Antonia Navarro-Tejero, *Gender and Caste in the Anglophone Indian Novels of Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan, Feminist Issues in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*

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REFERENCES


1 While it has become quite common place to talk about world fiction, internationalized English literature and literature without borders to refer to new literatures written in English, the question of critical reception of such literary works in spaces which fall outside the purview of Anglo-American cultural brokerage is yet to be examined. Antonia Navarro-Tejero’s book is indeed a sign of the specific dialogue to come between Indian writing in English and Spanish readership, as Susi Tharu remarks in her perceptive preface to the book.

2 At the initial stage, the reader might be slightly disoriented by the rather academic style of the text, the brusque entry of the family names of Tharu and Niranjana, the frustratingly laconic footnotes and the annoying abbreviations of the titles of the two novels studied. However, the theme of the book, the focus on the two famous authors, and the honesty of the tone help the reader overcome any impatience with formal imperfections to get to the heart of the matter, which is showing how Indian women negotiate with oppressive patriarchal constructions such as caste and gender by relying
on the forces of modernity and globalization to liberate and express themselves. Antonia Navarro-Tejero first overviews women’s studies in India, both in terms of creative and critical writing. She does so in order to avoid the pitfall of the Euro-American bias that often leads to a misreading of the context. Her personal interviews with the authors chosen and her visiting lecturership in India give a stamp of authenticity to her enterprise.

3 The analysis of Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* lays stress on the protagonist Devi’s falling back on the strength of the female characters of her life to escape the snare of the seemingly comfortable male protection offered by her boyfriend, husband, father-in-law, and lover. As for Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, Navarro-Tejero emphasizes the threatening otherness of Ammu who transgresses communal law twice, once by marrying a Hindu and another time by having a relationship with a Dalit (an untouchable). The connection between the two novels is made by underscoring both authors’ strategies of rewriting mythological female role models.

4 It is when Navarro-Tejero uses and adapts French structuralism and the theories of Julia Kristeva, especially with regard to abjection, that she is at her best and her interpretation becomes interesting, audacious and relevant. In the case of Indian women, a return to the maternal is not a regression but an act of liberation, she contends (p.130). Similarly, the reading of Arundhati Roy’s *Estha* as an abject enables her to deconstruct his behaviour as an exercise in nostalgia for a past that never was (p.134). One wishes that Navarro-Tejero had gone a step further in borrowing Kristeva’s theories to offer an insight into the language of the novel, which is intricately linked to the ideological issues it deals with. However, Navarro-Tejero’s conclusion is quite convincing in so far as it succeeds in delineating not only the emergence of Indian female subjectivity, but also the “subterranean desires and frustrations and domestic agonies” (p.147) of Indian women. The two stories of transgression under scrutiny demonstrate the transformative vision of their authors, and the androgynous alternative proposed indirectly points to the Queer turn that postcolonial literature and criticism can take to subvert power and authority.

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