the corporatization of the US academy gains further traction in one of the most incisive chapters (one of my favorites in the collection), Chapter 6 ("Cartographies of Knowledge and Power: Transnational Feminism as Radical Praxis, with M. Jacqui Alexander"). They expose the hierarchy of Euro-American readings within contemporary whitewashed US academia, particularly within core Women's and Gender studies and LGBTQ/Queer studies syllabi. Mohanty frames syllabi and pedagogical practices as essential "cartographies of struggle" (coined in 1991) and calls for the decolonization of the privatized curricula, for upsetting of power/knowledge matrix that uses standpoint politics and reinforces the insider-outsider hierarchy within academia through *hyperracialization* and *erasure* of experiences, and deploying the transnational feminist praxis to create refined politically engaged feminist genealogies (177-178). In Chapter 7 ("Transnational Feminist Crossings: On Neoliberalism and Radical Critique"), Mohanty reflects on her own archive, tracing how her theoretical interventions have travelled, been read, and been misread. By foregrounding their afterlives, Mohanty reveals how the meaning of feminist theory is never fixed when it travels through neoliberal and "post"-modern circuits (200). She engages with the works of scholar-activists like Diana Mulinari, Claudia de Lima Costa, and Hernández Castillo, who acknowledge that Mohanty's work is respected but is often subject to citational appropriation, untranslatability, and the homogenization of academic feminism, highlighting both the successes and limitations of epistemology in neoliberal academia.

Finally, through a scathing conclusion, Chapter 8 ("The Challenge of Solidarity: Notes on Transnational, Insurgent Feminist Praxis") Mohanty urges a remapping of the "transnational" beyond the geographical, binarical (global/local) or co-optation strategy by neoliberal academia, framing it instead as an insurgent anticapitalist, antiracial praxis that interconnects histories, *cartographies of struggle*, and transnational epistemologies of oppression.

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MADHURIMA GUHA
Arizona State University, USA

AESTHETICS OF DALIT THEATRE: PERSPECTIVES ON CASTE, CLASS AND GENDER. By Shubhendu Shekhar Naskar. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025. VII + 256 pp.

Shubhendu Shekhar Naskar's *Aesthetics of Dalit Theatre: Perspectives on Caste, Class and Gender* reads like an insurgent archive in motion, constructing a rigorous account of Dalit performance as a site of social critique. He approaches Dalit theatre as a space where pain, refusal, and aspiration gather in embodied form, and where dramaturgy becomes a method of thinking caste from below. The book situates Dalit plays within a century-long history of Indian performance(s) and within the contemporary Dalit movement, seeking to fill a "void" in writing on Dalit theatre and its contribution to the Dalit cause.

One of the strongest contributions lies in the labour of recovery: Naskar metriculously builds a primer for critical caste studies and Dalit studies through theatre. Across the book, but especially in chapter seven, Naskar offers close readings of playwrights working across Marathi, Tamil, Telugu,

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Hindi, Malayalam, Bengali, Kannada and Odia, treating linguistic range as conceptual (pp. 67–69). Utilising the Dalit theatre as an "emerging domain of research" and a "powerful instrument" for representing layered oppression in visual form, while also lamenting the scarcity of English translations.

Methodologically, the study is impressively dense. Naskar combines textual analysis, interviews, archival research and ethnographic encounters with Dalit theatre troupes. He also speaks with playwrights such as Datta Bhagat, Achintya Biswas, Raju Das, and M.M. Vinodini, and observes rehearsals and performances to understand how scripts get crafted, staged, and received, and he frames interviews as a way of reaching the "contexts and backgrounds" that shape textual production. The ethnographic meaning-making sense of this scholarship is compelling, especially where the "spect-actors" formulation, developed through engagement with Jana Sanskriti's theatre praxis, strengthens the book's phenomenological register by showing how marginalised performers stage their own life-worlds as political knowledge. These layered methods lend the book an ethnographic *thickness*; theory arising from bodies on stage, from archives in Kolkata and London, and from the memories of performers who live the conditions as they enact (pp. 8–9)

The analytical core turns on a triad of caste, class and gender. In chapter three, Naskar links dramaturgical scenes of humiliation to structural inequality, using Berreman's (1991) formulation of caste as "institutionalised inequality" (p. 30). He also anchors the conceptual scaffolding within a longer anti-caste and sociological archive, revisiting Phule and Ambedkar as key architects of critique and method (pp. 17–18). The caste-class problem is treated as both historical antagonism and contemporary dispute: it explicitly flags the divergence between Marxist and Ambedkarite approaches, while chapter five returns to the problem through the limits of economism and the occlusion of Brahmanical power within certain Left readings (pp. 46–49).

