Dr. ARCHANA KUMARI
Assistant Professor
Department of English & Foreign Languages
Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya (A Central University)
Koni, Bilaspur – Chhattisgarh

ABSTRACT
The anxiety of identity and despair are the features of modern literature. Confessional poetry which is intensely personal and highly subjective is a branch of modern poetry. The twentieth century witnesses a plethora of Indian writers that flooded the literary scene. One of the fast developing genres of Indian literature is poetry. The study of Indian English poetry is incomplete without the study of women poets. In the poetry of Indian women poets of modern age, their silences speak more and better than the words do. The women poets in the post-independence India emphasise their feminine sensibilities vis-à-vis search for identity in a unique and creative way. Apart from the expression of self and identity, their poetry captures the moments of intense experiences of private life with all its uniqueness and immediacy. The confessional mode of their poetry seems to have therapeutic value as their poetry mirrors the realities of their life – anguish, frustration, longings, and loneliness, making their art transcends the self. The present paper attempts to highlight the confessional note in the poetry of modern Indian women poets like Kamala Das, Sunita Jain, Mamta Kalia, Anuradha Shrivastava, Monika Varma, Gauri Deshpande, Tara Patel, Imtiaz Dharker, Eunice de Souza, etc. who have shown how writing while being subversive can be emancipating.

Key Words: Confessional, feminine sensibilities, subjectivity.

INTRODUCTION
Confessional poetry is a style of poetry that emerged in the United States during the 1950s and is associated with several poets who redefined American poetry in the ’50s and ’60s, including Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, Allen Ginsberg, and W. D. Snodgrass. Confessional poetry is a division of contemporary poetry. Vividly self-revelatory verses, confessional poetry are expressions of personality and never an escape from it. Confessional poetry thus translates autobiographical facts as there is overtone of struggle, improvisation and resistance. Many Indian women poets too have written their poetry in confessional mode revealing their personal experiences of their shattered life. They find in their writings a medium to express their pent-up feelings. They have expressed their feelings and emotion without inhibition in their works. A woman’s life is a dehumanizing and humiliating experience in a
patriarchal society. Kamala Das and many other women poets of India manifest such experiences in their poetry in manifold forms of authenticity, candour, boldness, ebullient frankness, vehement assertion, sadness etc.

Indian women poets in English have come a long way since pre-independence period with the emergence of Toru Dutt (1856-77) – the first Indian woman poet writing in English-- who represented extensively the Indian tradition in her poetry. Then comes ‘the Nightingale of India’ Sarojini Naidu (1879-1940) – who has been the most prominent woman poet of the colonial India. Some other women poets who are noteworthy are Susi P. David, Zeb-un-Nisa Hamiduallah, Savita Devi, Sister Lalita, etc. Modern Indian women poets in English, viz., Kamala Das, Sunita Jain, MamtaKalia, Anuradha Shrivastava, Monika Varma, Gauri Deshpande, Tara Patel, Imtiaz Dharker, Eunice de Souza, etc. have portrayed the real picture of Indian women and have a strong subversive approach in order to give vent to their feelings and thoughts, dreams and aspirations, urges and urgencies, pains and peeves, agonies and anguishs so as to liberate them from the labyrinth they have long been encaged in.

Among the modern Indian women poets kamala Das is the harbinger of a new dawn for women writers where they have found a distinctive voice of selfhood and individuality. Kamala Das is one of the most significant voices of modern Indian English poetry. Influenced by American poetry Kamala Das’ poetry is usually written in confessional style. She writes about herself in confessional mode like Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, Anne Sexton, John Berryman, and Sylvia Plath. A perceptive change has come to Indian English poetry with the writings of Kamala Das who is quite open and frank about her feelings and declares, “I too call myself I”. K. Dinesh Singh points out:

“The modernism and feminism of Indian women poets begin with Kamala Das who broke away with the romantic-idealist tradition of the pre-independence women poets and rendered a realistic and concrete portrayal of life-experience, particularly in the ambit of man- woman relationship (Feminism and Postfeminism: 58).

Generally, a sense of eternal torture is a motive behind confessional poetry. Confessional poetry is often called “the poetry of suffering” (130) as reviewed by Rosenthal in his The New Poets: American and British Poetry since World War II. The torture and suffering lead to protest – the protest against the injustices and the persecution to which the women have always been subjected. In almost all the poems of Kamala Das, there is a note of suppressed anger, which is but quite natural. Subjective and autobiographical in nature, her poems let the readers peep into her sufferings and tortured psyche on the one hand and complex nature of the feminine sensibility on the other. The suffering of woman, according to Das, is as old as the hills and has been felt across time. Kamala Das and other women poets of India writing in English choose to write in the confessional mode to get away their sufferings and whichseems to have healing effects on their psyche.Kamala Das declares in one of her Anamalai Poems:

If I had not learnt to write how would I have written away my loneliness
Or grief? Garnering them within my heart
Would have grown heavy as a vault, one that
Only death might open, a release then
I would not be able to feel or sense.

