

South Asian Mothering: Negotiating Culture, Family and Selfhood

Jasjit K. Sangha and Tahira Gonsalves, eds.
Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2013.

REVIEWED BY GINA WONG

This book explores the primacy of selfhood in South Asian mothering contexts, specifically how South Asian women “have sought to ameliorate the impact of racialization and subjugation through their mothering practices” (4). The collection is divided into four sections: “Reshaping, Reclaiming, Resisting,” “Mothering, Mental Health and Wellbeing,” “Complicating Women’s Work,” and “Iconic Mothering, Outlaw Mothering.” Overall, the volume seeks to problematize the cultural disempowerment experienced by many South Asian mothers. Topics addressed include the role of Sikh mothers; immigration, isolation, and poverty; the pressure to conform to “South Asian cultural ideals of motherhood”; caring for special needs children; midwifery experiences; empowering Punjabi Mothers; mothers with home-based businesses; and the experience of a lesbian Muslim mother. This unconventional examination of South Asian women—“outlaw” mothers who dare to overstep boundaries of expected norms and behaviours—makes this an invaluable collection.

Editors Jasjit K. Sangha and Tahira Gonsalves explore “the subtleties of culture and dispel myths or stereotypes about how culture influences South Asian women’s mothering practices” (5). In highlighting cultural practices and elucidating the experiences of South Asian mothers in the diaspora, the editors hope to foster dialogue. Their book makes clear, in fact, that South Asian mothers are pushing against subjugating forces. Many embrace mothering practices that empower the individual and challenge norms and customs associated with caste, gender, sexuality, and physical ability.

I was particularly touched by “Mothers and Warriors,” Sadia Zaman’s poetic narrative of her son’s three-year struggle with ill health and the “Mother Warrior” strength she mustered during the ordeal: “I don the armour that all Mothers have, the one that protects us during years of sleep deprivation and fatigue. I borrow a shield from the eyes of a Mother in the emergency room. Her child has just been hit by a car. I carry a sword, the same one the Mother next door uses to fight the cancerous cells that attack her little girl’s body” (112). In this powerful piece, Zaman shows that women are united, regardless of culture and context, in their deep and enduring love for their children.

South Asian Mothering: Negotiating Culture, Family and Selfhood offers rare insight into the experience of South Asian mothers. It should be requisite reading for all mothers, psychologists, activists, academics, sociologists, policy makers, and health professionals.

Mommyblogs and the Changing Face of Motherhood

May Friedman.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

REVIEWED BY KATE WILLIAMS

In *Mommyblogs and the Changing Face of Motherhood*, author May Friedman takes a poststructural theoretical approach to the digital phenomenon of mommyblogs. She relies on the three key terms of hybrid, cyborg, and queer to explore the voices of mommyblogs and to “help elucidate more fully the complexities of agency, power, identity, and subjectivity of motherhood” (22). Friedman contends that mommyblogs should be read as “innovative forms of maternal life writing that, taken collectively, begin to shift understandings of maternal subjectivity by presenting a public and multitudinous account of many mothers’ practices” (27).

The first two chapters, “Introduction” and “A Short History of the Mamasphere and the Discursive Construction of Motherhood,” offer historical and background information about mommyblogs and place mommyblogs within the canon of motherhood theory. In her introduction, Friedman grounds the genre of the mommyblog in earlier motherhood theory, citing Adrienne Rich’s and Alice Walker’s texts that argue for the significance of reading mothers’ stories. Friedman also engages with Judith Butler’s discussion of performance when she writes about the authenticity of mommyblogs and argues that “[i]n following Butler’s notions of performativity, I consider ‘women’ and ‘mothers’ as constructed rather than biologically created, and as unstable, incoherent subjects” (21). Chapter two offers an historical perspective on the development of blogs and mommyblogs. Here, Friedman tells readers how she selected the blogs under consideration in this book and her methodology for reading and analyzing her chosen blogs.

Chapters three to five focus on the three theoretical terms previously mentioned: hybrid, cyborg, and queer. In Chapter three, “On Hybridity: The Diversity and Multiplicity of the Mamasphere,” Friedman is less interest-