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**TRANSCENDING FRAMED IDENTITIES: A CRITICAL READING OF SELECT  
POETRY OF TASLIMA NASRIN AND IMTIAZ DHARKER**

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**M. S. Athira,**  
MA English, NET, Kerala,  
Email: [sivakripa7475@gmail.com](mailto:sivakripa7475@gmail.com),

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Abstract

Literature has the power to capture time and space through words. It is through the power and depth of these words the world get to know each other especially about the national consciousness, culture, political and social issues of each nation. These words will have more power if it is the voice of a female who is subjugated because of her sex and because of her nation. South Asian literature is blessed with the presence of such powerful female writers who shackles the chains of confinement and boldly presents their problems and also the problems of their nations. Taslima Nasrin and Imtiaz Dharker through their poems tried to give voice to the voiceless women in Bangladesh and Pakistan in particular and in general to all the females in South Asia. This paper makes a critical reading of the selected poems of these writers in order to make a comparative study of their works and their writing style and also focuses on how they transcended the framed identities as a woman and also as a citizen of their country.

Keywords: *female identities, religious oppression, the voice of liberation, national identities*

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Poetry is a genre which has the power of expressing inaccurate limited words. South Asian poetry, when compared to novels produced in this region, failed to acclaim the same status, with an exception of one or two writers like Kamala Das in the world literary scene. As per recent trend, many poets like Taslima Nasrin and Imtiaz Dharker are establishing their name with their unique way of presenting the society and the life around them. Taslima Nasrin is a Bangladeshi Swedish author, physician, writer, novelist, short story writer, and poet who is known more as a novelist but the initial years of her literary career were marked by her poems. Imtiaz Dharker is a Pakistan born British poet with a credit of six poetry collections- *Purdah, Postcards from God, I speak for the Devil, The Terrorist at my Table, Leaving Fingerprints and latest Over the Moon* in her name. Her writing is almost akin to Nasrin because both deals with the social and cultural restrictions imposed upon women and their subjugation in a patriarchal world. As females from the so-called third world nations their writing always have a space to showcase the suppression and oppression they are facing in the name of their identity, gender,

religion, and even nation. Both through their poems tried to give voice to the voiceless in their nations especially to the females.

There is a tendency in every patriarchal society to treat female as something to be ruled upon or as a commodity under their ownership. Even in their country, they are not free and safe. A close reading of poems *Character* and *You Go Girl* expresses the treatment women get in their countries And what the society expects from a woman is:

They said—take it easy...  
Said—calm down...  
Said—stop talkin'...  
Said—shut up....  
They said—sit down....  
Said—bow your head... ( Nasrin 1-6)

When Nasrin focused on the restrictions imposed on women by society, Dharker's main focus was on the boundaries framed by religion. In the poem *Purdah* "One day they said /she was old enough to learn some shame. It is a symbol of self-alienation also because, when a girl reaches a particular age she is forced to do what is expected of her than what she feels and thus she feels a sense of losing true to oneself. It is like a curtain drawn between her and the outer world in order to restrict her vision of the world and to her experience of the world. Dharker through the poem challenges the negative side of religion and in particular against Islam. She through her works and life advocated for the freedom of expression and thought and also for human rights especially for women.

Through their poems, both these writers make a strong call for women to stand up and fight back.

You should stand up now  
Should stand right up  
Hold your back straight  
Hold your head high...  
You should speak  
Speak your mind  
Speak it loudly  
Scream! (Nasrin 9-16)

Nasrin and Dharker being poets from once-colonized nations face cultural displacement, alienation, search for identity etc. and all this experience forms their writing. In the case of women, this is much more complex as they face all this along with the oppression they face in the name of religion and gender. Colonialism not only suppressed the land but also the mind. "west is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structure and mind"(Nandi xi).

My Bengal has ceased to exist,  
My Bengal has now eroded,  
Her body has rusted away.  
The east and the west are mixed up.  
Today she's a confounded mess. (Nasrin 1-5)

Cultural alienation will lead to a lack of identity. Imtiaz Dharker's poem *Minority* deals with the experience of being a minority in all aspects. Even when it is said that the east and the west are mixed up the east is always treated as a misfit in their circle as a result of cultural differences. In the process of search for identity, there will be a stage where every alienated one will try to be part of the west in vain.

I was born a foreigner.  
I carried on from there  
to become a foreigner everywhere  
...  
I don't fit,  
like a clumsily-translated poem;  
...  
There's always that point where  
the language flips  
into an unfamiliar taste;  
where words tumble over  
a cunning tripwire on the tongue;  
where the frame slips,  
the reception of an image  
not quite tuned, ghost-outlined,  
that signals, in their midst, an alien. (Dharker 1-3 13-14 19-28)

A reading of both these writers reveals that through their poems they explore the issues around them like the conflict between secular and religious cultures and on. Their poems do not

simply provide aesthetic pleasure only, as their intention in writing was to arouse the reader against the evils in society. While pursuing that aim, their criticism and words often become harsh and hard. Nasrin's life was always in threat for openly projecting the dark side of Islam through her documentary novel *Lajja* or *Shame* for that a fatwa was issued against her and was forced to go to exile. In all diasporic writings there is a call for the homeland but in her case: "If your homeland does not give you home, / Even in this twenty-first century the condition of women in their own homes and in society in South Asian nations are a pity. It is high time that the focus should be shifted from outer to inner problems but still, they are on a battle against patriarchy. Nasrin's and Dharker's voice are a source of support and strength for millions of women who are struggling to transcend the framed identities thrust upon them.

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