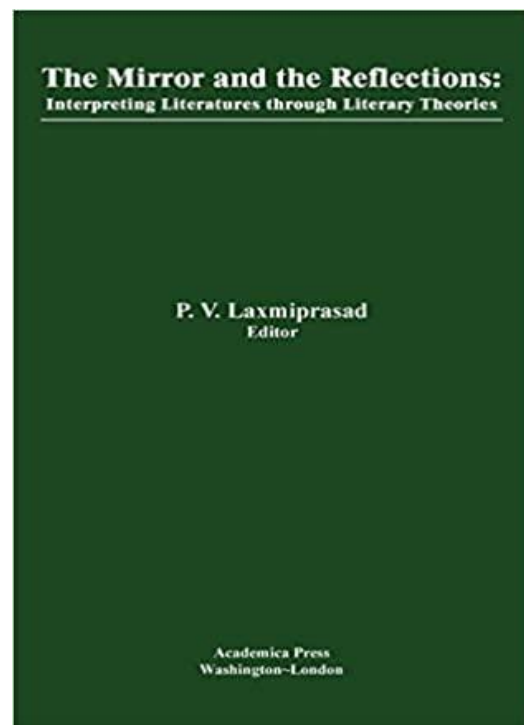


Book Review

***The Mirror and the Reflections: Interpreting Literatures through Literary Theories*, Edited by Dr. P. V. Laxmiprasad, Published by Academica Press, Washington – London, 2020, ISBN: 978-1680530995, Rs 13,775 /-, Pp. 260.**

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Dr. P. V. Laxmiprasad is a dynamic teacher, a scholar and a lover of the English language and literature. The collection of critical essays titled *The Mirror and the Reflections: Interpreting Literatures through Literary Theories* is yet another feather in his cap as an editor. Modern critical theories like Post-colonialism, Eco-criticism, Cultural Studies, Subaltern Studies and so on serve as newly established benchmarks or redefined touchstones for a researcher or critic to study a writer's mind and discover his/her intentions s/he had while composing a literary work. Such a researcher adopts a critical approach to strengthen his/her



stand while examining a text with a view to bringing out the explicit and implicit meanings of that text in consonance with the tenets of a chosen literary theory. A flock of such fourteen scholar-critics fly together in this edited anthology and employ the main planks of various literary theories in order to individually subject their selected literary works to their respective chosen theoretical frameworks. This volume consists of fourteen chapters.

The first chapter, titled "Colonialism, Racism and Resistance: A Post-colonial Reading of Itwaru's *Shanti*" authored by Dr. C. A. Assif attempts to read Itwaru's *Shanti* in the postcolonial context. Postcolonial writers like Itwaru, hailing from the indigenous communities who had inhabited their original lands with unique identities and traditions before conquest or

colonialism, emphasize the significance of both oral and written aspects of their indigenous languages, which the languages of the colonizers attempted to stifle. Arnold Harrichand Itwaru, a Caribbean Canadian writer, has been trying to develop a “culture of resistance” in all his works so as to make them distinctively different from the Canonical Literature and “colonized appreciation of works of art.” Shanti can be read as a feminist novel, but it does not draw on the model of European feminism, which is inescapably Euro-centric. Patriarchy and imperialism are twin oppressions, and women in a colonized society are starkly different from that in free societies as they have been “doubly colonized”. Itwaru explores the racist brutalities of male imperialism as they affect the life of a brilliant young woman after whose name the novel is titled with a touch of irony. Though her name, Shanti, is indicative of absolute peace and understanding, she is in reality deprived of peace. However, as a forward thinker, she has a sort of stoic endurance and sows the seeds of a new awakening among the oppressed women in her society by lending a voice to the voiceless.

