Power, Performance, and the Limits of Contemporary Animism as a (De)colonial Perspective for Indian Caste Society

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Abstract

"Contemporary animism" or what is often termed as "new animism" has emerged as one of the most powerful perspectives to understand and decolonize the indigenous cultural practices and knowledge systems in recent years. Brahmanical Hinduism (or neo-Brahmanism) is considered as a cultural-religious practice that still carries undercurrents of animism in India.[2] Animist beliefs have remained strongly embedded in Brahminical religious and cultural practices, such as belief in the existence of soul, persona and so on. This article argues that the ethos of neo-Brahmanism is not only antithetical to the perspectivism of contemporary animism, it rather offers a model that can be termed as 'inverted animism' or the cultural practices that tend to colonize the radical potentials of animism. Such Hinduism as hegemonic cultural practices disrobe the environment from its personhood, even fetishizes the person, and turns them into objects. It is an 'animism' that goes against its own spirit by colonizing the personality of the object, materials and other entities.

Keywords

New animism, decolonization, Brahminism, caste society, perspectivism and Adivasis

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[2] The debates around what is Hinduism, Brahmanism and Buddhism are far more complex. Scholars like Lal Mani Joshi see current Hinduism as an offshoot of Brahmanism. In his view, the elements of Shramanic culture and Buddhism were assimilated by the Brahmanical culture and resulted in what we now term as Hinduism (See Joshi, 1970:77). Joshi terms the current cultural-religious practices as neo-Brahmanism or Hinduism. I am formulating my reading in the light of Joshi's formulation of the Hinduism that incorporated the elements of Buddhism, Jainism, Tantricism, animism, and various other strands but on its own principles and conditions.

The Spirit Bound

Despite having a great admiration for much contemporary scholarship on animism (Bird-David, 1999; Graham, 2005, 2014; Descola, 1996; de Castro, 2015), one needs to be cautious about its potential use for decolonization in the Indian socio-cultural context. My concern has to do with the animated world of Brahmanical Hinduism, which, on the one hand, offers fascinating modes of interaction between humans, and nonhuman worlds but, at the same time, colonizes this interaction to produce hierarchies based on the caste system—a contradiction that turns the emancipatory potentials of new animism upside down. While non-human beings such as birds and animals find their personality in the animated world of Hinduism, they acquire their caste-based dispositions in this constitution.[3] For instance, where the bird *haliasatur Indus* is considered as part of the Brahmin caste with the name brahminy kite, the *Milvus migrans* or pariah kite is thought of as untouchable in many parts of south India (Pariah or Paraiyar being the untouchable caste in Tamil Nadu).[4] Likewise, one finds names of snakes, birds and trees named in line with caste distinctions. Wendy Doniger has shown how dogs have been viewed as Dalits in Indian literatures (2014, pp. 488–500). Not only humans but the non-humans' world is also judged based on the division of purity and impurity following the caste ideology. Like humans, non-humans are similarly placed in the hierarchies. In other words, the caste-based values of Hinduism become the main criteria to judge them and situate them in their respective orders and associations. The article problematizes the way Hinduism uses animism to reinforce caste hierarchy and to present aspects of 'animism' as a tool and conception to do this.

For scholars working at the intersection of anthropology and philosophy, the new (approach to) animism marks an ontological turn in the field of humanities and social sciences. It destabilizes fundamental assumptions of the field such as what it might mean to be human, a person or to be in a relation. The approach positioned itself in the indigenous worldviews which can be located in the light of the larger discourse of the decolonization and human-beyond human discourse of the ecological concerns. The set of relationships with the new approach can be termed as radical animism. However, this idealistic approach of new animism needs to be properly contextualized in its specific socio-cultural contexts. My main concern is the relationship between animism as it discussed by many scholars as an emancipatory perspective and the

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[3] In the absence of any specified texts on religious beliefs and practices, it becomes difficult to pin down the principles of the religion on which the criticisms can be posited. With varying cultural practices and contradictory belief systems, it is always complex to synthesize its ideology, structure and core arguments. Mainstream Hinduism has already consolidated and legitimizes specific sets of beliefs and practices that can be considered as point of reference in this work. It can be also argued that while Hinduism is a complex world of beliefs and has many forms across different regions in India, it shares a number of common features concerning the fundamental perspectives on life, death and living beings. Hindus, for instance still worship their ancestors, natures and animals in various forms.

[4] Pariah has become a denigrated synonym for the outcaste in several Indian languages. The term is used like 'nigger' in racial society, a term to use ethnic social group. Pariah caste has traditionally been associated with drumming and menial jobs.

animist structure that exists in the Hindu caste society. Drawing from the critical readings proposed by Graham (2005), Descola (2013) and de Castro (2015), the article problematizes animism as a possible decolonizing perspective in a caste-based society. It shows the power and limits of animism as a decolonizing perspective in India, unless there is an attempt to reclaim the radical animism from the indigenous discourse, as it is taking place in the case of many indigenous movements in India (such as in the demand of Sarana religion in Jharkhand).

