Recall This Book
Episode 118
Episode 1 of Violent Majorities: Indian and Israeli Ethno-nationalism, Balmurli Natrajan (Ajantha, Lori)
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Ajantha Subramanian:

Welcome to Recall This Book, where we assemble scholars and writers from different disciplines to make sense of contemporary issues, problems, and events. Usually, Recall This Book is hosted by Elizabeth Ferry and John Plotz. But today the podcast has two guest hosts. I'm Ajantha Subramanian, an anthropologist who works on caste and democracy in India and the United States. And joining me is Lori Allen, who's also an anthropologist, who works on liberalism and international law in Palestine and Israel.

This is the first episode of a three-part series on ethno-nationalism and fascism. This first episode will be a conversation with a scholar of caste and ethno-nationalism in Indian, and the second will be with a scholar of the Israeli extreme right. And the third and final episode will be a conversation between the two of us and John Plotz, in which we reflect on the similarities and differences across the two cases.

Today we begin with Indian ethno-nationalism, for which we're joined by Balmurli Natrajan. Murli is Professor of Anthropology at William Paterson University. An anthropologist and engineer by training, Murli's research and teaching interests are on caste, class and gender, globalization and development, and nationalism and fascism. His books include The Culturalization of Caste in India: Identity and Inequality in a Multicultural Age, and a co-edited volume with Paul Greenough, titled Against Stigma: Studies in Caste, Race and Justice Since Durban. And more recently, Murli has written essays on vegetarianism and beef eating in India and on Hindu nationalism, and these essays explore the intersections of caste, religion and nationalism. And Murli has also been very active in South Asia Solidarity work in the US, mainly focusing on issues of secularism, human rights and neoliberalism.

Welcome to the podcast, Murli.

Balmurli Natrajan:

Thanks so much, Ajantha. Glad to be here. And hi, Lori.

Lori Allen:

Hi.

Ajantha Subramanian:

Okay, so we wanted to start with your book before expanding the frame to talk about ethno-nationalism more broadly. First thing, the book is, in many ways, a very rich ethnography. It's a rich ethnographic account of one particular caste, the Kumhar caste of potters in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh. And it offers this account of how the lives and livelihoods of the Kumhars has changed over time.

And one of the things that you argue very strongly is that Kumhar elites, so the folks who no longer are practitioners of this craft, have taken to framing caste identity in cultural terms. And for you, there's a problem with this. So I wonder, can we start by you fleshing out this argument for our listeners? What is the problem? What's the problem with seeing caste principally as a cultural identity?

Balmurli Natrajan:

Excellent. Could I take a step back and actually say something about what prompted me to or what the problem was that I was grappling with in my own head, that brought me to this kind of a book. One of the key things that I was encountering in popular discourse, as well as in official discourse, as well as in some scholarly discourse on caste, was what I would say is a liberal understanding of caste from an anti-caste position, which interestingly, and very dangerously in some way, coincided with the right-wing understanding of caste, with right-wing too thinking of themselves as anti-caste.

So I captured this as the five tropes somewhere in the book, mostly in the preface really, the five tropes that actually face us about caste today. And the first one is that caste has modernized, and it's even in some way democratized because of the political ways in which previously historically marginalized castes have come in a big way into Indian politics. And so we really need not worry much about caste today, it's a thing of the past. It's also got its economic equivalent, which plays out in some kind of an argument that says, well, for an underdeveloped economy like India, caste is actually good for the growth of capitalism because you have trust when you actually make transactions and you save transactional costs. So there's a literature arguing that.

And then there's a third trope, which is what I actually focused on, which is that caste is now no longer just the hierarchy, in fact, it is not the hierarchy. It has become from a vertical into a horizontal structure, and it's just a benign difference. And this I call as the culturalization, which I'll say a little bit more about, but there are to these three political, economic and cultural tropes, I see two bookends. One is that admittedly caste exists, but it is existing in a benign, normal way. It is defined, so it exists in those cute matrimonial columns where people ask for the same caste. And so it just exists in these privatized spaces, and that really doesn't have a whole deal to dictate in terms of monopolization of wealth or inequality. It's just there.

