Chapter-6

Conclusion

The poetry written by contemporary Indian women poets is generally considered to be revealing “the growth of feminine poetic consciousness” on one hand and on the other hand “the changing position of women in Indian society” (Hasan 20). However, after a thorough examination of the selected works of the women poets taken up for study it has been found that the contemporary Indian women poets are still in the midst of dualities, because of the dilemma between what they want to do and what they are expected to do. The ensuing conflicts that arise in their unconscious minds and their ultimate resignation to their fate result in the development of schizophrenic tendencies in them. Although all the seven poets belong to different parts of the country, yet they share the same dissatisfaction with the given world order, and their inner desire of the need for a transformation in the situation of women leaves them perplexed and baffled. In their similarities and disparities all of them have unconscious repressed desires which surface in the form of a symptom or somatic (physical) disturbance: gestures, dreams, slips of the tongue, nervous tics, delusions, hallucinations and so on. Their poetry reveals the psyche of Indian women in general—women who are still caught on the horns of quandary—whether to assert
independence at the cost of values cultivated over centuries or to be lost in the limbo of apathy, drudgery and slavery.

In their early poems as discussed in Chapter 1 all the poets find themselves caught between the conflict of tradition bound self and the self looking for freedom and independence. They register their protest and resentment against a culture and society which gives preference to male children. They reveal acute awareness of the tragic fate which comes with the feeling of being born as a woman. Eunice de Souza has expressed this sentiment in “De Souza Prabhu”. The feeling of disability is so deeply ingrained in a woman’s mind that she starts considering herself as a member of the category of “lame ducks” (14).

The poetry of these poets shows that the cultural presumptions of the people which identify home-making and child-bearing with femininity lead to an inevitable effect on a girl’s personality and identity. The lessons on flexibility, adjustment and submissiveness hinder the development of strong opinions and commitments in a girl. The bewilderment of a growing girl who is coaxed and conditioned into stereo-typical roles has been delineated by these poets.

When some of them were interviewed in person, the poets spoke about the cramping effect of marriage on their lives and this is reflected in their poems. Married life has given them unbearable tensions. They cannot open up their hearts even to their parents and
near ones. The reality of Indian marriage, wifehood and motherhood has been exposed by these poets. Mamta Kalia admits: “I am a great fool / To think that marriage is a bliss” (“I am a Great Fool” 1-2).

The poets have shown their resentment against the conventional practice by which at the time of marriage, a girl is made to shift from her parental home into the unfamiliar, initially forbidding environment, of her in-laws’ place. She then begins to live without the love and support of precisely those persons whom she needs most in this transitional phase. Sunita Jain says:

I felt pain when I came to my ‘sasural’ as I became someone’s ‘bhabi’, ‘chachi’, and ‘mami’ at the tender age of 18. I felt as if I don’t have any identity of my own. It was a big shock—breaking away all the relationships from the past and building new ones in just a short span of one day. (Jain)

The marital relationship seems to be a setback in the lives of these poets because the husbands are typically patriarchal in their viewpoints. Besides marriage, the other cause of discontentment is kitchen drudgery which has often been condemned by the women poets. Sunita Jain feels burdened by the household chores like “years of washing dishes” which gives her a “creasing forehead” and “vague” eye that sees nothing. “When the husband leaves in the
Mamta Kalia’s poetry also presents how the daily household chores and drudgery has brought ennui and sickness to her life. All romance has gone out of it, and her state at the age of 37 is that she sleeps with a “headache” and wakes up with a “backache”. The complex joint family system is another major factor that is responsible for filling the life of a woman with tension and fear, frustration and suspicion. Her poem “After Eight Years of my Marriage” has presented how this family system in India proves to be a catastrophe and disaster for a woman. In an interview conducted with her in person she said:

I still remember when I used to cook, I used to dust ‘atta’ from my clothes and get into the car and move to college. I also couldn’t leave my family hungry. . . . the progressive career of a girl is hampered in marriage because a girl may be expected to be at a certain place at a certain time by our traditional family. (Kalia)

