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# Theme of Belonging in Syed Amanuddin's '*Don't Call Me Indo-Anglian'*

- Sayar Ahmad Mir

## Abstract:

Syed Amanuddin was an influential Indo-American poet, artist, painter, photographer, philosopher and English professor. His works capture the essence of the human experience, joy, happiness, love, pain, and suffering, sense of loss of belongingness, dissatisfaction, and disappointment. His works emphasize the search of the universal truths, the theme of border crossing without believing in the lines that create divisions in the society and help us see the injustice, irony, and beauty of the world around us. He was a blend of Indian essence and American taste. He writes about human experience and has a deep emotional fervour in his works. His other themes are musings and meditations and 'quest for meaning in life'. His visionary power, his philosophy of neti or UN-ism, empathy with a poor, profound sense of compassion, and his sense of commitment is quite lofty and of higher stature than that of any other Indian English poet. Syed Amanuddin, the philosopher, lover, and poet has carved out for himself a permanent place in the hall of Indian English poetry. His frank delineation of love places him among the modernist poets. Also, he is peerless in depicting Indian tradition and ethos; the process of evolution of love from the platonic to the pragmatic and surrealistic trends of our times. The study intends to show how Syed Amanuddin was a universal poet who revolted against any categorization. The study intends to explore the theme of border crossing in the poem

*Don't Call me an Indo-Anglian.*

**Keywords:** Belongingness, Crossing, Universality, Categorisation.

Sense of belonging is central to the human condition. The urge to belong is innate, stemming from our ancestry and is a source of safety and security. The desire to belong can encourage us to relinquish elements of our identity or to abandon other groups we had previously belonged to. Belonging to a group can influence our identity by creating new experiences that are specific to those people. The groups we belong to change over time and this is important to our ability to grow and mature. We are made more vulnerable by living separately from a group. Our families and communities are not chosen groups, but one that we inherently belong to from birth which influences our sense of identity from a young age (*The Engage Wiki*).

The term Indo-Anglian deals with the literature written in English by Indians. Indian English Writers use the English language in unique ways to express the Indian sensibility. The works of many distinguished Indian English Writers ascertain that English has been for them as natural as their own mother tongue (Kalaivani). Syed Amanuddin here in this poem 'splits this label into different constituents'by crossing the linguistic, cultural and all the geographical borders and 'explores the nuances of this label as well as where such label leads' (Kurian).

The poem "*Don't Call me an Indo-Anglian*" uncovers poet's anguish, protest,

and anger against those who label him as a poet of the particular race or region. He protests against those label makers and against the discrimination of nations and regimes. The poem '*Don't Call Me Indo-Anglian*' unfolds the liberties Syed Amanuddin takes with the syntactic structure(Preeti). The poem starts with the negation of any grouping:

'no i don't want to be a hotchpotch of culture

a confusion of language'

a nullity of imagination

an abortive affair between an indo n and an anglian(Kurian 10).

This poem is a part of the on-going discussion and debate on 'whether an Indians should write in English' or not especially when they have their 'own mother tongue'(Kurian). There are many other poems which deal with the same issue like Nissim Ezekiel's *Background Casually* and Kamala Das'*An Introduction*.

Syed Amanuddin starts off this poem, by crossing the linguistic boundaries as he starts the poem with small letters, with the negation since he doesn't want to be called a poet of some definite region or geography, a mixture of cultures, or of any language or imagination or a pendulum between an Indo and Anglian literature. This negation designates the anger and the protest against those who categorize him and associate him with a particular space. He says:

i hate hyphens

the artificial bridges

between artificial values

in the name of race religion n language

i damn all hyphenated minds

prejudicedoffsprings of unenlightened

souls

i denounce all labels and label makers (Kurian 10).

Syed detests the borders created by human beings over and again in the name of religion, culture, identity, and language. He condemns the separation of minds, people, and shows complete anger against any labeling. He denounces all label makers who label him as an Anglo or Anglian or a poet of any region or space. He says that he hates the hyphen which denotes that the poet is against anything that would give him any separate canvas of identity. More so, the poet writes every word in small letters which is unusual in Indian English poetry.

Syed doesn't give importance to any culture, region, language or literature. He doesn't want to be called by any name like Anglo or Anglian. These names would be like categorizing him with some geography which he detests strongly. Syed says:

they call me indo-anglian

the mistaken misinformed folk

n class me with a small group of writers

cloistering me

crippling me

i would rather roam with kalidas and kabir

or go on a spiritual journey with dante

meditate with khayam on the

mathematics of existence

or sing with ghalib the anguish of love

or drown with li po kissing the moons reflection in the river (Kurian 11).

He abhors any label or grouping attached with his name as by doing this he would be crippled, cloistered in the specific languages or geographies. Syed is happy to be a universal being, free from the confines of the culture and space, who would love to

roam with the different people and places but not being identified as one of them.

*Don't Call Me Indo-Anglian* pictures the gloomy picture as of classification for it divides people into different lines, be they geographical, cultural, regional. Syed suffers an identity crisis and above all finds no gratification by any categorization. He says:

they call an indo anglian  
its true i write in english  
dream in the language of shakespeare n  
keats  
but I am not an anglo my friend  
i am a poet  
i have lived forty centuries under  
various names  
i am amanuddin(Kurian 11-12).

Syed wants himself to be called a universal entity. He feels proud to be called a universal, global, and worldwide poet and not to be restricted, limited and confined by any race, region, and nation. For the poet, it is not his self that designates his identity but being 'a global and universal poet' is his identity than categorizing him with any specific group. Thus, he pictures himself as a cosmic poet by the amalgamation of different cultures, languages, races, and regions. The name is not important for the poet to describe him who he is but it the poet, the Amanuddin, which is his identity. Syed doesn't even attach any specificity to his name rather he, in the end, writes his own name in small letters indicating that he is not giving any significance even to his name because 'being a universal poet' is more significant to him.

## Conclusion

Syed Amanuddin is a mystical, spiritual

and moral poet like Ezekiel. His treatment of love, sense of belonging, theme of identity and faith in spiritual speak about his concerns about his belonging. There are many themes which run parallel to the theme of belonging like the theme of victimization, categorization, universality, regionalism, and particularity. Throughout the poem, *Don't Call Me Indo-Anglian* Syed poses the question of belongingness be it social, cultural or geographical. In the end the poet identifies himself as a poet of the world rather than a poet of any space or region or any other geography.

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तुम देश पर मरे हो,  
अनजान या अनाम  
ओ ! देश के शहीदों,  
लो देश का प्रणाम ।  
  
तुम लाल किसी माँ के,  
भाई किसी बहन के,  
सिंदूर तुम किसी के,  
निकले कफन पहन के,  
करजा चुका के मिट्टी का  
ही लिया विराम ।  
  
ओ ! देश के शहीदों  
लो देश का प्रणाम ॥





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**डॉ. पुरुषोत्तम सत्यप्रेमी जी  
की  
सत्रहवीं पुण्यतिथि  
(07/08/21)  
पर आश्वस्त परिवार की ओर से  
विनम्र श्रद्धांजलि**

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प्रतिष्ठा में ,

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