



# Debrahminising Diplomacy

## *Brahminical Misrepresentation, Globalisation of Caste and the Indian Diaspora*

*Gajendran Ayyathurai*

Anthropologist and Historian, Göttingen, Germany

*ag2114@gmail.com*

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### Summary

This article is an examination of the intellectual history of Indian diplomacy. That is, how colonial and postcolonial Indian international relations and diplomacy have been structured by the self-privileging-caste groups, such as brahmins, as the heir apparent diplomats of the British-brahmin raj and the brahmin-male claims and codifications, brahminical institutions and practices, as *the* transnational culture, religion and history of the Indian diaspora. Informal and personal international interventions of self-privileging-caste Indians have fostered brahmincentric religio-cultural privileges, institutions and networks overseas. Therefore, such efforts have propagandised transnational brahminism via Indian international relations and diplomacy. Engaging Critical Caste Studies, this article theoretically elucidates on and contributes to revamping Indian diplomacy. Furthermore, it is by incorporating raceless and casteless philosophies and practices that the seeding for debrahminising diplomacy emerges.

### Keywords

globalisation of caste – brahminism/casteism – brahmincentrism – colonialist-casteist continuum – debrahminising/debrahminisation – casteless and anticaste Indians – Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In this article I engage with the intellectual history of Indian diplomacy. The interdisciplinary orientations of Critical Caste Studies,<sup>2</sup> mobilised to examine the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial transgenerational aspects of racism and casteism,<sup>3</sup> have structured Indian international relations (IR). I will argue that brahminicentric linguistic, textual, cultural, political and historical claims and misrepresentations have coloured and casteised Indian IR and diplomacy during European imperialism and in modern Euro-American academic institutions.<sup>4</sup> Here, I show that because Indian IR and diplomacy are skewed by the problems of race and caste,<sup>5</sup> Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies offers immense possibilities. It underlines the need for hitherto elided close analysis of the Indian race-caste segregating social dispositions that have inflected Indian diplomacy. Given the normativisation and naturalisation of brahminness in the Indian IR and diplomacy, I furthermore argue that it is incumbent upon global and critical IR theories to interrogate the ontologies of brahmin power and transnational brahminism embedded in Indian diplomacy,<sup>6</sup> as they do about whiteness and white power. This article calls for the critique and rejection of race and caste aspects in all Indian diplomatic agendas. It theoretically elu-

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1 I sincerely thank Vineet Thakur, Kalathmika Natarajan and Pavan Kumar for their remarkable contribution to IR and Diplomatic Studies through this *HJD* special issue. I am grateful to them for inviting me to contribute this essay, which I hope will enhance the significance of Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies. The detailed and generous comments of three reviewers have strengthened the arguments and analysis. I thank them immensely.

2 Ayyathurai 2021a.

3 Casteism refers to prejudiced verbal and non-verbal behaviour, intentional and unintentional, malignant and benign indignities, insults, as well as having the power to indulge in violent discrimination to favour one's own self-privileging-caste identity and group by othering women, men and children as untouchables and lower castes.

4 I use lower case 'b' to write brahmin/brahminism/brahmincentrism/brahminisation to problematise the legitimacy that this category has gained among English speaking writers, academics and the public (of brahmin caste origin mostly) as well as the dictionary meanings that occlude the domineering casteist power behind it.

5 See Krishna 2014. Racism and casteism are widely prevalent in all the postcolonial countries of South Asia, see Ayyathurai 2023.

6 Transnational brahminism stands for the mythological, metaphysical and everyday exclusionary claims, institutions and practices of those who self-identify themselves brahmins by birth, names, bodily markers and other accoutrements in India and overseas. It is a not an allegory, metaphor, mystification or an abstraction. Instead, it is caste-based subordination, exploitation, dispossession and displacement of Indigenous Indian communities as untouchables, low caste and non-brahmins. Some non-brahmin groups are no worse in mimicking and perpetuating such caste violence historically.

cidates on and contributes to the Critical Caste Studies oriented revamping of Indian diplomacy and IR; crucially, by learning from and incorporating the casteless and raceless Indian philosophies, the standpoints of vernacular casteless, anticaste and antirace Indian intellectuals and practitioners.<sup>7</sup>

At the centre of my investigation into the caste-steeped nature of Indian diplomacy is the idea of Indian *moralpolitik*, a supposedly defining feature of Indian diplomacy. Figures such as Vivekananda, Gandhi and Nehru are cited in propagation of the idea that Indian *moralpolitik* emerges from its ancient history. In fact, Narendranath Datta (1863–1902), who self-promoted himself as Swami Vivekananda – hereafter Narendranath – famously said that ‘our eternal foreign policy [must be] preaching the truth of our *Shastras* to the nations of the world.’<sup>8</sup> Narendranath’s proclamation of brahminism/Hinduism as the ‘mother of religions’ and the Indian prime minister Narendra Modi brandishing India as the ‘mother of democracy’ and *vishwaguru*/world teacher camouflage the dehumanising race-caste oppression in colonial and postcolonial India.<sup>9</sup> Recently, the Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar has repeatedly invoked ‘Hindu’ scriptures to assert what I call the brahmin race-caste (*varnajiati*) frame as the basis of Indian diplomacy and foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, I argue that underlying such extravagant assertions are brahmincentric religious-cultural proclivities that legitimate the casteist model of the world in Indian diplomacy.<sup>11</sup> This would not have been possible but for the pseudo authority that the brahminical misinformation and misrepresentation has gained for more than a century.

In pursuing my argument, I problematise the colonialist-casteist nexus, which had far-reaching impact in postcolonial India’s IR and diplomacy. A genealogy of Indian thinking on IR and diplomacy shows the predominant presence and the transnationalisation of brahmin-male perspectives. Brahmin men’s caste segregating dispositions in the British-brahmin raj (that is, the British colonial governmentality that was collusively greased by brahmin-male elites) demonstrates the entrenchment of brahmincentrism in Indian IR and diplomatic policies. These trends have ensured that the world would come to view India *only* through the brahminical prism (that is, the brahmin gaze being

7 Ayyathurai 2025 (forthcoming).

8 Quoted in Keenleyside 1987, 111.

9 Sullivan de Estrada 2023.

10 Banyan 2024.

11 In short, brahmincentrism refers to the centrality that brahmins have assumed in much of the Subcontinent, and the marginalisation they have imposed on many communities they have *othered* by birth, language, regional origin, deities, texts, institutions and practices over diverse vernacular cultures and regions.

dispersed in the Subcontinent and overseas), including in the postcolonial period. Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies seeks to dislodge the vestiges of brahmincentric orientalism and gatekeeping through postcolonial brahmin hegemony in Indian IR and diplomatic institutions and practices. More importantly, it is meant to centre the inclusive ideas, practices and personnel of hitherto segregated and gatekept Indians through debrahminising Indian diplomacy.

Accordingly, the article proceeds in three further sections. The second section of this article outlines distinct ways in which understandings and practice of Indian diplomacy are shaped by casteist logics. These are: Indian *moralpolitik* as enunciation of casteist vedic brahminism; the dominance of self-privileging-caste<sup>12</sup> brahmins in both formal and informal apparatuses of Indian diplomacy; and a colonialist-casteist continuum that dominates both mainstream and critical aspects of knowledge production. The third section of this article attempts a genealogy of 'global brahminism', which reveals and critiques the ways in which brahminism has been globalised. The final section concludes the article with agenda suggestions for Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies.

