

life but in postcolonial world money and power demean them. One can not achieve his freedom from slavery with these traditional virtues.

Although the novel is written in non-fictional prose it is a worthwhile discourse on postcolonial theory in which man's eternal struggle for existence and quest for liberation is expressed in a realistic way. Adiga's White Tiger (Balram Halwai) though poor and lives in capitalist's 'Rooster Coop' he has an eternal desire to escape from it. Munna alias Balram alias Ashok Sharma thinks that, "There's no end to things in India" (320). He sacrifices his virtues, and escapes from the 'Rooster Coop' for new possibilities in life. Balram's escape deals with the sensitive effects of the history of colonisation. Balram's slitting of his master's throat is the beginning of the decolonising process of mind of the poor. He is happy with India's great leaders like Gandhi who made India free from colonial chains but unhappy with his successors today who promote exploitation through an internal colonisation. In self-willed amnesia for the past and 'triumphant utopianism' for the future Balram transcends the boundary of 'contact zone' between him and his master and escapes in a psychological recovery and "conscious unified revolutionary self" (Parry 1987:30). Avoiding police and hangman's noose Balram dreams to become an entrepreneur, marry, have children, and groom his future. He translates his future plans in his letter to Jiabao:

After three or four years in real estate, I think I might sell everything, take the money, and start a school - an English language school - for poor children in Bangalore. A school where you won't be allowed to corrupt anyone's head with prayers and stories about God or Gandhi - nothing but the facts of life for these kids. A school full of White Tigers, unleashed on Bangalore! We'd have this city at our knees ... I could become the Boss of Bangalore (319-320).

The revolt of his incorruptible self and murder of his master is an attempt to dismantle the science of imperialism in postcolonial discourses. This gives a clarion call to India's politicians, policy makers, sociologists and reformers for the ending of a jungle law and establishing a civil society for the promotion of democratic socialism.

Adiga cautions that the capitalist imperialism in India will frustrate the poor and these proletarian yahoos can liberate themselves from the capitalist houghnms for their rights. Inequality never provides liberty but liberty is necessary for an egalitarian society. He criticizes the politicians and policy makers of India who think in Orwellian sense, "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others". Adiga's excoriating portrayal of postcolonial India presents some aspects of realism in Orwell's *Animal Farm* not in fabular way but in Fabian way. If the rich favour capitalism in imperialistic way and the poor in sheer animalism believe - "Remove man (the capitalist master) from the scene, and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever" (Orwell 11) then instability will make India a faltering nation.

Postcolonialism had its emotional beginning before India's independence, historical beginning after independence and theoretical beginning in late 1970's. All the postcolonial Booker winning Indian novelists have expressed this 'underclass anger' in their novels. While Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) presents the 'growth of pangs' with India's birth as a new nation with her social and political upheavals; Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) unveils India's regressive 'caste chains'; Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) presents the world of exploiter and the exploited in a turbulent socio-political movements; Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* exposes real India with her rich and poor divide. Adiga is neither cynical nor pessimistic in his vision. In his fictional presentation he not only highlights India's glory but also castigates her vices which foster caste and class system. The novel as an "emancipatory narrative" (Parry 2004:7) deconstructs India in her post-nation theory. Lack of a strong plot and the narrative style in the manner of a political essay do not obstruct its artistic beauty. Reading the text of the novel is like an apolitical re-reading of postcolonial theory in protagonist's existential reality.

Works Cited :

- Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008. (All textual references are from this edition).
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* London: Zed Books, 1986.
- Deshpande, Shashi. "Debating Spaces". *The Hindu Literary Review*. 132:5 February 1, 2009.
- Fanon, Frantz. "Concerning Violence". *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). (Trans) Constance Farrington. London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1965.
- Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Hertfordshire: Harvester Press, 1980.
- Nair, Vijay. *The Hindu Literary Review*. 132:1, January 4, 2009.
- Orwell, George. *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (1945). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, (rpt) 1981.
- Overdorf, Jason. "The Alleged Booker Prize". *Outlook*: 48:43 October 27, 2008.
- Parry, Benita. "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse". *Oxford Literary Review* 9: 1-2. 1987: 27-58.
- _____. *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Said, E. "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors". *Critical Inquiry*. 15:2, 1989.
- Saxena, Shobhan. "Fact not Fiction". *Sunday Times of India*. October 19, 2008.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Post-colonial Critic: Interview, Strategies, Dialogues*. Ed. Sarah Harasym. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Suri, Sanjay. *Outlook* 48:43, October 27, 2008.
- Thiong'O, Nguigi wa. *Decolonizing the Mind*. London: James Currey, 1986.
- White, J., ed. *Recasting the world: Writing After Colonialism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, Maryland; 1993.



