

Gurucharan Das's representation of the 19th century history of British India focusing on the relationship between Henry Lawrence and Rani Jindan of the Panjab in *Larins Sahib* awakens the spirit of patriotism, loyalty, self respect in the modern reader.

Thus, it is found after reading the entire book that the author has made exhaustive analysis of the chosen historical dramas. He has minutely explored the ideas presented and explained them with the dialogues of the major characters. All these dramatists according to the author confirm our faith in the moral order of the universe and in the metaphysical security besides enhancing our zest for life and help us realize that life is beautiful, meaningful, enjoyable and worth-living in spite of all the occasional vicissitudes. Altogether this book is a great contribution to the study of historical drama. The neglected genre of drama in general and historical drama in particular has been brought on to the pre-eminent position through this book. The book is a beautiful example of the erudite scholarship of the well known writer. Moreover here the credit goes to him for doing meticulous research on a field which has not been researched properly on a pan-Indian basis. The objective of Professor Naikar is not only to describe the themes of these plays but also to highlight the imminent impact of these ideas on the future generations. The cost of the book appears to be on the higher side.

Harbir Singh Randhawa

Literary Theory: Textual Application, Ed. Sagir Ali, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2018, ISBN 978-8126926107, Pp. 202+x. Price: Rs. 595

"Literature is the one place in any society where, within the secrecy of our own heads, we can hear *voices talking about everything in every possible way*. The reason for ensuring that that privileged arena is preserved is not that writers want the absolute freedom to say and do whatever they please. It is that we, all of us, readers and writers and citizens and generals and godmen, need that little, unimportant-looking room. We do not need to call it sacred, but we do need to remember that it is necessary." (Salman Rushdie, *Is Nothing Sacred?*)

That this "unimportant-looking room" of literature is a vital polyphonic site of communication; that the production of literature goes hand in hand with its reception, interpretation, interrogation, acceptance and assimilation within the social fabric; that a text can assert its existence only in a complementary relationship with the reader and yet retain its autonomy within a whole babble of commentaries and understandings; and that it is through relentless critical ploughing that semantic richness is granted to a text - are facts that hardly need reiteration within an academic circle. However, to the average reader uninitiated into the practice of meaning-making, critical reading can, at best, be a daunting task; at worst, a bewildering one. While the camp of academics against theory continues to have reasonable support in most theoretical disciplines, the value of critical theory as the means of a philosophically-alert and politically-informed engagement with history and with the everyday world cannot be ignored. To literature, in particular, the contribution of theory has been life-changing, leading to a complete transformation in our ways of identifying with a text, and while complaints from

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the other camp concerning the dissolution of the reader's innocent and resigned pleasure continue to be registered, it remains impossible to deny that literary theory has brought literature out of the questionable privileges of the ivory-tower and into the matrix of robust and committed social engagement. Theory, in constituting a window, a lens or a point of view through which we choose to look upon the world, invites us to make sense of things in accordance with specific ideologies and specific systems of thought and being, and while the applicability of a particular set of theories to a particular text may well be disputed or found to fall short of accounting for it, the wealth of signification that theory brings to literature can hardly be questioned.

It is to this end that the study of literary theory, despite its occasionally intimidating philosophy and jargon, remains rewarding, and an induction and instruction into meaning-making constitutes, therefore, one of the most desirable agendas within a literature classroom. *Literary Theory: Textual Application* edited by S.K. Sagir Ali might be looked upon as a handbook that sets out to answer for, promote and further this precise agenda. The lucid, scholarly and well-charted *Introduction* by Prof. Anand Prakash, outlining the gradual shift in the early twentieth century from traditional historical and biographical criticism to close textual readings, and documenting with clarity and keen acumen the rise and flourishing of the various schools of critical thought and inquiry, establishes right away the book's intention to make its difficult subject comprehensible and accessible to new learners in the discipline. This intention is further affirmed by the staggering range of subjects that the book has attempted to bring together. Tidily packed into its pages are discussions and analyses of texts from British, Indian English and New Literatures along with articles on Contemporary Theory.

While Sagir Ali and Saikat Guha attempt Marxist analyses of Thomas Hardy's *Tess* and Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* respectively, Arnab Chatterjee attempts to study Anglo-Saxon elegies within a psychoanalytic framework and Subham Chowdhury uses the idea of Lacanian desire to study the character of Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. Laki Molla, Joydip Ghosh and Debaditya Mukhopadhyay – all three adopt a New Historicist stance in their approach towards their chosen subjects and while Keka Das and Sudipta Gupta take up feminist texts for examination, Tarik Ali and Samrat Laskar offer explorations into ecocritical and ecofeminist thoughts respectively with T.K. Rajendran and Kalyani Vallath's discussions on *Life of Pi* following suit. In attempting to offer to readers a simple yet compact workshop on the practice of literary theory, every major theoretical school finds its due representation in the book with Pritha Kundu practicing Deconstruction, Shilpa Daithota Bhat taking up Translation theory and Partha Sarathi Nandi and Ritushree Sengupta throwing light on Postcolonial critical practice.

The choice of texts made by the contributors is also highly worthy of commendation since many less-discussed works such as Dwijendralal Roy's *Nurjahan*, Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Gita Mehta's *A Riversutra*, Ratan Lal Basu's *The Oraon and the Divine Tree* and Gulzar's *Neglected Poems* can be met here to one's literary and critical satisfaction. Each article within the book, in addition to

adopting an innovative approach towards its subject and in being acutely well-researched, attempts to conform to the book's overall agenda of making theory simple, communicable and interesting to readers. All the eighteen contributors to the book, therefore, win our hearts and spontaneous academic admiration by their engaging interpretations of texts and the urge that they leave behind for more, ensuring that the reader does not rest till the original text, if unread, is visited, and new findings made in the directions laid out. From the beginning to end, one cannot help but deem this extremely well-edited book to be a worthy read, and expect it, by virtue of its eclectic introduction to theory and its usefulness in depicting theory-in-practice with clarity, to find a place in every library and university classroom of literature.

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