CHAPTER - IV
WOMEN POETS WITH HEIGHTENED AWARENESS

Women, be they writers, doctors, teachers, politicians or professionals, tend to be categorized as a class by themselves. Two major books of the twentieth century namely Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex (1953) and Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch (1971) not only celebrate ambitiously the very concept of womanhood but have also ushered in a new era in women writing. Exposure of mass media and the recent inter-disciplinary advancements in the fields like sociology, physiology, psychology and anthropology apart from broadening the mind-sets of the people has also created a kind of awareness towards the contemporary happenings around the globe. At last, we have landed at a stage that recognizes feminine consciousness. The age now, to quote Simone de Beauvoir looks at the second sex, if not as a “defect”, but as “at least a peculiarity.”

Before concentrating on the poetic output of the three selected women poets, it would be pertinent to throw light on women-writing in general and Indian women writing in English, in particular. Talking about writing as a mode of expression for women, Helene Cixous opines:

Women must write herself, must write about women, and bring women to writing, from which they have driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history by her own movement.

Narrowing down the focus of women-writing and considering IPE practised by women in particular, one may observe that it is not isolated from the global trends and essentially corroborates in itself all the feminist movements that swept through Europe, America, Canada and Australia since 1960s. It is during or after 1960s only, when Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza, Mamta Kalia, Tara Patel, Imitiaz
Dharker, Charmayne D'Souza, Sujata Bhatt and a few other women boldly upset the phallogocentric discourse of Indian English poetry and introduced a new matrix of thematic contents related to the dreams, desires, aspirations, yearnings and longings of women which otherwise were either trivialized or suppressed earlier. Subhas Chandra Saha endorses the above-quoted finding:

"For the first time in Indian English Poetry, the women poets of post-Independence and post-modern period portrayed in a subversive idiom their desires, lust, sexuality and gestational experiences. They enriched Indian English poetry with a wealth of new themes and experiences."

While terming this women writing as an “iconoclastic discourse”, Saha, further says:

"They developed a new innovative iconoclastic discourse to portray their repressed desires. Thus a new form of feminist poetry emerged and grew to give Indian English poetry new strength, new diversity and new potent signs of maturity and newer forms of approximation to contemporary issues and reality of social and political changes that have overtaken the course of human civilization during the period moving towards the new millennium."

Amongst Indian women poets, Kamala Das is indisputably the first Indian woman-poet who shocked and mesmerized readers with her highly original, confessional, uninhibited and severely introspective mode of poetic expression. Deriving much inspiration from Das, women poets questioned the patriarchal system and began to articulate resistance and self-confidence.

The resistance of the women poets towards the orthodox social and religious codes which debilitate woman's spirit and negate her identity outside the role of a mother/wife/lover echoed in Mamta Kalia, Eunice de Souza, Tara Patel, Melaine Silgado, Charmayne D'Souza, Imtiaz Dharker and Sujata Bhatt. Along with a daring, uninhibited and frank handling of taboo subjects, one finds exploration and celebration of womanhood in the contemporary women-writers.
While commenting on the thematic concerns of the women poets, Nila Shah and Pramod Nayar, the editors of *Modern Indian Poetry in English: Critical Studies* (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2000) opine, "Social contexts and their violent but untenable impositions upon individual desires or needs is perhaps best understood and treated by the women poets today." Exposing the hypocrisy of the male-counterparts for practising negation/marginalization towards women-related issues, they further add:

The conspiratorial silencing of women-centered issues, especially those revolving around sexuality, dependence and marriage and those forms of engendered violence that inform a woman's existence today are addressed by the women poets. There is the violence of memory and history, of estrangement and nostalgia that may figure at either individual or collective levels.

While probing into the desire behind the urgency of expression in women, Nishant Haider finds that, "Women write to break the silence, they write in anger, they write to avenge themselves, and they write to tell their stories." Due to the untiring efforts of these women writers, we have somehow reached at the platform where women are no more portrayed as a commodity, a plaything or a sex-toy. They are treated as complete human beings, parallel to their male counterparts who have their own identity and existence and can forcefully articulate their rights for love, sex, dignity, freedom, expression and above all, equality.

The contemporary Indian English women poets, in relation to the conventional idea of Indian woman express themselves very freely. This is indeed true of all the Indian English women poets....Their language, style, rhythms and forms are inventive, original and contemporary.

The present chapter presents a detailed analysis of the chosen poems of the three selected female poets namely - Mamta Kalia, Sudha Iyer and Imtiaz Dharker keeping in view the social and political relevance of their poetic art. All
the three women poets under study have marked skill in the use of language and creative expression, characterized by variations in versification, metre, line-length, syntax and use of other poetic devices.

The critical appraisal of their poems includes the discussion on the innovations of style, form and technique used by them. Each woman poet has been individually scanned for her distinct use of various resources of language, style and technique. Also, the poems chosen for critical appraisal are accompanied by the discussion on their form, structure, verbal and textual nuances.

MAMTA KALIA

I may not be able to transform the world but I can certainly make them see through my minus-three eyesight.

An M.A. in English Literature from Delhi University, Mamta Kalia has “no transit problems” and writes with equal fervour in Hindi also. She was engaged with writing in English during her stay in Bombay but her emphasis shifted to Hindi when she came to Allahabad, the “nerve centre of Hindi Writing.” She has published two volumes of English poems so far, namely *Tribute to Papa and Other Poems* (Calcutta: Writers’ Workshop, 1970) and *Poems’ 78* (Calcutta: Writers’ Workshop, 1978).

Kalila figures in the widely acclaimed book entitled, *Talking Poems: Conversations with Poets* (OUP, 1999) in which Eunice de Souza, interviews her along with Nissim Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar, Kamala Das, Keki N. Daruwalla, Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel, A.K. Mehrotra, Imtiaz Dharker and Melanie Silgardo and discusses their lives and creative works. In this book, while giving her mind on her style of writing and experience as a bilingual writer, she says:
I did not decide on style. In fact, I have none. P.Lal who published both my books in English says that's the way I think. Actually, writing in English was not something sudden. I was already a Hindi poet of the anti-poetic tradition. Akavita started with our efforts. When the scene became too confused I withdrew.

While answering the question, “What does creativity mean to you?” posed by Eunice de Souza, Kalia utters:

Besides self-expression, it is also a responsibility. Creative expression is a lone man’s battle against the enormous uncertainty of this universe. It also helps in understanding the distance between information and mystery that still surrounds the human condition.

Her reply not only supports but also confirms the basic tenet of the present thesis. It establishes the fact that creativity can bring a desired change in the outlook of the people. However, one cannot bring a complete transformation in a single day. A positive shift in the society can be brought by replacing old thoughts with new ones, stubborn attitude with reasonable one, indifference with empathy and above all, orthodoxy with modernity. All these desired changes can be best expressed through art. In the context of the present study, poetry comes handy to the blessed souls to curb the vices of the day.

She sees a bright future for poetry in the times to come: “On the threshold of a brand new century, who knows, people may just tire of telly inanities, electronic amenities, information bonanzas, and get back to books. The hope of being heard and read always exists.”

To her, writing poetry has a cathartic effect. In a conversation with Eunice de Souza, she out-pours her heart, “Instead of fighting I started writing.” She has even poeticized her above-quoted statement: “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’, Poems ’78, 17)

The thematic variety of Kalia’s poetry stretches from idealism, tradition,
culture, politics, love, marriage, family, modernity to society and its various burning issues which demand immediate attention. With a distinctive tone and a viewpoint peculiarly her own, she brings to the fore, the horrid reality of the contemporary life. With a powerful female sensibility, she boldly voices the social and political reality. Bruce King has rightly remarked, “The present contemporary manner appears to have been initiated by Mamta Kalia who explored the themes, attitudes, voices and registers of speech which have been taken further by de Souza and Silgardo.”

Autobiographical flavour suffused with a sharp intellectual sensibility lends a unique charm to her writings. Unlike most of the women poets, she exhibits a fair amount of wit in her verse. Her poems are compact and make their point economically. With an objective to bring forth the social and political ramifications of Kalia’s creative output, a detailed textual study of her work has been undertaken in this chapter.

While describing the theme of her debut collection namely, *Tribute to Papa and Other Poems* she says:

*Tribute to Papa* is an ironical collection. I tried to parody most of the relationships. I was breaking down things. There was a time when I wanted to disown everything and everybody. So the poems were against established values, established relationships which were taken for granted. Some of these relationships are served to you on a platter. The first book is a refusal of all that.

The title poem of this verse-collection begins with a set of interrogative sentences having implications of dissent with a father’s idealism. Kalia speaks with tangy irreverence about many ‘sacred cows’ of the Indian culture, patriarchy, parenthood, patriotism, to name a few. In an innovative style, she figures out an opposition not only towards the male dominance over women but more specifically, towards women’s acceptance of the male dominance. She is too
candid and direct:

Who cares for you, Papa?
Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean
words, clean teeth?
Who wants to be an angel like you?
Who wants it?

('Tribute to Papa', *Tribute to Papa and Other Poems*, 8)
[The subsequent references from this book will be abbreviated as *TPOP*.]

Apparently, it appears an ordinary conversation between a modern daughter
and a Victorian father but actually it is a shocking and hair-raising criticism of
changed priorities, changed mind-sets, newly acquired life-styles and above all,
modern life and living. The daughter pours a volley of accusations on her father:
“You are an unsuccessful man, Papa. / Couldn’t wangle a cosy place in the world.
/ You’ve always lived a life of limited dreams.” She feels disheartened to find that
her father could not acquire wealth and riches all through his life and led a poor
and wretched life. Here, “cosy place” connotes to the riches acquired by unfair
means and the expression “limited dreams” voices her father’s lack of ambition to
climb the ladder of success.

Further, in the next stanza, she reminds him that he has remained only a
lower-division clerk all through his life because he has no guts to “smuggle eighty
thousand watches at a stroke.” Had he indulged in smuggling “eighty thousand
watches at a stroke”, she would have proudly flaunted that “My father’s in import-
export business, you know.”

This particular line is bitingly ironical as it depicts the sick, selfish and
crooked mentality of the modern world. Snatching, plundering and looting are the
sought after lucrative professions in the present times because they ensure speedy
and quick monetary gains without putting any consistent and honest efforts. All
one needs is the “guts” to execute snatching, stealing and looting in a foolproof
style. Surprisingly, this shameful profession is termed as an import-export
Thereafter, Kalia depicts an utterly chaotic and dismayed contemporary world which has no faith in God. In a sarcastic manner, the daughter makes a scathing attack on her father's faith in God by saying: "When you can't think of doing anything / You start praying / Spending useless hours at the temple." Loss of faith, culture and tradition is the naked truth of our times and Kalia bravely confesses the truth.

From disbelief in God, the daughter now moves towards the idealism of her father. She does not even spare the brave and legendary woman of the Indian history: "I give two donkey-claps for your greatness. / And three for Rani Lakshmi Bai". In the contemporary world, it is not the parents who disown their children rather; it is their progeny who disowns them if they remain "unsuccessful" to amass wealth all through their lives.

In the poem, 'Papa' symbolizes the old value system and the speaker symbolizes the modern youth who has utter disregard for the sanctity of relationships and supports free sex. The daughter has liberal views but she finds it hard to defy the sacraments of her tradition-ridden father. Quite shamelessly, she defends the craving of sexual liberty of the young generation:

Everything about you clashes with nearly everything about me.
You suspect I am having a loveaffair these days,
But you're to shy to have it confirmed.
What if my tummy starts showing gradually
And I refuse to have it corrected?
But I'll be careful, Papa,
Or I know you'll at once think of suicide.
(‘Tribute to Papa’, TPOP, 8)

The poem reaches to its climax with this stanza. Kalia shocks her readers by bringing them face to face with the shameless youth. Culture, value-system, respect, traditionalism, patriotism, idealism have relegated to the background
while opportunism, treachery, modernity, pretence, show-off, artificiality are dominating in the modern times.

