

**AESTHETICS OF FEMINISM IN THE POETRY OF
IMTIAZ DHARKER AND CHARMAYNE D'SOUZA:
A CRITICAL STUDY**

THESIS

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to

*Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies
(Deemed to be University), Faridabad*

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December, 2019
Registration No. 13/Ph.D/026

Chapter – VI

CONCLUSION

If my book has helped women, it is because it expressed them, and they in their turn gave it its truth. Thanks to them, it is no longer a matter for scandal and concern. During these last ten years the myths that men created have crumbled, and many women writers have gone beyond me and have been far more daring than I. Too many of them for my taste take sexuality as their only theme; but at least when they write about it they now present themselves as the eye-that-looks, as subject, consciousness, freedom. (Beauvoir 79)

Feminist thought is still emerging and unfolding it to reach a point where it is easily understood with its meaning stark clear. With that objective, does it mean that just like other domains having independent theories and practices, there is feminism too with its comprehensive and accomplished ideology? It seems reasonable to ask if feminist canon has earned its theoretical conceptual concerns and academic boundaries. In an attempt to understand feminism, this research work attempts to inculcate various approaches to feminism in a brief manner. Considering the interwoven struggles of women in diverse situations, feminism is studied both at Indian and cosmopolitan stage. With such multifaceted and interconnected practices, it is intelligible to learn feminism as a subject matter with a variety of types. Having made this point, it does not mean that this research encompasses every aspect of the ideology or comprises of an absolute or even consummated survey of all the issues involved in feminist projects.

Various kinds of waves of feminism led to continuous stepwise growth to bring about gender equality. Liberal feminism focused on equal pay issues, equal access to education, suitable working conditions, etc. Besides these it also addressed issues like reproductive rights, access to abortion, health care, childcare, sexual harassment, right to vote etc. Most prominent liberal feminists were Abigail Adams and Mary Wollstonecraft. Psychoanalytical feminism asserted the theory of

inheritance which imparts a psychological need in men to subjugate women. It threw light on the conceptual and subconscious psyche towards women. Socialist Marxist feminism accepted that economic and social growth of women should be encouraged to establish harmony in the society. Radical feminism targeted patriarchy as the source of discrimination between men and women. It did not blame men for the bias and rather ruled out those issues like reproductive rights for women, pornography, prostitution, rape, gender specific roles etc. as the culprit. Cultural feminism projected that women and men are different as per biology, virtues and behavioral pattern. It asserted that women must preserve their essence and should not chase to become like men. Post-modern feminist ideas deduced that eradication of women oppression has to be multifaceted.

Miriam Schneir, in her book, ‘Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings’ says that, “Serious feminists of every generation have advocated financial self-sufficiency as a prerequisite for independence, personal fulfillment and socialization of womankind.” (*Schneir* xvii) Women feel empowered and independent when they are self-sufficient economically and thus are not giving away control of their lives in the hands of others. Financial independence would make them love themselves and walk the route of life with pride and honour. It is certainly an essential key to transformation towards incredible happiness, as projected and propagated by modern feminist thinkers. As noticed in the work of the authors Dharker and D’Souza too, independence imbibes immense strength to fight against all odds and define one’s attributes.

A woman is given an unjustified weapon, which is nothing but her sex. But the unfortunate query is whether their condemnation is an original curse or it is there because of initial faults in human history. Hostility encountered by women is assessed under the light of two interconnected sciences – Biology and Psychology. Throughout the Feminists have been inspecting and scrutinizing all possible facets of psychoanalysis which could release all causative factors responsible for sexist oppression.

Self-awareness needs to be instilled, so woman can comprehend her suppression by the male dominant society in terms of her talent and intelligence. She should learn and train her mind to deny to the assumed standards of how she should present herself. Realization of oppression in certain ways, which do not seem like a medium of subjugation, is the need of the hour. Appearance and personality ideals for women as per the male counterparts need to be deconstructed and to be reformed in the light of woman's acceptance and wants.