## 2 The Diplomacy of Caste

### 2.1 *Vedic Brahminism and Indian Moralpolitik*

Most studies that focus on South Asia in IR begin with the 1920s as the turning point, especially as the treatment of the India diaspora became an important foreign policy concern.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, with the Soviet Union's encouragement to organisations in the West against colonialism, South Asian diasporic and nationalist organisations gained more prominence. At the same time, the British tried to mentor some pro-colonial Indians as the go-betweens of the colonial government and the Western public. However, it is important to examine the pre-1920s antecedents of Indian organisations in the Indian diaspora – particularly in Africa and the Caribbean – that impacted the British-brahmin raj's diplomacy.

While concern for the Indian diaspora is extolled in the emergence of Indian diplomacy, some of the earliest Indian internationalist organisations were 'Hindu' missionaries. Among these, a key organisation was the Arya Samaj (Society of Aryans), founded by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. Dayanand differed from the notions of polytheism to prop up a monotheist Aryanism/Hinduism,

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12 I reject the term "upper-caste" and call such casteist groups as self-privileging-caste groups.

13 See Raza et al. 2015 and Thakur 2021.

by exalting the values of the brahminical Vedas, particularly its caste and gender segregation. Significantly, Arya Samaj missionaries were sent beyond South Asia to mentor the Indian diaspora into its vedic Aryanism in the early 20th century. Shikha Dilawri writes that Gujarati businessmen, who had casteist and racist proclivities, were at the forefront of the Arya Samaj movement, and that, '[i]nflected with a missionary orientation, the Hindu reformist movement was "highly conscious" of Indians living in overseas colonies and found its first East African foothold in 1903 in Kenya'.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, multiple Arya Samaj temples emerged in many plantation colonies in the Caribbean, which continue to function to this day. Brahminical paternalism and patriarchal predominance are enforced in all matters within the Arya Samajist Indian diaspora. Casteist and racist practices were evident in the Arya Samajists' 'repensible "colour distinction" in South Africa' and for them the native Africans 'could be compared to a certain extent' to the situation of 'Harijans in India'; Harijan is an abusive category of the casteists against the Indigenous Indians as shown below.<sup>15</sup> Such tendencies mirrored their 'obfuscation of caste to forge a Hindu majority, ... [with] increasingly Hindu hegemonic inflections'.<sup>16</sup> For Arya Samajists, thus, segregating caste, race and gender inequalities were foundational in their Aryan Hindu claims: 'Notably, the Arya Samaj was part of a growing number of Hindu organizations in East Africa, including caste associations, such as the Lohana Club ...'.<sup>17</sup>

Such organisations among the Indian diaspora valorised – and continue to promote today – Sanatani identity; that is, the belief in a putative eternal and birth-based hierarchical caste structure in which those who self-identify as brahmins will always remain at the top.<sup>18</sup> Those the brahmins othered through *their* race-caste discourse as low and untouchable humans will remain subordinated without any redemption. Some men in the Indian diaspora interestingly claim Sanatani identity *only*, by rejecting Hindu identity.<sup>19</sup> This means that the influences of travelling brahmin-caste activists and brahmin-gurus,

14 Dilawri 2023, 26.

15 For the usage 'Indigenous Indians' (*poorvaindiyarkal*) in the context of the Indian indentured diaspora, see Thass 1913, 3.

16 Dilawri 2023, 30 and 31.

17 Dilawri 2023, 26.

18 Recent studies that critique Eurocentrism and racism in the regulation of 'colonial Indian migration' conspicuously fail to critique brahminism/casteism in colonial India and the Indian diaspora, nor do they interrogate the entrenchment of brahmincentrism in British colonial IR and diplomatic policies. See Mongia 2018.

19 Field study-based observation in the Caribbean in 2019. Regarding the assertion of Sanatani identity in the Indian diaspora, see Ayyathurai 2021b.

sponsored by casteist and racist Hindu organisations in India, North America and Europe, have succeeded in legitimising the exclusionary Sanatani identity. The indigenous presence of multi-linguistic, multi-religious, agnostic and atheistic communities in all their regional diversities do not matter in this brahmincentric view of India and the Indian diaspora.

Transgenerational vedic brahminism received a further fillip in the late 19th century and early 20th century among diaspora and international audiences through Narendranath Datta and M.K. Gandhi, both of whom emphasised the scriptural essence of brahmincentric texts such as the *shastras*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad Gita*. Both Narendranath and Gandhi had only one common qualification to do so: they were zealous, self-privileging and caste-valorising ‘Hindu’ propagandists. They were never castefree or anticaste. Remarkably, they had guilt-driven occasional condescension to Indigenous Indians they pitied as untouchables, but only to absolve themselves from their own caste power; their caste-based accumulation of wealth through subordination of such Indians.<sup>20</sup> Given his own status as a member of the notorious casteist group, vaishya-bania – the merchant caste of Gujarat – Gandhi was rather prejudiced against the Indian indentured labourers that were racialised, caste-oppressed and exploited as *coolies*.<sup>21</sup> For him, they were the ‘second-class citizen’ and ‘the undesirable’ Indians.<sup>22</sup> Gandhi’s farms (which included a hundred-acre Phoenix farm) straitjacketed the behaviour of the members, especially the sexuality of the girls and women, as per his putative spirituality. Indians he deemed as untouchable and lower caste *coolies* and the native South Africans who he insulted with the racialised K-word were prohibited from his farms.

This vedic brahminism is mobilised by scholars and practitioners in Indian IR tradition to emphasise the innate *moralpolitik* of Indian culture. This oxymoronic caste morality calls for rigorous scrutiny.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Buddhism and Buddhist pacifism are also roped in to supplement the brahminical core of *moralpolitik* as representing a wider non-violent and peaceful tradition.<sup>24</sup> What is silenced in all of these is the antirace, anticaste and gender-equality aspects of Buddhist history in South Asia and beyond. In fact, Buddhism has strengthened

20 See Thass 19ub, 3 and Ayyathurai 2025 (forthcoming).

21 Desai and Vahed 2016.

22 Natarajan 2022.

23 For instance, postcolonial diplomat turned IR analyst, J.N. Dixit writes about pre-colonial Indian influences in IR to usher in ‘a more spiritual, tolerant, and moral world order’ that relied on and ‘rooted in Indian history’. Quinn 2018, 1–10.

24 See Ober 2019 and Werleman 2023.

multiple socio-economic movements against brahminism/casteism from the ancient to postcolonial periods. In a nutshell, the non-violent Buddhism was chiefly advocated against the violence of brahmin male power and self-privileging-caste exploitation.<sup>25</sup> Selectively, however, Buddhism has been used by caste valorising Indian leaders to project themselves as its worthy descendants;<sup>26</sup> thus, aligning caste-segregated Hinduism with anti-brahmin and anticaste Buddhism to project a putative Hindu-majoritarian India as the harbinger and exemplar of non-violence. Critical Caste Studies scholarship instead directs us to the works of figures such as Iyoothee Thass (1845–1914), the founder of modern anticaste Buddhism in India.<sup>27</sup> Thass opposed the brahminical appropriations of Buddhism and Buddhists by brahmins and whites as a subterfuge to cover up the violent processes of racialisation, casteisation and Hinduisation in India and beyond.

