

Subramani, *Dauka Puraan* (Star Publications Pvt Ltd, New Delhi; 521pp)

Literature ('*Sahittye*' in Hindi) is defined by the Nalanda Hindi Dictionary (*Nalanda Vishal Sabd Sagar*) as a collection of writings of any country or language in any genre that maintains high ethical standards and deals with subjects with aesthetic structures that help achieve social respect for the author and his work*.

USP Professor Subramani's *Dauka Puraan* is the anti-thesis of the above. The book is a collection of slang and vulgarity from Hindi and the standard sister languages of Hindi like *Awdhi*, and *Bhojpuri*. Of course, some, perhaps even many, people may have regularly used such collection of slang and vulgarities. But their position is similar to witchcraft, magic and sorcery, which has existed for long, but which never found its way to featuring in modern medicine and surgery.

There is no question that some real effort is needed to revitalize, re-nurture and re-nourish aspects of dialects and languages used by people in the past lest their values may be lost forever. It is not so much the rehabilitation of the past which is important, or even possible; rather it is the appreciation of the past which marks the virtues of such efforts. The latter assumes significance because of its educative importance. Works delving into the past, be they history or literature, ought to keep the educative aspects at the forefront. If it were literature, then the issue would be one of striking a reasonable balance between the 'history' and the 'established rules of grammar'. What is certain is that the use of vulgarity, slang, archaic metaphors and words of swear attributed to a section of society supposed to be an uneducated unschooled mass at a particular, imagined, point in time, can not be a substitute for either history or literature. In this context, Professor Subramani's book *Dauka Puraan*, can be taken seriously neither as history, nor educative literature.

The book is supposedly written in a tongue which some proponents advance as a unique language called 'Fiji Hindi'. Yet, a closer examination of the tongue shows that it cannot be a language, standing alongside any language. At best, one can call the tongue a dialect, but even dialects tend to have established rules of grammar. In 'Fiji Hindi' of *Dauka Puraan*, everything goes as legitimate. Worse, from an educational point of view, is the fact that there is no grammar in it.

Dialects are not languages with developed literature of their own, so 'Fiji Hindi' cannot claim to be an independent language on its own right. The *lingua franca* of the ethnic Indians in Fiji has been and continues to be 'Hindustani'. This enjoys the status of an official language in Fiji together and on par with Fijian and English. The language of classroom in Fiji's schools, radio, newspapers, television and cinema is Hindi. Hindi is Hindi, though like all languages do, it also contains its fair share of slang. The tragedy of *Dauka Puraan* is that it tries to elevate slang as a language.

* In Hindi: *Kisi bhasa ya desh ke un samasth grantho, lekho aadi ka samuh athwa sammalit rashi, jinme stahi ucch aur gud vishiyo ka sundar rup se vevasthith vivechan hua ho.. un vay sabhi lekh granth, aadi, jinka saundray, gun, rup athva bhauktapuran prabhav ke karan samaj me aahar hota hai.*

Dauka Puraan deals with many worlds – worlds which Subramani calls *dauka*, *banglak*, *hindutanik*, *kaivitik* and a nameless *puran* of the marketplace that the author promises to deal with later.

But *Puraana* is *Puraana*, the eighteen Hindu religious treatises which dealt with the ancient events, ideas and philosophies worth emulating. By calling his work *Dauka Puraan*, the implication is that the tongue used in the book is, like the *Puraanas*, worth emulating. This is perhaps the most damaging message which Subramani passes, consciously or subconsciously; that in this modern world, it is legitimate to substitute vulgar tongues for standard language. The most casual reader would know that the *Sanatan Dharmis*, the sect comprising a majority of Fiji's Hindu population, take the *Puraanas* as sacred; '*Dauka*' *Puraan* would be a slur on them. For, the title shows that the tongue embodies the ethos of Fiji's downtrodden masses of the ethnic Indians, who Subramani calls *Dauka*, meaning the untouchables. One may be forgiven for thinking that the *Dauka Puraan* is a very subtle attack on not only Hindi as a language, but on the *Sanatan Dharmis* as well.

Having said this, *Dauka Puraan* does contain some beautiful descriptions of peoples, places and events like weddings, musical performances and the like on settings of post-*girmit* times and modern Fiji. Some may even find the tongue used hilarious; afterall people tend to have a habit of taking joy from the lifestyles and habits created in the miseries of the downtrodden, whether this be in Fiji, England, or India.

But both, the humour and the settings could have been recreated more successfully had the work been in a style which was readable. The book is extremely difficult to read. It's a tragedy that a work which has involved effort of great magnitude has to be put aside on the shelves by users of Hindi like the reviewer.

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