And then on the other hand there's another bookend, which I call the brutal abnormal to the benign normal. You have the brutal abnormal, which has to admit that there are some incredible violent things that erupt from time to time, and it's only from time to time. And therefore the even more, pretty troubling word is the Atrocities Act, atrocity in some way connoting exceptional or extraordinary, whereas caste violence is ordinary violence, everyday violence. So when those things happen, it always happens in some backward part of India, not in the rest of India.

So this is the trope that I was really struggling with and wanted to have a clearly left response, left egalitarian response, to all of this. But I ended up focusing just on the trope number three, which is on the caste as culture. And of course all of this helped me then formulate the understanding that identities and inequalities are actually two sides of a single process within caste. And that we have to pose the question and ask the question, how does caste persist and what is the durability of caste, which then helps us understand how caste legitimizes itself. And I think in the legitimization aspect, that is where I unwrap some of the things on culturalization. So -- what indeed is culturalization?

The book is largely written against a scholarly trend that I saw, and still see, of asking us to think about the transformations in caste as an ethnicization of caste. That is, instead of a vertical hierarchy, which is what we think of when we think about caste, we are invited to consider that caste is now just about difference, it's on the horizontal plane. And so we can devote ourselves to thinking about how caste has ethnicized. Now, that to me is not at all what is happening on the ground, but also ...

For example, on the ground there is hierarchy, there are all kinds of inequalities, and there are appeals to fairly traditional forms of belonging, such as blood and purity and things like that. On the other hand, it is a

shirking of what scholars need to do, which is to distinguish between what is happening as a social process, and also bring in ideological aspects of legitimation as part of our analysis.

So culturalization then is really caste repackaging itself as culture. Caste in some way taking up the grammar of culture in order to present itself as benign horizontal difference/identity. And in doing that, what culturalization is is a depoliticization of caste. It is, in fact, I have even called it a counterrevolution of caste. It is the most recent form of the legitimation of caste.

Lori Allen:

I was wondering if we could segue from this conversation to your article on racialization and ethnicization. And there you're really addressing how Hindutva has this differential treatment of Muslims and Dalits in how it's manufacturing hegemony. You say that Hindutva relies on a kind of racialization of the Muslim as a racial other, and on the other hand an ethnicization of the Dalit as an internal other. But you point out how this boundary is really unstable and you talk about cow protection is one way that we can see that.

And I was just wondering if you could lay out that argument about racialization and ethnicization for us and how you see that working.

Balmurli Natrajan:

To get to this thing on racialization and ethnicization. When we think about the Hindutva project, and we can talk more about how we can understand it, one of the key things that we have to understand that it is not something that is just a recent electoral-based, successful, triumphalist project. It is at least been 100 years, if not more, in the making. And I would actually say it's probably 130 or 140 years in the making. That is almost at the same time that the Indian National Congress comes into play. You have the formation of a right-wing in the Congress, and that grows into something called the Hindu Mahasabha. And that grows and grows and grows. But it also taps into everyday life, everyday cultural life that we all value dear.

One of the things that I do want to point out is, although I argue against the culturalization of caste, I am not arguing against culture, I'm not arguing against cultural identity generally and things like that. One has to be careful how one gets read. But in this sense, Hindutva has done probably the maximum amount of work, well, I don't know if I should say maximum, but it

has done a huge amount of work on the cultural register. And so when we come to this kind of an understanding, then we immediately see that the three pillars of Hindutva ideology is Hindu, Hindi, and Hindustan. This is in their founding documents, ideologically reproduced, culturally embodied, signified in just about everything that they do. And in that the term "Hindu" is actually a racial term.

