MULTICULTURAL AND MARGINALIZED VOICES OF POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

EDITED BY
VARUN GULATI AND GARIMA DALAL
FOREWORD BY SHIRLEY R. SAMUELS

"*Multicultural and Marginalized Voices of Postcolonial Literature* is a rich collection of essays on how literature has given voice to the unheard, the subaltern voices. The editors have taken pains to provide an insight into various cultures and the way they have tried to suppress and oppress theses voices."

—**MOHAMMAD ASLAM**, Central University of Kashmir

Women and the word "marginalization" have never remained oxymoronic—the cross-cultural texts and Engels's interest in subjugation make a perfect recipe for this incongruity. *Multicultural and Marginalized Voices of Postcolonial Literature* traces multifarious facets of marginalized literature across the world, giving a brilliant overview of the historical roots of multiculturalist and marginalized sections. The fourteen chapters relate key literary and cultural texts and cover a broad spectrum of historical, linguistic, and theoretical issues. There are three sections in the book—section I deals specifically with theoretical constructions and representations. Section II offers a varied spectrum of discourses on world literature, intersecting with the frameworks of literary theories. Section III explores the minds of *dalits*, subalterns, colonial women, and gender issues, and a variety of Indian English writers that draw varied perspectives.

Contributors

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GULATI AND DALAL

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Acknowledgments

During the long gestation of editing this book, the editors have incurred many debts. And the greatest of these is the Almighty who gave us strength and courage, led our knowledge from darkness to light.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Shirley R. Samuels of Cornell University, who accepted our request to write a foreword for the book. Her valuable suggestions and scholarly advice have helped us to a great extent. We also extend our gratitude to our reviewers who worked on this project. It is our genuine pleasure to express deep sense of thanks to all the contributors whose contribution made this project a success.

Working with Lindsey Porambo, who is a wise and patient editor, and the team at Lexington Books, especially Nick and Laura, have always been a privilege and utmost pleasure. Hence, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to our acquisition editor and her team.

Last but not least, we owe a deep sense of gratitude to our families and friends for their constant encouragement throughout the project.

Varun Gulati and Garima Dalal

Foreword

Shirley R. Samuels

The essays in *Multicultural and Marginalized Voices of Postcolonial Literature* present an admirable introduction to subaltern voices. Yet some of the voices have become so familiar as no longer to operate in obscurity, such as the words from Gayatri Spivak, who initially made the term *subaltern* speak back to critical discourse and made it so powerfully visible, or the perspective presented by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o or ideas from Michael Ondaatje or the fiction of Buchi Emecheta, from whom readers have learned to expect valuable insights into the lives of women in west Africa. The ability not only to articulate theoretical concepts of alterity, but also to inhabit meticulous investigations of the significant details of biography and the separate performances of historical shifts in class position make the volume even more valuable.

From the *jouissance* of Luce Irigaray to the restrictions on the lives of the dalit, the volume presents a global investigation on particular lives and particular cultural artifacts, such as film, that convey these lives to audiences of popular culture. Presenting accounts of the Orisha ceremonial acts among the Yoruba as well as the daily routine of the so-called untouchables, the volume takes on investigations into social as well as cultural history. The editors are to be congratulated for their insights and perseverance in pulling together such a range of perspectives. From the position of an academic writing and teaching about the United States, I can say that my only regret is the delays, which can still impede a comparative approach between the global and the local in North America. The positions of the displaced and the migrating populations throughout Europe and North America make it all the more significant that the voices of postcolonial literature speak to each other.

