# Hinduism And Its Discontents: Kancha Ilaiah And Shashi Tharoor Perspectives On Hindu Identity- A Critical Comparison

Dr. Y. Praveen Kumar

Assistant Professor of English, Department of English, Government Degree College, Medak, Medak,

Telangana,

## Abstract

The research paper critically compares the writings of Kancha Ilaiah and Shashi Tharoor's works "Why I am Not a Hindu" and "Why I am a Hindu" through a critical discourse analysis to explore the relationship among language, power and social structure in these works. It examines how these two authors represent different social and ideological locations and construct and negotiate Hindu identity.

Ilaiah, a Dalithbahujan intellectual, critiques Hinduism as an oppressive system; at the same time, Tharoor, a Brahmin and Indian elite family member, defends Hinduism as a pluralistic tradition. It urges these two perspectives on Hindu identity to reflect deeper socio-ideological faults in Indian society. This research study aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the Hindu identity of complex Indian society as well as political and cultural understanding.

## Keywords

Hindu identity, Shashi Tharoor, Kancha Ilaiah, discourse analysis, Indian society, politics, culture.

## Introduction

The world's third biggest religion is Hinduism (The Global Religious Landscape, 2012). It is the most complex religion than any other religions of the world religions. It is the subject of interest, debate and discussion among scholars, intellectual society, and among the practitioners (Flood, 2008). Diversity, inclusivity and adaptability are the characteristic features of this religion. These enabled the religion to persist and traverse through centuries (Doniger, 2009), though it has been criticized for social and cultural hierarchies. These have been conserving inequality, oppression and social injustice (Ambedkar, 1936). There have been endless and continuous debates on Hinduism throughout the world, even today. The debate on it took a new turn with the publication of the two prominent books. In it, Kancha Ilaiah's book "Why I am Not a Hindu" (1996) and the second book is written by Shashi "Why I am a Hindu" (2018). One religion can be seen in two ways from the

perspectives of these two writers. Their beliefs are quite different in their books. They presented the role of it in Indian society.

The perspectives of these two writers are pretty different and interesting. Kancha Ilaiah, a Dalitbahujan intellectual, critiques Hinduism as a biased system that has been causing socio-economic inequalities (Ilaiah, 1996). On the contrary, Shashi Tharoor, a Brahmin and a member of the Indian elite, safeguarded Hinduism as a pluralistic and unexceptional tradition that contributed to Indian cultural and intellectual heritage (Tharoor, 2018). This research paper focuses on critically examining and comparing the two writings of Kancha Ilaiah and Shashi Tharoor. The ideal perspectives of these two writers on Hinduism and its role in present Indian society are discussed promptly. Through a critical analysis of these two works, the paper examines how these two authors build and negotiate. The religious identity (Hindu) and how the author's discussion reflects and harnesses broader social and power dynamics.

In writing the research paper, three research questions were put forth by the researcher to himself to relay the research paper. The first question is, "How do Kancha Ilaiah and Shashi Tharoor construct and negotiate Hindu identity in their works?". The second question is, "How do Ilaiah and Tharoor's discussions reflect and reinforce broader social and power dynamics in Indian society?" and finally the third question is "What are the implications of these two writers' perspectives on Hinduism for Indian society, politics, and cultural understanding?"

When it comes to the importance of the study, it is important to compare two different perspectives on Hinduism critically. The topic is highly contested and complex. The research paper examines how these two authors build and negotiate Hindu identity. This study contributes to a graded understanding of the social power dynamics that shape Hinduism. Further, its role in Indian society.

The method that was chosen to write this research paper was the critical discourse analysis approach. It will help the researcher to examine the works of Ilaiah and Tharoor. The study analyzes the language the tone and the style adopted by these two authors to build and negotiate Hindu identity. Their discourses mirror and harness broader social power dynamics.

Let the discussion start with the first question "How do Kancha Ilaiah and Shashi Tharoor construct and negotiate Hindu identity in their works?". The discourse analysis of Kancha Ilaiah and Shashi Tharoor reveals the complex Hindu identity. It is a contested concept. It has been discussed and debated by the Indian elite people to the commoner (Flood, 2008; Doniger, 2009). The prominent voices in this debate are Kancha Ilaiah and Shashi Tharoor. They wrote extensively on Hinduism and Hindu identity. The present discourse analysis examines how Ilaiah and Tharoor construct and negotiate Hindu identity in "Why I am Not a Hindu" (Ilaiah K, 1996) and "Why I am a Hindu" (Tharoor, 2018).

