

Unmasking Gender Violence : Reading Eunice De Souza's Poetry

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Abstract

Gender based violence refers to any detrimental act perpetrated against a person based on their gender, with women frequently being disproportionately affected. It is a widespread problem that occurs in all societies, cultures, and socioeconomic classes. Women are disproportionately the victims of such violence because of ingrained gender inequalities, harmful societal norms, and power imbalances. Physical, sexual, psychological, and economic assaults are examples of gender-based violence. This violence can manifest in a variety of environments, including the household, the workplace, public spaces, and online platforms. Domestic violence, sexual harassment, human trafficking, and juvenile marriage are all examples. In addition to causing immediate physical damage, these acts have lasting psychological and emotional effects on survivors. The victimisation of women is intrinsically linked to societal attitudes that perpetuate gender stereotypes and unequal power structures. Traditional norms frequently contribute to the normalisation of violence against women and impede efforts to prevent and respond to such incidents. Fear, stigma, and a lack of supportive systems contribute to the underreporting of gender-based violence, which exacerbates the problem. All these prejudices find expression in literature. Indian English woman poet, literary critic, and novelist Eunice de Souza exemplifies these in her poetry. Through her poetry, Eunice de Souza challenges societal norms and sheds light on the experiences of women, giving voice to their struggles and the injustices they face. Her powerful words expose the deep-rooted biases and inequalities that persist in our society, encouraging readers to question and challenge these oppressive systems. By addressing these issues in her work, de Souza not only highlights the need for change but also provides a platform for women to find solace and empowerment in their shared experiences.

Keywords: Gender, Violence, Detrimental, Empowerment, Inequalities

Introduction

A serious problem in today's society, violence against women is an issue that has plagued people of all cultures throughout history. Literature has frequently been used as an effective tool for raising awareness about a variety of important issues. A talented Indian poet and writer, Eunice de Souza has produced a body of work that demonstrates the acute sensitivity with which she approaches topics pertaining to gender abuse. She throws light on the complexities of gender-based violence through her poetry and prose, revealing the underlying structures that

perpetuate it while also offering insight into the psychological and emotional impact on victims. She does this by shedding light on the underlying structures that perpetuate it: the patriarchy and the dynamics of power. Poems by Eunice de Souza draw attention to the difficulties that women encounter, including prejudice against them because of their gender, defying the "traditional image" of women, social alienation, and identity loss following marriage. De Souza's poems

"arise out of alienation and the feeling that life is a mess, they are also highly conscious of the situations and problems faced by women." (King 158)

The purpose of this essay is to investigate the ways in which the works of Eunice de Souza communicate the complexities of the issue of gender violence, focusing on her perspective on patriarchy, identity, and resistance.

Indian English writer Eunice de Souza (1940–2017) was born in India. She was raised in a Goan Catholic family. She examines the Goan Catholic location critically in her two collections of poetry, *Fix* and *Women in Dutch Painting*, as the outsider-turned-insider who studied the peculiarities, mindset, and complexes of the community. De Souza writes about the suffering of women under patriarchy, the innocence of teenage girls, the psychology of spinsters, the suffering of expecting mothers, colour complexes, partiality for male children, the tacit affliction of women in the family, isolation, and repression of feelings due to fear of a husband or social norms, and finally about the women who break these chains to achieve freedom from the traditional codes of society. Her poetry is renowned for its restraint, economy, and aesthetic appeal. According to Bruce King, De Souza is in line with the feminist trend in modern poetry due to her candour, self-awareness, and lack of sentimental attachment to her upbringing. She discusses how women are victimised in Indian society, particularly in Goan society, and writes on the spot from a Goan perspective. Eunice de Souza is related to the group of poets with Goan Catholic roots, including Manohar Shetty, Charmayne de Souza, and Melanie Silgado. In her verse, De Souza communicates her rage, guilt, anxiety, hopes, and desires. Instead of making direct assertions, her look is sardonic. Her poems reveal a keen awareness of the circumstances and issues that women encounter.

