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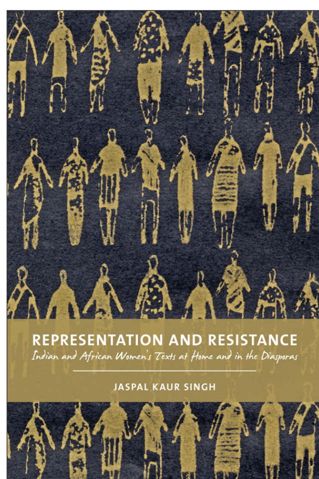


## REPRESENTATION AND RESISTANCE: INDIAN AND AFRICAN WOMEN'S TEXTS AT HOME AND IN THE DIASPORAS

by Jaspal Kaur Singh

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# Queering Diaspora in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Nisha Ganatra's *Chutney Popcorn*, and Deepa Mehta's *Fire*

To investigate the politics of location for transnational feminist critical theory and practice, to examine their various uses, and to study the ramification of such practices, we must pay special attention to the politics of production and reception of feminist texts in diasporic cultural spaces (Grewal and Kaplan 2). In an era of globalization and transnational cultural flow, gender representation and construction in the Global North and throughout the world remain problematic, leading us to ask some important questions: How are transnational women's texts theorized and received in the Global North? How do multicultural/diasporic South Asian women construct cultural, national, and gender identity? How do they define gender in cross-cultural spaces of both the Global North and South where ideas of identity take on special meaning? How are hybrid identities and sexualities represented and received in the Global North?

Indian women who construct a separate sexual self from that of the idealized and essentialized notion of "pure" womanhood struggle to depict their identities in troubled territories and diasporic locales. Given resurgent debates on nationalism and gender since 9/11 and the subsequent

wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, moreover, it has become difficult for certain diasporic Indian women to negotiate identity even in the "liberal" Global North, where ideas of individualism are seemingly encouraged. Thus, the necessity for transformational creative work for transnational feminist critical theory and practices is urgently needed. At the same time, however, as academics and critics, we need to be extra-vigilant about female writers' representational texts and the politics of their location, particularly their reception and their continued use of modernist assumptions regarding gender in a troubled globalized world.

While looking at the "transnational cultural production and reception" of texts by postmodern and postcolonial feminists, Indrapal Grewal and Caren Kaplan critique "certain forms of feminism [that] emerge from [the feminists'] willing participation in modernity with its colonial discourse and hegemonic First World formations that wittingly or unwittingly lead to the oppression and exploitation of many women" (2). Many so-called feminists support agendas of globalization, thereby misrecognizing and failing to resist "Western hegemonies" (2). Many cosmopolitan women writers see themselves as feminists, and come to inhabit privileged spaces. They then assume to speak for what they come to see as oppressed Indian womanhood, leading to a resumption of "form[s] of feminist cultural imperialism" (137).

How, then, can we read texts such as Shani Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Nisha Ganatra's film *Chutney Popcorn*, and Deepa Mehta's film *Fire*? Are these artists perpetuating Western feminism's imperial rescuing mission, or are they too navigating between various heteropatriarchal and feminist concerns (Grewal and Kaplan) which are necessarily depicted through narratives of global modernity (Arif Dirlik)? Or, are their sensibilities so Westernized, as seen by the Western audiences' responses to their work, that white feminists are "[embracing] them as those who 'finally learned their lessons'" (Shohat 12) and can be finally admitted to the ranks of liberated and modern subjects?

For example, in Ganatra's *Chutney Popcorn*, Reena, who is a headstrong and independent lesbian, constantly struggles with her Indian mother's idea of good Indian girls. Once again, we are faced with representation of backward Indian cultural practices clashing with notions of liberal sexualities in diasporic Indian communities in the Global North. Whereas *Chutney Popcorn* suggests hybridized identity constructions in diasporic spaces of the Global North, where arbitrary designs of Indian-

ness prevail, *Fire* portrays ideas of "oppressive" arranged marriages vying with love and lesbianism for liberation and choice in postcolonial India. Of the three texts, Mootoo's literary exploration of alienation and dislocation – sexual as well as national – is more nuanced and multidimensional than the filmic narratives, and provides excellent material for my extensive textual analysis. However, I will show that even an artist as savvy as Mootoo betrays fragmentation of her psyche when she bows down to Western and Westernized sensibilities of her audience in the Global North.