So in this foundation itself, there is some way in which they tap into folk theories of stocks, racial stocks, and things like that. And they learn very clearly, and there's enough scholarly literature out there which talks about learning from the experiences of the fascists in Italy and then the Nazis in Germany, but generally transposing the Jewish problem in Europe to the Muslim problem in India. So Muslims then are the racial other of Hindu. And some other scholars, for example like Zaheer Baber, he has argued for a while that we should not think of Hindutva as ethno-religious. It's really ethno-racial, or it's really a racial project in that sense. It's a racial nationalism and something like that.

But racialization for Hindutva and ethnicization for Hindutva are two prongs that are in some way weaponized for two different populations, that they desire in two different ways. Whereas the Muslim in India, in the project of Hindu Rashtra, or the Hindu nation, which is the ultimate project for Hindutva, the Muslim can only exist as a secondary citizen or needs to be excised.

So discipline, punishment and all kinds of oppressive technologies will be and are unleashed on the Muslim because that is the only way in which Hindu Rashtra can come into being, or so, I am arguing, is the ideology at work of Hindutva. That is only Hindus own the nation, which is really Hindustan, which is a territory. And Hindi is the ethnolinguistic hegemonic identity, which is foisted from a language that is actually, in some ways, scholars are fairly clear that Hindi, as a language, is itself of recent origins in some way. There are multiple other languages which gets kind of fused and counted as if they are all Hindi speakers. But nonetheless, it comes from a particular part of India, which is the Plains, the Gangetic basin and things like that.

And so you have a race, a racial identity, a linguistic ethnic identity, and a territorial identity being fused together. Whereas Muslims threaten the idea of a nation that, "In order to build a Hindu nation, you need to excise us. We are here and we are a 14 or 15% of the population. We've been here from as long as anybody else has been here. We've contributed in all kinds of ways with our labor."

But Dalits are a thorn in a different way. They challenge the idea of Hindu. They actually then challenge Hindutva as to, "Who is this Hindu that you're talking about? We are not Hindus." Of course, a large number of Dalits still continue to be counted as Hindus and many Dalits do practice certain forms that could be in some way syndicated into Hinduism. The worship of Muruga, for example, who's a God who is very popular in South India. There are lots of Dalits who actually worship Muruga. But the main point here is that Dalits, the only way for Dalits to remain in some way amenable to Hindu Rashtra, is for Hindutva to in some way ethnicize them.

And this has really nothing to do with Ambedkar's use of the word "ethnicize," when he said, "We need to form a new identity not derived from caste. That is truly ethnicization." And that never really happened, although Ambedkar tried and he exited Hinduism and therefore tried to make it into a Buddhist or a neo-Buddhist identity. But for Hindutva, they don't get into all that stuff. They just want to say, "Hey, Dalits are just one of us. They're just a different ethnicity. Caste is ethnicity. We are a house of different ethnic groups. Look how wonderful we are. And we're brothers and sisters, and Dalits therefore need to stay within the house of Hindu Rashtra."

But Dalits are recalcitrant. So from time to time, they will be deemed to be as anti-national as Muslims. They will also be deemed to be as anti-national as the even more permanent enemies of Hindutva, who are the left broadly speaking, party left, non-party left, intellectuals, artists, human rights advocates. Anyone who's for civil liberties, anyone who speaks in some way in a voice of dissent can be and is actually put into jail with all kinds of acts of sedition that are from the colonial era.

So that is the tricky thing for Hindutva. They don't know what really to do with either Muslims or Dalits, although they know what they want to do with both of them. They want one to leave and they want the other to shut up and put up.

Ajantha Subramanian:

There is so much use of religion to whip up popular sentiment. And I mean, it's obviously been very effective. And somebody like Christophe Jaffrelot, who's one of the main political scientists who is working on the Hindu right and has been for decades, he even makes the argument ... I heard him say in a podcast that he thinks that one of the ways that women have been recruited to the Hindu right is via religion, that religious conservatism maybe paradoxically has been a real attraction for women.

