

Gender and Race: An Intersectional Diasporic Study of Usha Kishore's Poetry

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Abstract

This article explores the intersection of gender and race from a diasporic perspective, with special reference to the poetry of Usha Kishore. As an emerging poet in the field of Diaspora literature, Usha Kishore writes about her own experiences of marginalization as a woman of colour in the United Kingdom. Despite its focus on migration and settlement patterns as well as the economic contributions of migrants, diaspora studies have historically failed to address the unique experiences of women, who have always been doubly marginalized due to their multiple intersecting identities like race, gender, religion, caste, nationality, sexuality, class, ability, and so on. We often address racial inequality in isolation from gender, class, sexuality, and immigrant status inequality, but these identities can occasionally lead to compounding experiences of discrimination. What is frequently overlooked is how women are exposed to all of these as diasporic subjects, not just in their homelands but also in their host countries, and how their experiences are more complex than the sum of their parts. The purpose of this article is to examine how gender and race intersect in the life of Usha Kishore in Britain, where she finds herself in challenging circumstances as a result of both her gender and her non-whiteness.

Keywords: Diaspora, Marginalization, Intersectionality, Gender, Race, Poetry.

Introduction

Diasporas, also called 'vibrant communities', are transnational groups defined by migrations, hybridity, and dual or multiple senses of belonging that are expressed through economic, political, and social contact with both

home and host nations.¹ As Nicholas Van Hear describes, “Diaspora broadly refers to the spread of migrant communities away from a real or imagined homeland.”² In the past century, Indians migrated to both the Middle East, and Western countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, or Canada, for a wide range of reasons, including academic or commercial reasons. Women from several parts of the Indian sub-continent have also moved to the Western nations in demographics that are irrespective of their castes, classes, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds. Despite the fact that women’s autonomy is closely linked to the success of international development plans and initiatives, gender inequality impedes social progress worldwide. In the case of immigration, various nations react differently to immigrants. Women expatriates in particular experience isolation more than males. Even in host countries, their experiences are largely homogenized and male-centric; and their thoughts, experiences, and roles in the Indian diaspora’s success story often remain unmapped and unheard.

According to Patricia Hill Collins, the “interlocking systems of race, class, and gender” form a “matrix of domination.”³ These inform the diverse range of experiences lived by women. However, it is often overlooked how women are affected by these in combination with one another, and how their experience is more than the sum of their parts. For instance, when considering statistics concerning experiences of isolation, racial differences are not necessarily examined in conjunction with factors such as gender, class, sexuality, and immigrant status inequity. In reality, the experiences of women during the migration and settlement processes have always been unique and distinct. This is especially true for black woman, whose status in her host country is distinctive not only because she is a woman, or simply because she is a black person, but also because she is a black woman. Women

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¹ Amba Pande, ‘Women in Indian Diaspora: Redefining Self Between Dislocation and Relocation’, in *Women in the Indian Diaspora: Historical Narratives and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Amba Pande (Singapore: Springer, 2018), p. 2.

² Nicholas Van Hear, ‘Refugees, Diasporas and Transnationalism’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugees and Forced Migration Studies*, eds Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long and Nando Sigona (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 2.

³ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999).

of colour always face additional racial and gender prejudice than their white female counterparts.

As an Indian-born British poet, Usha Kishore is a significant figure in the field of diaspora literature. Her 'cathartic' poetry covers a wide range of subjects and motifs from both India and the United Kingdom. She has authored and published several outstanding poetry books, including *On Manannan's Isle* (2014), *Night Sky Between the Stars* (2015), *Translating the Divine Woman* (2015), *Home Thoughts* (2017), and *Immigrant* (2018). Kishore's collections examine the concepts of otherness and integration, displacement, and exile, and interrogate the definitions of home and country in the process. She has been recognised as a contemporary Indian diasporic poet with a strong, distinct voice that is both assimilative of the two cultures while maintaining its tenor. She delves into the artificial constructs and gendered identities, uncovering the truths.

