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Activism in India and the Awakening of Justice through
Discursive Practices*

Reviewed by Gajendran Ayyathurai

University of Göttingen

gajendran.ayyathurai@cemis.uni-goettingen.de

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A Review of Identity, Rights, and Awareness: Anticaste Activism in India and the Awakening of Justice through Discursive Practices

Gajendran Ayyathurai¹

Identity, Rights, and Awareness: Anticaste Activism in India and the Awakening of Justice through Discursive Practices. By Jeremy A. Rinker. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018, xi + 211 pp., ISBN 978-1-4985-4193-0 (Hardcover), \$95.00.

The persistence of the problem of caste calls for innovative theories and more data for its eradication. *Identity, Rights, and Awareness* is a welcome contribution in this direction. The first book in the series Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Asia, it builds on the groundbreaking contribution of Johan Galtung. His pioneering views of “direct, structural, and cultural” forms of violence as an “equilateral triangle” call for a critical perspective on violence to arrive at lasting peace in any society. Jeremy Rinker relies on such recent scholarship in Peace and Conflict Studies to engage with anticaste movements. In this comparative study he examines three contemporary anticaste movements that are popular mostly in west and north India.

¹ Centre for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen. Email: gajendran.ayyathurai@cemis.uni-goettingen.de.

The first three chapters of *Identity, Rights, and Awareness* focus on Peace and Conflict theories and methods to investigate anticaste movements in India. Aware of the emergence of “privileging a self-identity over historical kinship identity” (11) among oppressed communities, the author analyzes three geographically and demographically diverse anticaste social movements in chapters four, five, and six. Rinker first studies Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana (renamed Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha, hereafter TBM), which is a “Dalit Buddhist social movement active in Maharashtra” (13). Second, the author takes up the All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF) in Nagpur (Maharashtra) for which his interest was sparked after he came in closer contact with it in the summer of 2016. Finally, he scrutinizes a “more secular human rights organization,” namely, People’s Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR) in Uttar Pradesh. The common thread in Rinker’s comparative analysis of these three movements is centered on who the conflict parties are, and more specifically, who the anti-caste activists are and their interests (14). The author examines the distinctness of each group. The TBM’s agenda is to spread Buddhism among caste-marginalized Indians. BAMCEF differs in that it stands for the propagation of a non-Brahminical indigenous identity for Indians who have been denigrated by Brahminism as lower caste and untouchable. Finally, PVCHR promotes civil rights for caste victims in north India.

Elaborating the significance of each of these organizations, Rinker writes that as “the vanguard of turning all of India into Buddhists” the TBM activists promote Ambedkar Buddhist identity among Dalits, seeing this as the first step towards re-establishing Buddhism in postcolonial India. In contrast, the author points out that PVCHR stands for a range of civil rights in the localities it serves. Rinker notes that PVCHR was founded by “an educated upper-caste Kshatriya,” Dr. Lenin Raghuvanshi, and his wife, Shruti Nagvanshi. For the author this has its own advantages. That is, “a high caste working for the low-caste rights places him [Lenin Raghuvanshi] in a socially complicated position with both elites and the less fortunate down-trodden.” In fact, for Rinker PVCHR is a “neo-Dalit movement,” although he

does not explain what he means by neo-Dalit vis-à-vis the category Dalit (which means “oppressed” or “broken”). Even as PVCHR functions as a “neo-Dalit” organization, it has an inclusive focus by working with communities that are “Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, and other excluded segments of the Indian population.” Cultural, religious, and historical aspects and identities are not part of PVCHR’s agenda, the author explains. In Rinker’s analysis, the BAMCEF, in divergence to TBM and PVCHR, stands for “Phule-Ambedkarite ideology.” That is, BAMCEF aims to combine the thoughts and practices of anticaste leaders from Maharashtra, those of Jotirao Phule (1827-1890) and Ambedkar (1890-1956), to spread their relevance in the all-India political transformation. However, the author clarifies that the founders of BAMCEF, Kanshi Ram and D. K. Khaparde, have worked to establish a new identity, the Mulnivasi (Indigenous Peoples) majority, for caste-marginalized communities. For the BAMCEF, thus, “caste annihilation” is only possible through “rule by the Mulnivasi (Indigenous Peoples) majority by integrating ‘low castes’” (19-25).

