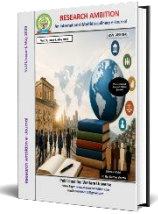




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Feminist Resistance in the Poetry of Imtiaz Dharker: An Analytical study

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ABSTRACT

Imtiaz Dharker's feminist stance is revealed in her prose and poetical writings in which she highlights the anguish and anxiety of Indian continent women caught in the morass of affected conventions social and familial. But at the first instance she portrays her own joys and sorrows, anguish and anxiety that she herself experienced in different situations of her diaspora life. She is a sensitive soul recording in her poetry and drawings all the intimations of wrong and turbulence that she feels she underwent through her life in exile. What distinguishes her writings is her ability to transform her personal feminine stance into something general, to give a universal colouring to her personal pain of diasporic life. Her anguished affirmation of independence is available in her hand drawn drawings upon her poetry books. Her quest for identity is directly the progeny of an old social set up, oriented towards the total annihilation of the feminine personality in different shapes particularly in the form of religion. Religion and diaspra feelings are, no doubt, the leitmotif of her poetry but the depth of her distress seems to have left a constant sting in her soul, and that does invest her identity with a certain tincture of pangs. This research paper argues that Dharker's poetry is not merely an expression of personal Feministic emotions; it is a literary strategy of resistance. Her poetry transforms private experiences into collective voices of women seeking dignity, independence and recognition.

Feminism means "the belief and aim that woman should have the same rights and opportunities as men". (Hornby, A.S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*) This belief and aim is the main motive of Imtiaz Dharker in practical life as well as in her works. In other words, "Feminism is a collection of movements aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic and social rights and equal opportunities for women. Feminists are persons whose beliefs and behavior

are based on feminism." (Learner's Dictionary). Dharker is in search of all these rights of equality. Precisely defining "feminism can be challenging, but pragmatically, a broad understanding of feminism includes women acting, speaking and writing on women's issues and rights, identifying social injustice in the status quo and bringing their own unique perspective to bear on issues". (Learner's Dictionary). This definition is most applicable for the life and works of Imtiaz

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Dharker, as she is one among those “women acting, speaking and writing on women’s issues and rights,” Feminism has emerged as a worldwide movement to secure women's social, political, religious, legal, moral & cultural rights on the one hand and love, respect, sympathy and understanding from males on the other. Feminism recognizes the inadequacy of male - created ideologies and struggles for the spiritual, economic, social and racial equality of women, sexually colonized and biologically subjugated. It is a concept emerging as a protest against male domination and the marginalization of women, Dharker is one of the prominent supports of this concept. It focused women’s struggle for recognition and survival and made them realize that the time has come when they should stop suffering silently in helplessness. Then only they can develop their moral and intellectual potentialities and qualities. Feminism, concerns women’s cause, their subjugation to men folk, their inferior status, their exploitation- physical, social, political, economic and religious. Feminists all over the world have been raising such issues with a pious wish that the women must be considered equal to men and Imtiaz Dharker is one from Indian subcontinent having such a pious wish. They should not be discriminated because of their sex. They have been generally forced to lag behind even in religion matters. Thus, feminism is a movement giving voice to women’s subordinated position in society and discrimination, encountered by them because of sex. So, equality, freedom and justice are central to the movement of feminism for bringing about a radical change in society.

Feminism is a concept emerging as a protest against male domination and marginalization of woman. But the development of feminist thought at the outset of this century has brought about a perceptive change in our outlook towards woman. Now, women are one with men and not their “otherness” as expressed by Imtiaz Dharker also in her poetry.

Women were not demanding only equal rights and equal status, but they also resisted the insidious power of the literature that forced them to suppress their feelings and approved the patriarchy as the only viable solution to a social order. Feminist writers originate participates in the larger efforts of feminism to liberate women from the structures that have marginalized women and as such, it seeks to redefine ideas of male and female. Feminists claim that literature bears the stamp of male domination. A major portion of literature has been written from the male point of view either by ignoring or suppressing woman’s point of view. The ideology of gender is inscribed and it is produced and reproduced in cultural practice. Feminists examine experiences of the women from all race and religions, classes and cultures. The traditional images of women as an evil force, a temptress, an inferior being, and as an impediment in man’s spiritual path have been totally discarded in favor of a more human, egalitarian image mainly due to the efforts of the feminists and the male humanists. In short, the main motive of Feminist is to make women conscious about their struggle for recognition and survival and made them realize that the time has come when they can save themselves from the anguish and anxiety of