The husbands have also turned out to be unworthy for these poets because they still adhere to conservative practices and ideas. Thus, the irony of an Indian girl’s coming-of-age can be seen in their poetry.
Even the relationship of these poets with their children has not been gratifying. It is very difficult for the poets to adjust with their own children as the latter develop their own individuality and wish to maintain it, thus wanting no parental interventions in their lives. Mamta Kalia and Sunita Jain’s poetry discusses this attitude of the children and the woman’s unhappiness with it. Sunita Jain while talking about her daughter says:

I listen to her thin babble
of welcome
as her hard eye
on my chore-worn face
frowns
on this intrusion
in her privacy.

(“The Occasional Visit” 8-14)

This poetry written by contemporary women poets also reveals the sexual harassment which a woman faces at the work place. Moreover, the poets are not happy in a situation which demands that they bear the double burden of house and keeping jobs. At home their work is seldom recognized and at their work place they are never treated as independent-minded individuals as their poems illustrate and here the crisis deepens. Simone de Beauvoir aptly points out that the secondary position of a woman is not imposed of necessity by
natural feminine characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of social traditions and education which have been under the control of men. De Beauvoir asserts:

She (woman) is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. (De Beauvoir xvi)

Though such patriarchal pressures have constituted traumas for the women poets, an increasing awareness of the injustice done to them has slowly made them raise their voice against inequality and oppression. They have not remained silent in such a situation. The secondary status attributed to them has made the quest for identity a prime concern. A growing sense of self-identity resulting in a clamour for recognition is evident in their poetry.

This new generation of women poets has emerged as “unafraid, motivated, clear sighted” (De Souza 6), partly due to the influence of feminist ideologies which have been discussed in Chapter 2. The poets are increasingly conscious of their identity crisis at various levels of being and have tried to express their gender related crises. While studying her “Tribute to Papa” Mamta Kalia has been discussed as a rebellious daughter as when she says:

These days I am seriously thinking of
disowning you, Papa. (23-24)

As she states in an interview:

I was a rebel like in the sense my parents were very methodical people. . . . I wanted to bite. I wanted to bite everybody. I wanted to express myself in the worst of words. It was very dissatisfactory. As a young girl of 27, I was not happy at all. I had to live a life which I never wanted. (Kalia)

Her bitter resentment with the order of things which was expressed during the interview and the bitterness observed in her poetry exemplify the hot-blooded nature of the feelings that emerge as a distinct feature of the contemporary women’s poetry.

Though these poets pronounce their discontentment loudly, they seem to be shocked and frustrated at the same time because the freedom and independence they crave for are denied to them. The conflict in their minds between feminist leanings and tradition-bound roles has left them bewildered and perplexed. The poetry surfaces as an expression of the psychic striptease of a woman who is denied what she hungers after. The poets are revealing their dilemma without inhibitions. Gauri Deshpande has put across the predicament of a woman in one of her poems:

You sight me glimpsingly
and won’t wait too long,
with a half-smile in your raised eyebrow
will leave me between shores
and walk off.

(“Poem” 11-15)

The new generation of poets has raised questions but is unable to get any definite answer. Their poetry suggests that there are no neat and final answers to the dilemmas of life. Simone de Beauvoir explicates this situation of a woman:

The situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. (29)

Suniti Namjoshi also questions the reasons for women’s silence in spite of all that they have to bear:

Was it courage or fear that kept us silent
Watching the dragonfly over the water?

(“The Head of Rose” 10-11)

In her disillusionment she reconsiders the man-woman relationship and ultimately decides to live without a man.

The poets have revolted against establishments of all sorts—the bonds of marriage, family and society—from which they wish to flee. Lalitha Venkateswaran in “Debit” has expressed this desire: “I would escape your circle if I could” (“Debit” 1). But this desire for freedom
has ultimately led to a conflict in the minds of the poets. Eunice de Souza while defying the norms on one side has been found to be suppressing her inner desires and trying to smile on the other hand. The psychoanalytic feminist perspective which has been deliberated in detail in Chapter 2 has assisted in assessing this conflict between the tendency to rebel and to conform to the norms and the resultant schizophrenia.

