

ILLUSION V/S REALITY: A GLOCAL STUDY OF INDIAN ENGLISH WOMEN POETRY

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Indian English Literature may be defined as literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality. It is clear that neither 'Anglo-Indian Literature', nor literal translations by others legitimately form the part of this literature. Indian Literature is a very literary phenomenon worthy of serious scrutiny. Freedom is perhaps the prerequisite for human life to flourish. Freedom means to be able to breathe freely, to meet people, to have an openness of experience to do as one likes. But in India a woman has been kept in kitchens and parlours, whether in purdah or in luxury she has been deprived of freedom. To express her wrath against patriarchy, a woman these days is moving outside cultural and disciplinary boundaries and is defying the traditional role of woman as a dutiful wife, mother or daughter. She is trying to break the walls of silence that habitually surround her. But the social pressures which mould her very thinking make her non-communicative about her real needs and desires. As a result there arises a contradiction in speech and behavior making her sometimes submissive and sometimes harsh. The same is the case with contemporary Indian women poets taken up for study in this project. The poetry written by contemporary Indian women poets is generally considered to be revealing the growth of feminine poetic consciousness on one hand and on the other hand the changing position of women in Indian society. Race, ethnicity and sexual identity, are the major tools of the poet with which she attacks and writes back against the established canon. The Present paper focuses on the different shades and treatment of Indian world(s) in Indian English Literature. It also concentrates on the location and status of queers in mainstream national iconography and discourses. It would undertake a cumulative study to present a comprehensive picture an idealised world and how is it different from real.

Modern Indian English poetry is one of the many 'new literatures' which began to emerge at the end of the Second World War. Indian English Literature may be defined as literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality. It is clear that neither 'Anglo-Indian Literature', nor literal translations by others legitimately form the part of this literature. Indian Literature is a very literary phenomenon worthy of serious scrutiny. Freedom is perhaps the prerequisite for human life to flourish. Freedom means to be able to breathe freely, to meet people, to have an openness of experience to do as one likes.

The story of Indian poetry began in 1830 with Kashiprasad Ghoshe, who called himself the first Hindoo who has ventured to publish a volume of English poems. It was Henry Derozio, however, who, with the publication of his poems in 1827, initiated the emergence of poetic

creation in English by Indians. Most early efforts were made out of gratitude and emulation and are derivative and imitative in nature. There are, however, some honourable exceptions that deserve due credit and recognition. Indo-Anglian women's poetry took its origin in the process of Westernization in the later half of the nineteenth century and developed gradually into an essential aspect of the total Indian poetic consciousness as expressed in English. "It can safely be asserted that the Fair Voice' in Indian poetry in English is not a 'sparrow's voice', it is a 'true voice of feeling'. (Chavan 121)" Toru Dutt (1856-1877) and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) were the first two great predecessors of contemporary Indo-Anglian women poets. Toru Dutt renders authenticity to the Indian English verse with her innovative style, representing extensively the Indian tradition in a foreign language.

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1940) popularly known as the —Nightingale of India, has been the most prominent woman poet of the colonial period who has won great acclaim in India and abroad. She was conscious of the woman's predicament which she has voiced in quite a few poems. Her poems reveal her —ambiguous attitude. Eunice de Souza points out: "Though she campaigned against 'purdah', her poem 'Purdah' is imbued with nostalgia and exotic appeal: Her life is a revolving dream / Of languid and sequestered ease; . . . (De Souza 3)" She feels concerned for the desperate condition of widows, but, at the same time, in her maudlin voice, she seems to be endorsing the practice of "Sati". Even the poet's friend James Cousins disapproves of some of her poems because of their "perpetuation of the 'door-mat' attitude to womanhood . . . that masculine domination has sentimentalized into a virtue. (Cousins 261-262)"

The post-1947 era, that is the period after India gained independence, is marked by the country's search for her own identity as a new-born nation in the modern world. This search for identity is also reflected as one of the remarkable features of literature produced by contemporary Indian writers. P.Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao, in a somewhat brash Introduction of *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1958) declare that "the phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojini Naidu. They emphasize —the need for the private voice, especially because —we live in an age that tends so easily to demonstrations of mass-approval and hysterical (Quoted in Naik, *History* 193). The same is the case with the Indo-Anglian women poets of the post-independence period. They have little in common with the earlier generation of Indian women writing sentimental and romantic poetry in English in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The poetry of these new poets is born out of their intense experience as women. They —have articulated as overtly and boldly as male poets (K. Singh 47). Their poetry has now taken for its theme various Indian subjects from legend, folklore, to contemporary Indian situations. Greater realities, analytical approach and greater awareness now marked their poetry. —The canvas became wide and interests more varied. Thus the real flowering of their genius came in the post-independence era (Bajaj 16).

