

A Gynocritic's Oeuvre: Daughters Towards Balance for Better¹

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Abstract: The language employed by women authors bear a 'difference' guaranteed by the author's femaleness. The evolution of the feminine aesthetic is complete when the 'psychodynamics of the individual or collective female literary tradition' (Showalter 1982: 15) receives the vindication of the canon of 'great' literature, at par with the literature authored by men. Women writers successfully continue the tradition of *écriture féminine*, or an exclusive style of women's writing, through a voice of their own. It contributes towards strengthening the exclusive style of women's writing 'which draws upon the formless primeval song that emanates from the voice of the mother' (Bhaduri and Malhotra 2016: 112) which the male writing often attempts to erase thereby naturalizing their gender roles as the virtuous woman, the seductress and the sacrificing mother (Nayar 2010: 94). The patriarchal mechanisms augmented through the naturalization of power structures are interrogated through women's writings which contribute towards the birth of a literature of their own bearing a feminine creativity and inventiveness to represent her female protagonists' 'journey towards self-fulfillment with Jungian rites of passage' (Baym 1978: 11). The metaphorical concept of 'female identity' is an inherent process dependent upon a mother-daughter bond, which the female creators/authors develop with their female characters (Gardiner 1982: 179); and besides being the hero of the author's creation, she also becomes the author's daughter as this connection contributes towards women's psychological identities (Gardiner 1978: 244). Therefore the female authorship creates this association and an identity of this association contributes towards the development of a distinct engagement between the woman writer and her characters and 'indicates an analogous relationship between woman reader and character' (Gardiner 1982: 179). Through this literal identity often a reader feels remarkable and cogent in spite of being pharmaceutically subjected to a state of identity dissipation.

¹ This essay is for Mr Norman Aselmeyer for his enduring love and abiding support.

Therefore through this distinct female identity Indian women authors writing in English have been able to portray women as 'seats of consciousness' (Donovan 1997: 212), their selves, their female voices, the social setting and audiences, and their responses towards it which differs to the male tradition, only to metamorphose the 'voice' as a woman-centered criticism – portraying aspects of 'women's experience which generate the style and content of their writing; and to examine the means by which women offer resistance to patriarchy through their writing' (Spaul 1989: 86) and 'deactivates its components' (Kolodny 1991: 113). The female experience is the foundation of an 'autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature' (Showalter 1997: 218). This essay will discuss Sanjukta Dasgupta's attempts to explore women's experiences of trauma, frustration and fears imposed upon them through several constraints of the society through the oeuvre of her short stories. Her short stories emphasize upon the regular grapples undertaken by women [Dasgupta's fictional daughters] with whom we can relate and feel the author's anger which proliferate every corner of the narratives, thereby contributing towards the development of a separate sensibility and writing style for women and furthering the cause of women's literature and female creativity by transcending the various historical boundaries.

Keywords: Women author, short stories, difference, interrogating patriarchy, Balance for Better.

Sumario: Introduction. The Female Author – Gynocriticism. The Bengali Gynocritic. The Annals of Dasgupta's Daughters. Conclusion.

Introduction

'Identity' is cardinal to the dynamics of contemporary ideological and moral criticism. It is a paradoxical term which not only enhances similitude, but also asserts difference or contradictions, especially when we explore the idea of 'identity' in the context of women authors, their writings and their creative characters. Patriarchal criticism subscribe to the dominant phallogocentric discourse to typify female identity through a language that develops in dullness of the womb, passes on like a woman's body fluids, and disseminates like her sexual pleasures. Dorin Schumacher considers a text as a unit of latent meaning and criticism as the method of contriving that meaning. She asserts that through a literal assessment of the text a critic thrusts upon a meaning which is generally 'gender-linked', and attempting a broadened interpretation for the words of the text as they connect to the model. Through these interpretive methods we have read male works well, but when it involves reading a work authored by a woman there is

