



The Anti-Violence Discourse And Advocacy Of Peace In Contemporary Indian English Women Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Social consciousness and concern are increasingly becoming significant thematic area of the contemporary Indian English women poetry. The sufferings of the deprived and downtrodden section; the degeneration of moral ,ethical and human values; the topsyturvydom of life values ; the prevailing chaos and corruption; the religious intolerance and fanaticism ; gender-oppression and gender-atrocities--all these relevant issues have become a part and parcel of their poetic concern. Their works also poignantly portray the agony and anguish caused by various types of man-made violence afflicting the present human world. The distinction of these women poets lies in their intense empathetic involvement in the cause of the unfortunate and miserable violence-victims. Along with the heart-rending description of the violence , the poets have also raised soul-searching questions about such evil tendencies. In fact, they have emerged as champions of non-violence and apostles of peace. This paper takes up study of the thematics of violence in the poetry of contemporary Indian English women poets- their depiction of the scenario and their portrayal of various dimensions of the impact of violence . It also highlights the message and the vision of these poets for creation of a violence-free and humane world.

Keywords: social consciousness, man-made violence, violence-victims, anguish, empathy, vision, violence-free, humane.

Introduction

Unfortunately, the cult of violence has considerably intensified in the contemporary times. Humans have become the worst enemy of humankind. It is an age of misanthropists where the hearts and minds are boiling with the lava of mutual hatred, contempt and malevolence. This lava manifests itself in form of violence at different levels, and bloodshed has become the order of the day. To borrow an expression from the poet Pia Ganguly, now “ every step is red with blood trailing like paint”(‘Images on a Stroll’).The sensitive psyche of any poet just cannot remain unaffected by this phenomenon. Women are more peace-loving by temperament and so as poets also ,they have been deeply disturbed by and emphatically articulate about this reckless self-destruction of humankind.

Violence,Woes and Wails -The Contemporary Scene

Margaret Chatterjee has universalized the fate of victims of violence in her poem ‘From the Abyss’. It is a chorus of all those ‘who have known destruction’ and who were destroyed - the people of Belsen, Buchenwald, Bengal, Stalingrad, Warsaw, Paris, Berlin, Hiroshima and Jews. Citizens of Paris, Berlin and Hiroshima experienced ‘terror by night/destruction at noonday` . People of Belsen loved beautiful things but are now a memory . In this way, those who loved beautiful things and sang songs merrily in kinder days were destroyed. In ‘September 3’ also, the poet painfully remembers such a colossal and cruel waste of beauty when those appreciating beauty of Michaelmas daisy month, were cut down like grass of the field. These victims of man-made violence and hatred entrust to the ‘world makers’ and ‘genuine feelers’ the responsibility to save the world from further disaster in the poem ‘From the Abyss’: “We have no voice left but yours” (*The Spring and The Spectacle* 6)

The pain and agony experienced by the bereaved and the fate of unfortunate victims is universal in nature. Margaret Chatterjee's poem 'Calcutta, 1970' moves from Troy to Noakhali, then to Auschwitz and Calcutta. Be it the city by the edge of sea, the city which has no walls or a village burnt, the tragedy is similar:

*Dry-eyed we weep
for the labelled dead.
Lament for ourselves*

... ..
*For these were husbands
Fathers, brothers, sons.*

(*Towards the Sun* 1)

Mary Das Gupta laments the loss of peace in today's India in her poem 'Peace':

*Peace
has got up
and moved out
over to I-don't-know where.*

(*The Circus of Love* 11)

It is a painful experience for her to see shyamoli's 'nailed shut windows' and the 'search -your -handbag darwans' at the gates which are double-barred with wire-fences. CRP and padlocks on Uttarayan's lovely doors do not let pass even peace itself.

Achla Bhatia's 'Devils of Doom' is a reflection on the recent spurt of violence in the country. The devils grin on the recent kill--human slaughter, ruthless onslaught, ravages they wrought and havoc they caused. Their bullets riddled all alike - dim eyes of wrinkled face and terrified wide, innocent eyes of a three-year old. It was a complete bloodbath as the red splotches lay suffused, the smeared earth moaned and devils

*remained
impish, insolent, inanne
like ogres
who have no religion*

(*Awakening* 22)

Wars are the naked dance of death and destruction. Mary Ann Gupta represents all women poets in her dislike for war and violence:

*I do not like this game
Of war
It seems to me that
everybody loses.*

(*'October 1973'*)

