

National Crime Record Bureau shows that in 2014, for the first time, 58 per cent arrests were in relation to sedition and anti-terror laws, while in 2015 a total of 30 cases of sedition were filed all over India and a total of 73 persons were arrested in relation to these cases. Despite this decline in number of cases registered, the number of people arrested for sedition has risen. This data highlights the gap between executive and judicial discourse of sedition in India. While conviction for sedition at the level of higher judiciary is becoming a rarity and use of sedition laws in the domain of executive is veracious. Anushka has shown how sedition and anti-terror laws are being used against a diverse spectrum of Indian masses – wherever for raising slogans or resisting the authoritarian nature of the state (state and/or central regimes)– and have been imposed on people across political ideologies. Therefore, the author notices a juridical shift in the domain of anti-terror laws and Indian democracy that is facing continuous moments of contradictions to deliver justice and the fundamental rights of people in this country.

The conclusive part of the book has been beautifully titled ‘the life of law and contradictions of liberal democracies’ where Anushka makes an insightful comment on the life of law that exist both within and beyond the statues, therefore subject to interpretations. This assertion has been made in the background of journey of laws of sedition. The first concern itself with analysing the language of law of sedition, the second deals with studying judicial dispositions on sedition and the third pertains to interrogating the everyday life of law. The book makes a claim about Indian democracy; how it has not only been controlled but contradicted, about its practice from aspiratory perspectives of marginal people of India.

This book not only offers an interesting reading for the academic fraternity and which is engaged in social sciences and politico-juridical domains, but also for activists and ordinary citizens interested to know the practice of seditious law and extraordinary laws in contemporary India and beyond.

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E.V. Ramakrishnan, *Indigenous Imaginaries: Literature, Region, Modernity*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2017, pp. xvii + 274, Rs. 775/-, ISBN: 9789386689450.

E.V. Ramarkishnan’s book should be seen in the light of the statement he has made in the third chapter of the book. According to him, translating India to European terms has led to a crisis of representing ourselves which

speaks volumes about the nature and scope of the book. As Indian academics is heavily working under the influence of Western philosophy and paradigm(s) in post-colonial times, the present book by E.V. Ramakrishnan is the result of an author’s search for Indian epistemology. To use A.K. Ramanujan’s phrase, also used by the author in this book, the author is also searching the Indian way of thinking.

The book is a compilation of scholarly essays written and presented by the author in various national/international seminars in India and abroad in which the author argues for redefining the study of literature from the perspective of comparative studies. Divided into three sections, Ramakrishnan explores contestations between Western and Indian epistemologies. He is of the opinion that going back to literature written in regional languages and translation can be potent tools in this search. Besides, the author discusses Bhakti literature, relevance of literature in the age of globalization and identity politics in contemporary India. The author has studied regional literature with special focus on Rabindranath Tagore, Valmiki, Mahatma Gandhi, Mahasweta Devi, Amitav Ghosh, Bhalchandra Nemade, Aga Shahid Ali to name a few, which also indicates the vast range of writers from different regions of India.

The opening chapter traces the history of English discipline in India, introduction of the printing press, its role in spreading Malayalam literature and construction of modernity in India. Prose written in Malayalam did not borrow motifs from the mythology and drifted away from the model of Sanskrit. Printing of literature in Malayalam facilitated the process of Malayalam identity formation. Thus, the author establishes a historical connect between press, modernity and Malayalam identity. Studying regional literature, for the author, is part of the politics to resist hegemonic structures of European countries which have legitimized homogenization of the world. Citing Chinua Achebe, the author makes a very valid point that the adjective ‘universal’ for European mind does not go beyond the boundaries of Europe. Study of regional literature demystifies the Western canon, it also resists their cultural hegemonic position.