propensity to 'ascertain the adequacy of any interpretive paradigm to a full reading of both male and female writing' which wittily relocates the critical centre from works to elucidative processes (Kolodny 1991: 97 – 116). This involves in a narrow process of 'representation of the world' which 'like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their point of view, which they confuse with the absolute truth' (Beauvoir 1956: 162). As a result the men create the world from their point of view and it emerges as the truth to be described, ignoring women and their point of view towards creation (MacKinnon 1982: 537). This segregation has not only enabled the men to 'spring from the masses' to be 'propelled onward by circumstances', but also played an important role to corner the women on 'the margin of history, and circumstances are an obstacle for each individual, not a springboard' (Beauvoir 1956: 151). Therefore the history of women's struggle for vindicating their identity corroborates that women 'have been thwarted by our society's prescriptions concerning gender and disrupted by social norms dictating powerlessness' (Davidow 1989: 68) to enable her only to be the 'second sex'. This process of pseudo-identification of the women has programmed them to be comfortably considered by patriarchy as the 'second sex' where the 'difference' of their self, mind and soul remains unrecognized, dominated and exploited in one way or the other. These imposed identities are subtly coercive and seldom are women able to extract themselves from this strong hidden adhesive which unconsciously entraps them like a Venus-fly trap. The woman's body and its specific characteristics which are biologically, culturally and literally different becomes a space where patriarchy tends to explore in order to control and violate it. This violation serves as a reprimand upon the liberating, self-willed woman for interrogating the patriarchal advances, and also emerges as a metaphor of repercussions faced by any woman for employing her freedom of choice by crossing the 'lakshman-rekha' which she is not expected to transgress – a metaphorical patriarchal admonition and sexual politics meant to affirm manhood (Bagchi 2019: 7). Succumbed to these entrapping processes of imposed identities the woman emerges as the Eastern 'Lakshmi' (Dasgupta 2017: 11) and the Western 'Angel of the House' (Woolf 1970: 238) only to be subjected to sexual exploitation and violence at home and the world. Amidst all this turmoil which unfortunately continues even today, the true self of the woman is lost forever, and she survives as the 'other' sacrificing her life at the altar of patriarchy without any reverence and respect for her as an individual, but to her pseudo-identifications which satisfy the male ego where the idea of the individual identity of the person as a woman ceases to exist. It is of utmost necessity to debrief patriarchy and its violent ramifications, and enable women to lead a life of their own, realising their own selves. It is therefore imperative for women to be empowered in this era of cultural and economic globalization where they will exist and be respected and honoured at par with the men i.e. 'balance for better', the UN theme for the 2019 International

Women's Day. This clarion call ventured by the United Nations women's organization focuses on treading towards a gender-balanced world, where women are not considered and treated as the other. In recent times due to the spread of education and enthusiastic endeavours undertaken by various organisations' exploitation upon women have been checked to a great extent, if not completely eradicated. It is necessary to eradicate such inhuman crimes which are committed upon women – often these do not make it to the headlines, they remain concealed within the abysmal depths of the patriarchal structure of the society, unknown, and unheard of.

Women's experiences easily 'disappear, become mute, invalid and invisible, lost in the diagrams of the structuralist or the class conflict of the Marxists' (Showalter 1997: 219). Like feminist activists addressing such issues through various endeavours, the entelechy of the creative writers have enabled them to explore these unheard and unknown phases of women's life, the disguised and subdued messages of women in history, in anthropology, in psychology, and study these sensitive issues to vindicate its seriousness and emphasize through their creative medium the need for liberating women from the androcentric clutches. Sometimes they have been able to quiver the society through their argument leaving an indelible impression among all sensitive minds. Writing is an activism for a writer; it is the only possible way by which she/he can express her/his political standpoint, ideology, worldview, dreams and visions; leading towards a harmonious fusion of ideas (Dasgupta 2015) in 'a thinking, understanding world of creative participation' (Fraser 2015:66). Through their creative writing the creative artists continue the art of discovering the mystical humanity. As communication of life can only be possible through a living agency therefore writers through their art of writing communicate and nurture the growth, development and progress of a culture which grows, moves and multiplies in life (Tagore 2003: 21). Therefore the author being the 'world-worker' is able to 'transcend the limits of mortality' (Tagore 2005: 55) towards an existence where all the people are coordinated by the vision of the author to be 'receptive as well as creative' towards an 'inspiring atmosphere of creative activity' (Tagore 2003:2) through which 'a harmonious blending of voice, gesture and movement, words and action, in which [the poet's] generosity of conduct is expressed' (Tagore 2001: 495). Through an expression of her/his own worldview and ideology, the author is able to voice 'universal, human experience' (Parthasarathy 2002: 11); this has facilitated an interrogation of the hypothesis of 'marginality' (Paniker 1991:12) which has often been used to describe Indian literature written in the English.² Employing the global *lingua franca* the Indian

