

Resources on Non-Brahmin Movement

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Badri Narayan's article 'Heroes, Histories and Booklets' (October 13, 2001) explores the dalit-bahujan literature which has often been ignored. At best social scientists have labelled these booklets and pamphlets as 'polemical' and thus unworthy of academic engagement. For many of us who are seeking to develop an archive of the publications and audiovisual documentation of the non-brahmin movement in Maharashtra, Narayan's piece was welcome.

Narayan's analysis of the UP and Bihar experience as juxtaposed with that of Maharashtra opens up possibilities of comparative studies of the non-brahmin movements in India. However, we feel that some of the conclusions about the concordance/discordance between the western and north Indian experiences were rather hastily drawn. Firstly, his analysis of the dalit movement in Maharashtra rests selectively on Surve and Murugkar's analysis, thereby overlooking the vast literature on the theme. Drawing upon these readings, he concludes that "except for a few neo-Buddhists – most others affiliated to the Left" or that "most of the leaders of the dalit movement in Maharashtra were those who had returned from an American University". Not only

do these conclusions not hold empirical ground, but also they overlook the important tensions between the Marxist and Ambedkarite trends in the Dalit Panther movement. The Dalit Panther movement has seen several regroupings but its contributions to revolutionary movements both in terms of ideology and strategy cannot be brushed aside. In highlighting the divide between the neo-Buddhists and the Left, Narayan overlooks the emergence of the Satyashodhak Marxvadi Party and Shramik Mukti Dal, for instance, which have sought to integrate a Marxist-Phule Ambedkarite position. In the last decade, the Dalit-Adivasis-Grameen literary movement, the Sakal and Vidhrohi Sanskritic Movement have sought to creatively go beyond the question 'who is your true Father – Marx or Ambedkar?' There have been other significant developments in the dalit movement in Maharashtra in the last decade. A movement for December 25, Manusmriti Dahan Divas, to be commemorated as Bharatiya Stremukti Divas was spearheaded by a young dalit woman Dr Pramila Leela Sampat and the 'Divas' is celebrated officially by the major RPI groups and autonomous dalit women's groups. There have been in the last decade at least over a hundred booklets published in Marathi, written by dalit-bahujan writers on issues

related to globalisation and religious fundamentalism. A comparative analysis of the dalit-bahujan discourse in northern India and Maharashtra, such as the one Narayan undertakes, would require that the publication and circulation of booklets in the two regions be compared.

Narayan argues that the dalit discourse in Marathi has laid emphasis on the present and at best looked at the life histories of Phule, Shahuji Maharaj and Ambedkar. The dalit-bahujan discourse has in fact recovered Bali, Shambuk, Eklavya and Ravana and these figures have become common vocabulary in the peasant and dalit-bahujan movements in the region. The writings of Sharad Patil have recovered Sita, Nirruti and Renuka and Shivaji for non-brahmin feminism. While the writings of Bharat Patankar and Dhanaji Gurav in 'Shramikanche Asud' have recovered the bahujan renderings of the myths of local gods and goddesses. The last decade has seen several debates on the recovery of Shivaji, Tukaram and women in the *Mahabharata*, (see especially the writings of Sadanand More, A H Salunkhe and Govind Pansare.) Interestingly, the Bahujan Mahasangh has sought to recover the tradition of 'adimaya' for its rendering of feminism (see Rekha Thakur's 'Adimayachi Mukti'). The Ambedkari gayan parties (singing troupes) sing not only the life history of Babasaheb but narrate alternative accounts of the nationalist movement and the Pune Pact. These histories reach homes through the cassettes of these parties which draw upon popular titles ('I Love You Ambedkar' or 'Kaun Banega Ambedkar', for instance) and tunes.

Lastly, if more than 'his-stories' are to be recovered, recovery of Jhalkaribai and Avantibai will not be enough. The participation of women in these chauharmahal melas and redrawing of histories would have to be documented.

In times of astrology and purohitya and brahminisation of history, right-wing documentation centres are building up their resources. The need to put together and translate regional resources on the non-brahmin movement and its publications, cassettes, 'jalsas', singing troupes, etc, has assumed political urgency. Some of us at ISHARA (C-13, Rachana Garden, University Road, Pune-411007) are trying to develop such a collection (thanks to a seed grant from Sarai CSDS, New Delhi) and welcome your suggestions for the same. ☐