Dr. Dinakar Palaurthy’s article, “Voice of the Voiceless: Nalini Jameela’s The Autobiography of a Sex Worker,” constitutes the second chapter. Nalini marries Koyakka, a Muslim, and acquires her second name Jameela. In an autobiography, the author generally tries to integrate the reconstructed past, perceived present, and imagined future with the amalgamation of personal experiences, and it is the discovery of the self which has the features like subjectivity, responsibility, freedom, and autonomy. On the same lines, Nalini Jameela’s autobiography is a confessional statement of her journey from a casual labourer in a clay mine to a sex worker who ultimately becomes an activist to stand up for the rights of the sex workers in Kerala through a forum called, ‘Jwalamukhi’ by stating that sex workers are also professionals. Women in India are already marginalized, but the plight of sex workers is much worse here. So, she condemns the duplicity of men in a hypocritical society and argues that a paradigm shift is necessary to address the problems of sex workers by delinking them from the problem of sexual morality and espousing the cause of women’s rights.

In the third chapter, Dr. Abida Farooqui uses the feminist theory in her article “Reimagining the ‘Feminine’ in K. R. Meera’s Hangwoman”. Hangwoman is the translation of a Malayalam novel titled Aarachar which portrays a woman named Chetna who makes inroads into the male-dominated field by performing the role of an executioner and reinforces gender

equality. The translator J. Devika uses a neologism ‘hangwoman’ as an equivalent to ‘hangman’ which is characteristic of an andro-centric language. Chetna, reared in a very conventional family, rises above the social and professional structures imposed upon her by her family and society, thereby making herself an epitome of female power and an agency for social transformation.

The fourth chapter contains the paper “Manifestation of Ambivalence in the Works of U. R. Anantha Murthy: Postcolonial Perspective” by Dr. Kalapala Padmaja. U. R. Anantha Murthy projects ambivalence in his writings but lends it a unique dimension by adapting it to the socio-political context of his times. His works are reflective of the transformational phase and its effects on the individual and society. A sense of equivocation and uncertainty between the two world views, western and eastern, finally makes Anantha Murthy move towards a stance where he starts taking a skeptical outlook on all those aspects of modernism such as modern education and rational thinking. The individuals who were earlier “uncivilized” and “incomplete” in the eyes of the West are now accepted with awe and a kind of reverence for the contentment that they can draw from their lives rooted in their indigenous culture and tradition. In his characterization and narrative discourse, the “otherness” as identified by western critical canons is wiped out, and indigenous culture and literature are restored to their own former glory and uniqueness that had been flourishing for long until colonization.

The fifth chapter titled “An Eco-critical reading of P. Raja’s Water Please” by Dr. Lily Arul Sharmila views the urgent need for sustainable development for the future of mankind through the lens of eco-criticism. Eco-criticism was born out of our increasing awareness of the consequences of excessive exploitation of nature and addresses the issue of healthy environment for healthy living. P. Raja’s Water Please is a historical play dealing with the life of Aayi, a courtesan in the sixteenth-century Pondicherry who was generous enough to dig a tank at Muthirapalayam for public use. Her noble act later solved the serious scarcity of potable water in the white town mostly inhabited by the French during the French regime in the eighteenth-century Pondicherry. The play’s immediate context can be universalized as the play bridges literature and the physical environment and projects Nature as a destroyer and also a preserver of life despite the fact that the plot of the play revolves on a certain time in the history of Pondicherry, a Union Territory in India.

Dr. R. Janatha Kumari has contributed the sixth chapter titled “Nadine Gordimer’s *Burger’s Daughter*: A Historic Document of the Changing Scenario of South Africa.” Gordimer, a South African writer and political activist, states that in a certain sense a writer is ‘selected’ by his subject, his subject being the consciousness of his own era. Consequently, the themes of her novels are centered on the contemporary African experience. She further says that the change in the social attitudes unconsciously reflected in her works represents both that of the people in her society and her apprehension of it. This chapter views *Burger’s Daughter* from the angle of New Historicism that sees literary texts as the material products of specific historical and political conditions. *Burger’s Daughter* is concerned with the predicament facing the inheritor of a revolutionary tradition, Rosa, in the context of South Africa in the 1970s. It is a journey, a quest for individualization of the self. Rosa, the protagonist, at last emerges from the all-encompassing shadow of her father to live a life of her own, vouching for women’s rights and gender equality.