² Bruce Kings states, 'English is no longer the language of colonial rulers; it is a language of modern India in which words and expressions have recognized national rather than imported significances and references, attending to local realities, traditions and ways of feeling (1987: 3).

women writers continue to strive a reinvention of womanhood by addressing issues of women and their lives. Through their endeavours they have been able to break the silence and emphasize the need for women to journey towards 'self-discovery' and 'a search for identity' (Showalter 1977: 13) through their creative medium. These creative endeavours by women help their struggling fellow sisters and daughters to recognize themselves, and their identity, as Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic insights vindicate that all perspectives of identity are androcentric in nature, but female identity and experiences differs from the male model in profound and regular ways. This element of 'difference' contributes towards the evolution of a feminine aesthetic, a language which is particular to women's writing, whose 'difference' is pledged by the 'femaleness' of the author (Spaul 1989: 84). This feminine aestheticism acts as 'functionaries of resistant gender ideology, and unearthing from the debris of history the numerous women authors who were sidelined in the process of construction of an androcratic canon' (Bhaduri and Malhotra 2016: 115).

The Female Author - Gynocriticism

The evolution of the feminine aesthetic is complete when the collective female literary tradition receives the vindication of the canon of 'great' literature, at par with the literature authored by men. Women writers being enthralled by their 'inspirational eleventh muse' (Dasgupta 2017: 49) successfully continue the tradition of *écriture féminine*, or an exclusive style of women's writing, through a voice of their own rapidly contributing towards strengthening the exclusive style of women's writing 'which draws upon the formless primeval song that emanates from the voice of the mother' (Bhaduri and Malhotra 2016: 112) which the male writing aims to stereotype as 'subordinate to the main stream: an undercurrent' (Moi 1985: 55) thereby naturalizes their gender roles as the virtuous woman, the seductress and the sacrificing mother (Nayar 2010: 94). This voices being heard will eventually facilitate the process of rediscovering 'the lost continent of the female tradition [which will rise] like Atlantis from the sea of English literature' (Bhaduri and Malhotra 2016: 122). As a result Elaine Showalter comments that 'each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex' (Showalter 1977: 11 - 12) which contributed towards the birth of a strong subculture within patriarchy (Nayar 2010: 97). Such patriarchal mechanisms augmented through the naturalization of power structures are interrogated through women's writings which contribute towards the birth of a literature of their own bearing a feminine creativity and inventiveness which is established

through the use of language by women authors to represent her female protagonists' 'journey towards self-fulfillment [inner awakening] with Jungian rites of passage' (Baym 1978: 11). This language used by women authors and poets contributes towards the birth of a literary canon by women as Showalter has argued by consigning the authors into three main types, equating to the three main stages in the evolution of women's writing itself in her *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*. She coined the term 'gynocriticism' which involves in

the study of women as *writers*, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a feminist literary tradition (Showalter 1982: 14 - 15).

This facilitates Showalter to account for the woman writer as the author [creator] of texts and meanings involving critical interpretations and thereby 'uncover particular modes of women's writing by positioning the woman's experience as being at the centre of both writing and criticism' (Nayar 2010: 97).

The 'unique difference' (Showalter 1982: 16) in women's writing became a reality as women began to voice their causes, depict their real selves through their women characters as they should be, unlike the male authors whose women characters are repressed under patriarchy with limited opportunity to offer any kind of resistance against the exploitative institution. As a result the literary creation and critical interpretations by women authors gave birth to 'woman-centered criticism' and accelerated breaking their centuries' silence and ripping apart the imposed barriers of barbed wires towards 'a wider field of their talents'. Therefore women's literature is a firm response and challenge to patriarchy disintegrating at once 'the relative segregation of the women as [the second] sex, relaxes the restrictions that otherwise narrow women's functions' (Guha 2012: 267) by probing the 'servile submission to custom and practice without regard to their tendency for good or evil' (Banerjea 2009: 118). This process aims to revive and preserve 'the echo of women's literature' (Moers 1977: 66) and strengthens the female identity and the female literary tradition and for creating a world characterized by disentrainment, egalitarianism and erudition where the woman writer cannot be contained, smothered, confined or silenced from gyrating the world with her perception embodied through her writings (Fraser 2015: 61).

