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Different Religions Having One Voice: Kamala Das, Imtiaz Dharker and Eunice De Souza

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Abstract:

The women poets are the first to create a sacred zone for the female subject. Indian women poets have come a long way from the earlier different days when it was a taboo for them to speak of their inner self. In the poems of post 1960 period, it is love at the most mundane level. The whole scenario is replaced by their independence. The Indian women poets have written with accumulated deposits of shared tradition and sets of values with which they have lived with. Kamala Das, Imtiaz Dharker and Eunice de Souza are such women poets in the history of women poetry. They are from religions but strengthening one voice against discrimination.

Key Words: Suppression, Individualism, Marginalization, Patriarchal, Hegemony.

Literature is often regarded as a mirror reflecting the reality of life, reflecting the writers' self. It is a process of transforming the subjective into objective so that the writer can identify with himself or herself. It is an essential business of an artist to create an identity. Poets thus act as recorders of history, preservers of tradition, restorers of romance, interpreters of emotions, painters of art, thinkers of philosophy, inventors of intellectual sophistication and messenger of God. As women who have been reprimanded, rejected or dismissed by the establishment know writing is a subversive activity in patriarchal societies. To take up the pen and write one's destiny is the ultimate transgression, which is why the first and most fundamental censorship for women is the denial of the right to read and write. Women's accounts, when written down, are full of stories about their struggles to get educated and the obstacles they encountered in the way. Secrecy, Concealment, rebellion and fear recur like leitmotifs in their journals and diaries. Women writers were more visible today than they have ever been before, largely as a result of the systematic surfacing of their work by women's presses, critics, teachers and activists who have been part of the women's movement and broadly share its politics.

Eunice De Souza, Imtiaz Dharker and Kamala Das are the eminent writers of English poetry. Although all the three belong to different religions yet they went through same agonies and pains in their lives. They raised their voices against male-dominated society and let readers hear them through their writing. Despite being from different religions all of them wrote against discrimination. They felt that the place which woman should be holding is not given by the society. She is only made to suffer all through her life. This research paper is an attempt to trace the protest poetry written by three distinguished woman poets Eunice De Souza, Imtiaz Dharker and Kamala Das as they progress in their individual lives from subjugation, suppression and suffering to lead autonomous lives of fulfilled identities through cathartic purgation to confessional poetry.

Kamala Das (1934-2009) was born at Punnayurkulam in southern Malabar. The autobiography of Kamala Das "*My Story*" contains her open statements about the efforts to get free from the cage. About her childhood experiences she says in her autobiography: "In day dreams, I too became a Draupadi who commanded her adoring mate to brave the demons to get flowers for her wavy tresses" (31). "*My Story*" is that work in which the conflict between the poet's mind and instinct is clearly portrayed. It is about the struggle of the poet which is going in inside herself. The obsession with love is one of the prominent features of her poetry. The failure to arrive at its highest point leaves her wounded. There are some poems such as '*The Freaks*', '*The Old Playhouse*', and '*An Introduction*'. '*The Looking Glass*' which is not only the mirror of her hurt-self but also shows her struggle to achieve identity and individualism. Some of her confessions about various love episodes have shocked the readers and the critics both. It is stranger because such kind of poetry is coming from an Indian woman who is mostly considered to be shy, silent and introvert.

In her love experiences, kamala Das feels incompleteness. She wants to be loved with the intentions to know her real self. For her being in love means losing her freedom. In an institution called marriage, woman is just an image. She craves to be free but her husband is like an intruder in her privacy. She encountered death once like Sylvia Plath, but fortunately escaped from that. After that in all her poetry she is questing for love which makes her an optimist. Regarding her open expression of feelings E. V. Ramakrishnan says, "Comparing to the poems of Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Theodore Roethke the poems of Kamala Das lack in the unifying stream that has to run through the various shifting moods. Her poems are wanting in a patient writing and delivering thoughts in a spontaneous rhythm. At the level of ideas, her poems are extremely compressed dynamic wholes on the verge of bursting"(34).

Female poets have enriched the Indian English Poetry to a great extent. Kamala Das is a pioneer among them. Das projects herself as a feminist poetic voice who is always asking for a dignified place of honour. She realizes that male world tends to allow women no other place except that of an object but women can aspire to the positions provided they can learn to rely on their own powers. Das's poetry is most convincing to those readers who approach it to discern the self of a poet, sees the world through the eyes of a haunted woman. Kamala Das is one of the most significant Indian female poets today. Her poetry is all about herself, about her desire for love, for emotional involvement and her failure to achieve such a relationship. Most important feature of her poetry is that she does not imitate Anglo-Americans but uses it in a typical Indian way. That's why she is called one of the best Indian English Woman poets of modern times.

