Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The feminine poetic consciousness of Indian Women poets in English is a complex phenomenon, which illumines the changing position of women in Indian society on one hand and the development of the feminine poetic sensibility on the other. Women are naturally creative and generally they are more aesthetically sensitive and emotional. Rajashekhara in his treatise on aesthetics Kavya-Mimmasa wrote: "Women also can be poets. Sensibility and sophistication know no barriers of sex." Poetry writing by women has a very long tradition in India. Their very first creative expression was in verse and they kept on expressing themselves in earlier ages through poetry only.

The modern period begins with the establishment of British power in India. The introduction of the British educational system by the rulers in 1814 may be regarded as the main cause of the modernization of Indian woman. It marked the beginning of the Indian Renaissance as it brought Indians in contact with the western culture. One of the most important elements of this Renaissance was a dramatic change in the attitude to women. A considerable impetus was given to the female education by the Christian missionaries, and also by the Indian social reformers like Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Pandita Ramabai, the Ranades, Joyitaba Phule as well as by the social organisations like the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj. The Gandhian Movement gave an opportunity to women to participate in the social and political activities of the country.
on the basis of equality with men. Mahatma Gandhi proclaimed the need for "removing those blemishes which are represented in our shastras as the necessary and ingrained characteristics of women" to achieve the regeneration of women in India. The new social situation led individual women to assert, for the first time, their full identity as independent, self-made individuals in the man-oriented society.

One of the visible marks of this bold assertion is the fresh impetus given to women poets in all regional languages right from the beginning of the Indian Renaissance. Women like Saralabala Sarkar, Nirupma Devi, Radharani Devi, Snehalata Mukharjee, Kshanaprabha Bhaduri, Rajlakshmee Debee, Savita Banerjee, have been some of the contributors to the Bengali poetry while the works of Jayanti Devi, Shanti Barphivala, Jayamangauri Pathak and Chaitanyabala Divatia evidence modern woman’s contribution to Gujarati poetry. The history of modern Hindi poetry records many women poets such as Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Mahadevi Varma, Shanti Mehrotra, Tara Pande, RajKumari Shivpuri, Lakshmi Devi Verma and Snenmayi Chaudhari. Malayalam poetry is enriched by women like Mary John Thottam, Mary John, Lalithambika Antarjanam, Bhagirathi Amma Thampuran, Balamani Amma and Sugatha Kumari. Women like Rajyalakshmi, Kanchanapalli, Kanakamba, Indumati Devi and S.Kamalamba figure in the history of modern Telgu poetry. The poetic works of women like Lakshmibai Tilak, Manoramabai Ranade, Padma Gole, Indira Sant, Sanjeevani Marathe, Suhasini Irlekar and Vasudha Mane and many others embody the Marathi woman’s search for her poetic identity in the modern context.
Indo-Anglian poetry has been a favourite genre with women litterateurs before and after independence. A very interesting phenomenon of modern Indo-Anglian poetry is a large number of women poets indefatigably writing verse. It has compelled attention from critical circles also P.Lal points out the phenomenon of 'high percentage' of women writers in English producing technically competent and sensitive work. He also goes on to remark, "many of the Gargis and Maitreyis of the twentieth century are Indo-Anglian." Women love to fly 'on the wings of poesy' and English is their chosen medium. Besides the frequent publication of their poetic volumes, magazines, dailies and journals are flooded with their poetic pieces. K.R.S.Aiyengar observes, "We have reached the stage where more women than men are essaying verse." Their poetry possesses not mere quantity but quality also.

