

the dominant group's paradigm, i.e., the standard language. It certainly does not permit the learners to fall back upon their own idiom as the means of developing a positive sense of self worth. And this a direct affront to the positive face needs of the learners, non-recognition of which may well be the grounds for a breakdown in communication. (Aditi Mukherjee, p. 99).

Since knowledge is defined from the vantage point of the elite, the social milieu of the poor is generally associated with a cognitive deficit. There is considerable evidence now to show that the so-called illiterate societies nourish several important local oral and written literacies and forms of knowledge that compare favourably with any modern mode of discourse. . . . Given the economic and political pull associated with each language in a given setting, it is not always easy to implement and sustain the academically sound but socio-politically neutral concepts of literacy and education through the mother tongue notwithstanding the ad infinitum repetition of the 1953 UNESCO declaration in support of education through the mother tongue. . . . We also know once again of whole elite groups which for political mileage construct extremely attractive rhetoric of patriotism and nationalism around the mother tongue of the community to which they belong but send their own children to schools that use language of power right from the kindergarten. (RK Agnihotri, pp. 44-46).

After commenting on the state of the 'tribal literacy' programmes in Kerala, Krishna Kumar stated that the literacy programmes are not really concerned about teaching reading; they have a deeper ulterior motive, which is to acculturate the

illiterate. It must be noted that reading the alphabet, writing one's name and counting to hundred may be sufficient to become 'literate' if you come from marginalized section of the society. But an Indian 'citizen' is considered to be genuinely literate by the State only if he (and she?) can read the 'classics', the constitution and the daily newspapers. It is only that citizen who can contest the elections. (D Vasanta, S Gupta, and P Devi, p.158).

The Chhattisgarhi language differs considerably from standard Hindi and native speakers of Chhattisgarhi have considerable difficulty in managing to speak what is called standard Hindi, let alone read or write it. There has also been an articulation of the Chhattisgarhi identity from the point of view of classroom practice, the initial reaction to our proposal that we would conduct literacy classes in Chhattisgarhi was one of disbelief. Many of our teachers and learners equated education with learning the Hindi language, and did not think it was possible to be literate in Chhattisgarhi. A familiar reaction was that Chhattisgarhi could not be written as it had no script. (Irina Sen, p. 235).

The ideological mess in theory and practice is obvious. In fact there is a lot of import-export in the articulations of these authors. The article, Literacy pedagogy: the West Bengal scenario by Sandip Bandopadhyaya has ten references. Incidentally all ten of them are by the foreign scholars—Bettelheim, Chomsky, Freire, Goodman, Gumperz, Halliday, Olson, Piaget, Street, Vygotsky. Obviously there is no Bengali who knows anything about Bengal!

Once more this anthology

demonstrates, if any demonstration was ever needed, how intellectually bankrupt is the Indian academic milieu. I agree with Agnihotri that most of these literacy projects are a farce. All these statistics about Kerala being hundred per cent literate or the whole country having acquired sixty or seventy per cent literacy amounts to absolutely nothing. If literacy is defined by the capacity to articulate in a grammatically and logically coherent manner, we cannot boast of more than five per cent literacy in Bharat.

HARJEET SINGH GILL

Professor Emeritus

Jawaharlal Nehru University

Translating Caste: A Katha Classroom Text, edited by TAPAN BASU, Katha, Delhi, 2002, pp.262, Rs. 295

There cannot be, perhaps, an Indian literary act without 'caste' as its compelling site of production as well as reception. Implicated in the processes of culture, such an act is bound to negotiate and respond to the ever-changing dynamics of caste identities. At times 'caste' becomes too conspicuous and loud-pitched, and at times it remains dormant under the grand ideologies of Marxism, Nationalism, Religion and Secularism. But it never withers away. It is fiercely contested as well as cherished. It is contested because it stratifies society into rigid grids, it is cherished because it structures the amorphous mass of people into a system.

