
Sushi Das’s memoir deals with the ramifications of being a daughter of Punjabi migrants in 1970s Britain. Das, in a darkly humorous tone, details her ongoing battles against the image of the good Indian daughter ‘under control’ (104), from writing ‘Geldof is God’ (71) on the headboard and attempting to avoid an arranged marriage. From a reader’s perspective, Das can be viewed a ‘thrice displaced migrant’ negotiating a variety of migrant discourses between Indian, British and Australian cultures. Themes of home, belonging and space reverberate through her work as well as the negotiation of diasporic identities in transnational and transcultural spaces by the narrator. Das appears to be seeking a centrality, constantly renegotiating her identity within the paradigms of her conflicted personal history.

The most striking image within the memoir is that of a suitcase. As a young girl Das packs one as part of her plan to run away from home, writing SIOUX (7) as a play on her name, reflecting her bicultural struggle; her father carries one on his migrant journey into Britain and Das again packs when moving to Australia. The book comes full circle with Das’s daughter Lotus, named after India’s national flower and the offspring of an interracial marriage in a multicultural society, using Das’s old suitcase to stock her treasured toys (276).

Avtar Brah writes that ‘At the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey.’(180). Das’s father sets out in 1963 as part of a wave of migrants from the Commonwealth seeking to make a new home in the West. The book reverberates with images familiar from movies such as *Bend it Like Beckham*. The young Sushi, like Jassi, the young Punjabi protagonist of *Bend it Like Beckham*, identifies herself as ‘an outsider in her parents’ culture’ (13). Where Das excels is in her ethnographic detailing and clear images of the control exerted by the British-Punjabi community’s hegemonic discourse, vividly evoked through the narrator’s eyes. ‘Izzat’ (90) or the ‘honour’ was the community’s byword and in 1970s Britain ‘losing face’ (106) was the greatest fear. Later, Das appreciates the sacrifice her parents made for her as their community shunned them following her first marriage, to a white man.

Das’s dark humour leaves the reader torn between laughter and sympathy as she navigates between her mother’s disappointment at her unimpressive bust, comparing her breasts to two aspirins on an ironing board (18), and the unfairly high value placed on the Indian male child (16). Das’s quirky humour surfaces in her portrayal of her mother’s struggle with the English language and her father’s obsession with keeping ‘undesirable elements’ (79), namely white boys, out of his daughters’ lives. This provides the reader with candid glimpses into the dichotomy of the Punjabi-British migrant existence. Das’s humour emerges again in her gently funny etching of intercultural communications in instances such as her mother offering to dye Tom Hyland’s white hair black on their wedding day (266).

Essentially, the book details the story of several marriages; the arranged marriages of Das’s parents and her sister Vin and her two marriages to ‘outsiders’. Das appears contemplative never judgemental in her analysis of her parents’ marriage, especially as she is simultaneously moved yet bewildered by the Hindu *Karvachauth* ritual of a woman fasting for the husband’s longevity (51). Das refers to arranged marriages which are not forced as ‘mere matchmaking’ (267), raising her voice only against forced marriages (137). She cautions Australia where there is ‘no more awareness of Indian culture apart from cricket and curry’ (268) and yet where multiculturalism is now the trend,

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to beware of similar problems given the influx of migrants from more tradition-bound cultures. Das questions the structures or lack thereof of the Indian community worldwide in support of abused women (130). While it might be taken by some as proof of Das’s status as cultural outsider, she raises a valid point. Das deems the romanticising of Indian arranged marriages by Westerners at large and the British in particular as ‘toadying’ to Indian culture.

Das’s move to Australia as a British Indian migrant affords her deeper insights into issues of national identity and the sense of being an outsider for a long stretch of time (228-9). She identifies with her mother’s feelings of alienation: ‘I now understood how Mum must have felt washing nappies in cold water and pushing me around in a pram in the park whole day.’ (231). She also faces the fact that being an outsider takes on many hues as her first husband, John Hobson, comments it is better to be Indian than a ‘pom’ in Australia (232).

Das limns disturbing images of racism within the Anglo-Saxon discourses from the British boy openly taunting her of smelling of curry (60) to the Australian woman at the National Library cruelly asking her to move away because she smells bad. (234). Most disturbing in the latter instance is the utter silence of other spectators. As Das says, she felt ‘small, humiliated and very far from safety’ (ibid). Das speaks with the voice of a migrant who bore the full brunt of a Britain which was not sensitively attuned to the culture of its former colonies; yet in case of marriage, both times, she has felt culturally and emotionally attuned to Anglo-Saxon males. Das’s second marriage to the much older Tom Hyland also reflects a growing emotional maturity. She and Hyland appear to have translated a friendship into a marriage, unlike the illicit and exciting passion of her relationship with the ‘other’ as with her previous relationship with John Hobson.

Das is clear that every individual should be free to make his or her mistakes (248). There is a bit of a Walt Disney feel to the last few pages with the utter camaraderie of the family reunion in the US and with Das in her sister’s comfortable lounge musing on the end of the era of arranged marriages in the family (280). Ironically, at times Das appears to be at a cultural crossroads, questioning her decisions and wondering if an arranged marriage would have spelt future happiness and perhaps growth of love (243). But Das concludes on a note of reconciliation and a deep appreciation for her parents who have ultimately and gracefully accepted it all, whether it is Vin’s move to the US, her brother Raja’s British-Chinese wife, or both her marriages. She views the ‘tyrannical distance of Australia’ (237) as a ‘boon’ which helped resolve her issues with her family. Overall, Deranged Marriage is worth a read as the migrant female voice cuts across cultures, compelling us to recognise common human follies.

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