

Reclaiming Female Sexuality and Identity: A Critical Feminist Study of Eunice De Souza and Sujata Bhatt's Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Cultural studies have changed the understanding and research paradigms of a literary text. A text put forwards multiple issues concerning identity, culture and self. The research framework of identity transforms with the context of time and society. The concept of self and identity emerged as the most challenging in the recent academic research. It has been analysed in the literary text from the perspectives of postcolonial, postmodern, post structural, feminism and post feminism in the emerging writings across the globe. The present research paper proposes to explore the notion of identity from the lens of feminist and post feminist contours in the select poems of Eunice de Souza and Sujata Bhatt. The paper is an attempt to explore the patriarchal precarious existence of female sexuality, body and identity comparatively in developing writings of Indian women. The paper also endeavours to investigate the psychological and emotional state of female as conceptualized the select poets.

Keywords: *Female, Identity, Sexuality, Patriarchy, Gender, Culture.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The present research paper is going to disseminate the inflections how the contemporary Indian English women poets have disintegrated the aspects of precarious existence of female sexuality and identity in the receptacle of their writings/poetry. Do they dissimulate or reiterate the torment of it in the incubation/concretization of their writings or not? In terms of the articulation of patriarchal tradition, do they map out the master-slave and colonizer-colonized relationship in terms of male-female representation or not? How do these contemporary Indian English female poets vindicate the women persona through the contours of their writings in response to the 'discriminative values', 'hypocrisies' and 'prejudiced rules'? Do they struggle for the establishment of women's identity in the contemporary world? How do they commemorate the birth of female child in the proliferation of their poetry? As in the patriarchal society, the birth of female-child is not considered collectible wherein the female child is considered "second Sex", "other", "subject", and "non-man"- the female-child in the incubation of her biological person is taught in the "process of being socialized to internalize consciously or unconsciously the reigning patriarchal ideology- male superiority; and so conditioned to derogate their own sex and co-operate in their own subordination. Patriarchal hegemony has prevented women from realizing their productive and creative possibility." (Krishna 207) That is why women realize "sub-alternity" and "marginal position" in the society. But Eunice de Souza and Sujata Bhatt boldly endeavour to refuse to go along with such patriarchal supremacy and dominance by creating widely divergent images of female sexuality and identity-traditional as well as modern in the amplification of their poetic universe.

The final research question, in the deployment of this paper, would travel around the influence of socio-cultural, politico-historical factors that have shaped the transitions in the notion of female sexuality, body and identity at the level of representation. Impact of their language on their poetry, in this paper would also be carefully contrived, as they have invented a new sort of literary idiom/language in the deliberation of new Indian women's writings.

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"Patriarchy", in the words of V. Geeta, "is a system where men are family heads, descent is reckoned through the father, men alone are priests, and all laws and norms dictated by male elders are held to be just and right." (Geetha 5) Further, Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick in the same trend in their book *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory* orientate, "The term 'patriarchy' literally means the 'rule of the father'. It has been adopted by the majority of feminist theorists to refer to the approach, in which societies are structured all the way through male domination over, and oppression of women. Patriarchy therefore refers to the customs in which material and symbolic resources (including income, wealth and power) are unequally distributed between men and women, through such social institutions as the family, sexuality, the state, the economy, culture and language." (Edgar and Sedgwick 269-70) Mulk Raj Anand in his article "In Yama's Hell, Indian English Writing about Women" says: "In my opinion, one cardinal cause of suffering of woman in all ages, except the first Aryan phase, has been the dominant patriarchy, sanctioned in the *Smritis*." (Anand 5) According to Uma Chakravarty, in her book *Rewriting History, the Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai* disseminates that:

Woman, especially Indian woman, is not a monolithic social category. She has a number of images to follow according to class and caste hierarchies and stratification and humiliation varies from class to class and caste to caste for her. (Chakravarty 17)

Consequently, the age-old patriarchal ethos controlled women all the way through the familial culture, customs, myths, communal environment and lore universally come into existence as an essential part of the collective psyche of a society and an index of its advancement. Commenting on the susceptibility of women within the prevalent patriarchal norms, Jagpal opines:

These social patterns are not immutable entities, but are susceptible to historic transformation that opens up new areas of struggle and negotiation of relationship between gender and classes. It is basically through the ambivalence and paradoxes of these relationships and failure to resolve element of hostility that the protest finds an expression. It is, however, distressing that women remain the most vulnerable section who quite often is seen to accept the socially imposed constructs blindly and wriggle under the weight of redundant and regressive tendencies. (Jagpal 58)