## 2.2 *Brahmins as the Heir Apparent of British-Brahmin Diplomacy*

With the first Prime Minister J. Nehru serving as the first Foreign Minister as well, independent India's Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Foreign Service came into being. But these institutions were not established overnight. In fact, from the 1920s onwards one could see the emergence of many international networks and organisations in which Indians could learn about and be mentored in personal and informal diplomacy.<sup>28</sup> V.S. Srinivasa Sastri (1869–1946) is considered as the first officially recognised Indian diplomat. Vineet Thakur's significant study shows that, '[t]he native diplomat, like Sastri, is chosen because they are an ode to colonialism, a living tribute to the success of the civilizing mission.'<sup>29</sup> And that:

As a Tamil Brahmin, Sastri was more than aware of the social mobility that his caste status allowed him, even internationally. His sagely disposition and enviable mastery of the word, both verbal and written, could easily be reduced to his caste, and often was, by his audiences. ... *His caste was personified in his virtues*, facilitating his access, legitimacy and authority in white spaces. This allowed for a trans-racial empathy, analogous to the 'honorary white' status that the Japanese enjoyed in apartheid South Africa. In turn he sued this in-group access to fracture *understandings of*

25 Ober 2023.

26 Ober 2019.

27 Ayyathurai 2024 and Ayyathurai 2025 (forthcoming).

28 Abraham 2023; Thakur 2021.

29 Thakur 2021, 7.

*racial purity*. When speaking to his white audiences, he would empathise with the race purity argument, comparing it with *Brahminical purity*, but go on to make a distinction between biological purity and the deprivation of social, political and economic rights. In its benign, the former implied self-exclusion which was understandable, if not commendable, he would argue. The latter, however, was oppressive ....<sup>30</sup> (14) [emphasis added]

Sastri was a fourth-grade schoolteacher in the rural town of Mayiladuthurai/Mayavaram. In the early 1890s, he was able to elevate himself as the top diplomat, irrespective of the violent conditions of late colonialism in India. This would not have been possible, as Vineet shows, but for his exclusionary birth-based identity as a brahmin-male and the nepotism of brahmin-caste groups, which gatekept non-brahmins. Sastri's claim of brahminical purity was a propaganda of brahmin eugenics, similar to scientifically invalid Nazi propaganda celebrating unscientific claims about their Aryan genes and eugenics (of *arische Rasse/aryan race*) in Germany in the 1920s. Only brahmins were entitled to the honorary white status. They shifted back and forth happily between race and caste power. Such purity was not available for those who were dehumanised as Aborigines, Native Americans, African Americans, African Europeans, Samis, Romas, Burakumins and Indigenous Indians; they were segregated as untouchables. Thus, Aryan-brahmins could go scot-free with their propaganda of the lie of racial and biological purity, which was nothing but antihuman racism and casteism. But the damage of the minority-brahmins was done in colonial India, as it was in the pre-colonial period. And so this fourth-grade schoolteacher, Sastri, could rise as the first Indian diplomat primarily and only through his brahmin networks and pro-white cultural proclivities.

There are two sets of people in this personal and informal diplomacy that emerged in the 1920s. First, the colonial power had to react to the Indian diaspora's struggle against racist policies of social segregation, citizenship, land ownership, enfranchisement and so on in South Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere. To assuage the feelings of Indians in India and overseas, the British imperialists had to recruit the right go-betweens. That is, those who would not be subversive against the continued imperial siphoning of wealth from India to Britain, and at the same time make Indians feel good about the colonialists responding to their demands for equal treatment. It is here that brahmin-men, such as Sastri, found their niche. Because of the stellar role of such *go-between brahmin diplomats*, what thrived as a British-brahmin raj until then in India was

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30 Thakur 2021, 14.

also extended to the Indian diplomacy since the 1920s. Self-privileging-caste nationalists took it upon themselves to serve as personal and informal diplomats and also mentored their own brahmin-men who would be recognised, celebrated and honoured as ‘renowned diplomats’. Such men included people like Tej Bahadur Sapru, N.M. Joshi, V.V. Giri, B. Shiva Rao and Girija Shankar Bajpai, among others.<sup>31</sup>

The second set of people from this Indian personal and informal diplomacy were those who were seen as representatives of the Indian tradition; those whose writings and tours presented India to the world outside. Thus, Narendranath Datta, Rabindranath Tagore, Srinivasa Iyengar, Sailendranath Ghose, J. Nehru, V. Patel, Sarojini Naidu, S. Radhakrishnan and others fulfilled such roles. These men and women became, in the words of Rammanohar Lohia, ‘merchants of the high-minded phrase’ and in the words of K.S. Murty, such self-elevated diplomats made sure that India ‘set itself up as a moral monitor of the world’.<sup>32</sup> ‘Caste’, as Baijayanti forthrightly writes about the Harvard anthropologist, Biraja Sankar Guha (1894–1964), ‘became an allegory of racial distinction to determine an elite group, which could in future lay claims to being the natural successors of the colonial rulers’.<sup>33</sup>

During the late colonial and postcolonial periods, critical IR scholars point out that India’s foreign and diaspora policies aligned *only* with the ‘upper-caste Indians’. Because ‘the economically successful Indian in the Global North was the kind of figure an emerging power wanted to be associated with, not the descendant of an indentured laborer’. Such casteist Indians also reliably promoted the resilience of ‘the Hindu caste hierarchy [that] reflected inherent ability (“merit” in local political parlance), rather than being merely an attribute of social inheritance’ in the Indian diaspora.<sup>34</sup> Predictably, these pernicious practices were the result of and spearheaded by brahmin males of late colonialism in South Asia. Vineet Thakur and Alexander Davis confirm this by analysing the Indian IR organisations. They show that the International Council of World Affairs (established in 1943), the leading Indian IR think-tank of postcolonial India, was made ‘almost entirely of Members of one community and similar political complexion (upper-caste Brahmin Hindus)’.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, critical IR studies identify the inter-war period as the formative years of white-Eurocentric and brahmincentric Indian IR policies and practices, the

31 Gupta 2021.

32 Quoted in Keenleyside 1987, 112–113.

33 Roy 2024, 39.

34 Abraham 2023, 204–205.

35 Birkvad 2020, 65; Thakur and Davis 2017, 689 and 701.

vestiges of which have only been vitiated in postcolonial Indian IR and diplomacy.<sup>36</sup>

Kira Huju's influential study *Cosmopolitan Elites: Indian Diplomats and the Social Hierarchies of Global Order* shows how postcolonial India's Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Foreign Service of India have blatantly remained the fiefdom of 'blue-blooded Brahmins'. Such brahmin officers indulge in and get away with their malignant and benign casteism against the non-brahmin officers they look down upon as the "Scheduled Castes" (SC – Dalits), "Scheduled Tribes" (STs – Indigenous Peoples or Adivasis) and "Other Backward Castes" (OBCs). Huju's findings demonstrate how 'upper-caste diplomats' gatekeep their profession by brazenly proclaiming their inherent cosmopolitan characteristics and that 'OBC communities were "by nature less cosmopolitan"'. Furthermore, Huju exposes the casteist diplomats when she emphasises that 'a retired diplomat, in response to my incredulous clarification question on whether Dalits could be cosmopolitan, pronounced with a baffled self-evidence: "of course not"'. Clearly, brahminism is engrained in Indian diplomacy behind the oxymoronic brahmincentric cosmopolitanism. This is evidenced by another casteist officer who repulsively said that 'lower-caste Indians ought not to become diplomats at all'. Unsurprisingly, considering such brahmincentric practices of Indian diplomacy, the '[a]rchival records from the 1960s indicate years in which no Dalits were included in diplomatic batches at all'.<sup>37</sup> Here we see Narendranath's century-old vision of Indian diplomacy finally bearing fruit.