The reader is served with contents just opposite to what he/she expects after reading the title of the poem. She smells a change in the values, beliefs and ideals in the contemporary society and dares to portray the same on her poetic canvas. The woman with a modern sensibility in her, courageously discards the idealism and didacticism of her father. Without mincing words, she openly tells her father that the present world has no room for his ideals, values and morals and that he sounds a complete misfit in the modern society.

Kalia, like her contemporaries, has also chosen free verse for her linguistic expression. Her style is direct, candid and conversational. The most striking quality of the poem is its natural speech rhythm which makes her poem easy to be read, especially to the urban readers. The poem progresses with a debate on the questions raised in the beginning and the closure is marked by the persona's acquiescence into the object of interrogation. It moves like a river in spate which aggressively transgresses its banks but after a brief upheaval, calms down and regains its normalcy.

Kalia shows marked deviations in the structure, line-length, metre, syllable-count and stanza structure. The long and short sentences appear in a run-on style in her poem. The line-length varies from three to twelve words. Regular rhyme has been dispensed with. However the poem attains rhythm with the stylistic devices of alliteration, assonance and repetition: "Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean words, clean teeth?" The diction is colloquial, effortless and informal. The question tags lend a conversational and sonorous effect to the poem.

Like most modern poets, Kalia does not indulge too much in figurative devices. Irony, sarcasm and wit are the main principles of her idiom. The first-
person narrative enhances the over-all impact of the poem. The title ‘Tribute to Papa’ is highly ironical and thought provoking. Through this poem, she epitomizes an awakened and audacious twenty-first century woman who possesses the guts to question, judge and finally reject the patriarchal norms imposed on the fair sex down the ages. She represents a modern woman who has the bravado to raise voice against the set patterns of patriarchy. This is how M.K.Naik reacts to this poem:

The impoverishment and squalor are not merely without, they are within as well. It is virtually a total devaluation of the currency of values itself. The young daughter’s world-view in Mamta Kalia’s “Tribute to Papa” is fairly representative of her generation.17

While comparing Kalia’s ‘Tribute to Papa’ with Melanie Silgardo’s ‘For Father on the Shelf’, one finds that if Kalia in a love-hate tone, questions certain patriarchal norms which she may not wish to conform to, Silgardo admits the deep impressions of her father’s life on her own mind. Unlike Kalia, Silgardo as a child, dreaded her drunken father so much that she could never dare to question his actions and always sought solace in shedding tears: “The days you drank too much / I cowered your smell..../ You never knew I wet my pillow / Oftener than I had ever wet my bed.”18

Like Kamala Das and Gauri Deshpande, Kalia also jostles with the ground realities of life. Using a candid poetic expression, she in her poem entitled ‘Sheer Good Luck’, forcefully voices crime against women that has taken the shape of a cancerous ulcer in modern times. The whole woman community today is haunted by the feelings of insecurity, betrayal and paranoia at the hands of men.

Without directly pointing out at various forms of crime against women, she supposedly puts herself in various embarrassing and clumsy situations: “So many things / could have happened to me. / I could have been kidnapped / at the age of seven / ravaged by / dirty minded middle-aged men.” (“Sheer Good Luck”, T P O
She startles the readers by giving her poem an unexpected and a sudden start. She presents three discomforting situations which a woman could face in her life. The first situation is quite shameful and disturbing. She voices kidnapping, abduction and rape of innocent girls/women in our society. No woman, whether of six months age or of sixty years of age, finds herself safe and secure in our society.

In the second situation, she imagines herself being married off to a man “with a bad smell’ and turns “frigid” as a “frigidaire”. This image evokes the picture of hundreds or even thousands of women who turn unresponsive, cold as an outcome of a forced marriage. Not only these women lose their own identity and power of decision-making but also could not fulfill their desires, wishes and dreams. They have to bear their husbands in all their acts. The expression “a man with a bad smell” implies the imposition of masculinity and “turns frigid as a frigidaire” is suggestive of her suppression and marginalization. The expression also carries undertones of sexuality.

The last supposition brings to the fore, the evil of illiteracy and ignorance rampant in women residing in the rural and backward areas of the nation: “I could have been / an illiterate woman / putting thumb-prints / on rent-receipts.” This picture apart from depicting illiteracy and ignorance on the part of women also takes to task the men-folk who misuse their unawareness. These lines tear off the mask of hypocrisy from the face of patriarchy which uses or misuses women-folk as rubber-stamps to materialise their own thwarted and unfulfilled dreams.

The poem culminates to a close with an under-statement: “But nothing ever happened to me / except two children / and two miscarriages.” Kalia amuses her readers by referring to her children and miscarriages. With her versatility and
creativity, she transforms the atmosphere of gloom and despair into a jovial and good-humoured one.

Her style is informal, direct and intimate. The poem begins with a supposition which is intensified by insertion of several contrastive images and it is brought to a closure on a note of satire and wit. The regular rhyme is missing. The fourth, sixth and twelfth lines, however, rhyme with each other: "...seven (line 4) / ...men (line 6) / ...woman (line 12). The pace changes and the thought takes a turn from the fifteenth line onwards. The poem exhibits great organic unity and coherence. The title, 'Sheer Good Luck' is quite captivating as it arouses interest of the reader in the poem. To sum up, the poem is highly suggestive and telling. It carries international ramifications, as the plight of uneducated and ignorant women is same around the globe.

'Against Robert Frost' is a fine example of social and political criticism. This six-liner poem is best read as a whole:

I can't bear to read Robert Frost.
Why should he talk of apple picking
When most of us can't afford to eat one?
I haven't even seen an apple for many months-
Whatever we save we keep for beer
And contraceptives.
('Against Robert Frost', T P O P, 21)

Kalia expands the horizon of her imagination with the growing lines of the poem. Starting with her personal liking and disliking, she moves on to the national issue of price-hike and poverty and finally, glides to an ever-increasing trend of over-indulgence towards drinking and sex around the globe. In a very free and frank manner, she acknowledges the fact that she has not "even seen an apple for many months." If this is the state of affairs of the upper-middle class families then what would be the plight of the poor people?

However this poem has been written in seventies but it has not lost its
appeal in the contemporary times. On the contrary, it has become more pertinent and piercing as the prices of all the commodities have been soaring high at the sky-rocketing speed since that time. What to talk of the poor masses, things have gone out of reach from the hands of so-called well-to-do families in the present times.

In the last couple of lines, she makes a dig at the changed needs and priorities of people. A few years back, people considered food, shelter and clothing as the basic needs for living but this thinking has faced a severe blow in the present context. With the changing needs and requirements of the era, food has been replaced by “beer” and “contraceptives”. It is the debauch and bohemian lifestyle and not food which will ensure survival in the modern world. The title of the poem immediately catches the attention and evokes interest of the readers in the poem. An allusion to Robert Frost startles the reader as if Kalia would speak something ill against the famous poet but nothing serious surfaces in the course of reading. The last couple of lines appears as an anti-climax to the beginning.

The poem has a direct, chatty opening, an argumentative progression and a closure marked by a statement of personal resolution. No structural formality has been observed but the redeeming feature is the undercurrent of irony that strengthens the theme of the poem. The syntax is informal, chatty and relaxed while the theme is very bold and urbane. Parallel to the poems discussed before, the question tags and first-person voice re-surface in the poem.

In her poem ‘Dedicated Teacher’, Kalia speaks about the faulty education system which imparts learning without any practical experience. She lends her poem an idiomatic start:

It seems funny at times –
I’ve rarely seen a mountain,
forest or a river,
Yet I teach geography.
Using poetry as a medium, she spots the grey area of our education system. She voices the fact that we impart bookish knowledge devoid of practical experience to our students. Ideal teaching is that which can be related to life otherwise it is no teaching at all.

She reveals, "I'm working for a PhD these days. / Even if I know / I'll never complete the thesis". She exposes the tendency of the majority of college-teachers to get themselves enrolled for Ph.D. They do not take up their research-projects seriously and in heart of their hearts, they are aware of the fact that they would never complete their research successfully. However at the same time, they want to flaunt being busy with their research-projects.

The sting of irony gets deeper in the concluding lines: "It's all to wangle a Readership you see. / The University needs me." This glaring fact arouses an immediate question in the minds of the readers: How can these teachers deliver their best in the classrooms when they are not committed to their own research-projects?

Another thing which surfaces on the brim is the mentality of those teachers who think they have to undertake such projects because University "needs" them. Sadly, all this is done to "wangle a Readership". The Ph.D. work undertaken by such teachers is just a facade, a formality. Through this poem, she has dissected the ugly truth of the education system in the contemporary times. Who else can tell better than Kalia who herself is a teacher?

The form and structure of this 12 lined poem is not bound by the traditional norms of prosody. The first-person voice appears once again in this poem. The opening sentence has been split into four lines. The line-length ranges between three to eight words. The use of expressions, "never mind", "...you see" and
"I've", "I'm" and "I'll" lend a conversational flavour so much so that it sounds like a mere statement. Though the poem does not exhibit any artistic flourish but it achieves the desired result by the effervescent and raw emotions which impart an organic unity to the poem. Kalia is perhaps not so self-conscious about style and hence, adopts a relatively more direct and unadorned style in her poems.

The title of the poem is highly ironical and captivating because contrary to the expectations, readers find the teacher exactly opposite to what has been pronounced by the title. With an objective to reform the mental make-up of the whole community of teachers, Kalia brings us face to face with the degenerated and deteriorating standards of education.

Like Meena Alexander and Sudha Iyer, Kalia too exhibits a strong political awareness in her poetry. In her second collection of verse, she has moved from individual to social concerns. She elaborates the theme of her second collection of verse namely Poems' 78:

I felt contradictions in society were more important and more critical than personal contradictions and failures. Society is full of so many contradictions. Women are burnt and raped. Dowry demands still exist. Instead of talking about post-modernism we should talk about post-barbarism. Much needs to be done with the pen.49

In the poem 'I Do Feel National' Kalia shows a bitter but true picture of an independent India which boasts of freedom, liberation and nationality. Without mincing matters, she proclaims, "I do feel national / When I sing the National Anthem." In the very next couple of lines, she uses the rhetorical device of hyperbole to shock her readers "So what, if my mind keeps nagging me / "What have you to boast of?" ('I Do Feel National', Poems' 78, 7)

In a frank manner, she owns the harsh fact that free India has given her nothing except a "dingy hole", "a bug-ridden bed", "two cracked bits of crockery"
and "three thread bare saris". Her rage intensifies with the succeeding lines. She terms her "degree" as a "roll of paper." This statement speaks volumes about the worth of so-called educational degrees which could not even ensure a comfortable life-style to the degree-holders. Hinting at the politicians, policy-makers and bureaucrats, Kalia resents, "They in Delhi do not know / What it is to live like mice."

How can the people who live in luxurious houses situated in posh areas of the cities know the sufferings of the common masses who have to struggle hard to make their both ends meet? These people strive hard for survival by gathering bare minimum household commodities. On the contrary, the politicians and ministers befool them with false promises and never-ending speeches. The expression "to live like mice" is not only a fine example of alliteration but it also symbolizes the abject, wretched and miserable state of the have-nots in our country.

Pronouncing rebellion against the people who enjoy power, she writes: "I'll ever be a rebel / As long as I don't get / Sugar, Dalda and Kerosene oil / At fair price." She perhaps, suggests that hoarders and black marketeers in connivance with the ruling politicians sell the bare minimum commodities at soaring prices. Ideally speaking, the policy of the ruling party should be such that the basic needs should be provided at affordable prices to the common man and the luxury items should be offered at costlier rates. Unfortunately, what is practised is contrary to the reality. With an objective to heighten the over-all impact of the poem, she capitalizes the first letters of basic commodities listed in the above-quoted stanza.

Kalia not only ignites the slumbering conscience of common person through her poem but also registers her resentment towards the rulers and politicians. She brings the readers face to face with the fact that these politicians are elected because of the votes of the masses cast in their favour. They enjoy
power, pelf and status because of them only and hence, these people have to be reminded of their origin.