This research project is a wholehearted attempt to render emergence and writings of contemporary feminist poetry written by women. It incorporates a brief version of feminism as a distinct genre at global and national level. This is a precise panorama of the comprehensive study of works of prominent writers in the stream of feminism. It covers the writers who began the canon of feminist writings to contemporary writers who are still escalating the flame. Writers who laid the foundation of feminism like Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf are discussed too. Ideologies of other prominent feminist writers like Abigail Adams, Grimke sisters (Sarah Grimke and Angelina Grimke), Harriet Taylor Mill, John Stuart Mill, Simone De Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Naomi Wolf etc. have been included to form a background of the wave of feminism. Their role in the escalation of the wave of feminist struggle is indispensable and is therefore included. Their battle against gender bias made place among present women writers and made their work stand out distinctive without any prejudice. History of feminism progresses towards feminist writings in India, where men initiated it surprisingly. The first writer to propagate the same via novels was Rabindranath Tagore. Central figure in his stories were women and not men.

Contemporary feminist writers like Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza are working to rehabilitate the laws and societal systems which strategize to subjugate women. They have instigated a fresh and energetic feminist consciousness to propel and add pace to this transitional phase of feminist struggle. Educational barriers, domestic adherence, vocational inhibitions and professional limitations which were

earlier in-depth, now seem to be dissolving and woman is awoken enough to aspire of basking in the light of absolute freedom in near future. Millions of women are slowly engaging themselves in a search of their real identity and sisterhood. Dharker and D’Souza have added much momentum to the awareness needed in women. Their works inspire and open new horizons for women so that they are able to sense freedom. Contemplating a long history of servitude by women, verses written by Dharker in her first book, must be recalled to regain and retain the enthusiastic feminist movement:

“There you are, I can see you all now
in the tenements up north.

In or out of purdah, tied or bound.

Shaking your box to hear
how freedom rattles...

one coin, one sound.” (*Purdah and Other Poems* 10)

Dharker’s verses written to expand feminist struggle, have procured a quantum leap which marks her poetic occupancy among connoisseurs. Dharker’s rebellious agitation against cultural impositions and religious curtailment has propagated the wave of transformation and has set an exemplar of transition via poetry. Her outcry does not target mere exposure of dehumanization and partiality; it also aims to converge and eventually reconcile the dichotomy inherent between real and imposed images of women. Her strong uninhibited ways of expression unveil the real dominant face of male hegemonic society which used a literal veil to subjugate and rule over women.

Imtiaz Dharker writes with rich and vivid imagination and thoughts. Since childhood, her exposure and experiences channeled a defiance in her which discovered an artist and a poetic genius in her. Her prodigious talent and courage

took her to different places and cultures, thereby novel energies instilled in her, led to the emergence of a feminist perspective par excellence. Created with style and mystery, her verses sparkle with pronounced ideas and factuality. Dharker powerfully captures the quandary, predicament, hardship and labour of women forging against all odds around her. Dharker retaliates by implementing her words as a tool to broadcast animalistic picture of male dominion system predominantly observed in Muslim society. Dharker's rebellious agitation against cultural impositions and religious curtailment has propagated the wave of transformation.

Dharker prominently unveils the frailty and fragility of Muslim women by rebuking imposed cultural and religious dogmas which have been forced on them by the society. She has created a new sphere to be introspected with a fresh standpoint, which in turn furnishes better insight to her ideas. The set of twenty-five poems in her book 'Purdah', accompanies with it a firestorm, dealing with religious prejudices and gender bias. Dharker not only speaks as a Muslim woman, but she represents womanhood as a whole since she intends to cross the boundaries of name, religion and nationality. She invests her wisdom and knowledge as a scalpel to create a new horizon for women. Dharker's vulnerability towards social, cultural and religious teachings is clearly comprehensible.

