

## Chapter 80

# Intersections of Gender, Sex, and Power: Control Over Women's Bodies and Sexuality Amongst the Bangladeshi Diaspora in Britain

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter highlights the dilemma of being immigrant diasporic women in a British cultural context by focusing on the everyday life of British Bangladeshi women who are being controlled in the private sphere based on empirical research. Particularly, the chapter shows how cultural ideologies are intersecting with patriarchal norms to gain control over women bodies and sexuality. Finally, the chapter discusses the process and system of differentiation and domination through an intersectional analysis to understand how women ostensibly belonging to the same ethnic group may have different and competing experiences of migration and Diaspora.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I draw a feminist poststructuralist theory on diaspora and intersectionality, particularly AvtarBrah's theoretical and empirical research *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), which induced me to shape my research. I draw some specific concerns for Brah's idea in discussing the existing South Asian or Bangladeshi diaspora research grounded on diaspora identity and politics of amalgamation and so forth, which have persuaded me to choose this arena of scholarship. In point of fact, there is little research on the issue of Bangladeshi Diaspora, Identity and Intersectionality. Avtar Brah (1996) is the prominent scholar to look at the issue critically in her empirical research on South Asian Diaspora. Later on Desai (2000) and Alexander (2000) explore the intersection of ethnicity with gender, race and age, which unfold the formation, representation, and contestation of the identity of a generation of young British Bangladeshi men in the public sphere.

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In her research, Brah tries to focus the debates on contestation of culture, politics, subjectivities and identity by reconnoitering the intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, generation, and nationalism (Brah 1996, p.17). Brah emphasizes multi-locationality, and sees diaspora space as shaped and reshaped through the politics of power and the discourse of intersectionality, which plays out in economic, political, cultural, and psychic spheres. From an anti-racist, and poststructuralist perspective, her deconstruction of binary oppositions: inferior/superior, regarding diaspora, drives her to reinterpret predominant understandings of migration, as she thinks diaspora space is more occupied by ethnic groups than by those who want to remain ethnic. However, she overlooks the notion of the 'sameness' entity of Britain, which requires securing the situation of socio-cultural/political/economic cosmos from incursion via ethnic migrants. Brah (2007) thinks 'identity' and 'difference' are fluid and are changing processes through the chronological settings. Thus, her clarification is to introduce shared understanding or commonality in Britain to overcome the prejudice, racism, or homophobia. Hence, my research paper adopts a diasporic and intersectional approach to investigate the identity of British-Bangladeshis. More specifically, it examines the gender, generation and class distinctions that create complex or changing identities of British Bangladeshis in Britain through analysing their experiences and practices of domestic and social life in diaspora space in Britain. This has been done by analysing experiences of 20 women and men, who have all been living in Britain as immigrants.

The chapter considers the dilemma of being immigrant diasporic women in a British cultural context and explores the situation of immigrant women who are trying to mix and reshape their values, and beliefs and cultural practices with new socio-cultural and political spheres of diaspora in their daily life. The relation between first generation immigrant parents with their British born next generation children, and their subjective view of their identities is another key focus of this research paper.

Diaspora as a cultural element focuses on the practice or construction of the identity (Gilroy, 1987; 1993). The identity is influenced through the intersections of social categories (for instance ethnicity, race, gender, age, sex, sexuality, religion, class, generation, etc.). The interactions of these categories work out within the process of power construction in diaspora space. As, in the present research paper, an intersectional analysis has been applied to measure these categorical interactions, in this instance, the categories of gender, generation and class have been observed in terms of their interaction with other mentioned categories.

## **WOMEN IN BANGLADESHI DIASPORA IN BRITAIN**

The Bangladeshi diaspora in Britain is an ethnic minority group of people of Bangladeshi descent. The earlier generation were born in Bangladesh and settled in Britain to have a better lifestyle, to eradicate poverty or to provide financial support to families in Bangladesh. They treat themselves as a segregated group in British society and the next generations who were born and brought up in Britain, have a more complex identity because of their position within and between two cultures (Hussain, 2005).

In terms of diaspora space, the formation of identity is always positioned, and fluid by nature (Brah, 1996). Therefore, the socio-political and historical contexts have significance in understanding the migration and settlement of the community. In the history of migration of Bangladeshis in Britain, the pattern of migration by early settlers, from Sylhet region to Britain through 'the region's connections with the imperial trading routes from Calcutta' (Adams, 1987; Choudhury, 1995; Gardner, 2002; Visram, 1986) shows that the early imperial trade business and subsequent global foreign trade business made a huge

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