

## Socio-Psychological Elements in Eunice De Souza's Poems

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### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the poems of Eunice De Souza written in confessional mode through the lens of socio-psychological theory. The socio-psychological theory states that psyche of an individual gets affected by the society he lives in. The desire to meet the expectation of the society creates internal turmoil in an individual which either lead to alienation or identity crisis. The perfect blend of sociopsychology with literature is very well seen in the poem "An Advice to Women" and "Marriages are Made" by De Souza. The psychoanalysis of the society and its people help investigate into the true condition of women in the second half of the twentieth century. De Souza through her poems help us to glance at the societal structure of India after independence besides that she gives the honest portrayal of women's psyche. The works by De Souza manifests the predicament of women as a wife especially 'housewife', daughter, maid, spinster and worker etc. This paper also delves in the psyche of a twentieth century India women which is explored in context of the patriarchal setup.

**Keywords:** confessional poetry, psychoanalysis, gender, marginalization, alienation, identity crisis

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### INTRODUCTION

The aim of psychology is to analyse the personal life and the psyche of an individual whereas the work of confessional poetry is to explore these dimensions. The amalgamation of these two lenses is seen in the confessional poems, "Marriages Are Made" and "Advice to Women" by Eunice de Souza. With the help of psychoanalysis we will dive into the psyche of India women in the second half of the twentieth century. And, with the help of poet's confessional mode we will get to know the position of women in India. It is said that if you really want to know the real picture of a society then just look at the treatment they give to their women.

De Souza through her poems help us to glance at the societal structure of India after independence besides that she gives the honest portrayal of women's psyche. She is amongst the Indian English poets of the twentieth century. India English poetry emerged as a 'new literature' in the early nineteenth century. This literature was produced at the climax of World War II and colonialism. The works by De Souza manifests the predicament of women as a wife especially 'housewife', daughter, maid, spinster and worker. Her poems constantly inspect the theme of existential crisis, quest for identity, alienation and isolation that go along with womanhood. Her poetry apprehends revolt and

torment in short utterances that have a lasting impact. She instilled her work with her experiences of growing in a Goan Catholic Community and family. Her poem “Marriages are Made” raises the question on the institute of marriage and condemns the ugly objectification of women by the Indian society. Her other famous poems are “Bequest” and “Advice to women”. This chapter will try to analyse her two important poems, “Marriages are Made” and “Advice to women”.

In these poems she interrogates the India along with the inflexible culture and traditions of Christian society through her works. De Souza was an unconventional woman who remained single throughout her life. Being a spinster was condemned by the stereotypical Indian society. In a society where women is just seen as care taker of family she happily choose to be a spinster and an independent confessional poet. On top of that she cared for her mother until the latter’s death. Besides that she also took care of her aunt proving the society that women can be as powerful as the man if they are given a chance. She had a liberating soul and she stood as an example for modern women to stand on their feet and raise their standards. Ranjit Hoskote, the Indian poet and art critic, upon her death in 2017 admirably said that, “For young poets, particularly women poets, her approach was very liberating.” He presumed her writing style to be, “a distinctive voice, wry and sardonic, and there was a kind of cruel wisdom in her poetry. Her work became more minimalist over time, and the poems in her last collection have a crystalline clarity.” Eunice de Souza encouraged generations and especially women proving them that a women is strong enough even without men. And, marriage is not the ultimate objective of women’s life. “Marriages are made” by Eunice de Souza. Whether its Indian, American or European society, plight of women is same everywhere. The works of the women writers mirrors the darkness of the so called ‘developed western society.’

The women of the western countries were not allowed to raise their voice or give their opinions. The only role of the women was to procreate and to nurture the family. Any other role except this was not given to them. Thus, the women who wants to express their views as poets or writers, had to write under the male pseudonym like Mary Ann Evans wrote under the male pen name George Eliot and the most popular Bronte sisters originally published their works under pseudonyms. Where Charlotte wrote under the male pseudonym of Currer Bell, Anne became Acton Bell and Emily became Ellis Bell. This shows the enslavement of women by the patriarchal ideology. If the women were subjugated to this extent in the so call developed countries then think of India that has just tasted the independence in the second half of the twentieth century. The women in India were marginalised and were voiceless. They were treated as passive object of male sexual desires. So, on one hand India became independent in 1947 and on the other hand women were still captivated behind the bars of social constructs formed by the patriarchal heads.

### **Eunice de Souza’s Attitude Towards Love and Marriage**

Eunice de Souza who was born on 1 August, 1940 has witnessed both the pre and post independent India. She was of a view that women have the potential to earn their living and live on their own without any help from the males. Besides that she believed, marriage to be a part of women’s life and not her entire life. Growing up in the patriarchal India, De Souza has comprehended that marriage as an institute was forced on Indian women. It was the only way by which women can get a position, respect and identity in the society. Marriage instead of being a sacred and pious institute

turns out to be a transaction of women between the males. This shows that women in the independent India has no right to choose their own husband or to raise their voice against the evil system of society. Therefore, the poem is a satire on Indian marriage system. The title of the poem is ironical as it replaces the phrase, “marriages are made in heaven” to “marriages are made” i.e. it is not God who gets to decide the marriage between two people rather it is the decision of the dominant society system. Thus, the poem develops on the idea that marriages are made on earth and not in heaven i.e. it is a societal construct. The poem also calls attention to objectification of women during the process of marriage. Marriage as a pious institute or a business: Objectification of women in Indian The poem “Marriages are made” calls attention to the objectification of women during the process of marriage. In India the model of a perfect Indian bride is one who is beautiful, fair and subservient. The women in question here is Elena, the cousin sister of poet, who is being inspected for the purpose of marriage. Her physicality is inspected by her in-laws, “her eyes examined for “squints/ her teeth for cavities/ her stools for the possible/ non-Brahmin worm” (De Souza, lines 7-10). These lines highlights the ruthless Indian society and their treatment towards women. The girl Elena is bought in front of the groom’s family for the demonstration of her physical appearance. Here she is being treated like a machine whose every part is being checked before being bought.