Deconstructing Hindu identity by Ilaiah, he is a Dalithbahujan intellectual, critiques Hinduism as an oppressive discriminative system. It has been nurturing socio-economic and socio-political inequalities. In "Why I am Not a Hindu" he urges that this religion is a caste-based religion. It has been used to justify social hierarchies and oppression (Ilaiah, 1996, p. 12). He criticizes that the Hindu identity concept is deeply rooted

in Brahminical ideology. It has been marginalised and excluded Dalitbahujans and other marginalised communities (Ilaiah, 1996). His construction of Hindu identity is characterized by a critique of its dominant and elastic nature. His appeal is that the Hindu identity is not a homogeneous concept but a complex and contested category. It has been shaped by power dynamics and social hierarchies (Ilaiah, 1996).

Shahi Tharoor, a Brahmin and a member of the Indian elite reclaimed the Hindu identity. He defends Hinduism as a pluralistic and inclusive tradition. It has contributed to India's cultural and intellectual heritage (Tharoor, 2018). In his book "Why I am a Hind", he argues that Hinduism is a unique and inclusive faith. Critics have misunderstood and misinterpreted it (Tharoor, 2018, p.10). He contends that Hindu identity is not a fixed or essential category but a dynamic and evolving notion. It has been shaped by India's diverse cultural and intellectual traditions (Tharoor, 2018). A defense characterizes his Hindu identity construction, and it lies in its pluralistic and inclusive nature. He argues that the Hindu identity is not a monolithic or homogeneous concept. But it is instead a complex and multifaceted category. It has been shaped by India's diverse cultural and intellectual traditions (Tharoor, 2018).

Power dynamics and the negotiation of social hierarchies in Hindu identities are reflected in the writings of both authors. Their construction of religious identity reflects deeper power dynamics and social hierarchies in Indian societies. Ilaiah criticizes Hinduism as an oppressive and exclusive system that reflects the experiences of Dalits and the other marginalized sections of the people. They have been marginalized from the mainstream of Hindu society (Ilaiah, 1996).

Contrary to his voice, Tharoor defends Hinduism as a pluralistic and inclusive tradition that reflects the perspectives of the Indian elite and dominant caste groups. Historically, They have benefited from the socio-cultural hierarchies of the Hindu society (Tharoor, 2018).

Both the authors reflect the Hindu identity, and deeper power dynamics and social hierarchies in Indian society. In contrast, Ilaiah criticizes the Hinduism as an oppressive and exclusionary system and Tharoor defends it as a pluralistic and inclusive tradition. This discussion highlights the complex and contested nature of the Hindu identity and the need for a nuanced and critical understanding of its constructions and negotiations.

The second question, "How do Ilaiah and Tharoor's discussions reflect and reinforce broader social and power dynamics in Indian society?" is the second question, which tries to reflect and reinforce social power dynamics analysis in the two books. Ilaiah and Shahi Tharoor's texts, through the discourse analysis of their books Why I am Not a Hindu and Why I Am a Hindu, reflect a broader social dynamic of Indian society. These works mirror power dynamics in Indian society. This analysis examines how these two construct Hindu identity and caste hierarchy and how they reflect and reinforce dominant and marginalized perspectives in Indian societies.

The dominant perspectives on Hinduism and Indian society which can be seen in Shashi Tharoor's Why I am a Hindu. His Hindu identity construction is characterized by defending its pluralistic and inclusive nature. It reflects the perspectives of the Indian elite and dominant caste groups (Tharoor S, 2018). His text harnesses

the belief of the Hinduism as a unique and inclusive faith. Critiques have misunderstood and misrepresented it (Tharoor S, 2018, p. 10).

Tharoor's reinforcement of dominant perspectives on Hinduism and Indian society reflects and reinforces broader social and power dynamics in Indian society. His text perpetuates the notion of Hinduism as a dominant and inclusive tradition, which marginalizes and excludes Dalitbahujans and other marginalized communities (Ilaiah, 1996).

The challenging dominant perspectives in why I am Not a Hindu (Ilaiah K, 1996) of Kancha Ilaiah reflects challenges dominant perspectives on Hinduism and Indian society (Ilaiah, 1996). He construction of Hindu identity is characterized by a critique of its oppressive and incomplete nature, which reflects the perspectives of Dalitbahujans and other marginalized communities (Ilaiah, 1996). Ilaiah's text also challenges the notion of Hinduism as a "unique and inclusive faith" and instead argues that it is a "caste-based religion" that perpetuates social hierarchies and oppression (Ilaiah, 1996, p. 12). He challenges the dominant perspectives on the Hinduism and Indian society. It reflects and reinforces broader social and power dynamics in Indian society. His text perpetuates the notion of the Hinduism as an oppressive and prejudiced system, which reflects the experiences of Dalitbahujans and other marginalized communities (Ilaiah, 1996).