Eunice de Souzas expresses her concerns about the Goan Roman Catholic community in the poem *Catholic Mother* from her debut book of poetry, *Fix*. Eunice has firsthand knowledge of gender discrimination because she was raised in a typical, strict Catholic family. It is important to keep in mind that gender-based disparities between men and women are the result of societal constructs when we discuss the gender-based discrimination that women experience. However, it should be remembered that a woman's physical deficiencies make her vulnerable to sexual assaults and attacks. Social institutions like the family, marriage, the church, and others perpetuate and strengthen this form of subjection of women to oppressive authorities. With attitudes deeply established in the social ethos that allow and justify such enslavement and oppression, *Catholic Mother* stands out as a strong critique of the portrayal of a traditional woman as weak, docile, and attractive. In cryptic and bitter terms, Eunice expresses her frustration with the submissive role that women play in a patriarchal social framework and how society supports and accepts this role as the accepted standard. Between her personal demands and cultural pressures, she feels conflicted. However, it's crucial that a woman's self develop into a place of conflict, change, and negotiation. Even the poem's title is ironic because it begins with a reference to a father, even though the poem's "Mother" is its focal point. As a spokesperson of the Catholic Church, Francis D'Souza is referred to as the "Grace of God" and the "Pillar of the Church" and is portrayed as a well-known public personality gifted with spiritual virtues. Eunice does not, however, communicate her thoughts of bitterness at the Father's sexual proclivity without some qualms. The Father upholds his name personally as well as on a spiritual level, bearing the weight of the entire congregation with him. Father of the year is Francis x D'Souza

We've had seven children (in seven years) through the grace of God, he claims

("Catholic Mother" 39)

According to Francis D'Souza, who is referred to as the "father of the year" , his followers will develop a sense of community. But because he didn't recognise this wife's specific sensibility and inner

potentialities, he became an utter failure in his personal life. The Father's wife is stripped of her social, economic, family, and even basic human rights due to the constraints of a patriarchal culture. The Father's wife's pitiful situation is reflected in her seven consecutive pregnancies, and her miserable situation is an obvious example of the gender disparities present in the current social structure. In this regard, it should be noted that Eunice exposes the idiosyncrasies, self-importance, hypocrisy, and stereotypical projection of women as mere objects of sexual lust and desire in an essentially patriarchal framework that forbids women from having their own space through her candid portrayal of the members of her Goan Catholic community. Fundamental issues about the patriarchal oppression of women are brought up by Eunice's explanation of the Father's obsessive sexual appetite. The Father's wife was designed as a role model for conventional characters. She is extremely devoted to her husband and always courteous, subservient, and self-effacing, willing to set aside her own feelings and happiness. Her role and responsibilities as a woman are only defined in relation to those of her husband when placed within the conceptual framework of paternalistic ideas.

In "*Sweet Sixteen*," Eunice explores the psychological and emotional uneasiness that women experience in patriarchal societies. The restrictive limitations of society completely regulate a woman's demands and desires in today's society, which furthers her disadvantage and underprivileged position. The dominant society ignores a woman's mental anguish and suppresses her feelings:

"Mamas never mentioned menses.

A nun screamed :You vulgar girl

don't say brassieres

say bracelets." ("Sweet Sixteen")

Given that she is compelled to adhere to the idea of gender inequality, sex subordination, and submission in an unfair patriarchal order, it is apparent that a girl, a Goan Catholic Girl, is not allowed to speak her body. Her feminine inclinations and senses are entirely disregarded because they are not permitted to be represented or expressed. This is one way in which "Sweet Sixteen" provides a realistic depiction of the female psyche trapped in repressive systems that have stifled a woman's wants.

