Modern India is witnessing the emergence of a new woman with a distinct sense of identity in the man-oriented society, owing to the processes of urbanization and westernization. This has led to a sudden increase in the number of women in the literary field including Indian poetry in English. The poetry by modern Indian English women poets is thus the first chaotic blossom from a virgin land of feminine poetic consciousness bursting into creativity. Monika Varma is also one of the most celebrated poets of modern times. She belongs rather to the older generation of Indian poetesses than to the new and she is most voluminous of all Indian women poets writing today.

Monika is a poetess with a difference. Grace, balance, melody, aesthetic satisfaction and artistic beauty is the hallmark of her poetry. Her poetry covers all aspects of human life. There is what is called a harmonious blending of subjectivity and objectivity in her poetry. To quote her own words:

“My interests are so wide, so varied, that my knowledge deep or shallow, covers an enormous arc. From sophisticated city life to a deep rural area, from the borders of Tibet to the shores of the coastal seas-my poetry covers all this because it is part of my personal living experience. From bird life to western classical music, from paddy growing to social
philosophy ...words taken from the Upanishads and Bhagavata to an Easter poem to Jesus are all in my poetry.”

Again to quote her own words from her reply to one of Syed Ameenuddin questions, as how she first began to write poetry, she says:

“I began as a freelance journalist and a short story writer and moved into writing poetry in less than two years. Why I began to write poetry is a mystery to me. Let us say it just happened. The first poem was written on a monsoon evening, as I sat on a balcony where a drift of yellow flowers was being blown in from a huge blossom covered tree. The words formed a pattern, I wrote them down, they looked a kind of poem to me and I sent it to the Editor of Illustrated Weekly and it was published. That’s how it all began.”

Regarding the influences on her, she writes: “All writers and thinkers, are made up of so many influences. Even human life is built up with the impact of actions and thoughts; thoughts pouring in and thoughts rising, this is what structures the whole personality.” Further she writes that the creative writer is fortunate enough to be able to express this experience, occasionally adequately. But just as life’s experiences do not cease, till the cessation of living, so the thought process continues to develop in more and more expression.

Her poetry is the outcome of her responses to the three specific areas of experience related with nature, personal life and social consciousness. Many of her poems reveal her concern with subalterns.
She celebrates the dignity of ‘a man in the slums’. Any indulgence in pity on him in practical or in form of articles, treatises, census reports and gazetteers is improper and insulting as he is not mere statistics or figures, but is very much alive in his own way. In her poem ‘Man’, she describes graphically the life of the man in the slums. She reveals her social philosophy at her best in this beautiful poem. Her photographic social observation and dedicated human concern come to the force in quite a superb way in this poem. Her realistic portrayal of the slum dwellers and their inhuman and miserable life touches our hearts. These slum dwellers live in a ‘smelly rag’ and ‘in tin shack’, beats his wife and his children squall and scream. At times they eat well, at other times just the left-overs and the stale, unhygienic food but he is very much alive and is an individual. The poet goes rhetorical:

The man in the slums...

........................

He is alive.

He lives in a smoothy rag and tin shack,
he beats his wife.

His children squall, scream, run, fall,

sniffle and snuffle.

Some days they eat well

others and so good, left – overs

and perhaps stale unhygienic food

but he is alive ... he is a man

an individual, perhaps a cipher
but a cipher without whom there would be no meaning
no country, no love, no home
no me, no you.4

Her understatements and mild ironic comments on our so-called high society and its hypo-critic organs like press and other media are quite meaningful and suggestive.

