

Prismatic Representation of Modern Woman in N. P. Singh's Millennium Blues

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ABSTRACT

N. P. Singh is a veteran teacher who has taught language and literature in a third world country. He has a long successful career of teaching which is also a synonymous with exploring and searching of new horizons. Though his collection Millennium Blues carries several themes of Mandir and Masjid, (Urbanization), Philosophy of life, Romanticism, Nature, reminiscences of childhood, communalism and the poems on dignitaries like Ram Bilas Sharma, Rajiv Gandhi, Kalpna Chawla, Monica and Stefi, yet the portrayal of women is kaleidoscopic as well as prismatic. The varieties of images, the pictorial quality, the emotive vortex and the tackling of women by the poet is exquisite and exemplary. N. P. Singh has succeeded in his portrayal of modern woman. From Romance to Ritual and Imaginative to Realistic, he has covered all the aspects related to modern Indian woman. He does not try to demean or to insult; rather with an emphatic touch, he gives meaning and creates love and sympathy in the hearts of his poetry readers so his portrayal of woman is prismatic.

Keywords: *Indian-English Poetry, Mandir and Masjid, Imaginative, realistic, ritual.*

A woman today

Is a prism

Reflecting more than seven colours (88)

Certainly, when N. P. Singh, the well-known signature of Indian-English Poetry pens such lines, he seems to be in quest of feminine sensibility and appears to be more and more inquisitive to solve the enigma called the woman. N. P. Singh is a veteran teacher who has taught language and literature in a third world country. He has a long successful career of teaching which is also a synonymous with exploring and searching of new horizons. Though his collection Millennium Blues carries several themes of Mandir and Masjid, (Urbanization), Philosophy of life, Romanticism, Nature, reminiscences of childhood, communalism and the poems on dignitaries like Ram Bilas Sharma, Rajiv Gandhi, Kalpna Chawla, Monica and Stefi, yet the portrayal of women is kaleidoscopic as well as prismatic. The varieties of images, the pictorial quality, the emotive vortex and the tackling of women by the poet is exquisite and exemplary. The very first poem of the collection 'A Woman in love' compares the bride to a 'fragile bottle-green leaf' that 'curled and blushed like a bride' and further he compares the woman in love as:

The coy bride
Shed her blush
Soaked the moving fire
Of wide paramour
And spread out
Like a woman in love.(11)

The other poem 'The Sleeping Woman' sketches the woman who 'sat alone brooding/ eyes stitched' and whose 'ample frame/was rooted in utter repose/ with 'eyes' 'stitched tight' and the poet conjectures:

She was perhaps
Loitering in a valley
Full of red, red rose
Or straining herself
In a frantic futile endeavour (31)

Again, he suspects about her when he finds her 'perhaps/crossing a dark maze/where sinister eerie shapes chased her (the sleeping woman) remorseless. After passing through 'innumerable doors' the poet adds:

She groped forward
Feverish, frantic, fumbling
To find the door
Out of the labyrinth
But there was no door
Beyond the maze.(32)

In the poem 'the Wife' the poet voices the pangs of the housewife who explodes 'in anger' and 'in black rage' who was 'married at an age of eighteen' and was hurled into the oven. After giving birth to three children, 'running a large house/ with meagre resources' and 'selling old newspapers to scrape through' the last days of the month without 'rest', 'clothes', 'food', 'love' and the attention of the dumb husband, the woman eventually says:

I'd certainly have been
Much more happy If my
Father had got me married

To a clerk in an office
Or even a lousy laborer
Rather than roast me alive
In oven for decades- for ages. (34)

Another poem 'A wife' is also the delineation of Indian wives who 'get immersed/in a drab dreary routine/ (after a splendid marriage) and cooking, cleaning and dusting are their fate. The poet says at last:

Another name of the
Broken stone is wife.
We do not know
Exactly when the young girl
Dwindles into a wife (87)

'The College Girls' mirrors the college life of the girls who in 'denim jeans' when they see a snake lying across the snake charmer's bare torso, spring up and run away. The poet puts up a question:

I don't know
Why college girls
Are so scared
Of drowsy brown snakes.(43)

Besides in 'The Two Wives' the poet shows the modern attitude of man to his mother who wishes to have two wives, one for himself and the other for the mother to serve, to massage her sore feet and be with her all the time. At this attitude the reaction of the mother is well portrayed by the poet:

My silver-haired mom
Looked astounded- incredulous
At her seven years old son
Who was awfully keen
To have two wives.
He was not willing
To share his wife
With his mom.

His logic was indeed
Perfect, wasn't it ? (44)

The poem 'An Old Woman' is a saga of an old woman hobbling painfully over weary heels.
The poet states painfully:

The old woman
Couldn't ever remember
Savouring youth and élan
She was born old. (47)

In the poem 'A Woman'(80), the poet metaphorically says:

A woman is a red rose

That pricks rudely-sometimes.
Man is a strange animal
Who can neither
Live with a woman
Nor without a woman.

The romantic aspect of the poet can also be seen in many of his representation of woman. Like when the poet says:

The tall cute woman
With a black umbrella
Vanished quickly.
I could see her face
Her smile of an imp as well (52)

Two young women
In my spacious drawing room
Sounded like a symphony. (Two Young Women, 72)

She looked winsome
Like a red, red rose
Peeping archly through
A cluster of green leaves.

She looked fresh teasing
Like a morning newspaper. ('She', 99)

But the poet puts also another aspect of woman when he says:

A woman is a dream
Tantalizing and teasing
A dream tremulous and fleeting

A woman is a daisy
That fades, fades fast
Rainbow that gleams
And is gone- gone abruptly. (64)

Besides, his poem 'I Have A Dream' written on the plight and woeful end of Kalpna Chawla who was 'the first Indian/born woman into space' and from a small state in the northern belt of India. The poet's emotions are with the girl and he hopes for the upsurge of many other girls like her:

She had a dream
That drove her on
Till Columbia Space shuttle
Exploded
And her dream came to an end.

Her dream, however
Still lives in the heart
Of the innumerable man and woman. (89)

The poem 'A woman' (58) is much similar to the statement of Lord Francis Bacon 'wives are young men's mistresses, companions for middle age, and old men's nurses.' The poet adopts the same tone when he says:

A woman is a nurse
For a child
A tireless maid for a mother-in-law. (58)

But the poet's imagination is larger than that of Bacon when he looks at the modern woman who is-

A commodity
For a global entrepreneur
And a mine of juicy scandal
For old women. (58)

To sum up, it is true that N. P. Singh has succeeded in his portrayal of modern woman. From Romance to Ritual and Imaginative to Realistic, he has covered all the aspects related to modern Indian woman. He does not try to demean or to insult; rather with an emphatic touch, he gives meaning and creates love and sympathy in the hearts of his poetry readers so his portrayal of woman is prismatic.

References:

N. P. Singh, Millenium Blues. (All the quotations are drawn out from the same book) Kolkata: Writers Workshop, 2004.