Rather than advancing chapter by chapter mechanically, the book circles back to central questions. When Naskar traces the history and aesthetics of Dalit literature, he shows in chapter four how Dalit writing consolidates as a movement-form whose aesthetics are inseparable from political struggle (pp. 35–37). Alongside this, chapter two demonstrates how drama remains marginal within major anthologies, *such as Poisoned Bread, No Alphabet in Sight,* and *The Exercise of Freedom,* even as other Dalit genres circulate more widely, and how translation scarcity shapes what becomes "visible" to English-language criticism (pp. 11–15). This mapping exposes how editorial and institutional choices confine Dalit performance to the periphery even as Dalit writing circulates widely (pp. 11–12).

The genealogy of Dalit theatre emerges through a careful threading of longer performance histories into Dalit political modernity. In chapter one, Naskar flags 'Ambedkari Jalsa' and 'Satyashodhak Jalsa' as formative counter-cultural models that precede the genre's consolidation (pp. 3–4). Chapter seven, then, expands this genealogy across regions and playwrights, sharpening the sense of theatre as both archive and movement practice (pp. 67–69). Chapter eight, then crystallises this history into a conceptual proposal: an aesthetic that privileges testimonial realism, collective anger and Ambedkarite critique, yet remains formally inventive. Naskar's formulation of a new aesthetic of the subaltern theatrical traditions with specific ideological allegiances captures his desire to move beyond simply adding Dalit plays to mainstream canons.

When Naskar turns to production and performance in chapter nine, the analysis widens into theatre studies and political pedagogy (pp. 107–110). Drawing on Armstrong's account of Dalit drama as a forum that reconstitutes misrepresentation and retells Dalit history, he reads street theatre, people's theatre and theatre of the oppressed as modes that cultivate spectatorship as critical participation (p. 4). The chapter's staging vocabulary also enables comparative theatre language, including an explicit discussion of "Brechtian technique" in relation to Dalit theatre's address, estrangement, and politicised spectatorship (p. 114) - plays such as Datta Bhagat's *Whirlpool* and *Routes and Escape Routes*, K.A. Gunasekaran's *Touch* and M.M. Vinodini's *Thirst* become case studies in how performance narrates hunger, dispossession and caste humiliation while inviting audi-

ences to reflect on their own complicity; Bengali plays like *Chuni Kotal Speaking* further show how regional histories of education and bureaucracy enter Dalit theatre's repertoire.

Gender runs through the book as both a theme and a critique. Chapter six foregrounds how caste governance relies upon controlling women, and it details the intensification of sexual violence against Dalit women as a technique of terror and social discipline, foregrounding the double marginalisation of Dalit women and drawing on feminist work on brahmanical patriarchy, including Sharmila Rege and Uma Chakravarti. Chapter twelve, then, offers dramaturgical readings that show how everyday denial, humiliation, and retaliatory speech become theatrical material, while also clarifying why Dalit feminism cannot be flattened into generic feminist frames (pp. 183–191). The book's forward-looking argument also signals the growing significance of Dalit women playwrights, the need for deeper critical attention to their work, and the urgency of treating women as symbols rather than agents.

The book opens important conversations that future work can deepen. Chapters five and eleven, respectively, extend the caste-class problematic by staging analogies of dehumanisation, labour exploitation, and structural unfreedom, thereby widening the grammar through which class is made legible without evacuating caste (pp. 153–161). Yet there is scope for further dialogue with contemporary debates on neoliberal labour regimes, cultural industries and the financial life of theatre spaces. At the same time, the conceptual horizon created by the gender chapters (pp. 52–53; pp. 183–191) and the performance chapters (pp. 107–114) invites further work on contemporary media ecologies, cultural industries, and emergent publics, also extend towards queer, trans and disability perspectives, especially given how bodily difference and non-normative desire surface implicitly in many plays. These are fewer shortcomings than the invitations produced by the density of Naskar's archive, and I am sure this is something his upcoming work will address, and will give us as rigorous an analysis as this scholarly work has brought.