The article points to the relational approach of Hinduism (informed by strong currents of Brahmanism) based on hierarchies and argues on the (im)possibility of new animism to make a critical turn in the postcolonial context without fundamentally acknowledging the cultural context of animism—is Ontology just another name for culture? What is at stake here is not the decolonization of Brahmanism as a culture of animated belief, but the decolonization of the colonized world of animism itself. Identifying this problem is vital for two important reasons in the contemporary indigeneity politics in India. First, India has a significant number of indigenous populations, often referred as Adivasis (aboriginal people or original habitants) who largely follow animism. At the outset of escalating neo-liberal and neo-conservative polices of the Indian state in which Adivasis have to be "sacrificed" for the progress and development of the nation, Adivasi communities are facing the direct brunt of the state on various issues including those of displacement, citizenship, customary laws and on the issues of cultural appropriations by resurgent Hinduism—where the aim is to reinforce Brahmanical ideology. Such Hindu religious groups have been actively trying to appropriate indigenous beliefs by reinterpreting Adivasi myths and texts to serve its own end. It can be argued that decolonization for the indigenous communities in India have to fulfill both the aims, i.e., decolonization from the colonial legacies as well as decolonization from the hierarchical Brahmanical beliefs.

Second, the animism of indigenous people is more in the vicinity of the decolonial perspective proposed by contemporary animist scholars than the elements infused in Brahmanical encoded Hindu cultural practices that has gone through an "ontological change" by positing hierarchies at the centre. Can we say that the radically posited animism of non-Brahmanical traditions went through an ontological turn in caste-based Hinduism? In a different context, Aparecida Vilaca (2015) asks, 'Do animists become naturalists when converting to Christianity'? He considers an ontological turn in the light of the ontological change that happens in the shifts of socio-cosmological views, as happened in the case of modernity. Elaborating on the Amazonian tribe Wari, he argues that in the conversion to Christianity, a complex and a non-linear transition between the two ontologies seem to have happened. What do such similar transformations suggest in relation to the practices of animism in the Hindu world?

However, the animist beliefs of Brahmanism cannot be merely viewed as an appropriation of indigenous knowledge forms; it can be rather considered as a parallel to new animism. It is rightly so because the Brahmanical inscribed culture and the Indigenous societies both practice some deep tenets of animism; however, their perspectives of animism remain different. Marine Carrin (2018) has pointed out a

similar connection in the context of "Hinduisation" of indigenous belief systems in the tribal region of Jharkhand in India. She argues how the same cult object may have a different meaning for the indigenous Santhals and for the Hindus who believed in the caste system (2018, p. 119). The problem becomes acute when we discuss how Hinduism and tribal societies interface in Indian society and the (re)shaping of animism in the new sites of cultural appropriations. It can be argued that Brahmanism might have promoted an animated world of beliefs in its residual practices but in its very principle, it goes against the principles of radical animism by resisting the transformative potential of the latter. My concern here is not to analyze how these transformations or appropriations might have taken place in Hinduism. It can be largely seen through a socio-political change in the society overall which led to the shift in ontological entity. This includes the historical changes and the formation of class and caste-based societies and development of agriculture and industry and different hierarchies that Brahmanism tends to perpetuate. The colonialism has also played a vital role in the shift of ontology while subsuming various aspects of animism of those societies.

Povinelli (2016) has examined how the state and neo-liberal forces have appropriated vitalist, and animist practices of indigenous communities in Australia, and how vitalism is the last vestige of the late neoliberal society. We can problematise this animated relationship by analyzing how capitalist ideology has influenced the animist world through the fetishization of objects, and, in a related sense, by exploring how animation helps to uphold and transmit capitalist and corporate ideology. We can take examples of the corporate animation industry in which capitalist entertainment corporations have exploited what is essentially an animistic logic (Forgacs, 1992, p. 363). Disney preys on and appropriates animism in order to cater childhood into global circulation as a commodity. In doing so, it creates what Forgacs terms 'a utopian realization of a world of complete freedom' (1992, p. 363). A similar case can be observed in the case of mainstream Hinduism where the animist logic is used to domesticate and exploit other human and non-human personalities. By positing animist world of Hinduism, the article shows how animism works merely as a tool to justify its relational world.