Love and sexual cravings are the persistent themes of Indian women writers since the time of the Vedas but with Kamala Das poetry made a departure from the early romanticism as they are much more realistic, frank, and bold. As a confessional poet, Kamala Das, truthfully and courageously expresses her inner self. It is of course the sexual frankness of Kamala Das that shocks and amuses the general readers and critics equally. As a womenpoet she expresses her personal emotional experiences without any inhibition which aregenerally taboos in a patriarchal society like India. Kamala Das believes in total immersion in love and thus emphasizes in Simone de Beauvoir words, “profound self-abandonment”:
Gift him all that makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your Endless female hungers (The Looking Glass)

Though she advocates the complete surrender in love but she complains the “mere appetite without any feelings of intimacy” from the male counterparts. The denial of perfect union leads dissatisfaction and frustration in her life. She believes in liberating the self from the shackles of do’s and don’ts and so plainly she admits:

So free am I, so gloriously free,
Free from three petty things –
From mortar, from pestle and
From my twisted lord.

Kamala Das’ fictional autobiography, My Story reveals that her poems are indeed an intense study of her personal traumas and tribulations that she experienced in an insensitive, largely man-made world. However, her poems are not just confessions but the vigorous voicing of her female identity. Her feminine self is a combination of the need for domestic security and the desire for independence:

That I shall find my rest, my sleep, my peace,
And even death nowhere else but here in
My betrayer’s arms. ("A Relationship")

The woman in Kamala Das seems to struggle between passion and tradition. In search of true love she wants to break the chains around her and refuse to be domesticated. The poems like “An Introduction” dramatize her aching disappointments where she rebels the passive role that a woman is forced to play in a traditional and tabooed society:

...Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they cried. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers.

This shows how patriarchy tries to mould her according to the norms but she rejects all categories. Not only she refuses to be categorised but also she defies her womanliness that patriarchy has turned into a curse:

...I wore a shirt and my

Brother’s trousers, cut my hair short
and ignored
My womanliness.

She shows her restlessness with woman’s passive acceptance of servility and so she reveals a deep disgust for her own body. To transcend bodily limitations sometimes makes her seek escape through identification with the world:

...I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is every man
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love. In him ...the hungry taste
Of rivers in me...the oceans’ tireless
Waiting....

The confessional elements in most of the modern Indian poetry in English by women poets perform the function of catharsis as they give vent to their suppressed feelings. These elements are reflected in their writings in manifold forms as they write about their sexual needs and longing for love, mutual respect, betrayal, loneliness, motherhood, assertion of identity and about their body. The confessional note is evident in the poetry of Sunita Jain also who never hesitates saying:

Let me love you
As a tree loves
With all its flower tips on fire
Without embracing (“Silences”)

There are poets like Tara Patel besides Das and Jain who do voice their longing for love and companionship that never meets its due satisfaction. Her poem entitled ‘Mother’ represents this sorrowful condition of woman in the following lines:

You married at the right time
If not to the right man.
You were the lucky daughter
Who went abroad, ...
I dare say your discovery of sex was not wonderful.
After the mandatory children
And regret over four daughters,
You got your son.
Sex must have ended with your son.
With relief you turned to Ram
And Krishna –Fancying yourself to be
Sita and Radha...

In Tara Patel’s writings there is a vehement rejection of the old traditional womanhood. In Tara Patel’s metaphor “the new Indian woman’s predicament rises from the fact that she has moved out of square one” (Ram: 2012, 168). Here ‘square one’ signifies the life of her forebears, that is, the home of her mother. Tara Patel through her poetry not only expresses her inner feelings but also she projects herself as a feminist poetic voice who asks for a dignified place of honour and respect:

I cannot live like you, mother,
Maintain the status quo.
I’ve moved out of square one. (ibid)

Simon de Beauvoir, the eminent feminist writer, believes that love for women is religion. She wants the lover to represent the essence of manhood and says, the act of love requires of women self-abandonment: she bathes in a passive languor: with closed eyes, anonymous, lost, she feels as if borne by waves, swept away in a storm, shrouded in darkness: darkness of the flesh, of the grave. Annihilated, she becomes one with whole, her ego is abolished...her body is no longer an object: it is a hymn, a flame.