Across the centuries, women in India have mutely maintained the patriarchal taboos, cultural institutions and social bondages. They do not ponder over their liberty, spirit of equality, authoritative identity and social constitutional rights through which they can construct a dignified space for themselves. They have always been treated as daughters, wives, and mothers and as a “value-holder of society” in a male-dominated world. They do not acquire the breathing space for their individual identity. Their identity is because of their father, brother and husband. Although the flavors of their individuality and strapping identity have never been permitted to shatter through these socially and culturally circumscribed roles. In terms of the renovation of women’s position within the patriarchal convention due to the modern phenomenon of globalization and liberalization, Anju Jagpal maps out:

Despite the diversity of caste, class, creed, region and religion, woman’s subordinate status has been vouchsafed unanimously by all in the Indian society. This belief has been shaped over centuries by the ancient Indian normative texts and holds sway even today. Though vibrant changes in the socio-cultural domain are distinctly visible in the post-Independence India, yet a large segment of it still retains the asymmetrical traditions in new moulds. Notwithstanding the vast spate of modernization, globalization and mechanization, a large section of Indian society still endorses the medieval norms and traditions regarding women in the name of religious and cultural conformity.....”(Jagpal 58-59)

In this regard the contours of the feminist critics have demonstrated and explained that “literature reflects a patriarchal, or a male-dominated perspective of society.”(Jagpal 16) It is exclusively patriarchal conventions, way of life and arrangements which have regulated the dissimilarity between male and female in terms of superior and inferior beings. This concept of ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ is “cultural constructed, not natural constructed.” It is solitary patriarchal notions that have subjugated female life and their body in an awful mode. It is merely the patriarchal ‘accepted wisdom’ that have mushroomed a master-slave and colonizer-colonized relationship between male and female body and created gender preconception. Male body is at all times treated “strong, powerful and superior to women.” Moreover, women are always considered deficient human beings without the companionship of man in their life. That is why they were forced to accept “sati pratha” (widow burnt) after the death of their husband. Therefore, it is not more than the mechanisms of patriarchy that have fabricated/created penis as a sort of “emblem of social power” whereas male and female sexual organs are in fact a matter of biological composition only. Both have exceptional universal sexual function in terms of male and female body. One is imperfect without the other. Consequently, it is only the ascendancy of patriarchy that has endorsed a cultural ‘mind-set’ in men and women perpetuating sexual inequality and female subordination. In terms of the bias that women are subjected to, Kanwar Dinesh Singh pertinently ponders over:

Woman has always been projected as secondary and inferior. The bias against women can be seen right away from the day one of Creation. It is said that God created man in his own image. The suggestion is that God is male. Further, it is said that God, after creating man, made woman from the rib of man. As Adam, the first man on the earth, remarks about Eve: ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman. Because she was taken out of man’. The suggestion is that man is created first, and woman is taken out of man. In other words, woman is secondary to man. (Singh 9-10)

Therefore, the present research paper aims at studying and analyzing the poetry of Eunice de Souza and Sujata Bhatt in response to the articulation of female sexuality and identity under the influence of patriarchy. The paper would look at how they revolt the age-old patriarchal hegemony/domination through their poetic volumes as they have spoken on women’s liberation, education, political and social rights as well. In patriarchal Indian Society, a woman cares about her fidelity, chastity and duty as a daughter, wife, mother etc... But these contemporary Indian women writers endeavour to create an innovative space for woman by revolting

against patriarchal traditions and situations. They do not believe in submitting themselves as helpless victims of social system and are not ready to live a life of 'deprivation' and 'discrimination.' They do not surrender their unique identity for the sake of their familial traditions. These contemporary woman poets in the acceleration of their poetic collections describe women emerging in the 'new outward appearance' to discover their potential as human beings and do not limit their life space to the constricted precincts of being daughters, daughters-in-law, mothers and wives. These contemporary women poets captivate and provoke the readers by raising questions, opening perspectives, challenging, illuminating and explaining realistic panorama of social and cultural life of woman. They have addressed the issues of "exploitation of women, their marginalization and gender discrimination in a world dominated by patriarchal power" through their writings.(Mohit K. 1-17) They resist the unjust patriarchy and their poems attempt to subvert the prevalent gender bias due to patriarchal supremacy. That is why these poets seem to be reflecting their sharp discernment and profound insight in response to the articulation of female life and their bodily experiences. They endeavour to construct and relocate the female in an authentic voice. Their poems are "seriously involved in deconstructing the submissive roles deployed to women by the patriarchal norms of society. Consequently, their poetry depicts a power-struggle between the two sexes and they respond to this struggle according to their faith, experiences, training and exposure to the outside world and their desire for empowerment."(Nabi 111) Commenting on the reflection of a distinct feminine sensibility in their poetry, R D Bhattacharya remarks:

