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## Introduction towards The Theory of Feminism

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Feminist theory strives to assess women's lives, their environment and explore cultural space of understanding the existence of being a woman. Feminist movements have prominently worked to bring major historical societal changes for women's rights, questioned and analysed women's social roles and their everyday experiences and worked to develop theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues concerning gender.

Feminism is a social and political movement to champion the cause of women's equality whereas feminist criticism refers to literature studies. The feminist studies have emerged on the literary scene because for long the western culture treated women as subordinate to their male counterparts and the literary studies also reflected this.

Feminist literary studies primarily responded to the way women is presented in literature. It works on two premises, one 'woman, presented by male writers from the male perspective, and two, 'woman' presented by female writers from feminine perspective. Numerous feminist movements and ideologies have developed over the years and represent different viewpoints and aims. Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. Feminist theory aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. Feminist

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theory explores discrimination, oppression, patriarchy, stereotyping, and sexual objectification and focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests.

Elaine Showalter describes the development of feminist theory as having three phases. The first she calls "feminist critique", in which the feminist reader examines the ideologies behind literary phenomena. The second, in which the "woman is producer of textual meaning", Showalter calls "gynocriticism". The last phase she calls "gender theory", in which the "ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex/gender system are explored".

In 1970s French feminists, developed the concept of female or feminine writing' (*écriture féminine*). Helene Cixous argues that writing and philosophy are phallogocentric and along with other French feminists such as Luce Irigaray emphasize "writing from the body" as a subversive exercise. The work of Julia Kristeva, a feminist psychoanalyst and philosopher, and Bracha Ettinger, artist and psychoanalyst, has influenced feminist theory in general and feminist literary criticism in particular. However, as the scholar Elizabeth Wright points out, "none of these French feminists align themselves with the feminist movement as it appeared in the Anglophone world". More recent feminist theory, such as that of Lisa Lucile Owens, has concentrated on characterizing feminism as a universal movement.

Feminist writers countered the 'images of women' as portrayed by men both in classical literature and modern literature. They are of the opinion that women characters portrayed by men lack the genuine feminist expression and men writers lack women's experience and are incapable of understanding women's psyche and sensibility.

Critics, being generally male, had not generally concerned themselves with gender issues. Most of the world's great literature had been written by men. Sappho, Austen, the Brontës and Emily Dickinson apart, it was difficult to think women really had it in them to write at the highest level. The response and expression of a women

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from the women had greatly contributed towards raising the issue emphatically.

Virginia Woolf was herself a refutation of that thesis. In her essay *Professions for Women*, Woolf complained that the writing career of a woman gets hindered by her social obligations. Their lives gave them a different perspective, but women were not fundamentally different from men in their psychological needs and outlooks. Women had been made to feel that they were inferior by nature. Some men might be sympathetic to women's issues, but only women themselves knew what they felt and wanted.

The gathering feminist movement very much disagreed, and argued that women's writing expressed a distinctive female consciousness, which was more substantial and genuine than coming from the male writers. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* documented the ways "Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth." (1)

The women as writers establish a female literary tradition. Feminist literary studies have stressed upon specific female themes, genres, styles and feminine tradition. This has largely added to the literary studies.

The American Feminist critic Elaine Showalter writes in her essay 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' (1979) 'Woman as the producer of textual meanings, with the history, genres and structures of literatures by woman. Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity – Linguistics and the problems of female language.' (3)

Modern Western feminist history is split into three time periods, or "waves", each with slightly different aims based on prior progress. First-wave feminism of the 19th and early 20th centuries focused on overturning legal inequalities, particularly women's suffrage. Second-wave feminism (1960s–1980s) broadened debate to include cultural inequalities, gender norms, and the role of women in society. Third-wave feminism (1990s–2000s) refers to diverse strains of feminist activity, seen as both a continuation of the second wave

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and a response to its perceived failures. These termed waves construct a sort of form to the history of Feminism.

Empowered by The Feminine Mystique, new feminist activists of the 1970s addressed more political and sexual issues in their writing, including Gloria Steinem's *Ms.* magazine and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*. Millett's bleak survey of male writers, their attitudes and biases, to demonstrate that sex is politics, and politics is power imbalance in relationships. Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* described a revolution based in Marxism, referenced as the "sex war". Considering the debates over patriarchy, she claimed that male domination dated to "back beyond recorded history to the animal kingdom itself".

Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, Sheila Rowbotham's *Women's Liberation and the New Politics*, and Juliet Mitchell's *Woman's Estate* represent the English perspective. Mitchell argued that the movement should be seen as an international phenomenon with different manifestations based on local culture. This entire movement had the focus on consciousness-raising and creating awareness towards women issues. Kathie Sarachild of *Redstockings* described its function as such that women would "find what they thought was an individual dilemma is social predicament". Literature expressed by women writers reflect quite effectively their status, their roles and their expectations.

The question of gender is central in the theoretical debates. Raman Selden writes, "gender criticism will never be able to resort to a universally accepted body of theory." Thus the debate and contention for feminism prevails.

Feminism is a social movement that purposes the equal rights and opportunities for women in society. It is a movement, which established by a group of women, whom we may call the 'feminists' raised the issues relating to woman's subversive and marginalised status in society. Feminism is not only the movement, which run by women for women but it is a kind of Human liberation movement, which encourages society to consider women as human beings and

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individuals. Feminism encourages to think about them, their problems, dreams and aspirations.

The word 'Feminism' seems to refer to an intense awareness of identity as a woman and interest in feminine problems. The subjugation of woman is a central fact of history and it is the main cause of all psychological disorders in society. According to Janet Richards,

"The essence of Feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism."(4)

The differences between men and women have been interpreted in various stages of childhood, young girl, married woman, mother and the woman in love in the *Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir.

In her 'Introduction' she asks 'What is woman' "Tota Mulier in utero" says one 'Woman is a womb – She is a womb an ovary: She is a 'female' the word is sufficient to define her. In the mouth of a man the epithet – female has the sound of an insult, yet he is not ashamed of his animal nature, on the contrary he is proud if someone says of him, 'He is male'. The term 'female' is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman's animality but because it imprisons her in her sex. ( Beauvoir 35).

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman ... Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an other." (Beauvoir 295)

According to Simone de Beauvoir: A woman's personality within her home gives her no autonomy, it is not directly useful to society, it does not open out in the future and it produces nothing. This dissatisfaction results in a sense of nothingness

Freidan identified the real problem of feminine entrapment, the desire for something more than the domestic ideal that was identified with true femininity.

To face the problem is not to solve it. But once a woman faces it. ...she begins to find her own answers'. So when she starts

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thinking about her status. What is her real position in society? Besides being someone's daughter, wife and mother she is something more .she has her own individual personality, her liking disliking. She has to search her identity. (Madsen44)

Feminism stands for woman's struggle against their continuing circumscribed existence at work, in society and in the culture of the country .Women are set to fight for emancipation and liberation from all forms of oppression by the state, by society and by men. A women's identity is defined by man's world and it revolves around providing him all comforts. It is an irony .She does not own her own life. There are set rules or norms which dictate her life.

Betty Freidan's, *The Feminine Mystique*, talks about American women's lives in the post war years. Freidan comments," it is a cliché of our own time that women spent half a century fighting for 'rights' and the next half wondering whether they wanted them after all. The situation that Freidan describes is where the 'women problem' has not been solved, has not gone away, but what has disappeared is a language of oppression .This lack is what Freidan termed the 'feminine mystique or, in her opening chapter, the problem has no name.'

"The problem lay buried unspoken for many years in the minds of American women---- she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question-Is this all" .(Madsen44)

Recent form of feminism that came to existence after 1960s has become a theoretical project, which aims at understanding the power structures in the society, patriarchy, traditions, social practices and social institutions, which subordinates the position of women. The strong wave in the 1960s and 1970s helped to theories a woman's discourse. In 1980s, 'Feminism' concentrated on transforming the individual fields and in 1990s began a major role in directing academic focus on the concern of the so-called 'otherness', differences and questions of marginality. Margaret Homans has rightly pointed out that the concept of feminism raises fundamental queries about reading, writing and the teaching of literature. ( It operates as an interdisciplinary tool for social and cultural analysis and as a

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political practice. Feminist theory aims to transform the social structures, and to bring equality and dignified identity for women. Feminism is seen as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist aggression. The need to raise a cry for this cause has long been felt. Woman did not write in the beginning as it now, the obvious reason as Virginia Woolf puts it,

“A woman must have money and room of her own if she is to write fiction.’

Money symbolizes power and freedom and a room of her own is to have contemplative thinking Very often women had enjoyed these things in the past so to develop their imaginative capabilities and personal freedom. Eisenstein interprets the term feminist or feminism as,

“In my understanding of the term ‘feminist’ then I see an element of visionary futurist thoughts. This encompasses a concept of social transformation that as part of the eventual liberation of women with change all human relationships for the better. Although, centrally about women, their experience and condition. Feminism is also fundamentally about men and about social change.”(3)

From a long time, women have been considered as second-class citizens. The feminist literary theory is developed since the beginning of the contemporary women’s movement with Simon de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Betty Freidan. In ‘The Second Sex’ (1948) Beauvoir wrote, ‘One is not born, but becomes a woman.’ Beauvoir asked what woman is and how she is constructed differently from men. Freidan analysed seductive images of women in American magazines. Millet wrote that the most fundamental concept of power in our society is male dominance. Elaine Showalter identifies four models of differences between man and woman. The first is biological, second is linguistic, third is psychological and the fourth is cultural. In biological approach, we find many texts having explanation of woman’s body. It means that if someone mirrors the body, he reduced it to a woman’s body. Women usually have been featured as ‘desired’ rather than ‘desiring.’ On the linguistic, psychological and cultural ground, women were considered subordinate one. Women

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were not allowed to write and speak publicly because they were considered always inferior in the society. In all the centuries up to the 20<sup>th</sup> men wrote more than women and so it became impossible for women to reach to the goal of an authorship. Men were allowed to evaluate the particular work; when women were not. It created barriers in women's development. Their work always ignored on the grounds that, it was trivial, unimportant and uninteresting.

Many aspects of human life changed from fifth to the 20<sup>th</sup> century but one feature of considering women as second-class citizens never changed in the whole literature. The attitude towards women was very bad in the past. They treated merely as a toy, which used only for sexual pleasure. In Europe, women had been considered the cause of all diseases and calamities. Therefore, women were called witches and were burnt alive. The kind of annoyance of women compelled many feminists to re-define feminism. Through the study of literature, we can realise it very well.

Women in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries were challenged with expressing themselves in a patriarchal system that generally refused to grant merit to women's views. Cultural and political events during these centuries increased attention to women's issues such as education reform, and by the end of the eighteenth century, women were increasingly able to speak out against injustices. Though modern feminism was nonexistent, many women expressed themselves and exposed the conditions that they faced, albeit often indirectly, using a variety of subversive and creative methods.

The social structure of sixteenth century Europe allowed women limited opportunities for involvement; they served largely as managers of their households. Women were expected to focus on practical domestic pursuits and activities that encouraged the betterment of their families, and more particularly, their husbands. In most cases education for women was not advocated—it was thought to be detrimental to the traditional female virtues of innocence and morality. Women who spoke out against the patriarchal system of gender roles, or any injustice, ran the risk of being exiled from their



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communities, or worse; vocal unmarried women in particular were the targets of witch-hunts Elizabeth I ascended to the throne in 1558, a woman who contradicted many of the gender roles of the age. She was well educated, having studied a variety of subjects including mathematics, foreign language, politics, and history. Elizabeth was an outspoken but widely respected leader, known for her oratory skills as well as her patronage of the arts. Despite the advent of the age of print, the literacy rate during this period remained low, though the Bible became more readily available to the lower classes. Religious study, though restricted to "personal introspection," was considered an acceptable pursuit for women, and provided them with another context within which they could communicate their individual ideas and sentiments. In addition to religious material, women of this period often expressed themselves through the ostensibly private forms of letters and autobiographies.

The seventeenth century was not an era of drastic changes in the status or conditions of women. Women continued to play a significant, though not acknowledged, role in economic and political structures through their primarily domestic activities. They often acted as counselors in the home, "tempering" their husbands' words and actions. Though not directly involved in politics, women's roles within the family and local community allowed them to influence the political system. Women were discouraged from directly expressing political views counter to their husbands' or to broadly condemn established systems; nevertheless, many women were able to make public their private views through the veil of personal, religious writings. Again, women who challenged societal norms and prejudices risked their lives—Mary Dyer was hanged for repeatedly challenging the Massachusetts law that banished Quakers from the colony. Though their influence was often denigrated, women participated in various community activities. For example, women were full members of English guilds; guild records include references to "brethren and sistern" and "freemen and free women." During the seventeenth century, women's writings continued to focus on largely religious concerns, but increasingly, women found a creative and intellectual

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outlet in private journal- and letter-writing. Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, published in 1682, is a famous narrative written ostensibly for personal use that was made public and became a popular success.

The eighteenth century brought many changes in society. The increasing power of the middle class and an expansion in consumerism increased and with this change, women's roles began to evolve. The economic changes brought by the new middle class provided women with the opportunity to be more directly involved in commerce. Lower-to middle-class women often assisted their husbands in work outside the home. It was still thought unseemly for a lady to be knowledgeable of business so, though some class distinctions were blurring, the upper class was able to distinguish themselves from the rest of society. The rise in consumerism allowed more changes in the life of woman and some women established a literary niche writing etiquette guides. With mounting literacy rates among the lower classes there was an increase in publishing, including the rise of the periodical. Men and women of all classes found new means to express ideas in the wider publishing community. Though women's writing during this period focussed largely on home, family and domesticity, they found a market for publication. The act of professional writing, however, was still considered "vulgar" among the aristocracy. Significant colonial expansion during this period provided would-be writers with unique subject matter—letters written by women abroad discussed foreign issues and culture, and offered a detailed view of far-off lands. These letters were often circulated among members of an extended family, as well as in the larger community. In defiance of social strictures, women such as Mary Wollstonecraft began to speak out publicly on women's rights, including education and marriage laws. Though women had better access to education, the goal of women's education was to attain an ideal "womanhood"—a "proper education" was viewed as one that supported domestic and social activities but disregarded more academic pursuits. Women such as Wollstonecraft advocated access to education for women that was equal to that of their male

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counterparts. Marriage laws, which overwhelmingly favoured men, also spurred public debate, though little was accomplished to reform laws during this period.

Throughout the world, women took action to advance their political and social rights. Catherine the Great of Russia devised a coup d'etat to take the throne in 1762, an aggressive act to prevent her son's disinheritance. Catherine continued to rule in an unconventional, independent manner, withdrawing from the men who made her ascension possible and remaining unmarried to ensure her power. Catherine was a shrewd politician, and used wide public support to enact laws that significantly altered the Russian political system. In France, Olympe de Gouges demanded equal rights for women in the new French Republic, and was eventually executed by guillotine in 1793. Madame Roland, who also met an untimely death in 1793, influenced revolutionary politicians and thinkers during the French Revolution through her famous salon. She, too, was an activist for women's social and political rights and was executed for treason, largely due to her outspoken feminist ideas. Phillis Wheatley, an African-American slave, examined slavery and British imperialism in her poetry, and became a notable figure among abolitionists in America and abroad. Increasingly, women rebuked traditional roles and spoke out against the social and political inequalities they faced. The century closed with the deaths of visionaries such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine the Great, and the births of a new breed of female writers and scholars. The political and social changes that took place in the eighteenth century paved the way for these future writers and activists to advance the cause of women's rights. All these together influenced the feminist movement all over the world.

Feminist poetry is a movement that came to life in the decade of 1960s, when many writers challenged traditional notions of subject and form and language of writings. With feminist poetry a movement began; women wrote about their experiences and confessional poetry was written by women poets. Audrey Lord writes:

“For women, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we

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predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action.”

Poetry written by women is an important area of understanding feminism because each voice is grounded in particular socio-historical conditions and gives an insight to the position and status meted out to women in society.

The act of writing and speaking for themselves has transgressed the boundaries of womanhood and feminine norms and has redefined and reorganised the structures which has hitherto created boundaries for women.

## 2

# Study of Feminism in Indian Context

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To understand and sympathizes the sensibility of feminism it is important to observe that Indian feminist present altogether different picture sequence. Feminist situation in India possess a dissimilar scenario. Indian society has always been highly hierarchical. The Indian society bounded in relationship, caste lineage, customs and traditions have been maintained very strictly. These boundaries curtailed the independent existence and identity of woman and forced them to raise their voice.

The most distinctive features of feminist movement in India is that it was initiated by man. It was only towards the end of the century the women joined the fray. The list of who championed the cause of women is long –Raja Ram Manohar Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Matahari, Phule, Agarkar, Ranade, Karve to mention a few. Their efforts towards the reformist movement to abolish the practice of Sati, the custom of child marriage, custom of distinguishing widows, the ban on remarriage of the upper caste Hindu widows and many other civil practices that affected women are very remarkable in uplifting the status of women. The feminist thought and feminist movement in the west have some influence on the woman's movement in the developing country like India. Yet, feminism as it exists today in India has gone beyond its western counterparts. Uma Narayan rightly puts it third world feminism is not mindless mimicking of western agenda in one clear and simple sense. The woman in order to educate and empower herself questions those structures and cultural practices that subject herself to patriarchal domination and subjugation.

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Indian writing in English is gaining ground rapidly. English education was introduced to India in the nineteenth century, serving as an ideological force behind social reform and control. There was an imperial mission of educating colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a mission that in the long run served to strengthen western rule and colonialism.

The establishment of English colleges in India led to the creation of an English-educated, and predominantly Hindu, elite, who eventually became critical of both their own religious orthodoxies, such as the caste system and child brides, and of British rule. The British-style education also had the effect of linking Indian writers to literary traditions of the West, enabling Indian writers writing in English to reach an audience in Europe as well as in India.

In the nineteenth century, both progressive and orthodox reformers supported female education in India, believing that social evils could be eliminated through education. However, the concept of education was limited to producing good homemakers and perpetuating orthodox ideology, as women were believed to support the traditional values of Indian society. Christian missionaries and British rulers, especially in Bengal where the British had made their first inroads in the mid-nineteenth century, started girls' schools, and in the 1880s, Indian women started to graduate from universities. The vast majority of girls, however, did not attend school, as education for women was mainly confined to the larger towns and cities.

Although India has a history of ancient civilisations such as the Harappa and Mohenjodaro, no written records of women's literary prowess exists predating the 6th century BC. The emergence of the first body of poetry by women in India could be attributed to the advent of Buddhism. The earliest known anthology of women's literature in India has been identified as those belonging to the Therigatha nuns, the poets being contemporaries of the Buddha. One of these, Mutta, writes,

So free am I, so gloriously free, free from three petty things -  
from mortar, from pestle and from my twisted lord. [Tharu and Lalita  
p.68]

Mutta's works, translated from Pali, offer an explanation through their interpretation. Religious escapism was the only way out

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for many women who were frustrated with a life inside the home. They chose to join the Buddhist sangha (religious communities) in their attempts to break away from the social world of tradition and marriage. Thus emerged poems and songs about what it meant to be free from household chores and sexual slavery.

Although the early forms of writing addressed the issue of personal freedom, the poetry that followed later was a celebration of womanhood and sexuality. The Sangam poets that dominated the era between ca. 100 BC-AD 250 wrote extensively about what it meant to have a female body. The translation of Venmanipputi Kuruntokai's 'What she said to her girlfriend' reads,

On the banks shaded by a punnai clustered with flowers,  
when we made love my eyes saw him and my ears heard him; my  
arms grow beautiful in the coupling and grow lean as they come  
away. [Tharu and Lalita p.73]

The content of the poem is bold for its time because it is expressing a woman's pleasure in sex. The poems written around this age echo a sense of sexual liberation.

According to A. K. Ramanujan, who translated most of the poems of the Sangam age, disparities in gender are evident in the way women have written about their experiences. Some of the poems echo the need for bodily love and passion, the foolishness of war and the 'spears' that men left with to wage wars.

This was also the time when the University of Nalanda was set up (c.a. 100 BC), which opened its doors on an equal basis to women. Most of the university records have been lost, but one can assume that the women scholars contributed.

Among the poets who wrote in the 12th century AD came the medieval Kannada poet, rebel and mystic, Akkamahadevi, whose life and writing challenged the patriarchal dominance of the world at large. The spread of Buddhism and the rapid acceptance of Islam forced Hinduism to rethink the caste system. As Hinduism underwent a revision of spirituality and basked in the new-found outlook of the Bhakti movement, so did the men and women associated with the religion.

