

Female Representation in Select Travel Writings: A Critical Reading

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Abstract

From the advent of the twenty first century onwards, travel has become a culture along with the development of tourism as a recreation, an escape from the chaotic work schedules of the modern world, and also the increase in the desire for adventures and exploration. But the world of travel is also gender biased and women are far behind men in terms of getting travel opportunities, their travel narratives are often neglected. Seldom women venture into travel individually, of course with group travel especially to some pilgrimage places like Aadhiparashakiti temple, Tirichandur Murugan shrine and so on. This research paper aims a comparison between Anees Jung's *Unveiling India* and G. Willow Wilson's *The Butterfly Mosque*. The study reveals two distinct perspectives on the experiences of Muslim women in different parts of the world. While both books explore the complexities of identity, culture, and religion, they differ in terms of their tone, style, and focus. Both books can be read as the collective experience of women in two different parts of the world.

Keyterms: Representation, Women traveller, travel culture and experience, postcolonial, travelogue, western, Colonial

Throughout the world, it is not to be generalised, but the truth is women are considered to be a kind of defiance if they leave the male-dominated home. Of course the degree varies. Women fighting for independence started right from the school, the awareness for the freedom of ideas and attitude getting its right place in urban and semi urban cities. They seek in every remote location their independence by writing about their journeys in an effort to subvert constrictive cultural expectations. These were mothers, scientists, and alpinists from various cultures around the world as well as wealthy European spinsters. Due to their lack of knowledge, resources, and the capacity to live regular lives, women feel trapped by these issues and are unable to find a solution. No matter their caste or religion, women have historically faced obstacles that many are still working to overcome today. These problems, such as female foeticide, parental gender bias in employment or school, child marriage, and covert daily routines, are prevalent in many rural areas of the nation. Women feel trapped by these problems and are unable to find a solution because they lack education, financial assistance, and the ability to lead normal lives.

Travel writing is a form of creative nonfiction that describes a writer's experiences, observations, and reflections during their travels. It can take many different forms, such as guidebooks, memoirs, essays, and articles, and can cover a wide range of topics, including culture, history, food, and adventure. Travel

writing can be written by anyone who has gone on a journey and wishes to share their experiences with others. Some travel writers are professional journalists or authors, while others are amateur writers who enjoy sharing their travel stories with others. One of the key elements of travel writing is the ability to transport readers to different places and immerse them in new cultures and experiences. Travel writers use descriptive language and vivid imagery to help readers visualize the places they are writing about, and they often include personal anecdotes and insights to help readers connect with the people and places they are describing. Successful travel writers are skilled storytellers who are able to capture the essence of a place and convey it in a way that is engaging and informative for readers. They are also knowledgeable about the destinations they are writing about and are able to provide useful information and advice for travelers who may be interested in visiting these places themselves. Overall, travel writing is a rich and diverse genre that can inspire readers to explore new places, try new things, and gain a deeper understanding of the world around them.

Women's travel writing is a genre of travel literature that focuses on the experiences and perspectives of women travelers. Historically, women's travel writing has been marginalized and dismissed as being less serious or significant than men's travel writing. However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the important role that women travelers have played in shaping our understanding of different cultures and societies. Women's travel writing often focuses on issues related to gender, such as the challenges and opportunities faced by women traveling alone, or the ways in which gender roles and expectations vary across different cultures. Women travelers may also be particularly attuned to issues related to race, class, and sexuality, and may offer unique insights into the ways in which these factors shape people's experiences of travel.

Many notable women writers have contributed to the genre of women's travel writing, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Isabella Bird, Freya Stark, and Dervla Murphy. In recent years, there has been a surge of interest in women's travel writing, with a growing number of women bloggers and social media influencers sharing their travel experiences online. Women's travel writing has also become an important tool for promoting women's empowerment and gender equality. Many women's travel writers seek to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about women's roles and abilities and to inspire other women to travel and explore the world. By sharing their stories and perspectives, women's travel writers are helping to create a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the world we live in.

Indian women travel writers have made significant contributions to the genre of travel writing, both in India and abroad. These writers have brought their unique perspectives and insights to bear on a wide range of topics, including culture, history, religion, and politics. One of the most famous Indian women travel writers is Arundhati Roy, who is perhaps best known for her novel *The God of Small Things*. In addition to her fiction writing, Roy has also published several works of nonfiction, including *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, which includes essays on a wide range of topics, including travel. Another notable Indian women travel writer is Gita Mehta, who has published several books on her experiences traveling in India and other parts of the world. Mehta's works include *Karma Cola*, which explores the impact of Western culture on India, and *A River Sutra*, which tells the story of a diverse group of travelers who gather along the banks of a river. Anees Jung is another writer who has contributed to the genre.

