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Feminine Perspective : A Study of Indian English Women

Poets

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ABSTRACT

Poetry comes out of pain, says Goethe. Modern English poetry by Women poets is passing through a phase of transition for its manifestation of woman's pain in the form of subjugation and marginalized status in the family, society and even in the Indian poetic world. It is cut off from the vital springs of communal experiences and aspirations and has turned into a detached scrutinizer of the self and society. The poetry of Indian women poets acts as a social document because they themselves are the victims of social changes. Through their poetry women poets have often raised their voice against social and cultural conventions that constrained their freedom and perpetrated a sort of institutional subjection of woman.

The nineteenth century Indian English poetry in the hands of woman poets like Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt quite clearly project a phase which is the cultural intersection from within and without. They have expressed Indian sensibility and devoted to the multiculturalism of Indian pluralistic society and have their mark firm and rooted. At the same time Kamala Das through her confessional poetry extends her exploration of womanhood and love. Her extensive writing as a mother, a beloved, and a social rebel identifies her as a woman in her major poetry. Like wise Sujata Bhatt in her poem *Voice of the Unwanted Girl* exhibits her rare sensitivity, social concerns, inhumanity and horror of female feticide wonderfully articulated through a victim girl. In *Udaylee* Bhatt again explores with haunting sentiment, the state of menstruating women who are deemed untouchable during that period according to the beliefs and practices in the Gujrati community of her childhood. No doubt very few women poets like Taslima Nasrin have crossed the limit of feministic approach by composing the poem *Masturbation* neglecting the assistance of man in women's life. On the whole the contribution of women poets in the dynamics of women's poetry can't be undervalued.

Indian English poetry by Women emerged at the end of the Second World War and after the end of colonialism. It has been recognised as a well-established literary discipline. Post-independence poetry in English by Indian poets has acquired a distinct character and voice of its own. The new poets of the post – 1947 period 'have been suddenly lifted from an exclusive to an extensive range of creative experience. They have been raised from a conservative to a cosmopolitan culture, to confront the new shape of things and to acquire a new view of human destiny. The age has changed and requires a new change. This has been met by the poets.' Indian English women poets bring out the conflict of gender through the Indian female psyche in its interaction and correlation with the male psyche. Their poetry acts as a social document because they themselves are victims of social change. Through their poetry women poets have often raised their voice against social and cultural conventions that constrained their freedom and perpetrated a sort of institutional subjection of women. Women writers assert that the creation of community of women is necessary antidote to the excess of individualism. They believe that women need to

explore their collective consciousness and shared experience in order to transcend the fragmentation and isolation of their lives. Indian English poetry by women is passing through a phase of transition where Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das and Toru Dutt have virtually left the scene for the women poets after 1980s to carry forward the tradition.

The present paper highlights the remarkable poetic output and feminine perspective of a few Indo-Asian women poets.

Dr. Nandini Sahu is a distinguished poet and professor of English at the Indira Gandhi National Open University. Her poetry collections include *The Other Voice* (2004), *The Silence* (2005) and *Silver Poems on My Lips* (2009). Her poems are remarkable for the superb fusion of the personal, social and the spiritual dimensions of creativity. There is an exploration of the personal and the poetic identity of the poet and her personae. Most of her poems are monologues where the personae herself is the protagonist. Other than putting question to the world around, she prefers to focus the torch of inquiry inward. In her poetry, aesthetics and morality do not resort to solutions for social evils and problems. She loves to make her poetics clear, through the design of perfection, if at all that she has achieved through ages of acute pain and its manifestation through her poetic lines.