This was also the period in India's history that witnessed invasion and gradual settlement by the Persian Empire. The rise of

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Islam, not only as a religion but also as the framework of the Mughal dynasty that ruled India for almost three centuries thereafter, brought a new set of experiences and influences to women's literature in India. Muslim women had to be literate to comply with the requirements of the Holy Koran which made it mandatory for every Muslim, male or female to pray. Women made use of this rule of the religion to write about themselves and their experiences. One of the earliest to write was Princess Gul-Badan Begum who in 1587 completed the *Humayun Nama* which details the life and history of one of India's most powerful Mughal kings.

In 1730, Muddupalini, a courtesan in the kingdom of the Nayaka kings of Thanjavur in the south of India, was born. Since the rulers of the Nayaka dynasty were scholars and poets, lovers of music and literature and patrons of the arts, extensive patronage to women educated in the art of dance and music was given. There were other distinguished women poets and scholars in their courts who were recipients of this patronage. One of them, Ramabhadramba, writes about women in the Thanjavur courts who composed poetry in eight languages.

Maddhupalini's *Radhika Santwanam* consisted of five hundred and eighty four poems about the relationship between Krishna and Radha. In an unusual third section, Krishna complains that Radha insists on making love even though he doesn't want to. According to K. Lalita, no other Telugu poet, man or woman, has written about a woman taking the initiative in a sexual relationship. Her compositions created a stir in the literary world when they were published almost two centuries later. The frank expressions in *Radhika Santwanam*, stunned even the most liberals.

Traditionally the only women who had access to scholarships and the arts of literature and dancing were courtesans. Their status in society was of high standing, and because of the wealth they accumulated due to patronage, their property endowed them with the ability to choose their lovers and friends.

Another courtesan who was raised within the Asaf Jahi Sultanate in the Mughal Empire was Mahlaqa Bai Chanda, who



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received an 'elaborate education and composed beautifully' [Tharu and Lalita p.120] as a court poet and songwriter. Her poetry was collected and published after her death in 1824 as *Gulzar-e-Mahlaqa* (Mahlaqa's garden of flowers). According to Afeefa Banu most of her poems are composed in the Ghazal form which originated in Iran.

Around the 18th century, however, a combination of factors led to the decline of women writing in India. The East India Company, established in 1600, whose initial purpose had been to trade, gradually took over as rulers and thereafter the British government established its rule in India. As a result of princes and kings losing their kingdoms, and being restricted by a small privy purse, there was loss of patronage to women in courts. This led to the loss of education for women and the production of women's literature.

The trend of educating women began again in the late 19th century with the rise of the reformist movement in India which saw more women's participation in rebelling against British rule. This led to a new stage in the development of women's literature in India. The body of work produced was often related to the freedom struggle and the reform and nationalist movements. The earliest woman writing during the reformist period was Savitribai Phule, who along with her husband championed the cause of women's education. She was the first woman teacher in modern Maharashtra and together with her husband started the first school for girls. Her writing carries the mark of an activist and scholar who wholeheartedly believed in the cause of the untouchables.

Among the women writers who followed was Pandita Ramabai Saraswati who was educated both in English and in Sanskrit. In her *The high caste Hindu woman* she argues against the patriarchal reading of the Hindu scriptures and early scholarly works of learned Brahmins which encouraged a repressive and demeaning interpretation favouring the suppression of women.

Sarojini Naidu, dubbed the nightingale of India, published her first set of poems at the age of sixteen and went to England where she was educated at King's College in London, and later at

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Cambridge. Her writings as an activist and as the governor of Uttar Pradesh reflect her honest and heartfelt concerns.

Towards the mid-nineteenth century more and more women began to write in English. Some of them, such as Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, created a world of feminist ideologies. In *Sultana's Dream* she talks about a world dominated by women; a world which has imprisoned men in a male equivalent of *zenanas* (women's quarters). She creates a world that is much better than the one men managed. In her woman's world, there are no wars and there is constant scientific progress and love for the environment.

Pre-independence literature wrote about nature and the nationalist movement, and there was not much dichotomy between the genders. The literature that emerged post-independence was probing for their self and identity. The conflict arose when the women started interrogating their identity and gendered roles. The woman poet now had a feminine ego that could be vocal, bitter, cynical, and even sarcastic. This post-modernist theory found its roots in the fact that the norms for women had been decided and they are the receptors and had to follow them to be feminine. But femininity when started searching for individualism started questioning and raising their voices against the set established norms.

Women's writing in the 20th century moved towards a medium of modernism in which womanist and feminist statements were combined with political messages. The writings of women such as Hamsa Wadkar conveyed an honest impression of a world of professional women whose careers in television and stage segregated them as a class apart, yet subjected them to the same brutality and force of patriarchy. In her autobiography, Hamsa Wadkar talks about her life as an actor from the age of eleven, her marriage to a suspicious and abusive husband, the birth of a daughter, her life after eloping with another man, the imprisonment she faced at his home along with two of his other wives.

Women writers such as Mahasweta Devi combined women's causes with political movements. In *Draupadi* Mahasweta Devi creates a world of tribal rebels whose fight against a political system

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of enforced capitalism has driven them to become Naxalites (supporters of a Chinese-style Communism). Others such as Sashi Deshpande build a platform of universal female experiences. Over the years and throughout the political instability which affected Indian society at large, along with a myriad of other influences which have affected culture, language and social patterns, women's literature in India has evolved to show common experiences, a sense of sisterhood and a range of female experiences that question the recurring face of patriarchy.

Along with western feminist criticism a special focus is required over feminist criticism in Indian tradition. The first phase of women's movement in India can be encapsulated between the years 1850 – 1915, which were the prime colonial years. The highlight of the first phase was the abolition of Sati practice. Most of the action for social reformation was undertaken by the men to reduce impact of casteism on women, reduce illiteracy levels, allow widow re-marriage and forbid child marriage. Brahma Samaj in the East India, Arya Samaj in the North India and Theosophical Society in the South India were at the helm of societal reformation. The women's issues were not seen through the lens of gender dynamics but under the generic category of social issues as 'social reform movement'. In the light of colonization and the cultural changes that entailed, the society heeded women's emancipation as a sympathetic gesture arisen out of the pitiable, downtrodden condition of women in the society. There was enough consideration to give women a dignified life. However, there was no thought to empower them with equal rights and power over self, property, state and social institutions. This perception lasted till the end of the second phase in women's movement.

The second phase of feminism in India emerged distinctly after 1915 and lasted till the year India declared independence from the colonial rule. The nature of women's empowerment is what demarcates the second phase from the first. If in the first phase, the intention was eliminating blatant inhumanity, the second phase saw proactive initiatives to mainstream women's involvement in the independence struggle, thus trying to bring women on par with men.

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Mahatma Gandhi was instrumental in the same. His non-violence movement, which although secular yet religiously sensitive, encouraged women's participation by proclaiming that men and women are equal in their capabilities. His famous quote states, "Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity." Post-independence, when the Constitution of India was formulated; the rights of women were incorporated because Gandhi spoke of it throughout the freedom struggle. In the frenzy of the Nationalist movement, there was no agenda of human rights and all eyes were on the goal that was achieved on 15th August 1947. Gandhi was the only freedom fighter who in the process of independence, spoke on communal harmony, Dalit issues and the rights of women. If Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was the unflinching supporter of women's rights in India, Gandhi was the spirit behind the independence movement and women's rights.

In the newly independent India, there was an optimism and sense of confidence that the idealist, secular and equality-guaranteeing Constitution would be implemented in the same spirit as it was constructed. However, that was not the case. Infrastructure, agriculture and other socioeconomic agendas took precedence over women's issues. Women's political participation in independent India dwindled down to 3 percent, which was an abysmally low figure compared to the recently concluded freedom struggle and the major role played women in it. Atrocities against women, further caused disillusionment and was contrary to what the Constitution stood for.

The 19th century was the period that saw a majority of women's issues come under the spotlight and reforms began to be made. Much of the early reforms for Indian women were conducted by men. However, by the late 19th century they were joined in their efforts by their wives, sisters, daughters, protegees and other individuals directly affected by campaigns such as those carried out for women's education. By the late 20th century, women gained greater autonomy through the formation of independent women's own organisations. By the late thirties and forties a new narrative began to

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be constructed regarding "women's activism". This was newly researched and expanded with the vision to create 'logical' and organic links between feminism and Marxism, as well as with anti-communalism and anti-casteism, etc. The Constitution of India did guarantee 'equality between the sexes,' which created a relative lull in women's movements until the 1970s.

Early 19th century reformers argued that the difference between men and women was no reason for the subjection of women in society. However, later reformers were of the opinion that indeed it was this particular difference that subjugated women to their roles in society, for example, as mothers. Therefore, there was a need for the proper care of women's rights. With the formation of women's organisations and their own participation in campaigns, their roles as mothers was again stressed but in a different light: this time the argument was for women's rights to speech, education and emancipation.

In context with feminism in Indian literature, Bengali Literature - consistently performing and dishing out legendary writers and penmanship for extensive period of time - has had its own substantial share of feminism. The efforts of Bengali reformers included abolishing sati, which was a widow's death by burning on her husband's funeral pyre, abolishing the custom of child marriage, abolishing the disfiguring of widows, introducing the marriage of upper caste Hindu widows, promoting women's education, obtaining legal rights for women to own property, and requiring the law to acknowledge women's status by granting them basic rights in matters such as adoption.

To Shri Ramakrishna, woman was the Universal Mother. To the great novelist, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay the women's role is threefold - the daughter, the mother and the most seductive, the consort. But most often, these roles do overlap, because in Bengali literature, the woman exerts in the real dignity and a material empathy, which makes her the motivating force within the society or household. In Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel, sometimes the woman is an activist who wields justice and power.

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Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan stated that, Indian literature written in twenty two regional languages and numerous dialects not only reflect a common culture and a uniquely India version and way of life, but surprisingly the face of Indian woman in all Indian literatures has impressed upon a pan-Indian psyche with of course inevitable local touches and variations. Women have inspired literature and the feminine theme has been a pivotal importance too. She herself is also a creator of literature and is all pervading. This is true of Indian literature also. Indian literature spans a rich variety of themes - from the theme of a conventional woman to that of the new woman, reflecting in the process the changes that have been going on in the society. Post-Independence literature in Indian and feminism portrays all these trends and voices, the clamouring of women for a new and just way of life. Over years, the age old image of the woman seems to be slowly blurring and gradually shading off into a new image.

The "heterogeneity of Indian experience" shows that there exists multiple level of feminisms. Hence, feminism in Indian literature as well as the broader perspective of feminism in India, is not a singular theoretical point of reference; it has metamorphosed with time, history, culture, modernisation, education and consciousness.

The sensitive contemporary woman poet, today, is affected not only by the complete metamorphosis of transformation of her existence but by the very concept of her century's long suppressed feminine personality. Her journey has been long and arduous to search for her identity. The contributing factors of such women poets have been the legacy of equality and dignity inherited from the western influence, the Indian freedom struggle, Indian constitutional rights of women, spread of education and the consequent new awareness among women. Indian women saddled with the burden of the past were caught in the flux of tradition and modernity. So, to overcome the traditional barriers to express freely in all walks of life constitutes the crux of feminism in Indian literature. In literary terms, this pursuit aims to search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self. Indian women poets writing through the medium of English in recent years have worked consciously to create new Indian poetry in

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English, nourishing themselves, while at the same time asserting their individuality and expressing their sentiments and views about life.

Feminist writers in India today proudly uphold their cause of 'womanhood', through their writings. The literary field is most bold to present feminism in Indian literature in the hands of writers like Amrita Pritam (Punjabi), Kusum Ansal (Hindi) and Sarojini Sahoo (Oriya), who count amongst the most distinguished writers, making a link between sexuality and feminism in Indian languages. Feminist literature in India has existed in India from the Vedic Period, with the changes gradually bringing to light the voices of women.

Susie Tharu and K. Lalita compiled an anthology of two volumes of women writing from thirteen languages which, for the first time, published in English translation, illuminate the lives of women over two millennia of Indian history and extend our understanding of literature, feminism and the making of modern India. They have meticulously taken special note of women writers who were criticized or spoken about dismissively, and of controversies that involved these women. In the process they have come across debates in which women had intervened; about their roles as wives, companions, and mothers who "also" wrote. The most distinctive feature of Women's movement is that it was initiated by men. Hence, the struggle did not acquire the overtones of gender warfares as it did in the West. "westernized" feminism in India in the mid-seventies, influenced the indian feminist writings and expressions.

Describing the reaction to the feminist movement in India, Suma Chitnis writes,

"The most distinctive feature of this movement is that it was initiated by man. It was only towards the end of the century the women joined the fray. The list of who champion the cause of women is long - Raja Ram Manohar Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, KeshavChandra Sen, Matahari Phule, Agarkar, Ranade, Karve to mention a few. The record of the reform they undertook to achieve is impressive. It reveals that their efforts spanned action toabolish the practice of Sati, the custom of child marriage, custom of distinguishing

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widows, the ban on remarriage of the upper caste Hindu Widows and a lots of other evil practices that affected women.”(2)

The authenticity of feminine sensibility and feminine experiences would demand a brief scrutiny of the changing position of women in India. The study of the Indian feminine psyche evolves a change from tradition to modernity. Critics have proposed various methods to define these patterns of change. Shri K.S. Iyenger, divides the history of Indian writing in English in three general periods - '1875 to 1900', the new flowering of the creative Indian genius, 1900 to 1947, the Gandhi an Era 1947 onwards the post-Independence period.

In order to reach to the proper definition of feminism, we should learn first to understand the co-concepts like 'patriarchy', 'masculinity', 'subaltern', 'others' and the history of woman's development. After reading all this, we could succeed to wipe up many prejudices, which were carrying with us from a long time in the concern of feminism. We should learn to make difference between freedom and promiscuity. If we want women's freedom, we should know that at least from what we do expect it. Behaving like male is not freedom, but at the same time, we should know the differences between man and woman. We should know our weaknesses and power. We should know it better that to oppose male is not the way to reach to the goal. Patriarchy is nothing but a social system. Therefore, if we want women liberation we should go through the history of man. We could easily get the answers of being a patriarchal one. If we go through the proper definition of feminism, we come to see that the purpose of feminism is beneficial to both men and women. Men also want liberation from the burden of masculinity. Therefore, if we succeed to apply feminism in society it works great and for that, we need to concentrate on different grounds like gender, cast, race, religion and disabilities.

The search for identity among the Indian women poets who write poetry employing English as their medium of expression is noticeable. Since Toru Dutt (1856-77), the first Indian women to write poetry in English, women have come a long way. They stand apart



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from Indian men who write poetry in English, by emphasizing their feminine identities in so many creative ways.

Apart from the expression of a uniquely and powerfully realized feminine sensibility and quest for self and identity, what distinguishes these women writers from the contemporary male poet is their realistic attitude to life, sex and lust, and their frank autobiographical, vivid, candid and bold expression of such issues. The poetic self in such 'New Poetry' concerns itself with capturing the moments of intense experience of the private life with all its uniqueness and immediacy.

There have been different approaches to explore self within Indian philosophical, religious and spiritual traditions: the Vedic approach was dynamic with focus on things outside the self such as rituals, as it celebrated man's relationship with nature, cosmos, earth, sky, etc. The Upanishad approach was more inward and introspective. Another approach was devotional which postulated itself in relation to God/god and then to humankind.

The 'search for self' in Indian religious and philosophical tradition becomes a major concern for the sages through meditation. For ordinary mortals, it progresses as a dialectic in terms of various relationships of man, woman and God/god. The women poets of the Bhakti movement set examples of search for women's identity within Indian spiritual tradition. Their devotion to God/god oftentimes took the motif of Lover and the loved and thus brought in intimate relations between man and woman as part of the identity process.

The sensitive contemporary woman poet, today, is affected not only by the complete metamorphosis of transformation of her existence but by the very concept of her century's long suppressed feminine personality. As a result she has traversed the long journey eventually to find a distinctive voice of selfhood.

The indigenous contributing factors of such women poets have been the legacy of equality of sexes inherited from the western civilisation developments, the Indian freedom struggle, Indian constitutional rights of women, spread of education and the consequent new awareness among women. Indian women were/are

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caught in the flux of tradition and modernity saddled with the burden of the past. So, to overcome the traditional barriers to express freely in all walks of life constitutes the crux of feminism in Indian literature. In literary terms, this pursuit precipitates a search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self. In critical practice, it boils down to scrutinizing empathetically the plight of women characters at the receiving end of human interaction.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a Diasporas feminist who says, 'women are universally oppressed by men'. (Ray, Kundu, vol-2, 2005, p. 150-179)

The feminist writing in India starts to change a mask of Indian literature, specifically in the writings of Indian women Novelists like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Veena Paintal, Kundanika kapadia, Indu mallah, Mrinal Pande, Gouri Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai. The stride change in the Image of Indian woman comes to see in their writings. These women writers have given literary work in India an unmistakable edge and they have been recognized for their originality, versatility and the genuine response. Gender is only incidental but Indian women writers have dealt with manifold issues such as sensuality, servility, subjugation and society.

Indian women poets writing through the medium of English in recent years have worked consciously to create new Indian poetry in English, nourishing themselves, while at the same time asserting their individuality and expressing their sentiments and views about life.

In short, their poetry exhibits three concentric circles of the self in relation to society, self in relation to family, and self in relation to itself. These poets display a different open attitude. The subjects which were taboo earlier now are openly expressed in their lines. They express their thoughts, their feelings, their fears and insecurities through their own felt life experiences. The reflections come from within and they are the end product of how life has treated them, their trials, tribulations, struggles and ultimate victories.

The Indian women poets demonstrate their love for the intensely personal confessional mode. With certain amount of

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attraction for the feminist views, they are all actively writing poetry. However, while their attempt is to explore the 'self' and identity in depth, most of them could only scratch the surface. There are several distinct poets who work out their projects differently. According to Bruce, 'A period in English poetry written by Indian women was moving from rewriting of legends, praise of peasants to writing about personal experiences.

These modern poets began to create their impact in literature. These writings become prominent because they document and bring the feminist issue to the larger world.

# 3

## Quest for Self in Indian English Women Poetry

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Women poets occupy an important place in the history of Indian English literature. The significant voices of women poets occupy a distinct place in understanding Indian English poetry. The beginning of Indian English poetry witnessed the voices of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. The feminine gaze appeared stronger in Post-Independence period. Indian English women writings has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions and vocal expressions of women, not the interpretation of the male writers. The perceptions and experiences of women writings are given less importance also due to the fact that most of these women write about the enclosed domestic space.

The contribution of women poets to Indian English poetry holds an important place in literature as they share and document the experience of struggle, suffering and success with us. Poems of great worth and intense themes are penned by these poetess'.

Toru Dutt is a gifted Indian poet and was the first Indian woman poet to write in English. She is often compared to famous English romantic poet Keats figure as she died young at the age of twenty one. She shares her vision and her experience with us, celebrates Indian womanhood and her language exhibits variety and

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originality. Toru Dutt through her poetry depicts feminine expression and voice. Through the characters taken from Indian mythology such as Sita and Savitri, she celebrated Indian womanhood, , showing women in suffering, self-sacrificing, potent roles, reinforcing myths and characters celebrating nationalism and patriotism. Her first book, published when she was twenty, was a book of verse translations from French, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields: Verse Translations and Poems* (1876).

Sarojini Naidu has written a variety of poems, on a variety of themes; the feelings, passion and love abounds her poetry. She records social Indian life in her poetry with her experiences of regional, cultural and rustic memories and expressions .She is a patriot and a poet, a poet of *The Golden Threshold*(1905), *The Birth of Time* (1912),*The Broken Wing*(1917), and *Feather of the Dawn* (1961).Love , life , death and destiny frequently surface in poetry . Her creativity and music is remarkable characteristic of her poetry.

Monika Varma is a major woman poet who holds a prominent place in Indian English poetry. There is something of Wordsworth in her poetry and she is contrasted with her famed contemporaries Kamala Das and Gauri Deshpande in the application of her disciplined mind. *Dragonflies Draw Flame* (1962) is among best collections.

Kamala Das is a highly independent and bold poet, often compared to the famous English writer D H Lawrence in recording and sharing her most intimate emotions and experiences which the feminine writers abstained from reflecting in their expressions. She responds to the needs, aspirations and emotions of every woman without the norms specified by society .Her English collections include *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967) and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973).Her poem 'An Introduction' is known for its simplicity and its sincerity .She wrote fiction in Malayalam. Kamala Das' poignant feminine confessional poetry, explores man-woman relationship from feminine perspective. This style was subsequently taken up by other women poets such as Gauri Deshpande, Suniti Namjoshi, and Chitra Narendran.

