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Book Review: India that is Bharat: Coloniality, Civilisation & Constitution

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first instalment of The Bharat trilogy by advocate J Sai Deepak. The author primarily deals with India's indigeneity, consciousness, and identity and the European colonisation's impact on it. The book is divided into namely three parts, i.e. coloniality, civilisation, and constitution to gauge the impact of the first on the latter two in the Indian context. The presence of civilisation between the other two in the sub-topic signifies the former's grim reality of trying to exist like a sandwich between coloniality and constitution. The author makes a stark difference between colonisation and colonialisation or colonial consciousness where the former is a product to achieve imperialism the latter is a state of mind or an idea through which the former is achieved. He further differentiates between the post-colonials and de-colonial schools of thought where the former is widely prevalent in India and the latter is presented as an indigenous alternative. Post-colonialism is a state of affairs that could be tangible and conspicuous or intangible and acknowledged whereas decoloniality is a state of mind just as coloniality is.

The pernicious effect of colonisation on former colonies (e.g. Latin America) is widely discussed using the works of western decolonial scholars to state that the fate of India was no exception. Colonial consciousness is targeted for its lasting and conspicuous impact on native Indians in contemporary India which can be seen in legal, political, and educational institutions across the ideological spectrum.

STRUCTURAL REVIEW

The introductory part is a more or less autobiography of the author and reason for taking up this venture. The book starts with Christopher Columbus's voyage to discover the other world or the non-Christian world in 1492 to make the reader aware of its colonising and evangelising intentions. Sai Deepak calls it the beginning of coloniality. He then goes on to decode the protestant reformation, the theory of two kingdoms, and the treaty of Westphalia and their secularised and not secular contents. He (Author) discusses India or Bharat as a civilisation in which Bharat's indigenous identity must be traced to a period before the Islamic invasions and the Hindu religion was the glue that bound this civilisation. The further discussion on India's civilisation proceeds by explaining Indic ontologies, epistemologies, and theologies and how the matrix of faith, nature, and patriotism is an integral part of Indic civilisation and the white man's failure to understand this through his Eurocentric and ethnocentric vision gave birth to colonial terminologies.

So, varnashrama system became caste, adivasis became tribe, and Sanatana Dharma became Hinduism by fitting it within the box of religion. The coloniser then takes up the venture to Christianise Indian education by introducing the English language which is further validated by native elites and Hindu reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy and missionary projects using bishops and at the same time delegitimizing native learning system by calling Hindus idol-worshipping superstitious heathens and not giving any social space for them to earn their livelihood and respect. The Marxist school of thought is accused of validating the colonisation by giving it the name of 'development' of former colonies. The book also discusses the Islamic invasion and colonisation as India has been a victim of both the colonialisms and how European colonialism succeeded in what the former failed to do, i.e., successfully attacking the

indic consciousness. The book then reaches its end by tracing the colonial character of India's constitution in India's first British made constitution i.e. the Government of India Act, 1919¹ but firstly decoding the Montford report which then became the basis of GOI Act, 1919², and its not so coincidental connection with the league of nations to understand its attempt to act as a yardstick of universal civilisation. The author presents decoloniality or decolonial school of thought to counter coloniality with the aim of not only getting rid of the western subjugation and inferiority complex but also understanding the past through a decolonial lens and reclaiming our indigenous consciousness and therefore, identity. The third and last section ends by mentioning the map for the second installment in this trilogy which would deal with Bharat's constitutional journey between the period 1921 and 1951.

EVALUATION OF THE BOOK

The book in, overall, engages in an uphill task to establish a relationship between the consciousness of the world's oldest surviving indigenous civilisation and the constitution of the world's largest democracy with European colonialism looming large on both of them. The book is highly filled with primary sources like debates of the British parliament and Indian Constituent Assembly which makes it quite esoteric for the readers to comprehend but at the same time difficult to refute the author's points. The book is ought to make one uncomfortable with universalised and pre-conceived notions of certain terms and ideologies like secularism, humanism, modernity/rationality, and toleration as their origins and applications present a different picture. The depiction of a historical painting at the beginning of each chapter denotes the author's attempt to help the reader to visualize the upcoming content and also present the gist of the chapter. The author deliberately uses the word 'Bharat' instead of 'India' to refer to the nation because of its civilisational character which is even validated by article 1 of India's constitution³ and thus, hints the readers about the author's proclivity towards the decolonial school of thought. The detailed study of coloniality, civilisation, and constitution makes the students, teachers, and scholars of political science, history, sociology, and law its

¹ Government of India, Act, 1919

² *Ibid*

³ Constitution of India, 1950, art 1

target customers who definitely must give it a read but at the same time, the balanced literature of the book gives leverage to the general audience.

CONCLUSION: RESTATING THE THESIS

The Indian academic discourse lacks the space for decoloniality as a subject and this book marks the potential to at least ignite a discussion on public forums. There are quite a few works dealing with coloniality, civilisation, and constitution separately but not many that connect the dots of all the three like this one. The book forces its readers to ask an imperative question: did India exist before 1947 or did she have any identity before the arrival of the white European coloniser? To answer such questions it becomes crucial to look at history, not through a colonial lens.