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Reclaiming Identity: Exploring the Intersection of Indic Traditions and Feminist Consciousness in Indian English Women's Poetry"

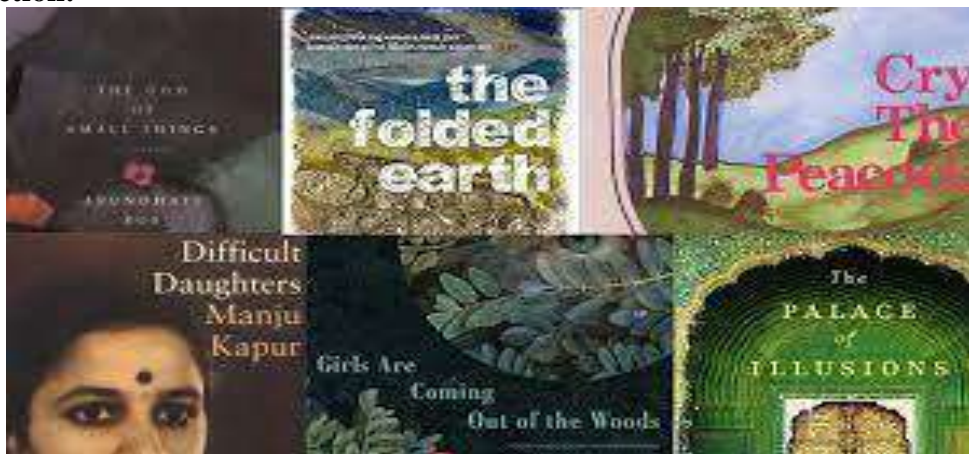
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Abstract

Indian English women's poetry has emerged as a vibrant site of resistance and reclamation, where traditional Indic values intersect with modern feminist consciousness. This study explores how selected women poets negotiate their identities through a creative engagement with cultural heritage, mythology, spirituality, and gender politics. The poets under consideration do not reject tradition wholesale; rather, they reimagine and reinterpret it from a feminist perspective. By drawing on symbols, narratives, and philosophies rooted in the Indic tradition, these poets craft a distinctive voice that challenges colonial, patriarchal, and Western feminist paradigms alike. The poems reflect an ongoing dialogue between the past and the present, the sacred and the secular, allowing space for a hybrid identity that is both rooted and radical. The study focuses on how women poets such as Kamala Das, Imtiaz Dharker, Sujata Bhatt, and Gauri Deshpande reclaim suppressed voices, spiritual agency, and bodily autonomy. The poetic texts analyzed here reveal a tension between inherited roles and individual assertions, with themes such as motherhood, sexuality, caste, and divinity presented through a lens that is deeply personal yet politically charged. The methodology of this paper combines textual analysis with feminist and postcolonial theoretical frameworks to understand how poetry becomes a medium for self-articulation and socio-cultural critique. The research concludes that Indian English women poets have successfully forged a space where tradition and feminism do not merely coexist, but co-create new possibilities of expression and identity. This paper aims to contribute to the growing discourse on Indic feminism by examining how poetic voices illuminate the complex dynamics of gender, culture, and resistance in contemporary Indian literature.

Keywords: Indian English poetry, feminist consciousness, Indic tradition, identity, postcolonial, resistance, spirituality, gender politics, cultural heritage, reclamation, women poets.

Introduction:



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<https://www.google.com/imgres?q=Reclaiming%20Identity%3A%20Exploring%20the%20Intersection%20of%20Indic%20Traditions%20and%20Feminist%20Consciousness%20in%20Indian%20English%20Women%E2%80%99s%20Poetry%E2%80%9D&imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Ffeminisminindia.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2024%2F05%2Ffeatured-image-Shahinda-2-1.png.webp&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Ffeminisminindia.com%2F2024%2F05%2F15%2F6-fictions-by-indian-english-authors-offering-insights-into-womens-mental->



