



INDIAN DIVERSITY IN THE POETRY OF SMITA AGRAWAL

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Abstract

Indian poets and poetess of the twenty-first century who write in English attempt to add fresh depth to Indian poetry in English for the sake of aestheticism and genuine touch. In their literary works, they experiment with new objects, languages, and techniques. Smita Agrawal is one of the Indian poets who felt the need to write in fresh voices. This way of thinking led to the discovery of her knack for familiarising readers with the language of her generation. She is a poetess from post-independence India who has received praise both at home and abroad. Her poetry makes excellent use of many expressions from other languages, and she talks with a fresh vocal tone. Because of her word choice, writing style, and grammar, she gained both civil liberties and the right to express her culture. She portrays current India, its customs, and its values through her poems. Her poetry has developed its own distinctive characteristics and voice. She is more aware of her language and form because she is an Indian poet from the post-independence era. She made an effort to creatively employ English by effectively combining it with other languages. Regarding creativity and invention of 21st century Indian English poetry, the themes of her poems are relatively recent. Her poetry is characterised by its modernity, Indianness, use of Indian proverbs, multilingualism, Indian myth, symbolism, and specific motifs. Taking inspiration from Indian heritage including history, myths, legends and colloquial language, the present study aims to examine how some of the poems included in her book *Mufassil Notebook* reflect Indian diversity.

Keywords: Indianness, Culture, Society, Multilingualism, Myth, Folklore, Diversity.

Introduction

Being inspired by Indian roots, contemporary Indian English poetry is truly indigenous. Philosophy, ethics, usage, conduct, values and other aspects of Indian society and history are brought together in contemporary Indian English poetry. Contemporary Indian poets writing in English have broadened the scope of Indian culture by using symbols, situations, themes and other

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aspects of Indianness in their poetry. They use vernacular, idioms, traditional knowledge and stories from Indian folklore as their primary poetic subjects. The diverse myths, symbols, images, feelings, and sentiments infused with Indian tradition and culture are what distinguish 21st-century Indian poetry from earlier works. It demonstrates how aware of their cultural norms, values, and current social and cultural events Indian poets of the present era are. They switch to speaking in ordinary terms instead of their usual poetic vocabulary. The Indian poets of the modern age are not interested in copying the poetry of the West; Instead, they have their own ideas, which makes Indian English poetry very different from earlier periods. This poetry adopts a new persona. Today, a poet writes as per his wish, drawing inspiration from things like inner struggle, loneliness, despair, frustration, isolation, interactions with others, personal family and social circumstances, love and emotions. Smita Agrawal is one of such poets. She is the author of two poetry collections and is endowed with extraordinary poetic virtuosity. She is a prolific Indian English poet of the twenty-first century. Smita Agrawal's *Mofussil Notebook* is a special collection of her fifty-seven poems. The book is divided into five sections, and each section is punctuated with a quote, such as "My backside is where I am," "The tambourine keeps beating its chest," "I knew women like Am / And not only in pictures," and "Make me small and edible, love," which highlight Smita's literary talent and her brilliant poetic canvas. She covers a wide range of topics in this collection, including the natural world, the ecosphere, human desires and longings, joy and erotic pleasures, pain, faith, change, illness, the plight of women, men and women's relationships, nature, love, the issue of casteism, metropolitan life, nostalgic feelings, cultural and traditional rituals, and elements of modern life. where she has eloquently illustrated a magnifying picture as well as the social and cultural settings of Indian society. Her poems do a good job of capturing her sociocultural awakening to Indian values. Her poetry has a distinctly Indian feel to it. Indian English writing has experienced a huge boom in recent years, particularly in the area of poetry. Post-modern Indian English poetry has always been characterized by its Indianness. Indianness is a quality of a poet that enables him to represent India through the language, imagery, and sensibility of India in his poetry. It is impossible to define "Indianness" in one specific way. Paul Vergese, however, provides a clear definition, stating that "Indianness is nothing but the portrayal of Indian culture. As a result, "Indianness is the totality of Indian cultural patterns, deeply ingrained in ideas and ideas that form the minds of India" (copied from google). India's socio-political, economic, secular, and spiritual conceptions are all part of what it means to be Indian, as are its culture and traditions. In some of her poems that are included in *Mofussil Notebook*, Smita Agrawal also captures the authentic image of India. Her *Mofussil Notebook*, when closely examined, reveals that she has been greatly influenced by the environment and culture of India. In her poems, she uses Indian speech, and it seems that everything else comes later for her.