The “double-voiced discourse” and the “muted story” of these women poets have been interpreted as their schizophrenic existence as discussed in the present project. Their “wild zone becomes the place for the revolutionary women’s language” (Showalter 324). It is this zone that makes women reside inside and outside the male tradition simultaneously.

Thus, one consequence which has come into view due to this kind of inequity in their minds is a heightened female frustration and depression under the pressures of patriarchy, together with a generally pronounced conflict and bewilderment which has ultimately resulted in their developing a schizophrenic identity. C. Vijayasree while commenting on the poetry of Suniti Namjoshi rightly points out that her poetry presents “schizophrenic battle within the divided self” (Vijayasree 37). The characteristics of a schizophrenic person i.e. odd behaviour, unusual tearfulness, deep sadness, suicidal attempts, delusions, hallucinations and disorderly thinking have frequently
been referred to by contemporary Indian women poets, and Chapter 3 attempts to talk about these in detail. Very often the poets behave in the manner of schizophrenics.

The extent of the frustration of these women with the existing system can be gauged by the fact that they do not even hesitate to question the very existence of love. Lalitha Venkateswaran in one of her prominent poems asks:

Why do I love you, if at all;
How much is it, and where is it;
Is it seasonal, or evergreen;
What are its exits and its entrances.

(“Declarations” 2-5)

Love and marriage are not the ultimate sources of fulfillment in the lives of women. Debjani Chatterjee expresses the agony of a woman who is married and yet, lonely; she has lost her freedom in an alien country, while marriage has not given her much:

You are married and yet single—naturally!
Are you not British and yet black?
Learn to sing of thwarted love and broken home.

(“Primary Purpose” 42-44)

A melancholic tone, and a deep feeling of the oppressions and tensions faced by women in society can be witnessed in whatever
these poets say, even their laughter is underlined with sadness / sorrow:

I laugh till tears
Ran down my cheeks, stumbling
From the bed, laughing;
Till tears ran down my cheeks.

(“Only A Joke” 27-30)

All these dualities have left the poets sad, lonely and empty and their poetry as a result has become poetry of failures rather than that of success and self-assertions. The poets are tortured by existential factors like restlessness, meaninglessness, fear, pain, sufferings and sorrows. Sunita Jain has spent:

Many the days that cried for respite
Many the nights that would not go to sleep.

(“I Don’t Know, Love, if You Caused” 4-5)

Eunice de Souza even does not hesitate to confess her suicidal tendencies and her delusion which are again the foremost characteristics of schizophrenia:

... the whole world
was trying to rip me up.

(“Autobiographical” 23-24)

In her distress Gauri Deshpande says, “The rush of passing days disturbs me” (“Marks: 1” 6). Vacillating between passivity and
rebellion she reflects the frustration and disappointment which lead to her schizophrenic existence.

The bizarre attitude of Mamta Kalia is also an illustration of the schizophrenic nature of these poets’ existence. As mentioned earlier in “Compulsions” she wants to “pick” her “nose / in a public place” (1-2), she wants to “sit” in her “office chair” (3) with her “feet up” (4), she wants to “slap the boy / who makes love in a café” (5-6). Not only this, she also wants “to pay Sunday visits / totally undressed” (9-10), indicating behaviour which sounds a bit abnormal and is actually rebellious.

Although the contemporary Indian women poets are not schizophrenics in the medical sense of the term as we uphold the creation of art something created by the whole psyche, by the conscious and the unconscious and we accept that a temporary regression from the world of rational consciousness may be a necessary moment in poetic creation. “An oscillation between regression and full vigilance . . . results in a creative product” (Graziano 51). So the poetic genius may sometimes be described as eccentric. The other question is: “If the writer is neurotic in his themes, how is it that his work is intelligible to his readers?” (Welleck 82). The poets studied also reveal a bitter discontentment with reality which results in dualities of thoughts. Moreover, as Nayantara Sahgal says, “We are all somewhat divided selves” (104)
and according to Pascal, “Men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness” (Quoted in Foucault xi).