In many of her writings, Eunice de Souza reveals her profound grasp of patriarchy as the underlying cause of violence against women. By deconstructing the story of the fairy tale in her poem "Rapunzel," she reveals the power relations that are responsible for the continuation of injustice. Souza emphasises the ways in which patriarchal norms limit agency and freedom by using the story of Rapunzel as a metaphor for the woman who is silenced and constrained in her life. Her investigation into power dynamics reveals how many forms of violence against women can be enabled by these dynamics, which she reveals via her work. In her poem "Marriages Are Made," Souza takes a critical look at the institution of marriage as well as the imbalanced power dynamics that exist within it. She goes into the ways in which society expects women to behave in a submissive manner, so normalising unequal power dynamics and contributing to the maintenance of a culture of violence. The work of Souza brings attention to the subtle yet widespread kinds of gender violence that are sometimes overlooked because it juxtaposes societal conventions with the psychological struggles of women. Souza's work challenges the idea that these dynamics are innate and unquestionable by highlighting the unbalanced power dynamics within marriage. She focuses on how societal norms of submissive behavior support a culture of violence, making it important to address and overthrow these expectations. Souza reveals the complex relationship between societal norms and the psychological struggles faced by women

through her investigation of gender violence, ultimately arguing for a society that is more just and compassionate.

The vulnerability of women in the face of gender violence is another theme that emerges throughout Eunice de Souza's body of work. She describes the inner difficulties of married women in her poetry "Married Women," which is about how women are caught between the standards of society and their own aspirations. The poem sheds light on the ways in which women are pressured into accepting violence as an inevitable consequence of their roles, so fostering an environment in which their vulnerability can be exploited.

Her poem "The Suicide Note" conveys the inner agony that a woman goes through as a result of being subjected to domestic violence in a powerful way. The psychological damage caused by gender violence is brought into stark relief by Souza's representation of the woman's voice through the note she left behind before taking her own life. This piece addresses the prevalent stigma that surrounds talking about traumatic situations by drawing attention to the emotional toll that it has on victims.

Although Eunice de Souza's works frequently shed light on the bleak realities of sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence, they also highlight the resiliency and possibilities for resistance. She weaves a story of self-empowerment via the memories of her sister's death at the hands of her husband into the poem titled "For My Sister," in which she discusses the death of her sister. By commemorating her sister's life and speaking out against the silence that surrounded her passing, Souza gives other women the confidence to speak out against the silencing effects of violence. Through her poem, Souza not only sheds light on the tragic reality of domestic violence but also emphasises the importance of breaking the cycle of silence and raising awareness about such issues. By sharing her sister's story, she encourages women to find their voices and empowers them to stand up against gender-based violence, fostering a sense of solidarity and strength among survivors. Souza's work serves as a powerful reminder that by speaking out, we can create a world where no woman has to suffer in silence.

The poem "Advice to Women" written by Souza serves as a rallying cry for women to break free from the constraints of subservience and assert their agency. The poem acts as a manifesto of female empowerment in the face of gender abuse since it encourages women to disobey the expectations of society and instead focus on their own sense of fulfilment.

Souza exhorts women to embrace their own strength and autonomy rather than the idea that their value is dependent on how well they obey. By encouraging women to speak up and assert their rights, Souza's poem empowers them to challenge the oppressive systems that perpetuate gender abuse and create a more equitable world for all.

Conclusion- The literary works of Eunice de Souza serve as an engaging examination of gender violence, providing insights on the widespread nature of patriarchal power structures, the precarious position of women, and the possibility of resistance. By means of her poetry, Souza strips away the many layers of gender violence, so calling into question the accepted standards of society and campaigning for change. Her heartbreaking rhymes and riveting narratives force readers to tackle the subject head-on, which in turn fosters a deeper comprehension of the complexities underlying gender violence. Her writings, which continue to strike a chord with readers, are a constant reminder of the critical importance of addressing and eliminating all forms of gender-based violence from our culture.

Refernces-

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