



A CRITICAL STUDY OF IMTIAZ DHARKER'S POETRY

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❖ **ABSTRACT:**

The main aim of this research study is to show that Imtiaz Dharker has touched the basic issues concerned with the women such as, women's identity, exploitation, harassment etc. After describing and exploring the various themes in the selected poems, an attempt has been made to point out how Imtiaz Dharker is different from the rest of the contemporary women poets in treating sensitive feminine issues. Contemporary poets also have talked about women and their problems but Imtiaz Dharker has talked about the same without any hesitation and fear about the society.

Imtiaz Dharker deals with the replication of the female histories, and the portrayal of the female subject as victim agent. She also explores the struggle for freedom, hope, social change, feminine sensibility, womanhood, religious strife, gender conflict, misinterpretation of religion, hypocrisy practiced in the name of God, a ruthless oppression of women, socio-political unrest, the sufferings of women, child-marriage, illiteracy, ill-treatment of widows, dowry-deaths, ill-matched marriages and female foeticide, etc. are some of the common themes that run through her poems.

❖ **KEY WORDS:** *Feminism, religion, Maulavi, Purdah, social change, communal riot, cultural and geographical displacement, national Identity, victimization, subordinate, Patriarchal society.*

❖ **Introduction-**

Imtiaz Dharker is a Scottish diasporic muslim women poet, artist and documentary film maker. She occupies an important place as one of Britain's most inspirational contemporary poets. She belongs to three cultural heritage. She was born in Pakistan in 1954, brought up in Scotland and come back to India for work with her husband. So, the question is always in her mind about her national identity. She calls herself a Scottish Muslim Calvinists.

She has scripted and directed over a hundred films and audio-visuals, centering on education, reproductive health and shelter for women and children. In 1980 she was awarded a silver lotus for a short film made in India and also received awards for her documentaries. An accomplished artist, she has had nine solo exhibitions of pen- and- ink drawings. She was part of the judging panel for the 2008 Manchester Poetry Prize, with Carol Ann Duffy and Gillian Clarke.

Imtiaz Dharker has written five collection of poems. They are as follows.

- Purdah (1989)
- Postcards from God (1997)
- I speak for the Devil (2001)
- The Terrorist at my Table (2006)
- Leaving Fingerprints (2009)



All the above collection of poems are published by the poetry publishing house Bloodaxe. This mixed heritage (Pakistan, Scotland and India) and itinerant lifestyle is at the heart of her writing. However, she is a truly global poet, whose work speaks plainly and with great emotional intelligence to anyone who has ever felt adrift in the increasingly

complex, multicultural and shrinking world we inhabit. Infact, being a muslim whatever she experienced, is presented in her poems. She deals with the following themes that we find in her collection of poems.

- Childhood
- Home
- Exile
- Freedom
- Journey
- Gender politics
- Geographical and cultural displacement
- Religion strife
- Communal conflict
- National identity

The above themes are handled by Imtiaz very skillfully. The images used by her in her poems are not merely created for poetic effect but they are like blazing fires compelling the readers to take notice. Tension is the key that we find in her poems. She is totally neglected by her society as well as her husband.

However, the influence of her painting are depicted in her poems. Her poems highlight powerfully the social, religious, racial and sexual entrapment. Her work has been totally or consciously feminist, consciously political, consciously that of a multiple outsider, someone who knows her own mind, rather than someone full of doubt and liberal ironies.

Her poems highlight strongly, concerned economical poetry in which political activity, homesickness, urban violence, religious anomalies, are raised in an unobtrusive setting, all the more effectively for their coolness of treatment.

The present work focuses the thematic concerns in her works. Let us see her collection of poems in brief. They are as follows

1. **Purdah (1989)-**

'Purdah' provides an interesting perspective on the way people's ideas about female subject relate to the way she is seen in public. However she memorializes the betweenness of a traveler between cultures, exploring the dilemmas of negotiation among countries, lovers, and children. Purdah is windows, shuttered upon a private world.

'Old enough to learn some shame'

The above line implies that when the world (especially the male gaze) starts seeing her as an 'object' the girl ought to respond by taking recourse to purdah.

'But they make different angles in the light,
Their eyes aslant, a little shy'.

The above line indicates since the girl is seen by the world as a women, the entire perspective changes as she is seen by people even by those who have known her, with different eyes.

Here, Dharker is trying to suggest that for men, irrespective of the way they may relate process of objectification at work; men who look at her may not do so directly as the words 'aslant' and 'shy' indicate, and this is a sign of men's hypocrisy.

However, the Purdah restricts her vision of the world as well as her experience of life in the ordinary sense, which is available to others but not her. Central to the poem is the issue of gaze, which Dharker approaches both from the viewpoint of the girl and from the position of those who objectify and situate her accordingly.

The 'veil' or the 'Purdah' serves to secure her condition or safety from prying eyes, but the fact is also cultural weight that she cannot easily overwhelm is apparent here. Thus, she is constantly engaged in the process of self examination, trying to make sense of her own situation and the world around her.

