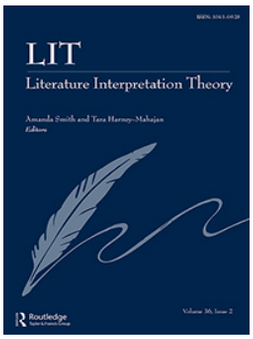

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory

ISSN: 1043-6928 (Print) 1545-5866 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/glit20

Undoing brahminism/casteism: Toward a Post-brahmin Philology, Literature, and History

Gajendran Ayyathurai

To cite this article: Gajendran Ayyathurai (2025) Undoing brahminism/casteism: Toward a Post-brahmin Philology, Literature, and History, Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory, 36:2, 128-153, DOI: 10.1080/10436928.2025.2516395

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10436928.2025.2516395

LIT: LITERATURE INTERPRETATION THEORY
2025, VOL. 36, NO. 2, 128–153
https://doi.org/10.1080/10436928.2025.2516395

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Undoing brahminism/casteism: Toward a Post-brahmin Philology, Literature, and History

Gajendran Ayyathurai

Introduction

In this essay, I employ a Critical Caste Studies perspective on how European Indological, comparative literature, and historical studies have predominantly served brahmin-patriarchal views during the precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods.[1] While in the colonial past, Sanskrit Chairs at universities like Bonn in Germany derived much of their prestige from Indological Studies, such departments are now closing. I suggest that European Indological studies, comparative literary studies, and historical studies of South Asia could become relevant again if they embrace the need for their own decolonization. By decolonization, I do not only mean a furthering of postcolonial theory's critiquing of Eurocentric imperial power because such a standpoint conspicuously leaves out the social, cultural, religious, and economic hierarchies that preceded colonial rule and that were then cemented by colonial rule to secure European domination. Rather, decolonization needs to examine the complex structures of power—both local and colonial—that persist and continue to fracture postcolonial societies through hierarchies such as caste. The disregard for, and gatekeeping against, casteless and anticaste South Asian communities in South Asian humanities and social sciences in the West, which has remained uninterrogated by postcolonial theory, shows the need for a decolonization that is committed to reconstructing post-brahmin and post-caste societies in and beyond South Asia.[2]

Everyday brahminism/casteism has continued into the postcolonial period within South Asian humanities and social sciences departments in the West.[3] The printing and popularization of brahmin-male-centric Sanskrit literatures, the translation of brahminical literature in European languages such as English, French, German, and so on, have furthered the cause of brahminism in Europe and North America from the colonial period onwards.[4] Clearly, this transnational brahminism and brahminical gatekeeping could not have been possible without what Laura Brueck calls "translational practice[s]" that have "real and often complex political impacts" (Brueck 34). Even as it selectively pursues decolonization, such scholarship represents a collusion of the Western

academy with brahminical patriarchy that has only perpetuated caste segregation in the West, as in India.

One cannot be critical of Eurocentrism and demand the provincialization of Europe while consolidating the logic of brahminical patriarchy and brahmincentrism against diverse indigenous communities.[5] I use the term "indigenous" to denote those whose presence in the subcontinent precedes and exceeds the violence of untouchability and caste. They re-center casteless vernacular identity, land-based agency, environmental and economic entitlements, and egalitarian ethics through their historical consciousness of being "Indigenous Buddhists" (*poorvabauta kudikal*) and "Indigenous Indians" (*poorvaindiyarkal*).[6] Brahmincentrism is responsible for culturally othering and religiously subordinating this large majority of Indians as low humans through inflicting brahminical myths, deities, texts, institutions, and practices on them. By not recognizing the centrality of brahmincentrism, the postcolonial academy 1) has indulged in what Wilhelm Halbfass and Miranda Fricker have critiqued respectively as "epistemic subjugation" and "epistemic oppression" not just of the non-European Other but of lower-castes as well, so that the dissemination of the logic of Eurocentrism has also become the logic for the dissemination of brahmincentrism; 2) has ignored the urgency of challenging and annihilating caste/casteism/brahminism; 3) has resulted in the consolidation of colonial-casteist categories such as "Paraiyars" (which comes from the P-word i.e., *pariah*, a term that should be prohibited like the N-word).[7] Epithets such as Depressed Classes, Scheduled Castes, *panchamas*, *paraiyans*, and so on only reproduce and reinforce the segregated re-marginalization of such Indians within these disciplines.[8] These casteist brahminical and colonial categories were not created with their consent and will during colonialism, as is shown below, but the imposition of new anglicized condescending categories of casteism nevertheless continues in institutionalized forms.[9] Such disciplines have failed to interrogate the self-privileging-caste groups, such as brahmins, and the colonialists colluding to impose their racist and casteist exclusionary categories on casteless Indians. Reconstructing castefree vernaculars, cultures, religions, regions, and histories of such Indigenous Indians requires new ideas, concepts, and sources that are hitherto unavailable and/or overlooked by the theories, institutions, and practices devoted to decolonization (Thass, "An Enquiry" 3).

In South Asia, decolonization, among other things, has to take seriously and challenge two major aspects of its precolonial and colonial history: 1) the colonial entrenchment of precolonial brahminism[10] and brahmincentrism[11] has perpetuated the self-privileging of Indo-Aryan brahmin-caste groups through the othering, subordination, and exploitation of non-Indo-Aryan South Asians as untouchables and low castes;[12] 2) the refusal to engage with the epistemologies and ontologies of vernacular South Asian communities, their casteless and anticaste cultures, knowledges, homesteads, environments,

economies, memories, and histories. These have survived, even if they remain disregarded and dehistoricized.[13]

Partaking in such a decolonizing project requires a clear shift in focus to those diverse vernacular Indians and South Asians who have so far been marginalized by brahmincentric philological, institutional, and historical orientations. By "vernacular" Indians, I refer to those who have retained indigenous, regional, and environmental identity, memory, and history; their inclusive casteless and anticaste knowledges, religious and cultural institutions and practices; and their reading, speaking, and writing in languages and dialects that are unconnected with and antithetical to linguistic casteism and racism. Therefore, I ask: how have casteless and anticaste Indians, who were oppressed by racists and casteists as low humans, responded to European and brahmin propaganda of brahminism/casteism and brahmincentrism? Answering this question first calls for a critical understanding of, as we shall see below, how European Indology played a pivotal role in propping up brahmin power during the colonial era, which continues to have profound racist and casteist implications in postcolonial South Asia.[14]

The emerging field of Critical Caste Studies offers new possibilities for German and European Indology to orchestrate interdisciplinary and intertextual critiques of all forms of caste and casteism.[15] Critical Caste Studies defines brahmins as the inventors and prime beneficiaries of untouchability and as the perpetrators of caste and gender violence on a majority of multilingual, multicultural, and multireligious communities in South Asia. Brahmin power has enforced its model of caste segregation and emulation among those it has othered by conferring on them the status of being non-brahmin upper and lower caste groups. Thus, given the colossal failure in South Asian humanities and social sciences to rigorously study and reject the mechanisms of brahminism, Critical Caste Studies has the potential to 1) critique all forms of caste power of self-privileging-caste groups while investigating how the brahmin gaze gets normativized and naturalized; 2) explore the diverse indigenous, vernacular, cultural, and religious communities that have retained their precaste, casteless, and anticaste ways of life, despite the caste oppression they have faced for centuries. This would involve generating intertextual, interdisciplinary, and intermedial frameworks and methods to re-center anticaste cultures, religions, memories, and histories of vernacular caste-marginalized Indians by unveiling their hitherto silenced transformative politics, their reading, speaking, and writing against brahminization in South Asia; 3) challenge the collusion of European scholarship on South Asia with caste, focusing particularly on how German and European Indology colluded with brahmins and legitimized their brahmin-patriarchal power during colonialism.

It is here that we also see the decolonizing concerns of Critical Caste Studies assume importance. Because indigenous casteless and anticaste Indians bore the brunt of imperialism and brahminism by which their water, land, labor,

resources, homesteads, and environments were dispossessed, and because they were displaced, Critical Caste Studies stands for and insists on reparations in the postcolonial civil society, state, and academy. Many caste-oppressed Indians challenged European racism and brahmincentric casteism and called for debrahminization by recentering their humanity. In this vein, this essay addresses how the most caste-oppressed Indians from the remote corners of South India provide frameworks through which to challenge the colonial caste-ism of race-caste peddling German comparative philologists, Oxbridge Professors of Sanskrit and Hinduism, and brahminical patriarchy.

