
Book Review:

Title	:	Critical Coalitions: Literary Aesthetics and Beyond
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Critical Coalitions: Literary Aesthetics and Beyond, edited by Rimika Singhvi and Gunja Patni, is a unique blend of well-evaluated articles on theories that depict a wide spectrum of critical analysis ranging from Post Colonialism to Gendered Spaces in literature; forging towards Myths as well more contemporary narratives involving digital media, with the later chapters bringing forth ideas of renowned literary figures through their interviews and finally concluding the cognitive activity with the section providing emotional respite through creative expressions of poetry. The book is an absolute delight for scholars and academicians who would read through the deeply researched, methodologically arranged and articulately presented articles, allowing a glimpse into the futuristic approach to evaluating.

The common contexts that the articles engage through disparate theories form the foundation/basis of the first three sections of the book. The few/slight/minor/ variations, however, allow for a deeper perspectivization thereby foregrounding a fresh pasture of engagement and few variations allow the subjects to be implored more with the perspectives that delve into them with a fresh engagement.

Beginning with a foreword aptly called ‘A Walk-Through’, Prof. Jonathan Locke Hart’s write-up gives a bird’s eye view to this amalgam of critical articles, elaborate talks and poetic pieces, presenting a smart articulation of the book in brief that would help the readers to comprehend the contents of the book.

The first section called “Postcoloniality, Posthumanism, and Ecosophy: The Rhetoric of Resistance” and the first chapter by Rohit Yadav and Roshan Lal Sharma voice the concerns of the digitalisation and the impacts of the new generation, especially on women and children who have to bear the brunt of the whole

process making the natural as completely mechanical and silicon. It can be called a well-capsulated analytical critique on Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* that delineates the degradation of humanity, hollow religious principles, an apocalyptic world, decreasing population rates, feminist submission and many more futuristic challenges after the technological advancement and ultra modernisation.

In the second chapter "Invasion and Posthuman Female Body: Liminality and Resistance in Science Fiction," Anusha Hegde focuses on the liminal phase where the female bodies have been interspersed by scientific and advanced technological procedures, that intrude into the woman's space and her social identity, ultimately objectifying the woman by reducing her to being a mere medium of reproduction.

The third chapter, by Anshu Gagal and Barnali Shah, dives into the Ecowomanism, an aspect that has failed to catch the attention of academia. The authors deserve much appreciation for intricately tracking the trajectory of the characters including the evaluation of the oppressor as well. Cholly, being a symbol of taboo and immorality, was a victim once, is where the concept of opposing the nature originates. Coming back to the title of ecowomanism, the marigold and the dandelions have been long analysed in the novel by critics, and it forms a major chunk of this article as well, but with a more profound comparison with the outer world. What makes this article a path-breaker of a kind is the incorporation of a woman's body that has been juxtaposed and assimilated with nature, affirming its proximity with the same, more than that of the men, in its abstraction and manifestation, including a cat, depicted as a victim of human insensitivity. The authors conform to the immense potential and creativity of women. However, the reference of the failure of the seeds of submissiveness and dominance to germinate, symbolically compared to a Marigold, is contrary to nature. The article has voiced the concern of ecofeminism. Ample reference to critics and works of Afro-American women writers enriches this piece by Gagal and Shah's by reinforcing their stance on this aspect. Walker's assertion that womanism has been rooted in pluralism, conforming its inter-sectionality, has relevantly been cited by the authors. The article is concluded appropriately suggesting a profound understanding of the "other self" for becoming a whole for achieving the objective of ecowomanism.

The fourth chapter of the first section by Alvin Joseph "The Empire Hits Back: Chinua Achebe and The Fiction of Resistance," as the name suggests, is a piece that resists and defends the narrative that portrays Africa as a cannibal state, poor in terms of cultural heritage, with its only legacy being its completely uncivilised stature. The texts taken up for this chapter are all written by Chinua Achebe, and Alvin delves into the novels by imploring them in the perspective that completely defies the colonisers' stance about the African way of life.