The discussion of the power dynamics and social hierarchies of Kancha Ilaiah and Shashi Tharoor reflects and reinforces broader social and power dynamics in Indian society. Ilaiah's critique of Hinduism as an oppressive and racist system reflects the experiences of Dalitbahujans and other marginalized communities who have been historically marginalized and excluded from mainstream Hindu society (Ilaiah, 1996). On the other hand, Tharoor's defense of Hinduism as a pluralistic and inclusive tradition reflects the perspectives of the Indian elite and dominant caste groups who have historically benefited from the social and cultural hierarchies of Hindu society (Tharoor, 2018). These two authors' discussion reflects and reinforces broader social and power dynamics in Indian society. While Ilaiah challenges dominant perspectives on the Hinduism and Indian society, Tharoor reinforces them. This discourse analysis highlights Hindu identity's complex and contested nature and the need for a nuanced and critical understanding of its constructions and negotiations.

The implications of these two writers' works are their perspectives on Hinduism, for a better understanding of Indian society, politics, and culture understanding will give a big picture of Indian society. The social implications in Kancha Ilaiah's "Why I am Not a Hindu" (1996) and Shashi Tharoor's "Why I am a Hindu" (2018) offer two contrasting perspectives on Hinduism, with significant implications. Ilaiah's critique of Hinduism as an oppressive and restrictive system highlights the need for social reform and equality in Indian society (Ilaiah, 1996, p. 12). His perspective emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing the historical injustices faced by Dalitbahujans and other marginalized communities (Ilaiah, 1996, p. 15).

In contrast, Tharoor's defense of Hinduism as a pluralistic and inclusive tradition reinforces the notion of Hinduism as a dominant and inclusive culture (Tharoor, 2018, p. 10). His perspective perpetuates the idea of Hinduism as a unifying force in Indian society, potentially marginalizing and excluding non-Hindu communities (Tharoor, 2018, p. 12).

Similarly, the political implications from the perspective of Ilaiah on Hinduism have significant implications for Indian politics, highlighting the need for policies and laws that address social inequality and promote justice (Ilaiah, 1996, p. 20). His critique of Hindu nationalism and its absolute politics emphasizes the importance of a more inclusive and secular approach to governance (Ilaiah, 1996, p. 25).

On the other hand, Tharoor's perspective reinforces the notion of Hinduism as a central aspect of Indian identity and culture (Tharoor, 2018, p. 15). His defense of Hinduism as a pluralistic and inclusive tradition potentially legitimizes Hindu nationalist politics and its censorious agenda (Tharoor, 2018, p. 18).

The cultural implications highlighted in the voices of Ilaiah and Tharoor on Hinduism have significant implications for cultural understanding in India. Ilaiah's critique of Hinduism highlights the need for a more nuanced and critical understanding of Indian culture and its complex social hierarchies (Ilaiah, 1996, p. 30).

Tharoor's defense of Hinduism, on the other hand, reinforces the notion of Hinduism as a dominant and inclusive culture, potentially perpetuating a simplistic and homogenized understanding of Indian culture (Tharoor, 2018, p. 20).

In conclusion, both the writers, Kancha Ilaiah's and Shashi Tharoor's perspectives on Hinduism have significant implications for Indian society, politics, and cultural understanding. Ilaiah's critique of Hinduism highlights the need for social reform, equality, and justice, while Tharoor's defense of Hinduism reinforces the notion of Hinduism as a dominant and inclusive culture. Further, the discourse analysis of "Why I am Not a Hindu" and "Why I am a Hindu" reveals two contrasting perspectives on Hinduism, reflecting deeper social and power dynamics in Indian society.

Ilaiah's critique of Hinduism as an oppressive and biased system highlights the need for social reform, equality, and justice. At the same time, Tharoor's defense of Hinduism reinforces the notion of Hinduism as a dominant and inclusive culture.

The implications of these perspectives are far-reaching, with significant consequences for Indian society, politics, and cultural understanding. Ilaiah's perspective emphasizes the need for a more nuanced and critical understanding of Indian culture and its complex social hierarchies. In contrast, Tharoor's perspective perpetuates a simplistic and homogenized understanding of Indian culture. Ultimately, this analysis highlights Hindu identity's complex and contested nature and the need for ongoing critical engagement with the social and power dynamics that shape Indian society.

Future research recommendations

- Further analysis of the intersections between caste, class, and gender in Indian society and their implications for Hindu identity and cultural understanding.
- Examination of how Hindu nationalism and its clannish politics are shaping Indian society and culture.
- Investigation of alternative perspectives on Hinduism and Indian culture, including those of Dalitbahujans, women, and other marginalized communities.

The debate on Hindu identity and cultural understanding is ongoing, with significant implications for Indian society, politics, and culture. This analysis contributes to this debate, highlighting the need for ongoing critical engagement with the social and power dynamics that shape Indian society.

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