These new women poets stand poles apart from their predecessor, Kamala Das. At the same time they are rooted in her and linked with her, sharing the same ambience and the same concerns. These poets and perhaps women poets anywhere inhabit the same women's world. It is impossible to get out of one's skin. They possess distinctly feminine sensibilities. (Pandey 2007:200)

Eunice de Souza and Sujata Bhatt are from two major religious, traditional, and cultural beliefs of Indian society and represent a cross-section of Indian women's life. Both poets express their resentment against the patriarchal Indian social set-up and attempt to disintegrate this system all through their poetic expression. Since the life of earlier women in India has been restricted and bounded to the domestic sphere only, they protest against such traditional role of women in their poetry. This act of articulation presents them as "iconic/dynamic feminist voice" in contemporary Indian English women's poetry. They protest against the process of patriarchal tradition in a highly aggressive tone to foreground the repression of women, articulating their ideas through powerful images and symbols in their poems. Originating from two diverse cultural backgrounds, their way of resistance against patriarchal precariousness of female existence is also based on different locations. De Souza revolts against the process of patriarchy through the theme of love, marriage, her salacious language and female body sexuality and identity. And her contemporary poet, Sujata Bhatt offers a critique on it by choosing the theme of female biological process such as female pregnancy, female sexuality, female bodily exposition and man-women sexual ties. She does not only put in writing but also read her poems on different occasions to diverse audience. In an interview with Vicki Bertram, she admits her poems in response to the theme of female sexuality:

I have poems about women's experiences (such as menstruation and childbirth) is because I tend to write out of my own life - it is my life that I am trying to understand. In many poems I've changed things or put in a lot of fiction: often I have a female character who is not me, but an imagined woman in a different time and a different place. Of course, in some way these imaginary women are connected to me. In my opinion 'women's experiences' are universal subjects. People can forget that half the population is female and that pregnancy and childbirth are experiences that also affect men.... (Bertram, 2012 Online)¹

Eunice de Souza, living and brought up in Indian "Goan Catholic society" glances at the overall problems and issues of women in Indian society and articulates them from a dispassionate angles. Her poetic articulation foregrounds "a realistic image of man-woman ties" in Indian cultural system. She endeavours to expose the subjugation of Indian middle-class woman in their families, married life and at large by the Indian male-centric tradition, which is not only socio-cultural, but psychological as well. Her expression of the sufferings and agonies of woman with a touch of irony under patriarchal repression and her revolt against it prove her a powerful feminist voice in contemporary Indian English women's poetry. In her poems, she tries to demonstrate brilliantly the miscellaneous social and cultural contexts in which patriarchy functions in her poetry. In response to the patriarchal dominance, de Souza realistically unravels the tragedy of her mother under the dominance of patriarchy in the poem "My Mother Feared Death". Here she constitutes the compendium of her mother's life which is devoid of love, feeling and emotional touch. She gives account of her confinement and suffering which she has experienced within the doors, grilles and locks of house. She postulates:

doors, grilles, locks

that would not open

Coffins, crematoriums.

No way to treat a lady.

.....

Alive or dead, mothers are troubling. (*A Necklace of Skulls* 108-9)

She seems to be holding out the fact how patriarchal set-up brings woman down physically, mentally and emotionally as well in the confined space which is created by male patriarchal system. The process of patriarchy creates a situation of sufferings in their life whether they are dead or alive. The above mentioned terminology with images like --“door”, “locks” and “grilles” powerfully and symbolically depicts her as a serious critic of patriarchal female precariousness. But the crux of the poem lies in the line “No way to treat a lady”. This is what really brings out a strong space for the poetry of de Souza seeking a reaction against the precarious female identity in the incubation of contemporary Indian English women poetry. She reflects “The women moan” (*A Necklace of Skulls* 110) in her poetic collections and seeks to create a dignified space for woman persona in Indian precariousness patriarchal society/dominance. It is such an irony that even now in this modern age of science and technology which is being followed by equal standards status of education, the birth of female child is still a consideration/matter of lament. Even in the present modern world, patriarchy operates in such a way that it still maintains the gender bias between male and female. In this context of gender bias, Singh lengthily points out:

In spite of biological categorization of people (because of inherent sexual difference), gender (as desired or interpreted identity that male or female is supposed to take on) has created the stereotypical masculine and feminine gender identities. Men are the ‘super sex’ or the ‘stronger sex’ while women are the ‘inferior sex’ or the ‘weaker sex’. Men are considered as logical, rational and objective, whereas women are presumed as emotional, inconsistent, intuitive, subjective and lacking self-confidence. Men should be extrovert, competitive, bold, brave, dominating and aggressive, and women should be submissive, well-behaved, polite, soft-spoken, supportive, co-operative and sympathetic. The gender bias is reflected even in the use of language, as is manifest by a number of generic terms such as ‘mankind’, used to denote the entire race of human beings. The sexist attitudes are seen in the use of words referring to women having negative connotations. For example, men ‘discuss’ and women ‘gossip’ and ‘chat’, and men are seen as ‘forceful and masterful’ but women are described as ‘bossy and domineering’. Women have been considered chatty and garrulous by nature. As says Hesoid: ‘Their untir’d lips a wordy torrent pour’. (Singh 10-11)

In this response women are not considered cogent, rational and intellectual beings as compared to males. They are always treated as secondary and cooperative to their male spouse. But it is the influx of educational arrangement which imparted the buoyancy in the temperament of women to go up with men in all the sphere of the way of living. Along with the process of women’s convent educational system, the advent of cyber-culture, rising use of internet, impact of cinema also played a vital role in the development of their personality and rationality. It provides them to prove their potentialities and abilities in all the sphere of life. In this reaction woman character that appears in the poem “Aunt” by de Souza emerges as a powerful female character who can read great books, magazines and newspaper though being under the patriarchal authority it is not an easy job for women to read and contemplate. They are usually treated purely an object of love and sex. Through the processes of education they are empowered to challenge and subvert the patriarchal hegemony and dominance. That is why the process of women’s education gives them freedom to contemplate over various dimensions of their emancipation and liberation. They commence to reflect on their roles in domestic and social spheres. They start to sabotage the male dominance and patriarchal praxis. Hence, the female protagonists in de Souza’s poetry often engage in a critical consideration of their function and role in the patriarchal world and they make an effort to liberate themselves through their education:

She reads the newspapers from

first page to last

looking for a cheerful story. (*A Necklace of Skulls* 114)

In the poem “Invitation” de Souza writes, “We can read in the courtyard” (117) and even the female character has aptitude to “write a happy poem or two” (117). These female characters are creative and being creative celebrates their life. They do not want to live under the shackles of men’s bondage and dominance. They would like to be aware of their life achieving an authoritative individuality. Consequently, their creativity becomes their power. Therefore, they are challenging the patriarchy which “impacted

all aspects of women's lives". (Geetha 92) They endeavor to undermine all prevalent patriarchal notions responsible for sufferings of women in this male dominated world. That is why their poetry seems to be a "departure from the early romanticism and comes out much more realistic, frank and bold." (Prasad 270) In fact, these contemporary women poets have inundated the expression of female experiences within the literary scene.

On the other hand Sujata Bhatt's poetry regarding the precarious existence of female sexuality and identity is more rebellious and harsh as compared to de Souza's poetry. Her works are more proliferated and open in terms of resisting the patriarchal hegemony in the contemporary world in response to female-bodily needs, desires and psychology. She concerns over such sort of issues on the world strata as she has visited many countries and has been a visiting writer at various universities. That is why her work has been widely anthologized, broadcast on radio and television, and has been translated into more than twenty languages. Bhatt subverting the Precariousness of patriarchy in her poetry delineates:

to go to court of law

where the judge said:

'This is no marriage! You are free!

You can choose again,

You can decide for yourself- (*Point No Point* 80)

The above mentioned lines which are from Bhatt's poetic volume *Monkey Shadows* underpin to root out the long existed patterns of male-dominance and system of patriarchy. Being a contemporary female poet she speaks on the modern machinery of law and order which provides to women a space of equality, liberty and sense of self-respect subverting the long traditional setup of precarious female subjugated identity. This is what denotes the expression of modern system of judiciary in the poetic world of Bhatt which vindicates the equal right for women to choose their husband and attempts to demolish the aspect of marriage which takes place under the influence of patriarchy which appropriates the idea of heterogeneous forced arrange marriage. She does not represent women merely as a sexual object for male lust. She does not articulate women as secondary, other and non-man. When she writes on man-woman sexual relation, sexuality and identity she displays woman enjoying it. In her world, women characters emerge economically dependent or independent too. They are creative and sensible human characters. Even they are educated as she says in "A Story in Pearse": "Reading your new books." (*Point No Point* 79). Further articulating the female bodily biological process she writes:

A thousand rivers collided

rushing

and changed direction

within my chest. (*Point No Point* 99)

Sujata Bhatt through her poetic collections articulates such themes which are not considered easy for a woman persona in a "male-dominated patriarchal order". She, through the above mentioned lines, delineates a journey of woman which is all about her experience from womanhood to motherhood. Her poetic expression is also distinct as she does not conform to established poetic conventions. She writes unusually, unconventionally and openly and it seems that cotemporary poets like her have invented a new sort of literary idiom. As she has written in "A need to Recall the Journey", "snap away/then break apart like rubber pipes/full of blood." (*Point No Point* 99) This seems to be suggesting a realistic expression of female bodily biological function in an unflinching way in a "male-dominated patriarchal world." (Geetha 61)