As the next section documents, such disciplines and the scholars that constituted them were architects of the colonialist casteist continuum. Through them, the colonialism of Europeans on one end and the casteism of brahmins on the other willfully came together as adjacent and collusive elements to enforce their race-caste oppression in India. The brahmin collusion with European whites was meant to legitimize brahmincentric racism and casteism in the Indian subcontinent.[16] For white Europeans, the logic of caste made sense because it furthered the cause of white-racism via Aryanism and Nazism.[17]

The European Propagation of brahminism and Caste Segregation

During 1892–93, Nietzsche's close friend Paul Deussen became one of the first German Indologists to visit India. Once there, Deussen delivered a lecture on Vedanta philosophy in the Bombay Presidency to a predominantly brahmin audience and regularly hosted meetings at his apartment to discuss such subjects. One day, "Pandit Veniram" visited him. Noticing that Mr Lalu, a male domestic-helper of Deussens, was able to go anywhere and do everything in the household, the Pandit—a birth-based exclusionary high caste male, with the self-glorifying pretension of being a learned person—told Deussen, "If that person were to touch me I would not return to my house without having first taken a bath and changing or washing all my clothes" (Deussen, *My Indian Reminiscences* 28–29). On witnessing first-hand such casteist tendencies from those who identified themselves as brahmins against the Indians they insulted as "Cûdras" (Shudras), was Deussen inclined to change the course of German Indology? No.

Instead, in his study of Vedanta, Deussen came to glorify brahmin-male power through his elaboration of the word "Brahman," which conflated the word "Brahma," or "god," with "Brahmins." He named "Brahman as the creator of the world"—a *double entendre* that confused the notion of god with the self-privileging-caste group, brahmins, and their masculine authority. In fact, Deussen's book, *The System of the Vedanta* (1912), is perhaps the first most comprehensive veneration of brahmins by a white-European Indologist and comparative philologist. Dessuen identified the brahmins as "immigrant

Aryans" of the Indian subcontinent, while continuing to fabricate, confuse, and popularize "Brahmanism," "Brahmanam," and "Brahminism." The eight chapters of the First Part of Deussen's *Vedanta* are a convoluted narrative of preposterous claims, which continue to turn brahman into brahmins, and vice versa, through an unscientific and casteist valorization of themes such as "Brahman as Intelligence" to "Brahman as Bliss" (Deussen 3–18,129–44).

Deussen's casteist attitudes are also revealed in his recounting of native interrogations regarding his own caste identity. In one such example, Deussen describes his encounter with a brahmin "saint" woman in Banares: "Nobody knew her age, she was believed to be at least a hundred years old, and yet she looked a perfect girl." He writes:

> It was now her turn to put questions, and her chief one was to what caste I belonged. As all non Brahmanic Indians are categorically reckoned as among the caste of the Sudras, the pariahs, I had previously declared myself to be a Shudra when this question was put. I had however excited such painful surprise in my hearers that I afterward always *told them a pious fiction, in which I described myself as a Brahman*, who, in consequence of a sin committed in a previous existence *had sunk to the degree of a European, a Sudra*, but that I trusted in my next existence to be permitted to *become a Brahman again*. This little fiction, which generally excited much merriment I retailed for the benefit of the saint. … This argument appeared to convince the good matron. … I continued "Now, after having visited India, having tarried in Benares, *having seen you, oh, holy one*, I dare hope that in my next existence I may again become a Brahman." The holy woman burst into tears, which as they rolled down her face and breast, she wiped with her hair. (Deussen, *My Indian Reminiscences* 99–200, emphasis mine)

Thus, Deussen's caste-identity tricks colluded with brahmins to benefit from their race, caste, and gender hierarchies. Yet, this ready adoption of discriminatory frameworks of inherited privilege is not surprising in light of his racism —Deussen also disparagingly comments on the "nigger English" of the sailors of the ship that took him to India (Deussen, *My Indian Reminiscences* 19).

Deussen's racist-casteist outlook inspired Indian writers. His work was duly mimicked in the 1920s in the tomes of the brahmin, S. Radhakrishnan, whose *The Indian Philosophy—Vol I and II* elevated brahmins and their brahmincentrism in multiple chapters.[18] Radhakrishnan's *The Indian Philosophy—Vol Il* mirrors Deussen, employing Deussen's "The Six Brahmanical Systems" to touch on esoteric, irrational, unscientific, unethical, and brahmincentric themes that range from Vaisesika to Vedanta and to suggest that non-brahmin South Asians are neither entitled to casteless personhood nor to intelligence nor bliss.

Not surprisingly, these texts are alienating to brahmin women, non-brahmin and non-religious persons, and multireligious communities who suffer from birth-based brahminical violence of casteism. Within such European and brahmincentric collusion, the philosophies, cultures, languages, literatures, memories, and histories of casteless and anticaste South Asians

simply did not matter. Although Radhakrishnan was accused of plagiarizing *The Indian Philosophy*, escaping a jail term by settling the case outside court,[19] he rose in his career by networking with his caste-groups and colonialists, bizarrely becoming an Oxford Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics and, later, the President of India. His birthday continues to be problematically celebrated as Teachers' Day in postcolonial India.

Significantly, Deussen was not the only German Indologist who self-identified as a brahmin. The comparative philologist Friedrich Max Mueller did so as well. In fact, Mueller was deeply committed to the brahminical identity, often "overflowing with pro-Aryan sympathies in his letters to Hindu correspondents, even to the extent of indulging a vain regret for his not having been born a Brahman" (Max Mueller xxxi). He, like Deussen, was participating in a long tradition of deceptive self-proclamation about and partaking in racist-casteist power, demonstrating that the collusion of European Indologists with brahminical-patriarchy was systemic.

This systemic history of racist-casteist patriarchy can be traced back to the very first colonial encounters with India. Preceding Deussen and Mueller, the Italian Roman Catholic Missionary, Robert de Nobili (1577–1656), who landed in the Tamil speaking regions to convert the pagans to Catholicism, proclaimed himself a brahmin back in the 1620s, providing the earliest example of white-European surrender to and recognition of brahminism. De Nobili gave up wine drinking and meat eating to become a vegetarian. He combined racist and casteist proclivities to proselytize among the caste groups, brahmins, and other "Aryan castes." Unsurprisingly, de Nobili shared prejudices against lower castes and untouchables and only condescendingly baptized them by imposing caste segregation. Predictably, other Italian Roman Catholic missionaries, such as Joseph Constantine Beschi (1680–1747), meticulously followed Nobili's racist and casteist proclivities,[20] fabricating and promoting themselves as "European Brahmins" (Blackburn 157). Such missionaries were the pioneers of the brahmin-white nexus and of global brahminism.

In fact, there is a long list of European, but especially German philologists, preceding Deussen, who have played a crucial role in textually valorizing brahminism and brahmincentrism while being employed in Europe as philosophers, poets, writers, and academics. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) was influenced by British Indology, which began to flourish in the middle of the eighteenth century.[21] But Herder went even beyond these British Indologists, grandiloquently claiming that India was the epitome of civilization and the place of human origin. He viewed Sanskrit not just as the mother of all Indo-European languages but god's own language. And he saw brahmin-males—and not Europeans—as the personification of civilization in their use of Sanskrit. In *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (1785), Herder treated brahmins and Sanskrit synonymously and audaciously promoted his pejorative views on

the "*die Parias*" [the *Pariahs*]. This meant Herder prioritized the brahmin gaze over and against those Indigenous Indians who were othered by brahmins as untouchables, resulting in the promotion of violent racist-casteist and gendered claims as the philosophy of man.

Following the footsteps of Herder and extending the German obsession with brahmincentric Indology, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) legitimized race-caste segregation in a poem titled, "The Pariah's Legend." In it, Goethe writes about "the noble Brahmin's wife" turned "an adulteress" who is put to death by her husband's sword. Goethe represents this outcome as "Brahma's will" because the "sad Brahmina" dared to "feel the gross and earthly passion of the Pariah evermore" (Goethe, lines 3, 61, 115, 123, 126). Through such sleights of hand, the poem equates sexual licentiousness with lower castes and purity with brahmins.

The white-Eurocentric colonial racialization and casteization of the non-European world also found unprecedented philosophical justifications in Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).[22] Kant's glorification of white Europeans as the most civilized species among humans depended on primitivizing Asians, Africans, and Native Americans. Yet, Kant also had special consideration and appreciation for casteist Indian philosophy. For Kant, brahmins were the only visible philosophers of South Asia, not the non-brahmin philosophers and organic intellectuals whose discursive and non-discursive narratives and practices would have undercut his white-Eurocentric claims. Based on his familiarity only with the literature of brahminical orientalism (which is analyzed in details below), Kant wrote that "Hindus will always stay as they are, they will never go farther, even if they started educating themselves much earlier" (qtd. in Larrimore 112). Later, these views were to be more favorably interpreted by Eurocentric philologists such as Herder, Goethe, Nietzsche, Deussen, and others. Thus, Kant's brahminicentrism played a vital role in the propagation of global brahminism by the end of late eighteenth century.

