



Book Review

Minority Discourses in India: Narrating Centers and Peripheries

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P John Joseph Kennedy (Ed.), *Minority Discourses in India: Narrating Centers and Peripheries*, Viva Books Private Limited, New Delhi, 2017, pp. 94, ISBN 978-81-309-3409-9

Discourse Analysis is an important method as well as a popular approach to reading texts and contexts in Humanities and Social Sciences' research. Emerging from postmodern approaches to questions of identity, it underlines the discursive, which is difficult to determine and yet, ironically the basis for all discourses. In other words, discourses, assumed to be authoritative, contain a self-repudiation and critique of the very processes which attempt to define them in essential terms. Discourse Analysis reveals how ideologies crystallize and naturalize enough to become fixed, hegemonic sites of knowledge and being. The discursive is highly unstable, often complicit with power structures and capable of obfuscating narratives, which replicate and attempt to re-establish relations of domination and subordination. *Minority Discourses in India: Narrating Centers and Peripheries* is a recent publication which underlines the need to overturn the hegemonic from within the discursive site whereby it is constituted, namely the abjected, marginalised other - the minority.

Dr P John Joseph Kennedy, Professor of English and Dean, Humanities and Social Sciences, Christ University, Bengaluru, is the Editor of the volume published by VIVA Books, New Delhi. The volume provides scope for nascent, contemporary research by

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consolidating select research articles written and presented by students, budding researchers and faculty in Humanities and Social Sciences from colleges and universities across India. What sets this collection of articles on minority discourses apart from more recent ones is its dialogic approach to minority issues and concerns. The issue moves beyond the dialectic of minority versus majority to questions regarding the intersectionality of minority issues; gender and class, ethnicity and historicity, linguistic identity and citizenship are called into question. The book integrates multiple narrativizations of the concept of “minority” through a close analysis of the language through which minority identities are constructed and represented. Language, thereby, becomes a political act and moves beyond the literary and the textual to the experiential, ontological and phenomenal rubrics of interactionism with culture and society. Literature, media, the global economies of museum and market space and, liminalities between the religious and secular idiom of the nation become integral to the polyvalence of minority voices from India.

In her insightful and critical foreword to the volume, Dr Gauri Viswanathan, Professor in the Humanities, Department of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University, remarks upon the need to bridge activism and academic intervention in minority discourses. She congratulates the attempt made by the Editor in bringing together “cogent analysis of the issues that drive activist work in protection of minority rights” (vii). Pointing out the Editor’s reference to Mahasweta Devi’s *Chotti Munda* as a relevant reminder of the need to address ‘unwritten histories’ (vii), Dr Viswanathan warns us of the dangers of re-entrenching dialectical oppositions of “us versus them” and the tendency of objectifying the minority in an attempt to write for them. Dr Viswanathan reiterates that “the demolition of pre-existing ideas about groups and communities is thus the first step towards challenging the social relations and social structures that consign individuals to such unhelpful and distorting categories as “majority” and “minority.” (viii)

The editor’s introduction to the volume underscores the diversity of minority discourses in India and upholds the power of creative writing to “produce alternative textualities without looking for

narrative closures" (xvi). Dr P John Joseph Kennedy outlines the heterogeneity of emerging minority discourses in India as a necessary foundation for questioning the monolithic notion of "minority" histories, often defined in absence or closure, or worse still, by hegemonic voices of the majority. Historicities of caste, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, and linguistic identity are thus subjective, plural, specific, self-reflexive and interactive in minority discourses. The individual and the community are inextricable and interconnected in ways that resist colonial, neo-colonial and sometimes even postcolonial brackets of the subaltern.

A critical reading of the articles in the volume reveals the fresh challenges that are emerging in the articulation of minority rights in India. Divya K.B's article "Linguistic Minorities in India - An Overview of the Challenges, Rights and Provisions" highlights the need for inclusion of minority languages within the rubric of basic human rights. S.A. Khader's chapter, "Dalit Literature in India: Marching beyond Confines" brings to focus the role of literature and translation in Dalit writings across India in making the plight of the community visible. Both articles point out the significance of language in articulation of minority rights and the textuality whereby Dalit consciousness counters the epistemological violence of caste hegemony.

In "My Cart, Her Class: Exploring Class and Gender in Indian Advertisements for Online Shopping Sites" Namrata Harish draws upon the exigencies of global markets in conditioning experiential domains of what the consumer market deems fit to be feminine. The article is an interesting feminist articulation of the ever growing demands of global economies which operate within patriarchal imperatives. The gender spectrum is further explored in Miruna George's article, "Negotiating Minority Identities in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance like a Man, Seven Steps around the Fire* and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*". The author explores the displacement which constitutes the very identity of transgenders and sexual minorities beyond the binary of male/female and explores Mahesh Dattani's plays as sensitive probings into the non-oppositional praxis of gender. Performance and performativity, narratives through which gender is enacted and normalised, are critiqued through a performative reading of the characters. Along

the same lines, Christina Dhanasekaran questions the classical epistemological burden of dualism inherent in the body-soul divide through a close reading of Girish Karnad's *Yayati*. Myth and mythology emerge in this analysis as dominant sites of repression of the unconscious, thereby, emphasizing how even psyches are collective manifestations of regimented ideologies. While Rose Sebastian's article, "The National *vis-a-vis* the Tribal Museum in India: Politics, Pedagogy and Performativity" re-signifies questions of museumization and objectification of native tribes, Amala Poli and Madhurima Maji explore the incoherence of the personal as against the religious and the secular, in democratic nations constituted by conflicting ideologies. The marginalised of the marginalised, namely children who are not taken seriously as individuals within discourses of the adult world, are central to Padma Baliga's arguments in "The Periphery of the Margin: Contemporary Indian children's Literature and the Minority". She underlines how children belonging to minority groups based on caste, gender and class are significantly absent from children's literature in India.

Ranging from literature to curation, media to mythology and performance to political rights, the volume integrates narratives that question discursive formations of minority identities on the basis of religious and linguistic difference, gender, ethnicity, caste, age and globalized notions of nation and citizenship. A significant ideological contribution which this book offers to research on minorities is the need to strengthen dialogues, not just within minority groups but across intersections of marginality which are at the root of established hegemony. In a truly dialogic attempt, this issue marks the radical shift in Social Sciences and Humanities from interdisciplinary to multidisciplinary approaches to divergent and convergent axes of centrality and marginality.