Thus, it is evident that brahmin diplomats inbreed their own caste members. Obnoxiously, as is shown above, they get away with their propaganda of exclusionary brahminism to declare that non-brahmins by birth are ineligible for Indian diplomacy. Despite the blatant presence of casteism in the Indian Foreign Service, there is a failure to critically examine brahmincentrism and brahminical propaganda about India. Unsurprisingly, transgenerational brahminism remains normativised and naturalised in the Indian Foreign Service and Indian diplomacy.

In this section, I have pointed towards a colonialist-casteist continuum that has historically shaped Indian diplomacy.<sup>38</sup> However, this is obviously a product of this continuum's hold on Indian society as a whole, where the colonialists on the one end and the casteists on the other end of the spectrum subordinated 95 per cent of India's population. Apart from controlling civil societal

36 Sullivan 2014, 640–655; Krishna 2014, 151–168; Thakur 2021; Huju 2023.

37 Huju 2023, 58, 161, 172, 178, 197 and 198.

38 For more on this, see Ayyathurai 2024.

institutions, such as brahmin land and temple possession, brahmins grabbed almost all the colonial educational and administrative opportunities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As C.J. Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan show for the Madras Presidency:

In the Provincial Civil Service examinations between 1892 and 1904, fifteen out of sixteen successful candidates were Brahmans. In 1913, ninety-three of the 128 permanent district munsifs (lower-level judges) were Brahmans, compared with twenty-five non-Brahmans and ten from non-Hindu groups; in the Madras High Court, four of the five Indian judges were Brahmans. By 1914, the 650 registered graduates of the University of Madras included 450 Brahmans, 124 non-Brahmans and seventy-four from other communities; eleven out of twelve elected fellows of the university were also Brahmans. Not only did these and other figures show that Brahmans dominated the government service and the university, but the same group also dominated the nationalist movement, for fifteen out of sixteen members elected from Madras to the All-India Congress Committee were Brahmans and only one a non-Brahman.<sup>39</sup>

### 2.3 *The Brahmin–White Nexus in Postcolonial Cosmopolitanisms*

Studies in critical IR have pointed to how the problems of race, slavery, colonisation, dispossession as well as epistemological violence have skewed the international institutions and practices in favour of Eurocentrism. This has led to what Sankaran Krishna writes as ‘[t]he consolidation of Europe as norm and normal’.<sup>40</sup> Strengthening such a perspective, Meera Sabaratnam unequivocally argues that ‘[i]n studying race, the key proposition is that a racialised social formation generates racialised subject-positions through discourse that help subjects make sense of the world in terms which anchor their social positions within it’, especially ‘White-racialized subject-position’.<sup>41</sup> In the same vein, given the brahmincentric race-caste propaganda, it is incumbent that studying caste/casteism and race/racism in Indian IR and diplomacy ought to unveil how casteised social formations in the Subcontinent since the vedic period were vitiated by the brahminical discourse in the modern period and, especially, how it has propagated casteised subject positions, primarily brahmincentric subject positions, in the colonial and postcolonial Indian IR and diplomacy.

39 Fuller and Narasimhan 2014, 10.

40 Krishna 2001, 414.

41 Sabaratnam 2020, 14 and 18.

How must this endeavour itself forefront a rejection of the assumptions and practices of casteised frameworks, which are steeped in ‘the fetishization of oppressed groups’?<sup>42</sup> South Asian humanities and social sciences in India and the West – which are predominantly controlled by brahmins – are complicit in silencing the ‘benevolent imperialism’ (i.e., Hindu colonisation) in South-east Asia during the colonial period. As Itty Abraham shows, ‘postcolonial Indian elites’ worked with a ‘staircase’ mentality to self-glorify ‘cosmopolitans and Hindu nationalists’ (such as Nehru and Tagore) and ‘India’s place in the inner circle of global powers’ over and above others. Such self-privileging-caste groups were also known for their ‘deep paternalism toward the Africans’ and viewed the Indigenous Indians as low by birth, race and caste.<sup>43</sup>

These criticisms suggest that while such postcolonial cosmopolitans critiqued racialised global politics, they benefited from their ‘conspicuous national fault lines of both class and caste’ in the local geo-cultural history.<sup>44</sup> Importantly, such race-caste prejudices were no less writ large among the Indian diaspora.<sup>45</sup> This could be traced from self-privileging-caste groups (mostly brahmins) and their casteism against those they audaciously identify and categorise as untouchables and low castes: no human would stoop to self-identify herself as an untouchable or low. Beyond South Asia this is evident in the segregated and ‘impoverished lower-caste populations’ of indentured labourers in colonial plantations and their transnational descendants since the 1830s.<sup>46</sup> Thus, in addition to the colonial state apparatuses which imposed and legitimised racism through ‘white violence’, what is also evident is the concomitant imposition of brahmincentric casteism.<sup>47</sup> Unquestionably, this was *only* accomplished through multiple collusive and violent mechanisms of brahmin–white power.<sup>48</sup> For instance, the British decennial censuses were meant to enforce macro and micro caste segregation on Indians from 1871. But brahmins assumed their self-chosen top spot in the segregated caste hierarchy they invented by interpolating their casteism in and through the British imperial local and global racist agendas. Thus, the transnational ascendance of brahminism was accomplished with the help of British imperialism.

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42 Stoffel and Birkvad 2023, 3.

43 Abraham 2023, 186, 195 and 196.

44 Abraham 2023, 203.

45 Ayyathurai 2021b.

46 Abraham 2023, 204.

47 Kolsky 2010.

48 This was exposed by the anticaste leaders and writers in the early 20th century, see Thass 1911a.

For our purpose, it is also important to realise that the emergence and entrenchment of global brahminism has had enormous implications on the Indian diaspora and Indian diplomacy. Primarily this means that the Indian diaspora is not monolithic. Rather it is riven with brahmin-at-the-top caste segregation among overseas Indians across the Indian, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Such processes have essentially valorised and globalised the ideas of seeing India *only* through the brahminical prism. One of its consequences is, as Ida Birkvad reminds us, the ‘transnational connections between a Hindu and Western Right’.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, this brahmin–white collusion in the Global North and South has also resulted in what Arjun Shankar terms as ‘brown saviors’ and ‘savarna Indians’, those ‘globally mobile’ but prosper only by being the ‘gatekeepers’ against the Indians they *othered* by race, caste and religion in the postcolonial world.<sup>50</sup> Shankar lucidly demonstrates that self-privileging-caste groups, such as brahmins, have reproduced and reinforced white racism on the one hand, and propagandised their own transnational brahminism, since the colonial period, on the other. Crucially, this study points to how brahminical conceits and claims promoted ideas and practices that mystified and glorified the violent segregationist tendencies of caste/casteism as the touchstone of the Indian diaspora and the making of India a global power.