Introduction

Varun Gulati and Garima Dalal

The uncultured bigots are screaming crazily that the face of democracy is singular; contrary to their whim and fancy, they are too fragile to handle the gospel truth that diversity is one of principles and part of the beauty of democracy. The literary works in multicultural societies, broadly speaking, have grappled with a strong awareness of the sense of poverty, racism, cultural and religious beliefs, gender, and equality. Multicultural literature is generally interpreted as a work about people who, throughout the ages, have been kept apart from the mainstream of society and considered marginalized and downtrodden. In today's time, the notion of biculturalism has proliferated to multiculturalism. References have been constantly made to it in connection with the position of certain political ideologies that see all the cultures and institutions as almost equal. However, in the case of certain political zealots and agencies multiculturalism is an evil force "bent on undermining western culture," and a potential "threat to the very fabric of Western civilization."[1]

However, the gamut of multicultural literature, across the world, has become classic, enriched aesthetically, and involves diversity and inclusion; indeed, it is a broad representation of the myriad of cultures, power structure, and struggle. A convenient point to fathom out what multiculturalism is describes it as "salad bowl" or "cultural mosaic."[2] Nonetheless, the creative flair of postcolonial writers like Marquez, Achebe, Rushdie, Coetzee, Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Malouf, Wright, and so on with a mélange of cultures and languages, have found a common ground and values. For instance, the debut novel of Chika Unigwe's *De feniks* (*The Phoenix*) was heralded as a brilliant piece of work by a Flemish author of Africa. Challenging the conventionality of Dutch Literature, the trendsetting novel of Unigwe supports Rebecca Walkowitz's notion that literature of migration, "reflects a shift

from nation-based paradigms to new ways of understanding community and belonging to transnational models emphasizing a global space on ongoing travel and interconnection."[3]

It would be appropriate to understand that every culture is distinct in itself. To certain extent, it is, of course, much less sanguine about the harmful effects of cultural assimilation, resulting in a hegemonic control and the decadence of long and proud rich cultural heritage. For all those writers who have tried to assimilate with Universalism, their voices have always imbued with a certain degree of local colors and sounds.

Are the democratic countries free of cultural differences? Do the greater authorities of a multiculturalist nation safeguard the marginalized cultures and people of different backgrounds? Whatever pleases us about it, the loss is invariably since much before the word *multiculturalism* acquired the status of a classic in the literary and academic world, the inescapable fact is evident that marginalized cultures across the world had experienced the tragic experiences and discussed about terrible ordeal they suffered. Charles Taylor, in his essay "Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition" justifiably made a claim that Homo sapiens are cultural beings, and such a culture remains a part of one's identity.[4]

If the real strength of this cultural identity is not recognized, there will a trauma of psychological harm, chronicled with a sense of verisimilitude. On the other hand, what is, indeed, valuable to understand is that exile, migration, and expatriation are not only physical conditions but also states of mind. It does not matter where one is, in one's native or in an alien land. The sense of exile results in deep feelings of loss, ache, and separation, yearning for recuperation. "Home" is the axis on which the entire discourse of migrancy revolves. It is home that determines one's identity, defines or redefines one's belonging. With modernization expanding its tentacles, squeezing the traditional social and family system, breaking them apart, man has been engulfed by an identity crisis and his greed for material possession has made him migrate to different lands, uprooting him from his culture and society to reroot in an alien land. But the striking of one's own root is a painful process, involving mental, spiritual, and emotional trauma leading to cultural and self-alienation, because to feel uprooted is against man's nature, for as a physical being man needs to be located in space. As Ashley Montague points out, "No living organism is either solitary in its origin or solitary in its life. Every organism from the lowest to the highest is normally engaged in some sort of social life. The solitary animal is any species, is an abnormal creature."[5]

Among other things, the potentialities of marginalized literary voices, of men and women writers, have sparked a lively discussion in the field of postcolonial studies. Much before we can weigh up on the range and quality of this literature, the eye-catching title of Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" resonates in our mind. Spivak and the other postcolonial thinkers

like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Nawal Saadawi, and Kumari Jayawardena have sparked a significant rethinking of the feminist thought. These vehement views have challenged the statement that all women are the same; in fact, they gave emphasis to the importance of respecting differences that had prevailed in race, class, religion, citizenship, and culture among women. While concluding her essay, Spivak tried to recuperate the subaltern agency, speaking to recover the voices of the suppressed and open new spaces for historically marginalized and silenced voices to be heard. Spivak's own position tends to fix a responsibility for the intellectuals and academia to sustain awareness of the intersecting factors of race, class and so forth. Spivak argues: "The Subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual has a circumscribed task, which she must not disown with a flourish."[6]

