

BOOK REVIEW : COLONIAL DOMINANCE AND LOCAL RESISTANCE IN SOUTH INDIA, G.SAMBA SIVA REDDY, RESEARCH INDIA PRESS, NEW DELHI, 2016, PP.485.

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When India became independent the nation-state was the framework of reference and study and 'national histories' were written. All India surveys were the norm. It was also doubted whether there could be a separate history of the Indian National Movement at the regional level. Regional Politics was seen essentially as a replication of what happened at the national level, albeit in a smaller and limited way. It was in the seventies that the focus shifted to the provincial and regional level. Reorganisation of states had been more or less completed by then and political movements demanding 'autonomy' especially in Tamil Nad and Jammu and Kashmir gained momentum. The seventies academically were noted for the emergence of the so called Cambridge school of historiography. The historians belonging to this school doubted whether there was a 'genuine' national movement at the regional level, ignoring the influence exerted by the ideology of nationalism and the consequent sacrifices made by the people. Politics was viewed as emanating from self interest. The constitutional enactments made by the British, it was argued, gave certain powers and privileges to a group of people who functioned as factions and cliques distributing favours. A patron-client relationship ensued and the competition and collaboration between them formed the essence of politics.

In studies in the eighties and nineties made from a Marxist, nationalist and later subaltern perspective, these arguments were debunked. Such studies showed that there was indeed a case for the study of Indian national movement at the regional and local level, as it was revealed that there were departures more than replications. Indian national movement was no longer seen as one of unilinear progression. It was also shown that Indian national movement could not be reduced to the history of a political party. The Indian national movement, one of the greatest the 20th century had seen in terms of extent and mass participation, had its own complexities and inner dynamics.

These are brought out in the empirically rich study of Kadapa District of the erstwhile Andhra Province by Samba Siva Reddy, Kadapa, which exhibited a high degree of nationalist

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temperament, was called 'Second Guntur' by British officials. While Guntur was subjected to a micro study by Eric Frykenberg and B.Seshagiri Rao, Kadapa did not attract the due attention of historians. In a study divided into ten chapters including an introduction and conclusion, Reddy doesn't attempt an episodic narrative of the incidents connected with the national movement. Instead, he devotes his attention to the formative period of the movement, highlighting the role of the press in 'articulating awareness among the people and inculcating nationalist fervor in remote areas' and the library movement which grew in spite of the government's obstructions (Reading rooms which were pro British were promoted). Libraries, as correctly pointed out by Reddy, 'familiarised people with contemporary society and the problems faced by the nation.' People evince interest in public affairs by reading. Social awakening forms another chapter. The incidents and movements specific to Kadapa are also highlighted: Shaik Peer Shah's activities during the 1857 revolt, the Rayachoty Forest Satyagraha during Non Co-operation Movement, the growth of Hindu-Muslim Unity and the Uragattupadu Forest Satyagraha during Civil Disobedience Movement. These are apart from the numerous public meetings held during different phases of the national movement and the undertaking of constructive activities. (Appendix VI, contain details of the meetings held during the Non Co-operation Movement in Kadapa).

Some of the findings of Reddy are worth noting: Theosophical Lodges formed the platforms for the expression of a nascent nationalism and were later converted to Home Rule Leagues. Different organizations convened to strengthen Andhra Movement helped Home Rule Movement (p.208). We find similar developments elsewhere in the Madras Presidency.

Majority of the leaders prioritized the attainment of Indian independence over the formation of the Andhra Pradesh (seen as Subnationalism by Reddy) but ideological differences notwithstanding 'all agreed on the need for a separate Andhra Pradesh' (p.318).

Contrary to the assumptions of some western scholars who sought to place caste affinities above nationalist ones, Reddy emphasizes nationalism and has given a list of non Brahmins who opposed the non Brahman Party and supported the nationalist leader P.Kesava Pillai. In spite of the vigorous efforts made by the Justices to strengthen the party during 1926-37, the majority of the leaders as well as people, concludes Reddy, joined Congress Party (p.202). However Reddy is aware of the need to see the caste and communal divisions of society as his analysis of the social composition of the delegates who attended the sessions of the Indian National Congress amply demonstrates (pp.301-302).

This is an empirically rich study as the author consulted a variety of sources, archival and non-archival and conducted interviews. The details provided in the Appendices running to 80 pages bear testimony to the hard work done by Reddy in collecting various sources. His methodology of making cross references to studies conducted on similar movements (forest satyagraha for eg.) elsewhere is commendable (pp.282-283). He has also given pen portraits of leaders from Kadapa district which help us in placing them in historical perspective.

There is however scope for 'improvement of the work (p.xiv)'. In Chapter I there is not much on 'people'. Reddy could have given the details of the demographic profile. When statistics are given, percentages should also be provided (p.19).

Though peasant problems were raised (Reddy makes mention of them - pp.255, 263, 280) there is no attempt to follow up and enquire whether peasants were mobilized either as part of the national movement or separately and whether they formed an important group in the social composition of the national movement. If not, the question of why not has to be raised for Andhra remained a predominantly agrarian state.

The book running to nearly 500 pages is remarkably free of printing mistakes or inelegancies of expression. But there are minor mistakes: the footnotes 54 and 55 in p.134 are the same; two paragraphs in p.335 are repeated; the footnote in p.221 is awkwardly constructed.

These are but minor points and do not in any way hamper reading. Reddy writes in a lucid, flowing style. Overall this book is an important contribution to the growing literature on regional studies of Indian national movement and unhesitatingly recommended.