



Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste

Toral Jatin Gajarawala

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William Riley Parker Prize for an outstanding article published in PMLA

"Some Time between Revisionist and Revolutionary: Unreading History in Dalit Literature"

May 2011 issue of PMLA

Untouchable Fictions considers the crisis of literary realism--progressive, rural, regionalist, experimental--in order to derive a literary genealogy for the recent explosion of Dalit ("untouchable caste") fiction. Drawing on a wide array of writings from Premchand and Renu in Hindi to Mulk Raj Anand and V. S. Naipaul in English, Gajarawala illuminates the dark side of realist complicity: a hidden aesthetics and politics of caste. How does caste color the novel? What are its formal tendencies? What generic constraints does it produce?

Untouchable Fictions juxtaposes the Dalit text and its radical critique with a history of progressive literary movements in South Asia. Gajarawala reads Dalit writing dialectically, doing justice to its unique and groundbreaking literary interventions while also demanding that it be read as an integral moment in the literary genealogy of the 20th and 21st centuries.

This book, grounded in the fields of postcolonial theory, South Asian literatures, and cultural studies, makes a crucial intervention into studies of literary realism and will be important for all readers interested in the problematic relations between aesthetics and politics and between social movements and cultural production.

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