

# A Refutation of M.N. Srinivas's Theory of Sanskritization

by [Ankur Betageri](#) (July 2018)



*Iron Law*, Odd Nerdrum, 1984

*In memoriam* Prahlad Betageri

**The Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas** has proposed the concept Sanskritization to explain caste mobility in the hierarchical Hindu caste order. “The caste system” he says, “is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and

especially in the middle regions of the hierarchy. A caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by Sanskritising its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden. This process has been called 'Sanskritisation' in this book, in preference to 'Brahminisation', as certain Vedic rites are confined to the Brahmins and the two other 'twice-born' castes." [1] Elsewhere, he defined Sanskritization as a process by which "a low or middle Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently *twice-born* caste. Generally, such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant class by the local community."

I will analyse Sanskritization by looking at the two processes Srinivas delineated under the concept: the supposed emulation of Brahmins by non-Brahmin castes, and the supposed emulation of a "high and frequently *twice-born* caste" by a low/middle Hindu caste or a dominant caste by a non-dominant caste.

### **On the Supposed Emulation of Brahmins by Non-Brahmin Castes**

Brahmins placed themselves at the top of the hierarchy and it was accepted because they had state power, were feudal landowners, and had a monopoly over knowledge-production for a good part of Indian history. However, in constructing this model of caste mobility Srinivas, himself a Brahmin, makes numerous ideological assumptions influenced by Brahminical narratives about Brahmins:

i) Srinivas misattributes the superior status of Brahmins in the varna hierarchy to the practice of vegetarianism and teetotalism and to “customs and beliefs” which, in spite of his disclaimers to the contrary, he assumes were unique to Brahmins “for all time.” When Brahmins first came up with the hierarchy of varnas in the Purusha Sukta (c. 600 BCE) [2] of the Rig Veda they, far from being vegetarians or teetotallers, were voracious meat-eaters and drinkers of the inebriating drink soma.

Purusha Sukta, which describes the dismemberment of the “cosmic giant” Purusha, is itself very likely an allegory of human sacrifice. But, whether Brahmins practiced human sacrifice or no, they were certainly meat-eaters. There are numerous references in the Rig Veda itself that Brahmins ate beef: the meat of cow, ox and buffalo. The Rig Vedic hymns which refer to the slaughter and eating of these animals are provided in the end notes [3]. The Vedic rituals of sacrifice also required them to sacrifice animals. For example, the twelve-day Agnichayana or Atiraatra ritual requires the sacrifice of fourteen goats. [4]

Similarly, the Brahmins of the Rig Veda were not teetotallers. They regularly drank soma and wrote hymns praising its intoxicating qualities. In fact, the whole of Mandala IX of the Rig Veda is dedicated to extolling the virtues of soma. There are many theories as to what soma is: Flattery and Schwartz (1989) [5] believe that it is harmel or wild rue—*Peganum harmala*—a plant known for its intoxicating qualities. The other major contenders are plants of the *Ephedra* genus containing an adrenaline-like stimulant *Ephedrine*: (a) *Ephedra sinica* or homa, as the Zoroastrians

call it, is a plant with psychoactive properties that only grows in cool climates; it is hypothesized that the Aryans brought it along with them when they migrated to India from Central Asia. (b) *Ephedra distachya* is seen as a more likely contender as it, unlike *Ephedra sinica*, grows in India, and enhances awareness, alertness, and locomotion—exactly the qualities for which soma is known (Falk, 1989)[6]. But Wasson (1971)[7], who wrote a book on the subject with the well-known Indologist Wendy Doniger, claims that soma is actually the bright red fly agaric mushroom—*Amanita muscaria*—known for its psychotropic qualities. There are many other contenders including cannabis juice (or “bhang” as it is widely known, still prepared and consumed, especially during Holi festival), Indian Lotus or *Nelumbo nucifera* containing psychoactive alkaloids and known to produce feelings of euphoria on ingestion (McDonald 2004)[8] and ragi or finger millet—*Eleusine corcana*—“still used in the Eastern Himalayas for making the intoxicating drink called *marua*,” as proposed by Havell (1920)[9]. Regardless of the exact botanical identity of soma, what is beyond dispute is the fact that it was an *intoxicant*, and that the Rig Vedic Brahmins were brewing and consuming it when they came with the model of hierarchy of castes cited in the Purusha Sukta. This means that the superior status that the Brahmins ascribed to themselves had nothing to do with either vegetarianism or teetotalism.

