

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.86

ISSN 0976 - 8165



# THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

— 12<sup>th</sup> Year of Open Access —

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Peer-Reviewed  
Open Access e-Journal

Vol. 12, Issue - 4 (August 2021)

Editor-In-Chief : Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor : Dr. Madhuri Bite



www.the-criterion.com



AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## Book Review

***In Words and Music: Glocal Imaginaries in the Novels of Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Amit Chaudhuri* by Patrycja Austin. (Allahabad: Repro India Limited), 2014: pp 5/207, Rs.300/-. ISBN 978-81-8253-517-6**

**Reviewed by:  
Dr. Chandrima Sen  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Bodoland University**

Patrycja Austin, in this book, concentrates on the aspects of language and music and the aspect of local and global in the select novels of Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Amit Chaudhuri. She makes an analysis of Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath her Feet*, Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and *An Equal Music* and Choudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*, *Afternoon Raag* and the *Immortals*. The book is divided into three consecutive chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter one titled as 'The Glocal Language', Chapter two as 'Reading Music' and the final one as 'Local Histories, Global Perspectives'. The first chapter posits Austin's analysis of the language represented or used by the three writers with an attempt to vernacularize English language. The language acts as the medium to express their linguistic innovation with a touch of local language phenomenon. The second makes an analysis of music with its own expressive value and the final chapter deals with the local histories and its global perspectives that makes to glocal imaginaries.

She begins with the position of English in India which is regarded as the 'language of the coloniser' associated with foreign values. Here she refers to Raja Rao, the first Indian writer to write in English who shows the pain of an Indian English novelist. Austin presents the history of English language and its presence in India and thereby discusses it as a matter of cultural dominance and identity. She proclaims the position and status of English as a language in India.

She begins her analysis by focussing upon Lord Macaulay's 1835 minute on Education and its insistence on the promotion and importance of foreign language. She also refers to Gauri Viswanathan's 'Masks of Conquest' and its counterpart to revitalize Indian culture. She mentions about 1830s Anglicism that advocates Western learning instead of

Eastern. Austin speaks about the Orientalist phase that conquers and manages the hegemonic power and function of English.

She refers to Leonard Bloomfield's response to language and its emergence. She also deals with how he converses about the language of the coloniser that becomes an embodiment of cultural control. On the other hand Ashcroft argues that signifiers and the signifieds are linked obviously. The language and the speaker of a particular language are alike relating to the sense of belonging. There is also a reference to Edward Said's hegemonic power of language. She defines the term 'glocal' in terms of transcultural relationships between colony and imperial centre during the period of imperialism. According to her, the main distinction between languages paves the way for glocal culture. She is of the view that language is a social practice that remains open for transformation. She dwells upon the use of English by the three writers to make artistic creation possible. Gandhi's policy during 1950s and 60s try to establish a national language for the vernacular writers who take English to be a foreign language. Meanwhile, writers like Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan choose English to be their medium of expression.

She admits that with the publication of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981, Indian English gains international recognition and the position of English in India also changes. She here quotes Amitav Ghosh who says how English becomes an opulent language with a national value and identity. Austin here emphasizes upon how Rushdie admits that he has read the vernacular literatures mostly in translated version. Thus, he is criticised for his limited knowledge about novels in vernacular languages.

Thereby, Austin posits how English becomes a necessity for economic and social advancement. According to her, English can be considered as a language of protest and as a language meant for the Dalits. In this regard, she quotes Ashcroft, Chinua Achebe and Chandrabhan Prasad, a Dalit writer. This part talks about the awareness among the three writers to use the global language to make the local context visible in the global standard.

Austin starts talking about Salman Rushdie's novels *The Ground Beneath her Feet* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* and their linguistic diversity. Rushdie argues that the Indian linguistic terrain has been the battlefield of power relations. She insists on linguistic localism. His set of characters from Bombay speaks HUGME English- a mixture of Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Marathi and English.

Here in this book, Austin talks about how Rushdie concentrates on the impact of translation where he supports the source language and its authenticity and the target language which is imitative. She also corresponds to his lack of translation. As a result, his meaning and sense remain obscure to the one who is not fluent in Indian languages. Thus, the reader is unable to read and enjoy his language. Austin also refers to Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* where Rushdie alludes to new global technology. His novels talk about Bollywood's local response and Hollywood's global perspectives. He wants to create a potential for assimilation and enrichment of local culture. In the eyes of Austin, his novels are heterogenous. She describes about his portrayal of characters in which the Indian urban middle class gets the primary importance, whereas, the rural and lower class are not given voice. She talks about Rushdie's multilingualism and his power to create alternative realities.

However, Austin tries to link Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath her Feet* with Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. Both the novels in her view, proposes a multilingual reality of the Indian nation state. These two novels symbolically represent the different registers of English language. According to her, Seth portrays characters who communicate in a number of different languages. Further, he considers English as one of the many migratory vernaculars. He employs the English language in order to present its multiple registers. In his novels the choice of language depends on the situation and the speaker. His linguistic diversity is best seen in *A Suitable Boy*. He makes his characters switch over to other languages. Both the novels present the unification of language and promote linguistic diversity.

