoy a Johnny Depp movie, but they he wasn’t part of Mollywood. As a child Kancha had come across the Brahmanism. His parents treated the Brahmins and baniyas with respect, so did other people of his tribe. Brahmins were learned, baniyas were richer. People who accepted their status in society were given perks by both of these communities.

Kancha goes on to elaborate on how the caste system was created by the brahmins and used as a tool to oppress the dalits. Dalits and lower castes were not part of the brahminical religion known today as Hinduism. Brahmins who were driven by the desire to stay in power created Shiva as a God of the Dalits for the Dalits. Shiva was intentionally designed with lesser power than Brahma and Vishnu as a means of subliminally conveying to the dalits that they were lesser in status.

According to Kancha, the puranas were a quintessential brahminical text which was constructed to help the brahmins remain in power. He cites proofs from the texts -some more obnoxious than others.

Mr Ilaiah quotes and cites Ambedkar at many occasions.But they are essentially two different people. Ambedkar realised the importance in maintaining civility while presenting his arguments.He was aware that what India needed was a change in mindset and not a divide between different classes.

Like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr and many other great leaders, Ambedkar relied on what is known as Common Humanity Identity Politics.In his works he relies on the factual information available then to put forth that the Aryan Invasion theory was a myth used to divide the Indians.Meanwhile Kancha Ilaiah’s opts for Common enemy identity politics. The book reduces itself into a rage fuelled self blinding toxic rhetoric against the brahmin community- a soft target.

When Ambedkar put forth encouraging inter caste marriages and a short term of of caste based reservations for the dalits, to annihilate caste, Kancha suggest Dalitisation as an antidote to Brahminical Nationalisation— encouraging lower castes to separate from mainstream hinduism which is disguised brahmanism. This is a sort of political and social separatism, and could have unintended consequences. The state of India is not as strong as the idea of India, and so encouraging any kind of secessionist movement might end in disintegration of the state.

It is very difficult to see Kancha Ilaiah’s call for dalitisation as anything more than a cheap political trick.What he seems to forget the distinction between pre independence era and post-independence era caste. Post-Independence caste system is a mutated beast with reservation flowing through its veins.

Not to mention, Kancha Ilaiahs attack on the Brahmin community is regressive hate mongering. There is one instance in the book where Kancha Ilaiah intentionally falsifies Hindu myths for his own convenience -which cuts too close to a Keralite heart.

Vamana according to him was a devious brahmin who tricked mahabali into granting him three feet of land, and unlike the original story, which we revere, Vaman in this story uses a metal shoe to curb-stomp mahabali, and kill him.Such reframing of stories is nothing short of hate mongering. This book ought to be read, despite the obvious political intentions of the author.