### 3 A Genealogy of Globalising brahminism

The word brahmin circulated in early modern Europe via the Catholic and Protestant missionaries of the early 17th century. Robert de Nobili (1577–1656), the Italian Roman Catholic white missionary landed in Tamil Nadu, South India, in 1605 to convert the pagans into Catholicism. Realising the failures of his Portuguese Catholic predecessors, de Nobili not only gave up drinking wine and eating meat to become a vegetarian, he also immersed himself in all the brahmin paraphernalia of brahminical tuft and attire to follow suit till his death in Chennai in 1656. All these he did *only* to appease the brahmins who lived by caste and spatial segregation against the Indigenous Tamils. Predictably, de Nobili was followed by other Italian Roman Catholic missionaries, such as Joseph Constantis Beschi (1680–1747), who also relied on brahminism to promote and benefit themselves as ‘European Brahmins’.<sup>51</sup> Although he miserably failed to recruit brahmins into Catholicism, even as he went against the cause of

49 Birkvad 2020, 58.

50 Shankar 2023, 24 and 107.

51 Blackburn 2003, 157.

Christ by incorporating casteism along with his racism, de Nobili was stunned to meet Muktiudaiyaan on 31 July 1626. He pejoratively treated Muktiudaiyaan and brushed him aside with the P-word.<sup>52</sup> But it was Muktiudaiyaan who considered himself as a casteless and anticaste Tamil and gave an unprecedented new lease of life to Catholicism by bringing a few thousand castefree Tamils into its fold. Nonetheless, de Nobili had done the damage. He upheld and propagated brahmin power in Europe by identifying himself as a white-brahmin.<sup>53</sup>

It was only a matter of time before the Dutch and British Protestant missionaries began to spread their racially condescending admiration for the putative greatness of brahmins in Europe in the 1620s, then the French and Germans followed suit. By the 1750s when shastras were discovered and translated from Sanskrit to English (at once in French and German), brahminism had gone transnational. In 1814 the first Sanskrit Chair in Paris, France, and four years later, the first Sanskrit Chair in Bonn, Germany, were established. Not surprisingly, the white Europeans who had supposedly mastered Sanskrit paid obeisance to brahmin-male claims of race-caste.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the irreparable harm to non-brahmins in general and the Indigenous Indians who were dehumanised with the P-word gained traction in the West from the early 19th century onwards. The British colonial censuses referenced such 'Hindu' textbooks to impose caste identities from the 1890s.

White-European racialising fascination with Sanskrit fostered brahmincentric Indology and orientalism. This was to wittingly serve the interests of Euro-

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52 That is, as a *pariah*. This is a derogatory word that needs to be rejected and replaced with 'P-word', like the N-word. This P-word is notoriously used by brahmin and other non-brahmin caste academics as well as white academics, IR specialists, writers and novelists with utter disregard for the caste-oppressed communities in India and the Indian diaspora. It is vital to mobilise the International Court of Justice to impose punitive measures against individuals, academics, institutions, websites, social media platforms and state leaders that indulge in the perpetuation of the P-word. For instance, see Uddipan Mukherjee's 'India and the "Pariah" States: Iran' in the *Global Diplomacy* blog (<https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/posts/india-and-the-pariah-states-iran>) as well as the list of 'Pariah States' at <https://www.worlddata.info/pariahstates.php>. More recently, Ted Svensson paradoxically begins his well-meaning article on caste and international relations with a brahmin-female author who has insulted, with malicious intent, the pioneer of casteless and anticaste Buddhism in modern India, Pandit Iyothee Thass (1845–1914) as a 'Pariah intellectual' (Svensson 2025, 2). In this context, it is important to note that Thass filed legal cases against those who had referred to him with the P-word and won in the British colonial court of Madras Presidency. For more on Thass see Ayyathurai 2025 (forthcoming).

53 Ayyathurai 2024.

54 Ayyathurai 2022.

centrism primarily and brahmincentrism secondarily, which subordinated and exploited most Indians; the history of which remains woefully understudied. In the same vein, the Sanskrit Chairs sponsored by US brahmins – brahmins who have immigrated to the United States but continue to identify themselves brahmins – have continued to be successful at collusion between brahmins and whites.<sup>55</sup> This has also led to the transnationalisation of brahminism in the Global North in the postcolonial period.<sup>56</sup>

Among those who anchored global brahminism in the West, none fared better than Narendranath. He was a propagandist of brahminical ideas and practices in the United States in the 1890s. Ostensibly, he was in Chicago to attend the so-called Parliament of Religions. But he stayed longer and left more impact among white elites such as the ‘Boston Brahmins’ and other white US people about yoga-based Eastern spirituality in the east and west coasts of North America.<sup>57</sup> In fact, he was the first Indian in the West who propagated caste segregation beyond South Asia. It was couched in his metanarratives of brahminical-Eastern spirituality and the brahminical virtues of yoga, into which the Euro-American whites were “gullibly ensnared. But Narendranath’s credibility was in doubt due to his blatant contradictions in everyday life, including his advocacy of ‘beef, biceps, and the Bhagavadgita as the way out for what he perceived were India’s problems.’”<sup>58</sup> Regarding Narendranath’s racist Aryanism, Baijayanti perceptively writes:

a revivalist Hindu sect based in Bengal that had formed around the mystic Ramkrishna (1836–1886) and his internationally famous disciple Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). The English-educated monk Vivekananda sought to revitalize Hinduism by calling for a return to the golden age of Vedic Aryans when Hinduism was a pure, primordial religion, without any ‘non-Aryan’ elements ... this strand of Hindu spirituality [was propagated] through *Prabuddha Bharata* (‘Awakened India’) the journal of the Ram Krishna Mission, the religious order founded by Vivekananda ... The journal already enjoyed a high reputation among some German Indologists, who wrote articles for it.<sup>59</sup>

55 Most recently, a three and a half million-dollar grant Sanskrit Chair called the Anupama and Guru Ramakrishnan Professorship in Sanskrit Studies was established by employing a white Sanskrit researcher at Chicago University in 2016. See Guo 2016.

56 Ayyathurai 2014.

57 All these before his death in his 30s.

58 Sharma 2013, xii and Harris 2022. Significantly, these studies demystify the self-proclamations and propaganda of this Datta turned Swami.

59 Roy 2024, 22–23.

Although he was neither erudite nor academically qualified, his reach among the white Americans and Germans was phenomenal. Narendranath's fabrication of racist and casteist vedic Aryanism found immediate resonance with the Nazis of Germany.

