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“Having come home, all you can do is leave”:

The Praxis of Spirituality and Philosophy in Imtiaz Dharker’s ‘Battle Line’

Abstract

Each person is born into this world with dignity and regards himself as an individual. Inspecting man-woman relationships in the present scenario Imtiaz Dharker’s poem ‘Battle Line’ builds a situation depicting man-woman conflicts. Having both literal and metaphorical connotations, it expresses the pain of separation after being together where an unseen barbed wire comes across the bed room that obstructs the once blissful voyage of love, making it a battle field where one is stripped off her dignity. It is taken from the collection *Purdah* which is the symbol of alienation and isolation functioning as a wall between the woman and the world. Her humanistic and feministic concerns silently give the message to regenerate and rejuvenate female psyche and her boisterous explosion with her anguish and agony, sympathy and protest has broadened the thematic concerns of Indian English Poetry. Here the spiritual manifestation of passion is acting as a catalyst in the celebration of sexuality to discover the essence of human nature. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the practical possibilities of ‘Battle Line’ in a spiritual and philosophical vision.

Paper

The recipient of Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry and the author of six poetry collections, Imtiaz Dharker (1954-) describes herself as a Scottish Muslim Calvinist though she was born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1954 to Pakistani parents and lived with Anil Dharker, an Indian in Mumbai and after his death married Simon Powell, a Welshman. The birth and upbringing as a Muslim girl along with the trauma of cultural exile and alienation provided her the strength of conviction to demolish the barriers prescribed by the patriarchal society with the strength of powerful imagery and subtle use of irony without any sign of pretension. Carol Ann Duffy comments that Dharker drew together her three countries, Pakistan, Britain and India to create "writing of the personal and the public with equal skill" (www.theguardian.com). Though the socio-cultural and socio-religious restrictions imposed on women have robbed them off their intellectual awakening, the intensity and eloquence of Dharker's astonishing poetic life have captured everything associated with the fragile fabric of life and the pain and poignancy endured in suffocation and suppression have found a justifiable outlet in her creative instinct. Her humanistic and feministic concerns silently give the message to regenerate and rejuvenate female psyche and her boisterous explosion with her anguish and agony, sympathy and protest has broadened the thematic concerns of Indian English Poetry.

Each person is born into this world with dignity and regards himself as an individual. Inspecting man-woman relationships in the present scenario 'Battle Line' builds a situation depicting man-woman conflicts. Having both literal and metaphorical connotations, it expresses the pain of separation after being together where an unseen barbed wire comes across the bedroom that obstructs the once blissful voyage of love, making it a battle field where one is stripped off her dignity. It is compared very much to a war zone with the barbed wire in between

marking the territories. The battle that ensues is well articulated with careful choice of diction when she begins her poem with the question “Did you expect dignity?” Though we proclaim warriors as heroes, in the battlefield no dignity is given to human beings where a lot of atrocities are committed against each other and the mutilated bodies are thrown here and there. They lose wholeness.

All you see is bodies
crumpled carelessly, and thrown away.
The arms and legs are never arranged
heroically. (2-6)

The lovers or husbands and wives are like two nations with lines demarcating their territories. They create boundary lines with checkpoints on the border which are demolished by their will. The transient nature of love is summed up in terse idiom:

distrustful lovers
who have fought . . .
but in sleep, . . .
to fit together,
whole again; at peace. (24-31)

In sleep the warring lovers forget their hostilities having reminded of their shared moments of warmth and companionship and they feel comfortable enough during night. But morning brings a sense of new attack as their ego comes back when they awake and they feel falling apart.

