

Identity crises and self realization in Neither shadow nor reflection (Na Chaey Na Aks)

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ABSTRACT

The paper undertakes examination of Naseem Shifae's poem Neither shadow nor Reflection ("Na Chay Na Aks") translated in English by Neerja Mattoo by focusing on theme of identity. Literature looks at humanity with a questioning as well as affirmative gaze ,disapproving and approving at the same time, reaffirming stereotypes as well as breaking them . Throughout ages narratives in Kashmir have revealed the inbuilt discrimination and biases against women. Cultural space for women is highly restricted in Kashmir.Inspite of their marginalized position kashmiri women made themselves heard ,undeterred by established womanly restraints interrogated the patriarchal practices and refused to live in a culture of silence . Naseem Shifae is a powerful women voice acclaimed internationally with the publication of her first poetry collection Darichi Matsrith (windows thrown open)highlighted the existing reality of women in contemporary Kashmir. My paper will explore the incongruity between the societal image of female poetic persona and her own instincts about her true nature .It will be argued how poetic persona is trapped in male allotted and confined space, persuaded to look at herself continually in terms of social conventions according to which women are denigrated by patriarchal supremacy .The bewildered state of mind leads her to undertake the obsessive search for her authentic self identity .she questions what if roles were reversed? Naseem Shifae weaves a pattern referring to myths ,rendering from past women poets and exposes man's treatment of women through ages .She leaves behind patriarchal structures and frees herself from male domain there by entering into phase of self awareness and assures herself of her own identity .Naseem Shifae assume the role of the medium in establishing female non being into self realized person.

Keywords: *Women-Kashmir-Patriarchy-Identity*

Throughout history women has always been the subaltern across cultural boundaries .Men need her, love her, adore her and write about her but they do so in relation to their lives. In this respect women has always been the "Second sex" .To quote Virginia Woolf, "Imaginatively she is completely insignificant, she pervades poetry from cover to

cover; she is all but absent from history.”¹Her representation in history in other words defined ‘negation’. It provokes many women writers to raise pertinent question against the gender based inequalities through their writing.

Naseem Shifae an internationally known translated a noteworthy contemporary kashmiri writer draws our attention to the deleterious dimensions of gender discrimination.Naseem began her literary career with two collections of poems “ Darichi Mutsrith” and “Na Chai Na Aks”.She has been translated in english and many Indian languages.Her poems are honest explorations of female self and the roles women are offered in traditional kashmiri society.Her poetry explores the silent and hidden operations of gender and conflict its politics.

Kashmir has a rich tradition of women poets .Lalded a 14th century poet heralded the rich tradition of kashmiri literature and was followed by Habba khatoon ,Arnimal,RoopBhawani and many other women poets.The timeless Lala became the collective consciousness of all kashmiris . Habba khatoon in her poetry symbolized her life,romance ,marriage and her separation from her husband who was imprisoned by Mughal rulers and subsequent pangs she faced throughout her life. Lalavakyas (wise sayings) of lalded and rich verses of poets rolled down to generations through word of mouth in kashmiri language.In Kashmir wanvun and Rov are two genres of kashmiri folk poetry in which women express their happiness and joy ,despondency strain and stress.These songs are spontanous outpouring of subjugated and deprived women of Kashmir and are invaluable documents of psycho-social life of kashmiri women.

Naseem Shifae became powerful voice of what may be called modern poetry in Kashmiri with her publication of “ Darichi Mutsrith” (windows thrown open) which begins with a dedication to “all those women of Kashmir who wanted to open their hearts but could not find words to do so”².Her poems provide comprehensive grasp and internalization of problems kashmiri women confront in attaining full recognition .This paper examines Naseem Shifae’s feministic perspective as it emerges through her poem “**Na Chaey Na Aks**” (Neither shadow nor Reflection),) translated in English by Neerja Mattoo. Naseem’s contribution to kashmiri women does not lie simply in portrayal of suppressed and oppressed women but in her efforts to impart her a separate identity .In her poem “Na Chaey Na Aks” (Neither shadow nor Reflection) she articulates feminist quest for identity .The poem opens with a women’s voice addressing her eternal disappointment to a male how he through ages have ignored her real self for empty pleasures of body.

