
Rejoinder to the book review by Sumeet Mhaskar and Prabodhan Pol of: Satyendra More. *The Memoirs of a Dalit Communist: The Many Worlds of R.B. More*, edited and introduced by Anupama Rao

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Rejoinder to the book review by Sumeet Mhaskar and Prabodhan Pol of: Satyendra More. *The Memoirs of a Dalit Communist: The Many Worlds of R.B. More*, edited and introduced by Anupama Rao

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The book review to which this rejoinder refers is available [here](#).

- 1 The following is a response to the extended review of *Memoirs of a Dalit Communist: The Many Worlds of R. B. More* by scholars with keen knowledge of Ambedkarite politics and the Communist left in Maharashtra, and of Bombay in particular.
- 2 The book is the result of an extended collaboration with R.B. More's grandson, Subodh More. It comprises my Introduction, a Translator's Note by Wandana Sonalkar, and translations of R.B. More's autobiography and Satyendra More's biography of his father. Elsewhere (Rao 2020), I have noted that the English text draws on interviews with, and material from the private collection of scholars and activists who have a rich and enduring association with Maharashtra's anticaste movement, and that we opted to omit documents of the Communist Party (Marxist) that are part of the public domain, and therefore easily accessible.
- 3 The SAMAJ review makes clear that there is an important conversation to be had about the trajectories of anticaste thought and Marxism in late colonial and postcolonial

India, and their ongoing impact on political thought and practice. *This is also why it is necessary to correct a misleading and fundamentally incorrect assertion by the reviewers.*

- 4 At the beginning of paragraph 17, the reviewers assert that, “R. B. More’s decision to join the Communist party has been interpreted by Anupama Rao as a rebellion against Ambedkar’s politics. However, this assertion lacks substantial evidence. We do not find any examples in the memoir which suggest R. B. More had major ideological disagreement with Ambedkar.”
- 5 *I am afraid that I have nowhere explicitly stated such a position, nor have I implied this to be the case. Indeed, I argue the exact opposite.* Ironically, the reviewers have misunderstood the stated purpose of my Introduction: to stage R.B. More as a Dalit Communist whose intellectual and political formation was governed by the anticaste struggle, and who found himself a lone voice in emphasizing the primacy of caste for Communist politics. The review counteracts my plea for a nuanced strategy of reading that must necessarily bracket the question of why R.B. More joined the Communist Party in favor of embedding this extraordinary figure within the urban and intellectual histories of interwar Bombay. And finally, our reviewers scant a key conceptual argument I presented in my book over a decade ago (Rao 2009), and which I have since developed across a significant body of writing and public engagement.
- 6 Perhaps a few key quotes from the Introduction to *Memoirs of a Dalit Communist* will help clarify my position: anticaste struggle and Ambedkarite politics offer a critical corrective to intellectual histories of Indian Marxism, and underscore the unique role R.B. More played as a bridge between two intersecting, but sometimes antagonistic ideologies of emancipation:
- 7 [R. B. More’s autobiography] “... tracks the story of a heterodox, utopian Marxism which was neither fully comfortable with the Ambedkar movement nor with the Communist Party, but which was quintessentially urban and enabled by Dalits’ complex encounters with colonial urbanity” (More 2019:21).
- 8 In noting the narrative distinction between R.B. More’s autobiography, and his son’s biography, I write: “Satyendra More claimed his father for Communism, but he did so by emphasizing two things: R.B. More’s decision to join the Party in 1930 while maintaining extensive contact with the Ambedkarite movement throughout his life; and More’s persistent criticism of the Communist Party’s evasion of caste.” His text is “... a severe indictment of the exclusions that structure the divide between heterodox histories of political emancipation, on the one hand, and its subsequent ‘flattening,’ and homogenization on the other” (p. 27).
- 9 Elsewhere, I note: “It is interesting to think about the affinities between [R.B.] More’s description of urban subalterns, and their recurrence in descriptions of class as social heterogeneity, i.e., in the *Jahirnama* [Communist Manifesto]” (p. 33).
- 10 And finally, I argue that: “[As] regards the relationship between Marxism and anticaste thought, we might argue that the latter already existed as a set of critical practices organized around images of destitution and dispossession, and the figures who perpetuated it, e.g., the cunning Brahmin priest, the moneylender, or the upper-caste bureaucrat in colonial institutions. I am suggesting that Marxism took up and redefined extant practices of anticaste critique—e.g., the concern with historic dispossession, the focus on dignity and respect, and the demand to value work and labor. In the process, Marxist thought was rendered both more capacious and more specific” (p. 45).

- 11 I appreciate the chance for debate and dialogue about intellectual histories of caste-class convergence but I hope it is clear why our reviewers failed to find any textual evidence for More's decision to join the Communist Party as a "rebellion" against Ambedkar's politics. *This is because I made no such claim, and argued no such position in the first place.*
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