



Narratives of Selfhood: Female Authors and the Historical Evolution of Indian English Literature

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Abstract

This research paper will focus on how the story of being Indian has changed over time in the literary works of prominent Indian women writers, where the oppression experienced has been internalized to empower multifaceted identities. Based on the postcolonial feminist theory, intersectionality, and narrative identity, the paper will examine several major texts in the various historic periods: Kamala Das, her confessional autobiography *My Story* (1976), the first text offering vocal disobedience to patriarchal restrictions, and bodily autonomy; Anita Desai, her introspective novels, including *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and *Fire on the Mountain* (1977); Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) which intertwines personal fragmentation with caste and gender violence in postcolonial society; and diaspora writings by Jhumpa Lahiri (*Interpreter of Maladies*, 1999) and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*The Mistress of Spices*, 1997), which portray hybrid, transnational selfhood amid cultural displacement and globalization. The thematic analysis highlights the bargaining of tradition and modernity, intersectional effects of caste, class, and religion, and new methods, such as stream-of-consciousness, non-linear narrative structure and autobiography, are the subject of thematic analysis. Although it has come with its share of obstacles including publishing bias, censorship, negativity of the society and criticism of English-medium elitism, these are stories that have added value to Indian English works, boosted its popularity in the world and inspired new voices. The results highlight the significance of the feminist discussion of feminist works authored by female writers in the development of feminist discourse, the reconceptualization of cultural identity in postcolonial India, and the contribution of the feminist discourse in the Global South to feminist discourse on agency

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and resistance. The paper sums up these changing tales of selfhood as being mirrors and drivers of socio-cultural changes, enabling women and altering literary canons.

Keywords: selfhood, Indian English literature, female authors, postcolonial feminism, intersectionality, hybrid identity, patriarchy, diaspora.

Introduction

The Indian English literature or Indian Writing in English (IWE) has its origins in the 19th century during the British colonial rule. Policies such as the Macaulay Minute on Education (1835) which introduced English to India eased the rise of English as a tool of Indian expression which was first used by the elite. Initial publications were done towards the end of 18th and the early 19th century with poets like Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt making a first step towards poetry then prose forms. The novel titled *Rajmohan's Wife* written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1864 is considered as the first Indian Novel in English (Wikipedia, 2024). This literature was heavily influenced by colonialism because English was not only a weapon of power employed by the imperialist but also a place of opposition and cultural exchange. Authors tended to struggle with the issues of imitation, hybridism and conflict between Western modernity and Indian culture (Mukherjee, as cited in a range of historical sources).

Indian English literature grew fast after 1947, the year of the Indian independence, mirroring the nation-building, trauma of partitioning, and socio-political changes. Canonical writers such as R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand emerged in the 1950s-1970s, whereas the liberalisation generation since the 1990s introduced world-recognition with the voices of diaspora and experimental writing (Tharu and Lalita, 1991). This development is comparable to other literatures of the Global South, where the colonial past conflicts with the local identity, as it is experienced in postcolonial literature in Africa and Latin America.

Selfhood in that case means the formation of the personal identity, including autonomy, agency, cultural hybridity and gendered subjectivities. According to postcolonial theorists, selfhood is fragmented but bargained in the context of colonial and patriarchal structures of power (Bhabha, 1994). The idea of selfhood in women consists of bargaining individual desires with the eminences of the society that is usually characterized by an intersectional oppression of gender, caste, class, and colonialism. Selfhood is transformed in Indian English literature to be a conflict internalized into assertive reclamation as it is in postcolonial societies pursuing individual and collective identity (Spivak, 1988).

Women writers have been vital in breaking the rules of patriarchy and expressing the experiences of the marginalized. Since the first women writers such as Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, women have employed literature as a means of subversion, expression of female plight and gender revolution. Their writings reveal the limitation of patriarchy, family demands, and social-cultural conditioning and glorify the female agency and their independence (Tharu and Lalita, 1991). In the Global South, there is also a critique of

colonialism, as well as indigenous patriarchies; as Mohanty (1988) explains the homogenized portrayals of the Third World woman in Western feminism, and the need to focus on diverse, situational struggles.

