

## **Essentialising Feminist Paradigm in South Asian Diasporic Theatre in the UK: Reading Rukhsana Ahmad's *Song for a Sanctuary***

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### **Abstract**

*The word theatre reflects the representation of certain tale/story or social, political, and cultural facts in a performative manner before the physically present audience. Moreover, considering particularly the female representation in these cultural, social, as well as political issues, we find a binary pole where female is perceived as meek and submissive and thus gets marginalised. Women's theatre from this point contradicts mainstream theatre and brings up the portrayal of women's subjectivities where they can assert their existence in the dominant social structure. In the context of diaspora, theatre by women provides a free space for articulation about living in a country different to their own for different ethnic communities hardly get exposed to the mainstream theatre. Theatre groups by migrants are a minority group and from the socio-cultural perspective, they are marginalised as well. Women in diaspora theatre embody a kind of marginality within the margin. The socio-cultural issues and conflicts faced by the migrants are incorporated in the plays by playwrights who are themselves diasporic. Many a time the plays by diaspora playwrights focus on the migration to a specific setting where he/she contemplates home. Likewise, the changing attitude towards migration and culture is also represented in the plays. Thus, the theatre by migrant groups evolves in due time according to the changing patterns of migration. The diaspora communities thus not only reflect on the ethnic conflict in the host country in their writing but also deal with the inter-community issues among themselves. Theatre by women on the same ground represents the conflicts*

*regarding their existence, identity, and space on foreign soil. Thus, this study undertakes the aspects of feminist theatre to analyse the text related to the representation of migration and conflict on the part of women. The issues of cultural conflict, identity, and generational problems of migrants are essentially focused here. How the theatrical representation of women concerns these problematic positions are incorporated in this study. Thus, this paper tries to reflect on women's theatre in the context of diaspora through the analysis of Rukhsana Ahmad's play *Song for a Sanctuary*.*

**Keywords:** Women's Theatre, Diaspora, Culture, Conflict, Negotiation.

## **Introduction**

The deliberation on female-centric representation has marked a long silence in theatrical purview. In the south-Asian diaspora, this finds a liminal experience as we try to locate the concerns in terms of spatial understanding. The British mainstream theatre, however, hardly acknowledges the cultural paradigm at the forefront of representing its minority diaspora population. On the other hand, feminist theatre brings up the portrayal of the subjectivity of women where they assert their existence in the dominant social structure. In diasporic space, theatre provides a free space of articulation for different ethnic communities that hardly get exposure in mainstream theatre. The socio-cultural issues and conflicts faced by the migrants are incorporated in the plays by playwrights who themselves come from diaspora communities. The diaspora communities not only reflect on the ethnic conflict in the host country but also deal with the inter-community issues among themselves. Theatre by women on the same ground represents the conflicts regarding their existence, identity, and space on foreign soil. Plays like *My Name Is...* (2014) by Sudha Bhuchar, *Sweet Cider* (2008) by Em Hussain and *Strictly Dandia* (2003) again

by Sudha Bhuchar and Kristine Landon-Smith are among the example that narrates the cross-cultural negotiations of women. The paper focuses on the theatre practice among south Asians and deliberates on the concerned text to engage with the issues put forward in it. Thus, the study carefully looks at the emergence of feminism vis-à-vis women's theatre along with the dimensions of argument that form its core objectives. It also searches the pattern of diasporic engagement to analyse the issues of cultural conflict, identity formation and the generational problems of migrants. Looking closely at Rukhsana Ahmad's play *Song for a Sanctuary*, the paper seeks to analyse the theatrical representation of women concerning the problematic positions of nation, culture and ethnicity and the entrapment that situates women devoid of their position in society.

### **Diaspora and Theatre: Performative Nuances of Representation**

Theatre denominates an essential activity in cultural production and performativity within a particular social context. The elevation of a specific action into the mould of performance to reach the audience is one of the many concerns of theatre. Theatre largely interrogates the metanarratives around the reception and production of political, economic and social traits. Thus, it provides a separate space for an individual playwright where a free flow of dialogue can exist with its uniqueness. The main concern of this paper is to introduce theatre in regard to diasporic engagements, delineating its imaginative underpinnings of it. "Diasporic imaginary", Vijay Mishra writes, is a condition "of an impossible mourning that transforms mourning into melancholia...sometimes in intensely contradictory ways at the level of the social" (Mishra 2007:9).