The tormented sense of social chaos agitated by modernity has become a perennial problem.[7] The complexity lies in the fact that the ideological gulf between the conservatives and the liberals ultimately affect the literature, directly or indirectly. The representation of any culture is immanent in the very artistic works of a pluralist multiculturalism since the author is ultimately liberated and open to discuss unhesitatingly. In this case, the author acts as a messiah of the hopelessly marginalized and the deprivileged people of society. If, on the other hand, we look on the naturally rebellious and dissenter, there will be a bitter condemnation of sociopolitical cultural diversity and mockery of the social order.

Hamstrung by such conditions, the marginalized voices have carried a burden of despotism. Let me underline the point that the work of or for the marginalized has to locate a place for itself in an enormous international market. The cross-border mobilizations and geographical dispersion have mounted a serious challenge for the unheard voices. In a sense that I understand—albeit in its own distinction—there is not a struggle for the survival but for the recognition and identification.

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In "Scripting Cultural Codes: Women and Cinema" Rachel Bari discusses how women are oppressed within the film industry by being packaged as images of sex objects and being victimized. Male critics who celebrate auteurs for their complexity or irony also oppress them within film theory. The male gaze theory of Laura Mulvey is well known. Feminists from Simone de Beauvoir onward had seen cinema as a key carrier of contemporary cultural myths. If woman is the bearer of cultural codes, then the messages are being subverted. The chapter argues in this direction to study a few films, attempting to seek the "female imaginary" as put forth by Luce Irigaray.

In "De-linking Existence: From *Dasein* to *Damne*" Arti Nirmal and Sayan Dey trace Nelson Maldonado-Torres's term *damne* through his essay "On the Coloniality of Being" as a counterpoint to Heidegger's *Dasein*. The chapter addresses the contemporary voices of existential marginalization and the different possible ways to address it.

In "Displaced Denizens: A Socio-historical Reading of the Literature of Displacement from Assam" Mukuta Borah analyzes the representation of displaced people in Assam, seen in the fictional works coming out in Assamese. The chapter constructs a social and historical account of displaced people through a close reading of the chosen texts.

Vipin Pal Singh in "Colonialism/Post-colonialism: A Multicultural South Asian Perspective" discusses how South Asia has remained a location of the most involved and intimate conflicts between European colonial powers. The region has exerted deep influence on British imagination. It has inculcated in British consciousness the most enduring and enormously immersed models of Asiatic civilization and cultural difference.

Guru Charan Behera in "Nation State and State of Nationlessness: Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*" argues how the novel seeks to deconstruct the essentialistic monolithic notion of nation, culture, history, and identity and project the vision of a multicultural borderless world and the nation as a space for many nations. It further demonstrates how the novel posits the transnational as a constituting element of the history and identity of a nation, and textualizes these issues through the interweaving of various texts and genres, history and fiction, personal narrative and scientific references.

In "Dynamics of Marginalized Female Voices in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*" Geetanjali Multani narrates that Ngũgĩ believes in the committed nature of literature. He sees literature as a very powerful weapon in understanding the social and cultural dynamics of a society, which has undergone massive upheaval since the colonial slaughter in Africa. In *Weep Not, Child*, Ngũgĩ reflects the history of Africa in a continuum through the marginalized female voices that exhibit the traits of a particular stage.

In the chapter "Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*: Linking Nature and Motherhood" Sarannya V. Pillai discusses the deplorable conditions of "childless" women who are condemned by the society. The idea of fertility plays a crucial role in defining a woman's position in the Igbo community. The text draws connection between women and the natural environment by stating how the ideal Igbo woman has been equated with the fertile land and the infertile woman with the barren landscape.