The paper is noteworthy because it investigates the way in which the literature written by women has transformed Indian English literature through focusing on the selfhood of women. In the light of increasing international attention to postcolonial feminisms, this kind of analysis brings the significance of Indian contribution to feminist literary discourse and the importance of literature to social change.

The main research aims are to follow the development of selfhood discourses of the main female writers and observe their contribution to Indian English literature. This includes thematic analysis of how historical periods evolve in terms of narratives and how the narratives contribute to socio-cultural transformations.

Indian female writers, in their Indian English literature, have increasingly changed the literature on the representation of selfhood: the repressed self in the early writings has gradually developed into empowered and varied selves in the recent literature, which represents the general socio-cultural changes in postcolonial India.

The range is narrowed to the 20th and 21st century female writers such as Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, and others, who present the theme of changing selfhood in their works. Non-English Indian literatures, and books authored by men are left out of the study as comparative items, and depth rather than breadth is used. Restrictions are the English-focused approach that can miss vernacular voices, and the selective element of authors, but making an attempt to reflect various periods and topics.

Literature review

The literature review positions the study of the narratives of selfhood in Indian English literature in the context of historical, theoretical and scholarly perspectives of feminist writers in postcolonial India and selective parallels of the Global South.

The Indian English literature has been developing in separate stages. The pre-independence era (late 18th century to mid-20th century) was introduced by the British colonialism, where English was used as a compulsory language and also as a language of resistance. The early works included the works of poets such as Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt and other prose writers such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. Female writers were few but Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, oriented their way through colonial mimicry and nationalist feelings (Wikipedia contributors, 2024). The post independent period (1947-1980s) was concerned with nation-building, partition trauma, identity and social realism. Authors sought personal reflection and experiment, and dealt with freedom and cultural re-creation (when it comes to different historical versions). Since 1990s, the diaspora era has attained prominence, and this can be described as globalization,

transnational and hybrid identities. Similar to postcolonial literature in the Global South, including African and Caribbean literature, Diaspora writers wrote about displacement, cultural negotiation, and global citizenship that overlaps the role of the colonial past with local agency.

The feminist literary theory is a critical theory that is used to interpret the stories of selfhood. The original idea of Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) according to which one is not born, but becomes, a woman, highlights the intersectional feminism and critiques the conditions of oppression caused by race, class, and patriarchy, and provides analogies to investigate the issue of caste and class in the lives of Indian women (de Beauvoir, 2011/1949). Bell Hooks re-iterates that feminism is intersectional and that conditions of oppression are exacerbated by race, classes and patriarchy and can be used by Indian feminists to transform such thoughts in the postcolonial lines. The subaltern theory by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak raises the issue of whether the marginal voices especially the third world women can speak through the hegemonic structures, pointing out to epistemic violence and restriction of representation (Spivak, 1988). Chandra Talpade Mohanty is critical of Western feminist homogenization of the Third World women as consistently oppressed women and proposes contextual analyses of agency and resistance in the Global South (Mohanty, 1988). These theories shed light on how the Indian female writers negotiated their selfhood between gender, colonialism, caste, and class oppression.

The current gender research on Indian literature has been revolutionary. The landmark collection of *Women Writing in India* (1991, 1993) by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita restores the voices of women over the centuries, both ancient and modern, and undermines the canons of male interpretation and British colonialism. The books carry biographical and critical headnotes, and re-write the cultural history in feminist terms, as well as addresses the Euro-American theory and bases the analysis on Indian settings (Tharu and Lalita, 1991). This piece has impacted research on agency, resistance and history of women literature up to English-language writing. Another literature looks at gender relations in postcolonial fiction, such as militarism, housewifery, and feminine power (several reviews since 1990s).