Concurring with the three organizations’ commitment to anticaste social change in India, Rinker shows that they stand for alternative identity, rights, and awareness in that order. He argues that a clear understanding of these organizations and their social movements is feasible only when one learns about their “narrative agency.” Quoting Peace and Conflict Studies specialist Sara Cobb’s definition of narrative agency as “the capacity to develop a story about self in which one is an agent,” the author writes that “narrative is not a silver bullet for creating positive social change, it is a key element in grasping the lived-experience of injustice, . . . [and is a] first step in . . . protracted social change” (34). This narrative agency, which “provides a critical lens to understand caste oppression and anticaste resistance,” enables the unraveling of what Rinker, following Cobb, calls “narrative violence” (39). For Rinker it is against this narrative violence that the narrative agency of the oppressed emerges to produce anticaste discourses.

But to show how productive narrative agency works, the author first instantiates some non-narrative agency moments in response to the problem of caste that rather constrain the anticaste politics of the oppressed. Story One is about the Daulatabad Fort of Maharashtra. In it, Rinker points out how present-day casteism is practiced by Muslims against Dalits by mimicking privileged castes' exclusionary utilization of public resources, such as drawing water from public tanks. While conceding such casteist practices are reprehensible, Rinker views the response of Dalits in this case as re-narrating "Dr. Ambedkar's own experience" of suffering discrimination in availing public utilities as a "close off [of] potential dialogue with others." For the author this "unwittingly reifies the community's own sense of separated identity and victimization," which does not enable its "positive identity and awareness education." From this story he concludes that there is a "failure" to "devalue separateness of identity and simultaneously value liberty, fraternity, and collective awareness of injustice" among the oppressed, that is, Dalits. Thus, he fervently asks how activists in anticaste movements can develop empathy among non-Dalits "and enliven revolutionary pressure for immediate rights" (43-44). However, Rinker does not elaborate on what this revolutionary pressure is and how it can engender empathy among the upper castes towards Dalits.

Story Two is about an "SC," that is Dalit, activist teacher from Gujarat, who fought against discrimination in drawing water from a public well. After all his challenges, the teacher could find ways and means "to dig another well!" While seeing the narrative violence of the oppressors in this story, Rinker finds the telling of such stories leads to unwelcome effects including "further dividing them [low castes] from other higher-caste communities," even though the victims are conscious of their powerlessness against such upper castes. Therefore the author disapprovingly concludes, "Despite the narrative violence inherent in the story—the story clearly sets and reifies low-caste and high-caste communities as diametrically against each other. . . ." Nevertheless, Rinker finds James Scott's concepts of "hidden transcripts" and "weapons of the weak" at

work in “the nods, knowing glances, and command of the audience this teller deploys” (46-48). And this makes one feel that maybe the author overlooks certain crucial aspects in Story Two. That is, despite the oppressed public’s open resistance, community support, and victories against casteism, their efforts are reduced to passive and hidden forms of resistance, and their life sustaining successes are overlooked as shortcomings. Here perhaps Rinker is rather constrained by his uncritical and irrelevant deployment of categories from James Scott’s romanticization of hidden forms of resistance (passive subversions, such as spitting and slander, against social power), which do not help in understanding multiple forms of active and anticaste public resistance.