Sujata Bhatt in her poem "More Fears about the Moon" subverting the patriarchal set-up gives vent to the articulation of "the anguish of a woman who suffers from multiple miscarriages. In her pain and helplessness the female persona experiences dislocation of her 'inner voice' for her body, which seems to her as an empty receptacle that cannot retain her beloved children." (Chaudhuri 2) Henceforward she becomes numb and silent as she eliminates "fetus after fetus." (*Point No Point* 140) In this regard Chaudhuri excogitates that she experiences a life shattering rejection as her girls and boys, who "could not wait/to leave...they didn't want/to become children/slip away from her." (*Point No Point* 140)

In her poems revealing the Indian pregnant women's psychology, she realistically writes on the fear which a woman has to face at the time of child-birth when she is anxious whether the new-born child would be male or female. In this respect she excogitates on the psycho-contemplation of woman during the process of pregnancy. And she even longs to see the "faces of the children, but the tiny bodies are smothered in the blood" in the incubation of pregnancy.

And the inner voice

dares not speak to me.

Each Time I looked /there was always too much blood.

I could never see the face. /Only the fins: limp,

but they glistened and once,

the curved spine seemed to tremble/in the dish.

Too many little ones slipped away/from me. My girls,

my boys-couldn't wait/to leave- my crooked fishes.(*Point No Point* 140)

In this response to the poetry of Sujata Bhatt Chaudhuri remarks that "the contrary experience of a mother choosing to abort her girl child and practicing the heinous crime of female infanticide is movingly addressed in "Voice of the Unwanted Girl". Here in this poem the aborted girl-child poignantly interrogates her mother and enforces her to remember the dire facts."(Chaudhuri 3) In this respect Bhatt realistically narrates the facts that how the new life which is about to come out in the world in the image/form of girl is smothered due to the gender difference prevalent in this patriarchal male-dominated universe.

Mother, I am the one

you sent away

when the doctor told you

I would be

a girl--- yours second girl. (*Monkey Shadows*, 25)

Therefore sarcastic, unsympathetic, yet excruciating, irony in the poem can be observed in the idiom "your second girl"-commenting on a society that enunciates the girls insignificant- 'unwanted' – and "compels a mother to abort her own daughter to get away from persecution, the shame and guilt of bearing girl children, displacement, even death."(Chaudhuri 3) In Indian society the birth of female-child is considered unwanted and a matter of embarrassment. That is why during the process of pregnancy the 'fetus' is destroyed mercilessly as soon as one realizes that the new born child would be a girl. In this regard Bhatt's poems become 'uniquely personal' and have 'universal appeal' which indeed reflects the resistance against precarious patriarchal female identity and existence. In her widely read book *My Mother My Self*, Nancy Friday renders that in response to the proliferation of self-development "women have to break their infantile connections to overcome the feelings of dependency, insecurity and sexual guilt resulting from over-identification with the mother if they have to grow-up wholly in the adult world."(Jagpal 33)

Revolting against patriarchy in her most auto-erotic poem "The Kama Sutra Retold" Bhatt along with the celebration of female sexuality delineates the transformation that can be seen in the modern women's life style in response to their dress code as they feel pride in the exposition of their female sexuality through the use of bra, jeans, T-shirt etc. Even the female-persona in the poems of Bhatt does not use "*Ghunghat*" (a veil pulled over the face) and *Odhni* (a head scarf which is used for the *Ghunghat*) which sustains the design of patriarchy. Commenting on the practice of purdah, Jasbir Jain intimates in her article "Purdah, Patriarchy and the Tropical Sun":

And from being a mere part of a dress it has the capacity to signify a relationship between the self and the other. As part of a dress, its manner of use is often indicative not only of the religion one follows but also one's caste, class and perhaps region. The real significance of purdah lies not in these external signifiers, but in its impacts as a social constructs. It impacts both men and women alike and defines the notion of both masculinity and femininity. It

impacts even those of us who have always believed that we are outside its influence. In a large it sustains the idea of patriarchy. (Jain 137)²

But Sujata Bhatt negating the concepts of purdah and patriarchy throws light on the modern woman's dress in her poems. Female characters in her poems expose their sexuality and body through the use of modern dresses. This is what creates her space as a strong feminist voice in the development of contemporary Indian English women's poetry. In the proliferation of her poetic universe, the articulation of such themes moves her step further from the poetry of Kamala Das in response to the expression of female sexuality. That is why she articulates:

she turns her head away

as she takes off her T-shirt

blue jeans, underwear, bra. (*Brunizem* 39)