Further, the poet also foregrounds the obsession of Indian’s towards fair colour, “Her complexion it was decided / would compensate, being just about / the right shade of rightness to do justice to”(De Souza, lines 14-16). Besides that her family background is investigated, “for T.B and madness.” And her father is “declared solvent” by the groom’s family i.e. a person who has the ability to pay his debts. The bank balance of Elena’s father is checked to make sure that he has the capability to pay them dowry. Thus, showcasing the dark reality of Indian society where immoral practices like dowry exists. In addition to that the girl is not allowed to speak anything or give her opinion. Rather she is treated as a commodity to be sold.

Marriage as an institute was reduced to monetary values where love between a boy and a girl is not important. India has always been a patriarchal society where women’s are only worshiped and respected in the temples. But they hold no respect and authority at their own home. All their life decisions are taken firstly by their father, then by their husband and later on by their sons. The role of the women was restricted to the domestic sphere. They were only seen as a procreator and as a nurturer. Gender discrimination was and still prevalent in the India. Where the ability of the women is judged on the basis of their looks rather on the basis of their educational qualification. Beauty is the first criteria for women to be the prospective bride. Other than this it was made sure that the women is submissive and has perfectly mastered the domestic chores. Consequently, women has to be attractive and puppet in the hands of patriarchy. The poem features the oppression of women in male dominated societies.

De Souza shatters the passionate concept of marriage as an association of love, tenderness and admiration between man and women. Thus, the style of her poetry is anti-romantic. De Souza herself stood strongly against the norms of the society. She remained single her entire life thus standing as an example for young women who define themselves on the ground of marriage. She motivated the youth to live their life on their own terms and make their own identity. “Advice to Women” by Eunice de Souza The short poem “Advice to Women” is a master piece by De Souza.

As the title suggests the poet is giving advice to the young women on how they should counter the romantic rejection. The poet makes use of the image of a cat and its attributes. She wants women to idolize cats and learn from them. "Advice to Women" is a twelve- line poem encompassed in a one stanza. There is no specific rhyme scheme in the poem i.e. it is written in free verse. The poem works on the themes of otherness, physicality and sexuality, indifference, and the art of being happy and single. In the poem she has used the image of cat because cats are not needy. They regulate their own life. Their actions are driven by their own desire and not by the will of others. Thus, she use cat rather than any other animal. The Theme of Otherness The poem begins with the following lines "Keep cats / if you want to learn to cope with / the otherness of lovers" (Eunice de Souza, lines 1-3). The poet advices the women to keep cats and make them their model. She further says that if women wants to learn to deal with the "otherness" of their lovers then they should imitate cats. When men loses the interest in their lovers they make "otherness" the medium to neglect them. The lover who once used to give so much attention to their lady love suddenly starts to treat them as unimportant and as 'other'. Women are extremely emotional being, they get totally broken and shattered by such behaviour. She gives voice to women's feelings and emotions. She portrays that women too gets disturbed by the breakups. In this poem she gives women the status of human. She also highlights the fact that men treat women as toys so when they get bored with them they replace them with another toy. Taking the poem forward the poet advices the women on how to deal with the otherness of their lover she tells them to inculcate the qualities of cat. And show their lovers that they are not needy of them. The cats are so much into themselves that they are unaffected by the negative people around them. Theme of indifference Poet advices women to be haughty, self-centred and indifferent like cats. She ask them not to hold any grudges against their ex-lovers, "Don't cuss out of the window / at their enemies." She tells that women should develop indifference towards their lovers. As indifference is the best way to take revenge. She wants women to do what they like and stand on their own feet. She tells the women readers that they may have to face the negligence of their lovers at one point in their life and there is no solution to it. Thus, she wants them not to be upset and handle their breakups with the same indifference as the cats hold.

## **CONCLUSION**

The poem is the reflection of De Souza's own set of beliefs as she chooses to remain single throughout her life. The poet wants her female readers to be find joy within themselves. She wants the readers to make themselves and their desires the centre of their life. She uses the metaphor of, "That stare of perpetual surprise" to show what happens when women loses themselves in the matter of love, their lovers become indifferent towards them and the women are surprised by their otherness. Due to this surprise the women becomes apathetic towards her ex-lover. Thus, the women stands bravely against all the negatives and learns to live alone, in those great green eyes / will teach you / to die alone" (De Souza, line 10-12).

The poet motivates her readers to be self-dependent. She herself has implemented these principles in her life. She never got married and took care of her mother and aunt. Thus, standing as the example for the modern women of India and across the world to do what feels right to them. She showed the world that with all its odd a women can stand on her own foot.

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