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The Theme of Freedom in Imtiaz Dharker's Poetry

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Imtiaz Dharker is a Third World feminist poet who has examined the issues of racism, class, sexuality and nationality in her poems. She is a dislocated poet who tries to explore the reality of her identity through her journey into various countries, cultures and religions. In her poems there are serious issues or themes of dislocation, religious conflict related to physical existence as a woman in the postmodern patriarchal world. In her poems she writes about the exploitation and harassment of women in tyrannical societies. She draws attention of the readers to the miserable and harmful condition that is likely to devastate secular freedom in the South Asian countries. In spite this socio-political concern she gives much preference to the aesthetic values for her poetic creation. For her poems are not related to any kind of social, political or religious propaganda but they always transcend and enter into an aesthetic world. She explores the theme of freedom in her poems.

Introduction:

Imtiaz Dharker deals with the replication of the female histories, and the portrayal of the female subject as victim agent. She also explores the struggle for freedom, hope, social change, feminine sensibility, womanhood, religious strife, gender conflict, misinterpretation of religion, hypocrisy practiced in the name of God, a ruthless oppression of women, socio-political unrest, the sufferings of women, child-marriage, illiteracy, ill-treatment of widows, dowry-deaths, ill-matched marriages and female foeticide, etc. are some of the common themes that run through her poems. The collection 'Leaving Fingerprints' especially deals with women's freedom, admiration of natural wealth, survival of life, quest for identity, life and death, rebirth, humanitarianism and universal sisterhood, Change in attitude towards Partition, the concept of Sufism, rejection of the concept of rhizomatic thought, Love and Protest, etc. are some of the common themes that run through these sections. Different peoples have interpreted freedom in different ways. Freedom has been defined by various thinkers on different way. They talk about personal freedom, national freedom, cultural freedom, political freedom, economic freedom and many more types of freedom into various categories, but each one affects the other and all are interrelated. In terms of metaphysics, freedom can be posed as a matter of free will that stands in opposition to determinism. In political terms, freedom can be posed as a matter of liberty which emphasizes individual rights and equality of opportunity. When we talk of freedom as 'free will', 'free' means that one's actions are not caused by factors or forces outside of oneself but when we say that freedom is 'determined', then in that case being free means enjoying the liberty to act as one would like but within the bounds of one's capabilities which are affected, directly and indirectly, by the external factors.

In her poem *Spire* this theme draws attention to such issues. The speaker advises the reader to rise above obstacles to enjoy freedom. In the last part of the poem she says:

*“This is how you teach stone to lift
its head to the sky.
This is how, out of clumsy earth,
with daily labour, you set free whatever
it is that you call god.*

*This is how you draw your human breath
In one pure line across an empty page.”(47)*

In *Learning Fingerprints* collection Dharker has associated the creative writing with manual labour. The poet is compared to a manual labourer who excavates and carries mud by working with an axe on wood in order to rise above. The poet tries to give a proper shape to all the rough objects and transforms some unpleasant and troublesome elements into a creative art. It is expressed in the last lines of this poem.

In Dharker’s poems there are links between fingerprints, lines and alliterations and reveal familiar landscapes through some unusual expressions of unfamiliar conditions. They are also concerned with the everyday reality. Her poems in *Leaving Fingerprints* collection are closely related to her drawings because they are like crossing the same ground by different means of transport. Dharker says that drawings do not decorate the poems but they occur at the same time. In this collection drawings and poems work around particular themes. In Dharker’s poems the line plays an important role in the creation of meanings. It is a unit of language in her poems. It works as a metaphor and vivid element to draw attention of the reader. It expands in all directions. It is used in the context of the description of women’s hair or in the description of the veil and apparels. The line connects the small rope of words of poems. It is used as a theme for acquisition of freedom from a static condition. This theme is in the poem *Either Way*. The speaker says about it in the following lines:

*“A sheet of paper. On it I have trapped
a line.
The line could become a wrinkle
a chain of words, a song,
a lace of winter branches,
this line could move in or on”(113)*

In order to highlight this theme Dharker uses the image of a pot-maker giving shape to clay in the poem and interprets her perception of the reciprocal influence between drawing and writing or the means of communication. It is a mood of using media to express her feelings. There is an affiliation between drawings and poems. They are connected with each other.

In the poem *The Missing Piece* the speaker says that the entire world is reduced into a kind of puzzle. There is something missing in its structure. She tries to find out and assert that piece which is nothing but social, religious and cultural freedom for women in this world.

She says that some or the other female (woman) artist tries to interpret the status of women in this world. The visual artist is a maker of a picture. She tries to put together these pieces that are disgruntled she does this in a detached manner and tries to reconstruct the picture of the world. The speaker tries to find out solutions to women's complicated or mysterious problems by bringing together her various attitudes towards the male-dominance society of this human world. This suggests that it is very difficult to enjoy freedom of thoughts and feelings in this patriarchal society. She tries to give an attractive shape to the picture by concealing something of little worth and add special features to make the picture more effective and attractive. It is reproduced as a brilliant resource for women to assert their identity in this patriarchal world.

The speaker asks to see the picture of outstanding women musicians are playing on various musical instruments such as a drum, a lute with entire interest and dedication to this art.

After the completion of this picture, she lifts another piece of proper but finds a complex space that is not suitable for the fitting of the parts. She is joined by another artist. It is like a bright covers that of the inevitable progression of women into the future with the passing of present events into the past. They seem to have created puzzle. There are the others who are putting together the pieces of the puzzle and there are some others who are being brought together. They are like the instruments of this social, religious, cultural puzzle. They play with these instruments. In such a state these opposing forces seem to neutralize each other. They seem to work together in such confusing situation.

