Abstract

Configuration of Space in the Poetry of Meena Alexander and Anna Sujatha Mathai

The present thesis focuses on two poets from Tiruvalla, Kerala - Anna Sujatha Mathai (b.1936), and Meena Alexander (b.1951). Belonging to the Marthoma community of Tiruvalla, they have carved out a niche for themselves in Indian English writing. Anna Sujatha Mathai, an extensively travelled poet, is settled in New Delhi. She has been publishing poetry for more than three decades and has four volumes of poetry to her credit: Crucifixions (1970), We The Unreconciled (1972), the Attic of Night (1991), and a collection of poems in the book Life-On My Side of the Street and Other Poems by Anna Sujatha Mathai. Born outside Kerala, she studied at the Universities of Delhi, Edinburgh, Bangalore and Minnesota. Her mother tongue is Malayalam, but her writing is confined to English. She has taught at Delhi University and had been involved with the theatre. Her poems have been translated into several European and Indian languages, and she has given poetry-reading sessions at various places, including The House of Culture, Stockholm, and the Danish Writers Union, Copenhagen. She has also worked as professional social worker in England and America. Her latest collection of poems, written over the last decade reveals a “struggle to find meaning and illumination in dark and difficult years” (Daruwalla x). K.R.S. Iyengar includes her with other poets like Sunita Jain, Rina Sodhi and Meena Alexander in his comprehensive study of Indian Writing in English (728). In the Introduction to her latest collection of poems (Life-On My Side of the Street and Other Poems), Daruwalla calls her poems “lyrical and meditative at the same time” and draws the reader’s attention to the fluency, effortlessness and cadence in them. Though Daruwalla calls her “a painter of bleak landscapes,” he discovers an inner strength in her poems (ix- x). The delicate shades of emotions that enhance her poems are...
tinged deeply with the experience of life’s bitter moments. This curious blend of the light and dark nuances of life creates a flow of visuals that derive their clarity from the “imaginative reservoir” of her childhood spent in Tiruvalla with her maternal grandparents. She refers to those years as “a precious and central part of my imaginative reservoir” in her letter.

The present thesis attempts to offer a spatial perspective to the reading of their poetry, thereby enhancing its resonance to the reader. It necessitated a search into the nebulous world of memory that helped to foreground the interplay of the spatial and the temporal in their writing. The study enters the labyrinth of selfhood and moves towards the possibility of a return and resolution embedded in the poem itself. This posits one of the innumerable ways in which poems could be read and enjoyed.