Women litterateurs have generally been criticized for the narrow range of their writings and Jane Austen's 'limited range' has become a literary cliché to describe the restricted world and vision of any writer. The writing of women generally centers around their personal and that too family life. The world outside seems to be beyond their ken and they reveal only a little social consciousness or awareness of the events, circumstances and situations around them. Indo-Anglian Women poets are no exception and the charge most frequently and scathingly leveled against them has been their lack of social consciousness and obsessive concern with the theme of love. A number of critics have pointed out this serious limitation. Admittedly, one does not find much social consciousness in the pre-Independence poets represented by Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu.
Torn Dutt (1856-1877) and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) were the first two great predecessors of modern Indo-Anglian women poets. Torn Dutt, the daughter of distinguished poetic Dutt family of Bengal, is a poet with a real historical significance. She holds the distinction to be the first Indo-Anglian woman poet. Her poetry laid the foundation for the future edifice of Indo-Anglian woman poet. A pioneer and an innovator, she gave authenticity to Indo-Anglian verse. In her short life span of twenty-one years Toru’s literary output includes two novels ‘Le Journal De Mademoisell’ ‘Arvers’ (French), ‘Binaca’ (English) and two poetry books. Her poetic collection ‘A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields’ (1880) is a translation of about two hundred poems by French poets. Her ‘Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan’ (1941) contains Indian legends like “Dhruva”, “Lakshman”, “Battoo”, “Savitri,” “The Royal Ascetic and Hind ”, “Jogadhya Uma “, and “Sita”. In these legends and ballads the poet’s translative impulse becomes transcreative. Her poetic contribution is eight original poems – ‘Miscellaneous’ pieces in ‘Ancient Ballads and Legends’. Themes are Nature, love; home and the poems reveal her narrative and descriptive skill. Indian world of myths and legends is authentically portrayed for the first time in her ballads. Toru remains a case of ‘promise unfulfilled’ due to her premature death. To her goes the credit of putting Indian poetry on the international literary map by evoking a wide critical attention abroad.

The next important poet of this period is Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949). The child of a Bengali family with rich cultural heritage, the ‘nightingale of India’ is a most popular poet who has won great recognition in India and outside. Her poetic corpus includes four

Toru’s original poetry is very little and Sarojini is the first full-fledged Indo-Anglian woman poet. She takes up various themes like love, Nature, God and death. In her poems we find traditional India unravelled in all its beauty and splendour. Sarojini’s poetry is marked by lyricism and mysticism. She reveals influence of English Romantics like Keats and Shelley on one hand and Persian and Urdu poetry on the other. Though Sarojini Naidu played an important role in Indian freedom struggle, yet she remains only a singer of sweet lyrical songs in her poetry. Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons advised her to write about native world and Sarojini has presented the heart and soul of India to the West.

Both Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu were the first authentic Indian voices in English. Their successors were minor versifiers whose poetry could not rise above romantic indulgence in dreams, fancies, love and mysticism. Susi P.David’s ‘The Garlands’ (1938) contains sonnets on themes of love, God and death. Sister Lalita’s slender volume ‘The Star and the Path’ (1944) reveals her mystical sensibility. Sabita Devi’s ‘Phantasies’ (1943) is a collection of small lyrical verses describing beauty in different forms. Her specialty is her unrhymed pattern of verse and lines of unequal length. Sukhalata Rao’s ‘Leading Lights’ (1956) contains seventy-three pieces of uneven quality of which twenty deal with mystical themes. Zeb-un-Nisa Hamidullah describes frustration in love in her two poetic volumes – ‘Indian Bouquet’ (1942) and ‘Lotus Leaves’ (1946). This poet also reveals social consciousness in her poems “The Call” where she gives
a call to women to cast back veil of centuries and “Harijan Boy” which is a sympathetic and affectionate portrayal of the boy. ‘Poems’ (1956) by Themis contains seventy-four lyrics articulating her mystical experience through RadhaKrishna myth. She conveys her emotion in simple and rhythmic verse. These poets do not possess the grandeur of Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt. One poet who merits attention here is Bharati Sarabhai with her poetic play ‘The Well of the People’ (1943). Romanticism and realism intermingle here. The play contains five choruses- the first two are sung by old women, the next two by Gandhian Social workers describing the new identity of India and the last chorus is sung by old women workers and peasants. They are a celebration of India’s new emerging identity. The play embodies the changing social scenario during the pre-Independence period. The poet projects a social theme on the spiritual—metaphysical level. Thematically Bharati Sarabhai holds the distinction to act as a bridge between the pre-Independence Romantics and the post-Independence modern women poets.

Gradually the winds of change started blowing and this change was reflected in the writings of these women poets also. From Monika Varma onwards ‘Songs of Innocence’ became ‘Songs of Experience’. Greater realism, analytical approach and greater awareness now marked their poetry. The canvas became wide and interests more varied. Thus, the real flowering of their genius came in the post-Independence era. Vasant V.Shahane and M.SriramaKrishna record:

“The post-Independence scenario presents a richer and more fertile crop of Indo-Anglian women poets who
through their wonderful creations have carved an abiding niche in the temple of Muse.”

