

**Dilemma of Subaltern Women in Imtia Dharkers “The terrorist at my table”****PEER SALIM JAHANGEER***Ph. D. Research Scholar**APSU REWA (MP)***Abstract**

Imitaz Dharker experienced the world as an arena of various power struggles: false religion against female, victor against victim, male against female. Her poems as well as the drawings can be seen as attempts to mediate these antagonisms. She felt life as a chaos of conflicting oppositions and counter forces and tried to co-ordinate these counter forces by corresponding to her art and life. Thus Dharker's own inner and outer life provided not only form, but also matter for her writing. She wrote about her own emotions and about actual events, places and people of three counties i.e. Pakistan, India and UK. In turn, her writing shaped her life. A strong feeling of her own independence, rebellion against male domination, resentment and protest against male domination, resentment and protest against women who were passively perpetuating the human values and mindless domesticity are freely expressed in all her works particularly in “*The terrorist at my table*”. In a male-dominated society she sought to establish her identity as a woman and an outstanding writer. The quest for identity of subaltern women becomes the main theme in “The terrorist at my table”. The focus of this paper will be “Dilemma of subaltern Women in Imtiaz Dharkers ‘The terrorist at my table’”.

**Keywords:** own emotions, rebellion against male, women, male-dominated, subaltern women.

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Inequalities have existed since the dawn of civilization and women have been fighting against all sorts of discriminations: legal, economic, religious and social. The various factors responsible for their suppression were misogyny, romantic glorification and patriarchy. Irrationally romanticized, they were not allowed to play a significant role as independent, self confident individuals. This was compounded by other unjust social, political, religious and biological factors which produced a rationale or opposition to their rights. As a consequence, they did not enjoy a comfortable position in society. Women in the recent past have launched a liberation movement called Feminism demanding equal rights and equal status for themselves. *Feminism means “the belief and aim that woman should have the same rights and opportunities as men”* ( I A.S, Hornby. *Oxford Advanced*). This belief and aim is the main motive of Imtiaz Dharker in practical life as well as in her works. In other words, “*Feminism is a collection of movements aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic and social rights and equal opportunities for women. Feminists are persons whose beliefs and behavior are based on feminism.*” (*Learner’s Dictionary*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 66.). Dharker is in search of all these rights of equality. Precisely defining “*feminism can be challenging, but pragmatically, a broad understanding of feminism includes women acting, speaking and writing on women’s issues and rights, identifying social injustice in the status quo and bringing their own unique perspective to bear on issues*”. (*Joseph, P. Pickett. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Boston : Publishers and Distributors 4<sup>th</sup> edition, p.243.). This definition is most applicable for the life and works of Imtiaz Dharker, as she is one among these “women acting, speaking and writing on women’s issues and rights,”

Feminism has emerged as a worldwide movement to secure women's social, political, religious, legal, moral & cultural rights on the one hand and love, respect, sympathy and understanding from males on the other. Feminism recognizes the inadequacy of male - created ideologies and struggles for the spiritual, economic, social and racial equality of women,

sexually colonized and biologically subjugated. It is a concept emerging as a protest against male domination and the marginalization of women, Dharker is one of the prominent supports of this concept. It focused women's struggle for recognition and survival and made them realize that the time has come when they should stop suffering silently in helplessness. Then only they can develop their moral and intellectual potentialities and qualities. Feminism, concerns women's cause, their subjugation to men folk, their inferior status, their exploitation- physical, social, political, economic and religious. Feminists all over the world have been raising such issues with a pious wish that the women must be considered equal to men and Imtiaz Dharker is one from Indian subcontinent having such a pious wish. They should not be discriminated because of their sex and to become subaltern. They have been generally forced to lag behind even in religion matters. Thus feminism is a movement giving voice to women's subordinated position in society and discrimination, encountered by them because of sex. So, equality, freedom and justice are central to the movement of feminism for bringing about a radical change in society. Margaret Benton's views are very relevant in this connection. She writes that we are feminists because we believe not only that the evidence shows the oppression of women, but, further, that such oppression is wrong. We also believe that society should be changed to end all forms of oppression. Feminism is a concept emerging as a protest against male domination and subaltern of woman. But the development of feminist thought at the outset of this century has brought about a perceptive change in our outlook towards woman. Now, women are one with man and not their "otherness" as expressed by Imtiaz Dharker also in her poetry particularly in "the terrorist at my table".