In the concluding lines, she tears apart the mask of hypocrisy from the face of “Establishment” by making a declaration: “I’ll always be the sty / In Establishment’s cool eye / As long as I’m made to linger and not live.” The expression “cool eye” connotes to the apparent and pretentious sympathy and consideration of the establishment towards the poor and needy. In reality, this sympathy and consideration is mere a lip service practised by the politicians with a pre-planned objective of grabbing votes from them.

Irony is the main principle in her poetry. Adopting a conversational style, she resorts to free verse and a run-on pattern. The poem is a monologue having a direct opening followed by a series of thoughts and incidents that override her sensibility. The sentences are split into lines containing subordinate or coordinate clauses. The regular rhyme has been dispensed with. The ninth, tenth, twelfth and sixteenth lines, however, rhyme with each other: “...twice (line 9) /...suffice (line 10) / ...mice (line 12) / ...mice (line 16)”. Also, the second line and the eighth one exhibit false rhyme: “…Anthem (line 2) / ...Freedom (line 3)”.

The title of this 19 lined poem i.e. ‘I Do Feel National’ is very apt and interesting as it arouses interest towards the poem. Without being swayed by the emotions of nationality, freedom, liberation and independence, Kalia employs a practical approach to bring her readers face to face with the reality.

She poses a very pertinent question to the readers that does self-rule and independence carry any meaning for the people who are striving hard merely to exist in this country? Rich people are becoming richer and negative forces are flourishing these days. Using poetry as a medium, she suggests that establishment should take serious steps to uplift the poor and downtrodden so that we can call
our country enjoying independence and self-rule in real terms.

Kalia has also tried her hand on Haikus in this verse-collection. Realistic, straightforward, at times stark in presenting the truth, she lays bare the sick psyche of the people: “No one expired in the hospital / Today. / What a day!” (‘No One Expired’, Poems’78, 10)

Hospital is an institution where people receive medical, surgical or psychiatric treatment and nursing care. Contrary to what the hospitals are meant for, this Haiku unleashes the sick mentality of the modern world. Indifference, aloofness, individualism and selfishness stand exposed. In this strange world, people feel discomfort and unease if nobody loses his/her life on a particular day in a hospital as if it is mandatory to observe death(s) in a hospital everyday!

Using a metaphor, she unleashes the fast-paced, self-centered, individualistic, indifferent and mechanical life-style of Delhi. Dearth of love, sharing, caring and understanding in a metropolitan culture results in a cryptic remark by the poetess: “In Delhi / the sea / could have really gone dry.” (‘In Delhi’, Poems’78, 11)

The last poem of this verse-collection namely, ‘After Eight Years of Marriage’ has got the distinction of being integrated in an anthology entitled, It’s a Woman’s World: A Century of Women’s Voices in Poetry edited by Neil Philip (New York: Penguin, 2000). Delving into the labyrinth of human relationships and emotions, she presents a very realistic and touching portrayal of a married woman. Lending her poem a conversational start, Kalia narrates:

After eight years of marriage  
The first time I visited my parents,  
They asked, “Are you happy, tell us.  
(‘After Eight Years of Marriage’, Poems’78, 26)

She calls the question asked by her parents an “absurd” one, on which she “should have laughed” but instead she “cried” and in between “sobs”, nodded
“yes.” She intended to tell her worried parents about all the joys and sorrows, pains and pangs of her married life. While going down the memory lane, she undergoes an interior monologue: “I wanted to tell them / That I was happy on Tuesday. / I was unhappy on Wednesday. / I was happy on day at 8 o’clock / I was most unhappy by 8:15.” Generally, this is what is felt and experienced by any woman around the globe irrespective of clime, colour, sect or community.

A woman embraces all the happy and unhappy moments of life and never ever allows these experiences to cast a shadow on the peace and happiness of her family. She not only bears all the pains, angst, misery and anguish smilingly but also unfailingly carries out her duties and obligations towards her hearth and home. She recollects the happy moments of her life: “I wanted to tell them how one day / We all ate a watermelon and laughed”.

While making a sudden shift in the succeeding lines, she depicts the indifference and negligence of her husband towards her. She feels so insecure, weak and hurt that she even tries to commit a suicide but perhaps, the thought of her kids stops her from doing such a heinous crime: “I wanted to tell them how I wept all night once / And struggled hard from hurting myself. / That it was not easy to remain happy in a family of twelve.”

However, we may boast of our rich tradition of joint family system but the truth lies in the fact that it is very difficult to cope up with all the members of the family. Through her poem, Kalia tells us that it is only the lady of the house who makes various types of adjustments, compromises and sacrifices in order to make her house a happy home. Breaking her interior monologue, she faces the reality and sees that her parents “were looking” at her “two sons” who were “Hopping around like young goats.” She startles her readers by using such an imaginative simile.
Kalia describing the physical state of her ageing parents: “Their wrinkled hands, beaten faces and grey eyelashes / Were all too real.” Apart from depicting the old, dilapidated and decaying physical condition of her parents, these lines also connote to the helplessness, inability, worthlessness, weakness, dependence, powerlessness and incapability encountered in an old age. Using rhetorical device of pun, she concludes the poem: “So I swallowed everything / And smiled a smile of great content.” These lines glorify sacrifice, patience, forgiveness and adjustable nature of women.

Kalia’s inspiration comes from the strengths and the frailties of the human relationships. Passion, love, care, indifference, neglect, deceit, manipulation and suffering are the emotional experiences which shape up our lives. She has tried to unleash the deep layers of emotions of a woman’s heart in this poem. Her descriptions bear a colour of realism. She has chosen poetry as an apt medium to pronounce her anger and resentment towards the evil practices of the society.

The poem is a monologue having a direct opening which is followed by a series of thoughts and incidents that override her sensibility. The regular rhyme has been dissolved. However, the second, third, seventh, fifteenth and eighteenth lines exhibit false rhyme: “...parents (line 2) / ...us (line 3) / ...yes (line 15) / ...sons (line 18)”. The poetic devices such as repetition (“I wanted to tell them”), alliteration (“So I swallowed everything, / And smiled a smile of great content”), assonance (“Were all too much too real”) and onomatopoeia (“And in between sobs, nodded yes”) create the music of words in her poetry. The repetitive use of the subordinate clause, “I wanted to tell them” (lines 8, 13 and 15) not only lends rhyme and rhythm to the poem but also intensifies its emotive effect.

Kanwar Dinesh Singh in his book entitled *Contemporary Indian English Poetry: Comparing Male and Female Voices* (2008) stresses upon the point that
her poetry transgresses the barriers of individualism and attains a kind of universal appeal because women meet the same fate anywhere irrespective of their class, clan or nation:

Mamta Kalia's descriptions, however, bear the colour of realism and do speak of her heart felt experience. She finds poetry an apt medium to articulate her grudges. She, however, does not speak of her own throes alone; her poems, in fact, represent the agony of an average Indian middle-class housewife.

The dynamics of modern-day relationships has undergone a complete transformation but what has not changed even today is the position of woman. She is still relegated to clichéd patterns of relationships. Not only the Indian women poets writing in English but also the women poets who write in the regional languages, display awareness towards the relegated status of women in our society.

Worthlessness, ordinariness and emptiness of modern living are voiced with a grim humour by Kalia in the poem captioned, 'Anonymous'. It was published in Hers: An Anthology of Poetry in English by Indian Women, ed. Mary Ann Gupta (Writers' Workshop, 1978). While playing down her persona as a woman artist, she brings forth the destiny of any Indian woman and female species as a whole. The poem is best read as a whole:

I no longer feel I'm Mamta Kalia.
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.
I see worthless movies at reduced rates
and feel happy at reduced rates.
I get a free plastic bucket
With a large packet of Super-Surf,
and feel happy.
I put on weight every month
like Kamla or Vimla
or Kanta or Shanta,
and feel happy.
I am no longer Mamta Kalia.

The poetess fearlessly voices the loss of her identity and individuality in this poem. With a ruthless honesty, she tears apart the conventional attitude to reveal the quintessential woman. The poem under consideration is not an utterance of Kalia; rather it is the voice of an average Indian middle-class woman being empathized by her.

Though she presents a typical Indian woman but the poem transcends the barriers of nationality and turns global because of the fact that women, their sufferings, their nature and their experiences are same everywhere. In the poem, Kalia’s wit controls and enhances the sadness simultaneously. Suffering an acute loss of identity, a middle class woman in this poem simply dwindles into an average housewife.

We confront another sensitive woman complaining the same loss of identity in Kamala Das’ ‘The Wilderness’. All through her life, she felt that she successively belonged to her parents, her husband, her lover and her readers but has now reached to a sad conclusion that “There is nobody with me.../ I am what they once called Kamla.” This loss of identity also surfaces in Adil Jussawalla’s ‘Missing Person’.

One is forced to ask: If realization of loss of identity and alienation comes, can madness be far behind? This is what is experienced and felt by majority of people these days and the contemporary poets examine the same subject in their respective works.

The form and structure of this 18 lined poem is not bound by the traditional norms of prosody. The free verse of this particular poem by Kalia becomes so free and relaxed that it appears less of a verse and more of a statement. The diction is
thin while the over-all atmosphere of the poem is light. However, the poem is marked by the under currents of irony which in return strengthen the theme of the poem. The line-length ranges between two to seven words.

The structure is cyclic. The poem gains musical note by the poetic devices of rhyme, alliteration (“I bear, I rear / I nag, I wag / I sulk, I sag”) and repetition (“...feel happy...”). This subordinate clause appears repetitively in tenth, thirteenth and seventeenth lines. Also, by including the names like “Mamta”, “Kamla”, “Vimla”, “Kanta” and “Shanta”, the poetess has adorned her composition with an Indian flavour.

Monika Varma, a practising poet and an astringent critic pleaded that the poetry by Indian women should be a little “more than sighs and thighs,” and Kalia does not annoy Varma in this respect. She touches upon a fair amount of social issues in her writings.

To satirise and deliver judgement on modernity and more particularly, socio-political condition of our society, Kalia employs “spiky wit” in her poetry. This is a term coined by Eunice de Souza to describe her poetry. She makes use of various stylistic devices namely contrast, juxtaposition, understatement, satire, irony, wit, humour and speaker in her poetry. Her terse, witty and colloquial style casts a spell on the mind of the reader and keeps him/her hooked to her poems. She proves herself as a skilled wordsmith and a tireless experimenter and designer of words. She appropriates the English language by bringing it under the influence of vernacular. Before concluding, it would be worthwhile to consider the opinions of a few critics on her poetry.

While commenting upon her poems, Eunice de Souza says, “They are tightly constructed and make their point more economically. Her English poems as her Hindi ones reveal that few writers can capture the tragicomic nitty-gritty of
Satish Kumar observes:

Her language is direct, ironic and swift moving. She has a clear grasp of the rhythmic and conceptual units of verse, a feeling for form evident in the way the poems work with apparent blandness towards unexpected endings.

Bruce King rates the expression of women poets more powerful than their male counterparts. He is of the opinion that "the directness of expression and natural, idiomatic colloquial vigour is more often found in the verse of Das, Kalia, de Souza and Silgardo than in the male Indian English poets."

Subhas Chandra Saha reacts to her poetry:

Mamta Kalia enacts a demolition of patriarchal value-system in a series of aggressive verbal blizzards couched in a colloquial idiom through which she reverses the poetizing, romanticizing and idealizing idiom of nineteenth-century Indian English women poets. She figures out an opposition not only to men's dominance over women but women's acceptance of man's dominance.

He further states, "Kalia's treatment of the feminist theme shocks us into an awareness of woman's power, the feminine power. Kalia celebrates this power in poem after poem."