Forgetful of hostilities
until, in the quiet dawn,
the next attack. (32-34)

The major theme or total concern to refute fate and demonstrate the freedom of will is portrayed through an almost romantic, familiar disposition. The readers share every twist and turn in her thinking process and move along her psychological and corporal voyage. The absence of warmth creates a sense of vacuum in their life and instead of nurturing life they pave barbed wires in their relationship. When man is considered as an absolute master of the situation woman feels being imprisoned by the metaphors of colonization. It contains a number of various references to the process of colonization leading to the domestic unrest caused by the civil wars in relationships. An analogy could be drawn here between him and the colonisers enduring a tiresome journey and then tempting the inhabitants with the prospect of wealth through trade; and on acceptance, thus marking their own loss and transgression into a state of perpetual inferiority. In this most substantive and domineering allusion to colonisation, the other can easily be perceived as the bold colonist, not lacking the audacity of his convictions, claims whatever he passes as his own and try to make the best of his circumstances, be it at the expense of being exiled from the heaven of joy. By manipulating and corrupting their counterparts man could seize advantage of the woman's innocence by blatantly encroaching on her possessions, with minimal opposition. Like colonizers their separation turns disgrace into a voyage before a quest with a mission in one of the worst far flung corners of the globe, with hideous ruin and fire. Ostensibly the other endeavours to colonise the body of the woman. She has placed their emphasis not exclusively on a level of integrity or self understanding but rather a rediscovery of the body and soul, almost a form of physical space with layout.

He cuts across the room

his territory. . . .

Together,

we have reached the battle-line. (61-67)

Dharker understands the gravity of the situation and strongly feels that women must voice their conscience and protest against such deadening discriminations and demoralizing endorsements. Thus the organized purposes of identifying, locating and securing are perceptible in an apparently inexhaustible source of spirituality with which to ordain her poems but the duality of de-sexualising and sexualizing emphasis dehumanizes the effect. Against the debased social, political and religious values of human civilization which has given birth to corrupt metropolitan culture with its leaving man under severe stress and strain, she creates an atmosphere of transparency and originality symbolic of innocent personality undisturbed by the craftiness and crookedness of man with an inimitable touch of simplicity and spontaneity.

Having come home,

All you can do is leave. (68-69)

Poetry with its most persuasive plurality, richness of language and syntax becomes the best means of communication. "Battle Line" taken in the form of a confession with its simple, suggestive and highly evocative style can be taken as a moment of introspection. Dharker has yoked the tools of poetry to create an impact of the divine within and thereby conveys its spiritual essence of communication.

The space on the skin

that the other . . .

of secrets in. (42-47)

She attempts to portray occasions of profound reverence and occasional enlightenment in their own spiritual journey. Prof. R.K. Bhushan speaks about her vision that is "broadened into all-

embrative cosmopolitanism smoothly crossing all geographical, historical, religious, cultural and social boundaries and the subject of humanitarianism has been superbly handled”

(www.liberiaseabreeze.com).

The combination of imagery and definitions of time and space have the unique effect of creating a spiritual perception of her background history and environment. Here cosmology retracts a seemingly incomprehensible geography of far-fetched proportions, utilising allusive language to describe the indescribable. Apart from its length, the poem appeals to the visual immediacy with which Dharker realizes the probable scenes. Is she speaking about war or comparing the warring lovers to warring countries, is not clear. It may be the war between India and Pakistan. Instead of living in the East she is in the west and not in the orient but in the occident. Settling down in Scotland she could get the proper view of the whole situation.

According to Prof. R. K. Bhushan

she divides her time between London and India. This mixed heritage and itinerant lifestyle is at the heart of her writing: questioning, imagistic and richly textured poems that span geographical and cultural displacement, conflict and gender politics, while also interrogating received ideas about home, freedom and faith.

(www.liberiaseabreeze.com)

The poem also can be interpreted as a metaphysical poem with spiritual and philosophical overtones. The barbed wire can be taken as a metaphysical conceit, a true farfetched image signifying war or broken relationship. If joined the two will be a whole like India and Pakistan before partition or the reunion of the lovers. In metaphysical poetry the body was seen as a worldly vessel, embodied with a spiritual love of the world, attached to a humanist concept that pre mined to embody God within the body of man. Here the spiritual manifestation of passion is

acting as a catalyst in the celebration of sexuality to discover the essence of human nature. The status of body, that of men and women, and the relationship between themselves with one another are presented as an exploration of the desires and disappointments, the egotism and depression, that public life offers with the possibilities and problems of freedom and self-restraint. The infinite quest of the spiritualist to return to innocence can only be achieved when irrelevant and extravagant thoughts of covetousness and lust are controlled.

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