Kishore's writing often concerns racial discourse, which "remains a sort of catch-all term for 'the other.'"⁴ Through her poetry, she argues that the life of an Indian woman in Britain is highly haunted by the discourse of gender and race (the markers of power-relation), and discusses how this affects inclusion or exclusion, union, or division for a diasporic subject in the British Isles. This article focuses particularly on the interconnectedness of gender and race, with special reference to Kishore's poetry.

The Concept of Intersectionality and the New Diasporic Perspective

There has been a great deal of debate in recent years over the changing dynamics of societal layers. Social categories include race, class, caste, sexuality, ability, and country; 'intersectionality'⁵ refers to the interrelated nature of these social categories that work together to oppress an individual. Many factors, like gender and race, work together to impact the experiences of others. Hence, the concept of intersectionality is a relative one. Stephanie

⁴ Peter Ratcliffe, *Race, Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining the Inclusive Society* (London: McGraw-Hill, 2004), p. 24.

⁵ Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw brought the notion of intersectionality to the field of legal studies. The term 'intersectionality' refers to the manner in which different types of inequality, such as those based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and socioeconomic status, 'intersect' with one another to produce new and distinct dynamics and effects. Through the lens of intersectionality, first- and second-wave feminism, which generally concentrated their attention on white women from middle-class backgrounds, have been broadened to include women of colour, women living in poverty, and immigrants.

A. Shields' definition of intersectionality is thus:

Intersectionality is a reflection of reality and in reality, there is no single social identity category that can describe how individuals respond to their social environment and how others respond to them in the same environment and it is important to consider an interconnection of multiple identities in order to fully understand the complex nature of reality.⁶

The phrase is also associated with the concept of 'simultaneity'⁷ which is defined as the whole outcome of race, sexuality, gender, caste, and class that has influenced both resistance to oppression and the lives of larger diasporic populations. According to the 'simultaneity' principle, all axes and their respective identities must be included in social analysis. Kimberlé Crenshaw explains, "Intersectional subordination need not be intentionally produced; in fact, it is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment."⁸

Intersectionality is in opposition to analytical methods that consider each axis of oppression separately. People's experiences of overlapping identities vary based on their social position within the parameters of racial affinity, sexual orientation, gender position, and class consciousness, among others. As Ann Denis describes,

It is posited on the study of a matrix of power relations. It involves the concurrent analyses of multiple, intersecting sources of subordination/oppression and is based on the premise that the impact of a particular source of subordination may vary, depending on its combination with other potential sources of subordination (or of relative privilege).⁹

Crenshaw coined the word 'intersectionality', but its theoretical foundation

⁶ Stephanie A. Shields, 'Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective', *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, vol. 59, no. 5/6 (2008), pp. 301-311.

⁷ During the 1970s, participants in the Combahee River Collective in Boston, Massachusetts, expanded the concept of simultaneity. The term simultaneity refers to the simultaneous influences of race, class, gender, and sexuality on the members' lives and resistance to oppression. As a result, the Combahee River Collective led to a better understanding of African-American experiences that challenged assessments from black and male-centred groups, as well as mainstream white, middle-class, heterosexual feminist movements.

⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43 (1991), pp. 93-118.

⁹ Ann Denis, 'Intersectional Analysis: A Contribution of Feminism to Sociology', *International Sociology*, vol. 23, no. 5 (2008), pp. 677-794.