So I'd like to hear you say more about religion and whether this is ... Is this a movement that started out as more racial and territorial, but religion has become more prominent as a pivot of difference and as a mobilization tactic. Where is religion in this?

Balmurli Natrajan:

I would say that religion has always been part of this, even though you rightly point out that its founders and founding ideologues didn't really get into religion in the sense that we think of as needing faith and devotion. The ones who are actually doing the work of Hindutva, that is folks who belong to part of that labyrinth network, they largely vanguardize religion.

And I'll just say one last thing, which is probably one of the most difficult and most emotive issues very much amongst those of us who are in some way self-declared or self-identified anti Hindutva, I have consistently made an argument that it is the Hindutva project, the project of its ideologues, to equate Hindutva with Hinduism, the religion. I know Jaffrelot has made some argument that early on it was not quite the case, but today, Hindutva's project is to speak for Hinduism, the religion, and all adherents to Hinduism, the religion, who are therefore Hindus.

And so it would be a mistake to gift that away. And so we have to have some way to say you could be a Hindu, and Hinduism is not Hindu. You could be a Hindu without being Hindutva. And Hinduism has many aspects to it that have really nothing to do with Hindutva. This should not be a hard task given the incredible myriad of beliefs, rituals, that without ecclesiastical structures just get packaged as Hinduism. We should remember also Hannah Arendt, who somewhere said in some ways the space of religion was vacated by secular Jewish left intellectuals. And I think we need to bear some of those learnings in mind.

Lori Allen:

I'm really glad you brought up Arendt there, Murli, because as you were talking, I was thinking about the parallel struggle among some anti-Zionist Jewish people to reclaim a Judaism that is a spirituality and a way of life that's full of ritual beauty, that is unhooked from the Zionist project, which as you know, has a lot of parallels with the Hindutva project. So I just wanted to toss that out there.

Ajantha Subramanian:

I think that this is something which is so ... It's kind of a puzzling thing. Given the heterogeneity of what comes under this umbrella of Hinduism, how has Hindutva been so successful at convincing people of this equation between the ethno-territorial conception and religiosity?

Lori Allen:

If you can just talk about where you see the effect of populism in relation to the elitism of Hindutva.

Balmurli Natrajan:

Fascinating. I think Hindutva has been successful and it has failed, or it has run up against its own limitations. And in some way the understanding of populism, also that ... Lori, you talk about Hindutva challenges us to think about what populism could mean. And so I want to just place these two things for us to keep coming back in some way.

I think I'll start with the latter and then move to the former. I mean, Jaffrelot's understanding of Hindutva as ethno-nationalism is supremely important, useful, and it comes from probably one of the best scholars of Hindutva that we have today. But I also want to see it as ultra-nationalism. And I want to make the distinction in a very maybe simple way, because I think that suffices for now, that whereas nationalism is really about in some way bringing people together and building a identity. And I'm again oversimplifying some of that, but just to make hopefully a useful, insightful point.

Ultra-nationalism is actually focused on naming enemies, demanding constant allegiance to be proven and stuff like that. Hindutva is ultra-nationalism in that sense. It's really not interested in nation-building. It might appear from time to time to be for that, but I would argue not at all. And we could do some analysis of materially what wealth has left India since Hindutva has taken power, what kind of development has taken place and things like that. So from 2014 to 2019, the election planks are very clear. 2014, there was a hope for development, *Vikas* is the term that was used in the Hindi language that is hegemonic to Hindutva. That's completely dropped out. There has been no *Vikas*, i.e development. And so now we're just Hindutva, plain, plain only Hindutva.