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Eunice de Souza is a major feminine voice in Indian English poetry with a unique and modern approach. She is often equalled to Emily Dickinson. Her poetry is modern marked with economy of words, combined with bitter irony. She deals with a variety of themes in her poetry, from poets to students, from women to marriage and religion. She has published the collections-Fix (1979), Women in Dutch Painting (1988), Ways of Belonging (1990), etc. She has also edited numerous anthologies.

Suniti Namjoshi is a feminist and a poet; raises controversial and burning issues relating to culture, sex, gender, identity, etc. Her collections include Poems (1967), Cyclone in Pakistan (1971), The Jackass and the Lady (1980) and The Authentic Lie (1982).

Gauri Deshpande is a modern Indian English poet whose name deserves a special mention. She explores man – woman relationship and responds to nature in three volumes: Between Births(1968), Lost Love (1970) and Beyond the Slaughte rHouse(1972). She is highly emotional and clings to past memories and romances.

Mamta Kalia belongs to the school or the group of her great contemporaries-Kamala Das , Eunice de Souza , Suniti Namjoshi and above all, Gauri Deshpande. She writes in Hindi and English. She examines the role of a woman in a family and society .Her personal experiences and emotions shapes her outlook and poetry.Her verse collections are Tribute to Papa (1970) and Poems (1978).

Meena Alexanderan Indian poet of the international repute writes about the place she left behind and how she feels residing in a foreign land. She is among the famed Indian diasporic poets. Stone Roots (1980), House of a Thousand Doors (1988), River and Bridge(1995), Illiterate Heart (2002) and Raw Silk(2004) are her poetry collections.

Imtiaz Dharkeris a modern Indian English women poet exploring feminine sensibility in addition to communal , cultural and spatial themes. Her collections include Purdah (1989), Postcards from God (1997), Speak for the Devil(2001),The Terrorist at my Table (2006) and Leaving Fingerprints (2009).

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Chitra Banerjee is a celebrated Indian woman poet, residing in America , known for her versatility in the literary world , who won in1997, the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize and the Pushcart Prize for her poems in 'Leaving Yuba City'- the best known collection.

Sujata Bhatt is an internationally recognised Indian English poet. Her overseas experience shapes her poetry. She earnestly addresses linguistic issues and other contemporary issues in Brunizem (1988), Monkey Shadows (1999) and The Stinking Rose (1995).

Smita Agarwal is a contemporary poet with a couple of collections, writing poems of small town India and magical transformations .She is very sensitive to nature and women related issues.

Mani Rao is a major contemporary poet , with more than half a dozen collections, published nationally and internationally. She writes about love,Nature, God and Satan exploring the meaning or the mystery of life .She is also a translator.

Neelam Saxena Chandra employs two languages to express herself .She writes poetry in English ; but she writes fiction in Hindi .She is a winner of the Rabindra Nath Tagore International Award for Poetry, 2014.

Nandini Sahu is a new talented poet who knows how to employ language and how to utilise personal experience for creative work .She has published some bright collections, especially The Other Voice(20004).

Tishani Doshi is a promising and recognised poet with a couple of exciting collections –Countries of the Body (2006) and Everything Begins Elsewhere (2013) , focusing on nature, man, woman ,immigration and the human body . She is full of sympathy for the victims or the sufferers.

Meena Kandasamy:-is a practising and passionate poet who concentrates herself on women –related and caste –related issues .She is a poet with a mission and her collections include Touch(2006) and Ms.Militancy (2010).

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Tara Patel, writes and expresses the predicament of single woman, spinster or separated, as a prominent theme in her poetry. Her *Single Woman* (1991) shows the harsh reality of the world and the quest for companionship.

Anna Sujata Matha writes of the pain of separation and the trauma of a separated woman. Her *Attic of Night* (1991) reflects her agony, and the struggle for survival. She projects woman as strong and determined, and she advocates for belongingness and companionship.

Poets such as Prabha Mehta, Purabi Patnaik, Vijaya Goel, Mani Rao, Anuradha Nalapet, Venu Arora, Kamal Gurtaj Singh, Renu Singh Parmar, Chandni Kapur, Rita Malhotra, Monima Chudhury, Tara Patel, Jyotirmayee Mohapatra, Madhavi Lata Agarwal, Shilpa Vishwanath, Jelena Narayanan, Sunanda Mukherjee, and others are effectively contributing towards Indian English feminist writings. They have energy to fight discrimination and constantly question stereotypes and prejudices. These writings make us understand the realities of their sufferings, isolation and neglect, betrayal, denial of sensual fulfillment, false sense of pride or fear of shame, and desperate struggle for a meaning in life and their sense of existence.

Women poets have contributed a lot for the recognition and growth of Indian English poetry. In women's poetry, we hear the voice of the New Woman's definition of herself and a quest for her own identity. These poets are worth reading, full of energy and enthusiasm.

Indian women struggle between the tradition and the modernity. Feminism underlines and emphasizes to express freely in all walks of life. In literary terms, this pursuit precipitates a search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self. Gender equality, western influence, the Indian freedom struggle, rights of women, spread of education and the increasing awareness among women has highly contributed towards the expression of the women poets.

It needs to be remembered that poetry written by women need not be viewed only as feminist poetry. The problems of



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marginalization, sociological discrimination, gender inequities, and of the dominant need for inclusion and democratization, all contribute towards the distinctive character of this poetry. The deconstructive strategies of narrative and conceptual frames and emotional and intellectual rendering have made their poetry a formidable area of study and research. The skilful use of the standard poetic devices, the stylistics and metaphorical details have raised the feminist strategies of interrogation. For the first time, mapping out new terrains the poetry of such Indian women poets bring forth the voices of women as an individual.

This new poetry by Indian English women poets with its new thematic and contemporary concerns has raised interrogation towards the position of women in society. The suppressed desires, lust, sexuality and existential experiences focuses upon the new terrains the poetry of such Indian women poets bring forth. This literature has incorporated itself with the feminist movements that swept through Europe, America, Canada, and Australia since 1960s and specifies the global oneness of the issue.

The contemporary female poetic activities, is a natural extension of women's expanding role in society and demonstrate the creative release of feminine sensibility. Women poets in India have been freely talking about their desires and assumptions. They know well how hard it is to tackle the taboos around sex and sexual expression, yet they register and express their potent voice. Their critique reveals a strong assertiveness exposing their disapproval and striving to achieve some kind of liberating effects against the various forms of 'structural oppression' emanating from patriarchal arrangements, authority and cultural, social perspective. Usha Kishore, in "Indian Poetry in English: A British Indian Overview" (2006), writes, 'Women poets, like their male counterparts, seek to know themselves as composites, contradictory, and even incompatible. They understand that each of us is many different people serious and frivolous, bold and timorous, loud and quiet, aggressive and abashed. They too write to express themselves, accommodating a variety of differences, including inner and outer

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conflicts,sufferings and celebrations, even as they appear marginalized.'(4)

They collectively present women poets as a vibrant community. Their metaphors and images reflect their observations and experiences reacting against being neglected. They create a discourse which cuts across cultures and regions and outreaches from personal to universal experiences

But almost every woman poet voice a strong desire to give the message that women need not find themselves lonely, or dependent. Written in a personal and confessional style, their poetry, acts as a social document because they themselves are victims and agents of social change. They bring forth the new feminine voices articulating being a woman and female creating an impulse for raising a voice, and pointing at the arrangements which curtail individual sense of freedom and expression.

# 4

## The Early Women Voice: Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu

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Women poets occupy an important place in the history of Indian English poetry. Indian women poets writing in English expresses variety of experiences and various tendencies it reflects. The experiences shared by these women poets are of vivid variety. Thus this poetry transcends the term feminist poetry. The history of Indian English Poetry has been dominated by the male voice and imagination. But the significant feature of Indian English literary scene is the emergence of the powerful voice of women poets communicating a powerful female sensibility in their poetry.

It needs to be emphasized that poetry written by women need not be viewed only as feminist poetry but as a document critiquing social structures and arrangements which marginalize a major section of society. Subordinating a woman is almost as tormenting as the other oppressions. Women writings raise their chiselled, sharp, pithy and effortless voice and gaze in a poetic language which interrogates their position and status in public space as well as in private.

With regards to this remarkable movement and new trends and techniques in women's poetry with the skilful use of the semiotic, symbols, poetic devices and the metaphorical properties of

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expression, this poetry offers a formidable area of study and research. We have a glorious line of women poetesses outnumbering their male counterparts.

Toru Dutt beginning the tradition was the innovator in the field and it was she who compelled the critics to take notice Indian women poetry in English. Toru Dutt is often considered the first Indian poetess to write verses in French and in English. She was born to a Bengali family on March 4, 1856 in Rambagan, Manicktollah Street, in erstwhile Calcutta. In 1862, her family embraced Christianity and was baptized. She came from a liberal family where education was encouraged for even the females of the family. Her family moved to France in 1869, following the death of her brother Abju. In France, she was educated in language, history, and the arts. Toru, along with her sister Aru, mastered the French language during their short stay in France. She also wrote "An Eurasian Poet" and two essays on the French Romantic poets Leconte de Lisle and Joséphin Soulayr for *The Bengal Magazine*. This fascination with the French language and culture would be sustained through Toru's life, and her favorite authors were the French writers Victor Hugo and Pierre-Jean de Béranger. Later, the family moved to Britain, where Toru pursued her education at the University of Cambridge. The pastoral landscapes of southern England adding to her experiences in Baugmauree house in Calcutta, played great role in contributing to the natural sensuous expressions of her poetry.

Toru started publishing her work when she was only 18 years old. She began her literary career with prose, but has fame for her poetry. Her first collection, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, was a volume of French poems. Her 'Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan' is her interpretation of Hindu myths and legends. Her most famous poems—those which, like "Sita," "Buttoo," and "Lakshman," retell traditional legends or stories from her native India. She was bred with Christian faith and in French and English cultures, yet her love for her tradition, culture and nation is explicit in her writings. The poet's narration of Indian myths and legends underlines that in ancient India women enjoyed a status of equality with men. Moreover, in poems like

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"Sita," Dutt explores the shared experiences of women throughout time in linking herself to both her mother and Sita, who are also set up as parallels. This understanding of Dutt makes her an important woman writer of Colonial India. Her poems mark her individuality and show her love for freedom. Also present in *Ancient Ballads* are poems like "Our Casuarina Tree," "The Tree of Life," and "Baugmaree," which deal with her life experiences with different cultures and religions in Colonial India.

### **Our Casuarina Tree**

LIKE a huge Python, winding round and round  
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars,  
Up to its very summit near the star..

### **Lakshman**

'Hark! Lakshman! Hark, again that cry!  
It is, - it is my husband's voice!  
Oh hasten, to his succour fly,

### **The Lotus**

Love came to Flora asking for a flower  
That would of flowers be undisputed queen,  
The lily and the rose, long, long had been

### **Christmas**

The sky is dark, the snow descends:  
Ring, bells, ring out your merriest chime!  
Jesus is born; the Virgin bends  
Above him. Oh, the happy time!

### **The Young Captive**

The budding shoot ripens unharmed by the scythe,  
Without fear of the press, on vine branches lithe,  
Through spring-tide the green clusters bloom.  
Is't strange, then, that I in my life's morning hour

### **The Sower**

Sitting in a porchway cool,  
Sunlight, I see, dying fast,  
Twilight hastens on to rule.  
Working hours have well-nigh past.

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Shadows run across the lands:  
But a sower lingers still,

### The Broken Bell

'Tis bitter-sweet on winter nights to note,  
Beside the palpitating fire reclined,  
The chimes, across the fogs, upon the wind.  
Now loud, now low, now near and now remote.  
What recollections on that music float!  
Blessed the bell that through the darkness blind

The Bengali poet-translator is often considered the first Indian poetess to write in French and English. Toru produced an impressive collection of poetry and prose. She contributed regularly to the "Poet's Corner" of *The Bengal Magazine* and *The Calcutta Review*, publishing a series of English translations of French poetry between March 1874 and March 1877. In *A Scene from Contemporary History*, published in *The Bengal Magazine* (June-July 1875), Toru translated two political speeches by Victor Hugo and M Adolphe Thiers. She also wanted to translate the French writer Clarisse Bader's book *Les Femmes dans L'Inde Antique* (Women in Ancient India) into English, as her correspondence with Bader shows, but her ailing health prevented it. The intensity of her literary activities during this time as well as the urgency expressed in her letters to Mary Martin show that Aru's death and her own failing health had perhaps given her a premonition of her own approaching end. Sadly, Toru Dutt did not live to see her success. She, like her siblings, died from consumption in 1877, at the age of 21. In spite of her untimely death, Toru Dutt remains an exemplary poet, and her works are widely regarded as being among the best of Indian-English writings in particular for her individuality, uniqueness and amalgamation of European and Indian cultural influences.

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Even though Dutt's "Christian training" and her "girlhood spent partly in France and partly in England" are influential in what English historian H.A.L. Fisher calls Dutt's unique "appreciation of [...] Western literature" and "hold upon the essential soul of the two languages in which she wrought"—it is not just this linking of East and west and the multilingual and multicultural comprehension, but also her focus upon the themes of loss, youth, and the nature, that is impressive and significant in Dutt's poetry. Dutt has a deep, Romantic interest in the relationship or rift (depending on the context) between mankind and the natural world. Dutt allows nature to take on a variety of dynamic roles in her work that intermingle personal experiences of loss and growth, self-discovery, and deep reflection. These various roles are linked to the various natural environments in which she was raised and also relate her poetry closely to her own personal life, her late siblings and her nostalgia and memories.

Dutt's scholarship positions her as a poet of East and West, her attention to nuanced feelings regarding loss, and her poetic output as a representative of a unique Romantic sensibility. Her genius and complexity. Her genius marks her as an important woman writer.

The act of revisiting the past is akin to responding to the culture and tradition that is ever evolving, and it gives a new interpretation and contemporary understanding of the text. It suggests that there is a possibility of a newer meaning. One myth that resurfaces time and again in Indian literature is the myth of Savitri. "The Ballad of Savitri" by Toru Dutt attempts to look at the prevalent original myth with a new look. Savitri is shown as a woman with determination and ideas establishing herself while conforming to patriarchal norms and performing her duties within the parameters of a dogmatic society.

At a time when women were generally kept away from the use of English because it could threaten the orthodox patriarchal structures, the course and scope of the very beginning of Indian women writing in English is very significant in the literary history of

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India. Historically women had been the chief upholders of a rich and diverse oral tradition of story-telling through mythology, legends, songs and fables, it was only during the middle of nineteenth century that those stories were transformed into poetry, drama, and other forms of literature. The poetry of Toru Dutt thus marks the beginning of Indian Women Poets writings in English.

### **Sarojini Naidu**

Sarojini Naidu, known as the 'Nightingale of India', was a popular Indian poet, playwright and Indian independence activist. Her first collection of poems *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905. Her poems were widely admired. Her collection of poems entitled *The Feather of The Dawn* was edited and published posthumously in 1961. She was the first woman to become President of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to achieve the post of Governor of Uttar Pradesh state.

She was born on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1879. Her father Dr. Aghomath Chattopadaya, was a scientist and philosopher, her mother Varada Sunderi Devi, was a poet. Her family at that time lived in Hyderabad, India. Sarojini was an extremely intelligent child, becoming fluent in five languages and wrote poems from a young age. Her father was impressed with her mastery of words in the thirteen hundred lines poem composed by her and titled 'The Lady of the Lake'. Later she wrote a play, 'Maher Muneer' he sent it to the Nizam (ruler) of Hyderabad. This resulted in her being granted a well-deserved scholarship to study at King's College in England. Here she expanded her writing bringing to the western readers the great temples and mountains of India and the complex details of Indian social and folk life.

She returned to India and married at the age of nineteen to her chosen partner Dr. Muthyala Govindarajulu Naidu from southern India. She met noted figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru and joined the Indian freedom struggle after the 1905 partition of Bengal. She travelled extensively to other parts of the world,



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including Europe and America, in order to speak about the Indian Nationalist cause. Her election as President of the Indian National Congress Party was in 1925.

Her political activities did not diminish her enthusiasm for writing. It was said that her poetry was so beautiful it could also be sung. From 1905 to 1912 she wrote three collections of poems. 'The Golden Threshold' (1905) brought her recognition as Bul Bule Hind, or Bharata Khokila, – the Nightingale of India. She dedicated 'The Golden Threshold, a collection of folk songs as well as poems to Edmund Gosse, who persuaded her to write about her native themes and culture.

Her major contribution was also in the field of poetry. Her poetry had beautiful words that could also be sung. Soon she got recognition as the "Bul Bule Hind" when her collection of poems was published in 1905 under the title Golden Threshold. After that, she published two other collections of poems--The Bird of Time and The Broken Wings. In 1918, Feast of Youth was published. Later, The Magic Tree, The Wizard Mask and A Treasury of Poems were published. The poems which she has written tell of the different aspects of Indian life, art, society and culture.

### **Palanquin Bearers**

Lightly, O lightly we bear her along,  
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;  
She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,  
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream.

### **Autumn Song**

Like a joy on the heart of a sorrow,  
The sunset hangs on a cloud;  
A golden storm of glittering sheaves,  
Of fair and frail and fluttering leaves,

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### Indian Weavers

WEAVERS, weaving at break of day,  
Why do you weave a garment so gay? . . .  
Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,  
We weave the robes of a new-born child.

### The Bangle Sellers

Bangle sellers are we who bear  
Our shining loads to the temple fair...  
Who will buy these delicate, bright  
Rainbow-tinted circles of light?

..

### Indian Dancers

EYES ravished with rapture, celestially panting, what passionate  
bosoms flaming with fire  
Drink deep of the hush of the hyacinth heavens that glimmer around  
them in fountains of light;  
O wild and entrancing the strain of keen music that cleaveth the stars  
like a wail of desire,  
And beautiful dancers with houri-like faces bewitch the voluptuous  
watches of night.  
The scents of red roses and sandalwood flutter and die in the maze of  
their gem-tangled hair..

### Village Song

HONEY, child, honey, child, whither are you going?  
Would you cast your jewels all to the breezes blowing?  
Would you leave the mother who on golden grain has fed you?  
Would you grieve the lover who is riding forth to wed you?

Mother mine, to the wild forest I am going,  
Where upon the champa boughs the champa buds are blowing;

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To the köil-haunted river-isles where lotus lilies glisten,  
The voices of the fairy folk are calling me: O listen!

One of the main themes of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is the theme of Indian life and culture. She offers diverse images of the lives of Indian people and their life habits. Sarojini Naidu's place is very significant in Indian English poetry. In the words of Padmini Sen Gupta "By this new style which every true poet needs, she fashioned a new school. Her poetry was a legacy to the future development of language and poetry. It was refreshing and continues to refresh in a world now sophisticated and ugly and unromantic and far too starkly realistic."

If we consider the contribution of these two early Indian English women poets, their contribution towards women writings are very specific and remarkable. Toru Dutt in her short span of life founded Indo – Anglian poetry on firm footing and established tradition which were persuaded by Sarojini Naidu. As interpreter of Indian life and as a very talented nature poet Toru Dutt directed the path of Sarojini Naidu. Sarojini Naidu, an eminent personality as a politician, nationalist leader, poet activist for women's rights orator and celebrity, was certainly one of the most significant strong Indian Woman. Toru Dutt is superior to Sarojini Naidu in narrative and descriptive poetry, whereas the latter enjoys an inevitable place in Indo – Anglian lyrical poetry. Toru Dutt's poetry is characterized by simplicity, lucidity expression and an easy and graceful style. Sarojini Naidu's poetic style has lyrical spontaneity and rapidity of movement and is characterized by radiant and colourful diction. The flair for the romantic, the new, the traditional and the urge to give voice to their feelings and imaginations make their expressions epical as feminine voices and perspectives in the male dominated world. Both expressed the influence of cross fertilization of cultures, the mixing of emotion and intellect and the resulting independent voice registering their

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strong emergence as women poets. Both discovered themselves as poets and went ahead with their literary pursuits.

These two women poets Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt are superb in their respective spheres.

# 5

## Feminine Sensibility In Modern Indian English Poems: Voice of Eunice De Souza

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Eunice de Souza is one of the most famous confessional poets of second half of twentieth century. Eunice De Souza represents the social milieu of our country of the 1980s. She has minutely and intuitively portrayed the disjointed and fumbling society in a satiric vein. Her stories epitomises a sick and feeble society Souza sarcastically comments upon the social taboos, artificial behaviour and false mannerisms of people in society.

