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Exilic Experiences In The Selected Poems Of Sujata Bhatt

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Abstract:

Language has always played the fittest role in dominating human conscience through the narratives of poetry, prose, drama and fiction. Our emotions and feelings which flow through our heart with mixed memories of suffering, loss, happiness etc take humans under its control to realise about their life in past. Sujata Bhatt, undoubtedly has mastered in this field through her poetic excellence to capture human conscience and feel like her. The central issues, which this paper will explore, has nothing else except to introduce readers about the journey of her life she has gone through with multiple experiences in foreign land. This paper truly explicit the conflicts which Sujata Bhatt has crafted through her poetic writings like *Brunizem*, *Monkey Shadow*, *Point No Point* and *Augatora*. Sujata Bhatt's exilic experiences across the continents has fascinating insight of her journeys to connect with poetry lovers with diasporic existence and her multilingual identity.

Key Words: *Sujata Bhatt, Brunizem, Monkey Shadow, Point No Point, Augatora, Exile*

Poetry has been an indispensable part of Indian Literature since Vedic age. It is regarded as dynamic and vibrant because of its different writing pattern. The birth of poetry in terms of themes, language, form, content and even readership is matchless from other literary forms. The evolution of poetic tradition has been no less of Indian women writers. From the epochal poetry of Meera, Mahadevi Verma, Sarojini Naidu to the candid and invigorating poetry of Kamala Das, Eunice De Souza; women's poetry has created a wide spectrum on the world canvas to be acknowledged. Indian Women's Poetry has travelled widely- Bhakti, Romantic, Nationalist, Mythical, Mystical, Feminist, Modernist and the journey still continues. In spite of being so assertive it took years to establish Indian English Women's Poetry as a distinctive and unique field to be focussed upon. Contemporary Poetic scenario unlocks numerous shades- from sacred to profane, aesthetic to morbid, rural to urban, and many more to be searched. The contribution of contemporary women poets is commendable and praiseworthy. In this field, poets like Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Suniti Namjoshi, Smita Aggarwal, Imtiaz Dharker, and Sujata Bhatt have remarkable effect on literature.

The famous poet Sujata Bhatt, born and in 1956 at Ahmedabad, Gujarat in India. After receiving her primary education, she went abroad for higher study. There she completed her studies at University of Iowa and finally married and settled in Germany. As her academic excellence, she has taught in famous universities like British Columbia, Canada and Pennsylvania. And for the purpose she has been awarded several awards and accolades at international platform, including Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia). Bhatt as a poet and a passionate translator has a distinct place among poets. She has six notable volumes of poetry to her credit- *Brunizem* (1988), *The Stinking Rose* (1995) and *Augatora* (2000) to name a few. Her poetry as well as titles of her poetry collection are interesting and eye catchy in all the sense. They possess deep variety in languages and thoughtful creation in the poetry.

Bhatt has been read and analysed for raising issues of her experienced life with a number of adjectives stated with her multicultural, colourful and multilingual poet. Her works justifiable and admirable completely. Her poems possess the themes of various cultures, representations in various languages and blossomed with vibrant colours and nature's elements.

In fact, Bhatt admits that it was all due to the environment she had at her home which gave opportunity to write her poetic feelings. She states this in her interview as below:

My paternal grandfather was a writer and a teacher. He was an essayist, a short story writer as well as a translator (from Sanskrit to Gujarati). Two of my uncles (both of them my mother's brother) are highly respected poets. They write in Gujarati. As a child I was aware of the fact that my uncles were not only writing poetry but that they could also recite it (from memory) and even sing it depending on the form of their poems. One of them, in particular, Bharat Pathak, has always been and continues to be a source of great inspiration to me. Along with my mother he is a brilliant storyteller. In this way I grew up with the oral tradition. I wrote my first poems when I was eight. Given my background, I felt it was a natural thing to do. (Carcnet Press)

As stated above from her interview, it is clear that she has high-class interest for writing poetry from her early life. Her early writings display that despite a huge difference in age group both of them convey a strong bond of understanding to the readers:

At that time
I am seventeen, and have just started
to wear a sari every day.
Swami Anand is eighty-nine
and almost blind....
Mornings he summons me
from the kitchen
and I read to him until lunch time. (Point No Point, 21)

Britishers came to rule in India in 1942 and the country was partitioned into India, West Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). This was planned by the British and Muslim leaders to assist the Muslim minority and give them a national identity. This partition became the witness for bloody conflict which ruined around one million people brutally.

