

Book Review

Western Academia's Toxic Hinduphobia

Arvind Gupta

Snakes in the Ganga: Breaking India 2.0,
Rajiv Malhotra and Vijaya Viswanathan. Occam, India, 2022. Pp. 864.
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Rajiv Malhotra and Vijaya Viswanathan's 800-page well-researched book *Snakes in the Ganga: Breaking India 2.0* exposes the expanding ecosystem of Hinduphobia in academic and media circles in the West.

Hinduphobia is not merely in the imagination of a few people; there are several recent examples of growing anti-Hindu sentiment fomented by anti-India forces. For instance, a conference titled "Dismantling Global Hindutva" was organised at the Stanford University in September 2021 to discuss, in the words of the organisers, "the fascist dimensions of the ideology, its alignment with other supremacist movements" and what is at stake "across a range of political, socio-cultural, and economic issues." The conference was sponsored by over 50 universities and colleges across the US. In September 2022, massive anti-Indian violence took place in Leicester, UK, in which several Hindu temples were attacked by Muslim groups. This led the Indian High Commission in the UK to strongly "condemn the violence perpetrated against the Indian community in Leicester and vandalism of premises and symbols of Hindu religion." In an unprecedented intervention in March 2022, India's Permanent Representative to the UN publicly questioned the international community's deliberate sidestepping of phobias against Indic religions like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, etc., while focussing exclusively on Abrahamic religions.

Arvind Gupta is the Director of the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF). He served as the Deputy National Security Advisor, Government of India from 2014 to 2017 and is also the former Director of Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi.

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Critical 'Caste' Theory!

The book is written in three parts. Part-I of the book, consists of six chapters, and is academic in nature. In this section, "Critical Race Theory", and its popular version, 'Wokeism', are examined. The theory, according to the authors, seeks to demolish the established order through "extreme intolerance, including the use of violence." The proponents of the theory promote 'cancel' culture, thereby denying alternative viewpoints, "dialogue and freedom to think." They reject rationality, objective evidence, and "even science" (page-xxix). Originally, the theory was developed to examine racism in Western society and institutions. Now it is being applied to 'caste' in India. The theory equates 'caste' with 'race'. It systematically attacks the values of Indian civilisation, particularly Hindu philosophy and culture. Vedic texts and associated literature, the Indian family system, and the Sanskrit language are the specific targets of attack. Dalits, Muslims, and LGBTQ+ communities, portrayed as victims of oppression, are being encouraged to attack Hinduism. Harvard University, the leading hub of Critical Race Theory, is at the forefront of fomenting Hinduphobia, the authors affirm.

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Equating caste with racism is highly problematic. Such assertions are based on an imperfect, incomplete, and distorted understanding of Hindu thought and culture. The authors provide a strong rebuttal and a systematic critique of the Critical Race Theory in Chapter 6. They point out that the scholars of Critical Race Theory, when they apply their theory to Indian Varna or Jati system, deliberately ignore that social organisations in India have evolved over centuries and that the present-day problems cannot be all blamed on Vedic or Hindu foundations of Indian society. The root cause of misunderstanding about India is the deliberate distortion of the Varana-Jati system of Hindu society. Varnas were created on the basis of professions and not birth. There was inherent flexibility in the society. The authors point out that "Indian society has been extremely diverse, fluid and continually evolving. No single framework can be applied consistently over time, and it is misleading to assume a fixed and normative view."

Chapter 6 provides a detailed account of Indian social history, beginning from the early Vedic period to globalisation, and through invading Muslim rule and the European colonial period. The authors argue that during the Mughal period, which was extremely

oppressive and exploitative, the jati system became more rigid in matters of “marriage and sharing food” and disintegrated into opportunism and social stratification resulting in the “collapse of social mobility.” The Portuguese gave the name ‘*Casta*’ to the various occupational jatis. The British characterised the jati as the formal ‘caste system’. In reality, India’s professional jatis were flexible. Even shudras could advance socially to become a king. Jatis have played a role in providing economic security. The authors also point out that the original jati system has been disrupted as a result of colonialism and modern democracy. The so-called ‘caste’ system is collapsing in India without endangering the survival of Hindu dharma and culture.