The present age of globalisation challenges the idea of centralisation and introduces a necessary process of growth through the interactive exchange of goods, knowledge and culture among the nation-states. In this process, people from various parts of the world have come to associate with the creation of a contact zone of cultures, nations and religions, otherwise termed as 'diaspora space' (Brah 1996:208). A complex interconnection among the diverse discourses has evolved across the world into this process. The expansion of the term 'diaspora' has been further explained in *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian Diaspora* (2006) where phrases like 'the time factor', the 'will to survive as a minority and the 'collective memory' form the critical elements of diaspora (Lal et.al 2006:36-51). Rai and Reeves mention that:

A Diaspora exists precisely because it remembers the 'homeland'. Without this memory... these migrants and settlers would be simply people in a new setting, into which they merge, bringing little or nothing to the new 'home' accepting in various ways and forms the mores and attitudes that already exist in their new country and society... The people of diaspora, however, do not merely settle in new countries: they recreate in their socio-economic, political, and cultural situations a version of... that homeland that they remember (Rai and Reeves 2009:1).

The argument over diaspora in the acquisition of certain space, moreover, realises human experience which not only gets represented across different genres of literature but also epitomises the performative nuances in the mediums like cinema and theatre. It only makes it compelling and tempting to engage the audience. Theatre is an audio-visual mode of representation that has a specific advantage of enactment before the audience, who gets to know the concerns of

diaspora and has a common ground of either an active or a passive experience.

The contact zones among nations put an impact on theatre studies as different elements of culture get assembled and moulded into the postcolonial theatre while the intercultural coalescence enlarges the margin. Apart from the amalgamation of different forms and techniques into the practice of theatre, the interconnection of cultural elements brings up the cultural association and difference in the theatre production. Thereupon, the homogeneous idea of culture and the singularity of its identity transcends with the rapid increase of migration. On the other hand, the cultural history and the identity travel with its people from one place to another and generate a hyphenated co-existence in the identity of the migrants. The subject of representation coming under this 'hyphen' impacts the theatrical practices by the migrant communities in the exploration of different cultural forms experienced in living between two or more cultures. This essentially is the theme getting represented in many plays written from different contact zones of culture, race and identity. For example, Rukhsana Ahmad's *Homing Bird* (2019) and *River on Fire* (2001), Sharmila Chauhan's *The Husbands* (2014) and Naylah Ahmed's *Mustafa* (2012) portray characters in tension with the racial identity of mixed parentage among others. So, the representation in the theatre of the diaspora does not merely answer, but rather explores the enactment of the human experience of 'home' and the 'other'. The mutability of cultures is also the point of discussion in the plays written by the migrant playwright.

In representation, however, the dialogue between home and host requires to look back towards the emergence of the theatre of diaspora. In various parts of the world, theatre by the migrant groups comes into existence mainly with the abolition

of colonial rule. However, some intercultural elements have a long history of being written and enacted wholeheartedly. In British literature, components of Indian history and philanthropic ideals are made known in the works like John Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe; or the Great Moghal* (1675) as it narrates the tragic fall of Aurangzeb, the great Indian Mughal Emperor and in *Mariana Starke's The Sword of Peace; or a Voyage of Love* (1789) where the main story concerns the journey of two women to India in search of their husbands. With migration, different groups of people along with a variety of cultures, languages and practices encounter each other and help establish a kind of interchange as well as the formation of a hybrid identity through their existences. In some cases, migrants started performing plays in their native languages to establish their cultural identity. Similarly, the practice of adopting a text from the native country for the foreign stage also comes into prominence. For this, the implementation of the inter-cultural techniques to represent their concerns and experiences sound most contemporary in its tone. It entails the question of space that these performances adhere to in delineating the socio-cultural difference as well as their engagements. Many of Tagore's plays found a suitable adaptation on the foreign stage in this category.

