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Symbolic significance of Imtiaz Dharker's poem "Leaving Fingerprints"

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Abstract

Imtiaz Dharker although spent diasporic life willingly but she never forgot her motherland and always lived in the memories of Indian culture. Her poems show that she was pulled by her motherland again and again. Her poems prove that she was not only emotionally but also physically alienated from her birth place, Pakistan, and adapted country India. This is the reason that she writes most of her poems both about subcontinent India i.e. present Pakistan or India. Her poetry proves that her heart was deeply rooted in Indian culture and society. It also proves that she faced a lot of identical problems in UK and that's why she felt alienated. Keeping all these things in view, it is very essential to see how Dharker was alienated from great Indian culture, how she felt rootlessness in a foreign country and how she proved herself as a true daughter of subcontinent India. Her consciousness about Indian society and culture brought her recognition all over the world. Therefore, it seems necessary to appraise her personality based on her poetry in this context. The story of Dharker's search for an identity is in agreement with modern culture and demands of modern life which is expressed by her well known book "Leaving Fingerprints (2001)". This book has deeper symbolic significance as is indicated from the title of the book. The title of this book works like a sign board which gives proper direction. So, the focus of this paper will be the about the deeper and symbolic significance of its very title i.e. "Leaving Fingerprints".

Keywords: Diasporic Life, Motherland, Alienation, Nostalgia, Subcontinent

The main themes of Imtiaz Dharker's poetry are alienation and banish, the disaster of individual identity and of cultural identity, childhood memories and familial relations and homesickness and nostalgia. In the case of her some pomes, the sense of nostalgia from the family or the community becomes so vast that they turn completely inward. The result of such inwardness is a highly private poetry, confessional in quality and gripped with solitude and anxiety from which the escape is sought either in the erotic fantasies or the self- inquiring of a suffering soul. Her poems thus expose her consciousness of raw Indian identity. The poetic sensibilities are leaning along three distinct possibilities: the modes of confirmation in terms of legend and history search for the self in and through love, modes of refusal in terms of desire for suspension and death. In other words, Dharker's poetry has centered itself around self in relation to society, history with family as the core unit and in relation to self, its own propelled emotions and feelings. She was an Indian English diasporic poet and that's why Prithvi Nandi says in Indian Poetry in English Today that "the Indian Poet in English represents his generation and speaks for it. Yet he knows his own generation is freak, part of an affluent subculture, rootless, often alienated from the mainstream of the Indian experience". At this moment it can be noted that Dharker's alienation from inherent religious philosophy finds expression in several ways. Whereas alienation is the uncertain birth right of the modern artist in any society, the situation of Dharker reveals several forces at work which appear to generate especially strong sense of alienation in her. As it is well known to all that poetry reflects the poet's argument with life and cultural values. Most of the existential problems of life are taken up by her poems. Whether a person is shifted to an alien soil for an intellectual or economic reason or else the country in which he is born and lives may be under the power of imperialism, his life gets affected by the cross cultural and religious encounters same is the case of Dharker. Thus her poetry is a brilliant by any standard because of her alienation from Pakistan and now divides between Bombay and London. . There is no doubt that a diaspora poet like Dharker enjoys two different lives – the one within, the one without. It is true that because of the present mobility conventional notions of exile have taken a new shape. It is true that she is deeply attached to India sub content. It's visible that disturbed by the deep sense of alienation in the modern world, the poet makes an intense search for relationships through her poems. It is quite clear that Dharker was staying in two cultures– one Eastern and the other Western. The Eastern is related to India subcontinent i.e. presents India and Pakistan and Western is related to UK.

In "Leaving Fingerprints", the title poem of Dharker's collection, the landscape becomes benign, and the poem begins with "I know this frosted landscape / better than it knows itself, its layers / a busy clock of history, still ticking" (2009, 49). She is offering her readers a very different landscape from that portrayed in the previous collections. Instead of images connected to fleeing, in "Leaving Fingerprints" the impression is that the speaker is more adjusted to the land, to the slow indicating of time, and to the names of those who have occupied the land, fingerprinted it. The link to the act of writing is clear, so much that the

land seems to obtain the quality of paper: the names of the people who walked the land – who have written before Dharker – are “written and rewritten in the calligraphy / of roots” .

Dharker takes relief in the foreign land from the memories of the past history about the great leader of her ancestors. She feels nostalgic in the diaspora life about the great Mughal rule upon the India subcontinent. Also, misplaced, hidden things that float up from the earth come back in the collection: in “When they walled her in” the speaker tells the myth of Anarkali, a slave girl who was supposedly buried alive behind a wall by order of Mughal emperor Akbar as a punishment for having a love affair with his son Salim, later to become emperor with the name Jahangir. In the poem, Anarkali, which means “pomegranate blossom”, brings with her inside the wall the poetry she has enjoyed in life, and the speaker anachronistically lists some twentieth-century poets: Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Ahmad Faraz, Mahmoud Darwish, and Agha Shahid Ali, some of Dharker's major influences. In this poem the inner of Dharker comes out when she mentions the names of great Indian poets who have influenced her. She remembers them and feels nostalgic about them in the diaspora land. It appears evident, through these references, that Anarkali represents the contemporary subaltern woman who uses art, poetry in this case, to survive. Slowly, Anarkali starts cracking the wall where she is enclosed. Once again, the image of breaking barriers is central to Dharker's imagery. Even though Anarkali has been silenced, she is alive in other ways. As the poem “Anarkali, inside” makes clear:

my name spoken aloud,
Anarkali, Anarkali
in the open marketplace
in the courtyards and in bedrooms,
in darkened cinemas.