War is a No-win situation which makes the poet feel like a 'helpless pawn' in the cocky hands of capricious fate. Only worthless people, guided by selfish motives, indulge in it and it is a contest among 'liars, cheats and bullies'. Lila Ray is disgusted with war and brings out its horrors very vividly. The great homicide in two world wars is presented in heart-rending and dreadful images:

*Stitching streets with threads of blood
bullets sew our species shroud
The twitching carcass of the flame-stricken city
Fester in pools of people killed without pity*

(*'In Times of Unbelief And War'*, Bhatnagar)

Loss of human life is the most barbaric aspect of wars. Annihilation of soldiers in 1965 Indo - Pak war and loss of life make Jaya Appaswamy bemoan in her poem "Wagah":

*Where are all the people now
who filled the streets
And with their cries
Made resonant days and nights?*

(*Hers* p.14)

Wartime has its own enervating and frightening impact and wartime psychology has been well expressed by these poets. Lila Ray keeps confined to her room 'In war Time' and 'worries'. She is afraid to open letters for the unknown fear of the sudden possible shock. Mary Gupta cannot enjoy eating or reading as

*Nixon's heavy bombers obliterate Hanoi
and the neat pungent fragrance
disappears.*

(*'December 1972'* 11)

Kamala Das wants to wear white flowers into her baby son's hair as a protective gesture against 'war, bloodshed and despair' in her poem 'The White Flowers'.

Besides war, the mutual hatred of man expresses itself in racial violence, communal violence and violence in the name of religion. Suniti Namjoshi has ironically brought out the racial violence prevalent in America in her

poem 'Alwin Ailey'. Negroes and Whites danced together a ballet dance in which White devils kicked the Negro ladies out. The poet's ironical comment is:

*If everyone was taught
To be a ballet dancer.
Life would be so graceful
And so cruel.*

(*More Poems* 11)

Racial discrimination, violence and alienation in America make the poet's eyes 'flood with tears'. Her despair is "Can a body hurt a body?" ('A Problem', *More Poems* 36) Tapati Mookerji thus describes the inharmonious racial state of Africa in 'Africa':

*Africa
doomed, amorphous bed chamber
Of two who are not the same colour*

(*The Golden Road to Samarkand* 7)

A picture of communal hatred and violence let loose after Mrs Gandhi's assassination is portrayed in Malavika Sanghvi's poem 'When a Tall tree Falls, Earth is Bound to Shake.' A surge of ominous passion changed humans into monsters. One minute before, these people were borrowing onions from one another and all of a sudden the communal frenzy gripped them. They all loved 'Chaya-geet' and 'National Integration' brought neighbours together every week, but then, the once rainbow land became all red. T. V.s ran riot with messages of harmony but

*blood leaks
from network to network
transmission to transmission
Coast to Coast.*

(*Poems Recent and Early* 27)

The real 'enemy's within' the hearts and minds of people. Kamala Das has been much upset to see the massacre in the name of ethnicity in Sri Lanka and asks:

*Did the Tamils smell so
different, what secret
chemistry let them down?*

(*'The Sea at Galle Face Green'*)

Her poems 'Summer 1980' and 'Delhi 1984' are critiques of Sikh and Hindu fanatics and 'Colombo Poems' bemoan and rage against the racial violence in Sri Lanka against Tamils.

Sujata Bhatt is sick of communal violence and won't even think or talk about it any more:

*Today I don't want to think
Of Hindus cutting open
Sikhs and Sikhs cutting open
Hindus and Hindus cutting open.*

('3 November 1984')

In her poem 'Inheritance' Kamala Das protests against religious fanaticism which breeds and nurtures 'ancient virus' of contempt in our soul. We walk with hearts grown 'scabrous' with illogical hate. So when Muezzin's high wail sounds from the mosque, the Chapel bells announce angels and Brahmins' assonant chant rises from the temple, we still have hearts full of hatred. Though we do sense our father's lunacy speaking

*Slay them ...disembowel their young ones
And scatter on the streets meagre innards.*

(*The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* 20)

but we choose not to believe our good sense and blindly glorify religion and its preachings. And when religious frenzy is let loose:

*Synagogues are smashed
Temples and churches desecrated*

(Margaret Chatterjee, 'From the Abyss')

The Poets' Empathy and Concern

These poets have also well understood the feelings and sentiments of homeless people uprooted by wars and riots. A refugee's psychology, his alienation, insecurity, nostalgia and rootlessness are captured in Tapati Mookerji's 'The Refugee'. The refugee feels expelled from the 'womb of security' like a 'dying foetus'. The rain and bit of earth at home was sweeter than 'immortal fame'. His eyes daily caressed the known landscape and familiar faces with daily 'resurrected love'. The language of the place spoke his pain and his love and had 'power' of his 'soul'. Now all sweetness is gone and his cry is:

O tell me then

*Where sweetness flies
under foreign skies
among alien corn.*

(*The Golden Road to Samarkand* 9)

Any refugee from Sutej, Padma or palace on the roof of the world feels uprooted and perpetually wonders: "Where is sweetness fled?"

