

Tishani Doshi's Poetry: A Clarion Call against Suppression, Subjugation and Exploitation of Women

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Abstract – *Half Welsh, half Gujarati, Tishani Doshi is a poet, journalist and a talented performer. Her poems, essays, and stories have been widely anthologized. Her poetry covers topics of the oppression women face, the role of nature and its relationship with women empowerment and their true potential. Her poetry voices the tales of struggles of women. Her poems sound a stern warning grounded in a refusal to suffer violence or shame. She deliberately sets out the boundaries of the female body in order to challenge those who might lay claim to it. Tishani avers that until more legislation is put in place to protect women, until mothers and fathers raise their sons and daughters equally, until we can create a society that offers women the same freedom and access to education as men and ensures women's complete power over their reproductive rights, we would fail in our mission of giving women a respectable place in their society. The present paper endeavors to elaborate on the voice of dissent and revolt against suppression and subjugation of women as shown in the poems of Tishani Doshi.*

Key Words: Suppression, Suffering, Violence, Empowerment, Subjugation, Inequality.

INTRODUCTION

Tishani Doshi is an Indian poet, journalist and dancer based in Chennai. She is widely acclaimed as a creative writer. She has published six books of poetry and fiction. She is the recipient of an Eric Gregory Award for poetry, winner of the All- India Poetry Competition. Her first book of poetry "Countries of the Body" (2006), won the Forward Poetry Prize (Best First Collection) in 2006. Her poetry covers a range of themes and subjects ranging from travel, love and longing to finding and transforming ones identity across borders, self-illumination all tinged with her own experiences with the same. It covers topics of the oppression women face, the role of nature and its relationship with women empowerment and their true potential. She claims that what she aims to do with her poetry is to "turn the skin inside out and reinvent every lost word to burnish, to steel, to do what I must in order to singe your lungs".

Her poems sound a stark warning grounded in a refusal to suffer violence or shame. Doshi deliberately sets out the boundaries of the female body in order to challenge those who might lay claim to it.

Tishani Doshi's third collection " Girls Are Coming Out Of the Woods " departs from the more transcendent, restless poems of her previous

collection, 2012's "Everything Begins Elsewhere" . At times, Doshi's work still hovers over inner landscapes of longing, where the self-trails its mortal question across a personal geography from South India to Europe. The collection "Girls are Coming out of Woods" is polyphonic in its concerns. Her poems address mortality, love, identity and loss as much as they address gender roles and the terrible violence that the roles enable as much as they address the redemptive power of poetry. Girls Are Coming Out Of The Woods stands out meticulously crafted and provoking a range of responses with loss, wonder, fear, strength, and more, human nature comes to the table in this work. The collection is an unnerving gathering of poems that seems to have clawed their way out of hard earth. Girls Are Coming out of Woods is not so much a warning of the state of the world as it is a promise of some kind. When the curtain, frayed and mauled, is pulled back, the eyes of girls and women flash back defiantly.

The titular poem "Girls are coming out of woods" reads like an anthem. It is menacingly, beautiful so. Doshi says, "I wanted it to feel like an anthem for it, to be unrelenting in the way that the violence is unrelenting." The poem was a way of saying that these stories and ghosts refuse to be buried, that a chorus of voices will echo back from all that horror. It is a haunting vision of retribution, drawn both from the murder of Tishani's friend Monika Ghurde

and the rape of Jyoti Singh on a bus in Delhi in 2012. In an interview to Deccan Chronicle, Tishani Doshi, when asked about the original brain wave for the poem Girls Are Coming..., she told "reading the newspapers, the horrors of the violence committed against women in this country- that's what motivated that particular poem Girls Are Coming..."

Doshi's poem is exceptionally timely, although it was written before the rise of the 'Me Too' Movement. The poem is a chilling call to arms whose forceful incantation compels us to listen to girls,

"wrapped in cloaks and hoods

Carrying iron bars and candles

And a multitude of scars..."

Each line of the poem thrums like a war drum whose rhythm belies its anger. Violence is no longer confined to the woods, that dark interior of childhood fear and desire. This is no fairy tale. The wronged and murdered women who transfigure into birds,

"pecking and humming

until all you can hear

is the smash of their minuscule hearts

against glass..."

are coming to confront society's complicity with gender violence and their anger will no longer be silenced.

The poem "River Of Girls" is about power of the girls, about

"the sound of ten million girls singing of a time in the universe

when they were born with tigers breathing between their thighs

When they set out for battle with all three eyes on fire

their golden breasts held high

like the weapons to the sky..."

In poems such as 'Meeting Elizabeth Bishop in Madras', Doshi connects the deep awareness of mortality to the other great theme in the book, systematic violence against women. Again and again these themes come together: the way in which women are assaulted and killed, the fact that we all must die, and the act of reclamation that is poetry, the fact that we all must die, and the act of reclamation that is poetry.

The apparitions of women who have been murdered appear not only in the titular poem but also in 'Everyone loves a Dead Girl' and an older poem 'The River of Girls'. It is an active kind of haunting. By doing so Tishani is giving these characters voices and agency in death where they have been given very little in life. In reply to a question put forward during an interview with the Helter Skelter magazine that Tishani "has rejected traditional ideas of what being in a world as a women should be like.", she says, "It is strange how some women need permission to move away from the path and others blaze into the wilderness making paths of their own..." the remedy against this oppression, suppression and subjugation can be summed up in the words of Tishani. She says,

"We live in a country that claims to worship the female principle but the reality is quite different. Until more legislation is put in place to protect women, until mothers and fathers raise their sons and daughters equally, until we can create a society that ensures women complete power over their reproductive rights, we would fail in our mission of giving women a respectable place in the society.

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