

## A Voice on Violence: A Critical Study of the Select Poems of Eunice De Souza

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*Samimuddin Khan and Sambhunath Maji*

Women exploitation is no more a recent phenomenon. Since time immemorial women have been suppressed and subjugated irrespective of their class, colour, education, designation, position, religious status and geographical location (Karmakar, 2015). They have been fighting against the shackle of patriarchy in their own way. Some of them have participated physically in various socio-religio-political movements and some have used their pen to paint their pains and sufferings in the patriarchal society (Khan, 2023). Numerous movements took place to liberate the soul of women from the black shadow of patriarchal mindset. Several waves of feminism came to efface the multilayered inequality and injustice done to women and to bring women empowerment (Padhi, 2019). Consequently several articles have been added to the constitution for the protection and betterment of the condition of women but still women have been victimized in each and every aspects of life, throughout the globe (Tavassoli et al. 2022). In Indian context, be it northern, southern, eastern, or western part of India, thingification of women is a common scenario (Ghooni 2013). As the post-independence India has been searching for its own new identity, post-independence Indian English women poets have also been searching desperately for their own identity. Unlike the pre-independence silent, nostalgic, sentimental, romantic women poets, post-independence women poets like Suniti Namjoshi, Melanie Silgado, Imtiaz Dharkar, Kamala Das, Sunita Jain, Mamta Kalia, Gauri Deshpande, Eunice de Souza and so on are voiced, practical, realistic, rebellious, self revealing, confessional feminist in their approach to life and use their poetry as weapons against the patriarchal norms, codes, and values (Sharma and Gupta 2014). They waged war, not a guerrilla but an open war to liberate the soul of women who are caged,

oppressed, suppressed, subjugated, tortured, and exploited by the patriarchal mindset. Breaking their long state of silence and they started celebrating womanhood shaking off the bondage of subjugation to create women's self-existence in the society (Karmakar 2015). This proposed research seeks to present the position and condition of women as depicted in the select poems of de Souza, chiefly "De Souza Prabhu", "Bequest" and "Advice to Women". The purport of this research paper is also to discuss how de Souza tries to liberate women from all kinds of bondages and how she endeavours to create a position for her own self and for the whole women being specifically in social, familial life.

Eunice de Souza is one of the most regarded modern poets belongs to the western part of India. She is a realistic confessional poet. Real life experience is the base of her poetry. She has converted her life into poetry. She has expressed her thoughts, feelings, anguish, tension, frustration, depression, in her poetry. Actually she has unlocked her heart through her poetry to show her inner conflicts, loss, alienation, pains, and sufferings. To say directly, the subject of de Souza's poetry is to pain the real picture of women, their expectations, desire, tension, loss, and frustration intending to create an individual space for women in domestic and social life (Sharma and Gupta 2014). To meet these objectives she has made herself a representative figure for the whole women being facing the same problem throughout the whole Indian society. Sharing the experiences of her personal life she has tried to expose the external as well as internal state of the whole woman being in the Indian society. Through her poetry one can peep into her inner mind, sufferings from a lacerating pain and the tortured psyche always tensed, anxious, depressed and frustrated because of the constant conflict between what she is and what she is expected to be, between what she desires and what she achieves (Karmakar 2015). In a confessional mode she has tried to create awareness about such discrimination by advising the women and criticizing the entire male dominated society through her poetry (Padhi 2019). In one hand she has brutally criticized the traditional rules, and regulations, values and moralities, codes and customs and whatever that is patriarchal constructed to restrict women curbing their freedom, on the other hand,

almost like a leading maternal figure sometimes she has advised the marginalized, subdued and victimized women with full of sympathy and tenderness and sometimes chastised their weakness and shortcomings to liberate them from the vicious patriarchal bondages (Karmakar 2015).