Let us examine *Chutney Popcorn*. Directed and acted by the Canadian-born Ganatra, the film received many awards.[1] The film opens with the gaze of the camera lingering on young female bodies being decorated with what are popularly known as henna tattoos. Just as the film's title connotes Asian Americanness, henna tattoos construct Indian culture as a commodity for American consumption. Born into a Punjabi American family, Reena, the lesbian protagonist of the film, works in a beauty salon in New York and struggles to define her sexual and racial identity in a hybrid space. This diasporic identity is conflicted as Reena negotiates between the transnational social spaces represented by the multicultural beauty salon and the traditional home space provided by Reena's mother, Meena, and the diasporic Indian community. Empowerment for both Reena and her sister, Sarita, comes from constructing independent identities separate from seemingly Indian ones – Sarita marries a white man, Mitch, while Reena dates a white woman. While Sarita's choices are sanctioned by her mother due to her heterosexuality – she is trying to become pregnant – Reena's lesbian sexuality and the presence of her girlfriend are either seemingly ignored or glossed over by Meena (played by Madhur Jaffrey) or become a site for hilarity.

While the film revolves around a gay and a straight sister, the intergenerational conflict takes centre stage. The Indian mother, no matter how long she resides in the West, must try to arrange a marriage for her daughter with a suitable boy. In one scene, she invites Reena's male agemate to the house for tea, knowing Reena will have to talk to this very "nice young man." In yet another scene, when Reena attends her sister's wedding, she stands on the sidelines, dressed in an odd assortment of Indian and Western clothing, unable or unwilling to join members of the Indian community Bhangra dancing to loud Punjabi music. Her mother introduces her lesbian partner, Lisa, as Reena's roommate. Thus, the home space for Reena is rendered inhospitable and unsafe. While the dilemma

of racial and sexual identity for young Asian Americans is explored in this film, the immigrant community is rendered as illiberal, only interested in progeny and religious impositions.

When Reena insists that she is a lesbian, her mother seemingly ignores her declaration. Sunaina Marr Maira suggests that "for second generation Indian Americans, ideas about gender roles and sexuality are constructed in both local and global contexts, shaped not just by the expectation of youth cultures and mainstream media, but also by the norms held by immigrant parents and the ethnic community" (153). Maira discusses dating and sexuality in the Indian American community, particularly for girls, and the problems of naming such desires. She suggests that debates regarding arranged marriages, sexuality, and dating among second generation Indian Americans, "with its underlying erotic fantasies, are … fraught with the politics of not only gender and sexuality but also of nation, generation, and belonging" (153). As can be seen from Maira's discussion, in immigrant communities, sexuality is implicated in the idea of nationalism and in the sense of belonging to the nation. Reena feels at home with all her white women friends in her shared apartment, as well as in the beauty salon, but not in her mother's house or in the Indian community, where she cannot name herself or her sexuality. Naming will make her modern and American. She will belong to a modern nation-state. She will be safe.

Ganatra shows the Indian American community in problematic ways in order to bring the taboo subject of lesbianism to the fore, while the Canadian-based Deepa Mehta's *Fire* shows construction of gender and sexuality through two sisters-in-law's lesbian love for each other. *Fire* also received much critical acclaim in the West.[2] The Western audience's admiration for these films is not to be negated. As Gayatri Gopinath points out in "Local Sites/Global Contexts: The Transnational Trajectories of Deepa Mehta's *Fire*," this film was "funded largely with Canadian money [and] had circulated from 1996 to 1998 mostly at international film festivals in India, Europe, and North America and had a lengthy art house release in major U.S. cities" ("Local Sites" 149). As noted, the film was first released mostly at international film festivals as well as at art houses in the U.S. and abroad, but because of its controversial representations, it erupted into mainstream cultural and urban spaces in India and other diasporic spaces of the Global North.

