

WOMEN WRITERS OF THE SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA: INTERPRETING GENDER, TEXTS AND CONTEXTS. By Ajay K. Chaubey and Shilpa Daithota Bhat (Eds.). Jaipur & Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2020. 264 pp.

The pluralities involved with the very construct of the body of South Asian Cultural Studies repeatedly invite critical inquiries to locate and address the gaps existing within its frame of existence. The trajectories of South Asian Studies in the post-human era offers glimpses of fluid identities intrinsically posited within its construct from which it is possible to negotiate on newer ideas or definitions of gender identity, politics of narration and several other nuanced tropes, some of which Ajay K. Chaubey and Shilpa Daithota Bhat (with a foreword by Mariam Pirbhai) in their publication, *Women Writers of the South Asian Diaspora: Interpreting Gender, Texts and Contexts* (2020), has intensely focussed on. The tradition of silencing women's voices in the name of gender as well as race has been supported by various agents and the situation only worsens when the issue of migration is involved. The trauma of displacement has timelessly affected women denying them of several things such as social position, cultural acceptance or even economic empowerment. Many social developments have contributed towards providing the female subjects their rightful voice but the struggle continues till today.

The world in spite of acquiring a global status with its ever increasing denominations of an inclusive outer structure has failed to accommodate women and refurbish them with equal rights. The world of hyper real with its idea of surplus, however, often fails to even provide the women with their basic demands. The counter image of helplessness, economic despair and emotional insecurity along with several other gaps which are intrinsically linked with the lives of South Asian women are often left unaddressed or even unvalued. While the paradigm shifts of the socio-cultural order of the world had been accredited primarily by the school of postcolonialism, the gender issues were taken into account by the postcolonial feminist school. Diaspora has always been an ever widening field of studies that has dealt with the issues of space, migration, dislocation and fissured identities. In today's academia, diaspora studies competently address the multiplicity of diasporic encounters, experiences and exchanges, gradually shifting away from the former construct of its highlighted ideological definition. This book in particular takes into consideration the women's voices echoing multiple issues connected to the broader field of diasporic studies. The editorial comment that sums up the focal point of the book that, "this book interrogates diasporic issues of transplanted individuals through the analysis of the works by South Asian women writers..." (2).

The volume, under review, categorically acknowledges the importance of recognizing the otherwise marginal voices in a growing transnational world. Battling the crisis of the homeland vs. hostland dichotomy, the editors have emphatically interrogated the politics of reading texts articulated by diasporic women writers. It has remained a fact that their spatial and geopolitical identity often has overruled their literary prowess. The identity struggle of most of the diasporic writers run parallel to their desperate attempt of negotiating their narratives along the thin lines of reality and imagination. The exploration of male characters also provide the readers with novel perspectives, allowing them a rather plural and nuanced portrayal of the gender troubles across the world at large. The

book speaks about the roaring popularity of select women writers from the Indian origin and how even within the diasporic centre of literature, there exists marginal positions for authors of other South Asian nations. These nuanced issues of diasporic women writers have been addressed competently by several authors who have contributed their essays in this book to make it a pertinent text within the academic field of diasporic studies. The book targets to puncture the silences and the voids that prevail within the readings of texts articulated by women transnational writers.

As acknowledged by the editors, it is due to the rising popularity of South Asian women writers across global academia, several texts have been identified and their issues rightfully addressed. Keeping in mind the existing plurality within South Asian literature, the book has been divided into four sections. The first section of the anthology appropriately named as 'Diasporic Women Writers from India: Critiquing Transnationalism' opens with a brilliant essay focussed on South Asian American women writers by Christiane Schlote that explores women writers such as Talat Abbasi, Meena Alexander and several others, emphasising the utmost need to develop a comparative approach to appropriate issues such as 'identity politics and pan-ethnic ideologies' (7). The issue of identity in terms of cultural citizenship is addressed by Monalisha Saikia and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar. The duo rigorously enquires into the text and the latent binaries that exist within its body, laying threadbare Mukherjee's immigrant politics while touching upon the greater problem of exoticising one's present and the past as per the requirement of one's situation, a convenient construct exploited by several other diasporic writers.