the modern world, which they bear silently in helplessness. This motive is practiced by Dharker not only through her writing but in her practical life also. She is one among the post-independence Indian women poets who have given a credible pledge that Indian English Poetry counterpart the best everywhere. Among these poets, we may include Kamla Das, Melanie Silgado, Sujata Bhatt, Eunice de Souza, Mamta Kalia, Tara Patel etc. They have widened the thematic concerns of Indian English Poetry. In their imaginative instinct technical excellence as well as the anguish and anxiety continued in suffocation and repression which have found a reasonable vent in their imaginative instinct. Their poetry is not only limited to women's issues but is a violent assessment of the state's suppressive political, social and cultural setting. They emphasize diverse problems and plights of women by using a set of literary terms such as satire, similes and metaphors in their poetry. Dharker's poetry shows her concentration in women's health, their social situation and education. She mirrors the condition of women in contemporary world: "Women are racing ahead in all kinds of fields: ... And yet there are women who don't even know they have Choices . . . The cases are in our newspapers. Every-day, a young girl abused within their own families. . . . I do see all the bright young girls and the self-confident women around me. . . . of course, they are shining ... and what I am saying is that I want all the others to shine too, to have the same opportunities." (Dharker)

Since the Post World wars has shattered the nervous of human beings as life seems to be difficult to live. It has

similarly precipitated anxieties, anguish and fear among the present writes. At current time most females like Imtiaz Dharker and others have started to write about this anguish and violence that seems to be the only reality to them. The study of Indian English poetry is incomplete without the study of women poets. After 1960, women poets' poetry was focused on feminism. It is the 'new literature' which began after the World War II. Many Indian feminists are dealing with family violence, education and female sexuality. Feminist theorists Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Tolpade Mohanti, Mandakranta Bose who are living in West are helping in improvising the condition of Indian women. Like other feminist of the world, feminists in India even in diaspora seek gender equality in all matters and it also includes women acting, speaking and writing on women's issues and rights, bringing their own specific standpoint to bear on issues. Indian feminists also have fought against culture-specific issues within India's patriarchal society. So, Feminism in Indian is generally defined as a movement for the recognition of women's claims for all rights equal to those of men. It is a critique of patriarchy which devoured women's identity and prevented them from realizing their productive as well as creative possibilities. It is also a voice against the male domination and female subjugation and humiliation in our society. Indian women have launched organized efforts to prevent all angst and anxiety against them in a male dominated society on grounds of sex and in the fields of social, political, economic, and even on religious rights.

Imtiaz Dharker is one among these poets, who register their voice against sexism, violence, religion exploitation etc. She was born in Pakistan and brought up in Scotland, and she divides her time between London and India and writes for the cause of females of Indian subcontinent. There are

different themes of her poetry of Imtiaz Dharker such as: home, freedom, journeys, geographical and cultural displacement, communal conflict, religious exploitation and gender politics etc. In the realms of the Post-Modern literature Imtiaz Dharker occupy a very significant position as a rebel against the tradition of marginalization of women in Indian subcontinent society. She is widely acclaimed as revolutionary poet for having raised in poetry her voice rebelliously against cultural displacement, communal conflict, religious exploitation and gender politics which is the causal factor of feminine disturbance. In order to awaken the idealistic women from their age-old slumber, she started writing poetry and her poetry protests against the injustices and the persecution to which pious women have long been subjected in the name of religion, even though which is not mentioned in religious books. She protests against the passivity and the timidity of the pious religious women who spends her life silently in the false religious society. She makes poetry as a vehicle for the expression of her resentments and indignation against such false religious society. She is a contemporary Indian poetess quite conscious of her artistic design and purpose as well as her responsibility towards the hopes and oppressions, the concerns and anguishes, of womankind. Her poetic voice imbued with feminist angst and anxiety sensibility is typically her own and it cannot be confused with anyone else's. She experienced the world as an arena of various power struggles: false religion against female, victor against victim, male against female, master against servant. Her poems as well as the drawings

can be seen as an attempt to mediate these antagonisms. She felt life as a chaos of conflicting oppositions and counter forces and tried to coordinate these counter forces by corresponding to her art and life. Thus Dharker's own inner and outer life provided not only form, but also matter for her writing. She wrote about her own emotions and about actual events, places and people of three countries i.e. Pakistan, India and UK. In turn, her writing shaped her life; her metaphors provided temporary states to hear diaspora life and thus structured her experience. A strong feeling of her own independence, rebellion against male domination, also resentment and protest against male domination, resentment and protest against women who were passively perpetuating the human values and mindless domesticity are freely expressed in all her works. In a male-dominated society she sought to establish her identity as a woman and an outstanding writer. The quest for identity becomes the main theme in almost all her poems. She extends her range to comprehend the social and cultural history of the West in her poem "Over the Moon". Like other woman writers, marriage and family life made it difficult for Dharker to realize potential. Although she was conscious that writing and family life do not go together, yet she remained determined to indulge in both. She divides her time between London and India. She eloped to marry Indian, Maharashtrian Hindu who lives in Bombay and was a journalist, Anil Dharker, a Hindu by birth. Because of that, her family completely cut her off and she did not see or hear from them for the next fifteen years (Dharker in de Souza 1999, 112). After the death

of her first husband Anil Dharker, she married with Simon Powell. At present time she divides her time between the United Kingdom and Mumbai. She habitually describes herself as a Scottish Muslim Calvinist, born in Lahore and adopted by India. It is this feminine experience that experiences her poetry and drawings.