Sensitive and Sentimental yet Profound and Bold: Feminine Voices of Indian English Poetry

- G.A. Ghanshyam

Abstract

In a patriarchal society however, a woman is hardly heard; often her silence is taken for granted as her inability to speak. The silence is more of an imposition of constraints on her free expression; the subaltern position of muteness which was referred to by Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak as the 'subaltern cannot speak'. Like wise her voice is also not her own; either its subdued or silenced or given an expression but under male censure. In Indian English literature, feminine voices are few and far between, more so in the genre of Poetry. Indian English Poetry written by women crossed the threshold of modernity to emerge as a bold expression of the personal and psychological dilemmas and experiences of being a woman. The present paper critically analyses Indian English Women's Poetry starting from the renderings of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu to the modern poetess.

Keywords: Feminism, Exploitation, Sensibility, Imagery, Womanhood, Rebel, Confession, Disillusionment, Alienation,

*I write
Because I cannot bite
It's the way
The Weak ones fight.*

-Mamta Kalia

Life starts from a woman yet society refuses her right to her own life, even to her own voice. The essence of being a woman is its ability to give life; it is the life force that sustains and continues life, and so it is said in the 'Poem of the Ute Indians':

I am the woman who holds up the sky.
The rainbow runs through my eyes.
The sun makes a path to my womb.
My thoughts are in the shape of clouds.
But my words are yet to come.

Femininity defines what essentially the society ordains of being a woman; to be feminine. 'Feminine' is a word that relates to women or girls and is characterized by a possession of qualities generally attributed to a woman; graceful, gentle, sensitive, sentimental and meek. So Feminism is a concept that addresses the issues related to women and girls. A phenomenon which has its roots in the West, made its presence felt in the

Indian soil during the freedom struggle and more precisely in the post-independence era. Literature has played its crucial part in nativizing the concept in the tradition bound society of India. Educated women paved the way for their counterparts to come forward in every field of life with a vigour and confidence that liberated them from the shackles of patriarchal restrictions and exploitation. They asserted their identity in their own words, on their own terms. Literature proved to be the window that enabled these women to voice their beliefs, experiences, pain, anguish, desires and wants in a free, unrestrained and loud voice.

Indian English Poetry is a genre that is endowed with a galaxy of poetic talents who have enriched it with their renderings. Beginning with the exceptionally talented Toru Dutt and her compositions written in the Victorian style, Indian English Women's poetry has come a long way to its present status of a modern genre that asserts the identity of a woman through her verse. What distinguishes Indian English Women's Poetry as a genre of its own is its unmistakable femininity; sensitive and sentimental yet profound and bold. They are an assertion of the poet's feminine identity in an essentially patriarchal society. The very face of Indian English Women's Poetry changed with the advent of Kamala Das, a poet whose expressions shocked and overwhelmed the entire Indian society with her boldness and candid confessions. Her emergence on the literary scene transformed the genre from its traditional and conventional approach to a modern one. To address Das as the first true feminist poet of India would not be a wrong assertion for it is in her that we find the fiery rebellious voice of a woman determined to make herself heard in a male dominated society. Her's is an indomitable spirit that speaks out vociferously against such domination and asserts her identity. Characterized by a strong desire to free herself from the restraints imposed by society Das asserts in '*An Introduction*' her individual identity with the personal pronoun 'I':

... I wore a shirt and my
 Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
 My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl,
 Be wife, they said.

Das refused to bow down before the dictates of society and rebelled against them but underneath her angry outburst was a woman's heart in pain from the exploitation and apathy she had to face in the hands of the men in her life. She articulates the loss and anguish of a woman yearning for love and security that is not given to her by her husband.

Doll for his parlour, a walkie talkie one to
 Warm his bed at night ...
 ... he folded
 Me each night in his arms and told me of greater
 Pleasure that had come his way, rich harvest of
 Lust, gleaned from other fields, not mine, the embers died
 Within me then. ('*of Calcutta*')

Kamala Das' feminine sensibility finds its finest and fullest expression in her love poems. Women's writings are peculiarly distinguished by a strong desire for love and emotional fulfillment that is more often denied to them by men as Das expresses in '*Suicide*'.

Ah, why does love come to me like pain
Again and again and again?

... ..
If love is not to be had,
I want to be dead, just dead.

In her search for freedom from the bonds imposed upon women by society, she explores the matriarchal status of women that once existed in society. She delves into Krishna Radha stories of ideal love to search for a meaning in human relationship. Das's yearning finds an expression in the traditional myth of the greatest lover Krishna, echoing the strains of her predecessor's poetry.

