



**WRITINGS OF SAROJINI SAHOO:  
A REINFORCEMENT OF FEMALE INDIVIDUALISM IN POST INDEPENDENCE ERA**

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**ABSTRACT**

This present paper studies about the female individualism and its values rather than social values in the writings of Sarojini Sahoo. It focusses the priority given to individualism specifically to women in Odia literature. In Odia literature, a reader can see there is always a conflict between social values and individual values. This conflict can be seen from the first short story 'Rebati' by Fakir Mohan Senapati to till now. In nineteenth century, the social values are the domain factor in Odia fiction but in post-independence age, more individual value based fictions came to the light. Female individualism approached equality legally and the key concept of feminism with individualism--- such as equality, justice and class--- bear so little relation to the concepts as used by socialists. It is not merely a position on affirmative action or civil liberties. It is a comprehensive, integrated system of beliefs concerning women's relationship to society. Linda Gordon in woman's body and woman's right wrote, the closer we look, the harder it is to distinguish social purity group from feminist ones. In this context Sarojini says: as a feminist I think I am more a writer and as a writer I think I am more a feminist. Her focus on female individualism articulates polyphonic voices speaking to women, urging them to empower themselves coaxing them to speak, to write, to tell their stories, to break their silence. The richness of this tradition is not surprising when you realise that the very root of feminism were profoundly individualistic.

**Key words:** Individualism, feminism, sexuality, spiritualism, gender bias, socialism.

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Sarojini Sahoo is purely a feminist writer, bilingual south Asian feminist writer in contemporary Odia literature. Though she is a bilingual writer, she prefers to write her creative writings in Odia and her critical appraisal in English. In English, one novel and two anthologies of short

stories have been published to her credit. In Odia, there are eight short stories collections and eight novels in published form to her credit. Her fiction always projects feminine sensibility like restrictions in adolescence or pregnancy, the fear factors like being raped or being condemned by society and the

concept of a bad girl etc. are the themes of her novels.

Firstly, I propose to define Individualism is the right of the individual to freedom and self-realisation. Individualism is thus also associated with artistic and bohemian interests and lifestyles where there is a tendency towards self-creation and experimentation as opposed to tradition and popular mass opinions and behaviours. Individualism holds that a person taking part in the society attempts to further his or her own interests or at least demands the right to serve his or her own interests, without taking the interest of society into consideration. They cared deeply about social problems, but they did not believe in governmental solutions. Although many were firmly puritanical in their views and personal conduct, they were even firmer in their commitment to the right of peaceful individuals to choose.

Browsing the history of Odisha, before independence, the language of odia was basically in Sanskrit or literary idioms but after independence the writers freely used the western concepts, idioms, images, and adaptation of western myths. During the early decades of the twentieth century, several factors including the moment for the preservation of Odia language, the of Odia regional consciousness, the advent of BramhoSamaj, the campaign for widow remarriage, the legal abolition of untouchability and the struggle for national movement--- odia women writers like Sarala Devi, Bidyutprava Devi, KuntalaKumariSabat, Sita Devi Khadanga etc. show their social values towards Odia people and language and also in their writings. But post-independence writers mainly focus upon the individual values, though their writings based upon the social values. The modern woman adopted myth as a strategy to challenge the pre conceived notion of woman so as to recreate her in new ways. Their writings interface with many progressive events in the state, such as rise of female education, trade union movements and women's participation in various aspect of civil and political life and also women's liberation which paves the way for the process of social recognition.

The priority is given to the theme of individualism of women that the Individual feminists

approached equality in a more strictly legal manner, appealing to natural law theory. They wished the individual rights of women to be fully acknowledged under laws that protected the person and private property of men and women identically. It makes the self-ownership which referred to the moral jurisdiction every human being has over his or her own body and over the products of his or her own labour. This approach not only embraced private property and natural rights to choose any lifestyle that did not involve aggression against another. The first wave feminism fought for votes for women, the second wave feminists believed in women's collective empowerment, producing expressions such as "sisterhood is powerful" or "the personal is political. The third wave feminism from the mid-1990s onward emerged of a new postcolonial world order, challenging the notion of "universal womanhood". Women fought for being recognised as capable, strong, and assertive social agents. All these three waves of feminism had in common goal: to focus people's attention on them, to demolish the cultural ideology according to which women's lives are not interesting and are not worth attention. Because they were consigned to the historical margins as well.