2. Postcards From God (1997)

This is the second collection of the poems of Imtiaz Dharker. It meditates upon disquietudes in the poet's chosen society its sudden acts of violence, its feuds and insanities, forcing her into a permanent wakefulness that fits her eyes with glass lids. However 'postcards From Gods' are doorways leading out into the lanes and shanties where strangers huddle, bereft of the tender grace of attention.

Here, Dharker indicates the image of God as a blank canvas, in-filled with images, or palimpsest quality. Like her black and white drawings that are typically composed of lines, patterns and balance are only one aspect of her poetry and picture, with their seemingly chaotic lines branching off in all directions.

3. I Speak For The Devil (2001) -

Poems from a third collection, 'I Speak For the Devil', explore the place of women in contemporary societies both East and West

'Honor Killing' is a defiant, subtly politicized piece, beginning with an identity strip-tease, which gives voice to satan in its powerful portraits of the female body as a site of oppression and revelation. Although these poems are not didactic or 'political' in any obvious manner, they resonate a strong social conscious that is also apparent in her documentary films which have covered topics from street children to disability, winning numerous awards.

However, the woman's body is a territory, a thing that is possessed, owned by herself or by another. Her sequence they'll say, 'she must be from another country' traces a journey starting with a strip-tease where the claims of nationality, religion and gender are cast off, to allow an exploration of new territories, the spaces between countries, cultures and religions.

4. The Terrorist at my Table (2006)-

In her next collection of poem, named The Terrorist at my Table which reveals in blurring the public and personal.

'The Right Word' is perhaps the most successful poems describing the same scene in repeatedly differing terms as an anonymous man is seen as a terrorist, freedom fighter, guerrilla warrior and martyr, before being cast as.

'a boy who looks like your son'

However, its extremism is domesticated, brought home to Pollokshields (Glasgow). New images are as much a part of the landscape as the street or field outside the window.

5. Leaving Fingerprints (2009)-

This is the last collection of poems by Imtiaz Dharker. From its subject-matter and imagery right down to the pen-and-ink sketches of whorled, undulant landscapes with which she punctuate the poems, this volume is larged and smudged with fingerprints.

However, the symbol is a resonant one. Dharker is definitively a diasporic writer (born in Pakistan, she grew up in Glasgow and now shuttles between Mumbai and London.), and it's easy to see the appeal of the fingerprint with its suggestions of permanence, immutability, above all of ownership-to a woman in exile, unsure of her place in the world. It stands as a counterpoint to the nagging fear of effacement that lurks around the foundations of this collection and bubbles to the surface in poems such as 'Her Footprints Vanishes' which begins 'she disappeared without' a trace,/they said. If there were footprints/on the sand, the sea got there/ before anyone saw and wiped/ her off the face of the earth.

In fact, the sense of a landscape imprinted ripples through the collection. The links that Dharker draws between identity and landscape are physically apparent in countryside that takes on the contours of fingerprints.

In this way, she explores what she calls her 'real country', movement, transition, crossing over', as well as the tensions between secular and religious cultures in a world of fear and emergent fundamentalisms.

Thus, Imtiaz Dharker belongs to the generation of post-independence women poets who have given a convincing assurance that Indian English poetry matches the best anywhere. She not only broadened the thematic concerns of Indian English poetry but also shows how words and images can be simple, suggestive, and highly evocative.

❖ **Aims and objectives-**

The present research work proposes to fulfill the following objects.

1. To study Imtiaz Dharker's biography.
2. To analyze the collection of Imtiaz Dharker's poem in the light of thematic concern.
3. To analyze the socio-cultural condition of the poet.
4. To explore the myriad themes presented by the poet.
5. To reveal the influence of paintings on the writings of Imtiaz Dharker.
6. To study the concept of feminism found in her poems.
7. To highlight the custom, code and tradition of the Muslim community depicted in her poetry.

❖ **Scope and Limitations-**

The proposed research work entitle 'UNVEILING THE PURDAH... A CRITICAL STUDY OF IMTIAZ DHARKER'S POETRY' focuses only on the themes that is found in the works of Imtiaz Dharker. It is not possible to analyze each and every stylistic devices that would widen the scope. Imtiaz Dharker has written five collection of poems. The scope of the study includes all the five collection of poems. She deals with different themes. e.g. home, exile, political gender, religion conflict, geographical and cultural displacement. So all the themes of her poems will be taken up for study.

❖ **Research Methodology-**

For the present proposed research work, 'UNVEILING THE PURDAH... A CRITICAL STUDY OF IMTIAZ DHARKER'S POETRY', the emphasis is laid on a close reading of the collected data (primary and secondary sources.) so, analytical and interpretative methods are used for the present study.