ii) Srinivas sees the practices that Brahmins adopted from others as unique to Brahmins and essentializes certain qualities as specific to Brahmins much like the Guna theory of Brahminism which sees Brahmins as the bearers of the sattvic (goodness-inducing) quality. As we have already seen Brahmins gave up animal sacrifice and took to vegetarianism and teetotalism at a certain point in history by imbibing the value system of *ahimsa* (non-violence) and by imitating and

adopting the non-violent practices and customs that originated among the Sramanas, the Buddhists, and the Jains.

Srinivas uses the word Brahmin not only as a signifier for a caste but, ideologically, as a semiotic placeholder for all that is good, excellent and accomplished, that is, as the very locus of culture (etymologically samskriti/sanskrit=the refined, the cultured) and whenever someone is accomplished, or something is cultured, it is always associated in his mind with the Brahmin and the Brahminical.

Therefore, Sanskritization as a theory of social/caste mobility is invalid because Srinivas does not interrogate the ideological idea of the Brahmins as the standard-bearers of society.

iii) Srinivas, following the Brahminical guna theory, essentializes qualities and practices as specific to castes, and presupposes a uni-directional model of cultural transmission in which Brahmin cultural practices are adopted by non-Brahmin castes to rise in the hierarchy of castes. But this uni-directional model of cultural transmission, as we have already seen, is patently false and ideological.

If we look at the history of cultural transmission between castes, sects, and tribes one gets a completely different picture. Brahmins, far from being the originators and bearers of customs and practices that the non-Brahmins imitate and adopt, are appropriators of non-Brahmin and non-Brahminical values, customs, practices and gods.

The history of the expansion of Brahminism from Vedic Brahminism to Puranic Brahminism to modern pan-Indian Brahminism/Hinduism is a history of cultural appropriation. This process of adopting pre-vedic mother goddesses and symbols, non-vedic village gods and goddesses, folk songs, prayers and hymns, tribal narratives and music, subaltern dance-forms (Sadhira as Bharatanatyam), popular non-Brahmin shrines, pilgrimage sites, totemic symbols, non-Brahminical system of monasteries (Sramanic system of ashramas), and non-Brahmin customs, practices, and value systems has been identified as "Brahminization" by D.D. Kosambi and "Deshification" by Wendy Doniger. Srinivas does not mention this process though he talks about Secularization and Westernization implying, without any hesitation or doubt, that the only form of cultural transmission taking place within "Hindusim" is from Brahmins to non-Brahmins.

### **On the Supposed Emulation of "High and Frequently *Twice-born* Caste" by a Low/Middle Hindu Caste or of a Dominant Caste by a Non-dominant Caste**

i) The use of the religious term "twice-born caste" in sociology as if the "twice-born-ness" of the caste were an empirical fact is quite funny and shows the extent to which the theory is steeped in Brahminical ideology. What does "twice-born" mean, by the way? Are there even twice-born "castes"? Since the conclusive answer to this question is "no" the very fact that such a theory has existed unchallenged—at least it has not been challenged enough to remove it from the undergraduate syllabus of Delhi University—is quite astounding. Let me explain: Sanskritization, Srinivas makes it very clear, is not a theory of social mobility of *individuals* but a theory of social mobility of *caste-groups*. "Twice-born," a translation of the Sanskrit word *dwija*, refers to the two-