Although these developments have been made, there are research gaps. Although gender and identity are being addressed, little attention is given to the concept of selfhood being a changing narrative tool- changing the internalized oppression to empowered and multifaceted identities through historical stages. A lot of research focuses on thematic issues, such as patriarchy or nationalism, but does not pay much attention to the construction of selfhood by using different techniques, including introspection or fragmentation. Moreover, intersectional analysis, which combines gender with class, caste and diaspora, is immature whereby emphasis is mostly given to gender alone. This paper is one such attempt to fill these blank spaces by tracking the development of selfhood in specific writings that were produced by female authors to bring a more refined insight into the feminist development of Indian English literature.

Theoretical foundation

This theoretical background of the given study incorporates postcolonial feminism, intervention methods, and narrative theory to explore the shifting concept of selfhood in Indian English literature through female authors. The framework focuses on Indian socio-cultural settings and makes comparisons to the Global South where colonial heritage, patriarchal systems, and overlapping oppressions are the determinants of women identity making.

It is mainly viewed through the prism of postcolonial feminism, which denounces the ways in which colonialism and patriarchy are intertwined to relegate women in societies that were once colonies. The subaltern theory as is developed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak doubts the chance of marginal voices, especially those of Third World women, ever being heard in hegemonic discourses, and focuses specifically on epistemic violence and silencing influence of colonial and patriarchal power (Spivak, 1988). The theory is applied in Indian contexts to explain how female authors mediate selfhood through the forces of caste, class, and gendered hierarchies, and usually are subaltern experiences that disrupt hegemonic accounts. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues against the tendencies of Western feminism to homogenize women of the Third World as being uniform victims of oppression and instead argues in favour of contextual analyses which note agency, resistance, and various struggles (Mohanty, 1988). This point of view is crucial to Indian English literature, in which women authors assert a sense of selfhood through localized experience of tradition, modernity and postcolonial nationhood, comparable to feminist interventions in African and Latin American literature that both resist colonial occupation and local patriarchies.

These postcolonial criticisms are supplemented by the Western feminist foundations. The idea of gender as a performance that is socially constructed on the basis of patriarchal experience is presented in the statement by Simone de Beauvoir who states that a woman is not born, but she becomes one (de Beauvoir, 2011). This is reflected in the struggles of characters against family and social norms that pressurize and restrict agency and self-expression in Indian English texts, which can be used to understand caste-gender intersections in India in the context of bell hooks intersectional feminism (hooks, 2000). The recent scholarship highlights that Indian feminism has enhanced intersectionality by foreshadowing caste as a constitutive power alongside gender emphasizing intersecting systems of domination that facilitate distinct processes of subordination of Dalit and marginalized women (diverse arguments, such as Dalit feminist thinking).

The paper relies on the idea of narrative identity by Paul Ricoeur to analyse the construction of the self in a narrative. In this case, Ricoeur assumes identity is not predetermined, but it is developed through the active interaction of emplotment, when individuals pack life episodes into consistent but open-ended performances that permanence (character) and change (ipseity) (Ricoeur, 1990). This framework is applied in postcolonial and feminist

literature to depict how female writers employ narrative strategies, including introspection, fragmentation, and non-linear narration, to transform fragmented, oppressed subjectivities into empowered multi-dimensional subjectivities. This method is appropriate to Indian English literature, where heroes tend to find their way through cultural hybridity, diaspora, and socio-political change via autobiographical or confessional.

Intersectionality also enhances the analysis by becoming gender, caste, class, religion and diaspora. In India, caste is a ubiquitous axis of oppression that intersects with gender to provide women with a different experience at various social levels (Rege, as cited in intersectional studies). This lens deals with the divergence of Dalit and upper-caste female accounts, which underlines postcolonial feminist readings and draws parallels in the Global South, in which identity is constituted by multiple marginalizations (e.g., race-class in Africa, indigeneity in Latin America).

Together, these approaches to determine the development of the concept of selfhood in Indian English literature, postcolonial feminism (Spivak, Mohanty), fundamental feminism (de Beauvoir, hooks), narrative identity (Ricoeur) and intersectionality, offer an effective spectrum of viewing the development of selfhood in Indian literature. They facilitate the process of researching the ways in which female writers develop internalized oppression into agency, which reflects the changes in postcolonial level, but also allows feminist discourses all over the world.