Unveiling India: A Woman's Journey is Anees Jung's best-known book. The book is a particular type of document (1986). The trip journal accurately depicts the situation of women in India. It is a moving depiction of the suffering and misery experienced by India's rural and working-class women. Jung has

presented tales and testimony of various women from all over India with incredible skill and exquisite language, painting a heartrending portrait of various women and disclosing what it is like to be a woman in India today. To use a passage from an article from the stirring image of Indian women... "independent Financial Express career woman" The source of Jung's inspiration for writing this book is: Three days after the then-Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was killed, she started her journey. "A came from the journey," she said. Jung fled the chaotic city of Delhi with the help of photographer T.S. Nagarajan, who likewise had a deep love and faith for India. Jung embarks on a journey that has a specific goal. The goal is to establish a connection with the spirits of rural Indian women from various backgrounds. The cultural and ethical ties that bind women together can be assumed to constitute the "spirit" of India, despite the fact that it is difficult to describe. It also discusses where these ladies stand in our nation. Jung discusses the disparity between the urban and rural areas, religious prejudice, and the communities that Indian women are a part of. The women mentioned in this book lack a voice and a sense of personal identity and are poor, deprived, illiterate, and backward.

Women have a sense of collective identity, but it is not solely negative, according to western feminist and critic Susan Stanford Friedman in her essay *Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practise* (1998). It might serve as a source of power or transformation (Friedman 75).

In order to portray Jung's search for identity and the experience of women in general, the trip motivation becomes a crucial component of the novel. The journey starts with locating Indira Gandhi and attempting to centre other marginalised women's patriarchal and religious views. The following are some passages in which women describe their struggles: Women in slums may not be literate, but they always have a sense of their existence, as they suffer more they are ready to change according to Mrs. Thakur, a slum resident says.

"I was a poor woman," recalls Santosh Ben, a member of SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association). "I was anonymous and faceless. When I joined this group, I noticed that there were many other women doing the same jobs and leading similar lifestyles. Among them, I felt powerful. We all raised our voices in unison to call for respect, the right to work, and a place to sit. Today, we are required to sit in chairs and receive tea when we enter an office". (UV 121122). "I started life with a weight on my back, says Maangi from Tilonia village, who married at the extremely young and impressionable age of ten" (UV 64). "After being turned away from a Hindu temple, SaaduBai, an untouchable native in the Maharashtra Jamkhed area, states, "we decided to have our own temple" (UV 38). Jung thus constantly feels a connection to Indian women, and her narratives are the result of her own observations of everyone who is thoroughly planted in India, its soil, and its culture. Her initiative to use her writing to highlight the perspectives of underrepresented Indian women paid off. She conducted her interviews in a way that helped the women build a sense of mutual trust as well as a path to self-identification.

Jung also addresses a number of pressing social issues in contemporary India, including poverty, gender inequality, and religious conflict. She emphasizes the importance of women's empowerment and education as key tools for addressing these issues, and she highlights the many inspiring women that she meets who are working to effect change within their communities. Throughout the book, Jung writes with a deep sense of empathy and compassion for the women that she encounters, and she paints a vivid portrait of contemporary India that is both nuanced and multifaceted. *Unveiling India* offers a rich and complex exploration of the many challenges and opportunities facing Indian women today, and it offers a valuable glimpse into the complexities of Indian society more broadly.

The title is well justified and illustrative of how women's status and identity in society are determined by their role in their families and the communities they belong to. When they attempt to leave the confines of these structures that have encircled them for so long, they face challenges to their status in society. The sheer act of resistance for them is to step outside the bounds and reveal their needs and ambitions. Jung depicts women's victimhood and resistance to all sorts of violence in the social and political context of the book. In the book, women have become significant political figures who have left their homes in search of employment and demonstrated their own forms of resistance. Jung emphasises the existential challenge faced by Indian women. She makes a radical change without stirring up any conflict. In the writings of post-colonial women writers, the existential struggle of women to define their identities, attest to their uniqueness, and fight desperately to exist as a distinctive element is evident in all its ferocity. The same is true of Jung, who makes an effort to dissect and reassemble many of the post-colonial theory's principles. Since ancient times, patriarchal powers have dominated India. India's women were confined to the house's four walls. The 'Sita-Savitri' beliefs were to be upheld, it was demanded of them. Men treated them as objects of enjoyment and amusement. To a large extent, they were viewed as puppets and sexual objects.

