

**Family Portraits, dislocation and history in Poetry of Sujata Bhatt****Sujal J. Pathak***Asst. Professor, Ashvinbhai A. Patel Commerce College, Sector: 23, Gandhinagar, (Gujarat) India***Abstract**

Sujata Bhatt belongs to Gujarat, who migrated to U.S.A. in 1968, presently living in Bremen, Germany, with her Play Wright husband & daughter. She has been focusing on diasporic sensibility and the rich tradition. Her attachment with her birth place can be very well observed in her poetry as every little aspect is highlighted, which ranges from religion to human-relationships, history, animals, paintings, suffering, nature of beings and so on. An attempt is made to trace Poet's sensibility towards inner and outer world

Oxford companion to twentieth century poetry describes Sujata Bhatt's poetry as "the Anguish of immigrants when they start losing their first language". At the beginning of 'Search for My Tongue', an eight pages poem, the Gujarati sentences are translated literally into English. Bhatt is obsessed with the question of language .she is aware of the limitations of the language and writes:

"The best story, of course is the one  
Is the one You can't write  
You won't write  
It's something that you can only live  
In your heart  
Not on paper."

Bhatt's grandfather, Nanabhai Bhatt, who was a follower of Gandhian Philosophy and was very close to him, influenced by Gandhi's philosophy, such divisions find geographical expressions in the poems, which explores ideas of Home. Sujata Bhatt writes;

"So much information  
Swallowed like Vitamins  
For Finals-And yet, I passed at every turn

Wondering which parts he  
Had loved"

Sujata Bhatt's long story in U.S. and Germany has implanted in her an unfathomable awareness of her Indianness. Sujata Bhatt says;"For me, the fact that I had to leave India certainly made me think about it more." And in her poem, 'Nanabhai Bhatt in prison', She writes:

"At the foot of Takhteshwar Hill  
There is an L-shaped house  
Hidden from the road  
By five Mango trees  
Planted by Nanabhai Bhatt."

While going through poems of Sujata Bhatt, one can find that her poetry of exile and dislocation results from the diasporic consciousness. According to Steven Vertovec :

"Diasporic consciousness is a particular kind of awareness said to be generated among contemporary transnational communities. Its particularity is variously described as being marked by a dual or paradoxical nature.....in which the individual is aware

of de-centered attachments, of being simultaneously “Home away from Home” or “Here and There”.

Sujata Bhatt exemplifies her own feeling of loss in the poem ‘*Whenever I Return*’ in which the lyrical persona addresses the reader with the words,

“Don’t speak to me of Exile,  
Don’t question my memory  
How can you understand?  
A soul of brain cells?  
.....  
You have never lived “

Bhatt’s desperate questions ask us to consider the truth of her experience of loss and to look at her as she sees herself-as a forced exile .It is through glass of exile that diasporic consciousness takes hold. Because, Bhatt perceive herself to be forced exiles, she feels that she does not belong to either homeland or host-society. The pains of displacement, the fond memories of homeland the individual of her native place, the sensitive awareness of being a woman, a love for mother tongue encompasses all as mythical and local. As she writes in ‘*The One Who Goes Away*’:

“I am the one  
Who always goes  
Away with my home  
Which can only stay inside  
In my blood- my home which does not fit  
With any geography”

When a diasporic writer starts to draw images of home and nation, they consolidate memory and desire to energize their sense of identity; they mix the real with sense of

alienation. In the poem ‘Ajjwali Ba’, Bhatt falls back on the tales told by her father:

“It’s past midnight  
Almost 1:00 a.m. and my grandfather  
Is about to enter the house  
He has spent the day working as usual  
With the poor trying to help  
The shunned Harijans  
.....  
Blocking his way  
Asks him first to bathe”

Her poem ‘Deviben Pathak’ presents nostalgic mood and discusses the event of distant past and immediate present of Sujata Bhatt’s life. Her maternal grandmother was adamant to *Swastika* pendant from a goldsmith, though she was warned by goldsmith that *Swastika* symbol is related with Hitler, whose inhuman deeds have made him infamous in the world.

“But it is 1938  
And the goldsmith reminds her  
Of the latest news  
Oh *bhen* don’t you know....?  
Still she didn’t hesitate  
.....  
How she dismissed his worries with her  
faith”

Now the poet remembers her own childhood: how she with other children, practiced drawing *Swastika* and other geometrical forms. But she loved the *Swastika* most, as it was holy symbol in Hindu Religion. But her own personal experience with the ‘holy swastika’ is challenged by her present: her marriage to German and her Germany born daughter and she worry about her future:

“Oh my German born daughter  
 Arriving during a spell of bright spring  
 weather-  
 Lucky girl  
 To be born on St. Brigid’s day  
 What will you say? What colours will you  
 Prefer? In what language  
 Will you speak?”

In poem ‘Muliebrity’, this means womanhood, the status of being woman and possessing full womanly powers, Bhatt looks obsessed with the girl, who is picking up cow dung. Bhatt has seen her many times as she was growing up in India before moving to U.S.:

“I have thought so much about the girl  
 Who gathered cow dung in a wide, round  
 basket  
 Along the main road passing by our house  
 .....  
 .....  
 And the power glistening through her  
 cheekbones  
 Each time she found a particularly  
 promising  
 Mound of dung-”

Bhatt represents condition of middle class Indian woman, who transcends her physical boundaries by being spiritually and creatively alert. ‘A Story for Pearse’, based on her aunt Hirabehan; who is tortured, beaten up, whipped. All this tortures, led her to take a decision in which she is free from all the boundaries:

“My great aunt Hirabhen  
 Was rescued from her mother-in-law  
 Rescued from her husband  
 Soon after she was married

Her mother-in-law used to beat her  
 .....  
 Until her pretty skin turned ugly”

But in a country like India, at that time, it was not easy to calls off a marriage. If it is so, it makes a woman’s life more difficult. But being free is not easy; one has to etherize the soul:

“But I am certain  
 That her soul walked out  
 On her that day in court  
 After the battle was won  
 .....  
 She could never feel her soul again”

#### Conclusion:

Thus, the close reading of her poetry-reveals that Sujata Bhatt uses history-, society-, politics, religion, memory, relations, and multiple languages, to portray her constant struggle to harmonize multiple identities. These identities have not made her insular. It also shows that the kind of politics of identity- and place, we usually find in multicultural poets and writers -often termed, as poets/writers of Diaspora- is almost there in Bhatt. The act of writing itself is a creative engagement where subject does not matter. Her poems go beyond any fixed definition of poetry. Energy to go beyond, to transcend the barriers of languages, regions, and cultures as well as a sense of plurality enables her to moves between multiple cultures and identities. The way in which she connects memory, religion, history, womanhood with one another shows a new approach towards writing poetry which is perhaps seen for very first time in the Indian English poetry.

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