

BOOK REVIEWS

Indian Literature: An Introduction

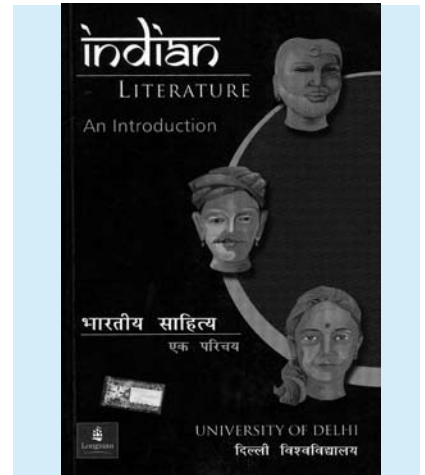
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The Department of English, Delhi University has recently revised its BA Programme course. In the new restructured programme, a new foundation course entitled 'Language, Literature and Culture' has been introduced. The book reviewed here comprises the Literature portion of this course. The purpose of this book, as stated in the preface itself, is "to make the students aware of the wide range of Indian literature in its broadest outlines and of the main phases of its development across time and space, and to do this through an engagement with specific texts rather than through a 'survey' or 'history' of Indian literature." As the students have an option of choosing either English or Hindi as the medium of instruction and examination for this course, the book is bi-lingual, having both the English as well as Hindi version of the text chosen.

The book has twenty-six chapters comprising excerpts, poems, short stories and plays. These chapters cover a breathtaking range, right from Valmiki's *The Ramayana* to Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. The book is a fair representation of many important periods, movements and languages. The Classical period is represented by Valmiki, Veda Vyasa, Shudraka and Ilanko Adikal, the Bhakti and Sufi movements find representation in Namdev, Kabir, Meera and Khusro. On the language front,

Sanskrit, Hindi and its dialects, Urdu, Bengali, Oriya, Assamese and English get representation. The languages of the southern part of the country are given due recognition with selections from Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Selections from Dalit Literature, Feminist Writings and Folk Literature give a further dimension to the already rich collection.

There is a fourteen-page introduction to the text (twelve pages in the Hindi Translation), which very succinctly traces the entire trajectory of Indian Literature across time, space and languages. It is divided into sub-sections, right from 'Ancient Indian Literature: 2000B.C. to 1000 A.D.', to 'Medieval Indian Literature: 1000A.D. to 1800 A.D.' to 'Indian Literature under Colonial Rule: 1800 to 1947' to 'Contemporary Indian Literature: 1947 onwards'. In spite of its clarity and precision, the introduction is emblematic of the problems and shortcomings of the book itself. Bowing to the requirements of brevity, certain terms like *buranjis* and *virasaiva* movements etc. perhaps not familiar to the average B.A. programme student find a mere mention with no explanation whatsoever. It teeters under the dual pressure of the requirements to convey a mammoth body of knowledge in as brief a survey as possible on the one hand and the desire to cover, or at least mention



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Pages : 384

those areas too, like the writings of Lal Dyad and Habba Khatoon in Kashmir, which otherwise do not find a representation in the text.

In its endeavor to be as representative as possible, the book somewhere loses sight of the fact that it is meant as a text book, that too as one of the three components of a Foundation Course for a B.A. Programme. If it had at least been written in a text book format with a review and practice exercise at the end of each chapter, that would have gone a long way in helping not only the students but also the teachers faced with the daunting task of covering such a vast area in the prescribed and all too brief a lecture format. The introduction to each unit, though useful in itself, requires and generates a lot of explanation and discussion in the classroom scenario, further contributing to the slow progress.

Languages like Marathi, Gujarati, North-Indian Languages like Dogri, Kashmiri etc. and the

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entire Northeast, with the exception of a lone representation from Assam are conspicuous by their absence in the book. Considering the fact that these regions have traditionally felt neglected by the Indian Heartland, this omission in a textbook aiming to provide a panoramic view to the

Indian Literature is, perhaps, very unfortunate. The book, therefore, could perhaps be more useful as a 'Foundation' book, if it had either been the lone component of this course, thereby giving the lecturer an opportunity to do justice to its range and content, or at least

if it had been less ambitious in the choice and selection of the components.



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