Gandhi too, we have pointed out above, practiced caste and racial segregation. In South Africa, he became the go-between for settler whites and self-privileging-caste groups.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, as Maureen Swan argues, his campaign in South Africa championed only the upper-class and self-privileging-caste Indians.<sup>61</sup> In seeking the support of whites, Shobana Shankar writes, 'Gandhi highlighted the common Aryan roots of Europeans and Indians'.<sup>62</sup> In fact, as often recounted, Gandhi's brutal experience of being thrown out of the train because he was a brown man helped him to finally wake up and be outraged about the cruelty of race/racism in South Africa. However, it did not push him to critique and reject his own vaishya-bania caste-power or brahmin power or brahmin-bania collusion that hacked many Indians to cruelty and death daily in India then, as is the case now. Nor did he care to notice Indigenous Africans and caste-oppressed Indian indentured labourers suffering from the everyday racism of the settler European racists. Indeed, he eventually became the most successful propagandist of global brahminism in Europe and Africa.

After his return to India, Gandhi did not care about the religio-cultural sanction of everyday violence of *varna-jati*/race-caste segregation in India. He never rejected the long history of pejorative brahmincentric caste-views on women and Indians in general. He was also antithetical to compensatory reparations and re-centring of caste-oppressed Indians, through the self-representation of their culture, politics, economy and history against brahminism/casteism. In fact, Gandhi had the audacity to re-marginalise the Indians who had suffered the brahmin-male invented untouchability for so long. With a new condescending category he invented, 'Harijans', and interpreted it to mean 'the children of god'. It demonstrates Gandhi's politics against the casteless, anticaste and Indigenous Indians, as well as his casteist tendency to categorise, infantilise and denigrate the Indigenous Indians in his national and international politics. Not surprisingly, such Indians, who considered themselves as casteless and anticaste Indigenous Indians, registered their repugnance against this vitriolic category. They confronted and rejected Gandhi and his will to hegemonise them. Thus, they shred the category 'Harijan' to smithereens and rejected it

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60 Tidrick 2006.

61 Swan 1985.

62 Shankar 2021, 30–31.

as highly offensive; the Supreme Court of India has prohibited it as an abusive term.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, Gandhi's hegemony over and against caste-oppressed Indians and Muslims was evident in the Round Table Conference, London, in 1931: Gandhi arrogantly declared that he was more entitled to represent 'the untouchables' and Muslims than their own more internationally qualified and erudite anticaste leaders, such as B.R. Ambedkar and Rettaimalai Srinivasan.<sup>64</sup> Clearly, behind the façade of Gandhian pacifism in national and international politics lay the uninterrogated brahmincentric casteism against subordinated Indians.

Rabindranath Tagore and his visits to the West in the 1920s and 1930s were no less important in the propaganda of the brahmincentric 'Hindu' view and Eastern spirituality about India. It is important to know that fascism and Nazism were on the rise in Italy and Germany in the 1920s during Tagore's multiple visits. Hitler's ideas of Aryanism had owed a great deal to the German Indologists since the early 19th century.<sup>65</sup> Johannes Bronkhorst writes about the racist and casteist agendas behind Nazis and brahmins making memorials, monuments and museums.<sup>66</sup> That is, the brahmin-fabricated myths about the ancient vedic period and temple establishments in modern India were not different from Hitler's fabrication of the putative Greco-Roman pasts of the Germanic race. Considering the rise of Nazism in Germany during Tagore's visits, there is no evidence of the brahmin Nobel laureate from Bengal critiquing the dehumanising aspects of Nazism. Only in his later years, when he could not travel abroad, did he express his uneasiness with Nazi Germany in hindsight but only to glorify 'the spirit of the East' in comparison. Nor did Tagore critique the brahminical violence of casteism either in India or abroad; in fact, he was laudatory about the supposedly assimilative aspects of Indian 'civilization', arguing that India's message to the world was one of racial/caste harmony, obscuring how his 'syncretic civilization' was a product of violent subjugation.<sup>67</sup> These race-caste aspects of Tagore have not captured the imaginations of the groundbreaking postcolonial intellectuals – who are mostly brahmins from Bengal – so far.

Narendranath's and Tagore's Hindu Aryanism inspired other caste-valorising Bengalis such as Biraja Shankar Guha (1894–1964)'s trailblazing study 'The Racial Basis of the Caste System in India' at the University of Harvard in 1924.

63 See <https://www.thenewsminute.com/voices/stop-calling-dalits-harijan-sc-calls-term-abusive-we-remain-ignorant-and-insensitive-59315>.

64 Ambedkar 1945; Birkvad 2020.

65 Ayyathurai 2024; Birkvad 2020.

66 Bronkhorst 2016.

67 Das 1996.

It was known for ‘propounding racialized views of India’s history and society’. More importantly, Guha was invited by the German Nazis to deliver lectures such as ‘The Racial Foundation of the Indo-Aryans and Racial Miscegenation in India’, which was also published in Germany. He proudly asserted, Baijyanti writes:

‘[H]eroic’ Vedic Aryans were ancestors of upper-caste Hindus from north India as well as of the tribes from the north-western border. It also claimed that these Aryan descendants had managed to retain some of the Indo-Aryan traits. The article concluded that artistic and philosophical expressions of Nordic Aryan thoughts that started with the Rig Veda had continued to live on in India through the literary works of Rabindranath Tagore.<sup>68</sup>

Here we see Guha racially linking the German Nazis and Nazism as true descendants of vedic brahmins and brahminism. In fact, Guha, the brahmin from Bengal, mentored other brahmin students such as Achyut Kumar Mitra, who was truly erudite in not only securing the pro-Nazi German India Institute and Humboldt Foundation fellowship in 1934–1935 and went on to complete his groundbreaking PhD dissertation ‘A Contribution to the Racial Studies of the Bengalis (India)’ at Munich University. Not surprisingly, he meticulously mirrored his Nazi ‘race hygienist’ advisor Theodor Mollison’s racial proclivities.<sup>69</sup> Another Bengali intellectual, Benoy Kumar Sarkar – celebrated in IR accounts for his highly inventive article ‘Hindu Theory of International Relations’ – was not only a staunch defender of nazi antisemitism but also advocated that Hitler combined ‘the moral idealism of a Vivekananda multiplied by the iron strenuousness of a Bismarck’.<sup>70</sup>

Another luminary of global brahminism was Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, known for globalising ‘eastern spirituality’. He was educated in the Christian institutions of Chennai, South India. His self-projection as an erudite brahmin-male secured him prosperous academic jobs. Radhakrishnan would go on to write *Indian Philosophy* – Vol. I (1923) and Vol. II (1927). When Jadunath Sinha accused him of plagiarising this work, Radhakrishnan escaped a jail term with the out-of-court settlement *only* with the collusion of Bengali brahmin networks. Problematically, this plagiarism-tainted brahmin-male was allowed to

68 Roy 2024, 40.

69 Roy 2024, 40.

70 Acharya and Buzan 2019, 100 and Sarkar 1933, 4.

become the Oxford professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics, the first Vice-President of India and then the second President of India, and the Indian government continues to celebrate Radhakrishnan's birthday as the teacher's day of India.<sup>71</sup> He was also a member of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation from 1931 to 1939, and the Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO in 1948.<sup>72</sup>

His Indian Philosophy rivetingly valorised 'Brahminical Systems'. The brahmin violence of race/racism and caste/casteism in India from the vedic period did not bother him. They were just a minor aberration and not an abomination for him. In fact, the questions of why Alexander the Great 'slaughtered' brahmins in 326–325 BCE (apparently not being able to bear their casteism),<sup>73</sup> how brahmin-males declared themselves as superior to even their deities,<sup>74</sup> what were the violent brahminical mechanisms of bodily violence and death against brahmin-women, non-brahmin women, men and children and so on did not trouble Radhakrishnan, the Oxford philosopher of Ethics. All these instances of historical antihuman wrongs have been perpetuated by racist and casteist groups in the Indian Subcontinent from the ancient and medieval to colonial periods. But they have been conspicuously overlooked intentionally, voluntarily and with full knowledge by brahmins who arrogated and self-proclaimed themselves as philosophers, litterateurs, anthropologists, and historians. Their success and prosperity were achieved only with their colonial brahmin–white networks; more so in North America, Europe and elsewhere in the world today.

