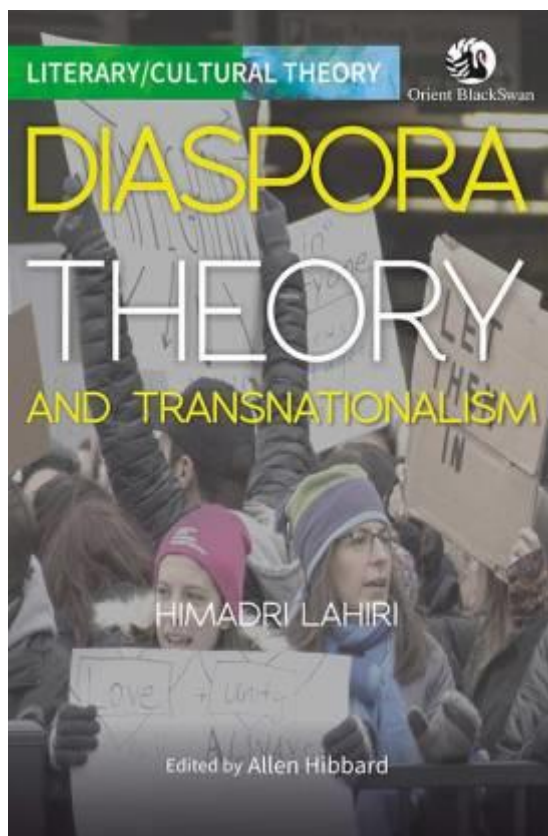


Himadri Lahiri, *Diaspora Theory and Transnationalism*. Ed. Allen Hibbard. *Literary/Cultural Theory*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2019. Pp.172. ISBN 978 93 5287 614 3.



Diaspora Theory and Transnationalism by Himadri Lahiri charts the mutation of a concept that has its origin in the “classical period” and is “[s]oaked... in the spirit of history, politics and religion” of those times down to contemporary understandings of the term as a “theoretical tool to explain certain kinds of dislocations taking place all over the world” (1). The title is indicative of the discursive trajectory of the volume – it delineates the evolution of the idea of diaspora from its originary terminological and historical specificity to how it is presently enmeshed in contemporary global realities that have led to a broadening of the scope of Diaspora Studies. The earlier “migration from one country to another” perspective has now given way to relocations rooted in contemporary global economic flows, political developments and social realities that bring together the terms “diaspora” and “transnationalism,” thus effecting a

perspectival shift in Diaspora Studies from isolatable and discrete experiences to global ones, i.e., from the inter-national to the trans-national.

The size of the volume belies its scope. Well-researched and informative, this slim volume offers a concise introduction to the field in a way that balances the synchronic and diachronic perspectives. The introduction outlines in detail the ways in which the terms diaspora and transnationalism have evolved and have been defined. It starts with tracing a genealogy of the term diaspora and the field of Diaspora Studies from the 1980s through globalisation to present day realities and the imbrication of the idea of transnationalism in it. The book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter focusses on the major diasporic movements by dividing them into three broad phases – classical, early modern and contemporary/late modern. Both early and late modern diasporic movements are discussed with respect to colonial “modernity,” decolonialisation and perspectives on the process of capital formation. The chapter also has a short discussion on evolving ideas of home and homeland. The second chapter, taking off from contemporary ideas of home and homeland, delves into the constitution of the diasporic subject. It offers insights into the dynamic tension between diasporic and nativist identity formations leading to variations in assimilation, acceptance and privileges and at times antagonisms as well. Inter-diasporic variations within apparently similar diasporic subject categories are also suggested. These issues are discussed with respect to generational status, postcolonialism and cultural hybridity, and traditional and contemporary perspectives on citizenship.

The idea of diaspora is implicated/embedded in the transformation of time and space with respect to fast changing global state of affairs which fashion volatile social, economic and political realities as well as technological advances which contribute to them. From the earliest idea of diaspora to present ones, the term develops both in accommodation to and as a critique of these realities, sometimes in consonance with traditional ideas and sometimes in opposition to it. It is also made more complex by variations in class, race and ethnicity, age, gender, religion, sexuality and ability. While class, race and ethnicity and age are issues that have come into the ambit of discussions on diaspora, other intersectional areas are less discussed or often overlooked. Lahiri discusses the diasporic subject from the perspective of both gender and sexuality and religion. The chapter on gender and sexuality discusses how the diasporic subject’s experiences are invariably gendered and how these experiences are intricately connected with race and ethnicity. Sexuality as a structuring feature of diasporic experience is discussed; queer experiences are also touched upon. The chapter on diaspora and religion exemplifies, through textual illustrations, how religion plays out in the diaspora and how it is often different from indigenous religious practices. The chapter highlights the role of religion as a binding force in diasporic locales and how relevant it is as succour, sustenance and as a marker of diasporic

subjectivity. The author highlights another significant issue, one that is insufficiently theorised till date, in the concluding chapter. Drawing upon examples of the Tibetan and Syrian diaspora and the Rohingyas, he points out how technological advances and cyber communication have transformed temporal and spatial dynamics to restructure inter-personal and communal relations by shaping a “postnational world.”

The volume is part of a series of introductions to key concepts in literary and cultural theory titled *Literary/Cultural Theory*. Presumably following the series brief, the author adopts the survey method to give a synoptic view of the field of Diaspora Studies. The survey brings together diverse perspectives on Diaspora Studies articulated by theorists like Sheffer, Safran, Cohen, Vertovec, McLoughlin and Brah on the one hand to Hall, Bhabha and Clifford on the other, to name just a few, illustrating them through references to and discussions on a wide range of creative writing, mainly novels and stories. Lahiri’s volume is also characterised by fresh insights into intersectional areas like the ones discussed in the preceding paragraph. Meant to be an introductory volume, it has two useful features which merit mention. The first is a chapter which familiarises learners with the textual application of key ideas related to diaspora and transnationalism by taking up for analysis Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*. Second, the volume also incorporates a glossary at the end.

An individual or collective’s perception of diaspora is mediated by its own understanding of diasporic situations and of terms like “minority,” “ethnic,” “religion” etc. as well as its responses to them. While there might/will be shared features, there will also be differences in individual or collective responses to different diasporic predicaments and realities. For example, East European, Latin American or African diaspora would be perceived differently in different locations. A volume like the present one, which bases itself largely on Asian experiences and more specifically South Asian ones, therefore contributes to developing an understanding of the term that is more in consonance with a particular region.

On the whole, the volume packs in a wealth of detail and analysis. It is able to offer a clear and insightful introduction to the field and opens up the area to possible new dimensions of inquiry. The book reads well, and the lucidity of presentation is commendable. It is an excellent resource for students and researchers of Diaspora Studies.

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