Historical Evolution of Indian English Literature and Female Contributions

Historical development of the Indian English writing can be mentioned as more general postcolonial changes where the female writers made a great contribution to the stories of their identity. This development has been presented in three major stages which are characterized by different socio-political circumstances and changing images of the identity, autonomy and agency of women in India and are parallel to the trends in other Global South literatures where colonial pasts converge with gender conflicts.

Pre-independence period (19th - early 20th century): Indian English literature started being created during British colonialism influenced by the English education policy of Macaulay and the necessity of the cultural negotiation. Early men poets such as Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt were foundations but women were rare whose voices were pioneering. Toru Dutt (1856-1877), known as the first female Indian poet who wrote in English, had published a volume of poetry, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876) and a collection of Indian mythology, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882). Her literature was a mixture of European romanticism and Indian mythology, which revealed indirectly a proto feminist consciousness of colonial mimicry (Tharu and Lalita, 1991). The nationalist poetry was then followed by Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), the Nightingale of India, in her volumes like *The Golden Threshold* (1905) and *The Bird of Time* (1912). Naidu's poems brought to mind the Indian womanhood, patriotism and slight opposition to

the patriarchal and colonial restrictions, but there were few accounts of self-hood: they were usually masked in the nationalistic discourse, not direct personal freedom (Tharu and Lalita, 1991). These pioneering efforts reflected tendencies of the Global South such as early Caribbean or African women writers negotiating imperial languages as they attempt to find a place to express cultural self amid imperial mimicry and silence.

Post-independent period (1947-1980s): On gaining independence, the country experienced nation-building, partition trauma, and social reconstruction which led to increased introspection in Indian English literature. Women writers came to the fore, identifying personal self-subjectivity with national identity and gender struggles of dislocation. In *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *A Handful of Rice* (1966), Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) did not only describe the selfhood of rural women as being connected to survival and childcare but one of quiet rebellion as a means of adaptation to poverty, modernization, and patriarchal oppression. In novels like *Rich Like Us* (1985) and previous novels like *This Time of Morning* (1963), Nayantara Sahgal (b. 1927) discussed the issue of political corruption, marriage, and the desire of women to find their independence in postcolonial democracy. Her heroines usually have to face the issue of tradition and modernity, whereby the sense of self is formed by psychological tension and national disappointment (Sahgal, different analyses). The interest of this period in partition trauma and nationhood can be compared to literature in Global South, including African postcolonial novels, that cover the gender roles and identity crisis experienced during the period of independence in areas of political instability.

Liberalization and globalization (1990s-present): Economic reforms, migration and globalization changed the Indian English literature to become a global phenomenon with the themes of diaspora and transnationalism prevailing. Feminine writers placed the subject of selfhood in the realms of the hybrid and fluid identities. *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy suggests the interrogation of caste, gender violence, and forbidden love in Kerala, disordered selfhood in rigid social structure, but a sense of agency through narrative resistance (Roy, 1997). Jhumpa Lahiri, a diaspora author, in *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003) addresses the theme of immigrant life, cultural displacement, and conflicts between generations. Her characters bargain crossing of bicultural identities, where selfhood is transnational, having Indian background and American acculturation (Lahiri, as discussed under the diaspora studies). This stage is representative of the trends in the Global South, wherein authors of either Africa, Latin America, and South Asia engage the theme of hybridity, migration, and cosmopolitan selfhood in the context of globalization and break down strict national or gendered identities (Mohanty, 1988).

Throughout these periods, women have entered the Indian English literature by giving voice to women, changing the definition of selfhood to the process of being colonized where it is limited into a material of colonial parody and lastly to globalized hybridity.

Such a path highlights the importance of literature in both feminist protest and cultural bargaining in postcolonial situations.

Key Female Authors and Narratives of Selfhood

In this section, the author discusses the representative female authors at the different historical stages of Indian English literature and how the narrative of the self-developed. It brings out thematic transformation and narrative strategies indicating changing socio-cultural realities in postcolonial India, and comparison to other Global South feminist literatures where women manage identity amid oppressions that intersect.