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was already in place in the prior writings of black feminists.¹⁰ The birth of intersectionality as a concept “challenged the notion that ‘gender’ was the primary factor determining a woman’s fate,” as bell hooks puts it.¹¹ Several years before Crenshaw’s use of the term, Deborah K. King published an article titled “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology”.¹² Additionally, Sojourner Truth may have been the first intersectional thinker who compared white and black women’s discrimination in her speech, “Ain’t I A Woman?” According to Truth, white women are generally considered sensitive and fragile, while black women experience racist abuse as they are perceived to be aggressive. She came to the conclusion that the obstacles she faced as a result of her ethnic affinity and gender identity were not adequately conveyed by the use of singularly gender or race-based analysis.¹³

Crenshaw came up with the term ‘intersectionality’ in order to assist in providing an explanation for the oppression of African-American women in her 1989 work “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine.” Crenshaw’s tenure has elevated racial equity and identity politics to the fore of national discourse. As a black feminist, Crenshaw writes that the experience of being a black woman cannot be described separately from being a woman or a black person. According to her, communication between the two selves must take the form of interactions that reinforce one another.¹⁴

Her article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour” discusses three types of intersectionality regarding violence against women: structural, political, and representational. The concept of structural intersectionality describes how various societal structures combine to intensify the oppression of intersectional minorities. Political intersectionality shows how white women

¹⁰ Kimberlé Crenshaw, ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics’, in *Feminist Legal Theories*, ed. Karen Maschke (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹¹ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹² Deborah K. King, ‘Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1988), pp. 42-72.

¹³ Sojourner Truth, ‘Speech at the Woman’s Rights Convention, Akron, Ohio’, in *Available Means: An Anthology of Women’s Rhetoric(s)*, eds Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), pp. 144-146.

¹⁴ Crenshaw, ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex’.

and women of colour are separated into two subordinate groups by two political systems that are at odds with one another. The British women's suffrage movement of the late 1880s is a key example of how women of Asian, African, or Latin American origin were left out and how their experiences were different from those of white women. Finally, representational intersectionality concerns how women from various ethnic backgrounds are perceived by Eurocentric society, and how those perception affect how they are treated.¹⁵

The concept of intersectionality is used to describe those processes that are frequently disregarded by feminist theory and movements. The issue of racial inequality was largely overlooked by first-wave feminism, which was primarily focused on achieving political equality for white women. Second-wave feminism arose from Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and sought to eliminate sexism associated with women's traditional household roles. While feminist activists and their ideas were at their peak in the 1960s and 1970s, women of colour remained marginalised and their suffering unacknowledged.¹⁶ The third wave of feminism started shortly after the term intersectionality was invented in the late 1980s, in direct response to early feminist movements' lack of attention to race, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity. This wave attempted to provide a channel for addressing political and social disparities, which were overlooked by early social justice movements. Many scholars, including Leslie McCall, have claimed that little study has transparently reported the experiences of women who are subjected to various modes of oppression in our society. The inter-categorical approach to black women "focuses on the complexity of relationships across multiple social groups within and across analytical categories."¹⁷ Black American women in particular have been subjected to a variety of forms of oppression since the 1830s, as described in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. In it, Beverly Guy-Sheftall asserts that "...black women experience a special kind of oppression and suffering in this country which is racist, sexist, and classist because of their dual race and gender identity and their limited access to economic resources."¹⁸

¹⁵ Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins', pp. 1241–1299.

¹⁶ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).

¹⁷ Leslie McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2005), pp. 771-800.

¹⁸ Beverly Guy-Sheftall, 'Introduction: The Evolution of Feminist Consciousness among African American Women', in *Words of Fire: An anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995).

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According to Vrushali Patil, intersectionality should also take into account transnational racial and cultural hierarchies. In Patil's words: "If we continue to neglect cross-border dynamics and fail to problematize the nation and its emergence via transnational processes, our analyses will remain tethered to the spatialities and temporalities of colonial modernity."¹⁹ Following the works of Chandra Talpade Mohanty and M. Jacqui Alexander, who emphasised the limited ways the feminist agenda had previously protested on behalf of women of colour, academic work on individual experiences of travel, migration, and belonging adopted a more gendered point of view. As a result, there is a growing focus on women's migration experiences and attempts to create long-term theories that provide the terminology needed to address women's issues in the diaspora.²⁰

