

Embodied Consciousness and Yogic Philosophy in Indian English Women's Poetry

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Abstract:

This study is going to investigate the intricate relationship between embodied consciousness and yogic philosophical traditions in Indian English women's poetry. It seeks to demonstrate how women poets writing in English from the Indian context engaged deeply with indigenous epistemologies to articulate a nuanced understanding of the body as both a material and metaphysical entity. Drawing on the works of Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza, Arundhati Subramaniam, Meena Alexander, and Rukmini Bhayia Nayar, this paper examines how poetic expression mirrors yogic principles, including mind-body integration, meditative introspection, and holistic self-realization. Moving beyond reductive binaries such as body versus mind or material versus spiritual, these poets conceptualize embodiment as a dynamite site of self-awareness, resistance, and transcendence. By analysing corporeal imagery, cognitive reflection, and linguistic strategies, the study demonstrates that Indian English women poets negotiate personal, social, and spiritual identity through poetry. This interdisciplinary approach highlights the philosophical depth of their work, situating it at the nexus of literary, feminist, and philosophical studies.

Keywords: Intricate relationship, embodied consciousness, yogic, Indian English women's poetry, nuanced understanding, material, Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza, Arundhati Subramaniam, Meena Alexander, Rukmini Bhayia Nayar, introspection, interdisciplinary approach

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Indian English women's poetry in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries marks a significant moment in literary and feminist discourse. These poets articulate experiences of gendered subjectivity, cultural identity, and social negotiation while engaging deeply with the philosophical understanding of selfhood. While feminist criticism has foregrounded women's assertion and resistance to patriarchal structures (ShodhSagar), the *philosophical and experiential dimensions of embodied consciousness* in these works remain relatively underexplored.

In the period when the pace of life has accelerated and stress has become a constant companion; yoga stands as a profound Indian gift to humanity— an ancient discipline whose relevance continues to deepen in the modern-time world. It (Yoga), in its true essence, is not merely a physical practice; It is a comprehensive way of life that harmonizes the body, mind intellectual intellect, and spirit. Yoga, as an indigenous Indian philosophical and practical system, offers a conceptual framework for understanding selfhood as a union of body, mind, consciousness (Feuerstein 12-16). Its practices— physical pastures (*Asana*), breathe regulation (*Pranayama*), ethical precepts (*Yamas and Niyamas*), and meditation (*Dhyana*)— emphasize self-awareness, introspection, and the integration of sensory, cognitive, and emotional experiences. Analysing Indian English women's poetry through a yogic lens allows scholars to investigate how poets employ bodily imagery, meditative reflection, and linguistic expression to articulate the conscious self.

This study examines some selected works by Indian women English poets— Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza, Arundhati Subramaniam, Meena Alexander, and Rukmini Bhaya Nair, arguing that their poetry embodies yogic principles, demonstrating a sophisticated negotiation of personal, social, and spiritual identity.

Theoretical Framework: Yoga and Embodied Literary Consciousness

Yoga, derived from the Sanskrit root ‘*yuj*’ meaning ‘to yoke’ or to ‘unite’, is fundamentally concerned with the harmonization of body, mind, and consciousness (Feuerstein 12). Philosophically, yoga emphasizes *embodied self-awareness*, meditative attention, ethical practice, and the cultivation of inner liberation (Feuerstein 15). In Literary Studies, yoga provides a conceptual lens for exploring the convergence of physical, emotional, and cognitive experience in literary expression.

Feminist and post- colonial literary theory complements this perspective by foregrounding how cultural, social, and gendered positionality informs the articulation of selfhood. When these perspectives intersect, Indian English women’s poetry emerges as a medium that simultaneously enacts philosophical reflection, feminist critique, and cultural negotiation, revealing a complex layering of consciousness, embodiment, and linguistic expression.

Analysis of the selected poets

Kamala Das: Confessional Selfhood and Bodily Awareness

Kamala Das’s poetry foregrounds personal experience, corporeal identity, and linguistic autonomy. In her poem ‘*An Introduction*’, she declares:

‘‘I speak three languages, write in two, dream in one...’’

(Litcharts).

This multiplicity reflects the embodied nature of her self- expression, resonating with yoga’s emphasis on integrating mind, body, and consciousness. In ‘*The Old Playhouse*’, Das intertwines memory, desire, and physicality, demonstrating reflective awareness and personal liberation (Granthaalayah). Her confessional style emphasizes the body as a site of experience, aligning with the yogic principle of *self-realization through embodied awareness*.

Eunice de Souza: Mindful Observation and Social Consciousness

Eunice de Souza’s poetry explores urban life, relational consciousness, and bodily agency. In ‘*Bequest*’:

‘‘I will not leave a will... Let the world decide what to do with my body’’ (Indian Book Critics).

