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INTERPRETATION OF REINCARNATION IN IMTIAZ DHARKER'S "ANARKALI"

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ABSTRACT

Imtiaz Dharker, a Pakistani/Indian/British poet is a versatile persona, an entity, poet, painter, film maker, and a conscientious human being. She is irritated at the massacre under the name of religion and ways of god. She is attracted by the Sufi faith and the teachings of Rumi. Sufis believe in reincarnation, which is the religious or philosophical belief that the soul or spirit, after biological death, begins a new life in a new body that may be human, animal or spiritual depending on the moral quality of the previous life's actions. They deem the continuous recreation of the 'self', universal god, religion, reincarnation of the soul and existence through annihilation, *fanaa*. This doctrine is a central tenet of the Indian religions. Dharker believes this doctrine and she expresses it in the Poems of 'Anarkali'.

Key words: Sufism- reincarnation- Anarkali- punishment- philosophy

Imtiaz Dharker, a Pakistani/Indian/British poet is a versatile persona, an entity, poet, painter, film maker, and a conscientious human being. Dharker's Multicultural experiences and observations made her an emotional person to remark on all the politics of life. As she is annoyed at the carnage under the name of religion and ways of god, she turns her mind towards emotion of 'well-being'. She is attracted by the Sufi faith and the teachings of Rumi. Sufis believe in reincarnation, which is the religious or philosophical belief that the soul or spirit, after biological death, begins a new life in a new body that may be human, animal or spiritual depending on the moral quality of the previous life's actions. They deem the continuous recreation of the 'self', universal god, religion, reincarnation of the soul and existence through annihilation, *fanaa*. This doctrine is a central tenet of the Indian religions. Dharker believes this doctrine and she expresses it in the Poems of 'Anarkali'. To exemplify this philosophy, Dharker immortalises the legendary slave girl 'Anarkali' in the collection *Leaving Fingerprints*. She evokes her from her tomb to relate her experiences while she is

walled in. The songs of 'Anarkali' contain Pibroch, consisting of various themes of existence i.e. the realities of life, death and reincarnation, effectively.

The inert meaning of life and existence through annihilation is the hypothesis of 'Anarkali' poems- "When they walled her in", "Walling her in", and "Anarkali inside". Anarkali was a legendary slave girl from Lahore, Pakistan. During the Mughal period, she was allegedly ordered to be buried alive by Mughal Emperor Akbar for having an illicit relationship with the Prince Nuruddin Saleem, later to become Emperor Jahangir. Due to the lack of evidence and sources, the story of 'Anarkali' is generally accepted to be either false or heavily inflated. Nevertheless her story is appreciated by many and has been adapted into literature, art and cinema. A tomb of Anarkali is situated on the premises of the Punjab civil secretariat in Lahore. Latif, Syad Muhammad in his book *Lahore, Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities* writes that 'It has been suggested that the probable origin of the name Anarkali was that it was the name of the Mughal garden where the alleged tomb of Anarkali was later built, or that the style of the

cupola suggested a pomegranate bud. The date given in letters and figures is 1008 a.h. (1599 a.d.), which refers to the death of Anarkali. On the west side of the sarcophagus, above the words 'in Lahore,' is another date, 1024 a.h. (1615 a.d.), which is the date of the building of the tomb. Akbar died on the 13th October 1605, and thus the building was completed ten years after his death. The incident of walling in and the song of Anarkali about erased history are the theme of these poems.

'Anarkali', the symbol of beauty and sacrifice, an icon of love and courage is immortalized. When the builder has come to build a wall, 'Anarkali lifted her head and began to sing'. In the beginning, the builder does not pay any attention to her and began to 'build a wall around a song'. She sang about love, lost courage, missing people including the builder. She sang about erased history, list of faded empires like Srinagar, Baghdad, Kabul, Gaza, about gardens, poets like Faiz and Darwish, who came to live with her behind the wall, the tomb. After listening to this song of loss the builder died of a broken heart. After some time people also forgot the tomb. The poet enlightens in "When they walled her in":

In the long days and the long nights
the wall was just a wall, no one could tell
that inside there was a song.
People sat in its shadow, leaned bicycles on
it,
made phone calls pissed against it.
They treated it like any other wall. (P. 55)

Anarkali's song remained immortal though she was dead but not what she enumerated. Her soul took life again:

One day a crack appeared. Another day
a pomegranate blossom burst through.
Someone looked at it and said,
there, that must be a letter from Berlin,
a word from prisoner 46664,
a song from Belfast, a poem from Dublin.
(P. 55)

Life regenerated in the form of a pomegranate blossom, like a letter from distant lands, surprisingly.