Intersections of Race and Gender and Their Ubiquity

The institutions of race and gender are two different social categories that become inseparable in the experiences of women of colour. The multiple facets of power within a given society have further marginalized particular groups of women. Groups of minority women are not marginalised by the politics of race or gender alone; rather, prejudice is based on the full constellation of social qualities of an individual, including race, gender, physical disability, and age. An intersectional perspective argues that there is no race-blind gender perception, and there is no gender-blind race perception.²¹ Lynn Weber has also asserted that "Race, class, gender, and sexuality are interrelated systems at the macro institutional level—they are created, maintained, and transformed simultaneously and in relation to one another. Therefore, they cannot be understood independently of one another."²²

The entwining of social categories, which are connected to numerous stereotypes, connections, and events, alters people's social identities and perspectives. It is something more than the sum of their parts to the women of colour for bearing the identity of a woman and a black subject. Long

¹⁹ Vrushali Patil, 'From Patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment of How Far We've Come', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2013), pp. 847-886.

²⁰ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *boundary*, vol. 12/13, no. 3 (1984), pp. 333-358.

²¹ Lynn Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework* (London: McGraw-Hill, 2001), p. 17.

²² Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality*, p. 104.

histories of violence and persistent discrimination have resulted in substantial inequities that have harmed women for many years. It is important to remember that women are victims of society not just because of gender but also of other social inequalities like class, race, age, nationalism, ability, sexuality, and so on, all of which contribute to their marginalization.

Through social contact, gender roles are constantly reinforced. Using Simone de Beauvoir's distinction between gender and sex, "one is not born but becomes a woman,"²³ Butler emphasizes the link between gender and identity: "In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts."²⁴ For instance, women in India are deeply rooted in their society's values and beliefs, which are based on their history and mythical or religious stories. These stories are based on patriarchy, power hierarchies, and different views of men and women. Even though women have been treated like second-class citizens in patriarchal cultures, they have been the ones to pass on traditions and culture to the next generation. Women are perceived as retaining cultural identities and are also responsible for physical reproduction in both the home country and the new nation, so gender becomes a significant part of the diaspora in many ways. They are regarded as crucial in constructing new borders based on ethnic and national identities, as well as participants in national economic and political events when they are outside of the country. Women have traditionally been considered a vital element of what makes a family, not only in the home country, but also in the context of migration and diaspora.

Paradigms surrounding race and gender are socially formed and may be fluid, historical, or situational. A growing body of literature reveals how the meanings of gender and race shift over time and across geographies. For example, when the "one drop rule"²⁵ was used in 1992 to define black ancestry in the United States, with any individual with any trace of black ancestry being classified as black.²⁶ Marginalized communities frequently acquire the status of being the 'other.' As Audre Lorde argues, if one deviates

²³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Classics, 2015), p. 295.

²⁴ Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4 (1988), p. 519.

²⁵ The 'one-drop rule' was passed by Arkansas in 1911 by Act 320 (House Bill 79). Any offspring of a mixed-race union would be categorized as black under the one-drop rule. It was the one-drop rule that was the precursor to formal laws prohibiting miscegenation.

²⁶ Lawrence Wright, 'One drop of blood', *The New Yorker*, 17 July (1994), pp. 46-55.

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from the mythological standard, one is regarded as 'another'.²⁷

Many scholars assume that the intersections of power relations happen all the time because they believe that these categories are mutually made up at the level of social interaction and representation. Scholars who look at institutions, are also of the opinion that intersections of race, gender, and class are everywhere. In *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, Weber talks about how race and gender are both "social systems" that "operate at all times and in all places" and that, because they are connected and make up each other, neither will ever be more important than the other.²⁸ Given the marginalisation of topics surrounding intersectionality, particular attention must be paid to art that represents these kinds of experiences and communicates them to a wider audience – and indeed, to others who share the same experience. We will now consider these ideas of intersection and power as discussed in the poetry of Usha Kishore.