The body is foregrounded as a site of autonomy, aligning with yoga’s principle of *mindful observation*. Similarly, in another poem ‘*Advice to Women*’, she examines social and relational constraints, emphasizing the ethical and attentive engagement of the body and mind, demonstrating the interplay between introspection, relational awareness and conscious action.

Arundhati Subramaniam: Meditative Awareness and Contemplative Reflection

Subramaniam’s poetry is contemplative, often exploring inner landscapes and interrelation of thought and body. In *Where I Live*, she observes:

‘‘The mind moves like water... yet the body is a still vessel’’ (Granthaalayah).

The body functions as a stabilizing anchor for consciousness, reflecting yoga’s meditative practice (*dhyana*). Through the integration of sensory perception, memory, and reflection. Subramaniam’s poetry embodies meditative attachment, situating consciousness within the temporal present.

Meena Alexander Diasporic Embodiment and Memory

Alexander’s poetry explores themes of displacement, memory, and embodied consciousness. In *River and Bridge*:

‘‘I carry the reverse in my body...’’ (Feuerstein 20).

Her articulation situates the body as a repository for memory and experience, resonating with yoga’s holistic approach to mind- body integration. Alexander’s work demonstrates how selfhood persists across geographical and cultural displacement, highlighting the embodied negotiation of memory, identity, and experience.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair Cognitive- Linguistic Integration

Rukmini Bhaya Nair explores the interplay of language, cognition, and the body. In *Dark Laughter*: “The mind weaves the body’s patterns into words...” (Indian Book Critics).

Her poetry demonstrates the embodiment of consciousness through linguistic expression, reflecting yoga’s principle of integrating thought, body, and expression. In “*Kali*”, linguistic intentionality, ethical consciousness, and emotional awareness converge, revealing the dynamic interplay of mind, body, and language.

Poet	Poem’s Quotation	Themes
Kamala Das	“I speak three languages, written in two, dream in one...”	Confessional selfhood. bodily identity
	“I am the unvanquished...”	Inner resilience
Eunice de Souza	“I will not leave a will...Let the World decide what to do with my body”	Body as agency
	“Women who care for men...”	Relational critique
Arundhati Subhramaniam	“The mind moves like water... yet the body is a still vessel”	Contemplation inner reflection
	“Memory fabrics itself into the breathe...”	Memory and perception
Meena Alexander	“I carry the rivers in my body...” memory	Diaspora; embodied
	“Every loss is a form of remembering”	Remembrance
Rukmini Bhaya Nair	“The mind weaves the body’s patterns into words...”	Language and identity
	“Each word carries its own breath...”	Linguistic intentionality

DISCUSSION

The Thematic patterns across these poets reveal:

Embodied Consciousness:

The body functions as a site of desire, memory, and self- expression (Das, de Souza).

Introspective selfhood:

Meditative and cognitive reflection shape identity (Subramanian, Alexander).

Integration of mind, body, and language:

Poetic expression embodies holistic consciousness (Nair).

Yoga provides a conceptual framework to interpret these patterns, demonstrating how literature can enact *mind- body integration, reflective awareness, and self- realization*. The findings enrich feminist, post-

colonial, and philosophical discourse, highlighting the philosophical and embodied dimensions of Indian English women's poetry.

CONCLUSION

Indian English women's poetry offers a rich and thoughtful engagement with the idea of the self, especially in relation to the body, inner awareness, and the freedom to express one's voice. Rather than presenting identity as fixed or stable, these poets often depict it as something that evolves through experience, reflection, and emotional depth. Their work brings together personal narrative and broader philosophical concerns, allowing readers to see how individual lives connect with larger questions about meaning and existence. When these poems are read alongside ideas from yogic philosophy, their deeper layers become more visible. The body is no longer seen merely as something shaped by social expectations, but as an active source of perception and transformation. The Yogic on the unity of body, mind, and spirit can be felt in the way poets describe breathing, sensation, and awareness as closely linked. This perspective helps us understand how their poetry expresses not only for a desire for independence but also a search for inner clarity and balance.

Language, too, plays an important role in this process. These poets do not simply use language to describe experience—they reshape it to suit their own realities. In doing so, they challenge traditional ways of speaking about women and identity. Their poetic voice becomes a means of reclaiming authority, where writing itself turns into an act of self-definition as well as subtle resistance.

Taken together, these aspects show that Indian English women's poetry holds an important place in contemporary literary studies. It speaks not only to feminist concerns but also wider discussions about consciousness, embodiment, and the nature of the self. By bringing together the physical and the inward, the personal and the philosophical, this body of work offers a meaningful and lasting contribution to our understanding of human experience.

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