A close analysis of Monika Varma’s poems, reveal her basic social concern, and her fine depiction of social realism, as a social poet. She represents the Indian life better than any other poet. Her depiction of rural atmosphere and beautiful natural landscape of our great country is remarkable. Her imagery, idiom and tone are typically Indian. Further, she is a poet of social reality. In most of her poems she depicts the pathetic condition of man, the down-trodden, and the humiliation he suffers in the cruel hands of our so-called high society, in a very moving way. In her poem ‘Give Me Space’, she talks about the meaningless life we live. Just existence is not life:

Give me space...space not just to exist
But live, think, crumble all the icy pinnacles
And melt the petrified forests of static thoughts
Welded into words...no knowledge, unwise.5

Life means we must live, without care, spirituality free to smile and laugh:

Give me space...space for laughter
Gargantuan, un-mocking, full of smiles.
Give me space...why live if laughter dies.
Oh give me space for one little day before I die.\textsuperscript{6}

This eldest and the most voluminous Indian woman poet, in each of her seven volumes confirms her all-pervading sympathy for the objects, scenes and activities of nature. The metaphysical approach to life as a whole conditions her attitude to it. The philosophic poet accepts the oriental doctrine of wise passivity, and believes like Tagore, in joy as the basic principle of life. She explicates it sufficiently in:

\begin{quote}
And my being moves away from all these questings,
These coiled-care whys: why should I grieve…
There is laughter in a silver thread breeze.\textsuperscript{7}
\end{quote}

The poet defines her faith in the joy of life through the medium of ‘gold’, when she bursts, out ecstatically:

\begin{quote}
O give me gold:
the gold of sunlight,
the gold of pollen-drenched flowers,
the gold encrusted by a thousand gems
that glitters a crown.

\begin{quote}
And gay, gay, is all this song
of trees and sun and birds,
and gold-light on rough boles,
my heart.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

Even her persistent awareness of the dimensions of space is distinctly metaphysical, as in:
Across the vast spaces,
known and unknown
the elements weave nests for us,
the sun and moon and stars, planets. 9

Monika Varma's conviction about nature as the symbol of joy in life remains fragmentary because of her attitude of philosophic detachment from the world of man. It prevents her from confronting experience, private or social, boldly and honestly. Of course, her earlier passion about nature for its own sake yields gradually to the later impulse to respond to the world of experience through the medium of nature. For instance, in 'In Sunlight', rain brings:

democratic death to houses
and chawls of Bombay
or a mud-hut and home in Jaora Village. 10

The frequent reference to the sights of human suffering in Alakananda confirms the sincerity of that impulse. But her final belief in wise passivity in the face of human sufferings becomes clear in 'Once Again' where:

Death, herons, I,
the seasons that never change their way,
and the flowers wait. 11

In spite of the painful awareness that:

Over there women weep
and children starve
and murder goes by many names.
The flowers, herons and I wait
Men raise their voices,
cry halt to murder by other names.¹²

One is, hence, persistently conscious of the poet's sense of detachment from the world of human experience in spite of her occasional struggle to confront it. Probably, the conviction about the eternity of nature prevents her from taking a bold plunge into experience, private or social, facilitating only her horizontal exploration of a variety of interests.

Monika Varma's poetry is an attempt to probe into the area of nature - experience in particular. Her first creative writing 'Dragonflies Draw Flame' is inspired by a naturalist's appreciation of the world outside. The sights and sounds of nature like mountains, hills, valleys, rivers, sky, clouds and sea, ensues in the panoramic transcription of the succulent details aided by the poetess' imaginative splendour. Her tender love for animals, insects and reptiles finds an expression in most of her poems on bird's life. She loves animals but displays peculiar fondness for birds and their movements. Her treatment of nature, nonetheless, lacks the luxuriant sensuousness of Keats because she always prefers the specific to the generic. She is at best when she enlarges her perspectives and emotional terrains, and moves into the metaphysical - symbolical axis, as does Emile Dickenson, the contemporary American poetess. Many poems from this collection are tapestry weavings in tinsel words and metaphors, sustained by a fervid imagination. The very first poem, 'In The Domino Dusk', builds up a pattern, and is underlined by haunting phrases and alliterative tones. For example:
Read him when the malignant moon yellow in drowning hate
makes Cyclops eyes of still glass pools
that gloating spider-wise in mute speculation wait.¹³

