

Image of Indian Woman in Woman's Poetry

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ABSTRACT

The voices of the women are reverberating in the for a long time and throughout history, but only in songs sung to highlight spiritual yearning or in lyrics and passionate love songs. For a long time, Indian women had been engulfed in the whirlpool of pain and suffering that was orthodox society. Despite the fact that much has been done to alleviate their plight since the time of William Bentick to curb the evil practises against women, and that social reformer like Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated for widow remarriages and the restoration of her rights. However, the pace of reformation remains slow. Women's voices have yet to be heard, despite the fact that women in India have been fortunate enough to hold high and honourable positions of power. However, the fact remains that traditional bound society has yet to fully liberate Indian women. There are undeniable differences between male and female temperaments, and these differences are evident in everything that both sexes attempt. Aside from the necessary technical standards, what matters in art is the expression of the individual temperament. This paper attempts to map the image of Women in the poems written by the women.

Keywords: *Indian Poetry, confessional poetry, Indian Womanhood, Traditional Poetry.*

Woman's voice was heard for long and from ages but only in the songs sung to highlight the spiritual yearning or in the lyrics and the passionate love songs. Indian woman for long had been encircled in the whirlpool of pain and suffering of orthodox society. Though much has been done to relieve them from the plight from the time of William Bentick to curtail the evil practices against woman and that social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy clamored for widow remarriages and for restoration of her rights. But the pace of reformation is still slow. The voice of the women is yet to be heard though women in India have been fortunate enough to occupy high and honourable places of power. But the fact remains that traditional bound society is yet to liberate the Indian women fully. It cannot be denied that there are clear differences between male and female temperaments and this difference would show in everything to which both sexes turn their hand. In art apart from the necessary standards of technical efficiency, what matter the expression of the individual temperament is. I am not trying to prove that one (male or female) is superior to the other in the emotional vitality. I honestly feel that there are such features without denying the essential fact that any satisfactory work of is produced under conditions of total incandescence of the whole personality. It is also possible that what are known as female ingredients are features of poetic style of thematic choice not altogether absent in male writers but which occur in the female writers with great frequency. As a

preliminary exercise in identifying such features and the overall view of women poets about Indian women is intended to present the poetry of women poets in our country is Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpandey, Monika Verma, Lakshmi Kannan, Mamta Kalia, Lila Ray, Gauri Pant, Margaret Chatterjee, Chitra Prasad, Rohini Gupta and Anna Sujata Modayil. The emergence of a large number of women poets is significant features of Post-independence Poetry. These Indian English women poets communicate a powerful female sensibility which does not find expression in their male counterparts.

Women poets write consciously as women. What distinguishes their poetry is their confessional and autobiographical note, frank, candid, bold and realistic expressions of their attitude to woman. Commenting on the feminine sensibility in Indian English Poetry Murli Das Melwani says:

Their themes are few in number. Thwarted desires, the frustration of living in a male dominated world, Sex and of course Love are common ones. Contemporary situations are finding more frequent mention in their poems. The viewpoint is peculiarly feminine, a distinctive tone setting of their work from the rest of Indo English Poetry. Another distinguishing mark is the frequency with which imagery is used to suggest personal reactions. (Melwani: 35)

A vast impact of surrounding milieu can be glanced in the poetry of these Indian Women Poets. Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu are called the precursors of women poetry. In those olden times the condition of woman was not so crucial as is now but there was also rampant the slavery of orthodox beliefs, although a strong impression of righteousness, love and peace can be seen in the women of ancient times. In the past the image of woman was that of Kali, Uma, Lakshmi, Durga, Sita and Anusuya whom man also gave full reverence. The images of the woman are basically drawn from the Hindu religious texts i.e. the Ramayana, the Mahabharata Shrimad Bhagvada Gita and Vishnu Puran. A.N.Dwivedi aptly remarks, "Savitri, Sita and Jagadhya Uma are the ideal representative of Indian womanhood and offer an opportunity to the poetess to reveal the mysterious feminine nature. Toru's intimate feelings are expressed through them."