De Souza, like many other Indian poets, comes from an English-speaking family. Her poems are derived from memories of her Goan Catholic childhood in Pune and deal with issues of religious 'repression, prejudices, ignorance, social injustice and women's places in marriage and family'. While she is unmarried and childless, her poems address women's roles in their families and religious institutions as well as the patriarchal nature of Indian society. De Souza's first volume of poetry *Fix* (1979) was published by Newground, a poetry co-operative started by poets Melanie Silgado, Raul D'Gama Rose and Santan Rodrigues. Newground was a short-lived project, which published four volumes in total, but it was considered to be a significant part of a poetry movement in Mumbai

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because it exhibited new work by Indian poets writing in English and brought the voices of women poets to the public.

When Arvind Krishna Mehrotra edited his iconic anthology *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1993), he chose to include the work of only one female poet Eunice de Souza, who he believed was the only woman to meet his 'high standards of poetic technique, a body of published works and a preference for imagist poetry'. The anthology was praised but the exclusion of Kamala Das and other female writers conveyed the discriminatory mindset. In 2001 De Souza responded to Mehrotra's volume with the publication of her anthology *Nine Indian Women Poets* in the hope that the book would showcase the work of significant women writers from Catholic, Parsi, Hindu and Muslim backgrounds. De Souza's collection includes her own work as well as that of Silgado, Das, Bhatt and others to demonstrate a variety of poetic styles, syntax, language and reasons for writing in English. Since the publication of the anthology, de Souza has published other volumes of poetry and novels, as well as two other edited anthologies on women's writing, *Purdah* (2004) and *Women's Voices: Selections from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Indian Writing in English* (2004). She also co-authored the comprehensive anthology *These My Words: the Penguin Book of Indian Poetry* (2012) with Silgado. Having experienced firsthand the marginalisation of poetry by women writing in English, de Souza responded by not only ensuring the publication of Indian women's poetry but by also engaging in literary criticism of their work to gain a wider readership for Indian women poets.

Her poems offer a broad understanding of the society surrounding her.

In the poem 'Bandra Christian Party' Souza points out towards the luxuries and wealth leading to various evils. In 'Forgive Me Mother, Souza repeats the moral taboos and evils prevalent in society. Her poems stand out notable for her personal life and she successfully manages to context her personal experience to the broader social and cultural milieu. Her poems portrays the prolific

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variety in poignant succinct and daring style. She draws heavily from her personal life and connects her personal life and connects her personal experiences to the broader perspective of society surrounding her.

In her poem 'Women in Dutch Painting', she recognises the women in painting to the familiar women she knows. She questions the various norms society assigns to its feminine part. These assigned roles makes women affirmative and silent reconciling them to the lot which society has fixed for them.

The afternoon sun is on their faces  
They are calm, not stupid  
Poignant, not bovine.  
I know women like that  
And not just in painting.

Women are placed secondary as against their male counterparts. Gender discrimination has always been prevalent in Indian society. In this context Eunice de Souza's poetry shows not a particular woman but the whole women race as they are troubled, unfixed, tormented, and confused. Mohanty said: "To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness being woman has nothing to do with race, class, nation or sexuality, just with gender. But no one 'becomes a woman because she is female'. Her poems reveal the insecurities of her mind, her desire for peace and comfort, her yearning to raise her voice against inequality and oppression. Her poems like 'The Road', 'Advice to Women', 'Miss Louise', 'Prabhu' etc attempts to register her voice in the existing patriarchal society. She gives a voluntary expression as a means of self-expression. Her poems represents female literary modernism. Her poems are not only a medium of feminine protest but also places women to protest against this oppressive structure. In 'Bequest' she writes:

I wish I could be a  
Wise women  
Smiling, endlessly, variously  
Like a plastic flower

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Saying child, learn from me

The splash of irony and satire tinges the fabric of her expressions. The anger she expresses in her poems underlies the stern feminine gaze towards society and its various conventional norms. This makes her poetry confessional in tone, dualism in meaning and rebellious in nature. It reflects feminist quest for its own identity and recognition.

She has minutely and intuitively portrayed the troubled, unfixed, tormented, and confused social milieu through her poems. Her stories epitomises the social discrimination and ills. Her poem 'Miss Lousie', raises the issue of hypocrisy and artificiality afflicting the modern society:

Miss Louise

She dreamt of descending  
curving staircases  
ivory fan aflutter  
of children in sailor suits  
and organza dresses  
till the dream rotted her innards  
but no one knew:  
innards weren't permitted  
in her time.  
Shaking her graying ringlets:  
"My girl, I can't even  
go to Church you know  
I unsettle the priests  
so completely. Only yesterday  
that handsome Fr Hans was saying,  
'Miss Louise, I feel an arrow  
through my heart.'  
But no one will believe me  
if I tell them. It's always  
Been the same. They'll say,  
'Yes Louisa, we know, professors  
loved you in your youth,  
judges in your prime.



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Her anger reflects her inner quest for her identity and recognition. Her poetry is confessional in tone underlies the stern feminine gaze towards society. Author of four books of poetry – Fix, Women in Dutch Painting, Necklace of Skulls, Learn from the Almond Leaf – the poet's style has been compared to Nissim Ezekiel's craft.

Sweet Sixteen

Well, you can't say  
they didn't try.  
Mamas never mentioned menses.  
A nun screamed: You vulgar girl  
don't say brassieres  
say bracelets.  
She pinned paper sleeves  
onto our sleeveless dresses.  
The preacher thundered:  
Never go with a man alone  
Never alone  
and even if you're engaged  
only passionless kisses.  
At sixteen, Phoebe asked me:  
Can't it happen when you're in a dance hall  
I mean, you know what,  
getting preppers and all that, when  
you're dancing?  
I, sixteen, assured her  
you could.

Post-independence literature written by Indian women expresses their desire for freedom and self-assertion and present varied dimensional approach to femininity. De Souza revolts against the subjugation of women in society and raises voice against the marginalised status given to women. She interrogates and contends in varied terms in her poems. De Souza's dealing with love and sexuality in her poems show how she is dissatisfied with the society

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which gives her pain and suffering and demands silent acceptance from a woman. Her aggression gets manifested through her poetry.

Patriarchal society, cultural practices, social taboos, superstitious beliefs and harmful practices – these are some of the factors that deprive women from essential life indicators (Vigyan Prasar, 2011). An exploration of self and search for identity became an utmost need of the hour and this wave of contemplation primarily sprang up from Indian women writers,

The poet also confesses that: —I am still learning/ to cross the road (21-22). The —otherness of women seems to be the chief concern in Advice to Women:

### **Keep cats**

if you want to learn to cope with  
the otherness of lovers  
Otherness is not always neglect—  
Cats return to their litter trays  
when they need to.

(—Advice to Women 1-6)

Poet's confessional mode here reveals the insecurity of her mind. She seems to be yearning for peace and comfort

There is a constant undercurrent of frustration and tension in her poetry. She raises her voice against inequality and oppression. There is a constant conflict in her minds between feminist learning and tradition-bound roles. The poetry appears as an expression of the psychic and inherent conscious self of the poet but she writes

### **Don't Look For My Life In These Poems**

Poems have order, sanity  
aesthetic distance from debris.  
All I've learnt from pain  
I always knew,  
but could not do.

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The poets are revealing their dilemma without hesitations. Eunice de Souza's poems are major attempts to invoke introspections and subjective reflections in the readers. She adopts an observant tone with a detached voice and underlying rage in her poems. She expresses her resentment against the Goan-Catholic society in this way that it makes her tone strident. Many of her poems are the exposure of her this harsh attitude:

Her search is through her poetry and writings. This search is not only for knowledge but also for identity as women. So her writing is not merely self-expression but also a means of self-exploration and self-assertion. Eunice de Souza's strong confessional voice and self-assertion in her poems shows a mirror towards feminine sensibility. Her poetry also shows the growth of psychological, inner and emotional potentialities. She has portrayed her own experience as a woman also in her poetry.

The underlying meanings of her poetry disclose an atmosphere of subdued tensions, hidden sexuality, and frustrated emotions and her poetry allow us to peep into her sufferings and tortured psyche on the one hand and the paradox and complexity of the female psyche on the other hand. She reveals the tensions and frustrations which a woman faces because of what she wants and what society expects her to do.. Her poetry is the poetry of loss and self-disgust. In the —Introductionll written by Keith Fernandes in De Souza's Selected and New Poems, Fernandes expresses her own attitude towards the poetry of Eunice de Souza —There are poems which speak of failure, isolation, disintegration and lossll (xvi). There is a deep sadness in her verse. She has attempted to work out her traumas through her poetry.

De Souza's verse is made upon her memories of Goan Catholic life in Poona and represents the community's repressions, prejudices and ignorance. Discontented childhood experiences as part of this community form the stuff of much of her poetry. Her verse expresses her private fears, anxieties, desires and hopes. She adopts a satirical and ironic tone in her poetry, As Bruce King states: While it has no affiliations in politics, community, humanistic ideals, religion, it

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is feminist in its kind of awareness, female vision, and affinities to the mode of her women poets rather than in a proclaimed commitment. She inquires the position of woman and thus became a representative of female literary modernism. The mentality of the society towards a girl child and the effort to condition her to fit in stereotypical roles is unacceptable to her and she raises her voice through her writings. At times her voice becomes rebellious and bitter looking at this discrimination. Eunice De Souza expresses herself with economy of expression, abrupt endings and easy diction and she has a naturalness and charm that is distinctive.

Eunice de Souza emerges as a very well known feministic poet who shown how women are treated in a society under patriarchal domination. She firms her position by showing the conscious of the women community by enlarging the boundaries and borders of woman created for them.

# 6

## Poetry of Revolt: Kamala Das's Poetry

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Kamla Das is one of pioneering post-independence Indian English poets who have contributed immensely to the growth and development of modern Indian English poetry.

Kamala Das belongs to the Modern Indian English Poets who has brought into English Poetry the concept of Confessional Poetry which was rare then in Indian English poets particularly the woman poets.

In Kerala, her birthplace, she gained fame by her short stories and autobiographies written in the local language (Malayalam) whereas, in English Language, it is the poetry that has given her a significant place. Her family has a considerable influence on her literary career.

Her poetry could be divided into two categories- love poems where she expresses her happiness and the poems where she expresses her resentment against unfulfilled love, and the nostalgic poems about her grand-mother and ancestral house.

Kamala Das' Reminiscences of childhood at Nalapat House, her family home, are tinged with nostalgia as in "My Grand-mother's House" and "A Hot Noon in Malabar". Her Grand-mother and the

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ancestral house dominate quite a few memorable poems. The house is a symbol of rootedness and sense of belonging to a place, In “My Grand Mother’s House”, the poet recalls the house, where she once received love and the old woman (i.e. the Grand-mother) who loved her dearly. She is nostalgic about it and the memory of the Grand-mother makes her pensive.

The poem begins with a note of nostalgia :

There is a house now far away where once  
I received love..... the woman died.

Following the death of the Grand-mother a great change comes over the house. In the words of the poet,

The house withdrew into silence, Snakes moved  
Among books I was then too young  
To read, and my blood turned cold like the moon.

Through subtle imagery and figures of speech the poet brings out the changes in the house in the form of unused books and books that have been damaged due to lack of attention, which turned the blood of the poetic persona ‘cold like the moon’. She recalls the past to write poetry as ‘the emotion recollected in tranquility’. Thus she writes :

How often I think of going  
There, to peer through blind eyes of windows  
Or just listen to the frozen air,  
Or in wild despair; pick an armful of  
Darkness to bring it here to lie behind my  
Bedroom door like a brooding  
Dog..... You cannot believe, darling,  
can you, that I lived in such a house and  
Was proud and loved.

Kamala Das deeply loved and admired her grandmother. In a different situation, Kamala Das laments over the death of her Grandmother and decline of her ancestral place. In ‘Composition’ Das writes :

The only secrets I always  
Withhold

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Are that I am so alone

And that I miss my Grandmother.

“A Hot Noon in Malabar” is another poem about her ancestral place. Here she recalls the activities of the people in a hot after noon. With all its peculiarities like ‘beggars with whining voice’, men coming ‘from hills with parrots in a cage and fortune-cars’, ‘brown Kurava girls’, ‘bangles-sellers’, ‘strangers’, and ‘wildmen’ coming to Malabar, the place fascinates her without end. Staying away from Malabar is a kind of torture for her. The hot afternoon seems to bubble with activities like buying and selling of bangles, ‘fortune-telling’ by fortune tellers and giving arms to beggars. But the afternoon is not without its perils for ‘stranger’ and ‘wildmen’ visit the place. The poet puts it in its proper perspective in the following lines :

Is this a noon for strangers with mistrust in  
Their eyes, dark, silent ones who rarely speak  
At all, so that when they speak, their voices  
Run wild, like jungle-voice. Yes, this is  
A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love.

Betrayal in love and physical exploitation underline the agony of the woman expressed in “The Sunshine Cat”. The poet describes the plight of a woman who has become a victim to the lust of many men. The poem, as usual with Kamala Das, begins abruptly with a conversational tone and colloquial speech rhythm. The opening lines almost read like news paper item imparting sensational news

They did this to her, the men who knew her,  
the men/she loved, who loved her not enough, being  
selfish/and a coward, the husband who neither loved  
nor/used her, but was a ruthless watcher, and  
the band/of cynics she turned to, clinging to  
their chests where/new hair sprouted like great  
winged moths, burrowing her/face into their  
smells and their young lusts to forget.  
To forget, oh, to forget

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The woman is complaining against male chauvinism but the remedy is out of her reach. They were kind only to be cruel when they “let her slide from pegs of sanity into/a bed made soft with tears.” Her husband was the worst of the lot who confined her “to a room of books till she was cold and/half-dead woman, now of no use at all to men.” This is one of the negative poems of Kamala Das in which the bitterness is loudly pronounced.

Kamala Das has devised her own medium for expression, which reveals her emotions forcefully.

The language I speak  
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness  
All mine and mine alone. It is half English, half Indian  
Funny perhaps, but it is honest  
It is human as I am human.

The expression is natural and spontaneous and expresses her point of view of existence. They deal with her interior life and subjective state. Through these poems she expresses her feminine sensibilities in various forms and meanings. Her diverse roles as grand-daughter, daughter, sister, mother, wife, beloved and seeker for unfulfilled love are poignantly expressed in her poems. She expresses her unfulfilled yearning for the love she received from her grandmother, parents and the physical spaces of the house and surroundings in poems such as, ‘My Grandmother’s House’, ‘Composition’, ‘Blood’, ‘Fed on God for Years’, ‘A Requiem for my Father’ etc.

Her loneliness haunts her, torments her, disgusts her, irritates her and frustrates her. Her poetic expressions underlying love, sex and loneliness uncover the details with frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context. The undisguised expression is sensuous, fleshy, and includes anatomical details, body functions and frank confessions. Her unhappy marriage is extensively detailed in her poems. Kamala Das uninhibitedly talks of her husband’s lust and cruelty. She is frank enough to assert that while her husband owns his body, her lover holds her soul.

That other owns me; while your arms hold



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My woman form, his hurting arms  
Hold my very soul.

Kamala Das could not come to terms of her hurt and premonition which deepens when society fits her to the role of a girl and wife. The helplessness of women suffering through the social taboos annoys her. The unnatural, stifling and patriarchal set up annoys and cripples her zest for life. She feels molested by all including her husband.

I am wronged, I am wronged  
I am so wronged.

She sets out and struggles to find her objects of desire, true love, lover and her own self. This journey has phases of isolation, turbulence, betrayal and doubts. She holds her husband responsible for her straying conduct.

You let me sing in empty shrines,  
You let your wife  
Seek ecstasy in others' arms

Her freedom leads her to mate with many men she meets. But even these man frustrates her and fails to satisfy her quest for love and her agony and pain continues. The 'empty love' empties her own vigour and enthusiasm for life. She weaves her emotions of love and pain to weave her poetic fabric.

Yes,  
I sang solo, my songs were lovely, but they did  
Echo beyond the world's unlighted edge.'  
Her poems have become the honest oration of her heart  
When I die  
Do not throw the meat and bones away  
But pile them up  
And  
Let them tell  
By their smell  
What life was worth

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On this earth  
What love was worth  
In the end.

Kamala Das in her works make use of her frustrated desires to criticise the male domination. Das's provocative poems are known for their bravely honest explorations of the self and female sexuality, urban life, woman's roles in traditional Indian society, issues of postcolonial identity, and the political and personal struggles of marginalized. *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1975), poems such as "Substitute," "The Suicide" examines the failure of physical love to provide fulfilment, escapism and freedom from past. In "An Introduction," Das universalizes and makes public traditionally private experiences, suggesting that women's personal feelings of longing and loss are part of the collective experience of womanhood. All her poems explore a revolutionary thought against the patriarchy. In "An Introduction" she writes, "I met a man, loved him. Call/ Him not by any name, he is every man/ Who wants a woman," On another occasion she says "In him... Hungry haste/ of rivers, in me... the oceans" which shows us about her notion about the male being.

"The Invitation" is not easy to read, for here, a complex thought pattern has been infused into the loose structure and thereby demands a close study of the text. The beloved invites the sea to take her away or wipe out her bitter memory of being jilted in love. She, as it were, invokes the sea :

Oh Sea, let me shrink or grow, slosh up,  
Slide down, go your way.  
I will go mine.

The complaint against the lover is bitter and images chosen area appropriate to the context:

He came to me between  
Long conferences, a fish coming up  
For air, and was warm in my arms  
And inarticulate .....

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The lover is likened to fish coming up for fresh air and diving deep when the need is over. The image of sex and note of betrayal go together. Since 'The man is gone for good', it would be foolish to wait for him. But the memory lingers on and the pangs of separation abide. Thus, she recalls :

On the bed with him, the boundaries of  
Paradise had shrunk to a mere  
Six by two and afterwards, when we walked  
Out together, they  
Widened to hold the unknowing city the sea.

The sea seems to console her and offers a way out by saying 'End in me, cries the sea'. The woman (i.e the protagonist) of the poem to have entered into a dialogue with the sea by unveiling her heart and seeking consolation in order to get rid of this mental tension and physical separation. Thus, she recalls:

All through that Summer's afternoons we lay  
On bees, our limbs inert, cells expanding  
Into throbbing suns. The heat had  
Blotted our thoughts..... Please end this whiplash  
of Memories, cries

The woman being young, the waiting is still there for the lover to come. "I am still young/and need that man for construction and/Destruction", says the woman. With the rise and fall of tides in the sea, the passion of the woman rises and falls and the longing for the man becomes irresistible.. Thus the poem ends with an invitation to the lover, justifying its title :

The tides beat against the walls, they  
Beat in childish.....

Darling, forgive me, how long can one resist?

She wants tenderness, emotional fulfilment and love beyond desire, which the man fails to fulfill as he is indifferent to her as a person. "The Freaks" is such poem in which love turns to lust. The woman in the poem complains bitterly against this attitude of her man.

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There is no love between them and what keeps them together is the lust. The man is described by her with disapproving appearance, his cheek is 'Sunstained', his mouth 'a bark cavern' and teeth 'uneven'. There is no love between them and as he puts his right hand on her knee, "they only wander, tripping/ldly over puddles of Desire". 'Desire' here is personified. It stands for lust-mere carnal desire devoid of warmth of love and affection.

Thus the woman asks angrily:

Can't this man with  
Nimble finger tips unleash  
Nothing more alive than the  
Skin's lazy hungers?

In the loveless life between a man and a woman nothing provides solace. She thus asks :

Who can  
Help us who have lived so long  
And have failed in love?

In desperation she concludes :

I am a freak. It's only  
To save my face, I flaunt, at  
Times, a grand, flamboyant lust.

The subjective expression is the most important aspect of the Indian English women poets after 1960s. Kamala Das is the most prominent of these confessional poetesses. She writes, 'A Poet's raw material is not stone or clay, it is her personality. I could not escape from my predicament even for a moment.' ('My Story', Sterling Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1979, p.65). She is one of the modernist writers to assert her femininity as a human in Indian literature. Her poetry is a protest against discrimination to women, hegemony of male supremacy and her inherent quest for identity. Kamala Das is recognised as the harbinger of post colonial feminism in Indian context. All through her poetry her female vision is pressing hard for recognition. There are an unkind variety of experiences she has in

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life. Her poetry expresses love, sexuality, loneliness, sickness, drudgery, death, morality and such personal emotions.

Kamala Das has devised her own medium for expression, which reveals her emotions forcefully.

The language I speak  
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness  
All mine and mine alone. It is half English, half  
Indian  
Funny perhaps, but it is honest  
It is human as I am human.

The expression is natural and spontaneous and expresses her own view of existence. They deal with her interior life and subjective state. Through these poems she expresses her feminine sensibilities in various forms and meanings. Her diverse roles as grand-daughter, daughter, sister, mother, wife, beloved and seeker for unfulfilled love are poignantly expressed in her poems. She expresses her unfulfilled yearning for the love she received from her grandmother, parents and the physical spaces of the house and surroundings in poems such as, 'My Grandmother's House', 'Composition', 'Blood', 'Fed on God for Years', 'A Requiem for my Father' etc.