In terms of the patriarchal tradition concerning the gender difference between male-female, again Jasbir Jain in her another book *Indigenous Roots of Feminism* (2011) has percolated down the sentiment that "gender construction in India has its roots in Sita's *agnipariksha*, Draupadi's *chirharan* and Damayanti's adherence to the *pativrata* code." (Jain 29) But these women poets such as Bhatt and de Souza subverting the Precarity of patriarchal notions through their poems celebrate the consciousness of their female body and exposed female sexuality and also demonstrate a rejection of the 'docile' female model perpetuated through the concept of dependency. They even resist the old traditional notions of female dress code too as their protagonists prefer to wear the dresses which would highlight their female sexual identity.

Further, Eunice de Souza in the exaltation of her poetic universe also stresses that due to the patriarchal dominance, a woman has a "limited role" in Indian male-dominated society. That is why there are certain things they can do and things they cannot do. In the same way, there are things that are regarded "womanly and unwomanly." (Manjeet 148) In response to Indian patriarchal system of marriage in the poem "Marriages Are Made", which has been compiled in the poetic collection *A Necklace of Skulls* (2009), de Souza offers a sharp critique on the notion of male-dominance which only favors man's desire in the context of choosing a partner for marriage. They are (female characters) treated as secondary creatures. That is why it is the will/supremacy of man to decide who he would like to marry. Highlighting the discrimination that women have to suffer in matters of marriage, Manjeet in his article "Shifting Paradigms of Feminine Sensibility" remarks "that the institution of marriage in India doesn't give women equal rights, nor equal opportunities." (Manjeet 144) A woman has no freedom to choose her life partner. And in terms of marriage, Simone De Beauvoir also argues: "Feminists say that marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society." (Beauvoir 445) De Souza writes in the poem: "Her complexion it was decided/would compensate, being just about/the right shade/of rightness/to do justice to..." (*A Necklace of Skull* 4) In this context, it would be appropriate to refer to J.S. Mill's observation that "Marriage is the worst of slavery for women." (Mill 124) He further says: "No slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of words, as a wife is." (Mill 124) And Millett expresses similar idea in her *Sexual Politics*: "the institution of marriage, reducing the status of a woman to a mere utility item, an object for decoration, for possession and for man's sexual gratification." (Millett 25) Eunice de Souza writes:

The formalities

have been completed:

her family history examined. (*A Necklace of Skulls* 4)

Marriage system operates in such a way that a women has to pass through series of tests and examinations in order to get married and such conceptualization of marriage, escalates a space of male-dominance and patriarchal precariousness of female existence and identity. That is why "in a patriarchal society women have to struggle to be educated, to have property or to make choices regarding marriage and other aspects of life. For men, these resources are a matter of right and can make choices that affect their lives." As a new Indian English women poet de Souza dares to write to destabilize precariousness of these patriarchal rules imposed over women which do not let them enjoy the liberty of choosing their life partner. In this regard rejecting the idea of marriage which is seen as the second door of patriarchy after the father's house, Eunice de Souza in the poem "I Choose Not to Marry You, Love" deliberately stipulates:

I choose not to marry you, love.

There is poison in my tongue.

I maul. I calcify. (*A Necklace of Skull* 52)

Here, she is emerging in an innovative form tearing the precarious patriarchal rules of marriage in which male is all and all. She emerges as fervent and aggressive breaking through the wall of male choice. She is not ready to accept the patriarchal order, system and taboos. She is in the position of being able to take decision herself without the permission/interference of her family and society. She achieves a new status while enjoying her unique individual female identity. That is why Eunice de Souza delineates the change which has taken place in the nature of Indian women due to their education and the social environment which is full of social and technological progress of which women persona are becoming a part. They are educationally and economically empowered to destabilize the patriarchal orders in this progressive society. In the poem “Mrs Hermione Gonsalvez”, de Souza deliberately criticizing the concept of heterogeneous marriage under patriarchal system writes:

Just look at my parents

how they married me to a dark man

on my own I wouldn't even have

looked at him. (*A Necklace of Skulls* 8)

In terms of critiquing the patriarchal system, de Souza emerges as a satirist and unfolding the subjects of her satires she scathingly speaks on the authority of church, institution of marriage, notion of Catholic motherhood, system of Indian colour prejudice, sexual prudery and hypocrisy, Goan vulgarity and the alienation felt by many Goan Catholics towards Hindu India. In the poem “Conversation Piece” she holds out:

My Portuguese-bred colleague

picked up a clay shivalingam

one day and said:

Is this an ashtray?

