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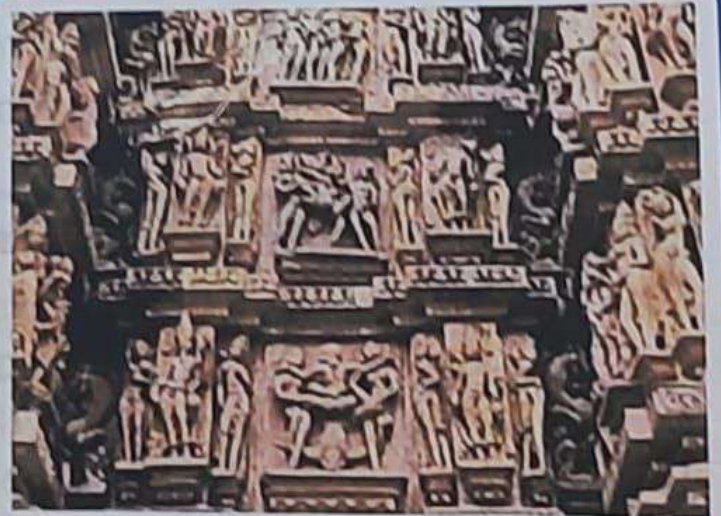
Vidyawarta[®]

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Indian Sensibility in Indian Writing in English

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nations on a regular basis. They even empathize with heroes and other powerful characters in the works at times. Almost all writers tried to project the core aspect and inherent spirit in Indian families located in foreign soil, of which Jhumpa Lahiri is an accomplished artist. The inextricable bond between one's roots and the ground is called in all works, there is a similar undercurrent.

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Reflections of Dissent in the Poetry of Indian Women Poets

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The modern Indian poetry in English has been the poetry of dissent. Nissim Ezekiel bugled its arrival with his first poetic volume *A Time to Change* (1952). Since then poets like A.K. Ramanujan, Gieve Patel, Jayanta Mahapatra, Dom Moraes, K.N.Daruwalla, R. Parthasarathy have written poems with higher or lower pitch of dissent. This dissent is three-fold: dissent from the native poetic tradition, dissent from the colonial poetic tradition, and dissent from the milieu. The modern Indo-English poets, particularly belonging to 1970s and 1980s, defied their poetic predecessors like Tagore, Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu both in their choice of urban, contemporary, unromantic themes and experimentation with prosody. Many Indo-English poets chose the 20th century British and American poets like Auden, Eliot, Pound, Stevens as their model. But as they matured as poets, they deviated from their role models by writing poetry of distinct Indian flavour particularly in distinct Indian idiom. Most of the Indo-English poets are nonconformists as they do not accept the social, economic and political set-up of their times per se. In this regard woman poets are ahead of male poets. Therefore, Kamala Das, the grandmother of Indo-English poetry, emerges as a staunch rebel in her poetry. Many woman poets have trodden the path shown by her. The notable among these woman poets are Monika Verma, Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia, Eunice de Souza, Imtiaz Dharker, Melanie Silgado, Menka Shivdasani, Sujata Bhatt.

The present paper aims to study the group of woman poets who have been associated with Bombay in one way or the other much like their male counterparts including Ezekiel, Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel, Saleem Peeradina, Manohar Shetty, Ranjit Hoskote. Known as the Bombay woman poets this group includes: Eunice de Souza, Imtiaz Dharker, Charmayne d'Souza, Melanie Silgado, Menka Shivdasani, Tara Patel, Kavita Ezekiel and Mukta Sambrani. The present paper aims to do a comprehensive study of these new voices of dissent.

