

Khanna, Neetu. *The Visceral Logics of Decolonization*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020. xii+ 174 pages. Paperback, \$24.95.

“The body is a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves, a nodal point or nexus for relations of juridical and productive power.”¹ Heavily inspired by previous studies of power and the body, *The Visceral Logics of Decolonization* is a postcolonial feminist study of the “dense and knotted set of relations between embodied experience and political feeling”—what Khanna terms as the “visceral.” This is the latest book from Neetu Khanna, who is an academic engaged in theories and literatures of decolonization, global Marxisms, postcolonial literature and theory, materialist aesthetics, and queer and feminist theory. It is an expansion of her thought-provoking article “Poetics of progressive feeling: The visceral aesthetics of Mulk Raj Anand” published in *Journal of Postcolonial writing*, in 2015.²

Khanna herself begins the book with an emotive, hopeful feeling; one that is characteristic of feminists and emancipatory theorists, by quoting Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*: “We can feel new feelings. We can learn to be aware with a new awareness.”³ In *Visceral Logics*, Khanna argues that this claim by Anand is achievable and that the act of “feeling” has deeper colonial, political and gendered power connotations than the act of mere affect. The book centers on the work of internationalist literary work and art of Indian Marxist Muslim scholars from the 1930s to 1950s, such as Ahmed Ali, Rashid Jahan, Sajjad Zaheer, and Mahmudazzafar Khan; who collectively came to be organized under the banner of the Progressive Writers’ Association. Based on the work of the above artists, Khanna makes the following central arguments. Firstly, Khanna contends that the “visceral,” which she uses in a broad sense to refer to the inward feelings of the subdued—whether she be the colonial subject or a person of gender or of the black race, and consequent bodily actions manifest due to such emotive sensibilities; is a response to the torment and oppression

experienced by the subdued subject. Such visceral responses according to Khanna have an “involuntary nature” (p. 59) and we have little control over it; and “cannot be interrupted by a psychic intervention” (p. 7) of the subject’s own consciousness. Khanna further goes on to argue that such visceral responses of the subdued subject inform and define the consciousness and actions (be it making political or cultural choices) by acting as a “catalyst for that transformation.” Emotions and the visceral instigate, inspire, and enable the consciousness that seeks emancipation and revolution. In arguing so, Khanna has, with brilliance, used the physiological construct of the body as the point of entry into inquiry of the subject, moving past the apparent consciousness of the subject, which could have well been constructed by the oppressor. In beautifully crafted chapters that depict an emotion and the associated visceral responses, Khanna craftily elevates the writings of the Indian “progressive writers” by ascribing political and power connotations of emancipation and freedom to the already excellent extant work.

Visceral Logics is an excellent work that cuts across established domains of science and inquiry. While it will not be an easy read for students and even for domain-specific scholars; it rewards the reader with invocations of critical thinking that enable reassessments of the existing knowledge on art, colonialism and power discourses in the end. It is a fusion of affect studies and postcolonial feminist analysis, and has relevance for any movement or discourse that seeks emancipation. The fact that fascinates the reader the most while reading the book is the embodied Foucauldian discourse of power that Khanna employs and effectively enriches through the book, despite not quoting him or referring to his work directly, even though Foucault finds mention in the bibliography. Like Foucault, Khanna conceives of “power as relations”⁴ between the oppressor and the oppressed, of it being embedded in the visceral that reeks of “emotive contagion and transmission.” Additionally, by arguing that the consciousness cannot control the visceral, but rather that the visceral

informs the consciousness; Khanna seems to have maintained the hope that despite the extreme levels of power exercised by the oppressor over the oppressed, there is still a spark of unpolluted, uncoerced “agency” within the subject that manifests itself in the “visceral.” This is precisely why Khanna’s work is monumental, for it instills an emotion of hope; of the possibility of emancipation for the oppressed and the downtrodden.

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¹ Judith Butler, “Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 86, no. 11(1989): 601.

² Neetu Khanna, “Poetics of progressive feeling: The visceral aesthetics of Mulk Raj Anand,” *Journal of Postcolonial writing* 51, no. 4 (2015): 449-461.

³ Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchability*, (New York: Penguin, 1940), 153.

⁴ Michel Foucault, “What our Present is,” In S. Lotringer (Ed.), *Foucault Live – Collected Interviews, 1961–1984* (United States of America: Semiotext (e), 1996), 410.