Women were not demanding only equal rights and equal status, but they also resisted the insidious power of the literature that forced them to suppress their feelings and approved the patriarchy as the only viable solution to a social order. Feminist writers such as Imtiaz Dharker and others originates and participates in the larger efforts of feminism to liberate women from the structures that have marginalized women and as such, it seeks to redefine ideas of male and female. Feminists claim that literature bears the stamp of male domination. A major portion of literature has been written from the male point of view either by ignoring or suppressing woman's point of view. The ideology of gender is inscribed and it is produced and reproduced in cultural practice. Feminists examine experiences of the women from all race and religions, classes and cultures. The traditional images of women as an evil force, a temptress, an inferior being, and as an impediment in man's spiritual path have been totally discarded in favor of a more human, egalitarian image mainly due to the efforts of the feminists and the male humanists. In short the main motive of Feminist is to make women conscious about their struggle for recognition and survival and made them realize that the time has come when they can save themselves from the anguish and anxiety of the modern world, which they bear silently in

helplessness. This motive is practiced by Dharker not only through her writing but in her practical life also. Imtiaz Dharker belongs to that generation of post-independence women poets who have given a convincing assurance that Indian English Poetry matches the best anywhere. Among these poets, we may include Kamla Das, Melanie Silgado, Sujata Bhatt, Eunice de Souza, Mamta Kalia, Tara Patel etc. They have not only broadened the thematic concerns of Indian English Poetry but also shown how words and images – simple, suggestive and highly evocative – can recite the music of their anguish and agony, their irritations and humor, their observations and reflections with no sign of pretension. This serious and well-considered response to the observed and lived experiences is a drama of daily life here and there poeticized. Not only the technical excellence but also the pain and poignancy endured in suffocation and suppression have found a justifiable outlet in their creative instinct.

Taking glance out of Europe and America the Third world women writers have won critical acclaim by writing their protest in a wide variety of writings. Certain Asian and other diasporic writers, among whom Dharker is one, have attempted novice writings. Since the Post World wars has shattered the nervous of human beings as life seems to be difficult to live. It has similarly precipitated anxieties, anguish and fear among the present writes. At current time most females like Imtiaz Dharker and others have started to write about this anguish and violence that seems to be the only reality to them. The study of Indian English poetry is incomplete without the study of women poets. After 1960, women poets' poetry was focused on feminism. It is the 'new literature' which began after the World War II. Many Indian feminists are dealing with family violence, education and female sexuality. Feminist theorists Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Tolpade Mohanti, Mandakranta Bose who are living in West are helping in improvising the condition of Indian women. Like their feminist counterparts all over the world, feminists in India even in diaspora such as Imtiaz Dharker seek gender equality and it also includes women acting, speaking and writing on women's issues and right, identifying social injustice in the status quo and bringing their own unique perspective to bear on issues. Indian feminists also have fought against culture-specific issues within India's patriarchal society. So Feminism in Indian is generally defined as a movement for the recognition of women's claims for all rights equal to those of men. It is a critique of patriarchy which devoured women's identity and prevented them from realizing their productive as well as creative possibilities. It is also a voice against the male domination and female subjugation and humiliation in our society. Indian women have launched organized efforts to prevent all angst and anxiety against them in a male dominated society on grounds of sex and in the fields of social, political, economic, and even on religious rights. Like other woman writers, marriage and family life made it difficult for Dharker to realize potential. Although she was conscious that writing and family life do not go together, yet she remained determined to indulge in both. She divides her time between London and India.

She eloped to marry Indian, Maharashtrian Hindu who lives in Bombay and was journalist, Anil Dharker, a Hindu by birth. Because of that, her family completely cut her off and she did not see or hear from them for the next fifteen years (Dharker in de Souza 1999, 112). Her second husband, Simon Powell, whom she married in 2007. Imtiaz Dharker currently divides her time between the United Kingdom and Mumbai. She often describes herself as a Scottish Muslim Calvinist, born in Lahore and adopted by India. It is this feminine experience that experiences her poetry and drawings.