On the other hand, Amit Chaudhuri's strategy is entirely different. He associates himself with the pre-Rushdian notion. He mainly stresses on the use of words. This is the way he tries to traverse and recast his identity. Austin regards that his novels *A Strange and Sublime Address*, *Afternoon Raag* and the *Immortals* Chaudhuri present a language hierarchy that depends on the locality. In *A Strange and Sublime Address* he uses English without scattering Indian words. The use of everyday words evokes a kind of cultural history. This, indeed, is a modern approach. In *Afternoon Raag* there is a reference to his use of mother tongue. He believes in the way of life. In his *Immortals* he suggests the importance of objects and places. Individual words occupy a central place in his novels. He like Rushdie and Seth gives preference not to institutionalised language but to unofficial use of language. He features three languages in his novels viz. Bengali, Hindi and English.

The second chapter titled 'Reading Music' features music as the medium of expression. Austin refers to Werner Wolf's *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* that examines the commonalities and dissimilarities between musical and literary consequences. In her words, music expresses and conveys meaning. Music appears as a continual presence in a literary discourse. Austin here envisages the connection between music and language in the context of Indian literature. This chapter speaks about Rushdie's love for Western rock music. Rock music appears to be the medium to reconfigure memories in the writings of Rushdie. It also reflects or mirrors his attitude to life. Sound and rhythm are the two most significant aspects that illustrate the meaning of any text. Austin here talks about Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* that insists on the superiority of music over words. She also contextualises the role of music as a form to communicate. She regards Rushdie's affluence to music lies on his ideas of gender, race and equality.

Vikram Seth also is very much attached with music. It works as a metaphor in his novels. Music for Seth is emotive and invoking as it appears in *A Suitable Boy*. Further, it acts as a consolation in *An Equal Music*. *A Suitable Boy* directs music as a powerful element in configuring the radical meaning of Northern Indian classical music. In *An Equal Music*, music deals with memories that are highly personal. For him, music happens to be symbolic.

Just like Rushdie and Seth, Choudhury also treats music as the present reality. Being a Bengali, he gets influenced by Tagore. His novels are musical and deal with both Eastern and Western philosophy of music. He deals with the traditional aspect of music. He tries to mingle music with dance and comments on its underlying connection. Choudhury's tune of music is fragmentary. Music, to him is always a kind of hybrid. He categorises music with rhythm. Repetition and description hold a crucial place in his delineation of musicality. In most cases, music is central to the plot. In this chapter, Austin particularly deals with how music gets projected in the novels of Rushdie, Seth and Choudhury.

The third and the final chapter presuppose the local histories in a global perspective. This begins with a quotation from Choudhury's *A Strange and a Sublime Address* which elaborates the emergence of a nation state during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Austin centres on the issues of nation and nationalism. The basis of which lies in the choice between global and local i.e. ethnonationalism. She talks about the interplay in the binary between global and local. She consults Priyamvada Gopal's idea of 'coincided cultural contexts'; Timothy Brennan's 'imaginary construct'; Benedict Anderson's idea of homogeneity and the idea to

represent national imaginary; Harish Trivedi's concept of nation; Aijaz Ahmad's nationalism; Edward Said's orientalism and many more. Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* celebrates the beauty of music in breaking all kinds of borders and sense of belongingness. The so-called nostalgia provides a platform for a global standard. In the words of Austin attachment leads to change. Rushdie's allegorization marks the provincial allegiance of music along with its reference to the subcontinent. In her opinion, Rushdie utilises a homogeneous entity. On the other hand, Seth stands in contrast to Rushdie who clarifies a diverged society.

Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* begins with Mexico, then moves to India, England and the US. His characters are uprooted. The combination of Eastern and the Western tradition of music subscribe to the approach of the eternal wisdom. Music appears as a kind of religious experience. The different tradition in music creates the structural basis of his novels. Cultural imperialism is at its centre. The novel celebrates the restless energy of music. Memory, nostalgia and attachment contribute to the power and wisdom of music.

This chapter actually insists on a new cosmopolitan outlook of the three writers. It partakes to the significance of local cultures to promote cosmopolitan internationalist phase. The cast of music alludes to the attachment of the local heritage and concern. His novels are transnational and transcultural. There is a mention of places like London, Venice, Boston, Rochdale etc. in his writings. Each place provides a specific configuration. The present chapter refers to the *Location of Culture* by Homi Bhabha and its proposition on tuning. According to him, tuning reflects the standard social norms and also something beyond it. Austin epitomises music that helps the characters to come out of their traumatised life. His characters acknowledge the diversified human race. Seth appears not to abandon his roots. Escapism and existence are the two catch words in him to experience music in its varied forms.

Choudhury is more akin to diverse thought process. His narrative moves between two worlds, the global and the local. Choudhury's fiction centres on the classical North Indian music. He also delves into Shastriya sangeet. He presents music with variability as a ground reality. Capitalism, homogeneity and history are sensitive to the production of music. His idea of home gets exemplified with his score of music.

Thus, the totalitarian overview of the three writers, correspond to the idea of heterogeneity. Their novels foreground globalization in a different way. The rootlessness with an inner sense of non-belonging in Rushdie, the private world of music in Seth and the

classification between exile and non-belonging in Choudhury disseminate the connection between local and global. Austin here attempts to recognise the dichotomy of the three writers. She succeeds in viewing the multiplicity of cultures in these novels. She incorporates with a view to understand the trajectory of languages and words. This book materializes a kind of an expedition undertaken by Austin to provide an affinity for an imperial relationship between local and global. She suggests that the metaphorical meaning of words and music correspond to each other. She accelerates a new dimension to the notion of multiculturalism and globalization.