Section A: Early Pioneers (e.g., Kamala Das)

Kamala Das (1934-2009) or Madhavikutty in Malayalam is a pathfinder of confessionalism in the Indian English literature. Her autobiography *My Story* (1976) and poetry books such as *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) and *The Descendants* (1967) are not afraid to include personal experiences and this transitioned the silence to vocal self-expression.

Das uses confessional style in *My Story* where she documents her life, marriage, sexuality and her search of independence. The confession is disclosed in the story in terms of crude revelation of matrimonial disenchantment, external sexuality, and paternal oppression. She is non-conformist to the social norms of womanhood where she is supposed to be chaste and submissive; she claims to be the master of her own body, with words that reflect her poetry, like in her poem *An Introduction*, where she says, I am Indian, very brown, I was born in / Malabar, I speak three languages write in / Two, dream in one. Rebellion against patriarchal demands prevail, and codes of morality repressing women are broken by Das, making the female body a place of shame turn into a place of liberation and self-assertion.

This development represents a transformation of the internalized silence, which is forced by colonial and traditional standards, to the vocal self-expression. The confessional mode of Das is similar to the confessional literature of the Global South like that of African women writers, who challenge the colonial and patriarchal silencing, and take back the narrative control of personal identity (Tharu & Lalita, 1991).

Section B: Mid-20th Century Voices (e.g. Anita Desai)

Anita Desai (b. 1937) is an epitome of the 20th century self-exploration, with her priorities on the inner world and the house imprisonment. Internalized selfhood is portrayed in novels such as *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) in the context of family and social life, under the influence of existentialist ideas of alienation and loneliness.

In the book, *Clear Light of Day*, the main character Bim Das works through family memories, partition, and unrealized dreams. The story has stream-of-consciousness and non-linear structure of searching the psychological intimacy and showing how females are confined in housewife and male demands. The search of the personal identity of Bim finds its expression in her

opposition to marriage, in her contemplation of a missed opportunity and in the inner struggle between the sense of duty and desire.

Equally, *Fire on the Mountain* depicts the isolation of an old age Nanda Kaul denying family demands to demand an individual space. The motifs of family entrapment and existential alienation highlight a selfhood trapped by internalized worlds though rebellion against society is suppressed. Desai adopts the psychological realism which transforms selfhood not of rebellion but of internalized, latent desires to autonomy, in keeping with the contemporaneous world literature of the Global South (e.g., Latin American women writers) which explore existential crises during postcolonial transitions.

Section C: Postcolonial and Feminist Narratives (e.g., Arundhati Roy)

The God of Small Things (1997) by Arundhati Roy is an experimental post-colonial feminist twist that combines personal and political stories. The novel explores divided self in a stratified society by the use of caste, gender violence and forbidden love.

In her non-linear story, Roy narrates of twin siblings Rahel and Estha with the tragic defiance of Ammu being a young woman rebelling against the caste and male patriarchy. The caste oppression and gender violence themes discontinuously reconstitute selfhood because the affair of Ammu with Velutha a man of lower caste has violent repercussions that reveal the collaborative oppressions. These minor details, personal gestures, are turned into points of opposition to more momentous buildings of authority.

This development incorporates political activism into individual stories, and it is turning the state of selfhood into a resistance, though it may be tragic. Echoes of the work of Global South feminist novels (ex: in Africa or Latin America) which relate gender violence to the inequalities of a system (such as caste or race), Roy has the collective and individual resistance (Roy, 1997).

Section D: Diaspora and Contemporary Perspectives (e.g., Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni)

Such writers of the contemporary diaspora as Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni describe globalized selfhood, which is the fusion of Indian and Western cultures. The short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* by Lahiri (1999) deals with cultural displacement and the hybrid identities. Stories such as that of Mrs. Sen and the stories of *Interpreter of Maladies* portray the immigrant women who are trying to negotiate autonomy in the face of dislocation. Characters have discontinuity in their selfhood due to generational and cultural conflicts, but they gain power in their storytelling and efforts of connection with other characters.