Impact of India's Diversity on her Poetry

Every human being is influenced by his or her environment, local culture's art, music, and literature, as well as its traditions and practices. Smita Agrawal is not an exception to this rule. Her poetry has been referred to as Indian because she has been greatly influenced by Indian culture, customs, traditions, etc. Her poetry has signaled an incredibly bright future for Indian English poetry. Smita's writing style is distinctly Indian, which has a positive impact on Indian English poetry. Indianness therefore naturally appears in her poems. In *Mofussil Notebook*, Smita wrote some poems that are infused with Indianness, or Indian culture, tradition, beliefs, and ethics. She discusses several facets of Indian life, including the superstitious rural populace and the way of life

in Indian towns like Allahabad, Nainital, and Uttarakhand. Her poem "Bharat Bharati: An Address to India" is a good illustration of how interested she was in India. The poem's expression is startlingly modern despite having a strong traditional Indian sensibility foundation. She is aware that by drawing comparisons between ancient and modern India in this poetry, he presents a different image of that country. In her poem "Bharat Bharati: An Address to India," which refers to India as the "Mother of swamis and milk-sipping Ganapatis," the author describes how in the past, "devout Hindu women went round her tulsis" and that "Pair indulged in foreplay, ran/Round a tree singing a duet. India" (MoFussil Notebook 79). She paints a picture of an ancient India that is spiritual and peaceful in these lines, but she finds that it is very different in the modern era:

You're in the twenty-first century,
And I can't identify my tulsis,
Sun or tree as meaning is continually
Deferred. What'm I to do with the nuclear
Explosion in my mind? (*Mofussil Notebook 79*).

She emphasizes that in the digital age people have forgotten moral values and the importance of spiritual things as she writes, "God switching off" (80), while shedding light on the impact of the internet in her essay "we're all connected via Internet" (79). Her poetry clearly reflects Indian sensibilities. She is a representation of mother India's aspirations, hopes, fulfillments, devotions, and accomplishments, as well as the oneness projects that foster a sense of national identity.

Indian Rituals, Ceremonies and Tradition and Influence of Modernism

Wide-ranging culture, bizarre rituals, and strange traditions can all be found in India. According to Smita's poem "Roots," some rituals are performed in the name of religion. This poem refers to the formerly common practice among Garhwali Brahmin families of celebrating the first birthday of the eldest son's heir with a blood sacrifice-

A courtyard, greened by tulsis. Incense, chanting,
The ringing of bells . . . Purohitji with chandan on his forehead,
Rajyarajeshwari under her filigreed golden canopy,
Lamps lit to commemorate the family reunion . . .
Bare-bodied priests sprinkle water
On the ram's head. It nods thrice.
Assents to the descent of father's sword
Cutting clear . . . (*Mofussil Notebook 101*)

In her poem "These Days" she throws light that how Indian traditions are manipulated by the impact of modernity;
Ramlila, the story of an ideal prince, has changed its format.
Bar girls gyrate to film tunes,
While Suparnakha, in her act of seduction,
Jumps into Laxman's lap.
And we, the public, hiss and clap . . . (*Mofussil Notebook 78*)

Another example from the same poem stamps on her indianness,

A defeated Indian in *dhoti* and *kurta*,
Casually sipping his tea. A cow walks up to him
When his back is turned; it dips its head and pushes
Its wet muzzle into the cleft of his bottom
And gives him a tender nuzzle.
X X X X X X
We Indians don't allow anything to surprise us,
Since we never put our trust in anything. (*Mofussil Notebook 78*)

Instead of employing alluring Indian similes, in her poetry presents a pure, authentic, and honest image of India. An auspicious mark worn by Indian women and girls is called a bindi. Smita's poem "Bindi" makes clear the importance of bindis in Indian Hindu culture.

