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Education as a Tool for Empowerment in the Selected Poems of Neetu Arora

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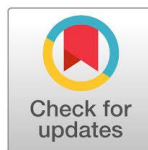
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Abstract: *This research paper aims to analyze the themes of the selected poems of the young Punjabi poetess Neetu Arora, and analyses how education proves to be a transformative force and acts as a catalyst in changing the plight of women for good. This paper aims to study the role of education in women empowerment as depicted by Neetu Arora in her selected poems and expounding the paramount contribution of education in the emancipation of women, which leads to the realization of self and identity formation. Critical Discourse Analysis and the views of various feminist thinkers are used as benchmarks.*

Keywords- *Education. Empowerment, self, Identity, Consciousness.*

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Introduction

Education serves as the foundation stone of an equitable society free from the vices and biases as it contributes in the development of a nation in various ways. The lives of the weaker, underprivileged and marginalized sections of the society can be transformed using this tool as it is directly linked with the financial emancipation and individual independence.

The poetry of neetu arora

The Punjabi poetess Neetu Arora's poetry is replete with the representation of education as an instrument in transforming the lives of women and their empowerment in the Indian society. She also takes into account the image of 'new woman' and her perception and reception in the society as "a *khatarnaak aurat*" (a dangerous woman) as in the poem *Supansaaz*. She writes that women who carry paper and pen in their purse instead of comb and mirror; who do not use make-up and jewellery are considered a threat to the established norms of patriarchy:

Oh Samajhde hann

Mein Khatarnaak aurat haan

Aurataan jo Surkhi Nahi Laundiyaan

Choodiyan nahi paundiyaan

Gehneyaan di thaan

Kitaaban Khareed diyan hann

Jihna de Pursaan Vich

Kangha Sheesha nahi

Kaaghaz 'te Kalmaan hundiyaan

Ajehiyaan Aurataan Khatarnaak Hundiyaan [1]

Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* talks about the emancipation and uplifting of the subaltern through education [2]. According to bell hooks (*Teaching to Transgress*), the role of a teacher and education is to make the students transgress the various boundaries of sex, class, race and so on, in order to make the student achieve the goal of emancipation [3]. Neetu Arora seems to believe that education, whether formal or informal, enables a person to think critically. In her poem "Asi jo sONdy nhIN" (*Asi Jo Saunde Nahi*), highlights the significance of questioning the age-old ideas which have been accepted by generations. The speaker points out that we should question the narratives prevalent in the society. When the grand mother tells the tale of a king and queen and ends it with their death, one must question about the happenings after the death of the king as it would probably not be "the end". Many questions like who occupied the throne after them and who wore the crown arise. Neetu writes:

Daadi Maa

Jhooth taan Nahi Boldi

Oh Jaandi Nahi

Ke Kahaani Raaje Raani de maran te mukkdhi nahi

Agge turdi hai

....

Daadi Maa nu pucchange
Kahaani Raaje Raani de maran naal
Khatam kivein hoyi?
Takht te kaun baitha?
Raaj Mukut da ki baneya?
Pucchange
Parja raatan nu
Jhoothiyaan adhooriyaan kahaaniyan sun sun
Saundi kyon rahi?
Raja ne katha nu vass kivein kita?
Daadi di apni katha goongi kyon rahi? [4]

Indian Literature has vehemently portrayed women and their position in the phallogocentric society. The position of women in India has been variable. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes that subaltern is quietened by the dominant groups, "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third-world woman caught between tradition and modernization." [5]

The Indian male writers have dealt with the woman question but presented an outsider's view in their writings. Women also started penning down their experiences. Education, therefore, is instrumental in bringing into fore the experiences of the wearers of the pinching shoe.

As quoted in *The Essential feminist Reader*, Beauvoir points out, "Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. ... Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without a man. And she is simply what man decrees, thus she is called "the sex", by which it is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being.... He is the subject, he is the absolute- she is the Other." [6] Woman is relegated the status of "the other" while man has dominated the concept of "the self"; woman is defined in relative terms to man, a woman is- whatever a man is not i.e. a dissentient reference to man. Tradition relegates the status of a second hand individual to a woman; a status inferior to man. The bias, oppression and gender-based discrimination is challenged by the liberal institutions and modern education. Women internalize the biased social values and accept their subservience and men's authority and control. Those who emerge as an anti-figure, receive criticism and hostile responses. This theme has been artistically depicted by Arora in her poem *Supansaaaz*.

Arora's poems provide ample testimony to the miraculous impact of education in shaping the lives and destiny of Indian women, echoing the ideas of Freire and bell hooks.

conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that Arora emphasizes the catalytic ability of education in altering as well as reclaiming the identity of woman. Very aptly, she employs images and words, challenges the entrenched patriarchal notions in the male as well as female psyche and points out the importance of critical thinking as well as the significance of questioning the validity of the age-old narratives. Her poetry echoes the feminist ideas and provides a spark to ignite the critical thinking of her readers.

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