

Prem Kumari Srivastava and Gitanjali Chawla, ed. *Re-storying the Indigenous and the Popular Imaginary*. Volume III. New Delhi: Authorspress, 2017. 202 pp. ISBN 978-93-5207-385-6.

The present volume is the third book in the series titled *De-territorialising Diversities: Cultures, Literatures and Languages of the Indigenous*. With its title implying a link between indigenous narratives and popular imaginary, this volume seems to be a significant postscript to Volume II (*De-territorialising Diversities: Literatures of the Indigenous and Marginalised*) and Volume I (*Cultures of the Indigenous: India and Beyond*). Distinguishing its thematic content from its predecessors, the editors have observed in the Foreword that “[a] more nuanced and sharpened focus on the uneasy alliance between the indigenous and the popular mass media became the centrepiece in Volume III of this series” (xvii). The book primarily analyses how the power-knowledge alliance operating in postcolonial society is culpable for the “uneasy alliance” mentioned in the quotation from the Foreword above.

The word “Indigenous” is usually associated with the original inhabitants of the land, their cultural history, folklores and mythological narratives. “Popular imaginary” implies a set of notions and beliefs which become an integral part of a cultural tradition. The precepts of socio-cultural hierarchy ingrained in these beliefs often render the “indigenous” an “other” within the nation space/society. In the “Introduction” to the present volume, the editors have rightly pointed out that in the “make-believe and fanciful” domain of popular imaginary, the indigenous is usually represented as “[c]aricatured, burlesqued, exoticised, museumised, removed, marginalised, ‘out’ but never ‘in’ the cultural imaginary” (xxiv). The representation of the “indigenous” in different forms of mass media such as books, art and sculpture, theatre and cinema has been subjected to manipulation, thereby, misrepresenting the “indigenous” in popular imaginary. The trend of stereotyping the “indigenous” echoes the colonial tradition of representing the non-white colonised subject as an inferior other. In this context, the act of othering is not perpetrated by the foreigners. The “indigenous” emerges as a marginalised entity in which the colonial forces operate from within the nation-state. The discourse on indigeneity in connection with the popular imaginary presents the post-colonial nation as a neocolonial space where the indigenous seeks to write back against cultural hegemony. The present volume addresses this issue from the perspective of the indigenous people of two nations – Australia and India – with only two articles out of ten dealing with the Australian aborigines.

The contributors to this volume have used historical and analytical methods of investigation for situating the “indigenous” in the Australian and the Indian contexts. Simi Malhotra’s article “The *Lok*-al in a Global World,” which features in the section called “Conceptual Framework,” talks about the problematics of

negotiating between the contrary cultural forces of globalisation and the drive of sustaining ethnic identity. In India, culture or *sanskriti* means the act reforming. Malhotra explains that in India *sanskriti* “becomes...an instrument or means to reform, to control and to administer the people” (7). She contends that in the culturally heterogeneous society of India the *lok* cultures, as these have been represented in the folk traditions and local narratives, are fluid. Internet technology has further enhanced their fluidity. Since *lok* culture refrains from the rigidities of “identitarian ‘here and now’” (10), Malhotra concludes that it can have a “cosmopolitan future” (10).

Framed within this “Conceptual Framework,” the other articles in this book have been included under three broad sections – “Interrogations,” “Confluences” and “Retellings.” The first section, focusing on the aspect of self-representation, “interrogates” primarily the power relations between the indigenous and the non-indigenous groups within a nation state by analysing the representation of the indigenous in translated texts, life narratives, oral traditions, paintings and sculptures. Abhinaba Chatterjee’s article “Critiquing Fourth World Literature” discusses Aboriginal Literature of Australia as “a literature of resistance,” which has redefined “Aboriginality” as “a counter cultural movement and a reaction against the hegemony of the White Australian society” (23). Chatterjee tells us how “translation” emerges an effective means to disseminate the literary works of the Aborigines across the globe. In her article “It’s Our Land,” Payel Paul looks into the issues of land, dispossession and displacement from the perspectives of the aboriginals in Australia and the *adivasis* in India. She analyses how, within the socio-political matrix of white supremacy in Australia, autobiographical narratives of aboriginal women have become a “very influential and popular medium for reclaiming Aboriginal history and identity” (42). Similarly, the *adivasis*, the victims of internal colonialism, are “now using the power of written alphabet to construct an identity of their own, to present their life and their rich culture and to talk about their long history of pain and loss” (48). T.S. Satyanath makes an effort to excavate the cultural history of two subaltern classes, the hunters and the agrarians, in his article “In Search of Politics and Poetics of Representing Hunters.” He points out that intervention of subaltern histories into the classical tradition is visible in literary texts as well as in forms of visual art. He discusses in detail how the paintings and the sculptures of the male and the female deities in the folk traditions of Karnataka and Orissa, represent different forms of inter-gender power relations. Satyanath’s study reveals how the indigenous tradition interrogates the position of women in society and seeks to bring equality among the genders.