Eunice de Souza was born in a Goan Catholic family, situated in Poona. She has presented the Goan Catholic society as the miniature version primarily of the whole western part of India and then the whole India. Her poetry actually is the production of her real life experience. Sharing her own practical experience de Souza has tried to show the helpless and pitiable state of women in a patriarchal society. Unfortunately, it was her own family, not the outside society made her to believe that it is a curse to be born as a girl child. Instead having motherly love and care she was rejected and condemned almost like the monster in Shelly's "Frankenstein". Since she came to be aware of the fact that her parent were waiting for a male child and she was just an unwanted female child of her parents she felt completely broken within. All the moment she was experiencing a hellish suffering (King 2007). Still she has tried her best to behave like a boy hiding her own true self, self identity, her womanly feelings, emotion, even her biological traits to satisfy her parents but in vain. She laments her situation in one of her well-known poem "De Souza Prabhu", saying:

My parents wanted a boy  
I have done my best to qualify.  
I hid the blood stains  
On my clothes  
And let my breasts sag.  
Words the weapon  
to crucify. (16-22)

With this forcefully imposed identity she started to feel rejected, dejected, alienated, unreal, suffocated and traumatized in fear. The condition of women in general is almost like de Souza. Still the 21<sup>st</sup> century India prefers male child instead female. Female child is not at all welcomed. They are taken as a burden to the family (Padhi 2019). Moreover, the

society does not want to accept woman as she is, rather it tries to shape her according to the patriarchal model. Consequently, they feel alienated, detached from her own self, feel suppressed, oppressed, loss of self identity and suffocated with the burden of imposed identity. Thus, the lives of women are always filled with fear, fear of losing her own self, her true emotion, feelings, passions, preferred behavior and her peace of mind.

A woman's life is constantly bogged down by fear and it is one of the main hindrances to the attempt at self realization. One of the main reasons why women are oppressed by patriarchy is that it is capable of inducing fear into them (Jena 12).

De Souza herself is lamenting in one of her autobiographical poem about the way the surrounding world is treating her:

I thought the whole world  
was trying to rip me up  
cut me down go through me  
with a razor blade. (Autobiographical 23-26).

This constant fear and confusion leads to silence and depression initially and bold and rebellious fighter subsequently. To make her parents happy she has suppressed her womanly feelings, emotion, passion even physical traits of woman and while doing that she has lost her soft womanly voice and develop a rude, harsh and satiric tongue that has made her a betrayer to her feminine society (Karmakar 2015). In the poem "Forgive me, Mother" de Souza cries in pain towards her mother, almost in the same rebellious tone of Plath for her loving daddy:

Forgive me. Mother,  
that I left you  
a life-long widow  
old, alone  
It was kill or die  
And you got me anyway

I was never young

Now I'm old, alone.

In dreams I hack you. (*Forgive Me, Mother* 1-12)

In the beginning of the poem, "Bequest", De Souza has tried to portrait the level of sacrifice done by women to meet the needs and demands of the patriarchal society through the image of Jesus Christ. The poet says:

In every Catholic home  
there's picture  
of Christ  
/holding his bleeding heart  
in his hand.

I used to think, ugh. (1-4)

Generally, a Catholic family keeps an image of Jesus holding his bleeding heart in his hand. Here the image of the bleeding heart of Christ is symbolic, directly symbolizes the idea of 'self sacrifice'. By giving the reference to the image of Christ, the speaker is actually trying to imply the Christ like sacrifice of women in the society. Christ sacrificed himself for the salvation of the total mankind. Here the 'heart' comes to represent the unconditional love of Christ for human being and His ultimate sacrifice. This image bears two significances. Firstly, it implies Christ's sacrifice. On the other hand, it portrays the speaker's own bleeding heart inflicted by the norms of patriarchy that has made women to live a traumatic lifeless life. What the speaker is trying to say under the veil of Christ image that in the patriarchal society women have sacrificed a lot to meet the needs and demands of the society and to make them happy. They are expected to give pleasure and happiness as a daughter, a wife and a mother to her respective families. They have tried their best to satisfy them but in vain. Subsequently they come to know that they want something more and all of their efforts become fruitless. In the society women have sacrificed their freedom, their voice, self identity, even their comfort and peace of mind.