Despite some radical changes in the world of beliefs, Hinduism still believes in worshipping nature, animals and ancestors unlike the clear separation of human and animals that largely happened in the case of Christianity as part of European modernity (Vilaca, 2015). Nevertheless, Hinduism appears to subvert the fundamental relational logic of radical animism that has been taken for granted in contemporary scholarships. In a radical change, it brings hierarchies into a relational perspective: that is, the obvious hierarchy that can be seen in human and animal relationships and between human and human relationships. They could be only seen and accepted as subservient in the relational terms. Scholars have rightly pointed out how 'the separation between humans and animals is associated with the constitution of a given natural universe' (Vilaca, 2015, p. 6). In this subordination and domestication of animals, Descola sees this shift from an animist ontology to an analogical ontology (2013, p. 388).

Hinduism de-subjectivises animals and gives them secondary status. While animals still maintain an autonomous subjectivity in the indigenous beliefs, they are largely domesticated in Hinduism. For instance, a lion becomes a mount for the powerful Hindu deity Durga, an owl for Hindu goddess Lakshmi and similarly other deities can be seen riding other birds and animals. Arguably, the independent existence of non-human beings ceases to exist. In this regard, the works of animist KajArhem and Sprenger (2015) offers a specific framework to understand this complexity in the Asian context. Most importantly, how the very domestication of animals in an agrarian society promotes domestication of animal relationships and symbolism, and therefore the animist practices. He underlines a distinction between the animist principles of Castro, Kohn and others who work on animist practices of the tribal communities of the Amazonia, and mainland South East Asian animisms which are emerging from hierarchical agricultural societies. The Amazonian communities see animals (usually often in the relation of game/prey) as another that has to be imagined, captured, sought into a relation, therefore expanding their cosmologies into non-human actants. KajArhem, then uses the many examples of South East Asian Mainland animisms (many of which are Hindu in origin, or from the Theravada Buddhist practices), where he argues that because animals are now domesticated, they now incur a relationship of ownership with the human. He states that in agricultural societies, animism prevails but it is turned into one of sacrifice (the animal is the homo sacer), and therefore, they become part of one of hierarchies, property and ownership. The relationship to the other which marks Amerindian knowledge, what I have termed as radical animism, is thus turned into a relationship of the self in this case. It is one of intimately knowing the animal (hence animist), but also converting it into one of value—socio, economic and moral. It can be argued that it is a world where anthropomorphism slides into anthropocentricism (and anthropocentric practices like the caste system are reflected in animist knowledge). Though his work does not speak of Hinduism proper, one can see a fundamental resonance between Arhem's work, and animisms of agricultural societies, of which the Hindu caste society is an example. Arhem's work is also interesting in the sense that his works lies in the interstices of global south/east cultures without being necessarily decolonial in perspective. It rather recognizes the violence and hierarchies of these practices. Moreover, his readings complicate the inherent decolonial claims of the animist world.

The other relevant transformations can be observed in the changing worldview of the so-called low-caste Hindus. The animist beliefs among the low castes maintain more regional and ecological currents and remain relatively more dynamic than the animated worldview of the upper caste because of their socio-cultural contexts and beliefs in the spirit world (Prakash, 2019). It can be argued that interactions and relations are already performed in the entrenched world of upper caste Hindu ideology. When it comes to the relationship between the upper caste worldviews and the low caste worldview, it is the hegemonic worldview of the upper caste that plays a more crucial role and subverts the dynamic relational mode prevalent among the animist views of the low castes. In the background of the emerging debates of new animism,

it becomes pertinent that we underline this shift in the context of local socio-cultural hegemonies.

The shift in approaches on animism from a derogatory to critical term requires that we clarify what this move consists of in terms of thinking about an animist worldview. As discussed by several scholars (de Castro, 2014; Bird-David, 1999), this is a shift from animism as part of anthropological construction to animism as part of the vital strategy of decolonization. The shift has changed the terms of seeing, mode of interactions and ways of engaging with the human-non-human world. It happened in two major ways: while the earlier anthropologists viewed animist societies with a great suspicion, the new anthropologists view it as an emancipatory paradigm at the outset of colonization and widespread ecological concerns. For example, de Castro gives his anthropological work with the Tupis an epistemic charge—that he levitates what is merely ethnographic fieldwork into conceptual claims about ontology and species relations. The new animism has reversed the nature and culture poles seeing nature as particular and culture as universal. In this case, multinaturalism replaces the notion of multiculturalism.[5] The new approach claims to reposit indigenous knowledge from various positions; however, in the lack of criticisms of the internal colonization, it appears to be another ethnocentrism.