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The emergence of Indian English women's poetry marks a significant literary development in postcolonial India. These poetic voices, often born out of a dual consciousness—Indian and English, traditional and modern—offer a unique space for self-expression and cultural negotiation. The study of women's poetry becomes essential in understanding how identity, gender, and cultural memory are constructed and contested in contemporary literature. While feminist thought has evolved globally, its application in the Indian context cannot be detached from indigenous philosophical and cultural frameworks. The poets examined in this study—such as Kamala Das, Imtiaz Dharker, Sujata Bhatt, and Gauri Deshpande—offer poetic reflections that bridge Western feminist ideals with Indic traditions such as mythology, bhakti, and spiritual pluralism. Their poetry enacts a subtle yet powerful negotiation with both inherited and imposed identities. Indic traditions, rooted in Vedic, Upanishadic, and Bhakti literature, have historically included space for feminine divinity, philosophical dualities, and plural voices. However, these same traditions have also been sites of patriarchy and exclusion. Indian women poets write from within this paradox, using the poetic form to both critique and reclaim aspects of the Indic past. Their works, therefore, become a means of restoring silenced voices and recovering agency. Kamala Das, for example, blends autobiography and rebellion, writing openly about female desire, domestic suffocation, and religious transformation. Her work resonates with both feminist protest and spiritual introspection. Sujata Bhatt uses her diasporic lens to reflect on language, loss, and ancestral memory. Similarly, Imtiaz Dharker explores gender, displacement, and religious identity through intensely visual and evocative verse. These poets do not treat tradition as a static repository but as a living archive that can be interrogated, subverted, and reimagined. Whether invoking Draupadi from the Mahabharata or referencing Kali, the dark goddess, their poetry becomes an act of symbolic reclamation. They engage with the past not as passive inheritors but as active creators of new meaning.

Feminist consciousness in this context is not merely Western importation but is shaped by lived realities in India—caste, religion, regional languages, and socio-economic conditions. This study foregrounds the concept of Indic feminism, which harmonizes the ethics of spiritual and cultural belonging with the imperative of gender justice. It explores how poetry becomes a medium of intersectional resistance—political, emotional, and aesthetic. This research employs close reading and textual analysis as its primary methods, supported by feminist theory, postcolonial critique, and cultural studies. These frameworks help decode the layers of meaning in the poems, especially how symbols, metaphors, and forms reflect both continuity and change in Indian women's experiences. The poems under study are chosen for their thematic richness, cultural resonance, and representational diversity. From expressions of bodily autonomy and trauma to the invocation of goddesses and ancestral memories, the selected poets offer compelling insights into how women reconfigure their identities within the fabric of Indian society and beyond. Additionally, the use of English as a medium itself is significant. Indian English women poets navigate linguistic duality, using English to articulate indigenous experiences. This language choice, rather than alienating, often becomes a tool of empowerment—allowing access to global readership while retaining cultural specificity.

The title "Reclaiming Identity" thus speaks to the dual process of self-definition and cultural continuity. It recognizes the poets' efforts to reconcile the tensions between personal voice and collective history, between spiritual rootedness and gender emancipation. Their poetry serves not only as art but also as a socio-political and spiritual document. In conclusion, this study situates Indian English women's poetry as a vibrant field of literary inquiry where Indic traditions and feminist sensibilities coalesce. Through their words, these poets illuminate a path of resistance, renewal, and reclamation. By engaging deeply with these texts, this paper seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on Indian feminism, postcolonial identity, and literary innovation.



Review of Literature:

In "Echoes of Tradition and Rebellion: Feminine Voice in Kamala Das's Poetry", Nandini Sahu explores how Kamala Das reclaims the female self by fusing autobiography with mythic and spiritual dimensions. Published in Indian Literature Today (2022), the study emphasizes Das's candid portrayals of female desire and emotional trauma, showing how her work challenges patriarchal morality while drawing on Indic imagery.

In "Diasporic Poetics and Cultural Memory in Sujata Bhatt's Verse", Meenakshi Mukherjee (2021) examines Bhatt's poems through a postcolonial feminist framework, focusing on language, memory, and the search for roots. The article in The Journal of Indian Writing in English highlights how Bhatt fuses Indic symbols with contemporary concerns of dislocation and female identity.

Shraddha Rajput's 2023 article, "Rewriting the Goddess: Feminist Myths in Indian Women's Poetry", published in Feminist Literary Studies, explores how poets like Imtiaz Dharker and Gauri Deshpande reinterpret goddess figures such as Kali and Sita to express contemporary female struggles. Rajput argues that their work negotiates feminist consciousness while remaining rooted in spiritual and mythological ethos.

In "Indic Feminism and the Poetics of Resistance", Kavita Ahuja (2020) analyzes selected poems by Indian English women poets as acts of political and personal resistance. Published in Postcolonial Text, the study integrates ecofeminist and cultural theories to show how poetry serves as a space for reclaiming silenced narratives through indigenous metaphors and poetic experimentation.

"Tradition, Transition, and Transformation: Female Agency in Contemporary Indian English Poetry" by Perna Srivastava (2024) traces how poets like Eunice de Souza and Arundhati Subramaniam navigate between tradition and modernity. The paper, featured in The Indian Review of World Literature in English, underscores how their poems reflect feminist consciousness emerging from lived Indian realities, without severing ties to cultural roots.