Mark of the Hindu; fashion-statement
ever since Madonna took to you;
symbol of wedlock or mere
facial embellishment, dumb bindi,
eloquent in your shapes . . . (*Mofussil Notebook 91*)

A Grass Widow's Prayer, Grandmothers, and For(e)mothers are just a few of Smita's female-centric poems. In addition to discussing Indian women's fashion and style, she also discusses the plight of Indian women and how they navigate patriarchal society.

Folk Music, Idolatry and Indian Places

India's unique feature is its folk music. Smita, an Indian poet, was also attuned to Indian folk music. In her poem "Beggary in Bhatiyali," the boatsman sings Indian folk music that has become popular in West Bengal:

ta nana tantanatan tantanatan tantanatan
ta nana tan tanatan
ta nana tantanatan tantanatan tantanatan
ta nana tan tanatan
ta nana tan tanatan (*Mofussil Notebook 41*)

It demonstrates how Smita's writing demonstrates the fact that she is an Indian. Indians' belief in idolatry is another aspect of being Indian that she captures in her poetry. Idols are viewed as the manifestation of divine God or as a symbol of spiritual concepts in many Indian religions. In her poem "At Fifty Three," she describes Indians' belief in idolatry.

Idol of stone,
Shaped like a phallus.
And then, more often than not,
A priest discovers you embossed
On a rock; female, eight-armed,
Armed with trident, sword,
Mace, chakra, bow,
Seated on your tiger-throne. (*39 Mofussil Notebook*)

Though in the end of the poem she makes it clear that an idol is not of God's abode, rather God lives in one's heart,
I cleave open my chest,
Reach out for my heart,
I see on its template
The imprint
Of your face . . . (*Mofussil Notebook 40*)

Smita's Indianness is notable in terms of myths, images, antiquity, beliefs, heritage, and features and background that are indigenous to India. Indian locations, roads, and cities are eloquently described in her poems "Binsar Barahmasa," "Nainital," and "Muse II. The Road." For instance, she depicts Allahabad's Civil Lines in the poem "Ghazal: Civil Lines, Allahabad."

The mom 'n' pop shops were once sprawling bungalows . . .
At every step, malls are the rage now in Civil Lines.
On the patio of the posh Big Bazaar, a beggar on his mat,
The small change glinting in the sun; high life with the low
in Civil Lines. (*Mofussil Notebook 63*)

Reflection of Myth, Images and Other Social Concerns

Her poetry displays her affinity for Indianness by featuring Indian mythological figures. Indian myths about the sage Agastya and his wife Lopamudra were the inspiration for Smita's poem "Lopamudra." After getting married to the wise man Agastya, Lopamudra grew weary of his frugality. She then pleaded for his love and attention, trying to make him fall in love with her beauty by describing herself as,
the woman who perfected erotism.

X X X X X X

I want you most
When, you take on those vows of celibacy.
Austerities make you lean and glum,
But my breasts swell . . . the nipples itch . . .
And the-two-little-fish-in-a-cow's-hoof-pond, throb. (*Mofussil Notebook 117*)

Smita's portrayal of Lopamudra from Hindu mythology is distinctive. She is an example of a strong and powerful woman thanks to her tale of love, bravery, and courage. In addition to that, she also collects images of "Ravana, Rama" (from "All the World's a Stage"), "Kamadeva" from "Binsar Barahmasa," and other figures from Indian perspectives. She illustrates the way the Indian leader placates the common people by pointing out the Ganges' overflow into Indian streets. In her poem "These Days," she refers to Lalu Yadav as evidence for this.

The Ganges burst its banks . . .
The Ganges burst its banks and flooded the streets;
Lalu Yadav placated us by saying the goddess
Wished to kiss the common man's feet . . . (*Mofussil Notebook 77*)

Smita turns her attention to Indian nature and climate in addition to talking about Indian rivers and mountains in her poetry. The best poems in this category include "Eyeshot," "The

Garden," and "The Gift," all of which are by her. In addition to praising the beauty of Binsar in Uttarakhand, she calls attention to the effects of climate change by posing the question, "Will there be a day we won't have any seasons?" she writes:

No winter, no snow . . .
No high-heat in May . . .
No relentless rain in August . . .
No leaves turning red-brown in October . . .
Just one standard season,
Heat sucking out the life of grasses and plants,
X X X X X
Vaporizing glaciers;
Nostalgic of their juvenilia ditties written,
When the Earth moved
And the seasons turned . . . (*Mofussil Notebook* 122)

