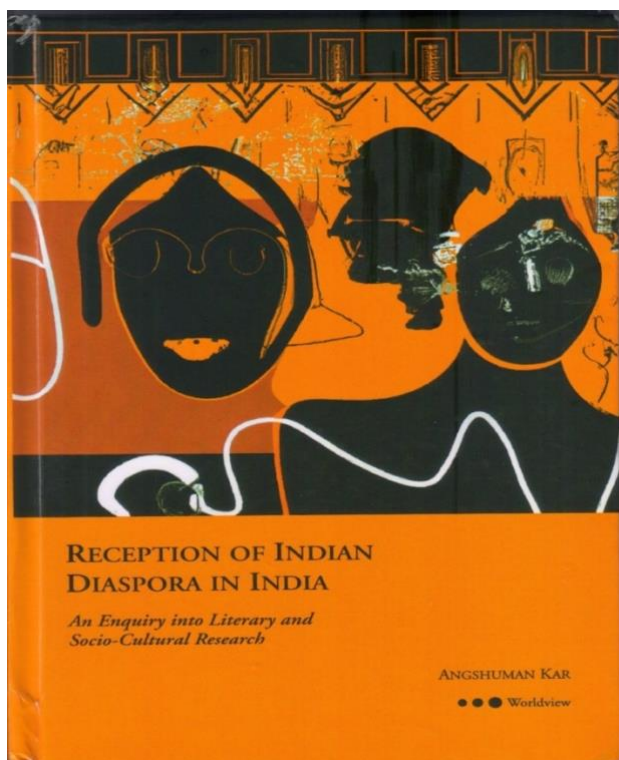


Angshuman Kar, *Reception of Indian Diaspora in India: An Enquiry into Literary and Socio-Cultural Research*. Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2022. i-vi+233 pp. ISBN: 978-93-82267-97-3



Research works based on interview data are now becoming more relevant to studies conducted in the areas of social science and humanities. In their essay, “Inside Interviewing, New Lenses, New Concerns”, James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium discuss the “interactional” (3) aspect of interviewing while emphasising the fact that an interview is “a site of, and occasion for, producing knowledge” (4). Interview data is produced through a process of collaboration of different subjects engaged in the act of discussing issues associated with a particular topic of research. Angshuman Kar’s book, *Reception of Indian Diaspora in India: An Enquiry into Literary and Socio-Cultural Research* makes a unique attempt to use interview data for discussing a vast range of ideas which are pertinent to the contemporary Indian diaspora. This book, which is the outcome of a UGC major research project undertaken by Kar, places at the centre of its structure the interviews which were chiefly taken during conducting the project. Before writing

this book, Kar took more interviews and updated the data of the earlier interviews by providing a scope to the interviewees to revise their responses. Thus, the foundation of this entire book is based on the collected data, which indeed has shaped Kar's critical insights into the field of his study. Such a critical piece of work in diaspora studies is an excellent effort as the method of capturing the essence of 'reception' of the Indian diaspora is embedded in the idea of a dialogic mechanism where the mind of the author collaborates with the minds of the respondents (interviewees).

This book contains two sections. Part I includes four critical chapters, which define the theoretical, historical, sociological, and literary aspects of the contemporary Indian diaspora, and Part II consists of twenty-two interviews followed by a chapter that makes a qualitative assessment of the responses of the interviewees. In the first chapter of the book, Kar provides a brief review of the important critical discourses on diaspora while underscoring the complex notion of 'home' in diaspora theory. Perspectives on generation, gender, class, religion, and language, according to the author, have become much more nuanced in recent diaspora studies.