***The Butterfly Mosque* by G. Willow Wilson:**

G. Willow Wilson is an American writer, essayist, and journalist. She was born on August 31, 1982, in New Jersey, USA. Wilson is best known for her work as a comic book writer, having written the Marvel Comics series Ms. Marvel, which introduced the character Kamala Khan, a Pakistani-American Muslim teenage girl from New Jersey who becomes the first Muslim character to lead her own Marvel Comics series.

Before becoming a comic book writer, Wilson worked as a journalist, reporting on the Middle East and other regions for publications such as The New York Times Magazine, The Atlantic, and The National. Her experiences living in Egypt and working as a journalist in the region inspired her to write the memoir *The Butterfly Mosque*, which was published in 2010.

Wilson's other notable works include the graphic novels *Cairo* and *Air*, as well as the novel *Alif the Unseen*. In addition to her work as a writer, Wilson is also an advocate for Muslim representation in literature and has spoken publicly about the importance of diverse voices in media. Wilson has received numerous accolades for her work, including the Hugo Award for Best Graphic Story and the PEN Center USA Literary Award for Graphic Literature.

The Butterfly Mosque is a memoir by G. Willow Wilson that chronicles her journey to Egypt and her subsequent conversion to Islam. The book offers a unique perspective on the experiences of a Western woman who becomes a Muslim, and it explores the complexities of identity, faith, and culture.

The book begins with Wilson's arrival in Cairo in 2003, where she has come to teach English and explore the city's rich cultural heritage. She is immediately struck by the beauty and vibrancy of the city, as well as the stark differences in culture and customs compared to her native United States. Over time, Wilson begins to develop a deep appreciation for the Egyptian way of life, and she is drawn to the country's Islamic heritage and traditions.

As Wilson becomes more involved in the local community, she begins to explore Islam and ultimately decides to convert. She reflects on the challenges of reconciling her Western upbringing with her newfound faith, as well as the complexities of navigating relationships with family and friends who may

not share her beliefs. Throughout the book, Wilson emphasizes the importance of individual agency and the power of personal choice in shaping one's own path.

Alongside her spiritual journey, Wilson also explores the rich history and culture of Egypt. She visits historic mosques and other landmarks, learns about the country's complex political landscape, and becomes involved in local activism and social justice initiatives. Through her interactions with a diverse cast of characters, Wilson comes to appreciate the complexities and contradictions of Egyptian society, as well as the power of human connection to bridge cultural divides.

Overall, *The Butterfly Mosque* is a rich and complex memoir that offers insights into the complexities of identity, faith, and culture. Through her experiences in Egypt, Wilson explores themes of agency, empowerment, and personal choice, emphasizing the importance of individualism in shaping one's own path. At the same time, the book offers a nuanced and insightful portrait of Egyptian society, highlighting the beauty, vibrancy, and contradictions of this complex and fascinating culture.

Representation of Women in Travel Writings

Unveiling India offers a nuanced and empathetic portrait of the struggles and aspirations of Muslim women in India, highlighting the complex intersection of religion, culture, and gender in their lives. Through her travels, Jung meets a diverse range of Muslim women, from rural villagers to urban professionals, and explores the many challenges they face in their daily lives. She examines the impact of patriarchy and gender norms on Muslim women's lives, as well as the ways in which religion and culture intersect to shape their experiences. Throughout the book, Jung highlights the ways in which Muslim women in India are breaking down barriers and fighting for their rights. She explores the role of education in empowering Muslim women, and profiles women who are using their education to challenge stereotypes and effect change in their communities.

Overall, *Unveiling India* offers a deeply personal and introspective look at the lives of Muslim women in India, highlighting their resilience, courage, and determination in the face of adversity. The book is a testament to the power of storytelling to break down barriers and build empathy, and serves as a reminder of the importance of amplifying diverse voices and perspectives in our understanding of the world.

One of the central themes of the book is the tension between tradition and modernity in the lives of Muslim women. Jung notes that while many Muslim women adhere to traditional values and customs, there is also a growing desire for education, empowerment, and autonomy. She observes how many Muslim women are finding ways to navigate this tension by seeking out education, entering the workforce, and advocating for their rights within the framework of Islamic values and teachings.

Jung also explores the ways in which Muslim women are affected by social and political dynamics in India, including issues such as communal violence, poverty, and discrimination. She describes how these factors often exacerbate the challenges faced by Muslim women, particularly those from marginalized communities.

While there are certainly challenges faced by Muslim women in India, Jung's book also reveals a resilience and strength of character among these women as they navigate their lives and work to create a better future for themselves and their communities.

The Butterfly Mosque offers a unique perspective on the experiences of a Western woman who becomes a Muslim, and as such, it focuses on the author's personal experiences and observations rather than providing a comprehensive view of the lives of Muslim women in Egypt.