The long and short of everything is that Imtiaz Dharker has created a new arena for women to bask in the light of realization and to claim their personal identity. Her poems demand for women's right for freedom, devoid of any encroachment by men. Reckless presentation of poet's conceptualization compels the reader to cherish her language, which is hard-hitting and impactful. Imtiaz Dharker's poetic layouts not just reinforce a new facet to women but also dazzle a man's moral sense. Knife-edged and undaunted words are easy to find in her poems, which send a shiver to the soul and also provoke a thought process in the reader's mind. Efficacious use of vivid and fearless language conveys and registers her message very clearly. Dharker has although, painted her poetic canvas with different colours but the crux of her poetry stands out explicitly in all her poems referring towards woman's

individuality. Poet's deep insight gives rise to an urge to transform, an alarm to get alert, towards prejudice and religious orthodoxy. Her zeal for change is unquestionable, since such a poetic inclination which is completely dedicated to reveal the issues of the world cannot be instilled in someone, one is rather born with it. It is clearly appreciated too by Carol Ann Duffy who says that, "Reading her, one feels that were there to be a World Laureate, Imtiaz Dharker would be the only candidate." (www.imtiazdharker.com)

Enjambment is one of the prominent features found in the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker. Flow of her ideas and emotions do not need the support of any couplets or stanzas. She uses words, lines, stanzas, or even punctuation, in a truly imagistic manner. Her style is unique as she gives interesting titles to her poems. The word 'devil' is used in several poems such as 'The devil's day', 'In bed with the devil', 'The devil to the poet', 'Dealing with the devil', 'The devil to god', 'The devil's advice' and 'The devil's valentine'. There is no rhyming scheme but verses are abundantly rich with alliteration and assonance.

Personification is another feature sometimes found in her poems which adds much substance and beauty to her words. Like poet has used body parts like 'arms', 'hands', 'fingers', 'fingernails', 'faces' and 'feet' in the poem 'Here' to reveal her bewilderment. This also reveals personification since she uses these body parts in context with trees. Next poem 'There', unlike 'Here' has been stocked with materialistic parts of a house. Enjambment is implemented where one line follows the other in the same line of poetry. The same is seen in the following lines:

"Things happened. Walls came up,
a door punched through." (*I speak for the devil* 9)

Her books are further divided into sections which are given different names. The names are usually common with one of the poems included in that section. She has laid a set of ten poems under the title 'The broken umbrella' which is a part of her

book ‘I speak for the devil’. Like many of her other poems in this book, this section also consists of poems with strange and materialistic titles. ‘The umbrella’ is the first poem of this section and is yet another fine specimen of the poet’s skill to reveal her thoughts implementing metaphors like of an umbrella. Feeling of evacuation is evidently inherent when words like ‘airport’, ‘conveyor-belts’, ‘check-in’, ‘immigration’ etc. are noticed.

A simple literary device like of a metaphor finds place in her poetry, which are exhibiting strong feelings and experiences. Metaphor used in the poem ‘In a cold place’ is a glove. Poet deciphers her sentiments via condition and placement of a leather glove. She has also enforced personification in this verse. Human attributes like of ‘sitting’ and ‘waiting’ are added to a lifeless leather glove. With all her poetic expertise, a glove is used as a medium to demonstrate her inner feelings.

Another common feature of Dharker’s poetry is minimum dependence on rhyming scheme. Some lines do not rhyme totally but stanzas end in rhythm with the same sound as in ‘grain’ and ‘pain’. One more fascinating facet is the thought-provoking modification of words like a Hindi word which is made to appear English. The word ‘chutney’ is added with a suffix ‘ed’ to fit in correct grammatical sense. The word ‘chutney’ which literally means a thick paste made out of a few things by a grinding process. In the poem, this word refers to the mixture of ‘pain’ given from a number of sources.

She has connected consecutive poems a number of times; here too there is a set of poems which seem to be in continuation. These poems are named as ‘Question 1’ and Question 2’. As the name suggests, both the poems raise a question and hence end with a question mark.

D’Souza envisages the need for woman to recognize the importance of her identity and space, which has always been eclipsed by the patriarchal structure of society. There is an urgent need that woman realizes her value to feel like a woman who has

the right to form her opinions and live a respectable life with dignity. After living a life of hollow ideologies and social unjustified doctrines, she drops the human substance in her as she is not able to feel neither as a woman nor as a man. There is complete obliteration of actuality and what remains is only a materialistic piece of luxury item, devoid of thinking ability. A woman feels so afraid and insecure if she chooses a life as per her wishes. She consistently compromises and sacrifices her dreams and surrenders herself to the set pattern customized for any woman by the society. A woman is thought of as a meek personality who would always need a strong and dominant support system around her to lead a safe life. Poet Charmayne D'Souza added more life and movement to the images with her magnificent poetic disposition in her second book 'Itinerants Mumbai's nomads. She strongly believes that poetry has to be free from social, cultural and geographical boundaries. It is fascinating to experience how she grips her own self too as a force and a thought-provoking factor to create poetry.