No, said the salesman,

This is our god. (*A Necklace of Skulls* 14)

In the poem Eunice de Souza has mapped out the social order wherein she grew up and “which she feels made her what she is now.” The poem “De Souza Prabhu” rejects her past and alien mixture of names and language, but claims that she belongs with “the lame ducks” (*A Necklace of Skulls* 26) ever since she heard her parents ‘wanted a boy’. Often de Souza resorts to satiric mode “in these poems the implied personality appears off-hand, cold, controlled, self-distancing, ironic.”(King 156) Through such poems she displays how parents long for the birth of male-child in Indian families. They consider the birth of female-child not less than a curse in this patriarchal world;

I heard it said

my parents wanted a boy.

I've done my best to qualify.

I hid the bloodstains

on my clothes(*A Necklace of Skulls* 26)

There are some poems by de Souza which display the “psychological” aspects of a girl-child as she becomes conscious of her sexuality and brings out “the results of conflicts with parents.”(King 157) In this respect her poem “Forgive Me, Mother” is unambiguous:

It was kill or die

and you got me anyway:

The blood congeals at lover's touch

The guts dissolve in shit. (*A Necklace of Skulls* 24)

Bringing the women under the influence of precariousness of patriarchy, Indian traditional religious cultural system encourages them to follow the 'ritual of fast' which also promotes the idea of male-domination for, both married women for the well-being and prosperity of their husbands and for unmarried girls to get a good husband. In this concern writes Eunice de Souza in the poem "Feeding the Poor at Christmas":

you don't drink

you can't take your share

for your husband." (*A Necklace of Skulls* 5)

This is what denotes the roots of patriarchy in Indian traditional-religious society. In this regard Neera Desi and Maithreyi Krishnaraj argue in their article "An Overview of the Status of Women in India" that:

... the subtle expression of patriarchy is through symbolism giving messages of inferiority of women through legends highlighting the self-sacrificing, self-effacing pure image of women that through the ritual practices which day in and day out emphasized the dominant role of a woman as a faithful wife and devout mother. (Desi and Krishnaraj 299)

That is why being a contemporary Indian English women poet, Eunice de Souza displays the bitterness of the "second sex" challenging the "lofty image of Indian woman that vindicates her ordinariness" in an effort to demolish the interpretation of Indian women enforced by patriarchy in the development of her poetic world. In her poem "Poem for a Poet" she wittingly speaks on the sexual activities subverting the precarious patriarchal notion which is an act of "creative expression" by women in an Indian male-dominated society. Therefore she puts explicitly up:

'Marie, my frequent sexual encounters

represent more than an attempt

to find mere physical fulfillment. (*A Necklace of Skulls* 18)

She chooses English language as her medium to articulate the feelings of sex and desire which are considered a sort of sin in Indian society and deliberately seems to annihilate the old patriarchal system through her female protagonists. Eunice de Souza upholds:

Write her a poem about woman flesh.

Watch her become oh so womanly and grateful. (*A Necklace of Skulls* 19)

Further tearing the layers of patriarchy and male-hegemony, she depicts the woman who is full of rebellious mood.

She would walk too close to me

and then protest naively: How

should lovers walk? (*A Necklace of Skulls* 20)

Again in the poem "One Man's Poetry" de Souza probes into the psychology of a woman in terms of making love. She freely speaks on female sexuality in a colloquial style. Through such frank articulation of female sexuality, these contemporary woman poets have created a place for strong female voice which itself is a rebel against precariousness of female existence. The female protagonist of de Souza reveal an unrestrained frankness about her sexuality: "My limbs began to scatter/my face dissolve/my love

would hold me close/for hours when I could/neither speaks nor weep/for him I am learning love”,(30) “Dirty Jokes/hot stuff and sex/such pink lips/look at that chest”.(A *necklace of Skull* 9) In the traditional patriarchal world the use of such sort of “terminologies was considered improper from the woman’s lips and considered unwomanly”. (Mitra 62) Further in this regard de Souza propounds the “unsaid prohibition on the use of certain expressions by women.”(Mitra 62) In this respect the poem, “Sweet Sixteen” offers a realistic portrayal of the female psyche caught in the oppressive structures that have suppressed a woman’s sexual-cum-emotional desires. According to Eunice de Souza, the character of mother in this poem is a representative of an arbitrary power as she performs the role of an executor of patriarchal will. To her, the usage of words like “menses”, brassieres” etc are taboo as these purely personal words which do not find a place in the communal life. The intimate, private life of a woman is at odds with the politics of the conservative Catholic religious community. In a society that mutely follows the centuries-old relationship between man and woman based on rigid sex roles, and that which allows no space for a woman, it is therefore, not surprising that Eunice mother considers the blatant use of such words by the poetess as having a demeaning and demoralising impact on the society around.

