

Review of Sayan Dey's *Performing Memories and Weaving Archives: Creolized Cultures across the Indian Ocean*. London and New York: Anthem Press, 2024. Paperback, 114 Pages. ISBN:9781839986901 ,£5.00, \$24.95

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Sayan Dey's analysis of creolized cultures offers a refreshing take on human-ocean relationship. Academic texts have often discussed man-ocean relationship in terms of commercial, political, economic and cultural exchanges by drawing references from various ethnographic and archival materials but in the Introductory Chapter Dey shifts the readers' focus on the "repertoires of greetings" or "patterns of greetings." According to Dey, this functions as a "tool" that has helped to develop linguistic and cultural bonds among diasporic communities in India and South Africa. This kind of analysis or idea that Dey proposes offers a novel perspective to the readers who try to understand the "conflictual" and

“collaborative” human-ocean relationship. However, it would have been better if the implication of this tool was explained in detail by the writer in the book. “Greeting” is a basic human gesture of introducing oneself to other but “how” this was exercised among the communities in different diasporic locations could have been discussed in greater detail. The title of the Introductory Chapter is catchy as the different terms used by different communities to greet one another are mentioned but what I find missing is the link between the title and the content of the chapter. Dey has discussed several books and articles published by twentieth century scholars; works of pre-colonial travelers; paintings and artworks featuring Indian and South African diasporic communities during the colonial period and has also given us a detailed historical account of how trade networks expanded between India and Africa in the precolonial time. Yet, the interpretation of greetings requires more investigation and analysis.

Readers of this book would, however, be satisfied with the explanations of the research methods that he has followed in his book. Dey has conducted interviews in semi-structured manner by selecting eleven research participants belonging to South African Indian diasporic community in Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Durban, and four research participants coming from African Indian diasporic community in Gujarat with the help of snow-ball sampling method. As he is considering the oral narratives of the community, he has borrowed Irma

McClaurin's idea of "emvoicement" that interprets narratives of research participants through lived experiences. Dey is basically focusing on the active involvement of the participants who would no longer function as mere "information giver" but would contribute as active co-researchers. Another important research method that he proposes is the use of "kin study" instead of "case study" method where the narratives of both humans and nonhumans are accepted and valued. He also tries to follow Lorisia MacLeod's citation template model to cite the voices of "indigenous elders" and "knowledge keepers" thereby trying to be comprehensive in details and subject matter.

The idea behind weaving this project developed from the stories that the author heard when he was a child. The stories of an African king who had a kingdom in West Bengal in the late fifteenth century to some extent inspired him to write this book. Within his family too, the stories of migration were common as his grandparents and parents were actually migrants who migrated to West Bengal from Bangladesh during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Through his personal experiences Dey seems to relate to the position of those diasporic South Africans and Indians, and also correlate with the ambivalent space that they occupy.

These "archipelagic sociocultural spaces" that are created in India by the presence of African Indians is de-

scribed as “porous.” Dey further explains this porosity in cultural sphere by mentioning Ananya Jahanara Kabir’s arguments of “porosity” which she referred to in one of her lectures to draw comparison on matters flowing on both directions. Cultural narratives, according to Dey, function in a similar way, creating a two-way interaction. This argument becomes problematic in the Indian diasporic context because of the caste practices which limit such cultural penetration within the periphery itself. Dey mentions the drawbacks of caste practices in India, and how the idea of caste consciousness plays a crucial role in determining the identity of an individual. Now, if such is the case, how can then the phenomenon of porosity function so evenly in a society that operates on the basis of caste practices? The phenomenon of porosity therefore needs to be problematized to understand this cultural percolation which does not happen so uniformly among diasporic communities because these communities often belong to minor groups. The idea of “co-becoming” may seem romantic but the stories of struggles and pain that their experiences offer could have been addressed and discussed in this book. In the final chapter Dey mentions in general about “painful remembering” but unfortunately readers would not find any specific evidence to relate to such experiences.

There is also a detailed discussion on the complex narratives of “sacredscares” that gave birth to the transoceanic worship cultures and interreligious folklores. The

use of Afro-Indian creole languages in religious songs not only give them different meanings but also help to develop a common feeling of togetherness. However, these religious and spiritual practices have their disadvantages too. Dey mentions the role of passenger Indians who through certain religious practices strengthen the caste-based division among Indians in South Africa, thereby instilling the idea of social hierarchy and disrupting the unity. These creolized forms of spiritual performances often seem to problematize the social space which is believed to promote an identity free of all prejudices. In music too this kind of segregation and selection are practiced. The creolized music that is produced by the performers, Dey mentions in Chapter Four of the book, resist assimilation or distortion of any kind. The creolized musical practices prove to be quite exclusive as they avoid mixing of music borrowed from outside their community. In case of culinary practices, contrarily, the examples that Dey cites highlight the cosmopolitan nature of these communities where native foods are prepared by using local Indian spices.

The title of the final chapter focuses on 'continuity' which suggests plans about adding more information in future and developing his understanding on diasporic communities in India and South Africa by revising some of his research ideas. But what this book lacks are the discussions on the ethnographic narratives of the struggles and resistance of the African Indians and the

South African Indians. The author has mentioned an example of the black miners of South Africa but apart from this nothing else has been documented. Records on the life and sufferings of African Indians need to be addressed so that historical analysis could be made to trace the changes within these communities. This book gives readers a broad picture of various cultural practices and performances taking place within the diaspora community but also confuses the readers as no specific timeline or period is mentioned. References are drawn from colonial, post-colonial and contemporary periods, and so it becomes difficult for readers to keep a track of the events discussed in the book.

Every book remains incomplete even after entering the print world. This book which is a product of hard work and labour, too has more to say and add. Apart from the shortcomings, this book discusses a topic that is quite relevant in today's time and also critiques the idea of cultural homogeneity which resists cultural assimilation. By citing his own personal experiences, Dey sympathetically explores the experiences of diaspora communities settled within and across nations. This personal emotional connection obviously highlights the appeal of the book. So, Dey rightly points out when he says in the dedicatory page that his "transoceanic ancestors" always "bless" him in spirit. This (transcendental) connection may remind readers of some fairy tale moments that are often found in children's literature but this connection

between the author and aquatic entities actually serves as the starting point of this project but also prepares him intellectually and emotionally to document, archive and critique the oceanic and transoceanic cultures and linguistic practices. Sayan Dey's meticulously well-researched book should be read not only by the scholars but also by those interested in the stories of migration and diaspora.