

## Book Review

By  
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### ***Beyond the Horizon***

Samrudhi Dash

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Feminism is both a political stance and a theory that concentrates its focus on gender as a subject of analysis. Feminism as a theory argues that the representation of women as weak, seductive, sentimental, and powerless, a sex object or a procreating machine, a vendable commodity is absurd. In the twentieth centuries the novelist Virginia Woolf pioneered the critiques recognising feminism as we recognise it today. In her works like "*A Room of One's Own*" and "*Three Guineas*", Woolf contended that the patriarchal discourses prevent women readers from reading as women. As a result, woman texts do not survive except as "*the poor cousins*" of the male authored texts. Simone De Beauvoir, too, followed the suit. In her, "*The Second Sex*", she argued that men are able to "*mystify women*" and this mystification is instrumental in creating patriarchy. Her statement that "*one is not born a woman but becomes one*" speaks volumes about her averment that a woman is constructed by men and society.

"*Beyond the Horizon*", authored by a young female Indian writer, Samrudhi Dash, is a feminist but philosophical novel that deals with the shams and vanity of the modern society, laying bare the shallowness coupled with hollowness of intricate relationships and the complexities of life that mock at ones face. The gripping plot revolves round a young Indian girl, Navira, the protagonist, who finds herself caught in a whirlpool of trials and tribulations when she rebels against the social and patriarchal standards and customs to make a bid at carving and shaping out her individuality. Navira, a girl of twenty one, "*kind of a wild flower in a garden of roses!*" the sandalwood tree that smears even the axe that stabs it with fragrance, has been portrayed as a girl who is compelled to go through a series of ordeals in a male chauvinistic and patriarchal world which fails to understand and value her sentiments, dreams and aspirations, when she ventures to the world out there to assert her individual "I".

The novel is divided into three parts. Part I, comprising four chapters, encompasses Nivara's life at school, at JNU, a life full of fun and frolicsomeness, a stage when, despite her illness, she savoured life in the premises of JNU, where she felt that JNU was her world of

dreams. Part II, constituting of six chapters, belong to the crucial and harrowing stag of her life, life of love with Aryan, then an unexpected breakup after being deserted by the latter. It is that stage of Nivara's life when she is utterly shocked at the revelations of inherent human falsities that strike her and strike her terribly. It surfaces to her that her innocence, trust and gullibility have ushered in such a devastating doom in her life. In the words of the author "*she knew her innocence had been her biggest failing, that one virtue that had ripped her apart in a world where women were considered as just number.*" Her attempt of suicide, then a miraculous comeback "*like a phoenix*" arising "*from the very ashes that had sought to destroy her*" metamorphosed her into a strong, self-esteemed asset recognised by all and sundry. She turns her tears into pearls of poetry. When Nivara drenches her pillow her depressed head rests on in tenebrous nights, with droplets of nude, barren pain and translates all the pain into poetry, the reader is reminded of Kamala Das's "**My Story**" in which she agonisingly writes: "*My grief fell like drops of honey in the white sheets on my desk. My sorrows floated over the pages of the magazines darkly as heavy as monsoon clouds do in sky....*"

Part III, the longest in the novel, has eleven chapters. Nivara, after a miraculous comeback never looks back. Having glimpsed death from very close, she now decides to assert her individuality and speaks up so vociferatingly for herself that she is heard above the crowd. She is no longer a nincompoop, weak or gullible. She is "*a dreamer, a winner, a survivor*" who "*with undaunted courage and incomparable grace crossed the tightrope from belief, trust, innocence and gullibility to reality, maturity, understanding and final renunciation that's rare at such an age.*" She has reached the stage in her life where she echoes Kamala Das' "*I call myself I*" It is here when she has catapulted her life from the nadir to the acme of fame and recognition, Nivara, to the shock of every reader like "*her parents, Aashish, Anindata and Vanisha*", when "*after achieving worldwide recognition of women's femininity, grace and dignity*" excursions to what Shakespeare calls "*the undiscovered country from whose bourn/No traveller returns...*" Yes, she goes "*beyond the horizon*" never to return.

The reader is flabbergasted to read such an end to the novel and it is very difficult to come to terms with such an unwanted ending. It seems like reading the end of Shakespearean tragedy, King Lear. The death of Nivara reminisces one of the death of Cordelia as if no "*poetic justice*" has been done. But, the novelist has made a marvel out of such a seemingly tragic ending to the story and has succeeding in justifying it because in the words of the author "*the end (of Nivara) was something that brought with it the promise of eternity.*" The novelist succeeding in making these words of Nivara true "*I want to die at the height of my success.*" Also Nivara gives a solid and cogent reason to leave this world for good, in her own words: "*The main reason behind my final choice is, I am not meant to survive in a world so parochial, subversive and stereotypical in its approach.*"

Coming to the language, diction and style of the text, it is a piece of literature written in artistic style, a product of *Jouissance*. To use the term of Roland Barthes, from his seminal book, “*The Pleasures of the Text*”, the novel is “*Readerly Text (Lisible)*” not “*Writerly Text (Scriptable)*”. It is reader friendly because a reader easily follows the message and does not need to be intellectually smart unlike the text like T S Eliot’s *Waste Land* which the reader cannot read on a comfortable easy-chair as the reader needs to be fully conversant about the whole corpus of mythology and literature.

To cut it short, it must be said that the novel “*Beyond the Horizons*” is a treat to the intellect.

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### **Short Bio of the Reviewer**

A Kashmir University Gold medallist (2002) in English Literature, **Wani Nazir**, from Pulwama J&K India, is an alumnus of the University of Kashmir, Srinagar. Presently working as Lecturer in the Department of Education, J&K, he has been writing both prose and poetry in English, Urdu and in his mother tongue Kashmiri. He is a voracious and wild reader, a reviewer and critic. He contributes his brain-children-his poetry and prose in *Kashur Qalm*, The Significant League, Muse India e-Journal, Setu-a bilingual e-journal published from Pittsburgh, USA and Learning and Creativity – a Silhouette Magazine, and has been receiving laurels for his beautiful writings.