And so it's not only ultra-nationalist in that sense, therefore its brand of populism is authoritarian populism, that is that it ... And I have found it very useful to go back to an old text by Arthur Rosenberg, who actually was from

Brooklyn, I believe, but of course had his own trajectory, and Jairus Banaji writes about Arthur Rosenberg. But Arthur Rosenberg, he has a very clear understanding that fascism is a mass movement. It is not just a political seizure of power and things like that, and that it does have some clear things such as a anti-liberal strain to it. And I think he uses the term counter-revolutionary capitalism, but we can just say neoliberal capitalism, for example, just to capture some of the things, that it is very anti-labor and therefore very neoliberal capitalism.

But it also has some interesting other things, that is it calls for national renewal and it offers itself as the redemption. And that redemptive power is where I will try to connect with what Ajantha is asking us to think about. There's something about redemption, there's something about ... And Stuart Hall, for example, all his work on the UK and Thatcherism and things like that, one of the things that comes out from there is, I mean, there is a crisis in society, but this force comes and it really doesn't address the crisis, but it uses the crisis to offer itself in some redemptive ways for a bunch of other things. And the crisis continues, or even deepens. And so it's a national renewal with that redemptiveness, and you then very clearly also have a Stormtrooper, kind of a paramilitary aspect to that. All of this comes together in some way.

Sorry, Ajantha, do you want to say something?

Ajantha Subramanian:

In terms of the populist character of this, what makes it authoritarian populist? When we think about populism, often the distinction that's drawn is between the people and the elites. This is not about the people and the elites. This is certainly about an enemy that the nation is against, and the enemy is a moving target. It can be the Muslim, it can be the liberal, it can be the secularist, it can be any number of things. But the fact that this is a form of populism that is yoked to counterrevolutionary capitalism – this is not about class elites, right? Class elites are not the enemy. So can you say more about the class character of this form of populism, which is quite different from, say, labor populism.

Balmurli Natrajan:

Yes. Yes. Yes, I think ... I mean, of course, the classic thing is Laclau, and so constantly reproducing certain boundaries within, internal boundaries, so that we have an us and a them. I would suggest that Hindutva is very clear on the "them." It is having a hard time constructing a people, because people are

recalcitrant, sorry, indisciplined, and they're all over the place, and it's very hard to construct that people with the Hindutva movement. And some parts of their commitment to anti-liberalism and anti-labor, or neoliberal capitalism, makes them have to come down hard on folks who may otherwise be part of the people. And so it's rife with those types of internal contradiction.

So if we move from this to what are the successes, why has it been so successful, one thing is that, going back to Hannah Arendt's thin[king]--the house of Hinduism got vacated by a lot of us who thought of ourselves as secular, of course, even non-believers, but ended up not paying any attention to therefore who's going to the temples, who is attending these discourses and sermons. When I was doing fieldwork, yes, one of those radical militant right-wing women, Sadhvi Rithambara, her speeches used to be broadcast in my neighbor's house, and my neighbor was part of the Hindutva Parivar [Family], and she would invite me for lunch all the time to have a discussion. I somehow avoided it.

But I just want to say that one thing is that, who speaks for Hinduism -- if one asks that question -- Hindutva is a primary candidate, not the only one, thankfully, but Hindutva is a self-styled speaker for Hindus and Hinduism. Then the second thing that I want to offer is, although there are attempts to make Ram into a Supreme God and things like that, it runs into problems, especially in the south, but not only in the south. There are all kinds of people who raise questions about this, and Gandhi tried that in a much more benign way, Ram Rajya, and that too did not take some root.

There are ways in which Hindutva actually materially manifests itself in the realm of production of religious symbols in a constantly proliferating manner, through the media, through any other kinds of ... Even printing presses, through ... So there's a whole lot of money that gets pulled into that, and someone who reads some of these things doesn't really get the full-fledged toxic stuff. The toxic comes in some kind of a concealed manner. It is ever so lightly introduced. And people who switch on the television and the number of channels that are devoted to religion is shot up, as much as the film, Bollywood and Kollywood and all of those channels. So when they switch that on, you have to listen for some time and then you'll find some Hindutva drop in there or two.