In the postcolonial period, Jawaharlal Nehru became independent India's first prime minister. Hagiographies on Nehru have consecrated his significance by declaring the period 1947 to 1964 as the 'Nehruvian Era' and as 'Nehruvian socialism' in India. Multiple studies on Indian IR and Indian diplomacy declare Nehru as the man who put India on the global map. This is more so as not just independent India's first Prime Minister but also as the first Foreign Minister who set in motion the 'Nehruvian foreign policy'.<sup>75</sup>

Nehru was unflinching in the way he identified himself as a brahmin. He celebrated his community's putative significance in India's ancient, medieval and modern history. In fact, Nehru audaciously determined what ought to be the postcolonial India's touchstone of Indianness to set internal and external policies. He chivalrously proclaimed 'India clings to me, as she does to all her

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71 Chatterjee 2017.

72 Keenleyside 1987, 114.

73 Bronkhorst 2016, 9.

74 Olivelle 2005.

75 Gupta 2021.

children, in innumerable ways; and behind me lie, somewhere in the subconscious, racial memories of a hundred, or whatever the number may be, generations of Brahmans. I cannot get rid of that past.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the honourable first prime minister upheld brahmin race/racism and caste/casteism in one fell swoop. We need to note that the supposedly socialist Prime Minister did not want to give up his racial memories of brahminness.

These illustrations reveal how the violence against and exploitation of a large majority of Indians by casteist groups, such as brahmins, were overlooked and camouflaged to normalise brahminical ideas and practices in the West. Unsurprisingly, recent scholarship in South Asian Studies points to the violence of racism and casteism as the two sides of the sword against many marginalised communities: such as those who were religiously codified and segregated by brahmins as lower castes, untouchables and Northeast Indians of East Asian origins during colonial and postcolonial periods.<sup>77</sup> It is also crucial to examine whether Narendranath, Gandhi, Tagore, Radhakrishnan and Nehru were the promoters of brahminical sciolism: that is, brahmins and other self-privileging-caste groups peddling irrational, untruthful and unethical claims as knowledge to mislead and perpetuate institutions and practices of caste segregation that impacted the Indian IR and diplomacy in hitherto unknown ways.<sup>78</sup>

### 3.1 *Globalisation of Caste*

It is important to note that globalisation of caste (that is, the transnational spread of birth-based caste identities, brahminical norms, institutions and practices of caste segregation) is a reality now. Beyond South Asia, caste/casteism is alive and well in the Indian ocean islands, such as Mauritius, the Caribbean, South Africa and elsewhere from the colonial period. More recently, the immigration policy changes in North America and Europe have enabled the self-privileging-caste groups to immigrate and emigrate *en masse* to the Western world like never before. True to their casteist origins, beliefs, institutions and practices in India, wherever the casteist groups have immigrated casteism has spread in many countries, including in the Global North. In fact, the United States has become the most fertile ground to nurture brahminism in the world now. From there brahmin and non-brahmin casteist groups continue their stranglehold via mass media, social media platforms and crowdfunding brahmincentric projects in India and elsewhere. In addition, their saviourism, through multiple profitable and non-profitable organisations, is meant

76 Quoted in Cohn 1987.

77 Kikon 2022; Cháirez-Garza et al. 2022; Dwivedi 2023.

78 Ayyathurai 2024.

to impose themselves and to subordinate vernacular Indian communities that see themselves as casteless and anticaste in the West, as in India.<sup>79</sup> Such exclusionary practices are made possible primarily by the triangular mechanism of civil societal institutions, state validation and academic promotion of the brahminical prism in India and overseas. The Indian state and its so-called bilateral and multilateral Indian diplomacy have continued to endorse such brahmin-centric globalisation of caste, the deleterious consequences of which remain unexamined in IR and diplomatic studies.

The US Immigration and Naturalization Policy of 1965 made feasible the immigration of the self-privileging-caste groups, such as brahmins, as professionals.<sup>80</sup> With their newfound American wealth, their establishment of temples and temple venue-based cultural practices began to mushroom. Soon, the United States will have more than 1,000 temples. In North America and Europe, like in India, brahmins have reproduced temples of segregation, religio-caste identities and practices, with pedigreed brahmin-priests and brahmin and non-brahmin caste groups as their temple trustees. Thus, brahmin temples have become *the* civil societal institution that promotes brahmincentrism overseas. In fact, brahmin-temples are the networking hub of self-privileging-caste techies, corporate entrepreneurs and employees. They are also the venues for their brahmin preachers, marriages and caste-network meetings.<sup>81</sup> Businesspeople, ministers, bureaucrats, academics and diplomats of India are often seen extending their official endorsement of such brahminical institutions and practices overseas through their offices in North America, Europe, the Caribbean and other regions of the world. And this is prodigiously suitable for such discriminating women and men from India, given what Shikha Dilawri writes as their ‘emphasis on “social segregation” around food and housing reflects casteist notions of purity and pollution. This also reveals how the complex translations of racial hierarchies, and how casteism and forms of internal racialization in India’ were transposed wherever such casteists would migrate, immigrate and emigrate.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, vegetarianism has been a key identity claim of a globalised brahminism, so much so that it is now considered a measure of special honour for a visiting Indian prime minister.<sup>83</sup> Foremost among the Indians who projected a vegetarian view of India – even though most Indians are

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79 Shankar 2023.

80 Abraham 2023; Thakur 2021.

81 Personal observation in multiple temples in California in 2022.

82 Dilawri 2023, 33.

83 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/how-to/how-us-laid-out-vegetarian-diplomacy-on-a-plate/articleshow/101243210.cms?from=mdr>.

diverse meat eaters, including beef, pork and wild animal meat – through their exclusionary and self-privileging philosophy were M.K. Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and S. Radhakrishnan.

