

moments of recent political history, the challenges of complex situations and the consequences of imitating the western pattern, which is not suitable for traditional societies.

The discussion begins on the premise that non-western countries, in imitating the western models of Enlightenment and western political theory, tend to create new political problems for themselves. They, therefore, need to connect to their own local aspirations and employ strategies that suit their postcolonial, post-independent power structures. They should "aspire for democratic determination of politics as opposed to determination by those who consider themselves superior to others" (p. 309). The author dwells on binary opposites—superior/inferior, us/them, self/other, western/non-western, citizen/polis and local/global—to understand the top-down democratization of decolonized countries. He questions the validity of abandoning ancestral culture by non-western countries (like India) for the glamour of a more advanced modernized socio-political structure, and perceives ambivalence in the demand that the traditional be retained only as a marker of identity.

Political theories like liberal humanism, Marxism, feminism and others are western in origin and these may not necessarily be suitable for non-western structures. According to him, after Independence, the new leadership of India and elsewhere did not realize that importing a political institution or its underlying political theory was "not like importing a washing machine" (p.6) and had its serious repercussions. This borrowing of the western model of Enlightenment resulted in conveniently forgetting that it will also enhance popular culture of materialism and consumerism and relegate the have-nots to the margins. The author rues the fact that while we had our own model of enlightenment and social ethics suitable for our conditions, there was no point in imitating the West.

Prof. Kumar problematizes the "right" and the "good", placing them against the backdrop of liberal humanism as operative in political institutions and opines that the "right" and the "good" need to be inclusive and "extend a helping hand to the last man in the hovel" (p. 314). This can be achieved only when the global and the local coalesce to merge the advantages of development with the aspirations of the local. The global cannot be wished away; on the same analogy, the local cannot be discarded either. The local is the base of one's identity and the "natural habitat" of human values. It is motivated by what the author terms "neighbourhood sentiments" and is the base from where human values can be transmitted globally. The best way to achieve the synthesis of the global and the local and disseminate the advantages of modernity to the marginalized is to revert

to Gandhian political ideas of humanism. Taking his cue from Gandhian thought, the author believes that if the individual man or woman is able to pull himself/herself away from the lower self and move towards realization of the higher self, a harmonious decolonized society can be set up. Decolonization cannot be a question of political passion, nor is it a matter of social prestige. It can be meaningful only when the individual of the non-western world gets his/her rights.

Nothing escapes the microscopic vision of the author—the ambivalence of the top-down and bottom-up political and social forces, the state-society relations and the impact of materialism on culture—all come within his purview. Further, he discusses various issues to arrive at the conclusion that ancient and medieval political thoughts, state rights, national rights, class rights and individual rights, the role of language and inter-textual narrative have the power to twist and turn meaning and finally the human element that can vouchsafe the "good" and the "right", which is the main thesis of the work. World politics today is a complex web of various influences. Terms like diversity, power politics, pluralism, hegemony, religion and autonomy have assumed several connotations. Neither un-reflexive traditionalism, nor unmediated rationalism can come to the rescue of non-western societies if they do not find their own system harmonious to their particular needs and value system.

With international standard in printing, paper and cover design *Liberal Humanism and the Non-Western Other* is a book that leaves its impact on the readers, for which the publisher deserves our compliment. Besides, the language has flow and makes a smooth read. It raises a myriad questions dwelling on significant changes that need be addressed if India is to protect itself from being a fractured society. The author puts before the reader several posers that are pointed enough to make him/her re-think for further discussion. The questions are answered in a conversational style that forms the base of the discourse. Political theorists, students of international affairs, postcolonial and subaltern studies scholars will find the book very useful.

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Chhanda Chatterjee (ed.), *Literature as History: From Early to Contemporary Times*. Delhi: Primus Books, 2014, pp. x + 176, Hb, Rs. 595/-, ISBN: 978-93-84082-03-1.

The fields of literature and history, emerging as they both do from within the dense web of the complex forces of power—socio-cultural, political, economic, ideological and

military—share the common core of human experience. Both have “narrative” forms, both draw out themes from the spaces of human experiences and the horizon of human expectations. Literature, however, can delve into the past, explore the present and project limitless possibilities into the future—free-ranging over the temporal and spatial dimensions of human subjectivities, even to the extent of positioning its narrative strategy from within the interiority of a single individual’s singular and intimate understanding of the world. History, on the other hand, while sharing the narrative form, is understood to have a specific temporal orientation towards the past. However, it is now an established claim of history and literature both that historical enquiry, whatever be its deep temporal referentiality, always positions itself within the frame of the “contemporary” or the “present”. It is further compelled to direct inquiries into the past through the conduit, as also the demands, of the present. It may then project this reflexive intellectual move from the present back to the past and then forward into the future, in attempted prognoses of whatever problem or problems it has chosen to engage with.

