
Nalini Natarajan. *Woman and Indian Modernity*. New Orleans: UP of the South, 2002. Pp. vi, 138. \$49.95 pb.

Nalini Natarajan's *Woman and Indian Modernity* contributes to the growing debate on women's location in postcolonial India. Natarajan interrogates Indian women's shifting subjectivities in the vicarious domains of fiction and cinema. She covers literature that ranges from the colonial period to the present. Her arguments transcend a casual itemization of women's woes as she challenges the multiple and contradictory narrative and theoretical paradigms, influences, and differences through which women's subjectivities have been constructed in the Victorian novel and in colonial and modern Indian fiction and modern cinema.

In *Woman and Indian Modernity*, Natarajan enters into a critical debate with the ideas of motherhood, wifehood, and daughterhood as they were conceptualized and operated under British colonial imperialism in both Britain and India. Natarajan is acutely aware of the adaptability of ideas of race, caste, religion, class, citizenship, and proprietorship as viable concepts of women's representation in fiction and cinema in both colonial Britain and modern India. Consequently, she adopts multiple theoretical frames including feminist, psychoanalytic, ethnographic, and Marxist approaches, not only to question the use of the novel and cinema as media of systemic containment of women, but also to examine the roles of fiction and cinema as tools of empowerment to project women's navigational skills through masculinist labyrinths to construct their subjectivities.

Natarajan starts with extensive reviews of Austenian and modern Indian narratives and shows how colonial, nationalist, and modern India's narrative and cinematic representations of woman are derived from Austenian narratives of dysfunctional English families. She argues that in both British and Indian narratives women as daughters, wives and mothers are expected to flawlessly navigate the interstices of contradictory social expectations between public self-effacement and private subversion of authority if they hoped to achieve agency. To prove her point, Natarajan undertakes a comparative archival reading of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's nationalist novel, *Swami*, with Jane Austen's *Emma* and details similarities between the two.

Natarajan engages what she calls ethnopsychanalysis to expose limitations of Dumontian structural anthropology and feminist psychoanalysis that have been engaged to study the complexities of Indian male Brahmanism while ignoring women's roles. She argues persuasively that Dumontian structural anthropology and Western feminist psychoanalysis, when applied without revisions to study colonial Brahmana India, unintentionally undermine native

male elite psychology and consequently generate feelings of emasculation and inadequacy among Brahmana males. Men subsequently then transferred their inferiority complexes and anxieties unto women. Natarajan therefore prescribes a new multilayered approach which she terms ethnopschoanalysis. Through ethnopschoanalysis, Natarajan challenges the contradictory representations of women as both present and absent in Indian nationalist narratives. She presents U. R. Anatha Murthy's *Samskara*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* as evidence of modern Indian nationalist's narrative discourse and political economy that ignore questions of women's unpaid and unacknowledged domestic contributions in modern Hindu India.

Subsequently, she contends, issues of sex and gender relations and performance are bifurcated and subsumed under behavioral dichotomies: male transgression is general and spiritual, female transgression is individual and secular. In order not to lay total blame for the peripheralization of the Brahmana woman on internalized Hindu phallocentrism, Natarajan reads *Samskara's* exploration of the consequences of British intrusion into Brahmana India. The effect on the Brahmana male is a feeling of masculine insecurity, which is ameliorated through a negation of an ideologically static Brahmana female. But the novel nonetheless projects woman as a subject in transition capable of engineering social changes.

As a corollary, Natarajan unveils the masculinist elitism of Salman Rushdie's rhetoric in *Midnight's Children* and the power of cinematic spectacles of Bombay cinema that project stereotypical sexist images of Indian women. She unravels Rushdie's narrator's eroticized male gaze at nationalist India seen as two female bodies, whole, static, asexual, fragmented, sexually desirable, and unmanageable. Subsequently, Natarajan fears new "Third World" nationalist subjectivities and alterities have been promulgated on essentialized, exploited, and elided female corporealities. On the one hand, Bombay Cinema creates and consolidates a hypocritical, ascetic, male-centered, eroticized theatrical illusion of a national consciousness, and translates woman into a symbolic spectacle in order to evade male complicity and guilt while asserting female transgressions. On the other hand, Bombay Cinema projects a conflicting Indian Hindu nationalist agenda that endorses the centrality of the Bharat Mata, the immovable maternal defender of collective Indian cultural heritage, or woman as a moldable raw material according to the national and cultural imaginary.

Natarajan explicates Roy's feminist treatment of the problematic of traditional notions of homeplace (site of female alliance for empowerment, and also a site of imprisonment) to portray new types of cultural alliances in post-

independent Indian. Natarajan argues that Roy shows how the cityscapes in *God of Small Things* allow women to create new meanings of homeplace to initiate non-traditional women's roles in Indian modernism. Natarajan explains how the roles of the prenuptial maternal homeplace and the post-nuptial homeplace as sanctuaries of potential women's empowerment are undermined and reconfigured as dystopias by cable and satellite television programs, as the programs raise questions of unpaid labor, sexual exploitation of women, and daughters' potential as heirs to property. Likewise, the supremacy of the Brahmana father figure in the paternal homeplace as idealized in Indian cultural narratives become destabilized through British colonialism, Indian nationalism, and the influence of Syrian Catholic Christianity.

Natarajan concedes that the demise of the traditional homeplace induces alternative possibilities in the city for reimagining a new national consciousness. These possibilities are projected through Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*. Like *God of Small Things*, *A Fine Balance* provides the potential of escape from traditionalism through artificial bonding in lodgings and workplaces. Women and men form non-traditional alliances that challenge and partially erode the caste system and class elitism in cities. Natarajan sees in the city novel such as *A Fine Balance* the potential for a re-conceptualization and re-perception of modern Indian woman as an insurrectionist Bharat Mata who leads the way toward the definition of a new modern Indian national consciousness.

Natarajan has done a fine job, though she could have expanded the scope of the book. The last chapter also reads as if it was rushed, and does not have the same exegetical vigor as the other chapters. Nonetheless, it is a text I would recommend to scholars interested in the place of woman in post-colonial societies, particularly the way they are re-envisioned and re-constructed in the cityscapes of new postcolonial states.

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Christopher J. Knight. *Uncommon Readers: Denis Donoghue, Frank Kermode, George Steiner, and the Tradition of the Common Reader*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003. Pp. xiii, 506. \$50.00 cloth.

This compendious and well written book is a valuable addition to UTP's new series, Studies in Book and Print Culture. Its very thoroughness may make it unattractive to anyone but the academic reader, but it deserves careful consideration by such readers at a time of volatility and vulnerability in the humani-