In Story Three, Rinker critically examines hagiographic views on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and his role in the making of the Indian constitution. The author states that “more complicated and revolutionary aspects” about Ambedkar are lost in “nationalist narratives about him . . . [and] . . . acritical reverence for Dr. Ambedkar . . . [that] conspire to narrow the narrative of Dr. Ambedkar outside of these mostly Dalit communities.” Furthermore, he adds that this also leads to “a shallow collective understanding of Dr. Ambedkar’s legacy” among Indians in general. In Rinker’s view, such hagiographies of Ambedkar in fact “forestall any constructive dialogue or criticism about his revolutionary ideas for social change” and “his legacy and full impact are done a grave injustice.” For Rinker these narratives only lead to “religious or historical identity” politics and so do not foster “thick descriptive and complicated narratives” (49-54). The rest of the book is about comparatively investigating such narratives emerging from within the TBM, BAMCEF, and PVCHR organizations. From this analysis the author evaluates which among them is the best for anticaste social change and thus can serve as an archetype for present and future social change across India.

The chapter on TBM delineates its principles and provides a critical assessment of its ineffectiveness in producing social change regarding caste. Rinker writes that TBM is a “British-born transnational

organization” but works for and with “the sub-group of Indian Buddhists known as Nava (new) Buddhists, who converted to Buddhism following Dr. Ambedkar’s in 1956.” Since “separating Ambedkar ideology and identity from Nava Buddhism is almost impossible,” the author calls them Ambedkar Buddhists instead of Nava Buddhists (xiii-xiv). Though Rinker finds in the narratives of TBM the depiction of injustices against Dalits and appeal for social justice, he points out many shortcomings in them: (1) regarding the Nava Buddhist identity he asks how “to overcome the distrust and exclusion that this narrative of self-pride and in-group identity formation engenders in other communities” and “how to balance marginalized people’s needs for a sense of collective identity and self-esteem with an inclusive message and stance that includes potential allies”; (2) TBM leaders are known for “dogmatic insistence on the need for a Buddhist identity . . .”; (3) this has left higher castes and the public space to simply equate Buddhism with low castes and disregard it outright; and (4) for all these reasons “Framing Dalit Buddhists as neo-Buddhists or new age cults complicates TBM’s strategy of Buddhist identity creation.” Furthermore, Rinker writes that the neo-Buddhists are obdurate about “the original twenty-two vows taken by Dr. Ambedkar upon his conversion to Buddhism . . . and lack . . . critical re-assessment.” To substantiate his views he quotes Christopher Queen that “Nagaloka (TBM’s Training Institute) should be teaching comparative religion and they really need to drop the 22 vows. . . . They need to say what they are for and leave aside what they are against.” Pithily, Rinker concludes his analysis of TBM by writing that it is a “pro-social movement” that stands for “self-respect” and at the same time is also an “anti-social movement with a negative exclusive underbelly that breeds resentment and reifies social distance” (74-75).

Examining its socio-political aspects, the author writes that BAMCEF is a “non-political, non-agitational, and non-religious” organization prised of educated middle class people from low caste communities, that is, “SC [Scheduled Caste], ST [Scheduled Tribe], and OBC [Other Backward Classes] communities, not just Dalits.” Its agenda is to shift the re-marginalization of the oppressed from categories, such as Harijan and Dalits, to

an identity of “Mulnivasi Bahujan” (indigenous majority), which is achieved “by narrating an ancient unified history” (81-83). For Rinker BAMCEF members’ narratives have the twin purpose of bringing the educated of the low castes to the vanguard of restoring the “pre-caste history”—that is, before the onslaught of Brahminism/casteism when Indians were casteless—through “national education” of the injustices they have endured under casteism, on the one hand, and by means of the educated and civil servant BAMCEF members “paying back” the Mulnivasis of India, who have remained “victims of Brahmin control,” on the other. However, he critiques BAMCEF as an organization that is “too nationalistic” with “us/them rhetoric” and that “Their unique positionality as low caste, educated, middle class, and mostly civil servants may, in some sense, dampen a radical impulse to radical revolutionary change, but this positionality also simultaneously engenders a paternalistic sense of their ability to drive real structural change.” In fact, Rinker argues that BAMCEF’s concept of re-education about Mulnivasi ancient Indian history is “contentious and scant of primary source evidence,” and therefore this long-avowed identity agenda is “almost evangelical educational indoctrination” instead of being “either evidenced or pragmatic.” For these reasons, the author concludes that the BAMCEF cadres are “myopic in their refutation of other identity constructions and potential solidarities” (122-126).