Harin K. Majithia is another Indian woman poet who prides herself on being 'a student of the great bard of Avon' and in teaching Shakespeare for about three decades. Obviously her choicest form of poetry is sonnet. Her fifth poetry collection *Sonnets Sonorous* (2001) consists of twenty five sonnets that sing of human fears and follies which are universal and generic in nature rather than lyrical response to a moving movement in one's life. She draws on Shakespeare in punching the poetic vision of the sonnet in the concluding couplet: Shallow waters never run deep./ And the strong never ever creep. (*On This Maze*). Her sonnets do not conform to the metrical structure of Shakespearean sonnet; only stanza division is the same. But it has become a trend in which conformity to the traditional structure of a poetic form is not held necessary. Even celebrated poets like Daurwalla, Mahapatra or Mehrotra do not follow Shakespearean or Petrarchan model of sonnet. The dominant trend in modern poetry is what Ezekeil called voicing of contemporary Indian culture or we can say our contemporary concerns. But hers is not contemporary; it transcends time and has universal appeal. In her preface she makes her poetic credo clear, "Poetry I believe is after all beyond bondage. It flows like a brook, rushing, gushing a head in its own frenzy, flowing over the pebbles, running smooth or disturbed at times but always straight from the heart." (7)

Shanta Acharya is another Indian female poet who has chosen to live alone in London yet with close ties with family members in Orissa where she grew up. Her poems collected in five volumes – *Not this, Not that, Numbering our Days, Looking in, Looking out, Shringara* and *Dream that spell the Light*. Her poems reflect various facets of human emotions. They explore issue of religion and nationality of belonging and displacement and the necessity of retaining the memories that functions as impulses to organise. Her poem *Dream That spell the Light* begins with a number of poems which are located in distant places, ranging across Italy, Lahore, China, The Sunderbans of Bengal and Kabul. She makes connection between culture – the abundant richness of an Italian Cathedral; the stone temples of Orissa – or across time- between Kalinga, the birthplace of Buddha in Orissa, and the sacred relics of his tooth carried in revelry and procession in modern, lately war-torn Sri Lanka, which makes these poems exploration and discoveries.

Acharya's wide-ranging embrace of the world reflects not only a breadth and diversity of culture but also of sensibility. In her poem *Of Magic and Men* Acharya writes about the waves of miracles. That swept across Hindu, all over the world when deities 'drank milk' that was lovingly given by the devotees. It received a kind of media coverage that lulled people into believing that such a thing actually happened. Her next poem called *The Sunderbans* is named after a place familiar to readers through the wonderful novel, *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh. Quite unlike the other places explored, this region fascinates because 'here are no boundaries/keeping freshwater from salt, river from sea/ land from water, island from island.' The islands shift, 'world on the move' 'moving world' – The words 'move' and 'moving' are poignant and come with different senses. The changing habitat becomes the home of different birds, animals and fish at different seasons: the floods, the receding tides and the drought. And finally there is a possibility that the River Ganges may yet one day dry out, the Sunderbans itself may disappear.

Vijay Goel is another celebrated woman poet with prolific output in Hindi and English. She belongs to Punjab and is a painter, poet and short story writer. It is reported that she has brought out nine books and they have large circulation. Solo exhibitions of her paintings have been held besides participating in other national/ international exhibitions. Her third poetry collection *Sound of Solitude* was published in 1997. In her poems she creates small stories which she has personally lived. She writes: Let us sing the song/ that is our own/ the notes churn the life./ Let mind be just a flower/ for once let us go wild. (50)

Goel's poetry narrates the social, religious and political divisions in the society. In *Mid-Air Collision* there is a description of meaninglessness of narrow domestic walls:

His son had touched his feet
In the vicinity of all, proud he was
One by one they entered the capsule
Together these all flew, breathing the same air
Together they all panicked clutching each other
Together they fell, into a heap of garbage.

Among the Indian English women poets who represent the sensibility of modern Indian woman **Kamala Das** occupies an outstanding position in Indo-Anglian poetry. She deals with the trial and tribulations of the woman who is struggling hard to find a place in the patriarchal society. 'The crux of the matter is that from the very beginning human society has been dominated by male, otherwise literature of the world would have been very different. However it is worthwhile to mention here that the attitude of literature to love and sex is opposed to that of religion and ethics. And in this context, a female poet like Kamala Das takes advantage of her poetry to undo this historical imbalance in the society. ¹ Her poetry depicts her feminine sensibility but the unfulfilled desires lying dormant in the unconscious mind also take part. Her sincere and frank outbursts sometimes jar and jolt the reader who is not habituated to such utterances. Her candid confessional revelations give a new dimension to her poetry. Her poetry encompasses a woman's longings, hopes and fears. Her repulsion for physical love and lack of sincere love occupy a very significant place. She craves for union with man for the fulfilment of love but she is disillusioned and frustrated when it degenerates into sheer lustfulness and bodily pleasures. Such beautiful love gets spoiled without getting solace and comfort from a being. Kamala Das deals with the quest of a woman for love in general terms. It is her deep desire to find fulfilment in love:

I met a man, loved him, called
Him not by any name, he is every man
Who wants to woman just as I am every
Woman who seeks love... (An Introduction 59)

In her poem *The Looking Glass* Kamala Das sarcastically remarks that the woman should accept the cruel reality that she is merely an object for satisfaction of man's lust. A woman should derive satisfaction out of her sexuality by challenging traditional social norms. C.V. Venugopal remarks: "The poetry of Kamala Das is full of questions that are rarely answered. They are queries about truth. But truth, in general, is unbearable. And Kamal Das, the seeker after truth feels betrayed. The wise ones live in a blue silent zone, unscratched by doubts." ²

Kamala Das in her poem *Gino* expresses a sense of disgust at male habits and treatment. The lover is like a reptile who keeps on sucking the female body. One feels that that it is very difficult to draw the demarcation line between life and death. There is a desire to experience true love but it turns poisonous even outside marriage. Thus Kamala Das' attitude towards love and feminine sensibility in her poetics has interpreted from different angle.

Like all other Indian English women poets **Sujata Bhatt** too occupies a significant place in the history of Indo-Anglian poetry. Born in Ahmedabad, India in 1936 raised in Pune, India and New Orleans, educated in Baltimore, married and settled in Bremen Germany Sujata Bhatt's multi-lingual and multi cultural identity as an Indian English poet of the Diaspora is a well established acclaimed award winning poet. Bhatt's first collection *Brunizem* came out in 1988. Her other famous poems are *Monkey Shadow* (1991) , *The Stinking Rose* (1995).

Sujata in her poem *White Asparagus* brings to light the female desire which is as important as the male's. She shows the argument that in a society where both the male and female have equal contribution as well as participation, why is the female-desire not recognised whereas the male-desire is looked upon with proper respect:

Who speaks of the strong currents
Streaming through the legs, the breasts
Of a pregnant woman
In her fourth month
She's young, this is her first time
She's slim and the nausea has gone
Her belly's just starting to get rounder.

Sujata Bhatt's most famous poem, *Search for my Tongue* takes on the forms of a palimpsest as it negates the oppressor's foreign tongue and re-inscribes a natural, creative countless critics, the loss of tongue, the physical act of speaking, signifies the loss of Bhatt's mother tongue Gujarati, but it might also be taken as a metaphor for the loss of freedom of speech, the loss of voice or forced silence as experienced by a woman in a dominant culture. The mother tongue is the first language, a child learns to speak. It comes naturally to her, a language by means of which she can express her lived experiences – her dreams, desires and nascent sexuality, her sense of self, as it were. In a colonizing patriarchal culture that taboos female speech and enjoins a debilitating, repressive must learn a foreign tongue in order to survive.

Bhatt's *Voice of the Unwanted Girl* as the title states is the articulation of girl child, who questions the inhumanity and horror of female infanticide. The poem, taken from the anthology *My Mother's Way of Wearing a Sari* written with rare sensibility and social concerns critiques patriarchy and demands for a world in which gender discriminations are erased:

Mother, I am the one
You sent away
When the doctor told you
I would be
a girl – In the end they had to
give me an injection to kill me.

Again in her poem *Udaylee* Sujata Bhutt explores with haunting sentiment the state of menstruating women, who are deemed untouchable during that period according to the beliefs and practices in the Gujrati community of her childhood:

Only paper and wood are safe
From a menstruating woman's touch
So they built this room
For us, next to the cowshed,

Thus, the Indian English women poets not only represent regional as well as national culture but also remind the humanity of their inextricable relationship with nature which is the permanent source of health and vigour. Their poetry is an important social document in which one finds struggle, search for identity and dignity, enlightenment and a yearning for a world in which the women are not just in periphery rather they are as central as the men.

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