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Yasmin Hussain. *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. Pp. 148 ISBN: 9780754641131

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The book *Writing Diaspora* written by Yasmin Hussain explores the identity of South Asian women through creative literary writings and films in Britain. It focuses on the identities which are initiated in both forms as literature and film produced and directed by South Asian women. The book discusses the variety of theories related to Diaspora and cultural hybridity to look at such identities. Different issues like cultural hybridity, diaspora, racism and ethnicity are the central concerns of this book. Hussain points out these ideas to explore the cultural production by the South Asian women in Britain including Gurinder Chadha film's *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), and Meera Syal's fiction *Anita and Me* (1996). The book draws on the experiences of the British South Asian community and its key concerns appear in the work of the new generation of women writers and directors. Particularly, these authors show the differences between individual and group identity and how both are affected in terms of ethnicity and gender in their film and literature.

In the beginning of the book, Hussain states the book's aim, themes, and arguments and also explores the current theories of diaspora and culturally hybrid identities. To show a concept of diaspora, she points out the concept of power because power always determines the relationship between majorities and minorities citizens and also sometimes determines the social relationship between them in term of "class, gender, racism and sexuality". The main patterns and principles that are characteristics of women's lives in the diasporic communities of South Asian country particularly India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are portrayed in the book. Moreover, Hussain argues that diasporic experiences are preoccupied with "universal" human themes like education, marriage, language and so on in the South Asian women's lives in Britain as either first or even second generation diasporic citizens as well.

Another major concern of the book that Hussain demonstrates is the significant social aspects that shape the identities of the South Asian population in Britain. Here she focuses in particular on the importance of generation. She emphasizes the development of distinct first and second generation identities among British South Asians. For instance, the first generation immigrants have little involvement in British society because of both internal cultural values and norms and external prejudice. They are more cautious in adapting to British society, but in contrary the second generation of people particularly women have a trend to move to multiculturalism and dual identities. Therefore, the second generation's realization of life is very

dissimilar in comparison to the previous generation. As a result of the cultural conflicts between the young and their parents there emerges an “inter-generational conflict” as one aspect of “crisis” in British- South Asian communities.

Hussain suggests the idea of feminism and its role in the creative writings of both Black British feminists and South Asian women’s writers. She delineates the negligence of both black feminism and South Asian women’s writings by white feminism or feminists. According to Hussain, South Asian women’s writing on diaspora or cultural diversity has a great debt to the legacy of Black British feminism because of certain reasons. Also, black feminism creates “a space and a framework” for the other women from different ethnicities, classes, and genders. She also talks about how writing becomes an empowering act and a political gesture to challenge the prejudice against these nameless and voiceless women in that particular time in Britain. As a consequence of these writings there is an emergence of New Women in diasporic literature. Hussain presents a study between Indian women novelists, for instance Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and Rama Mehta and new women in diasporic literature like, Ravinder Randhawa, Farhana Sheik and Leena Dhingra in this book. According to Hussain, this new woman represents a change taking place within the female protagonist’s lives, where questions of identity are highlighted and a realizing of the self is achieved through self-analysis.

To display the films made base on South Asian women’s writings and direction, Hussain selects two films, for instance *Bhaji on the Beach* (1994) and *Bend it like Beckham* (2002) directed by Gurinder Chanda. Chanda’s account of making films is to educate the audience, “I wanted to use the camera which is so powerful to change the way that people are portrayed”. Chadha successfully re-defines British identities as culturally plural and fluid rather than being stable in notions of national, ethnic, racial or also other fixed boundaries. Hussain suggests that Chadha also explores the ideas of diaspora, hybridity and cultural synecry through her films. In both films Chanda raises the issues of South Asian communities in Britain, particularly generational differences. In addition, both films show either the ‘Indianising’ of Britain or the ‘hybridising of Britain’. Hussain also shows that the terms of hybridity and ethnic identity are abundant in Chanda’s films, which are mainly concerned with “dress, food and music”. According to Hussain, the plots, themes, characters, and style of both films are representative of cultural hybridisation among the South Asian community in Britain. The films also deal with second-generation South Asian women as protagonists who have to make critical life decisions in order to negotiate between South Asian and Western cultures.

After mentioning the films produced by South Asian women, Hussain shows fiction as a tool of the women writer related to their diasporic experience along with diasporic theme, language, plot, and style. Here she depicts British Bangladeshi novelist Monica Ali and her renowned novel *Brick Lane* (2003), where Ali depicts the tradition of migrants and the impact of migration in women’s lives. According to Hussain, Ali discusses the “emotional shock” of the

migrants and also “East-West encounter” as central themes of the novel. Instead of admiring the book Hussain criticizes it, arguing that Ali’s position on the outside of the Bangladeshi community contributes to a lack of authenticity in the book. Though trying to represent the concerns of Bangladeshi women, according to Hussain, the novel fails to achieve the goal because of Ali’s lack of familiarity of these concerns. Moreover, Hussain also talks about one more novel written by South Asian writer Meera Syal namely, *Anita and Me* (1996) where Syal shows childhood as a theme to focus on the main character “Meena” with an older peep group in the novel. Meena’s adolescence experiences as an Indian minority is what Hussain describes as a result or product of racism. Hussain also claims that the film adaptation of the novel is failed to reach the goal as like the predecessors *East is East* and *Bend it like Beckham*.

Although Hussain’s book offers a solid analysis of diaspora and hybrid culture in terms of gender and ethnicity for those who are interested in the issues of diaspora, films and literature but at the same it has some limitations which are highly apparent. The book tries to be a bit simplistic and over generalized. Sometimes generalizations are evident without proper references. For instance, the generalization about gender and sport in the film *Bend it like Beckham* in chapter five is very simple and does not draw on the wider range of literature of ethnicity and sport as well. Hussain shows South Asian communities time and again but as a reader one can hardly observe the relationship or differences among the different cultural and ethnic groups in the communities. Moreover, Hussain talks about only South Asian women more specifically Indian subcontinent women without mentioning other countries and women located in South Asia. Overall, I think the author could have more existing research and literature and this could be substantiated the author’s argument more comprehensively.

In a nutshell, the book *Writing Diaspora* by Yasmin Hussain is attention-grabbing and as well as worth reading. As a reader of this book I have come across many new things in the field of diasporic literature and multiculturalism, although to some extent it has limitations which should be avoided. Nonetheless, the book enhances my prior knowledge on South Asian women’s writings and also films. So, based on these previous ideas it can be said that the book will be of interest to a wide range of audiences at different levels of academia and also for those who want to know about South Asian migrant’s history and literature. Besides, the book will be suitable for those who are involved in gender studies, racism and in ethnicity. More specifically, the book will appeal to those who are interested in literature and film as well.