The metaphorical concept of 'female identity' is an inherent process dependent upon a mother-daughter bond, which the female creators/authors develop with their female characters (Gardiner 1982: 179); and besides being the hero of the author's creation, she also becomes the author's daughter as this connection contributes towards women's psychological identities (Gardiner 1978:

244). Therefore the female authorship creates this association and an identity of this association contributes towards the development of a distinct engagement between the woman writer and her characters and 'indicates an analogous relationship between woman reader and character' (Gardiner 1982: 179). Through this literal identity often an individual/reader feels remarkable and cogent in spite of being pharmaceutically subjected to a state of identity dissipation. Therefore through this distinct female identity Indian women authors writing in English have been able to portray women as 'seats of consciousness' (Donovan 1997: 212), their selves, their female voices, the social setting and audiences, and their responses towards it which differs to the male tradition, only to metamorphose the 'voice' as a woman-centered criticism – portraying aspects of 'women's experience which generate the style and content of their writing; and to examine the means by which women offer some resistance to patriarchy through their writing' (Spaull 1989: 86) and 'deactivates its components' (Kolodny 1991: 113). The female experience is the foundation of an 'autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature' (Showalter 1997: 218).

The Bengali Gynocritic

Through her insightful contributions towards the genre of women's literature following an intuitive and distinctive style (Moers 1977: 66) Sanjukta Dasgupta has effectively contributed towards maneuvering 'the echo of women's literature' (Moers 1977: 66) which patriarchy tries to erase through several coercive mechanisms but remains unsuccessful. The dynamic feminine power of her creative outlook facilitates Dasgupta to re-vision women 'to seek out a feminine aesthetic, or 'essence', which differentiates women's writing from men's' (Spaull 1989: 84) and their varied dimensions in their respective cultures, questioning and revising the passive, impoverished and anaemic stereotypes, to 'celebrate and venerate the dignity and strength of the enlightened woman and represent a critique of the regressive ideals of patriarchy' (Kumar 2009: xxvi). Like her poetry, the remarkable style of Dasgupta's short stories, endorses an expression of a woman author's experiences of the home and the world and vindicates the 'self-defined critical consciousness' of women as 'opposed to a mass-produced or stereotypical identity' (Donovan 1997: 212); contributing to the style and content of women's writing 'by which women offer some resistance to patriarchy through their writing' (Spaull 1989: 86). Her short stories facilitate the birth of a 'unique and uniquely powerful voice capable of cancelling all those other voices' (Capkova 2011: 4) in order to 'resist gender hierarchies through literary practice [through] a combination of both the demand for exclusivity and real struggle into a truly subversive aesthetic' (Bhaduri and Malhotra 2016: 113). They echo the birth of a female reader impeding the strategic patriarchal alienation and manipulation of the female reader/writer and

the implanted male perspectives as expostulated by Judith Fetterley's arguments regarding the politics of manipulation, androcentric value system and the portrayal of female characters through 'male eyes' in her famous book *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1978). Like other women writers, Sanjukta Dasgupta's short stories are deeply engaged with issues involving not only to women's history, culture and literature, but also their plight and neglect by patriarchal generations which are often suppressed, unheard and unrepresented. As a woman writer she addresses them from the woman's experience facilitating the woman as the producer of textual meaning 'in their exclusivity [to] search for the trans-symbolic semiotic order of multiplicitous choral voices, rather than the glorified patriarchal monologism' (Bhaduri and Malhotra 2016: 112). This intense association and commitment towards her [female] characters not only make them lively and familiar, but also connects to them as her daughters, whose unheard stories and issues of life get addressed through her creative medium as it reaches to the common ear breaking the glass closet which patriarchy builds around women's writings. This is gynocriticism derived from Elaine Showalter's *la gynocritique: gynocritics* who are 'more self-contained and experimental, with connections to other modes of new feminist research' (Showalter 1997: 216). Through her short stories Dasgupta, an ardent gynocritic from Bengal [India] create 'a new understanding of our literature [in order] to make possible a new effect of that literature on us, and to make possible a new effect in turn to provide the conditions for changing the culture that the literature reflects' (Fetterley 1991: 497). Sanjukta Dasgupta is perhaps an Indian embodiment of Showalter's programme of gynocriticism.³ This process of artistic creation by a woman author involves in a struggle to explore the spirit of difference. This is a struggle which like all female authors, even Dasgupta undertakes, dealing 'not against her precursor's [male] reading of the world but against his reading of her' (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 49) and her texts.

