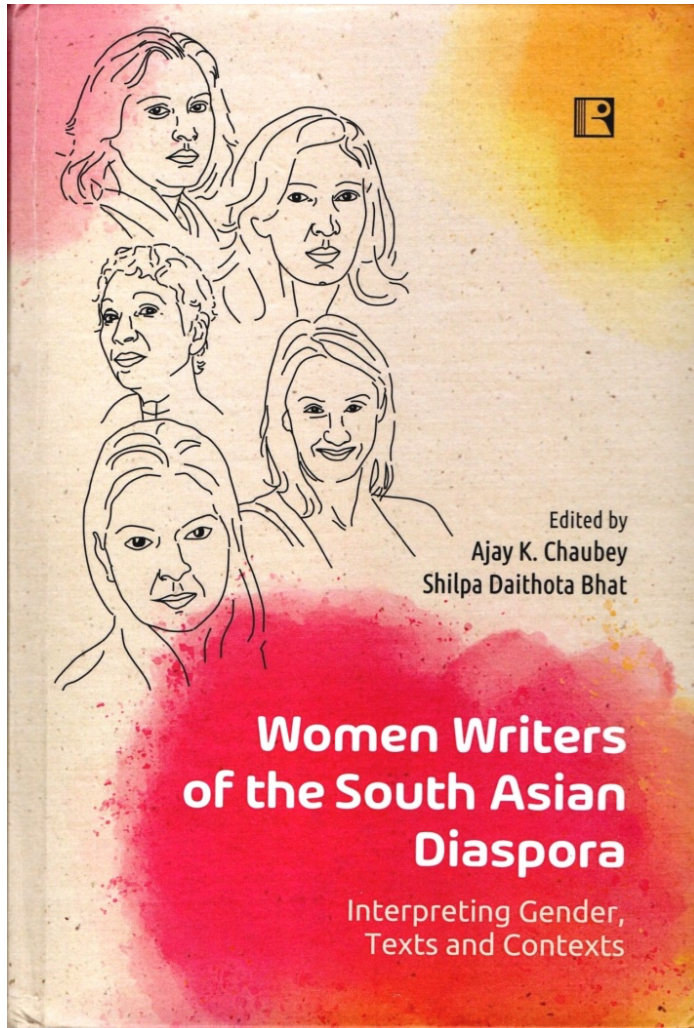


Ajay K. Chaubey and Shilpa Daithota Bhat, eds. *Women Writers of the South Asian Diaspora: Interpreting Gender, Texts and Contexts*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2020. xx+244 pp. ISBN 978-81-316-1059-6.



Women in general receive a marginal treatment despite the call for their empowerment and the insistence on equality with men. They are denied the space they deserve alongside men in social, political, and economic spheres. The

perspectives of women are often undermined, as the domain of knowledge is still considered a male prerogative. Patriarchy still remains operative in some way or other, relegating women to peripheral positions. Despite patriarchal opposition and treatment based on gender, many women writers strive to make their voices heard and struggle to carve their niche in the literary and cultural terrain. The publication of *Women Writers of the South Asian Diaspora: Interpreting Gender, Texts and Contexts* is a significant effort in the direction of according women their rightful space.

In the introduction to the volume under review, the editors Ajay K. Chaubey and Shilpa Daithota Bhat have presented a historical overview of how women characters are portrayed in the literary works of male writers. They have also shown how the perspectives of women writers remain mostly ignored. In Western diasporic spaces, women writers experience greater marginalisation and discrimination than their male counterparts for reasons of gender, race, and ethnicity. The Asian diasporic writers generally receive such treatment because the West still has an Orientalist attitude to the East, tending to underestimate the latter's body of knowledge. The editors have painstakingly surveyed the existing body of literature on the South Asian diaspora and found that unlike diasporic women writers from the countries such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, those from underdeveloped countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, and others have not received sufficient critical attention. So, quite justifiably, they have come up with essays to bring to light diasporic women writers whose origin lies in different parts of South Asia. In this sense, the volume is inclusive in some way.