There was efflorescence in poetic creativity in 1960’s and 1970’s and the literary scene was literally inundated with the publication of their poetic volumes. Many major poets made their debut- Kamala Das, Monika Varma, Margaret Chatterjee, Ira De, Roshen Alkazi, Sujatha Modayil, Suniti Namjoshi, Gauri Deshpande, Mary Gupta, Indira Dhanrajgir, Leela Dharamraj, Tapati Mookerji, Lila Ray, Shri Devi Singh, Lalitha Vankateshwaran, Gauri Pant, Tillottama Rajan, Chitra Pershad, Nasima Aziz, Vimala Rao, Malathi Rao and Dorothy Sinha. 1980s and early 90s registered further growth of poetry by women as many new voices were heard like Sunita Jain, Meena Alexander, Melanie Silagardo, Intiaz Dharker, Malavika Sanghavi, Achla Bhatia, Menka Shivdasani, Nilima Wig, Sujata Bhatt, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Charmanye De Souza and Vijaya Goel. The earlier poets also kept on publishing their volumes during this period.

As compared to the pre-Independence era where we had just two well-known figures of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, we have a large number of modern Indo-Anglian women poets who have made their presence felt.

The present century women poets have kept the tradition alive and the great divide of 1947, when India achieved political independence, acted as a morale booster and liberating force for Indian women. Therefore, the post-independence period evidences a sudden but exuberant unleashing of the feminine poetic psyche. The post-independence women poets in a way represent the transitional stage of
Indian society and the possible direction, which the women tend to evolve in future.

Indian women poets writing in English, though numerically few and less prodigious in output, have also endeavored to continue the tradition of their male counterparts in their own way, appending to its the essential feminine consciousness. In a way Indian poetesses have expanded the frontiers of poetry, and their work no longer exudes narrow provincialisms; the perspectives of their poetry race beyond national frontiers since their imagination is agglutinative and conglomerate as to encapsulate a wide variety of affirmations. Their expressive concern with the exploration of the feminine consciousness lends to their poetry an urgency and immediacy of utterance.

Narsingh Srivastava rightly observes:

"We find in their poetry a remarkable fusion of the English form and the Indian theme—the harmonious unity of the alien body and the native spirit. In this respect, the poetess quite like the poets have done a greater service to their beloved nation and its age-old culture than to the foreign tongue which, of course, have used with an amazing mastery, perfection and natural ease".6

But the women poets of the present century have surely and confidently came out of the romantic entanglements, of the claptrap of the past tradition and succeeded in formulating a new tradition and a 'new mode of articulation' this is at once original, natural and spontaneous. The poetry of Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia, Monika Varma of the older generation and Sunita Jain, Lakshmi Kannan, Meena Alexander, Vimala Rao and Eunice de Souza of the
present represents the genuiness and geometricality of the essential feminine sensibility.

As a matter of fact one of the most distinctive features of modern literature is its increased social consciousness and concern. In their quest for meaning the post-Independence women poets move further to a wider context, i.e., the society around them. Various facets of society affect their sensitivity and sensibility in the process and their poetry records both the diverse social situations and the responses these situations elicit from them.

The woman today is experiencing all the pangs and woes of a society in transformation. There is a great topsyturvydom of values. The age -old Indian ideals of non-violence, spiritualism and self-abnegation are being thrown to the winds. Violence in different forms is becoming the order of the day which has created a new section of suffering people viz. riot-victims and refugees. Urbanization has cut Indians off from their roots in Nature. Man has become indifferent and insensitive to the miseries around. Self-interest and self-aggrandizement reign supreme. Corrupt leaders, corrupt religious men and corrupt system have disillusioned modern man with everything. He is confused, baffled, alienated and victim of severe identity crisis. He has no philosophy or vision to offer or one to guide his own life. In a nutshell, with its increased exposure to the western values through media literature, India is becoming a part of modern international scenario.

These women poets are writing in the backdrop of all these factors and reveal this influence in their poems. These poets have
expressed the deep anguish experienced by a sensitive soul-seeking fulfillment in a world sans values.