Sanjukta Dasgupta's triumphant struggle vindicated through her characters [daughters] of her short stories as well as through her poetry bears the hallmark of [her] female creativity (Spaul and Millard 1989: 128). They emerge as the female precursors contributing towards a feminist poetics and a feminist literary tradition through a "uniquely female process of revision and redefinition that necessarily caused them to seem 'odd'" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 73). Debriefing the androcentric codes and the cultural construction of femininity through her

³ It involves the fabrication of 'a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritic[ism] begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the nearly visible world of female culture (Showalter 1997: 217).

powerful feminist narrative in her short stories Dasgupta has been able to create some simple yet extremely powerful women characters who are very familiar to us, yet their stories are unknown and unheard. Dasgupta's association and feeling with them becomes lively in the course of the narratives, which establishes the metaphorical maternal association between the female author and her female characters. Dasgupta as the mother of all her characters [female] portray the dynamics of their life struggles (Mallick 2019: 54) – their quest for their own identity, their self-definition (Showalter 1977: 13) in order to be able to erase the lines of control which had trapped them within the humiliating and terrifying domestic space and to 'spread her arms like wings / [spin] wildly on her toes / [sing] like a Koel in spring' (Dasgupta 2017: 15). In this essay we will explore the struggles of Dasgupta's [fictional] daughters⁴ – Saraju and Rani, Seema, Payal, Meera and Sabita, Pratibha, Nandini and Samita, Linda, Susmita, and Radha and Piyali, who have been able to resist 'the self-perpetuating and closed nature of patriarchal structure and institutions' (Palmer 1987: 183) by relentlessly fighting their way for their rights and helping other women at times of need. They are very common people whom we perhaps meet every day, but seldom do we hear and come to know of their distinctive female experiences. Sanjukta Dasgupta's short stories speak of the regular grapples undertaken by the common women with whom majority of us [the readers] can relate and thereby feel the author's anger which proliferate every corner of the narratives, thereby contributing towards the development of a separate sensibility and writing style for women and furthering the cause of women's literature.

The Annals of Dasgupta's Daughters

Saraju and Rani in 'The Gift', Seema in 'Break' and Payal in 'Dear Diary' are Dasgupta's daughters who are struggling within the abysmal depths of the androcentric society to carve a space and a room of their own.

Like the narrative of most of Dasgupta's stories, here too we observe how the society's stereotyped conventions act as a trap to continue the act of coercing women in the name of conventions, marriage and family. As the women often fail to escape from their *sasur-bari*, the prison house as Rabindranath Tagore had stated in *Tasher Desh*, they seek to virtually escape, even if it is temporarily, to a space of their own. Interrogating the stereotypes a widow is subjected to, Saraju emerges

⁴ This essay discusses the stories of Saraju and Rani in 'The Gift', Seema in 'Break', Payal in 'Dear Diary', Meera and Sabita in 'Touch', Pratibha in 'Blood Ties', Nandini and Samita in 'Selfish', Linda in 'Black and White', Susmita in 'The American Dream', and Radha and Piyali in 'Compulsory'. All these short stories are anthologised in Sanjukta Dasgupta's *Abuse and Other Short Stories*.

