



PANNA NAIK'S POEMS- INTERIOR MONOLOGUE OF WOMAN'S HEART

Vandeepa Modi

Research Scholar, Department of English, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, India

Dr. Darsha Jani

Principal, Smt. S. R. Mehta Arts College, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, India

Abstract

Panna Naik is an Indian Gujarati language poet and storyteller who has been living in Philadelphia, United States since 1960. She has published eleven volumes of poetry and a volume of short stories. She wrote poetry drawn from her inner world and the world around her.

The present paper focuses on the journey of Panna Naik from an alienated bride in foreign land to a poet and various themes she has dealt with. Panna's poetry presents the feelings of women living in the big city and a foreign country focusing on "endurance, individuality, estrangement". She also captures her relationship with men, the struggles of married life, hopes, and confusions in her poems. She got inspiration from the *Love Poems* (1967) of American poet Anne Sexton.

The themes of love, loss, reminiscence, endurance, individuality, estrangement are dealt with in her poetry. Her poems address sorrow, craving for motherhood, the unborn child she yearns to conceive. Nevertheless, there are also poems expressing joy.

Keywords

Love, loss, reminiscence, endurance, individuality, estrangement, motherhood

Introduction

Panna Naik was born in 1933 in the city of Mumbai and is a resident of America since she migrated there as a bride in 1960. She established herself as an eminent American Gujarati diasporic writer. She has written path breaking poetry, essays, and short stories centered chiefly on Indian American women. She has published eight volumes of Gujarati poetry and translated Gujarati poetry into English in which she expressed the agony of her unfulfilled motherhood and the dissatisfaction with contemporary life. Her simple yet bold style of writing has fascinated the readers of the 21st century. Her poems express the inner frustrations of woman, who is forced to adjust in a world that is devoid of warmth, true love and compassion.

Her first poetry collection was *Pravesh* (1975), *Philadelphia* (1981), *Nisbat* (1984), *Arasparas* (1989), *Ketlak Kavyo* (1990), *Avajavan* (1991), *Cherry blossom* (2004), *Rang Zarukhe* (2005) are her poetry collections. *Videshini* (2000) is the republication of her first five poetry collections, which addresses the issues of Indian Diaspora. *Dwideshini* (2017) is the collection of later five poetry collections. *Attar Akshar* is her Haiku collection. *Flamingo* (2003) is her story collection. *The Astrologer's Sparrow* is a collection of poems from her eleven verse collections published between 1976 (*The Beginning*) and 2014 (*The Last One*).

Women's bold attitude and her inner desire to live generously are reflected in her poems. Panna emphasizes the inner happiness and emotional gratification of women. Panna presents feminine issues related to nostalgia, homesickness, alienation and the inner sufferings of female mind battling to find expression. Her poems reflect the struggles of diasporic women for attaining mental peace and striving to get inner satisfaction. Panna

emphasizes the fact that the modern gadgets of communication prove miserably worthless in diminishing the wall between the couples who live self-absorbed lives. Poems of Panna are subjective; they reveal her own pain and depression, her personal agonies and discontentment. Panna expresses the desire of the feminine heart to lead a life of her own choice even in an unknown country. She opens her heart talking about the life of an Indian American woman craving for the company of a loving heart and longing for togetherness, which, she fails to acquire. Her poems present the desire of fulfillment of the feminine hopes and the difficulties in fulfilling her dreams.

Panna Naik's The Astrologer's Sparrow (2018)

Panna Naik's poetry gives voice to the inner sufferings and struggles, which are experienced by women of all generations. Her poetry collection *The Astrologer's Sparrow* published in 2018 clearly shows the plight of women who are forced to adjust in a world devoid of love, warmth, compassion, and understanding.

According to Carlo Coppola, Professor Emeritus, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures in Us, "The Astrologer's Sparrow is a masterful collection of poetry. Elegant diction and resonant tone highlight the creative sensibility of an important contemporary poet, someone who has long pondered upon, and has much to say about, the vagaries, contradictions, and confusions that plague the human condition."

