

■ Book Review ■

***Contemporary Diasporic South Asian Women's Fiction:
Gender, Narration and Globalisation***

Ruvani Ranasinha. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 286 pages

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Contemporary Diasporic South Asian Women's Fiction: Gender, Narration and Globalisation is Ruvani Ranasinha's new book that focuses on the topics of migration and diaspora and also provides a significant re-evaluation of South Asian female writers, combining readings of famous figures such as Kamila Shamsie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and Monica Ali along with less familiar names like Tahmima Anam, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Sorayya Khan. It is a brilliant attempt to draw attention to some new angles of gender, narration, and globalization of the "post-migration" generation of diasporic female writers from other regions of the UK outside London and to a broader canvas of contemporary South Asian novelists in the post-colonial milieu. This book identifies the new aspects of the boundary of diaspora and the vast effects of globalization (previously known as economic boundaries) and examines selected authors of the new generation who ascended in the wake of established diasporic writers like Arundhati Roy. Ranasinha argues about the nature of the complexity of "Re-Orientalising" which is not found in their peer South Asian female writers. The author helpfully situates South Asian female writers' migration to the UK and their contemporary migration discourses which have become increasingly virile and xenophobic in recent decades. Hence, this book claims to be a new approach to the reading of contemporary diasporic women's fiction that is different from the traditional postcolonial reading. The writer's focus is on the diasporic writers of subcontinental countries other than India because she feels that India is very much the center of focus and other sub-continental writers are not given enough attention. The author explores the Pakistani female writers in the context of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) presence, Sri Lankan writers in the wake of the elimination of the Tamil Nadu movement, and Bangladeshi writers for the obvious reason of that locality.

Ranasinha focuses on the new female writers from the world of the diaspora

who write freely, uninfluenced by critically commended male writers or colonial manipulation because the hegemony of the male writers in this context has been challenged by the constellation of diasporic South Asian Anglophone female writers who have created a niche of their own narratives. Moreover, these female writers incorporate diverse, significant, and worldwide social, cultural, religious, and diasporic issues, as well as issues of globalization and migration, by making them a part of the history of anti-migrant sentiments, laws, and regulatory observance in the UK.

This reader-friendly book is divided into six chapters; all the key concepts and the relevance of selected authors are clearly explained in the introductory chapter. The remaining five chapters represent different authors. The second chapter revolves around the concept of globalization, labor, and narrative as presented in the writings of Arundhati Roy, Monica Ali, and Kiran Desai. The post-migration texts of these writers give a complex glimpse of globalization with the amalgamation of the colors of the subcontinent's culture. The third chapter includes a close study of the novels by Tahmima Anam and Sorayya Khan, and of Sri Lankan female writers. This section of the book traces the footprints of war and violence and their echoes in memory.

In the next section, Ruvani examines the matrix of Islam and gender through the texts of Kamila Shamsie, Tahmima Anam, Monica Ali, and Ameena Hussein. She attempts to discover the overlapping values of secularism and religion in their novels and their common concerns and "responses to faith and politicized, gendered, global Muslim identities" (p. 131) by tracing the decline of secularism in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Through the analysis of these writers' fiction, Ruvani highlights their reconfiguration of the gendered notion of Islam and emphasizes the necessity for "an alternative framework to consider Muslim women beyond the totalizing conceptual categories of both Islam and feminism" (p. 171). Hence, Ruvani considers these contemporary Asian women authors to be the negotiators of secular feminism in the context of the nexus between the representations of Muslims and gender and Euro-American secularism in their writings. Moreover, Ruvani concludes this section by elaborating Shamsie's and Anam's fictions, which deal with various discussions about Islam and secularism as a political vigor and the distinct constitutional forms of Islamic identity in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The fifth chapter, captivatingly, is devoted to a discussion and analyses of the texts of Jhumpa Lahiri, a well-known female novelist of Sri Lankan origin. Her writings represent most of the female subjectivities in the context of gendered migration which have been expanded on for generations. Ruvani comprehensively

delineates Lahiri's narratives along with the inclusion of gender and class rights and the nature of complexities during migration and in the post-migration milieu. In so doing, she shows how the construction of national and gender identities have been refigured inside the contemporary transnational perspectives of globalization and immigration. However, the final section gives a sharp comparison of the representation of the city space and the complex analogies of post-colonialist feminine urban geography in contemporary diasporic South Asian women's fiction. Ruvani's focus is to highlight how the body of fictional works deals with the geographic multi-localities of its writers, countering nationalist notions as well as national geographies.

All in all, Ruvani Ranasinha's book is of unique importance as it offers new perspectives on the aspects of post-colonialism, opening up new possibilities of meaning in the texts of a post-migration generation of female writers. It is an important addition to the scholarship on the South Asian female diaspora and migration literature, as well as deconstructively elaborates key concepts such as post-colonial cosmopolitanism, globalization, and postcolonial feminist ideas.

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