Rinker’s analysis of TBM and BAMCEF makes one anticipate his take on PVCHR, especially after he characterizes BAMCEF’s Mulnivasi Bahujan as “more exclusive and limiting than the broad frames of ‘neo-dalit’ movement, which PVCHR is organizing around” (135). This chapter, with its subtitle “PVCHR’s International Rights Discourse,” gives certain clues about what to expect. The very second sentence of the chapter says, “The Internet, Facebook, and blogs are an important part of the PVCHR activists,” which compels the reader to critically understand more about its methods in the struggle against caste in a country in which only 26 percent accessed internet in 2015. PVCHR’s headquarters is in Banaras, Uttar Pradesh, which the author perceptively describes as a place renowned for “modern-day caste feudalism,” and which holds one of the major consti-

tuencies of present Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He writes that “PVCHR confronts the complex interconnections between marginalization, narration, and reconciliation through a rights-based discourse that is simultaneously international, trans-local, national, and inclusive.” In addition, PVCHR is supposedly “a neo-Dalit movement” but is “inclusive, humanistic, radical, and international facing.” Essentially, PVCHR positions for “the testimonial therapy process” ably conceived and promoted by its Kshatriya founders and their colleague Shabana Khan, of course, “in collaboration with Inger Agger of The Rehabilitation and Research Center for Victims of Torture (RCT-Denmark).” Rinker explains that this therapy is “practiced over four meetings between victims and trained outreach workers from PVCHR.” Thus, it is not an individual exercise but a social and “a village event,” and it is actually a “cultural and community building” effort. The PVCHR members facilitate public narratives of therapy against social abuses based on caste “to memorialize tragedy” of the “torture survivor” (143-145).

However, in Rinker’s analysis PVCHR is more “anti-national than national” and resembles “local community organizing found in the United States.” But he does not elaborate why it is anti-national and what US local community organizing stands for. In fact, the author celebrates PVCHR’s rights-based approach rather than organizing around “identity boundaries” that he finds so “problematic” in various “anticaste movements like TBM and BAMCEF.” These supposedly lack “secular and progressive organizing.” What is even more impressive in his analysis is that PVCHR “works in the English language and embraces international rights framing as a means to engage not just the oppressed, but also the oppressors” (145-147). To substantiate his views on PVCHR Rinker shows some instances of its public trauma therapy in which victims narrate their loss of loved ones to police brutality and the trauma caused by fellow privileged villagers. In contrast to “the distant past” Mulnivasi agenda of the BAMCEF and the “aspirational Buddhist future” of the TBM, the testimonial therapy of the PVCHR caters to the victims’ “psychological needs and humanity,” he writes. Nevertheless, Rinker is aware that “the immediate consequences

of testimonial therapy are not always evident.” More candidly, he avers such narratives of the victims “may not be a panacea to caste injustice” and yet points out that such “public telling does lead toward social resilience.” This is not made fully clear though. Rinker insists that the local and global connections of PVCHR have at least saved it so far “from high caste reprisals” even as it has stood for civil and other rights of the oppressed, since it “frames resistance as reform not revolution” (155-161).