Mamas never mentioned menses.

A nun screamed: You vulgar girl

Don’t say brassieres

Say bracelets. (A *Necklace of Skull* 6)

Through the above mentioned lines from “Sweet Sixteen”, de Souza ponders over the psychic and emotional insecurity which is generally faced by a woman in an Indian patriarchal setup/society. In the contemporary society, the sexual needs and desires of a woman are under the entire grip of “society’s oppressive restrictions and this in turn contributes to her disadvantaged and unprivileged status.”(Nair 126) The patriarchal dominated society endeavors to subjugate the “women’s feelings and brushes aside her mental agony.”(Nair 126)

As has already been pointed out in this research, Eunice de Souza was brought up in Indian Goan Catholic community. Thence her childhood memory of Goan Catholic society in which a woman or girl-child cannot speak on her body and its sexual needs and desires are still alive in her psyche where “female-sex” was forced to be besieged by the philosophy of “gender inequalities”, “sexual subordination” and subjection in an “unjust patriarchal” world. That is why in this regard, Nair says that “her feminine urges and sensibilities are not allowed to represent and express themselves.”(Nair 126-27) As in the poem the usage of the words like “menses” and “brassieres” display the conservative religious mind of Goan Catholic people where women could not even speak on their bodily or sexual needs. She creates a poetic idiom which endeavors to subvert patriarchal hegemony. Hence it could be argued that the contemporary women poets have created their poetic universe which is full of direct-revelations and free expression. Now the relevance of their poetry lies in the fact that it emerges as “a significant and effective medium to capture and analyse the sensibilities and ethos of modern Indian socio-cultural life structured around patriarchal value system.”(Nair 123) Moving a step ahead from their predecessor Kamala Das, they endeavoured to break the “long silence” from Indian women’s writing in response to the articulation of female sexual issues and subjects. Commenting on the self-revelatory nature of their poetry, Bruce King remarks that in their poetic universe the “subject matter has largely shifted from the external world to the psychology of the self. It is the poetry of memory, dreams and anxieties, fears and self-revelations.”(King 133)

Now the question that naturally comes out into consideration is what about precariousness of patriarchy today? Does it still exist with the advancement of education, use of technology, and the disintegration or near extinction of the joint family system? Despite the shift in the fashionable society, the excessive sexually exposure through the use of new fancy dresses specially of modern women, unmarried couples living together in metropolitan cities, increasing trend of love-marriages, patriarchy still continues to exist in other ways but it could be argued that to a great extent that the precariousness of patriarchy seems to be losing its control with the rising education of women and their economic stability and retrogressive practice like “child marriage has also been banned and condemned long ago.”(Jagpal 67)

Therefore, these new women poets through their poems do not silently bear the patriarchal hindrances. They on the contrary assert their individuality by subverting it and blame the patriarchal set up for their miseries and do not come out as faithful votaries of male-centred world. They vindicate for women’s liberation and empowerment by breaking the silence of the precarious patriarchal subordination and empowering themselves to raise voice while nesting into the present ultra-modern cultural inscriptions. They are not ready to accept the old system of male political and socio-economic domination. They are creating their own powerful space everywhere in the world. That is why “scrutinizing and questioning the orthodox dogmas and superstitions, they discover the various thresholds that hold back their existential response and give preference to the desired social response.

They also recognize their own role and consent in their own dehumanization and the indignities that they suffer in the process of becoming and craving out a role for themselves in the prescriptive role space.”(Jagpal 103)

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End Notes

1. I'm pleased to see that my daughter is so much more relaxed and calmer about it. Of course, she is growing up in a different time and place - Western Europe. Also, I've consciously tried to give her a more positive image of womanhood. At the moment I'm working on more poems exploring the 'udaylee' theme - for what I have written in Brunizem about menstruation (as I witnessed and experienced it in India) is just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. My mother has started to break some of her silences with me. And I have been recording her memories of her childhood. For me, those are some of the most exciting and moving stories - those of her life from her perspective - told now when she is old and it's just the two of us and there are no elders left to prevent her from speaking. And even my father, if we include him in our conversation, is happy to just listen. And her memories illuminate some of the confusing parts of my childhood - and in turn clarify for me my own relationship with my daughter. I don't know what I will write about these experiences - poems, stories, who knows? But in the end this is what really matters to me. Web link: www.carcenet.co.uk-bin/scribe?
2. For more info. See Jasbir Jain' *theorizing resistance Narrative in History and Politics*. Article "Purdah, Patriarchy and the Tropical Sun". Ch-13.Pg.137-148