The monograph insists that the field of Dalit theatre studies remains open and urgently in need of further documentation, translation and comparative analysis. In this sense, *Aesthetics of Dalit Theatre* feels like a threshold text. It revives and stabilises a dispersed body of plays, demonstrates that Dalit aesthetics on stage carry both affective charge and theoretical insight, and sets out an agenda that future scholars will have to acknowledge, extend and contest. For readers in critical caste studies, theatre studies and global decolonial humanities, Naskar's work offers a living archive to which one can return repeatedly, each time encountering fresh questions about how theatre imagines, endures and transforms caste-ordered worlds.

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HARSHUL SINGH
SOAS University of London, UK

Shubhendu Shekhar Naskar's *Aesthetics of Dalit Theatre: Perspectives on Caste, Class and Gender* is a field-making study that addresses an imbalance in Dalit literary criticism. Despite the prominence of Dalit poetry, autobiography, and life writing in scholarship and teaching, Dalit theatre remains comparatively less visible in English-language criticism.

The book's first major intervention is diagnostic. Chapter 2, "Documenting Research Trends," shows how Dalit theatre's marginal position is reinforced by the institutional history of anthologization

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and translation. Canon-defining Dalit anthologies have tended to privilege poetry, autobiography, and short prose, leaving drama underrepresented, and major Indian drama anthologies include Dalit plays only sporadically. Naskar argues that the scarcity of translations into English is not a minor inconvenience but a structural barrier. Dalit plays primarily circulate in vernacular languages, and inadequate translation infrastructure limits both global circulation and sustained critical engagement. This chapter justifies the book's larger aim to address the conditions that have made Dalit theatre harder to teach, cite, and canonize.

The conceptual groundwork proceeds through three framing chapters that are especially valuable for classroom use. Chapter 3, "Indian Caste System and the Origin and Plight of the Dalits," operates as a primer on caste as a system of graded inequality and Brahminical control over labor, knowledge, and everyday social space. While this chapter is not theatre-specific, it clarifies the book's guiding assumption: Dalit theatre's meaning and force are inseparable from caste as a structure of dehumanization. Chapter 4, "History and Aesthetics of Dalit Literature," then turns to the question of definition. Naskar lays out competing understandings of what counts as "Dalit literature," including a broad, inclusive formulation and the stronger authenticity claim by Sharankumar Limbale that Dalit literature is "writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness" (qtd. in Naskar 36). He emphasizes *anubhava* (lived experience) as the grounding of Dalit expression, contrasting it with *anumana* (speculation). This chapter is crucial because it later underwrites Naskar's claim that caste-themed plays written by non-Dalit playwrights are not equivalent to Dalit theatre, and that "aesthetics" in the Dalit tradition is closely tied to experience, protest, and ethical urgency rather than conventional literary pleasure.

The book's intersectional commitments are articulated most explicitly in Chapter 5, "Caste-Class Antagonisms," and Chapter 6, "Intersection of Gender." In Chapter 5, Naskar separates caste and class analytically—caste as a religio-social hierarchy and class as economic exploitation—while arguing that in the Indian context caste has historically organized class position by controlling access to resources such as land and property. He frames the debate through Marxist and Ambedkarite tensions and argues that emancipation requires addressing both caste annihilation and labor exploitation. Chapter 6 extends the intersectional frame by theorizing "Brahmanical patriarchy" (especially through endogamy and control over female sexuality) and naming "Dalit patriarchy" as an internal structure that can reproduce domestic and cultural violence against Dalit women. The chapter also addresses the political divergence between dominant-caste feminism and Dalit feminist critique, insisting that universalized notions of "woman" often erase caste and class differences. Together, Chapters 5 and 6 establish the analytic vocabulary the later play-focused chapters will mobilize.