❖ **Hypothesis –**

- Imtiaz Dharker has wide range of experience of the Muslim culture.
- She has the sense of National Identity.
- Her poem deals with communal conflict and geographical displacement.
- Her poems are representative of feminist, political, and multiple outsider.
- She knows brutality of violence.
- She is well acquainted with socio-political conditions in Pakistan, Scotland and India.

❖ **Justification-**

Imtiaz Dharker is a Scottish Muslim diasporic woman poet, artist and documentary film maker. She is a challenging poet and as per the researcher's knowledge no one has worked on her poems. Being a Muslim, whatever she experienced she depicts and picturizes in her poems. She writes about the customs and traditions of the Muslim. She occupies the place as one of Britain's most inspirational contemporary poets.

By studying the poems of Imtiaz Dharker, one can get an insight into her works and be aware about the custom, code, tradition of Muslim religion.

❖ **Review of Literature-**

- Ranjit Hoskote, The Times of India.
- Christopher Levenson, Toronto South Asian Review.
- Alan Ross, London Magazine.
- Poetry International by Arundhathi Subramanian.

The above review and articles are not in detail. But there has been some fragment or limited work done so far. No work has been done on the thematic concerns.

❖ **Proposed chapter scheme-**

The proposed research work is divided into five chapters. They are as given below.

• **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

This chapter deals with the detailed description of Imtiaz Dharker as an Scottish Muslim Calvinist. Her life and works as a poet. It includes the personal life, education, upbringing, literary condition. Her five collection of poems and influence of painting on her writing. The social, political and cultural factors that

affect her writings. The significance, aims and objective of study. It includes the scope, limitation and methodology.

It consists brief outline of the collection of poems.

- Purdah (1989)
- Postcards from God (1997)
- I Speak for the Devil (2001)
- The Terrorist at my Table (2006)
- Leaving Fingerprint

• Chapter 2-

This chapter include the detailed study of the following collection and the themes included in it.

1. Purdah and other poems (1989)
2. Postcards From God (1997)

The above collection of poems will be analyzed in detail focusing upon the thematic concerns.

• Chapter 3-

This chapter consists of the detail study of the collection of poems by Imtiaz Dharker. The focus is laid on the themes of poems.

1. I Speak for the Devil (2001)
2. The Terrorist at my Table (2006)

The above collection of poems will be analyzed in detail.

• Chapter 4-

In this chapter, the collection of poem of Imtiaz Dharker, named 'Leaving Fingerprints' published in 2009 will be studied in detail considering it from the thematic point of view.

• Chapter 5- Conclusion

This chapter includes the brief survey of the entire process of investigation as well as the general summary of research experience. In addition, it would focus the findings of the research. In nature, this chapter would be summing up of the research process. Thus the present study will deal with thematic concerns in the poetic works of Imtiaz Dharker.

❖ Data collection-

For this proposed research study data would be collected through both primary and secondary sources. The original texts are the primary sources of the research work. The secondary sources include Encyclopedia, books, internet, interviews, articles, journals, newspapers, etc.

❖ . MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

1. Imtiaz Dharker's poetry is a voice of confidence. She speaks assertively and without any sense of guilt.
2. Hers is essentially a stand of protest against establishment of every description.
3. Her fearless mind is seen when she addresses certain sectarian, religious issues and dictates/ practices particularly involved in the Muslim faith. The purdah is one such target which she aims at and tries to view from multiple points of view, sometimes even self-contradictory.
4. Her sense of protest is especially strong in view of her being a woman as an easily vulnerable victim of oppression, atrocities and exploitation of every type.
5. Her poetry is a passionate and insistent cry for liberation from external, man-made constraints, regarding gender, identity, stereotypes.
6. There is an irrepressible desire and courage to break the mould and emerge as a free, dignified, normal human being.
7. The desire to revolt is also counterbalanced by an equally strong desire to connect and belong.
8. The female body is one recurring engagement in her poetry: it both attracts and repulses the world but will have to be taken for what it is, a human reality.
9. A constant quest for identity is one more theme in her poetry; identity is found in power of the word/letters/writing, creativity, freedom of choice and freedom of revolt: she is the "terrorist at her table," not afraid of making friends with even the devil who is god's permanent enemy.

10. For her life is a big puzzle and we had to make every effort to put the pieces in order to construct a pattern of our own.
11. To read Dharker's poems is to acquaint ourselves with the moods, gifts and aspirations of the competent new woman.
12. In Dharker's view the state of the Muslim women is the most miserable in the ruthless practice of wearing purdah and multiple marriages allowed to the male. There is always the pain and threat of not belonging and being discarded in the minds of Muslim women. The misery is intensified through her deprivation of formal education. In fact, a woman is an image of sin and uncleanness for she trails the month behind her. The most effective symbol used by Dharker to describe her sufferings is a heap of footwear outside a prayer house. Absence of education is true bane of Muslim woman, because it easily spends her economic doom too. This is very effectively brought out in subtle suggestion of exploitation and deprivation of the woman in the family: the poor thing has neither freedom nor money to buy a vegetable of her choice.

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