Intiaz Dharker is born in Lahore in 1954. She is a documentary film maker and was raised in Britain. Her first book '*Purdah*' (an Urdu word for veil) was published in 1989 and another '*Postcards from God*' in 1994. She was born to a muslim family, brought up in England and married to a Hindu. *Purdah* seems to be the symbol of religious moral and social taboos which is sophisticated young woman would like to break but she feels trapped because eventually it is the '*Purdah of the mind*'. Dharker too shows her inner life through her poetry like Kamala Das and Eunice de Souza. What makes her poetry authentic is her expression from inner to outer world and from exclusiveness to inclusiveness.

The title of her first volume of poems, '*Purdah*' created controversy. For Islam, the term is related to religion but here it symbolizes marginalization, patriarchal discrimination and exploitation of women. The strong personality of Intiaz can be known from her poetic works. She rightly places the *Purdah* where it should be. She says that it is a patriarchal society

and here victimize always has the priority. Dharker's main theme is social change. A sharp note of anger is there in a victim's voice. She is aware that how much power the words have. She calls Purdah a powerful symbol for signify the domination of man over women, especially in Muslim society. A. K. Tiwari says: "The Purdah is an instrument of masculine effort to keep the low the spirit of independence in women... The conformance to the norms of the Purdah restricts and limits the roles of women, keeping them within the confines of Jenana apartments and keeps their status low"(262). Imtiaz need not search her identity or individuality. She has demolished the religious and cultural barriers prescribed by the patriarchal society and imposed and sometimes superimposed upon women. Imtiaz has awakened women to the incalculable damage done to their psyche since centuries. She has also convinced them of the triumph of the spirit in her.

Eunice de Souza was born in 1940. She studied at Sophia College Bombay, did her masters from Marquette University, Winconsin and Ph. D. from Bombay University in 1988. Her collections of poetry include 'Fix' (1979), 'Women in Dutch Painting' (1988) and 'Ways of Belonging: New and Selected Poems' (1990). Her poems are based on suffering of women. Her poetry is not an expression of her private experiences. Often her poems are stripped down to their bare bones. Some seem settled, fixed in point of view. Others appear immediate responses to conversations with friends. She avoids making poems literary artifacts and uses normal diction.

Eunice de Souza is related to the group of young poets like Manohar Shetty and Melanie Silgado who associate themselves with Bombay and Ezekiel. All these poets share a common Goan Catholic background. Her verse expresses her anger, fear, guilt, hopes and desires. Though expressed in ironic understatement rather than in overt comment, the poems register a high level of consciousness of the situation and problem faced by women. Bruce King states: "While it has no affiliations in politics, community, humanistic ideals, religion, it is feminist in its kind of awareness, female vision and affinities to the mode of other women poets rather than in a proclaimed commitment" (158). Eunice's poetry is all about the childhood experiences. Her poems include the problems faced by the women, expressed in ironic statements and striking images. Her language clearly shows her rebellious resentment of the suppression of gender discrimination. In Bruce's words, "Although de Souza's poems arise out of alienation and the feeling that the life is a mess, they are also highly conscious of the situation and problems faced by women. This consciousness is expressed through understated irony rather than articulated comment"(158). De Souza is best known for those quietly angry yet somehow compassionate portraits of the society in which she was raised.

Touching upon the broad spectrum of a number of Indian English Poets and finally focusing on the three selected poets has been made to identify, evaluate and comment on the content of protest and its variables like rage, resentment and anger in their poetry. The poetry of post-independence has been different from the pre-independence period. It has become more personal rather than social gesture. One of the most significant events in this post-independence Indian English poetry is the rise of women's poetic voice. Their poetry reflects the quest for identity, position of women in society, individual space and self-assertion. The poetic world of new women poets is more real and has succeeded in asserting their identity. These poets expose their feelings in the barest bones rather than hiding their suffering behind some mark or persona.

The recurring themes of these women poets are: women's quest for identity, her struggle for self-realization, her pursuit for freedom and equality, her protest against discrimination. The modern Indian women poets reveal the complexities of their feminine

psyche. Confessional and protest poetry find an important place in the works of these women poets. Their poetry acts as a social document as it is written in personal and confessional style. They themselves are the victims of social change. They struggled hard to live their lives on their own terms and conditions not through the ordains of male hegemony.

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