Usha Kishore's Poetic Representations of Gender and Race Intersections

Kishore was born and raised in Kerala, India, but now resides in the Isle of Man. Her poems expound on issues of cultural identity and belonging, with collections often discussing the relationship between host and root cultures and carry them beyond their usual limitations. Usha Kishore's obsession with Indian womanhood is encapsulated in her 2015 poetry collection *Night Sky Between the Stars*, which also expresses her concerns about a gendered identity that is marginalized. She not only presents her experiences as a young girl in the patriarchal family of her motherland, but also at the same time brings the real picture of a host country where she faces the issues of identity due to both her gender and race through the collection called *Immigrant* (2018). In a poem called "Kali," Usha writes:

How can I portray you as a goddess here?
They would not comprehend your mini skirt
Of severed arms, your garland of demon heads,
Your serpent bracelets, your vicious fangs
And lolling tongue seeking some twilight vein,
Your disheveled hair flying across the world.²⁹

²⁷ Audre Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference', *Campus Wars: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference*, ed. John Arthur (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 374-380.

²⁸ Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality*, p. 4.

²⁹ Usha Kishore, 'Kali', in *Immigrant* (London: Eyewear Publishing, 2018), p. 63.

The word ‘kali’³⁰ means ‘black’. The complexion of Goddess Kali here becomes the symbol of racism. The poet describes the “lithe body” of Kali who is “dark” as night, portraying her as the ‘Third World Feminist’³¹ who represents all marginalized women of colour. Kali is also the representative of women who are oppressed, restricted and are ordered by society not to cross their boundaries because of their gender.

Kishore is a diasporic Indian woman who writes about her homeland and exile, as well as a representative of ethnic minorities who writes from the imperial capital. Numerous studies in recent years have shown that ethnic minority women in western societies frequently encounter unique challenges in the workplace.³² As an Indian teacher teaching English in a British school, Kishore is consistently appalled at racial discrimination in the United Kingdom. Her marginalisation is exacerbated by the scowls, derogatory language, epithets, jibes, and mocking tones that she hears from the white European students. She claims that she wrote the poems as “a reaction to what I was going through: to what I think was a race-related harassment at the workplace.”³³ She explains how she is perceived: “A hand shoots up: *Asian woman and hair unravelled? Reformation or rebellion?*”³⁴

Lived experience is a vital aspect of intersectionality. By illustrating the fractured nature of the everyday, a lived-experience approach allows us to be open to competing interpretations, thereby illustrating both the

³⁰ In Hinduism, Kali is regarded as the embodiment of all power, time, and change. She is believed to be a fierce incarnation of Mahadevi, the mother of all living creatures and the most powerful being on earth. In order to protect the innocent, the goddess destroys evil. Her skin colour is described as black. The name Kali derives from the Sanskrit word *kala*, which means “time force.” When there was no creation, no sun, moon, planets, or earth, there was only darkness, and everything was created from the darkness. Kali’s dark appearance represents the darkness from which everything arose.

³¹ In opposition to white second-wave feminists’ one-dimensional views of gender oppression that ignored Third World women’s diverse and complex oppressions in their various social contexts, Third World and transnational feminisms have developed. In light of this, both feminisms have two “Third World feminist” tenets in common: first, feminist analyses of Third World women’s oppression and resistance should be historically placed; and second, Third World women’s agency and voices should be acknowledged.

³² Seonyoung Hwang and T. Alexandra Beauregard, ‘Contextualising Intersectionality: A qualitative study of East Asian female migrant workers in the UK’, *Human Relations*, vol. 75, no. 4 (2022).

³³ Sunil Sharma, ‘Talking Muses and Myths with Usha Kishore’, *Boloji*, 17 October (2014). At <https://www.boloji.com/articles/16363/talking-muses-and-myths-with-usha-kishore>.