In the poem 'Savitri', Savitri the ideal of Indian womanhood follows Yama boldly and when she is asked to retrace her steps home and perform the duties of a widow, she strictly denies:

If fate so rules, that I should feel
The miseries of a widow's life
Can man's device the doom repeal? (118)

In 'Lakshman' and 'Savitri' both Sita and Savitri speak in alike tone in relation to love and attachment to their lords. Savitri says:

No weariness, O death, I feel
And how should I by the side
Of Satyavan ? in Woe and weal
To be a help mate swears the bride
This is my place. (131)

When Sita feels that Ram's life is in peril, she also says:

Learn this – whatever comes may come,
But I shall not survive my love
Of all my thoughts here is the sum!
Witness it God's in heaven above
If fire can burn or water drown
I follow him." (141)

In the poem 'Sita' she has she has beautifully portrayed the plight of a rejected wife and her children. K.R.S.Iyanger comments, "This almost perfect poem is attribute to Toru's mother's genius for storytelling, never Toru had written more feelingly or evoked a scene or an emotion as unforgettable." (65)

Sarojini Naidu or the Bharat Kokila is the most lyrical woman poet of India. She made more definite contribution to Indian English Poetry. Her poetry reflects her involvement with Indian life. She is an epitome of Indian womanhood and commands respect from the younger generation as an intrepid freedom fighter. She said about herself, "The lyric child had grown into the lyric woman. All the instincts of her awakening womanhood for the intoxication of love and the joy of life were deeply interfused with the more urgent need of the poet's soul. For a perfect sympathy with its incommunicable vision its subtle and inexpressible thoughts."

In her poems like "Indian Love Song", 'Village Song', 'Pardanashin' and 'Indian Dancers', she has portrayed the life of Indian Woman of different sects where women are seen dancing enjoying and involved in the thoughts of their lovers. A beautiful talk is worth noting here:

"Mother mine, to the wild forest I am going,
where upon the Champs boughs the Champa buds are blowing:
To the koil- haunted river- isles where lotus lilies glisten
The voices of fairy- folk are calling me, O listen!" (48)

Love is the prominent theme of her poetry where woman are shown as a sacred beloved who are ready to surrender before their lovers. 'If You Call Me', 'The Path of Tears', 'The sanctuary' and 'The Worship of Love' mirror the role of woman as a beloved in the diverse moods. In 'If You Call Me' the beloved is longing to move swiftly on the call of her lover. Here the lovers are lord Krishna and Radha:

If You call me I will come
Swifter O my love,
Than a trembling forest deer
Or a panting dove,
Swifter than a snake that flies
To the charmer's thrall
If You call me I will come
Fearless what befall. (33)

In her poems we find woman complaining of her negligence but at the same time she shows her preparedness to accept all humiliation and suffering at his hands as sweet token of love. 'Love Guerdon' gives an example of the same:

Fires were the wounds You struck me O my love
And bitter were the blows!
Sweeter from dear hands all suffering
That rich love tokens other comrades bring
Of crimson Oleander and of rose(33)
Here we can mark out her sensuous ardour of passion:
Crush me o love, betwixt thy radiant fingers
Like a frail lemon leaf or basil bloom,
Till aught to me that lives for thee or lingers
Be but the wraith of memories perfume,
And every sunset wind that wadereth
Grow sweeter for my death. (33)

Sarojini's poems breathe an Indian air with particular light on women and their glory. They are mellifluous and catching and disclose an image of ideal woman of ancient times. Dr. S. Z. H. Abidi remarks:

A study of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is a delightful affair. She is a poet of colour and melody and beauty while her poems, one is bound to be deeply involved in her aesthetic response to things.

Kamala Das is one of those luminary poets whose name is synonymous with Modern Indian English Poetry and who has opened new dimensions in the field of Recent Indian English Poetry. Her feminine sensibility finds its finest and fullest expression in her love poems. Her bold and straight forward treatment of love and sex and her emphasis that is not to the blind worship of the husband but the consummation of love make her peculiar and precursor of woman's poetry in modern Era. Kamla Das is a skilled painter of images and her poetry is a finely woven piece of imagery where she mingles the tinge of memory and her observing expressions into one. Looking at her mother at sixty six, she portrays:

.....I saw my mother, beside me,
Doze, open mouthed, her face ashen like that
Of a corpse and realized with pain
That she was as old as she looked, but soon
Put that thought away.....
.....I looked again at her, wan, pale
As a late winter moon and felt that old
Familiar ache, my childhood fear
But all I said was, see you soon Amma
All I did was smile and smile and smile. (Hers 29)

Kamla Das in her poetry carries the theme of independence in her poetry when she writes:

Women, is this happiness, this lying buried
Beneath a man? It is time again to come alive,
The world extends a lot beyond his six foot frame.”(72)

And again she says:

“On the bed with him, the boundaries of
Paradise had shrunk to a more
Six by two and afterwards, when we walked
Out together, they
Widened to hold the unknowing city.(SIP 72)

In the poem after poem, she is interested only in talking about her sexual exploit, her physical life and moods of her body. This is a valid theme for any particular poet. Kamla Das plays out her rules of unhappy woman, unhappy wife, and mistress to Youngman, mother, reluctant nymphomaniac pining for the lost joys of innocent and childhood.