victorious when she plays Tagore's songs over her esraj. It becomes a signifier of protest to defy the pain inflicted upon widows, and the true respite comes through a creative [music] expression. Through Seema, Dasgupta attacks the patriarchal notions regarding 'working' and 'non-working women', emphasizing that homemakers often work more than the women pursuing jobs. The orthodox attitude of the society towards women having jobs, and the subtle way of husbands coaxing their wives to be economically dependent upon them is brutally exposed through Pradip's 'oracle' on his togetherness with Seema (Dasgupta 2013: 20). Amidst such a trap, Seema discovers her freedom, a space to be her own. 'The Gift' and 'Break' vindicates that creative spaces debriefs the loneliness and helplessness of women, hence they should earn to [exercise] it well' (Dasgupta 2013: 18), if necessary surreptitiously. Payal in 'Dear Diary' escapes her depression through her diary where she can voice to her expressions. Her protest is silent but vivid one. She attains all the academic accolades, like qualifying GRE to receive an admission offer at the University of Columbia, she had laboured for in spite of being divorced by her husband who prioritized his career for the same accolades over his wife, and fails to attain them. Through their 'own subject, own system, own theory, and own voice' (Showalter 1982: 14) Saraju, Rani, Seema and Payal offer resistance and interrogates the violent gyres of the society through their creative pursuits.

Like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper', through Meera and Sabita in 'Touch', Radha and Piyali in 'Compulsory', and to a certain extent Samita and Nandini in 'Selfish' Dasgupta explores female companionship. Through their association they seek answers to the questions that derive from their experiences, and to underscore the subtle and often neglected problems and issues, and here their experiences, problems and issues are both from their lives in the patriarchal society, as well as the occurrences in the lives of women in the society, who, like them, struggle to have a space exclusively of their own amidst the confinements of life. This friendship, as *Of Woman Born*, vindicates female 'physicality as a resource rather than a destiny' (Rich 1977: 62) interrogating at once the Freudian coordinates of 'penis envy, the castration complex, and the Oedipal phase' which determine women's relationship with language, fantasy, and culture (Showalter 1982: 24). Along with *écriture féminine* Hélène Cixous is of the opinion that the feminine principle involves a woman giving without any expectation of return because unlike the male she does not undergo a trauma from castration anxiety. Meera escapes the conditioned gyre of her familial life through her masseur Sabita who made her feel 'a teenager again, eager, intense and very happy' (Dasgupta 2013: 39). Breaking all the social conditions of companionship both become friends and soon Meera urges for Sabita's presence in her life, perhaps for a few hours of respite from the existing trap named family. On a similar vein, Radha and Piyali raises serious questions on the persisting issue of money and material [dowry] in marriage and the dilemma of women within such internment in the modern day.

Samita in Dasgupta's 'Selfish' is an embodiment of the 'new woman' who is intelligent, educated, self-sufficient, sensitive, hard working and is the ever assuring space to her friend Nandini who in spite of all her labours towards her children is left lonely at her old age after the death of her husband. Though through the narrative we come to know of Samita's pragmatic advice and help to Nandini to start a tailoring venture and how she becomes her true mentor and changes her life for good. Nandini discovers her lost self, grows in her endeavour, employs others and feels no regret for her emphatic reply to her insensitive son who is selfish for his own interests over his mother's likings and associations. Through 'Touch', 'Compulsory' and 'Selfish', Dasgupta's Meera and Sabita, Radha and Piyali, and Samita and Nandini respectively, become the embodiment of Luce Irigaray's idea of a female 'homosexuality' as an extensive alternative to the dominating male 'homosexual' in order to resist patriarchy's attempts to sexually marginalize women in the 'foregrounding of the exclusivity of the female sexual organ as plural as opposed to the strictly unitarily focused genital masculine sexuality' (Bhaduri and Malhotra 2016: 115). The women support and help each other to possess 'a self-defined critical consciousness' and thereby challenge the various complexities of life which aim towards establishing 'a mass produced or stereotypical identity' of these women (Donovan 1997: 212). Like *A Room of One's Own*, this short story facilitates a feminist analysis of the material conditions – social, political and economic – in which women struggle to have a sphere and room of their own (Whitson 2004: 278). The woman's sphere is governed by the 'cult of true womanhood' and the 'feminine ideal' which develop the women's culture redefining women's activities and objectives from a woman's perspective through an 'assertion of equality and an awareness of sisterhood, the community of women' based on values, institutions and relationships and processes of communication consolidating female ordeal and culture (Lerner 1981: 52, 54).

