

## **Feminist Issues in Hira Bansode's Poem "Woman": A Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Hira Bansode (1936...) is one of the leading voices of Feminist Movement in India. Being a lower class woman writer she is much aware about social hierarchy in which inequality prevails. She knows very well that in Indian social set up there is not only inequality between men and men but also between women and women. The lower class Indian women are less vulnerable in our society and they have to face many problems in their daily routine life. It is believed that women are almost fifty percent of the world population. They are equal partners of men in the growth of family and society. They play an important part for the progress of family, society and nation. They sacrifice all their desires either for their children, husband and other matters at home but they are either neglected or their voice remains unheard. If women try to raise their voice then their problems grow more serious. Moreover women everywhere are expected to be silent sufferers. They have to suffer like a mute animals and their only duty is to give birth and to care for the family. Their limitations are only within the four boundaries of the house.*

*These women's problems have attracted almost all writers and more importantly female writers whether they are writers from the West or Indian feminists. All feminists have in their writings have focused on women's issues, women's suffering, their predicament and their role and place at home in friend circles and in the society. This problem is more serious with the women who come from low class society. They are not only exploited by men rather they are ill-treated by the women belonging to upper class society. Hira Bansode is such a feminist who highlights through her poetry and other writings the sufferings of lower class women caste issues which they have to face everywhere at working place and in society in their day-to-day life.*

**KEY WORDS:** *woman, issues, patriarchy, society, India, low class*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In Indian patriarchal society women are almost fifty percent of total population but they have been deprived from their rights. Man is believed to be stronger and regarded as master of family. He is regarded as champion of woman's rights. Women in male dominated Indian society are ignored and their voice remains unheard. They are more vulnerable and this issue is more serious with the women who are poor and come from low class society. This vulnerability and tragic condition of women have attracted all Indian feminists and Hira Bansode is one of them.

Hira Bansode (1939---) is one of the best known and strongest voices of dalit literature in India. She was born in Mahar community at a small village of Pune (South India). Her father was an employ in Bombay municipality and her mother Ganga an illiterate and simple house wife. She got married when she was a student of just 9<sup>th</sup> class. Her marriage brought a turning point in her life which increased her more duties and responsibilities. After marriage she came to know the shocking assumptions of inequality between man and woman. She realised that ego and ambition of a man (husband) must be served first. She came to know the harsh realities and true face of male dominated society.

Her poetry originally written in Marathi language reflects her own experiences. Most of her poems, like the works of M.R. Anand and Kamala Markandaya, mainly deal with man –woman relationship, their temperamental incompatibility, caste problems, role and place of a woman in family and society, the predicament of dalit oppressed women, their unfulfilled hopes and dreams, conflict and struggle between upper and lower class, poverty, hunger, cruelty, injustice, humiliation of poor woman by the rich woman and exploitation of poor woman by man.

The term 'feminism' is an ideology which denotes female. It was first used in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Actually feminism is the ideology of women's liberation as it opposes women's subjugation in family and society. It means the adage which advocates for women's complete equality with men in all spheres of life - political, social, economic, legal, familial, cultural and academic etc. The feminist movement is an organised effort to raise the voice of women and for achieving equality and rights for women. Moreover feminism is committed to the struggle for equality for women's rights and emphasises the value of women as they are. Alice Jardine offers a definition of feminism:

**A movement from the point of, by and for women.<sup>1</sup>**

In India strong wave of feminism started in 1960s and 1970s. Since independence of India, Indian women writers have made much progress in every field including the field of writing and much of them have acquired prestigious position in this field. An emergence of female writers during the post-colonial period marks the new birth of an area which promises a new deal for the Indian women writers. The writings of Indian female writers are different from that of Indian male writers' like- R.K. Narayan, M.R. Anand, Raja Rao, Khuswant Singh and many others. As revealed in Robert Southey's famous letter to Charlotte Bronte, the bias in the West against women including in creative Creativity was very strong:

**Literature in not the business of a woman's life and it cannot be.<sup>2</sup>**

It has been generally noticed that male writers write with heavy themes like – war, heroism, chivalry, patriotism, action, revenge, murder, affairs of state, espionage, and sexual encounter etc. while on the other hand female writers write about women, their emotions, suffering, social condition problems, inequality, injustice, male-female relationship and women's place in the society etc. These main theme and the key issues are the things which differ females from male writers and their works reflect all these. The thematic concern of women writers leads to the emergence of the Indian women in the fast changing social milieu. They raised their voice and banner of revolt against injustice and exploitation of women in the patriarchal set up. Srinivasa Iyenger observes:

**Women are natural story teller which have made their own mark.<sup>3</sup>**

Bansode is regarded one of the strongest voices of feminism in India. She is primarily known as a champion of the lower class women. Bansode's remarkable and one of the best known poem "Woman" was originally written in Marathi language but later Viany Dharwadker translated it into English. Though the poem is small one but it has a deep meaning as it raises the burning issues related to man and woman in male dominated society. The poet says that a woman is not free. At every step she has to depend on man in one or other way. She says:

**She, the river  
Said to him, the sea:  
All my life  
I have been dissolving myself  
and flowing towards you.**

The poet here expresses her own personal experience of inequality in patriarchal society. She feels that patriarchal society gives more importance to man than woman. It is generally thought that man is the saviour, the protector and the fender of family, society and state. This very concept of the family is based on man's unchallenged rule over his brood which consists of his wife and children. Society has empowered man and has made him master of the world. Bansode feels that a woman is not independent rather she has to depend on man. She has no existence and her own identity. In the society a woman has to play the role of a daughter, wife, and mother but she is treated as a second sex. A woman belongs to her man either by contract or by blood but she is not taken as individual and independent being. The poet, to prove this point, uses the metaphor of 'river' for woman and 'sea' for man. In these lines she is not a single woman rather represents women as a class. The river says to the sea all its life it has been flowing and merging itself into the sea. The poet here means to say that all through the ages a woman has been dissolving her identity into that of a man. She has always surrendered herself completely to man. She has to play many roles in family and society. As a daughter she is not independent rather she has to follow the advice and order of her father and brother. Her likes and dislikes have no importance. She is taken as other's property (PARAYA DHAN). Even her career is decided by her father. She has no choice. She does not get equal opportunity of eating, drinking, job and education etc. Then the poet talks of man's ego and ambition and woman's love and sacrifice for man as she says:

**You went on  
For your sake  
In the end it was I  
Who turned into the sea  
A woman's gift  
Is as large as the sky**

Here the poet makes use of metaphor of "SKY". She says that a woman makes all kind of sacrifices for a man and her sacrifice is as vast as the sky. As the sky is limitless and vast which can never be measured so is the love of a woman for a man. She has always dissolved her identity into that of man. She has always moulded herself as per the desires and pleasure of man. On the other hand a man never cares for a woman. His heart does not melt on the pathetic condition of woman. He never thinks about a woman's sacrifice. His heart remains

unaffected. He never compromises with his ego. Sometimes he kills his daughter for the false honour of family and society, sometimes rapes and burns woman and sometimes curtails her freedom. Bansode comments:

**But you went on  
worshipping yourself  
you never thought  
Of becoming a river  
And merging  
With me.**

It is a general question which every woman makes in man-woman relationship and the poet is also not an exception to it. Bansode also complains for a reciprocal relationship of equality between man and woman. She criticises man for his biasness against woman. Although a woman makes all sacrifices for man but he never pays any attention for her rather exploits her for his profit. Bansode thinks ego and ambition of a man served first for which he never compromises. Every day we read in newspapers about the torture of woman by man. One day we find for family reputation Arushi is killed then another day Nirbhaya is raped and many other women are burnt and murdered who neither get coffin nor grave ( Bhanwari). A woman has to face many problems. She has to make sacrifice at every step from birth to death. She works as a servant 24x7 but she never gets due regard and respect from her sons, husband and other men in the society. She is ill-treated and misbehaved as a subaltern. Her work is to give birth to children and to take care for them. She is regarded just a child productive. As a mother she has to sacrifice for her husband and children. Maria Mies comments:

**Her Problem arises firstly from the contradiction between the image and the demand of a social situation.<sup>4</sup>**

To conclude Bansode comes from such a society in which biasness of man against woman exists. It is such a society where the voice of a woman is neglected and remains unheard.

Hira Bansode makes a question to men and women to observe the truth. While for women it is their relationship with men which becomes the governing factor of their life but for men it is not so. They can side step this issue and identify themselves with larger ones. Men and women differ from each other not only in intensity of their involvement but also in their sensibility and views. She suggests that true man-woman relationship and true friendship consists in accepting a man and a woman as a whole with all his / her faults and shortcomings.

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