

Juan Ignacio Oliva-Cruz, Antonia Navarro-Tejero and Jorge Diego Sánchez. *Revolving Around India(s): Alternative Images, Emerging Perspectives*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020. Pp. 313. £64.99. ISBN: 9781527545243.

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India is far more than a geopolitical state, a postcolonial nation (with a so-called democracy that was born after Partition in 1947) or an amalgam of cultural and socioeconomic puzzles. Xavier Batalla argues that “India contains many Indias” (3; our translation) and Arundhati Roy has recently proclaimed that a “shadow world is creeping up on [India and Indians] in broad daylight.” The scholarship on Indian Studies and its diaspora has been valedictorian, dissident or ambivalent on some of the related issues that cripple in the many Indian realities: poverty, bad governance, caste discrimination, advance of religious totalitarianisms and the reenactment of epics to disseminate specific ideals. *Revolving Around India(s): Alternative Images, Emerging Perspectives* advances numerous perspectives on the multiplicity of Indian cultures and focuses on its literatures, whether in English or in the vernacular languages.

The volume focuses on the multiform voices of Indian traditions and on its rereading of the diasporas, showing the way in which the roots from the past collide with cultural constructs such as gender, caste, and the religions of contemporary India. This book elucidates the diversity of heritage and different ethnicities with their religious pluralism: Hindu, Brahman, Muslim, Sikh and Christian. It also analyzes various contemporary as well as ancient texts, intending to “embrace the plurality of the Subcontinent,” and it seeks to disarticulate the “unitary concept” of Indian tradition (1). Authors offer panoramic research of the texts interweaving their alternative images with Indian socio-political studies and their transnational counterparts.

Revolving Around India(s): Alternative Images, Emerging Perspectives contains three parts that reveal insights into today’s Indian realities in which the past and the present coexist. The references are provided at the end of each chapter. The first section, “Revolving Around Tradition(s),” displays the diversity of India’s heritage. The texts discussed in this part are divided into those revealing the historical past: “Religious Pluralism in Bengal: A Historical Perspective” by Abdul Momin Chowdhury, “The History and



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Political Governance of the Reservation Policy in India” by Jaysshree Singh and “Christianity in Early Northwest India” by Simi Malhotra. Another group, including “Subjugated Knowledges, Emergent Voices” by Meenakshi Malhotra and “Retelling Experiences: Myths from the *Mahabharata*” by S. Asha, mediates upon ancient Indian myths. The last two chapters examine the intertextuality of Kalyan Ray’s novel *Eastwards* and Tamasha’s Bollywood adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* (2009).

The editors have decided to start the first section with a survey on syncretism among the diverse religious backgrounds that have shaped the many consciousnesses of India. Pre-Brahmanic cultures, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity or British colonization have all led to “an attitude of accommodation” that became a bridge to the past (13). Two central epics of Indian culture —*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*— that are usually viewed as the source of meaning and of the cultural imaginary, were analyzed from a gendered perspective with a specific focus on the figure of women and their sociocultural construct in dependence on the political powers, religious institutions and educational attainment.

The north-western Indian “cultures of patriarchy” as well as norms and codes in society are depicted through the saga of the *Ramayana* (40). On the one hand, in Chandrabati’s epics, the wife is presented as a perfect role model honoring her duties in the family. Through her writings, Meenakshi Malhotra has contributed to the awakening of a feminist trend which is shared by many other authors. The author notes the differences in other versions of the *Ramayana* where the wife is seen as an object, submissive to the role to which she has to conform and which moulds a society based on patriarchal attitudes. According to Malhotra, the application of contemporary viewpoints to the analysis of epics “infuses fresh life into them” (47). Castes, social status, politics, gender and the man’s role are many other important aspects addressed by Malhotra in “Subjugated Knowledges, Emergent Voices.” The retelling of myths in Indian culture has allowed women writers to question men’s behavior and to put forward societal issues in India such as the role of the woman. The different characters of the epics offer many interpretations on the individuals’ status in a patriarchal society. That is why Malhotra in her article insists that narrow readings only reify and diminish the epics while new interpretations help recreate them.