- Women and feminist thinking are closely related. Feminism must be understood as referring to an awareness of the identity as a woman and interest in feminine problems. It is the position favourable to the rights. The Webster's Dictionary defines the term feminism as; (a) the principle that women should have political rights equal to those of men; (b) the movement to win the rights of women of women. According to Maggy Hamm "Feminism incorporates diverse ideas which shares three major perceptions: that gender is a social construction... ; that patriarchy shapes that construction; that women's experimental knowledge is the basis for future double agenda. The word feminism and

gender are used in majority. Gender has taken place of the feminist aspect. Gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman, the way society distinguish men and women and assign them their roles. According to Ann Oakley “ Gender is the matter of culture, it refers to the social classification of men and women into masculine and feminine.” Gender function through manipulation, canalization, verbal appellation and activity exposure. Thus the concept of gender highlights the reason of man being a man and woman a woman. It is necessary to mention nine major feminist tests.

- *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft
- *The Subjection of Women* by J.S Mill
- *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf
- *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir
- *Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer
- *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Freidan
- *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett
- *The Laugh of Medusa* by Helen Cixous
- *The Dialectic of Sex* by Shulamith Firestone

The major and important key terms in women writings are:

- Androgyny
- Ecriture Feminine
- Gynocriticism
- Subaltern
- Matriarchy
- Stereotype

Androgyny is a neologism constructed from the Greek words andro (male) and gyny (female) to describe a state of unity of ambiguity with respect to gender. Technically a union of both sexes in a individual. Ecriture Feminine was coined by Helen Cixous in a widely read essay ‘ The Laugh of Medusa’ to describe a language that is outside of the masculine economy of patriarchal discourse. According to Elaine Showalter ‘ the inscription of female body and female difference in language and text.’ Gynocriticism is a term introduced by American feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter to classify critical works such as her own which exclusively focuses on literature written by female authors to understand women's construction of textual meaning. Subaltern, a term coined by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to examine the formation of the marginal classes in a variety of setting in South East Asia. Matriarchy is a term which means government by women – either within the family or in society at large, with authority descending to the mother. Significant in recent criticism as an actualized alternative ti Patriarchy, there have also been claims of the past matriarchal cultures. Stereotype is originally taken from a process of painting which suggests that oversimplification and prejudice are involved in its formation and use

Poetry took an analytical turn and in Indo-English poetry as well the new emerging concepts and issues started approaching. In a literary debate certain keywords are used for the discussion of problems and issues.

Local Issues
Mofussil
Regional

National
Transnational/Glocal
Universal

Literary discussions which discuss local issues are called local. Writers like Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, and R. N Tagore etc have discussed local issues in their works. In literature there are discussions on the small towns which are called by the British as 'Mofussil'. When there is a discussion about one nation or region, they come under the category of regional and national issues. Transnational is glocal. For example *Tokyo Cancelled* by Rana Dasgupta. The word consists of two words global and local which makes glocal. Glocal means to combine global and national issues.

Indian English Women Poetry ignites all issues as a whole. There are four major causes of female suffering.

Silence
Law of Threshold
Secret Desire
Women as Property.

Thus illusion is reality and reality is the product of poet's imagination. An Illusion is a distortion of the senses revealing how the brain normally organizes and interprets sensory stimulation. Though illusions distort reality, they are generally shared by most people. Illusions may occur with any of human sense. Reality is the state of things as they actually exist, rather than as they may appear or might be imagined. In a wider definition, reality includes facts and figures in the literary world of acceptance which 'idealises the real and realises the ideal' because of the spontaneous flow of feelings and ideas. Illusion is willing acceptance of slavery, lack of the sense of awareness, fancy and the state of infancy whereas reality is maturity, knowledge, rejection, resistance and truth. Truth is not accepted with open hands in society. It undergoes rejection, criticism, alienation, exile, pain and trauma etc. There is a very slight margin between truth and reality. What is true might not be real, and what is real might not be true. One has to undertake a long journey towards imagination to make it real and real might be distortion. Truth is the final statement and real is the medium to reach truth. Thus reality has multiple shades with no certainty.