Vrindavan lives on in every woman's mind
And the flute, luring her
From home and her husband. ('*Composition*')

Simone de Beauvoir says that, "The world is too strong and if a woman persists in her opposition, it breaks her." (de Beauvoir 387). However endowed with the strength of the creative impulse women have shielded themselves from such breakage through self expression. The pen is mightier than the sword and in the hands of a woman it is one of the most powerful weapons, full of great potentiality. And Kamala Das has wielded it to its fullest use. She discovers and reveals male hegemony imbedded within the feminine consciousness. Delineating her strong and frank feminist voice through sex imagery she presents a feminist movement through her poetry. Rebelling against conventions and society she reaches out to every woman, awakening them to a sense of self, "Woman , is this happiness, this lying buried /Beneath a man? It's time again to come alive / The world extends a lot beyond his six-foot frame."

The trend started by Kamala Das was followed by the subsequent breed of women poets like Monika Verma, Mamta Kalia, Lakshmi Kannan, Gauri Deshpande, Anna Sujata Modayil, Rita Malthotra, Meena Alexander, Eunice de Souza and so on. Some of the important themes that are largely universal and integral to women's writing are an assertion of self identity, rebellion, love, longing, protest, nostalgia, identification with relations like motherhood and the use of imagery.

Imagery:

It is not that women's poetry solely concentrated on women oriented themes; in fact women's poetry is replete with an appreciation of life and nature, contemporary social, cultural as well as political issues. Abundance of imagery and extensive use of symbolism marks women's poetry as a medium that enable the women to assert their otherwise muted voice. The female voice so much intent in its involvement with the

inner workings of the heart and mind of a woman often employs the use of surrealistic imagery. Imagery in women's poetry range from an extensive use of nature pictures to that of immediate environment of a modern and city life. Woman forms the basis of Lakshmi Kannan's poetry and she writes about womanhood depicting a woman's life with the metaphor of a river in her collection of poems *Unquiet Waters*. A woman's submissiveness is taken for her weakness but there is an inherent strength that remains hidden from view like a river which though calm hides an inherent strength that can transform into a ravaging flood of destruction.

Images of nature abound in the poems of Monika Verma; mountains, trees, rivers, dusk, dawn, etc. Her imagery touches a surrealistic note in lines like "laughter in a silver thread breeze". Surrealistic imagery is employed in lines like "mountains on your forehead/ and pine trees on your fingertips" by Melanie Silgado or Suma Josson's "I tied the sun to the wooden wheelbarrow" and "the earth came to me in the rain", while Sunita Jain presents striking picture images when she says "I have been tied to an elephant's foot" or "lodged like a sorrow/ in the Helen of my heart." Meena Alexander's imagery is wide ranging and based upon her experience as an expatriate in an alien city with the associated feeling of nostalgia to "edge of San Andreas Fault" and "Moor Market".

Womanhood:

Woman's identity is closely entwined with her life experiences and relations. The experience of motherhood is an integral part of a woman's identity that often finds representation in the poetry written by women. The desire of son is an important factor in a woman's life. Monika Verma displays her love as a mother in 'You and I', "Once all of you was mine,/ As mine was yours, for you and I were one." Meena Alexander depicts the filial relation of a mother to her child in '*Young Snail*', "A body cupping a body/does not make two/.../ two lives in one body/might be closer to it." The experience of being a woman is one of great forbearance and patience. Even in the midst of relations a woman is often alone. Her destiny is an endless wait for acceptance, appreciation and approval; for love and freedom. Anna Sujata Modayil depicts the unending and unbearable experience of waiting that every woman has to endure in her poem '*Crucifixions*':

Of our common womanhood
And the secret knowledge of suffering
Something shared, not spoken of.

In '*Anonymous*' Mamta Kalia voices not only her own frustration but those of women in general and their loss of identity in a web of responsibilities and relations when she says, "I no longer feel Mamata Kalia/ I'm Kalia/Or Vimla/ Or Kanta or Shanta/ I cook, I wash, /I bear, I rear /I nag, / I sulk, I sag". Lakshmi Kannan uses language remarkably to express the restraints imposed on women; the usual codes that describes womanhood in a patriarchal society:

No, no, don't run,
 Don't take long strides, Don't raise your voice,
 Be a everyman, be moderate in everything
 Be a model of mediocrity.