Her vision thus is a documentation of her own vivid existence pressing hard for recognition. Her chief contribution to Indian English poetry lies in through the strong assertion of her individuality. She has been extensively bold and frank enough to bring forth a woman's psychic self that lay dark hidden inside them because of social taboos and norms. The feminine search within herself and a quest to find her answers within and learning from her own experiences and blunt, bitter and concrete moods make her expressions unique and genuinely confessional.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that Indian English women poets have exhibited a desperate courage and urgency in their poetry. Women poets are a sort of school in

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contemporary literary scenario. Poetry of contemporary Indian English women poets is moving towards a larger consciousness and wide variety of themes. This line of women poetry promises illustrious future promising new dimension opening up for new poetry, articulating feminine vision which does not find expression in the work of their male counterpart.

# 7

## Exploring Concern For Feminine Self In Gauri Deshpande's Poetry

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The operation of feminine sensibility is perceptible in Contemporary Indian English Women Poets. This feminine sensibility introduces a new revolution and modernity in Indian English poetry. Gauri Deshpande's poetry highlights the revolutionary social and moral attitudes of the society towards woman in general. Gauri Deshpande echoes what Simone D Beauvoir once stated: One is not born a woman; one become one. ... The situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where a man compels her to assume the status of the other. The marginalised, trivialised woman subjected to the politics of patriarchy is a woman full of intensities of a throbbing heart and a palpitating soul. (The Second Sex, 197).

. Gauri Deshpande is a notable name in Indian English Poetry. With her poetic output, she is equally ranked with Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Eunice De Souza and Kamala Das. Her poetic output includes three collections, namely, Between Births (1968), Lost Love (1970), and Beyond The Slaughter House (1972) with a total of eighty poem which portrays female psyche and feminine sensibilityto its core. Her individuality, struggle for existence is discerned in her poetic output and delineates the emotions which she faces, being a

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woman. This gets reflected in her poems like *The Female of the species*

### **The Female of the species**

Sometimes you want to talk  
about love and despair  
and the ungratefulness of children  
A man is no use whatever then .  
You want then your mother  
or your sister  
or the girl with whom you went to through the school,  
and your first love ,and her -  
first child -a girl-  
and your second.  
You sit with them and talk .  
She sews and you sit and sip  
and speak of the rate of rice  
and the price of tea  
and the scarcity of cheese.  
You know both that you 've spoken  
of love, despair and ungratefulness of children.  
The way she portrays feminine position is remarkable.

Born in Pune to Irawati Karve and Dinkar Karve, Gauri Deshpande was a writer in Marathi and English. After passing out of Fergusson College in Pune where she took an MA in English literature, she published her first poem in English entitled "Between Births" (1968). This was followed by "Lost love" (1970) and "Beyond the Slaughterhouse" (1972). 'Her first collection of poems Between Births (1968) explores sensitively the frustration and alienation resulting from her incapacity to make meaningful relationships. She expresses her immediacy of experience through a tightly webbed series of images in poems as "A Change of Seasons", "Migraine", and "the Female of the Species". "Family Portraits" poetically portrays an entire lineage. Deshpande boldly encounters sexuality in Between



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Births. Her next collection *Lost Love* also breaks away from the sensuous and mellifluous treatment of conventional love. Her primary concern with man-woman relationships is expressed in a series of poems ranging from the treatment of sexual love and abortion to barrenness and old age. She expresses various emotions through poems such as "The Eclipse" where she is forced to accept her alienation, and "December" where she accepts love but hesitates because it chains and confines her. The search of existence of the modern woman finds expression in Deshpande's poetry: 'Beyond the Slaughter House' 'Where Do Lonely People Live', "Work of a Day Woman"

*Between Births* was published in 1968 and has twenty-six poems. The first poem *Death* delineates the emotions of the beloved who is expressed as "a tardy lover for surrender". The beloved knows that love is a way to death – death of freedom, death of individuality and death of one's peculiar whims but still she is determined for this fatal union "Make him/my ally"(18-19). In the succeeding canto of the poem the "frantic effort" to reach out to one's lover is still maintained. The female role that of a wife, of a mother and above all that of a human are juxtaposed with the yearning for feminine in terms of love, affection, emotion and desire. The destination is reached through this yearning: "Here's where you've brought me, my meager brown path/This is the end" (34-5). The woman in the poet recalls all that it longed for. The commitment of a woman to her expansive social realm has reduced her personal demands. The longings are conveyed through the imageries of various seasons. The pangs of *Lost Love* is romanticised in the fourth canto where she debates her walk through "long and windsome streets" to her final union with her lover. There is a sense of resignation and a note of despair.

Deshpande's poetry reveal a world of modern anxiety of fragmented human beings struggling to search their self. She also lists the idea of 'misery and discontent' of an urban existence in her poems. The frustration, depression, futility, sadness, loss, conflict, dilemma are precisely brought forth in her poems. The yearning and desire of women for love, acknowledgement and care are pictured in

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these poems. This gloom and pain abounds in her poetry. The various themes in her poems marks her creativity and concern for feminine self . Profoundly influenced by the modern scientific theories like Darwinism, evolutionism, Deshpande seeks to highlight the idea of 'misery and discontent'; of living 'in disharmony' with decadent dreams; 'barren and bereft' of hope and consolation that characterize human lives in modern times.

She has observed man and women very minutely and man women relationship prominently gets focus in her poems. She writes;

When you left me lying . . . . .  
I hated the cold air  
drying my sweat on your hands  
and driving my thought  
from your tired thigh.

Deshpande deals with the modern women's rebellion and protest against the rule of male dictators of the Indian patriarchal society.

Gauri Deshpande's poetry at the social and moral attitudes of the society towards woman in general. Gauri Deshpande echoes what Simone D Beauvoir once stated: One is not born a woman; one become one. ... The situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where a man compels her to assume the status of the other. The marginalised, trivialised woman subjected to the politics of patriarchy is a woman full of intensities of a throbbing heart and a palpitating soul. (The Second Sex, 197). ' A Sentimental Journey'illustrates the essence of an emotional soul. The emotional contours are wonderfully described in terms of epithets and similes. On entering her maiden house she remembers young youthful life and the childhood home fitted around her like a garment in which she immediately slides down to fathom a world of unlamented remembered moments. The father image to some measure reciprocated with intensity of love. He also gave a glance of "fleetingly, smiling remembrance" (10) She wonders at the identity of her vibrating heart and attempts to explore the aspects of masculinity

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in terms and perspective of femininity. The status of women upholding their traditional status while men at large enjoy the liberal stature that society grants to patriarchy. She craves and struggles to carve out her individual existence because the society confines her to various restrictions. The Guest is a poem of disharmony and of discord in married life. The poem is a picture of deep rooted gloom and helplessness, which is the fate of a woman since ages. The poem is a crisp note on how a lady surrenders herself in order to make a home for a man but in return a man leaves her "empty, barren and bereft". The note of sadness and loss abounds in her poetic output. The poet said that the nearness of her lover is a mesmerising experience and an intense desire for his proximity gnaws her soul when he is not there. The waiting of the woman in love is a wonderful expression of femininity. I Wanted to Weep reflects the pain and suffering. It is a woman's desperate efforts to hold to a relationship that has gone awry. The void in relationship makes a woman cry but then a woman has little role in re-making a life or reconstituting a relationship. Her fate remains in the hands of her predator. The poem expresses the abysses in sex harmony, which is discontentment in the congenial climax of love. A woman is subjected to only passive reception of sexual love but is deprived of the authority to express her sexual urge. A woman is trained in suppressing her sexual desire and the word 'sex' is a taboo to her, therefore should not be spoken with loudness. Such a state of a woman is described by Gilman Parking in her book The Home as: The man needs the wife and has her; needs the world and has it. The woman needs the husband, and has him; needs the world, and there is the husband instead. She stands between her and the world with the best of intentions, doubtless but a poor substitute for full human life. (263) Poems in Winter is a long poem spread to the length of three cantos. The poem is all about the disappointments in love and the rejection of the essence of a woman as a living being. The poem is subjective and the poet speaks the anguish of her rusted heart in the autumn of life. The poet calls her life. The poet calls her day "chapped and wintry" (6) and looks with complete disappointment at the piles of sawdust on image concretizing vast barrenness within

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her. The satiety is love makes the presence of the lover an unbearable confrontation and the absence there by of the lover is measured rewarding and “fruitful”. The poet then recoils to those yearning which are not only unknown but also unseen. She also thinks about her love and her desire, which stands, unreachd and unrealised.

Her concern with man-woman relationships is expressed in a series of poems ranging from the treatment of sexual love and abortion to barrenness and old age. She projects the dilemma of a lost love through poems such as “The Eclipse” where she is forced to accept her alienation, and “December”, where she accepts love but hesitates because it chains and confines her. A clear progression towards accepting poetry as a social outgrowth can be noted in *Beyond the Slaughter House* where she shows a rare insight about employed women in the busy city of Bombay. “Work of a Day Woman” expresses the intensities of a woman who has lost her sense of emotions and this projection of loss even of gender roles within a changing society finds expression in “Where Do Lonely People Live”. The identity and awareness of the self of the modern woman finds expression in Deshpande’s poetry. (Ray, 134) After her mother’s death in 1970, she wrote her memoir in Marathi for a newspaper, and initiated a new tradition of Marathi writing with the idea of narrating ‘kahani’ or women’s tales. She started with *Ekek Pan Galawaya* (1980), then *Teruo Te Ani Kahi Door Paryant* (1985), *Ahe He Ase Ahe* (1986), *Niragathi Ani Chandrike Ga Sarike Ga* (1987), *Dustar Ha Ghat Ani Athang* (1989), *Mukkam* (1992), *Vinchurniche Dhade* (1996), *The Lackadaisical Sweeper* (1997) (a collection of short stories in English), *Goph* (1999), and *Utkhanan* (2002). She also translated Sunita Deshpande’s *Ahe Manohar Tari* as *And Pine For What Is Not* and sixteen volumes of Richard Burton’s *Arabian Nights* into Marathi. In the words of Sherwyn T. Carr, ‘She (Gauri Deshpande) is a mature poet, aware that neither passion nor disillusionment are simple emotions and the texture of her best poetry is accordingly complex. Most of her verse is marked by a sense of sadness and loss’. (Carr, 125) Aparna Mahajan, in her essay on “The Portrayal of Relationships

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in Gauri Deshpande's "The Lackadaisical Sweeper", goes on to point out how Gauri Deshpande seeks to make her readers aware of the fact that women's suppression and subjectivity should not be looked upon as her destiny for she believed that it was up to the woman alone to think and to create her own distinctive path in the given circumstances.

Gauri Deshpande has made her mark as outstanding women poet. She is constantly attempting to peel out the layers of memory. In her poem 'To Self Portrait' she expresses thus:

.....I find  
Myself an onion  
layer after layer of seeming meaning  
and intent, sufficient by itself  
leading to no heart.

'Anchored in the world around here expressed Keki N. Daruwalla, 'Gauri Deshpande's poetry deals with the trivia of every day life, the coming of a lover, the death of a puppy dog, ingratitude of children. Everything is grist to her mill, from city with its greasy caress and harsh endearments to a tree scape' Patriarchy creates the psychic conditions for women's oppression and subordination which restricts women to their marginalised status . With her fiery feminine sensibility and her candid and realistic expression, she expresses herself more freely.

The operation of feminine sensibility is perceptible in Contemporary Indian English Women Poets. This feminine sensibility introduces a new revolution and modernity in Indian English poetry. Gauri Deshpande's poetry highlights the revolutionary social and moral attitudes of the society towards woman in general. Gauri Deshpande echoes what Simone D Beauvoir once stated: One is not born a woman; one become one. ... The situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where a man compels her to assume the status of the other. The marginalised, trivialised woman subjected to the politics of patriarchy is a woman full of intensities of a throbbing heart and a palpitating soul. (The Second Sex, 197).

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As a poet depicting feminine sensibility and issues, Gauri Deshpande holds a significant position. She genuinely depicts her emotions and ideas through her poems. Aparna Mahajan, in her essay on "The Portrayal of Relationships in Gauri Deshpande's "The Lackadaisical Sweeper", goes on to point out how Gauri Deshpande seeks to make her readers aware of the fact that women's suppression and subjectivity should not be looked upon as her destiny for she believed that it was up to the woman alone to think and to create her own distinctive path in the given circumstances". (59-64) Thus in the development of modern Indian English poetry and its feminine sensibility, Gauri Deshpande has played a vital role which merits full recognition.

8

## Cross Cultural Influences: The Voice of Sujata Bhatt

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Sujata Bhatt born in India and educated in the United States, has been shaped by cross-cultural experiences as reflected in her three collections: *Brunizem* (1988) which won the Commonwealth Poetry prize (Asian Section), *Monkey Shadows* (1991) won a poetry Book Society Recommendation and her third anthology *The Stinkin Roe* (1997) is the recent book with a selection from the first three books introduced by one new poem, the title poem.

Rajana Ash in *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry* describes Sujata's poetry as "the anguish of immigrants when they start lose their first language," and she comments approvingly on the poet's attempt use Gujarati line interspersed with English ones" onomatopoeia effect, and because for her certain subjects cannot be described in English." In fact, her bi-lingual poem explore the conflict between different cultures. At the beginning of 'Search For My Tongue,' an eight page poem, the Gujarati sentences are translated quite literally into English. As the poem progresses the Gujarati lines remain flat, prosaic and closed, while the English sentences that flow become longer and richer, spinning off associations and graphically

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building on them so that they work quite independently of the Gujarati original.

Sujata Bhatt, is of a younger generation poets and her poems engage with representations of women as mothers and preservers of a national culture and traditions. Bhatt moved away from India at a young age, having grown up in the United States and moved to Germany after marriage, but her poems reflect a sense of loss in leaving Gujarat, which she explores through idealisations of Indian motherhood and women's roles in the home. Her poem 'My Mother's Way of Wearing a Sari' from the collection *Augatora* (2000) capitalises on childhood memories, as Bhatt correlates her mother's way of dressing with a 'simple' way of life that she no longer has now that she resides abroad.

"She wraps the sari around herself  
in less than three minutes and sometimes  
I wish she would start all over again."

Bhatt idealises her mother's role as the representations of women's public and private roles. In the home, her mother only wears saris made of khadi, a "hand-woven cotton", and holds a political significance, for khadi is associated with Gandhian ideals of women's involvement in the nationalist movement. Her mother also holds importance for her as the preserver of Indian culture in poems such as 'History is a Broken Narrative', also from *Augatora* and 'Gale Force Winds' from *Pure Lizard* (2008), both of which depict her mother in traditional roles in the home. 'History is a Broken Narrative' centres on Bhatt's experience of learning English and the alphabets of her own native languages of Gujarati and Marathi at the same time; she continues to think in different languages and fuse her native languages with English in her poems. In 'History is a Broken Narrative', Bhatt associates her mother with their culture and language:

'Afternoons my mother  
led me through our old alphabet –  
I felt as if the different scripts  
belonged together'.



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In learning her native languages from her mother, Bhatt feels connected to her Indian heritage even though she lived abroad. Her mother thus becomes a medium to unite her with the mother tongue and motherland. While Bhatt writes in English, she continues to feel connected to her Indian heritage through these languages. In 'Gale Force Winds' from *Pure Lizard*, Bhatt nostalgically uses the same spices in Germany which her mother once used in India,

I'm refilling jars with spices.  
As I release them,  
as I pour them from paper into glass,  
I recall my mother's instructions,  
her recipes, her ginger cures  
for almost every ailment.(6)

Bhatt's desire to preserve her heritage simplifies her mother's responsibilities to her family by placing her mother in domestic roles and portraying her as the preserver of Indian culture and traditions. Nevertheless, these poems demonstrate the significant influence that her mother had on her personal life as well as creative development as a poet.

Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin discuss the significance of women's stories as part of history in their study *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (1998). They note that, 'Different sorts of telling reveal different truths, and the "fragment" is significant precisely because it is marginal rather than mainstream, particular (even individual), rather than general, and because it presents history from below'.<sup>[2]</sup> This statement suggests the importance of bringing women's narratives into a national history, which Bhatt does through a poem about her mother's experience of the partition of British India.

The poem 'Partition' from *Augatora* explores Bhatt's mother's memories of growing up in Ahmedabad, a major city located just southeast of what is now the Pakistan Indian border. Given the title of the poem, it is clear that Bhatt wants her mother's story to be seen as part of the greater narrative of Partition history, and the poem reveals

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her mother's experience through a retelling of a story that is passed on from mother to daughter. The second part of the poem moves from her mother's memories of Partition to Bhatt's own experience of 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.[4]

In shifting the perspective of the poem from her mother's memory to Bhatt's experience of hearing it, we are able to perceive Bhatt's role as the storyteller within a greater narrative. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin note the significance of hearing women's stories of Partition, even if they are only in the form of a story, because women's everyday experiences and memories of Partition are just as important as documented historical facts of that time.[38] Bhatt's inclusion of her mother's words in the poem holds personal significance, for in relating their conversation, she places herself within her own family history and in a national history. Bhatt's 'Partition' depicts this personal story as an important aspect of Indian history and signifies her desire to portray the experiences of the women in her family. Bhatt's poems about her mother show us the importance of perceiving women's stories as part of a national history, but they also reveal the simple details of her mother's life as an Indian woman. Sujatha Bhatt is one of the most distinctive Indian poets writing in English, her poems deal with the themes of "Interpersonal relations", "Inter cultural relations" and "The element of feminism". But the element of feminism is not as strong as it comes in Kamala Das' poems. We have an expression of female sensibility in some of her poems. For example in the poem "This room is part of the NYS Subway system", she expresses thus

"We sleep in A room filled with Sylvia Schister"s drawings.

A room filled with point dark heads – stern, Pensive.

They take up all the space on the walls.

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There is such beauty in the shape of their skulls:  
An ideal geometry of saw bones and cheek bones”.

Sujatha Bhatt expressed the feminine sensibility in a gentle way. She too speaks of the common women and her basic need for love and security. In one of her poems “Honey moon” she writes

, “I remember your power  
Your distance : triumphant  
And the lack of any horizon on your face.  
But I always wanted to know, grandmother,  
What had you been denied?  
What great bitterness was it That made you decide.  
Your twelve year old daughter, my father’s sister,  
Had to accompany my parents On their honeymoon?

Bhatt seems to be obsessed with the question of language, which she looks at from different points of view at different times. The title poem of Point No Point begins :

Why name a place Point No Point?  
Does it mean we are nowhere.  
When we reach it?  
Does it mean that we lose our sense  
of meaning, or sense of direction  
when we stop at Point No Point?

In many other places, almost the same urge of exploration and dislocations is evident, as in the poem ‘The One Who Goes Away’ from the book The Stinking Rose where she is searching for a place in order to keep her soul from wondering.

Sometimes I’m asked if  
I were searching for a place  
that can keep my soul  
from wondering  
a place where I can stay  
without wanting to leave.

Her relationship with memory remains a powerful driving force to her creativity

## **Feminine Sensibility in Indian English Women poetry**

I am the one  
who always goes  
away with my home  
which can only stay inside  
in my blood – my home  
which does not fit with any geography.

Moving between countries and cultures, Bhatt is concerned with the construction of the self and its relationship with memory, history and identity. While honouring the importance of her heritage, she also seems to be striving to discover who she is; she fosters both the values of her birthplace and her Western living.

From the above analysis of Indian English women poetry, it can be concluded that Indian English women poets have exhibited a desperate courage and urgency in their poetry. Women poets are a sort of school in contemporary literary scenario. Poetry of contemporary Indian English women poets is moving towards a larger consciousness and wide variety of themes. This line of women poetry promises illustrious future promising new dimension opening up for new poetry, articulating feminine vision which does not find expression in the work of their male counterpart.

9

## Post Colonial Voice: Meena Alexander

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Meena Alexander (1951-2018) was one of the most accomplished poets of postcolonial India. At the age fifteen, she changed her birth name of Mary Elizabeth to Meena, the name she published all her work under. She was Distinguished Professor of English and Women's Studies at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She remained deeply connected in her writing to her Indian and particularly Kerala roots, representing gender, religious, racial justice and a cosmopolitan sensibility through her poetry. In her poetry, which has been translated into several languages, she explores migration, trauma, and reconciliation. She was nurtured in India and migrated to Sudan, England, and her final home since 1980s, the island of Manhattan.