Kanwar Dinesh Singh comments, "Mamta Kalia thematises her experiences of love, marriage, family and society in a simple, direct and conversational style and with poignant irony." While Kamala Das is the pioneer in setting a climate for an honest, revelatory and confessional poetry, Kalia has followed the trend set by Das by using her personal voice and self-revelation as a means of self-assertion. She has thrown several issues to an open discussion which were either forbidden or ignored, in the earlier times. She has shown how an Indian woman poet could create a space for herself in the world.

Kalia through her poetry "articulates her feeling of dissatisfaction with her
milieu. Her India is badly tainted with vices of social and political corruption, familial bickering, connubial displeasure and deterioration of human values."\(^{29}\) Instead of digging the past, she promotes creative writing related to the contemporary social and political reality. Hence, the basic tenet of the present research gains weight with the below-quoted statement by her:

\[
\text{In 1998 you cannot write in the manner of 1948. Today language is breaking down, diction is splitting up. Words are losing their weight of sense. Today's reader is more sensitive to the sounds of sim card and punch cards. So to make yourself present, much noise has to be absent.}^{30}\]

Even today, her poetry has not lost its sheen and relevance. Eunice de Souza in *Talking Poems* (1999) comments on her poetry, "Nearly thirty years after they were first published, the poems remain fresh."\(^{31}\) Following the tradition set by Kamala Das and Mamta Kalia, the contemporary women poets reflect the undercurrent of violence in women's lives in their poetry. They "describe the sordidness of marriage and love, express their criticism of patriarchal cultures frankly, and poeticise the search for an authentic identity of their own."\(^{32}\)

**SUDHA R. IYER**

My poetry is my response to Reality in its broader sense. It is an expression of my reactions to external reality as well as a rendering of certain intense inner experiences. For me, it has also become a path of self-discovery.


Sudha Iyer has three collections of verse to her credit namely: *Evening Bells* (Nagpur: Akshaya Mudra, 1993), *Twilight Rhymes* (Calcutta: WW, 1999) and *On the Edge* (Calcutta: WW, 2003). Her maiden verse-collection entitled *Evening Bells* earned her a respectable place in the arena of Indian poetry in English. Her
succeeding verse-collections namely *Twilight Rhymes* and *On the Edge* have been published by P.Lal’s Writers’ Workshop, Calcutta.

Her poetry encompasses a wide variety of themes. With an acute feminine sensibility or more precisely, feminine assertiveness, she has chosen poetry to express reality. The weight of the unintelligible world presses her sensitive soul to unburden herself by writing poetry. To Iyer, poetry is a “heightened awareness” which is bound to make the reader acutely conscious of his/her surroundings.

She captures even the fleeting moments of life with a rare touch of an artist. Her heart, soul, mind, spirit, body and intellect are integrally and indispensably associated with the fragile fabric of life. To her, life is a mixed fair of joys and sorrows and she portrays the same pleasures and pangs of mortals on her poetic canvas. She strongly believes that pain has the sharpness of a rapier to penetrate the inner recesses placed at the rock bottom of human mind. Man always yearns to realize his true nature which is ‘ananda’. She avers, “If every fabric of one’s being is to be soaked in ‘ananda’ or bliss one has to reach out to the supra-sensuous symbolized by Light beyond the Dark.”

Coming to her stylistics and diction; Iyer employs an open and colloquial style of writing. Her poems spring naturally as leaves to a tree. Her writing is imbued in the local colour and nativity. Her unique, original and confessional style transcends the barrier of nationality and leads her poetry towards universality and permanence. Symbolism and imagery play a pivotal role in her poetry. The very titles of her collections namely - *Evening Bells*, *Twilight Rhymes* and *On the Edge* are symbolic to the various stages of her own life.

She skillfully employs the poetic devices of irony, satire, sarcasm, contrast and juxtaposition in her verse. One finds plenty of fresh phrases, startling similes and metaphors in her poems. She uses language with an extra-ordinary liberty and
flexibility. Like a true modernist, she experiments with the language and diction "to minimize, if not eliminate, the distance between the thought and language."^35

A charge often levelled against poetry by women is that it lacks sense of humour. Critics allege that women’s poetry is often devoid of split-vision that generates humour. This finding is perhaps, partially true. One feels tempted to cite a few remarkable exceptions. Sudha Iyer along with Suniti Namjoshi is amongst those women poets who show consistent mischievous streak in their verse.

Her poem ‘Outdated’ presents a humorous and an engaging dialogue between a father and a son but underneath the surface, it proves to be an unpleasant revelation which confronts the readers with the contemporary social reality. A mischievous streak peeps through the opening stanza of the poem:

You are outdated, Sir
You don’t dye your hair.
In everything and everywhere
Grey should not grey appear.
Make if black or red.
For who can face the truth?
(‘Outdated’, EB, 8)

Outwardly, it appears that the son is making fun of his father’s appearance but beneath the surface, the poem connotes to the clash between the two generations, or more precisely between age-old value-system and treacherous, deceitful, pretentious modern life-style. Interestingly, the mischievous and humorous tone at the outset, lends the poem a brilliant take-off to the heights of poetic pleasure and later towards the revulsion of truth. At wordy level, it seems that the duo is talking about the dying of hair but the conversation brings to the mind; dying, pigmenting and colouring of all that is wrong, ugly, old, not presentable because, “For who can face the truth?”

In addition to this, the suggestion of the son to make hair either “black or red” needs an explanation. Black colour is suggestive of mystery, complexity and
melancholy while red points at passion, lust, anger and violence. All these traits are synonyms to the life-style of the younger generation who believes in achieving success by any means. Calling his father “comic”, the son accuses him of “shambling” with his “shabby burden” of “old-aged values”. Showing an utter disregard and disrespect towards the moral values, he goes to the extent of yelling, “You ought to be ashamed.” All this comes as a bolt from the blue for the father and in a bewildered state of mind, he resents:

I ashamed! What for son?
I do my work well.
Work is worship, don’t you know?
I am honest, I am humble.
I can love, I can suffer
and that’s my measure.
(‘Outdated’, E B, 8)

Clutching hard his age-old cardinal values namely - duty, work, honesty, humility, love, patience and concern, the father debunks the deceitful, self-centered life-style of youth. Without being swayed by the arguments of his son, he registers his strong derision for the modern life-style. Showing courage of conviction, the old man firmly stands on his grounds and re-affirms: “I live by my creed / I stand firm through infirm / I am content.”

Further, the son who stands for the new generation, while putting on display wretchedness and disrespect of the highest rank, yells in full-blown voice: “You got no right to be living / in this age. / Like grandpa’s clock / You should be disposed of.” The son shamelessly dismisses the right of his father to lead his own life. Finding himself unable to impose his own life-style on his father, he turns reckless and insane to the extent that he compares his father’s life with his grandpa’s clock and reveals his intention of disposing him of.

Abandoning old things is a peculiar trait of the modern generation but hardly do they visualize that growing older is a cosmic law of nature and they are
not an exception to this law. Keeping faith in the age-old values and showing a sharp reluctance towards the shallow and showy life-style, the father announces in the concluding lines: “Son, let the Ragman come for me, / I am ready.”

Pathos and pain ooze out of these lines as he chooses to kiss the gallows instead of earning disgrace by changing himself with the changing times. He prefers to quit the stage of life courageously than to degrade and degenerate himself. By calling him as an “outdated” and “comic” person, the age-old values as a “shabby burden” and death as a “ragman”, Iyer lends her poem a mischievous streak. The figurative expression of simile where the son compares his father’s life with his grandpa’s old clock lends an exquisite charm to the poem.

Iyer employs the post-modern technique to voice the absurdity and moral turpitude of the post-modern era. The diction, style and handling of the subject matter are perfectly in harmony with the tone and theme of the poem. The free verse, along with the vital ingredients of straightforwardness, conversational style, post-modern diction and directness of expression lead to the desired effect. It seems T.S. Eliot’s statement, “There is nothing like free verse; there is good verse, bad verse and chaos.” complements Iyer’s poetic art.

She experiments with the line-length, syllable-count, metre and diction. The poem has six stanzaic divisions running into six lines each, unlike the last stanza which contains eight lines. The line-length varies between three to seven words. Her sentences are split into lines containing subordinate or coordinate clauses. The poem presents a dialogue; a “You” and “I” talk. It has a direct and casual opening, an argumentative progression and an ending marked by a statement of personal resolution.

The diction is dense and conversational. Like a true artist, her voice is divinely gifted with harmony and musicality. In her case, the orchestra starts
playing on its own. The poem achieves musical note by the poetic devices of alliteration ("shambling with your shabby burden") and assonance ("You are outdated, Sir / You don't dye your hair.")

The way she has handled the sensitive issue of reversal of value-system in the contemporary times deserves appreciation. Symbolism plays a pivotal role in the poem. Underneath the humorous conversation between father and son there is a noble message for the reader. Apart from this, the poem voices the universal subjects of clash of value-system and generation gap.

Iyer is perhaps among those few poets who utilize poetry as a tool for bringing a reformation in the society. While stating the true purpose of writing and reading poetry, K.Balachandran endorses her opinion, "Poetry is not merely for reading; it is also for observing - to change our life for the better."37

'Fears of an Indian Bride' is a beautiful poem which brings to the surface the fears, inhibitions, uncertainties and scared thoughts of a newly-wed Indian bride about her married life. The dreams, desires, hopes, longings, expectations and aspirations of her long-cherished and eagerly-awaited wedded life stand in sharp contrast with the "stony indifference", "gritty frowns", huge monetary expectations, greed for dowry and heartlessness of her in-laws. Being herself a woman, she easily empathizes with an Indian bride and presents her feelings/emotions at her in-laws' house with a matchless perfection. She boldly tackles the subject of dowry-seeking, mental harassment and ultimately, a dowry-death of an innocent girl at the hands of her greedy in-laws. However, scores and scores of poems have been composed on this subject but nobody has dealt it with so evocatively and touchingly as Iyer has:

Henna on palms and feet
has not yet faded.
Turmeric gloss on the skin
has not yet paled.
Bangles jingle and anklets tinkle.
But smiling bangles
break against stony indifference
and dancing anklets
stumble against gritty frowns.

(‘Fears of an Indian Bride’, E B, 27-28)

Cinematographically, she portrays the fact that how the parents of her bridegroom start humiliating and harassing her for more dowry from the day one of her marriage. The poor girl who has been transplanted from the warm and cozy home of her own parents to her in-laws house, finds herself unable to cope up with the suffocating atmosphere of “stony indifference” and “gritty frowns”. The insatiable greed of the dowry-seekers results in mental and physical harassment of the poor girl: “Wet faggots of expectations / emit smoke / even before the fire of love / is aglow.”

Iyer employs a fair number of highly original rhetorical devices which lend her poem artistic brilliance and rare appeal. The metaphors namely, “Wet faggots of expectations”, “the fire of love”, “A hunted stag”, genuinely touch the heart of the reader. By juxtaposing “honey of hopes” with the actual “bitterish” taste of marriage, the poetess evokes the desired effect. The image of a newly wed girl frightened like a “hunted stag” is highly telling and expressive of her plight.

The poem echoes with Kamala Das’ title poem of her third collection of verse namely _The Old Playhouse and Other Poems_: “.........You called me wife, / I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and / To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering / Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and / Becama a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your / Questions I mumbled incoherent replies...”

Like Das, Iyer speaks of wiping of her own identity after marriage in this poem. In a highly telling style, the next stanza narrates how the greedy in-laws throw cunning, mischievous and “sly” suggestions coupled with “subtle
innuendoes” on the newly wed girl hinting at a “diamond ring”, a “Priya” scooter or even a “Maruti” car. Their insatiable demands go on increasing with each passing day. Anger smoulders around and smoke chokes the innocent bride and all her dreams and desires lick the dust of reality. Iyer says, “Love-lorn longings lose themselves / in a blind alley.”