### **South Asian Presence and the Theatre of Migrants**

The movement of South Asians beyond the sub-continent provides a more prominent definition of diaspora. South Asia mainly comprises the southern region of Asia where the core countries are India, Pakistan and Bangladesh which were ruled by the British from 1857 to 1947. Apart from these three, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Afghanistan also share the historical and ethnic benevolence as being a commoner under the umbrella term South Asia. South Asia relegates to a broader range of variety in terms of language, region, culture,

religion, custom and tradition. Vijay Prashad suggests that South Asia establishes a kind of “solidarity despite their different national origins and religious commitments” (Prashad 1999:187). South Asian migrants comprise a variety of groups which “includes traders, imperial auxiliaries, ‘free’ migrants and long-term migrant professionals” (Rai and Reeves 2009:2). The heterogeneous nature of South Asia is marked by a diversity suggesting a complex “zone of engagement that includes diasporans with diverse social, political, economic and cultural backgrounds” (Sarwal:28). The experience of slavery, the indentured labour system and the forced dispersion of people are very different from the contemporary voluntary migration of South Asians journeying mainly for the white-collar job in the West. The transnational connection of migrants makes them negotiate religious, ethnic and cultural ties which are the markers of their identity. Brij V. Lal writes,

Due to its varied origins, divergent patterns of migration and settlement, and different degrees of absorption or integration into the culture of their new homeland, the Indian diaspora defies easy categorisation. It is a complex confluence of many discreet cultures, languages and histories (Lal et al 2006:10).

The case of the South Asian diaspora in the United Kingdom is a group of diverse people being merged into a new identity. They are defined in a geographical attribution that is explained as an area of inquiry that investigates the cultural significance of migration.

The South Asian diaspora, as apprehended in the literary, cinematic and theatrical representation, responds as a symbol of shared belonging. People who have migrated from the South Asian region after the Indian independence, are primarily the educated professional who carried their cultural roots with them to the host nation. During the 1970s, the presence of

South Asian voice is first marked in the genre of theatre. The earlier theatrical representation in the 1950s and 1960s by the South Asians are mainly brought from their homeland, and many of them were being performed in the native language only. Apart from the Sanskrit plays in translation like *Sakuntala* and *Ratnavali*, several of Tagore's Bengali plays are also translated into English and adapted accordingly. Only in the year, 1970 with the establishment of Tara Arts, the first theatre group by the migrant community, the South Asian diaspora community found their own stage to present the diasporic sensibilities of the community. Language is the most innovative part of their productions as it presents the microcosmic view of the multicultural society. Chambers argues that the director-producer of Tara Arts, Jitender Verma, "was beginning to develop a distinctive methodology he termed Bilingual, a name that captures the fractured, overlapping hybridity of modern Britain. Bilingual is distinguished textually by transposition to an Indian setting, often using storytelling devices and, in performances, through costume, set, and the actors' accent, inflection, tone, gesture, and stance" (Chambers 2020:161). Using this hybrid representation, Verma introduces distinct theatre praxis. The prominent examples of Bilingual in the Tara Arts production are *Mitti Ki Gadi* [The Little Clay Cart] (1984), *Tartuffe* (1990) and *Cyrano* (1995). The production also presents representation from other cultures, showcasing the pattern of dress and customs apart from the language. It features the British, Asian and Black cast to counter the prominent practice of the English stage. The plays like *Mandragora – King of India* (2004), *The Marriage of Figaro* (2006), *People's Romeo* (2010), and *A Night on the Tile* (2011) are examples of cross-cultural production. Apart from Tara Arts, there are several contemporary establishments of cross-cultural production, namely Kali Theatre, Tamasha Theatre and Manmela Theatre

that have active participation in representing South Asia on the British stage.

The emergence of the theatre production marks a crucial phrase for South Asian diaspora in the U.K. The diasporic communities started to establish their own theatre groups despite having the chance to contribute to the prominent mainstream theatres. This is as Griffin specifies the aesthetic distance that the diaspora maintains is non-negotiable where the migrant groups “bespeak the histories from which these theatres emerged, histories of colonisation, of cultural exchange, curiosity, transformation and international engagement” (Griffin 2003:1). It establishes the identity of the migrants in a foreign land which creates a better understanding of migration and the conflicts of the people of the diaspora. *Zameen* (2008) by Satinder Chohan is one such example that explores the story of a Punjabi farmer who hopes for the prosperity of his cotton fields on high-quality seeds and the ‘western’ pesticides. His ambitious son Dhani dreams of going to America whereas his dutiful daughter Chandni is uncertain about her fate, dwindling over whether to stay in her precious motherland or follow her lover abroad to a more prosperous life. These dilemmas only offer the motive as the play narrates the painful breakdown of a family on the verge of a rapidly changing world.