Other German Indological theorists would follow suit in the early nineteenth century and thereafter. Among those early German Indologists, the Schlegel brothers were crucial. Friedrich von Schlegel's *On the language and wisdom of Indians* (1808) was a detailed study of Indo-European languages, which celebrated Sanskrit (and, with that, brahmin-males) as the fountainhead of Greek, Latin, German, and other European languages. As the promoter of racial links between Germans and brahmins, Schlegel was preeminent in globalizing brahminical texts by promoting Sanskrit as the primary language of the Indian subcontinent—which it never was—and turning it into a source of academic employment opportunities in Germany. Indeed, his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel would become the first Sanskrit Chair at Bonn in 1818. For the Schlegel brothers, Indology meant Sanskrit, and Sanskrit meant Indology. Scandalously, they dismissed vernacular languages of India as impure derivatives, as per the brahminical propaganda.[23]

The esteem with which Sanskrit was judged by German indology is explicable in relation to Germany's own religious context. After the emergence of Protestant Christianity in the sixteenth century, many ardent white Catholic Germans could not reconcile themselves with its revisionism of Christianity. They reviled the decentralized, commoner, and vernacular Christian devotionalism that Martin Luther initiated in Europe—he was the first person in the world to translate Greek and Latin bible into vernacular German while living in exile at Wartburg castle, Eisenach, Germany in 1522–23. Because modern Protestantism had the potential to democratize religious worship, it also opened up possibilities for indigenizing Christianity in diverse parts of the world by subversively rejecting its Eurocentric proselytization as well as by challenging problems of race-caste inequality.[24] This presented a challenge to elite Christians, resulting in some strands of German Romanticism seeing a parallel between themselves and brahmins and between Latin and Sanskrit. They resisted the vernacularization and democratization of religion through a kind of Eurocentric casteism that manifested itself through the Aryan theory —the idea that both brahmins and white Europeans were descendants of the same mystified, mythologized, and globalized ancient Aryan race that they now saw manifested in the ancient and dead Sanskrit language and literature. But at the same time as claiming common descent, the German Romantics also reaffirmed their cultural superiority to brahmins by deeming that the ancient Aryan cultural and philosophical idealism had been lost and corrupted by decadent modern brahmins. This means that white Germans could swoop in, master Sanskrit, and emerge as the indisputable authorities of a putative Indo-Aryan racial identity, language, and literature, even without crossing their borders.[25]

In the South Asian context, European Indology contributed to the brahminization of diverse vernacular regions. Although the brahmins are a minority community of not even five percent of India's population, their Sanskrit was given the status and label of being an Indo-Aryan language, like Greek, Latin, and Persian, by the British Indologist William Jones of the *Asiatic Society* since 1786. The Schlegels, Max Muellers, Nietzsches, Deussens, Buehlers, and other white-German Sanskrit authorities contributed to the exclusionary ascendance of Sanskrit and brahmin-males in South Asia and beyond. Mimicking this brahmin-white nexus, in the nineteenth century, Narendranath Datta, who identified himself as Swami Vivekananda, "in his turn, presented Sanskrit Romanticism to his compatriots and so helped to create what we call 'Neo-Hinduism'" (Gaeffke 100, emphasis in original).[26] As Mukti Lakhi Mangharam details, Narendranath was a key figure in the propaganda of Vedanta and Yoga to a Euro-American audience, "bringing Hinduism to the status of a world religion" free of supposedly non-brahminical practices such as idol worship, tantrism or ritualistic aspects (Mangharam 49). Narendranath propped up neo-brahminical mythologies and Sanskrit texts for an Orientalist

audience both at home and abroad, "preaching the truth of our *Shastras* to the nations of the world" (qtd. in Keenleyside 111). These became the sources of pseudoscientific claims to determine the emotions and bodily features of humanity hierarchically through race/color/caste (*varna*) and sub-caste (*jati*). In contrast, by repudiating such claims, B. R. Ambedkar wrote that "the real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras. How do you expect to succeed, if you allow the Shastras to continue to mould the beliefs and opinions of the people?" (Ambedkar, "Annihilation of Caste" 68). German Indology is, therefore, implicated in the early promotion of brahmin-white nexus and the propaganda of global brahminism. Nonetheless, brahminism's violent propagation of race-caste segregation in Europe, North America, the Caribbean, Indian Ocean Islands, and wherever the brahmins would immigrate, remain conspicuously understudied.

German Indology and European Sanskrit Studies thus promoted the birth-based, exclusionary, and eugenic identity of brahmin-males, colluding with race and racism, caste and casteism. Moreover, in doing so, the discipline subsumed diverse ways of being in the world into an invented, universal brahminical "Hindu" identity. This is succinctly pointed out by Anustup Basu in the context of his rejection of the brahminical violence of Hindutva: "The modern project of a Hindu political monotheism has been to induct the privileged and the pariah into a universal, congregational plane of Hindu identity. The question … is whether the whole thing is simply a Brahminical minority's historical masquerade as a Hindu majority" (Basu 2).[27]

To summarize, Aryan race-caste notions attained a new level of acceptance during the colonial period. Although Aryan race-caste fabrications emerged in the ancient Vedic period, casteless and anticaste Buddhist and Islamic cultures and kingdoms could subdue and eradicate them in multiple regions in ancient, medieval, and modern South Asian history.[28] But the modern European Indological, philological, and historical cooption of these notions influenced colonial state apparatuses, through means such as the institution of censuses organized by caste categories of brahmin-males to resuscitate brahminical-patriarchy like never before.[29] Instead of rejecting brahminical sciolism, the Europeans largely mimicked and legitimized it for their own motives of racist Eurocentric proselytization and imperialism. These were brahminical systems of knowledge fabrication that were meant to perpetuate caste and gender segregation. Inclusive humanism is antithetical to brahminism and brahmin-centrism. In fact, brahminical sciolism could not have ascended in the modern period but for its collusion with the Eurocentric structures of colonialism and Orientalism.[30]

German Indology's propaganda of brahmincentric Sanskrit, brahmin-centric canonization, and brahminical censorship led to an utter disregard for the language, philology, literature, and history of Indigenous Indians and

their diverse vernacular cultures. Such vernacular cultures had existed before the invasion of Indo-Aryan groups in South Asia during the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization and have survived despite the violent ascendance of brahmins and Sanskrit. But these histories did not matter to German Sanskrit Chairs and Sanskrit Studies. This also means that the linguistic, cultural, religious, and historical diversity of India suffered the imposition of brahminization by which a large majority of Indians had to endure racist and casteist discrimination, untouchability, bodily violence, and premature death—which only makes their call for reparations a compelling necessity.

The Case for Undoing the Colonialist Casteist Continuum

In the 200-year history of Western Indological and/or comparative philological institutions, there is a predominance of brahmins. The Indians who were violently othered by brahmins as untouchables, lower castes, and women continue to suffer gatekeeping in such disciplines in Europe and North America. Karthick Ram Manoharan writes, "[T]here is hardly any representation of Dalits, Backward Castes, and Tribes—who constitute the majority of the Indian population—among Indian postcolonial academics in the West or at home. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Indian postcolonialism has largely been an upper-caste affair" (Manoharan 1). The self-privileging of brahmin students and researchers and their resulting preponderance in South Asian humanities and social sciences, including Sanskrit and comparative linguistics studies, is widespread in the West, like in India. The participation of caste-oppressed Indians in the Western academy and their lived-life rebuttal of and counter-discourse against caste, race, and gender inequalities would undercut the assumptions and practices of brahminization of South Asia and the Indian diaspora. To decolonize Indology and Sanskrit Studies in the West, it is time, therefore, to reset its priorities for the sake of those ignored by such disciplines, including women (regardless of their caste), men, children, and LGBTQIA+ people in marginalized religious, regional, and vernacular communities in India.

The imperative to decolonize Indology is a feminist one. Religious texts with the colonial Western focus on Sanskrit upheld the brahmin male gaze, ignoring the ways that brahmin women and non-brahmins were hierarchically ordered, dispossessed, displaced, and endured gruesome bodily violence and death. Regarding the gender problem in Sanskrit, Stephanie W Jamison's "Women 'Between the Empires' and 'Between the Lines'" argues that the sedimentation of brahmin-male-favoring-designs in Indian society was done through religious texts and practices dating back to ancient times. She writes that in the Dharmasutras and Dharmasastras, "the preoccupation is simply the *dharma of a male brahmin* following a traditional way of life, and women are essentially invisible to these texts, except as they impact *the life of the brahmin*

male … [and even in the later Dharmasastras] *the brahmin male is still the central theme*" (Jamison 191, my emphasis). Partly because of the legitimacy that the collusion between Eurocentrism and brahmincentrism has given to brahminical patriarchy, such brahminical literatures have only inadequately been subjected to antirace, anticaste, and feminist critique.[31] This has further undermined the multilingual, multicultural, and multireligious societies of South Asia.[32]