The second section of the book “Body Matters: Gendered Geographies and the “Articulation of Agency” begins with the chapter “The Trajectory of Self Awakening: ‘Joissnace and Desire in Tagore’s Chandalika.” The chapter focuses on the concept of dasein experienced by Prakriti, the subaltern character and the jouissance she feels as her being is exposed to the world. Emoting her pleasure at being acknowledged as an entity worth talking to, and the pain deeply embedded in her is manifested in her desires, structured through her dance. Her performance is a psychological process for her to amalgamate into the spectators’ vision, liberating herself from the shackles of fear, oppression and subjugation. The author of the article, Rama Hirawat has analysed the performance called Chandalika which presents the dual marginalisation of Prakriti a woman and an outcaste, but a Buddhist monk’s request for water marks a point of realisation for the protagonist. This well-theorised article reflects upon the suppressed desires that find a vent in the Indian art forms of dance, drama and music.

The next chapter deals with the colonial idea of beauty and how it is represented in the texts *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The God of Small Things* where the protagonists Antoinette and Estha feel “lesser” due to the lack of Eurocentric beauty features. The settings of the novels, one preceding and the other succeeding independence of India, foreground the stagnation and lack of development of the social standards defining beauty, that are still largely colonially marked. The article is penned by Laxmi Anil who has picked up Jean Rhys and Arundhati Roy aptly to delve into the theme of body and beauty as depicted by both the women novelists and to depict colourism in the colonised nations.

The next article on Bollywood films presenting the dancing women ““It was these people.”: The Erotic Body in Indian Popular Culture” is a critique on the voyeurism and eroticism seeded in the form of dancing moves that arouse sexual tension among the audience and how the body symbolises power and political aesthetics. Swarnika Ahuja has elaborated on the films *Mughl-e-azam* and *Pakeezah* that had set a cult of strong, independent and defiant women protesting emerging as strong, independent and defiant characters protesting against the social norms, through the dance steps illustrated through pictures/shots from the films.

The next article by Akshita Chotia, “Is the Body “The Only Truth?” has picked up the theme of transnationalism, nationalism, internationalism and globalisation, in context to “Kya Shareer hi Sab Kuchh Hai” , which has been highlighted as the center of research. Depicting the gendered spaces of man and woman, Akshita has also ventured into the field of the constructed sex and the socially assumed gender.

With the third section, the theme shifts to myths and their literary adaptations in

contemporary media and cinema. The first paper in the section focuses on the film *Antarmahal*. The paper written by Ruchi Sharma, “Transnational Feminism in Film *Antarmahal*: Visibility and Representation of Women during Colonial India” looks at the film based on novel *Protima* by Tara Shankar Bandyopadhyay, set against the backdrop of the Pre-independence Bengal where the domesticities of life have been implored. The feminine body is described as the recipient of sexual violence at the hands of powerful men of society. The concept of a chaste and compliant wife who is seen as a trophy for men, who are hypocritical enough to please their British lords to get the title of ‘Rai Bahadur’ by molding the clay into a statue of Goddess Durga symbolising the Queen of England. The idea of converting an Indian Goddess into the image of Queen of England depicts transnationalism. The roles of women have been critically evaluated as that of being rivals, to enjoy a better status in the families and society at the cost of their bodies.

The next article “Redefining Education and Independence for Young Rural Women in the Digital Age” is dedicated to the contemporary issues of media and emphasizes on the rural women of Rajasthan, the most traditional state of the country with very low literacy rate. The writer of the paper, Shefali Martins, has divided her work into sub-headings like “DigitAAL, Grassroot efforts and Women in STEM and Creative Communication Pursuit” that implore the use and impact of smartphones. The women of the tribes of Rajasthan are more inclined towards education and employability, refraining from getting married and living in their in-laws’ places. YouTube channels have contributed greatly to their emancipation as they film their own cultural practices and regions, to be watched by the audiences across the world. Rajasthan is already a tourist hub and with digitalisation, the women of such traditional societies as Rajasthan have a vent to liberate themselves from the conventional routines. The article by Martins, “Redefining Education and Independence For Young Rural Women in The Digital Age” picks up an important topic of education of women at the rural level that is based on case study of many villages, women and NGOs who work relentlessly to let developmental schemes seep through the sands of the state. Another peculiarity of this article is that the research is based on the articles in e-magazines, e-papers, e-journals and personal interviews with people involved in the projects on digitalization.