Dr. Sheeba S. Nair’s “Sword Turned Shield: An Existential Overview of George Ryga’s *Indian*” forms the seventh chapter and takes up the philosophical theory of Existentialism for examining Ryga’s play *Indian*. Existentialism put forth by thinkers like Sartre and Nietzsche tries to unlock the secret and meaning of human existence, goes deep into the concerns of human life, and tries to exemplify and enlighten confused and conflicted minds. *Indian* is a short play with very few characters but does an exemplary task of addressing the struggle of the natives after colonization. It brings into focus the plight of numerous natives who suffer from a sense of homelessness in their own land, Canada. The protagonist is deprived of a distinct name and a definite identity, and he, with his family, has been suffering all along in the white-dominated society and is compelled to perceive the indispensable need to adapt to the Sartrean humanism “that you can always make something out of what you’ve been made into.” He represents all those that face such an identity crisis as his in the post-colonial Canada irrespective of space and time, and addressing this lack of identity is one of the chief concerns of Existentialism.

In the seventh chapter, V. P. Prasaja uses the theory of Disability Studies in her paper titled “The Myth of Ableism: The Representation of the Grotesque and the Disability in The Mahabharata.” Disability Studies is a trans-disciplinary area of study that focuses on the

social, economic, cultural and political conditions of those who are secluded and labelled as the disabled. Disability Studies and Postcolonial Studies share a concern with silenced populations. Epics like The Mahabharata abound in myths and are flooded with a number of dwarfs, monsters, giants and airy spirits. Myths are instrumental in defining and sustaining the cultural codes of a society. Looking at disability through myths promotes the comprehension of the structures of power and knowledge which determine the construction of disability. The embedded mythical narrative actuates the formation and fixation of hierarchy enhancing ideologies. These ideological codes of myth correspond with the existing discourses on disability. This chapter presents a discourse of cultural disability as to how the most disadvantaged and disempowered group including those who are physically, mentally, intellectually and spiritually incapacitated, and who are deprived of the basic rights to pursue a dignified life. It is exemplified through the characters like the blind king Dhritrashtra and Ashtavakra, a sage with eight bends in his physical frame who appears in both The Ramayana and The Mahabharata.

In the ninth chapter titled “Colonial Residues and the Penurious Existence: Expounding the Life of Periphery in Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan,” T. Shijith treats the marginalized, who, being weak and poor, fail to be in the limelight of social structure. The centre-periphery binary notion is a usual term that frequently appears in the postcolonial discourses. The relationship between the centre and the periphery is often one between the dominant and the deprived. Manjula Padmanabhan in her play Harvest treats this tragic predicament of the periphery, revealing the reality that in the medical wing involving the sale of human organs, the rich First World countries take advantage of the poverty-ridden and uneducated sections of the Third World countries like India that have become an easy and safe destination for “biomedical imperialism”. Om, the exemplary and tragic victim of the neo-colonial world, by the end of the play, reveals the upsettingly grim fact that in such a society as India’s, there are only two classes, namely the haves and the have-nots.

The tenth chapter titled “Revisiting Ezekiel’s The Night of the Scorpion: A Multi Theoretical Reading” and contributed by Dr. Suamathi Shiva Kumar makes use of the basic tenets of the theories including Marxism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Linguistics to revisit the poem. The Marxist approach highlights the class differences between the narrator, an educated

father's son, and the illiterate villagers. A feminist approach reveals that stung by a scorpion on a rainy day, the mother, being a woman and part of a patriarchal society, suffers silently till the pain subsides on its own. A psychoanalytical approach holds that the boy, now a grown up, recalls those moments vividly since the harrowing scene has affected him psychologically and caused a deep scar in his mind. The words of the villagers justifying the sufferings of the mother in expiation of her sins committed in the previous birth, accompanied by the sinful desires in the present, could have terribly impacted the boy's impressionistic mind. A linguistic approach reveals that the unrhymed free verse and the uneven length of the stanzas, more like "verse paragraphs", go to strengthen the way of recreating the scene from the boy's point of view as "a vision of ordinary reality, especially in Indian life, unmediated by cold intellect."