The film's narrative portrays the lives of two sisters-in-law in a middle-class New Delhi neighborhood who are oppressed or ignored by

their respective husbands. Radha (Shabana Azmi) and Sita (Nandita Das) – named after mythic heroines who are supposedly self-sacrificing, pure, and idealized wives – provide most of the labour for the family business as well as for the household. Radha's husband experiments with sexual asceticism because she cannot procreate, while Sita's newly wedded husband continues his sexual liaison with an Americanized Chinese hairdresser. Sita's husband views arranged marriages as backward and oppressive, but still tries to impregnate her as his duty, which is carried out in a distasteful and callous manner. He literally rapes her. Eventually, the sisters-in-law turn to each other for support and comfort. That this support and community takes the form of sexual expression – lesbian love – between two sisters-in-law is the focus of much controversy – in fact, becoming a "Hindu dilemma" in India.[3]

While critiquing this film, one has to be mindful of the right-wing Hindu government's reaction to it. The film does bring a taboo topic to the fore, and the director must certainly be lauded for her considerable effort so that needed social and cultural transformation can occur. However, it does so at the cost of demonizing Indian patriarchy and fetishizing oppression in monolithic terms. Additionally, in a culture where same-sex expressions of affection are not seen as deviant, the portrayal of Sita and Radha, as two typical middle-class wives who enjoy community and show affection in sexualized terms might have long-term detrimental effects on same-sex support (see Madhu Kishwar's discussion). How many sisters-in-law oil each other's hair on a regular basis in India – or Burma, where I was born and raised, for that matter-- and are never considered deviant? I saw such acts on a daily basis within my own family. However, in this film, Sita and Radha eventually leave the "oppressive" household – after Radha miraculously escapes being burned alive by her husband (shades of Sita's *Agni Pariksha)* – portending a life of love, liberty, and independence. In one scene in *Fire*, Sita comments to Radha about lesbian love and notes that there is no word in their language to describe what they feel for each other. Western critics view the narrative in terms of the Indians' inability to "articulate lesbianism, which in turn signifies the failure of the non-West to progress toward the organization of sexuality and gender prevalent in the West" (Gopinath 153). For example, in *Chutney Popcorn*, for Reena's mother, not naming Reena's sexuality does not mean that she negates her lesbianism; she does not see the need for it, as many first generation immigrants do not see the need to name their children's sexuality, hetero

or homo. Gopinath suggests that non-disclosure regarding dating and sexuality in the Indian immigrant community harkens back to India, but for Reena, naming this identity appears paramount because "within the dominant discursive production of India as anterior to the West, lesbian or gay identity is explicitly articulated as the marker of full-fledged modernity" (Gopinath 153). Both Ganatra and Mehta fall into the category of writers who favour modernity and therefore have become complicit with Western ideology by showcasing oppressed Indian women in simple binary constructions. However, when we as transnational feminists critique the showcasing of gender oppression in such simple binaries as limiting, there is a danger of us being labelled fascists or as being in cahoots with right-wing heteropatriarchal fundamentalists in perpetuating gender and sexual oppression. Monica Bachmann, for example, demands the right to "choose … the ability to be open with the world about intimate relations" for homosexual Indians (237). Again, the word "choice" becomes conflated with liberty and liberation in Western terms, as though homosexual people are not persecuted in the Global North. Bachmann's article implies that we, who dare critique *Fire* for its limitations, are trying to silence and censor lesbians. Bachmann claims that for political and social change to occur, sexual oppression must be articulated, for "analysis has shown that separating [the personal and the political] is impossible, linked as they are to kinship and economic structures that encompass both the most intimate and the most public relations" (240). Bachmann's assertion appears valid, for paradigms do shift, leading to expansion and social change; however, we must engage political structures strategically, and toward that end, work with majority groups by forming coalitions within a given paradigm. Otherwise, feminist voices simply become a fashion statement, as seen in many parts of the Global North.

Modernity and the construction of liberated sexuality are also showcased in Shani Mootoo's writing. Mootoo, who was born in Ireland and grew up in Trinidad, is a filmmaker and visual artist who now resides in Canada. Her first novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), is set in a fictional Caribbean island called Paradise, in Lantanacamara. Mootoo, a product of four cultures – India, Ireland, England, and Trinidad – shows her characters negotiating in and out of many different and difficult spaces. Her novel focuses on homosexual and transsexual identity construction for the transnational subject.