Usage of impressive and impactful style is like a hallmark in the poetry of Charmayne D'Souza and her first poetry collection 'A Spelling Guide to Woman' received much appreciation for the same. Her verses are filled with richness of vocabulary and rhythm. Contemporary notions are ingrained and her fiery words add escalation and much substance to her themes.

D'Souza is neither a sonneteer nor a follower of a set pattern or style in her poems. Readers would not find any rhyming scheme or a common tone in her verses. Her mode of expression is marked by absolute spontaneity. She focuses on a certain theme and instills an echo in the poetry via repetition, alliteration, assonance or a mixture of all these. D'Souza's poetic rhythm is propagated by a palpable dose of spontaneity. The first poem, which shares its title with the book, is so astonishing and admirable, since it offers a strong message in the shortest way possible. Though, it is a short draft, it is crafted in a sterling worthy way:

"Woo men,

womb men,
woe men,
whim men,
warm men,
who, men?
no, woman.” (*A Spelling Guide to Woman* 1)

This is probably her shortest poem and the best example of her poetic proficiency. Seldom are many poems written which are so short, yet delivering a strong message. There is thorough alliteration, assonance and repetition throughout the poem. Every line consists of only two words, but clearly resonates poet’s stance. The word ‘men’ is repeated in every line, depicting how a woman’s life revolves around a man in various ways, which also delivers the theme of the poem.

Presentation via enjambment gives more strength to her spontaneity and her viewpoints stand strong and prominent. Her style does not need a pattern or a form, as her words are coming right from her heart, delivering a powerful message. Her verses reach the actual source of realities and present an undiluted approach. ‘When God First Made A Whore’ is a stupendous example of superabundant variety of words used in one piece of art. This particular poem includes references from Bible, chemical tests, animals, sounds of animals, machinery etc.

Charmayne D’Souza’s next piece of work ‘Itinerants Mumbai’s Nomads’ is in collaboration with her husband who is a photographer. The method incorporated in this book is matchless since the adjoining photographs with the poetry behave as the title of the poem. The pictures sing out her words loudly, creating a more impactful experience. The theme of the poem is reflected with colours and visuals of the photographs. The contemporary substance in this book is ultra-modern as she adds embellishments to it with background images, numbers, multiple font sizes, designing of words etc.

Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza are true practitioners of contemporary modern style in poetry. Their verse have abundance of clear imagery and bold presentation and is not isolated in themes or limited in context to words. Their unabashed way of writing is free of inhibitions and demarcates clear dispersal of their fiery ideas and emotions. This research has outlined only a few facets of feminism in detail which were found apparently inherent in Imtiaz Dharker's and Charmayne D'Souza's poetry. By no means it is a discrete opinion merging in isolation, rather an evolving jargon with extensive and enormous strands. This work contributes with its rehearsed analysis over these poets' work to the existing vast field of feminist theories drafted by feminists everywhere all these years.

Set against an escalating upsurge of feminist struggle, this thesis is an addition to the wave of feminist writings. Provocative poetry of Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza resonate a new and fresh stream of consciousness among readers. Leaving aside social inhibitions and religious boundaries, these poets unmask the false world of patriarchal ideologies and their impact on the society. This work contributes to the upheaving canon of feminism by moving towards progression and negating prejudice, enslavement, superstition and fundamentalism.

These undaunted rebels exercised their poetic expertise to bring forth the subjugation and submission of women from different social and cultural trajectories. Their significantly articulated poetic discourse is comprehensive, hence can be studied again and again to gain a better perception of convictions in the light of feminism. Condensed poetic outcome of these poets mark their prominent presence in the list of contributors to Indo-English poetry. Present contemporary zone of feminist poets witness Dharker and D'Souza as new emerging voices which have covered all possibilities of efforts to engulf the dominant darkness on the blossoming freedom of women. The flambeau lit by these poets is rich enough for upcoming readers, poets and scholars to elevate the literary canon of feminism further.