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Indian Billionaires and Harvard

Part II of the book titled “Harvard Vishvaguru and Indian Billionaire” has ten well-researched chapters. One of the chapters examines the role of the Harvard university in promoting ‘critical theory’ research with strong anti-Indian tones. A number of chapters highlight the role of Indian billionaires like Anand Mahindra, Laxmi Mittal, Godrej, the Piramals, and others who have been funding such anti-India research. The book also highlights how the Harvard university controls the academic and media ecosystem in India and how the Harvard Kennedy School and Harvard Business School regularly brainwash Indian elites and businesses.

In Part III, titled “Is India for sale”?, the book examines the nature and activities of several new institutions studying and teaching liberal arts that have come up in India in recent years. The book is highly critical of Ashoka University, Azim Premji University, Godrej India Culture Lab, Omidyar Network India, and several others for their role in supporting and nurturing Hinduphobia and anti-Indianism. The authors go into minute details about the output of these centres of learning and the view of well-known left-leaning scholars. In Chapter 18, the authors mention the nexus between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the Saudi-funded Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), its South Asia Centre, the Institute of Financial Management and Research (IFMR), and Krea university, etc. The authors maintain that these institutions, in the name of studying poverty, are collecting India’s “data on discrimination based on identity.” They offer to multinational “experts to understand religion-based

discrimination in terms of access to development.” The authors describe this network of institutions as part of the “Breaking India” ecosystem.

The book seeks to make the reader aware of how a significant portion of Western academic research and media advocacy is a part of a larger information warfare in which reputed academics, institutions, agenda-driven scholar communities, media, NGOs and politicians are wittingly or unwittingly playing a role. The key conclusion of the book is that wokeism promotes “cancel culture” by suppressing alternative viewpoints. Technology platforms controlled by techno elites are using big data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to control narratives.

Study’s Lasting Value

The authors’ contention is that academic research in Western institutes and affiliated Indian institutions are not just academic. It is driven by a pernicious, destructive and motivated agenda. The objective is to undermine Indian culture, society, social practices, history and civilisational values by propagandistic, academic theories of doubtful credibility and by misapplying them to Indian situations out of context. They propagate these theories through high-visibility seminars, conferences, media, books, etc. Reputed western universities lure students and scholars into their network by offering jobs, scholarship surveys, and field trips. This lends credibility to mischievous research. The entire project works in a systematic fashion over a long period. The aim is to break India and disrupt its rise. Many people affiliated with these institutions have close links with policymakers. Some of them have occupied higher posts in the government. The authors are also critical of the New Education Policy, which in their view, would open the floodgate to western scholarship and western biases at the expense of Indian traditions and knowledge.

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It will come as a shock to many that several of those who have been criticised in the book are well-regarded individuals and institutions. Their articles and research are widely published and used in university curricula. Yet, the book presents facts and

figures to support its arguments. While some may regard the book as alarmist and having gone too far in its conclusions, the growing trend of Hinduphobia and anti-Indian sentiment in western academic and media circles cannot be ignored. The book raises awareness about these trends and their undescribed motivation to undo Indian traditions, values, and institutions. The authors are not per-se against critical research on India. They, however, point out that western institutions such as these make all efforts to block alternative viewpoints. They suppress critical voices coming from the other end of the spectrum.

The authors have given several interviews in the media. The book's conclusions have already generated a debate in India. This should be welcomed. The book has served its purpose.

In a socially and culturally diverse society like India, there is bound to be internal contradictions and fault lines. The use of jati in vote bank politics is prevalent. This cannot be denied. There are many other social distortions in society. Over centuries, influential social and religious reformers have raised their voice against social ills. Buddha, Gandhi, Nanak, Kabir, Phule, Vivekananda, Ambedkar, Tagore, Ram Mohan Roy are on the long list of philosophers, religious leaders and social reformers. Affirmative action is an indispensable part of the Indian Constitution and political reality. Hindu social life and structures are in a constant state of reform. The existence of social ills does not mean that Hindu civilisation should be destroyed and dismantled, as 'Breaking India' forces want. What is a matter of deep concern is that anti-India forces, both within and outside India, are exploiting the internal fault lines not to reform and change but to demolish India and Indian society. That is the key message of the book.