In the Preface to this collection, Nissim Ezekiel has observed:

“Good poetry is not always clear and lucid; nevertheless, the
amateur poet ought to aim at clarity and lucidity. Concrete and relevant
images are usually superior to vague immensities. Simple, disciplined
forms, within which much freedom can be exercised, help the poet to
discover what he feels, more than sprawling accumulation of lines.
Rhyme and other devices may be discarded only if structural
compensations and very special effects are provided instead.
Development within a poem is sign of maturity in the poet. In most of the
poems one reads, there is addition but no working out, no resolution of
themes, no final equation.”¹⁴

Monika Varma achieves success by tantrums, as it were. The only
fascinating thing about her poetry is its lucidity of expression. She never
allows her emotions to be camouflaged in phrasiological gimmicks or
needless involutions. Poems such as ‘Evening’, ‘Mountains Let rest the
head’, ‘Glad Light Green’, ‘This Gift Of Morning’, and ‘No Meaning
Any More’ are fairly successful because of their intimate rendering of the
objects of nature into a collage of ideas, imbued with the resonance of
meaning. For instance, the following lines depict the mood:

This gift of morning tender as young innocence,
Lonely with the morning flight of migratory birds
Honking their way over northern lakes,
and rivers bordered by shivering trees whose lanes tremble
In terror, or is it love?  

The last poem is significant for its tinsel colouring of imagination which takes her into an intimate theme of time. For Eliot, 'time past and time present are present in time future', and for Monika Varma, time present is all that is important. Her theme thus gets diluted by her rather excessive enthusiasm for the 'present mirth and present laughter':

Time had a meaning when I was small of life and living,
But a loop of grass ties my past hours.
Gone is time when I shouted glad the hours.

And the concluding lines of the poem:

Time brings peace to the famine
of the heart,

But Time has no meaning any more.

Her Second volume ‘Gita Govind and Other Poems’ shows the reciprocity between nature and man as in Wordsworth’s poems. Her responsiveness to nature and its celebration in various litanies of expression is meant to explore the universal problem of coming to terms with reality. Nevertheless, her undimmed passion of the glories of nature and her abiding faith in the joie de vivre of life are flawed, and fissured by her rather infelicitous transmutation of her perceptions into vivid tableaus of meanings. She feels the self-sustaining and evergizing spirit in the beauties of nature and finds in the sights and sounds the essential spiritus mundi, with love as the regenerating principle of life. She very
nearly indulges in philosophizing at the expense of poetic propriety. She says:

Look the honey-bird has flown
and the flower, with dropping sepals, grieves alone...
but the essence of life?
But Ananda, it is the whole of it,
the whole of it, nor just a part.\(^{18}\)

The first poem in this volume ‘Recherche’ deals with the poetic-process or its signature which becomes an obsessive preoccupation with her. The opening lines of the poem brings out the geometricality of her emotive perceptions and her sensitive use of the language:

This is the only way to write
not to care a damn what anybody says.
Let the dog days come lop lopping through the hours;
I shall wait.\(^{19}\)

Ezekiel has observed elsewhere that ‘the best poets wait for words’, and Monika, too, is conscious of the inadequacy of words to transcribe her feelings fossils into an inspired articulation. She feels the compulsive need to be simple and unpretentious and does not strain words to yield meanings. She knows the power of words to hurt and her advice in ‘Only Words’ is:

Be gentle in this life
Violence of words murder.\(^{20}\)

Other poems ‘No Title No Name’, ‘Words’, ‘Bagatelle I’, ‘Bagatelle III’, continue her seminal thrusts into the potential use of words as purveyors
of thoughts. She has also expressed her disillusionment and frustration with writing, as it has not been able to achieve its desired purpose. Monika Varma realizes the 'powerlessness' and futility of the exercise in 'Words I' as they seem to serve no personal or social purpose:

Does just one misery, one weary
round and round squirrel thought
settle down?
Does one stone – throwing violent
frustrated young arm stop paralyzed
by words, words, words…

She finds
no peace
in writing poetry
It is unending, leaves me no peace

The poet compares herself to a 'cricket' that keeps on cog-wheeling and is a 'unceasing irritant' and a 'stupid chap':

rather like that cricket, stupid chap,
his voice: cogwheels in rapid action,
An unceasing irritant till you can
discover him, stop him,
and throw him out.

Monika Varma finds the process of poetic creativity to be a 'rage in creating' with a frenzy of its own which creeps:

into your blood and bone with nibbling fingers
drives you into a wild mnemonic rage 
not knowing what, why and when.\textsuperscript{24}

She establishes that a poem is very much an outcome of a poet’s efforts and involves either heart or intellect and a poet possesses consciousness of both—past and present in him. For Monika, one’s various and varied experiences in life provide the basis for one’s writing:

Behind every poem 
there is a tremendous conglomerate 
of experience 
Which like an ocean swell 
breaks with a roar leaving 
foam of surf on the sea-shore... 
that is what this poem is \textsuperscript{25}

To give her feelings and thoughts a concrete form she needs words to communicate in the wilderness and loneliness:

Lost in this wilderness 
I need words — words that belong 
to people and poets, 
words that speak from one loneliness 
to another. 
All those who speak... 
not babble words... 
live locked, 
and realizing this finality 
speak joyfully each to each.
I need words...
give me speech.\textsuperscript{26}
But she cannot stand mere soft and sweet ‘wordiness’ without substance. She is tired of ‘windy – worded men’. Words are meaningful and purposeful only when human associations blend with them:

\begin{quote}
Words as words do not heal
or get rooted in the tattered ribbon
of silence.
It is only when we remember
and blindingly recollect
that words
mean.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Monika realizes the inadequacy of words to express her perceptions creatively. She is diffident about the expressive power of words:

\begin{quote}
Words are always so inadequate; therefore
let them be nimble, like needle and thimble.
Words, wise in old love, monogamous as cranes,
clutch the mizzenmast,
and we, words as I, in sibyl silence sail.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Monika is very particular about the poetics of her thoughts. She follows a ‘mathematical rule’ as it were, for writing a poem, and arrives at precision and accuracy in her articulations, but never sounds careless or prolix. For example:
What a poet should do is to pick up a news-item, a contemporary view, and spin it into the poet's spectrum in a form, supposedly, under poetic rule. The visual spectrum moves within the crystal's clarity sweeping from blue to green, red, flares into yellow.  

'Across The Vast Spaces' offers an interesting example of Monika's technique and modalities of perceptions. The following lines carry the emotional pitch with peculiar ease and lissomness:

Give me space...space for laughter
why live if laughter dies.
Oh, give me space for one little day
before I die.

Some poems in her other collections 'Past-Imperative' and 'Alakananda', bear the signature of her individuality in that they became significant articulations in the specific context of her felt experiences. The rivers—the Sutlej and the Alakananda and the Himalayas, with their age-old associations and rituals, form a part of her landscape, which holds her imagination. For instance, the Alakananda is far more than a mere river to her. She writes:

Alakananda, mysterious
in the High Himalayas,
Alakananda, those cold lilting waters...
love, Alakananda and me.
The brown river strong amidst men.
Bhagirathi – Ganga...
Our river of love,
from Deva Prayag to the Sea.\textsuperscript{31}
She is passionately responsive to the vast elements of nature like mountains, valleys, rivers and clouds. Nature plays a predominant role in her poetry. It is because Monika Varma’s special forte and fascination is nature. She can easily be called as the major nature poet of Indo-Anglian Poetry. No other Indian poet has described it so richly and vividly as Monika has done in her poems. She has a strange love and longing for nature. Her tender and sensitive feelings are always associated with the tender and exuberant phases of nature and its multicoloured beauty. Her spirit always craves to merge with the scintillating symphony of serene nature. Very often, the dawn, dusk, green landscapes, beautiful valleys, haunting cataracts, chiming birds, echoing winds, whispering rivers, attracts the attention of this delicate and sensitive poet. In one of her poems ‘Solan’, she describes nature thus:

The other road winds round the hill
to a pinewood full of call of birds.
The song of breeze
gossips with trees,
and nightingale—koels in mind—afternoon sing.\textsuperscript{32}
In another poem ‘Oddments’, she describes nature with visual effects, with a superb imagination of an artist. She juxtaposes the beautiful nature with human life. Thus she compares the pre-wedding ceremony, the anointing of the bride with turmeric yellow paste, with the colour smeared evening sky:
These colours
smeared on the evening sky
a turmeric yellow paste:
The sun and the darkening sky,
and there the lovers shall die
each within the other.  

Another beautiful poem, which is addressed to the beloved, is 'For You'. It abounds in excellent, description of nature. This poem is remarkable for its sensuousness and for the vivid presentation of the mild details of nature:

Do you like scent?
The heady perfume of the Madhavi-lata?
She who scents the night air
From great bunches of green – pink blossom
And the bees go wild with joy
or do you like clear water?
The rills and rivers, and bounding waterfalls,
Or the chuckle, from the pebbly
bed, of a mountain stream?

.................................

All for you, just for you.  

'Rocks' is another beautiful poem by Monika Varma. This shows her acute and sensitive observation of nature and its fantastic phenomenon. Very few poets have described so beautifully the rugged rocks, in the
world literature, as Monika has done. She has glorified the rocks and has almost gone to the extent of humanizing it:

Do not remember rocks too might have a private hell,
No seismograph records their screaming anguish,
Nor will any geologist find their grief – torn shell.
Don’t look with pity at rocks- don’t touch.
For their sharp edges will tear your hands,
Might break your heart,
And their brooding moods are shrouded by soft mists.
Forget them- they are rocks.

Yet another beautiful poem which deals with nature is ‘Petal Fall’. This is a short and evocative poem, which is highly suggestive and meaningful. This poem is highly philosophic and symbolic in nature. It suggests beautifully, through its rich imagery, the brighter and the darker aspects of life, i.e. joy and sorrow, life and death, a continuous phenomenon and a perfect circle, each has to follow the other. All these intricate phases of life are suggested through the excellent description of nature:

The sun on kestrel wing,
and flight,
sends songs of joy to rise
into the great winds,
to circle, merge, each into each,
and to die.
but the scent of roses fills my garden
as the petals fall...die.\textsuperscript{36}

In spite of her rather passional involvement with the world of nature, her
nature poems apparently pass into nucleus of inanities, save her only
poem ‘Alakananda’ which confirms the poet’s maturity of poetic
experience.

A majority of poems from ‘Past Imperative’ and ‘Alakananda’
are definitive reverberations of her nostalgic reaching out for the familiar
regions of the North. The sense of alienation that comes after being too
long in the West makes her home sick, and she tries to give the familiar
sights and sounds ‘a local name and a local habitation’. Her sense of
loneliness, coupled with her enforced exile, intensifies her agony:

\textit{...my own tongue is locked
within my mouth, my speech
is captive...}
\textit{For I am in an alien land,
an exile from mountains and mist.}\textsuperscript{37}

In ‘The Dispossessed’, she attempts sincerely to explore her emotional
relationship with the North. She remembers nostalgically the Sutlej
which:

\textit{climbs out of the earth,
she skips, she runs, she runs green.}\textsuperscript{38}

The personal experience of alienation assumes universal dimensions
when:
dispossessed, dispossessed,
the North wind shouts,
now guns...death dealing guns,
like the wind –hover kestrel
wait.  