The poem "Partition" is not all about the partition of India but is about all kinds of violent epochs that thwarted the aspirations of the common people, as found in the vast expanse of recorded history. The poem is a record of multiple incidents in which a land and its people are partitioned for being different religion, beliefs, cultures and locality. These issues give central theme to the collections of poetry. Here, Sujata questions the validity of the decision which changed the scene of the nation unnoticed and caused the bloodshed of civilians on a large scale:

How could they
have let a man
who knew nothing
about geography
divide a country?

The second part of the poem unfolds her mother's memories of Partition to Bhatt's own experience as she is sitting with her mother and hearing the story. She says:

Now, when my mother
tells me this at midnight
in her kitchen – she is
seventy-years-old and India
is 'fifty'. 'But, of course
India is older than that,' she says,
'India was always there.'

Other poem Bhatt has dedicated to her grandfather is 'Nanabhai Bhatt in Prison' explores the sufferings. Bhatt continuous visits and her strong bonding with her family and culture always became a source of writing for her though she shifted to America. In this inspiring poem, she recollects the life of her grandfather portraying him as a freedom fighter. She is miles away from her Native land studying literature. There she gets nostalgic about her grandfather who was fond of the great revolutionary poet Tennyson. Her grandfather's inclination for literature and love for his country flashes in her memory in the lines below:

One semester in college
I spent hours picturing him:
a thin man with large hands,
my grandfather in the middle
of the night, in the middle of writing,... (Point No Point, 65)

Apart from her grandfather Bhatt was quite close and sensitive towards her mother, the umbilical relationship between the two is undoubtedly strong and trustworthy. Sujata Bhatt observes her mother managing all the household works early in the morning before the sun has not risen. Both Bhatt and her mother who cannot sleep due to work. Sujata Bhatt has communicated what was remained unsaid by her mother. A beautiful, simple yet firm connection between Bhatt and her mother is conveyed effectively:

But now it's still dark
as my mother adjusts her sari end-
she tucks it in Gujarati style and turns
to leave for she must fill all the clay pitchers
with water- all the large brass
vessels are waiting for her.

.....

There is still time
 before my brother wakes up.
 Time- before our grandmother
 calls us to the kitchen-
 But I cannot sleep. (Augatora, 92)

Both have the same experiences even personality has gone through several changes along with the learning of new scripts but the connection is unique:

I felt as if the different scripts
 belong together: I felt them raw,
 clotting together in my mind,
 raw, itchy- the way skin begins to heal.
 Still, I took my language from New Orleans
 when I was five.
 And then someone changed it:

 History is a broken narrative
 where you make your language when you change it. (Augatora, 41)

Bhatt's another poem which demonstrates that her connectivity is still with her native land even though she is not there as it is depicted in the poem 'A Different History'. The poem has only two sections. The first part of the poem is dedicated to Indian ethos, beliefs, myths and Indian deities. The second section appears as to be a creation of Post-independence Indian Poet writing about the inculcation of English language in India.

Cecile Sandten in one of her article has quoted the Bhatt's opinion on her being a diasporic writer:

'In a way, exile brought me closer to India. I started reading everything I could find about Indian history, Indian mythology, Indian art, sculpture, sociology, etc. I missed the Gujarati language as well and started reading Gujarati books (specially ordered from India of course) with a new persistence [...]. I consider myself to be an Indian writer, but I like to think of myself as living in the world as opposed to in any one country.' Although she seems to have solved the problem of displacement, her feelings of up rootedness and exile are prominent in her poetry. This poetry is also imbued with an acute awareness of the epistemological and cultural implications of blended identity and the possibilities of its creative potential. (Sandten, 232)