The first section concludes with Laura Viñas Valle and Blanca M. Lara González’s research on the Bollywood adaptation of English classics, such as *Wuthering Heights*. Tamasha’s play successfully mingles different worlds of east and west in one piece of art, advancing a new reading of Emily Bronte’s

novel which “engages with another culture’s values and myths and attempts to build bridges between different cultural backgrounds” (85). Tamasha’s version of Brontë’s novel includes different aspects of India’s culture: Pushkar Camel races, Rajasthan culture, Hindu names, etc. This cross-cultural work is described as an “attempt at ‘Indianizing’ an English literary work” and “Bollywoodizing Western cultural artifacts” (80–81). The transposition of *Wuthering Heights* fosters different cultural values and new identities in Indian literature.

Thus, introducing in the last chapter the concepts of “diaspora,” “diversity,” and “hybridity,” the editors delicately lead us to the second part of the book in which the focus shifts from so-called ancient Indian traditions to the way in which they are reread and re-interpreted by the diaspora. In the second section, “Revolving Around Distances(s),” the authors gradually elaborate on the notion of hybridity through the prism of a new identity and illustrate such principal concepts as distance, ethnic community, postcolonial anxieties, “third space,” and dislocation.

Uma Parameswaran’s “Forty-Five Years of Diasporic Life and Writings,” Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Sujata Bhatt’s collection *The Stinking Rose*, Gosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, Rohinton Mistry’s works and Chaya Parmessur’s narratives are scrutinized in this section to show a new image of India. Chapter eight introduces the reader to the Indo-Canadian diaspora. After explaining the five stages immigrants go through, the author turns to literature and suggests four different approaches to analyze the works of Indian writers in the diaspora. Uma Parameswaran focuses on the emerging writers of the second generation of the Indo-Canadian diaspora, Rajni Mala Khelawan, Gurjinder Basran and Ranj Dhaliwal, and approaches their works from the interdisciplinary perspective, analyzing not only literary but also political and sociological areas.

Juan Ignacio Oliva Cruz and Luz González analyze in their article Rohinton Mistry’s fiction, *Family Matters* (2002) and *Such a Long Journey* (1991). They explain how Rohinton Mistry constructs the sense of in-betweenness — as previously quoted “third space” — experienced by the Parsi diaspora. The authors believe that turning back to their roots and being part of the ethnic community can save immigrants from postcolonial anxieties.

The authors of the following chapter, “Divided Nation: Dislocation and Relocation,” study Intizar Husain’s *An Unwritten Epic* (1994) and Jamila Hashmi’s short story *Exile* (1994) as an example of partition narratives. They present another tragedy and how that has led millions of Indians to an identity crisis. This “cross-border migration” in 1947 remains a big trauma in the

memories of people (148). The pain, suffering, and violence experienced because of partition produced a sense of non-belonging, loss, and resulted in dislocation. According to such scholars as Ritu Menon, Urvashi Butalia, and Kamla Bhasin, women's trauma of partition was twice as hard, since women lost not only their homes and communities but their bodies as well: "Their bodies were the terrain on which religious boundaries were drawn" (153). This chapter also includes "stories of relocation" in which, despite the violent times, humanity and consciousness survive in human souls as in Attia Husain's *After the Storm*, and in Lalithambika Antharjanam's *A Leaf in the Storm*. The second part of "Revolving Around India(s)" ends with a considerable discussion on the understanding of identities that emerged from shared immigrant experiences in a globalized world.

Part three, "Revolving Around Difference(s)," is concerned with the analysis of the postcolonial concepts that compose Indian contemporary culture. Therefore, several topics are highlighted: immigrant psyche, sexuality and gender issues, religion, and the concept of resilience. The first chapter of this section describes in detail how double consciousness is reflected in postcolonial literature. Cultural schizophrenia is explained as the existence of beliefs and social norms of the native culture of a person who lives in another culture. Life among different cultures with different social orders results in a fragmented self. According to the authors, intercultural dialogue is needed to overcome cultural schizophrenia and self-division. Immigrant psyche affects the language and leitmotifs of Indian women writers, who are overwhelmed by feelings of disorientation, a sense of non-belonging, nostalgia, loss, and anxiety. Indian women writers are divided here into two groups, those feeling and expressing dislocation and fragmentation (Himani Bannerji, Surjeet Kalsey, Meena Alexander, Sherazad Jamal), and those expressing an optimistic view and defending assimilation (Uma Parameswaran and Bharati Mukherjee).

