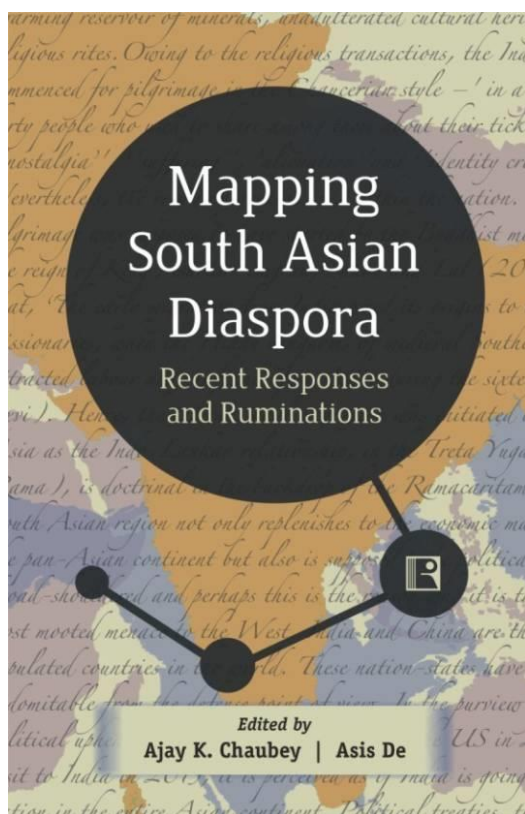


Ajaya K. Chaubey and Asis De, eds. *Mapping South Asian Diaspora: Recent Responses and Ruminations*. Jaipur and Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2018. 296 pp. ISBN 978-81-316-0901-9.



The phenomenal progress of technological modernity has gradually increased the need to reconfigure the notion of identity. Even our sense of belonging demands revisionary perspectives. In today's globalised world, diaspora is being characterized more by routes than by roots. As a result, diasporic identities are now becoming fluid. Moreover, the phenomenon of diaspora is still evolving, and, is, therefore, refusing any fixed definition. Diaspora studies is now preoccupied with the shifting patterns of experiences. In such a context, the publication of *Mapping South Asian Diaspora: Recent Responses and Ruminations*, edited by Ajaya K. Chaubey and Asis De (with a foreword by Emmanuel S. Nelson), is a welcome addition to the corpus of diaspora studies.

In the Introduction to the volume under review, the editors have sketched the evolution of diaspora to facilitate the reader's understanding of the premise

of the book. They claim, “the fast changing socio-economic and cultural scenario due to globalization” (9) has given rise to certain issues in South Asian diasporic context that deserve immediate critical attention. Hence, they feel the need for the publication of a book like this. They refer to some important diaspora theorists, among whom Khachig Tololyan observes that diaspora as “a term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community” (qtd. in Chaubey and De 1). Diaspora, in a way, has now become an umbrella term. In spite of its multiple meanings, diaspora, as the editors assert, is basically concerned with “the issue of human migration from the place of origin to some other transnational locations” (3). In order to offer a theoretical overview of South Asian diaspora, the editors have historically divided it into three phases: “(a) Diaspora in the pre-colonial period, (b) Dislocation and transportation in the colonial period, and (c) Postcolonial Diasporic movement to the West” (4). In the first phase the diasporic movement was voluntary and largely motivated by “trade and religious transactions” (4) while, in the second, it was largely forced and motivated by economic reasons. The diasporic movement in the third phase has become largely voluntary, and motivated by the longing for “a better living and global privileges” (4) and can be regarded mainly as “a postcolonial phenomenon and then, as natural consequence of globalization” (6).

Section A, “Diaspora in Flux: Newer Insights,” exclusively discusses critical responses of Vijaya Mishra, a renowned scholar and critic of Indian origin, to questions regarding the shifting patterns of South Asian Diasporic experiences and the emergence of the newer forms of diasporic imaginary. Dwelling on several important issues related to the old (“egalitarian”) diaspora and the new (“selfish”) diaspora, and the role of the cyber world, he observes that “in the transnational modern Indian diaspora culture is a memory that is commodified, a memory that has now been transformed into different types of items and these items take the form of cinema or YouTube, Skype and the like” (22). He suggests that it is really difficult to “theorize a diaspora which is no longer a diaspora traditionally defined within the semantics of home, absence, trauma, belonging, and loss” (22).