It was in Khartoum, Sudan that Alexander first started writing poetry – her earliest poems were translated and published in Arabic translation in a local newspaper, when she attended Kartoum University in Sudan at the age of thirteen. Her early life was imbued with multiple fragmentary languages – the Malayalam of her ancestral home in Tiruvella, Kerala, Hindi and Sanskrit in Allahabad, English across India, and French and Arabic in Khartoum.

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She is regarded as one of the finest poets of contemporary times by *The Statesman* (India). The subjects explored in her writing include language, memory, and the significance of place. Her poetry collections included *The Bird's Bright Ring* (1976), *I Root My Name* (1977), *Without Place* (1978), *Stone Roots* (1980), *House of a Thousand Doors* (1988), and *The Storm: A Poem in Five Parts* (1989). and a memoir, *Fault Lines* (1993).

Alexander told Ruth Maxey of the *Kenyon Review*, "I have always grown up in a world where there were things one did not understand, because there were languages that were not completely accessible ... I think this is a very good hedge against a certain kind of rational understanding, the presumption of linguistic clarity or transparency, post-Enlightenment, that sense that everything can be known and a light can be shone into all parts of one's thought."

Alexander's first poetry was published in India by the Calcutta Writers Workshop. In the US, her first book of poetry, *House of Thousand Doors*, came out in 1988, followed by *River and Bridge* (1996), *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections of Postcolonial Experience* (an anthology containing lyrical essays and poetry), *Illiterate Heart*, *Raw Silk*, *Quickly Changing River*, *Birthplace of Buried Stone*, and the latest collection *Atmospheric Embroidery* (2018). Alexander also published two novels – *Nampally Road* in 1992 and *Manhattan Music* in 2000. Among her works of prose, it is her memoir *Fault Lines*, published by the Feminist Press of the City University of New York, first in 1993 and then in revised form in 2003. Alexander's scholarly works include *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (1979) and *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Dorothy Woodsworth* (1989). She struggled to express her individual poetic voice although she was deeply influenced by the British Romantic poets. She is remarkable as a post- colonial poet indicating the burden of colonial language through her writings.

Nineteen years old, I crouched  
on the damp floor where grandfather's  
library used to be, thumbed through Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

## Feminine Sensibility in Indian English Women poetry

thinking, Why should they imagine no one else  
has such rivers in their lives?

I was Marlowe and Kurtz and still more  
a black woman just visible at the shore.

— “Illiterate Heart”

As the poem progresses, she documents her rejection of the script of her mother tongue of Malayalam, choosing to write in English, while still being influenced by her mother tongue’s lyrical cadences:

Uproar of sense, harsh tutelage:  
aana (elephant), amma (tortoise)  
ambujan (lotus)  
A child mouthing words  
to flee family  
I will never enter that house, I swore  
I’ll never be locked in a cage of script

— “Illiterate Heart”

She tries to synthesize the cultures of east and west through her poems. For her poetry offers her a very intense place to reflect on the world. She understands her position as a feminist voice reflecting female interpretation and expression. While in an essay in **The Shock of Arrival**, she celebrates women writers like Toru Dutt, Lalithambika Antherjanam, and Sarojini Naidu, she simultaneously acknowledges the debt of American minority writers like Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Gloria Anzaldua and Leslie Marmon Silko, who influenced her own writing. She also acknowledges postcolonial writers outside of South Asia Assia Djebar, Edouard Glissant, Nawal El Sadaawi, and Ngugi wa Thiong’o among others, whom she considers as major influence.

Alexander’s poems and lyric essays touch on buried memories of personal trauma and also expresses unspeakable acts of public violence. Whether it is the poem “Spring Already”, where she mourns the death of West African immigrant Amadou Diallo due to police brutality (a poem she first read at a rally Desis for Diallo in

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Jackson Heights, New York City), or poems lamenting the violence on Muslims in Gujarat, in poems like “In Naroda Patiya” in her collection *Raw Silk*, Alexander uses the lyric to witness, record, mourn and protest.

More recently, in 2017, she published a poem titled “Refuge” in the *Bennington Review*, in which she assumes the persona of Sarra Copia Sulam, a seventeenth-century female poet of Venice to lament the death of Turkish refugee child Aylan Kurdi, whose photograph on a rocky beach drew global attention to the Syrian refugee crisis.

Clinging to the fins of a dolphin  
I have swum to Lampedusa and back  
Do you know that  
I have kissed the eyes of the child  
Who fell off a fishing boat  
Who barely floated, who swallowed  
Sand and could not breathe.

“Fault Lines,” which was reissued in 2003, was indeed far more lyrical and exploratory than the average autobiography, a search for identity through the elusiveness of memory.

It was a quest she also took up in her poetry. “The wind lifts up my life,” she wrote in a poem called “Dog Days of Summer,” “and sets it some distance from where it was.”

Her poetry reflected various experiences

Meena looks through a child’s eyes in a war-ravaged nation, in her Darfur poems, “*Last Colours*” and “*There she stands*,” where life and art seem to inspire each other:

In another country, in a tent under a tree,  
A child sets paper to rock,  
Picks up a crayon, draws a woman with a scarlet face,  
Arms outstretched, body flung into blue.  
The child draws an armored vehicle, guns sticking out  
Purple flames, orange and yellow jabbing,  
A bounty of crayons, a hut burst into glory.

The trauma and sadness is reflected further



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*On a cloud,  
A child, arms splayed.  
Beneath her, a field.  
Red trees  
With creatures clinging on —  
Cat, dog, goat, mother, father too.  
How are they all going to live?*

Meena Alexander's lyric poems embodies themes of feminism, post-colonialism, dislocation, memory, cultural tradition and power of language. For her poetry served a very important medium to impact and influence people and therefore she struggled for the poetic voice to be indulged and heard. Prageeta Sharma, in *The Women's Review of Books*, praised one of Ms. Alexander's best known collections, "Illiterate Heart" (2002), writing, "Her poems contemplate departures, arrivals and in-betweens of the soul."

In the *The Shock of Arrival*, Meena wrote:

"The act of writing, it seems to me, makes up a shelter, allows space to what would otherwise be hidden, crossed out, mutilated. Sometimes writing can work toward a reparation, making a sheltering space for the mind. Yet it feeds off ruptures, tears in what might otherwise seem a seamless oppressive fabric."

The theme of displacement appears in myriad forms in Meena's poetry. In the poem, "meaning base or foundation from the volume, *Atmospheric Embroidery*," she writes:

*Where are those refugees  
Amma did not want me to see,  
Gunny sacks and torn saris,  
Stitched together with cord?  
Udisthanam,"*

This sense of loss is recurrent in her poems.

*Unseen umbilicus  
That tethered me  
Even as the ocean  
Swept on and on.  
Going, going, gone!*

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*Someone banged the gavel,  
Hearing the house was sold  
She lay down in the mango grove  
And stopped her eyes with stones,  
Crazy girl, inconsolable!  
Where is she now?*

And the poem ends in the same realization of displacement and emptiness resulting through these experiences

*What becomes of houses torn down?  
In the room where she slept  
Milk trickles  
Syllables swarm, lacking a script  
Door jambs stick to emptiness  
Threshold split from walls.*

*(Tarawad)*

Meena's worth as a women Indian English poet lies in her voice reaching out to the global world. Her sensitive poetry pierces through many identities and her voice emerging out of the various cultural influences and journey to various lands. She is thus an international poet making peace with migration and the acceptance of her many identities.

Alexander earned numerous awards during her prolific career. Notable among these is the 2009 Distinguished Achievement Award in Literature, conferred by the South Asian Literary Association, an allied organisation of the Modern Language Association. She was the Poet in Residence in Venice in 2016, which marked the 500th anniversary of the Ghetto Nuovo. In 2014, she was named a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study. She died in late 2018.

10

## Mamta Kalia: The Personal And Confessional Voice

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Mamta Kalia is one of the notable Indian women poets writing in English and has the unique distinction of writing both in Hindi and English. Mamta Kalia started writing at the age of nine. Her books in English 'Tribute to Papa (1970) and Poems 78 (1978)' have been particularly appreciated. She has written five novels in Hindi, seven short story two one – act play collections, four novelettes for children. She has written a collection of one-act plays, edited several books and is a regular contributor to leading magazines. Her novel Beghar was a major success and ran into five editions. Her poems deal with frustrations of a woman's life in and her boredom resulting out of her relationships and boundaries laid down by the society. Mamta Kalia feels suffocation in such a society and repents that she is a woman. Her anger and strong voice results out of her loneliness in a women's hostel just after marriage, her dissatisfied living with a loveless husband, her relationship with the members of her husband's family and the experiences in a male dominated society. Her tone is confessional and her poetry is subjective. She strongly gives voice to her emotional trauma and physical and psychological torture that she undergoes being a woman. She speaks as if she is fed up of being a woman. By using irony, she concentrates on the ordinariness of

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women's life and adopts a confessional tone in her literature to overcome the aggression faced by them in the male-oriented society. Her poetic output is suffused with her wit, irony and feminine sensibility. Her poetic output thus provides a substantial document for feminist study.

Mamta Kalia's poetic sensibility is almost exclusively subjective in its response to experience as a beloved and as a serving woman. She struggles with the ardent feminist within her. She goes to embrace the ideology of feminineness that has been indoctrinated into the women of her generation. Kalia is a subjective poet distilling into the pages of her poetry the experience of a woman in different roles – as a beloved, as a wife, as a housewife etc. Her poetic output is impregnated by her wit and feminine sensibility. She is very straight forward. She takes up cudgels against the world through her writings.

So Kalia's poetry embodies the agony of women emerging from the state of subjugation and bondage 'She seeks to establish their identity and be accorded a place of dignity the self.

"Life of a woman is very difficult especially for modern woman, where there are so many responsibilities for her. There are so many rubbish works for women as house keeping and chores that are really tiresome. And, ultimately nobody realize your worth, but when you are a writer you are free from all the responsibilities so I am satisfied as a writer because at that time you are nobody but a writer. So I sneak time to write, I don't want to be a defeated person, I am a woman who always want to win everywhere." (Kalia)

The woman character in poems of Mamta Kalia plays various roles in which a women feels suffocated and silently suffers. Her poetry become confessional and gives voice to the sorrow of women .This poetry serves as a form of protest against a male-dominated society.

The established patriarchal structure controls and curtails the lives of women in one way or the other. Mamta Kalia revolts against this oppressiveness. Her attempt to self- discovery leads her to interrogate the existing structures and she searches for her own identity and personality.

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Her voice revolts with fury, anger and frankness against the established traditions and conventions which for ages has been suppressing the feminine self. Kalia's poetic persona represents the rebellious will to fight for a world that is free from this discrimination, hypocrisies, dogmas and prejudices that afflict society. Mamta Kalia stands as a representative of Indian women. She understands their suffocation and speaks for them. She depicts oppression of women with a greater sense of involvement and with a tone of protest.

Mamta Kalia's poetic sensibility is very subjective in giving words to her experiences as a beloved and as a serving woman. It becomes very difficult for a woman to maintain her own identity in this patriarchal society. She speaks very frankly of the various adjustments of a woman resulting out of marriage. She shows us inner pathos of a middle class woman's life that she has firstly to perform her household duties only then can she ever think of herself. This preoccupation with their daily routine becomes a threat to their identity. Her routine life changes to managing her home, saving and working to meet the demands of her family. She has to take care of everybody. The pressure of kitchen-work and house-hold work becomes a threat to a woman's freedom and individuality.

Mamta Kalia's "Tribute to Papa, which is according to 'Eunice De Souza', one of the most compelling poems. Tribute to Papa pays a different kind of tribute to a father. She figures out an opposition not only to men's dominance over women but women's acceptance of men's dominance. This is a very challenging poem in which the poetess portrays male dominance over women in all matters of life. Mamta tries to question her father why does the tradition permit him to control and determine the fate of his daughter. She questions if his daughter's own voice and opinion are important to him as a father.

She rebels against patriarchy and the restrictions exercised upon her by traditions and society. Such poems are haunted by the memories of her father. She proposes to choose her own course and follow her own ideals. She interrogates even her father for curtailing her dreams and expresses her liberal views. The title of the poem

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'Tribute to Papa' is quite ironical and satirical and shows her revolt against patriarchal establishment.

Who cares for you, Papa?  
Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean words, clean teeth?  
Who wants to be an angel like you?  
Who wants it?  
You are an unsuccessful man, Papa.  
Couldn't wangle a cosy place in the world.  
You have always lived a life of limited dreams.  
I wish you had guts Papa  
To smuggle eighty thousand watches at a stroke,  
And I'd proudly say, "My father's in import-export business, you know."  
I'd be proud of you then.  
But you've always wanted to be a model man,  
A sort of an ideal.  
When you can't think of doing anything,  
You start praying,  
SPending useless hours at the temple.

You want me to be like you, Papa,  
Or like Rani Lakshmibai.  
You're not sure what greatness is,  
But you want me to be great.

I give two donkey-claps for greatness.  
And three for Rani Lakshmibai.  
These days I am seriously thinking of disowning you, Papa,  
You and your sacredness.  
What if I start calling you Mr. Kapur, Lower  
Division Clerk, Accounts Section?  
Everything about you clashes with nearly everything about me  
You suspected I am having a love affair these days  
But you're too shy to have it confirmed  
What if my tummy starts showing gradually

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And I refuse to have it curretted  
But I'll be careful, Papa,  
Or I know you'll at once think of suicide.

The poem's ironical meanings reflect on the male domination. She satirises by asking "Who cares for you papa? / Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean words, clean teeth? / Who wants to be an angel like you? / Who wants it?"

Sheer good luck  
So many things  
could have happened to me.  
I could have been kidnapped  
at the age of seven  
and ravaged by  
dirty-minded middle-aged men.  
I could have been married off  
to a man with a bad smell  
and turned frigid as a frigidaire.  
I could have been  
an illiterate woman  
putting thumb-prints  
on rent-receipts.  
But nothing ever happened to me  
except two children  
and two miscarriages.

Her poems are constructed as an irony on the economical continuation of man. Her poems aim to bring balance between men and women.

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 cafe  
while I wait alone for the waiter  
to bring me coffee and sandwich~

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I want to pay· Sunday visits  
totally undressed  
I want to throw away  
all my cosmetics  
I want to reveal  
my real age

*(Compulsions)*

She struggles with the ardent feminist within her. She goes to embrace the ideology of feminineness that has been indoctrinated into the women of her generation. She conveys the turmoil of feeling in cool, idiomatic and sensitive prose through her writing.

Mamta Kalia's poem "Oh, I'm fed up of being a woman" expresses the feeling of a woman always cautious about her looks, if she is looking beautiful or not. Her poetry reveals the need of an independent existence, identity and freedom for women. The subordination and dependence of women would never let them liberate from the various shackles society imposes upon them. This dichotomy begins right in her parent's home and continues always.

Oh, I'm fed up of being a woman,  
This all time beware ness of my body(Poems 79)

Her dissatisfaction is reflected in her various poems

I keep hanging on to you like an appendix...

You obligingly smile

Asking me to keep note of milk and bread" (Papa30)

She describes herself as an appendix, as the last page of book or a small tube shaped part which is joined to the intestine on the right side of the body and has no use in humans . Her husband is a book (the significant part) and she is an appendix (the insignificant one). to a note of milk and bread. There is not any emotional bonding in their relationship and her importance being keeping note of ordinary things like milk and bread. She adjusts herself to this role also

But the moment I hear your foot steps



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I put all of me together

And give you my best smile. (Papa30)

There are various stages and complexities of married life. In her poem 'After eight years of Marriage' shows us what happens after eight years of marriage and shows us how a woman suffers in her marital life.

She shows her dissatisfaction with her marriage and fitting into a large family of the in-laws. When she visited her parents for the first time after eight years of marriage, they asked her of her new life. But she could not disclose the real feelings and truth and like other adjusting wives hid everything in the garb of smile. But her genuine personal suffering finds way through her writings

That I was happy on Tuesday

I was unhappy on Wednesday

I was happy one day at 8 O' clock

I was most unhappy by 8.15...

And struggled hard hurting myself...

I swallowed everything

And smiled a smile of great content (Poems78,26)

A woman pleases everyone. But the innate self of the poet revolts and retaliates. This response loudly and emphatically comes through her poetry. Mamta Kalia advocates that the feminist movement targeting towards the freedom of the female body should focus more upon the liberation of the female self. All the beauty pageants depend upon woman's beautiful body because this show is exclusively related to the female body and its display in various forms and dresses. Mamta Kalia thus becomes a voice for every middle class woman suffering within the confines of relationship and family. She very well projects and depict their agonies

Mamta Kalia uses the common language, the conversational language. She writes in free verse, her style is direct and her poems touch our mind and heart. Her poems were against established values and established relationships. She fights for a world that is free from

### **Feminine Sensibility in Indian English Women poetry**

discrimination, hypocrisies and prejudiced laws. She acts not only against male dominance but also against the women accepting this dominance from males. She displays that women also have sense and feelings which she expresses through her poems

11

## Suniti Namjoshi: A Diasporic Lesbian Voice

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Suniti Namjoshi is an important writer in contemporary Indian literature in English. She was born in India and lived in three other countries – England, Canada and USA. She worked in the Indian Administrative Service and in academic posts in India before moving to Montreal. She earned a PhD from McGill University (with a thesis on Ezra Pound), worked at the University of Toronto and later at the Centre for Women's Studies at Exeter University, UK. Her poetry reflects multiple interactions. She identifies herself as a diasporic lesbian author and her poetry creates resistance against racism, misogyny and homophobia. Her poetry, fables, articles and reviews have been featured in various anthologies and journals in India, Canada, the US, Australia and Britain. A deep engagement with issues of gender, sexual orientation, cultural identity and human rights infuses her work. She was active in both Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation.

She has several books of verse and fable to her credit. She worked in the Indian Administrative Service and in academic posts in India before moving to Montreal. She earned a PhD from McGill University (with a thesis on Ezra Pound), worked at the University of Toronto and later at the Centre for Women's Studies at Exeter

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University, UK. She now lives in the UK where she works as a full-time writer. Her poetry, fables, articles and reviews have been featured in various anthologies and journals in India, Canada, the US, Australia and Britain. A deep engagement with issues of gender, sexual orientation, cultural identity and human rights infuses her work.

Suniti Namjoshi has pictured feminism in various aspects. She is a great feminist myth maker. By myth making, she is actually evaluating her identity, perceptions reordering the world and value systems projected in the past. Her writings are a resistance against racism, misogyny and homophobia.

She struggles against the white supremacist and masculinised discourse of America and also against Hindu patriarchy. Her writing explore the diaspora and shifting, with wit and humour. Her notable poetry collections include *Because of India, Flesh and Paper* (in collaboration with her partner Gillian Hanscombe) and *The Fabulous Feminist*.

Namjoshi's first book of poems, 'Poems' was published by P. Lal of Writers Workshop , Calcutta in 1967. In 1968, Namjoshi took study leave from the Govt. of India, and undertook a Master's degree in Public Administration at the University of Missouri in America. Namjoshi wrote about her diasporic experiences in her book 'Because of India' :

'...In India I was inescapably my grandfather's granddaughter...but now I was literally 'Nobody from Nowhere' - and I didn't like it'.

She particularly acknowledges the influence of her friend, the poet and activist, Christine Donald. In 1969 Namjoshi resigned from the Indian Administrative Service and did her doctoral dissertation on the 'Cantos' of Ezra Pound, at McGill University, Montreal, Canada (1969 - 1972). From 1972 until 1989, she taught at Scarborough College, University of Toronto. In 1978-79 Namjoshi went to England and spent time in London as well as at Cambridge. It was during this year that she was politicised by the evolving feminist and gay liberation movements.

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As compared to the men, there is more complex, cultural situations in women diasporic writers and they depict more conflicts and problems in their writings. The complex cultural situations, subordinated within most relationships, merged into other overpowering identities and the female desire for freedom. Suniti Namjoshi, brings the diasporic position in the following poem

The old country says My young people are all out,  
Voyaging through strange lands.  
And the old country says  
To these strange new lands,  
Look at my young people.  
Have I not brought them up well?  
Look at the shape of their eyes And the colour of their skin  
. My minerals fed them.  
And now they are all out And home ground well.  
(“The Old Country Says” More Poems)

She effectively depicts the diasporic sense of uprootedness and dislocation.

“In my own country I was a princess.” –  
“Yes, but this is not your own country. miss.” . . . . .  
We are all princes in exile,  
she sang, picking seashells, clamshells, crayfish and crabs.  
(“EMIGREE” The Jackass and the Lady)

During that time she reflected the state of mind of an Indian woman living in Canada. Through the use of fantasy, myth making, female sexuality and pain of racism, she creates new literary space. The themes of dislocation and diasporic living dominate it. Among Namjoshi’s central concerns are the process of „othering“ and „marginalisation“. The loss of self-identity in an alien land cannot be described well than as in the following composition:

First, You take off your clothes, Your titles and name And put on a  
robe,  
Sterile and Clean,  
With neat black letters, Marking THE STRANGER  
Then, You walk down the street, Alone in fancy dress.