### **Feminist Theatre and Contemporary South Asian Experience**

The script, the actors, costumes, the dialogues, lighting and the setting- all the elements of a theatre get arranged in such a way that the audience finds it convenient with the performance of a piece. The audience of a theatre consists of mostly heterosexual, middle-class citizens whose conscience is embodied in the predominant constructs of culture. With the resistance movement and the writings of feminist critics, this

mode of contingent spectatorship is challenged in every corner of representation. The theatrical practice is no exception. The feminist critics exposed the gender-specific nature of representation in theatre and radically defied the existing terms. Dolan points out that these critics denaturalised “the position of the ideal spectator as a representative of the dominant culture”, which enables them to analyse every aspect of theatre “from the types of plays and performances produced to the texts that are ultimately canonised, is determined to reflect and perpetuate the ideal spectator’s ideology” (Dolan 1988:1). Thus, theatre along with visual art, dance and film are the manifestations of specific ideological meanings which have inevitable materialistic consequences. The contemporary theatre, performed, narrated and directed by women is manifested by resistance to conventional discourses. Cixous in her play ‘Le Portrait de Dora’ (1972) describes this resistance as an emblem of women’s desire to leave the symbolic order. She mentions that,

Le Portrait de Dora was the first step for me in a long journey; it was a step that badly needed to be taken so that a woman’s voice could be heard for the first time, so that she could cry out, “I’m not the one who is dumb. I am silenced by your inability to hear.” (Cixous:134).

The canon of theatre studies maintained silence for a long time about theatrical productions by women that also represents women. British socialist and historicist Sheila Rowbotham questions this intentional elimination of women from socio-cultural history in the book *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women’s Oppression and the Fight Against It*. Elaine Aston, the feminist theatre critic further inquires into the marginalised position of women in theatre as she questions “why women...had been buried by man-made history” (Aston 2003:12). This critical endeavour aims at pointing out the

oppression of women in literature as well as finding the tradition of writing by women. Honor Moore, an American writer in *The New Women's Theatre: Ten Plays by Contemporary Women* talks about the difficulties of finding the past engagement of women in theatre as she realises “the lack of female tradition in playwrighting similarly to that which exists in both fiction and poetry” (Moore 1997:xiv). Moore challenges the mainstream theatre practice and the omission of women from the history of theatre both as the means of production and with creative writing attempting to locate women's tradition in the genre of theatre. The re-reading of the conventional portrayal of women, as explored by Kate Millett, is ventured by the scholars of feminist theatre through the analysis of the previous productions where women were ignored and disregarded. Elaine Aston, however, reflects that,

Image-based methodologies have evolved into more sophisticated structuralist and semiotic lines of enquiry generated through the understanding of theatre as a sign system. Within this context, a more highly complex method of reading theatre from an image base has developed, which, in turn, has been appropriated by feminism to re-read the gender bias of the canon (Aston 2003:13).

The emergence of feminist theatre challenges the “active/male and passive/female” narrative structure (Mulvey 1989:19). Charlotte Rea, a feminist theatre critic mentions “Women’s theatre groups are seeking new forms that have not been derived from the male-oriented and male-dominated theatre that now exists” (Rea 1972:77). The formation of theatre groups of women establishes the control of women over the organization as well as its content and style. These theatre groups present a non-hierarchical and linear organisation modelled on the Women Liberation Movement.