Mootoo focuses her attention on the members of the Indian diasporic community in the Caribbean and their painful search for personal and sexual identities. She portrays the struggles and pain of the displaced and dispossessed Indo-Caribbeans who, due to severe colonial oppression and postcolonial/neocolonial conditions, become alienated, and in their alienation we see the internal and external violence of the subjects shaped in this troubled space taking extreme forms. Abused, they either become abusers, or find escape – in the in-between spaces, through a maddening descent into the void, or through displacement, physical or metaphoric, to the "liberating" spaces of the West. Yet beyond madness in Bhabha's "Third Space" ("DissemiNation" 149), there is transformation for Mootoo's characters; through healing, there is hope, there is an idealized space for all creatures, mad, queer, or the nervous, and this space too is predominantly located in the Global North. How do we provide a postcolonial criticism of Mootoo's seemingly hopeful text? I examine Mootoo's politics of location to provide an analysis of the novel's characters, and show how they can be misread and (mis)interpreted by mainstream readers.

The narrative begins with the arrival of Mala Ramchandin, a madwoman suspected of murder, to the Paradise Alms House. The circular narrative reveals the story of Mala's family, which spans about sixty years, to the present time. The narrator of the story is Nurse Tyler, whose own story of sexual ambiguity is interwoven with Mala's sexual abuse, as well as with her mother's lesbian love for Lavinia, a white woman her father used to be in love with. The subplot of the story revolves around Ambrosia, or Otoh, the "son" of Mala's childhood friend, Ambrose (or Boyee). Otoh is born a female but convinces everyone that she is male. Such characterizations of madness and sexual ambiguity are linked to colonialism's oppression and exploitation.

We see colonialism's oppressive practices and their effect on the Indians in the Caribbean. Mala's father, Chandin Ramchandin, the son of indentured labourers, who is "adopted" by a white missionary, Reverend Thoroughly, eventually becomes so alienated from himself due to English education that, in the end, he perpetrates the worst kind of sexual and physical abuse on his own family members. As Frantz Fanon explains about the colonized in *The Wretched of the Earth*, colonialism uses extreme violence to keep the colonized oppressed, and when the oppressed subject reaches the limits of tolerance, he/she either explodes in revolt, or implodes (61). Since violence is also cyclical, the abused then becomes

the abuser. Many postcolonial/neocolonial economies, such as Zimbabwe, Uganda, South Africa, many parts of the Caribbean, Burma, just to provide a few examples, attest to the theory of cyclical violence. This "nervous condition" of the postcolonial subject is amply represented in Mootoo's narrative. We see madness in Chandin – who ultimately constructs his masculinity in opposition to the abused body of his daughter, Mala – exploding in the text.

Chandin's soul is imprisoned by colonial ideology, as can be seen from his tutelage by Reverend Thoroughly. According to Ngugi, "the bullet was the means of the physical subjugation [of the colonized]. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation" (5). If, as Ngugi claims, the introduction of the colonizer's language is like a "cultural bomb" that changes the psyche of the victim, we can see such cultural violence represented in Chandin's character. Ngugi asserts that language was the most important vehicle by means of which the colonizers kept the soul of the colonized imprisoned; we see such examples when Chandin, as a young boy, is torn from his family. Imperceptibly, the boy's psyche begins to shift. He starts to believe in the superiority of the White man: "In his innocence he felt that his people's lack of these things (the chandelier, the fine cabinets, carved chairs and side tables and lamps with fancy shades in the Reverend's house) was a result of apathy and a poverty of ambition. He thought of his parents' mud house and the things there [and] felt immense distaste for his background and the people in it" (30–31). The outsider's viewpoint is really well put by the author, who can see the dismal quality of life in the Indian homes. However, the outlook appears more dismal than it should, for, having spent only a few days in the Reverend's home, it seems unlikely that Chandin could become so aware of the stark difference between the two homes. However, Mootoo, who lived in the Caribbean until the age of nineteen and now resides in Canada, could and did see the immense disparity between the two lifestyles and so can write it with such clarity, yet in simple binaries, for the Western audience. One must be aware of the metropolitan privilege of such writers who can negotiate two territories with relative ease; although she herself is still a minority in the West, Mootoo's accounts of the dismal lifestyles of the Indo-Caribbean, though not unfounded, are highly exaggerated. However, for Western readers, the Indo-Caribbeans appear gloomy and dreadful; there is no heterogeneity in their representations and they appear homogeneously oppressed and oppressive, leading truncated lives.