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(“How to be a Foreigner” More Poems)

The poem “My Aging Country” pictures the confusion of mind of an expatriate Indian. She has great reverence for her ancient country and she is not happy with present conditions.

“You lie there, Smiling, lazy, wicked, Unashamed of yourself,  
Lazy in a blue sea.

You really don’t think You might smarten yourself?”

(“My Aging country” 8-13)

Namjoshi experienced different experiences in a country of different culture, people and environment. She also touches upon the problem of racism that diasporic writers generally experience

The eye floods with tears.  
Can a body hurt the body?

(A Problem 1-3)

She deals with ideological and conceptual aspects and the geographical and physical aspects of the experiences of diaspora. There is anxiety and belongingness to two different cultures.

The poem „Alwin Ailey” is a poem where she brings out the hateful, racial violence prevalent in American society.

Listen they danced for me last night,  
The negros and the whites in green and orange lights  
And they were so beautiful.

The white devils kicked the negro ladies out.

If everyone was taught To be a ballet dancer,  
Life would be so graceful And cruel.

(“Alwin Ailey” More Poems)

Going through all these experiences she explores the cultural, intellectual and emotional dimensions in her poetry and these experiences also enriches her as a writer. Suniti Namjoshi adopted the foreign culture in her own way. She was an Indian by birth and started living in a foreign land harmonizing and accepting the distinction of life style. This crisis of belonging to the new land creates the paradigm of multifaceted emotions in her poems. Women diasporic writers have responded to the shifting, dislocation , identity and diasporic experiences in their unique way and Suniti Namjoshi

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also explores the cultural, intellectual and emotional dimensions of her multiple interactions which enriches her poetry. Her poetry presents an alternative model of women empowerment and female identity through lesbianism. Her lesbianism is a solution to establish female self-respect and life of freedom. Suniti Namjoshi feels no need of man in her life to support her emotionally, psychologically, financially, physically and sociologically. In her world a woman is complete. Her idea of lesbianism is thus a new outlook towards feminism.

Suniti Namjoshi has been a free bird from the very beginning of her life. In her passion for freedom from conventional sexual norms, she craved for fulfilling and satisfying relationship. The idea of lesbianism came to Suniti Namjoshi in 1978-79. This was the time when radical lesbianism a prominent feminist movement was taking female sentiments in its way. This movement entered a new phase in 1970"s with a motto called the "Women-Identified Women." Suniti Namjoshi"s heart and mind can also be observed as a lesbian feminist writer. Namjoshi"s *The Jackass and the Lady* spells out her position as a lesbian writer. Namjoshi"s *Because of India: Selected Poems and Fables* (1989) and *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth* (2000) are considered autobiographical and they show her development as a third world lesbian poet. She also explores "the different facets of lesbian desire and identity" within the frame work of postcolonial discourse (Rath 143).

She is a passionate lover. She loves warm touch of a lady and is transported to the world of ecstasy when she is absorbed in love making with a lady of her taste.

Will you take to the sea, my darling?

Will you let me caress you?

The tips of your feet, your legs, your sex?

Will you let my tongue caress you?

Will you lie in my arms?

Will you rest?

("Well, then let slip the masks" 14-18)

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She compares their shared feminine pleasure with an imagery of God  
and Goddess in a temple,  
“In that particular temple  
A god slept And a goddess danced,  
and in another a goddess slept and a god danced. . . . .

. . .

When we make love you and I are both sacred and secular.  
The goddess’ limbs begin to move. Balanced underfoot the world  
spins.

(“In that particular temple” 1-6, 17-23)

.The sensuousness abounds through her poems

*I give her the rose with unfurled petals.*

*She smiles*

*and crosses her legs.*

*I give her the shell with the swollen lip.*

*She laughs. I bite*

*and nuzzle her breasts.*

*I tell her, —Feed me on flowers*

*with wide open mouths,*

*and slowly,*

*she pulls down my head.*

*I give her the rose*

Her lesbian mate was Gillian Hanscombe. According to her, in *Flesh and Paper* the two voices “shape a universe in which the lesbian consciousness is central what is unusual in the sequence is the sense of equality and partnership, so that traditional barriers between speaker and listener, poet and audience, dissolve” (Namjoshi *Flesh and Paper*).

Thus, we see her poems are the sensation of a woman’s passion. She wants to convey that the heterosexuality is culturally conditioned whereas the lesbian sexuality is natural. With an unusual boldness she expresses her sexual desires. The innermost urge for freedom and proclaiming her identity is clearly visible in her poetry.

C. Vijasree underlines: Namjoshi represents the tensions of inhabiting and writing from margins and in between spaces as a



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woman, as a lesbian and as a diasporic writer. She does not, 2 however, show any anxiety about resolving the tensions emanating from such a complex and complicated subject position, but sophisticates the art of tapping on the plural possibilities afforded by her fluid state (Vijayasree 15). She is trying to make sense out of the various experiences and her search for identity and freedom.

## The Poetess and The Visual Artist: Imtiaz Dharker

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Imtiaz Dharker was born in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. She grew up in Glasgow where her family moved when she was less than one year old. She describes herself as a Scottish Muslim Calvinist, and it is this different combination that characterises both her poetry and her visual art. Dharker has written seven books of poetry: *Purdah* (1989), *Postcards from God* (1997), *I Speak for the Devil* (2001), *The Terrorist at my Table* (2006), *Leaving Fingerprints* (2009), *Over the Moon* (2014) and *Luck is the Hook* (2018). An accomplished artist and documentary filmmaker, she is an important name in the world of Indian poetry in English.

The main themes of Dharker's poetry include home, freedom, journeys, geographical and cultural displacement, communal conflict and gender politics.<sup>[12]</sup> All her books are published by the poetry publishing house Bloodaxe Books. Her poems reflect her experience of global living, intercultural identities, journey, cultural displacement and gender.

In her earliest books, *Purdah and other poems* (1988) and *Postcards from god* (1997), Dharker explores what she calls her 'real country': 'movement, transition, crossing over', as well as the tensions between secular and religious cultures in a world of fear and emergent fundamentalisms:

Here, in this strange place,

The trauma of cultural exile and alienation and unsettlement abounds her poetry. Her work has been described by critic Bruce King

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as “consciously feminist, consciously political, consciously that of a multiple outsider, someone who knows her own mind, rather than someone full of doubt and liberal ironies”. Alan Ross in London Magazine terms this “a strong, concerned economical poetry in which political activity, homesickness, urban violence, religious anomalies, are raised in an unobtrusive setting, all the more effectively for their coolness of treatment.”

Purdah (1989), Dharker’s first book, explored a somewhat layered implications of the veil and the experiences of being behind a purdah

One day they said she was old enough to learn some shame.  
She found it came quite naturally.  
Purdah is a kind of safety.  
The body finds a place to hide.  
The cloth fans out against the skin  
much like the earth falls  
on coffins after they put the dead men in.

(*Purdha* )

Imtiaz Dharker in her, *Purdha* speaks about the sufferings of Muslim women. How woman’s voice is unheard in the society due to the male supremacy. In the poem “Purdha I” she writes, “Voices speak inside us, / echoing in the spaces we have just left.” She also projects the distinctions that take place in religion as we in other social institutions. Imtiaz also speaks about the identity crises in her poem, “Minority”. She quips, “I was born a foreigner. / I carried on from there / to become a foreigner everywhere / I went.”

With the rise of feminism and its becoming a world-wide rage, a force; purdah is seen in new light and new perspectives.

A more overt social critique characterised her second book *Postcards from God* (1994), , Her next book, *I Speak for the Devil*, the poetry journeys further. The landscapes of the self, the metro and the country expand to embrace the world.

“If the starting point of *Purdah* was life behind the veil,” reflects Dharker, “the starting-point of the new book is the strip-tease, about what happens when the self ‘squeezes past the easy cage of

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bone'."

So Glasgow meets Lahore and Mumbai meets Birmingham in this and the fruits of journey brings remarkable experiences in Dharkar's poetic output.

Imtiaz Dharker's inspiration and genuine human experiences arose out of two completely different cultures. As a British Asian woman, she experienced injustice and oppression, which gets reflected in her poetry. She uses her own experiences to tell people about gender injustice in the 21st century. Not only she raises gender issues in her poems but also contemplates upon other issues, for example, water shortage a problem in developing countries like India is undertaken in her poem 'Blessing'. Her poetry brims with everyday joys and struggles of ordinary people and their cultural heritage.

There are just not enough  
straight lines. That  
is the problem.  
Nothing is flat  
or parallel. Beams  
balance crookedly on supports  
thrust off the vertical.  
Nails clutch at open seams.  
The whole structure leans dangerously  
towards the miraculous.

(Living Space)

"Living Space" speaks truthfully about the existence and personal habits of someone living in a Mumbai slum.

Sometimes, the sudden rush  
of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,  
silver crashes to the ground  
and the flow has found  
a roar of tongues. From the huts,  
a congregation: every man woman  
child for streets around  
butts in, with pots,  
brass, copper, aluminium,

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plastic buckets,  
frantic hands,  
and naked children  
screaming in the liquid sun,  
their highlights polished to perfection,  
flashing light,  
as the blessing sings  
over their small bones.

(Blessing)

The poem 'Blessing' is set in India, in slums of Mumbai where water is considered a luxury. The rush of people shows how water is a silver blessing for them.

The changing stylistics and tonal texture of her poetic work makes it fascinating. There is terseness of expression and witty style even while dealing with the serious subjects.

The school-bell is a call to battle,  
every step to class, a step into the firing-line.  
Here is the target, fine skin at the temple,  
cheek still rounded from being fifteen.  
Surrendered, surrounded, she  
takes the bullet in the head  
and walks on. The missile cuts  
a pathway in her mind, to an orchard  
in full bloom, a field humming under the sun,  
its lap open and full of poppies.

This girl has won  
the right to be ordinary,

(A Century Later)

The position of girls and women in the war like a bullet points out towards the sad reality that a woman has to struggle for even ordinary day today living. The ordinary, mundane experiences of her life is reflected in her poems. Simultaneously she broods upon the larger issues of identity, landscape and fingerprints in her poems. She underlines that there is an inherent desire in us to stay connected to our roots.

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I know this frosted landscape  
better than it knows itself, its layers  
a busy clock of history, still ticking.  
Under my feet I feel the trail of the slug,  
the snail, the earth's deep squirm  
around an anklet or an amulet, a broken cup.  
Lost, the names of the ones  
whose fingers made and used  
and threw away these things,  
written and rewritten in the calligraphy  
of roots

(Leaving Fingerprints)

A sense of place and landscape in this poem is closely connected to the sense of one's roots and identity.

Poetry in only a couple of stanzas can connect us to different people, customs of the opposite parts of the world. Such is the power of Dharker's poetry. The metaphor she uses and the convincing imagery that she applies in her following poetry leaves a great impact upon the readers.

What prayer are they whispering?  
Each one has left a mark,  
the perfect pattern of a need,  
sole and heel and toe  
in dark, curved patches,  
heels worn down,  
thongs ragged, mended many times.  
So many shuffling hopes,  
pounded into print,  
as clear as the pages of holy books,  
illuminated with the glint  
of gold around the lettering....

(Prayer)

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When I can't comprehend  
why they're burning books  
or slashing paintings,  
(They'll Say: 'She Must Be From Another Country')

Paper thinned by age or touching,  
the kind you find in well-used books,  
the back of the Koran, where a hand  
has written in the names and histories,  
who was born to whom,  
the height and weight, who  
died where and how, on which sepia date,  
pages smoothed and stroked and turned  
transparent with attention.  
If buildings were paper, I might  
feel their drift, see how easily  
they fall away on a sigh, a shift  
in the direction of the wind.  
Maps too.

(Tissue)

We feel blown free, but circle back  
to be in love, to touch and part  
and meet again, spun

past the face of the moon, the precise  
underpinning of stars. The cycle begins  
with one and ends with one,

(Taal)

So this is how it is done, one hand inching  
round the coast to map its ins and outs,  
to mark the point where ink may kiss  
the river's mouth, or blade make up  
a terra incognita, an imagined south.

(When the copperplate cracks)

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A filmmaker as well as a visual artist and poet, Dharker's writing always recognizes the centrality and proliferation of the image. Imtiaz Dharker's development as a poet is an impressive phenomenon in contemporary Indian writing in English. Imtiaz Dharker belongs to that generation of post independence women poets who ensures that Indian English Poetry matches the best anywhere. . Her handling the issues of social, cultural and religious significance impacts the readers. She depicts sensitively and insightfully her understanding and response to the three cultures she has known. Dharker's poetry makes an interesting study for understanding feminism because she underlines that that socio-cultural and socio-religious restrictions on women have robbed them of all their potentialities and she speaks for the freedom, dignity and respectful living of women, especially in the Muslim society.



# 13

## Consciousness And Awareness In Modern Indian English Women Poetry

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Poetry is an emotional rendering of living experiences. The development of contemporary Indian English poetry reflects feminine sensibility. The expression of the self is variously and strongly depicted in the Indian English women poets. K.P. Saradhi writes, "Among the contemporary Indo-Anglian women poets there are various figures whose achievement compels notice, but quite often they are good just because there is in them a pleasant feminine touch or a naked command over the medium. Some of them, however stand apart as important writers possessing a broad vision of life. Among these can be counted, Gauri Deshpande, Roshan Alkazi, and kamala Das, who not only bring to their poetry a measure of awareness of the problems of life but are also rich in expression." (K.P. Saradhi, 'Three Indo-Anglian Women poets: Gauri Deshpande, Roshan Alkazi and Kamala Das' p.29). The analysis of the poetry of major women poets enable us to understand the themes and technique of these poems.

English Poetry has come a long way to strive for global recognition, quality, variety, validity and recognition. In the development of Indian English poetry female writers have greatly contributed. A. N. Dwiwedi writes:

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'In the fast-changing socio-cultural environment in our country, women are becoming much and more self-conscious, self-expressive, and self-assertive. They are competing today with men not only in political, financial, administrative, and religious matters, but also in literary and cultural activities.' (A.N.Dwivedi, pg 240).

The women poets began to articulate and embrace feminist ideas and theories from west into Indian poetry in English. These women poets testified post modernism in literary articulation. Iyengar remarks:

"Certainly, the women poets of today have dared all that men had dared, and they have few inhibitions. Freedom and energy often team together, but there is need also to go beyond the recurrent sense of hurt and appetite for strife, and reach at the beauty, harmony, peace, fulfilment. And this is on the women poets' agenda too."(Iyengar, 1985)

There is a long list of women poets writing in English whose poetry is intense, expressive, assertive and very important in the study of the development of Indian English poetry as an important area of study.

Menka Shivadasni's poetry hold together a private world of chaotic emotions through its logical development and its strikingly imaginative icons. Her *Nirvana at Ten Rupees*(1990) is a careful selection spanning twelve year's work. Shivdasni, a well-travelled journalist who worked for a year in Hong Kong, was one of the founding members of the Bombay Poetry Circle in 1986. In her poetry, she had anticipated many of the new characteristics of Bombay poetry as it would develop during the 1990s. Her poems can be broadly categorized under three types of skeptical attitudes which reveal the writer's preoccupation with pessimism. The first category deals with the relationship between man and God, the second, with the human predicament and the third with the women's condition. In all three cases the life has hit her so hard that the situation is desperate and pathetic and death seems to be the only escape from the generally disturbing experiences of life. Her horrors and

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temptations of living alone in a small flat, the anxieties of a single life which get complicated by being a woman, the sordid world of sex, drugs, broken relationship and the aftermath are portrayed in stark reality. She traces her own transition from a believer to an atheist in the very first poem of the collection, 'The Atheist's Confession.' The poem starts with nostalgia of rosy faith in the "earth god" when she "ate Prasad only after a bath" is contrasted with a later stage when "gods no longer smiled when I prayed" because she had framed her cold logic that "They couldn't/They were of stone."/and eventually comes the final word that "God didn't exist." The writer's uncertainty regarding the existence of God is further evidenced in the poems 'Are You Three' and 'Somewhere on the Streets.'

The tedious nature, the sheer monotony of the modern mechanized existence is described in 'Destination'. Another poem 'Schoolgirl No More' displays the modern women's predicament that having spent a lifetime in acquiring bookish knowledge at school, "nothing measures up to what it should. "Geography taught her the vastness of space, history not to live in the past and English Literature "That I belong nowhere. Physics, Einstein and his theory of relativity taught her to hate everything including herself. So mere acquisition of knowledge is fruitless without its moderation through contact with wisdom, seems to be the centre of many of Shivdasni's poems.

In the poem Safe-I Think, 'the human being is compared with a palm, tree, the coconuts of which are likened to the tears of human beings. The coconuts are "wrenched" for profit. Despite thinking that it is safe for the next one hundred and fifty years the trees are surviving under the permanent fear of destruction. The modern man's threatened condition is reflected in the concluding lines that offer a comment on the ever-growing materialistic attitude of people who are simply not concerned with the life and feelings of others :

.....Twenty four  
ridges on a coconut tree are not  
150 years, unless some bureaucrat  
worried about his job, orders

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me cut because I'm standing  
in the middle where a building ought to be.  
The title of the volume Nirvana at ten rupees comes from the poem  
Loser, Lose, Addict'  
When you are happy, only cliché's  
come to mind – the sky is blue,  
grass is green, butterflies are free  
then something happens, and solitary  
as a murderer, you twist the knife  
and stalk the streets, your brain  
being crushed to powder like the contents  
of vial of smack. Nirvana at ten rupees  
is cheap, but the sky has a silver tinge  
you could rather perceive as grey,  
the butterflies are pinned, heads down,  
their backs to the wall, like you.

Highly metaphoric, at times almost surreal, her poems show a woman alienated from the expected conventions of social life, strongly aware of sexuality and mental unrest where her inner and outer life is at odds. In the above mentioned poem though Shivdasni apparently mocks at the heart of the volume lurks a similar wage for a paradise or a nirvana, something better than the anxieties, dishonesties, repression, false needs hypocrisy and basic ugliness of ordinary life.

The woman is still a 'football' who is kicked around, used and abused and when the man "scores his goals," he leaves her into the drain where it belongs once the game is over. She gets disturbed and angry at the maltreatment meted out to her but is there anything that she can do to alleviate her miserable plight? Another woman poet who is aware of the discrimination of the genders in the society is Tejdeep. The alienation and marginalization as the inevitable rate of woman in patriarchy is portrayed by her in her volume of poems entitled Five Feet Six and a Half Inches (1977):

It is always made solstice if they could  
the sun would be spelled son

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and again a woman is depicted as a one  
holding a bruised soul in six yards of  
nylon  
where she has no distinctive identity of her own but veiled  
That hard-earned past-graduation  
forgotten on the husband's name  
plate.

Gender typing and conformity to patriarchal norms is significantly observed in a poem 'Visionary'.

Visionaries at dawn do strange things  
with a handful of flour or chalk  
because it is her attempt to hoodwink evil form strangers that  
with chalk and powder she must attempt to hoodwink evil from under  
a stranger's spell.

For her writing poetry is healing and acts therapeutic.

In another powerful metaphor she muses over wisdom and existential dilemma.

Time seals memories in trunks of  
trees agitates pages in a diary..... time  
erodes friendship burnishes new  
friends..... time just does not leave it  
squats on eyelids endlessly.

Her poetry charter a new territory for themselves.

Tara Patel is the writer of the poems called "Women" and "In a Working Women's Hostel." She like Kamala Das speaks about post-colonial identity and personal struggle of women in her life. Her poems carry emotional tone yet succeed in bringing the reality to the fore. She tries to show the feminine role in the society. Her works do not work as revolutionary spirit against the society nevertheless portrays the society as it is.

Indian poetry in English began to be more prevalent in 1947 when C. R. Mandy, an Irishman, became the editor of Illustrated Weekly of India and transformed it into a modern-day literary journal which encouraged contributions from local writers. While there was much support within this group of writers, Kamala

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Das was the only female poet to be actively involved in publishing and writing Indian poetry in English. Das's work was considered to be revolutionary for women's writing in India because of her depictions of sexuality, marriage and the female body as well as her use of 'confessional' verse. She was the first Indian woman writer to express herself freely in verse against the established norms of society, whose work responded to social and political transformations that impacted women's lives in newly independent India.