A rapid increase in the number of South Asian women playwrights in the UK was witnessed since the 1980s. These playwrights are associated with different theatre groups, radio and television channels who have either migrated with their parents or are born in Britain. The works of South Asian women playwrights bear the signature of multiple locations that affect their lives. Many play scripts are written only to be enacted by the South Asian actors and actresses. Thus, the plays written by migrant women provide acting opportunities to the women of different ethnic groups by placing them in the centre of the action. It also attracts the attention of the audience towards the social groupings of migrant people who generally do not have any representation on the British stage. Again, the play scripts by women of diaspora thematise the issues of ethnicity, race and identity. Diaspora generally deals with ethnic and cultural hybridisation by narrating their position within the dominant host culture. The play scripts narrate the double marginalisation of women both as a woman in a patriarchal society and as a migrant in a foreign country. A. S. Colombo mentions that “women in the diaspora, instead, are more concerned on the daily problems of life in common with different cultures, ethnicities and races” (Colombo 2014:369). Apart from this, the South Asian women playwrights actively engage with the historical as well as contemporary socio-political issues that have affected the community in a particular way both in Britain and in their place of origin. Gabriele Griffin notes some of the key concerns in women’s theatre of the diaspora in representation. They are-

1. The contemplation of migration within a certain home setting;
2. Migration within the country one was born in—usually from country to city;
3. Migration to another country, usually the UK, and its impacts;
4. Breaking with one’s community as an effect of changing values and attitudes across generations and between women and

men, a migration effect; 5. Living in peer groups outside specific ethnically and/or racially defined communities as a function of one's particular history, development, and identity, another migration effect (Griffin 2003:16-17).

*Song for a Sanctuary* by Rukhsana Ahmad records the “breaking with one’s community as an effect of changing values and attitudes across generations and between women and men” (Ahmad:19). These disruptions are commonly unintentional on the part of the woman who decides to discard the community ties. As a result, both physical and psychological violence influence the development of the character. The play promotes “a positive space for sharing the experiences of and raising awareness for migrant women [that] has a long and continuing tradition across the UK” (Ahmad 1993:36).

### ***Song for a Sanctuary: A Story of Abuse, Abomination and Violence***

*Song for a Sanctuary* depicts the troubled life of a refugee who is a victim of abuse and murder in one of the women’s refuge shelters in the U.K. Rukhsana Ahmad brings in the element of gendered violence, cultural duality and community life in a portfolio of South Asian presence in Britain. Ahmad, a Pakistan born British playwright, novelist, short-story writer and translator, migrated to the UK, starting her career primarily as a playwright and journalist. In 1991, her first translation of Urdu protest poetry, written by women, *We Sinful Women* was published. Later in 1993, she translated Alta Fatima’s novel *The One Who Did Not Ask*. Ahmad’s first novel, *The Hope Chest* (1996), narrates the intertwined paths of three women Ruth, Rani and Reshma who in their journey confront the crossroads of culture. Her plays include *Song for a Sanctuary* (1991), *River on Fire* (2001), *Mistaken: Annie Besant in India*

(2007) and *Homing Bird* (2019). The play *Mistaken: Annie Besant in India* brings the Indian independence struggle to the British stage. In *River on Fire*, she addresses the conflicts faced by the British Asians. The play portrays a young British-Asian actress, Kiran, who works with an Indian film director. She plays the role of Shola, a Mogul Antigone for the film makes her re-visit her ancestral roots. Ahmad's contribution to the diaspora theatre continues with the play *Homing Bird*. It tells the story of a young Afghan refugee Saeed. Ahmad stages the refugee crises to bring the issues of identity and belonging of the migrants in a foreign society. The problem of illegal migrants and the sanctuary homes is also addressed here. Among her radio plays, *An Urnful of Ashes* (2009) took precedence whereas adaptations like *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* for the BBC Radio earned her fame. Ahmad's projection of women's search for identity in the plays like *River on Fire* and *Song for Sanctuary* represents the concerns of women in contemporary society. Through these plays, Ahmad questions the patriarchal social structure of both the East and West. She is regarded as a prominent name in the South Asian women's theatre for having promoted the conflicts faced by women in the contemporary scenario. She had been the co-founder of Kali Theatre Company and South Asian Diaspora Arts Archive (SADAA) and was nominated for the CRE Award for best original radio drama for her *Song for a Sanctuary*.