Notably enough, she does not turn to poetry as a means of cathartic release from the tensions of love-relationships like other women poets. As she has herself confessed, “I have no frustrations to proclaim, get rid of, etc. No past to linger over sadly, no cherished memories to chew and spew up.” As she states, “I don’t think anything in my poetry is specifically ‘feminine’ – since feminine has come to mean wife, beloved, mother, frustrated and / or bitter woman.”

Another most important aspect of Monika Varma’s poetry is her love poetry. She has written a number of fine poems on love theme. Her love poems are superb in conception and technique. They are highly evocative, sensitive, sensual and symbolic. Fertile imagination and rich imagery is the hallmark of her love poems. The beauty of her love poetry is that it abounds in sexual and erotic imagery, which is provocative, serene, symbolic and sometimes sentimental.

In her poems there is vivid use of imagery. Imagery is the chief characteristic of any good poetry. Monika has a natural gift for evolving such sensuous and visual images in her poetry as evoke strange emotions in the minds of the readers. Especially she is superb in her expression and thought process as far as the love poems are concerned. Her love poems are a visual feast, which takes the readers to the romantic
realms of physical, sensual and spiritual love. In her description of love, she is very much influenced by the great traditions of ancient Indian love poetry, especially the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa.

The poems like 'Gold-Mulched Hours' and 'Green Leaves Are Gold' are true love poems in the sense that the poet speaks of love, uses imagery which may be called both sexual and erotic. Further, one can observe in 'Green Leaves Are Gold' that a good deal of animal imagery is used. 'Green Leaves Are Gold' can be compared to Kalidasa's 'Ritu Samhara', though it may seem somewhat too ambitious. But a close study of the poem reveals the idea of the seasons, and Love, and lover's reaction in words such as — 'my Love from the rain and hail of life's storm- let me shade you in the shelter of my arms'- echoes certain striking resemblances with Kalidasa's 'Ritu Samhara'.

'The Time Of Green Leaves Is Gold' is a very descriptive, sensuous and highly provocative love poem. Here the poetess speaks of physical and passionate love and the idea of seasons. On the whole it is a very rich poetry, each line is enchanting, resounding, lilting with music, pregnant with meaning, and abounds in rich erotic and visual imagery. It is in the form of a dramatic monologue. All the time the lover is addressing to his beloved. The action and the reaction are suggested by the lover only. The lover is fond of his beloved, he longs for her company night and day. He is highly passionate, emotional and impulsive. Throughout the poem the lover longs to unite with his beloved physically to experience the sensual ecstasy. The pangs and pleasures of the temporal love are described in a very convincing way. It appears, the
beloved is not ready for the physical submission. In the poem, the lover forces her for an embrace and a kiss:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{and all the stars lie} \\
\text{as scattered pearls} \\
\text{broken from the rope around your neck} \\
\text{when I pull you close.}^{42}
\end{align*}
\]

The change of seasons is beautifully described. The lover goes on pleading, pointing out the seasons, saying it’s time for them to unite and to break the artificial barriers between them. Description of each season is superb, sensuous, picturesque and most enjoyable. First the lover describes the spring season and says:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The time of green leaves} \\
\text{is gold, my love,} \\
\text{................} \\
\text{Let me shade you in the shelter of my arms.}^{43}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Tree’ is a symbol for his love because it shelters his beloved. ‘Sun’ is a symbol for the lover’s unbounded warmth and unquenchable passion for his beloved:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The sun} \\
\text{...............} \\
\text{fills me with power of his passion} \\
\text{for this earth} \\
\text{and you, you, my love,} \\
\text{will you not come into my arms, my eyes,} \\
\text{be embraced by all the strength…}^{44}
\end{align*}
\]
The poem abounds with such provocative and visual images:

This sky is rounded
Like the under reaches of your breasts,
my love.
Beautiful sensuous expressions like;
and as I kiss your mouth,
your honey-sweet mouth, my love, 45

