

Review of *Revolving Around India(s): Alternative Images, Emerging Perspectives*. Edited by Juan Ignacio Oliva-Cruz, Antonia Navarro-Tejero and Jorge Diego Sánchez. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020, 313 pp. ISBN: 978-1-5275-4524-3).

India, as an isolated word, may not adequately conjure up the sheer complexity of the country for which it stands. Its ethnic, linguistic, religious and political diversity creates an amalgam of superimposed selves that intersect with issues of gender, caste or class, which in turn lead to the outright rejection of Indianness as a one-sided, monolithic category. Whether through the lens of pluralism (Sen), fuzzy multiculturalism (Mitra), or contact/conflict theory (Gundelach), those manifold identity markers apply to a population of nearly 1.4 billion whose circumstances ultimately influence the overall perception of their homeland. The editors of *Revolving Around India(s): Alternative Images, Emerging Perspectives* dive deep into these matters through a comprehensive volume that covers three core elements in the forging of any identity, namely tradition(s), distance(s) and difference(s). By adopting a holistic approach to those interconnected tags, the twenty-one selected articles illuminate how history, space and culture combine to shape not only the Indian nation, but the infinite Indias within.

The contributions in the opening section –“Revolving Around Tradition(s)”– offer a diachronic perspective on faith, epics and policies, as well as a thorough analysis of their changing social significance. The scholarly inclusion of minority and minoritised groups such as Christians or Dalits, for instance, calls into question an assumption of national homogeneity which is further challenged by alternative readings of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. In their respective chapters, Meenakshi Malhotra and S. Asha address gynocentric, polyvocal narratives which contest the patriarchal undercurrent in said myths without denying their pivotal role in the construction of an Indian imaginary. Along the same lines, the remaining articles explore the transculturation and assimilation of Shakespearean and Brontëan texts, thus breathing life into the postcolonial interpretation of English classics

in both the Indian subcontinent and its diaspora. In fact, the Bollywoodisation of *Wuthering Heights* deftly analysed by Laura Viñas Valle and Blanca M. Lara González encapsulates the dominant idea of the section: a much-needed acknowledgement of identities off the radar or in the making which, in their defiance of essentialism and purism, create new spaces and senses of belonging for subjects like those at the heart of the next segment.

“Revolving Around Distance(s)” evaluates the subcontinent from its periphery through in-depth chapters on the works of Rohinton Mistry, Sujata Bhatt, Hanif Kureishi, Amitav Ghosh, and fellow indo-diasporic authors such as Uma Parameswaran, who is herself a contributor. Her first-person experiential article produces an insight as to how notions of hyphenated ethnicities, inbetweenness or migrant melancholia have profoundly influenced her “Forty-Five Years of Diasporic Life and Writings”. Literature is indeed a valuable tool for the interdisciplinary study of diasporas and transnational communities, the latter no longer “consisting of a bilateral relationship between the homeland and overseas communities,” but being “caught in fluxes” (Gowricharn 4). Likewise, the politics of location are of utmost importance in Bandana Chakrabarty’s chapter on the traumatic Partition of India. Through her close reading of selected short fiction, the author perfectly captures the popular attempts at coming to terms with a past of displacements and relocations that is equally ever-present and defensively forgotten, especially for women, as brought to the forefront by the feminist current of historiography on which she draws. By the end of the section, it becomes apparent that mobility –be it the outcome of (de) colonisation, globalisation or even free will– also involves a constant cultural flow able to blur the same national boundaries which, despite often constricting the definition of a homeland, do not prevent diasporic identities from surpassing geographical limits.

Otherness and its associated coping strategies are the main focus of “Revolving Around Difference(s)”. Indian people, in the broadest sense of the term, “can be many things *and* one thing” (Tharoor 126). Hence, the articles that



make up this segment show how deviations from normative beliefs and patterns of behaviour may result in a feeling of alienation which either enforces social exclusion or, if shared, strengthens the bonds between those affected. For example, in the comparative literary analysis carried out by Luz González Rodríguez and Juan Ignacio Oliva, the pursuit of written self-definition acts as a means for doubly colonised subjects to transcend cultural schizophrenia. Rejection on the grounds of race and gender also features prominently on Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri's and Antonia Navarro-Tejero's pieces, which incorporate queer performativity on the one hand and sexuality-based abjection on the other. The following contributions shift the attention towards casteism and religious stereotyping. However, inasmuch as discrimination harbours the potential for dissension, writing can become a form of resilient activism which, as Jorge Diego Sánchez argues in his closing examination of Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*, could dismantle dominant structures of power and ultimately change the world if only readers were willing to listen.

All in all, the coherently structured, substantial book that is *Revolving Around India(s)* manages to unpack the unconventional points of view anticipated in its title. The well-balanced corpus of household and extracanonical artists, albeit predominantly literary, evinces that there are still untrodden paths to follow in the study of what it means to be Indian. As such, the volume should appeal alike to academics across disciplines and to general audiences with an informed interest in the subcontinent and its diaspora, for it does an excellent job of recovering unheard voices and reclaiming contested spaces that can only be found by repeatedly going round identitarian dynamics. Although "literature is not a blueprint for action" (Spivak 25), it may instead be one for the (re)presentation, (re)consideration and (re)cognition of fluid subjects whose mere existence poses a threat to movements of a dichotomic nature such as contemporary Hindutva. Composite nationalism may at first seem to be a more inclusive political model, but it is a plurality beyond nationalist boundaries that truly transforms India into the tapestry of

identities reflected in this volume. It is, in conclusion, a timely addition to the growing body of indological research, and one that underlines the urgency of turning the spotlight on off-centre selves to gain a more accurate understanding of an otherwise overshadowed India.

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