births that Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya males are believed to have—the first biological and the second symbolic. Males of these three varnas have a symbolic second birth when they undergo the *upanayana* ceremony by wearing the cross-thread (*janeau/yajnopaveetam*), itself a symbolic representation of amnion or the innermost membrane surrounding the foetus in the womb. (To make matters worse for Srinivas, the goat-shaped rice and barley cakes that are currently offered during this ceremony—rice and barley “goats” whose necks are symbolically broken—are themselves relics of the “sanskritization” of the “twice-born” castes as they are substitutes for the discontinued practice of animal sacrifice.[10]) Women of these three varnas, since they are considered *Shudra*, are *not* allowed to undergo the *upanayana* ceremony and wear the cross-thread.[11] This means an entire half of the members of Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya varnas are not considered *dwija* or “twice born.” How then can the members of these castes/varnas as a whole, or the castes themselves, be called “twice born?” They can’t be. There are no “twice-born” castes, there are only “twice-born” Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya men. And since “twice-born” castes don’t exist the question of emulating them does not arise.

ii) Caste, whether high or low, is a concept. It is a reified (concretized) generality that stands in for a population of real people. Since this concept attributed to a people does not think and act—and it is only *individuals* who think, act and imitate—agency cannot be attributed to a caste. It is always the individuals who have agency, and a caste has agency only when individual members express a *collective will* to move in a certain direction. If the collective will of a caste group is consciously expressed we call it a *politics*, and if the collective will is unconsciously expressed we call it a *social tendency*.

If Sanskritization is real, it must satisfy at least one of the following conditions:

- a. Members of a caste placed lower in the Brahminical hierarchy must have a *conscious collective project* to imbibe the practices of a caste placed higher in the Brahminical hierarchy to enhance their status in the Brahminical hierarchy. That is, there must be a caste politics.
- b. Members of a caste placed lower in the Brahminical hierarchy must have an *unconscious desire* to imbibe the practices of a caste placed higher in the Brahminical hierarchy to enhance their status in the Brahminical hierarchy. That is, there must be a caste tendency.

Since one has never come across a consciously expressed collective desire—that is, a politics—of any caste to imitate and imbibe the practices of a caste placed higher in the Brahminical hierarchy, one assumes Sanskritization implies the unconscious desire—that is, a social tendency—of the members of a caste to imbibe the practices of a caste higher in the Brahminical hierarchy. Note that Brahminical hierarchy is not the same as social hierarchy or social status, it is just one of the aspects which contributes to social hierarchy.

When it is said that caste X imbibes the social practices of another caste Y what it means in actual terms is the aggregate of the new practices of individuals belonging to caste X have been acquired by imitating the existing practices of caste Y. However, if there is a new fashionable practice in town, and if it is being practiced by individuals of caste A, caste B, caste C and caste D and the status of these individuals in the Brahminical hierarchy is not clear or unknown but who enjoy a high social status, and if such a practice is adopted by



individuals belonging to caste E, caste F and caste G, then, whether the status of these castes in Brahminical and social hierarchy is high or low, it cannot be called Sanskritization. Because the imitation of practices of high status individuals by low status individuals is a universal phenomenon, it has nothing to do with Brahminical hierarchy and one's status in Brahminical hierarchy. For example, in the 90s Satyanarayana Pooja was a fashionable practice among the middle and upper-middle class families in Bangalore and even people who did not worship Narayana adopted this practice because it came to be regarded as a "social do"; the performance of this pooja was an occasion to invite one's relatives and friends and have a vegetarian feast. It was not a practice acquired by a family of "a caste" from a family of "another caste"—though, naturally, the practice must have originated in a specific caste. It was rather a religio-social event that families belonging to middle- and upper middle-classes classes acquired from each other though caste-wise these families belonged to different levels of Brahminical hierarchy.

