

**O.P. Mathur, *The Spectrum of Literature: Experiments in Exploration*. New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 2011. 192 pp. ISBN 13: 9788176257190.**

Dr. O.P. Mathur, the former Professor and Chairman of the English Department of Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, happens to be one of the veteran scholars of India. He is easily one of the senior and serious critics from India after the old guards like K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah and Professor M.K.Naik. His latest critical anthology, *The Spectrum of Literature* is evidence of his wide-ranging scholarship, critical acumen and liberal humanist outlook. This anthology contains sixteen well researched articles on all the three major literary genres like poetry, drama and fiction. The first thing that strikes the attention of the reader is that the titles and treatment of his subject are happily free from the Western critical jargon, so widely parroted by the younger scholars of India. His observations are born out of the authority of his experience as a professor and researcher in the field for over four decades. Another great quality of his revealed in the anthology is his willingness to recognise the latest, younger and neglected writers of India in addition to discussing the older and established writers, who enjoy a lot of media hype.

The first article in an extract from the writer's Presidential Address delivered at the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of All India English Teachers' Conference held at Meerut in 2003. It has to be taken seriously by all the teachers and students of English literature in India. In it O.P. Mathur pleads for the development of a beautiful mind, which should be the substratum of values in English Studies. He rightly laments the moral degeneration in all walks of life including the academic field. He is sad to know that "missiles are guided and men misguided" and "in this waste land of values sensex and senseless sex are rated much higher than true sense and sensibility" (3). Similarly he laments the futility of research in Indian academia, wherein "repeating often pointlessly, like a kaleidoscope, old material on established authors, instead of exploring upcoming authors" (4) is the norm. He alerts the UGC to devise a mechanism of informing the prospective researchers about the topics that are already covered so that "duplication or triplication of research, if not something worse, is avoided" (P.9).

The second section, devoted to the discussion of poetry, deals with the old and new poets like Sarojini Naidu, I.K. Sharma and Sayed Ameeruddin. He highlights the typically Indian imagery and the timeless and dreamy India, often outside history presented in Naidu's poetry. He offers the right kind of critical recognition to the poetry of an upcoming writer like I.K. Sharma. He opines that "Sharma's imagination is like that of a lyricist, condensed, penetrating and

profound. For him brevity is the soul of poetry” (31). Further, he shows how I.K. Sharma excels in his animal poetry which humanises the animals.

In his fourth article, Mathur exhibits his wide-ranging scholarship and deep insight by analysing the nightingale motif in British poetry from a historical and comparative perspective. He shows with illustrations how the nightingale is a melancholy bird, as well as a symbol of happiness, and a bird singing the immortal song. In an age when birds are decreasing and even vanishing, it is desirable for the modern urbanites to read at least about them in poetry. It is one of the very interesting articles in this collection.

The third section contains five articles on drama. The first of them deals with the nature of the “Closet Drama” of the Romantics, then and now. He quotes Saintsbury, who says that, “The plays, as a rule, which have been good literature, have seldom succeeded as plays; the plays that have been acted and have been successful have seldom been good literature” (73). Mathur aptly concludes, “This interesting divorce between literature and theatre is embedded in the closet dram of the period” (73). Then he discusses briefly the writers like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lord Byron, Shelley, Keats and Sir Walter Scott, who attempted many closet plays. In the last article of this section, Mathur demonstrates how Basavaraj Naikar’s *A Dreamer of Freedom* emerges as a powerful Indian English Closet Play dealing with Bhaskararao Bhavé’s tragic encounter with the East India Company during 1857 upheaval.

The fourth section consists of seven articles on fiction. He discusses a new writer from Kottayam (Kerala), Alexander Raju’s *The Haunted Man*, which is interesting on many counts. He considers it as a memory novel about the Emergency in which the venom of anger and horror are expressed with underlying comedy and satire. In his two articles on Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* he considers it as a memory novel showing the paradox of the division of humanity between “here” and “elsewhere”; of “coming” and “going” and depicting an allegory of the “relativistic” unity of time and space. In his discussion of Salman Rushdie’s *The Enchantress of Florence* he shows how the novelist has depicted the incongruous features of King Akbar which are reminiscent of those of Mohammad Bin Tughlaq. In his analysis of Aravinda Adiga’s *The White Tiger* he shows how the novelist exposes and satirises the increasing chasm between the rich and the poor, the moral chaos and corruption and communalism reigning supreme in post-Independence India. In his last article he analyses the relation between society and the individual, especially in North-Karnataka, as depicted in the short stories of Basavaraj Naikar, whose *The Thief of Nagaraballi and Other Stories* was short-listed for the Commonwealth Fiction Prize for the Best First Book from Eurasia in 2000. Also he highlights the use of various symbols in these stories.

On the whole, O.P. Mathur’s *The Spectrum of Literature* offers a rich fare of critical material that is at once scholarly and insightful and therefore is of

enormous value for the researcher in the realm of Indian English letters. Dr. Mathur has been a true descendant of Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah in his sound judgment and incisive analysis of literature. Kudos to Mathur!

**Basavaraj Naikar**  
**Karnatak University, India**