Sociology offers more important insights into the nature of 'femininity' since it correlates sex differences in abilities, temperament and motives with the sex roles in society. Sociologists attempt to study the position of women in different societies of the world from a historical point of view in order to gain a clear idea about the 'feminine' character in a particular social context. They find that subordination to a man is one of the common factors of a woman's position in the social history of a number of communities. The general condition of woman in society in various parts of the world is summarized in 'Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences' thus:

"The core of social structure, the closely knit patriarchal family in which property was transmuted through the male line, institutionalized the dominance of men over women."

The process of industrialization of society has, however, changed the woman's position throughout the world.

The psycho-sociological approach to the 'feminine' character encourages a new awareness about woman as an artist and as an individual. Ashley Montagu believes that women have comparatively fewer achievements than men in the field of art because art involves artificial creativity. Women are naturally creative as mothers and "for the most part women are busy creatively living the life that men can only paint or write about." It must be admitted at the same time that the modern technology with its birth control measures has brought about "the separation of sex from procreation" and makes
it difficult to link woman’s artistic creativity exclusively with the function of reproduction. Virginia Woolf links feminine writings on the other hand, with the social situation when she say: “It is only when we can measure the way of life and the experience of life made possible to the ordinary woman that we can account for the success or failure” of the woman as a writer.

Patricia Spacks thinks that a woman’s point of view in literature is “doubtless the result mainly of social conditioning... Women writers have written books only during the eras of their social subordination " 11. Simone De Beauvoir interprets the secondary place of woman in different fields of life as the result of her condition which “ has remained the same through superficial changes, and it is this condition that determines what is called the ‘character ’of woman.”12

Psychology and sociology, on the whole, validate the concept of ‘femininity’. Psychology tries to decipher certain components of ‘femininity’ in terms of degree. The psychologists interpret (1) certain personality traits being more dominant in men than in women, (2) certain differences of interest if not of ability, and (3) a possibility of certain specific traits to be found only in women and not in men, and vice versa. Sociology stresses further how the ‘feminine ‘character develops in a different manner from the ‘masculine ‘because of the operation of social forces. The ‘feminine ‘character is thus made up of certain instructive psychological traits as well as certain socially conditioned ones.

The question of caste is more relevant in Indian society because it has always been highly hierarchical. The several hierarchies within the community have been maintained and integrated by means
of a complex combination of custom, functionality and religious belief. Instances of class caste or race oppression and discrimination like gender oppression and discrimination are also the results of systematic exploitation. Indian constitution declares women along with the former untouchables and tribals to be recognized as weaker sections.

The poor and the downtrodden sections of the society have compelled the maximum attention of Modern Indo-Anglian women poets. Their own secondary status gives them a kind of imaginative empathy and makes them more sensitive and sympathetic towards these ignored and oppressed people. Plight of the poor, the needy and the suffering has shaken these poets particularly – Kamala Das, Sujatha Modayil, Monika Varma, Margaret Chatterjee, Suniti Namjoshi, Mamta Kalia to their souls. They have bestowed these slighted people with individual dignity. It is not mere lip-sympathy and the poets are genuinely involved in what they write. Violence, war and bloodshed have affected their sensitive psyche and so has the chaos of values, miserable state of women and overall dehumanization of man.

A significant part of the poems of Kamala Das deals with the themes of social justice, human rights denial and the oppressed. Kamala Das is deeply committed to humanism. Her poetry reveals that she is fully alive to the social evils around her. She reacts sharply to social injustices, cruelty of the rich, the inequality and poverty among the poor and the evils of religious fanaticism. Kamala Das’ poetry expresses her awareness of the world around. Her poetry not only gives a living expression of modern woman’s thoughts and feelings but also of all other oppressed groups/communities, the doubly oppressed low caste/Dalit/Minority Woman. She speaks of
her social role in an unpublished interview in ‘Indian Literature’- “I was fully conscious of my role in society that I have come here to change it a little bit, if possible.”

Kamala Das embodies the most significant stage of the development of Indian feminine poetic sensibility not yet reached by her younger contemporaries. Her poetry voices to the full not only the existential pressures generated during the modern Indian woman’s journey from tradition to modernity, but even the Indian woman poet’s sense of commitment to reality.