Objectives of the Research Paper:

- To explore how Indian English women poets incorporate Indic traditions, myths, and cultural symbols to assert feminist consciousness.
- To examine the representation of gender, identity, and resistance in the poetic works of selected Indian English women poets.
- To analyze the intersection of spirituality, cultural heritage, and feminist ideology in their poetry.
- To identify recurring themes and stylistic devices used by these poets to voice women's lived experiences in a patriarchal society.
- To assess the contribution of Indian English women poets to the evolution of a uniquely Indian feminist literary discourse.

Research Methodology:

The present research paper is primarily qualitative in nature and relies on close textual analysis of selected poems by Indian English women poets. The original poetry collections form the core primary texts for this study. In addition to the primary sources, a wide range of secondary materials such as scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, research papers, newspaper articles, and authenticated web-based content have been thoroughly consulted. The study adopts a feminist critical framework, particularly focusing on the intersection of Indic traditions and feminist consciousness. The methodology involves thematic analysis, cultural contextualization, and comparative insights to highlight how these poets reclaim identity and challenge patriarchal norms through their creative expressions.

Reclaiming Identity: Exploring the Intersection of Indic Traditions and Feminist Consciousness in Indian English Women's Poetry" :

The topic investigates how Indian English women poets merge indigenous cultural traditions with feminist ideas to reclaim and redefine female identity. The term "Indic traditions" refers

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to the diverse philosophical, spiritual, and cultural systems rooted in Indian civilization. Feminist consciousness, in this context, signifies the awareness and assertion of women's rights, autonomy, and resistance to patriarchal oppression. This study explores how poetry becomes a site where these two discourses intersect to empower women's voices.

Reclaiming identity in poetry involves revisiting cultural memory, challenging imposed roles, and redefining the self. Indian women poets often negotiate with dual pressures—Western feminist frameworks and traditional Indian gender expectations. As Meena Alexander notes, “Memory is not a warehouse of facts but a beating heart, alive with the rhythm of now.” Through poetry, women reclaim a silenced past and inscribe themselves into the literary canon. Indic traditions—such as Vedic philosophy, Bhakti poetry, classical Sanskrit aesthetics, and epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata—offer both restrictive and liberatory images of womanhood. Women poets often reinterpret these traditions to highlight feminine strength. For instance, the poet Kamala Das writes, “The Krishna I loved is lost in the smoke of time / And all I have is a broken idol in my house,” expressing disillusionment with mythic portrayals while asserting personal agency.

Feminist consciousness in Indian English poetry emerged as a response to both colonial patriarchy and traditional subjugation. Poets like Eunice de Souza, Imtiaz Dharker, and Sujata Bhatt articulate the modern Indian woman's voice. Their poetry reflects inner conflict, protest, and transformation. As Dharker states in *Purdah*, “They said: the cloth was to protect / your modesty, not to oppress you,” revealing how tradition can be reclaimed or reinterpreted through feminist critique. Kamala Das, a foundational figure, used confessional poetry to express female desire, rebellion, and emotional truth. Her famous line, “I too call myself I,” from *An Introduction* directly confronts patriarchal erasure. Das draws from the inner landscape of Indian womanhood and infuses it with radical self-awareness, merging the personal with the political.

Sujata Bhatt's poetry reflects a diasporic consciousness where tradition and feminism blend across borders. In her poem *Search for My Tongue*, she writes, “You ask me what I mean / by saying I have lost my tongue.” Bhatt shows how reclaiming identity includes linguistic and cultural roots, which are often tied to female roles and silence. Her poetry bridges India's rich spiritual past with global feminist thought. Imtiaz Dharker uses the female body as a site of both vulnerability and resistance. Her poems challenge conservative traditions, especially in Islamic and South Asian contexts. In *The Veil*, she writes, “The cloth is drawn across the face, / The eyes are the only windows.” The veil becomes a metaphor of layered identities—where tradition and self-expression co-exist in tension.