Though a comparative study of three anticaste movements is itself a stupendous task, *Identity, Rights, and Awareness* also provides readers with a detailed analysis of each movement. In addition to unraveling their basic principles, practices, and challenges, Rinker shows how such organizations are constrained by their own ideologies. His critical engagement is necessary for this analysis, which is otherwise not available through a rigorous understanding of their claims and activities. Rinker is also unequivocal when he writes Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is made into a “demi-god” or a “pop-icon” whose words, contribution in the making of the Indian constitution, and sufferings are straightjacketed to the extent that the organizational adaptation and transformation of Ambedkar’s ideas and practices to the changing local and international conditions are overlooked. One may add, mere symbolic veneration of Ambedkar in his blue statues and valorization of saying or writing “Jai Bheem/Bhim” as a salutation in honor of Ambedkar do not lead to casteless transformation of India—ironically some overzealous Ambedkarites vilify other anticaste oppressed Indians, who are also followers of Ambedkar, for not saying such salutations in emails, Facebook, and WhatsApp messages, and in personal conversations in the US, Europe, and India. Ambedkar himself would not approve of such hero-worshipping tendencies—during his anticaste campaigns in the 1930s, Ambedkar walked out of meetings of his sycophants. Therefore, given the increasing caste-based and religion-oriented atrocities and impoverishment of marginalized communities in India, on the one hand, and the exponential economic growth of privileged caste groups through privatization and globalization in India, North America, and Europe on the other, the author’s call for radicalizing Ambedkar is relevant, particularly

for organizations such as TBM to be pertinent to the anticaste poor and oppressed.

Rinker is forthright when he writes that certain rigidities of BAMCEF and the lack of dialogical commitment in its leadership is unproductive to its own cause. It is true BAMCEF's identity construction, namely, Mulnivasi Bahujan, is a crucial contribution in centering the indigenous populations of India and to provincialize Brahminism. Though the author does not discuss this, BAMCEF was also vital in the emergence of a political party, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and in the election of chief minister, Ms. Mayawati Prabhu Das, in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Mayawati, as she is popularly known, could pull this off as BSP leader without kowtowing the Congress or privileged caste or Left parties' paternalistic casteism, but only because of new non-Brahminical identity conceptualizations such as Bahujan—more recently she gave this Bahujan identity a short shrift by problematically inventing an all-caste reinforcing Savarna identity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Mulnivasi Bahujan identity could not take roots beyond Uttar Pradesh to galvanize the entirety of north India itself. It is also clear that such ideas have not made the cut in south India.

But this shortcoming of BAMCEF is not because of what Rinker considers BAMCEF's unsubstantiated claims about Indigenous Indians who are unconnected with the Brahminical culture. Instead, it is arguably due to BAMCEF's all-India outlook and its inability to give due to the regional, linguistic, and cultural diversity of Indians who do not belong to Brahminical mythologies, doctrines, and propaganda. It is true BAMCEF's website, banners, and pamphlets increasingly have pictures of regional anticaste leaders such as Periyar, Birsa Munda, and others. But such gestures might still be seen as mere tokenism, as BAMCEF is yet to incorporate and learn from the deep anticaste histories of diverse regions of India that are viable only in their lingua franca. Thus, BAMCEF's predominantly Hindi or Marathi or English based mobilization among the educated subalterns is a major constraint in its taking seriously the multilingual

indigenous histories of casteless Indians. Perhaps BAMCEF's all-India postures would never allow it to be grounded in diverse linguistic regions of India. Rinker is unable to see this deficiency in BAMCEF because his study does not engage with anticaste cultural identities, movements, and histories.

This study brings to light the existence of PVCHR in Banaras by highlighting its strategic aspects. Its English language-based functioning, international connections, involvement of non-Dalits, and public exposition of human rights violations are significant factors in PVCHR as an anticaste movement against rampant casteism in north India. Given the present Indian government's pooh-poohing of human rights as a Western ideal—while welcoming an unhindered flow of Western food, dress, technology, dollars, and euros—it does not augur well for anticaste activists and their organizations in India now. Here Rinker's analysis of PVCHR's ability to take on casteism through English and global networks as the way forward is significant. However, PVCHR ignoring the regional and linguistic histories of casteless and anticaste Indian communities and their movements is problematic. This is because it prioritizes English over one's Indian language in which one has retained one's memory, culture, knowledge, and history that has come down through the ages. Thereby PVCHR is undercutting marginalized Indians' wherewithal to counter mythical and existential threats and to challenge the realities of Brahminical exploitation and dehistoricization. Rinker's admiration of PVCHR's international networking in English thus undermines the necessity of being grounded in its anticaste regional, linguistic, cultural, and historical strengths.