According to Sahoo, feminism should not act in opposition to men as individuals. To her, feminism is against oppressive and out dated social structures which forces both men and women into positions which are false. Her writing deals with female sexuality, the emotional lives of women and the intricate fabric of human relationships, depicting extensively about the inferior experiences of women and hoe their burgeoning sexuality is seen as a threat to traditional patriarchal society. According to her, feminism is not a gender problem. It is an integral part of femaleness separate from the masculine world. Her feminism is constantly linked to sexual politics of a woman. She denies patriarchal limits of sexual expression for a woman and she identifies women's sexual liberation as the real motive behind the women's movement. To her, common women writer's voice while relating the truth and exposing their inner self. Even their weaknesses or love relations are also not expressed clearly in fear of social scandal of their character. A

typical womanish shyness prevents them to write their actual feelings towards sex and love. This is not only due to any restriction imposed by their family, but much time we find that an idea of being a good girl pursues them to hide their own feelings and experiences.

Her first attempt in Odia literature to focus on sexuality as a part of social revolt by any woman. Medha, the protagonist of the novel *Upanibesh* was a bohemian. In her premarital stage, she was thinking that it was boring to live with a man lifelong. Perhaps she wanted a chain free life, where there would be any monotony. But she had to marry Bhaskar. Can Indian society imagine a lady with bohemianism? Her another novel *Pratibandhi* describes about the thematic development of sexuality in a woman. Priyanka, the protagonist of the novel has to encounter the loneliness develops into a sexual urge and soon, Priyanka finds herself sexually attached with a former member of parliament. Though there is an age gap between them, his intelligence impress her and she discovers a hidden archaeologist in him.

Her famous novel *Gambhiri Ghara (The Dark Abode)* describes an unusual relationship between two people---a Hindu house wife of India and a Muslim artist of Pakistan. It is a net oriented novel. A woman meets a very sexually experienced man. One day, he asks if she had any such experience. The woman Kuki scolds him by calling him a caterpillar. Gradually they become involved with love, lust and spirituality. That man considers her as his daughter, lover, mother, and above all these as a goddess. They both madly love each other through the internet and on the phone. Kuki does not lead a happy conjugal life though she has a love marriage with Aniket.

The unusualness of the socio-cultural background of these two characters is delicately portrayed by Sahoo in a sensitive and convincing manner. Readers become familiar with the two sets of roles that Kuki plays; that of a lover and that of a wife. Sahoo subtly balances these two roles and at the same time, highlights the superiority of a wife in a pragmatic world. But the novel is not merely a love story. Though love is a part of the novel, it deals with a much broader topic: the providence of a

woman in India. At the same time, it also portrays a story of how a perverted man, over time, becomes a perfect man. It also delves into the relationship between the 'state' and the 'individual' and comes to the conclusion that 'the state' represents the moods and wishes of a ruler and hence, 'the state' actually becomes a form of 'an individual.' Additionally, it takes a broader look at terrorism and state-sponsored anarchism.

Her description about Sexuality, it is something that can be related to many other aspects of culture tightly linked with an individual life. Anyone's class or geographic identity could be closely associated to his or her sexuality. For her, organism is the body's natural call to feminist politics. If being a woman is this good, women must be worth something. Her novels like *Upanibesh*, *Pratibandhi* and *Gambhiri Ghara* cover an area from sexuality to philosophy, from the politics of the home to the politics of the world. Sexuality may well be the most rewarding bliss of all possible experiences that life can offer between two people passionately attracted to each other. The union it produces between men and women in love is so close and so complete that two finite individuals can interrelate almost as if they were one indivisible being. It involves not only physical but also psychological, spiritual, and somehow anthropological and social aspects. It is related to reproduction. But because it does involve reproduction and transfer of genes, society has always tried to grip it under its control, denying any need of its other aspects. Even, anthropological theories are denied by the social gurus. Society or religion articulates its own definition of sex as all sexual activity ought to be potentially reproductive, that marriage must last forever, and that women must be subject to men.