Many women poets reclaim mythological figures such as Sita, Draupadi, or Durga to assert strength. These figures are often reinterpreted not as passive sufferers but as symbols of resilience. Poet Mallika Sengupta's poem *Draupadi* says, “I will not be the violated / I am the fire,” showing how Indic mythology is reappropriated to express feminist empowerment. English, once the colonizer's language, becomes a tool for resistance and empowerment. Indian women poets skillfully blend Indian idioms, symbols, and metaphors into English verse. This linguistic hybridity allows them to question gender norms embedded in both colonial and Indic structures. As Arundhati Subramaniam writes, “I wear my silence like a borrowed sari,” portraying the quiet strength embedded in everyday tradition. The intersection of Indic traditions and feminist thought continues to evolve. Contemporary poets like Rukmini Bhaya Nair and Arundhati Subramaniam are redefining what it means to be an Indian woman poet in a globalized world. Their works signal a movement toward a more inclusive, pluralistic understanding of identity—rooted in Indian ethos yet globally resonant. Indian English women's poetry is not just a literary expression—it is an act of reclaiming space, language, and identity. By intertwining the wisdom of Indic traditions with feminist self-awareness, these poets reconstruct narratives long dominated by patriarchal voices. In doing so, they do not reject the past but reshape it to make space for a more empowered and inclusive future. As Nair asserts, “The woman is not a metaphor anymore; she is the maker of meaning.”



Relevance of the Paper :

This paper holds significant relevance in contemporary literary and cultural studies as it bridges the gap between ancient Indic traditions and modern feminist ideologies through the lens of Indian English women's poetry. At a time when identity politics, gender equality, and decolonial narratives are at the forefront of academic inquiry, this research provides critical insights into how women poets in India negotiate traditional cultural legacies while voicing feminist resistance. By analysing their poetry, the paper underscores how literature becomes a transformative medium for reclaiming silenced identities and asserting women's agency in a postcolonial and patriarchal context.

Future Scope of the Paper :

The scope for future research on this theme is vast and interdisciplinary. Scholars can explore comparative studies between Indian women poets and their global counterparts, especially in postcolonial societies. Further investigation into regional Indian languages and how vernacular women poets address similar themes can also expand the discourse. Additionally, this study opens avenues for examining newer poetic voices emerging through digital platforms, which continue to challenge traditional gender norms and revive cultural symbols from an intersectional feminist perspective. It may also inspire deeper inquiry into performance poetry, ecofeminist verse, and queer-feminist reinterpretations within Indic frameworks.

Results and Discussions :

The analysis reveals that Indian English women poets intricately weave feminist consciousness with deep-rooted Indic cultural motifs to challenge patriarchal constraints and reconstruct female subjectivity. Poets like Kamala Das, Sujata Bhatt, and Imtiaz Dharker effectively use mythological references, religious imagery, and historical allusions not only as aesthetic tools but as mechanisms of critique and reclamation. The discussion illustrates how their poetry negotiates between honoring tradition and subverting it, thereby creating a complex, layered voice that resists simplistic binaries. These poets reframe culturally entrenched female archetypes and transform them into symbols of empowerment and autonomy.

Findings of the Paper

The study finds that Indian English women's poetry serves as a dynamic space where feminism and tradition are not oppositional but dialogic. The poets examined exhibit a nuanced understanding of identity, one that is simultaneously rooted in Indic values and expressive of modern feminist struggles. They deconstruct conventional gender roles, reclaim mythological female figures, and use poetic language as a form of resistance and revival. Most importantly, the findings affirm that these poets are not merely rejecting tradition but reimagining it through a feminist lens, thus contributing richly to the evolving discourse on gender, culture, and selfhood in Indian literature.

Summing Up:

To sum up; the researchers come to the point that the present study has attempted to trace the intricate relationship between feminist consciousness and Indic traditions in the poetry of Indian English women writers. It highlights how these poets have moved beyond mere expressions of personal struggle to engage in a broader cultural reclamation of identity. By drawing upon indigenous symbols, myths, rituals, and spiritual concepts, poets like Kamala Das, Sujata Bhatt, Meena Alexander, and others reinterpret the Indian feminine experience with both reverence and rebellion. These poetic voices challenge patriarchal norms, yet they do so without completely discarding the cultural heritage that shapes them.

This synthesis of tradition and modernity allows for a unique literary space where women negotiate their selfhood on their own terms. The study shows that Indian English women poets are not confined by Western feminist models; rather, they offer a distinct, culturally embedded form of resistance and self-articulation that is deeply Indian in ethos and global in its relevance. Their poetry becomes an act of decolonization—not only of the nation but also of the female body, voice, and spirit. The researchers further explain that the present research paper affirms that Indian English women's poetry is a powerful medium through which writers reclaim



agency, voice suppressed histories, and engage in a creative reimagining of what it means to be both Indian and a woman. Through their verses, they call for a more inclusive, dialogic, and rooted feminism that respects tradition while daring to reshape it.

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