

Call for Papers

Indian values: Diaspora and womanhood

DESI, La revue, Diasporas : Études des Singularités Indiennes

Abstract :

The pluridisciplinary peer-reviewed journal DESI (Diasporas : études des singularités indiennes) is planning a special thematic issue (3) on the relationships between migration, gender and Indian values (publication scheduled for Autumn 2014). We are looking for contributions on the questioning of Indian values (content, significance, evolution of Indian values in a context of dis- and re-placement), the place of women and the evolution of changing social relations in migration and their effects on the definition of these values. The CFP is destined to young and confirmed researchers from a wide range of disciplines.

Argument:

Indian cinema and literature bear witness to the multiplicity of exchanges materializing between India and the West. The most common theme of these diasporic media remains the encounter between East and West and its subsequent redefinition of identity; yet, mutations in Indian society together with the new forms of migration have helped shape a radically new image of the Indian migrant.

The image of the new Indian migrant, in films, fiction, or in anthropology and geography has morphed into the image of the migrant as actor of their own migration which is now perceived less as a radical break from their country of origin than as an opportunity for social and material improvement (Percot 2005). Change is also present in the “identity of the purveyors of exoticism: they are no longer exclusively Western but Indian. Non-resident Indians fabricate it every day from abroad” (Béneï, 2005). This new form of exoticism is by and large produced by the community of NRIs who are reinventing new forms of diasporic imagination together with a redefinition of Indian identity. A perfect example of such an evolution is the character of the NRI often embodied by Sharukh Khan in Subhash Ghai’s 1997 *Pardes* or in Aditya Chopra’s emblematic *DDLJ*. These Bollywood films from the 1990s depict NRIs as British or American-educated cosmopolitans, but whose hearts remain faithful to Indian tradition. They contribute to the image of a united, predominantly Hindu, mythical India in which “Indian values” are paramount. Women seem to be the best “keepers of tradition” and bearers of “Indian values” in that constant movement of reinvention of identities from one country to the other.

In diasporic fiction (Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni or Sri Lankan novelist Roma Tearne) female characters hold particularly uncomfortable positions at cultural crossroads where the integration of “non-Indian” values is perceived by the community (within the limiting frame of an enlarged family) and themselves as the betrayal of typically “Indian” values: the sense of belonging which is sometimes conditioned by cultural stereotyping, thus keeping men and women in a limbo of straight-laced traditions and relationships. In many novels and in scientific descriptions as well, settling in a Western country is far from being a factor of emancipation and, on the contrary, generates new situations where wives are even more dependant on their husbands.

These situations must certainly be seen from the broader perspective of the personal project of migration, generally initiated by men or at least constructed as such. In the US for example, the migration of women is more often than not the opposite of a success story, as

Shivali Shah underlined (2004). Highly qualified English-speaking women who join their husbands (after an arranged marriage) are granted the H-1B visa for the highly qualified and yet are forbidden to enter the labor market according to the provisions of the H-4 visa. These “H-4 wives” are therefore particularly vulnerable and sometimes become the victims of domestic abuse. In this particular case, apparently neutral public policies have gendered effects and promote situations of dependence.

Although the mass migration of males, as in Kerala, has granted autonomy to the women who remained at home (Gulati, 1993), it seems the migration of Indian wives to join their NRI husbands has often been the source of tensions and grievances. Conversely, in the case of Indian female nurses, Marie Percot (2005) has demonstrated that when the migration project stems from a desire for social self-improvement and wider access to consumer goods, daughters and wives long for more autonomy and more individualism, eventually putting into question traditional social values.

The thrust of this issue is twofold: first, it aims at questioning the representations of gender in migration in art, cinema and literary productions; then, determining the element that modifies in migration the relationships between the genders and creates an unbridgeable gap with the Indian model.

All the contributions questioning Indian values (content, significance, evolution of these values in favour of a multiplicity of dis- and re-placement), the place of women and the evolution of social rapports in migration and the effect it has on the definition of these values will be welcome.

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Coordination du numéro : Anthony Goreau-Ponceaud, senior lecturer, University of Bordeaux IV and Paul Veyret, senior lecturer, University of Bordeaux 3.

Calendrier

1 Dec. 2013 : submission deadline for contribution proposals (250 words with short resume).

15 March 2014 : Deadline for submission to peer-review committee.

November 2014 : Publication du N°3 de Desi, La revue

Contact

Anthony Goreau-Ponceaud, University of Bordeaux IV, anthonygoreau@yahoo.fr

Paul Veyret, University of Bordeaux 3, Paul.Veyret@u-bordeaux3.fr