The last stanza of the poem is drenched with pathos and pain. Iyer presents the stark reality of dowry-death. The bride is deliberately done to death by her in-laws and the gory incident is “reported as suicide” to the public. The whole poem moves in a cyclic path starting with the solemnization of marriage and culminates with the death of the innocent bride at the hands of her insatiable and ever-demanding in-laws.

It is really very sad and depressing that in this revolutionary age, when we boast of equality and women-empowerment, thousands and thousands of well-educated and talented girls are still traumatized, humiliated and oppressed by their respective in-laws for dowry. One can site innumerable gory incidents of crime against women to name a few - female-foeticide, abduction, rape, domestic violence, dowry-death, mental and physical harassment while scanning a newspaper.

Iyer deserves appreciation and praise for utilizing her poetic sensibility to bring us face-to-race with the gruesome reality. The celebration of ‘Women’s Day’ and ‘Mothers’ Day’ may succeed in lending an occasional fillip to the women-related issues but to make the equality of the genders a reality, a positive change in the outlook is the need of hour. Further, in the present scenario when women have to undertake twin responsibilities of managing their homes and jobs, their male counterparts must bring a positive change in their orthodox ideologies and mind sets and should accept the reversal of roles with open arms. Also, even education
and financial freedom cannot take women too far unless they themselves become aware of their rights. To conclude, it is high time for women to equip themselves to face challenges of the new millennium.

The poem has four stanzic divisions running into nine, ten, ten and seven lines respectively. The progression of thought is linear upto stanza 3 but thereafter there is a sudden halt, as the poetess turns meditative and sees through the future of the bride. The diction is dense and laced with similes and metaphors. The poetic devices of alliteration: “Honey of hopes tastes bitterish” (line 14), “Sly suggestions” (line 20); assonance and alliteration: “love-lorn longings lose themselves” (line 28) and onomatopoeia: “Bangles jingle and anklets tinkle.” (line 5) lend a musical note to the poem. The second and fourth line (“... faded” / ... “paled”), sixth and fifteenth line (“...bangles” / “...strangles”) rhyme with each other.

While commenting upon the thematic aspects of her second collection of verse namely, \textit{Twilight Rhymes}, Patricia Prime says:

The themes of the collection play with ideas about the “twilight of life”- that time when the poet takes stock of all that has gone before and what remains. Although the poems encompass the pleasure for relationships and events, they also uncover deeper psychological layers and try to explore the meaning of life.\textsuperscript{39}

Displaying a mischievous streak like Mamta Kalia and Suniti Namjoshi, Iyer in her poem, “In Our Colleges” presents modern youth’s disenchantment towards customary virtues and outdated morals. Being a college teacher herself, she gives first-hand information of what actually happens in our classrooms. She depicts the poor plight of a teacher who indulges in the futile exercise of mending the ways of restless and incorrigible youngsters. Quite humorously she calls the college-going boys and girls as “congress grass” which nobody dares to uproot for
years together. The simile exhibits an ironic mode:

In the spacious premises
boys and girls spread
like congress grass
nobody dares to uproot
for six to seven years.

("In Our Colleges", Twilight Rhymes, 37) [The subsequent references from this book will be abbreviated as TR.]

In a highly candid and matter-of-fact style, she gives a cinematographic picture of a classroom with “broken switches” and fans with “bent blades” where a poor teacher “tries to make contact” with the restless community of students. Pointing at the scanty attendance of students in the classrooms, she humorously presents another original simile, “In the famine-struck / A few stray like wayward cattle”. Hilariously, she calls a teacher an “inevitable tongue-toiling visitor” who makes futile attempts to make contact “with restless butterflies in walled exile”.

By registering the fact of “bent blades”, “broken” switches and dismantled windowpanes of the classrooms, she shows a serious concern for the ever-increasing aggression, anger, short-temperedness, individualism, self-centeredness, self-righteous attitude, rashness, irrationalism and intolerance amongst our youth. The broken windowpanes of the classrooms invite a modern student to make emergency exit “to fly to freedom / where dappled blossoms rock / in ferment of joy.”

These lines apart from depicting the wish of students to escape from their teachers also, hint at the tendency of rebellion ingrained in their psyche. This rebellion is not only towards parents and teachers but also towards the age-old value system, tradition and culture. The word “ferment” is suggestive of agitation and tumult which the modern youth loves to indulge in.

In the succeeding stanza, she brings the readers face to face with the fact how the students resist their teachers. Amusingly, she says, ‘Against the powerful
weapon / of rapier tongue / minds turn into puddles and pools / to resist creases, cuts or permanent scars.” Depicting the teacher’s tongue as a powerful rapier, she brings alive, the situation when the students rebel against their teachers who intend to perform a corrective surgery on their disrespectful, discourteous and erratic behaviours.

The concluding stanza presents the version of the incorrigible new creed. To attain the desired effect, Iyer uses inverted commas to register their stubborn attitude. Without even an iota of shame, youth denies to change or correct their behaviour. Shamelessly, they announce, “We have wrapped our minds / with polyester, our minds / against old-world moral creases / that prevent our survival.”

Iyer aptly uses the word “polyester” to depict the incorrigible attitude of youngsters. Polyester is impermeable as it does not allow anything to pass through it. Likewise youth too, does not wish to reform themselves. Without any inhibition, they confess: “We have to have virgin soil / to sow triple-C seeds / of corruption, cunning and cruelty / that yield a bumper crop / of power and pelf.” She has the daring to call spade a spade. Finding no ray of hope for reformation, she concludes the poem with a streak of frustration and pessimism.

Without mincing words, she brings her reader face to face with the harsh reality. She is pained to see youth indulging in opting for easier and dishonest ways to taste an immediate success. She makes us think, ponder, evaluate and access the complex situation of our times. Children today shirk work and do not mind to gain “power and pelf” with foul ways.

Though the poem is characterized by an organic form but no structural formality is observed while penning this 30 lined poem. Showing an innovation, Iyer experiments with the line-arrangement. The poem exhibits four sentences in totality and each sentence constitutes a stanza. The tone of the poem is light at the
opening but a sudden change in the tone and atmosphere is felt in stanza 3 which turns ironical and finally satirical at the closure.

The poem exhibits alliteration and assonance: “minds turn into puddles and pools / to resist creases, cuts or permanent scars.” (lines 18-19) and “to show triple-C seeds / of corruption, cunning and cruelty” (lines 27-28). The diction is dense and laced with similes: “boys and girls spread / like congress grass” (line 2-3) and metaphors: “with restless butterflies in walled exile” (line 11).

Women writers, quite often have to face criticism for showing an over-obsession towards the women-related issues. In addition to this, they are also accused for not exhibiting any political awareness in their writings. These charges have lost their sheen and glitter in the contemporary times. Refuting all such kind of charges against women species as a whole, Sudha Iyer, Imtiaz Dharker and Meena Alexander along with some other women-poets display an uninhibited political awareness.

The poem ‘Two Faces of Politicians’ is a trenchant satire on crafty, wily and self-serving politicians who feed on scams and scandals. The title itself sets the tone of the poem. In the first stanza, she reveals how they strive to perpetuate their existence through their progeny at the cost of the masses. She metamorphically exposes the ulterior and hidden agenda of these tricky politicians:

They rivet their hawk-eyed gaze
on visible horizons
seven generations distant
imagining glamour coursing along
their own blood
through all their progeny.

(‘Two Faces of Politicians,’ T R, 63)

In the second stanza, Iyer uses an evocative simile to lay bare the shamelessness, shallowness, treachery and double-dealing of the politicians. They
proudly carry a “ringed dark halo” of scams and scandals “like Saturn’s ring” with them. In the present times, double-dealing, treachery, greed for money and power, self-promotion and self-obsession have become synonyms to our ‘worthy’ politicians.

The third stanza ironically calls the future generation of these crafty politicians as “obscure offshoots”. The sting of irony becomes penetratingly deeper when the devious political leaders wishfully aspire to reach the unreachable and wish to achieve the impossible like Icarus. These crooked politicians crave to “perpetuate” their own existence even beyond the “inevitable end of all mortals.” Pretending to be God themselves, these iniquitous politicians “fondly” lock the luck of their descendants in the safe deposits of “Swiss banks” but hardly do they visualize the uncertainty of the Destiny.

The anger of the poetess becomes scathing and unsparing in the penultimate stanza of the poem. Utterly unresponsive to the call of their conscience, these greedy and self-obsessed politicians keep on amassing gold and silver by unfair and foul means. Iyer satirically calls these lying politicians as “supposed custodians” of our nation who shamelessly shout slogans of “Garibi Hatao” but on the contrary work day and night to eradicate “Garib” from our society! Bringing the poem to a close, she concludes the whole matter by saying that the real and ugly face of the politician stands revealed sooner or later.

To sum up, the subject of the poem has been dealt with in a matter-of-fact style. The tone is scathing and unsparing. The expressions like “hawk-eyed gaze”, “invisible horizon”, “obscure offshoots”, “dark folds of future”, “brazen self-love”, “vaults of Swiss banks”, “lambent limelight”, “ill-gotten ingots of gold”, “supposed custodians” and “sleek slogans” lend the poem an extraordinary appeal.
This 38 lined poem exhibits six stanziac divisions running into six, five, eight, six, five and eight lines respectively. The progression of thought is linear up to stanza 3 but thereafter there is a sudden stop, as the poetess turns contemplative and sees through the inevitable future of the corrupt politicians. She turns ironical and witty at the closure. The poetic devices of alliteration: "of scams and scandals, / like Saturn’s ring," (lines 9-10) and assonance: "with ill-gotten ingots of gold" (line 28) lend a melodious hearing effect. She indulges in the capitalisation of letters in between, with an objective to invite the much-needed attention of the readers. Apart from this, she has indianised the English language by quoting the slogan, “Garibi Hatao” yelled by the avaricious politicians.

In her third verse-collection, Iyer takes stock of her sweet, bitter and sour experiences during the journey of life. Towards the end of the earthly journey, every sensitive soul is assailed by constant doubts about the ultimate destiny. Human mind is torn between the two opposites - “total extinction or resurrection.” Majority of her poems in the third collection, entitled *On the Edge* are reflections of such a state of mind. The ‘Preface’ of the book reads:

> When twilight fade, the dusky ambience throws a pall of unreality over all that is left behind. All my past experience seems too remote to have been related to me. I feel like a cool watcher hardly able to believe that it was “I” who was involved in all that has happened to me.\(^{49}\)

After years of ceaseless mundane activity she stands on the edge, unsure, upset and unrelieved. Revealing the innermost recesses of her soul, she says, “Here now I stand on the edge, beyond pleasures, beyond tears, with the question “Who am I?” incessantly pecking on me.”\(^{41}\)

In this collection, she encompasses several themes related to Nature, war, human attitudes and relationships and man’s ultimate destiny. While reviewing her book, *On the Edge*, R.K.Singh avers:
The thirty-six poems in the volume provide insight into the poet's life and contemporary social behaviour, thinking and attitude that incite her reflections from 'growing up' to becoming old vis-à-vis the issues of survival, essentially as a women, and the self search to rise "higher than the mundane plane. 42

Her poem 'Wedding Reception' takes her readers to a wedding reception of a newly wed couple. She presents a cinematographic picture of the artificially designed place and the pretentious people who happen to attend that party. As a minute and keen observer of life, Iyer portrays not only the things which are visible to our eyes but also the working of the minds of people who grace the 'sacred' occasion. The poem takes an exuberant start with the description of the venue where the said party is hosted:

Entering a dragon's belly, a frilly
Long cavernous, sequined, passageway
you emerge into an open-to-sky freedom.
A virtual paradise of colours!
('Wedding Reception', On the Edge, 35-36) [The subsequent references from this book will be abbreviated as O E.]

She unleashes the mask of shallow and artificial atmosphere of the venue. The expression “virtual paradise” suggests the superfluous nature of the whole occasion. In the same stanza, quite mischievously, she tells her readers how people flaunt their multicolored, “glittering designer costumes” in the party. Carrying loads of make-up on their faces these people, especially women, wander in the party “sporting tailor-made smiles and artful accents”.

