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De-stereotyping Indian Body and Desire

Kaustav Chakraborty

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Stereotypes result in deceptive generalizations about groups and are held in a manner that renders them as derogatory. As such, this volume advocates an active, goal-oriented effort in order to reduce prejudice through contact. Deconstructing the motivated 'otherizing' of the marginalized, the book offers an alternative reading of the representations of Indian body and desire, in both literature and media, that are often politically inscribed as 'abnormal' and 'unnatural' due to their non-conformity. Poststructural and postcolonial theories have argued that the body is a cultural construct rather than a natural entity. This argument is based on the assumption that there is no unalloyed body with any singular signification, but there are bodies onto which a multiplicity of meanings are inscribed and enforced. The responsibility of this 'inscription' lies with the agencies that hold power in a culture, and the infused meanings will consequently facilitate the ideologies of such agencies. In other words, the bodies of a certain culture are the 'embodiment' of the ideas of those who hold power in that culture. The corporality of the body, in this sense, is a cultural site in which the subtle political ideologies are deftly imposed, and, accordingly, 'correct' and 'sanctioned' desire is expected to germinate. Consequently, it may be argued that apparently unified or non-contradictory bodies of 'normal' desire should be suspected of having subtle hegemonic mechanisms in their formation. As a corollary to this, an investigation into such 'abnormal' bodies with 'unnatural' desires may have the effect of subverting such a power structure. Today's world believes in de-stereotyped thinking and stereotyped living. Language has already been decalred as a means more of camouflage than of revelation. As a result, there is a need to deconstruct the so-called 'radical' representations and expose the undercurrent of the norm. Otherization through stereotyping agencies and ideologies motivates racist, sexist and other de-humanizing positions and perspectives. This book, which is the outcome of the UGC-sponsored National Seminar organised by the Department of English at Southfield College, Darjeeling, is an endeavour to demystify the politics behind stereotyping, and to advocate the justification of de-stereotyping. As such, it represents a significant contribution to numerous disciplines including subaltern studies, women and gender studies, queer studies and minority discourse.

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