In addition, the imperative to decolonize is also a legal one. It is important to note that colonialists in collusion with brahmin-males encoded casteist practices within the Indian legal system. British colonial machinery set up the legal system through texts such as John Zephaniah Holwell's *Interesting Historical Events relating to the Provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Hindostan* … (1765) in which he worked out the "Religious Tenets of the Gentoos" ("Hindus"). This was reissued, with some additions, under a new title *A Review of the Original Principles, religious and moral, of the Ancient Brahmins* in 1779 (Marshall 5–6). Though Holwell himself probably did not know Sanskrit, or knew only a little, he effectively became the racist and casteist voice of both the oxymoronic "ancient brahmins" and "modern brahmins" rather than of Indians in general. The Governor General of India, Warren Hastings (1732–1818), formed a commission of "eleven *Pandits*" (brahmins) under Holwell who were "instructed to draw on the best authorities and to lay down the law once and for all" (Marshall 10–11). This was published as the *Gentoo Code* in 1776. Soon after, in 1778, R. E. Raspe's German translation of the text was published under the title *Gesetzbuche der Gentoos*. Hastings recruited Charles Wilkins to publish *Bhagavad Gita* in 1785 and then William Jones to translate *Institutes of Hindu Law; Or, the Ordinances of Manu* in 1794, which eventually gave the final shape to a set of "laws" favoring brahmins—which are still referred to today in judicial judgments in postcolonial India.[33] One of the consequences of this colonialist casteist collusion was the universalization of brahmincentric immorality through one of the most violent religious texts that humanity has ever witnessed: Manudharmashastra prescribes punishments that include the cutting of eleven body parts of the South Asian women and men who would breach the barriers of race and caste through consensual sex and everyday life interactions.[34] Such texts set the precedent for the gruesome violence and death often suffered by those who contravene brahminical caste segregation in postcolonial India.

The centering of brahmin-male edicts within colonial legal projects gave texts such as the Manusmriti a centrality they should not have had, working against most Indians who were from various religious, regional, and linguistic communities. German Indology and European and North American Sanskrit Studies joined their hands together, shamefully failing to interrogate Manu and Manudharmashastra as non-representative of diverse South Asians.

Contemporary recognitions that this was the case were largely ignored, such as that of the German Georg Buehler, who worked at Elphinstone College in Bombay (Mumbai) between 1863 and 1880 and who was unequivocal that *Manu* represented the perspectives of "Aryas"/"Aryans" only.[35] In the present, Sanskritists such as Patrick Olivelle agree that "the brahmanical vision of society is largely absent in South Asian inscriptions that are *not* in Sanskrit and whose makers or instigators have *no* association with Brahmanism. It is absent from the inscriptions of Asoka. They refer to none of the four *varnas* except the Brahmins, nor to the system as a whole. The same is true of the early Tamil inscriptions" (Olivelle, *Ashoka* 58, emphasis in original).

It is also important to emphasize that the colonialist casteist continuum is also responsible for the brahminical vegetarian vigilantism against many Indian communities. Recently, this brahminical culinary violence has affected the gastronomical cultures of non-brahmin and Indigenous Indians. Certain foods, such as beef, are being banned by brahmins and other casteist groups who pretentiously identify themselves as "pure vegetarians"—even as they consume food, medicine, and COVID vaccinations that are also based on animal-based extracts. In fact, such brahminical culinary impositions against most Indians have been offensively given the status of being a "Hindu meal" in the airline industry. The postcolonial Indian state-supported brahminical culinary vigilantism aims to wipe out the meat-centered food cultures of Indians who have lived unconnected with and antithetical to such brahminical claims across the Indian subcontinent from the precolonial period. Paradoxically, historian and Sanskritist D. N. Jha's study *The Holy Cow* indisputably shows that brahmins relished multiple species of birds and animals as their food, including beef.[36] Aditya Kiran Kakati's recent ethnographic study confirms the popularity of pork among "Hindus" in New Delhi and elsewhere (Kakati 113–24). But vegetarian vigilantism is at the core of global brahminism by which caste, gender, and religious segregation has been normativized in postcolonial South Asia and beyond. Nonetheless, there has always been a deep resistance against this colonialist casteist continuum as well as postcolonial brahminism.

Toward a Castefree Language, Literature, and History

Brahmincentric orientalism has faced critical scrutiny from various religious, regional, and vernacular communities in South Asia about whom we are only beginning to learn now. For instance, the Tamil Buddhists of South India were one such community to openly oppose brahminism/casteism during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Their Buddhist movement rejected and interrogated the brahminical claims, practices, and texts that legitimated race-caste-based cultural, spatial, and economic segregation, rebutting birth-based and violent notions of *varna-jati*,which referred to color/race/caste. The Tamil

Buddhists undercut the brahmin arrogation of the right to determine the identities of the South Asians they subjugated. They refuted all such brahminical claims of untouchability and caste as fictitious, mystical, unscientific, and antihuman deceptions. More importantly, they saw themselves as the descendants of Buddhism, which has had a long casteless and anticaste indigenous history in South Asia, preceding the Indo-Aryan invaders.[37] In fact, Tamil communities were the pioneers of modern Buddhism in South Asia, interconnecting and asserting their casteless identity as ancient and modern Buddhists.

Iyothee Thass (1845–1914) was the founder of the modern Buddhist movement of the casteless and anticaste Indians in the late-nineteenth-century Madras presidency.[38] After his conversion to Buddhism in Sri Lanka in 1898, he returned to the Tamil country to establish the South Indian Buddhist Association. Thass published a weekly, *The Tamilian*, from 1907 to 1914. He was its editor until his death. Thass carried out a visionary recognition of the inseparability of caste and gender problems, leading to his writing of a section titled *Lady's Column* in *The Tamilian,*[39] within which many Tamil Buddhist women writers asserted their feminist standpoints. They called for collective mobilization for the education and employment of girls and women. In addition, Tamil Buddhist women (and men) also wrote against child marriage, demanded care of the body and sexuality of girls and women, and called for widow remarriage in the early twentieth century.[40] Thus, *The Tamilian*, representing the people who asserted their Tamil-linguistic individual and collective identity by rejecting and refuting caste-identities of all kinds, became the vehicle for mobilizing Tamils and Indians against caste and gender violence in modern India.

Most importantly, Thass and his fellow Tamil Buddhist women and men exposed the brahminical invention of caste and untouchability and the methods through which brahmins had become the prime beneficiaries of Aryan racism and casteism in India.[41] They asserted that brahmins and other non-brahmin self-privileging-caste groups who emulated brahminical caste-power should be held responsible for all forms of caste-based segregation, dispossession, displacement, and oppression. For instance, Iyothee Thass writes, "[T]hose who proclaim themselves to be brahmins do so by denigrating others in mean terms, on the one hand, and by destroying other families (i.e., non-brahmins), on the other" (Thass, "Veshappiramina Vedanta" 1). For these reasons, the Tamil Buddhists were also the pioneers of reparations against the self-privileging casteist groups. They demanded primary to higher education for caste-oppressed Indians with state scholarships and equal employment opportunity in the institutions of colonial modernity, thereby displacing the monopoly of brahmins. Petitioning the British, they called for health facilities and initiated the land-to-the-tiller movement.[42] It is significant to note here that the caste-oppressed Indians understood how fictitious caste-identity

claims enabled the accumulation of wealth of the casteists, particularly the disproportionate land control of brahmins in the precolonial period and notoriously more so across the Indian subcontinent by their collusion with the colonialists. Despite the violence of the colonialist casteist continuum, the casteless and anticaste Indians sought to undercut the temple and other land-based brahmin power by demanding land redistribution. In addition, to transform their lives, they also pooled their own resources from casteless and anticaste Tamils and Tamil/Indian diaspora for a vocational educational movement in the Madras Presidency, "The Non-Caste Dravidian Industrials Limited" in 1908 (Australiavasi 5). In their mobilizing of the reading public against caste/casteism, the Tamil Buddhists had a profound role in creating the non-brahmin movements that built on their cultural, political, economic, and historical interventions in colonial and postcolonial South India.

Tamil Buddhist critiques of caste in the late nineteenth century unleashed three crucial impacts in colonial India. First, the Tamil Buddhists framed race, caste, and gender discrimination as transnational instantiations of antihuman oppression carried out by self-privileging persons in India, South Africa, North America, and Europe. Iyothee Thass, titling his editorial in English "An inquiry into the causes for sympathy with Indians in South Africa," writes a four-part series in *The Tamilian* from December 13 to December 31, 1913 in which he interrogates the casteist tendencies of Indian National Congress (INC) for discriminating against the indentured laborers in South Africa and elsewhere as "lower castes." Questioning the INC appeal for British intervention in South Africa, Thass asks poignantly, "who is responsible for the Indian immigrants' suffering in foreign nations?" and answers that it is "those who wear the stink of caste" (the self-privileging-caste groups) that call their fellow Indians untouchables and kill them directly and indirectly. Because there is ignorance about the problems of "Indigenous Indians" (*poorvaindiyarkal*) overseas, Thass writes that he will carry out a comparative analysis of these problems in the Indian diaspora in South Africa and elsewhere in subsequent parts (Thass, "An Enquiry" 3).

