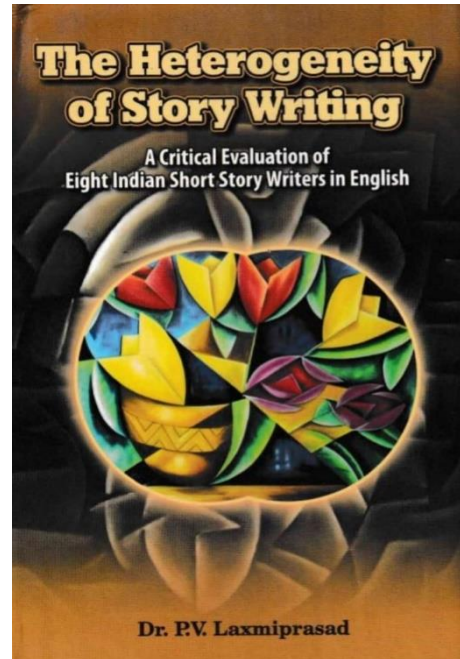


***The Heterogeneity of Story Writing: A Critical Evaluation of Eight Indian Short Story Writers in English* Ed. by P. V. Laxmiprasad, New Delhi: Authorspress, 2015. Pp. 469. Rs. 1900.00.**

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The Heterogeneity of Story Writing (2015) edited by Laxmiprasad is an exquisite compilation of forty-three articles contributed by thirty-two critics on the short stories of eight Indian writers, making it substantial and diverse, both in variety and range. In addition to the articles, there are three inclusive interviews with three of the story writers: the editor has interviewed P. C. K. Prem and P. Raja; and Jaydeep Sarangi is in conversation with Basavaraj Naikar. In addition to the above mentioned three short story writers (the interviewees), the other five names are Nalini Sharma, Rita Nath Keshari, Pronab Kumar Majumder, Anil K. Sharma and Aju



Mukhopadhyay. The editor has apprised the readers of the brief biographical sketch of all the eight short story writers along with a page exclusively dedicated to the list of the short stories penned by them. In his note to the readers, the editor has given a concise and precise introduction to skill and technique of short story writing, the role of a narrator; and the history of Indian storytelling and literature. The editor also introduces the “Eight Story Writers” (12) and acknowledges the sincere attempts of the contributors. The book ends with a ‘List of Contributors’.

Out of the two papers on Aju Mukhopadhyay, the one by D. Swati is very critical, presenting a genuine overview of writer’s collection of twenty-six stories—The Moments of Life. The paper by Dr. V. Sunitha is, comparatively, well-researched and well-executed piece of writing on the select stories of Mukhopadhyay.

There are ten articles on P. Raja’s short story collections. Two of them deal with the writer’s skill and technique of storytelling; and the theme of realism has been discussed by three of the contributors in their respective papers. Four out of the rest five explore the ‘vicissitudes of life’,

‘Didactic Elements’, ‘Incarnation of Servility’, and ‘Temporal Distortions’ (the last two articles are a comparative study of P. Raja and Rita Nash Keshari by the same critic) in P. Raja’s select short stories. However, the article, entitled ‘Merry Concoctions and Pleasing Concatenations’, is cryptic and is neither well-organized nor properly concluded.

All the eight articles on Nalini Sharma are based on her short story collection: *The Unwed Mother*. Three out of eight of the papers explore the feministic elements in Nalini Sharma’s stories. One of the papers analyses the man-woman relationship. Propounding an interesting and different perspective, a paper subtitled: ‘An Eulogy on Men’ proves that “[m]ost of the stories included in the collection sing praise of men, but women are not given that kind of treatment” (279). In the similar vein, the writer drawing inspiration (for his article) from a male character, Ram, holds: “what attracted me is the character of Ram in the story, ‘Determination’ . . .” (102). An article on ‘Social Milieu and Ethos’ is based on three of Nalini Sharma’s short stories—‘Justice’, ‘Grudging Acceptance’, and ‘The Unwed Mother’—from the collection. It is a well-researched and well-written piece of writing and establishes that these “short stories can be a great source for transformation of any society” (399). The last article on Sharma is titled: ‘Thematic Concerns in Nalini Sharma’s *The Unwed Mother*’. The article is well-researched as it touches various themes like imagination, human psychology, narrative technique, social milieu and morality in Sharma’s select short stories from the collection.