There was a time when our lusts were
Lying multicoloured flags of no
Particular country. We lay
On bed, glassy-eyed, fatigued, just
The toys that children leave behind,
And we asked each other, what is
The use, what is the bloody use?
That was the only kind of love,
This hacking at each others' parts
Light convicts hacking breaking clods
At noon. (IEP 96)

She presents a feminist movement through her poetry. She discovers male hegemony from the inner care of her feminine consciousness. She has delineated her feminist voice through sex imagery. It is the woman who offers to man the sensual pleasure of her body:

Gift him what makes you woman, be sent of
Long here, the musk of sweat between the breasts
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your
And lap female hungers.(page 131)

The growth he generally hints at in her poetry is not of virgin into woman but of a girl into wife and mother. She feels raped in life by all- husband, lover, society and also the humorous heaven. On the contrary, the awareness of that peace which come with the soul's union with the divine as in the Radha Krishna poem remains a far-off vision that she is trying to reach, through the throes of physical frustration. Sri Raghunandan remarks, "Kamala Das in her search for freedom from bond imposed on women by society, explore the matriarchal status of women that once existed in Kerala, and tried to delve into Krishna Radha stories of ideal love to search for a meaning in human relationship."

Among the numberless voices surging and floating on the surface of Indian English writing, "S. Radhamani", says S.L. Peeran, "is a frail woman who has all the chappings of an Indian

woman, tradition bound, deeply spiritual, a loving devoted wife, a duty-conscious mother, a conscious citizen, a humble teacher in male dominated society and voice of suffering woman in all corners of the society.” With her published volumes of poetry ‘The Times Ahead are Propitious’ (1996), ‘Thistle and Transformation’ (1998), ‘Tirings of Transition’ (2000) and ‘Obsessions and Transitional Exuberance’(2001), she has given bent to the rampant pain, suffering and the depravation of the basic rights to the woman, making her go round the tread mill of all social evils and tortures heaped on her. Her poem ‘My Luxury’ expresses the agony of the loneliness of women:

How often loneliness has served me
Soothing as soothsayer.
More often than not, my aloneness
Has assured me with
Assurance of unconditional prayer.

Almost all the collection of her poetry speak aloud for the cause of woman but she is not only the champion of the rights of woman but she also torch bears the path of modern woman, who has been blind folded by the extreme light of westernization and modernization. In the poem ‘A Soliloquy’, the poet advices wives to be true and loyal alike Savitri:

Whether you get married to man young
You must be true to your beloved or old partner.

Some other poems like ‘Publish or Perish’, ‘Grief is but Brief’, ‘Before and Behind Ph.D.’, ‘A Drive on the Night Street’, ‘Tender to be Tethered or Withered’, ‘Penury Bounteous’ and ‘suffering to What Extent’ are the woeful tales of the exploitation, depravation, sufferings, frustrations and turmoil of woman in the present time.

Another luminary poetess Gauri Deshpande shows different feminine sensitivity; full of events, baffling, sensuous and captivating. Love for her is not of consummation and fulfillment but a torment of flesh as well as spirit. In ‘The Guest’, Gauri Desh Pande recalls the unwelcome lover, who lived with her and enjoyed her, has gone now living her empty. The depth of feeling of the loss is unequivocally expressed in the following lines:

You are gone now
The perfect mouth that kissed my words no
Longer by,

And as the clouds heap and heap upon the west

I lie empty barren and bereft. (56)

In some of her poems she complains of her lover's relationship with other woman and at the same time states:

You choose well, my love

For before you they have been all

Taught me carefully to read contempt

In other faces, making me adept

At acceptance and regret.(59)

True in the spirit of Indian girl, she pines for lover imagining him as Lord Shiva- the unattainable but much sought after the lover. According to her, when women talk among themselves, they become warm, intimate and personal. She says:

Sometimes you want to talk

About love and despair

And the unforgetfulness of children

A man is no use whatever then. (61)

'A Lunch on The train' reflects her views on the strange condition of middle class women when they are married at too young age:

The woman in front of me, a mere girl,

Too young to have been a mother of three

Is struggling vainly to feed one, control

The other, and the third is abandoned

From a weary care.