Chandin, who painstakingly copies the Reverend's mannerisms, practises for the power to change. His love for Lavinia, the Reverend's daughter, presents additional pressure to "improve." However, he soon realizes that Lavinia can never belong to him because the Reverend, who surmises his intense feelings for his daughter, expressly forbids the liaison on the grounds that she is his sister, even though Chandin is "adopted." Because of the Reverend's treatment of him, and because Lavinia, suddenly relocated to the West, is now out of his reach, Chandin turns to Sarah, "a woman from his background," for security (45). Chandin, who still mourns the loss of Lavinia, is an indifferent and "dispassionate" (49) husband to Sarah, and the two seldom speak to each other unless it is strictly necessary. Soon, Lavinia returns, raising Chandin's hopes. However, Lavinia returns only to elope with Sarah, whom we now know to be her lover, to the West where they can be "safe" as a family (59). What is of considerable importance here are ideas of sexualities which are seen as deviant in the Caribbean but are seen as perfectly acceptable in the West. Knowing the persecution and discrimination members of the gay community suffer in the West, one wonders at such utopic representation of the West in many Westernized Indian texts.

Tragically and inadvertently, however, they leave Sarah's two daughters behind, and soon, Lantanacamarans come to know that "Chandin pick up with [his] older daughter" (47).

Later, when Ambrose (Boyee), Mala's childhood friend, returns from the West, educated and gentrified, he finds Mala leading a truncated life as her drunken father's caretaker; Asha has eventually run off to the West and to liberty from her father's abuse. Ambrose starts to woo Mala again. As their love for each other blossoms, the increased threat from Chandin becomes imminent. One day, when he discovers the romance, his incest and increased sexual and physical brutalization of Mala's body shove her into madness. Years later, when Otoh, Ambrose's son, comes to deliver some food for Mala, her delusional mind misrecognizes him as Boyee, leading him to her father's skeleton in the basement. In his panic, he inadvertently leads the police to her house, becoming the instrument of Mala's incarceration at the Paradise Alm House. Tyler, the male nurse – "who was neither properly man nor woman but some in-between, unnamed thing" (71) – could identify with Mala because "she has secrets and I had secrets" – the secret of Mala's incest (124). He could also eventually become a lover to Otoh, or Ambrosia, the "son" of Ambrose. The circular narrative allows

us to see Mala's sexual oppression, and gives us an insight into Chandin's tormented soul, fractured by colonialism, manifesting in cyclical violence and eventual madness.

Even though colonialism's violence is contextualized well in Mootoo's text, many Western and Westernized critics show Indo-Caribbean Hindu patriarchy and masculinity as ultimately monolithically oppressive and violent. Take Brinda Mehta's analysis of Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, for example, where she *does* provide a careful historical perspective of Indian plantation indentured servitude and colonial violence, leading to further violence in the post-indenture period, *but* she too eventually falls prey to imperialist feminist ideology when she sees the *Hindu* household as *inherently* violent, "especially in terms of their control over women" (194).

What is flawed in many so-called feminist critical analyses is the valorization of the West as a liberatory space. While pondering deviancy and its definition, Tyler thinks about his own "perversion" and concludes that his desire to go abroad has less to do with his wish to study there than with wanting to be in a place where his sexuality will not be seen as perverse, only his "foreignness" (47). When Tyler and Otoh stroll in the garden arm in arm, Hector, the gardener, wishes that his gay brother, who left town (presumably for the liberating West!) never to be seen again, could meet the two of them. When Elsie, Otoh's mother, declares that there are always a "handful of people like you in every village" (238), Otoh evinces surprise at her mother's knowledge of her sexuality, at which Elsie claims, "You think because I never say anything that I forgot what you are" (237), very much in the manner of Reena's mother, Meena. The idea of naming is Western and is then monolithically imposed on to all communities. For Mootoo, who dwells in the West, queerness is "conceptualized in motion," and she suggests queerness will suddenly be proclaimed and named in the Caribbean, for she deploys "nostalgia" as "a means by which to imagine [herself] within those spaces from which [she] is perpetually excluded or denied existence" (Gopinath, *Impossible* 186). Additionally, the narrative points to a liberatory space in the egalitarian West, where "deviant" sexualities can be proclaimed loudly, leading one to modernity and to belonging to the modern nation-state, which in itself is a myth for many gays and lesbians in a nation that continues to discriminate against and brutalize many minorities, including, of course, homosexuals. What is problematic in this text is that once the fluid sexualities of the Third World spaces be-