While continuing to register her resentment towards the pretentious, flirtatious and immoral ways of the high-society people, Iyer reveals the fact that people instead of relishing the colourful décor, “exotic ambience” and “skyey splendour” of the party, eye on the “rustling rainbows”. The expression “rustling rainbows” is suggestive of the kitty coquettes dressed in multicoloured, revealing outfits who grace these functions with a core objective of putting their wardrobe,
hair-styles, make-up and jewellery on display. Artificial mannerism, plastic smiles, intrigues, back-biting, character-assassination and shallow laughter seem to be the favourite pastime of these high-society people.

In the next stanza, she introduces the entry of the bride along with the bridegroom. In a lighter vain, she says, “Finally, all roving eyes rest / on the finery clad star pair”. The expression “roving eyes” amuses the readers as it suggests wandering and ever-searching eyes of the people present in the party. The line, “All legs wend their way / to greet the carefully made up couple.” present a fine instance of metonymy.

The sting of satire gets deeper with the expression, “carefully made up couple” because the poetess makes a direct comment on the calculative process of match-finding and matrimonial alliances in the contemporary times. Along with the complexion, height, weight, blood group, horoscope and mannerism of the girl, her siblings, financial status of her parents, their assets too, are taken into consideration. Another thing of the top-most priority is the job-profile and pay-package of the girl. Along with these parameters of consideration, still another point of prime concern is the capability of the girl to run the household affairs with a matchless perfection. She should not have any objection to manage her job along with her domestic responsibilities in her in-laws’ house.

Amidst this eventful and seemingly happy atmosphere, the twin ghost of anxiety and fear intrudes the stage: “Babbling expectations and gurgling fears / about the uncharted course for future life / threaten to break the banks of patience.” Fatigue and restlessness reflects from the polished faces. While observing the whole scene of the ‘wedding reception’ from a distance, Iyer says, “I stand away taking in the scene / a mute observer, ruminating over / the lack of proportion in all human activity.”
Taking stock of the whole situation in the concluding stanza, she meditates:

“We spend hours designing garments / for what in itself is a mere garment / of the soul...” Today people are highly concerned about their physical appearance, clothes, hairstyles and accessories but hardly do they pay any attention to the inner beauty. Iyer lampoons the craze of the modern generation for “cleansing creams” and “conditioners” and raises a million-dollar question, “Do we even care to sweep the dust off / the bedimmed soul?”

She juxtaposes the environmental pollution with the inner pollution. People show great awareness towards personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness, in and around their homes but unfortunately, they neglect the cleanliness of the soul and promote “free entry to deadly enemies”. She is pained to see that people of today’s world are so “hypnotized” by the “razzle-dazzle” of the “worldly affairs” that hardly do they care about the cleansing of the soul.

Her heart aches to see the ever-increasing madness for artificiality, show-off, pretence, shallowness, hollowness and class-consciousness. Perturbed by the sick ways of the contemporary world, she seeks an immediate reply in the penultimate line of her poem, “When shall we correct our perspective?”

Iyer quite often, combines ennobling idealism with the depressing reality. A streak of pessimism is reflected through the concluding line of the poem: “Shall we ever get our priorities right?” In a way, she externalises her own doubts regarding the complete metamorphosis of the society whose faith rests on bohemianism.

Today people lay emphasis on the external appearance and neglect the beauty of soul. Unfortunately, they are unaware of the fact that the one who possesses the inner beauty does not have to apply cleansing creams and lotions. The beauty of the soul itself, lends an extra-ordinary glow and irresistible charm to the
one who keeps the evil deeds at bay.

The fifty one lines of the poem are spread in four asymmetrical stanziac divisions in terms of line-length. Her composition showcases powerful emotions that gush out overflowing like an energetic jet. Parallel to Kamala Das, Iyer also employs a striking syntactic device of enjambment in this poem. It is a peculiar poetic feature in which the new sentence starts from within a line itself, at a juncture where the preceding sentence meets its full-stop. Apart from metonymy, the below-quoted excerpt from the poem presents a fine instance of enjambment:

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Finally, all roving eyes rest
on the finery clad star pair
on the dias. All legs wend their way
to greet the carefully made up couple.

('Wedding Reception', OE, 35-36)
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The diction is dense and innovative. The poem abounds with fresh adjectival formations such as "open-to-sky freedom", "tailor-made smiles", "artful accents", "Babbling expectations", "gurgling fears" etc. It also puts on display the poetic device of personification:

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Tinkle of voices and shreds of laughter
cut across the wintry air suffused with
soft music, thank God, not rent
with blaring orchestra or raucous pop.

('Wedding Reception', OE, 35-36)
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Alliteration: "Glued to the glittering scene they wallow" (line 16), "flitting from the rustling rainbows" (line 18); assonance: "twinkle among the silent sentinel trees. / No eyes turn to the skyey splendor above." (lines 14-15) and onomatopoeia: "Tinkle of voice and shreds of laughter" (line 20), "Babbling expectations and gurgling fears" (line 32) create the music of words in the poem.

The title enhances the over-all impact as in the beginning, the poem appears to carry joyfulness of a wedding party but subsequently, it grows into a nerve-shattering experience when the poetess invites readers for soul-searching and self-introspection. The first-person narrative technique makes the
autobiographical tone glaringly visible.

Iyer has dedicated herself to the conventions of the lyric as understood in the twentieth century. Patricia Prime in a review of her book, *Twilight Rhymes* in *Indian Book Chronicle*, avers:

There is a clearly represented "I" speaking in these poems, and it tends to be lyrically thinking, feeling, or experiencing. Many of the poems are also highly narrative and in a number of them the "I" speaking is clearly the poet.43

‘On Being Married’ is a dismal but realistic account of an Indian bride who tastes the bitter and sore fruit of marriage. Iyer uses pathos to arouse readers’ anger and indignation against the corrosive self-denial and the incisive barbs which a newly wed Indian bride has to suffer. Lending her poem a spontaneous start, in a lighter tone she discloses:

The first casualty with the crossing of threshold
Of the husband’s house is spontaneity.
She begins to dangle between two opposites:
to speak or not, to do or not.
(‘On Being Married’, *O E*, 52)

Almost every Indian bride, irrespective of her class, creed, sect or community, meets with the above-said fate. The moment she enters into her in-laws household, she loses her spontaneity of expression and finds herself in a fix. Inhibition and indecisiveness of her mind are externalized by the poetess by using an objective correlative of “ivy,” a creeper: “Inhibitions, ivy like, coil around the mind / And climb up to the tongue.” The bride experiences strangulation and loss of freedom in her new house. Soon after her marriage, smile vanishes and she looses her bubbly nature and cheerful charm of her face: “Freedom stoppered / steps falter as if feet are fastened with fetters.”

In the third stanza, Iyer employs the objective correlative of “dams” to externalize the inner turmoil of an Indian wife who always tries to “build dams,
erect fortifications” to prevent her true emotions and impulses to leak in the shape of “words and gestures”. She is constantly conditioned not to “transgress modesty” and should never ever react to the indiscretion or indifference shown by her in-laws. She must have the patience to turn a deaf ear to “sugary sarcasms / against herself, her parents or siblings.”

This is the true and unpleasant picture of a typical Indian household where the daughter-in-law irrespective of her merits, educational status and accomplishments has to bear with the heartless behaviour of her in-laws. She has to digest all the sarcasms without a wrinkle on her forehead. Surprisingly, all this has to be born by her because of the sole reason that she happens to be a woman.

As the poem advances, the bride grows into a wife and subsequently, a mother. Owing to the denial of rights of expression and decision-making, she experiences shattering of her whole personality. She gets into the habit of “self-imposed prohibitions”, an “unnatural self-spying”. She develops an inbuilt terror towards any possibility of violation of “convention-induced restraints” and finally succumbs to a “silent resignation.” Her traumatized state is aptly evoked in the concluding stanza:

Crippled dreams hide behind hesitations,
Tired hopes find rest in nostalgia.
Habitual mind set gets crystallized
And bars the door forever
to freedom and happiness.

(‘On Being Married’, OE, 52)

These lines project the ordeal of those women who loose their own identity to the extent that they succumb to an abject surrender to the circumstances around them. Being a woman herself, Iyer has done full justice to the subject of suppression of women. The diction of the poem perfectly narrates the sad tale of the bride who is denied even the fundamental rights of self-expression, liberty and freedom.
This 33 lined poem exhibits six stanziac divisions running into six, five, six, five, six and five lines respectively. The text of the poem displays the use of long as well as short sentences. The line-length varies between four to eight words. Apart from this, Iyer once again employs the syntactic device of enjambment. The progression of thought is linear upto stanza 4, but thereafter Iyer turns thoughtful and looks into the propective future of the bride and turns pessimistic at the closure. The poetic devices of alliteration and assonance lend rhythm to the poem: “strangulated. Freedom stoppered, / steps falter as if feet are fastened / with fetters. Laughter languishes” (lines 8, 9, 10).

The poem is laced with fresh adjectival formations such as “Tension-spoked wheel”, “Crippled dreams”, “tired hopes” “sugary sarcasms” “unnatural self-spying” etc. The following lines carry transferred epithets and instances of pathetic fallacy:

The self stands sentinel
constantly pulling the reins
of vivacity raring to gallop,
builds dams, erects fortifications
to prevent emotions and impulses
breaking through in words and gestures. ('On Being Married', O E, 52)

Lines 5-6 of the poem not only exhibit the poetic device of personification but also present a fresh simile: “Inhibitions, ivy like, coil around the mind / and climb up to the tongue.” Also, the repetition of vowel /i/ in these lines lends a rich hearing effect to the poem.

While probing into the reasons behind the inhuman and shabby treatment met by brides in the Indian society, one concludes that it is not only men who work against the brides but surprisingly, women in the form of moms-in-law play a villainous role which results in their turmoil. Lack of confidence, alienation in her own home, denial of love and respect from the family members, denial of
monetary funds, fear of desertion, dejection and divorce are some of the endless reasons which yield to the nerve-shattering tumult of women.

To sum up the whole matter; if women wish to lead respectful lives not only will they have to get rid of their self-imposed prohibitions but also will have to fight for their rights. In recent times, man cannot afford to ignore a modern woman who is leading ahead with sure steps to make success in her life. Moreover, women will have to set themselves free from the image built by men for their own convenience. Today, they are rubbing shoulders with men in every walk of life. They have proved that they can not only survive in a men's world but also possess the ability to give them a stiff competition.

While emphasizing 'Indian reality' in Indian poetry in English, Bijay Kant Dubey avers, "It is of India, by the Indians; about Indian scenes, sites, places, languages, they speak and many other aspects." Sudha Iyer compliments Dubey's concern about 'Indian reality'. Now, it would be pertinent to quote a few comments by the renowned critics on Iyer's poetic sensibility. Observes R.K. Singh:

As a sensitive female voice with considerable poetic worth, Sudha Iyer, an important poet from Nagpur has a strong social and personal awareness and a feminine perspective for enduring destiny "which has ridden rough shod."

Further, he adds:

Iyer makes technical experiments with voice and viewpoint and tries to work out on her own the norms of life and poetry...She sounds serious and subtle not only in choice of words but also in form and rhythm. She makes her poems graceful and very reasonable.

Patricia Prime, a noted critic, opines that Iyer's "poems encompass the pleasure of relationships and events; they also uncover deeper psychological layers and try to explore the meaning of life. Iyer feels free to make statements
about people, and history."^47

By the detailed study of the selected poems by Sudha Iyer undertaken in this chapter, it has become obvious that she has utilised Muse as a vehicle of social and political criticism. With her poetic art and exquisite feminine sensibility, she has brought to the fore, several glaring issues and subjects of the contemporary society which demand our immediate attention.

IMTIAZ DHARKER

Women write from a position of strength. Knowing you have traditionally been a victim doesn’t make you a victim if you can see and assess what has happened to you.