The plight of a woman born in a patriarchal society is depicted in a similar light by Rita Malhotra in '*Cookie Woman*' "A function of man's desire /... / Shaped, chiseled,/ To suit her master,/ Is the manicured cookie/ Relished bite by bite until/ Dreams defeated,/ She is a shapeless mass once more." Women's poetry is a vehicle of self expression that enables the women to give a vent to their suppressed feelings, desires and yearnings. It is personal as well as universal rendering the emotions and experiences of not only the poet but those of the women general. In fact an awareness of the plight of other women in society and their exploitation is one of its distinctive feature. '*A Lunch on the train*' reflects Gauri Deshpande's views on the marriage of girls at a young and immature age and the resultant difficulties and problems they have to face.

The woman in front of me, a mere girl,
 Too young to have been a mother of three
 Is struggling vainly to feed one, control
 The other, and the third is abandoned
 From a weary care.

Confessional & Rebellious Tone:

What distinguishes women's poetry is its confessional mode and subjectivity. The poetry is marked by a personal touch and emotional expression that imparts an authenticity and poignancy to it. Memories form an important part of women's writings. Rachna Joshi recalls memories of her grandmother when she says, "You fed me milk / rubbed me in butter / left me some impalpable strength". Similar play of nostalgia can be found in Meena Alexander's '*City Street*' wherein she remembers, "burnt dosa on a griddle / idlis wasting in steam". Monika Verma explicitly depicts the role that memories play in her art in the lines, "But I have grown wise, and will now delve, / Into memories of long ago." Mamta Kalia's poetic collection *Tribute to Papa and Other Poems* brings forth the contrast between her father's idealism and her fascination for modern life. In poems like '*Tribute to Papa*', she pays a tribute to her father in rather mocking terms, "Who wants to be an angel like you? /Who wants it? / You are an unsuccessful man. /Couldn't wangle a cosy place in the world. / You have always lived a life of limited dreams." Her father's ideals were the reason for his downfall and her disappointment with him as a daughter. On a similar and blunt note Melanie Silgado relates to her father's memory in '*For Father on the Shelf*', "Father, you will be proud to know/ you left something behind./ The year you died/ I inherited a mind." Probing into the inner recesses of a woman's psyche, the poet voices their emotional experiences and emotional upheavals that they have to endure in their life. A woman has to bear everything in

silence and still smile. Freedom is a distant dream which finds an expression in a mood of rebellion against all kinds of restrictions and decorum expected of a woman. In '*Compulsion*' Mamta Kalia registers her rebellion in the words, "I want to pick my nose /in a public place /I want to sit in my office chair /with my feet up /I want to slap the boy /who makes love in a café / ... / I want to throw away /all my cosmetics /I want to reveal /my real age." The device of satire is often used by the women poets to reveal the hollowness and hypocrisy of society that oppresses and dominates its women. In one of her poems '*Catholic Mother*' from the collection *Fix*, Eunice De Souza depicts the plight of a woman having to bear seven children in seven years and the shallow pride of the egoistical father. In '*Miss Louise*', De Souza again mocks and reveals the hypocrisy of faith and the clergy disturbed by the beauty of Miss Louise. "My girl, I can't even / Go to church you know /I unsettle the priests /So completely ...". A strong vein of rebellion and cynicism is expressed in Charmayne D' Souza's poem that reveals her view of love and relationship, "One day / God will ask for this sweaty body / of mine, / but, like all the rest, / He will have to stand in line." In Menka Shivdasani's poem the woman's voice strikes out in revolt "What the hell am I doing kicked around / just because I have a leather hide?" ('*The Game You Play*')

To be a rebel and break free one has to strike out at all conventions and traditions and so unlike the traditional imagery of rain as a harbinger of new life and happiness, it is portrayed as a reminder of a sense of loss by Gauri Deshpande in her poem '*In Absentia*'. There are times when feminine camaraderie is more valued than a man and so Deshpande asserts:

Sometimes you want to talk
About love and despair
And the forgetfulness of children
A man is no use whatever then. (?)

Rebellious and confident, Rita Malhotra asserts her self even in the face of adversities and dares to dream, "Yet I dream dream." Refusing to play a fiddle to men and their wishes she says:

Woman today
Is not a mere mirror
That magnifies the image of her man.