In the eleventh chapter, titled "T.V. Reddy's Fleeting Bubbles - A Microcosm of Victimization," Dr. X. Anita Arul applies Mendelsohn's Theory of Victimization to the poems of T.V. Reddy in his collection *Fleeting Bubbles*, the victims being Indian women. T.V. Reddy portrays the stark realities of Indian society steeped in gender bias. India shines and looks incredible, but beneath the glow lurks a dark streak of victimization in regard to women. Women are trapped in the cages made attractive with the colouring of culture and tradition. Women are treated with glowing terms such as "a keyed skinny doll" and "a humble eve". A widow, though a victim of fate, is unjustifiably abused in society for no fault of hers. She is expected to conform to a life of isolation and perpetual sorrow. Like a burning candle that gives light around by sacrificing itself, women are selfless and sacrifice their individuality and creativity for the sake of the people around in a patriarchal society. T. V Reddy strongly recommends that women be self-reliant and economically independent in order to be free from victimization. Women should become forward-thinkers and choose to defy societal norms without succumbing to societal pressures of gender inequality.

Dr. Vijaya Babu Koganti's paper, "Institutionalized Racism and the Life of 'Coloureds': A Study of Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* (1965)," constitutes the twelfth chapter. The South African government institutionalized racism through various Acts such as "Immorality Act (1927)". The racial segregation was not only between whites and non-whites but also between different communities of non-whites. The action of the play, *Boesman and Lena*, is set in two Acts. Boesman and his wife Lena are presented as the white man's "rubbish" and

“neglected heap”. Repeatedly thrown out of their pondoks by the “bulldozers” of the white government, they move hopelessly and helplessly from place to place, performing their “dwaal” meaning ‘confused wandering’. The play depicts the humiliations heaped on them, the monotony of their wandering, the senselessness of their existence, their embarrassment and at the same time, their helplessness as individuals and as the marginalized people of South Africa. Boesman and Lena, said to be in their fifties, thus lead a life of “hardship and dissipation” and represent the “un-accommodated people” in the world with no “permanent home.” The play talks about the institutionalized racism, and the play’s greatness, as Derek Cohen observes, lies in its capacity to extend the range of its unnerving protest far beyond its South African context.

The thirteenth chapter titled “Feministic Perspectives in Indian Mythology: A Critical Study of Sita and Draupadi in Contemporary Times” is a contribution of V. Vishnu Vandana Devi. The feminist line of Elaine Showalter’s gyno criticism allows women to find an identity and seek a rightful and dignified place for themselves in society. Old myths are revisited and retold from a feminist perspective by writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*The Palace of Illusions*), Kavita Kane (*Karna’s Wife: The Outcast’s Queen*), and Pratibha Ray (*Yajnaseni*). The modern-day characters of Sita, Draupadi, and other women of the epics are unlike their epic counterparts as the retellings gave them space to defy societal stereotypes, challenge their gender roles, their status in family and society, and their marginalized lives. Such retellings advocate the emancipation of women by just not emulating the male models, but rather heroically interrogating the injustices done to them while upholding dignity and feminine values.

The last and fourteenth chapter contains the paper titled “Tahmima Anam’s A Golden Age: Postcolonial Perspectives” by Dr. Arabati Pradeep Kumar. Postcolonialism is an approach to literary analysis that concerns itself particularly with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries. Tahmima Anam’s first novel, *A Golden Age*, is predominantly a tale of a postcolonial mother, Rehana Haque’s struggle in the midst of the turmoil of a civil war. It vividly recaptures in words the Bangladesh Liberation War between East Pakistan and West Pakistan in 1971 and its consequences from the postcolonial perspective. The struggle and sacrifice of Rehana to keep her household life and her motherland unflustered during the

wartime chaos is akin to the tumultuous story of the people of Bengal from the pre-Partition period to the creation of a liberated nation. Anam has used a postcolonial allegory in her novel, and Rehana allegorically becomes the mother figure of the nation in due course of the Liberation War.

This anthology of fourteen research articles serves as a spectrum of criticism through which one can see the multiplicity of approaches to recent literary works as the contributors have drawn on different modern critical theories to evaluate their respective literary works. A single volume carries a lot of critical material and comes in handy to help the reader comprehend a variety of approaches in an easily accessible way in a short duration. We need to welcome and support such volumes of multiple critical approaches with appropriate illustrative analyses.