

Ajay K. Chaubey and Ashvin I. Devasundaram, eds. *South Asian Diasporic Cinema and Theatre: Re-visiting Screen and Stage in the New Millennium*. Jaipur and Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2017. 347 pp. ISBN 978-81-316-0907-1.

South Asian diasporic cinema and theatre in the twenty first century pose new perspectives because of the growing influence of globalisation and the merging or blending of boundaries. Several questions are repeatedly posed, namely how the diaspora perceive and address the domicile, how the model of centre-periphery and outside-inside can be overcome, and how the issues of the South Asian diasporic standpoint can be evaluated from within its area of address, wherever this may be – South Asia, UK, USA or other domains. The perennially contentious question of who represents whom continues to be raised in discourse surrounding ethnic minority representation, particularly in the USA and Britain.

Constituting of seventeen articles divided into four sections, this new anthology claims, according to the editors, to breach extant disciplinary boundaries and thought-provoking rapport with its readers by “forging a cultural studies causeway across the largely reductionist duality of South Asian ‘diasporic’ and ‘domiciled’ visual arts” (x). They believe that while broaching these themes it is crucial not to compartmentalise South Asian cinema and theatre into hermetic blocks, sealed off from each other. Reprinting nine essays which had been published earlier, the remaining essays broach the topic from the perspective of young and established scholars from many parts of the world. Section A titled “Filming South Asian Diaspora: Critical Essays in the New Millennium” is the longest and comprises of seven articles. The essays in this segment ask compelling questions on gender, nation, identity, nostalgia, inter-cultural relations, cultural tourism and film adaptation of canonical texts. In the first essay Sanjena Sathian chronologically explores the development of depictions of females in the Indian diaspora in five major Bollywood films: *Pardes*, *Dihvale Dulhania le Jayenge*, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gam*, *Salaam Namaste* and *Love Aaj Kal*. The increasing number of Bollywood films set in the diaspora can be accounted for raising usually untouchable issues in India like extra-marital affairs, pre-marital sex, casual dating, drinking and homosexuality. Interestingly, most of these films fall back upon the “culture” of the nation in influencing characters’ actions and the values of the films – often it is more a recognition of love for the homeland rather than the imposition of morality by the homeland.

Rekha Sharma in her article on *desi* films examines Indian diasporic films as a vehicle for cultural articulation and debate. She rightfully points out how these films address such broad questions as “Who determines the images of ‘Indianness’ outside of India, especially in a global communication environment?” as well as “How are Indians being portrayed in this global media

environment, and how do those images differ from earlier media portrayals in Indian and Western media?" E. Anna Claydon has contributed two essays in this section on British South Asian cinema. The first essay centres upon the concept of nostalgia as it is represented in three films, namely *Anita and Me*, *East is East* and *Bend it Like Beckham*, which epitomise the way in which contemporary, hybrid, British cinema has tackled issues of diasporic identities and the South Asian diaspora. The second essay is a complementary one to the first and focuses mainly on how America is represented in the works of Gurinder Chadha. The author discusses a discourse on America in Chadha's South Asian identity films and how the perspective upon American identity alters for Chadha in films like *Bhaji on the Beach*, *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Bride and Prejudice*. The next essay is "Bride and Prejudice and the (Post-) National Cinema Debate" by Ana Cristina Mendes who asserts that from the outset, the novelty of Gurinder Chadha's film *Bride and Prejudice* lies in its inclusion of 21st century Indian culture into a British canonical text, *Pride and Prejudice*. This is visible not only in the Bollywood-styled musical interludes but also in issues raised, such as the economics of cultural tourism. Issues like the anxiety in assimilation, and critique of secularism and fundamentalism is highlighted in the next essay where Pragya Shukla studies Hanif Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic* in details. The concluding article of this section is on the Afghan diaspora and it posits that along with identity, the notion of place that the Afghan diasporic community has left behind are strong, deep-rooted and multifaceted factors. In essence, the narrative of the Afghan diaspora is constantly imbued with a sense of belonging to the place where they grew up, the wider country – the *watan* and the nation – the *qawm*. The paper attempts to justify that for the Afghan diasporic community home indicates much more than a house, a village, a town or even their country.