Second, the Tamil Buddhists reclaimed their history, in their own words, by their self-representation, within which brahmins and their casteism were framed as an external invasion against Indigenous Indians. In the process, the Tamil Buddhists, by means of their proficiency in intertextual and intermedial sources, reconstructed their pre-brahmin casteless cultures, literatures, memories, and histories as well as anticaste vernacular Indian communities in South Asia.[43] They were the Buddhist polyglots who used their proficiency in Pali, Tamil, Sanskrit, and English materials to assert their caste free Buddhist vernacular identities, subjectivities, affects, and knowledge practices in the ancient, medieval, and modern periods.[44] Iyothee Thass underlines that Buddhism could spread in India and beyond only because of its insistence on ethical humanism in material, cultural, and religious aspects. This, for him,

was manifested in the way the Buddhists invented languages, their horizontal division of labor, their this-worldly concern for the well-being of all humans, and their respect for all humans, animals, and nature. Elaborating these two Buddhist developments, Thass writes:

> Pali, Sanskrit, and Tamil came into being to spread Buddhist ethics [*aram*] in Magadh country [*Magadha Nadu*], Sakya country [*Sagata Nadu*], and Dravidian country [*Tiravida Nadu*] respectively. The formations of these languages signal the shift from oral to written tradition to spread Buddhist values far and wide. (Thass, "History of the Indian Nation" 2)

Furthermore, Thass in all his series on the history of the Indian nation regularly cites Pali, Sanskrit, English, and Tamil sources to substantiate his explications on Buddhism.

Finally, the Tamil Buddhists represented their own casteless and anticaste views by reading, speaking, writing, publishing, petitioning, and mobilizing the public for a transformative politics in modern India. They hoped an organization like the Indian National Congress (INC) would care for the caste-oppressed and petitioned them to represent their educational and employment demands to the British in 1891. But the INC failed to respond to their call as it was predominantly a brahmin organization. Since only some casteist sections benefited selfishly through the INC, Thass asked whether it was right to call this organization the Indian National Congress, answering in the negative:

> [G]oing by the beneficiaries of this organization it should be called the Bengali Congress [*vankalasaathiyor congress*] or brahmin Congress [*piraminasaatiyor congress*]. Because such people negotiate only their demands with the British, and do not care for the casteless Muslims and Dravidians, it does not matter whether they exist in this nation or not. No wonder they have split into moderates and extremists. (Thass, "Kaangirasukamittiyin Kaalaakolam-II" 2)

Here, Thass rejected the INC as nothing but an outfit to serve the interests of the brahmins, not the Indian nation. Significantly, the Tamil Buddhists' exposure of the casteist groups reaffirms the views that "native elites" were only "using the subaltern minorities as pawns" to disproportionately prosper by "falsely universalizing [the] project of national independence" (Mangharam 31–32). The INC, which was established in 1885, had lost its credibility to represent the casteless and anticaste Indians within its sixth year, in 1891. For the Tamil Buddhists, the INC was an outfit of Eurocentrism and brahmin-centrism. They critiqued colonialist and casteist collusion for upholding race-caste segregation through the colonial state sponsored categories such as Depressed Classes, Panchamas/*panchamas*, and so on.

The Tamil Buddhist movement and *The Tamilian* were unprecedented casteless and anticaste voices in modern India that interrogated caste. Through their own vernacular and casteless practices and writings, they refuted the caste-imposing mythological propaganda of brahmins, their caste-segregating

religious and cultural practices, and their racist-casteist literatures, such as Manudharmashastra and brahminical epics, which brazenly legitimized bodily violence and death against women, men, and children who rejected casteism and breached caste segregation. Crucially, the Tamil Buddhists mobilized the reading public to undercut the political precedence that the brahmins had gained through colonial education, employment, and land holding by colluding with the imperialists. In this sense, the Tamil Buddhists and their anticaste movement unveiled the colonialist casteist continuum.

Crucially, their political assertions sprung from the Tamil Buddhist interventions in the cultural sphere. By distrusting the brahmin congress and the imperial state, the Tamil Buddhists mobilized their own resources in India and from the Tamil Buddhist diaspora—who were the descendants of the indentured labor from the 1830s—in Australia, the Caribbean, South Africa, Fiji, Malaysia, Singapore, and elsewhere for their transformational politics against caste in South Asia and beyond.[45]

There was a time when Thass and other Tamil Buddhists were emboldened by the hope that, unlike the brahmin Congress, the British would improve the conditions of lower caste Indians. This was not due to a lack of critical understanding of colonialism or orientalism but because the racism and casteism of brahmins and others compelled the Tamil Buddhists to look elsewhere for allies and strategies toward liberation. Nevertheless, Thass and other Tamil Buddhists soon realized that this was a futile expectation when they saw how those who brazenly self-promoted themselves as privileged-caste *swarajists* or self-rulers and who wanted to take away the state power from the British also boasted about their racial interrelations with the European imperialists[46]—clearly, the British imperialists were not for the caste-oppressed Indians, as they found the brahmins trustworthy agents and executioners of their imperial motives. This would lead Thass to describe "the demand for self-rule, *swarajya*, as a ploy to bring back destruction to India through brahminism" ("Indiyavin Kadaikalajseerum Sirappum—I" 2). Manu Goswami's critique that the "categories of high Brahminism" influenced the politics of the Indian national movement is substantiated by the Tamil Buddhist rejection of categories such as *swarajists* and *swadeshis* of the Indian National Congress (Goswami 627).

The brahmin nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak's notions of Aryan connections between brahmins and Europeans, for instance, mirrored the Orientalist views of Friedrich Max Mueller, amongst others. Unlike Tilak, who found an Aryan home in the Arctic for the brahmins and Vedas (Tilak 313), Thass saw himself as native to South India and did not hesitate to assert that, like the brahmins in India, the Europeans were also immigrants.[47] But, unlike German Indologists like Max Mueller and brahmins like Tilak, who subscribed to a theory of Aryan kinship and supremacy, for Thass, Europeans and brahmins could not simply be clubbed together. He mockingly asked that, if both

brahmins and Europeans were Aryans, why should the casteist *swarajists* be bothered whether Ram or Lakshman (the characters from the epic Ramayana) should rule; in other words, what difference did it make if India was ruled by an Indian or a European? Thass rhetorically asked, "[I]f the brahmins were born from the face of their God Brahma, why have not the Europeans, their kin, been born in the same way? Why don't the Europeans have Manudharmashastra, casteist brahmin categories or casteist arrogance among themselves, or avataars that destroyed Buddhism?" ("Iropiyarkaludan Indukkal" 3).[48]

Thass not only interrogated the Aryan-varna theory of both brahmin-males and Indologists but also the Europeans' patronage of diverse brahminical racist-casteist practices. Furthermore, he exposed the brahmin patriarchy's claims of commonalities with the Europeans by ridiculing them for not having invented or achieved anything worthy of humanity. Looking at European technological advances in transportation and communication that were beneficial to non-Europeans as well, for instance, Thass asks whether the brahmins have done anything that is worthwhile for themselves or for their non-brahmin others?[49] Brahmins, he mocks, have only invented the following:

> Keeping tuft, placing sacred thread around the ears [while urinating and defecating], checking the age of teeth, insisting on cotton for one and woolen sacred thread for others, praying for half-an-hour by standing in the river, declaring that Vedas are not meant for *sootirarkal* (Shudras/lower castes) and one should not eat in front of the *sootirarkal*, that one should kill Paraiyars with no sympathy, that they ask for alms on the night of eclipse and other days, that they give life to the gods of sand and rocks, and ask for money without qualms during death anniversaries. The benefits of these inventions could only be reaped after one's death by standing before Siva and Vishnu, the brahmin gods. Since such destructive creations are the mark of self-proclaimed upper castes, it is wrong to claim that they and Europeans belong to the same race (*aryavartanatar*). The Hindus and Europeans, thus, will never live together. It is only confirmed by the Hindus' reluctance to join the Europeans in the tramway jobs. [due to perceived indignities or inabilities] (Thass, "Iropiyarkaludan Indukkal" 3)

Here, it is also evident that the category "Hindu" stood for the brahmins and that it was not inclusive. The caste-oppressed Indians were alienated by and from it. Through such critiques, Thass uncovered and anticipated the irony of casteist groups' collusion in the creation of the racist-casteist categories of Indological philological projects, on the one hand, while orchestrating an anticolonial politics of casteist groups against Europeans, on the other. Despite the contradictions of such collusions and conflicts, their logic is clear: both seemingly contradictory moves guaranteed positions of power to casteist groups over the Indigenous Indians they subjugated and exploited as untouchables and lower castes in colonial and postcolonial India.