Kamala Das remarked in one of her poems:

The tragedy of life
is not death but growth
the child growing into adult.
(“Composition”)

No doubt, by child she meant the girl child. In our patriarchal society, for a girl child the experience of growing up is an experience of self-oppression, self-effacement, gender bias and tyranny. Das protested against the conventional womanhood in patriarchal society that marginalizes, suppresses, oppresses woman and the same protest is quite loud in the poetry of the Bombay woman poets. Almost all the woman poets have hit hard at the idea of woman in conventional society. Imtiaz Dharker in her poem “A Woman’s Place” expresses her anger in the following words:

Mouths must be watched, especially
if you are a woman
A smile should be stifled
with your sari-end
no one must see your serenity cracked
even with delight. (Purdah 55)

Tara Patel gives an insight into the fate of a woman’s life in a male-dominated world in her poem entitled “Woman”.

A woman’s life is a reaction
to the crack of a whip
She learns to dodge it as it whistles.
(Prasad 276)

The woman in Menka Shivdasani’s “The

Game You Play” asks:
Football is another world
Where men belong
What the hell am I doing
Kicked around
Just because I’ve got this leather hide?
(Prasad 276)

Charmayne D’Souza wittily remarks in the title poem of her poetic volume *A Spelling Guide to Women* (1990): “Woo men/womb men/woe men/whim men/warm men/who, men?/no woman.” Mukta Sambrani in her poem “The Same” poignantly expresses how “growing into adult” becomes “tragedy of life” for a girl child.

This is the same woman
as the girl in the picture, mister
only a little older
Her mother has slapped her cheeks flat
..... someone has had her dreams
Someone has had her stories
This is the same woman, mister,
The girl child in the picture
This is the same. (Naik 192)

These few examples reveal the Bombay woman poets to be feminist but their dissidence from patriarchy is not always direct. Most of these woman poets have written poems on the themes of father-daughter relationship and moth-daughter relationship in which they rebel against their upbringing.

Most notable among poems on these two themes are Eunice de Souza’s “Forgive Me Mother”, “For My Father, Dead Young”, Melanie Silgado’s “For Father on the Shelf”, “Goan Death”, Kavita Ezekiel’s “Family Sunday” and Dharker’s “Purdah II”, “Going Home”, “Zarina’s Mother” and “Choice”. Like Mamta Kalia’s “Tribute to Papa” de Souza’s, Silgado’s and Ezekiel’s poems are confessional in nature wherein they deal with their love-hate relationship with their parents. De Souza expresses here conflicts with her parents when she says to her mother “In dreams/ I hack you” (“Forgive Me, Mother”) and “I killed my father

when I was three" ("Autobiographical").
 Silgado's "For Father on the Shelf" is quite
 stirring:

Father, you will be proud to know
 you left something behind.

The year you died
 I inherited a mind.

Wherever you are, will you
 turn your index finger away?

And now I'm writing with my life
 The price of an inherited crutch.

(Papke 75)

The poem highlights Silgado's ambivalent attitude towards her father who is "both villain and hero of the piece." The poet has a mixed feelings of pride, love, apology and hurt, shame and rebellion towards the father. A sense of shame and disgust arises out of father's drinking habits. These woman poets rebel against their parents in their poems but it is not always easy to rebel. This is conveyed by Dharker's poem "Choice" which begins with the rebellion of a woman who tries to escape with her own child her mother's fate but ends with a haunting remembrance of her own mother. to look through darkened windows at night, Mother, I find you staring back at me.

When did my body agree to wear your
 face? (Purdah 49)

Sambrani's "Dear Father" and "An Apple for Mother" are also important poems to register the poet's protest against conventional parents who are the first important agents of patriarchy. The second important agent of patriarchy is the institution of marriage which continues the oppression and exploitation of a woman till she lives. The Bombay woman poets are educated, modern, economically independent and many are widely-travelled, single women. Therefore, it is natural to find in their poetry a dissent from the institution of marriage. D'Souza "Strange Bed Fellows" sums up marriage as an arrangement wherein :

Her mangalsutra

will be a bullet
 to her breast,
 ... my garland
 a hempen rope
 around my neck. (Naik 190)

The colour prejudice governing arranged marriages is satirically revealed in de Souza's "Marriages are Made" and "Mrs. Hermione Gonsalvez". Dharker in her poems on the theme of marriage depicts how the wife becomes "Another Woman" from what she was after years of shopping, counting "her coins out carefully", cooking and waiting for her husband. One is reminded of Kalia's poem "Anonymous" wherein the housewife says:

I'm Kamla
 or Vimla
 or Kanta or Shanta
 I cook, I wash,
 I bear, I rear
 I nag, I wag
 I sulk, I sag.