Imtiaz Dharker has written four self-illuminated books of poetry: Purdah (OUP, 1989), Postcards from God (Penguin, 1994; Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 1997), I Speak for the Devil (Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2001; Penguin, 2003) and The Terrorist at My Table (Bloodaxe 2006; Penguin, 2007). All her verse-collections are accompanied with her own line drawings.

As a conscious artist, Dharker believes in the chiselling of artistic expressions. While revealing her way of writing a poem, she says, “It often starts with one line. I do revise, but trim rather than add.”^48 She rates poetry higher than the film-art. She asserts:

The beauty of the poem or a drawing as opposed to a film is that I have total control. I don’t think about who’s going to read it or see it. I have the sense of a private moment of control. It’s a world which belongs to me. It’s not for anyone else. This is different from film which is audience-related. The moment the poem is published or the drawing exhibited it goes into a public area, and out of my hands.^49

Like O.P.Bhatnagar, Dharker too, feels that politics is an apt metaphor for
the contemporary life and living. While answering to the question posed by Eunice de Souza, "Do you feel that Third World poets should necessarily be concerned about politics?" she speaks her mind:

All of life is political. Politics extends into everything. Every act is political. We in the Third World are faced with this on a day-to-day basis, which is one of the reasons why I'd rather write here than anywhere else.50

Her cultural experience spans three countries and she acknowledges her rapid shifting from one place to the other. However, she does not call her frequent shifting and displacement as an exile. On the contrary, she celebrates her global experience and perceives it as an exhilarating sense of life at the interstices.

Quite unhesitatingly, she embraces unsettlement as a settlement. Dharker reveals that she never ever has felt the need of using Indian mythology for artistic expressions to establish her South Asian status and hardly has she thought to include glossaries to demystify her diction for an overseas readership. She states, "I don’t see why I need to explain myself. Readers who are interested shouldn’t have a problem approaching the work on my terms."51

With the same conviction, she assures her faith in penning poetry rather than moving to its fashionable cousin, the novel: "The writing of poetry and the public aspect of it are two completely separate areas, and that’s the great luxury of being a poet."52 The purity of poetic form attracts her and she unlocks her heart, "I feel the same excitement about the unadulterated line in drawing. It’s sure that poetry doesn’t receive the same attention as the novel, or drawing the same as painting, but there’s no point getting about it. I’d rather spend that energy writing or drawing."53

She finds poetry a suitable medium to display her anger and resentment towards the sad state of affairs in India. She declares, "It’s been about cutting
away unfruitful frustration. Of course, the anger never quite disappears, particularly when you see what's happening in this country, the way people are being pushed around by religion and politics.\textsuperscript{54}

She strongly perceives poetry as a rich and demanding form of artistic expression and brushes aside the opinion of decline in the number of buyers of poetry in today’s times, “I don’t think the audience has dumbed down. It’s just that there’s so much communication nowadays that poetry, which in any case is a demanding form—often feared for its abstruseness and non-linearity—requires more effort to read now than it did 30 years ago.”\textsuperscript{55}

Renate Papke in his book namely \textit{Poems at the Edge of Difference: Mothering in New English Poetry by Women} (Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2008) identifies two groups of poems in her poetry. The first group focuses on the impact of Muslim culture on women’s lives, their seclusion from public life, use of shame with a well-defined objective of suppressing female sexuality and the resultant discrepancy between their feelings, desires and actions, particularly in the situation of diaspora. The latter one reflects her concern for poor and dispossessed mothers and children in an Indian society.


Her poem ‘Purdah I’, understands purdah in its wider sense. To Dharker, it is not just the concealing garment rather it exercises a complete control over the life of a woman. She becomes a puppet in the hands of social power mongers and with this veil, she herself veils her freedom, her identity and her own self. The
poetess perceives purdah as a woman’s prison-house. Using a third person’s narrative, she opens her poem in an ironic mode:

One day they said
she was old enough to learn some shame.
she found it came quite naturally.\(^56\)

She vehemently protests the practice of wearing burqua by women in Islamic culture. She strongly believes that Islam uses shame not only to repress women’s sexuality but also to install it as a barrier against their spiritual, intellectual and emotional independence. Burqua leads women to falseness, ambiguity, distrust and isolation. While criticizing the practice of wearing purdah, Dharker contrasts it to shoveling mud on the coffin of a dead person:

Purdah is a kind of safety,
The body finds a place to hide.
The cloth fans out against the skin
much like the earth that falls
on coffins after they put the dead men in.\(^57\)

There is a wide range of literature available in the market which throws light on various attitudes and experiences of wearing purdah by Muslim women. In the last years of her life, Kamala Das, the forerunner of modern Indian poetry in English embraced Islam and endorsed burqua by herself wearing the said garment.

It would be pertinent to register the fact that contrary to Das, Dharker does not regard purdah as a fashion accessory. Rather she views it as a cage which imprisons woman’s personality. In the below-quoted lines, she tears apart the hypocrisy, pretense and façade from the face of patriarchy which trains women to view themselves as impure, unclean and sinful:

She half-remembers things
from someone else’s life,
perhaps from yours, or mine –
carefully carrying what we do not own:
between the thighs, a sense of sin.\(^58\)
Muslim families start cultivating their girls of five to nine years of age to wear purdah and at the age of twelve to fifteen years, they are confined to ‘Jenan Khana’ and are forced into a rigorous seclusion from men-folk. This seclusion and confinement, thrust upon them by the patriarchy results in building of a cocoon around them. Dharker comprehends it as an “interior colonization” reducing a woman merely to a walking corpse. She is decimated to a “clod of earth”, a dying tree desperately struggling to strike a balance and survive.

The Purdah is a terrible weapon used against women to wound their dignity and self-esteem. It is so powerful that it can lock or free their destiny: “Passing constantly out of her own hands / into the corner of someone else’s eyes ... / While doors keep opening / inward and again / inward.” It opens wide the door which leads to prisons for the victims whose only crime is that they happen to be women.

It exercises pressure and dictatorial control over many aspects of their lives and consequently leads them towards an alienation from their own selves. Superficially, the Purdah is an outer cover symbolizing seclusion but it is thrust upon women as a pre-requisite to cultivate modesty and shame in them.

She concludes with a profound revelation that emancipation of women can become a reality only if they dare to break the barricades set by the conventional codes of patriarchy. Dharker as a spokesperson of the whole clan of suffering women exposes the corrupt and inhuman male domininance of our society. She lashes out the social injustice, inequality, denial of love and care and sexual entrapment that beset women and throttle their dignity and self-respect. Her whole poetry is vociferous of the woman’s wounded psyche.

The poem is formally structured. Each stanza perceives burqua as a metaphor to express the woman’s experience which is followed by ironic,
humorous, sad, angry and somber comments by the poetess. In the poem, Dharker builds up tension by juxtaposing her observations and drawing comparisons and hence, spells her protest against patriarchy.

It has eight unequal stanziac divisions having three, five, five, five, six, eight and five lines respectively. Dharker experiments with the line-length, syllable-count, metre and diction. The text of the poem displays the use of long as well as short sentences. The line-length varies between three to nine words. Her sentences are split into lines containing subordinate or coordinate clauses.

The syntax is punctured by the use of various punctuation marks. A fresh and original simile is embedded in the texture of the poem: “The cloth fans out against the skin / much like the earth that falls / on coffins after they put the dead men in.” (lines 6,7,8). The regular rhyme has been dispensed with however at places, the poem exhibits alliteration and assonance.

Her *Purdah* mirrors life of an eternal woman, specifically Muslim women. Many people feel that they are reading their lives in the poems. While sharing her personal experiences with Eunice de Souza in *Talking Poems* (1999), she tells about the responses to her poetry:

> I find a lot of women coming up to me to talk about the poems and drawings in terms of their lives. One of the most moving things after *Purdah* was published was that a teacher wrote from Hull, and her students who are Muslim immigrants also wrote to me. The teacher encouraged the students to write about their experiences. It was wrenching to read their work.61

Annamma Joseph reads Imtiaz Dharker's *Purdah* "as a moving from a treatment of the socio-religious symbol of purdah as bondage/incarnation to a symbol of resistance".62 She argues that she "conflates the individual woman's state of bondage with a certain universal predicament."63
The next poem taken up for critical appraisal is ‘Namesake’ from her second collection captioned *Postcards from God*. In an informal and colloquial style, Dharker opens her poem:

Adam, your namesake lives
in Dharvi, ten years old. He
has never faced the angels, survives
with pigs that root
outside the door.  

Using an allusion to ‘Adam’, she ironically juxtaposes today’s Adam with the mythological Adam. She is pained to see that today’s Adam has “never faced the angels” and is leading a miserable life in acute hunger and squalour. He gets up at four and follows his mother to the hotel:

where he helps her cut
the meat and vegetables, washes
it all well, watches
the cooking pots over the stove
and waits, his eyelids drooping,
while behind the wall she sells herself
as often as she can before
they have to hurry home.  

These lines put on display how the hunger of belly forces his mother into the evil trade of flesh. The washing and cutting of vegetables and meat is a deception. The lady actually sells herself to acquire a square meal for herself and her kids. The expression “as often as she can” aptly communicates her wretched condition. It is not for the sake of lust she enters into this unabashed profession rather it is her family circumstances that lead her into it.

Another fact which comes to the fore is that though the son knows what his mother does there but he has to hide this reality from the society. That is why they take up the job of washing and cutting in that hotel. The next stanza not only presents a moving tale of the deprived childhood of Adam but also registers the curse of child-labour. Though we may boast of the economic progress of our country but the evil of child labour still prevails in the contemporary times. The
lines quoted below bring the reader face-to-face with his deprived childhood. He has never enjoyed his childhood like the other children of his age:

He very rarely runs
shrieking with other rain-
splashed children
down the sky-paved lane.
He never runs to look at you.
He has no memory
of the Garden, paradise water
or the Tree.66

Dharker once again juxtaposes the fate of the protagonist with that of the mythological Adam. By referring to the “sky-paved lane”, “Garden” and “Tree” she brings their childhood lives in sharp contrast with each other. Also, by capitalising the first letters of the words “Garden” and “Tree” perhaps, Dharker reminds us of the Garden of Eden and the forbidden Apple Tree.

She brings the poem to a close: “Reflected in sheets of water / at his back /
stand the avenging angels / he will never see.” These lines perhaps refer to the guilt complex the boy is carrying within him. He knows what his mother does but he can neither ask his mother nor can he deny the fact.

Apart from pointing at the evil of prostitution, the poem also addresses to the curse of child-labour. Dharker shows marked deviation in structuring her stanzas. It has five stanziac divisions of unequal lengths. The opening stanza runs into fifteen lines which is followed by smaller stanzas. The rest of the stanzas contain four lines each except the penultimate stanza which exhibits five lines.

Like most of the women poets, Dharker is also fond of using the syntactic device of enjambment. The first, third, ninth and tenth lines rhyme with each other: “...lives (line 1) / ...survives (line 3) / ... washes (line 9) / ...watches (line 10).” At some places, the use of alliteration becomes evident: “where he helps her cut / the meat and vegetables, washes / it all well, watches” (lines 8, 9, 10) and “they have to hurry home” (lines 15).
She declares the dedication of her third verse-collection, *I Speak for the Devil*: “For all the ones / who stood up / and spoke out. / For the ones who are still struggling / to find their feet / and their voices. For the ones / who have nothing left / to be afraid of. / For all the others / who haven’t yet begun.” With these words she spells her tone and announces the purpose and conception of her book. She salutes those who dare to speak, aspire to change the tide and strive to bring a positive change in our lives. She conceives her poems as a series of poems under various segments along with her pen-drawings. She differentiates each segment by clubbing together the poems which are more or less on the same subject.

The poem ‘Crab-apples’ puts on display, the sense of alienation and displacement experienced by the immigrants. Humorously, Dharker tells how her mother tried to overcome the sense of displacement and alienation in the foreign land. The poem is best read as a whole.

