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## **Book Review**

### ***DISPLACEMENT AND CITIZENSHIP, HISTORIES AND MEMORIES OF EXCLUSION***

by Vijaya Rao, Shambhavi Prakash, Mallarika Sinha Roy, Paporri Bora,  
Tulika Books, Delhi, 2020, pp. 312, ₹900, ISBN 9788193926956

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***Displacement and Citizenship, Histories and Memories of Exclusion*** by Vijaya Rao, Shambhavi Prakash, Mallarika Sinha Roy, Papori Bora, Tulika Books, Delhi, 2020, pp. 312, ₹900, ISBN 9788193926956.

***Reviewed by: Partho Datta, Professor, School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU.***

If there is one significant theme that runs throughout this book, it is that citizenship *excludes*. Coming to terms with the nature of citizenship has produced a range of responses from activists, artists, politicians, thinkers, scholars and grassroots workers. The struggle for inclusion has come up against caste dominance, patriarchy, community, pogroms and the surveillance mechanism of the state. The 17 wide-ranging, exhaustively researched essays offer a critique of exclusion. Themes addressed are marginalisation, Dalit discourses, sexual violence, minorities, colonial terror, the historical experience and aftermath of the defeat of Germany in the Second World War, the ‘Long’ Partition in India, national liberation in Bangladesh and genocide in Rwanda. The disciplinary location of the contributors—in the departments of Gender Studies, Languages and Literatures—is reflected in the choice of themes and approaches; most of the essays grapple with texts: works of fiction, memoirs and documentary films. The methodological approach is also related to this aspect—many of the essays address questions of representation, narratives, the fragmentary nature of texts, oral histories and memories.

The Editors have helpfully divided the essays into four broad thematic sections: Cultural Citizenship, Displacement and Refugeehood, Sites of Memory, and Gendered Violence. The lengthy introduction by Ayesha Kidwai summarises the essays and provides a useful map which makes it possible for the reader to trace themes across the sections: Udaya Kumar and Chitra Harshvardhan on the emergence of Dalit autobiographies as an important genre (Section 1); Leila Essa (Section 1), Nazia Akhtar and Pallavi Brara (Section 3) on comparative fictional representations of Indian Partition that question received histories; Anindita Ghoshal (Section 2) and Arshi Javid (Section 4) on the importance of ethnography in recovering memories of violence and displacement; Madhu Sahni, Shambhavi Prakash (Section 2) and Pallavi (Section 4) on the ambiguous response of German society to rape and violence perpetrated on women by victorious Allied soldiers and to returning Jews who had managed to escape the Holocaust; Papori Bora (Section 1) and Lipi Biswas Sen (Section 1) on gendered critiques of representation in the North East; Anindita Ghoshal (Section 2) and Mallarika Sinha Roy (Section 4) on emerging categories for the displaced (refugees, women) in Bangladesh.

Indian readers may be less familiar with Julia Franck’s *Lagerfeuer* (German, 2012), Manuel Scorza’s *Drums for Rancas* (Spanish, 1977), Scholastique Mukosonga’s *Notre-Dame du Nil* (French, 2012). However, these accounts from other nations—Germany, Peru, Rwanda—open windows and offer an important comparative perspective. The Editors have contributed in significant ways to this volume. Vijaya Rao’s fascinating essay on the Draupadi cult among poor Indian immigrants in Reunion Island, which she hints is a ‘memory of a memory’, a symbol of resilience, even emancipation. Shambhavi Prakash studies documentaries made in present-day Germany on refugees (from Eritrea, Cameroon, Iran and Yemen, and the ethnic groups of Kurds and Romas) which grapple with strategies that would not reduce their subjects to abstract

categories. Mallarika Sinha Roy explores the emergence of the *Birangona* (war heroine) and *Muktijodhha* (woman freedom fighter) in Bangladesh—a naming that reluctantly concedes the category of the militant woman. Pappi Bora questions the racialisation and othering of the North East in mainstream Indian discourses.

The essays qualify and wrestle with a range of historiographical issues whose relevance is far beyond the topics addressed by the authors. The function and role of memory is one such theme. Pallavi Brara takes up Maurice Halwach's definition of collective memory as a shared pool of knowledge and information, and its dependence on social structures and the significant alternatives offered by Paul Ricoeur, who argued that it was impossible for collective memory at any one point to integrate individual memories. Elsewhere Arshi Javid engages with Alessandro Portelli's insights on remembering. Dalit feminism is another theme—according to Chitra Harshvardhan, this critique grapples with the diverse relationship of dominance and power (sexual abuse by higher castes, patriarchal domination in domestic spaces) and resists essentialisation, offering an alternative political perspective. Udaya Kumar extends these insights by arguing that the destitute constitutes a key category in modern politics, and suicide in Dalit narratives challenges the exclusive monopoly of the modern state over the lives of citizens. Ekata Bakshi's essay addresses the consequences of women who entered the labour force during socio-economic upheaval. Engaging with the work of Tanika Sarkar, Partha Chatterjee, Jasodhara Bagchi and Udit Sen, she has shown that unlike the qualified enablement, such opportunities offered to upper caste women, for non-*bhadramahila* Dalit women, access to public forms of labouring intensified their precariousness and marginalisation.

It is impossible to engage with all the contributions in this short review. One persistent concern through most of the essays is the nature of the nation state which inevitably turns violently on its own citizens, defying democratic norms, and denying inclusion and belonging. As the debate on the National Register of Citizens continues, this book will help us unravel the roots of contemporary politics and the struggle for citizenship.