

FEMALE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONFORMITY IN THE SELECTED POEMS OF EUNICE DE SOUZA

Dr. Divya Das S. P

Associate Professor, Department of English, HPPC Govt. First Grade College, Challakere,
Chitradurga District, Karnataka.

Introduction

Eunice de Souza is the most notable writer of the modern Indian English literature. Her conveying aspects of feminist themes of the current situation are appreciable and effective. Being a spokeswoman for the women's community, she organizes the female folk to face challenges.

The present paper tries to represent Eunice de Souza's stand to create awareness among women. In this regard, this paper discusses the multifaceted perspectives of the writer in the poems, *Sweet Sixteen* and *Catholic Mother*. These selected poems of Eunice de Souza intend to peep into the personal experiences and associations of women's life. They further show the poet's attempts to incorporate the social expectations, adaptability and adjustability in women's mundane life. This article observes the author's feminist approach to create a sense of liberation in women to overcome challenges.

Eunice de Souza, an inhabitant of a Metropolitan, offers direct expressions to the various issues of women in the contemporary world. She displays women's loss of identity and adjustment in the realistic life to the demanding hegemonic bias during post independence era. The impact of Goan Catholic family's upbringing has contributed to convey her bold views on hidden biases which make women as invisible in all walks of life. She adopts the remarkable voice in her writings which are the result of her personal experiences and critical attitudes against the damaged human life. Her sensitive insights draw the marginalized conditions of women in the socio - cultural, religious and political realms. The realistic style of Eunice de Souza's writings enhances the inner strength of the women and transforms them to challenge the various suffocated structures.

Objectives

The present research paper focuses on Eunice de Souza's complex feelings towards the women's World. The poet's poems - *Sweet Sixteen* and *Catholic Mother* highlight situations of alienation, constraints, suppression and hegemonic status. Eunice de Souza's life has encountered the Catholic faith, church's marginalized ideologies, Goan structure of life and boundaries to dominate the world of human beings. The constructed social, political, cultural and religious systems of life determine the lives of women which deeply influence the author's writing. In addition, her determination to uplift the women's community inspires to voice out for the female identity and self- expressions. As an educator representing the issues of women, she attempts to shape the mindset of the marginalized women.

According to Sadaf Jamal,

“Eunice de Souza, one of the significant poets from the western region, attempts to explore her identity on ‘cultural individual and poetic levels’.”¹

Discussion

Modern Indian English writings include new perspectives of human beings. Particularly, postcolonial period exposes transformation in the lives of contemporary Indian woman.

“In the process, the post - independence Indian English poets distanced themselves from their immediate predecessors, adopting a style that was more realistic and social rather than transcendental, critical rather than creative, discursive rather than imaginative physical rather than metaphysical and experimental rather than conventional.”²

Thus, the contemporary women poets adopt various distinct ideologies to examine female sensibility, individuality and practical situation of women in Indian social structure. The glorified traditional suffocated pattern of female life is interrogated for a better life. Poetic words break the silence of the burdened and alienated self of women to put an end to all disparities.

This paper expresses de Souza's personal disturbances and her struggles to convey the required consciousness among women folk. Her writing of poems elucidates protest to every kind of mistreatment. Her purpose appears to strengthen the female community to have transformed life. She evaluates conformity of social, political and religious institutions which involve in the extension of norms.

The poem, *Catholic Mother* interprets the domination of the religious order. A family is depicted which is emotionally connected and associated with this structure. The cited poem leads the readers to have a picture of Indian Christian women. Eunice de Souza herself presents as a Goan Catholic woman. And her narratives in this poem showcase unjust treatment of women in the community of Indian Catholics. The elucidation of dominant hypocrite values subjugates them with the loss of identity. So, the author in *Catholic Mother* which is in the collection *Fix* (1979) emphasizes radical views towards the religious institution. She illustrates a Catholic family and satirically portrays a devout Catholic named, Francis x D'Souza to denounce the dominating patriarchal oppressive structure. He is praised as “the father of the year” who faithfully obeys all social and religious expectations. Congregation celebrates his personality and his role model image is popularized for the future generation.

Moreover, India has a legacy of harmonious relationship with various groups and communities. But, the fatalistic perspectives make people indifferent to country's optimistic purpose. It is evident in the image of Francis X D'Souza who strictly follows religious dogmas and blindly ignores the government's practical systems. Of course the colonial period has operated social change in the Indian lifestyle but at the same time Christian religious institutions exercise house old patterns claiming constraints. Francis X D'Souza sculpts himself according to the Church's wishes.

