

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY INSIGHT INTO THE LITERATURE IN EXILE OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT. CRANE, RALPH J. and RADHIKA MOHANRAM, eds. *Shifting Continents/ Colliding Cultures: Diaspora Writing of the Indian Subcontinent*. Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000. 262 pp.

Throughout the thirteen essays (plus an introduction and an afterword) that form this critical piece, both the specialised researcher and the general reader can find a lucid, profound portrayal of many of the different dilemmas and currents of thought which intersect at the crossroads of postcolonial, gender and (trans)cultural studies related to diasporic writing from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. As the editors explain in the introduction (Crane and Mohanram vii), the book originates as a response to a particular theme which originated at the tenth triennial conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS), which took place in Sri Lanka in August 1995. This theme, the problematic resulting from the usage of terms like 'diaspora' and 'exile', and the various understandings of these terms, centered particularly on "whether these terms should be reserved for the historical specificity of struggles within the context of nation and citizenship, or whether they could be extended to the writing of literatures or used to describe migrancy which comes out of privilege." (Crane and Mohanram vii).

The book proves to attempt to solve this dilemma at large. Despite existing the possibility of dividing the topics of the different authors into greater areas (such as diaspora and gender, or South Asian identity and cinema, to name just two) virtually every essay touches upon the intersections of class, gender and race in South Asian diaspora writing, and aim at a more complete picture than is often achieved, with an emphasis on the relation between migrancy and identity. Thus Ralph J. Crane explores the issue of dislocation in Leena Dhingra's *Amritvela*. The impossibility of finding a home neither in Britain nor in India —of escaping the very notion of migrancy itself— is interpreted by Crane as the very source for solving the dilemma: being trapped between two

worlds, the character needs to build a new, hybrid identity for herself; one which "can contain all her Indias (past, present and future) and all her Britains, too" (14). This constitutes, as the author points out, nothing less than a "diasporic identity" (16).

Another of the topics which the book deals with is the relation between gender and diaspora. Susheila Nasta offers in this respect a deeply interesting essay entitled "Home Without Walls: New Voices in South Asian writing in Britain", which not only provides us with a revealing overview of the evolution of South Asian writing in Britain in the last decades of the twentieth century, but points as well at the multiplicity of South Asian diaspora writing and the impossibility of ignoring the diversity characterizing the experiences of the different cultural groups that are commonly referred to under the one denomination of "South Asian."

A dazzling, and particularly compelling article is offered by Radhika Mohanram under the promising title "Postcoloniality and the Canon: Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*". Mohanram, explaining the novel's position as the genre that responds to the universalizing aim of the modern era, builds up a brilliant comparative analysis of Mukherjee's aforementioned novel and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. She proposes an understanding of the intertextuality of Mukherjee's text as the author's re-writing of the relation between postcolonial literature(s) and the canon, shifting the model of postcolonial literature from the U.S. to postcolonial subcontinental India. In a real *tour de force*, Mohanram beautifully asserts that "The formation and modernity of a nation can be articulated only by the simultaneous evocation and erasure of the past" (Mohanram 179).

Therefore, the idea of difference stands as well at the core of this collection of essays, as it is demonstrated as well by R. Raj Rao's reading of Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, which gives a clear overview of the book and some of its deepest concerns, like the depiction of the development of the protagonist's sexual self in riot-ridden Sri Lanka or the portrayal of a youth's victory over institutional abuse. The list of contributors is completed by Chandani Lokugé,

Satendra Nandan, Nilufer E. Bharucha, Deb-
jani Ganguly, C. Vijayasree, Zores T. Sullivan,
Susan Spearey, Jane Roscoe and Isabel Santaola-
lla. Undoubtely, a great choice for the investi-

gator in the field of South Asian postcolonial
studies.

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