To cull out an anthology of caste-stories from a scenario that is so intensely caste-driven, is a challenging enterprise for it has to avoid the extremities of caste-rhetoric on the

one hand and castelessness on the other. Each story has to be a narrative of the processes of caste, its complex textualities and rigorous internal reformations so as to stand apart from the polemics of propaganda literature. The anthology under review contains eight stories from various Indian languages that presumably revolve around 'caste' as their central character. Besides the stories, it consists of five essays, four critical pieces, one extended introduction and detailed bibliographical notes. The context, the text and the critique are thus packaged in one go—a format quite in consonance with some of the latest practices of academic book-publishing. But the anthology's mainstay is the short stories that unfold a number of textualities built in the discourse of caste through the power of the narrative.

Right in the first story 'Oorakali' by Irathina Karikalan, a different aesthetics comes into play as low-caste girls fiercely compete for the collection of dung coming out of the 'shrunken anus of the cows and bulls'. The girls would start 'screaming the moment they saw the skin expand and dung being pushed out'. As Appa, the cow-gazer would go around every house of the village-street to gather some food in lieu of grazing the cows of high caste villagers, he is given the left-over which he puts in the same vessel and later on 'drinks' as his 'kevaru-kambu kazhi mix'. The ending of the story is slightly polemical as the fair daughter of the low-caste Appa, named Thangatchi is raped and is forced to abort by the family. She dies a painful death, and the bewailing brother is seen asking a flurry of questions: 'Is it fair for the village to

graze on the very family that had grazed all its cattle?'

Mogali Ganesh's story 'The Paddy Harvest' reveals the unholy nexus between the traditional authority and the rational-legal authority, suggesting thereby the perpetual hegemony of one caste/class over the another in post-colonial India. When the efficient 'untouchable' tehsildar allows the low-caste villagers to harvest the crop sown illegally in the dried bed of village pond, the powerful landlords of the village meet the Deputy Commissioner and get the decision reversed. The daredevilry of old low-caste Thopamma in humiliating the upper caste police force of Deputy Commissioner through her garland of rotting meat is hilarious as well as tragic. She disappears and takes on the character of supernatural force. Next story is 'Bayen' written by the famous writer-activist Mahasweta Devi in which once again a woman-keeper of the cremation ground named Chandi is suddenly transformed into a witch that can strike at children without being visible. The 'loveliest' Chandi becomes the villain by mere heresy and superstition. Her self-sacrifice to avoid a train-disaster towards the end, however, is too dramatic and stage-managed.

MT Vasudevan Nair's 'Sukritam' is a story of the return of a young high-caste girl Cheriatti, long lost in the forest. Once back, the villagers begin to doubt her integrity. She as a disgraced being is asked to shift to a remote place away from the village precincts. Cheriatti volunteers to resign to uralppura, 'a room away from the main house'. But when she is asked to leave even that, she sitting cross-legged on the blanket undergoes a divine transformation. Suddenly she is hailed as devi, and

Uralpurra becomes a temple. As per the beliefs of her community, she is ceremoniously drowned in the village pond. Next morning her body is not found in the pond. Her mystification is thus complete.

'Doiboki's Day' is once again a woman-centric story. It recounts the travails of a fisherwoman who stays little late in the market to sell her fish at a reasonable price. On her way back when it is too dark, she is chased by some lusty army-men, and in moments of sheer fear she enters *naamghar*, a prayer-hall forbidden for women. She is pelted by high-caste women for defiling the prayer-house. Towards the end when Doiboki's son comes rushing to her, she screams loud, and a whole horde of fisherwomen standing at a distance pours in the *naamghar*, defying age-old conventions.

KP Ramanunni's story 'What is your caste' is more or less an extended academic argument wherein a committed Marxist teacher, addressed pejoratively as 'a Nair' by a low-caste woman in a seminar at a school, undergoes bouts of self-reflexivity to understand his caste-lineage. In sharp contrast to Ramanunni's story is 'A Childhood's Tale' by Urmila Pawar. Autobiographical in content, the story comes straight from self-experience, affirming the Dalit position that self-representation is any day more authentic than representation by others. The story throws many interesting insights, one such insight is: 'If it was father's legs that moved, with Aai it was her hands.'