In the book *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) by Divakaruni, Tilo is a mysterious foreign shopkeeper in America who sells spices as a way of curing but struggles with her own desires and her cultural obligations and responsibilities. The cultural displacement and

interbreeding identities carry out upon themselves with Tilo straddling between tradition and individual empowerment, and developing into a transnational self-identity that opens up to multiplicity.

These novels are an indication of globalized individuality whereby diaspora allows negotiating roots and adjustment similar to Global South migrant writings that anticipate hybrid agency (Lahiri, 1999; Divakaruni, 1997).

Comparative Analysis

Throughout time, the discourses of selfhood are turning through the victimhood to agency. Kamala Das begins vocal rebellion of the patriarchal silence changing to confessional assertion. Desai takes this quest internally in domestic and existence realms. Roy makes it political and personal fragmentation is compounded with caste-gender activism. Diaspora authors such as Lahiri and Divakaruni internationalize it and adopt hybrid and empowered identities through narration.

This development reflects socio-cultural changes in postcolonial India, like colonial patriarchy, national reconstruction, activism, and globalization, and it has a role to play in Global South feminist terms of differentiated, intersecting selfhood (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988).

Thematic Analysis of Selfhood Narratives

Indian English literature by female writers has developed multi-faceted stories of identity and challenges gender, culture, and power relations. The themes covered in this thematic analysis include gender and patriarchy, cultural hybridity, intersectionality, techniques of narration, and overall effect based on the works of such authors as Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. These themes indicate the changing feminist awareness in postcolonial India, where women authors have provided parallels with Global South literary works where women writers confront intersecting oppressions.

Gender and patriarchy: Defiance against traditionality One of the most important characteristics is the defiance of the patriarchal norms that limited a woman to the role of a wife, a mother and a responsible daughter. In *My Story* (1976) and poems such as *An Introduction*, Kamala Das is bold enough to claim bodily autonomy and sexual agency, and not to yield to the patriarchal domination of women bodies and voices. The main characters in novels by Anita Desai who include *Bim in the clear light of day* (1980) are against marriage and family tradition and these points out the issue of being trapped in the world of domestic patriarchy. In *The God of Small Things* (1997), Arundhati Roy reveals the oppressive power of caste-based patriarchy that subjects women to gender violence and makes them resist it, resulting in tragic outcomes but proclaiming a personal wish. Women depicted in diaspora literature, such as Lahiri, are in the process of negotiating

patriarchal norms in different cultures and find ways to resist traditional norms through silent resistance and self-construction. This subversion is similar to Global South feminist texts, authors of which criticize indigenous patriarchies, as well as the colonial past (Mohanty, 1988).

Cultural hybridity: Negotiation of tradition and modernity Selfhood narratives often describes the negotiation of tradition with Western modernity, leading to the development of hybrid identities. Diaspora literature is a good example: the stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) by Lahiri depict the situations when immigrant women have to balance between the cultural background and the American individualism, they are displaced but empowered by their hybridity. *The Mistress of Spices* by Divakaruni (1997) is written with magical realism that covers the issues of Tilo as he is torn between his mystical Indian roots and contemporary wants. In non-diaspora works by Roy, the fragmented narrative of Roy is the manifestation of hybridity within the postcolonial tensions. This theme can be familiar to the situation of Global South, in which hybridity is offered as the means of resistance to the cultural imposition but also reclaiming the agency (Bhabha, 1994).

Intersectionality: Caste, class, and religion as a factor in self-perception Intersectionality brings out how caste, class, and religion influence the way women perceive themselves differently. The novel Roy creates is a clear demonstration of caste-gender intersections as the relationship between lower-caste Velutha and upper-caste Ammu reveals the violence of the system. In the Desaiian domestic backgrounds the role of the class in influencing selfhood is noted in terms of economic dependence that strengthens patriarchal authority. Identity is further complicated by religion and social rules in that case of Das against the conservative Hindu demands. Caste is a highly important axis in the recent Indian feminism literature, as current scholarship outlines the view that divisions of Dalit and upper-caste women in India vary significantly (Tharu and Lalita, 1991). This is parallel to Global South intersectional wherein race, indigeneity, or ethnicity would be intersected with gender to create various forms of oppression (Mohanty, 1988).