Kamala Das is pre-eminently a poet of love, sex and lust, pain, nervousness, melancholy and frustration. She is a confessional and autobiographical poet who writes candidly about her own experiences of frustration in love and drudgery in married life. H.M. Williams call it “a witty and moving apologia which with economy, deftness and artful simplicity is both a vivid self-analysis and a poignant assertion of her individuality against social and cultural conformity.”

Poems in Das’ second collection ‘The Descendants’ carry her quest for self-awareness through love and lust. This theme is depicted boldly in “The Suicide”, “The Invitation”, “The Captive”, “The Convicts”, and “Composition”. Love is disturbing, destructive and doomed. H.M. Williams rightly says:-

“Again and again, Kamala Das turns to the subject of love, wielding the surgeon’s scalpel on experiences which are powerful, painful, shaking, not gentle. There is no tenderness. Love leads to anguish, patting death…but she is a poet of lust too and here too finds squalor, shame and freakishness.”
The poetry of Kamala Das flows with emotions, encompassing a wide variety of themes such as love and sex, the painful process of separation and the need to find a response in a world of insouciance, devoid of strength giving love and fulfillment. Her poetry is underlined by a process of psychic striptease. She is bold but candid, free but uninhibited, in her statements about her own life and she neither hides to reveal her innermost thoughts nor camouflages her intentions. She speaks of love–hate relationship, and her obsession with sex or libido, almost in a confessional vein.

Kamala Das has been labeled as a confessional poet. She confesses a number of things exclusively related to her own self—herself as a woman with her strong feminine sensibilities, proclivities and antipathies, caprices and whim whams. She really dissects and probes her own female psyche; and her “self” emerges powerfully in her poetry.

According to Iqbal Kaur, Kamala Das’s position is certainly secure in the ranks of the confessional poets. Furthermore, Iqbal is of the view that Kamala Das’s poetry is the poetry of protest and that this poetry surely has a cathartic effect on the reader. There is a very strong cathartic power in her confessional poetry which shows in her a sharp perception of poetic truth.

Eunice De Souza writes: “The intensely personal, confessional quality of Mrs. Das’s work recalls in some ways Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath who attempt to work out their traumas in their poetry. Anne Sexton, whose volume ‘Live and Die’ includes such titles as ‘Wanting to Die’, ‘Suicide Note’ and ‘Mensuration at Forty’, apologies for the fact that the poems ‘read like a fever chart for a bad
case of melancholy . Robert Lowell's preface to Sylvia Plath's "Ariel" describes the volume as the autobiography of a fever. Both Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath try, among other things, to work out in their poetry traumas in relation to their parents, particularly their fathers. Sylvia Plath, in 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus' (in "Ariel") writes about her attempts to exercise, through suicide the rage, grief and sense of betrayal she has felt since her father died when she was about nine. In Kamala Das's case, it is often the husband who is at the core of the disturbance:

You called me wife,
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
To offer at the right moment the vitamins.
(The Old Playhouse)

It is this confirmation with pain, pain in relation to sex and family that gives readers a point of contact with these intensely subjective poems and, in consequence, they (the readers) are moved by them very deeply."17

Kamala Das is deeply imbued in her own psychological gestures, feminine all through, forthright but unconventional – such is her arresting personality. Like Judith Wright, whose experiential range is varied and all encompassing, Kamala Das is quintessentially a poet of love. She adds to the vulgates of her experience an 'intellectual pride', a certain amount of open-hearted ease, ease lays bare her lover's heart in transparent veils of expression. The centrality of her poetry lies in giving expression to the tormented and betrayed self, and the persona in her poetry speaks with a sense of confessional urgency for 'that particular humility that true love brings out in a woman.'18
Kamala Das is a poetess of impressive talent and she impresses one by being very much herself in her poems. Essentially a poet of love and its attendant feelings of betrayal, boredom and unfulfilment, there is an all – pervasive sense of hurt in her poems. The tone of her poems is distinctively feminine and the rendering is self – consciously honest and straightforward.

Kamala Das inveigles against traditional values and questions their very propriety. She frees herself from senseless social restrictions, which are imposed upon the Indian Women, which manacle their progression. Kamala Das’s sensitivity to various sights and sounds and her attempts to attune mood to a symbol, all show the possible direction Indian poetry written by women may take. Her poetry in fact races beyond the ordinariness and moves towards a sustained implication of universality. She articulates them all with a forthright direction and candidness.