In the poem “Marriage are Made” de Souza has depicted the fact how women have become commodified. During marriage the parts of a girl is scrutinized almost like a machine. It is not at all a pure bond of heart rather a mere transaction of a woman between two male figures. One is the father of the bride and the other is the husband (Chamoli et al. 2021). She has punctured the romantic glorification of marriage. In the patriarchal society marriage is forcefully imposed on women as they think women do not have any respect and identity without men. Women are only used through the name of marriage. They are living a lifeless life. They cannot do anything what they want, they can only act as they are asked to do. This is how women are sacrificing almost like Jesus for the wellbeing the human society but still remains ignored. Their sacrifice is not even recognized. In the same tone a conscious reader can see the same experience reflected in Mamta Kalia :

“But nothing ever happened to me  
except two children  
and two miscarriages. (*Sheer Good Luck* 15-17)

In the next stanza the speaker ironically says that the “only” person with whom she has not exchanged “confidences” is her hairdresser:

“the only person with whom  
I have not exchanged confidences  
is my hairdresser.” (5-7)

Here the word, "confidences" may mean confidential private matter, too personal question of women in general that is how to live happily at least with the peace of mind in this society. Reply comes from different sources:

Some recommend stern standards  
others say float along.  
He says, take it as it comes,  
meaning, of course, as he hands it out. (8-11)

Some have advised to follow the strict norms and codes of the society constructed by the patriarchal mind. Women are asked to surrender to the patriarchal standard of life to live happily without any fear. If they try to transgress the boundary set by the patriarchal mind they are marked as deviant and rejected by the society even by their own family. Some recommended to move with the traditional flow of life accepting everything as it is going on without any question and He advised women to accept what their fate offers them. Here the line “take it as it comes” may allude to the advice of Christ to mankind. In the *Testament*, Christ advised human beings to accept whatever comes to their life, good or bad, pleasing or unpleasing politely. They have to be ready always for the plans that the creator planned for them.

Advices came from different sides but one common thread is there and that is to accept and surrender to the patriarchal norms of society where they are caged, tortured both physically, and mentally. They feel alienated and do not find any support. No one has talked about their suppressed and oppressed state of life and no one have advised them to fight for their own freedom. Even Jesus has asked them to accept their lot as it is. Here, de Souza has tried to depict the expectation of the whole society from women. They just want to control and exploit them completely. This is the vey cause that makes de Souza a rebel against the total patriarchal baggage- its social rules and restrictions, codes and customs, morals and values. This social attitude towards women makes her biased to such extent that she has taken Jesus as a symbol and agent of patriarchy and rejected his sayings.

A patriarchal society with full of barriers and restrictions kills a woman emotionally. She lives a lifeless artificial life trying her best to perform her role as a mother, wife and daughter. In the next stanza of the poem "Bequest", Souza has depicted the psychic desire of a woman ironically to cope with the confined situation. Here the poetic voice, actually De Souza expresses her desire to be a wise woman full of artificiality like plastic flower:

I Wish I could be a  
Wise woman  
Smiling, endlessly, vacuously  
Like a plastic flower.  
Saying child, learn from me. (12-16)

This wise woman is something different from the wise women in the true sense of the term. Instead self satisfying in nature, De Souza's wise woman is a woman who is well versed in living for others accepting the patriarchal terms and conditions deliberately and unquestionably. A wise woman has a good sense of maintaining the formalities. She can hide her feelings brilliantly. Even when she is suffering within she knows to keep a fake smile on her face. Here the poetic speaker ironically says that there is nothing left for women to be happy and smiley. All the moment they are suffering from loss, alienation, tension and frustration in the male dominated society. Yet she wishes she could carry a vacuous smile on her lips like plastic flower which stands for both an unchanging beauty and cheap representation of a natural. The speaker wishes to hide her tormented feelings behind the mask of artificiality. Moreover, it does not stop there rather it transfer to the next generation. That is the point of irony. This is how women are trapped through marriage, left alienated from herself that leads her to the verge of madness. This entrapment, alienation and madness become "relevant to our understanding of the new woman" (Sheshadri xi).

