

SAGA OF COLOURED WOMEN; THE PLIGHT OF NON CAUCASIAN FEMININITY IN THE NEW WORLD

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Gender and race are the two vital factors that has been dividing humanity into fragments from time immemorial. The magnitude of these biological forces is so immense that it often destabilises the fundamental structure of the society. In this fatal process of societal disintegration, it is the individual who suffers the most; that individual who is labelled perennially as belonging to the second sex or as considered to be the member of the ‘inferior’ race. Even in this twenty first century of technological advancements, it is an unavoidable fact of ignominy that humans still practise discrimination in the names of gender and race. Centuries of scientific learning has remained ineffective in curing this malady of human minds. Here is an attempt to analyse the elements of gender, race, nationality and culture in the poetry of a few non-Caucasian American Women Poets.

Literature in the United States, like any other country, was long based on the patriarchal standards that often overlooked women’s contributions. Therefore, their poems bear indelible imprints of their corresponding cultures and open before the readers novel vistas of American female experience. In the modern white dominated patriarchal society of America, the non-whites or the coloured people face various types of discrimination due to endless reasons. These dark tales of subjugation and oppression are vividly portrayed in their literary works too. Their uniqueness of expression springs out from their unique pasts. Not all of them are feminists, nor do their literary works invariably voice women’s concerns. More often, they are humanists who share their life experiences through their works and if at all it sounds feministic, it is purely by accident.

Janice Mirikitani, Donna Kate Rushin, Mary Tallmountain and Diane Glancy are few delegates of their own respective cultures. The Japanese American writer named Janice Mirikitani wrote her poems in the backdrop of the Second World War during which a sentiment of hostility had emerged against the Japanese. Donna Kate Rushin is a Black American writer whose poems give voice to the silenced history of black women and their families in America. Mary TallMountain is famous for the nostalgic portrayal of her native Athabaskan culture while Diane Glancy examines the socio-cultural dilemma confronted by the aboriginals as a result of the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

In the poem “Breaking Silence” by Janice Mirikitani, she describes her mother’s experience in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. The poet discusses how her mother came to America believing it to be a land of freedom and opportunity and later amended her prejudices. Her mother later understands the injustice and double marginalisation she had to

face being a woman and being Japanese. The poem also highlights on how Japanese people grew progressively despite the hostile treatment from the U.S. government. The poem thus concludes:

“We must recognize ourselves at
 last.
 We are in a rainforest of color
 and noise.
 We hear everything.
 We are unafraid.
 Our language is beautiful.”

Another poem of Janice Mirikitani, “Suicide Note” reflects her own life as a survivor of sexual abuse as a teenager that caused her to contemplate suicide. The same feelings of self-blame and self-hate faced by victims of sexual abuse are evident in this poem. However, she overcame from the crisis and rose to great heights such that she was named the second poet laureate of San Francisco.

Having received many awards, Donna Kate Rushin is the author of *The Black Black-Ups*. Her famous poem “The Bridge Poem” appears in *The Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, a ground-breaking feminist anthology. The following lines explore her search for identity as well as her boredom of being a bridge for others’ benefits.

“I must be the bridge to nowhere
 But my true self
 And then
 I will be useful”

The poet here talks about carrying the weight of the weight on her shoulders and her words seem too strong and deep. The poem begins with frustration of being a lone bridge and her vengeance or anger is let out through this poem.

A native Alaskan writer, Mary TallMountain calls her group of people “inbetweens” in an interview with Joseph W. Bruchac. The pain and agony of her past drove her to drinking and live in a “grey world” where she wrote with “a deeply spiritualized sensibility”. In the foreword written by Allen for her “Light on the Tent Wall” he finds that “In telling her life and the life of her far away people, she tells all our stories; she tells our lives. And in so doing not only affirms life, but re-creates it.” The concluding lines of her celebrated poem “The Last Wolf” is more or less a purgation of the poet’s soul and it goes like:

“Yes, I said.
 I know what they have done”

These lines are proof of an enlightened poet who is liberated from sufferings and hardships in a male dominated society. Diane Glancy is yet another prolific American poet and playwright who is a Cherokee descent. Glancy conceives oral tradition of poetry as the spirit of the people and she describes it as an “invisible library” which often helps in shaping a person’s cultural identity. Glancy’s poems are always written in a marginalised context which is further exacerbated by the sociocultural collisions. The presence of oral tradition in her literary works is actually an effort done by the poet to locate a marginal Native voice in the New World. Her critically acclaimed novel *Pushing the Bear* (1996) deals with the mass migration of the Cherokees in 1839. She uses literary arts as a healing force that is crucial for the survival of the marginalised community.

Thus, it is evident from the above that all these representative writers of non-Caucasian group suffered from acute identity crisis and rootlessness in the modern white dominated

American society. Their pain is aggravated by their gender and class also and they found solace in writing as it helped them to cleanse their souls and heal their wounds which are caused by the thorns of the reality.

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