Monika Varma writes:“ Quite often she indulges in death, love betrayal- it is all too full of pain and soul’s bemoaning and why? There is a fever in her but there is no hope. I find myself out of sympathy with the view- point of a poet who is without hope.”

Kamala Das thus emerges as a poet of significance, with a steady integrity that enhaloes her. She in fact explores her psychic geography with the curves of her exceptional feminine energy. The quest for an emotional liaison with the outer world of flux or her failure to establish the basic connexion with the established conventions becomes the central burden of her poetry. As R. Parthasarthy observes: “With a frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context, Kamala Das expresses her need for love.”
Devendra Kohli thinks “some of her poems will no doubt find a natural and honourable place in any future international anthology of contemporary women poets.” Though she deals with the ‘conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male oriented universe,’ her poetry in the final analysis amounts to a celebration of the beauty and courage of being a woman. As K.R.S.Iyengar observes: “Kamala Das’s is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world.”

A significant degree of social awareness offers a mark of distinction to Sujatha Modayil as a modern Indian woman poet. According to Lakshmi Kannan, Indian women poets seldom respond to wider spheres and hence, Sujatha Modayil’s social awareness is more ‘an exception than a rule’. Sujatha Modayil explores the dimensions of social existence in her two volumes, ‘Crucifixions’ and ‘We the Unreconciled’, in terms of pain, suffering and poverty. She is haunted by the poverty of Indian people. In her poems she sympathetically portrays a world reeking with slum-dwellers, footpath-wallahs, beggars, poor, labourers, exploited workers and farmers.

Sujatha Modayil is one of those women poets who are sensitive to their feminine identity and their inherent relationship with womankind. She sees herself bound to the common feminine destiny of waiting and suffering. In her feminist zeal to explore a woman’s predicament, she, however, ceases occasionally to be a poet and assumes the role of a social reformer pleading for justice. A.S.Modayil has written poetry of experience on the predicament of women.
"Woman's Loneliness" is a touching poem in which she depicts the urges and frustrations of women. She reveals a thorough understanding of the complicated predicament of feminine existence in "Pain", "Loved One", "Alone in Company ", etc. She feels that women are subject to oppression, suppression and a personification of frustration and suffering and a beautiful thing to be preserved in waiting for exploitation. Modayil’s poems contain a feeble note of protest against the sheer helplessness of woman.

Monika Varma is one of the distinguished women poets writing in English today. A very sensitive, gentle and sober poetess. She is very widely published, with several publications to her credit. Her important poetry collections are:-


Monika Varma is considered as one of the major Indo-Anglian poets of the post-Independent era. She is deeply rooted in Indian soil, as far as her poetic sensibilities are concerned. All her collections reveal various stages in her growth as a poet. In fact the journey of her poetic growth from ‘Dragonflies Draw Flame’ to ‘Alakananda ’ is the journey from adolescent piper of the songs of passion, to the maturer understanding of the world around her. Her poetry covers all aspects of human life. Her interests are so wide , so varied that her knowledge, deep or shallow, covers an enormous arc. From sophisticated city life to a deep rural area, from the borders of Tibet to the shores of the coastal seas- her poetry covers all this
because it is part of her personal living experience. Her essential attitude to the outer world remains the same except for the fact that her tone is modulated at a high pitch in her later volumes. She writes of the apparent dichotomy in the 'development of thought process', and in the 'development of expression', which are inherent in the Indo-English situation. As she writes about her poetic process:

"I have always, from my early days, had a love for words their form, texture and music – and from the time I first began writing in 1952, C.R. Mandy has been my unfailing helper and critic. Whenever I was disheartened he urged me to keep writing."^24

Margaret Chatterjee is a poet with a commitment to creative writing, which is rooted in her experience. Although she expresses Indian ethos, her creative writing may be called "international or intercontinental." She is an important voice among Modern Indo-Anglian women poets. She has published five poetic volumes till date, namely, 'The Spring and The Spectacle' (1967), 'Towards The Sun (1971)', 'The Sandalwood Tree' (1972), 'The Sound Of Wings' (1978) and 'The Rimeless World' (1987). Her distinction lies in her wide range of subjects, humanism and presentation of Indian life and philosophy. Her favourite topics are Nature, love, music, poetic art, social concern and philosophical musings. While other major women poets are intensely responsive to a particular area of experience, Margaret Chatterjee probes into all of them apart from her deep concern for the human situation. Probably, very few Indian poets – both men and women have her inclusive consciousness and meditative sensibility. Any attempt at the survey of modern Indian English
women poets is destined to be incomplete if it excludes Margaret Chatterjee whose contribution invites special attention.