In the final stanza of "Bequest", de Souza's speaker ironically says that she is going to perform an "act of charity" like Christ who accepted crucifixion for the sake of humankind. But, the speaker is performing a sacrifice not for others, but for redeeming herself from her mental sufferings. The poet says:

It's time to perform an act of charity  
to myself,  
bequeath the heart, like a  
spare kidney-  
preferably to an enemy. (17-21)

She wants to bequeath her heart. By using a simile, she compares her heart to a “spare kidney”. In this way, she decreases the value of the most important organ of the body, to an inferior one. It is important to note the meaning behind the term “heart”, the seat of emotion, passion and desire. De Souza’s speaker tries to sacrifice her heart to relieve herself from the pain it constantly causes. The longer it is in her body the more she will feel pain. It will keep reminding her of her mental sufferings for being a woman in a patriarchal society.

Thus in each and every aspects of society women are neglected as other and restricted by the patriarchal society. De Souza not only exposed the condition of women but also advised them to cope with this state of otherness. She has tried to guide these women to cope with such situation where she feels rejected, ignored, neglected, alienated, tensed, depressed and then dejected. In the process the poetic voice has also pointed out and criticized some negative traits of the female sex. While advising the women in the poem entitled, “Advice to Women”, the poet has brought the image of a cat:

“Keep cats  
if you want to learn to cope with  
the otherness of lovers.” (1-3)

Here the speaker is advising women to keep cats as their pet, firstly, to develop some characteristics and attitude and then to know how to react in the situation when they feel ignored, alienated and rejected by their lovers in particular and by the whole patriarchal society in general. The expression “otherness of lovers” apparently implies the indifference of the lovers in the course of a relationship. The speaker asks the women to keep a cat with them to import some specific qualities which can help them to live a peaceful life, even in the moment of rejection, frustration and depression. The conscious readers of de Souza can understand the oblique meaning of this small extract. Actually, it is not that women are only neglected by their lovers and she is writing only for the jilted women but for all the women robbed of their womanly freedom by the patriarchal society. In each and every field of the

patriarchal society women are made to feel other, meaning inferior and weak before man. This excerpt may indicate the suppressed, oppressed, subdued, neglected, tortured and exploited condition of women in general in the patriarchal society where women are treated as other or marginalized. Actually women are always placed as secondary in this society although they are the other half of the whole human existence and race. She shows not a particular woman but the whole women race as they are troubled, unfixed, tormented, and confused. The speaker has exposed this situation in a very humble way.

In one hand, she is talking about the other state of women, their feelings, emotion, sentiment, passion, tension, frustration, insecurity and also their struggle to live a peaceful life, on the other, she is bitterly criticizing the male sex or patriarchy. She ironically says that the otherness of lovers does not always convey a sense of neglect. It is not that the heartless lovers do not care for their partners. They do care for them but for a specific need only. Readers can easily comprehend what this need can be.

However, in the following lines, the speaker metaphorically reveals the need. She uses the metaphor of a cat and says that they always return to their “litter trays” when they feel nature call to release itself:

“Otherness is not always neglect-”.

