

Minorities and in Literature

Abhinaba Chatterjee

Independent Research Scholar

New Delhi, India

The Paradoxes of Marginalit(ies)

This paper discusses some of the barriers to the comparative study of Indigenous literature alongside non-Indigenous literature. These barriers include the Eurocentrism of traditional comparative literature, certain aspects of postcolonial theory and, above, all the assumption that Indigenous and Western epistemologies belong to separate and incommensurable worlds. It examines some recent theoretical and critical approaches that offer ways to bridge the two worlds and make comparative literature an ethical space of mutual respect and understanding.

The paper proposes to deal with marginality in the formation of the epistemic canon (“the mainstream”) and the production of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. By employing the vocabulary of marginality (“marginal,” “margins,” “luminal,” “threshold,” as well as dichotomies such as “minor-major,” “center-periphery”), it is proposed to shift from a discussion of the canon in terms of just one category of “marginals” (a certain race, class, gender etc.) to considering this complex concept in terms of a *plurality of players and factors* related to marginality broadly defined, some of which have little or nothing to do with power structures and dichotomies. Marginality is thus conceived of as an epistemic category and not as a power status.

At the heart of the argument lie the following questions: What is the relation between the concept of marginality and the construction of the epistemic canon in social and human sciences? How can such a theory account for the creation and dissemination of knowledge? The general goal is to explore the role of marginality—conceived of as epistemic category rather than power status—as well as the periphery-center dynamics. The idea of marginality, as illustrated by marginal authors, can shed fresh light on the explicit or tacit rules undergirding the formation of the canon as well as the creation and dissemination of knowledge.