But, as already stated, when M.N. Srinivas speaks of Sanskritization he does not mean this kind of social imitation at the individual or familial level. Sanskritization for him involves the adoption of practices by a lower caste from a higher caste to rise in the Brahminical hierarchy. But, since castes don't imitate, and it is only individuals who do, when we say one caste imitates or acquires the practices of another caste what we mean is a significant number of people belonging to a certain caste lower in the Brahminical hierarchy acquire practices which are typical of members of a caste placed higher in the Brahminical hierarchy. The practice of wearing *janeau* by men belonging to certain castes whose varna status *is disputed*—that is, they are not recognized as belonging to the first three varnas *by certain castes*—is frequently cited as an example of Sanskritization. But males of these castes

cite very “convincing” reasons which, are not, in any sense, different from the ones offered by men whose varna-status is not disputed, as to why they belong to one of the first three varnas. For example, members of the Daivadnya caste of the costal Karnataka region, for example, claim to the Brahmin status and wear the *janeau* but this is disputed by other Brahmins as they are thought to have intermixed with other castes. As if these Brahmins who question their status haven’t intermixed with other castes! Today, no caste can claim to pure caste-endogamic lineage as there is population genetics evidence that all castes and tribes have mixed with each other for 2,300 years from 2,200 BCE to 100 CE [\[12\]](#) after which the restrictions on caste-exogamy solidified.

One can cite examples of other castes (like the Vishwakarma) whose varna-status is disputed and the act of wearing *janeau* by its males is therefore seen as Sanskritization. In almost all these cases members of the disputed castes cite reasons to claim a varna status which is not very different from the reasons to belong to a varna cited by those whose varna status is not disputed. One of the oft-cited reasons to claim Brahmin status are the priestly engagements of a caste and the priestly regard in which they are held by others. The Brahmin status of such castes can’t be questioned on any sure ground because, with the exception of a handful of Brahmin castes whose Brahmin status is unquestioned, and who have also maintained genealogical records which are accurate at least to a dozen generations, there are many Brahmin castes whose Brahmin status has been conferred during the course of Brahminization. That is, when non-Brahminical groups were brought into the ambit of Brahminism the priestly families of such groups were anointed Brahmin by the Brahmins who converted them.

Many “Brahmins” of the tribal belt of the North-East, and of the once-Buddhist stronghold of Bengal and Orissa, have acquired their Brahmin status in this way. When we come to the case of Kshatriyas it becomes even more interesting. The status of Kshatriya, from the very beginning, has been quite volatile. It has depended less on birth and more on having administrative rights over a land area. While the word for Kshatriya in the Rig Veda is *Rajanya* and translates roughly to “royalty,” the later word Kshatriya comes from the word *kshetrapati* meaning “lord of a place.” Which means that a social group which acquired administrative rights over a place by winning a war and acquiring it from the previous ruler acquired the status of Kshatriya. Throughout Indian history we find many warring tribal groups acquiring the Kshatriya status after fighting and acquiring kingdoms. Rajputs (the name by which Kshatriyas have identified themselves since 16th century in Northern India) trace their ancestry to Bappa Rawal (c. 8th century), the leader of one such military group; these warring groups which formerly had kinship with some Pathan clans raided whenever it was possible and acted as mercenaries when paid. [13] While many military leaders easily acquired Kshatriya status after military success the Maratha king Shivaji faced great difficulty in getting himself crowned due to resistance by local Brahmins who objected to his Shudra status. Shivaji famously invited Brahmins from Benares who promptly prepared a genealogical chart to establish his Kshatriya status and crowned him king. The case of the Vaishyas is quite different.

The word Vaishya comes from the word *vish* meaning “common people.” Described, along with women and Shudra, as *paapayonah* (born of evil wombs) [14] in the 2nd century text Bhagavad Gita they have never really been held in great regard for anyone to claim this status. In Vedic times they were “subject to payment of... tax or tribute to ‘another’ (*anyasya*), could be

forced to sustain 'another'... and could be 'oppressed at will' (*yathakamajyeyah*)." But unlike the Shudra they "shared the privilege to offer a sacrifice and enter the sacrificial enclosure (Shatapatha Brahmana, III, 1.1.9-10)." [\[15\]](#)