Section B comprises four essays of which two seem to be totally out of place in this anthology as they are not even remotely connected with the South Asian diasporic situation which is the focus of the book. "Bollywood on the Wings of Technology and Its Contribution to Economy: Hundredth Year of Indian Cinema" and "Queer Tropes in Post 1990 Malayalam Cinema" speak about non-related issues. In the first article the author wants to convey the fact that "Bollywood has marketed itself as a diaspora destination riding on the skilled adaptation of ICT technologies and obtained access to foreign techniques, and, has created a pool of skilled manpower to offer their services abroad on competitive rates. The resultant enhanced pleasure of visual presentation from Bollywood has encouraged viewers within the country and abroad to pay increased entrance fee at the box office" (167). The argument by Rajesh James that queer representation in Malayalam cinema was an influence of the west is again not tenable as an argument. Shilpa Daithota Bhat's article "Bollywood Dreams Hand-in-Hand with the Canadian Movie Business: Interplay of Diasporic Cinema with Emotions, Creativity and Money" is self-explanatory. It

investigates the business dimension of this gargantuan industry in the context of Indo-Canadian bilateral association. Analysing some of Deepa Mehta's films and several other movies that have been shot in Canada, the author feels that in the context of the Indian diaspora, Bollywood conceptualises the desire for homeland for a community that has multiple associations. The other article in this section is Subrata Kumar Das's study of Deepa Mehta's *Fire and Water* where women are treated as "subalterns."

Out of the four articles that comprise Section C which speaks about the theatricality of South Asian Diasporic/Indian Theatre, once again one article does not justify its inclusion. Priyam Basu Thakur's "Theatre for Development in Indian Context: An Introspection" is a misfit compared to the other three well-written essays. Nandi Bhatia, in her paper entitled "Diasporic Activism and the Meditations of 'Home': South Asian Voices in Canadian Drama," analyses how the networks between home and spaces of residence in multicultural Canada come alive on theatre stages through visual motifs, actors, props and photographic collages, which confront the different trajectories of "home" that resurface in these plays. The next essay titled "Sharuk and Shylock: The Creation of a South Asian American Aesthetic" by Neilesh Bose examines the landmark play, Shishir Kurup's *Merchant on Venice* and its premiere production in Chicago in 2007, in order to initiate a historical discussion of South Asian American theatre history. The following essay by D. Sudha Rani gives us a detailed overview of plays produced by the South Asian community across the globe, especially in the USA, the UK, Canada and South Africa. The journey of diasporic theatre in the host countries began with the issues related to cultural identity, displacement and their encounters with the host nation and the citizens in the case of those who are first generation writers. In the case of second, third and fourth generation diaspora theatre personalities, the issues are more serious and certainly related to the host nation and dynamically varied but progressing towards the global issues.

The problem with the short last section of the book which contains two articles is that, once again, it has included an article which is prolific about cinema related to the partition of India but is in no way connected to the theme of diaspora. This reviewer is totally at a loss to understand why and how the essay "Partitioned Lives and the Cinematic Quest for Redressal" by Manjinder Kaur Wratch could be included here. The second and the last entry of the anthology is of course relevant. "Do They Want to Turn Partition into a Gilbert and Sullivan Opera?": Performing Partition as Uncanny Farce" by Anindya Raychaudhuri is informative and looks at a group of Anglophone plays that attempt to negotiate the traumatic history of Partition. The playwrights discussed represent different traditions – from canonical British theatre represented by Howard Brenton to avant-garde Indian theatre represented by Mahesh Dattani and Abhijat Joshi to dramatists like Sudha Bhuchar and Kristine Landon-Smith. For the generation of British Asian playwrights who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s and who were

often second generation Asians in Britain, the access to Partition was almost exclusively through their parents. For all these playwrights, negotiating their post-memories of Partition is thus also an important part of coming to terms with their Asian identities.

The objective to include the essays on “Partition” according to the editors is “not only to record the pain, agony, trauma and alienation of transplanted individuals and communities but also to capture the rubric of the nation in its essentialised binary of divided/undivided” (17-18). The problems of forced migration and voluntary emigration are not the same and the editors seem to be confused as to the definition of South Asian diasporic cinema and theatre with films and theatre that emanate from South Asia but is in no way related to the diaspora or its experiences. The title of the book “South Asian Diasporic Cinema and Theatre” and the first sentence at the beginning of the Preface stating that this volume “ushers the scholarly study of South Asian cinema and theatre into the contemporary arena” (ix) therefore do not coalesce. Thus, in my view, either the title of the anthology needs revision or the four essays that are in no way connected to the diasporic experience should be excluded to make the book more appealing and subject specific. The “eclectic and multi-hued anthology” (7) therefore suffers from a sort of dilution that could be avoided.

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