Narrative practices: Stream-of-consciousness, non-linear narrative, and autobiography Authors utilize new practices in order to build selfhood. Kamala Das adopts the autobiographical mode and confessional mode to directly express herself. Desai prefers stream-of-consciousness and soul searching to explore internalized struggle. The non-linear and fragmented narration by Roy resembles fragmented selfhood in oppression. Lahiri and Divakaruni combine realism with some touch of magic or episodic to bring out hybrid experiences. These approaches enable subtle depiction of shifting identities, resistance to oppression and change to agency, and fit into postcolonial feminist tactics of disorienting linear, dominant narratives (Spivak, 1988).

Influence on Indian English literature: Strengthening of the genres, the rise to world fame, and an appeal to younger generations Female writers enriched the genres of writing such

as the novel, short story, and autobiography and gave them feminist approaches and experimentations. Their writings have received international recognition--Booker and Pulitzer awards of Roy and Lahiri made Indian English literature known to the rest of the world. This openness is an encouragement to upcoming authors who make themes and voices more heterogeneous. They challenge the patriarchal canons thus becoming part of the postcolonial feminist discourse, which has an effect on Global South literatures and enhances transnational feminist solidarity (Tharu & Lalita, 1991).

All these themes show how the narratives by female writers reshape the concept of selfhood by making it less confined and rather empowered due to the socio-cultural changes in India.

Challenges and Critiques

Alongside the revolutionary changes to the literature of Indian English by female writers, there are still considerable challenges and criticisms, which represent system obstacles and ideological contradictions of postcolonial and patriarchal situations. These problems are more or less similar to those of female writers in the Global South where the ecosystem of publishing, social conventions, and colonialism tend to ignore various voices.

Discrimination against female writers: Publishing discrimination, censorship and negative social reaction Indian women writers in the English language have to put up with long-standing gender discrimination in the literary field, such as their lack of access to literary contacts, unequal media coverage of their work, and a perceived need to stick to domestic or feminine topics. According to studies and reports, the number of female authors reviewed disproportionately decreases, and there is resistance in creating work about crime, violence, or non-traditional topics due to deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs in the industry (Biswas, 2025). It is common in society to react more against the transgressors; even confessional or aggressive confrontations of sexuality and independence, as in the cases of Kamala Das, have always been subject to critical examination and moral critique. The censorship is a menace and self-censorship is born of fear of either social or legal punishment especially in the face of increasing conservative pressures. Indicatively, the threat of pressure by ideologically minded fronts has made publishers withdraw titles, which has led to the creation of a tense atmosphere that deters any contentious material (Time Magazine, 2014). Such obstacles are a reflection of Global South experiences, in which women journalists and writers are faced with hate online, platform-based censorship, and institutional discrimination, which is usually augmented by political or religious factors (Appiah-Adjei et al., as cited in special issues on gendered disinformation).

Critiques of selfhood discourses: Criticism of elitism (Preferring English as the medium) or Westernizing India. The discourses of selfhood in Indian English literature have been criticized as elitism because English as the language gives credit to urban and educated, and often upper-class viewpoints, which may disenfranchise the vernacular or subaltern.

Opponents claim that this emphasis on English restricts access and supports class dynamics and the establishment of a bubble of privilege within publishing (Feminism in India, 2021). Also, there is the suspicion of Western imitation, in which integrating confessional, introspective or hybrid forms are seen as imitation of Euro-American traditions as opposed to indigenous forms. This critique resonates with the postcolonial arguments over linguistic and cultural mimicry; that is, English-medium writing is viewed as collusive in colonial pasts, though it is viewed as a source of global visibility. This criticism is comparable to that of Global South, where domestically based writers are accused of the same when they indulge in Westernizing or globalizing forms or markets, usually in the middle of local authenticity versus transnational popularity (Mohanty, 1988).