Ahmad's play *Song for a Sanctuary* was first performed in 1991 for Kali Theatre; later the radio version of this play was broadcasted on 18th February 1993 on BBC Radio. Ahmad herself said that "*Song for a Sanctuary* was written partly in response to the murder of an Asian woman at a refuge"

(Ahmad:204). The paper looks into the narrative detail, one that has been understood by Ahmad, the South Asian presence and the subsequent dilemmas in exercising life outside of one's own country. The play, therefore, presents the moral conflicts of the characters and the evasiveness in their actions before the audiences as well as readers of the text. The incident referred here is the murder of a young woman of South Asian descent named Balwant Kaur on 22nd October 1985. Her husband killed her in the British Asian women's shelter. The play broadly outlines the murder of Kaur who come to the shelter after eight years of several fits of abuse from her husband. Her husband, along with some other men planned to kill her at the shelter but his friends assumed his ill intentions and warned Kaur against the same. After a few days, Kaur's husband stabbed her to death in front of their children. The Southall Black Sisters, a non-profitable organisation raised their voice against the violent murder of the British-Asian women. Ahmad's play narrates the story of Balwant Kaur within a complex cross-cultural social structure.

In the play, Rajinder Basi is the counterpart of Balwant Kaur, whereas the title of the play 'Song for a Sanctuary' foreshadows the unwanted ending of Rajinder's life through its elegiac tone. This three-act play is set in Rajinder's home and at a refuge depicting the arranged marriage and the household violence in western society. Rajinder and Sonia both are a character in this play suffering from the same plight but Rajinder being a Pakistani Muslim is not allowed to expose her experience of violence and is restrained by her cultural lineage, whereas Sonia narrates her suffering to others. It is evident as Rajinder says "I don't believe in washing my dirty linen in public" (Ahmad 1993:226). The experience and expression of violence for both Sonia and Rajinder varies because of their different socio-cultural background. Cecilia Menjivar in the article 'The Intersection of Work and Gender: Central

American Immigrant Women and Employment in California' maps the variation as she writes that "differences in social location are important to discern because they often get fused with issues pertaining to gender, particularly when immigrant women are characterized as a homogeneous and unified group" (Menjivar 1999:603). Rajinder had internalised the community's projection of the concept of shame and honour. Being a woman, she transmits the cultural values of her place of origin to her children. The cultural and social structure made a significant contribution to her current situation as she maintains a sense of pride in her cultural identity. Thus, she attempts to preserve an impression of the difference between herself and the other residents of the refuge as she declares "I'd like my children to grow up with some sense of who they are. We're different" (Ahmad:220).

Women's conducts are defined under the umbrella of right and wrong, which is also a case in this play. Rajinder readily inclines to differentiate herself from Sonia, the white fellow in the refuge and from Kamala, the refuge worker. When Savita tells her mother Rajinder that Sonia is a controller of her own body and is not at all ashamed of it, Rajinder at once denies the conversation, as if it is immoral to talk about the women's sexual choices-

Savita: ... She's what they call a 'hooker', a prostitute.

Rajinder: Don't you dare talk to me like that. I don't want to hear you talk, crudely, like this, even if it's true. I wouldn't believe that, even of her.

Savita: It's true; she's not ashamed of it. She says she's in charge of her own body, that's all it means. Housewives sell their bodies too, you know. Only it's to one man... they have no control over...their...bodies (Ahmad 1993:228).

Rajinder, shocked by her daughter's analysis, negates any parallel between herself and Sonia. She even denies assimilating with Kamala, who works in this refuge due to her poor economic condition. Rajinder criticises Kamala as an unmarried woman and dismisses her saying she is not able to understand her condition.

Ahmad represents the socio-cultural difference by posing two different groups of characters called Elien and Kamala, refuge workers, and Rajinder and Sonia, the client there. Gradually their similarities and differences are demonstrated to us as they somewhat embody the mirror image of one another and at the same time contradict each other. Thus, the cultural difference among these women is exposed as they speak for ethnicity, class, cultural variance and women's economic self-sufficiency. The juxtaposition of Kamala and Rajinder represents the two sides of the same coin. Both of them have a common South Asian ancestry despite their different migratory pattern. Kamala represents the identity of a person who is dynamic and adaptable to the changing circumstances. She challenges the notion of identity related to the appearance, which is not a matter of choice rather depends on the attribution. Precisely saying, Kamala dilutes the idealisation of home and her identity in the imaginary of the migrants. The conversation between Rajinder and Kamala bring forth the issues of culture, language and identity of the diasporic people-

Kamala: This language thing, it's just that, it looks like an inadequacy and it isn't. Names are all they had left to them, in the Caribbean; to keep the languages going seemed a bit pointless in the end.

Rajinder: So you're not from India?