And so we should start focusing not on the outright rabid folks, of which there are many, but on the even more number of folks who are not so rabid, but who casually put in some stuff, which in some way builds Hindus as a people, versus those who are not us.

Lori Allen:

Yeah, I've been thinking about ... I mean, obviously there are all kinds of ways that people get sucked up into this and sutured into this project. And one of the elements I've been very interested in is the role of basically these street thugs, whether it's the cow vigilantes or the love jihad policers or whatever. And I've been thinking about how does a movement convince so many, especially young men, to produce quite so much energy. Because this stuff takes effort to go out into the streets and do these things. And I'm wondering about what kind of gratification is offered through the maybe we can call it the field work of Hindutva of these guys.

And I was reading this book by a journalist with a very ethnographic sensibility, I don't know how you say her name, Snigdha Poonam, a book called *Dreamers,* and she has a chapter called The Angry Young Men, where she focuses on especially a couple of guys who talk about how their role in Hindutva, the roles that they play, give them a sense of power, give them a sense of prestige in their neighborhoods, and it comes through expressions of violence and power over others.

And so I was just wondering if you had any thoughts about what the kernels of that longing for power, where those kernels come from, and what is the process by which Hindutva has grown those kernels?

Balmurli Natrajan:

Lovely. I think there are very similar things on the ground happening, Lori, like the things that you suggested, and there are other authors too, Scott Atran, for example, some of his work. Anyone who has done work on gangs, anyone who has all of these things that come together that is really not ideology only, it's really the material social relations of belonging, of having a support thing and things like that. So Hindutva has for a very long time built an array of organizations that work at the lowest level, I mean, administrative level you can think of in civil society, small mohalas, that are these neighborhoods.

And they will be the first to respond, or the second to respond, but definitely in the top, to respond to a crisis. They'll be the ones who will be sought after to solve some kind of a really banal everyday life issue. And they build up these kinds of things. I think Thomas Hansen's work on the Shiv Sena for example, talks about some of this stuff, that they actually have these shakha models, these small cells, that are in every neighborhood. And their job is not to preach, their job is not to actually do ideological work. That's for the

pracharaks [preachers/ideologues], that's something else. They are the ones who will do every-day integration of things like set up a gym in a-

Lori Allen:

They offer services essentially is what they do. They actually help people.

Balmurli Natrajan:

That's right.

Lori Allen:

And I wonder if seeing how Hindutva groups have helped people is also a way for us to think about the cracks into the system or levers for offering an alternative system.

Balmurli Natrajan:

Yes. In fact, this is the job of the left, which the left has done for a long time in terms of organized trade unions and various kinds of work from left groups, parliamentary as well as non-parliamentary left. But with the successful onslaught that Hindutva has had on labor and any kind of unionism and collectivism, that space gets vacated. And we would be remiss in this discussion if we don't bring in the issue of the not just middle class, but upwardly mobile and hugely successful now capitalist classes, or even the managerial classes, who have in some way participated through chest-thumping about how India has arrived on the global scene. And India has a successful economy, has much to teach the world.

And that's also part of this complicity that even if it is not the biggest thing for them to have a Hindutva identity, for them India is in some ways being represented by Hindutva. So it's not just Hindus being represented, it's also India. And that is normally with some kind of a very basic, rudimentary, not really deep, anti-colonial, which is really not anti-colonial, it is actually anti-Western type of a thing, that is tapped into by the social psychology of Hindutva. It has mass appeal across castes as is regularly shown, not just in electoral victories, because one can think of electoral victories as being more vanguard in some ways. But also I don't think we should assume that some castes, especially subaltern castes, are impervious to the attractions of Hindutva.

Ajantha Subramanian:

Right. I think we have to start wrapping up, and we have all these other questions we wanted to ask you, but I think we've touched on so much. I wonder, since we're sitting in the United States, I wonder if we can end with a question about the United States and the difference between Hindutva here and Hindutva in India. Because one of the things that Lori and I have been talking about is some of the differences that we see in the way Hindutva activists position themselves, especially relative to liberalism. And maybe we can call it multiculturalism as well, I mean, which is how we started this conversation.