Naskar's theatre-specific contributions crystallize in Chapter 7, "Origin and History of Dalit Theatre," Chapter 8, "Aesthetics of Dalit Theatre," and Chapter 9, "Dalit Theatre: Production and Performance." Chapter 7 is where the book most clearly maps the field. Naskar distinguishes between early anti-caste plays (including Jyotirao Phule's) and Dalit theatre "as a genre" (67), which he locates in the 1950s through M. V. Chitnis's *Yugayatra* staged under Ambedkar's patronage for Dalit converts. He then offers a wide pan-Indian survey organized by language/region—Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Hindi, Bengali, Odia, and Gujarati—emphasizing that differences in regional socio-political conditions produce multiple Dalit theatre traditions rather than a single uniform lineage. This mapping is one of the book's most significant achievements as it provides a reference architecture for a field that often appears fragmented in scholarship.

Chapter 8 attempts to delineate Dalit theatre's aesthetics largely through contrast and affiliation. Naskar distinguishes Dalit aesthetics from Sanskritized "mainstream" or elite theatre through language (colloquial idioms rather than polished registers), evaluative criteria (new standards grounded in Dalit lived experience, political urgency, and accessibility rather than elite formal refinement), and political stance (Dalit theatre aims at critique and transformation rather than aesthetic autonomy). He also positions Dalit theatre as aligned with folk and street theatre energies and as hybrid

in relation to multiple performance genealogies. Chapter 9 strengthens and arguably best substantiates the "aesthetics" claim by tying form to material conditions, arguing that historical exclusion from stages, economic constraints, and political threats shape a performance ecology of minimal props, mobility, direct address, and audience activation. Here, Naskar's comparisons to Brechtian strategies and to Theatre of the Oppressed help situate Dalit theatre within broader histories of people's theatre. Across Chapters 7–9, the book makes its most compelling case that Dalit theatre's aesthetics is not reducible to themes and that it is also produced by performance conditions and political urgency.

The book's main limitation lies where it promises the most: the sustained theorization of "aesthetics" through analysis of plays. Chapter 10, "Representation of Caste," Chapter 11, "Representation of Class," and Chapter 12, "Representation of Gender" are rich in coverage and provide valuable thematic pathways through major plays. However, they often move through extended plot summaries punctuated by interpretive statements rather than developing a consistent formal-analytic vocabulary for theatre. Chapter 10 is strongest when it pushes beyond narration, such as when it reads mythic legitimation as a structure of caste punishment (for instance, by using Shambuka as an interpretive frame) or when it briefly attends to symbolic dramaturgy. Chapter 11 offers the clearest justification for discussing class with caste and makes productive use of Achintya Biswas's plays to show how caste fractures class solidarity. It also introduces race comparatively to illustrate how stigmatized identity becomes a mechanism of economic domination, though race functions more as analogy than as a fully theorized framework. Chapter 12's intersectional argument is one of the book's most important. It foregrounds Dalit feminist critique of mainstream feminism, defines Dalit feminism as resistance, identifies "Dalit patriarchy" as the reproduction of patriarchal power within Dalit communities, and raises the question of how tribal identity can be politically legible within Dalit solidarity. At the same time, the chapter acknowledges a key tension: while it includes a Dalit woman playwright (M. M. Vinodini), several of the analyzed plays are by Dalit men—an imbalance the book identifies but cannot fully remedy within its chosen corpus.

Overall, *Aesthetics of Dalit Theatre* is best understood as a comprehensive introduction and field map that will be especially useful for teaching and for orienting new research. Its strongest intervention lies in bringing together caste history, Dalit literary debates, and a pan-Indian survey of Dalit theatre, while also insisting that production and performance conditions are constitutive of Dalit theatre's aesthetics. The book's next step—whether for Naskar or for scholars building on this work—would be to develop a more consistent, systematic account of "aesthetics" at the level of theatrical form. That is, how staging, voice, rhythm, space, and audience interaction generate meaning beyond thematic exposition. Even with that limitation, the monograph remains a valuable, recommendable resource for students, scholars, and researchers seeking a grounded, expansive entry into caste, Dalit literature, and Dalit theatre in India.

LEENU SUGATHAN
George Washington University, USA

GANDHI'S CRITICS. By Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy. New York: Routledge, 2026. 403 pp.

Few political figures have generated as much respect and as much contestation as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The debates surrounding the Gandhian thought became the central axis during the freedom struggle and continues to animate the political discourse even in contemporary India. From constitutional liberals' uneasiness with mass agitation, to anti-caste thinkers who wanted

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