The purpose of going into the history of these varnas is to show the real historical process through which certain social groups acquired the status that they have in the Brahminical hierarchy. During the process of Brahminization, the status of Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya was acquired by non-Brahminical social groups not by imitating anyone but by expending powers that they had made their own—the priestly groups became Brahmin by the use of asceticism, vindictive intelligence, and powers of mass hypnotism, the warring groups became Kshatriya by the use of overflowing vigor, violence, careful military strategizing; and the trading groups became Vaishya by their capacity to contribute food grains and wealth and by their ability to sustain others. Sanskritization, then, which states that the low and middle-castes ascend in the Brahminical hierarchy by changing their customs, rituals, and way of life "in the direction of a high and frequently *twice-born* caste" is therefore ideological and false, and the empirical evidence provided by Srinivas is random and non-generalizable instances which only confirm his bias.

The case of the emulation of dominant castes by non-dominant caste is different in that the dominance of the dominant caste depends not so much on their rank in the Brahminical hierarchy but on their economic and political power and their numerical strength. One distinct marker of dominant caste status in the countryside is the ownership of locally available arable land. Since dominance in this case is not defined by Brahminical hierarchy but by local hierarchy and general markers which confer status to social groups this is more or less like class

emulation which is a universal phenomenon. But when Srinivas says the non-dominant castes adopt the practices and way of life of the dominant caste he is significantly off the mark because it is exactly the opposite phenomena that we see in the non-dominant castes. Non-dominant castes, precisely because they do not possess economic and political power, do not own large tracts of land and do not have the numerical strength, know that their sense of identity is founded on culture and hold on to their unique food cultures, social practices, dresses and ornaments, religious rituals and social customs. I don't know whether this tendency to preserve cultural markers that are unique to a caste is typical of Indian social groups, but it is definitely something that one can find in social groups which are of Indian origin, like the different Roma (gypsy) groups which are found in the countries of East Central Europe and in the USA.

Srinivas's concept of Sanskritization, whether it talks of the emulation of the higher castes by low and middle castes or the emulation of dominant castes by non-dominant castes is founded on the assimilation-into-Brahminism or the assimilation-into-Dominant-caste model, which, if true, should have led to the disappearance of caste differences, with all castes giving up their own practices and acquiring those of the so-called higher-castes. Since the status of the low and middle castes on acquiring the practices of the higher castes is also supposed to change in a space of two to three generations it should have also led to all the castes having the same status in the Brahminical hierarchy. This obviously has not happened in the two thousand years of the history of caste.

What has happened though is interesting: castes, whether high or low, have held on to practices with extraordinary tenacity, as if their identity depended on these practices and despite

popular condemnation. Among the so-called upper-castes we see this in their resistance to give up the practice of widow-burning or *sati* and in their extreme unwillingness to allow widow-remarriage. It took the force of legislation to bring an end to the former and allow the latter.

Among the so-called lower or Dalit castes we see an extreme unwillingness to give up eating beef despite majoritarian religious disapproval of that practice, persecution, and caste atrocities. Dalit castes have refused to give up beef though their persecution and the practice of untouchability has been connected to the practice of eating beef. These two examples show us how castes, far from easily taking to practices which would grant them greater social approval and higher status, stick to their practices despite popular censure and repeated attacks. Whether this tendency is good or bad is a different issue but what it proves, quite conclusively, is that Srinivas's theory of Sanskritization in which he presents a model of caste ascendancy through the adoption of rituals, customs, and way of life of a higher caste is ideological, unscientific, and theoretically unsound—the implications of the theory being denied by the history of caste itself.