Imagines connected to resurfacing of old things are offered in the poem “Gaddi aa gayi” , where the memory of Partition is evoked through the image of a broken china cup that is forgotten and never spoken of again. In the fourth stanza of the poem, the speaker's mother digs up the broken cup while she is planting potatoes, after many years and in another country. Suddenly, memories of Partition resurface, but they are now almost healed, perhaps made less painful with the passing of time and the resurfacing in the other country. In this poem Dharker remembers the past and feels nostalgic about Indian subcontinent’s partition. She remembers the feelings of her ancestors through the mouth of her mother when she says “She said the neighbours from the other side/ were kind.” This means that she feels nostalgic about the Indian subcontinent before partition:

She said the neighbours from the other side
were kind. They took her in and hid her.
Gaddi aa gayi tation the
Gaddi aa gayi tation the
to the country with a different name

to the station on the other side
on another train.

Bombay's tiffin-boxes are yet another thing in Dharker's latest collection that leaves traces behind, what she calls fingerprints in the title. The theme of traces left behind by every human person on the earth is also resumed in the sequence of poems dedicated to Indian fortune-tellers, only here the fingerprints are legible in the palm. In "According to the palm reader" Dharker writes:

This cross is where the past is buried,
that mound shows your appetites,
from this ridge strong trees will spring
and these creases here are all the children
waiting to be born.
Your thumb shows you will be
difficult, headstrong, stubborn.
You have a strong life line.

The second section of this poem offers images connected to gushes, the pouring out of life from the allotted lines:

That must be the slash through the middle,
like curtains torn apart
or earth split open, when all the prayers
I meant came pouring outstanding.

By the end of Leaving Fingerprints, the astrologer that was bravely reading the speaker's palm does not understand the situation of the dislodged poet: "Did she scatter the pages of her passport out /of a plane to be carried off in the beak of the wind?" she asks worried. The fortune-teller is also confused at the fact that the poet's handwriting "turned to sand". She sees more than a woman in one single body, but with only one hand to be read. This is an appropriate image for a covered identity whose difficulty should not be simplified. This poem is a hymn to the flexibility of identity, to the capacity of managing ones disjointed and puzzling identity, the voices of many women all sharing one single body. The last poem of the collection is aptly called "What they think she said", and it entails an open ending for the entire collection, and for Dharker's poetics:

Teach me to believe
that nothing lasts,
to wear my life
like a skin of glass
or water that will borrow
my shape and pass

It can be argued that in the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker there is something more complicated and ambiguous than a simple "life at the interstices", an image in itself very

reminiscent of Bhabha's theories of the third space. In "Lost Word", a poem from *Leaving Fingerprints*, the speaker gives instructions about finding freedom. The images provided are two: one is of a block of stone that one needs to chisel, "chip away / this corner, crack that letter / as if it were a bone", while the other is a restyling of an old coat. Both images suggest that one should use its art and its imagination to fabricate one's freedom. By the end of the poem, "the coat looks like a lack / hole, less coat / than sack", thus the idea conveyed is that of peering through, of lifting the veil.

The drawings of the section called "The Habit of Departure" from "The terrorist at my table" are of undulating pieces of cloth that sometimes look like hills. One could argue that the crooked lines of the broken umbrellas of "I speak for the devil" or of the precarious shelters of Postcards from god are almost gone, in favour of the leitmotif of the curved line. This style is resumed and amplified in "Leaving Fingerprints". Here she develops the concept even further: the layers on the hills become the lines forming fingerprints that are attached to the land, as if to leave their marks on it. In the aforementioned interview for the BBC World Service Dharker explains the image of fingerprints in the following way: "it felt like a homecoming because I discovered, when I started writing, that there was a whole army of other writers behind me, and they were my real family. And that's what a lot of *Leaving Fingerprints* is about. The other people who leave their fingerprints on you, not just the people you love, but the people you meet every day, the people on the street, the conversations you hear, the poets you read, the songs, the lullabies, the food you eat, all of those things leave fingerprints. And my suggestion is that that is the ancestry in the end." ("Spiritual Journeys")