Dividing the volume into four sections, the editors have tried to present the phenomenon of the South Asian diaspora in an organised way. In Section A, they have included five essays that offer a critique of transnationalism. Monalisa Saikia's and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar's essay on Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride* (2004) shows how the protagonist in her immigrant journey as a cultural citizen seeks to transcend national borders in this globalised world with a view to negotiating "the overpowering tugs of nostalgia and the alienation of the new culture" (43). Besides, this essay deals with how the neo-Orientalist tendencies often surface in the West's treatment of Third World people living in First World metropolises. It is important to note that two of the five essays offer critical perspectives on two women writers from north-east India. Payel Ghosh's essay "Nationhood, Identity and Violence in Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood*," for example, pays critical attention to Easterine Kire, an Indian

woman writer falling under the category of victim diaspora. Ghosh presents how the people of Nagaland, as Kire shows, are left traumatised when they are victimised by the Indian state apparatuses that perpetrate violence in the name of nation-building in post-independence India. Besides, Ghosh attempts to see how Kire problematises the idea of homeland which in her case is Nagaland. The last essay in this section, “Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*: Encounters with Neo-Colonialism” by Rositta Joseph Viliyamattam shows how Kiran Desai offers her perspectives on the ways the Indians encounter challenges like neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism.

Section B of the volume presents five essays that offer critical perspectives on some Pakistani and Bangladeshi diasporic women writers, namely Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsi, and Monica Ali. Shirin Zubair’s essay, “Opening Up New Spaces: Arrival Motif in Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*” presents how Sidhwa “not only contests colonial representations of third-world women but also transcends the traditional definitions of Eastern femininities” (101). The essay also examines how the (im)migrant identity of Sidhwa’s hero “is still a work in progress which lands her into new discursive spaces” (101). Another essay, “Ethnic identity and Multiculturalism in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *The Crow Eaters*” by Moncy Mathew focuses on the multiple factors mediating the formation of Parsi ethnic identity in the multicultural milieu of India before and after independence. Sania Iqbal Hashmi’s essay, “Islamic Feminism in the Time of Terror: Reading Kamila Shamsie’s *Offence: The Muslim Case*” presents an alternative reading of religio-political ideologies in the context of Pakistan through the lens of *écriture féminine*. The essay also argues “how belonging-without-belonging to Pakistan while living in London highlights the politics of locatedness in the globalized world of the twenty-first century” (140). The last essay in the section, “Alienation and Acculturation in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*” by Sidney Shirley examines how the first generation of immigrants finds it difficult to acculturate whereas the second generation of immigrants does so quite easily.

The six essays in Section C present an overview of some women writers from Sri Lankan, Nepalese, and Bhutanese diasporas. The section opens with Shashikala Muthumal Assella’s essay on the Sri Lankan American woman writer Nayomi Munaweera’s *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (2012) where she presents a critical reading of how in this women-centered narrative the female protagonists in the diaspora space form identities that are mediated by class, gender, ethnicity, and religion. Pallabee Dasgupta presents a postcolonial eco-critical

study of Chandani Lokuge's *Turtle Nest* (2003) to show how the West-centric idea of tourism entails gender and environment politics. Khem Guragain's "Home, Belonging and Diaspora: Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* and Nepali Identity Conflated with Indianness" examines the American Dream of freedom and also shows how Thapa's protagonist is caught between the clashes of two cultures – Nepali and American. Nazneen Khan's "Resisting Patriarchal Hegemony: Reading Kunzang Choden's *The Circle of Karma*" critically explores how the woman protagonist progresses from a traditional conservative woman to a modern woman in her quest for identity. Khan also explores how the novelist subverts the patriarchal notion of a single unified woman and upholds the plurality of the female voice.

Section D lends some distinction to the volume by covering interviews of two women writers Chandani Lokuge, a well-known Sri Lankan diasporic woman writer, and Manjushree Thapa, a Nepali diasporic woman writer. In her interview with Sissy Helff, while depicting her journey from Sri Lanka to Australia, Lokuge touches on the aesthetics of Bollywood cinema and Bhangra music. Manjushree Thapa, on the other hand, in her interview with Sally Acharya recounts her journey from Nepal to the United States and at the same time, she expresses her literary and political views on contemporary Nepali politics. Such interviews express authentic voices, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the socio-political realities of Sri Lanka and Nepal in a diasporic context.

All the four sections of the volume are well-integrated. It deserves much critical acclaim for various reasons. Most importantly, it counters the politics of exclusion by offering a challenge to the literary canon which is considered to be a male bastion. It is worth mentioning that while critically exploring South Asian diasporic women writers, this volume accords importance to the diasporic women writers from the margins. It addresses women writers from the north-east region of India as well as from Nepal, Bhutan, and other smaller nation-states that remain much neglected in the discussion of the South Asian diaspora. One should note that the volume extends the corpus of South Asian diaspora studies by including a critical essay on a woman writer from the Afghan diaspora.

Some errors, mostly of typographical nature, in the book have become an eyesore to readers. However, this book is a valuable addition to the existing corpus of South Asian diaspora studies. The contributors, the editors, and the

publisher deserve thanks for presenting students, scholars, and teachers with such a critically enriching and stimulating book.

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