## **The Real Sanskritization**

If Brahmins did not transmit culture as Srinivas describes what is it that they did transmit unidirectionally and with a singular force? What the Brahmins transmitted (and continue to transmit) was the *idea* of caste, and, they did not just unidirectionally “transmit” it, they parasitized [\[16\]](#) our brains with it, turning us all into casteists (i.e.

transmitters—and practitioners—of the idea of caste). They transmitted caste by producing and reproducing the following:

1. A model of hierarchy of castes (à la Purusha Sukta) and a set of punishments for those who violated it. That is, construction of the schema of caste and the imposition of it through social decree and state law.
2. The idea of caste, that is, the idea that the degree of “purity” and “pollution” of a person/a people is determined at birth.
3. The “discipline” of caste endogamy and a horror of exogamy (with the exception of anuloma— “uppercaste” male and “lower caste” female –marriages).
4. The legitimization and constant reproduction of Brahmin megalomania through megalomaniacal narratives of scriptures, puranas, epics, kavyas, dramatic and poetic conventions.
5. High-culturification (through Vedanta) and popularization (through Bhakti) of megalomania by making megalomania the way to God through formulations like aham brahmasmi.
6. Institution of the theory of karma which provides metaphysical justification for higher and lower births, and the suffering and misery associated with lower birth.

But who parasitized the brains of the Brahmins? Where did they get the idea of caste from? One has to ask this question because one cannot find caste system in any of the Central Asian or European Aryan groups. The short answer to this question is that Brahmins acquired a primitive idea of caste from the people of the Indus Valley Civilization but developed it into a powerful tool of social and ideological control on

their own.

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## End Notes

[1] Srinivas, M.N. 1952. *Religion and Society Amongst the Coorgs of South India*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.32

[2] 'There can be little doubt, for instance, that the 90th hymn of the 10th book [Purusha Sukta] is modern both in its character and in its diction. (...) It mentions the three seasons in the order of the Vasanta, spring; Grishma, summer; and Sarad, autumn; it contains the only passage in the Rigveda where the four castes are enumerated. The evidence of language for the modern date of this composition is equally strong. Grishma, for instance, the name for the hot season, does not occur in any other hymn of the Rigveda; and Vasanta also does not belong to the earliest vocabulary of the Vedic poets. But in spite of all the indications of a modern date, this hymn, if our argument holds good, must have existed before the beginning of the Brahmana period. I see no possibility how we could account for the allusions to it which occur in the Brahmanas, or for its presence in the Sanhitas of the Vajesaneyins and Atharvans, unless we admit that this poem formed part of the final collection of the Rig-veda-sanhita, the work of the Mantra period.' Müller, Max. 1859. *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, London: Williams & Norgate, pp.570-571

[3]



उक्षान्नाय वशान्नाय सोमप्र्ठाय वेधसे ।  
सतोमैर्विधेमाग्नये ॥

Let us serve Agni with our hymns, Disposer, fed on ox and cow,

Who bears the Soma on his back.

Rig Veda, 8.43.11

सूर्याया वहतुः परागात सविता यमवारुजत ।  
अघासुहन्यन्ते गावो.अर्जुन्योः पर्युहयते ॥

The bridal pomp of Surya, which Savitar started, moved along.

In Magha days are oxen slain, in Arjuni they wed the bride.

Rig Veda, 10.85.13

पिबा सोममभि यमुग्र तर्द ऊर्वं गव्यं महि गर्णानैन्द्र ।  
वि यो धर्ष्णो वधिषो वज्रहस्त विश्वा वरत्रममित्रिया शवोभिः ॥  
स ई पाहि य रजीषी तरुत्रो यः शिप्रवान वर्षभो यो मतीनाम ।  
यो गोत्रभिद वज्रध्रु यो हरिष्ठाः स इन्द्र चित्रानभि तन्धि वाजान ॥  
एवा पाहि परत्नथा मन्दतु तवा शरुधि बरहम वाद्रधस्वोतगीर्भिः ।  
आविः सूर्य कर्णुहि पीपिहीषो जहि शत्रून्भि गा इन्द्र तन्धि ॥

Drink Soma, Mighty One, for which, when lauded, thou breakest through the cattle-stall, O  
Indra;

Thou who, O Bold One, armed with thunder smotest Vrtra with might, and every hostile being.