Imtiaz Dharker, with her social and cultural growth and lived experiences spanning three countries -- Pakistan, England and India -- has shown her subtle artistry in exposing the Purdah System in her title poems. Her poems in Purdah give a more graphic delineation of the Muslim tradition and marks a shift towards resistance in which she forcefully expresses her serious humanistic and feminist concerns. Purdah is considered a protection against undesirable, vulgar and vile looks of staring people. But Dharker considers it as a symbol of alienation and isolation from the outside world. It is a wall between the woman and the world. She generalises the predicament of women and puts it as follows:

There are so many of me.
I have met them, meet them every day,
Recognise their shadows on the streets.
I know their past and future
In the cautious way

They place their feet”. (Purdah II)

Darker shows how women are oppressed because of masculine domination and destruction. Her feminine concern is reflected in her poem Honour killing when she says:

At last I’m taking off this coat,
this black coat of a country
that I swore for years was mine,
....this black veil of a faith
that made me faithless
to myself,
that tied my mouth,
gave my god a devil’s face,
and muffled my own voice.

Man-woman relations are never absolute nor are they one-way, rather they are reciprocal. This reciprocity is verbalised throughout in women’s poetry in English. Mamta Kalia’s poems express her feminist concern as well as expose ruthlessly the contemporary chaotic and pathetic condition of women in Indian society. She admits that being a wife means losing one’s identity. She laments saying that:

I no longer feel I’m Mamta Kalia
I’m Kamla
Or Vimla
Or Kanta or Shanta.
(Anonymous)

Mamta Kalia is conscious of her identity and to depict it she adopts the tradition on the one hand as an individual and raises her voice against the oppression of women on the other. She voices the real and living experiences in their naked form asserting her own identity. She gets some kind of emancipation from her inner turmoil while writing:

In my hour of discontent
I neither shout nor rant
I simply fill ink in my pen
And spill it with intent.
(My Hour of Discontent)

There is a vast range of humiliating experiences and feminine emotions reflected in the confessional poetry of Indian women poets of modern age – of the pangs of a girl growing up, about the first arousal of sexuality in a growing girl, about married life, about childbirth, about adultery, and about the void that comes from the non-fulfilment of their
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yearnings. Though a woman is a free and autonomous being like all creature but the social system is such that it underlines the position of women as ‘other’ which results in identity crisis. If either of the two – man and woman – is deprived of real status then naturally what arises is the crisis of identity. Thus, Monika Varma writes:

Give me space
Space not to exist
But live. (Give Me Space)

Monika Varma is identified amongst the Indian women poets writing in English because of her unique expressions as well as ideology. She looks man-woman relationship in a positive and broad way. She attempts in all her writings for sustaining harmony and mutual understanding to that of repugnant relationship.

Since the women do share many common experiences so through the subjectivity and confessional note the women poets clearly objectify the common experiences of every woman. Eunice De Souza says:

Sometimes you want to talk
About love and despair
And the ungratefulness of children
A man is no use, whatever then
You want then your mother
Or sister
Or the girl with whom you went through school...
You know...that you've spoken
(The Female of the Species)

A very strange but common tendency in Indian milieu is the preference for the male child as exhibited in Adrienne Rich terms “horizontal hostility”. De Souza’s anguish on her parents’ preference for male is well reflected in the following lines:

I heard it said
My parents wanted a boy.
I've done my best to qualify,
I hid the bloodstains
On my clothes
And let my breast sag.

Gauri Despande endeavours to depict the idiosyncratic traits of woman and compares it to those of man:

A woman learns to love a little
A man who praises her hair
And reads her poems and knows
How to elicit than special moan
With kisses; loves a little any man.

Despande strongly feels that “a woman has to compromise and adapt to the circumstances she is situated in, and for that reason she is compelled to have developed the ‘habit of pain’ and the grit of surviving in a milieu that is meaningless” (Singh: 2004 78).

Conclusion

In the modern Indian women poetry there is no reservation or moral inhibition when they make confession of experiences either as a wife or as a beloved, either as a mother or as a daughter/daughter-in-law. This is undoubtedly the transformation of the traditional woman into the modern woman. In the writings of Indian women poets the subjective feelings become predominant while advocating their selfhood and expressing their sensitivity towards unfavourable milieu which reduces them to battered souls. The anguish of woman is more because of her inferior position in family and society. The solution of the primordial issue of gender bias needs to be synthesised wherein there is no clash of rights and duties, ego and esteem, preference and position, love and lust, but an abode of harmony and peace, equality and humanity. In fact, modern Indian women poets through their confessional mode of writing have been able to articulate a harmonious relationship in all dimensions – physical, mental, spiritual, and social. Needless to say, the endeavours the Indian women poets make is towards attaining harmony, peace, and happiness in life.

Works Cited