Suniti Namjoshi is one of the few modern Indian English women poets with the gift of ironic perception. Her poetic volumes in English are ‘Poems’ (1967), ‘More Poems’ (1971), ‘Cyclone in Pakistan’ (1971) and ‘The Jackass and the Lady’ (1980). Suniti reveals a wide social consciousness and presents the anomalies with ironic incisiveness. Her ironic vision of life’s ambivalence is powerful enough to trigger experience with meaningfulness. Her poetry is of an uneven quality. Her poems demonstrate promise and not fulfillment. She writes about society, life and love in rhythmical, precise, restrained, balanced and lyrical style. She is alertly responsive to the social themes in terms of the essential paradox at the root of all experience. Her poetic volumes offer sufficient evidence of Suniti Namjoshi’s uniqueness as a poet.

Mamta Kalia is a bilingual poet and writes both in Hindi and English, and has made a dint as a poet, novelist, and a short story writer in Hindi. Poetry, in her case, is an inevitable result of the tension caused by her traumatic experience as a woman. She tries to find a pattern for the trivialities of life of a normal, urban, middle-class, serving woman. In English she has published two volumes of poetry- ‘Tribute to Papa and other Poems’ (1970) and ‘Poems 1978’(1979). Her poems deal with the frustrations of a woman’s life in and outside the house, boredom of married life and chaos of values in society. She is gifted with an ironic perception and introduces into poetry written by women the element of light-heartedness and gaiety.
These women poets reveal broadly the global divisions and differences in their thematic preoccupations and expressive concern with the idiom of expression. The contours of their sensibilities are traced out with a view to reveal, how they did strive hard to establish a ‘tradition of their own.’ They have shown how the basic components of the Indian reality could become assimilable elements. The approximations between the Indian poets writing in English with the other Commonwealth Poets writing in the other parts of the globe, significantly point out the basic similarity in their attitudes and vision though they operate in a different cultural context.

The study has been made collection wise in order to show the growth of the mind of the individual poet in particular and the development of the Indo–English poetry in general. Thematically, men–women relationship, love, sex, frustration and fulfillment, the dreary ugliness of contemporary existence, violence in the society, urban man’s predicament, his agonies and lacerations, agony of loneliness and separations the whole spectrum of Indian society, has been reflected.

Modern Indo–Anglian Women Poets have received detailed consideration in many works of various critics such as A.N.Dwivedi, Pritish Nandy, Makarand Paranjape, R.Parthasarthy, and C.Paul.Verghese but these critics have ignored, as Arun Mukerjee has pointed out, other important aspects such as poverty, exploitation, social inequality, social and political conflict, etc. Most of the critical works on Indo-Anglian Women Poets have so far centered around the study of the themes of love, nature, philosophical approach to life in their writings. The charge of lack of social consciousness may hold
ground in the case of Romantics like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu but it does not remain much tenable in case of modern Indo-Anglian Women Poets. The poetry of these poets strongly and urgently calls for a fresh critical appraisal.

It is against the unique Indian social scenario that this study has aimed to discuss the images of subalternity in the poetry of Kamala Das, Sujatha Modayil, Monika Varma, Margaret Chatterjee, Suniti Namjoshi, and Mamta Kalia. The work takes up for an in-depth analysis in the subsequent chapters the diverse ramifications of quest in the poetry of these poets as individuals and as social beings. Hence intensive analysis of the works showing images of subalternity has been made and the feminine poetic consciousness of these poets has been thoroughly surveyed and explored.
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15. Ibid.


21. Devindra Kohli, Kamala Das, Arnold – Heinemann, New Delhi, 1975, p. 120.