Cats return to their litter trays

when they need to.” (*Advice to Women* 4-6)

It comes and goes according to its own will. It goes out and returns after a certain time when it feels any need to come back. Question may arise why the speaker is urging women to keep cat not dog or other pets. From the standpoint of behavioral psychology, researchers have found uniqueness in cats as against dogs. It is very easy to tame and control a dog but to tame a cat is not so easy. A Cat is marked with some unique attitude. It is the master of its own will and disposition unlike a dog which is always loyal and faithful to its master and obeys every single command. A dog is said to have no ego syndrome while a

cat has tremendous ego issues. It is a highly egoistic animal which can be associated with a free spirit. It comes only it feels the urge to. In other cases, it will remain indifferent and oblivious to any order of its master. So, the speaker is asking the women to keep a cat because cat gives the message- develop patience, don't be emotional too much, do what is needed and when it is needed. Besides, it can make them cool, calm, patience, practical, proud and indifferent, and also offer don't care attitude. These are the traits that de Souza asked the women folk to emulate. Cats are often portrayed as a symbol of selfishness and mischief. The poet uses it for the same purpose. She portrays the physical urge of the lovers by using the verb "need". According to the speaker it is only the sexual urge that keeps them around their lady partners. She asks the women to inculcate the haughty and indifferent attitude of a cat to react to the negligence of others irrespective of their lovers or any other male figures in one hand and it will also help them to tackle the cat like selfish behavior of their male partners, on the other.

Further the speaker is advising women criticizing their foolish habit, habit of cursing their enemies. She advises women not to curse their enemies peeping through the window:

"Don't cuss out of the window  
at their enemies" (7-8)

Here the poet is criticizing the behavior of the women cussing and quarrelling with their neighbors and turned them enemies from their windows. Here, the "enemies" may indicate the antagonists of their lovers or the patriarchal agents of society. Through these lines, the poet makes them aware of reality. De Souza says that it will be a foolishness to do so. Instead she suggests to remain indifferent to their enemies as indifference is the best action done to the enemies. Here the speaker alludes to one of the positive characteristics of cats. They never show aggressiveness outwardly. With its patience it keeps itself cool. the speaker advises the women that if their lovers or others neglect them they should have patience they must not be violent with them.

Here, the poet indirectly highlights the dependent nature of women. They are depended on their lovers. The dependence of the women on their lovers also implies the dependence of women on the patriarchal figures. Without the love and care of the men the women feel alienated, frustrated, and dejected. As if they don't have any self existence. Without the male figures they are suffering from identity crisis. Here she is trying to train women in general to make her own identity within domestic life as well as in socio-political life. To enliven their morale the poet further has brought the reference to cat.

That stare of perpetual surprise  
in those great green eyes  
will teach you  
to die alone (9-12)

The poet acknowledges the grandeur of the "great green eyes" of the cat and she believes that those eyes bear the potentiality to teach the women how to live self sufficiently, independently. The phrase "perpetual surprise" may indicate the invincible determination, and emotional detachment and the word "green" can be used for its vitality and rejuvenating power which the poet believes can revitalize the caged, oppressed, depressed soul of women. The expression "to die alone" therefore does not at all implies physical death rather it implies strong determination, coldness, self-reliance and self sufficiency with which one can live alone , die alone overcoming all the fear and ignoring all the ignorance and rejection by their lovers and enemies.

Keeping all the issues in mind finally it can be concluded that Eunice de Souza is indeed a brave and rebellious fighter against the patriarchal mindset. She was fighting throughout her life intending to liberate the captivated soul of women from the vicious clutch of male authority. In one hand she has pointed out the pitiable state of woman in the male dominated society and called an open war against them defying all kinds of rules and regulations, codes and values, morals and customs developed by patriarchal society on the other. Namjoshi has also highlighted the deplorable state of women, specifically those women who aspires to

have more space within the patriarchal structure of society (Goel 180). Her poetry shows her disgust towards everything that is patriarchal and restricts women curbing their individual freedom and trumpets the drum for women's liberty, equality and happiness in every aspects of life. Truly, she is the victim of a biased patriarchal society, her poetry shows her fractured emotion, frustrated relation, unfulfilled dream, isolation, aloofness and her own condition actually reflects the condition of women in general (Karmakar 2015). She has not merely depicted woman's position and condition in this patriarchal masculine society, besides, almost like a leading maternal figure, she has tried her best to create a position for her own and for the whole women being in familial, domestic and social life with full of sympathy, tenderness, and compassion for women.

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