Identity, Rights, and Awareness has some limitations that need to be taken seriously if Peace and Conflict Studies wants to remain relevant in its engagement with the problem of caste in India and among the Indian diaspora (who are said to be around 17 million now). The major issue with this book is its reduction of caste to a crisis of rights. Rinker is aware of Clifford Bob's caution about taking Dalit activists seriously “beyond

ending abuses and protecting rights” (Bob 32) and also takes into account Johan Galtung’s threefold notion of direct, structural, and cultural violence. Yet the author prioritizes “rights discourse” of the marginalized over other multiple, additional components of their lives. Thus, his perspectives on the cultural, economic, and historical aspects of oppressed communities are put on the back burner or seen as irrelevant to more pressing civil rights of caste-based victims. Problematically, therefore, PVCHR’s testimonial public therapy assumes more importance in this study.

Caste is not a disease of the oppressed to be cured by various therapies. It is a violent invention of certain minority self-privileging caste groups who imposed this on those who were casteless. The imposers of caste have survived from the precolonial period in spite of Alexander the Great having “slaughtered” Brahmins for their casteism in the fourth century BCE, as Johannes Bronkhorst writes in his remarkably titled 2016 study *How Brahmins Won: From Alexander to the Guptas* (9). Later centuries of Muslim rule also could not annihilate the casteism of privileged caste groups; instead, some Mughal rulers patronized Brahminical groups, as Audrey Truschke shows in her 2016 study *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court*. These and other studies begin to emphasize how the academy has to shift its priorities toward examining why caste is persistent among those Indians who valorize themselves as upper castes by putting down fellow women and men as low castes and untouchables. For it takes a vile Brahminical patriarchy to invent the fiction called “untouchability” in order to justify exploiting the Indians it has dehumanized for free labor, sex, and food. Given the author’s lack of understanding of the history of Brahminism and casteless histories of the oppressed, perhaps it is myopic to prescribe testimonial therapies as a way to recover the humanity of such native Indians—even more so when one is not sure about the effective impact of such therapies against casteism.

Linguistically, religiously, culturally, and historically those who were branded as low castes were diverse and have remained so, even after

such violence. But Rinker is too caught up in the disciplinary constraints of Peace and Conflict Studies to unravel the interdisciplinary nature of caste and anticaste movements in India. Thus, questions of linguistic diversity, religious heterogeneity, cultural legacies, and agrarian and non-agrarian knowledge traditions of the oppressed are conspicuously absent in this study. To be sure, the author is aware of the positive identity that BAMCEF is trying to recover from the past and how TBM is trying to develop a modern identity with ancient Buddhist aspects. But the positive cultural histories of marginalized Indians that stand against caste are not a primary concern in this study.

This has put *Identity, Rights, and Awareness* in a situation of celebrating the hope of finding peaceful resolution of caste conflicts without disturbing the structure and functions of caste, as for instance PVCHR does. This is an oxymoron: letting privileged caste groups, that is, casteists, remain as such while oppressed Indians, whose bodies, labor, and land are violated and usurped, is ineffective in eradicating casteism. It is common knowledge that testimonies of the marginalized are never taken seriously by police, courts, politicians, the caste-public, and the academy. The history of diverse anticaste struggles of the oppressed shows that they are not supportive of establishing “inter-caste relationship” or finding “a role of higher castes” in their movements, but rather seek to undercut the very institution of caste and the power of the privileged in order to transform the oppressed and the oppressors (130).