Pamela Sutton, MSJ, MFA remarks that "Panna Naik's remarkable book of Poetry, "The Astrologer's Sparrow" makes India's diaspora very personal and tactile. This is the language of courage: as one who left home and family in search of a wider view of the world. Hers is the language of the explorer with acute emotion that readers are not likely to find elsewhere." As stated by Dr. Darsha Jani, in her article "Panna's poems are based on her experience as a wife of an insensitive partner who could never understand her emotions. Panna's lonely and gloomy life inspired her to express her strong emotions in the form of poems. Her unhesitant and bold expression of emotions in the poems proved to be catharsis of her pent-up feelings." [1] The poems were highly praised by all the literary establishments, both in India and America. She was awarded several honors for her outstanding literary contributions – such as Gardi Diaspora Writing Award in 2014, Gujarati Sahitya Parishad Award in 2008, Chunilal Velji Mehta Award in 2002, Gujarat State Award in 1978, Krishnalal Zaveri Award in 1954 and Mohanlal Suchak Award in 1953. Panna has given a distinct voice to women of India and America as well which her worldwide followers evidence.

Grief of Alienation

Panna's poetry reveals her uneasiness and grief of being trapped in the situations she cannot change. In spite of all the modes of luxuries and modern life style in foreign land, she longs for her own land and her loved ones. The following poem *Homesickness* reveals her state of mind:

“Uprooting
 a flowering tree
 from faraway tropical Mumbai
 I replanted it
 in Philadelphia's cold, alien soil.
 I was absolutely determined
 to ensure its survival.
 But
 When the trees here spew
 the sickening pink
 of cherry blossoms
 I long for
 the slow opening
 of glowing saffron
 Kesuda flowers.
 When the hard Earth here splits
 and pours forth hot summer roses
 my eyes cry red for Gulmohar.
 It rains here all year long
 But I long for
 the lost season of rains,

the monsoon fragrance of India
that still caresses my skin.
Here, we have everything.
And nothing.

I am homesick.
Feel like
packing my bags
and going home...

But where is my home now?" (AS: p. 32)

Panna finds herself a lonely person living in foreign land. She feels as if she was happy in her hometown in her native land from where she is uprooted and is displaced into the unknown land to Philadelphia. Panna longs for that warmth which she experienced in India in the company of a joint family. The natural environment of America does not console the craving heart of Panna as the flowers of *Kesuda and Gulmohar* are missing in Philadelphia. They are replaced by other flowers like Cherry Blossoms and Roses. However, they do not satisfy the soul of Panna. She misses the fragrance of earth of seasonal rains in India, though it rains for the whole year in Philadelphia.

Reverberation of Feminine Heart

Her poems are the expression of a feminine heart that bleeds continually and does not find solace anywhere. Her discontented state of heart is well expressed in the poem *Desert Swimming*:

"How does one understand
this desperate struggle for survival?
You suggest I ask a fish
tossed out of water.

But how do you define
the fate of living right beneath the roaring ocean and yet
doomed to swim in a desert?" (AS: p. 65)

Here she clearly expresses her difficult condition in which she has to survive or exist. She is trapped up in a situation where she, though being married has to lead a life devoid of warmth and love. She has presented a situation where outwardly everything seems to be perfect but the inner hidden truth is just the contrary. Outwardly she has the 'ocean'-all the comforts and happiness of life. But the truth is 'desert'- vast emptiness, hollowness barren land.

Desire for Dignity of a Woman

Panna puts emphasis on how she has been treated by her male counterpart according to his desires, whereas she needs equality, dignity, and honor women. She feels that women should be treated with due respect, love, and care so that they too enjoy their being. In many of her poems, Panna's has revealed the stress she has undergone in her married life. Panna craves for the respect, which she deserves being a woman, but her feelings and passions are crushed under the dominance of male ego. She boldly gives expression to her thoughts in the following poem *Lioness*

"You may stroke my neck with fingers now.
I will not roar!
I have become a tamed animal.

No need to worry
I may be dangerous.
See, the pet licks
Your hand, your cheek, your nose
And she rolls over at your feet.

