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Literary Works of Arundhati Subramaniam and Kiran Desai on Women's Spiritual Resistance in Indian Writings

Ms. N. Krithika

Part-Time Ph.D. Research Scholar
Department of English, Pachaiyappa's College,
Chennai-600030, India

*Assistant Professor in English (SFS) & Deputy
Dean, School of Languages, Guru Nanak
College, Chennai-600041, India*

Dr. K. Subapriya

Research Supervisor, Assistant Professor
Department of English, Pachaiyappa's College,
Chennai-600030, India

Abstract

This article examines how women seek spiritual strength in the present Indian English works, particularly selecting the writings of Arundhati Subramaniam and Kiran Desai. These two women writers show the world how spirituality is different from the so-called stereotypical sense in quiet and surrendering way but with a drastic shift which differs with reality by questioning the injustice in the society and also as identity formation for those characters. Arundhati takes an abrupt turn in the bhakti poetry by positing the role of self which is meant to be traditional transcending submission to the supreme power as it is supposed to be according to the old

ways. While Kiran sees the same spirituality as a way to fight back discrimination and bias globally. The theory of feminism is used in this paper by studying the paths of spirituality in the writings of these two Indian English Women authors who mark their power of self-expression against silence. Thus, treating spirituality from an enlightenment point of view.

Spiritual writings and narratives in literature have turned out to be a silent fight against the patriarchy taking the feminist revolution to the next level of resistance. Arundhati and Kiran's texts are peculiar in understanding the bridge binding the inner self and the materialistic divisions globally after the pandemic situations which made the questions of belonging narrow down to self. Embodied transcendence is evolved with not absence as a choice but understanding spirituality as an ongoing process where women retain their power not being dominated in this chaos.

Keywords: female spirituality, resistance, bhakti aesthetics, patriarchy, embodied transcendence.

Introduction

In Indian English literature the concepts of gender and spirituality act as one resulting in overlapping the both irrelevant to its unique significance of nature. Whereas women's traditional nature is far distant from that of men while one is made to submit while the other is privileged to enjoy the benefits of power. This conventional ideology is questioned by contemporary Indian English Women writers, Arundhati's poems voice out in a rebellious way about the submission and paving way for women to understand to follow the path of divinity not abiding to the power calling it as "the geography of longing." The literary work *The Inheritance of Loss* talks about how women felt separated due to the cultural and migration shifts while fighting back the system limiting the power of women within the walls of prayer.

Earlier in the 90's the feminist movements were based on the mix of metaphysical and power politics and at present the transition is far beyond questioning the power position even at the narrowest point of the society. Now the terms of feminist narratives have taken a different outlook from fighting for basic rights to awareness of the self.

Now, the voices of women travel from being silenced to breaking the silence through various mediums, though the fight for it is tiring but the results are fruitful with prominent results. Not only Arundhati Subramaniam and Kiran Desai but also Indian English women writers like Kiran Nair, Tishani Doshi and Meena Alexander voiced out spirituality as a resistance fighting against the power while identifying themselves. Arundhati Subramaniam and Kiran Desai have stood still with uniqueness from not being absent in the essential terms of the spiritual fight.

Literature Review

The article by Judy Iseke-Barnes "Living and writing indigenous spiritual resistance" indicates the existing spiritual practices of indigenous groups while resisting the prevailing suppression towards the submissive ones.

Mukul Chaturvedi's "Writing Self, Writing Resistance: Women's Life Writing in India" records Rasasundari Debi's struggle to get educated in a community where it was prohibited and treated as a sin. Tanika Sarkar, a feminist historian evaluates how the protagonist fights to lay the foundation of the self by the weapon of education where pen is mightier than the sword and laying the foundation of spiritual autobiography.

Devoutness, rebelliousness, transgression, spirituality and women empowerment: a study of saint Mirabai's poetry by Prof. L G More examines Mirabai's Bhakti poetry in the forms of Bhajans and songs worshipping the Hindu God. This article speaks about the Voiceless women facing the brutal patriarchy which was against the traditional set up of the society. She be-

came an example to voice out for female freedom designing a prominent place in the Bhakti poetry. As a powerhouse of strength, Indian feminism in spiritual context is spoken.

Surabhi Aggarwal's "Women's resistance-A review of literature" examines the power structure between the dominant and the submissive in the social environment, where one controls and the other resists. The spiritual resistance as a tool to revolt in the everyday lives of women.

"Resounding Resistance: A Critical Assessment of Women's Contributions in Shaping the Literary Cosmos" by Reshu Shukla tells the contributions made by women in the field of literature and their resistance to power politics in the Indian environment in a way shaping the society as a whole. "Shakti," the living manifestation of divine force is personified. Self-worth being embraced and recognised by their battles of standing tall against domination and discrimination.