But despite short, the stringing together of narratives of such a range and depth containing caste in its diachronic and synchronic textualities in a single anthology of less than 275 pages, it remains an enterprise

half-met. In most of the stories, the low-caste-woman is shown as the victim of caste oppression; in such stories more than caste it is gender that becomes the central concern. Each story records the transformation of woman into a witch or a devi or a motivating leader. This has more to do with 'translating gender' than 'translating caste' as such. This is not to say that woman-caste interface is less significant, its dominance however is unwarranted.

The middle castes are more or less missing from the narratives reducing thus the enormous caste-heterogeneity into the usual convenient frame of the upper versus the lower. In post-independence India much before the rise of dalit politics of late, it were the middle castes that appropriated the political space in the name of peasant-politics. The localized nature of middle castes as against the national presence of upper and lower castes perhaps stands in the way of their representation in the narratives that seek to cater to an all-India audience. Jats, Marathas, Rajputs, Kurmis etc. are middle castes that are too provincial to interest the national constituency.

There are other omissions that cannot be brushed aside as mere inevitable lapses in any anthology of such a range. For instance one fails to understand as to why should the anthology not include a story on intra-caste collisions and hierarchies within a caste. The interesting dynamics of communalization of politics on one hand and caste-politics on the other also remain un-represented. The continuation of caste-identities even after conversion to Christianity, Islam or Buddhism is one interesting aspect that has been left totally untouched in the essays as well as stories. More importantly there is not a single story or argument that brings

out any positive significance of caste system in India. Caste, as historians and social scientists, have repeatedly told us has not only saved Indians from being totally Westernized, it has also provided an inner defence mechanism to stand pressures of change from outside.

The essays do provide an extended and well-researched bibliography on the issue of caste. Sisir Kumar Das's essay 'The Narratives of Suffering: Caste and the Underprivileged' is a mind-boggling piece of research on caste-literature across various Indian languages before 1947 – a period hardly documented ever before. Tapan Basu's 'Narratives of Suffering: Dalit Perspectives' complements Sisir Das's effort in the sense that it furnishes an account of Dalit writings in the post-47 phase particularly. As an editor also, Tapan Basu in his 'Introduction' makes an effort to provide an over-arching view of various discursive configurations of caste from historical, social, ideological and political perspectives. But unfortunately the emphasis is more on information and bibliographic details.

An essay or two on "Dalit Aesthetics" could have provided a befitting ideological context for an anthology of stories that revolve primarily around low-caste characters. One reason that caste-stories are often run down is their so-called lack of aesthetic sophistication; it is held that most of the stories are propaganda-statements doled out in racy, passionate narrative forms. An essay on Dalit Aesthetics could have dispelled all such a priori notions of aestheticism and realism; it would have definitely sensitized the reader to alternate activist aesthetics. An essay by a Gopal Guru or Kancha Illiah or for that matter by any Dalit ideologue would not have been out

of place in the over-all scheme of the anthology. Urmila Pawar's interview with its focus on the role of women in Dalit movement, once again stands out for its honesty and conviction.

The four critical essays included in the anthology should have been dispensed away with. Except expressing anxiety about translations, these essays do not add significantly to critical awareness. One wonders how long do we need to be doubtful about our translations. The stories read well in their translated version, and should find a ready all-India audience. Over all 'Translating Caste' is a valuable literary contribution to the on-going interrogations on caste. The anthology is an evidence enough of the unflinching activist proclivities of contemporary Indian writers.

AKSHAYA KUMAR
Department of English
Panjab University, Chandigarh

Dharmakīrti's Theory of Inference : Revaluation and Reconstruction, by RAJENDRA PRASAD, Oxford University Press, 2002; Rs. 625.

Dharmakīrti's Theory of Inference: Revaluation and Reconstruction by Rajendra Prasad is a substantial contribution to the study and understanding of Indian theory of Inference in general and Dharmakīrti's theory of Inference in particular. The book is of added value because here one gets a comprehensive act picture of the theory of Inference. The author has identified the salient issues in the Western theory of Inference and has considered opinions and attitudes of scholars, trained in Western Logic, towards Indian theory of Inference