Kamala: No, not quite. They struggled to make us Indian, in some sense (Ahmad 1993:209).

Kamala disclosed that her history of migration is different from Rajinder whose ancestors once came from India, but Kamala had come from the Caribbean to Britain. Hence, her statement addresses multiple histories of migration and criticises the homogenisation of South Asian identity. On the contrary, Rajinder represents the complexities of belonging as her identity is always linked with her homeland. Thus, both of them embody the contradictory ideas of a diaspora. Shobhita Jain in her article ‘Transmigrant Women’s Agency and Indian Diaspora’ discusses that “Women’s positions within the field of conflicting relations define them not as fixed substances but as entities defined relationally. This is why women’s agency is always conditioned by prevailing mediations. Situated in the processual spirality, their mediated agency is mostly enabled by its conditions to imagine/invent and thus transcreate” (Jain 2010:193). Kamala and Rajinder agree to the conflict arising from their perception of identity in the hostland and, therefore, remained pre-conditioned.

Moreover, a scene (Act I, Scene 6) that captures Rajinder’s conversation with her elder sister Amrit shows that Amrit, who is well acquainted with the socio-cultural practice of their family and community, is insensitive to Rajinder’s plight. Amrit interprets Rajinder’s decision to leave her violent husband as an act of “western selfishness” which brings dishonour to the family:

Amrit: But you’re so wrong! ... You don’t make sense to me.

Rajinder: I did my best ...

Amrit: What of the children? They will be asking, ‘what’ll become of them’?... you’ll be sorry. I’m warning you. Your selfishness will ruin your daughters, I can tell you that. They’ll learn all the self-indulgent, sick ways of the West (Ahmad:221).

This remark of Amrit points to the negation of intermixing of values in a host society in the most contingent way possible which also for Ahmed is the notion of disregard of the diaspora with a narrow mindset. Even, when Rajinder asked her what should be done about her miserable condition, Amrit without any hesitation replied that “honour is always preferable to disgrace” (Ahmad 1993:221). This scene demonstrates the ideology behind shame and honour operating in women’s identity. Amrit is ready to sacrifice her sister’s life to worship the false god ‘honour’. Thus, because of this shame and honour, Rajinder denies discussing the physical and sexual abuse by her husband towards her and her daughter Savita. She also refuses to register the same before the authorities. Victoria Canning in *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System* notes the actuality of women’s condition in an asylum saying-

a long-running battle for those seeking asylum, with specific consequences for survivors of sexualised and domestic violence: problems which are disproportionately experienced by women... have experienced similar forms of pain infliction over periods of years at the hands of husbands and partners within domestic spheres (Canning 2017:25-35).

Rajinder explained her situation to Kamala by saying that “it doesn’t mean you can’t make any choices... just that... the circumstances in which you have to make them are often beyond your control. Like birth, or death” (Ahmad 1993:225). Rajinder here naturalises the life choices that are beyond her control by using the similes of life and death. As soon as Kamala tries attending to the authorities in the matter of Savita’s exploitation, Rajinder refutes it shielding her daughter’s ‘izzat’, as she says “I’d like to avoid a scandal. She’s got to marry one day. But then you don’t know what it is

to live within the community” (Ahmad 1993:236). Though Kamala tries to make Rajinder understand the harm of silence in the face of violence, Rajinder strictly clutches her roots of patriarchal beliefs-

Kamala: Don't you see, it's the 'privatisation' of women's lives which keeps us from seeing domestic violence in a socio-political context?

Rajinder: I don't need your political analysis. I have to deal with my life as I think best.

Kamala: Your story is common enough, believe me. It's part of a pattern of how men have used women over the years (Ahmad 1993:226).

Through the projection of the two contradictory characters, the play projects the ills of a society, where the voices of women are suppressed. In the context of diaspora, the constructs of society become more defining. In this scenario, the preference for preserving the culture becomes pivotal.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American lawyer, indicates the dichotomy and violence faced by women in migration due to their economic dependency on their husbands in the article 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color'. She mentions-

In most cases, the physical assault that leads women to these shelters is merely the most immediate manifestation of the subordination they experience. Many women who seek protection are unemployed or underemployed, and a good number of them are poor. Shelters serving these women cannot afford to address only the violence inflicted by the batterer; they must also confront the other multilayered and routinized forms of domination that often converge in these women's lives, hindering their ability to create alternatives to the

abusive relationships that brought them to shelters in the first place (Crenshaw 1991:1245).