In this poem she explores life and brings to life the wealth of fascinating (literary works) poems.

In the poem *The Lost Word* the poet presents a theme of women's struggle for freedom. She speaks about finding freedom in life. She calls freedom a block of stone and a bone. She asserts a need for giving a proper shape to them (i.e. freedom) to make there useful. The image of a bone (freedom) is compared with an old coat. The speaker (poet) says that by making use of an artistic skill and imagination one can give shape to such objects to enjoy freedom from social, cultural and religious restrictions. She advises the reader to look a hole like shape of the world to understand it.

The liberation of women is a concept that gathered force in the latter half of the twentieth century; India has a much earlier history and tradition of intellectually emancipated women during the Vedic period. The concept of women's liberation is not new one to an Indian who is familiar with ancient Indian history and tradition. The efforts to achieve woman's emancipation can be seen as the effort of Indian women to win back their past glorious Vedic tradition of equality with men.

In the short poem *CCTV* the speaker says that the footage (a piece of film) showed the woman's place where she reached.

The line "*she entered the shelter, sat down. Then nothing.*"(22)

It has a symbolic meaning. The word shelter stands for a Muslim word 'Purdah' which means a curtain. It refers to the system of secluding women and enforcing high standards of female modesty in South Asian countries like Pakistan. The shelter or 'Purdah' is a significant part of the life experience of many South Asian Women. But this system has limitation. It suggests its limitations between women and male persons outside some defined religious categories. This system sharply limits a woman's mobility outside her home and occupies one of the extreme positions. The *CCTV* is a symbol of modern life. It indicates a possibility of women's liberation from religious, social and cultural slavery. The speaker says that after her entry into a shelter (Purdah or Curtain), she was restricted, but it gave rise to her fighting spirit for her liberation. She goes through this horrific spiritual experience and comes out of it with new understanding or powers. She is again figuratively speaking a salamander which is a spirit of the fire level and represents a rebirth experience. A salamander is a symbol of rebirth. She writes about her revolt against the male-dominance and changeability as an important part in the life of modern women. She writes:

*"The footage showed that this was where she came.
She entered the shelter, sat down. Then nothing.
Under the seat they found a discarded table leg,
A worm, a shoe, an ancient stain and a salamander"*(22)

This poem shows that the poet has travelled a path from emotional injuries of cultural exile and isolation. She tries to celebrate unsettled life as a settled liberal life.

Literature is human experience through imaginative writing; the early phase was marked by autobiographical or even confessional writing which witnessed the relationship of literature to personal experience. In modern era, women are searching their self-identity, self-discovery.

In Imtiaz Dharker's poems in *Leaving Fingerprints* there is a revelation of movement and change from one place to another. There is a description of physical journeys of the speaker through various country-borders. There is also a symbolic description of every woman's journeys of self-discovery.

In the four poems of this collection the poet has presented the issue of the predicament of women in the world. This theme is presented through the predictions and assumptions of the fortune-teller or palm-reader. There is a theme of visible marks left behind by every human being on the earth. It is found in the sequence of poems devoted to Indian palm readers. However, only in poems the fingerprints are comprehensible. In the poem *According to the Palm Reader* the poet Imtiaz Dharker says that

*“This cross is where the past is buried,
You have a strong life line” (117)*

The palm reader says that women should be strong, determined and resistant for deliverance from harm, ruin or loss of their identity. They should be ready to do as they please and not as others want. The part claims that she has a strong source of salvation to come out of crisis without falling prey to existing social, religious and cultural systems in any society. It is suggested in the second stanza of this poem through the images connected to fluid rapid outflow or the pouring out of life from the allotted lines on the palm:

*“That must be the slash through the middle,
I meant came pouring out.” (117)*

This suggests a recurring theme of superstitions and old popular beliefs which displace a systematically arranged religion.

In the poem *What she asks the palm reader* the speaker (poet) asks the fortune-teller or palm-reader about the display of her probable life on her palm. She asks whether it displays the life that she lives or whether it indicates the life she should try to live or whether it reveals a kind of life she lives in her dreams. She sees a dream of a home at a moonlit night. She has lived a dark half-life in such a place. In her dream she walks inside that dirty house. She also sees a passing railway track. When she tries to go back, she cannot find stairs. The doors of that house lead her to more empty holes and a fast passing wall like brick walls that pass a passing train. The ‘wall’ has a symbolic meaning. It is an obstacle in her way to progress and future. Walls are commonly masculine items in dream interpretation. Her dream indicates a masculine influence in her life and also the lives of women. The walls in the poem are dream images. They act as obstacles and sources of her isolation. So she feels isolated and asks the palm reader to ascertain the way of life she prefers.

Conclusion:

Intiaz Dharker is a great poet reflects on some of the salient themes of lyric poetry: the self in identity flux, migration, travel, time, women and men, politics, particularly politics. She is also an accomplished artist, and all her collections are illustrated with her drawings. She deals the myriad themes: women’s struggle for freedom, changeability of life, significance of the image of fingerprints, contrast between abolishment and permanence, survival in life, women’s liberation, women’s journeys of self- discovery, uncertainty in human life, love and protest, journey of time, quest for identity, life and death, Islamic concept of Sufism, humanitarianism and sisterhood, rejection of the concept of rhizomatic thought, roots and intersections, poetry writing and creation culture, writing approach, optimism of women, rebirth or regrowth, change in attitude towards partition, realities of life, her identity as a creative artist and poet, fluidity of fingerprints and admiration of natural wealth, etc. For her

poems are not related to any kind of social, political or religious propaganda but they always transcend and enter into an aesthetic world.

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