In "History in Expatriate Experience: The Sacred Burden Borne in *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior*" Sonali Garg explores the seminal relationship between history and fiction, the latter often serving to reveal and lay bare the gaps overlooked by the former. The writer's deliberations on the experiences

of her expatriate Chinese history and her present quest for identity in the multicultural folds of the American society form the two major areas of discussion. What this experience spells out for the larger Pan Asian community is the related question emerging from Kingston's feminist re-writing of her Chinese American life story.

In "Reading the Autobiography of Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* as a Community Biography" Melissa Helen analyzes Baby Kamble's work as a community biography. Despite being the "other" among the "others" Kamble chooses to write an autobiography that is not self-centered. It does not fall into any of the four general categories of autobiographies—thematic, religious, intellectual, or fictionalized. Instead of a self-story, the autobiography is a candid account of tracing the community's enslavement to the rituals, subjugation by the dominant caste, and the despicable squalor of their living conditions. Whether it is the simple mischief of the children, the evil practices of the Dalit community, including the ill-treatment of their own daughters-in-law, Kamble uses humor as a weapon in her confrontation with the Brahmanical hegemony and patriarchal domination that made their lives deplorable.

Fatima Syedain's chapter "Fear of Pollution: Study of Humiliation in *Untouchables* by Mulk Raj Anand" analyzes of a single day's activities of a sweeper boy Bakha who registers the mute fury of the untouchables, unveiling the layers of subjugation and humility in which an untouchable is wrapped. Though the focus remains on his repressed feelings of helplessness, despair, failing hopes and agony, yet the novelist at no point fails to record the feeling of uncleanliness.

Golam Gaus Al-Quaderi and Sheikh Nahid Neazy in "Revisiting Class in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*: Post-modern Reflections" argue that *Untouchable* (1935) is one of those Indian novels of the colonial period which has been forgotten by many readers of Indian English literature. The chapter deals with the marginalized characters of postcolonial India as depicted in the fiction and shows how despite the deliberate obfuscations of post-modernist discourses about text, textuality, and history, one is compelled to treat *Untouchable* as a social document, rather than as a figment of imagination.

In "Locating Subaltern Voices in Anita Agnihotri's *The Awakening*" Aaleya Giri and Anju Mehra discuss the novel from a postcolonial perspective and locate the politically and socially marginalized voices. The chapter problematizes the notion of the "silencing" of the subaltern subjects in *The Awakening* by the dominant ideologies and examines how the subalterns, despite their oppressed and marginalized status, display agency and act against these ideologies.

In "New Historicist Approach to Analyze the Novel *A Bend in the Ganges* by Malgonkar" Pooja Gupta and Shalini Vohra evaluate how far the novel reflect the sociohistorical milieu of its times. This novel depicts the

milieu passing through two world wars and the events leading to India's partition, culminating in India's freedom from British rule in 1947 and the aftermath of partition.

In "Scrutinizing Dark Stature of the Second Sex in Society: A Critique of Shashi Deshpande's Selected Works" Poonam Pahuja evaluates an inseparable relation between literature and society which embellishes the assumption that literature elucidates history, illustrates social reality, and foresees the fortune of society. The chapter focuses on those lenses, which have been used by Shashi Deshpande to scrutinize the dark stature of the second sex in society.

NOTES

1. Joel Taxel, "Multicultural Literature and the Politics of Reaction," *Teachers College Record* 98(3), 417.
2. Peter Baofu, *The Future of Post-Human Migration: A Preface to a New Theory of Sameness, Otherness, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 22.
3. Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and Migrant Writer," *Contemporary Literature* 47:4 (2006): 527-45.
4. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"*: An essay with commentary by Amy Gutmann…[et al] (Princeton: Princeton U.P 1992).
5. Ashley Montague, *Man in Process* (New York: World Pub, 1961), 77.
6. Gaytari Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 308.
7. Graham Macphee, *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 108.

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