Section B, “Considering Diasporic Literatures of South Asia: Texts and Contexts,” which accommodates eleven essays, makes an attempt to critically explore the literatures of South Asian Diaspora. It opens with the essay “What Diaspora? Whither Diaspora?: Some Random Questions, Answers and Ruminations,” by Somdatta Mandal, a distinguished academic and an expert on Diaspora studies, which deals with the contours of diaspora and focuses on the ever-evolving processes the concept has undergone. She underlines the shifting nature of diaspora studies when she comments, “It seems that the whole branch of diaspora studies is becoming passé and being replaced by studies on

transnationalism” (33). Amritjit Singh, another eminent academic and critic, outlines a theoretical trajectory of the South Asian American experience and critically examines how “the diasporic populations and their ‘Imaginary homelands’ remind us of how culture and identity are reconstituted as they travel to new places” (60). The essay titled “Interrogating Borders in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* and *The Hungry Tide*” by Sharmistha De Dutta also deserves mention as it records the celebration of the cross-border socio-cultural interactions often taking place in defiance of the political border. In fact, it examines how Ghosh “problematizes the concept of borders,” thereby showing that “man-made borders are basically porous” (100). Along similar lines, another essay written jointly by Sulagna Mohanty and Amrita Satapathy, deals with the issue of crossing boundaries and its effect on “the cultural memory of contemporary postcolonial selves” (118) as illustrated in Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth* and *Pouring Rain*. Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam’s essay titled “Of Diaspora and Native Literatures: Reading Benyamin’s *Goat Days*” traces the Indian diasporic experience in the 1990s in the Gulf region and portrays the horrible effects of contemporary neo-colonialism. Actually, it examines the Indian diaspora’s rootlessness as well as its assimilation of the Arab culture in the 1990s in the post-Cold War period. Raj Gaurav Verma in his “Home No/w/here: A Study of Diasporic Dilemma in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*” focuses on the Afghan diaspora in America and critically analyses how nowhere do the diasporic people find their home. However, some other essays in the section critically deal with the issues relating to exile, dislocation, displacement, race, ethnicity and so on.

Section C, “Conversations and Discussions,” covers interviews of some well-known writers and critics. Tabish Khair critically discusses multiple dimensions of diaspora in the contemporary scenario while Murali Kamma’s conversation focuses on the discourse of identity as well as the politics of language. Eminent critics like Somdatta Mandal, Makarand Parajape and Manjit Inder Singh respond to the questions of negotiating identities, the issue of crossing borders and such. In fact, these interviews reveal the shifting patterns of lived experiences especially in South Asian diasporic contexts. It is, however, not clear why Vijaya Mishra’s interview is placed in a single section and not included here.

The four essays included in Section D, “South Asian Diaspora: Interdisciplinary Responses,” have presented the interdisciplinary responses to the issues related to less discussed South Asian diasporic groups. The first essay (a reprint) titled “Reconfiguring Asian Australian Writing: Australia, India and Inez Baranay” by Paul Sharrad deftly deals with the dynamics of Indo-Australian connection. Quite interestingly, it discusses Sharrad’s feeling that “Indian and Australian writers are beginning to wander into each other’s spaces and settle there in increasingly numerous and complex ways” (261). The essay “One Nation,

Two Diasporas: Nepali Migrants and Bhutanese Refugees in the United States” by Lopita Nath is also significant as it critically examines the role that the Nepali diaspora in the US can play in dealing with the Bhutanese refugees who are of ethnic Nepali descent. In fact, the essay seeks to address questions like: “How will these two diasporic communities identify themselves? Can they be clubbed as one community or will they choose to stay different?” (232). Another essay “The Bhutanese Diaspora: A View on History” by Alice Anna Verheij critically examines how the Bhutanese “Lotshampas,” (meaning “people from the south”) found themselves in a state of exile at the hands of the Bhutan government in the 1990s. Violet Cho’s essay “Searching for Home: Explorations in New Media and the Burmese Diaspora in New Zealand” examines the role of new media in addressing the Burmese diasporic identities. The essay also presents the new media as “a source of empowerment for members of diaspora communities... in the public sphere in the host country, their country of origin and across international boundaries” (278-79).

In the last two decades or so, there has been a proliferation of scholarly articles and books on diaspora. The present book evidently enjoys some distinction as it has dealt with some important aspects of diaspora. First, the concept of South Asia has been extended to include Burma (Myanmar) and Afghanistan and indeed, the airtight nomenclature (South Asia) fails to suggest the interactions that go on in the border states where history and lived experiences of bordering nation states have socio-cultural dialogues. Secondly, in South Asian context, India is generally foregrounded, resulting in the marginalisation of the smaller nation-states. This issue is addressed here with the inclusion of articles on Nepalese and Bhutanese diasporas. Thirdly, the book accords some prominence to the Indian labour diaspora in the Gulf in the 1990s – an area that is not much explored. Fourthly, the inclusion of interviews has enriched the volume as the direct responses as well as the personal views of some eminent writers and critics of South Asian origin bring to the fore the nuances of diasporic experiences. Finally, the book not only provides the literary and cultural representations of the changing patterns of South Asian diasporic experiences, but also includes interdisciplinary responses to them. On the whole, the book gives new directions to the South Asian diaspora studies in the context of globalisation.

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