Don't you feel the touch of her soft hair?

My needs are few: a little milk and meat;
A small corner in your mansion.
You are a lion and I am
A lioness.

You can lift and throw me in the air.
I won't tear you with my claws.
Here, put your hand on my neck and mouth;
Cup my soft muzzle.

See, I am a tamed lioness.

But you don't want me as a pet.
I know, you want to let me loose
Somewhere in the Acacia forest.
I also know why. It's because
I refuse to meet your demand.
You want a lioness that never roars.
Oh, naïveté!
No such creature exists.
You seek mythology." (AS: p. 18)

This poem clearly seems to be subjective. It represents her pitiable condition in the company of her life partner. She has been forced to change herself. She has been deprived of any rights. She has to do everything that pleases him irrespective of what she goes through. 'Lioness' is the metaphor used for her, and now she has been "tamed lioness" who is not even allowed to roar and is well trained to lick his master according to his desire. And still she's not able to meet his demands so is unacceptable. She lived a married life devoid of love, warmth, or self-respect, which clearly cannot be acceptable to any woman.

A Woman's Heart Yearning for a Child

In many of her poems, it is evident how much her heart craves for a child. She thought a child of her own would complete her life in true sense. She yearns a lot and his husband ignorant of her inner sufferings led a busy independent life. She has presented her own inner sufferings, cravings, and emptiness of her unfulfilled motherhood in them. Her inner longings are clearly expressed in the poem "*And I*"

"Each time after love-making
you drop into slumber,
and I,
keep tossing and turning
in nightmares about my child
never to be born.

I will name him "Vaibhav".
Yes, he will be the "Wealth" of our impoverished lives
that look like a beggars aluminum bowl,
dented and bent out of shape.

Oh, see, see!
Hear those drumbeats somewhere in the distance!
As the drums beat, fingernails
dig deep into my muscles,
someone is snatching away my "Vaibhav."
I open my weary eyes
and sense a rustle of air

leaving stealthily from under the bed
and sneaking out through the window cracks.

“Vaibhav” has vanished!
Your snoring has subsided.
And I tumble deep down a vale
like a derailed train.” (AS: p. 10)

Her inner uneasiness and the craving can be observed in this poem. She spent sleepless nights thinking about her unborn child. The emptiness of her life is expressed. She feels her life to be beggar like and that the child would bring grandeur (Vaibhav) to them. However, she knows the fact that she is never going to experience pleasure of becoming a mother. Her husband has no concern about her or her anguish. Her heart craves for motherhood.

Conclusion

Evaluating Panna’s poetry from the feminist point of view, it could be said that by depicting her own experiences, she has very strongly put light on how even in contemporary times women have been treated disrespectfully by their male counterparts. She wishes that men must treat women with dignity and honor. She desires that women should be loved, cared, and considered equal by their male counterparts. There are many examples when the couple that seems to be happy and contented and "made for each other" outwardly is inherently depressed and shattered and without any real companionship. Through the poem, Panna talks about her disgruntled married life she lived with her husband, which was more of a burden rather than a pleasant journey of life or happiness.

Through her poems, we can realize that she has presented the life of those American Indian diasporic women who adjust themselves in the new environment and adopt the norms and traditions prevalent in the foreign society. They face all discomforts of new atmosphere, culture, traditions, land, and life; they take care of their family members and want just affection by their loved ones. The environment, incidents and circumstances narrated by Panna in her poems expresses the emptiness of a woman’s heart and life. Women find themselves surrounded by emotionally detached partners who do not appreciate the pain of their bleeding hearts and leave them to suffer alone. To conclude, the important aspects of a women’s life are her near and dear ones, love and care and concern of her loved ones and especially of her life partner and her children. Otherwise, no worldly pleasures, luxuries and comforts or modern life can give her any contentment or happiness. It is the demand of the time that a positive environment should be created where women is truly considered as equals in society and is given due respect and dignity and identity. This can only happen if she is for once truly understood and given due consideration and emotional support by her family members.

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