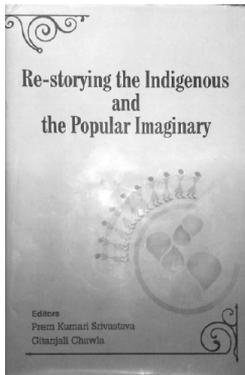# Re-storying the Indigenous and the Popular Imaginary

Reviewed by Shruti Sharma

Srivastava, Prem Kumari & Chawla, Gitanjali (Eds.) (2017). *Re-storying the indigenous and the popular imaginary*. Delhi: Authorpress. (202 pages), Rs. 900/ $45

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The third volume in the series entitled *De-territorialising Diversities: Cultures, Literatures and Languages of the Indigenous* by Prem Kumari Srivastava and Gitanjali Chawla is dedicated to excavating the indigenous discourses from their marginality by looking beyond the prevalent hegemonic dominant discourses. This volume *Re-storying the Indigenous and Popular Imaginary*, like the two others before it, is consistent in its pursuit to explore representations of the indigenous within the folk and the popular enunciations across India. The editors endeavour to bridge the divide between the "spoken and silenced" and furnish the contemporary critical discourse with references to the "indigenous cultures [that] are footnoted." (Introduction, xxiii)

This anthology includes an interesting mix of essays from the fields of anthropology, folklore, translation studies and cinema studies. It is through these diverse positionalities that the anthology is able to problematize and further engage with the indigenous while moving beyond the set boundaries. The addition of popular imagination adds its own unique element to the volume, but it does not mask the repetitiveness that persists within it. This decidedly Indian indigenous critical discourse also requires a prior understanding of the context for certain essays to be understood by the reader. A comprehensive argument for the existence of such diverse disciplines in one anthology can be found within the section aptly called "Conceptual Framework" by Simi Malhotra in her essay "The L*ok*-al in the Global World: Folk and Popular Culture Studies as a Means to Cosmopolitics of the Future". She conceptualizes both folk and popular renderings as *lok* culture,

i.e. people's culture. She adds that this would, through the study of its cultural repetition, lead to a democratic cosmopolitan. This argument made against what is reactionary idealitarianism may seem tenuous, but Malhotra does make a case for the marginal, subaltern, indigenous, folk, popular cultures gaining prominence due to globalization. The importance of their study to look beyond the dominant hegemonic metanarrative that exists currently cannot be denied. This essay opens the volume for further deliberations.

This volume, not unlike its predecessors, is condensed within three sections; namely "Interrogations", "Confluences" and "Retellings". The first section of the volume "Interrogations", comprises of three essays, out of which two essays move beyond the Indian subcontinent and explore both the Australian aboriginals and the Indian indigenous. The section ends with the essay "In Search of Politics and Politics of Representing the Hunter" by T. S. Satyanath, in which the author conducts a detailed and nuanced inquiry into the assimilation of non-agrarian communities within the agrarian communities of South India. The uncomplicated diction and fluid narrative make the essay an enjoyable read, even for readers with little knowledge of the subject. The essay offers a glimpse into the literary and visual representations of the non-agrarian communities during different time periods through photographic illustrations, making it stand out among all the essays in the anthology.

The second section of the anthology comprises of four essays two of which are based on the oral and written renditions of two distinct indigenous communities—the Gaddis in the Himalayas, and the Mappilas in Kerala. These are entitled "Echoes of Flute: Songs and Stories of Love and Longing of the Gaddi Tribe" by Hina Nandrajog, and "Indigenous Discursive Practices and the Popular Imaginations: The *Mappilas* of Malabar" by K. K. Abubakkar respectively. The third essay of the section by Mona Singh and Manjari Chaturvedi is entitled "Bringing the Haat to the City". In this essay, the authors examine the acculturation created by the merging of urban consumerism and non-urban ethnic artistic sensibilities in Delhi Haat. The specificity of the subject takes away from the essay as its nuances are lost on a reader who is not aware about this phenomenon which is available to a very minuscule number of readers. The last essay of the section, "Taking the Liberty: Female Retellings of Ramayana – *Sita's Ramayana* and *Sita Sings the Blues*" is written by Hija Chatterjee. Chatterjee interrogates these retellings for their subversive aspect within the Indian graphic novel *Sita's Ramayana* (art by Patua artists) and *Sita Sings the Blues,* a foreign take on the Indian myth of Ramayana. The essay may have been better placed in the last section of the anthology.

The last section of the volume "Retellings" commences with the essay "Myth, Misogyny and Marginalization" by Anupama Jaidev. She reads Mahashweta Devi's *Bayen* from the point of view of the double marginalization faced by women of the community residing in the periphery of Indian society. The remaining two essays are based on the representation of the indigenous cultures in the Indian cinematic tradition.

The conceptualization of an interdisciplinary anthology is a remarkable endeavour, and one that is needed in the diversified intellectual discourse that is currently prevalent. In fact, new commonalities need to be found so as to understand the linkages between the various genres that persist across the world. However, an anthology such as this requires a more thorough and careful selection of essays to make it more relevant within the domain of critical studies. This volume is an attempt to assimilate these diverse discourses and has the ability to create avenues for better comprehension.

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