In contrast, for Thass and the Tamil Buddhists, Buddhism was a repository through which to understand casteless and anticaste histories of the communities who were oppressed by brahminism/casteism. Thass used Pali, Tamil, and Sanskrit materials to interpret them as inter-related languages and sources, which served the cause of Buddhism in the Indian subcontinent. More than that, he was highly critical of Indologists (whose English language publications he followed closely) and their racist-casteist prejudices. In *Buddhist Review*, a quarterly published in London, for instance, he challenged Max Mueller's and T. W. Rhys Davis's claims that Buddhism had originated in the Upanishads (brahminical/"Hindu" texts), deciding that these conclusions were based on inadequate research (in Tamil he writes this as *tellara visaaranai saiyatakaalattil*). In response to Thass's argument, there was an about face in the quarterly. While recognizing their revised position that Buddhism pre-dated certain "Hindu" textual formations, Thass still castigates them for making such a claim in the first place and argues that *aadivetam* (Vedas) and *upanidatam* (Upanishads) only seek to resonate with the enunciations of the Buddha that preceded them. Instead of blindly believing any unverifiable claim, Thass argued that it was important to critically examine a text and its derivatives so that one gets to know the language, the author, the time, and the implications of its composition. Only then, he concludes, can one attain wisdom from it to share with others.[50] Thass also rebuffed brahmin claims of commonalities between the casteist groups (the "Hindus") and Europeans, writing an editorial in *The Tamilian* that "The British-Supported Educational Institutions Should Not Have Religion- and Caste-Based Curricula" (Thass, "The British-Supported Educational" 3).[51]

Conclusion

European Indology, with its influence in comparative philology and history of South Asia, has the unenviable legacy of propping up brahmin-centric perspectives about India for more than 250 years. And such views have spread to the North American Academy today, where they are flourishing in their new home in South Asian and Sanskrit Studies departments. Given the blatant favoritism to brahminism/casteism in and through Sanskrit Studies, it is high time to ask whether it should still form the center of South Asian Studies. Refreshingly, the incorporation of Buddhist Studies, Tibetology, Tamil Studies, and so on into Western Indology has enriched its complexity over the years, especially in the postcolonial era. These new developments still compel us to ask whether they contribute to decolonizing perspectives in South Asia. That is, to examine and reject the race-caste edifices of Indian societies, since the Vedic age, as well as to unravel the casteless and anticaste languages, literatures, cultures, memories, and histories of vernacular South Asians.

This essay shows how the collusion between Eurocentric and brahmin-centric power only served European imperial motives and the caste-based wealth accumulation of go-between groups such as brahmins. The colonialist casteist continuum discriminated against and exploited most South Asians. Decolonization has to focus on undoing the legacy of not only the Eurocentric imperialism of the colonial past but also of the colonialist-casteism that continues to influence civil societal views and practices, state policies and resources, and the academy. The pejorative practices of caste and gender continue to dehumanize many individuals and communities in South Asia. Nonetheless, the students and researchers who are still trained in such Eurocentric-brahmincentric prisms too often engage in a pitying pathos for "untouchable" and "lower caste" Indians, rather than focusing on the latter's sizable epistemic and ontological contributions to the casteless and anticaste histories of the subcontinent. Just as postcolonial theory's commitment to "provincializing Europe" has not grown to provincialize brahmincentric theory and practice, Western Indology has continued to focus almost exclusively —except for some researchers working on popular culture, religion, and gender—on textual, cultural, and historical aspects of brahmins and their dehumanizing caste-valorization. Those who identify as brahmins, their birth-caste-based claims, their caste-capital from their very names, their self-privileging accumulation of power and wealth, and their gender and caste prejudices and violence that have come down from precolonial and colonial into postcolonial periods have not been interrogated and indicted in decolonizing theories and practices.

Due to the history of scholarship that I have examined in this essay, as well as through continued brahmin gatekeeping of academia, other Indian communities remain under-studied, deemed unworthy of having their language, literature, and vernacular history be taken seriously. Non-brahmin students and scholars remain under-represented in studentship, scholarship, fellowship, grants, administration, and faculty positions. Such South Asians' discursive and non-discursive narratives and practices are partially recognized at the most by identifying them through neo-marginalizing categories such as "dalits"—not all of whom embrace such a name for its negative valences and its undermining of positive individual and collective memory and histories. In fact, there is an open rejection of this term in South India, the Caribbean, and North America.[52] There is also a trend of condescending recognition of the category "dalits" in the citations of Indian academics based in the Western academy at the same time that these academics continue to gatekeep South Asian Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Science Studies in the West.[53]

The instances of Iyothee Thass and the Tamil Buddhist movement illustrate that the marginalization of these casteless and anticaste voices is not due to the unavailability of sources, texts, epigraphs, traditions, and movements, which are outside the fold of brahminical history. It is time to engage with such

materials in the theories and practices of decolonization in the West as well as South Asia. Today, Western Indology needs to step up and move toward post-brahmin-centric methods, institutions, and recruitments—a move that could be enhanced by Critical Caste Studies. More importantly, after over two centuries, global Indology, philology, and history will have to take the languages, literatures, and histories of casteless and anticaste Indians seriously. For such postcolonial South Asians and their diaspora, decolonization in the present inseparably means dismantling the vestiges of Eurocentrism as well as pursuing debrahminization and decastization toward post-brahmin South Asian Studies and post-caste societies in and beyond South Asia.

Notes

1. Brahminical-patriarchy is a term that acknowledges the intertwined nature of patriarchal and caste oppression, drawing on the insights of Dr B. R. Ambedkar, who, in his 1916 paper, "Castes in India," pointed to endogamy (the principle or custom of marrying within a particular group) as the basis of the caste system. Endogamy worked through the practices of *sati*, enforced widowhood, and "girl marriage" (what we today would term child marriage). Control over and regulation of women's sexuality is, in his account, the basis of the caste system.
2. I use lower case "b" to write brahmin/brahminism/brahmincentrism/brahminization to problematize 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.
3. See Aloysius.
4. See Raymond; Halbfass.
5. See Ayyathurai, "Buddhism's Long Fight."
6. Here, Tamil Buddhist standpoints define indigeneity as a term applying to those whose presence in the subcontinent precedes the brahmin/Aryan invasion and the violence of untouchability and caste. That is, the Tamil Buddhists viewed Hindu/Aryan presence in their vernacular regions as a later development through the decimation of casteless Indians. They re-center their casteless historical consciousness of being "Indigenous Buddhists" (*poorvabauta kudikal*) and "Indigenous Indians" (*poorvaindiyarkal*). Therefore, the term "Indigenous Indians" is used in this essay to denote the Tamil Buddhist sense of self-identification of being casteless Indians and their rejection of the later brahminical imposition of casteist indignities.
7. This P-word is notoriously used by brahmin, non-brahmin, and white researchers in their academic productions with utter disregard for the caste-oppressed communities in India and Indian diaspora.
8. This also shows how dehumanizing caste identities were imposed on Indians by self-privileging-caste groups and the colonial state, without any consent from them. Problematically, the postcolonial Indian state policies continue to mimic such categories from the colonial period. The aspirations of casteless and anticaste Indians' cultures, memories, histories, and reparative demands do not matter in the Indian state's consideration.
9. In the postcolonial period, the Indian state's re-legitimizing the colonial categories via the so-called "welfare policies" has only stigmatized the caste-oppressed Indians as

Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Castes, and so on. None of such categories has led to either the annihilation of brahminism or the emancipation of caste-oppressed Indians. Instead, women, men, and children are now traumatized as "ST persons," "SC persons," or as "dalits" (that is, "the broken" or "depressed" persons), and "OBC persons." We are far from repudiating such pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial racist-casteist continuities intellectually, politically, and humanistically.

10. Brahminism is the institutionalized birth-based claim to superiority, power, and violence of those called "brahmins," since the Vedic period c. 1000 BCE. Brahmins see themselves as retaining the top spot in the caste hierarchy and dictate the segregating ways and means of the casteist order against casteless and anticaste women, men, children, LGBTQIA+ people, and diverse vernacular communities of South Asia and beyond. The benign and malevolent forms of brahminism/casteism have been normativized, culturalized, internationalized, and naturalized more virulently in colonial and postcolonial India. Inclusive raceless, casteless, and gender-sensitive humanism is antithetical to brahminism.
11. Brahmincentrism is brahmin-caste groups assuming religio-cultural centrality by subordinating, exploiting, dispossessing, and displacing innumerable indigenous South Asian communities as non-brahmin, untouchable, and low humans on the basis of their birth, language, religion, regional origin, and class.
12. See Bronkhorst; Birkvad; Dwivedi; Cháirez-Garza et al.
13. See Ayyathurai "Living Buddhism" (1–19).
14. See Kikon (278–97).
15. See Ayyathurai "It is time for a new subfield." Brueck; For a recent and detailed study of global brahminism which views itself as a contribution to "Critical Caste Studies school" see Shankar.
16. See Marshall.
17. See Birkvad; Dwivedi. For a brief comparative analysis of brahminism with Nazism and Hitler, see Bronkhorst.
18. See Radhakrishnan.
19. See Chatterjee, "Why Teacher's Day in India is a Sham?"
20. See Ayyathurai, "Germans, casteless Tamils, and brahminical sciolism" (97–123).
21. See Figueira.
22. See Dvivedi.
23. This was part of the violent brahminical purification, canonization, and censorship of multiple vernacular South Asian languages. For instance, the North Eastern Indian languages, such as Assamese, suffered "pure Bengallee" as well as Assamese brahmin-male canonization and censorship, which led to the occlusion of crucial linguistic elements of Indigenous Indians who were condescendingly othered as "lower classes" and "tribals" through the collusion between the colonialists and casteists. See Kar (24, 27). I thank the second anonymous reviewer for this reference.
24. See Ayyathurai, "Germans, casteless Tamils, and brahminical sciolism."
25. See Dvivedi.
26. For a critical analysis of Vivekananda's neo-Hinduism, see Mangharam.
27. I thank the second anonymous reviewer for this reference and their generous appreciation of the arguments and recommendations to strengthen this essay.
28. See Ober; Truschke.
29. See Wagoner (783–814). See also Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind*.
30. See Ayyathurai, "Germans, casteless Tamils, and brahminical sciolism."
31. This is more so because of gatekeeping the participation of casteless and anticaste women, particularly from those who are unconnected with brahminical religio-