The present compendium of essays, edited by Chhanda Chatterjee gestures at precisely this convergence in its “Introduction” to the book, struggling as it does with widely divergent themes, it has been cobbled together fairly adroitly, though Chatterjee is clearly hamstrung by the disparate themes that various scholars have explored in this volume. However, the clear thematic note—the space where history and literature meet—is brought out sharply by Ganapati Subbaiah’s essay, “‘Historicality in Literature’: A Case study of the Classical Tamil Text, the *Patirrupattu*.” Subbaiah’s foray into the classical Tamil Text explores the “everydayness” of the experiences of ordinary people and gestures towards the title through his deft use of Rabindranath Tagore’s critical entry-point (via Ranajit Guha) into historiography. Subbaiah ropes in Tagore’s criticism of historiography as unimaginative and inadequate for the task of explicating the “human” past. Literature, Tagore insightfully declared, would illuminate the blind-spots cultivated so assiduously by historians.

Amit Dey’s explorations of Sufi hagiographies also catch echoes of the lived everydayness of medieval Sufi saints, both men and women, in ‘Mystical and Eclectic Traditions as Reflected in Persian Sources of Medieval India’. Despite the sacral nature of these texts, which dwelt on the “miraculous” and the extra-ordinary even in the context of the thick descriptions of the “quotidian”, these very processes also document the every-day. Further, they mark sharp Sufi articulations of attitudinal resistance to the deeply ingrained gender prejudices that mark many of these texts. Dey’s essay brings out the remarkable freedom from such prejudices and the

creative religio-cultural spaces accorded to women saints who had the courage to deviate from the “normal” gender roles, normatively fixed through religion.

The next essay moves into the colonial period, and there is an optic shift regarding the locus of the female “body”. The “Nation” as Imagination, undergirding all nationalistic discourses—displaces the biological embodiment of the female as an inferior human form, and substitutes in its place the glorified and sacral feminization of territorially located “Indian” identity in abstract categories. Though resonating with strong overtones of “Hindu”/Brahmanical patriarchal moorings, this imaginary domain had litterateurs, including Tagore, extolling this feminine image of the “Nation”, and who were responsible for colouring this feminized landscape with sentimentalized, romanticized readings of a bountiful “Nature” which had showered “Mother India” with a verdurous and golden Beauty.

Rabindranath Tagore’s colossal contribution towards the task of imagining the Indian nation weaves through three other essays. Chhanda Chatterjee’s essay, ‘The Radical Rabindranath: “The Red Oleanders (Rakta Karabi)” and Dreams of a New World’, looks at Tagore’s vision of a new social formation that had successfully reinvented itself in an egalitarian and non-mechanical realization of the universal principles that finally celebrated a “humane” human existence. Sobhan Lal Datta Gupta’s scholarly and careful essay ‘Reading Tagore’s Letters from Russia in the Twenty-First Century’ introduces many critical insights and new research material into the letters Tagore wrote during his visits to Russia. The letters, as Datta Gupta highlights, had marked Tagore’s initial euphoria and then his later disillusionment with a regime that depended on controlling the human spirit. The penultimate, incisive essay by Igor Grbić, explores the faddy engagement of the West with Tagore’s writings, where much of Tagore’s writings were first flattened in an effort to read the “Oriental” message to the “Occident” framed by an ‘Oriental’ Prophet, and subsequently the complete jettisoning of Tagore, once this fad became unfashionable.

The essay by Somdatta Mandal, titled ‘The Evolution of Indian–English Language and Literature: A Socio-historic Survey’, examines the ways in which a colonial legacy of cultural power (exercised through the hegemonic strategy of the English language) is appropriated by the colonial subjects and subverted to resemble a multiplicity of indigenous dialects. This essay is bracketed by the last essay by Swati Ganguly, for she comments acerbically on the systematic manner in which the new legitimacy of English as a plastic medium conveying a multiplicity of indigenous designs and styles, also seeks to block translations of women writers’ fiction into English.

The book opens up a range of scholarship for the reader interested in English, or History or both, and is definitely worth a close and careful reading.

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Lata Singh and Biswamoy Pati eds., *Colonial and Contemporary Bihar and Jharkhand*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2014, pp. viii + 256, Rs. 995/-, ISBN: 978-93-80607-92-4.