Fine examples of captivating erotic imagery we find in lines where the lover’s intense longing is expressed:
the rage and passion of the sun...
the sun of summer that crashes down
in molten heat
on the earth awaiting
for the consummation of love.46

Also we find in the poem several evocative and picturesque images like:
Streams slide, sink,
to meet some swag-bellied
lover-river, gross with age... waiting.47

In the poem we find the lover waits patiently and observes the change of seasons. He describes each season in an appropriate way and expresses his eagerness and intense longing to embrace her, to be with her forever and to mingle with her to experience the romantic lull and the spiritual ecstasy:

Priye, my glorious love, gladden the mountain,
let us brake barriers,
put out the crimson flame
of tongued fire...give me rain...
your desire. 48

The lover’s romantic fever and impatience is expressed:

It is Autumn, my love,
the air is little chill, 49

At the change of another season, the lover says:

But it is winter now and our land...
and the land built by our love, 50

The ending of the poem is remarkable. The lover expresses desire to possess her and to worship her. It is the height of ideal love:

My love, I gather you into my arms,
hold you safe, small, within my grasp
and challenge the crash and fall
of thundering waters, its froth and foam,
its wearing away
of rock and stone.

I shall wear you as a gold topaz in my ring. 51

‘Gold-Mulched Hours’ is another very simple but superb love poem. Monika is very precise here and at the same time she takes her readers to the sweet world of romantic oblivion. The economy of words and the control of diction to suggest such an evergreen emotional gusto is the most praiseworthy feature of this small poem. The beloved recalls those happy romantic raptures she has experienced in the balmy company of her lover, in those gold- mulched hours. The poetess is very fond of rainy
season. Rainy season is a congenial season for the lovers to meet. Rain symbolizes the thrill, exuberance, wetty desire and fragrance of love and romance. The love imagery is predominant here. It would be quite apt to quote the whole poem here:

Gold-mulched hours
those days of rain,
I remember you, love,
beside me,
held in your arms, loved,
but now the somber clouds hide
my gold-mulched hours...

Regarding the development of thought process in her poetry, she writes: “It has been a ‘development of expression’. The more I have written the more I have been able to express my attitudes to various faces, factors, and phases of life and living. It possibly isn’t that I have changed, but that the thoughts boil up and get expressed better. It is a matter of better craftsmanship and felicity.”

Monika Varma’s imagistic sensibility shows a particular awareness of colours. She even finds the images of ‘cloth’ and ‘waiting’ a convenient medium for objectifying her poetic response. She overcomes gradually her earlier passion for sounds of words and is successful in getting perfect mastery over the verbal medium. ‘Quartered Questions & Queries’ offers some examples of her technical experimentation although she is more at ease with the regular narrative line. The earlier poems, given in their revised form with grammatical, metrical and structural
modifications, in 'Across The Vast Spaces' are interesting examples of the poet's craftsmanship.

Most women poets have normally regarded nature as a convenient medium of projecting personal experience or as an excuse for sporadic, sentimental outbursts of their sense of beauty. Monika Varma's psyche, on the other hand, seeks to interpret nature in the light of Indian philosophy, and struggles in her later poems to come to terms with the sorrows of life. She feels that human agony emanates from a host of factors. Initiation into experience and growing up is painful and so is the process of coming to terms with the world. She feels panicky:

Those protecting walls, my mother's eyes
Are leaving me now, strangers peer at my fears
Such dancing terrors assail me, when they say,
This is the world to which I must now be
Reconciled.54

For Monika Varma, 'The Greatest Amazement' of the modern times is man's lack of interaction with his fellow humans. Each in his own capsule goes on suffering till death. Now the world sees just the exterior and one's anguish is never revealed because the x-ray vision or human antennae that could catch sympathetic vibrations is missing.

