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**INTERSECTIONS OF
POETRY AND PHILOSOPHY**

Chief Editor: **Prof. Nandini Sahu**

Guest Editor: **Prof. Balaganapathi Devarakonda**

Editors: **Dr. Banibrata Mahanta
Dr. Santosh Kumar Padhy
Srideep Mukherjee**



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“Walls or Wings”: Contextualising *Écriture* Feminine in Select Indian English Poetry

Srideep Mukherjee

Abstract

This Paper, which draws upon Shanta Acharya's poem "Walls or Wings" for the idea of its title, delves into new frontiers of the epistemic philosophy of *écriture féminine* from a cumulative and contemporary postcolonial 'feminist' perspective. As philosophy, Helen Cixous' poststructuralist formulations on the primacy of the female body in writing womanhood have been problematised by Ann Rosalind Jones. Further, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique of the homogenizing trends of feminist discourse in "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" show, it is difficult to graft the central tenets of western feminism onto an Indian cultural context. The aim of this Paper is to re-locate the problematic in these feminist philosophies, taking as its praxis select poetry texts from *Suvarnaksha: An Anthology of Indian Women Poets Writing in English*. At the textual level, the attempt is to contextualise poetic aesthetics amidst the philosophic binaries of objective (*sic. societal*) realities and their subjective perceptions among contemporary Indian women poets.

While Lakshmi Kannan's poem "Don't Wash" which she pens as a eulogy to Rassundari Debi whose successful efforts at being self-taught marked a page of discursive triumph amidst the overtly chauvinistic 19th century Bengal Renaissance, explores the theme from a radical re-reading of nationalist history; Nandini Sahu's "Draupadi" and Rumki Basu's "The Other Radha" are read from cultural-materialist standpoints as texts that interrogate the overtly patriarchal hegemonies of epic and folklore respectively as domains of the mythical.

All the three poems thus hinge upon an equal number of different aspirations of the central characters – education as enlightenment for Rassundari Debi, dignity for Draupadi, and looking for the real beyond an elusive mystic love for Radha – the cumulative but not homogenising bracket being the writerly

aspirations and achievements of their modern day chroniclers. Each of these texts are about woman "writ(ing) her self: ... writ(ing) about women and bring(ing) women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies ..." (Cixous 875), and yet they aim at a liberated space that goes beyond the singular aim of "return(ing) to the body which has been more than confiscated from her ..." (880). The variety in themes notwithstanding, it will be noticed that the poets are in search of alternative philosophies that find culmination not in the language of any activist protest *per se*, but in the aesthetic soul-searching aggregation of their interiorized, perceptive and hence powerful selves. As poetic utterances, the diversity of themes thus hinge upon a transformative philosophical journey from the claustrophobia of engaging walls into wings that can liberate. In a way, this can be seen as an Indian response to the numerous debates that have constantly raged within the several strands of western feminism. Shanta Acharya's own poem "The Best is yet to Be", which forcefully re-writes the 'Browningian assertion' into the making of a self-liberated mind-space for *écriture féminine* to flourish, thus serves as an apt summing up of the Paper.

Keywords: Philosophy, *écriture féminine*, transcending homogeneity, discursive, poetic aesthetic, self-liberation

Historically speaking, Helen Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), wherein she first coined the term *écriture féminine*, marked the onset of what has been characterised as a phase of radical feminism within the second wave of the movement. Other forms of critical second wave feminism are commonly seen to include socialist, cultural, social welfare, postmodern, and postcolonial third-world spectrums. In the post 2nd World War scenario when women were increasingly becoming part of the workforce in various arenas, all these brands of feminism gathered around the rallying cry of a critique of extant patriarchal psychoanalytic theory, and in favour of the psycho-dynamic approach in social work on the ground that prevalent structures were of a "biologically essentialist" (Phoca and Wright 11) nature. Hence the need for a feminine way of thinking, both to counter the phallogocentric