The articles in the second segment justify its title “Confluences” by examining the cultural syncretism between the folk traditions and the mainstream popular cultures. Hina Nandrajog’s article on the “Songs and Stories of Love and Longing of the Gaddi Tribe” looks into the oeuvre of oral literature produced by

the members of Gaddi Tribe living mostly in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir. Their songs in Gaddiali and Bharmouri languages act as evidence of the community's existence through the ages in history. With the passage of time, these songs have been adapted in Bollywood as well as in literary works produced in the regional languages of North India. Abubakkar K.K.'s article examines the literary culture of the "Mapilla" community, a group of Muslims in Kerala. *Mappilapattu*, the indigenous narrative of the Mappilas, presents a confluence of the Arab mercantile class in the Malabar region and the local Malayalam culture. Abubakkar analyses *Mappilapattus* as an arena of cultural resistance in the colonial era and also sheds light on the changes that have affected it. Mona Singh and Manjari Chaturvedi's article on the "Dilli Haat" explores *baat*, a temporary commercial platform, as the meeting point for the rural and the urban socio-cultural trends. It concludes with an insightful observation that "[t]raditional *baats* functioned as a bioscope for the rural populace.... Dilli Haat as an urban *baat* reverses the gaze" (122). Hiya Chatterjee's analysis of the "Female Retellings of the Ramayana" should have been included in the next section called "Retellings." In the "Introduction" to the book (xxix), her article has been discussed as the first essay in the "Retellings" section. This particular discrepancy mars the thematic consistency of the sections. Chatterjee talks about two recent texts which have re-situated the classical narrative of the *Ramayana* in the contexts of marginalised black American culture (*Sita Sings the Blues*, a film) and indigenous *patuaart* form (*Sita's Ramayana*, a graphic novel). It analyses how innovative "retelling" from the feminist perspective can be achieved by re-framing the traditional "content" within the modern forms of representation.

In the final section, "Retellings," there are three articles, each of which makes an effort to re-view the conventional version through critical reinterpretation. In her article on Mahasweta Devi's play *Bayen*, Anupama Jaidev has examined social marginalisation of the Dom¹ community, whose reference is found in the narrative of Raja Harishchandra in the *Mahabharata*, through the harrowing experiences of Chandidashi, a Dom woman. Her story of becoming a "bayen" (witch) reveals that women in a caste-ridden society are subjected to double marginalisation. In the next article titled "The 'Out of Context' Subaltern" Vinanti Vasishth critiques the (mis)representation of tribal women in films and travelogues. Referring to their representation in films such as Satyajit Ray's *Aranyer Din Ratri* (1970) and Govind Nihalani's *Aakrosh* (1980) and travelogues such as Jim Corbett's *My India* (1952/1991) and William Darymdale's *Nine Lives* (2010), she discusses how such representations had been "out of context." Smriti Suman's article, the last one in this section, probes further into this topic by surveying the misrepresentation of the indigenous subalterns in Hindi cinema,

¹ A *dalit* community, the members of which are traditionally engaged in burning the pyre, a ritual in Hindu funeral ceremony.

from the post-Independence period to the period of NRI films. She argues that only in Mrinal Sen's film *Mrigya* (1976), a sincere effort has been made to represent the indigenous life and exploitation in "realist frames" (179).

With their vivacious and ingenuous presentation of arguments, these articles have certainly made this book a significant addition to the critical oeuvre of Cultural Studies, which is still an emerging area of study in Indian academia. By connecting the discourses of race, caste and gender with the study of marginalisation of the indigenous subject in popular media, this book has widened the scope of Cultural Studies.

Shyamasri Maji
Durgapur Women's College, India
Email: shyamasri.2010@gmail.com