In "Walling her in" the builder's expression of the prisoner, Anarkali is related. He listens to her song and finds the names of his family in the list of missing things. As it was customary to kill the builders after the completion of the construction, he

understands the reality. He thinks 'What is happening to her could happen to him also'. He understands that death is common to all life on earth whether it is an emperor or a commoner, whether it is a great city or an ordinary town, all collapse. After sometime that life returns and flourishes with another name and form. In "Anarkali, inside" Anarkali narrates how she is 'learning to grow with the other creatures' inside the wall. She has to live and gradually lose identity as Anarkali. She continues:

The emperor can only build a palace, he can
order
a wall. Will that protect the thing he loves?
Of all that we are making here, nothing is
lost.
The earth is keeping us safe
till we take new shapes and live again. (P. 5
7)

Suspecting her of a criminal intrigue with his son, the Emperor ordered her to be buried alive. She was accordingly placed in an upright position at the appointed place, and was built round with bricks. She came to life again through her song. So the poet concludes that Anarkali is not dead. She is alive in every art form, music, cinema, fashion, and she is even 'Alive, inside you'. Every living object has right to live and each existence leaves its traces in the world, whether one identifies it or not. Dharker through the voice of Anarkali expresses her philosophy of life, which insists that life continues even after death. If one understands this s/he can live a happy life, respecting every object. The knowledge of this kind of attitude makes man a universal entity, with a cosmopolitan outlook. The sentiment of 'hope' and the universality of love keep Anarkali in the state of immortality. She declares her immortality in the poem "Anarkali inside":

The whole world will sing me
in the bazaar, into babies' ears.
You will hear it again and again,
my name spoken aloud,
Anarkali, Anarkali
in the open market place,
in the courtyards and in bedrooms,
in darkened cinemas.
(Leaving Fingerprints, p. 57)

The poet opines that Anarkali does not blame anybody for her fate but happy for the chance given

to live along with all the creatures. She was not sad because she died as a single entity and returned with multiple identities and became a universal personality. She equates humans and worms and birds because the life force in all these is identical. Her impartial love towards everything in this universe makes her a universal figure in literature. The hope of life and the permanence of prolongation is the main theme of this collection. In the poems written on 'Anarkali', the legendary 'slave girl', explain the theme brilliantly. The Emperor, Akbar ordered Anarkali to be buried/walled in alive. She was not sad but felt happy because she was given a chance to live with every worm and every living creature in the tomb. Anarkali poems relate the phases of dying and being resurrected. When this reality encounters, Anarkali forgets all grief and lives in happiness even in grave. She is not sad because she is going to die but happy to be born again in another form. In "Anarkali, inside" she proclaims:

I am learning to grow with the other
creatures,
the snails, the snakes, the slugs, the worms,
my hair a net where ants save stories
and stories save ants, where poets
store the words of songs.

.....

My eyes will be filled to the brim
with living things, my hands rich
with salamander bangles and lizard rings.

.....

Of all that we are making here, nothing is
lost.

The earth is keeping us safe
till we take new shapes and live again.

.....

Alive, inside you,
I will be found. (P. 57)

Anarkali speaks about the company she keeps there in the tomb and her idea of reincarnation has social relevance. Her ideal of love towards the creatures grows from emotional level to higher level, i.e. love for all living things and mankind. 'Ultimately it comes to a love for the one being in everyone, and finally reincarnating comes to an end.' Anarkali confirms her existence in all living creatures and especially in every human being. She also shows her respect to different species, and response to other

species, classes, people, and forms of life. Haraway thinks that 'to belong to a species is the ability and willingness, to respect and respond. Derrida calls it 'I recognize my own human-ness'. According to Donna Haraway, 'even when we speak of people, the animal/human/living/nonliving category separations fray inside a kind of encountering worthy of regard'(2008).

Dharker believes in Sufi philosophy that all life in this world is a part of the universal life. Every form of life has the right to live and no one has any permission to kill it. All life force in different form lives, performs its duties and dies and again returns in a different form to perform a new action. This is cyclic and continuous. Rumi symbolizes this truth in Whirling dance, 'Sama'. It represents 'a mystical journey of spiritual ascent through mind and love to the perfect one'. In this journey, the seeker symbolically turns towards truth, grows through love, abandons ego, finds the reality and arrives at the perfection. The seeker then turns from this spiritual journey, with greater maturity, to love and to be of service to the whole of creation without discrimination with regard to beliefs, races, classes and nations. In some verses of *Masnavi*, Rumi describes in detail the universal message of love: 'the lover's cause is to detach from all other causes/love is the astrolabe of God's mysteries'. Rumi's visions, words and life tell one how to reach inner peace and happiness. Dharker understands his sayings and finds the joy within. However chaotic conditions may exist in the world, one can attain peace, when one understands the reality of life. She depicts this belief through the voice of Anarkali, the legendary slave girl.

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