Significantly, the US policies in favour of minority religious communities have become an easy opportunity for brahmins, for instance, to demand the US state's recognition of their caste-identity as 'Hindu' religious identity. In fact, such casteist groups' linkages with US political parties have catapulted them as judges, senators and representatives of those who are now classified as 'Hindu Americans'. In such instances, we see how the US state's failure to critique and prohibit casteists in the United States has brazenly favoured brahmins to prosper by discriminating Indians who are castefree and anticaste. Thus, the loopholes of US policies have extended undemocratic advantages to racists and casteists overseas, as in India. Anything that is portrayed as 'Hindu' in the United States now is primarily about brahmins. Therefore, multiple organisations that identify themselves as 'Hindu American' are brahmincentric in their organisational structure, membership, function and amassing of monetary benefits to misleadingly project themselves as a 'model minority'.<sup>84</sup> Clearly, the globalisation of caste would not have been feasible but for such brahmincentric Hindu American and British organisations that are on the rise.<sup>85</sup>

It is true that Indians in the United States have thrived in STEM studies and research, and corporate employment. But it is also vital to note that the beneficiaries are predominantly brahmins. Likewise, social sciences and humanities studies in the United States have also become the fiefdom of mostly brahmin students, researchers and faculty members. Only very rarely does one find a non-brahmin student or faculty member in the US (or European) educational institutions. This means that brahmins have now become US brahmins only to prosper as gatekeepers against most Indians in the United States. In fact, the Hindu American Student Associations in the US universities function like the brahmin-student clubs to promote brahminical festivities and vegetarianism.<sup>86</sup> Such brahminical associations and organisations thrive by excluding other Indian religious and non-religious Indians who have become naturalised Americans. Clearly, the smooth transition of brahmins from Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) to the Western educational institutions and Silicon Valley would not be possible but for the advocacy that the Indian state, Indian IR and Indian diplomacy extend.

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84 Prashad 2025.

85 Berg 2018.

86 Personal observation at Columbia University, New York, as a doctoral candidate, and in other US universities.

South Asian Studies and its close to 45 centres in the United States (and in Europe) have become the breeding grounds of brahmincentric studies, grants and recruitments. Although it is time for subfields such as Critical Caste Studies and Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies to be at the centre of South Asian IR Studies in North America and Europe, they remain overlooked. The exemplary exceptions are The University of Chicago and Brandeis University in the United States where post-doctoral fellowships in Critical Caste Studies have been established. Brahmin students, researchers and faculty continue to monopolise and indulge in nepotism to the extent that there are brahmin faculty members who have recruited and mentored mostly brahmin students into prosperous employments in the West. Recruiting non-white and non-brahmin students and scholars is not the concern of South Asian IR Studies or South Asian Studies, which continue to thrive as venues of brahmin-inbreeding, as are the postcolonial IITs and IIMs in India.<sup>87</sup>

However, the CISCO anticaste lawsuits, caste-discrimination banning legislations in Seattle, multiple caste discrimination data in the United States and the emergence of casteless and anticaste Indian American organisations, such as the Ambedkar King Study Circle, Equality Labs and Ambedkar International Mission of the United States, have opened new possibilities to critique and dismantle caste-based and brahmincentric institutions and practices in North America and elsewhere. It is in the emergence of antirace and anticaste publics that the means and ways of debrahminising South Asia studies, including studying IR and diplomacy, become a possibility.

#### 4 Conclusion: Towards Debrahminising Indian Diplomacy

This short study signposts that the postcolonial Indian IR and diplomacy have a precolonial and colonial past. I have shown how brahminical texts and practices have been valorised in North America, Europe and South Africa since the 1890s. Although the word brahmin and brahminical caste-exclusionary practices were curtly circulated by Italian Catholic and Dutch and British Protestant missionaries in early 17th-century Europe, it is because of later immigrant self-privileging-caste men that transnational brahminism has become entrenched beyond South Asia. In fact, the globalisation of caste in the colonial period itself was the result of wilful campaigns by men who often capitalised on their own *swami*-identity for their brahminical propaganda and its naturalisation over-

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87 Subramanian 2019.

seas. Clearly, brahmincentrism that was ingrained during the British-brahmin raj is also traceable to the caste imposing godmen, philosophers and unofficial and personal globetrotting diplomats. Their credentials of casteless and anticaste humanism were negligible. Therefore, it is vital to engage with debrahminising diplomacy; that is, how Indian IR and Indian diplomacy could be freed from brahminism, brahmincentrism, globalisation of caste and self-privileging-caste groups' predominance. There are at least two possibilities to revamp the caste-centric nature of Indian IR and Indian diplomacy, as detailed below.

First, Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies needs to undo exclusionary ideas, claims, negotiations, texts, institutions and practices that entrench brahmincentrism and invoke brahmin-caste groups as the voice of India. The world needs to know that brahmins are a minority casteist group of not even five per cent of the Indian population who have predominated modern Indian history by subordinating most Indians who are multilingual, multiregional, multi-religious and multi-cultural. This means Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies ought to reveal caste-based religio-cultural symbols and practices in Indian IR and Indian diplomacy. It must question the Indian state to shed its prejudiced agreements, which promote brahminical civil societal institutions, such as the mushrooming of brahmin temples overseas or emphasis on vegetarianism, as well as brahmincentric academic gatekeeping agendas abroad, such as the Indian government's vigilantism against anticaste studies overseas, which is on the rise.<sup>88</sup>

Second, Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies must centre casteless and anticaste voices of India and Indian diaspora. Anticaste thinker and practitioner E.V.R. Periyar (1879–1973) travelled to Southeast Asia and within Europe (including the Soviet Union/Russia) in the 1920s and 1930s, which helped him to understand the problems of Indentured Indians as well as to develop his antirace and anticaste thoughts and practices. Preceding him, Iyothee Thass (1845–1914) and Jyotirao Phule (1827–1890) had celebrated antirace, antislavery and the Underground Railroad movements (i.e., antislavery fugitivity to the US north and Canada) of African Americans to reinforce their raceless, casteless and gender-sensitive philosophies and practices of universal humanism and modernism. Such Indians had a local and global, rational and ethical outlook. They emphasised their solidarity with oppressed citizens of the world. Significantly, they repudiated transgenerational brahminism to re-centre their raceless

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88 Danavanth and Bania 2022; Paliwal 2023.

and casteless culture, memory and history.<sup>89</sup> Likewise, we find multiple anti-caste, antirace and gender equality aspiring Indian diaspora communities in Africa, North America, Europe, the Caribbean, Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Such Indians and Indian diaspora have suffered silencing for too long. Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies is meant to prioritise the inclusionary ideas and practices of these Indians.

It is time for Indian diplomacy to take into consideration diverse cultural, economic and historical institutions and practices of Indian communities that have survived racist, casteist and gendered violence. They have also resisted malignant and benign forms of caste discrimination and marginalisation for a long time, in and beyond South Asia. Indisputably, they must gain their centrality in Indian IR and Indian diplomacy. This is feasible only when the Ministry of External Affairs of India is determined to prohibit its brahmincentric modalities. Most importantly, it is only through the widespread establishment of and engaging with castefree and anticaste persons, institutions, practices and IR that debrahminising diplomacy could become a reality. Critical Caste Diplomatic Studies has the potential to provide new dimensions about and centring of raceless and casteless Indians and the Indian diaspora in the Global North and South.

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89 I thank the Reviewer 3 of this essay for suggesting that I include such anticaste and antirace Indian thinkers.

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*Gajendran Ayyathurai*

is an anthropologist and a historian from Göttingen, Germany. He has published on the culture, memory and history of the casteless Tamils/Indians and Tamil/Indian diaspora in Tamil, English and German. His forthcoming book is titled *Tamil Buddhism and brahminism in Modern India: Deep Resistance against Caste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025). Gajendran is the initiator of a new subfield, Critical Caste Studies.