Rukmini Nair's poem 'Malviya Nagar-Sissinghurst' highlights that partition of India has been fresh in the minds of these people and they are really uprooted souls as they do not 'belong' here. They still imagine fountains and chinars brushing the sky. Nehru had gifted them the ruined city of Malaviya Nagar and they have sweated and reaped rich benefits in business. The ruined Malaviya Nagar now boasts of flourishing shops and hotels. Their sorrow has turned to gold but for all the material progress, they are still rootless and broken:

*In one way or another
Partition broke us all
The place is not ours
We refugees know
the dust never settles in heart's deserts.
It rises chokingly*

(*The Hyoid Bone* 39)

Dorothy Sinha presents a moving picture of refugees in her poem 'Refugees'. These people are 'shelterless, without shed and with empty bellies'. They tread on ahead until their 'blistered feet' bleed and finally they lie dead. Sujata Bhatt in 'Walking Across the Brooklyn Bridge' is worried about Vietnamese refugees: "Who will take them in?" (*Monkey Shadows* 84).

Blessings of science, its inventions and discoveries have also proved disastrous for humankind as they have resulted in great tragedies and accidents. Anjana Basu recalls the dreadful Bhopal gas tragedy in her poem 'No Nuclear Night, Bhopal'

*One night the sky split, spat bright
blood red
colour killed us
Cannibal colour
Growing dust grows over this turpentine town
Small birds scream at night
in dead droplets*

(*In Their Own Voice* 19)

Chernobyl disaster is a permanent wound on the contemporary psyche :

*While in the towns near Chernobyl
Embryos didn't make it,
Foetuses didn't make it.*

(Sujata Bhatt , 'Wine from Bar Deaux')

and children 'suddenly became sick with leukemia'.

If the present spate of violence-intentional or accidental-continues, the twentieth century will be an age of total annihilation of man where the very survival of human species will be endangered. Lila Ray finds herself:

*The remnant of a proud race
my tattered flesh is torn testament
of the malignancy of man
On a shore of an island of pain
Sole survivor of Human odyssey.*

(' Twentieth Century' *Contemporary Indo-English Verse* 1 148)

These poets have not stopped at merely the portrayal of all-pervasive violence in the world around, but have also tried to make the blind world engrossed in self-destruction see the light of reason and understand the great truth. This great truth is the essential sameness of all human beings. Physical properties are the same and so are the emotions. Then

*Why is this one friend
And that one foe?*

(Vijaya Goel, 'Why')

All violence is ,in fact, self-destructive. Monika Varma asks a very searching question:

*Do they all throw rocks and bombs
Or do they merely destroy their inner self?*

('The Hostiles' , *Quartered Questions and Queries* 22)

In fact, the real concept of Peace is very deep and inclusive as Monika Varma suggests in 'Eyes of Stone' through a string of questions:

*Peace ? What is peace?
That a few guns are silenced?*

*but what of the violence of man's thought
towards man and within himself?*

(*Alkananda* 11)

In these poets' view, hatred like war starts in the mind of man. One has to be at peace with oneself and then promote peace in the outside world.

Conclusion

In their writings, these poets bemoan the colossal tragic loss of humanity as the Super-creation of God, i.e. humans, instead of working for his betterment, become engrossed in self-destruction. It is most unfortunate that in lieu of moving towards the realization of goal of Universal peace and One World concept, man today has reverted to the barbarism of Dark Ages. Violence destroys both-humankind and the beautiful dreams of humankind as love and life stand defeated in the face of death and destruction. These poets have not only portrayed the all-pervasive violence in the world, but have also given an earnest message for the creation of a violence-free, fearless and happy world:

*Why these weapons,
Why this scare
Why not let Happiness be
All around and everywhere?*

(Vijaya Goel, 'Why')

Unlike their romantic poetic predecessors Toru Datt and Sarojini Naidu, these poets have revealed deep social consciousness, social concern, sympathy and empathy for social causes. They have also gone beyond the usual pre-occupation of women writers with mere gender-concerns, and have emerged as spokespersons of entire humanity, striving for creation of a better world.

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