There is a remarkable shift in the poems of contemporary Indian women poets from eulogizing and spiritualizing love to a more mundane acceptance of sexuality and the physical needs of women. These poets have discovered their own voices and developed their sensibilities. Their poetry expresses the desire of woman to get away from the ties that have restricted her since times immemorial. "Some women poets, in particular, have made worthwhile attempts at mapping out new terrains as human beings and also as creative writers. (Pathak 15)"

In India, a woman is considered to be an embodiment of sacrifice and silent suffering. She should be virtuous, chaste, submissive, homely, graceful, and devoted to her husband and his family. She must seek pleasure in these relationships. Thus, the greatest crisis for a woman as Rukmini Nair explains is:

A woman is a thing apart
She is bracketed off, a
Comma, semi-colon, at most
A lower-case letter, lost. (Margins, ma(i)nstream 1-4)

These attitudes exemplify the belief that woman should not have any right of her own; that she has only duties in relation to man. Kamala Das also articulates the plight and predicament of woman whom she considers doomed to live in an intensely man-made world: . . .

Dress in saree, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in, Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. ("An Introduction" 45-48)

In a patriarchal society, the birth of a female child is traditionally less welcome than that of the male. Being born a boy is itself a privilege. Girls arrive in the world as undesirable creatures and the life-long battle against their formidable foe, i.e., their sex begins, as Eunice de Souza expresses in her "de Souza Prabhu" where she puts herself in the category of "lame ducks". In "One Man's Poetry" she says:

As I grew up
I longed only to laugh easily.
All that emerged was a nervous whinny. (25-29)

As a daughter Mamta Kalia is haunted by the father figure. Father in her case becomes a symbol of male-dominance: "Women like this relationship as this is the only male relationship which provides protection and affection without the physical in it. It is disliked as father is the first dominating male in life and a representative of the patriarchal society. (Bajaj 69)" In her poem "A Tribute to Papa" Mamta Kalia pays a different kind of tribute to her father, stating that her ideas and values clash with those of her father's: "Everything about you clashes with nearly / everything about me" (25-26). The mutual disillusionment has grown so much that she even thinks of "disowning" her father and his sacredness. Thus, the dichotomous attitude which continues to operate throughout a woman's life starts right in her parents' home. The contemporary poets show no respect or gratitude for their mother also. The relationship does not seem to be very pleasant, close or satisfactory. Eunice de Souza in her "Forgive Me, Mother" confesses that "In dreams" (11), she —hacks "(12) her mother.

The dichotomous attitude thus begins early in life and lasts throughout a woman's existence. She is continuously reminded of her femininity. Lakshmi Kannan was instructed:

No. Don't run
don't take long strides
don't raise voice be a woman,
be moderate in everything. ("An Omen")

Sujatha Modayil says that she was happy at twelve that she had become a woman but as she grew up she realized the male dominance and superiority:

Hold your breath now, girls,
The game is nearly over The power and glory, our's
For ever and ever. ("The Little Madams")

This secondary status becomes more obvious as a girl grows up. She is prevented from developing her own individuality. She is constantly reminded that she is destined for man and the one who gets the most masculine attention is the luckiest one. Entire rearing and gearing up of a girl is male-oriented and her salvation lies in marriage. Parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts—all condition her for this destiny right from her childhood. Sujata Bhatt in her poem "Light" expresses this tragic fate of being a daughter:

When I was seventeen
My grandmother said _Get her married
before the light
goes out of her face.

Intiaz Dharkar's Fatimah, a muslim girl, elopes with an English boy to free herself from the shackles of the closed muslim world but it turns out to be only an exchange of masters:

And there you are with your English boy
Who was going to set you free,
Trying to smile and be accepted,
Always on your knees. (*Purdah and Other Poems*)

Thus, marriage for a girl means only an exchange of masters—first it is the parents who control, now there will be husband. As Simone de Beauvoir observes:

There is unanimous agreement that getting a husband—or in some cases a protector—is for her the most important of undertakings. . . . She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother's hold, she will open up her future, not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master. (De Beauvoir 352)

Marriage does not turn out to be a companionship or equality for a woman; rather it is a trap which negates her rights to individuality, independence and self realization.

