

**GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND WAY OF EXPRESSION: A STUDY OF EUNICE
DE SOUZA'S POEMS**

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Abstract

A close look at the growth of Indian English poetry shows that most serious, profound and revolutionary poems are seen after a long way, in this decade as I am talking about poems written by woman. In this postmodern period, we have come across so many Indian woman poets and their poetry shows so many aspects as they find being a woman. Their poetry shows their perception regarding the realities of commonplace and also the problems they have to face in the society they live in. Their poetry sometimes is considered as poetry of self-revelation and confession. They want to create their own space and identity in the family and also in the society. They have broken their long state of silence and celebrate womanhood by breaking the bondage of subjugation to create woman's existence in the society. So many women poets came out to show these like Kamala Das, Meera Alexander, Imtiaz Dharkar, Gauri Deshpande, Eunice de Souza and so on. In this paper I want to show how Eunice de Souza shows the gender blindness and discrimination that she has experiences in the male dominated society and how she expresses those with the help of irony and images in her poetry.

Key words: Male, Gender, Irony, Female, Ethics.

Introduction: During the last few decades Indian English poetry changes rapidly and so many themes and aspects come into experimentation. And these changes also are seen in the writings of Indian English woman poets. Women poets at the pre independence period deal with romantic and sentimental theme in their poems as they were highly influenced by English romantic poets. But in the later half more clearly women poets of twentieth century want to show in their writing the socio-cultural life, domestic life of Indian woman. Male domination and behaviour towards them are the major concern in their writing. Also they

wan to protest against it through the medium of thei writing. One such Indian English woman poet is Eunice de Souza.

Eunice de Souza is widely known as A famous Indian English woman poets who raises her voice for the woman in contemporary world scenario. She chooses poetry as a medium to show her protest and to show the position of woman to transform it. Sometimes she has shared her personal experiences and connects herself with the all women. Her collection of poems are Fix (1979), Women in Dutch Painting(1988), Way of Belonging(1990), Selected and New Poems(1994) and many more.

Actually women always place as secondary position in this society although they are the other half of the whole human existence and race. Gender discrimination is always prevails here as Women in India always suffer in school, college, before marriage, after marriage as because of their biological exclusivity, dislocated imperfect society. In this context Eunice de Souza's poetry shows the ambivalence in women along with physical and psychological position of women in our society. She shows not a particular woman but the whole women race as they arte 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'. (Mohanty, 55)

In her poems we find that she shows her concern for woman. She shows the dislocation of mother, daughter, wife in a same way as the different roles of woman suffered different problems. She wants to be a device without these particular names as she is created with origin of multiple and diffused points. As she says in 'Bequest':

"I Wish I could be a
Wise woman
Smiling, endlessly, vacuously
Like a plastic flower.
Saying child, learn from me." (Bequest)

Indian woman has to do a lot to satisfy her family, parents and in the same time male are free and only they create the rules where as women are only the follower of those stupid rules. So woman has to face gender discrimination on a large scale in this society. In her 'De Souza Prabhu', she said about her parents and her efforts to happy them:

"My parents wanted a boy

I have done my best to qualify
I hid the blood stains
On my clothes
And let my breasts sag
Words the weapon
To crucify.” (De Souza Prabhu)

In Indian family girl child is less welcomed as everyone needs male child for this is a male dominated society. Girls are only treated as creatures and hence these creatures start their battle to live a life among these so called male society. Women are treated like lame ducks and Eunice de Souza showed these in her poems. I agree totally what Simone de Beauvoir said in this context regarding the condition of women, “There is unanimous agreement that getting a husband—or in some cases a protector—is for her the most important of undertakings. . . . She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother’s hold, she will open up her future, not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master.” (Beavouir, 355). Her poetry can be classed as quest for identity of women in the society both in terms of position and security. She shows how woman rather girls are treated at their teen age and this asymmetry of gender biasness and differentiation in sexual acknowledgements are shown in her ‘Sweet Sixteen’:

“Well you can’t say
they didn’t try.
Mamas mention menses.
A nun screamed: you vulgar girl
don’t say brassieres
Say bracelets.
.....
The preacher thundered
Never go with a man alone
Never alone
and even if you’re engaged
only passionless kisses.” (Sweet Sixteen)

She wants to break the so called ground for woman and often we find her struggle and suffering in doing so as she has been bound and restricted in a cultural construction and hierchial framework both in mind and body. In this context Mohanty aptly

commented, “It is the intersections of the various systematic networks of class, race, (hetero) sexuality, and nation, then, that position us as ‘women’. Herein lies a fundamental challenge for feminist analysis once it takes seriously the location and struggles of the Third World women, and this challenge has implications for rewriting of all hegemonic history, not just the history of people of colour”. (Mohanty, 55) In a patriarchal society, a woman faces tension, frustration and lifelessness because always a question arises in her mind as what way she has to live rather than what way she wants to live. In her ‘Bequest’ she shows exactly this condition of woman:

“Some recommend stern standards
others say float along.
He says, take it as it comes,
meaning, of course, as he hands it out.” (Bequest)

Women are always in fear and they even can’t make any kind of self-revelation in such fearful state. She is the victim in this society and she becomes alienated and loneliness captures her. Actually she wants to show the differences and challenges that women meet as Susan comments, “(T)he matter of bodies is neither an unformed flesh awaiting human decision, nor the bearer of biological limitations and potentialities. The body is not prosocial, or precultural. For Foucault, the body is that surface upon which society writes, such that it comes to life as discourses appear on its flesh.” (Susan, 55) As a result depression, confusion are very common to them. In her ‘Autobiographical’, she shows the fear of woman:

“I thought the whole world
was trying to rip me up
cut me down go through me
with a razor blade.” (Autobiographical)

Even she describes the condition of a spinster in a patriarchal society in a pathetic way. In her ‘Miss Louise’ we find an aged spinster now a helpless victim as her dream of luxurious life with mothering children is shattered. It is all because a woman’s life is dependent over a marriage, children and now she is at her youth. Few lines from the poet will clear the picture more:

She dreamt of descending
... of children in sailor suits
and organza dresses

till the dream rotted her inwards
...”You Louisa, we know, professors
loved you in your youth
judges in your prime.” (Miss Louise)

But Eunice does not remain silent only by depicting the gender discrimination in the society but she also raises her voice of protest through her poetry. And in doing so she uses satire, imagery and irony in a controlled and polished way to make his poetry a weapon before the male dominated world. Many of his poems bear double meaning and they are like two edged sharp sword. In her ‘Fix’, she comments harshly on the Goan-Catholic community and also satirizes on those hypocrite middle class lived in Goa and their prejudice and culture. As Veronica Brady aptly comments on it, “Many of the Catholic characters which appear in the poems are an embodiment of the complacency, the closed heart and mind which constitutes evil in de Souza’s world because it entails the refusal of freedom, the “passion for the possible” — as distinct from the cultural religiosity she attacks here.” (Sree, 42).

She uses irony and satirizes on so many aspects in her poetry. She thinks marriage as a very mean custom as two unknown persons are tied in a bondage and woman are the commodity and product which man gets in marriage. They are sold to exploit both physically and mentally through marriage. Her comments reminds me what Lucy Irigaray says, “Just as a commodity has no mirror it can use to reflect itself, so woman serves as reflection, as image of and for a man, but lacks specific qualities of her own. Her value-invested form amounts to what man inscribes in and on its matter: that is, her body.” (Perry 85).

Eunice de Souza is really an outspoken poet. Her poems are often full of ironic languages. In her ‘He Speaks’, she in a mocking way puts light on many themes. On one hand she shows the woman’s position in a patriarchal society and her desires and on other hand she also shows us the impacts of imperial binarism. Rejection and love here receive heavy blow as she shows here:

“She was an affectionate
creature and tried hard, poor dear,
but never quite made the grade
... After that pathological display
I decided there was only one

thing to do: fix her.
The next time we were making love
I said quit casually:
I hope you realize I do this
with other women.” (He Speaks)

Sometimes she uses images to convey her sadness, pity, anger and care for woman. But her use of imagery is polished that it immediately appeals to the readers. In her ‘For Rita’s Daughter, Just Born’, she uses the images drawn from nature. Here she compares a child to a luminous leaf and also compares the basic need that are needed for a child to be a happy woman. As she says in this poem:

“Luminous new leaf
May the sun rise gently
on your unfurling
in the courtyard always linger
the smell of earth after rain
the stone of these steps
stay cool and old
gods in the niches
old brass on the wall
never the shrill cry of kites.” (For Rita’s Daughter, Just Born)

Actually she wants to achieve a peaceful happy life of every woman after marriage. She longs for a place like heaven to stay and she shows these in her ‘Pilgrim’:

“God rocks, I’m a pilgrim
Tell me-
Where does the heart find rest?” (Pilgrim)

Despite of fear, pain, frustration and sufferings, she wants peace, comfort and happiness. She shows that marriage is not the ultimate motive of every girl as she is not only brought up to serve herself for the man but also to live a happy life in later. In her ‘And She Lived Happily’, she gives us the picture:

“And she lived happily ever after.
...Now the grey sky is a sky
... not always there,
but on call, often enough. (And She Lived Happily)

Conclusion:

In the concluding lines it can be said that like other postmodern Indian English women poets, her poetry also reveals the struggle of woman to attain freedom and quality. She shows the gender blindness and discrimination in the society and also the struggle to attain self-realization. Despite being in a situation of alienation her poetry shows the conscious for woman and through the use of some devices she wants to raise her voice against those issues. Actually she does not only break the so called tradition of previous writers abut also explores a new horizon for the upcoming women poets to take these issues in as more vivid way. She is a modern woman full of self confidence and she has the determination to change some of these old primitive issues as far as possible.

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