Francis' family has seven children in seven years and he believes that those seven children are God's gift. Impracticably, this large family is accepted as God's wish. The Catholic faith of enlargement of the family and denial of child abortion makes Francis to neglect the family planning policy of his Government. Ironical tone of Eunice de Souza strikes the glorification of deep Catholic community's faith which detaches a common man from the practical modern life and developments. Without being self-reliant, Francis complains India of "her wicked ways" and undermines the Hindus as unethical.

Francis X D'Souza's internalization of beliefs is legitimized through the voices of the Parish Priest and mother Superior. They enrich his deeds as productive for the Catholic Church which interprets him as "Pillar of the church" and his living in the "Lovely Catholic family".

Eunice de Souza underscores a wife's model traditional character with commitments inside the Indian Catholic family. Criticism regarding the patriarchal religious expectations and the ideas of liberation provides space for women's identity which is narrated in the poet's rebellious thoughts. The expression of the title *Catholic Mother* is highlighted to create courageous attitude in every Catholic women to be independent.

While mentioning the silence of D'Souza's wife, the poet criticizes all subordinating positions of a Catholic woman in the Christian family. It is clearly evident that wife's modesty symbolizes feminine sensibilities and submissive nature. But, Eunice de Souza's role as a reformer protests gender role in women's mundane life. She states a Goan - Catholic woman's sacrificing part is a voiceless side in the context of sexual feelings, pregnancy, family planning and domestic affairs. Emotional and psychological feelings of such woman are subjugated through cultural - religious imperialistic way. Inevitable condition of resistance and challenges are advocated in the author's narratives. Though Francis' character is elucidated as the perfect to the outside world, he fails due to his ignorance towards the personal feelings of his own wife. In addition to this view, the discussed facts penetrate into the minds of every woman to have self reliance and power for the better life

Another poem, *Sweet Sixteen* is selected from "Ways of Belongings". Eunice de Souza tries to explore the female psychic and emotional sufferings in the stereotypical structure of the human world. In the sense of humor, she marks the upbringing of young girls and views it as an act of colonizing their mind. A kind of fear and insecurity rules them throughout the young age until they enter the marital patriarchal world. The status of young women is restricted to discuss the topics of sex, sexual urges and individual desires in their day to day life. They are expected to suppress their feelings. The poet notes the conversation of two young girls over the pregnancy. They are scared if they dance with a man at the age of sixteen that could lead to pregnancy. The reproductive ability of women is realized to them with threatening facts about their body, the opposite sex and female feelings. Body function of a woman is indicated as a mystery. Gender

difference is clearly suggested in this poem to show the autonomous space for man who is free to discuss the matters of passion and sexuality. But a loose character is assigned to woman if she shares her realistic feelings of sexuality.

Pointing the personal experiences of life, the poet ironically considers issues of gender disparity, superstitious beliefs and various factors of world's expectations. This research paper also presents critical views questioning the women's role in executing centuries old conservations in the next generation. Mother, grandmother, elder sisters, nuns and teachers through family, religious and education institutions condition the female life at every step. The use of words like "menses" "brassieres" is strictly restricted in the public life. The poet illustrates mother's conduct in hiding the discussion of puberty. Even societal conditioning is extended to judge the dress of a young girl. A nun emphasizes dress code and ridiculously covers paper sleeves to the bare arms of girls at school. These young girls are marginalized to use the word "brassieres" as shameful act. Instead of that they are instructed to use the word, "bracelet" to keep them away from embarrassment in the traditional society. Resentment towards such taboos is advocated in the process of transforming women's consciousness. The young stage of every girl is expected to get exposure to the spirit of self - realization in the practical world with responsibility.

Conclusion

The progressive ideas of Eunice de Souza articulate contemporary discomforts of women and at the same time attacks the conservative beliefs. In the midst of her cited adversities, her poetry stands as a spirit of encouragement to women in the human world. Literary expression of Eunice de Souza invokes a message to the female world to find an individual space.

Notes:

1. Singh, Rajni and Krishna Singh.(ed.) "Indian Poetry in English: In Search of Identity." Authorpress, NewDelhi: 2012. p.142.
2. Ibid.,p.2

References

- [1] Singh, Rajni and Krishna Singh. (ed.). "Indian Poetry in English: In Search of Identity" New Delhi: Authorpress, 2012.
- [2] Khan, I.A. "Indian English Ficton." NewDelhi: Omega Publications, 2008.
- [3] Quayum, A. Mohammad. (ed.). "The Poet and His World – Critical Essays on Rabindranath Tagore. New Delhi :Orient Black Swan Private Limited, 2011.