Seven articles in the book are on Anil K. Sharma’s maiden short story collection, *Candid Confessions*. One of these seven papers is entitled, ‘Finesse of Feminine Presentation in Anil K. Sharma’s *Affectionately Yours & Other Stories*’. The italicized name of the short story, ‘*Affectionately Yours*’ and the phrase ‘Other Stories’ make a reader wrongly conclude that it is a yet another collection of short stories by Sharma. Such misleading content can be inconvenient and can be easily avoided by following the prescribed mechanics of writing. However, the range and newness of topics on Anil K. Sharma’s work is worth-mentioning—proving the versatility of and the scope for research on the author’s works. Themes, such as ‘Dehumanizing Face of Metropolitan Life’ and ‘Socio-Political Consciousness’ revolve around urbanity and the diminishing morality. Whereas, the papers entitled ‘Lessons of Life’ and ‘Facts through Fiction’ analyses the humanitarian and moral aspect of modern India. One of the papers gives a brief introduction to the humour, irony and originality evident in the prose style of Sharma. A paper carries out a comparative study of R. K. Narayan’s and Anil K. Sharma’s writing style and technique; and their respective skills at characterization, realism, etc. It is, indeed, an interesting read and holds tremendous scope for exhaustive research.

The four papers written on Pronab Kumar Majumder's collection of short stories, *Bouquet of Stories*, are on the themes of isolation, incompatibility, alienation, 'solitariness and solace'—the festering sores of the modernization, technological advancements, and nuclear family system. All the articles are well-executed, making it an interesting and a meaningful read.

Two of the critics have, individually, dealt with P. C. K. Prem's single stories, 'Animals' and 'Roots' from his collection, *A Slingshot Bag and Other Stories*. They have studied the theme of 'Repercussions of Partition' and 'A Quest for Genetic Roots in Tryst with Destiny' in them respectively. The same collection has also been analyzed in order to understand the author's 'Philosophical Thrust'. A critic has tried to fathom the 'Psychoanalytical' aspects in Prem's 'The Echo' from his second collection of short stories, *Shadows at Dawn and Other Stories*. A study of 'Social Reverberations' in both of the collections have also been made. Hence, the book comprises a total of five papers on Prem's short story collections.

The *Rebellious Rani of Belavadi and Other Stories*, a collection of twelve short stories by Basavaraj Naikar, finds no mention—neither in the list of works by the author nor in the Bio-note of the author. Anyhow, a critic has studied the collection from a 'Socio-Ethical Perspective' and a yet another critic has carried on a comprehensive research on the collection in order to prove that the author is 'a Historian and Social Chronicler'. A sincere analysis, in two separate papers, on the themes of 'Microcosmic world' and the 'Portrayal of Indian Culture (specifically the South Indian household, women and mode of living)' found in Naikar's short story collection, *The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories*, have been done. 'Indian Sensibility' in Naikar's *The Golden Servant and Other Stories* has been explored in one of the five papers on the author's works.

There are two papers written on Rita Nath Keshari's short story collection, *The Transplanted Wife*. One of the two is an 'Ecofeminist Analysis of the Select Stories' of the collection. The article proves that the eponymous story and 'Nirmala's Neem Tree' from the collection "attempt to equate the vulnerable state of women and nature [ecofeminism] . . . they [trees and women] enjoy only the status of 'the other' and are always at the mercy of male folk . . ." (236). The second paper also explores the theme of 'Women and Nature' in four of the stories from the collection. Two of the research papers in the book (as mentioned earlier) carry on a combined study of P. Raja and Rita Nath Keshari.

The book, in the true sense of the word, justifies its title and presents a plethora of perspectives and new approaches in the field of research on Indian short story writers in general and the eight renowned short story writers in particular. Touching the varied mellifluous chords of the

Indian life present and manifested in the short stories of these eight writers, the critics have succeeded in conveying and accentuating the indigenous tunes. However, as a reviewer, I would like to use the clichéd sentence: ‘There is always scope for improvement’. Speaking from the reader’s point of view, I feel the articles of a single author should have been chronically grouped together for the convenience of the readers. Most of the articles are very good but the editor could have dispensed with some of the articles which needed revision or reconsideration on the part of the contributors. In a nutshell, quality and not quantity should have been given preference. As far as the number of articles is concerned they are forty-three and not forty-six as stated by the editor in his note to the readers. The MLA style (seventh edition) should have been strictly followed in order to give uniformity and a tone of oneness to the whole book (the basic concepts of research methodology have been tactlessly overlooked in most of the papers). Year of publications with the names of the short story collections of the eight authors in the beginning would have been helpful. Nevertheless, besides conveying the pulse of style, settings and themes of Indian short stories, the book can be a useful referential text for all those interested in studying these eight contemporary Indian short story writers.