The existing problem has also to do with the existing approaches in the new animism which has been narrowly focused on a settler colonial framework.[6]There is no discussion on the experiences of the peasant community or for that internal colonization that could be part of an indigenous worldview itself. In this construction, the native becomes the absolute other to the European settler. It can be argued that the narrow historiographic framework of Castro and many other animists do not capture the complexities of Asian animism. Any decolonial perspective cannot undermine the hierarchies within because often this hierarchy creates alliances with the external forces. In this regard, Kenyan writer, Wa Thiong'o suggested moving the center in two senses, in the postcolonial contexts 'between nations and within nations' (1993). His site of criticism is parallel both to the external colonization as well as internal colonization. It can be observed that the shift in the discourse of animism has not paid enough attention to issues of the internal colonization in parallel to offering a critique of colonialism and capitalist exploitation. Otherwise, there is an inherent danger that the emancipatory project of animism will subsumed to another sort of ethnocentrism in the contemporary discourses. It is true that contemporary animism has emerged as one of the most powerful perspectives in the decolonial discourses. It has challenged conventional scholarship and radically influenced the various ways indigenous knowledge and worldviews were perceived. Even though the new animism

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[5]In de Castro's view, multinaturalism could be understood as the opposite of the multiculturalism. It designates a unity of mind and diversity of bodies. In multinatural perspective, culture is viewed as the form of the universal and nature as the particular (2014: 56).

[6]The problem has its root in the history of the colonial encounter with the indigenous people. Since the first knowledge of Amerindia came to Europe through Columbus and other European settlers, scholarship also tends to focus on this divide between the European settler and the indigenous forest dwelling native.

perspective has not yet significantly influenced postcolonial scholarships in India, one needs to be cautious of uncritically using the perspective in Indian and South Asian contexts.

New Animism as a Decolonizing Perspective

Animists see the presence of a lifeforce in humans and as well as in nonhuman beings, including what we normally perceive as things—tree, stone, river, mountain and soil. Things are supposed to possess life principles or life force, what is commonly termed as jeeva or jeevi in many Indian languages. Santhal indigenous communities of India believe that 'he who has jeevi is able to move.' They believe that they have jeevi inside their bodies. They all have agency and potency to transform themselves. One who believes in the animist world also sees the existence of soul and spirit in language and "abstract" words. Thus, we can say that in such situation the word also acquires animating presence besides being performative. The affect and meaning of word not necessarily appears in its performative dimension but also in its lively animated being. For example, the word is called shabd-jeeva (word life) and any violence on it is considered equally serious as physical and psychological violence.

Animism was earlier viewed and interpreted through the colonial lens in which animists were viewed as low creatures or backward people who were unable to understand the difference between nature and culture: between persons and things, life, death and metaphors, symbols and the living words. Animism was fundamentally seen as an epistemological error in those approaches. For several anthropologists and scholars, animism was based on an erroneous, unscientific observation about the nature of reality (Graham, 2005). However, animism has acquired a new force in the contemporary animism. The new animism has not only decentred the colonialist approach, it has also decentred the narrow humancentric approach that assumes colonization of non-human beings as the central prerogative in order to become human. The actions of non-humans are also considered "intentional, planned and purposive." Like humans, non-humans also participate in everyday exchanges of relationships. They participate in kinship systems and ceremonies with human, as well as maintain their own kinship systems and ceremonies (Harvey, 2005, p. 102). Things do not remain as things to be acted upon but equally act and participate in the works and ceremonies. This approach has not only changed the human and object relationship, it has also challenged how persons are to be treated beyond the confined boundary of identity and subjectivity. What Davi Kopenawa said about white people: 'white people do not think very far ahead. They are always too preoccupied with the things of the moment' (2013, p. 12).

I would like to mark three underlying radical principles of new animism which are opposed to the so-called animated world of Hinduism informed by Brahmanism. In the first case, new animism challenges the limited view of the human-centric world. Second, it has challenged the division between nature and culture, in fact, the idea of nature becomes cultural. And in the third case, the relationship between 'object'

and 'identities' is enacted through personification and not through objectification as it happens in capitalism. Apart from these shifts in fundamental principles, we can also discuss how new animism has placed ontology rather than anthropology (the sociology of knowledge) and epistemology in the centre. The strategic location changes the relationship between nature and culture and established nature as particular and cultural as a universal category. And beyond nature and culture division, nature is viewed as what Descola would term 'the society of nature'.

In Cannibal Metaphysics, de Castro (2014) argues for the Tupian mode of thinking (based on the worldview of the Tupinamba tribe who inhabited the Brazilian coast in the seventeenth century) which offers a new kind of Ontological Prior-Thinking from the others' positions. Descola has suggested that the human tries to understand the human-non-human relationship through four modes of identification based on interiority and physicality. Interiority stands for self-reflexive inwardness and physicality stands for the dispositions enabling a physical action. The aspects of interiority and physicality offer us an interesting way of understanding this relationship. So, while in the case of totemism, the object possesses elements of physicality and interiority analogous to a human being, in animism, the object has a similar interiority but a different physicality. It is believed that humans and all the kinds of non-humans with which humans interact have different physicality. In naturalism, the object is devoid of interiority but possesses a similar kind of physicality. In animism, human interiority is lodged in different kinds of bodies or they simply wear different kinds of skins. This background is important as it helps us in examining the Hindu world of animated beliefs and their potentials for decolonization.