The poem entitled as 'The One Who Goes Away' in one way sums up her being a writer of exile. She shares that she took memories with herself wherever she went. In a way we can say that her heart became a box of her experienced life. She was always surrounded with her past native memories crafting them into words. In fact, she refers that the ability to leave a place brings joy – "May be the joy lies / in always being able to leave-." The poet ends the poem by saying that her home does not fit in any geography as there in no other place like that. Since Bhatt's life is a journey of uncounted memories, shifting from one place to another; moving into new houses time to time, therefore literally she wishes to convey that she does not belong to one place/nation. She is not one but many nations in the one. As a person she carries her individualistic identity, her soul inside her heart filled with experiences, memories restored there. All these memories give peace in her heart rather

than any physical settings. She has, no doubt, found place in displacement.

In her works, women have their identity and they need not imitate males or exchange roles with males to subvert the patriarchal ideology. Apart from that woman is complete in herself. She need not desire to create a new identity for her, all her deeds, her house-hold works, her emotions, everything is important and commendable. A young girl collecting cow-dung in 'Muliebrity' carries greatness and power, which can't be exhibited by any other normal being on the earth. Bhatt says she is unable to apply this image as a metaphor for her because her greatness lies in what her individualistic image is. Beniwal and Mehta comments on this aspect of Bhatt's poetry as well:

Sujata Bhatt revels in various shades of bodily experience at the crosssection of culture and the self. On the one hand, she critically negotiates the patriarchal notions that reduce the female body into a cultural discourse and, on the other hand, resurrects female embodiment as a site of celebratory identity. Consequently, the female body emerges in her poems as a complex palimpsest, a multi-hued entity- a potential threat, a polluting medium, a pristine reproductive site, a labouring, nurturing care- giving body, a preserver of tradition, and a site for inscription of cultural marks and codes. (Beniwal and Mehta, 99)

Bhatt's another poem 'Sherdi' which is the example of rendering female's desires. The poem is based on the theme of love as making comparison eating/sucking sugarcane. Bhatt frankly writes how love-making makes her remember the joy of sucking sugarcane in the fields is also as emblem of trust and loyalty. 'Sugarcane' used here as a metaphor for male's sexual organ. The poem speaks pleasure felt by the woman in the course of love:

So tonight

When you tell me to use my teeth,

to suck hard, harder,

then, I smell sugarcane grass

in your hair

and imagine you'd like to be

she`

rdi she`

rdi out in the fields

the stalks sway

opening a path before us (Point No Point, 20)

Bhatt's next poem, 'Wine from Bordeaux' explains the harmful effects of world's largest nuclear disaster. Modernization has brought various advancements in human life, but the adverse effects of science and technology are menacing day to day causing numerous problems. Technology can lead to dangerous results only by the one wrong decision taken by humans. One example is happened in Chernobyl, Ukraine. The nuclear reactor exploded during the test, and thousands of people were lost. The effects were so dangerous and devastating that people stopped thinking about their family planning. Some of them couldn't dare do that. After many efforts children were born but they couldn't live healthy life. The lines in the poem depicts the hardness of the situation connotatively:

There's another man
 I can tell you about.
 He is real.
 He got himself sterilized
 in May 1986 when he was eighteen
 because he was convinced
 his chromosomes were damaged.
 And he didn't want to pass on
 any mistakes. (Point No Point, 78)

From human life to vegetation everything was destroyed:

While the women
 who gave birth over here
 in 1986 sometimes didn't know
 what to eat. (Point No Point, 78)

As Sujata Bhatt's literary endeavour, the course of her publications has her personal living experiences' journey from one continent to other. In her collections of poetries, Sujata has dealt with the issues of suffering and nostalgia remembering the span of her past life. She has developed the craft of artistic excellence using English tone to her creative poetic writings. Her poetry unfolds her blended identity with loving memories of birthplace/native land which she can never edit from heart. We also find her ambivalent feelings towards her homeland for the subject matter and her character as an exile artist. Therefore, Sujata Bhatt has used artistic maturity to convey her mixed feelings with the complex conditions of nostalgic experience as well as multifaceted European people.

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