Ramakrishnan finds translation studies to be symbiotically related to the study of regional literature in India. The author opines that modern Indian languages came into being in the beginning of the second millennium, which helped in resisting the hegemony of Sanskrit lasting for more than a thousand years in literary and knowledge domains. Since the advent of European colonial forces in India, regional languages have negotiated with the external influence by assimilation and resistance. According to the author, translation, especially translation of epics, has played a very important role in establishing regional languages in different parts of India and also in establishing a dialogic relation between *mārgi* and *desi*. By deviating

from the Sanskrit version, regional languages resisted the Sanskrit canon. The author gives a survey of translations of the Ramayana in various regional languages taking place from the tenth century to the sixteenth century. The author discusses the influence of Persian and Arabic languages of power and authority in shaping the Sufi discourse in north India. Ramakrishnan also discusses the role played by Arabic and Persian languages in liberating people from Sanskrit. He should have also included the role played by Sufi poet like Baba Farid (c. 1175-c.1266), considered to be the first poet of Punjabi, who, despite being a scholar of Arabic, wrote his poetry in the dialect of Punjabi. During the medieval period, Arabic and Persian became the languages of the elite. Issues of power that Prof. Ramakrishnan reads into dominant position of Sanskrit can also be read in relation to Arabic and Persian. In this context, Punjabi Sufi poetry created a space which gave resistance to cultural domination of Persian and Arabic languages. However, the author makes a very insightful comment regarding the promotion of Sanskrit by the British as it suited their Orientalist agenda. The British looked down upon regional languages by calling them dialects and incapable of communicating modern knowledge. Regional languages suffered at the hands of both Orientalists as well as Anglicists.

In the third chapter, the author has studied dialogism in Bhakti poetry, which challenged the monologue of Sanskrit literature. As the “poets of the Bhakti movement spoke from within the domain of lived experiences,” their self was not the result of borrowed paradigm. The author’s position is justified by Sundar Sarukkai’s idea that lived experience constitutes the self that experiences. Self is not the result of reflection on the self as a distant object. Thus, the lived experience of Bhakti poets gave them ethical ground and paradigm to question and resist the dominance of mainstream institutionalized religion and Sanskrit as used in the religious discourse. Bhakti movement is also seen by the author as a voice of the Dalit against oppressive Brahmanical institution.

The fifth chapter in the first section, which deals with identity politics and the discourse of minority in contemporary India, provides theoretical introduction to the chapters in the second section of the book as the next section has chapters dealing with representation of modernity, the Other, imagining India as a nation. Ramakrishnan redefines the term secular and the way it stands relevant even in modernity. His argument is that modernity has failed to do away with religion or pre-modern religious practices; rather modernity has redefined the significance of religion in the social space. Understanding the relation between state powers and religion, his argument is that in some cases state can have clear religious attitude

and people can be secular; and vice-versa as being secular and being atheist are two different categories. In Indian context, one can be religious, yet secular. Ambivalence in the nature of secular modern has resulted in the discourse of minorities- Muslims and Dalits –which has taken different trajectories. To validate the argument, the author studies the case of Kerala and Malayalam literature.

Ramakrishnan opines that Rabindranath Tagore critiques homogenizing modernity of the West. He has situated Tagore in the larger national context and placed him along with other poets from different parts of India such as Kumaran Asan (Malayalam), Muhammad Iqbal (Urdu), Keshavsut (Marathi), Subramania Bharati (Tamil), Bhai Veer Singh (Punjabi), Bhartendu Harishchandra (Hindi) who were negotiating with the colonial modernity. The author is of the opinion that in these poets the pain of being torn into two different worlds can be seen. They introduced the voice of modernity in their writings and have also contributed towards consolidation of their regional identity.

In the writings of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, the first major Muslim novelist of Kerala, tensions between the secular modern and insider view of a Muslim writer, who “distances himself from the homogenising logic of modernity,” have been explored. Basheer’s *Balyasakhi* (1944), an autobiographical bildungsroman narrative, through the story of Majid, narrates the experiences of the Muslim minority in Kerala; the narrator of *Shabdangal* (1947) is a soldier, who was an orphan and raised by a priest. Imagining nation from the point of view of a soldier or a Muslim immediately after the nation was born was an important artistic device of the writer. *Ntuppuppakkoranendarnnu* (1951) is one of the most significant novels written by the novelist and it discusses the issue of Muslim reform in post-colonial India. Through his study of Balachandra Nemade’s *Kosla*, Ramakrishnan has also narrated the nation from a regional lens.

