

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT – A REFLECTION IN THE POEMS OF “MUMBAI MIRROR” EUNICE DE SOUZA

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Abstract: Women’s Empowerment is a global issue in determining the status of women. The position and status of women all over the world has risen incredibly in the 20th century. It may be because of the awareness among women. We know that it has been very low in 18th & 19th centuries in India and other countries. Women were treated like “objects”. In the name of marriage they can be bought and sold. Their dependence on men folk was total. But now women started to learn the possible ways to be independent in the society. Their monetary independence led them to the way to empowerment. Robert Blood (1965) observes, “Employment emancipates women from domination by their Husbands and secondarily, raises their Daughters from inferiority to their Brothers” (Blood and Wolfe, 1965). According to Dr. Nafi’s Sadik, the former Executive Director of UNFPA “Women are the heart of development”. Women are responsible to bring about better lives for billions of people in the developing countries as well as developed countries to bring sustainable development

Introduction: The main aim of this research paper is to bring about the ideas about Empowerment of Women, and barriers to the Women Empowerment through the poems of Eunice De Souza. Her poem reflects the socio-cultural life and domestic life of Indian Women. She chooses poetry as a medium to show the position of women in the society. She frequently shared her own personal experiences or the experience of her friends and relatives in her poems. Her collections of poems include *Fix* (1979), *Women in Dutch painting* (1988), *Ways of Belonging* (1990), *Selected & New Poems* (1994).

In her Poem “*For Rita’s Daughter Just Born*”, the poet compares the new born baby girl to “luminous leaf” and the mother prays that her daughter’s life should be blessed with gentle sunshine and rain. She also prays God to protect her daughter’s life from all calamities. This shows the anxiety of mother when she gives birth to a girl child.

“Luminous New Leaf
May the Sun rise gently
On your unfurling
In the Courtyard always linger
The smell of earth after rain
The stone of steps
Stay Cool and Old
Gods in the niches
Old brass on the wall

Never the shrill cry of kites.” (1-10)

The experience and the emotional state of mind of the Mother with girl baby is clearly depicted in this poem. Since the mother is afraid of the male dominated society she prays to God that her

daughter’s life to be always filled with gentle sunshine and rain. She implores the God to protect the child from social and cultural problems when she says, “Stone of their Steps.” Girl child is often killed for financial reasons. Girls are considered a drain on family resources during their childhood, and without bringing economic benefits later on. That’s why in order to create an awareness among women through the poem, the poet blesses the new born girl baby for her overall development. The poem also reflects the anxieties of a mother for her daughter. Though motherhood is the greatest gratification to a woman, she has a great fear in her mind about the physical and intellectual growth of her daughter in the gender-biased society. “A Woman’s life is constantly bogged down by fear and it is one of the main hindrances to the attempt of self realization. One of the main reason why women are oppressed by the patriarchy is that is capable of indulging fear into them” (Jena,12)

In the poem “*Miss Louise*” the poet describes the position of spinster in a patriarchal society in a unhappy way. We can find an aged spinster who has become a helpless victim in the society as her imagination of luxurious life with mothering children has shattered. This is because a woman is always portrayed as a dependent of husband and children.

She elegant of descending
Curving staircases
Ivory fan a slutter
Of Children in Sailor Suits
And organza dresses,
Till the dream rotted her innards

But no one knew
 Innards weren't permitted
 In her time. ("Miss Louise" 1-9)
 She is very much conscious about her beauty. She exploits her beauty and valuable time to entice men and also the Priest at the Church so that she can be a dependent of a man in order to escape from the society. Shaking her graying ringlets:

"My Girl", I can't even
 Go to Church you know
 I unsettle the Priests
 So completely. Only yesterday
 That Handsome Fr. Hans was saying,
 "Miss. Louise, I feel an arrow
 Through my Heart" ("Miss. Louise" 10-17)

De Souza's poems are like two edged sharp sword as it bear double meaning. In her "*Fix*" she brings out that the traditions and culture of the society are the obstacles for the women empowerment. In this poem she portrays a modern woman with self-confidence who tries to break the old traditions. A woman could not get any recognition even she comes out with flying colours in her endeavors and in consequence she could not win recognition as a complete person. However, respected she may be she is considered as subordinate, secondary and parasitic (De Beauvoir 475)

The poem tells about love, marriage and upbringing of children in the patriarchal society. Mahatma Gandhi says, "Women are gifted with equal capacities and therefore she has equal rights. However, due to the force of custom, ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying superiority over women". ("Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi" pg. 424-425").

Women are not treated equal to men. Due to gender discrimination girls suffer a lot in schools, colleges and in work place. They also face many hardships as a girl, as a wife and as a mother because of their

biological exclusiveness and partiality. De Souza's poetry shows ambivalent nature of women and how women are troubled or confused because of the boundaries of the society.

Women faces may frustrations. Her poem "*Bequest*" shows the pitiable condition of women. She is not given freedom to choose her path. She is dwindling between the way she wants to live and the society wants her to live:

"Some recommend stern standards
 Others say Float along
 He says, take it as it comes
 Meaning, of course, as he hands it out".
 ("Bequest" 4-7)

Gandhiji says that "Women must not suffer any legal disability which is not suffered by men. Both are perfectly equal" (Young India, 17th October, 1929)

De Souza talks about the various roles of women as a daughter, wife and mother. She is created to perform multiple roles. As she says in the Poem "*Bequest*":

"I wish I could be a Wise woman Smiling, endlessly,
 vacuously Like a Plastic Flower Saying Child, learn
 from me." ("Bequest" 8-13)

Women's duties may differ from Men. But there is no duality, no inferiority, or superiority based on the body and mind.

Conclusion: Gender – discrimination is the foremost barrier to the empowerment of women. Investing in gender equality and Women's Empowerment can unlock human potential on a transformational scale. As President Barack Obama said, "When women succeed, nations are more safe, more secure and more prosperous." De Souza's poems exemplify the increasing awareness against gender discrimination. Her poems are an exhortation to the young women to emerge as successful beings with self respect and self confidence to overcome oddities of life.

"EMPOWER WOMEN, EMPOWER THE FUTURE"

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