

Emotion Cultures and the Culture of Emotions

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Pramod K Nayar's *States of Sentiment* is a work that explores the consequences of the play and politics of emotions in our day-to-day life. It makes a genuine attempt to unfold and highlight the complex ways in which emotions operate, both in terms of the ways in which they are organised by various socio-cultural mediums as well as in the ways in which they are consumed by the world, and the consequences that unfold.

Nayar's "Introduction" is indeed a carefully crafted introduction to the work. Through its length it intends to gear and orient the reader to the fundamental pillar upon which the book rests, namely, that though emotions are private and subjective experiences, their modes of production and their outcomes are not necessarily so and that they can be seen, in contrast, as being largely sociocultural. It is this social-cultural aspect of emotions and the politics that govern them that the book makes an attempt to explore and capture. The attempt is to explore what emotions (the author's neologism for this is *emotional dominant*) are *sought* to be extracted from us by representations that are represented in various mediums that are in circulation in a given sociocultural avenue. The book explores the manufacturing of these structures of representations that demand a determinate emotional response from us. As such, emotions as dealt with here are not captured and treated as merely subjective

States of Sentiment – Exploring the Cultures of Emotion by Pramod K Nayar (*Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2011; pp i-xxiii + 291, Hardcover, Rs 595.*)

experiential states but rather as an outwardly mode in which I am sought to be directed to relate to the world in specific stances and pushed to position myself in it in determinate ways. Thus emotions are, as Nayar puts it, to be seen as constituting a mode of "affective sociality" where my response to an event or an entity in a given cultural context is sought to be governed by the various manufacturing apparatus of mediums of presentation/representations of our sociocultural world and its narratives. Emotional dominants thus play a pivotal role in the politics of identity formation, identification/classification and evaluation of events and entities in the world. The text, thus, explicitly positions itself as an engagement with this sociocultural aspect of emotions, and by distancing the exploration that is undertaken in the book from an "exploration of the psychological foundations or authenticity of emotions" (p 4), it positions itself firmly as a work within the boundaries of cultural studies in general and cultural emotion studies in particular.

Landscape of Emotion Cultures

Apart from skilfully managing the expected tasks of orienting the reader on how to go

about the remaining 230 odd pages that constitute the four chapters of the book; in familiarising her/him with the terms and neologism that she/he needs to equip herself/himself in reading the text; and in helping the readers locate the book in the world of academic boundaries, the "Introduction" warns the readers to get the proper intellectual gear and tune it to the demands of the style in which this exploration is presented in the text. In a sense, the author through his text intends to introduce the reader to a landscape of emotion cultures and the various sites where emotions are "cultured". The attempt to introduce us to this landscape is done through snapshots, and hence it is crucial for the author that the reader is oriented in her/his reading of a presented snapshot.

The "Introduction" starts off with a set of discrete images (snapshots) that we have encountered in various mediums of our culture such as mass media but before we can think through them, the author forces us to look at them in terms of the emotional dominant that operates in each of these images by explicitly stating them immediately after the presentation of the image. In doing so, the text uses a blunt but a powerful tool of keeping the reader's mind from loitering around and then proceeds to put forth an analytic description of the complex sociocultural mechanism of the operating emotional dominant in a simple and free flowing style of exposition. Given the vastness and the complexities of the landscape that the author intends to familiarise us with, the author is generous with the number of snapshots provided to us and they are numerous. Thus, Nayar's movement from one snapshot of the landscape of emotion culture to the other

is necessarily swift and demands attention from the reader, which in turn is secured by the simple free flowing style of his analytic exposition of the snapshot positioning it in the larger context of the landscape. The reader must, however, be careful to not allow the transposition of the simplicity of the exposition as a qualifier to that about which the exposition is. The "Introduction" thus also implicitly makes the reader aware of the intellectual demand made by the text as the same style is consistently followed in the expositions provided in the four chapters of the book, each of which is devoted to the four "sentiments" of Well-Being, Suffering, Aversion and Hope. Each chapter provides, through the medium of snapshots, a lucid analytic exposition of how each state of these sentiments is manufactured, organised and circulated for our consumption through strategically designed discourses that we encounter in our day-to-day life. Given that the text is primarily an engagement with the discourses that pertain to states of sentiments, the choice of images (snapshots) that the

author uses for illustration of his points are borrowed from various forms of discourses ranging from *Calvin and Hobbes* to self-help books and from social networking sites to reality shows, apart from the usual mediums such as adverts and newspapers. The author employs a variety of these illustrative images and manages to bring to light the complexities that we usually take for granted in things we encounter and highlights the culture of emotions in which we partake. But at the same time, the variety and the numerous images employed by the author also demands an intellectual flexibility on the part of the reader to move from a hilarious image to a grave one within the space of a few pages.

The analytic description that the author intends to navigate the reader through is generously supported by other scholarly works to act as a ready signpost in case the reader has doubts about the navigating skills of the author. The ready references and the bibliography also enable the reader to seek out new avenues and routes to navigate the terrain should she/he intend to do so on her/his own.

I must also caution the reader that the work is not a book on mass-media ethics though it deals with the mediums of mass-media. The author has consistently managed to keep the text away from a tone of imperativeness of "ought to" or "ought not to" even while discussing issues with normative contents. The work is more in the spirit of descriptive and analytic exploration rather than a prescriptive analysis.

A well written *Foreword* to the text by Shiv Vishwanathan not only introduces the reader to the text but also positions the text and highlights its relevancy.

Nayar's *States of Sentiment* is a book that is engaging and is filled with insights; some piercing, some interesting, some both piercing and interesting. The strength of the work lies in its ability to corner the reader to put on her/his thinking caps and rethink the world of emotions and the way they work or are constantly being worked upon.

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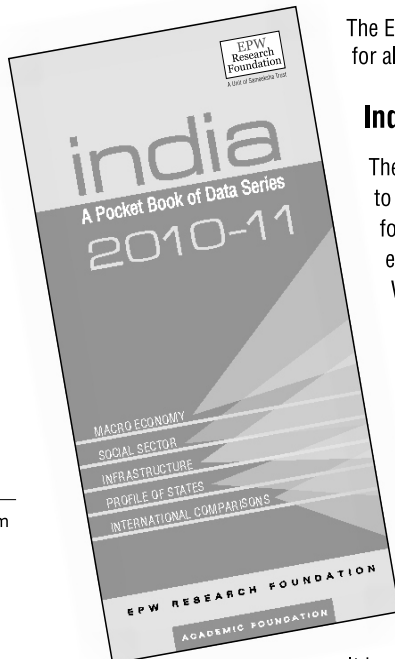
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