gin to be defined by First World ideology, misreadings occur, sometimes purposefully. It is not that queerness is suddenly going to be accepted in Lantanacamara; as Elsie declares, there have always been people like Otoh around. As Shohat suggests, Westernized "elites have absorbed the binaristic sexual norms of their colonizers, even in the Middle East/North Africa [and I add, South Asia], where a kind of informal bisexuality had sometimes been tacitly accepted" (20). It is only when Western ideas of gayness and patriarchal oppressions are imposed onto the cultural spaces of the Global South that the problem takes on a new face.

Take India, for example. In a land of fluid sexualities (and unofficial bisexuality) where women have had solidarity and community in domestic spaces for centuries without it being termed feminist, womanist, or lesbian/gay, it is only with the modernist agenda and recent movies such as Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, as well as the Hindu fundamentalists' reactionary politics, that discussion of such practices as deviant are coming into popular discourse. Even with that, the majority of India remains disconnected. In Paradise, if Tyler and Otoh find acceptance as a couple, it is because of the previously mentioned sensibilities and not because in the new millennium we are stepping into an idealized and utopian New World Order. On the other hand, representing mythical spaces, such as Ireland and Canada, where gay sexualities are accepted as normal, as seen by Sarah's and Lavinia's example, and where only race matters for immigrants as Tyler suggests (48), distorts the reality of minority and gay oppression, particularly for gays of colour. While there are urban centres and spaces where there is more visibility for gays of colour, they are still extremely marginalized and often exploited members of the gay community. In many gay film festivals, for example, films of or by gays of colour are tokenized and fetishized, as are gays of colour themselves.

Therefore, in reading *Cereus Blooms at Night*, one must not forget the location of the writer, the text, and the reception of it in the Global North or in privileged diasporic spaces in the Global South. In addition, and regarding race, while the text is located in the Caribbean, there is no Afro-Caribbean presence in the novel. While the narrative too is reflexive of the Black/White dualism, and where the Caribbean is represented as dismal, abusive, and oppressive, and where freedom, liberty, and happiness are located in the West, one wonders at the absolute absence of Afro-Caribbean or mixed-race elements; if any are present, one is hard pressed to find them. Even the Indo-Caribbean identity is ambiguous for

the most part. That remains incidental. We are always only sure about the White presence. Mootoo becomes complicit in the exploitation of Afro- and Indo-Caribbean landscapes by "supporting the agenda of modernity" as she "misrecognize[s] and fail[s] to resist Western hegemonies" (Grewal and Kaplan 2). She, along with Ganatra and Mehta, falls prey to the "conventional belief in travel as transformation" as she resides, works, and publishes in the West (Grewal and Kaplan 141). It is the utopic space that these diasporic writers, along with the Westernized feminist critics, point to that is so disturbing, particularly due to neocolonialism and transnationalism in a globalized and post–9/11 world.

