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## Unveiling the Self: Voices of Resistance in the Poetry of Ranu Uniyal

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### **Abstract:**

Ranu Uniyal is a prominent figure. Her openness and wide range of themes are admirable. Uniyal is one of the female poets who actively resist and averse to the dominance of patriarchy. She embodies the dissatisfaction and discontent of Kamala Das, the bold and outspoken spirit of Maya Angelou, the lyrical loveliness of Christina Rossetti, and, most importantly, like Whitman, she is a poet of the 'Self'. The poetry of Ranu Uniyal explores a wide range of human emotions, including friendship, philosophy, women's psychology, relationships between men and women, maternal love, anguish, suffering, love for nature, contemporary issues, and exploring identity. The analysis of her poetry reveals a wide range of human emotions related to defiance, male dominance, ideologies, and feminine sensitivity. These themes are not groundbreaking, but how she intertwines these emotions in her poetry is exceptionally distinctive and praiseworthy. The clarity of her thought process can be noticed easily. Uniyal nudges her readers to analyse her poetic talent. The poetry of Ranu Uniyal expands the horizons of Indian English poetry. It is a magnificent manifestation of her imaginative spirit.

**Keywords:** Resistance, Self-identity, Feminine sensibility, Confessional Tone, Literary Independence.

## Introduction:

Indian women's writing today challenges patriarchy and conventional beliefs that are based on gender inequality. In the past, expression of personal feelings and desires were talked about in a way that was based on complete silence and acceptance. However, now expression of self-identity, rejection of ideologies, and the power of resistance have become familiar topics in feminist debate. Indian women poets speak in a way that challenges the prevailing empire of male poets and strives to construct a separate place for themselves. Ranu Uniyal is also one of them.

In this paper, My attempt is to unveil the concept of 'self' presented in her poetry. My focus is centred on her Hindi collection *Saieda Ke Ghar* (2021), and *The Day We Went Strawberry Picking In Scarborough*, and bring out her artistic presentation of the concept of 'self'; the potency of 'resistance' in whatever she writes and talks about in her poetry is profound and straightforward based on the reality of her day to day life. The great American poet Walt Whitman said great literature will be known for its cheerful simplicity. This simplicity and cheerfulness be easily noticed in the poetic collections mentioned above. The poet says "All poems, or any other expression of literature, that do not tally with their writer's actual life and knowledge, are lies" (*The Great Poet's Character*) The emotions, experience, and sentiments which she describes in her poetry are based on her own experiences and are truthful. Her poetic self solicits attention. Poet Ranu Uniyal, proficient in English and Hindi. The poetic collection *Saieda Ke Ghar* has fifty-eight concise Hindi poems. This collection stands out for its exploration of diverse aspects of human relationships and its candid self-revelations. She says "Saeeda k ghar tandur par sikik rotian / mai roz khati piyaz or bhunay alu" (Uniyal 1). Here she craves the carefree days of childhood, when she would visit her friend Saeeda's house and relish roasted aaloo, onion, and rotis cooked in an oven. In this idyllic environment, she and her friend live a simple life filled with smiles and laughter.

Saeeda or mai roz sunte  
babu ki paan wali gali se  
kitne hi badbakht chehron ki hans  
dupatte ko munh mein rakh kar khud ki hans rokna  
kitna mushkil hota us waqt (Uniyal, *Saeeda ke Ghar* 9)

The poet provides the description of her mundane daily routine alongside her companion, which occasionally took place at her residence and occasionally in marketplaces. While crossing the street, the two of them happened to hear the laughter of strangers and how these young girls used to control their laughing with the help of their 'dupatta'. Simply yet superbly, Ranu Uniyal describes the Muslim culture, specifically how young girls were required to wear a 'dupatta' (which was multifunctional but now has disappeared from the shoulders of young girls in modern culture), how they used it to control their laughter:

Mai or Saeeda sabse bekhabar  
 Rachate mehendi or gaate tappe  
 Dhin dhin ki taal par kitta maza aata tha (15 – 17)

The reflection of her childhood is also remarkable for the carefree lifestyle of immature girls who were unaware and far from religious fanaticism and communal violence:

Fir ik roz baazar ka shor gali tak pahuncha  
 or bheed bhari aandhi saeeda ke abba ko  
 chaku se chaak kar gayi  
 saeeda ki ammi roti rahi, cheekhti rahi (19 – 22)

The poet describes in these lines how her friend's father was brutally murdered and left his mother in tears after becoming the prey of insensible beasts. In his book review, Professor Mirza wrote:

An authentic poet always articulates that which society wishes to suppress, calling out the veil and the mask for what they are, and naming the demons and the monsters, within us and without, that hold our rationality and humanity in thrall. In doing so, the poet always exercises her moral responsibility towards society, also thereby fulfilling the sacred duty towards her artistic self and vocation. (Mirza, *The Wire* 2022)

Professor Mirza has rightly remarked, the responsibility of an authentic writer which Uniyal portrayed in her poem, how the enemy of peace and love devastated friendship and humanity. Her sensitive and courageous mind is on full display in the title poem, which serves as the opening poem of her collection. By addressing the atrocities and insidiousness of communal violence in her childhood, she takes on the moral responsibility that comes with her calling.