There are some poems from the book "Leaving Fingerprints" through which Imtiaz Dharker expresses nostalgic feelings about her ancestral religion in her willing exile life. Through the poem "When they walled her in" Dharker feels nostalgic feelings about different Muslim countries and Muslim writers. As she writes "She sang the names of all the lost places, Srinagar, Baghdad, Kabul, Gaza." Also she writes about great writers as "She sang about poets/ who would live and die, Faiz, Faraz, Darwish, Shahid Ali. / They all went to live with her behind the wall." Though the poem "Hand of Fatima,/ Hand of Miriam" Dharker remembers her ancestral religious faith Islam that "Fatima daughter of the Prophet"(SAW) and "Miriam sister of Moses" will help women in this day as well as at the doomsday. Through the poem "Panditiji Will Predicts" we come to know the conscious of the Imtiaz Dharker. Although she lives in west but she has not changed her subconscious mind in which she has full faith upon "Panditiji". She has faith that "Panditiji Will Predicts/ Your Future by Palm". There are also two poems "According to the palm reader" and "What she asks the palm reader" of the same theme. In these three poems Dharker wants to know her future about the past as well as about the future. Actually she wants to know how and where will she spent her future life. But in another poem of the same nature, "What the palm reader said

then” Dharker expresses strangeness through the tongue of the speaker of the poem that “Your lines have changed as it/ they have forgotten where they are going.”

There are few pomes in the book “Leaving Fingerprints” through which Imtiaz Dharker expresses her nostalgic feelings about her childhood which haunts her even in foreign lands. The poem “Today they are shooting the teacher” makes Dharker nostalgic about her mother’s advice. As she expresses thin in the poem “My mother said, ‘Now they are shooting the teachers./ Tomorrow they will be shooting little firls.’” In the poem “Leaving fingerprints” which is also title of the whole book, Dharker expresses her views in this poem “Here I am, they say.” It shows that she is in the foreign land physically and not mentally even though she has exiled willingly. In the poem “Error” Dharker expresses her diasporic consciousness about “Bombay”. She feels nostalgic about “dabbawalla” who comes upon the “station” along with “tiffin-box”. She was at this time in “London” and wants to connect with India but she is not able to do so. In this poem she expresses her feelings in the same way as Agha Shadid Ali expresses in “A Country without Post Office”. She also mentions her contract with “Bangalore”. The title of the poem “Barkat” shows the diasporic feelings of Dharker in this poem. As the word “Barkat” is an Urdu word and there are also four verses in Urdu in this poem which expresses her nostalgic feelings which are sung by the grandmother and so expresses nostalgic feelings about her grandmother also, as: “saja chanda soja/ Meri raj dulari sloja. .. Tuje nindiya sataye saja / Soja chanda soja”. So it is clear from these Urdu verses that Dharker remembers her childhood song sung for her sleep by her grandmother. She feels nostalgic about this song and wants to listen it again and again.

In some poems from the book “Leaving Fingerprints” Imtiaz Dharker expresses her diasporic consciousness in a foreign country which one feels in alienation. In the poem “Meanwhile, my letter-box” Dharker expresses her nostalgic feelings when she receives letters from her mother land. She says in this poem as, “My letter/ box scream again. Another army of words marches in, information and stands there, shouting at me, shouting, shouting, saying nothing.” In this poem Dharker expresses that her mother land has complaint against her so that is shouting to her for accepting her diasporic life. In the poem “Hand-me-down” Dharker forecasts her fate of diaspora life, that she will have to leave the foreign country as is done by others. She expresses as “The city has been taken and given,/ named, renamed, possessed, passed on./ ... I too will hand it on.” By the poem “Somewhere else” Dharker expresses her inner feelings about her inner voice, which wants her to visit her own country because she feels homesick at the foreign land. She expresses as “But I wasn’t there, I hear/ my own voice say, I couldn’t/ have been there.”

In the poem “Last gift” Dharker expresses again her nostalgic feelings by its speaker’s mouth. As the most important gift for the speaker of this poem is “seed” of her “birth”. So it is clear from this poem that Dharker thinks that the most important gift for a person is nothing else than his/her birth place. It shows that diasporic consciousness id haunted by her motherland in herself exiled life.

In the poem “She was seen” Dharker expresses that one cannot change one's identity artificially by moving one place to another place. As she expresses in the poem “She was seen intermittently/ crossing the desert, but does that make her / a woman of the desert? ... She was seen in the city, but again that does not/ means she was a woman of the city.” So it is clear from this poem that Dharker wants to give lesson that if one spends his/ her life in exile but he/she is firmly rooted with his/ her birth place. This message is further strengthened by another poem “Where the river goes”. As in this poem she expresses her main message in a proverbial verse. “The river has never forgotten its source.” She wants to give lessons that in the same manner that of river one should not forgive his/ her birth place.

So it is clear that born in Lahore, Imtiaz Dharker migrated to Glasgow where she grew up as a nostalgia migrant woman whose subsequent existence moved to and fro between U.K. and India. Like most other nostalgia poets, Imtiaz Dharker too remains engaged in the normal dialectics of belonging and unbelonging that usually splits a migrant's opinion of her identity and the whole world of social living where she must always face diverse forms of isolation, ostracisation and racial otherization.

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