I. Watitula Longkumer and Nirmala Menon take upon the concept of ethnicity within the versatile domain of North-East literature. The cultural nuances of individual tribes, however could not be gauged sufficiently within the restricted frame of the essay. However, it does pave way for future research as it implores the reader to probe deeper into it. While Payel Ghosh offers a critique of the nuances of history when crafted through the lens of nostalgia and what is lost and found in the process of imagining the past in order to recreate within the palette of present, the last essay in this section, that has been penned by Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam focuses on the more crucial off shoot of postcolonial studies, the issue of neo-colonialism which allows the readers a scope of looking at the rapidly transforming cultural and social politics within and beyond the range of literary texts.

The second section of the book, 'Women Writers from Pakistani and Bangladeshi Diaspora: Contemporary Perspectives' comprises of five spectacular essays. Although the first two chapters critique Bapsi Sidhwa's literary works, their points of argument retain their individual readings. While the essay by Shirin Zubair focuses on the colonial representation of the Eastern female in *An American Brat*, Moncy Mathew interrogates the multiple factors that influenced the construct of the Parsi ethnic identity that struggled vis-à-vis the cultural cauldron of Pre-independent India with reference to Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters*. Sonali Maurya in this section offers her examination of 'how one's identity is transformed from historical past to present through language and translation' (8) in reference to Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses*. As her overarching critical tool, she uses Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural translation but somehow fails to comment on the trope of space and time which Shamsie offers in her text. Addressing the issues of Islamic feminism as appropriated in the body of Kamila Shamsie's *Offence: The Muslim Case*, Sania Iqbal Hashmi in her chapter incisively analyses how female writing offers alternative reading of the changing dynamics of 'religious and political ideologies' (139). The next

chapter written by Sidney Shirley takes into account the issue of changing immigrant narratives over the generations by focussing on Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*.

The third section focuses on women writers from the Sri Lankan, Nepalese and Bhutanese diaspora who have been formerly overlooked by mainstream academia. It is within such a gap that Shashikala Muthumal Assella proposes her reading of Nayomi Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* and how it negotiates with the appropriation of separate female identities and voices in dislocated spaces. A fresh attempt at a postcolonial eco-critical reading is devised by Pallabee Dasgupta in this section as she assesses Chandani Lokugé's *Turtle Nest*. Her reading despite acknowledging the connections between the social and environmental justice, however has overlooked an opportunity of commenting on the ecoaesthetics and its much debated link with ecotourism. Tamasha Acharya tracing along the biographical lines of Roma Tearne's has initiated in her essay a beautiful take on immigrant memory and transforming experiences across three generations of Sri Lankan women. A critically crisp reading of Manjushree Thapa's *Tilled Earth* is offered by Khangendra Acharya who implores the readers to engage with the text through content analysis method with special reference to hermeneutical approach. Another text by Manjushree Thapa, *Seasons of Flight*, has been analysed beautifully by Khem Guragain where the author has analysed the challenges of an American dream that affects the immigrants and their aspirations. The last chapter articulated by Nazneen Khan rightfully sums up the third section, bringing forward a thorough critical inquiry of the rising female voice battling patriarchal resistance as developed by Kunzang Choden in *The Circle of Karma* which is also read as a gynofiction. The anthology maintains a steady academic charm and allows the reader to engage with each of the essays. The closure is offered in the final section where a few South Asian writers such as Chandani Lokugé and Manjushree Thapa are interviewed by Sissy Helff and Sally Acharya respectively, where the writers have candidly graced the interviewers and the readers with first hand critical perspectives on their respective works and the experiences that shaped them as authors.

The book indeed offers a magnificent reading of South Asian women writers but also reminds us to take into account the women poets of South Asian diaspora that has been overlooked in this anthology. However, the volume appropriately contextualize the experiences of South Asian Women's literary creations in a rather steady manner, appropriately addressing the multiplicity of themes, inviting a closer reading between the lines as well as the gaps. The anthology offers a new age relevant take on the themes, contexts, patterns and insights offered by select South Asian women writers and at its closure, successfully paves the way for future academic and research endeavours.

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