She writes to assert her presence in literature as a modern poetess. She is well-educated, self-assured, aware of her abilities, influenced, and well status woman. She possesses a profound

understanding of the circumstances, obstacles, and hardships that women usually encounter in her day-to-day lives. Her writing style is simple, incorporating several forms of figurative language that promote inclusivity and challenge traditional male-dominated perspectives. The poems 'Aurat', 'Pati', 'Achchha Lagata Hai', 'Aakhen To Meri Bhi Hain', and 'Thooths' explore the theme of 'Self'.

The poetry of Ranu Uniyal serves as a representation of strong woman, expressing her voice and identity. Her poems embody themes of self-reliance, struggle against gender inequality, and opposition to patriarchy. She portrays a powerful, assertive woman who exudes confidence and is constantly prepared to confront life's challenges. In her poem "Why She Chose To Be Single," the author fervently challenges the conventional expectations of being a traditional wife when she says:

No, not for me that days sprinkled  
With unwashed sheets, pyjamas to be  
Ironed,  
and the dirty floor waiting to be  
scrubbed, (Uniyal 18).

This poem depicts the poet's rejection of the customary expectations placed upon a traditional woman, who is often responsible for preparing tea for her husband and attending to household chores. Uniyal is a career-oriented woman who cannot be compelled by the traditional wedding vows to fulfil household duties at the expense of her own objectives. She firmly believes that she is not a typical woman who would lose her identity and submits to patriarchal conventions. This poem spans seven stanzas, each of which aggressively challenges the conventional picture of docile traditional women. The last stanza, the speaker explicitly expresses her resistance. "No, not for me the singing of as contract, / while the draft of a poem remains unclaimed, without a signature." (*Why She Chose To Be Single* 18). In this statement, the speaker asserts her identity as a poet and emphasizes that her primary responsibility is writing. She cannot dedicate herself to domestic responsibilities due to her commitment to her craft. According to her, women have the capability to engage in all professional domains that are predominantly controlled by men. The American feminist and critic Elaine Showalter stated well:

In contrast to (an) angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experiences, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocriticism begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolute of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of male tradition and focus instead of female culture (Showalter 72).

The author advocates constructing a female-centered framework called gynocriticism to analyse women's literature. This involves developing new models rooted in female perspectives and experiences. Ranu Uniyal's poetry reflects her personal experiences, her poetry is free from this linear absolute of male literary history. In her next poem "In The Company of Women" She says:

I am often asked  
why is that up prefer being  
In the company of women  
not all, But certain women  
I prefer. (Uniyal 5)

The poet acknowledges that she finds pleasure in the companionship of ladies who share similarities with her. These women are incredible. They are self-assured, empowered, and self-reliant. The specific women selected by the poetess in her poetry are courageous in confronting pain and sorrow without expressing disenchantment. The speaker stands with them, she says:

sights and smells  
travel far and with them  
I have seen my own sadness  
...  
A healthy camaraderie  
between us floods and warms  
me inside out (Uniyal 5)

Ranu Uniyal is expressing her camaraderie with those women who possess similar beliefs about self-identity and self-respect. The poem suggests that the speaker is not only one facing challenges in establishing her identity, since there are others in the same situation whom she values. Uniyal openly shares her emotions, and everyone enjoys sharing their views, smiles and

sometimes shed tears together, enhancing their collective consciousness. They have the power to confront patriarchy and question the male gaze. In her hindi poem “Aankhen to Meri bhi Hain” she boldly questions the common attitude of males when she says: “Aankhe to meri bhi hain tumhari tarha / per we taadti nhi hain jism ko, kurte ke ander chipe gosht ko” (Uniyal 53) she says she also has eyes like man but the poetess never looks at a female body with the same hunger that he does. In each and every stanza, she fights against the gaze of males and raises her voice in opposition to those who consider women to be objects of sexual desire. This poem presents the mindset of a courageous, fearless, and self-assured woman who is considering taking a stand against the torments, physical abuse, and suffering that she has experienced. The poetry of Ranu Uniyal truly connects with young readers because of its realistic themes and expressive language. A multitude of young readers have conveyed their enthusiasm for her literary creations, commending her adeptness in encapsulating intricate emotions using concise yet impactful language. Social media has been essential in disseminating her poetry to a younger demographic, enabling her to engage with and motivate an entirely new cohort of poetry lovers.

