

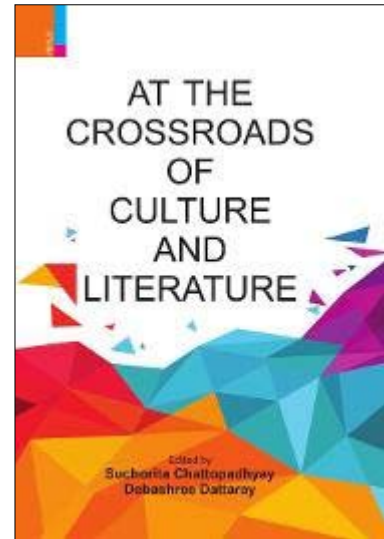
**Canadian Literature and Culture**by Annapurna Palit<sup>1</sup>*At the Crossroads of Culture and Literature,*

Eds. Suchorita Chattopadhyay and Debashree Dattaray.

Kolkata: Primus Books. 2016. Print.

ISBN: 978-93-84082-71-0.

202 pp. ₹ 1495.



*At the Crossroads of Culture and Literature* published by Primus Books can be a great boon to scholars of Canada Studies as well as Diaspora Studies. Covering a wide range of subjects, the book is dedicated to Barbara Godard, a renowned Canadian scholar and intellectual. The essays offer carefully researched, and in depth analyses of the socio-cultural and literary aspects of the South Asian diaspora in Canada and India. The Volume comprises of essays highly relevant to the study of Literature, Language, Comparative Literature, History, Philosophy, Life Writing, Sociology, as also to the study of International Relations. In short it addresses multiple issues that are pertinent to the study and research of several subjects. It also provides a significant base to important perspectives on Canada Studies in particular and Diaspora Study in general.

Though the Volume concentrates on many different aspects, the editors have been mindful of selecting two particular areas of Canadian life --- its aboriginal or native and its immigrant community. As a nation, Canada receives a huge number of immigrants every year and is considered to be the second highest immigrant receiving country in the world today. To gain a clear understanding of Canada it is imperative to look into the life and works of her diaspora communities. Similarly, her Native people have had a history of marginalisation, but have a rich body of literature and have been invaluable contributors to her development and establishment as an important nation today. The essays by Swagata Bhattacharya, Sayantan

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Deshbandhu College for Girls. Kolkata.

Dasgupta, Jennifer Gustar, Saikat Maitra and Sraboni Maitra and Soma Mukherjee give substantial and diverse accounts of the life of the Canadian immigrant, particularly the South Asian immigrant who comprise a large chunk of her immigrant population.

Swagata Bhattacharya's essay titled, 'Neither Here nor There': Fractured Identities and Hybrid Canadians', gives a glimpse of the problems of identity faced by the Asian Diaspora in Canada that has to grapple with many difficulties despite Canada's official policy of Multiculturalism. Sayantan Dasgupta's essay titled, 'Cricket, Colonialism, Racism: Reading Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta' gives a Ceylonese perspective to the 'immigrant' issue and the many meanings of 'home' for a displaced community. He also probes the issue of Sri Lankan identity politics vis a vis Canadian Multiculturalism. Jennifer Gustar's essay 'Haunting Legacies: The Imbrications of Canadian and Indian History in Anita Rau Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call ?*' also deals with the complex ideas related to 'home' and states how Badami suggests that the concept of nationhood goes beyond historical confines. Soma Mukherjee too gives a vivid and realistic account of the interplay between home, displacement, migration and other matters related to immigration in the works of Vassanji in her essay, ' "A Historical Odyssey across Continents" : An Analysis of M.G.Vassanji's Writings'.

Saikat Maitra and Sraboni Maitra's highly absorbing and informative essay, 'South Asian Immigrants and the Racial Politics of the Canadian Nation: A History of the Contemporary Moment' throws light on the experiences of South Asian immigrant women in Toronto and analyses the dynamics of race, gender, class and migrant status against the larger framework of the State, its policies and institutions as well as the real life experiences of the immigrant women. The essay is a laudable effort in bringing to the forefront several bitter truths about women and immigration. Maitra and Maitra write, 'Despite possessing university education and several years of professional experiences, they experience difficulties translating their skills into opportunities in the new country' (p 127). The essay traces the history of Canada's policies of immigration in what may be called a crisp and sound account.

Though the Volume has no essay on the internment experience of the Japanese diaspora in Canada, the essays touch upon multiple aspects in the life of the South Asian community in Canada and succeeds in providing a varied and gripping read. The diversity of

subjects together with the lucidity of style and powerful research behind each essay endows the collection with authenticity and makes it a significant link in the dialogue between the Culture Studies and Literature.

The other essays in the Volume devoted to Native Canadian writing are equally absorbing and are an invaluable contribution to understanding the Canadian experience as they lie at the other end of the spectrum, representing the original inhabitants of the land. Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm puts it beautifully in her essay, 'First Peoples' Literature in Canada', 'As Indigenous Peoples we belong to this land... In return it is our responsibility to care for and protect the land (p 53)'. Her essay gives an impressive detailing of the cultural ethos of the First Nation People and the fascinating appeal of their writing. She also succeeds in asserting how indigenous literature has reshaped and redefined Canadian Literature. Debashree Dattaray has given a hard hitting reflection of the works of Okanagan writer and activist Jeannette Armstrong in her essay, ' "Soft Power" : Marginalized Aesthetics in Jeannette Armstrong's Fiction'. Dattaray has succeeded in showing how relevant Armstrong's writing has been to contemporary society. Nilanjana Deb's essay, 'Land, Community, Text: An Examination of Three Ojibwe Women's Texts' also gives valuable and interesting insight into the consciousness of the writings of Native writers, particularly the role played by women in helping Native Canadian culture to survive. Dheeman Bhattacharyya's essay 'Which Canada, Whose Canada? : Situating 'Canadian' Studies as Area Studies within the 'Indian' Academic Discourse' deals with Aboriginal people in both India and Canada. He gives credit to Comparative Methodology in understanding and accessing the history of Canada.

The essays in the volume also address issues related to alternative identity and Canada's multicultural success as a society. Anway Mukhopadhyay's essay, 'Aphrodite of 'amor oscuro': The "Queer" Dialectic of Strangerhood and Familiarity in Urban Spaces in Contemporary English Novels from India and Canada', discusses alternative identities. He also raises the issue of 'home' in his work. The last essay in the volume, titled, 'Eurocentrism and the Limits of Symbolic Recognition' by Sonia Sikka discusses different aspects of Canada's Multiculturalism and the extent to which it may be called a success.

Special mention needs to be made of the first essay by Himani Bannerji, to whom Barbara Godard was a personal friend. In an essay that is emotional as well as factual, she talks about her long association with Barbara as ‘friends, colleagues and mothers’ (p 9). She gives interesting glimpses of Barbara’s life and how the latter tried to fill the gap between Quebec and Anglophone Canada with the help of translation. She praises Barbara’s attitude towards translation and says that it was relevant for India as India too is a country with many rich languages. She also contends that Godard tried to assert that Canadian society could provide ‘a space of convergence of multiple others’ (p 17). As Sikka writes, indeed in many ways, Canada is a success story in multiculturalism, Barbara Godard probably sought that possible space where multiple cultures could thrive and prosper.

It is indeed fitting that the editors of the book have dedicated the book to her.