My mother picked crab-apples
off the Glasgow apple trees
and pounded them with chillis
to change
her homesickness
into green chutney.

(‘Crab-apples’, *I Speak for the Devil*, 17) [The subsequent references from this book will be abbreviated as *ISD*.]

This short poem not only exhibits a sense of alienation but also acknowledges adaptation of people towards the new culture along with the previous one. It presents how people in alienated lands carve for their culture, flavour and food-habits. The act of the lady to pound “the Glasgow apple trees” with “chillis” to get a flavour of “green chutney” is heart-touching. The “green chutney” connotes to the Indian/Pakistani cuisine where meals are termed as incomplete without “green chutney”. This single sentenced is adorned with brevity and candidness. The poetic device of alliteration lends it a musical note.
In ‘The Location’ Dharker, whole-heartedly owns the fact that the devil rests within us only. She reveals her finding in a lighter vein:

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The devil is real.
Power exists.
You can smell it feel it touch it
between the items on
your shopping-lists.

('The Location', ISD, 66)
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Parallel to the anti-hero concept, she perhaps wants to convey that in the modern life and living, one cannot compartmentalise the types of characters around. We are human beings with varied emotions, feelings, sentiments, beliefs, opinions, responses, complexes and mood-swings. Consequently, negative thoughts at times, may overpower the positive ones.

She further adds, “I realised quite soon / the devil wasn’t in the footsteps / echoing behind, / a sound that, when I looked back, / slid away, nobody attached.” With these lines, it becomes evident that the devil is not outside rather it rests within us. Quite daringly, she makes an honest confession: “The devil was in me, / walking in my feet, / living in my clothes, / owning one half / of my heartbeat.”

Unhesitatingly, she admits the fact of devil being residing in her. This confession, in a way makes her a mouthpiece of the whole human species. The poem exhibits five stanziac divisions with unequal lines. The text is strewn with long and short sentences. The opening sentences comprise of four and two words respectively but the rest of the sentences in the poem run into several lines or even stanzas. Syntax is broken and the diction is thin. By using poetic device of repetition, Dharker achieves a hearing effect: “The devil...” (lines 1, 7, 11, 16).

‘The Devil to the Poet’ is a short poem which lays bare the harsh truth of life. Devil addresses the poet in the poem:

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Don’t pretend that you’re
above all this.
When it comes to survival,
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all your pretty words
and delicate observations
boil right down
to politics.

(‘The Devil to the Poet’, *I S D*, 75)

Dharker completely adheres to the universal fact that survival is the cardinal principle of life and the species of poets too, is not above this law. The poem is marked by its straightforward and colloquial style. It seems that her philosophy of life echoes with that of O.P.Bhatnagar’s who believes that the politics is the metaphor of life.

The adjectives - “pretty” and “delicate” not only lend a humorous touch but also enhance the beauty and grace of the poem. The expression, “boil right down / to politics” imparts a pictorial view to the closing of the poem. While complimenting Darwin’s theory of sustenance, she reveals that when it comes to sustenance, all the speculations, observations, interpretations take a back seat and the survival becomes the top-most priority. The hallmark of the poem is that she employs the Devil to utter the harsh truth to the poet.

As it becomes evident from the title of the book, *I Speak for the Devil* that the strangeness, angst and vacuity of the contemporary life has shaken the faith of the poetess in God and hence, she opts for speaking for the Devil. Undoubtedly, modern poetry is an attempt towards soul-searching and self-speculation towards finding new ways to sustain in the modern world. Kanwar Dinesh Singh finds that as “compared to the male voices, the female voices are more sardonic and sarcastic about the presence of God.”

Her fourth collection of poems appears with a title, *The Terrorist at My Table* (2006). It grows layer by layer, through the sequences, captioned as - ‘The Terrorist at my Table’, ‘The Habit of Departure’ and ‘Worldwide Rickshaw Ride’.
Each segment poses crucial questions about human life and living. The book puts under scrutiny, human relationships and their effects on our lives.

Majority of the poems published in this collection have been broadcast on BBC Radio. The first poem considered for a critical appraisal in the present study, is ‘Mine. Yours.’ Dharker, right at the outset, presents a fine example of wit:

Whose news do you receive here?
The same image comes
with different words.

('Mine.Yours. ’The Terrorist at My Table, 16)[The subsequent references from this text will be abbreviated as TMT.]

Her multi-cultural status peeps out in these lines. She perhaps, points at the fact that human life and happenings are same everywhere. It is only the language, which changes with the change of place. However, life is same everywhere. In the next stanza she brings to the surface, the quarrels and clashes on the pretext of a piece of land between neighbours of houses, states or even nations:

I pick up a piece of mud,
hold it in my fist,
and call it mine.
You put your foot here,
pick up the same piece
of mud and call it yours.

('Mine. Yours.’ , TMT, 16)

By putting “fist” in contrast to “foot”, Dharker perhaps points at different perceptions, opinions and beliefs of the people who pick up quarrels, clashes, collisions and even battles to acquire a piece of land. In the same poem, she asks inquisitively, “Do you have cable here? / Which channels do you get? / Is it our news or ours?” This triplet of questions has got its reply in the fact that human life, its pains, pleasures, sorrows, sufferings, experiences, incidents, miseries, hardships, afflictions, fears and joys are same everywhere. This pronouncement endorses the findings registered in the ‘Introduction’ of the present study. The last
question is highly telling because looking at the stuff of the news, one could not make out, as where a particular incident has taken place.

The poetess concludes the poem with a note of self-speculation and regret: “Perhaps one of them will tell us, / using the same words / and the same names, / who we killed today.” The expression, “the same words” and “the same names” again, lays stress on the realisation that we live in a global village and mode of life is same everywhere.

The transformation that results from self-analysis, surfaces at the end of the poem. The use of pronoun “we” instead of “mine” and “yours” speaks volumes about the reformation in thinking, attitude and behaviour. The poem not only establishes the fact that human life and living is same everywhere but also imparts a message of universal brotherhood and peace.

There is no structural formality observed in the poem but the redeeming feature of the poem is its theme which reflects the consistent nature of life. Dharker’s verse, specifically in this poem becomes so free that it appears like a statement. The pattern is “You” and “I” talk. The poem rests on six stanzas of unequal lengths. The diction is thin, plain and colloquial. The repetitive use of interrogative sentences lends a pattern and organic unity to the poem.

The poem ‘Inspiration’ is based on the theme of conception of poetry. Employing an informal and conversational style, she discloses her poet friend’s point-of-view:

The poet tells me he needs to hide
in the hills in solitude to write.
He says nothing comes to him
through sounds of traffic,
no words can penetrate
the turbulence of a city night.

(‘Inspiration’, TMT, 106)
The poet addressed in these lines could not pen poetry in the hustle and bustle of city life and hence he prefers to go to hills for creative writing. In the next stanza, Dharker juxtaposes her own belief regarding the conception of poetry with that of her friend:

Give me railway stations.
Voices on loudspeakers,
people with their surfaces pulled away
by travelling. Movement gives me words,
carried in the carriages of trains.
(‘Inspiration’, TMT, 106)

These lines depict that the poetess firmly believes in the fact that true poetry thrives on life and living which gets reflected through the hustle and bustle of railway stations, voices of loudspeakers announcing the arrival and the departure of trains and above all, through the pulled faces of the people who undergo long journeys.

The expression, “Movement gives me words” connotes to all the activities, actions and engagements of life which keep life rolling and moving. By referring to “travelling” and “carriages of trains” she not only depicts the activity on railway-stations but also points at the “travelling” in the carriage of life. She further says: “Give me a tea-stall on a busy street, / Halves of conversations, / Stories walking by.”

Dharker wants her poems to be humming and buzzing with life. To achieve the desired effect, she pens down what she sees, witnesses and experiences without even a single deletion or manipulation. She puts her poem to a close with a decisive reflection: “I will not go with my friend / the poet to the mountains. / Stillness lives inside the poem, / not out.”

She believes in throbbing of life and that is why she weaves her poems with the yarn of actual and real life happenings. She finds it bizarre to go to mountains to pen poetry. This eighteen lined poem contains four stanziac divisions
having six, five, three and four lines respectively. The poetic devices of
alliteration: “The poet tells me he needs to hide / in the hills in solitude to write”
(lines 1, 2), “…Movement gives me words, / carried in the carriages of trains.”
(lines 10, 11) and repetition: “Give me…” (line 7 and line 8.) lend rhythm to the
poem.

Considering Dharker’s poetry in totality, one can notice that her verse has
traversed an interesting path. From the trauma of a cultural exile and alienation in
her earlier works, namely Purdah (1989) and Postcards from God (1994), she has
moved towards a celebration of unsettlement as settlement in I Speak for the Devil
(2001) and The Terrorist at My Table (2006).

Taking up a few comments on Dharker’s poetry by critics and fellow-writers:

M.K.Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan opine, “Dharker writes in a spare,
controlled style with minimum use of imagery-a feature rather surprising in a poet
who is also a noted painter, and has held exhibitions in India and abroad.”

Madhurita Choudhury observes that she “surpasses the ego-centric issues
of rootedness, belongingness and marginalization and essentializes all women
through pain and suffering. In a way, she states that, not only, the Third World
Women, but women of all creeds, countries and colours are united by repression
and distress.”

G.Baskaran and B.Kathiressan comment, “Dharker lashes out at the social
injustice, racial discrimination and sexual entrapment that beset women and
destroy their self. Her writings in a major way seek to dismantle the male
hegemony and valorize the other.”

Bruce King describes Dharker’s poetry as “consciously feminist,
consciously political, consciously that of a multiple outsider, someone who knows
her own mind rather than someone full of doubt and liberal ironies.”
Alan Ross comments, "Strong, concerned, economical poetry, in which political activity, homesickness, urban violence, religious anomalies, are raised in an unobtrusive domestic setting, all the more effectively for their coolness of treatment."

A perusal of her poetry offers a revealing insight into the ongoing transition of the female psyche. Her confident and defiant style jolts the readers out of their complacency, restructures their sensitivity and sensibility and seeks to create a practically democratic and equal world where a woman could enjoy freedom, justice and equality.

A detailed critical probe into the poetry of the three select female poets namely Mamta Kalia, Sudha Iyer and Imtiaz Dharker, undertaken in this chapter, clearly reveals their concern for their locale, personal experiences, social and political upheavals of the society.

With a newfound confidence, coupled with a pointed conviction and directness of expression, all the three select women poets communicate various social, political, cultural issues of national and international ramifications with a powerful female sensibility. They have not only broadened the thematic concerns of IPE but have also shown how words and images - simple, suggestive and highly evocative - can recite the music of their anguish and agony, their griefs and beliefs, their observations and reflections with no sign of pretence.

This real, serious and genuine response to their observed and lived experiences is very much a part of our daily life and invariably, an essential ingredient of their poetic art. Not only have they excelled in technical competence but also in the depiction of the contemporary social and political reality with objectivity and rationality.
What has made the contemporary English verse by Indian women a distinct phenomenon is the fact that they are not lagging behind their male counterparts in creativity and articulation of their inner thoughts. The literature of the west namely, the school of Freud, Jung, Kafka, Marx, Simon de Beauvoir and Kierkegard has inevitably influenced them and their writings. These women poets daringly present the feminine perspective of various contemporary issues with an Indian sensibility. They express their point of view, feelings, thoughts, emotions and findings without any inhibition and fear.

While considering the whole range of women's poetry in Indian English, especially in the post-modern period, one may notice that they have invented a new discourse which has demolished the age-old phallogocentric language practised in the said genre. Their poetry has resulted in creating awareness in the whole species of women regarding their status at individual as well as at public level in the society. Not only these women poets have enriched the Indian English literature by using poetry as a medium to expose the mythical, historical and social conflicts prevalent in our society but also have expanded its thematic range and stylistic aspects by coining new diction, images, metaphors and myths from their innate physiological, emotional and social experiences as women.
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