



## Reviews

Zoe Norridge, K Brisley Brennan, Sohini Basak, Geoffrey Heptonstall, Moira Richards, Suvasree Karanjai, Aatreyee Ghosh, Aditya Misra, Dinesh Kafle, Aurogeeta Das, Tamim Sadikali & Rashi Rohatgi

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master of crystal clear prose that is as soothing to the ear as the sound of rain on a hot tin roof. And the translators – Maureen Freely and Alexander Dawe – deserve a special mention for their ability to capture the beauty and elegance of Abasiyanik's prose in English.

Abasiyanik's characters are often eccentric and nameless. Figures, like an old man obsessed with death sitting in a coffee shop, the adolescent with a hopeless desire for excitement and an unprofessional thief, recurrently populate his stories — they exist on the peripheries, always on the verge of jumping into the sea. 'The Silk Handkerchief' is a wonderful and unusual story of a fifteen-year-old thief who decides to steal a handkerchief for his girlfriend, but eventually dies falling off the mulberry tree with the silk held tightly in his hand. In the story 'I just Don't Know why I Keep Doing These Things', the protagonist finds amusement in dark thoughts: 'I think about Dying, and I think about growing old; I think about all the wars that haven't happened yet ... The darker the thoughts I let into my mind, the better I amuse myself' (111). And finally, the story that gives the collection its title delves into the mundane life of an old man. Even after losing all hope, this old man suddenly revives himself after visiting a hamam and decides to take a lover and begin life anew. Like Chekhov or Kafka, the stories in *A Useless Man* are fragmentary slices of life offered with an impressionistic intensity and reveal the depth to be found in the superficial, the banal, the everyday.

Dinesh Kafle

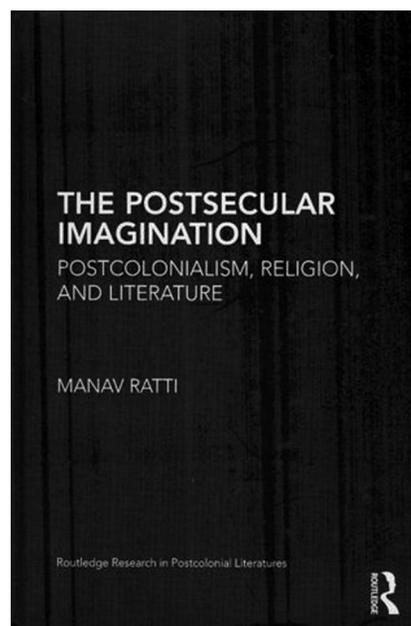
**The Postsecular Imagination: Postcolonialism, Religion, and Literature**

Manav Ratti

Routledge, London, 2013, hb  
240pp ISBN 0 4154 8097 0 £90.00  
[www.routledge.com](http://www.routledge.com)

Ever since Jürgen Habermas popularised the term 'postsecularism' in his lecture 'Faith and Knowledge', it has been a buzzword among

academics trying to negotiate the contentious relationship between religion and secularism in contemporary society. Manav Ratti's *The Postsecular Imagination: Postcolonialism, Religion, and Literature* is a scholarly attempt to formulate the postsecular imagination in literary texts from India, Sri Lanka and the South Asian diaspora, focusing in particular on the way that the affirmative values of love, compassion, belief and a sense of community are expressed through representations of Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and tribal cultures.



According to Ratti, postsecularism 'neither proselytizes secularism nor sentimentalizes religion' (xxi). He challenges Habermas's claim that postsecularism is a characteristic exclusive to the well-off societies of Europe and the North America. And in so doing, extends Habermas's 'recognition that there must now be a respectful and mature engagement with the full diversity of religions, secularisms, beliefs, and practices within nation-states' (Habermas, 2008, in Ratti xxiii). Divided into seven chapters, Ratti's book offers critical studies of the Anglophone fictions of Michael Ondaatje, Salman Rushdie, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Amitav Ghosh, Allan Sealy and Mahasweta Devi through which he attempts to understand the difference between individual and state-sanctioned notions of relating to

others. Ratti is fascinated by the tautological postmodern human condition which, on the one hand, celebrates notions of fellowship, community, open-mindedness and acceptance over and above the differences of religion and nation, but on the other, modern political systems, and concepts of secularism and even multiculturalism which fail to appreciate the multiple identities and differences that reside within a single community (xviii). For Ratti, the postsecular cannot be realised in grand narratives but in the individual and indigenous 'epistemologies and ways of being, quite apart from the pretensions, hegemonies, and constructs of the state' (65). He thus considers novelists that claim they are 'of the people – they are not necessarily cadres of the state – and they turn to literature as their craft through which to represent that which the state, either native or diasporic, cannot or will not' (65). So, in his analysis of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, the desert represents a 'paranational' space that escapes the cartographies of nation and religion, including 'official' discourses on human rights and paves the way for the exploration of postsecular affirmative values of love, tenderness, care, friendship and community. And in his reading of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie's use of magical realism promotes secular enchantment via the depiction of an array of 'Islams' as an attempt to offer multiple interpretations of a single religion. In this way, Ratti's approach to the postsecular is somewhat similar to the postmodernist approach.

The question of religious and communal harmony, and the need to promote peaceful co-existence in spite of differences, remains one of the core challenges for modern society. Taking as his subject the global citizen, Ratti tackles this using an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses literature, literary criticism, political theory and cultural criticism. A major addition to contemporary scholarship on postsecularism, this is a significant book for those interested in the study of issues related to religion and secularism.