Kanagalakshmi Ramachandran's "New Woman: Submission, Struggle, Self-Determination" speaks about the transforming experiences of Indian women in literature by establishing resistance to traditional practices, hesitating submission. Social view points and literature are connected, challenging the roles faced by women within a patriarchy, while questioning the society's expectations.

Theory

This paper adapts the post colonial feminist theories from the Scholars Chandra Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak. Spirituality in general means surrendering to the supreme, which differs when women are subjugated to spirituality by trying them to silence, this has broke out as a form of resistance against the patriarchy while also understanding the identity of the self. The action of dominance has set the fire to ablaze the ongoing discrimination and power patriarchy.

The Bhakti theory which emerged from the tradition of Bhakti literature connects the spirit with the body where the faith has been showcased as private and the actions being reflected in public spheres of the society, whereas the sacredness is overshadowed in the existence of cultural norms of prevailing society.

Gayatri Spivak's famous phrase on feminism "*Voice beyond visibility*," drafts how the gap between the visibility and silence prevails through changes have occurred significantly in map of feminist ideology. From this viewpoint it is evident that the Spirituality is more that political and the identification of the self. The divine poetic lines of Arundhati's writings are examined through the concept of *Écriture féminine* by Hélène Cixous, where the ideology is about the body activity writes thysself into the being.

Global sisterhood concept by Mohanty is reflected in the literary works of Kiran Desai, where the pain, struggles and experiences of the women from various cultural backgrounds are similar when discussed in the terms of migration, spirituality and silence. Both Kiran and Mohanty's writings reflect a decolonial point of view in questioning the conventional religious practices in terms of spiritual understanding. They conclude by stating the concept of divinity must be established as platform for liberation by disapproving the patriarchal power structures.

Methodology

A close reading of Arundhati Subramaniam's Poems *When God is a Traveller & Love Without a Story* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* is examined. Spiritual resistance, journeys, struggle, identity, Cultural norms, societal pressures that shape a women's self is studied for further understanding by comparing of the narrative of their respective literary writings. Spirituality in the lens of feminist point of view takes a break from the conventional ways and these writings show that this feminist Spiritual view with Indianness.

Textual analysis of the writing is followed by the hermeneutics which holds the perspective of the poetic form of literature and societal resistance. The ongoing webs of literature paves way of adopting various existing as well as new age theories of Philosophical and societal branches. The above-mentioned writings are not only read for aesthetic and leisure pleasures of literary experiences but also as a resistance of feminist ideology in the current age of Indian English Writings by Women. Now the dynamics have altered when the perspective is narrowed down to spiritual resistance of power and struggle.

The framework is drafted by inculcating the feminist theories and the theories of resistance. Further the resistance is interpreted by Spirituality approaches. This methodology makes us to acquire the Authors Perspective from the literary reading and the Spiritual, ethical resistance of practices that exist in the present postmodern Indian subcontinent's fragments.

Analysis

Arundhati exclaims that surrendering with self-awareness is merged by bhakti poetry. Her writings echo that divinity is existant with fear and feelings. The concept of Bhakti is reworked in the ideology of myth, intimacy, privateness by using these to question power rather than submission to the dominant discrimination both the books *When God is a Traveller* & *Love Without a Story*. Both speaks about alienation in the urban society while resisting the spirituality that stays with the policies of traditional patriarchal dominance in the names of culture and societal pressures. It narrates the similarities and dissimilarities between what it means to be modern and Indian.

When the Conventional methods mean bhakti not as a blind Surrender of obedience but as quest in search of answer that questions the prevailing Social & political powers and patriarchal hierarchy of dominance. Her writing strongly exhibits the doubt of identity, irony & resistance without emo-

tional quest. As Spirituality deals with abiding of sets of rules to be followed in a society of strict religious principles and modernity to be balanced along with the Conventional Societal norms. Her poems serve both the aesthetic sense and as a statement to spiritual resistance. When the patriarchal ideas narrate powerful rulers, Arundhati portrays the supreme powers as spiritual seekers. This now challenges the ongoing ideology of religion and power.

The setup of faith is broken and search of identity through self is broadened whereas differentiating Spiritual sense and religious understanding in conventional nature of ideology about God. She also reimagines God as a traveller and the faith as the journey which means that the definition of right and wrong are not specific to its purpose of conclusion with no specific answers to the questions.

When the traditional ideology is made to meet the modern Chaotic noises of the urban culture these poems mirror the struggle faced by finding the peace and inner strength of the self when these poems talk about Spiritual resistance it means to finding the Space for quiet and meaning to life not boycotting the realities of modern life and its chaotic nature of existence. Thus, the quietness and chaos are understood hand in hand in the lines of Arundhati's poems.

Spiritual search for women is not as simple as for men, where the traditional set up of power hierarchy stays with patriarchal systems, understanding faith and life of modern female seekers appears in these writings.