Future directions: - Emerging authors such as Anjum Hasan or Avni Doshi; possible directions of the digital novel. Emerging authors point to promising directions, such as in her fiction on Shillong, where she explores emotional space, urban change, family and personal histories, or books to come, such as *Burnt Sugar* (2020). These authors develop introspect and intersectional themes, exploring modern Indian realities and exploring the topics with subtlety and international appeal. The emergence of digital narratives also presents additional opportunities, such as web-based platforms, digital storytelling, hypertext, and multimedia delivery in which access is democratized, voices of the marginalized are amplified, and boundaries are blurred. The digital tools allow the feminist reimagining of podcasts, interactive fiction, and social media to break traditional dividers and tackle such issues as gender socialization and empowerment (different works on digital literature in India). These tendencies correspond to Global South progressions to digital media to resist and be seen, creating the female literary expression, an inclusive future.

Summing up, although the difficulties remain, changing criticism and the novel trends do not only contribute to the persistence and dynamism of female-written selfhoods in Indian English literature.

Conclusion

As illustrated in this paper, story of selfhood has evolved in female writers in Indian English literature by turning oppression experienced internally in early literature to empowered and multifaceted identities in modern literature in line with socio-cultural changes within the society of post-colonial India. It started with the groundbreaking confessional revolution of Kamala Das who proclaimed vocal self-expression through the silence of classic patriarchy, the inner journey of Anita Desai and her exploratory approach to domestic entrapment and existential alienation and ended with the hybrid, trans-nationalised identities of the diaspora writers like Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. A more and more agency is shown in each phase, the opposition to patriarchal lock-in, the psychic bargaining of tradition and modernity, the intersectional critique of caste-class-gender hierarchies, and the globalized selfhood of cultural multiplicity. These changes are the reflections of the Indian one, of colonial oppression and post-independent nation-cutting

on the one hand and of the liberalization, diaspora and globalization on the other, and they use new narrative strategies such as confession, stream-of-consciousness, non-linearity, and hybrid storytelling to create more independent and multi-faceted female subjectivities.

These narratives have a wider scope of application to literary history as well as in feminist discourse and culture in India. Making women experiences, wishes and dissent the centre of discussion, these authors disturb the patriarchal canons, reveal the multiple oppressions and reclaim the narrative powers of the oppressed voices. Their publications are added to a postcolonial feminist approach which is resistant to colonial histories and indigenous patriarchal structures to give subtle accounts of agency that does not homogenize Third World women (Mohanty, 1988). They contribute to the cultural identity of India by expressing hybrid and intersectional selves that mediate the realms of tradition and modernity, country and city, local and global, to create a more inclusive national imaginary. By thus doing so, these stories are involved in the more general task of decolonizing gender and identity, and much of this type of work is parallel to the feminist literary movements in the rest of the Global South that bring individual liberation to systemic criticism.

This study brings out a number of directions that future research can take. Comparative studies with other regional writing by women, e.g. Malayalam, Bengali, Hindi, or Tamil, should help to identify how the act of self is enacted as differently across language, cultural, and other contexts, and how much English-language writing represents the views of the elite or cosmopolitan. In the same way, a comparison of female-written stories with those of the male authors (i.e. Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, or Aravind Adiga) would reveal the difference between female and male approaches to identity, nationhood, and hybridity, which would make our interpretation of gendered relations in the literature of Indian English more complete. These researches might also involve the developing digital and multimedia to understand how modern platforms restructure self-storytelling.

The greater impact of this literature is that it helped to empower women, and this was coupled with redefining literary canons. With speaking of muted experiences, these writers motivate generations of readers and writers to imagine more equal identities. They diversify the Indian English canon, shifting it out of male dominated realism into feminist, intersectional and transnational voices that dominate the world. In the end, these stories attest to the power of literature to oppose oppression, encourage self-awareness, and bring cultural and social change both in India and in general.

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