However, Wilson does provide some insights into the lives of Muslim women in Egypt. She notes that Egyptian society is often highly segregated by gender and that women may face limitations in terms of their education, employment opportunities, and social mobility. At the same time, Wilson observes that there is a rich tradition of women's scholarship and activism within Islam, and she meets many inspiring women who are working to promote women's rights and empowerment within their communities.

Wilson also explores the ways in which religion intersects with gender and identity in her own life. She reflects on the challenges of reconciling her Western upbringing with her newfound faith, as well as the complexities of navigating relationships with family and friends who may not share her beliefs. Throughout the book, Wilson emphasizes the importance of individual agency and the power of personal choice in shaping one's own path. She says "Standing there, in the damp human crush of my religion, I began to cry. Not for the things I was leaving, but for the things I was taking with me—all I had fought for, all I had lost, and a joy so potent it felt like pain" (Wilson 304)

Overall, while *The Butterfly Mosque* is primarily focused on Wilson's own journey of self-discovery, it offers some insights into the lives of Muslim women in Egypt and the ways in which religion and culture intersect to shape their experiences. The book emphasizes the importance of agency, empowerment, and personal choice in navigating the complexities of identity and belief, and it offers a nuanced and insightful portrait of one woman's journey toward self-discovery and understanding.

Conclusion:

A Comparative Study of *Unveiling India* and *The Butterfly Mosque*:

A comparison between Anees Jung's *Unveiling India* and G. Willow Wilson's *The Butterfly Mosque* reveals two distinct perspectives on the experiences of Muslim women in different parts of the world. While both books explore the complexities of identity, culture, and religion, they differ in terms of their tone, style, and focus.

Unveiling India is a travelogue that chronicles Jung's journey across India to explore the lives of Muslim women. The book is a deeply personal and introspective account that offers a nuanced and empathetic portrait of the struggles and aspirations of Muslim women in India. Jung's writing is marked by a keen eye for detail, a sense of humor, and a deep sense of empathy for her subjects.

The Butterfly Mosque, on the other hand, is a memoir that follows Wilson's journey to Egypt, where she converts to Islam and falls in love with an Egyptian man. The book offers a unique perspective on the intersection of culture, religion, and identity, as well as the challenges faced by Muslim women living in the West. Wilson's writing is marked by a poetic and lyrical style, as well as a deep sense of introspection and self-reflection.

While both books explore the experiences of Muslim women, they differ in terms of their focus. *Unveiling India* focuses specifically on the lives of Muslim women in India, while *The Butterfly Mosque* offers a more personal and individualized perspective on the experiences of a Western woman who converts to Islam and falls in love with an Egyptian man.

Overall, while both *Unveiling India* and *The Butterfly Mosque* offer unique and important perspectives on the experiences of Muslim women, they differ in terms of their focus, tone, and style, reflecting the distinct voices and styles of their respective authors.

Biography of Author 1

Arularasi. P, Asst. Professor & Head, Rajiv Gandhi Arts and Science College, is the Coordinator of IQAC (NAAC), Coordinator for AISHE, NIRF and ARIIA of the Institution, officiating as State NSS Coordinator for Puducherry State NSS Cell, Government of Puducherry. Nominated as the Course Writer for B.A. English Literature, School of Humanities, TamilNadu Open University.. Translator in NPTEL and have translated the study material for the UG course. Received the Best NSS Programme Officer Award. Resource person of the Invited Talks such as “Poetry” “The Importance of Education & Soft skill”, “The Importance of Soft skill Development”, “Tamil Language and the Young Minds”, “Education and Empowerment of Women on “Education Day, “Orienting the Young Minds”. Had been an Expert Committee Member for conducting Inspection, Member of the Placement Guidance and also trained the students for Group Discussion for the Placement. Had been the Member of Board of Studies from 2010 to 2015, 2023

Biography of Author 2

Prof. Clement S Lourdes, Dean, School of Humanities, is a Creative writer, critic, translator, self-taught artist and a specialist in Indian Writing in English and translation Studies. Authored Prapanjan’s Kuyil and other Stories and edited 5 more books. Published as many as many as 15 papers in reputed journals and 27 articles in periodicals. Produced 8 PhD and 32 MPhil candidates. Visited Reunion University (France) and delivered a series of 15 lectures on Indian English Fiction. Won international recognition as a portrait artist and the artistic creations have been appreciated by the leaders of UK, USA, Australia, Denmark, Saudi Arabia etc. Contributed a set of aircraft sketches to No1 Squadron of IAF for their Diamond Jubilee celebrations which are permanently exhibited at Tigers Museum.

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