The schizophrenic existence of these poets is reflected not only in their similarities but in disparities also. The poets have used different methods to tackle the passivity imposed on them and the ensuing stridency in their tone and behaviour which have been discussed in Chapter 4. Mamta Kalia has adopted irony, ordinariness and confessional mode in her poetry to express her anger and dissatisfaction with her life.

Gauri Deshpande has opted love poetry which is different because of its free, frank and uninhibited portrayal of sex. A man excites her “yearnings” and “unseen, unknown images” but at the same time his actual physical presence and closeness make her feel disgusted with “bareness of your presence” (“Poems in Winter” 26). Thus, while revelling in the physical act, Gauri Deshpande expresses her contempt and distaste for sexual pleasure. Her poetry, as a result, gets suffused with personal anguish and dilemma and the psychological matrix of her experience makes her swim deep in the sea of pessimism and dispiritedness.

Suniti Namjoshi is a poet gifted with ironic perception and wit. In order to express her strong sense of discontentment with the values prevalent in the society, she is deconstructing the allusions in
her poems. Her situation gets further complicated and even more distinct because she is not just a woman poet but also a lesbian and a diasporic writer. Her schizophrenic identity which results not only from the attempt to resolve her tensions as a woman or a feminist writer, but also as a lesbian and a diaspora has been discussed in detail in Chapter 5 which deals with her poetry exclusively. It is the lesbianism which has given her some recompense. She has considered it:

... a purely personal matter, where an individual’s identity should neither be curtailed nor checked. She views compulsory heterosexuality as a repressive social structure that systematically subordinates women and reduces them to the status of ‘the other’ in a male dominated socio-cultural systems. (Vijayasree 26)

She along with Gillian Hanscombe feels:

It is not that your country is my country
or that where you lead I always follow,
though I do follow and follow freely.
In the land of the patriarchs
we walk together

(“It is not that your country” 1-5)

In her poems the tone of nostalgia which is very strong has also given rise to a schizophrenic battle. The fears of living in an
alien land and amidst strangers are voiced by her. Such poems present the feeling of distance, separation, loss and longing.

Like Namjoshi, Debjani Chatterjee’s schizophrenic identity gets revealed in her diasporic existence. In her distress which emerges because of being an immigrant, she says:

No matter what your generation,
You will always be an immigrant.

(“Primary Purpose” 3-4)

While moving from one place to another, she considers herself, “imprisoned” in her “time-machine” (“Distance” 16). Moreover, she is quite aware of the predicament of women in general as she says:

I was that woman who roused a nation
And was burnt so many times at so many stakes.

(“I Was that Woman” 47-48)

Although Lalitha Venkateswaran, unlike the other women poets included in the project, has been brought up in a comparatively open environment as she says,

Secure in my own world,
I knew only triumph.

(“Chitrangada” 5-6)

yet the situation is no less frightening and distressing to her:

After many summers, winters, rains,
For me this spring is full of tears.
She has written poems which are highly intense and personal as compared to other women poets.

The anger and resentment against the Goan-Catholic community emerges as one of the distinct features of Eunice de Souza’s schizophrenic existence. The annoyance and fury which is prevalent in many of her poems has been discussed at length during the course of study. In her case as in the case of Suniti Namjoshi schizophrenic identity can be concluded distinct and different from other women writers taken up for study because it deals with the religious oppression she faces.

Sunita Jain’s poetry reveals her thirst for being truly loved. However, this love appears to be self-love in the ultimate analysis. “The women poets want it to be a means of self-fulfillment and self-actualization. Self expands and seeks meaning in a broader frame and love is sought to be a means of that expansion” (Bajaj 59). In her quest for being truly loved, she says:

You who breathe through me

Breathe some more.

(―You who breathe through me‖ 13-14)

In her love poems it is companionship and togetherness which are more important than the physical act of love. She like an average
Indian woman seeks emotional satisfaction and involvement of heart, she considers sex as important but only as an expression of love.

