

for instance, in communitarian criticism of liberalism, in the work of philosophers like Charles Taylor, or Michael Sandel, or in the debate about secularism in India.

It can be contended that the notion of culture that is widely used is essentially an apolitical one. Hence the burden of explanation in a number of studies has shifted from political factors to cultural ones, both terms being understood in isolation from each other. This might appear to be a strange claim considering the emphasis given in post-structuralist and post-modernist approaches, to exploring the politics of culture. The influence of deconstruction, of Foucauldian notions of power, of post-modernist critiques of the meta-narratives of progress, reason and science associated with modernity, and the anti-humanism associated with post-modernist philosophies – such influences have converged to reinforce some of the characteristics of the anthropological notion of culture. They may also sustain the essentially apolitical approach of that view of culture. The politics which may be generated by studies made within such approaches may only be a politics of counter discourses of a search for indigenous community alternatives to colonial discourse, or for the silenced, subaltern subject positions which were masked by the homogenising discourses of dominant groups. Such critiques, of course, have their importance but their critical edge is somewhat blunted because of the framework within which they work.

In this study, these theoretical issues are examined in relation to certain contemporary debates in political theory in India as well as with reference to the political questions which they raise. For instance, the critiques of colonial discourse, and modernity, on the debate about secularism, encapsulate many of the issues mentioned above and also illustrate some of the strengths and limitations of the methodologies which are being used by social scientists. We need to look again at concepts like ideology which drew attention to certain issues of culture and social life which have of late not received critical attention, and to examine the politics of the culturalism which seems to obscure our understanding of social and political issues.

— SARAH JOSEPH
University of Delhi
Delhi

Women in Narratives: Selections from Rajasthan

The palace of Chittorgarh, commanding an arid stretch of Rajasthan's desert, hides an apocryphal secret. In the dark vaults of its underground chamber are the charred remains of a fourteenth century queen, Padmini, and a thousand of her women companions who immolated themselves in the name of Rajput honour. Like many other tales of women's destiny in Rajasthan, this too hinges on the idea of transgression – on the woman's

containment within recognised and often ritualistic codes and her actions to either affirm or negate her socially constructed identity.

The present project on the representation of women in Rajasthan's literature seeks to examine the patriarchal paradigms within which certain notions of 'womanhood' were created in a feudal society. It questions the legitimising of oppressive customs such as *jauhar*, *sati* and child marriage which was possible in the context of a hegemony determined by the superior position of men. While there are several points of intervention and critical mediation by which the woman's 'untold story' can be resurrected, I am selecting for analysis a few narratives which have been recorded in myth, history and folklore. The glamourising of Padmini's self-immolation by a series of male poets is an immediate example of how canonical literature leaves out a subtext of convergence between female power and helplessness.

The engaging discourses of other 'celebratory' tales of female heroism are just as disturbing for a feminist literary interpretation. The story of Mira Bai, born in 1504 in the Chaukari village in Merta district and later eulogised as a 'saint', bears another review. One could focus on her tribulations as a woman who, refusing to succumb to the norms of feudal practice, asserted her individual presence, and more significantly her independent voice.

The links forged by religion, spirituality, female identity and literary expression are complex. Moreover the borderline between the secular and the mythical often disappears. For example, in bardic tales relating to Pabuji-ki-Phar, still extensively recited by the Bhopas, the role played by the women in the story, though recorded, is traditionally marginalised. By contrast, the folk tales from rural Rajasthan are often vignettes attributing inventiveness, vitality, cunning and guile to women.

The cultural diversity of Rajasthan's literature pertaining to women has, to a large extent, remained obscure to English-knowing audiences though social scientists have done commendable work in area studies. My own attempt is to give visibility to texts selected for the purpose of foregrounding the portrayal of women in the narratives. Translation from vernacular to English is a necessary part in this enterprise. But, equally important to me, is an understanding of the gendered context in which the works root their effectiveness.

— MALASHRI LAL
University of Delhi
Delhi

Coincidence and Escapism in Prasad's Novels

Jaishankar Prasad, a contemporary of Premchand, whose writing career spans through 1918-1936, was a prominent poet, story-writer, playwright and novelist of his time. Prasad wrote three novels, *Kankaal* (1929), *Titli* (1934) and *Iravati* (incomplete). In my critical assessment of these two novels, I find