Margaret Chatterjee, combines in her artistic personality, the two world of experiences – poetry and philosophy. She has skilfully expressed her philosophy through her poetry. Margaret Chatterjee was known for her rigorous scholarship, the cross-cultural approach in a creative writing which may be called 'international or intercontinental.' She has published "The Spring and the Spectacle", "Towards the Sun", "The Sandalwood Tree" and "The Sound Of Wings"

In addition to her teaching and writing career, Margaret was an excellent pianist, with extensive knowledge of western classical music. For many years Margaret was a music critic of the Indian English-language newspaper the "Statesman". Chatterjee has a uniqueness of approach in her writings. She has an unflinching grasp on various human, philosophic and political situations. She is a singer of tender and delicate feelings and she has a flawless command over language and versification. An accomplished pianist and poet, her multidisciplinary expertise led to alternative ways of approaching a single problem. Never an admirer of tunnel-vision, she was always concerned with the problem of pluralism and its implications. There is a blend of philosophy, social science and common sense in her writings.

Margaret Chatterjee, in her poems expresses a variety of influences dealing with range of themes and diverse poetic expressions. She has done extensive research on Gandhi's life and has published eight books. She has extensively travelled and interacted with many and it reflects in her poems.

The poem *On Seeing Laurence Whistler's Engravings in St. Nickolas Church at Moreton* describes the beauty of church and its entirely

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engraved windows of glass, while *On the Coast of Inglesey* beautifully describes the seashore,

"The roaring sea, flings blue stones on the shore,  
shape upon shape, upon shape.

*Lovers in Buda* is the story of lovers who have nowhere to go.

"Like lovers at  
So many other times,  
They had no where to go, wandering sedately  
In parks,  
gazing and gazing,  
Garnering moments.

*Desire* is about being alive.

"Inordinate desire/ should be avoided`

Three small poems, *Chinese Juniper*, *Japanese White Pine* and *Cherry*, describe the condition of bonsai. In *Chinese Juniper*, Chatterjee compares bonsai with a small girl: "Your bonsai, / Wired down, / Is a young girl / With braces on her teeth." While *Japanese White Pine* shows her feelings of wariness, "Having stared / To grow / I know it / Will weather / Over several / Generations", in the poem *Cherry*, she takes a more optimistic view, "Just look at this bonsai / Cut down to size, / With just enough / Roots to survive. / It still blooms.

She communicates the textures of life widely through her images. She holds a very reputable place as an Indian English women poet.

Dr. Sunita Jain is an influential Indian poet, novelist, short-story writer, and scholar. One of India's most celebrated contemporary female writers, she has the rare distinction of having made her mark in two literary universes, writing in both English and Hindi. She has published "Man of My Desires" (1978), "Between You and God" (1979), "Beneath the Frost" (1979). The seven volumes of poetry were republished under the title *Sensum: Collected Poems 1965-2000* (2000); and an additional poetry collection entitled *American Desi and Other Poems* (2007). She is prominently a poet of love. She is a singer of the varied moods and shades of love.

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The authenticity and genuineness of experiences, vividness of observation and her harmonious expressions gives her an important place in Indian English poetry.

Monika Varma a well-known poet, critic and translator, is another female –voice who deserves to be mentioned as a major woman poet. Monika Varma has to her credit six volumes of poetry- “Dragonflies Draw Flame” (1962), Gita Govinda and Other Poems (1966), “Green Leaves and Gold” (1970), “Quartered Questions and Queries” (1971), Past Imperative (1970), Across the Vast Spaces (1975), and Alaknanda (1976). She does not turn to poetry as a relief from the tensions of love relationship. Monika Varma clearly understands the strains of gender. Monika Varma feels the “search of herself” in the patriarchal world and she turns to the “metaphysical world” of her poetry. This movement helps her rediscover and redefine herself

“ I must Change My way of Living

I must change my thinking

I must look at things in a different way. (“The Problem” 25)

Her poetry shows a fine balance between quality and quantity. As a worshipper of nature, she is brilliant in her poetry. Her poetry is stamped with grace, balance, melody, aesthetic satisfaction and artistic beauty. There is a harmonious blending of subjectivity and objectivity in her poetry

She evolves a style which is typical of her experience. There is an acute response towards nature and other images in her poems. Her insight leads the readers towards deeper meaning and existence. She is a distinguished Indian English poet.

Roshen Alkazi is another name to be taken into account. Her poems are an attempt at meditative analysis rather than passionate outbursts. She is different from other poets by being gifted with an unusual capacity for intellectual detachment. Her range is limited and her diction is simple and lucid. *Seventeen Poems* (1965) and *Seventeen More Poems* (1970) are her remarkable collections.

Dr. Nandini Sahu is a distinguished Indian English poet. Her poetry collections include *The Other Voice* (2004), *The Silence* (2005)



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and Silver Poems on My Lips (2009). Her poems mostly monologues are remarkable for the superb fusion of the personal, social and the spiritual dimensions of creativity. There is an exploration and journey within herself in her poems. In her poetry, aesthetics and morality do not resort to solutions for social evils and problems.

Lakshmi Kannan is a poet, novelist and short story writer. She is also her own translator. She is bilingual and writes in English and in Tamil. She has published twenty books till date that include four collections of poems in English, a novel and several collections of short fiction in Tamil and in English translation. Kannan published three volumes of poetry in English between 1974 and 1985, three volumes of short stories between 1986 and 1993, and one novel in 1998. Lakshmi Kannan's poems have two modes of expression: one is the search within and the other is to explore the world outside. She is deeply rooted in the Indian soil. She writes about regional rituals, cultural symbols, tradition and myths. She invokes God Ganesha in "Ekadanta", a mythical spirit who blesses all beginnings. Unquiet Waters, a volume of her poems, focuses upon mortality, family relationships river myths and feminine consciousness. Lakshmi Kannan's poetry is lucid and scrupulously honest. The tone is gentle and conventional.

Her poetry is concerned with a woman's search for identity, cultural identity and nature. They frequently examine how women are viewed in Indian society, adopting an increasingly feminist tone.

Lakshmi Kannan's outlook is feministic in general. She recalls some of the feminist's phrases to describe woman's body as "biology's destiny". She tries to compare and even give a synonymous meaning "human rights" to the term "feminism". In the interview she says: To me, at this point of time, it has become synonymous with "human rights". It has become as basic as that. Since I have got used to voice and articulate a woman's point of view with as much clarity as I could muster. ...."Feminism is human rights". (72)

'She' poem by Lakshmi Kannan is a remarkable poem interrogating the identity of women in society. In a patriarchal structure woman is regarded as a nonentity and no attempt is made to give her

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a distinct identity. In each of the three sections of the poem, Lakshmi Kannan presents elaborate description of the environment and situations surrounding women and it probes the psyche and deep search of women to find her place in society.

Harin K. Majithia is another important Indian English woman poet. Obviously her choicest form of poetry is sonnet. Her fifth poetry collection *Sonnets Sonorous* (2001) consists of twenty five sonnets that sing of human fears and follies which are universal and generic in nature rather than lyrical response to a moving movement in one's life. She draws on Shakespeare in punching the poetic vision of the sonnet in the concluding couplet: *Shallow waters never run deep./ And the strong never ever creep. (On This Maze)*. She believes in the universal effect of poetry, it transcends time. "Poetry I believe is after all beyond bondage. It flows like a brook, rushing, gushing a head in its own frenzy, flowing over the pebbles, running smooth or disturbed at times but always straight from the heart."

Shanta Acharya is another Indian female poet from Orissa who has chosen to live alone in London. Her poems collected in five volumes – *Not this, Not that, Numbering our Days, Looking in, Looking out, Shringara and Dream that spell the Light*. She makes connection between culture. Her poems reflect various facets of human emotions. They explore issue of religion and nationality of belonging and displacement and the necessity of retaining the memories that functions as impulsions to organise. Her poem *Dream That spell the Light* begins with a number of poems which are located in distant places, ranging across Italy, Lahore, China, The Sundarbans of Bengal and Kabul. Her range is wide and universal.

Vijay Goel is another celebrated woman poet with prolific output in Hindi and English. She belongs to Punjab and is a painter, poet and short story writer. She has brought out nine books and they have large circulation. Her third poetry collection *Sound of Solitude* was published in 1997. In her poems she creates small stories from her personal experiences. She writes: *Let us sing the song/ that is our own/ the notes churn the life./ Let mind be just a flower/ for once let us*

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go wild. Goel's poetry narrates the social, political and religious facets of the society.

Meena Kandaswamy, is an Indian poet, fiction writer and activist. Her work centers around feminism and her struggle to achieve social justice, which she expressed through her poetry. Her debut series of poems called 'Touch' explored the themes of caste and untouchability. Meena believes that through her poetry she has realized of her oppressed identity as a woman, a Tamil and a member of the lower caste. She interrogates her position in society and is determined to transcend and eventually redefine it. She broods upon her identity and strive to work towards empowering those in the Dalit community with her works. The quest of her poetry is her yearning for freedom in an uncertain world. She even writes about female aggression and silence, and these two together form the marginalised status of a woman.

“Blues blend to an unforgiving metropolitan black  
And loneliness seems safer than a gentle night  
In his arms. I return from the self-defence lessons:  
Mistrust is the black-belted, loose white mechanism  
Of survival against this groping world and I am  
A convert too. Yet, in the way of all life, he could try  
And take root, as I resist, and yield later, like the earth.”  
(My Lover Speaks Of Rape)

The poet describes the pervasive phantasm of violence that she cannot escape from. The poet cannot help but be on guard and yet a gradual and prudent surrendering is indicated. She explores the role of women bound by time .Her poetry is filled with memories and experiences.

Melanie Silgado in her poems carried an emotional tone, to project patriarchal domination over the society. In her poem, “Stationary Stop” she ironically shows how male domination collapses and how the renaissance of the female tradition takes place. In, “For Father on the Shelf”, Silgado finds a sense of humour for her father's silly contributions. She writes, “Father, you will be proud to know/ you

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left something behind. / The year you died / I inherited a mind". This seems to be the ultimate criticism of the patriarchal tradition.

Melanie Silgado was "born in 1956 in Bombay to Roman Catholic parents," subsequently going on to study English at St. Xavier's College in Bombay. A selection of her poems first appeared in the 1978 volume *Three Poets*. In 1985, as part of her course at the London College of Printing, Silgado produced a second volume of poems titled *Skies of Design*, which went on to win the Best First Book Commonwealth Poetry Prize, Asian Section.

Silgado's early work demonstrates a preoccupation with violence – particularly sexual abuse and the unraveling of a disrupted mind – that continues through her published work, but that is at its most assertive and "adrenalized" in the poems in *Three Poets*. The voices in Silgado's poems are the simultaneous voices of the victims and the oppressors. They "fall," "break," "scratch," "slap," and "scream," but they also watch "daily faces crumple, / die in front of mirrors" and mourn the dead "bundled in the van / your entrails angry and hanging loose."

Eunice de Souza, Melanie Silgado and Charmayne D' Souza are three significant Indian woman poets of the post-1970s period. All three are Goan Christians. There is a strong feminine sensibility in their poetry.

Melanie Silgado is de Souza's former student, and similarities can be seen between her poetry and that of her mentor. She is a Goan Catholic from Pune and also comes from an English-speaking family. Her work was an important part of the poetry scene in Mumbai during the 1970s. Silgado's poems demonstrate a similar 'visual craft and economy' as that demonstrated by de Souza, though they have a more ominous tone. After her poems appeared alongside D'Gama and Rodrigues in *Three Poets* (1978) published by Newground, Silgado completed a single collection of poems *Skies of Design* (1985) and went on to work as an editor for the feminist publishing house Virago Press in the UK. Silgado was at Virago during the late 1980s to mid 1990s when 'women's publishing houses were being put on the line to justify their existence'. She was

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asked to consult with clients of colour and even worked on a major collection of a century of Arab women's writing titled *Opening the Gates* (1990). While she continues to work in publishing and teaches creative writing, Silgado has not published another collection of poetry, which she links to self-criticism and a lack of time to produce new writing. The absence of a new collection may also be linked to her distance from friends and writing influences in India.

In her poem "For Father on the Shelf", the need for the supportive figure is expressed

"Father, you will  
be proud to know  
you left something  
behind.  
the year you died  
I inherited a  
mind".

("For Father on the Shelf")

Silgado remains an important figure in contemporary women's poetry in English, both for her poems and for her interest in publishing women's writing. De Souza and Silgado have gone on to careers as editors and critics who have greatly influenced the publication of women's poetry in India. Their friendship and experiences as poets and editors suggest the significance of women's involvement in the publication, distribution and readership of contemporary Indian women's literature in English. . This suggests that friendships and communities and various developments surrounding women's experiences have also brought more awareness to women's writing, and these changes help us look at the details of women's lives as part of the social study and research.

Women's writings have proved that they can compete equally with man. Indian literary history has seen many authorised women writers such as, Eunice de Souza, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das, Mamta Kalia, Melanie Silgado, Imtiaz Dharker, Smita Agarwal, Sujatha Bhatt, Tara Patel etc, are shining through their works. The emergence of a large number of women poets is the significant

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feature of Indian English literature. These Indian English women poets communicate powerful female sensibility which does not find expression in their male counterparts. They continue with varied themes in their poems. The philosophies and movements that took place in the world influence and strengthen the works of women.

If we objectively analyse the writings of women we would not find and inferiority. They stand equal to men in all spheres. They prove there is very little which they cannot achieve.

## Postscript

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Society demands mute acceptance from a woman. She cannot even cry. Her crying is considered as her rebellion. A woman only accepts the patriarchal structures and is always oppressed by a man. A woman is always oppressed as she is considered as 'weaker sex' or 'Inferior sex'. The concept of feminism in the society started the thought process of equality of sex. Feminism, both as a concept and a movement, has emerged as a reaction against the atrocities of patriarchy.

Women have been writing in India since 1000 BC. The role of women in literature is often quite wide in spectrum. Women are portrayed as secondary characters as per the literary history is concerned. This occurred even when women played multiple roles simultaneously –in their domestic spaces and in their professional career. The status given to women as compared to men is secondary. The notion of woman being is defined in relation to the significant position given to males. Even the great myths of Indian literature portray woman as the weaker sex.

Beginning with our own Indian mythologies we have first in the list, Manu who in his *Manusmrithi* speaks about women and projects them as slaves from the beginning till the end of their life. The two great epics of India, Ramayana and Mahabharata give no scope for women. It depicted them as the secondary being focussing on the male characters. This trend continued in history and still exists. The deep rooted patriarchal notions do not allow them to realise and

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express their roles. She is unaware of her own capacities, and therefore unable to raise her voice.. In the middle ages the conditions of women become worst than ever. Further the condition was worsened with the origin of superstitions which restricted the movement of women. Women were tortured in the name of tradition and religion. Condition of woman has been gradually changing in the present era.

Since India's independence in 1947, there has been a growing number of Indian poets writing English. Their genuineness in expressing their feelings and position and their language in depicting themselves in their everyday life have earned Indian women writers a place in the contemporary poetry world. In spite of these developments, the work of Indian women poets remains on the periphery of public readership and literary criticism both in India and abroad. Contemporary Indian woman poets writing in English face several challenges in regard to the publication and politicization of her work.

Woman's voice was heard throughout the ages but only in the songs sung to highlight the spiritual yearning or in the lyrics and the passionate love songs. Indian women for long have been encircled in the pain and suffering of orthodox society. Solution for this problem begins with the social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy who fought for widow remarriages and for assertion of their rights and other reformers who fought for female rights and education. But the reformation is still wanting. The voice of woman in society is yet to be heard and still the need is felt for the women to liberate themselves from the patriarchal constructs and age old beliefs of Indian society.

The ability to write in English opened new vistas for young Indian women in the latter half of the 19th century. Poetry by women poets provides insights, a wealth of understanding a reservoir of meanings. It constitutes a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. Through women poets eyes we can understand the experiences and feelings of a large segment of society who is marginalised due to their gender. In many appraisal of the Indian English literature, an appreciation of the writing of its women is



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essential. Many of the Indian women poets focus on women's issues; they have a women's perspective on the world.. One of the reasons that women have, in such large number, taken up their pen is because it has allowed them to create their own world. It has allowed them to set the conditions of existence, free from the direct interference of men. Similarly, so many women have taken to reading women's writings because it allows them a feeling of solidarity and oneness and from which they can identify of existences. Women's writing has occupied a significant and central place in women's lives. The history of Indian English Poetry has been mainly the story of male voice, male imaginations and male strategies. But the significant feature of Indian English literary scene is the emergence of a host of women poets communicating a powerful female sensibility in their poetry. Women poets occupy an important place in the history of Indian English poetry right from its beginning to the present day.

Poetry is a documentation of what is felt deep within. The experiences shared by these women poets is vivid and varied. K.P. Saradhi writes, "Among the contemporary Indo-Anglian women poets there are various figures whose achievement compels notice, but quite often they are good just because there is in them a pleasant feminine touch or a naked command over the medium. Some of them, however stand apart as important writers possessing a broad vision of life. Among these can be counted, Gauri Deshpande, Roshan Alkazi, and kamala Das, who not only bring to their poetry a measure of awareness of the problems of life but are also rich in expression."(K.P. Saradhi, 'Three Indo-Anglian Women poets: Gauri Deshpande, Roshan Alkazi and Kamala Das' p.29)

Poetry being the most characteristic and powerful form of literacy expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in the Indo – English Literature. Women's writing throws up all kinds of queries related to oppression and searching for the true self. The long continuing struggle and movement craves for an equitable humane society.

Modern feminism exists with the notion, "Feminism is a movement supporting equal rights for women" (Oxford *Mini*

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*Dictionary*). As a feminist, the primary aim is to seek equality between these apparently varied sexes. We can justify this point by analysing the number of roles a woman is expected to play in a society. Feminism throws a challenge on the age-long tradition of gender differentiation. It attempts to explore and find a new social order, to find pertinent resolves to the real life problems in the light of traditionally – gendered role – playing. Woman has always been projected as a secondary and inferior human being. Feminism is perhaps the most powerful movement that swept the literacy world in the recent decades. It has been articulated differently in different parts of the world by various writers depending upon their class, background and level of consciousness. As a critical tool, feminism aims at providing an altogether new awareness of women's role in the modern complex world.

In the development of contemporary Indian English poetry feminine sensibility has been creatively released which merits full recognition. The contemporary female poetic activity is a natural extension of women's expanding role in society and deals with their individual concerns and preoccupations in poetry. Love, sex, man-woman relationship, betrayal, loneliness, loss, search, memory, and pathos of women living in male dominated world are the more recurrent themes among various other themes in these poems. The themes are invariably explored from a feminine viewpoint with a distinctly frank and bold stance. Poetry by Indian women is moving towards a larger consciousness and a wide variety of themes are likely to be poetically explored by them.

Contemporary Indian English poetry by women is marked by both uniformity and variety. Collectively they exhibit a marked homogeneity in respect of themes and stance and yet at the same time they are diverse and individualistic in their matter and manner. Muri Das Melwani concludes that:

'It would be unwise to look for common features in the work of women poets. But certain similarities are self-evident. Their themes are few in number. Thwarted desires, the frustrations of living in a male dominated world, sex and of course love are the commoner

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ones. Contemporary situations are finding more frequent mention in their poems. The viewpoint is peculiarly feminine; a distinctive tone setting off their work from the rest of Indo Anglian Poetry. Another distinguishing mark is the frequency with which imagery is used to suggest personal reaction. A limiting factor is that technique and images are repeated. Poetry by Indo- Anglian women poets will attain maturity when they attempt new themes and treat present themes in greater depths, when they broaden imagination and imagery, when they become bolder in technique.'(p.10)

Indian woman poets and their poetry show emotions as they experience being a woman. Their poetry shows their perception regarding feminine world. Their poetry sometimes is considered as poetry of self-articulation and confession. They have broken their long state of silence and celebrate womanhood by creating their own space and identity in the family, breaking the bondage of subjugation to create their existence in the society. Indian English Women poetry has explored new dimensions. Their voices strongly articulate feminine sensibility and are an attempt to ascertain their individual self in a male dominated society.

Women poets are a sort of school in the contemporary scene. Indian women poets writing in English have substantially contributed to the growth of English poetry in India. In their writings; they share their experience .They have amplitude and range. They reveal the women's attempt to reveal herself in a male dominated society and this search not only brings a distinctive stamp with her poetry but enriches the literary world as well. Women poetry, indeed, is a rebellion against the conventional role of woman as a wife and mother. Indian English women poets embrace feminist ideas and theories from west into Indian poetry in English. These women poets testified post modernism in literary articulation.Undoubtedly they contribute noticeably towards the advancement of struggle for feminism. This process of self-analysis and poetic creativity in their poetry becomes significant field of comprehension and examination. As these women writers unravel the mystery of their poetic self in their

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writings, it becomes a social, psychological and philosophical document for the poets and their readers.

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