³⁴ Usha Kishore, ‘Teaching Tagore to 10A/S’, in *Immigrant* (London: Eyewear Publishing, 2018), p. 28.

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multidimensionality of hegemonic fact, as well as its resistance.³⁵ Kishore believes that poetry is the best medium for expressing her feelings as a racially disadvantaged woman. Her poetry assists her in being more self-aware. She says: "My poetry reflects my life, my experiences, multiculturalism, women's rights, and my reactionary stance of racism."³⁶

British multiculturalism is defined by the migration of people from former British colonies such as South Asian and African countries to the United Kingdom for employment. However, this mix of cultures in Britain cannot be called a melting pot where people of different races can mix and become one.³⁷ In her poem "You and Me," Kishore emphasizes how white British people demonstrate social prejudice by "denying members of certain groups equal access to scarce and valuable resources" because of intersecting social identities such as gender and race.³⁸ The idea of intersectionality has offered a useful theoretical lens for examining these disadvantages and difficulties faced by many ethnic minority women. Crenshaw states,

Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination [...] But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm.³⁹

Kishore writes that British political parties perform "a disappearing act/when I speak of integration,"⁴⁰ implying that they have no interest in South Asian immigration even though they profess integration. She writes,

You say that you believe
In the brotherhood of man and quietly graffiti

³⁵ Suparna Banerjee and Nandini Ghosh, 'Introduction. Debating Intersectionalities: Challenges for a Methodological Framework', *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2018).

³⁶ Sutapa Chaudhuri, 'I, the dark woman, in the trajectory of your consciousness: Indian-Born British Poet Usha Kishore in Conversation with Sutapa Chaudhuri', *Writers in Conversation*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2014), pp. 2-10.

³⁷ Prasun Maji, "'Marginal aesthetics of resistance': Race and Resistance in the Poetry of Usha Kishore", *Language in India*, vol. 18, no. 8 (2018), p. 4.

³⁸ Ellis Cashmore (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Race and Ethnic Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 345.

³⁹ Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex', p. 149.

⁴⁰ Usha Kishore, 'You and Me', in *Immigrant* (London: Eyewear Publishing, 2018), p. 14.

Your white walls with charcoal: *Paki*,⁴¹ *go home*-
Not knowing that Pak means pure.⁴²

In a poem called “Nikhat’s Mother,” the poet becomes the interpreter of Nikhat’s mother, “translating her language/her culture, her colour.”⁴³ The height of patriarchy and racism in Britain is clear:

She does not understand
Why Nikhat is harassed
By school bobbies:
Bibi jaan, taleem lena,
Dena hamara mamla hai.
*Ye gore kyun dakl dete hain?*⁴⁴

Partha Chatterjee once commented that “The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality.”⁴⁵ Kishore in her poetry shows how women have always been regarded as the arbiters of societal morality. Her poem “Chanting the Vedas” reads:

When the sun rises
Each morning, he tells me that I have been
anointed in the waters of the Ganges, that
I have reincarnated as sinless woman.
I have reincarnated into another,
so gradually, that I didn’t even realise,
until my own gods spoke to me
in an alien tongue. I do not know
which of my gods touched my closed palms
and bequeathed exile, where I flounder
in lost womanhood, with sindoor bleeding
from my forehead.⁴⁶

Kishore’s poetry is mostly influenced by her experiences as a woman of colour in Britain, particularly those poems that describe her life as an immigrant. According to her, racism permeates every element of the lives of immigrants in Britain. Omi and Winant define race as “a concept, a representation or signification of identity that refers to different types of

⁴¹ ‘Paki’ is a derogatory term for those of Pakistani or other South Asian backgrounds.

⁴² Kishore, ‘You and Me’.

⁴³ Usha Kishore, ‘Nikhat’s Mother’, in *Immigrant* (London: Eyewear Publishing, 2018), p. 64.

⁴⁴ Kishore, ‘Nikhat’s Mother’.

⁴⁵ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 239.