The way Imtiaz Dharker addresses about the dilemma of subaltern women in oppressing societies remembers the opinion made by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” It can be argued, though, that one difference between Spivak's opinion on the silencing of the gendered subaltern and Imtiaz Dharker's point of view on the same theme is that the latter is not as gloomy, in spite of what it might seem at first sight. In her poetry, Imtiaz Dharker offers some examples of women who manage to break free and speak up for themselves, or of women who find a way to speak, for example in the form of the possessed women of *I speak for the devil*. According to the poet, this is one of the strategies used by women to discover a tone of voice in circumstances of repression, even if that entails giving up their own voice – and thus their private agency – in favour of what the others consider to be the devil's voice. In “*I need*”, a poem from *The terrorist at my table*, there is a sort of counterpoint to bleak poems like the aforementioned “*Another woman*”, where the speaker wants to see a young boy bathing at the well, and boldly says:

I need to go to Crawford Market  
through the piles of fruit  
and buy a whole sack  
of ripe mangoes  
to suck and suck  
till nothing is left but dry seeds ( Dharker:2006, 104).

The poem ends with a mysterious “I need you to come back” (ibid), where longing for what seems to be a lover is mingled with the flavours from both Britain and of her other country,

Pakistan. The speaker longs to eat *sarson da saag*, and hot *makki di roti*, but also bacon and eggs, claiming that “my greed has no nationality” (103)189.

Intiaz Dharker’s feminist stance is recognized as one of India’s foremost poets to her credit 1 “*the terrorist at my table*” in which she highlights the anguish and anxiety of Indian continent women caught in the morass of affected conventions—social and familial. But at the first instance she portrays her own joys and sorrows, anguish and anxiety that she herself experienced in different situations of subaltern women who feel dilemma. She is a sensitive soul recording in this poem and drawings all the intimations of wrong and turbulence that she feels she underwent through the dilemma of subaltern women. What distinguishes this poem from others is her ability to transform her personal feminine stance into something general, to give a universal colouring to her personal pain of travelling life. She has written so many pomes under this collection of poetry. Her anguished dilemma of subaltern women is available in her hand drawn drawings drawn upon this poetry book. Darker’s quest for identity is directly the progeny of an old social set up, oriented towards the total dilemma of the feminine personality in different shapes particularly in the form of religion. Religion and diaspra feelings are, no doubt, the leitmotif of her poetry but the depth of dilemma of subaltern women seems to have left a constant sting in her soul, and that does invest her identity with a certain tincture of pangs.

She names numerous cities, not only in Pakistan or India, but all over the world, liberating herself from the claims of other people: sons, lovers, fathers, siblings and even from someone else's erotic fantasies. It is therefore incorrect to consider, as Madhurita Choudury does, that Intiaz Dharker “essentializes all women through pain and suffering” (2006, 177). She tries instead to offer an impression of different kinds of women and of their attempts to be heard: while some of them manage, some of them give in. This is also evident in the image of the pomegranate from the sequence “*Remember Andalus*” in the poem “*The women*”, where Dharker writes:

I scatter pomegranate seeds,  
and from each seed springs a woman.  
There is the one who sits  
in the window, day and night,  
rapt in the life on the opposite hill.

There is the one who slips out  
 into the garden, and comes  
 back with her hair undone. (2006, 71)

Most of poems from “*the terrorist at my table*” explain the Feminist dilemma of a subaltern women which she has projected a new device to liberate the women from the anguish and anxiety of slavery in man- dominated society. So, through the presentation of her own experiences in her poem “the terrorist at my table” in most its poems. Also through the various situations depicted in her hand drawing paintings she has highlighted the various images and roles of an Indian woman, as a wife, a mother, a daughter, a mistress and even as a pious religious woman. She has focused her stance on the problems faced by a woman in a male-governed social set-up, the categorized roles assigned to her, the prejudiced attitude of man towards woman, the status and identity of a female child, the treatment of woman mainly as a sexual object, and the new concepts and problems arising for her in the wake of changing socio-cultural and economic scenario. As a matter of fact she empathizes with the numerous Indian subcontinent women who daily suffer unspeakable tribulations, who are the victims of the same socio-familial set-up against which she herself takes the cudgel. She identifies herself with ‘every woman who seeks love,’ finds oneness with every woman who spends life in misery and bondage, sexual, familial and social, religious and participates in all the experiences of the woman in her dilemmatic life.