Smita's Brilliant use of India's Linguistic Diversity

Her use of multiple languages is one way she expresses her Indianness in her poetry. Smita does not write exclusively in English; rather, she uses a variety of languages, including Hindi, Urdu, and other idiomatic and colloquial ones, to create poetry that is uniquely Indian. She has been somewhat successful in establishing a new dialect for Indian English poetry. She uses words like "saijan" "ber," "jungal-jalebi," "ayahs," "aangan," "girgit" "ashok," "agal-bagal," "chaarpai," and "kabootari," among other Indian words. She claims that Indian English has its own recognition in her poem "Angrezi Vangrezi," which sheds light on the importance of Indian English. She talks about a New York City event:

...He swoops down on me
To say, Hey Lady!
I know you're from India!
You speak English just the way they do. (*29 Mofussil Notebook*)

The fact that Smita writes in Hindi, Urdu, and other Indian languages does not imply that she cannot write well in English. But she demonstrates how Indians speak English using such languages. She employed it as a tool in her poetry to infuse sarcasm and humor. The best illustration of this comes from her poem "Chutney: A Multilingual Existential Poem,"

We two were sitting *agal-bagal*
On a *chaarpai*, under the sprawling
Canopy of a *neem* tree, dressed in
Sarees, chamkeli, enjoying *chuskis*
Of tea with *kurkuri* hot *pakaori*.
We two were sitting *agal-bagal*
And discussing our *saheli*,
Hari-bhari at fifty-three,
Victim of cancer,
Now, *Hari ko pyaari* . . . (*Mofussil Notebook* 31).

With her multilingual skills, Smita pushes the boundaries of India's language variety in her poetry. With these qualities, she also contributes to the Indianness and the Indian English poetry. Despite being written in English, Smita's poetry has Indian-inspired ideas. Her poetry approaches the attribute of Indianness because to the way she structures linguistic phraseology.

Smita is aware of the societal ills that have spread throughout India since she is Indian. Through the love tale of Babli and Bittu, the author of "I Love You" sheds attention on the issue of casteism or inter-caste marriage. Other elements, such the adoration of widows and their customs, the crow's cawing, the skull signifying India's extreme poverty, etc., also exhibit an Indianness-related hallmark. Smita depicts the Indian setting, the seasons, and the natural elements with total artistic objectivity. Through some of the poems in *Mofussil Notebook*, a variety of themes, including Mother Nature, the Ganga River, mountains, love, the impact of materialism, the loss of moral values, the destruction of humanism, global warming, social issues, social evils, culture, faiths, longings, joys, sorrows, nostalgia, humour, and pathos harmony of diction, have been clearly articulated. These poems demonstrate how Indian sensitivity is present in Smita's poetry. She has used every-day Indian cultural leitmotifs in these poems and elevated them literarily via her mesmerising poetic skill.

Conclusion

Indianness is a fundamental and important component of Smita's garden of poetry, which reflects her own personality. According to the depths of her actual knowledge and experience, it finds a true mien and incarnation in Smita's poetry. Her poetry demonstrates her ability to write with good Indian sensitivity upon attentive reading. Indianness gradually permeates Smita's awareness and affects her assessments of both past and contemporary events. Smita discreetly depicts the main physiognomies of Indian culture, tradition, myth, socio-political difficulties, ecological concerns, etc. in a way that is entirely personal, poetic, and artistic. She has made a significant contribution to the lyrical quality of Indianness. The poem demonstrates how fundamentally humane and inclusive her voice is. She has expanded the possibilities for Indian English poetry with her artistic brilliance. Her poetry varies in subjectivity, lyricism, phonological experimentation, sassy sarcasm, harmony, and poetic diction. In her poems, English has been Indianized and other multi-languages have been utilised with effective and efficient usage of important aspects. She is an honourable writer who uses a language that is simple to understand. Smita's authentic creative expression reveals her close connection with the motherland due to the vibrant display of Indianness in her poems. Her contribution is that Indian heritage and culture pervade the white pages of Indian English poetry. She is inspired by distinctive imagery, metaphors, and symbols that lead her reader to appreciate her poetry, which is full of Indian sensibility and diversity.

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