During the survey, the cause of the schizophrenic identity of the poets has not been found to be a biological one. It is the study of psychoanalytical feminism which confirms that in the process of growth and development of a woman in the society, these schizophrenic characteristics are partly a result of unconscious sexual desires which have been repressed. It has shown that gender is constructed; it is not just wholly natural, but produced.

Almost all the poets taken up for the project have ultimately resigned themselves to the prevailing situation as is reflected in their later poetry. Their earlier defiance has been replaced with compliance and acceptance of the constraints. A woman like Sunita Jain who refused to be straitjacketed in the world of categorizers, now seems to have learnt to live in this male-dominating society. Earlier so rebellious she now confesses:

I think a woman has always been an emancipated being. Since Stone Age she is working with men. These days a desire has been created for equality and emancipation. These are the words which have been put into our minds. A woman can be totally emancipated but at the cost of her family and children. . . . The word ‘emancipation’
has been blown up out of proportion by social activists.

(Jain)

Though shocked and frustrated at the loss of freedom which she had always craved yet having no alternative, she now tries to accept an entirely appalling situation. This resignation to defeat is one of the schizophrenic characteristics.

Similar is the predicament of Suniti Namjoshi who is tired of the emotional wanderings attempting to explore an identity and freedom and has also learnt how to suffer in this society:

Merciful God, you taught us the meaning of guilt
And the world taught us how to trouble ourselves

We have learnt how to suffer.

(“The Lesson” 1-2, 5)

Eunice de Souza also acknowledges that women “finally learn / to claim nothing” (“Aubade” 10-11). She now wants to give up her earlier resentment against all established orders and wants to go with what her hair-dresser says, “take it as it comes” (“Bequest” 8). This loss of interest in life which has been perceived in the later poetry of Eunice de Souza is also a characteristic of schizophrenia.

The case of Gauri Deshpande is not much different because she ultimately find resignation to be the only solution to her tensions and
disquiet. She loses her interest in life to such an extent that she has even shed her desire for freedom and has chosen compliance.

Even the very rebellious Mamta Kalia later on accepts her destiny as a woman living in the male-dominating society. She admits that she is a weak person. She has also learnt this fact that to remain happy it is better “to flatter” a male and to go along with the patriarchal society than to defy the norms:

But ever since I learnt to flatter
I was happy.

(“What Could He Do” 20-21)

Hence, the new generation of Indian poets has tried to discover its own voice by developing its sensibilities. The themes have related to life in all its aspects. The poetry has struggled to break the boundaries of tradition while describing the conflict between the old and the new, and it has endeavoured to express the desire of a woman to break free of the bonds that have restricted her since times immemorial. However, the crisis they face is that the entrenched patriarchal structure is still controlling and restricting her life in one way or the other. It still considers that she is someone’s daughter, wife or mother, minus her own personality. The poetry of these poets taken up for the project reveals the frustrations and tensions which a woman faces because of the patriarchal structure and the discrepancy between the way she wants to behave and the way she is made to
behave. An in-depth study of these poets further reveals the difference between their early and later poetry. In most of the cases the point which emerges is the hiatus between their inner desire for a transformation of socio-cultural reality and the deep dissatisfaction with the given world order. This leaves them perplexed and baffled and ultimately they are reduced to a state of resignation from an earlier defiant stance. This bewilderment and ultimate resignation bestow upon them the schizophrenic characteristics.

Though the poets have not given any comprehensive vision or philosophy, but their poetry reveals similar divided selves and schizophrenic existence. Rarely have these poets shown their concerns with social evils like purdah, sexual crimes, ill-treatment of widows, Sati, bride-burning, infanticide, and female-foeticide—all of which make woman a victim. The prime concern of these poets has been their individual self—the self which is divided and tortured as a result of the societal pressures which mould their psyche and make them conform to the norms. These contemporary women poets are “sensitive persons”, and as Rashmi Bajaj declares, “the callous society turns sensitive persons into schizophrenics” (268) has been proved in this study.