The Animated World of Hinduism

Animist belief is strongly embedded in Hindu religious and cultural life, such as in the belief in the existence of the soul (even after death) and even in the worship of tree and stone and so on. However, I argue that Hinduism is antithetical to the ideology and the perspectivism of radical animism or what has been postulated as new animism. The dominant Hinduism, the point of reference here disrobes the nature from its personhood. It tends to fetishize the personhood of the non-humans which ultimately becomes an expression of a soul without spirit. In other words, the soul has to be purified from the infliction of the spirits. Spirits rather get imprisoned and lose their fluid energy and vitality that marks their movements and relations in the new animism. This does not mean that animism in Hinduism is immobile and is signified as static. What changes is basically what relation different bodies may imbue with it. This does not mean that the relationship to objects is always changing. This change has to do with the historical process of colonization in which meaning making shifts and every process or shift is seen as having a new ontology, instead of multiple relationalities. Thus, it can be argued that while Hindu cosmologies and Amerindian/new animist thought start off from a similar point, Hinduism makes a regressive turn with a moral-political enshrined in caste society. This is an animism that goes against its own spirit

by colonizing the personhood of the object, materials and other non-personal beings. The hierarchical ideology is so deeply embedded in Hinduism that any manifestation of animated being carries the graded distribution of the sensible. For all these reasons, much of the participatory world of animism becomes a terrifying world of hierarchy. In a paradox, a religion that is based on animism sees spirits and animism with contempt. While it justifies colonized aspects of animism, it sees archetypal animism as a threat.

The sense of being immersed in a sentient world is part of some of the major cultural practices of the adivasi and low caste communities. Without any discrimination, they will sing the praise of both human and non-human personhoods. They worship river, boat, plant, animal, fire, sky and the six directions supposed to be possessed by the spirits. All these objects were supposed to have their specific traits (personality). The communities treat these objects as spirits and deities of that particular non-human entity. They believed that like humans, non-humans also interact and express their emotion and feelings. A basket will talk to a broom and the broom can talk to a 'real' human being. In the new development, adivasi communities are moving out of the worldview of the animated world of beliefs to the image worship form of institutionalized Hinduism which tends to fix the traits and limits the relational approaches. For example, the sun was supposed to be an active force in agricultural society. From day to night and from one season to other, the sun will acquire different traits, but in the image worship of Hinduism, the sun as an active force gets diluted and gets uniformity and retains only specific representations. The same applies to the river deity, Ganga who is worshipped both in iconic and non-iconic forms.

It can be argued that the animated beliefs of Hinduism have radically changed the relational approaches of animism. In the animist understanding, a stone was imbued with spirits, but in the new worship, a stone has to be consecrated to become a sacred object. A stone has become an idol and represents human personhood rather than non-human personhood. So, an idol can be anthromorphic as well as symbolic but it is jeeva which transforms the stone into a stone god. This creates another problematic of the mode of relation in Hinduism. In this constitution, Hinduism subsumed some stones as inanimate. It has created some as ceremonial objects and emptied their personhood—other than human persons. The stone that has imbued values now acquires the value in ritual exchange; the exchange value becomes the basis of new personhood.

E.B. Tylor in his book, *Primitive Culture* (1871) observed stone worship in Tamil Nadu in which community members place five stones in a field. They daub them with red colour which can be viewed as erstwhile practices of animist beliefs. Tylor (1871) observed that these stones were then named after the five Pandavas of the Mahabharata epic. But what is entailed of turning the five stones into five Pandavas? Do they acquire a certain amount of uniformity contradicting their own dynamic nature of perspectivism? Let us consider an ideal situation of stone personality in animism. The stone will have a relational approach; its position will change in a given situation. In one situation it may participate in kinship and ceremonial events, in another situation it may have a dialogue with a tree and a hunter. In another famous story of the Ramayana, Ahalya, who was the wife of a much older sage Gautama

was seduced by Indra and reciprocated with desire. For this act of infidelity, she was cursed by Gautama to turn into stone, to be later purified by Rama. Her turning into a stone indicates her loss of agency and personality. While Hinduism still maintains the possibility of personality interactions, it appears that it also takes out the personality imbued in stone. Levi-Bruhl used the word 'participation' to characterize the animistic logic in which 'inanimate objects' like stones and mountains are often thought to be alive.