These poems highlight how women standstill in refusal to the rules of religious practices. The idea of love is not the same according to the poets understanding, the poem *Love Without a Story* is all about love which is not usual and is free from all the tangles. Love is eternal not to be interconnected with the thread of family, religion or identity but with resistance narrowing down to self as definitions of nonlinear & conventional relationships.

The Conversations that take place between these gods, peoples and stories lay a foundation of understanding in newer ways breaking down from the stereotypical belief systems of religious setups, paving a way to broader perspective of modern views. Now, these poems narrate God as an everyday routine in nature thus decoding to simpler terms of connection where Spirituality plays the role of coexistent to the prevailing modern-day life. The faith of devotion is made active in terms of questioning the myths and challenges of patriarchal powers while love is made open and free with Spiritual resistance.

The Inheritance of Loss is a book that deeply discusses the resistance to spirituality by analysing the losses faced by the characters of the fiction in terms of materialistic, emotional and Cultural Value systems. Amongst the contemporary validation and identity of self, colonised powers, violence and global acknowledgement of power positions. The concepts of isolation by inheriting losses of identity and alienation due to migration results in questioning of the spiritual resistance and patriarchal set up of the society.

The feeling of self-hatred and misogyny is strong in the writing which leads to Spiritual resistance later on. The disconnection from the love and traditional roots carries forward as solitary guilt. Though adaptation of foreign cultures welcoming at the beginning towards the end it resulted as loss of authentic reality of originality. The Violence and struggle to identity quest too leads to regret in the end thus paving way to resistance in spirituality. Questioning power and inner self by resisting the religious norms is primary in understanding the texts.

Intersections and Comparative Insights

A comparative reading highlights how Arundhati's overtly devotional poetics and Kiran's introspective realism converge by dwelling on one point: the reclaiming of spirit through inner alignment. While Arundhati expresses her spiritual resistance manifested through language and rhythm of each of

her poetry, it serves as a form of embodied prayer while Kiran's resistance exhibits through quiet endurance and perceptive understanding. Both of them neither opt for spectacle; their defiance is found in subtle shifts through transformations of awareness.

A feminist-spiritual dialogue between these texts also highlights the foregrounding of the evolving image of the "modern Indian woman." Instead of being conflicted no longer torn between faith and freedom, she integrates them. Spirituality, far from being regressive, emerges by becoming a modern language of empowerment. As global readership increasingly consumes Indian women's fiction for its "exotic" spiritual depictions of portrayals, both authors challenge stereotypes by presenting a complex, self-conscious spirituality that arises from doubt, humor, and discipline.

The difference in form — poetry vs. prose — offers complementary forms of resistance. Arundhati's poetry writes the mystical as immediate, while Kiran's prose narrates alienation as spiritual exile. Together, their narratives rewrite Indian English literature's understanding of the divine in feminine for the 21st century shifting from a mythic goddess to a conscious subject.

In the 2020s, global feminist discourse increasingly highlights the values of political significance of interior well-being. Literary Movements prioritizing mindfulness, embodiment, and eco-spiritual awareness find literary anticipating correlatives in works like Arundhati's and Kiran's. Their writings anticipate by demonstrating this shift, showing that the road to liberation originates not from external revolt but from inner coherence.

Their spiritually-inflected feminism has further circulated through virtual poetry performances and online reader forums, Arundhati's recent essays reflect by advocating for "mindful modernities," while Kiran's prolonged absence from publication heightens the meditative silence surrounding her work, which itself is an act of creative resistance.

Conclusion

Both writers break down the strict divide between sacred and daily life by situating spirituality within real struggles. Arundhati's intimate aesthetics and Kiran's portrayal of melancholia mark a shift in feminist spirituality: from imitation of divine love to creating personal divinity. Women evolve beyond mere devotees; they become architects of spiritual meaning of understanding. Their transcendence reinterprets by shaping the world rather than outright rejection of the world. Indian English fiction frames spirituality as a lived, powerful exercise in resistance and rebirth.

This study ultimately highlights functions of spirituality as a generative wellspring for feminist transformation in Indian English literature. Arundhati's poetic pilgrim and Kiran's silent seeker embody a synchronized consciousness and exemplify a harmonious awareness, turning by transforming devotion into defiance and solitude into solidarity.

Their writings also demonstrate that the reclamation of the sacred can also simultaneously lead to the political reclamation, creating by forging paths paving avenues by enriching a collective gender consciousness through self-knowledge. Further, the future research could expand by broadening this framework by exploring how digital-age interpretations of bhakti and spirituality appear by manifesting as a feminist aesthetic in the new generations of digital age across literature, performance, and art. With women expressing their spiritual identities and beliefs amidst socio-political turbulence, the enduring legacy of Subramaniam and Desai continue to offer a powerful lens for understanding resistance, belonging, and rebirth.

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