Drink it thou God who art impetuous victor, Lord of our hymns, with beauteous jaws, the Hero,

Render of kine-stalls, car-borne, thunder-wielding, so pierce thy way to wondrous strength, O  
Indra.

Drink as of old, and let the draught delight thee. hear thou our prayer and let our songs

exalt thee.

Make the Sun visible, make food abundant, slaughter the foes, pierce through and free the cattle.

Rig Veda, 6.17.1-3

वर्धानं यं विश्वे मरुतः सजोषाः पचच्छतं महिषानिन्द्र तुभ्यम ।  
पूषा विष्णुस्त्रीणि सरांसि धावन वरुहणं मदिरमंशुमस्मै ॥

He dressed a hundred buffaloes, O Indra, for thee whom all accordant Maruts strengthen.

He, Pusan Visnu, poured forth three great vessels to him, the juice that cheers, that slaughters Vrtra.

Rig Veda, 6.17.11

Griffith, Ralph T.H. (1896) [The Rig Veda](#)

[4] Gardner, Robert and J.F. Staal (1976) *Altar of Fire*, a documentary. The Film Study Center at Harvard University, color, 58 min. (The entire documentary can be watched [here](#).)

[5] Flattery, David and Martin Schwartz (1989). *Haoma and Harmaline: The Botanical Identity of the Indo-Iranian Sacred Hallucinogen 'Soma' and its Legacy in Religion, Language, and Middle Eastern Folklore*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (University of California Publications Near Eastern Studies, Volume 21.)

[6] Falk, Harry (1989) 'Soma I and II', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London: UCL Press, 52/1 (1), pp.77–90

[7] Wasson, Robert Gordon (1971) 'The Soma of the Rig Veda: What Was It?' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 91, No. 2, pp.169-187.

[8] McDonald, Andrew (2004) 'A Botanical Perspective on the Identity of Soma (Nelumbo nucifera Gaertn.) Based on Scriptural and Iconographic Records', *Economic Botany*, Vol. 58, Supplement (Winter, 2004) p.58

[9] Havell, E. B. (1920) 'What is Soma?' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 3, pp. 349-35

[10] Muller, Max ed., (1882) *Sacred Books of the East Vol. XII: The Satapatha-Brahmana*, Part. 1, trans. Julius Eggeling. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.49.

[11] Kane, P.V. (1941) *History of Dharmashastra: Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law, Volume 2 Part 1*. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, pp.292-295.

[12] Priya Moorjani, Kumarasamy Thangaraj, Nick Patterson, Mark Lipson, Po-Ru Loh, Periyasamy Govindaraj, Bonnie Berger, David Reich and Lalji Singh, (2013) "Genetic Evidence for Recent Population Mixture in India," *The American Journal of Human Genetics*, 93(3):422–438. doi.org/10.1016/j.ajhg.2013.07.006.

[13] Kosambi, D.D. (2012) *An Introduction to the study of Indian History*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, p.370.

[14] Bhagavad Gita 9:32: 'Son of Pritha,/those who seek refuge in me,/even those/ who come from evil wombs,/ or women, vaishyas,/ even shudras,/ they, too,

go on/ the highest path.’ All, except the Brahmin and Kshatriya men, according to this verse from the Bhagavad Gita, ‘come from evil wombs.’ *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Laurie Patton (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 109.

[15] Habib, Irfan and Vijay Kumar Thakur. 2006. *The Vedic Age: and the coming of Iron c.1500-700 BC*. Delhi: Tukila Books, p.53

[16] Though I use the word ‘parasitized’ I conceive the idea of caste as being closer to the specific kind of ‘parasite’ called virus. Because, like virus, the idea of caste is inanimate but when it comes in contact with the human brain it becomes animate and spreads exponentially, causing the epidemic of caste-mindedness—an epidemic which rearranges lives, relationships, and causes grievous harm to a large segment of Indian society placed at the middle and bottom rungs of the Brahminical hierarchy.

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