⁴⁶ Usha Kishore, ‘Chanting the Vedas’, in *Immigrant* (London: Eyewear Publishing, 2018), p. 70.

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human bodies, to the perceived corporeal and phenotypic markers of difference and the meanings and social practices that are ascribed to these differences."⁴⁷ Kishore, in a conversation, tells Sutapa Chaudhuri that she "discovered postcolonial angst, here in the UK."⁴⁸ When she is asked by the interviewer Sunil Sharma to explain her own experiences as a diasporic black subject in Britain, Kishore says:

Racism is not a political shibboleth in Britain. It is a living and breathing monster. Having worked in this country, I have faced racism in various avatars: verbal abuse, institutional racism, implied racism, racial stereotyping et al. A lot of work still needs to be done to eradicate racism from British society. The situation has improved, but recently the successes of South Asians, especially the Indian diaspora in the UK has created a lot of resentment within a considerable section of the host population and this has led to a lot of heart breaks for the Indian community.⁴⁹

Throughout her poem "Fussy Militant Rebel," she explores the ways in which European civilization tries to suppress the voice of a black woman. To speak out against the politics of exclusion, the poet is categorized as picky or fastidious, confrontational, and rebellious by British culture.⁵⁰ It is clear that the European people wish to obliterate their own existence. This distinction is made clear by the poet:

I play by your rules,
but you call me names,
for I am your other; your
reflection in a dark mirror,
your consciousness in colour.
I am Caliban, you want to tame me,
I am the exotic; you want to taste me.
When I say I am human, like you.⁵¹

Many of Kishore's poems are infused with this feeling of being a woman who is doubly marginalised. "Where Do I Belong?", "Journeying into a Foreign Tongue", "Postcolonial Poem", "Marginal or Peripheral", and "Bastard Children of the British Raj" further recount her times in her host

⁴⁷ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 111.

⁴⁸ Sunil Sharma, 'Talking Muses and Myths with Usha Kishore', *Boloji*, 17 October (2014). At <https://www.boloji.com/articles/16363/talking-muses-and-myths-with-usha-kishore>.

⁴⁹ Sharma, 'Talking Muses and Myths with Usha Kishore'.

⁵⁰ Maji, "'Marginal aesthetics of resistance",' p. 5.

⁵¹ Usha Kishore, 'Fussy Militant Rebel', in *Immigrant* (London: Eyewear Publishing, 2018), p. 43.

land. Intersectionality acts as an important medium here to highlight how intersectional identities have impacted her lived experience, and how she continues to fight against oppression.

Conclusion

Deborah King opines that it is “the necessity of addressing all oppressions.”⁵² In recent years, feminist epistemology and diaspora studies have come to see gender as an important factor that affects women and leads to different outcomes for them at every stage of migration: before migration, during migration, and when they settle. Gender and race are seen as the fundamental parts of society that affect both small-scale and large-scale institutions and processes in the motherland as well as in diasporic lands. Many layers of identity that are important for understanding economic, social, and demographic realities need to come to the forefront. If we do not judge one’s marginalization in the diaspora from the parameters of intersectionality, the minority groups will never get justice. Intersectionality provides a paradigm for identifying complex, varied, and frequently contradictory impacts that occur “when multiple axes of differentiation—economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective, and experiential—intersect in historically specific contexts.”⁵³ In this way, seeing the intersection of gender with other social and cultural constructs, like race, turns out to be a powerful factor in analysing the situations of women in the diasporic countries and their roles afterward for the betterment of society. Here, art is extremely significant, as it is the medium through which women of colour can communicate their experiences, both to society at large and to one another. Usha Kishore’s poetry is a shining example of how art can represent societal oppression, and by analysing this work and others like it, we can develop a better view what must be done to address this intersectional suffering.

⁵² King, ‘Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness’, pp. 42–72.

⁵³ Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix, ‘Ain’t I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality’, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2004), pp. 75–86.