

## Book Reviews

Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, eds. *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present: Vol. 1: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century. Vol. 2: The Twentieth Century.* New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995. Pp. 537 & 641. Rs. 150 & Rs. 175.

This two-volume collection will find—if it has not already done so—an essential place on curricula in a number of disciplines. It is unusual for such a thing to be said about an anthology of literature, but in their efforts to contextualize the texts meticulously and thoroughly, the editors have made some valuable contributions in a number of academic fields. In as much as the songs, poetry, and short stories are expressions of women's experiences for more than two thousand years, the work provides students and scholars of women's studies, history, and cultural anthropology with a valuable resource.

Beyond the detailed Preface, the two introductory essays "Literature of the Ancient and Medieval Periods: Reading Against the Orientalist Grain" (Vol. 1, 41-64) and "The Twentieth Century: Women Writing The Nation" (Vol. 2, 43-116) synthesize various political and sociological theories into a literary context. The first of these two impressive essays places the writing of Indian women in the contexts of Euro-American feminist theory and of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978); it juxtaposes antithetical perceptions of India with Max Muller's *India: What It Can Teach Us* (1892) and James Mill's *History of British India* (1817). As a result, the reader's perceptions extend beyond the historical context of ancient and medieval India. By weaving ancient and contemporary history together, the editors allow the reader to understand the relevance of these literary pieces as we approach the millennium. This is not to say that the editors have imposed modernist, postmodernist theories or other political theories on ancient Indian literature. Instead, they have described and explained the extent to which the India of the *Rig Veda* still persists in the India of today. They describe the complex evolution of India's multi-dimensional culture, and consequently contextualize the writing of Indian women in a most useful and meaningful way.

The second essay ("The Twentieth Century: Women Writing The Nation"), 73 pages in length, thoroughly examines women's writing in a twentieth-century colonial/postcolonial, nationalist context. The sections entitled "1977: A Turning Point" (48-49) and "What Is a Nation?" (50-53) outline the relationship between narrative, the creation of a new nation, and the identity of the individual. Both these pieces explore the roles of national and personal narratives in accommodating ever-changing political winds. These short sub-essays provide a thorough and useful introduction to these theoretical issues in colonial and postcolonial literature and raise important issues in the practices of neocolonialism. In their entirety, both these introductory essays reflect the interdisciplinary nature of literary analysis. They could and should be published in anthologies of literary essays, as well as collections on cultural and political theory.

Just as the editors wrote these two thorough and detailed essays, the contributions of the Regional Language Editors are equally impressive in their attention to detail. In the Preface, the methodological discussion includes one on translation which is important to the reader and helpful to students of comparative literature. In "Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context," T. Niranjana suggests that the translation of any work means not only translation from one language into another, but also from one culture into another. The discussion in the Preface deals with these issues by establishing three worlds: the world of the regional language, the world of the English language (also the Western world), and the world of the reader. The reader is implored to read "slowly" and make his/her "way into the writer's times and the writer's world." The reader should "live a mode of life and not just read about it" (xxii).

The individual pieces themselves are fluid. In fact, it is difficult to tell that they are translations at all. This is a critical issue in the translation of any texts from one language to another when the latter are so utterly different from the original. In fact, I am amazed to find patterns of rhyme, as in an excerpt from Chandrabati's *Sundari Muatua*, Section 15, "After the Black Night Comes the Bright Night" (105-07).

This collection deserves to be widely read and discussed both inside and outside of academic institutions. Unfortunately, the title (though appropriate) does not adequately reflect the breadth or range of the contents. I encourage any inquisitive reader to explore these volumes and share them with others regardless of disciplinary affiliation.

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WORK CITED

Niranjana, T. *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1992.