So Hindutva discourse in India doesn't even bother to claim a liberal mantle. In fact, it's anti-liberal and very explicitly so. And conversely, when you look at the United States and the way these activists position themselves, they're making use of liberal ideals.

Lori Allen:

And institutions.

Ajantha Subramanian:

And institutions. They deploy the language of religious tolerance, of minority rights, all sorts of things. They're using the courts to argue on the grounds of sentiment, Hindu sentiment, they're using identity politics.

So what do you make of this two-pronged approach, to be properly liberal subjects in one context and to be virulently illiberal in the other? Can you say something about that? Is there a contradiction here that those of us who are trying to combat Hindutva can utilize? I mean, I'd like to end on a more hopeful note about oppositional strategies.

Lori Allen:

Don't misunderstand this, we don't think that liberalism is the hopeful...

Ajantha Subramanian:

Is the answer, yes. But it's just when we look at these very different ways of positioning this movement in the two contexts, what can we learn from that?

Balmurli Natrajan:

Yeah, I think there is a documented history of material aid that goes in the form of money, hard money. And we've called it the saffron dollar in some of the works that have come out on actually documenting that, the amount of money that goes from here to various organizations that belong to the Hindutva family of organizations. So I just want to say that that is the foundational material reality, let's say, if not foundational.

Ajantha Subramanian:

Right. You got to follow the money, yeah.

Balmurli Natrajan:

That's right. Having said that, yes, there are contradictions, and yes, there are ways in which we can push at those contradictions, because of precisely the fact that there are many elected and increasing number of elected representatives of Indian origin, and a very clear and maybe growing set of Indian origin people, and hopefully a little more heterogeneity, than before, who are now in the upper echelons of corporate America. Apart from that, we have of course the vast numbers of middle range managerial software, but also working-class populations of South Asian origin, Indian origin in this case.

And I think in there we can have a way in which we will need to work through the issues of the desire and even the demand for identities that are classically seen as religious or ethnic in terms of linguistic-based ethnic identity within the diaspora population. But push the argument that one cannot benefit from liberalism here while supporting some kind of deeply anti-liberal project there. And I don't see any other way in which we can do this. It is even more important for us to be anti-caste, but not anti-Hindu. And the right wing therefore then will trip on their own petard or whatever, when it comes up with the Hindu phobia. And that's the kind of strategic politics one needs to arrive at.

I am afraid we are not there yet when we do anti-caste politics here it frequently gives fuel for the right-wing. And can we do it in a different way? I believe so. And it's not only logically possible, it is actually strategically necessary. So that is one way, and then we can also rein in ... I think if we follow the money and put pressures in particular ways, we can rein in that kind of a flow, that should never cease. Nobody who is in the US should be seen as supporting some completely vile actions somewhere else and then pretend that we don't know about that, because this is increasingly being

made visible by some very arduous scholarship that is coming out with all of that.

Lori Allen:

Excellent. Hear-hear.

Ajantha Subramanian:

All right. Okay. So sadly, podcasts have to end, they can't be endless conversations. But I hope this is the beginning of a longer conversation, Murli, that we have with you.

Balmurli Natrajan:

Yes. I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting both of you, and I wish we had some time to meet John too.

Ajantha Subramanian:

Yes. Well, maybe we'll all converge in real time somewhere, in a real place. Just before we wrap up, we would like to thank all the listeners of this podcast. We really appreciate you for being with us for this hour and really hope that you will join us for the next two episodes because this is a three-part series. So thank you so much, Murli.

Balmurli Natrajan:

Take care and be well.

Lori Allen:

Thank you.

Ajantha Subramanian:

Bye.

Balmurli Natrajan:

Bye-bye. Thank you, thank you.

John Plotz:

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