Woman is subjugated and sidelined and usually her position is no better than the poor, oppressed and racial minorities like the blacks. The “power politics” (25) to use a phrase from Kate Millett, operates in a subtle manner in the institution of marriage, reducing the status of a woman to a mere utility item, an object for decoration, for possession and for man's sexual gratification. In her book *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, Sheila Rowbotham uses the term “colonialized” to show the oppressed status of women in the society. She cites “economic dependence”, “cultural takeover” and “the identification of dignity with resemblance to the oppressor” as some of —the similarities that exist between the colonization of the underdeveloped countries and female oppression (2014). J.S.Mill is right in saying that marriage is the worst form of slavery for women. He says “No slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of words, as a wife is” (Mill 124). Engels in his *The Origin of the Family* also points out that the Latin word *Familia* means the total number of slaves belonging to one man. In marriage a man enjoys both the worlds: of home and of career. Marriage to him means enlargement and confirmation of his existence. It permits him progression and self-advancement. A woman on the other hand is virtually reduced to the status of a maid. Mamta Kalia complains of the effect of being a housewife on her individuality and seems to be frustrated and dissatisfied:

I, no longer feel I'm Mamta Kalia
I am Kamla
Or Vimla
Or Kanta or Shanta. (“Anonymous” 1-4)

Joint family is a great crusher of a woman's happiness. Mamta Kalia also feels the disparaging influence of this system as she says:

I wanted to tell them how I wept in bed all night once
And struggle hard from hurting myself.

That it wasn't easy to be happy in a family of twelve. ("After Eight Years of My Marriage" 15-17)

Throughout history, women have been appropriated as sexual objects, Karl Marx says, "*Marriage . . . is incontestably a form of exclusive private property (Quoted in Mitchell 110)*" and this is echoed by Gauri Deshpande who expresses about this position of a woman in marriage in her poem "Man and Woman":

That she could with such ease
be enslaved by your skilful hands
beggar's heart and from himalayan heights
condescend to warm your bed
stiffen your manhood
and bear your spawn. (Quoted in Barbuddhe 267)

Margaret Chatterjee reveals the same painful experience of a woman when a man leaves after having gratified his sexual appetite:

Loving quickly he
Turned his back,
while soundlessly
She wept
Into the night. ("Scars")

Talking about this sense of loneliness which exists in marital relationships, Greer says: "many a housewife staring at the back of their husband's newspaper, or listening to his breathing in bed is lonelier than any spinster in a rented room" (Greer 244). Most of the women suffer in marriage because their husbands like to remain locked up in their solitary cells and do not try to recognize the fact that love is necessary to happiness.

Extra-marital relations are no solutions to the marital problems.

Contemporary Indian women poets realized that real self or natural self is totally denied to a married woman and who knows it better than Kamala Das. A woman in marriage has to play imposed roles:

I must pose
I must pretend,
I must act the role of a happy woman,
Happy wife. ("The Suicide" 41-45)

A double life is the fate of a married woman. Love for a man is a temporary refuge from boredom and loneliness. For a woman love means complete emotional involvement. She wants a lasting and stable relationship with man. Man looks upon sex as a means of self-gratification and sensual pleasure whereas woman relates it to the emotional fulfilment and meaning in life. Sex seems to a woman a mere dry activity that leaves her unsatisfied. Kanwar Dinesh Singh while discussing her poetry expresses: "She finds the lack of genial 'afterplay' in lovemaking as most unsatisfying and disappointing. In the whole gamut of lovemaking she perceives neither physical intensity nor mental satisfaction, and finds neither emotional contentment nor even spiritual delight. (76)"

The lack of emotional content in man-woman relationship has been the cause of frustration in Kamala Das also. Lovemaking to Kamala Das is, as Anisur Rahman puts it, "a

painful union with only a remote hope of discovering something meaningful. (Rahman 49)” Kamala Das describes her experiences in “Convicts”:

That was the only kind of love,
This hacking at each other’s parts
Like convicts hacking, breaking clods
At noon. (Das, *The Descendents* 26)

Suniti Namjoshi’s poetry, too, shows her disillusionment with love. She seems to be so much disgusted with the physical in love that she talks always of sex in a satirical tone. In her “Benefits” she says, “Together we’ll make / many bastards (8-9)” While reading her, A.N. Dwivedi said, she “seems to be engulfed with a deep sense of horror and disgust in the matter of love and sex” (Dwivedi 208). Moreover, a woman is considered to be an instrument for continuing her husband’s family. The pressure of maternity for a son’s birth is usually faced by a woman.

Thus the long story of Indian English women Poetry is a never ending. The issues taken up by the poets are transnationally applicable and acceptable. The hidden realities are termed by the hegemonic society as illusion which women poets try to portray as real. In doing so, poets have crossed patriarchal boundaries and appear as ‘new woman’, ‘newly born woman’ etc. The global study bridges the gap between countries and proves the issues are the same but situation and circumstances differ. This gives a wide canvas to Indian Women Writing in English where all issues like gender, sex, self, subject etc are analytically judged and discussed.

If they see the breasts and long hair coming
They call it a woman
If beard and whiskers they call it man.
But look, the self that hovers in between
Is neither man nor woman...