The drawings from “*The terrorist at my table*” often include sketches of men and women, with clothes that look layered, crossed with undulated lines, as if to underline a stratification of the inner and the outer self. In an interview with Alexandra Hamlyn released in 2005 Imtiaz Dharker explains:

I am trying to look at the face not as a portrait but as an unfolding landscape; and then come to the inner landscape, the hidden self, the fragmented self, the mask, the veil, the cloth unfolding, cloth as concealer and revealer, cloth as an instrument of seduction, cloth as a threat. (qtd. in Astley 2006, 58)

Movement and change in Dharker's poetry represent both the physical journeys of one's body through boundaries and continents, and the allegorical trips of self-discovery of every woman. In “*Call*” the speaker is on the cell phone trying to connect one home to the other home in another country. As she writes, “home moved house / to bring me here” (2006, 118). The poem also includes references to passageways and in-betweenness in the form of thresholds:

after weeks of hesitating  
at other people's doors,  
seeing their lives in lighted windows,  
looking in at basements, at dinner  
being made, smelling the food,  
all the tables laid. (2006, 118)

The poem is about home, and about how complex it is to experience at home in one particular place. Sometimes, though, one can have more than one home. In other poems from the same collection, this same feeling of homelessness acquires more positive connotations. In “Halfway”, the last poem from “*The terrorist at my table*”, for example, the speaker ends the poem saying:

Halfway home or halfway gone,  
we have grown accustomed now  
to travelling on the faultline  
of daily miracles. (2006, 158).

The speaker is in other words aware that we are living in a “fractured time, / consulting ancient maps” (ibid), but the journey on the rickshaws “through city centres, / down high streets and round centres “ (ibid) equals one's life journey.

It is clear from above that Imtiaz Dharker , is one among these poets, who register their voice against sexism, violence, religion exploitation etc. She was born in Pakistan and brought up in Scotland, and she divides her time between London and India and writes for the cause of females of Indian subcontinent. The main themes of her poetry include home, freedom, journeys, geographical and cultural displacement, communal conflict, religious exploitation and gender politics. In the realms of the Post-Modern literature Imtiaz Dharker occupy a very significant position as a rebel against the tradition of marginalization of women in Indian subcontinent society. She is widely acclaimed as revolutionary poet for having raised in poetry her voice rebelliously against cultural displacement, communal conflict, religious exploitation and gender politics which is the causal factor of feminine disturbance. In order to awaken the



idealistic women from their age-old slumber, she started writing poetry and her poetry protests against the injustices and the persecution to which pious women have long been subjected in the name of so called religion. She protests against the passivity and the timidity of the pious religious women who spends her life silently in the false religious society. She makes poetry as vehicle for the expression of her resentments and indignation against such a religious society. She is a contemporary Indian poetess quite conscious of her artistic design and purpose as well as her responsibility towards the hopes and oppressions, the concerns and anguishes, of womankind. Her poetic voice imbued with feminist angst and anxiety sensibility is typically her own and it cannot be confused with anyone else's. Her poetry is not only limited to women's issues but is a violent assessment of the state's suppressive political, social and cultural setting. She highlights different issues and troubles of women by employing a lot of satire, similes and metaphors in her poetry. Dharker's poetry shows her attention in women's health, their social condition and education. She mirrors the situation of women in modern world:

Women are racing ahead in all kinds of fields: ....And yet there are women who don't even know they have Choices.....The cases are in our newspapers. Every-day, a young girl abused within their own families.....I do see all the bright young girls and the self-confident women around me..... Ofcourse, they are shining..... and what I am saying is that I want all the others to shine too, to have the same opportunities. (Dharker, Women Shining : Online)

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