Pratibha in 'Blood Ties', Linda in 'Black and White', Susmita in 'The American Dream' are the voices of women from three different age-groups who are subjected to stereotypes in different dimensions. In spite of all her labours of love towards her family, Pratibha Bose is not allowed by her children to remarry [after her husband's death] at the age of 75 to ward off her loneliness. She is not taken care by them, rather sent to Happy Home where she meets Ranjan Gupta, a 71 year old companion to live a proper life once again. Unlike Saraju, Pratibha dares to move ahead to take a decision on her own for the rest of her life. The septuagenarian couple's decision to donate their bodies after their death for medical research is indeed commendable and inspires the readers to rethink on the waste involved in the post-death rituals which are more often a 'show' of love for an individual after the individual's death than in reality. Linda's story in short can be put as 'Black People and Their Lives Matter'. She is rejected by the patriarchal Indian boy Rakesh Modi, even after spending quite some time with her, on the

account of the colour of her African American skin. Towards the end of this powerful story Linda realises that it would have been a mistake to be engaged with people like Rakesh, who in spite of their glamorous academic affiliations, remain deeply embedded in dogmatism against any ray of liberal, rational thinking where the heart and feelings matter over complexion, unfortunately. Susmita's story involves the predicament of many Bengali women being married by their parents to glamorous NRI professionals only to be metamorphosed to be their cook and 'good *desi* wives' (Dasgupta 2013: 72) at the foreign lands, at the cost of their brilliant careers. This story is an antidote against those parents who force their daughters to get married to NRI professionals only to enjoy the benefits [academic] of life at a foreign land, exposing the illusion behind such an activity.

Conclusion

With the freedom of words and dynamic courage of expressing women's unique experiences Sanjukta Dasgupta is a Bengali gynocritic whose short stories bear 'a new conceptual vantage point' (Showalter 1982: 15) of feminist literary tradition. It involves breaking free women's writings from 'the glass coffin of the male-authored text' only to attain and enjoy 'a dance of triumph, a dance into speech, a dance of authority' (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 44). The narrative in her short stories possess a distinct Indian character, context, tone, sensitivity and language (Peeradina 2010: xi), intertextuality encapsulating that 'all creative art must rise out of a specific soil and flicker with a spirit of place' (Gifford 1986: 58) to 'open new windows and doors of perception enabling a holistic understanding of the world' (Dasgupta 2016). Dasgupta's entelechy is explored through her astute treatment of the issues of our everyday life through her short stories, like her poetry, which being embedded with a vibrant force inspires the sensitive reader to think and 'to stand up' against 'trauma, fears and oceans of tears' (Dasgupta 2017: 73, 77).

Like Sanjukta Dasgupta's poetry collections *Snapshots* (1996), *Dilemma: A Second Book of Poems* (2002), *First Language* (2005), *More Light* (2008), *Lakshmi Unbound* (2017) and *Sita's Sisters* (2019) her widely published short stories also interrogate and deconstruct 'the double blind with power and understanding' towards 'a wider trajectory of the cultural diversity' along with the 'ideological position of the subject's voice of power' (Dasgupta 2006: 178). Sanjukta Dasgupta's delicate perception through an intense self-reflexivity colour her 'female imagination' as the only feasible vent for women's true aspirations and interrogate the anxiety of authorship to emanate an emotion of motherhood towards her female characters, who as her daughters 'affirm in far-reaching ways the significance of their inner freedom' (Spacks 1976: 316). Dasgupta's short stories 'ceaselessly deconstructs the male [androcentric] discourse' (Jacobus 2012: 12, 13) only to

provide a window to witness and hear the long unheard voices, which are different and distinct, but orchestrated together in its identity and sensibility (Vatsyayan 2009: xviii); facilitating a realization of gender inclusiveness and gender equality – the harmony of androgyny, instead of misandry and misogyny (Dasgupta 2019). The ‘dynamics of female friendship’ (Abel 1981: 434) explored through Dasgupta’s short stories by the mother – daughter bond between Sanjukta Dasgupta and her female characters represent women’s experiences which differ from men’s in profound and regular ways – as ‘for every aspect of identity as men define it, female experience varies from the male model’ (Gardiner 1982: 178, 179). It involves a shift in ‘the point of view’ (Spacks 1976: 315) to emphasize female imagination – creativity – voice - liberty by transcending historical boundaries; and it is through these great experiences as a woman Sanjukta Dasgupta envisions a reiteration of women’s position and their own literature through a creative genre of postcolonial women’s writing in Indian English.

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