Love & Disillusionment:

Women's poetry is characterized by the poet's yearning for true love and companionship. Sensitive and sentimental, women equate love with emotional attachment and feelings than mere fulfillment of physical impulses. In life however their desire for true love is seldom realized resulting in betrayal, loss, frustration and alienation. Women's poetry trails the emotional journey of these women from their dependency to a profound and bold assertion of independence. Love being a major theme finds a place in a Woman's poetic repertoire but the way a poet deals

with the theme is entirely her own. Some are candid and frank in their expression of it while some shun all kinds of exhibitionism and display. Monika Verma is a poet who stands apart from her contemporaries in her restraint of expression and control. She displays the picture of a woman yearning for love in '*The Question*', "Give me love." She celebrates the feeling of love equating it with life, "the flavor of love is living." ('*The Essence of Living*'). Tara Patel depicts love as an "alien magic" yearning for it "just once" but even in her need for a man's touch, "Touch me, touch, touch me somewhere" she is also aware of its inability to uplift her soul "Can a man take you by the roots/ of your anguish/ and set you free?" thereby revealing her disillusionment with it.

Mamta Kalia's sensibility as a woman finds expression in poems wherein she depicts her disappointment with her life and love in poems like '*Love Made a Housewife Out of Me*'. The same sense of yearning, disappointment and pain is represented by Gauri Deshpande in '*Integration*', "if only there was someone to fall in love." And in '*The Guest*', "You are gone now / The perfect mouth that kissed my words no / Longer by, / ... I lie empty barren and bereft." Suniti Namjoshi gives a very practical view of love in '*Weed*' referring to the emotion as a weed that has grown of its own and "how on several occasions we willed it to die/ and believing it dead, we let it grow." Sunita Jain rejoices romantic love in the fluttering of the heart in '*Is It?*', awaiting its discovery in another poem in the lines "Till I find myself/ or till you find me" while also representing its darker aspect in '*The Prey*' and the accompanying disappointment in '*What Hurts Now*', "what hurts now/ is not that it ended/ but that in the aftermath, it was easy/ to learn without you/ to live."

Alienation:

Apart from patience a woman needs indomitable strength and courage to face life alone. For her there is again the unending wait for love, emotional fulfillment and security that always eludes her in life. Anna Sujata Modayil's poem '*Women's Loneliness*' mirrors this feminine longing which ends only in despair and frustration, for fantasy seldom culminates into reality for a woman.

Woman's loneliness is a special thing incommunicable

She longs for perfection

But finds pain.

True love eludes her

Like dreams lost in the night.

At the special, still point of her being,

She weeps for what can never be

But no one knows about this

She bears children,

She cooks and cleans,

And her body grows old.

The man she loved

Search for younger lovers

But beneath the every day,
 Below the surface
 Lies a woman's loneliness.

The sense of being alone pervades the poetry of all women poets. Their disillusionment in love leads to a greater fear of loneliness even when with a partner. Sunita Jain very aptly voices this fear in a love devoid of emotional attachment, "the insatiable searing/ of our last love/ will it outlive/ this despair?/ Hold me love, hold me near." The loneliness that a woman suffers is expressed ironically in the poem 'My Luxury' by S. Radhamani, "How often loneliness has served me /Soothing as soothsayer. /More often than not, my aloneness /Has assured me ...", while Tara Patel sketches the depths of loneliness very poignantly in lines that reveal the frustration of the poet trying to speak out through confessions, "In the winter cold I fold myself up in supplication/ to hear myself more clearly. / listening to my own confessions ...".

Assertion of Self:

An assertion of a woman's voice, Indian English Women's Poetry centered mainly on the theme of a woman's identity represented through the personal pronoun 'I' and a general concern for their sex amidst a society which was largely male dominant and held a feeling of apathy for the women. When an individual is denied of self expression, he/she often takes the help of alternative mediums to give vent to their feelings. Writing is one such crucial medium, an outlet that provides the women to speak out their minds. And so Monika Verma in her poem, '*Recherche*' says, "This is the only way to write, /not to care a damn what anyone says." In her opening poem '*I am Not Your Woman*' from the collection *I am not Your Woman and Other Poems*, Rita Malhotra alludes to her purpose when she says, "Today I seek a route /To the open sea.", which is a voyage of self-discovery and roots. Despite the bounds of tradition marked by the symbol of 'Bindi' that symbolizes the identity of a woman in India, Malhotra empowers the traditional image of a woman in her poem of the same name:

I empower
 I endow her with sense of space
 As I pave the vibrant way
 She remains the soul
 Of this day.

Imtiaz Dharkar asserts her identity in the realization "There are many of me." Assertion of self is rendered in a strong female voice in the expression of one's desire as in Vimla Rao's, "I want I want I want / Life and beauty and love" or in the assertion of identity substantiated with the help of memory as in '*Transition*' by Rachna Joshi, "I see myself only as a woman, when I think back ..." Even the language that women have chosen to express themselves in, is an assertion of their self as Kamala Das had said at the initial stages of the genre's journey, "The language I speak / Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness / All mine, mine