In this sense, anticaste movements are against both Brahminism and self-privileging Brahmins, whose practices and codifications invented untouchability and the monster of casteism. Brahmins’ prosperity through ages has been directly proportional to those they have Othered as untouchables. Brahmin males have become the benchmark for other, non-brahmin caste groups who indulge in wealth accumulation through caste violence. Thus, critiquing Brahminism is about confronting brahmins and others who indulge in and promote dehumanizing religio-cultural and material practices against Indians who refuse to be part of their

caste-based culture, economy, and history. In this sense BAMCEF breast-beating that they are against Brahminism and not Brahmins, and Rinker suggesting that the anticaste movements have to include “Brahmins” and “high-castes” as they are, is sugarcoating Brahmins and other privileged caste groups while condemning casteism. In fact, it undermines anticaste movements’ philosophy of casteless consciousness and practice against perpetrators of Brahminism/casteism.

This becomes clear when we compare antirace and anticaste movements. Africans, African Americans, and whites in North America have challenged whiteness in multiple ways. Simon Gikandi, for instance, exposes the dehumanizing aspects of the racist culture of whites in his study *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*. Likewise, Ira Katznelson shows in his work *When the Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-century America* how whites monopolized economic benefits in the US by controlling state policies and resources, which deprived fellow citizens in the name of color. These antirace studies forthrightly confront the beneficiaries of racism. Similarly, the beneficiaries of casteism, that is, privileged caste groups, and their indulgence in casteist religious and cultural propaganda on the basis of which they monopolize economic benefits, have been unequivocally critiqued by the people they marginalize as low castes and untouchables. Therefore, seeing the *deep resistance* of the oppressed to recover positive identities, cultures, and histories as utopian and lacking in evidence while appealing to a *shallow resistance* to secure some rights, ironically through the benevolence of privileged caste groups, is limiting. Furthermore, it is a misinterpretation of the counter-hegemonic history of marginalized Indians.

Identity, Rights, and Awareness is perhaps the first book ever from the Peace and Conflict discipline’s perspective to grapple with the problem of caste and the struggles to overcome its gruesome persistence in modern Indian history. Jeremy Rinker, a white American academic, by taking the suggestions of an advisor who had a liking for Buddhism in India, and thereafter committing himself to a graduate study of anticaste

movements and then turning this study into a book after a few years of field study, is a worthy contributor. The anticaste struggles in South Asia have been there a long time. There are many anticaste regional leaders and movements with long histories. Studying just one movement itself is a challenging task. But Rinker takes the leap to compare three movements—TBM, BAMCEF, and PVCHR. With an amazing sense of balance, he has given close attention to important functionaries of these movements, their philosophies, and political practices. Despite Rinker's proximity to these movements and genuinely being part of them, he steps back to take stock of each of these movements with a critical eye in order to understand their witting and unwitting impacts, impacts to which they themselves might not be privy. These critical assessments do not belittle the decades-long efforts of some of these organizations and the movements that they have built. Rather, they provide the much needed interventions that could strengthen their agendas by weeding out certain inherent flaws in them.

It is clear that *Identity, Rights, and Awareness* is a study of an academic with antirace and anticaste commitments. Hopefully such studies do not remain as institutionalized sojourns of white American and European graduate students and scholars from diverse disciplines who happily check out caste in India, only to go back to their countries, get tenured jobs, and move on with other pet academic themes—a trend which is also emerging among second generation privileged caste Indian Americans and Europeans. Meanwhile the Adivasis, Dalits, and low castes they studied continue to languish in casteism. As of now, the educated subalterns from such communities are not supposed to enter the white academy as students, faculty, international collaborators, organic intellectuals, and bearers of anticaste practices and histories. It is only open to Indians with upper caste names who are willing to be postcolonial specialists while brazenly refusing to critique either their own or others' origins and legitimization of Brahminism/casteism in the academy. Such white-Brahmin collaborations would not welcome a new field of interdisciplinary Critical Caste Studies that would challenge the very basis of prominent caste-

related studies so far. In this scenario, Jeremy Rinker has conscientiously elevated TBM, BAMCEF, and PVCHCR organizations, as well as their intellectuals, members, and movements, to take their rightful place in the global academy.

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