Here is a book that attempts to bring together disparate ideas and perspectives on Bihar and Jharkhand in the colonial and contemporary context. The introductory chapter attempts the difficult task of trying to tie the strands of variegated themes together. Each chapter singularly deals with an issue that may be of some interest for readers who have been following up on the socio-political processes unique to Bihar and Jharkhand. I will focus on a few articles in the volume which caught my eye for the interesting subjects that they deal with and the manner of exploring these, and even if there are problems with these at some levels. These are the papers which give the book an edge

Imtiaz Ahmed's 'Bihari Muslims, Communal Riots and the Diaspora: Gleanings from Contemporary Urdu Writings', is a short, yet fascinating discussion of Partition (1947) and the Bihari Muslims, located in Urdu literature, more specifically in the writings of Kalim Aziz, an Urdu poet from Patna and his first collection of verses, titled *Woh jo Shairi ka Sabab Hua*; and his letters (1971-1991) in the collection, *Pahlu na Dukhega*; Abdus Samad's *Do Gaz Zameen*, Kalimuddin Ahmad's *Apni Talash Mein*. Kalim Aziz was apparently a witness to and victim of the communal carnage at Telhara; his mother and sister apparently "plunged into a well to save their honour, while 21 other relatives were butchered" on November 4th, 1946. (p.153) Imtiaz Ahmed quotes some of the lines from *Woh jo Shairi ka Sabab hua*:-

*Yeh Kahaan se Aayi hai Surkhroo, hai hare k jhonka Lahu Lahu
Kati jismein garadan-e Arzoo, ye usi gali ki Hawaa hai kya?*

This he translates as, "from where has it come with a bright face, each whiff soaked in blood, is the breeze coming from the lane where the throat of desires was slit?"

Kalim Aziz's family apparently got divided post-Partition in 1947. Aziz's writings, for Ahmed, reflect a sense of nostalgia for the "Ganga-Jumna culture" that dominated the social life of Bihar; when neighbours on either side of the divide caused by religious denominations, lived

as a family; when members of the two communities celebrated the festivals and observed the rituals of one another with equal enthusiasm and conviction; and when this harmony was not merely an ideal preached by a few, it was a practice observed commonly by the elite and masses. So, there is a sense of sorrow at the collapse of this bond, but there is no bitterness. The pain is there but its expression is restrained (p.155).

'Imag(in)ing Traditions: The Contested Canvas of Mithila Paintings' by Sandali Sharma is an interesting analysis of the making of a marketable culture (in this case the Mithila paintings) and its propagation while, as a sub-text, giving prominence to the upper castes that practise this tradition. In this sense the tradition is by itself a contested canvas. Madhubani paintings (endemic to the region of Mithila, comprising of nine districts of Bihar and some part of Nepal) as they are called, after the Madhubani region, "which is considered the epicenter of their evolution", are renowned the world over and have been given a boost with heritage tourism and exhibitions supported by the state and by several organisations in India and abroad. An Englishman named W.G. Archer of the Indian Civil Service apparently brought attention to these paintings in 1934 "after chancing upon them" in an earthquake debris in Bihar. "In the 1960s the India Handicrafts Board of the Central Government stepped in with the aim of providing alternative livelihoods for the people. This welfare measure led to a major transformation that took the paintings from the walls and floors of homes onto a new medium: paper, and led to their commercialisation" (p.181).

Gradually, Mithila paintings became popular across the country and abroad through exhibitions. But Mithila paintings, says Sandali, is a generic term and there are several styles of paintings in the region, some of which are closely linked to social groups. For instance, she says, the style locally known as "bharni"—with many colours—is employed by Brahmins and the themes depict gods such as Krishna, Durga and the theme of the dasavatara, the ten incarnations of Vishnu, and so on. The line style called *kachhni* is used by the Kayasthas and the *gobar* (cow-dung-style) was evolved by the Chamars (dalits), particularly by Jamuna Devi of Jitwapur village. Jamuna Devi's style depicts themes of everyday life. After her demise her family has continued that style. The *godana* (tattoo) style has been employed by women of the Dusadh (dalit) community, which was evolved by Chano Devi of Jitwapur, with depictions from their own folklore of the adventures of Raja Salhesa, their hero and their own gods, Rahu and Ketu, who are apparently not associated with the negative connotation given to them in mainstream Sanskrit religion. "In Dusadh cosmology, the sun is seen as the symbol of 'upper' caste dominance and Rahu