Sahoo's concept of Spiritualism makes the differences. 'Dharma' in Hinduism is different from the Western concept of religion. It is a code related to moral nature. There is a very negligible difference between this 'dharma' and 'spiritualism' whereas in the Western concept, 'religion' and 'spiritualism' are two different concepts. So society or religion always plays a role to suppress the sexuality and as the patriarchal dominance is more on these fields,

questions about the morality and the politics of sex are usually considered in isolation from issues about gender and erotic sex. But in spiritualism, it is related to an individual's understanding for salvation and freedom. For Hindu spiritualism sexuality is represented as 'Kama'. It is one of the four necessities, four aims of life: Dharma, Artha (material goods), Kama and Moksha (liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth). But in Western philosophy, the natural and the universal are sharply divided -- like heaven and earth. The division of tasks between heaven and earth, suffering on earth and happiness beyond, is part and parcel of Western culture and its philosophy, religion and mythology. Westerners tend to see the sensuous world around us as false or illusory and the world 'beyond' as real. But in Hindu spiritualism, when you are in your sexual desire, you might sense complete presence in your sensuous world, a perfect moment which is spiritual, natural and carnal all at once.

Sarojini Sahoo had a significant influence on these women, paving the way with a feminist approach to fiction and the introduction of sexuality in her work. She is known as the Simone de Beauvoir of India, though theoretically she denies the Hegelian theory of "Other" developed by de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex*. Unlike de Beauvoir, Sahoo claims that women are an "Other" from the masculine perspective, but that they are entitled to equal human rights according to Plato. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* deals with the treatment of women throughout the history and a major work of feminist philosophy and the starting point of second wave feminism. It is a period of feminist activity that first began in early 1960s in USA, a worldwide movement. It is focussed mainly on suffrage and obverting legal obstacles to gender equality. It is debate on the issues—sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, domestic violence, marital rape issues. Simone de Beauvoir elaborately described the gender role or problem away from biological differences. In Odia literature Sarojini is considered a key figure to discuss sexuality in her fiction with a sincere effort to express her feminist ideas.

She has a distinct view on "Other" theory and according to her for their "Eternal Feminine"

women are forced to relinquish their claims to transcendence and authentic subjectivity by a progressively more stringent acceptance of the "passive" and "alienated" role. It is not always due to man's "active" and "subjective" demands. They are the woman, unknowingly accept the subjugation as a part of 'subjectivity' Sarojini accepts feminism as a total entity of female hood which is completely separate from the man's world. She writes with a greater consciousness of women bodies, which would create a more honest and appropriate style of openness, fragmentation and non-linearity. Her fiction always projects a feminine sensibility from puberty to menopause. The feminine feelings like restrictions in adolescence, pregnancy, the fear factors like being raped or being condemned by society and the concept of a bad girl, etc., always have thematic exposure in her novels and short stories. Some of Sarojini's famous stories like "Smoke", and "Few Pages of Vacant Lot" are not found in this collection, though their English versions are available and readers can also read them from different websites.

Simone De Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex*, first elaborately described the gender role and problem away from biological differences. In Oriya literature, Sarojini is considered a key figure to discuss sexuality in her fiction with a sincere effort to express her feminist ideas. The book starts with Sarojini's famous story "Rape" and ends with "Behind the Scene". Both the stories were responsible to raise a storm of controversy when these were published originally first time in Odia. In "Rape", the writer asks a question whether a woman has no right for her sexual desire even if in her dream. And in "Behind the Scene" she compares the lesbian love with heterosexual love.

However, an increasing urge for self-awareness and a growing urge for emancipation, the result by and large of westernization marked the new spirit. It is reflected in the works of twentieth century women writers to present writers who are writing today. Their works fiction, novel, poetry, short stories—breathe the strong wing to change. Their writing coming primarily from the domestic contact, also interface with the history of many progressive movements in Odisha. But the modern

writers after getting independence and also getting freedom of Odisha, they began write about the culture of Odisha, tribal life of people. When they act as both as a social activist and a writer. The post independent writers regarded themselves only as a writer. Their interpretation of the cultural, political and ideological issues of their times provides valuable insights into the condition of Odia woman of the period.

The post independent women writers are now confident as well as of their own self and revolt against the right of woman in a male dominated society. Their writings interface with women's movement, the discourse of sexuality, gender dualism, eco feminism, black feminism, Gynocriticism, voice of woman consciousness, domestic violence, gender bias, psycho analytical treatment of women, silent suffering and unheard agony in the regional writings on women. The twentieth feminists insisted on female individuality on female individuality rather on identical rights to engage in worldly activity.

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