cultural histories in Indological and Sanskrit Studies. A few brahmin women postcolonial academics, as is evident from their very names, are challenging the "ideology and politics of Sanskrit" *for* women who suffer casteist marginalization in Sanskrit Studies. Since they are not able to generate a castefree and anticaste intellectual solidarity, their breakthrough against the wall of brahmin-male power remains farfetched and they prefer to turn away from it. See Maini.

32. For studies that engage with such questions, see Chandra; Cháirez-Garza et al.
33. See Chakraborty.
34. See Olivelle.
35. But who are these Aryas? It is clear from various brahminical texts that brahmin-males invented these four *varnas*, i.e., race-caste-based sectarian Aryan groups of brahmins and non-brahmin caste kshatriyas and vaishyas, identifying the Indians they subordinated and exploited as the low species fourth *varna* as shudras. The Indigenous Indians who did not belong to and also resisted such brahminical codifications were declared by brahmins as *avarnas* and untouchables.
36. See Jha.
37. See Ober.
38. See Aloysius, *Nationalism*; Aloysius, *Religion*; Dharmaraj; Rajangam (9–32).
39. Iyothee Thass and many other Tamil Buddhists were regular contributors to *The Tamilian*. They were in conversation with the Tamil reading public in South Indian cities, towns, and villages. *The Tamilian* carried multiple themes in each issue. Editorials and commentaries on colonial modernity, economy, technology, agriculture, health columns, sports news, philosophy, African Americans, Buddhism and its diversity, Jainism, Islam, Christianity, and advertisements were featured. *The Tamilian* also had a *Correspondence* section in which Letters-to-the-Editor were published. Although only a few hundred copies were printed every week from 1907 to 1914, *The Tamilian* had a global reach. It spread to diverse Tamil localities in South Asia and beyond as far as Burma/Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia, South Africa, and the Caribbean where the caste-oppressed Tamils were taken as indentured laborers during the colonial period.
40. See Ayyathurai, "Colonialism, caste, and gender" (133–56).
41. See Thass, "History of the Indian Nation" (12 October 1910) (2); Thass, "History of the Indian Nation" (12 July 1911) (2).
42. See Thass, "Kaangirasukamittiyin Kaalaakolam-I" (3); Thass, "Kaangirasukamittiyin Kaalaakolam-II" (2); Thass, "It is the Laws of Manu" (3); Thass, "Chennai Rajathani Vivasaya Virutikkeduti-II" (3); Thass, "Chennai Rajathani Vivasaya Virutikkeduti-II" (3).
43. See Ayyathurai, "Memory, History, and Casteless Consciousness" (9–26).
44. See Ayyathurai, "Living Buddhism."
45. See Ayyathurai, "Emigration against caste."
46. See Thass, "Kaangirasukamittiyin Kaalaakolam-I" (3); Thass, "Kaangirasukamittiyin Kaalaakolam-II" (2).
47. See Thass, "Indutesattin Nadukalakedum Ilivum-II" (3).
48. See also, Thass, "The Essential Principles Which A True Man Should Practice-III" (3).
49. Although Thass sometimes critiqued brahmins as pseudo-brahmins, he does not recuperate or concede any virtue to any form of brahmin identity. More specifically, he meant to unveil brahmins' clandestine, deceptive, and failed efforts to mimic Buddhist *Bhikkhus* even as they rejected the ethical and humane principles and practices of Buddhism. For Thass, therefore, brahmin identity (or any caste identity) is anything but worthy of emulation by Indians.
50. See Thass, "Upanidatangaliliruntu Boutatanmam Tondriyatho?" (2).

51. Here, it is vital to note that a Saivite anti-brahmin movement that emerged within the non-brahmin self-privileging-caste groups in the early twentieth century was not caste-free. Instead, they were as casteist as the brahmins against the Indigenous Tamils they re-marginalized as Paraiyars and so on.
52. See Ayyathurai, "Emigration Against Caste."
53. See Paliwal.

Acknowledgments

I thank Dr. Karthick Ram Manoharan for suggesting to the *LIT* journal to solicit my Critical Caste Studies work-based essay for publication. Dr. Mukti Lakhi Mangharam was kind to invite me to contribute a new study, which would fit with the objectives and review processes of the journal. But for her close reading and thorough editorial advice, this essay would not have been shaped into the way it is now. I am grateful to Dr. Mangharam. The two external reviewers gave detailed and generous comments which helped to strengthen the arguments. My sincere thanks to them.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Author Bio

Gajendran Ayyathurai (PhD Columbia) is an anthropologist and a historian from Göttingen, Germany. He has published on the culture, memory, and history of the casteless Tamils/Indians in Tamil, English, and German.

Works Cited

Abraham, Itty. "Narrating India In/And the World: Colonial Origins and Postcolonial Contestations." *Debating Worlds*, edited by G. John Ikenberry Daniel Deudney and Karoline Postel-Vinay. Oxford UP, 2023, pp. 184–210.

Aloysius, G. *Nationalism Without the Nation in India*. Oxford UP, 1997.

———. *Religion as Emancipatory Identity: A Buddhist Movement Among the Tamils Under Colonialism*. New International, 2000.

Ambedkar, B. R. "Annihilation of Caste." *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, edited by Vasant Moon, vol. 1. Government of Maharashtra, 2016, pp. 23–96.

———. "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, genesis, and Development." *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, edited by Vasant Moon, vol. 1. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014, pp. 3–22.

Australiavasi, Orr. *Tirutamilpaandiyarkaal satrunokanmin!" The Tamilian, No. 52*. Vol. II, 10, June 1908.

Ayyathurai, Gajendran. "Buddhism's Long Fight Against Brahminism and Caste." *Himal-South Asian*, 2023, https://www.himalmag.com/author/gajendran-ayyathurai/.

———. "Colonialism, Caste, and Gender: The Emergence of Critical Caste Feminism in Modern South India." *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2021, pp. 133–56. doi:10.1353/jowh.2021.0030. Fall.

———. "Emigration Against Caste, Transformation of the Self and Realization of the Casteless Society." *Essays in Philosophy*, vol. 22, no. 1/2, 2021, pp. 45–65.
———. "Germans, Casteless Tamils, and Brahminical Sciolism in Modern South India." *Nodes of Translation: Rethinking Modern Intellectual History Between South Asia and Germany*, edited by Razak Khan and Martin Christof-Füchsle. De Gruyter Press, 2024, pp. 97–123.
———. "It is Time for a New Subfield: Critical Caste Studies." *London School of Economics and Political Science*, 2021, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2021/07/05/it-is-time-for-a-new-subfield-critical-caste-studies/.
———. "Living Buddhism: Migration, Memory, and Castelessness in South India." *History and Anthropology*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2020, pp. 1–19.
———. "Memory, History, and Casteless Consciousness: Tamil Buddhists in Modern South India." *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2023, pp. 9–26. doi:10.1080/19472498.2022.2162730.
Basu, Anustup. *Hindutva as Political Monotheism*. Duke UP, 2020.
Bengali, Shashank, and Juan Perez Jr. "India Bans 'Vulgar' Book by University of Chicago Scholar." blogspot.com, 2014. https://bharatkalyan97.blogspot.com/2014/02/vulgar-book-by-wendy-doniger-chicago.html.
Berg, Dag Erik. *Dynamics of Caste and Law: Atrocities, Dalit Movements and Legal Developments in India's Democratic Order*. Cambridge UP, 2018.
Birkvad, Ida Roland. "The Ambivalence of Aryanism: A Genealogical Reading of India-Europe Connection." *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2020, pp. 58–79. doi:10.1177/0305829820971686.
Blackburn, Stuart. *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India*. Oriental Blackswan, 2003.
Bronkhorst, Johannes. *How the Brahmins Won: From Alexander to the Guptas*. E J Brill, 2016.
Brueck, Laura. "Critical Caste Studies and the Politics of Translating Dalit Literature." *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2023, pp. 32–49. doi:10.1353/mar.2023.a907320.
Cháirez-Garza, Jesús F. et al. "Introduction to the Special Issue: Rethinking Difference in India Through Racialization." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2022, pp. 193–215. doi:10.1080/01419870.2021.1977368.
Chakraborty, Atindriyo. "Manusmriti and the Judiciary – a Dangerous Game." *Countercurrents*, vol. 27, no. 7, 2020, https://countercurrents.org/2020/07/manusmriti-and-the-judiciary-a-dangerous-game/.
Chandra, Shefali. *The Sexual Life of English: Languages of Caste and Desire in Colonial India*. Duke UP, 2012.
Chatterjee, Arup K. "Why Teacher's Day in India is a Sham?: It is Not a Matter of Educational Success and Has Rather Become a Weapon for Exclusion of Education and Ethics." *Daily O*, 6 Sep. 2017, http://www.dailyo.in/politics/teachers-day-dr-sarvepalli-radhakrishnan-education-universities/story/1/19357.html.
Chunder, Rajarshi. "Tagore and Caste: From Brahmacharyasram to Swadeshi Movement." *Sahapedia*, vol. 19, Sep. 2018. https://www.sahapedia.org/tagore-and-caste-brahmacharyasram-swadeshi-movement-1901%E2%80%9307.
Deussen, Paul. *My Indian Reminiscences*. G. A. Natesan, 1893.
———. *The System of the Vedanta*. Motilal Banarasidas, 1972.
Dharmaraj, T. *Naan Yaen Dalithum Alla*. 2016.
Dirks, Nicholas B. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and Making of Modern India*. Princeton UP, 2001.
Dwivedi, Divya. "The Evasive Racism of Caste—And the Homological Power of the "Aryan" Doctrine." *Critical Philosophy of Race*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2023, pp. 209–45. doi:10.5325/critphilrace.11.1.0209.