Inverted Animism of Hinduism

Animist beliefs within Hinduism are not just an appropriation of indigenous knowledge forms. Indeed, some aspects of Hinduism remain animistic in nature. While animism clearly refers to the beliefs about spirits, we also need to understand what that belief and spirit might mean in a specific context. How does the activity called 'believing' manifest itself in a cultural context? How is it done and how is it recognized by observers? (Graham, 2005, p. 4). One of the main emphases of new animism is that life is lived in relation with others. Descola sees this ontological change when a kind of minority relation becomes hegemonic. This can be understood as a triumph of Brahmanism in Indian society. He argues,

> Certain ways of treating 'others' that are present in a minor form in one mode of identification sometimes come to play a more predominant role that soon renders them incompatible with the ontological regime in which they have developed; and this makes it necessary to alter that ontological regime or transfer to another mode of identification that is better suited to a different way of treating. (Descola, 2013, p. 366).

Descola considers the possibility of more than one ontology co-exisiting within the same community, organized in a hierarchical relation. There can be a dominant ideology but it does not completely erase the residual presence of the other ontologies. Anima (breath, life, spirit) can be translated as atman or jeeva in many Indian languages. I am not using atman as it brings contradictory interpretations. Jeeva could be used as possible working translation for the soul and spirit in Hinduism. Jeeva or jeevi is also a widely accepted term beyond caste, communities and regions in India. In some Indian languages (e.g. Hindi), animism has been translated as *Jeevavad*. The translation of spirit as jeeva still makes a vital connection in this context. Jeeva is life, the vital force in the human and non–human world that marks it as the centre of animism.

The *Kathopanishad* tells a story of a bird with one belly and two mouths, one representing atma and the other jeeva. Jeeva is considered as the unit of existence conscious of its physical being. It is bound by good or bad actions which gives its place in the hierarchy. But what is the basis of good and bad actions? It is the imitation of the model of Brahman that characterizes action as good and bad. Jeeva enjoys the physical and gross things, as it has a body that feels appetite. Because of the physical

body and its appetites, jeeva experiences hunger, thirst, sleep, anger and all such states. The physical body which jeeva possesses is the fleshy covering, which it casts off at its death. But other than the physical body, the jeeva has what is called a subtle-body. While the physical body dies, the subtle body survives death and accompanies the individual jeeva beyond death. Prana (refers to energy, life or breath) is considered as the most powerful individual vivifying principle in jeeva which permeates both animate and inanimate objects. In phenomenal experience of the animated beliefs, one is caught up with jeeva experience. One of the core formations of Hinduism has been to move away from the phenomenal body to noumenal body. In the formation of its hegemonic ideology, Hinduism emphasizes that the pure consciousness in jeeva is purity of atman (soul) and the ultimate reality is Brahman.

Hinduism in its institutionalized thinking deploys some important key terms to define itself. It believes that karma (action) has to follow dharma (duty) to achieve the highest realm of Brahman. Thus, it can be argued that Brahman is the model that defines the relations and actions. They are already performed in the light of Brahman. In Vedic thought, Brahman is the impersonal or non-personal generative principle which underlies all forms of manifestations. Such Hinduism creates uniformity and limits the possibility of unfolding relations. On the other side, Brahman is unchangeable quality unlike prakriti (nature), which is changeable. So while the animism of Hinduism believes in the idea of changing nature and in the universal self they are not relational in this sense and thus appear to lose its possible perspectivism. In this mode of relation, the ultimate causal level of 'person' is not attached to the transient. The ultimate goal of the atman (self) is to merge into the Brahman (the Self) and the finality of this destination therefore brings closure to the spaces and dialogues. The model in a way resists the transformative potential of the self and nature. It is often argued that with good karma, there is a possibility that a low caste personality can acquire the personality of the upper caste and it is possible that because of bad karma, Brahmins may turn into untouchables in the next life. However, the real essence of karma is to follow one's ascribed caste duty to achieve the highest status of being in the graded pyramid. The point has been well argued by Vijay Mishra,

> The brahminical orthodoxy who were traditional arbiters on questions of knowledge put a mechanism in place which stipulated that the self came into being already karmically formed (an earlier life experienced the present human condition) and self-representation or self-definition could not be removed from both an earlier life-experience and future life stages. (1998, p. 21).

Since Hinduism also believes in the afterlife determined by the Supreme Being, it marks another closure to the possibility of being and becoming. One of the core principles of Hinduism advocates getting rid of the birth-death cycle. To get moksha (salvation), one needs to transcend this bondage that could be only possible by merging with the Brahman. The nature of the transmigration of a soul into a reincarnated self as another caste human or non-human is controlled by hierarchization of Karma and how

it is contradictory with the unchangeable nature of the soul. Unlike the personality of the new animism, Hinduism believes in selfhood which is largely confined to the self goal. It believes that the soul will bear time and again unless moksha is not achieved. In this case not everyone is capable of achieving personhood and moksha. One can compare it to the Santhals world of beliefs in which everyone who dies is capable of becoming bonga and becoming the centre of relations. The goal of moksha (liberation) in Hinduism is to be set free from the cycle of action, reaction, and interaction. Mishra rightly underlines that 'there is then, a prior system that acts as a template, as a sanctioned pattern' (1998, p. 21). The arguments clearly exemplify that Hinduism is not interested in the mode of interactions based on perspectivism and participation facilitated in the animism. What we see is the "animist" world of Hinduism which is self-colonizing in nature and resists the emancipatory potential of the [new] animism. This also shows that animism needs to be placed in a cultural context before it can be claimed as 'decolonial' perspective. In the case of Hinduism, animism as a strategy of interaction goes against the very tenets of animism and merely works as tools of colonizing in a caste-based society which believes in purity and impurity and in the assumption of the supremacy of knowledge.