Lakshmi Kannan, a bilingual writer in Tamil and English is a well-known signature of Indian English Poetry. She has remarkable capacity for wielding English language to express Indian feminine sensibility and to alter it in order to suit her own feelings. She is woman first well aware of her emotions, psyche and place in male dominated society. 'I' in her poetry stands for woman. Lakshmi Kannan writes about her education, her adolescence and the warning voice of elders:

No, no, don't run,

Don't take long strides, Don't raise your voice,

Be a everyman, be moderate in everything

Be a model of mediocrity.(113)

Various stages of woman's life are vividly described. The desire of son is an important factor in woman's life:

There aren't enough brakes

To the money

War- horse-powered conjunctures

About

The thirst for a son.”(116)

Here, she writes about womanhood:

“Woman,

Tugged by occult pulls

The female cycle secret

Throbs with the star.(116)

Lila Ray comments, “Lakshmi Kannan's task has been the task of every woman, the task of discovering herself, for the 'I' is confused even with an appendix of a name, an age and a sex.”

The poetry of Mamta Kalia amalgamates the themes of love, marriage, family life and society where she impresses us for her sharp intellectual quality and autobiographical flavor. The poem 'Tribute to Papa and Other Poems' brings forth the contrast between her father's idealism which could not endow prosperity on him and her fascination for modern life which is without idealism and values:

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.”(306)

She discards the sanctities of life and believes in free sex:

Everything about you clashes with nearly everything about me

You suspected I am having a love affair these days

But You are too shy to have it confirmed
What if my tummy starts showing gradually
And I refuse it currected
But I'll be careful, Papa,
Or I know you'll at once think of suicide. (S.I.E.P., 306)

The poetry of Anna Sujata Modayil is poetry of experience and an insight into life, nature and human nature of modern India. In 'Crucifixions' she begins with her realization of the unbearable waiting. The unbearable pain of which is known only to the woman who 'have waited' and 'who wait.' The exoteric joy of waiting and longing creates a common bond among them:

Of our common womanhood
And the secret knowledge of suffering
Something shared, not spoken of. (S.C.I.E.V., 33)

Her poem 'Women's loneliness' mirrors the feminine longing for perfection, her ever-eluding of true love, her actual drudgery labor and search for joys of tomorrow that will ultimately end in loneliness:

Woman's loneliness is a special thing incommunicable
She longs for perfection
But finds pain.
True love eludes her
Like dreams lost in the night.
At the special, still point of her being,
She weeps for what can never be
But no one knows about this
She bears children,
She cooks and cleans,
And her body grows old.
The man she loved
Search for younger lovers
But beneath the every day,
Below the surface
Lies a woman's loneliness.

The poems by Indian women today constitutes a distinct phenomenon and what has made the contemporary English verse by Indian Women a phenomenon is the fact that they are not lagging far behind their male counterparts in the point of creativity. They have hardly written any light-hearted verse. They have carved out a distinct image of woman and taken them out of their cozy power of old-world tradition and express their feelings and thoughts without any inhibitions. The woman presented by Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu as an ideal one that love and is loved by all but we find a sea change in the image of woman created by contemporary female poets. Kamla Das is the pioneer in this category of poetesses who wrote for the art for art's sake without dwindling their minds in the ideals and doctrines of ancient Hindu life. In this regard their literature can be influenced much with the literature of the west and can be listed in the school of Freud, Jung, Marx, Simon De Beauvoir and Kierkegaard. Now in the literature of such women poets are no more considered as commodity, a plaything, a maid or a sex toy but they have their own identity and they have their own platform where they can speak out loud boldly about their rights on love, sex and dignity. Mostly the definitions about woman's conduct, behaviour and existence were given by men and the old conventional notions of male dominated society so rude, unbearable and depressive that a long depression gave birth to the movement of reform and restoration of women's state and rights which at first was germinated in the poems of these poetesses. The several references from the eminent poetesses clearly show that the concept of new woman will be justified only by bringing a radical change in public attitude towards man-woman relationships. The general perspective about woman as a shadow figure to a male caretaker, be he a father, a husband or a son, continue to persist. Man's affinity to woman is most often the bond that exists between the master and the slave. This state is called for a concerted effort by the women poets to demolish such notions and to assert the dignity and equality of woman in the family as well as in the wider social life.

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