Figueira, Dorothy M. *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority Through Myths of Identity*. State U of New York P, 2002.

Gaeffke, Peter. "India and the European Pessimistic Tradition." *Expanding and Merging Horizons: Contributions to South Asian and cross-Cultural Studies in Commemoration of Wilhelm Halbfass*, edited by Karin Preisendanz. Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2007, pp. 99–107.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. "The Pariah's Legend." *Poems of Places: An Anthology in 31 Volumes Asia: Vols. XXI–XXIII*. Translated by W. E. Aytoun, edited by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, bartleby.com, pp. 1876–79. https://www.bartleby.com/lit-hub/poems-of-places-an-anthology-in-31-volumes/the-pariahs-legend/.

Goswami, Manu. "From Swadeshi to Swaraj: Nation, Economy, Territory in Colonial South Asia, 1870 to 1907." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 40, no. 4, Oct, 1998, pp. 609–36. doi:10.1017/S0010417598001674.

Halbfass, Wilhelm. *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*. State U of New York P, 1991.

Jamison, Stephanie W. "Women 'Between the Empires' And 'Between the Lines." *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, edited by Patrick Olivelle. Oxford UP, 2006, pp. 191–214.

Jha, D. N. *The Myth of the Holy Cow*. Verso, 2002.

Kakati, Aditya Kiran. "For the Love of Pork: Eating in Ethnic Enclaves." *Odysseys of Plates and Palates: Food, Society, and Sociality*, edited by Catherine Gallin, Simeon S. Magliveras, and E. J. Brill, 2019, pp. 113–24.

Kar, Bodhisattva. "Tongue That Has No Bone': Fixing the Assamese Language, C. 1800 c.1930." *Studies in History*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2008, pp. 27–76. doi:10.1177/025764300702400102.

Keenleyside, T. A. "Diplomatic Apprenticeship: Pre-Independence Origins of Indian Diplomacy and Its Relevance for the Post-Independence Foreign Policy." *India Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 2, 1987, pp. April-June1987, pp. 97–120. doi:10.1177/097492848704300202.

Kikon, Dolly. "Dirty Food: Racism and Casteism in India." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2022, pp. 278–97. doi:10.1080/01419870.2021.1964558.

Larrimore, Mark. "Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of the 'Races'." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 25, Jan. 1 1999, pp. 99–125. doi:10.1080/00455091.1999.10716832.

Leonard, Dickens. "One Step Inside Tamilian: On the anti-Caste Writing of Language." *Social Scientist*, vol. 45, no. 1–2, 2017, pp. 19–32.

Maini, Kartik. "World Sanskrit Conference Shows That Sanskritic Scholarship in India Remains Afraid of Gender and Caste." firstpost.com, 2018, https://www.firstpost.com/living/world-sanskrit-conference-shows-that-sanskritic-scholarship-in-india-remains-afraid-of-gender-and-caste-4895051.html.

Mangharam, Mukti. *Literatures of Liberation: Non-European Universalisms and Democratic Progress*. Ohio State UP, 2017.

Manoharan, Karthick Ram. "Debrahminizing Decolonization: Imagining a New Curriculum." *All About Ambedkar: A Journal on Theory and Praxis*, vol. 1, no. 1, September-December 2020. https://www.allaboutambedkaronline.com/post/debrahminizing-decolonization-imagining-a-new-curriculum.

Marshall, P. J. *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge UP, 1970.

Max Mueller, Freidrich. *India: What Can it Teach Us?*. Penguin, 2000.

Mukherjee, Sugato. "Rabindranath Tagore: The globe-Trotting Bard." *Peepultree*, 27 July 2020, https://www.peepultree.world/livehistoryindia/story/people/rabindranath-tagores-travels.

Ober, Douglas. *Dust on the Throne: The Search for Buddhism in Modern India*. Stanford UP, 2023.

Olivelle, Patrick. *Ashoka: Portrait of a Philosopher King*. Harper Collins, 2023c.
———. *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Manava Dharmasastra*. Oxford UP, 2005.
Paliwal, Ankur. "How India's Caste System Limits Diversity in Science – in Six Charts." *Nature*, 11 Jan. 2023, https://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-023-00015-2/index.html.
Radhakrishnan, S. *Indian Philosophy – Vol I and Vol II*. George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1923 and 1927.
Rajangam, S. *Pandithar 175*. Neelam Press, 2021.
Schwab, Raymond. *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*. Columbia UP, 1984.
Shankar, Arjun. *Brown Saviors and Their Others: Race, Caste, labor, and the Global Politics of Help in India*. Duke UP, 2023.
Thass, Iyothee. "Indutesattin Nadukalakedum Ilivum-II." *The Tamilian*, vol. II, no. 2, June 24 1908.
———. "Indiyavin Kadaikalajseerum sirappum-I." *The Tamilian*, vol. II, no. 3, July 1 1908a.
———. "Veshappiramina Vedanta vivaram-I." *The Tamilian*, vol. II, no. 6, July 22 1908b.
———. "Kaangirasukamittiyin kaalaakolam-I." *The Tamilian*, vol. II, no. 17, Oct. 7 1908c.
———. "Kaangirasukamittiyin kaalaakolam-II." *The Tamilian*, vol. II, no. 18, Oct. 14 1908d.
———. "'History of the Indian Nation.' [*Indira Tesa Saritiram*]." *The Tamilian*, vol. IV, no. 12, Aug. 31 1910a.
———. "'History of the Indian Nation.' [*Indira Tesa Saritiram*]." *The Tamilian*, vol. IV: no. 18 Oct. 12 1910b.
———. "Upanidatangaliliruntu Boutatanmam Tondriyatho?" *The Tamilian*, vol. IV, no. 44, Feb. 8 1911a.
———. "Iropiyarkaludan Indukkal Enbor Ottuvalvarkalaa?" *The Tamilian*, vol. IV, no. 44, Apr. 12 1911b.
———. "The british-Supported Educational Institutions Should Not Have Religion- and caste-Based Curricula." *The Tamilian*, vol. IV, no. 48, 10 May 1911c.
———. "History of the Indian Nation.' [*Indira Tesa Saritiram*]." *The Tamilian*, vol V, no. 5, 12 Jul 1911d.
———. "It is the Laws of Manu That Today as the Bane of Agriculture." *The Tamilian*, vol. V no. 31, 10 Jan 1912.
———. "It is the Laws of Manu That Today as the Bane of Agriculture." *The Tamilian*, vol. VI, no. 48, 7 May 1913a.
———. "The Essential Principles which a True Man Should practice-III." *The Tamilian*, vol. VII, no. 7, 23 Jul 1913b.
———. "An Enquiry into the Causes for Sympathy with Indians in South Africa." *The Tamilian*, vol. VII no. 28, 17 Dec 1913c.
Tilak, B. G. *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*. Tilak Bros, 1956.
Truschke, Audrey. "Caste Control: Towards a Frank Reckoning of Who Represents Hinduism in History." *Canopy Forum*, 9 Mar 2022, https://canopyforum.org/2022/03/09/caste-control-towards-a-frank-reckoning-of-who-represents-hinduism-in-history/.
Wagoner, Philip. "Precolonial Intellectuals and the Production of Colonial Knowledge." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 45, no. 4, Oct 2003, 783–814.