In their journey towards self-identity, Indian authors have linked time and location through literature with the characters of Alice, from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, and Narcissus, from *Through the Looking Glass*. Indeed, places, spaces and time shape their identity which is constructed by nation and home. Boundaries move when one crosses his/her current identity border, conducive to hybridity. Both the migrant and the host country have to adapt to a tremendous change.

However, identity is questioned in the case of social dislocation in the host country. This is the case for Jamal who, in her writings, has to undergo a class change and social injustices when she emigrates with her family to

Canada. The notion of “double colonization” describes the way in which women with colored skin have to live in societies ruled by men, and have to suffer forms of racism in their new country (206). Jamal has to confront racism and rejection from others. However, later she has to undergo a new change when she takes a step back on her situation and decides to accept that she has to stay with people like her. Migrants struggle to find a new home and sever their ties from their original homes —hence the feeling of homesickness. Belonging to a group is, therefore, the only way for migrants to create a new identity.

Another topic discussed in depth is gender identity in India and its disruption by western modernity. The authors explain to us the concept of the “third gender,” presenting Amara Das Wilhelm’s closely investigated work *Tritiya Prakriti: People of the Third Sex* (2003), in which he argues that there is an allusion to the “third sex” in the *Vedas* (228). Some western societies nowadays struggle to recognize this idea of a third gender category, where there is a tendency to think throughout a binary categorization of masculinity and femininity that, at the same time, views homosexuality as unnatural and illegal. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri unveils the way in which Mahesh Dattani, an Indian playwright, introduces the figures from the third category in his plays so as to question such categorizations. His plays focus on Indian middle-class issues and are written in English. The majority of his plays consider sexuality, especially gay and transsexual, homosexual, lesbian, and bisexual orientations. The plays scrutinized in Chaudhuri’s chapter are *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Dance Like a Man*, *Do the Needful*, *Tara*, and *Seven Steps around the Fire*. Analyzing Dattani’s plays, Chaudhuri explores the concept of gender identity in India and re-articulates the idea of binary gender.

The book concludes with an analysis of Meena Kandasamy’s novel *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) by Jorge Diego Sánchez. He studies how the novel contains many themes such as social exclusion, politics and economics, marginalization, caste annihilation, and censorship on Indian media. He underlines that Kandasamy employs different narrative techniques to uncover “socio-political structures of power behind the massacre” in Kilvenmani in 1968 (284). To create the space for unheard victims of this event to tell their stories, Kandasamy herself collected the real testimonies of survivors. Diego Sánchez applies the term “resilience” while analyzing this novel. He explains that the characters in this book illustrate progressive resilience, which stimulates revision and alterations of Indian structures of power. The volume closes with an appendix, by Uma Pareswaran, listing Indo-Canadian writers.

Thus, the argument of this book is perfectly presented in its title *Revolving Around India(s): Alternative Images, Emerging Perspectives*. This book represents a new and valuable contribution to gender, cultural, and social studies. It offers the readers a better understanding of Indian society which is divided by the caste system and subject to social and racial discrimination. The education system is eroded by corruption and an exclusive fee system which deny access for the middle class to good-quality education. Institutional changes are needed. This book shows how Indian identity has had to face many challenges such as colonization, division of classes, racism, etc. It leaves its identity imprint in literature, cinema, and theatre, and is disseminated by the diaspora of Indian men and women around the world. Indian women's conditions and caste discrimination need many improvements. Women have to adapt and survive in a patriarchal society. Their voices can be heard through their myths and stories and their testimonies are anchored in history.

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