The way Imtiaz Dharker addresses about the dilemma of subaltern women in oppressing societies remembers the opinion made by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. It can be argued, though, that one difference between Spivak's opinion on the silencing of the gendered subaltern and Imtiaz Dharker's point of view on the same theme is that the latter is not as gloomy, in spite of what it might seem at first sight. In her poetry, Imtiaz Dharker offers some examples of women who manage to break free and speak up for themselves, or of women who find a way to speak, for example in the form of the possessed women of *I speak for the devil*. According to the poet, this is one of the strategies used by women to discover a tone of voice in circumstances of repression, even if that entails giving up their own voice – and thus their private agency – in favour of what the others consider to be the devil's voice. In “*I need*”, a poem from “*The terrorist at my table*”, there is a sort of counterpoint to bleak poems like the aforementioned “*Another woman*”, where the speaker wants to see a young boy bathing at the well, and boldly says:

I need to go to Crawford Market
through the piles of fruit
and buy a whole sack

of ripe mangoes
to suck and suck
till nothing is left but dry seeds

(Dharker: *The terrorist at my table*, 104).

The poem ends with a mysterious “*I need you to come back*” (ibid), where longing for what seems to be a lover is mingled with the flavours from both Britain and of her other country, Pakistan. The speaker longs to eat ‘*sarson da saag, and hot makki di roti*’, but also bacon and eggs, claiming that “*my greed has no nationality*” (*The terrorist at my table*, 103). The last poem of *I speak for the devil*, “*Exorcism*”, is a type of freedom, nearly a liberating moment, where the persona tries to get free from the idea of being haunted:

I'm letting all the bad things
fall away. I'm no one
but myself,
no one possesses me.

(Dharker: *I speak for the devil*, 119)

She names numerous cities, not only in Pakistan or India, but all over the world, liberating herself from the claims of other people: sons, lovers, fathers, siblings and even from someone else's erotic fantasies. The woman in this last poem is finally free to dance, “*flying [her] feet / over the rattle and clunk / where the drums thump thump*” (Dharker: *I speak for the devil*, 120). The poem and the collection with it, ends with a declaration of authority, of society, of finally belonging to something: “*This is how we belong*” (ibid), narrates the last verse, asserting the power of poetry, its rhythms and its music. She tries instead to offer an impression of different kinds of women

and of their attempts to be heard: while some of them manage, some of them give in. This is also evident in the image of the pomegranate from the sequence “Remember Andalus” in the poem “The women”, where Dharker writes:

I scatter pomegranate seeds,
and from each seed springs a woman.
There is the one who sits
in the window, day and night,
rapt in the life on the opposite hill.
There is the one who slips out
into the garden, and comes
back with her hair undone. (Dharker: The
terrorist at my table,71)

Most of Dharker's poems explain the Feminist Stance in which she has projected a new device to liberate the women from the anguish and anxiety of slavery in man-dominated society. So, through the presentation of her own experiences in her famous autobiography, “I Speak for the devil”, in most of her poems through the various situations depicted in her hand drawing paintings she has highlighted the various images and roles of an Indian woman, as a wife, a mother, a daughter, a mistress and even as a pious religious woman. She has focused her stance on the problems faced by a woman in a male-governed social set-up, the categorized roles assigned to her, the prejudiced attitude of man towards woman, the status and identity of a female child, the treatment of woman

mainly as a sexual object, and the new concepts and problems arising for her in the wake of changing socio-cultural and economic scenario. As a matter of fact, she empathizes with the numerous Indian subcontinent women who daily suffer unspeakable tribulations, who are the victims of the same socio-familial set-up against which she herself takes the bat. She identifies herself with ‘every woman who seeks love,’ finds oneness with every woman who spends life in misery, bondage, sexual, familial, social, religious and participates in all the experiences of the woman in her life of anguish and anxiety.

In conclusion, Imtiaz Dharker emerges as a poet of freedom, identity and resistance. Her poetry challenges silence, questions oppression and celebrates the human desire for dignity. Through feminist consciousness she has created a unique place for herself in contemporary literature.

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