The dominant form of Hinduism believes in moving from *aparaavidhyaa* (lower form of knowledge) to *paraavidhyaa* (highest form of knowledge). The aim of the highest form of knowledge is *Brahmaajijinaasa*. Hinduism believes that *aparaavidhyaa* is a lower form of knowledge carried out through the senses. The *aparaavidhyaa* comprises all empirical and objective knowledge. The *aparaa* form of knowledge in Hinduism is considered to be limited to the finite world. Against this lower form of knowledge, such Hinduism wants to posit the knowledge of Brahman as the highest form of knowledge which cannot have relational position. It is rather an absolute form of knowledge. The division of knowledge becomes the foundation of knowledge practices in India so much so that *aparaavidhyaa* is dismissed as knowledge.

One of the powerful manifestations of beliefs in Hinduism is engendered through *daan* (ritual gift) culture. Marcel Mauss (1990) has argued that gift objects themselves are 'in some degree souls and gift exchangers operate as 'things' in these interactions'. Drawing on the works of Mauss, Graham argues that gift exchanges are integral to relational definitions of personhood and central to debates about ontology (2005, p. 12). As we know, Hinduism maintains an elaborate system of *daan-punya* (earning blessing through gift exchange) culture. But the facet of Hinduism that has not been discussed yet is the foundation of relations through gifts. Hindus worship different objects and deities to achieve wealth and blessing. Most Hindu rituals are centred on the gift-exchange ceremony, from *gau-daan* (cow as gift) to *kanyadaan* (daughter as gift). The question that can be posed here is what is happening in this gift-exchange culture that exchanges the souls but without the spirits that imbues life energy. Let us take an example of Maoris who as per the animist beliefs will return birds that are caught back to the forest considering that it was an immoral and antisocial act. However, in the case of Hinduism, it would be highly impossible because the dominant social has taken over the participatory mode. Here again Arhem becomes important because

he explicitly traces a relation between the domestication of animals which produces different gift/ownership relations than predatory forest- based animist practices do.

What Hinduism did to Animism

This thought can be examined in various relations and objects of Hinduism. One of the kernels of Hinduism is the belief in *panchamahabhutas* (five cosmic principles) made of five *bhutas* (spirits). It is believed that the body is made of these five spirits—earth, water, fire, air and *akasha* (space). Often, these five spirits have been also translated as the five principles. In this relation, Gopal Guru argues that,

> The structural device [of Hinduism, inserted] involves the conversion of the ecological (five principles) into the sociological (hierarchical). In sociological reading Panchamabhute acquire different and perhaps negative meanings through deploying the ideology of purity-pollution, which is so central to the former. The conversion is sustained by the asymmetries of power that robs the panchamahabhute of their positive meaning. People do not follow the moral basis of the metaphysics of panchamabhute when they act. (2012, pp. 206–207).

The argument by Guru shows how ecological principles have been transformed into sociological principles by reinstating the human at the centre of the subjectivities. It also suggests how *panchamabhutas* are reduced to the principles by eliminating their spirits. The ecological has merely become an entity to support the social formation. The ideology of purity-principles has not been derived from animism but from Brahmanical ideology that postulates the absolute validity of this division. Guru rightly points out that 'how their material interest and the cultural need to draw relative superiority over others seriously undermine the validity of metaphysics as the universal framework that provides moral orientation to social interaction among people' (2012, p. 207). Purity and pollution become the essence of the personhood as in the case of Brahmany Kite and Pariah kite in Tamil Nadu and *dhobiyachirayin* (washerman bird) in north India.[7]

The need to remain socially superior has led the upper caste to convert the ecological into the sociological and the natural into the cultural category. Let me explain this in terms of the politics of converting the *panchamabhute* (five life elements) into instruments that are deployed to reduce some section of society to 'walking carrion', a degraded entity filled with a deep sense of repulsion. This transmutation, which is produced by the politics of the preservation of the hierarchically superior self, has serious implication for these five principles. They stand discredited; they are robbed of their vital meanings.

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[7]*Shilpashastras*are replete with caste ascription to non-human objects. *Vishnudharmottara Purana* divides stones into varna categories such as Brahma as *shuklavarnashila* (*satvika*), Kshatriya as *raktavarnashila* (*rajasi*), Vaisha as *pitavarnashila* (*rajasi*) and Shudra as *krishnavarnashila* (*tamasi*) along with different types of stone black, smith, chunar sandstone and others. Similarly, *Brhatsamhita* teaches and classifies woods into different categories.