Ranu Uniyal, an up-and-coming writer, has made a significant impression on readers of all ages, demonstrating the lasting influence of poetry in evoking emotions and stimulating thoughts. Undoubtedly, her work has the capacity to leave a long-lasting impact in literature. Therefore, it is strongly advised that individuals wanting a deep and rewarding reading encounter should delve more into her poetry. An article aptly characterizes Uniyal's poetic talent by stating that it is intricately interwoven with the passage of time. In the article *Identity Exploration and Representation of Motherhood in the Poetry of Ranu Uniyal* the writer says “Ranu Uniyal, through her confessional tone, broadens the border for women before the world. A woman is the epitome of beauty, and this beauty is caged, locked inside the four walls of the domestic universe” (Parvin 54) While it is essential to acknowledge the significance of embracing individuality, it is also essential to acknowledge that the inclusion of diverse voices and representation in literary works can assist in the dismantling of stereotypes and the development of empathy and comprehension among various groups. It is crucial to take into consideration the impact of various kinds of literature and media in creating cultural ideas about gender roles. Although Ranu Uniyal's work may have had an impact on how society views women, it is equally important to evaluate the impact of other influences. Readers can acquire a more profound comprehension of the complexities of gender identity and the problems that women

experience in a variety of countries by delving deeper into the issues that are prevalent in Uniyal's writing. Uniyal's work not only challenges old standards but also sets the path for a future that is more inclusive and equitable. This is accomplished by shedding light on the issues that are concerning.

Ranu Uniyal's poetry embodies resistance and resilience amid challenging circumstances. Her poetry makes for a strong influence, motivating others to resist injustice and persecution. Uniyal effectively conveys the themes of struggle, success, suffering, and hope through her vivid imagery and moving lyrics. Her poetry acts as a guiding light during difficult times, emphasizing that strength may be discovered through resistance and tenacity in the midst of challenges.

Ranu Uniyal's poetry "Like you Mama" showcases power of resistance by rejecting the traditional role of a sacrificial mother who is solely focused on household chores like washing, scouring, and beating clothes. She conveys her dismay and dissatisfaction that her mother had to endure in this barren, alienated, and exploitative environment. The female speaker openly expresses her own decision not to become a mother like 'mama', revealing an honest articulation of the resistance. She has defied the authoritarian societal conventions that shape femininity in women, which dictate that they are supposed to bear and raise children. The poem challenges the suppression of gender and societal ideals dictated by men. She aims to challenge traditional norms in order to establish herself as a representative of feminine essentialism, rather than conforming to the roles of a traditional and affectionate mother like her own. The poem primarily contradicts the notion of selfless motherhood. The poet affirms her personal decision that she does not fit within the frame of any patriarchal notion and she is able to create her own standard. She is reluctant to live her life dedicated to household tasks like her mother did. She says: "I wouldn't want to be like you mama. / washing and scrubbing, beating the clothes till they are stark clean" (Uniyal 5).

Ranu Uniyal's poetry is a compelling tribute to the power and endurance of women, as it confronts and questions conventional ideas about femininity and womanhood. Readers may promote a more inclusive and fair literary environment by actively involving and endorsing powerful voices such as Uniyal's, thereby challenging established social standards. Readers must actively pursue and promote the voices of resistance in literature, since these perspectives provide essential insights and viewpoints that may be disregarded in mainstream narratives. By expanding the range of the poetry we read and actively searching for works by poets like Uniyal



who questions the existing state of affairs, we can encourage a literary environment that is more diverse and inclusive. Moreover, by magnifying these voices, we may strive towards eliminating oppressive systems and establishing a fairer society for everyone.

The poet's work challenges conventional ideas of womanhood and urges readers to contemplate the complex and diverse aspects of identity. She explores the concept of powerful women, delving into the pleasures, challenges, and sacrifices that accompany this position. Through the interweaving of themes centered around self-discovery and resistance, the poet provides a deep understanding of the intricate nature of human existence and how our identities are influenced by our connections and obligations. Ultimately, the poet's examination of her own identity in her poetry serves as a potent reminder of the profound influence of love and the significance of comprehending and accepting all aspects of our own being. The poet emphasizes the significance of embracing the multitude of experiences that accompany everyday existence. Ultimately, the poet's examination of an independent woman in her poems serves as a potent reminder of the abundance and profoundness of genuine life encounters. Ranu Uniyal's poetry is a potent instrument for questioning established social conventions and promoting transformation within Indian society. By means of her language, she motivates readers to contemplate their own convictions and principles, igniting significant dialogues and stimulating proactive behavior. Through the exploration and active involvement with Uniyal's poetry, readers can acquire a more profound comprehension of her artistic skills and the influence her work has on the literary world. By actively participating in this interaction, one can genuinely recognize her importance as a contemporary Indian poet who possesses a distinct artistic vision and objective. Additionally, we can comprehend her position within the framework of present-day Indian literature.

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