In the narratives of Amitav Ghosh, Mahasweta Devi and Anand, the author explores the issue of memory in postcolonial Indian fiction. Memory takes various forms as it includes collective memory in its ambit and also the narratives of resistance into which are woven myths and legends of the community. Another aspect of memory and modernity is explored in the comparative study of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s writings and Malayalam fiction. In Marquez’s polyphonic fiction is embedded the culture and history of the society. Kerala’s fiction also confronts colonial modernity while retaining its regional elements. Ramakrishnan establishes geographical, historical and cultural similarities between their writings, despite their different locations. Cosmopolitan nature of Kerala and Keralites, incomplete project of modernity and

contestations between traditions and modernity are the elements that bring Latin American writers close to Kerala writers.

In the last section of the book, the chapter titled 'Hegemony, Ideology and the Idea of Literary', Ramakrishnan discusses the process of Sanskrit being relegated from its position of hegemony. The author studies 'the literary' as a space of "contestations and containments". In the West, the dominance of Latin was challenged by vernaculars as the latter also became the language in which knowledge was being generated and ideas were exchanged. During the British period, according to the author, the dominant position of Sanskrit was challenged by English. What intrigues readers here is that by the time European forces started controlling the administration of the country, the language of administration was not Sanskrit in most parts of the land, but Persian and Arabic. In the next chapter, Ramakrishnan problematizes the concept of canon in the Indian context, given its long oral tradition and linguistic diversity. Regional literature(s) in India is plural and has been influenced by internal conflicts, which are unique to every region. The diverse and varied nature of Indian regional literature(s) also questions unified or homogenous literary historiography in India. He also engages with the issues of power, centre and destabilising the power centres with the help of translation.

The book began with discussing 'telos of translation' and it reaches its end discussing translation and its role in shaping modernist discourse in India. Instead of discussing translation of regional literature into English, the chapter focuses on the contribution of the translation of European poets such as Rilke, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Baudelaire in bringing modernist discourse in India. Translations done by poets such as Buddhadeb Bose, Agyeya, Dilip Chitre, Ayyappa Paniker, publishing in various journals, provided Indian readers and young poets a new poetical discourse. Understanding translation as a cultural practice,

Ramakrishnan opines that their translations were also crucial in shaping Indian modernity and modernism in Indian literature, which is different from that of the West. In the last chapter, Ramakrishnan has studied shifting paradigms of literary historiography with special focus on Malayalam literary history. The author believes that literary histories run parallel to national histories- as political and cultural ideologies that intersect the space of historiography as well.

Focusing on Malayalam literary history, the author begins with the publication of *Malayala bhasha chaaritharam* by P. Govind Pillai in 1881. Using Pillai's ideas, Ramakrishnan also problematizes the canon as the history of Malayalam literature that goes back to the oral tradition. He discusses different essentialist and revisionist histories of Malayalam literature written by different authors. The author critically examines histories written and edited volumes produced by P.K. Parmeswaran, V.J. Varghese, M.N. Vijayan. Ramakrishnan argues that the literary historiography of Malayalam literature in the new millennium includes history or histories of women's writings, folk literature, oral literature, tribal literature, peasant literature, subaltern literature and histories of fine arts and performative traditions is also seen as an integral part of the literary sensibility, which indicates that in contemporary times both vertical and horizontal boundaries have been blurred. E.V. Ramakrishnan engages with larger issues of concern in literary studies, literary historiography and translation studies in postcolonial India. In this vast canvas, ranging from Bhakti poetry to modern writings in different languages, the book is a compilation of insightful and relevant essays on regional literature, modernity and nation.

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