Each of these five elements—the spirits of life has been colonized in the hierarchical thinking of Hinduism. Earth, which was considered the maternal force in many animist societies, is considered ritually polluting in the Hindu world of animated beliefs. In fact in the Tantric sect of Hinduism ritually polluting earth becomes the site of worship. Using ritual pollution to assign a negative quality to earth goes completely against the vital force that earth was supposed to inhabit. We can observe a similar pattern with other principles, so for example, water is used to create what Guru says 'a perennial division', thus rendering some bodies ritually pure and others as eternally impure not only marks the caste division among humans but also among the non-human world.

Fire is another example of the animated belief which is considered very powerful. In Hinduism fire has become another source of this purity and impurity division. If earth is intrinsically impure, fire is intrinsically pure. Fire acts as the purification agent in Hinduism. In the sati-system of Hinduism, widowed (it represents the state of impurity) and immoral women were not only burnt to death because she has violated the feudal moral order but they were also put into the fire to be purified. By going through the fire-trial, the women were supposed to purify their souls. Guru (2012) gives several such examples where fire is used as purifying element, it cleanses the spirit. Similarly, Guru (2012) asks but in what condition does air become an impure substance. He argues that 'it can be objectionable [because it is impure] only if is converted from its being natural and hence as a pure substance into a source of a contamination' (p. 209). It can be argued that Hinduism has converted animism into a morphology in which the archetype of animism gets castified. While the principle elements acquires the quality of purity and impurity, caste moves from being a matter of sociology to one of eschatology and cosmology. What Guru (2012) explains about the *panchmahabhutas* (five powerful spirits) describes the larger phenomenon of what might have happened with the spirits and animated beliefs of animism with radical potential.

It can be argued that caste society uses the logic of animism to displace the spirit and personhood of the human as well as nonhuman subjects. It tries to enslave these agencies by bringing them under the materiality of caste. This could be an effect that some objects and animals become pure and others become impure. In result, it is not only human society which has a caste-like structure but objects and animals also obtain the similar personhood (selfhood) in the larger structures of feeling. The shift from archetypal animism to Hinduism also shows the shift from perspectivism to absolutism. In the animist belief, humans and non-humans could have changed their appearance at will, so that real identity becomes difficult to ascertain. The caste world of Hinduism resists the permeable boundaries and creative power of animism and merely reduces it to serve its own aim.

Tupi or Not Tupi is the Question

This article analyzes the ontological changes brought out by Hinduism in the archetypal animism. It shows how animism is accommodated in the Brahmanical ideology of Hinduism. The point is not to root for any authentic animism but to show the changing

socio-cultural contexts in which animism is placed, within capitalism or religious contexts. Animism co-exists with various cultural practices and belief systems at the present; it cannot be seen as cut off from those practices and influences. Dominant Hinduism has produced a peculiar relationship with animism in India that appears to go against the very tenets of animism. It has also to do with the ontological changes brought out by Hinduism in the model of animism. Though I am not specifying the reasons of this development, however this development cautions us to critically analyze animism before taking it as a new approach of decolonization. Placing animal and human relationship, Danny Naveh and Nurit Bird-David (2014) have argued how the movement of animals and plants no longer carry their personality. What I have termed as the inverted animism of Hinduism is increasingly becoming the basis of ritual and festival of the dominant Hinduised society in India. It looks as if Hinduism has been successful in objectifying relations and therefore the mode of relations and being in the world. On the one hand, it has tried to produce the separation by constantly working to purify relations. And on the other, it has produced the separated world by constantly demeaning others. It is not only animals that loose the agency but by marking a whole low caste community at the pedestal of animal, Hinduism tries to de-subjectify the community from their agency and potency.

Hinduism offers an elaborate system of defining human and non-human relationships. But the animated worldview of Hinduism creates a complexity not only for the communities who follow it but also for scholars working towards the decolonization of approaches and methodologies in the field of culture. The complexity can be read in the light of the problem that de Castro (2014) asked in *Cannibal Metaphysics*. Using Shakespeare's famous question, he insists that 'It is not "to be or not to be" that is the question', it is 'Tupi or Not Tupi that is the question'. How should one reconcile with the animist world of Hinduism which at a time offers us a perspective that resists the colonial mode of thinking but at the same time colonizes the world internally. The point is not to decolonize Hinduism but to show how mainstream Hinduism in India has created a system of colonization that employs tools of animism to colonize the spirits and societies of radical animism. The question also needs to be posited that can we consider the radicalism of animism in relation to other religions, culture and society beyond the locations of indigenous communities?

Acknowledgments

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