Rajinder's painful plight in the play is not only because of the cultural prohibition of exhibiting her problems but also because of her socio-economic dependency on her husband. Her situation reveals no prospect of economic opportunities through employment and finding her a shelter but heightens the burden of women like Rajinder in a foreign land. Throughout the play, she did not consider financial independence as a path of liberation from her sufferings. Her husband's capability of tracking her and killing her shows the failure of the authorities. They fail to provide proper security to the battered migrant woman.

In another context, this play suggests that there is no harm in preserving the cultural values in a different place under the disguise of cultural preservation. It is wrong though to nurture the patriarchal domination in the same disguise. All the characters, represented here, are a victim of the dominant social structure. Upasana Mahanta et al. confirm this condition in the essay 'Women and Law in South Asia' where they uphold the notion of life for South Asian females-

Lived experiences of women in South Asia often navigate the volatility of individual and group rights, honour and shame, purity and pollution, customary practices and modern citizenship rights, extreme poverty, illiteracy, health vulnerabilities, armed conflict, gender-based violence, etc. These negotiations are deeply rooted in the social realities of religion, caste, race, ethnicity, class, age, and disability (Mahanta et al 2019:150).

Rajinder, who tries to behave according to the community rules, values her husband and justifies his deeds. She even glorifies him while she is terrified of him- "I'm trying to escape from a man who's cunning, and strong, and tough as a

bull; he can see through curtains, he can hear through walls. I am really frightened of him” (Ahmad:209). The generational conflict between the first and second generations is also presented through the portrayal of Savita, Rajinder’s daughter. Savita being born and brought up in England is influenced by the western culture, which is strongly denied by Rajinder.

Savita: I look cool in that, don’t I ma?

Rajinder: Sorry, Savita, you’ll have to change.

Savita: why? It looks fine to me.

Rajinder: I don’t want any discussion, or argument about this...

Savita: That’s not fair. You have to say why.

Rajinder: All right, then. The skirt’s too short...they look tartish.

Savita: Talk about stereotypes, Ammah! (Ahmad 1993:227).

As Savita discloses her father’s ill-treatment to her and her mother, Rajinder shuts her up by saying “that’s not true... there was nothing like that. You’re lying. You’ve no right to do this to me. Make things like this up, just to... humiliate me...” (Ahmad 1993:229). Thus, the oppression of women in a foreign land and the generational conflict are evident in this play.

The play through the articulation of individual suffering addresses a broader social concern regarding the marginal position of the migrant women. Consequently, the play accentuates the uniqueness of every character’s condition and, through the catastrophic recounting this play tries to transcend that uniqueness by putting them within the larger spectrum of the necessity of support for the marginalised groups.

## Conclusion

The study proposes several ideas and concepts such as theatre studies, feminist theatre and women's theatre, feminist criticism and diaspora literature as a post-colonial narrative. This study attempts to explore women's writing with representation on stage and at the same time understand how the transcultural representation of diaspora is incorporated into the women's theatre. The focus of this paper is on the methods and techniques presented by women playwrights of diaspora. This paper also analyses the impact of feminist theatre, not only talking about the feminist point of view towards the theatre but also takes language and writing in literary representation as one of the essential facts. Reflection of the female self in theatrical writing and engaging the audience/reader in it and creating a space where women can articulate their own words in her way are the main points that are discussed here. However, the enunciation of difference as well as the proclamation of diversity by the diaspora community in the context of homogenised Britain is presented in this text. The text also presents the cultural clash between the migrant and the local people as well as the generational conflict between the mother and daughter. The text also suggests that not only the communal construction of ethnic bonds but the validation of the power structure between genders is the source of oppression to women. Indeed, Ahmad's *Song for Sanctuary* shows the clash between cultures, and conflict among different diasporic experiences and more prominently projects the plight of women within the diaspora. The women characters seeking accommodation from the oppressive socio-cultural structure disrupt the binary opposition. Thus, the theatrical representation of migration and the condition of women in the women's theatre of South Asian diaspora utilises the 'third space'.

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