(King 155)

It can be said that the Bombay woman poets' unromantic treatment of marriage and romantic love is qualified by Patel's poetic volume *Single Woman* (1991) which dwells on the attractions and dangers of being single.

The Bombay woman poets' dissent is not limited to the strictures of patriarchy. Their poetry expresses their anger, their frustration at the tedious nature, sheer monotony of the modern mechanized existence. They desire "nirvana" amidst the anxieties, dishonesties, hypocrisy and basic ugliness of ordinary life. Shivdasani's *Nirvana at Ten Rupees* (1990), a careful selection of her best poems written during a period of twelve years, is a noteworthy example in this regard. Religious and cultural dissent mark the poetry written by de Souza and Dharker. De Souza's first poetic volume *Fix* (1979) "was denounced from the pulpit of St. Peter's in Bandra and Adil Jussawall said that if she continued on the same lines, she would soon

be denounced at St. Peter's in Rome" (Surendran 47). The reason being that de Souza severely criticizes her Goan Catholic Society in her poems. She defies her community for its bigotry, sexual prudery and hypocrisy and oppression of women. Her poem "Catholic Mother" reveals how the Catholic Church denies women the control of their bodies and reduces them into child-producing machines. The poem "Sweet Seventeen" is about how religion prevents women from knowing about their bodily functions. "Feeding the Poor at Christmas" exposes the vanity and self-interest that motivate the gesture of charity. De Souza also denounces her society for its bias against the Hindu India and the alienation felt by many Goan Catholics towards Hindu India. In her poetic volume *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988) de Souza evokes the Hindu iconoclasts of time long past to identify with the Hindu India.

Dharker follows the footsteps of de Souza. She too openly opposes her Islamic cultural background in her poems. Her "Purdah I" and "Purdah II" poems best exemplify this. The poems depict how culture uses shame to repress female sexuality and the independence of spirit and teaches a woman to denigrate her own self. *Purdah* makes a woman realize "between the thighs, a sense of sin" ("Purdah I", *Purdah* 14). "Purdah II" is a powerful poem of the experiences of Muslim women in diaspora and it "criticizes the arrogance and intolerance of the Muslim culture and the racism of the other side" (Papke 79). The patriarchal religion uses tradition and sense of history to teach "unwilling virgins" in "stranger's land" "to bind/their brightness tightly round,/whatever they might wear,/ in the purdah of the mind" ("Purdah II", *Purdah* 16). The poem "Grace" shows how religion treats female menstruation as impure ("She trails the month behind her/We are defiled"). The poems in Dharker's *Postcards from God* (1994) are expressions of her political dissent. Her poems like "6 December 1992", "8

January 1993", "The List" are concerned with politics, communal riots in Mumbai in 1993. Her poems "Namesake", "Adam's Daughter", "Adam from New Zealand", "Living Space" deal with the social injustice of poverty and she protests against sensational dealing with suffering in the world of the poor. Having worked in the impoverished slums of Dharavi for the making of a documentary film, Dharker writes poignantly of the precarious spaces which are slum-dwellers "Living Space". Bruce King rightly remarks that Dharker's poetry "is consciously feminist, consciously political" and "the poetry of commitment and politics is seldom as successful" (321, 326) as hers.

To conclude, the Bombay woman poets have carried forward the female poetic tradition of dissent initiated by Kamala Das. At the same time they have enriched the tradition by writing poetry which is unique expression of their specific realities. Their poetry share a number of common themes but the expression is distinct in each woman poet. This paper highlights the common thematic concerns of these new voices of dissent and shows how their dissent is varied-hued: personal, social, political, religious and cultural.

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