Vijay Mishra defines two types of diasporas – the diaspora of early and late capital. The early capital diaspora is the working class or the diaspora of plantation labour, while the diaspora of late capital is "distinguished by movements of economic migrants … into the metropolitan centers of the former empires" (234). Mehta, Ganatra, and Mootoo, as well as their viewers and critics, belong to the diaspora of late capital, "generally referred to as NRIs (non-resident Indians) and largely seen as upwardly mobile" (Mishra 234). A diasporic imaginary growing out of a sense of marginality, of being rejected outright, desperately "try to hang on to values that mark their differences from the rest of the nation-state" (Mishra 234), such as tradition, community, and family, while the attraction for the hybridized selves, such as Ganatra, Mehta, and Mootoo, is to love, sexuality, and liberty. My point is that while artists as socially responsible critics must bring oppressive practices to the forefront of debates in order for social and structural change to occur, they must not replicate imperialist feminists' agendas, particularly during these troubled times where violence shadows the everyday existence of many minorities, including members of the gay community. We must also be careful how we critique Indian female-authored texts. As Kirsten Holst Petersen pointed out so long ago, it is an oversimplification that a "woman's view is always bound to be more valid than a man's" in the discussion of women's oppression (251), and similarly, it is an oversimplification to think that an Indian woman's opinion regarding Indian women's monolithic oppression is always going to be legitimate.

The audiences of such films and texts are often the Euro-interpellated elite. Ganatra, Mehta, and Mootoo (very much like the Nigerian Buchi Emecheta whom Petersen critiques),

> can recreate the situation and difficulties of women with authenticity and give valuable insights into their thoughts and feelings. [Their] prime concern is not so much with cultural liberation, nor with social change. To [them] the object seems to be to give women access to power in the society as it exists, to beat men at their own game. [They] lay claim to no ideology, not even a feminist one. [They] simply ignore the [Indian] dilemma. (Peterson 254)

Years later, Ketu H. Katrak's "Decolonizing Culture," as well as Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes," echoed Petersen's stance. To be truly empowering models for feminist pedagogy, our readings of *Fire* and *Chutney Popcorn* must contextualize both the upwardly mobile middle-class milieu of Sita and Radha's families and the metropolitan spaces of Reena's and Sarita's lived worlds, as well as the directors'. These artists are modern and show modernity as a marker for equality.

As multicultural and transnational postcolonial feminists, we must see that resistance is not merely posited in gendered terms for a politically engaged pedagogy; it requires multicultural as well as postcolonial concerns. These three diasporic texts are marked by the artists' metropolitan as well as nationalist sensibilities; the reception of their texts suggests that the debate regarding individual vs. communal identity is still being posited in modern terms, long after debates regarding the modern moment should have passed, leading to a skewered perception of Indian culture, Indian womanhood, Indian masculinity, and Indian patriarchy. In institutions of higher learning, where issues of multiculturalism, transnationalism, and feminism are taught interchangeably in efforts toward curriculum diversification, dissemination of stereotypes leading to discrimination against ethnic and sexual minorities continues to occur in dangerous ways.

Due to the increased racism and violence that many ethnic minorities have been recently facing in the Global North, we must ask: Are feminist political concerns separate from multicultural concerns? More importantly, how can we, as transnational feminists, continue to critique and teach postcolonial texts that represent 'oppressed and powerless Indian women' brutalized by a monolithic indigenous patriarchy – be it in the 'First' or 'Third World' diasporic spaces – for a Westernized and Western

audience? In hierarchical social and political spheres, can transnational feminists focus only on feminist concerns – for all women, homosexual or heterosexual – ignoring racism, elitism, and globalism? According to Shohat, "the mutual embeddedness between transnational and multicultural struggles" must be highlighted, and feminists must pay special attention to "the political intersectionality of all … axes of stratification" (1), be it class, race, gender, or sexuality. Shohat argues that "even with the best of intentions, a fetishized focus on African female genital mutilation or on Asian foot-binding ends up as complicit with a Eurocentric victimology that reduces African or Asian agency and organizing" (9).

Gender issues must be theorized within a "conflictual community" in complex and strategic ways, where oppression in certain practices does not "perpetuate the false dichotomy of savagery versus civilization or tradition versus modernity" (Shohat 9); otherwise, social and structural change, the goal of all feminist writing and organizing, becomes just empty rhetoric. Thus, as global, postcolonial/transnational/multicultural feminists, we must not duplicate the colonial narrative of a rescuing mission. Instead, we must share the "critique of hegemony and the burden of representation" (9). Our work, especially with resurgent global debates on nationalism and national belongings in recent years, and particularly regarding the politics of location for transnational critics like us who continue to read and teach postcolonial literature and theory in the West, has just begun.[4]