Kar discusses the recent developments in the field of diaspora studies in the second chapter which explains the significance of "diaspora space" in theoretical discussions on Indian diasporic texts, and it also elucidates briefly some of the emerging terms in the domain of diaspora study: "internal diaspora", "partition diaspora", "digital diaspora" and "return diaspora". Apart from the notion of "diaspora space", which Kar believes has been undermined in the critical trajectory of diaspora criticism, he explains other terms that require special attention. While logically establishing the validity of these terms, Kar passionately argues in favour of using them in critical discourses. He is aware of the debates centred on the use of the term "internal diaspora", and to justify its usage he refers to William Safran who has used it to amplify the affective dimension of a community's psychological dissociation from a nation state and simultaneous connection with another country (36). Such cases of affective bonding with an imagined nation may occur in some communities to make subjects of a particular group feel internally displaced within a nation space. In fact, Kar refers to the interviews of Himadri Lahiri and Jasbir Jain, in which, both reject the use of the term "internal diaspora" in critical parlance. While Jain feels that this term has been misused because it promotes "parochial and divisionary" (85) attitude, Lahiri objects to its use because of its disregard of the fundamental aspect of 'diaspora,' that is, "the experience of living *outside the country or nation*" (114).

Apart from Jain and Lahiri, Somdatta Mandal, Anirban Bhattacharya, and Saptaparni Chowdhury (three other interviewees) have also expressed their anxieties about the use of this term. Bhattacharya echoes Lahiri's thought on "internal diaspora" when he observes that in a multicultural country such as India, migration within a nation may make some natives feel culturally displaced but

“they are still Indian and protected by the same law and fundamental rights that bound the natives” (155). The interviews are therefore replete with such contesting notions and the author has engaged in a logical debate with the interviewees to validate his perspectives. This phenomenon, the reviewer feels, is a noteworthy aspect of this book as the debates do not reach a point of closure, they enable a reader to rethink, reconsider, and revise opinions.

The third chapter presents an overview of the history, sociology, and polity of the Indian diaspora. This chapter, rich in terms of critical references, seeks to discuss the perspectives of important critics and how they have interrogated issues of class, caste, gender, and religion. Kar has critically assessed three novels in the context of the 9/11 event in the fourth chapter of the book. These novels, Marina Budhos’s *Ask Me No Questions*, Kazim Ali’s *The Disappearance of Seth*, and Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission*, according to Kar, narrativise the post-9/11 experience of the ‘South Asians/Southeast Asians’ immigrants in the US to foreground the “racialised fabric of the nation” (58-59). Kar’s critical perspective on these novels reflects his sensitive approach to the impact of 9/11 on the members of the South Asian community in the US.

Interview data in the second section of the book is divided into two groups. In the first group, interviews of renowned diaspora critics, research scholars working on diaspora studies, and students interested in reading diasporic literature have been placed. The respondents, in each case, reply to a set of questions which are contextually connected to the problematic ideas about and critical issues of diaspora studies. Kar elicits a wide variety of responses to decipher the perspectives of the interviewees on some problematic issues such as the identity of a diasporic writer, the definition of a diasporic writer, the contribution of a *bhasa* writer to the diasporic fiction, the use of the term “internal diaspora” and the dynamic of the production and consumption of diasporic literary texts. This process of negotiating with the responses of academic critics/scholars to generate a set of perspectives on the contemporary Indian diaspora is indeed a wonderful mode of writing criticism.

In a very subtle manner, Kar has discussed some ethical issues related to the role of an Indian academic in disseminating ideas about Indian diasporic writers and their literary texts. He argues that “market” forces, along with the media, influence the “production and consumption of the fiction written by Indian diasporic authors” (217). In such a scenario, the author suggests that academics, instead of becoming a participant in the process of “production and consumption” of diasporic texts, must use their discretion to teach texts or write on such issues which contain experiential knowledge (219-220). The interview data of the Directors of the different Centres for Diaspora Studies have been placed in the second group of this section. Kar examines the responses of these officially appointed directors to grasp the difficulties associated with the independent functioning of government sponsored research centres. Though

these centres are involved in conducting “interdisciplinary” research work (221), the data collected by these institutes is under the surveillance of government (222).

This book is indeed a welcome addition to the corpus of Indian diaspora criticism. Engaged in a dialogic order of thought process, Kar’s text expresses the anxieties of an academic caught in the web of ideas that are problematic in their ideational construct. The questions of accommodating new forms of diaspora such as “internal diaspora”, “return diaspora,” and “partition diaspora” into diaspora studies has been examined carefully by the author. This book will be immensely appreciated by research scholars and academics, as it provides a ready reference to a wide range of theoretical ideas.

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