Like always you came and stood at the door,saying nothing.

I Hear those flaming words that you always desire.

Your face alone I could not read ,but the heat of your glance

I felt.

In my mind I knew that now when you come

It would be to listen to my breath alone

You would enter my ravaged breast like the breath of spring. ³

Poetic persona has been trapped in male confines and finds herself reduced to sex object by patriarchal structure .It is obvious from her account she is aware of the ambiguous status given to her by patriarchy as inherited from her past ,entrapped in a culture which has perceived her as a static image, a shadowy figure.she cries

You have no idea of the shapes you cast me in !

With these words signals a sense of crises in narrator as the narration has to enact the reconstruction of female identity .It is with lyrical fantasy her sweeping imagination she created female odyssey through ages and lashes out at social hegemony of males who use different strategies ,make unjust rules and conditions to subjugate women. She evokes women referring to different ancient myths from Kashmir ,history ,religious establishments and includes verses from past women poets which are a part of collective memory of all kashmiri women passionately to expose man's treatment towards women through ages .

I came like Lal and Weeping I rose at the waning of the

night

And woke you up,O mad one,and you learnt to speak.

I was Habba Khatun and called you my sky

Called myself the earth and you a cover over all my secrets !

Became your garden and asked you to come and taste its

Wealth.

.....

Tarry a while and remember –it was me that held you in

my lap and sang:

Should you come as Krishna ,assuming numerous guises,

I will be Meera,with you at each step you take.

Should you pay heed to slander and ask me to prove myself,

I will stand in the flames and still keep chanting,'Ram,

Ram'!

It was God who commanded,'Go,inhale the fragrance from

that bottle .

To you a Messiah will be born,.....

As mother of Jesus, as Mary, how my value rose!

But abrasions of calumny followed my feet.

By calling women and women voices from past poetic persona bears witness to injustice patriarchy imposed on women and makes possible sympathy between these speakers across time, religious and cultural differences. Questioning power structures she asks

Did you ever seek my consent?

Ah, the faces you gave me,

Was one of them actually mine?

Her own voice clamours with the voice of these women declaring solidarity of women and throwing power structures open to implement disarrangements which demand new judgements and solutions.

Resisting the male constructs she questions and challenges conventional assumptions about identity of women.

No, I am not like you, nor the image of me in your dreams

You are you - and I have my own being.

.....

A separate being, that is what you must know.

The female voice in the poem denies and turns away from negative, subordinate submissive role and refuses to get washed away her selfhood, existence obliterated forever in conventional codes and categories. "Rather than merely reinforce our given perceptions, the valuable work of literature violates or transgresses these normative ways of seeing and so teaches us new codes of understanding"⁴ says Terry Eagleton. Poetic persona offers reversals turning the male territory back upon men. She leads him to take obsessive vision to feel her mutilated existence. She utters a challenge: What if rules were reversed.

Come, go down in me and plumb my depth for a while

And see me - beyond beauty of form and face.

Come on, like Krishna descend from skies and worship me

Come on, as Rama Come and go through a trail by fire!

Lal saw me in Shiva's embrace and told you of it

It was me, me alone but still you did not know!

Should you again abandon a Habba in midway somewhere.

.....

If Knowledge dawns on you even today, then come,

..... Today for me alone, to stand by me, with me, a real Adam!

Then I'll know that now you know -

That I am me, neither shade nor reflection.

These lines suggest by her empowering decision of leaving behind her patriarchal strategies she has freed herself from male domain thus acknowledging herself as an integrated, individuated self aware person.

In the concluding lines a revelation is dawn upon her. The pronoun "I" in the poem is quite significant she asserts herself into being when "I" and "me" are used in poem. Narrator recreates herself which was erased by patriarchy and reminds us of the fact patriarchy is retained in female consciousness. In search of her self narrator releases herself from conventional mirror image given to her and develops image for herself. A female self on equal footing with her male counterpart capable of reaching out to space which is beyond gender suggesting triumph of female power.

Naseem Shifae's poetry is committed to bring about changes in the lives of Kashmiri women. She advocates a change within not imposed from above in the form of laws and rules, she knows any freedom outside i.e. external ceases to have any meaning and strength unless it is reinforced by the inner freedom.

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