The next article on Culinary writings by S. Preethi and Premavathy addresses an important theme that gained much importance during the pandemic when the idea of healthy and hygienic eating was floated tremendously in households. The article “Perpetuality of Annapurna: Virtuosity in Literature and Filmography” is an intense write-up on the food of India which is evident from the reference to Annapurna, the Indian Goddess, a motherly figure who ensures serving of food rich in nutrition, that helps in the nourishment for people, much like a mother feeding

her children. The article takes up a few texts on food literature and elaborates on the multi-ethnic and multicultural cuisines of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujrat and Tamil Nadu. The nuances of the food in Indian civilization, beginning from the Indian shastras to language, literature and cinematography, intruding cyber literature through vlogs, shows and audiobooks, have come a long way with human existence, as elucidated effectively in the article. Though the authors mention the social events and cultural occasions and the places where food vlogging is carried out, along with the followers, the difference between traditional and modern cooking has also been talked about.

The next article delves into the OTT platforms that provide more services and opportunities than regular films; and series that include Audio Descriptions, Captions, Adaption of Written Works, Documentaries and Educational Content, Promotion of reading and many more written by Suman Swati. The article “OTT Platforms: Popularising The Reach of The Written Word” is a deep analysis on adaptations on the OTT platforms and emphasizes the way they have widened the reach of the literary pieces transforming them into global literature accessed by people all over the world.

Delving into the complexities of the immigrants in North Americans who are at the crossroads of cultural assimilation and gender crisis seen through the lens of a young queer adult Portuguese immigrant in Girard’s *Girl Mans Up*. The article has been streamlined and encapsulated well by Prerna Vanjani, throwing light on the research and how ‘Manning Up’ has been justified by the protagonist asserting his identity in the novel. The paper “Cultural Crossroads: Navigating Identity and Assimilation in the Portuguese Immigrant Experience of *Girls Man Up* perfectly analyses the theory of acculturation and gender identity management in North American society.

The next Section of the book contains transcripts of academic interviews with the book’s editors. The first one, with Gerald Sinyuy, provides a deep insight into the concepts of Postcolonial and Resistance Literature that challenge canonical narratives and how Posthumanism and Ecosophy may blend with other forms of literature to become inclusive.

The second interview with Sreemoyee Piu Kundu elaborates on the queries on female bodies and how Indian women have witnessed “patriarchal, regressive, moral, societal, familial and religious conditioning and moral policing” (Kundu) over the centuries. Kundu believes that Indian culture has always been open, plural and progressive but the whole idea is being corrupted now by “Moral Policing,” under the wrong pretext of “Bhartiya Sanskriti,” which she calls “Nonsense.”

The next Interview is with Syed Haider who responds positively to the 'growing consensus' between literary narratives and new forms of media, which he thinks would lead to a wider acknowledgement of the visual adaptations that enhances the richness of these works and texts. He further adds, "The intersection of technology, subjectivity, and aesthetics has indeed led to a profound transformation of the literary field, reshaping the way we create, consume, and interpret literature." (Haider, 197)

The last section of the book is a replete with creative poetic pieces compiled under the heading "Musings" include "Duality of Freedom" by Sayyam Jain that speaks delicately about the freedom which is only external, the internal is often in a conflict exhibited with ironies and paradoxes. The second poem by the same poet seems a sequel to the first name and is called "Duality in Education." The poem highlights the shallow and hollow education system today that deprives the soul of real knowledge and accomplishment.

The next poem "I Am Half," by Akshita Singh, questions the wholeness of our existence and how we as humans and, particularly as a woman are never able to come full circle and be complete. It will not be wrong to call it a feminist piece. The second poem by Akshita is titled "Medusa" and is again a feminist poem on the Greek woman who was very beautiful but devoured and cursed by the Male pantheon of Gods and turned into a monster due to the atrocities committed on her.

The next poem by Aadrit Banerjee is a sensual poetic piece about the queer relationship between Jamali and Kamali and how they were subject to ridicule and questioning by society, a much discussed topic on prime time, and how their love blossomed in secrecy.

The Afterword by the editors seals the book perfectly by highlighting the aim of the compilation: to bring together scholars to write on edgy topics that intermingle, and yet are set apart strongly owing to their affiliations to the main themes.

Comprehensively anthologised, this book is a must have for academia who would like to read well-developed papers on contemporary theories on resistance, the voice of gendered identities and well-articulated articles presenting an intersection of classical theories. Reading this book gives a glimpse into the contemporary poetic expressions by young scholars. The interviews of scholars add another genre of research analysis to this intelligently compiled anthology.

Abhyudita G. Singha & Himanshu Parmar