However, this schizophrenia which generally appears to be a morbid and defeatist thing—offering no hope and direction for future—becomes, for these women poets and others in general, a
methodical attempt for the dismemberment of the given identities, images, equations and constructs. It has lead to re-configuring the subjectivities and charting newer modes of self-actualization. Deleuze and Guattari describe unconscious desire as flowing between two poles: the schizophrenic and the paranoic.

In bodies whose flow is towards the schizophrenic pole, there is a desire to deterritorialize. In bodies where the flow of desire is towards the paranoic, there is a desire to territorialize. Schizoanalysis asks us to deterritorialize the Oedipal structure. (Smith 1)

The same is the case with these poets. The unconscious desires of these poets flowing towards the schizophrenic pole, have a desire to deterritorialize i.e. a desire to move away from a rigidly imposed hierarchical context, which seeks to package things into discreet categorized units with singular coded meanings or identities, towards a rhizomatic zone of multiplicity and fluctuant identity, where meanings and operations flow freely between said things, resulting in a dynamic, constantly changing set of interconnected entities with fuzzy individual boundaries.

The age of reason demands secrecy in order to avoid scandal and confines all sorts of irregular and abnormal people. However, madness is equally important as it not only organizes the unreason, but also reveals it.
There is only one word which summarizes this experience, Unreason: all that, for reason, is closest and most remote, emptiest and most complete; all that present itself to reason in familiar structures—authorizing a knowledge, and then a silence, which seeks to be positive—and all that is constantly in retreat from reason, in the inaccessible domain of nothingness.

(Foucault 101)

Further, Foucault assigns a value to classical unreason: . . . we must understand it not as reason diseased, or as reason lost or alienated, but quite simply as reason dazzled. (101)

He considers madness as a part of everyday experience. The voice of a madman should be heard instead of confining it as it is powerful and can result in creativity. The same has been observed in the case of these poets. Their modes of resistance have given them newer equations and newer self-conceptions. Thus, the importance of schizophrenic decentring cannot be ignored.

Moreover, the ultimate compliance or seeming resignation is a stratagem to survive amidst all kinds of unchanging oppressions and absurdities. Therefore, this compliance is a compliance with a difference. This is the compliance after vital and valid realizations and comprehensions. It is a strategic compliance, a survival tactic,
with the potential to result in new equations and newer self-conceptions.

As psychoanalysis constantly reiterates to us, the difficulty lies in the fact that the human mind does not proceed directly. It does not respond well to radical and immediate change, but repeatedly circumnavigates and exhausts every alternative it already knows until it is satisfied that it is sufficiently bored. (Smith 1)

The schizophrenia in case of these poets is a “put on”. This schizophrenia, hence, has been adopted as a mode of resistance—as portent of new emergences, new ways of being, newer consciousness.

Thus, a psychoanalytical study of the similarities and differences of the poets taken up for the project reveals that the conflicts and dualities which the contemporary poets face between passivity and defiance, between the need for domestic security and the desire for independence, between the ways they want to behave and the ways they are made to behave have led to frustrations and sufferings in their life and poetry. Their anguished tortured psyche struggles and their final resignation confirms their so-called schizophrenic existence.

However, in the ultimate analysis it has been found as Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus proves that the desire of these poets does not come from lack and all the efforts made by these poets are not in
vain as in Freudian understanding. On the contrary desire is a productive force. It is not a theatre, but a factory. It’s a productive, real force—and not an imaginary fantasy as psychoanalysis limits it. Though the poets have not achieved too much, yet their embarking upon their quest as women, as poets and as individuals has brought greater self-confidence and awareness among women in general. The dualities and the conflicts in their minds have given them some status and respect in their lives if not equal. They are writing and publishing good verse, evolving tradition both at the thematic and the stylistic level. At the social level they have championed the cause of women with an unparalleled fervour as they have laid bare in literature a feminine world. These poets stand at the threshold of tremendous possibilities today and the future seems to be very promising. Hence, the significance of this schizophrenic decentring as in the case of these poets cannot be overlooked. Newer axis can only emerge if the given axis ruptures into smithereens.
Works Cited