Metaphysical concerns also stir the psyche of Monika and death is one such inevitable phenomenon. Understanding of life includes understanding of death and in any attempt to understand and solve the mystery of human existence comprehension of death is highly imperative.
Women poets writing in English in India have portrayed death both as a Friend and a Foe. Monika Varma finds death to be 'the greatest giver':

...Death the greatest giver of them all.

A flail of courage is its gift, courage to look upon
his face, and be unafraid and clear.55

In her poem 'Petal Fall' she asserts that death is redeemed by the birth of the new and beautiful:

But the scent of roses fills my garden
As the petals fall...die.56

A poet's effort to attain self-awareness and self-knowledge also involve his understanding of the process of creativity. Modern age has its share of religious inspiration and expression. God and religion have made their way in the writings of modern women poets also. Monika Varma feels that the modern generation has no knowledge or understanding of God and the really awakened people are muted:

What indeed are gods? What is god himself?
Who knows ...those who know cannot speak, 57

There are many factors, which have shaken faith in God and religion. Modern religious leaders are hypocrites who have expertise in contemporary ways and mannerism and grow vain and 'big-bellied with pride' in Monika Varma's 'Quartered Questions & Queries'.

Faith in the Almighty's benevolence is adversely affected due to man-made injustices and atrocities also. She feels a great responsibility to usher an era of peace through poetry, and peace can be established not by violence but by love, and man's thought towards man
and within himself. Through her poems she shows a great humanistic and
democratic concern and her concern is genuine. In her poem ‘Eyes Of
Stone’ she projects her feeling:

Someone, just recently said:

a poet today has a great responsibility-
to usher an era of peace through poetry.

................................................

We have a responsibility—remove poverty…
and the poverty of thought?
and then, of course, there is love.\textsuperscript{58}

The cult of violence has grown very considerably in the modern age. Man
has become the worst enemy of mankind. It is an age of misanthropists
where the hearts and minds are boiling with mutual hatred, contempt and
malevolence. This manifests itself in the form of violence at different
levels and bloodshed has become the order of the day. The sensitive
psyche of poet just cannot remain unaffected by this phenomenon, which
is illustrated in:

Red seeds fall, butterfly wings moths are
scrunched by gecko…

Under the banner headlines. I can hear
the crump of shells scrunching bones of children,
tender women’s arms and men’s brain and head.

Where shall we call halt?
I cannot cease, shut up, no poet can
and bemoan grain stacked.
Peace is within myself
with no eyes of stone.  

Monika Varma differs from many other women poets in not being thematically circumscribed either by urban life or erotic experience. Her poetry is not confined only to lust, love and sex. It embraces and enormous arc of experience. Her own experiences form the subject-matter of her poetry. Her poems are conspicuous for social awareness, vivid descriptions of nature and the sincere presentation of the human emotions. She evolves a style- imagery, idiom and tone- which articulates her typical Indian experiences. The life of the urban poor who live in slums attracts her attention. She is deeply affected due to man- made injustices and is moved to see the plight of poor-starving people, brutally beaten and tortured by upper strata of society. There is an acute responsiveness to human sufferings in most of her poems. Her poems ring with profound passion.

Monika, among all other women poets, is the only poet, so far, who has attempted to explore so intimately the area of experience that involves an individual relationship with human nature. While for the women poets the outer world is an anathema, Monika seeks inspiration from it, which gives her both solace and succour. She is a distinguished Indian English poet.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.


6. Ibid.


12. Ibid.


15. Ibid., p.12.

16. Ibid., p.16.

17. Ibid.


19. Ibid., p.5.
23. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p.15.
29. Ibid., p.11.
33. Ibid., p.13.
35. Ibid., p.19.
37. Ibid., p.19.
39. Ibid.


43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
46. Ibid., p.25.
47. Ibid., p.26.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 28.
50. Ibid., p.29.
51. Ibid., p.30.


59. Ibid.