



REMODELING DOGRI LITERATURE VIA FEMALE GAZE IN PADMA SACHDEV'S *A DROP IN THE OCEAN*

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Abstract

Padma Sachdev is the woman who has unlatched the path for many Dogri women to write. She held the pen as a first Dogri female writer, for creating a history for the rest of the upcoming generation. She smashed many stereotypes that have bounded females of Dogri community within certain limits.

This abstract unfolds various aspects of Padma Sachdev's *A Drop in the Ocean: An Autobiography* and reveals essentials that help this text uphold its position strongly in front of other autobiographies. She has written her autobiography in Dogri but it has been translated by Jyotsna G. Singh and Uma Vasudev. Her book is the condensed image of her entire life which is expressed in a very simple and thoughtful writing style. She overcame many obstacles and rejected every stereotype or prejudices that society has always tried to impose on her, to earn the respect that she has today. Different circumstances of life always reveal different selves of people and it is a never-ending circle. Every situation demands something new, sometimes it is courage or at some point the honesty toward the situation. Every personal or professional occurrence of her life has been scrivened in the text and only provides an authentic bond to it.

The value of this book is on pinnacle because there is an eminently lesser count of autobiographies that have written in Dogri literature, especially by women. I want to propose that one should recognize her as a chain breaker, who has been an inspiration for a large proportion of the Dogri community.

Keywords: Dogri literature, women, autobiography, trends, Stereotype

We, humans, do live with a prospect of handling and conducting varied diverse social

sub-structural obligations endlessly. We do live in a paradoxical manner and that is undeniable;

we are in an unceasing mechanical system of untangling messy webs of authoritatively enforced patterns and principles. It could be considered as a never-ending war against the odds of passive societal chains, intended to muddle us in an expedient form accordingly. It is a noteworthy preaching in Hinduism that "we, humans, do come alone in this world and will die alone as well. Moreover, we are just stuck in earthly distraction and illusions (Moh-Maya)." But it is in our nature to crave for self-stability, that we mostly associate with communal harmony. Our shared communal sub-divisions functions as our 'safe-niches,' they give us a sense of identity. But, these comfortable positions, do results in inevitable problematical gaps alongside. In addition to this, we tend to use literature as a tool of comprehending and critiquing these social gaps, as they are proclaimed to be the unbiased mirrors of the society. It deals with claimed or constructive reality by the pieces drawn from different sections of the populace. F. Scott Fitzgerald has superbly specified this while talking about her work *The Great Gatsby* "that is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong." Similarly, Dogri literature deals with the issues of Duggers, the occurrences of their day to day lives, the praise of the Gods or Goddesses and the depiction of past chivalric doings of mighty kings in a textual form. Quite a few alluded thematic matters could be viewed as a miniature model of 'problems' from around the world, but some could be truly categorical and peculiar.

Language is an instrument of expression and subsistence for a particular literature. It is a direct medium used to reflect the originality, nativity, and uniqueness of a population. Dogri is an Indo-Aryan language that is primarily spoken in Jammu and Kashmir's region around Jammu as well as in a few isolated pockets in nearby regions. The purpose of language is to serve us and to

connect and link people. The uniqueness, nativity, and distinctiveness of a population can be directly reflected through language. It grants people the freedom to put their humanity before their concerns about their gender, class, or color. But the lack of eagerness in young literati toward the native literature, specifically poetry writing, is forcible enough for experienced writers like Ram Nath Shastri, Padma Sachdev, and some others, to realize the need of extensive revival. Till today, it has been the period of renaissance and enlightenment for Dogri Literature and an expectant exclamation can last long.

Furthermore, it is fairly suggestible to assume that the participation of female writers in the making of Dogri literature were actually none. Henceforth, there was an essential need of worthy female gaze, like that of Padma Sachdev as a young pioneering figure; it will provide a stability to thematic entirety and richness of the literature. Padma Sachdev is a successful writer with a wide readership among the Dogri community. She has written in her mother tongue Dogri as well as in national language Hindi. She has credited six collections of Dogri poetry, eight books of Hindi prose including two novels, one collection of short stories, an autobiography, a travelogue, and more than half a dozen translations, into her account. Padma Sachdev has written her autobiography, *A Drop in the Ocean*, in Dogri language, which has later got translated into English by Jyotsna Singh and Uma Vasudeva. Sachdev acknowledges the title of her autobiography, *A Drop in the Ocean*, by saying, "Life is like an ocean. An individual is just a drop. But when I sit down to look back in my life, I discover a virtual sea of people, events, situations, and relationships of a bewildering variety. I think that the drop is but a microcosm of the sea and hence I call this book by this title." (V)

Sachdev has been born in her ancestral village Purmandal in 1940 as an eldest of three children of Professor Jai Dev Badu, a Sanskrit

scholar. He was one of the many victims of India's Partition in 1947. She was a delightful person, always full of enthusiasm and had a very charming personality. Being a daughter of Sanskrit Scholar, the dawning of her passion toward poetry and Dogri language has started with her childhood enactment of reciting Sanskrit Sloka and Hindi couplet. She accompanied local women of her village to sing Dogri Folk songs and that inspired her for composing simple verses on the pattern of Dogri folk songs. She justified it, "While in my village Purmandal, I would add sentences to the Dogri folk songs. That would be like poetry" (131). She truly agreed with Virginia Woolf statement that "books are the mirrors of the soul" (16). She has composed short poems, on the themes discerned from her surroundings or borrow the reflections of ordinary life from the works of other contemporary writers. Evidentially, her personal leanings to songs, books, and literature, did in fact agrees to a statement that education is the key to get away from the trap of day to day mundane and trifling setups. Betty Freidan's 'feminine mystique' would be the uppermost aspect resulted in the notion that higher education for women useless, hazardous, and even questionable. It straightforwardly instructs women to be pleased and contented with the conformist tasks like marital duties, housework, children, and sexual lives.

Vedpal Deep, the editor of an Urdu Paper called as Sandesh, has published her first song along with her bio-data along with father's name. The poem, "*Raja Ke Mahal*," has been written by Sachdev at 14 and built paramount fame for her. It is indeed her masterpiece work, as she herself has stated, "It is with this poem that my place in Dogri Literature became firmly established. This poem made a very dramatic entry into my consciousness" (139). This poem designated her as a poet; it precisely talks about the feeble victims of partition and their immediate frightful conditions. Bakshi Saheb, then chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, has remarked her for the above-mentioned

significant prose work "This poem is a remarkable mirror of our times. Padma is Jammu's Habba Khatoon" (245). Moreover, if it is a mirror of the society, then it would be an absolute true stance that social managerial agency does hides the reflections of women's plight with pitch black charcoal! And it really led us to interrogation that what would it take to format the world in a more equitable manner; so that women could actually sustain like a human being with all her flaws and worries. Further, they would have a freedom to use their substantially numerous capacities in interminably diverse ways, in contrary to being limited by the fate of their gender to one domain of endeavor—probably child bearing and housework. Although, it is a quite present-day debate to recognize all the labor exertion onto a house management as a reputable assignment. Also, it tends to liberate womankind from a conformist belief that irrespective of being questionably free and futile, they do get all the extravagance possessions by the hard-earned labour of her male counter partner.

It is undeniably perceptible that the demands of a necessity for a female's appearance to always shine do come from a private and bizarre whispers of other women. But appearance doesn't always gleam when we see our husbands thriving, our houses clean and children prospering. It does glow when we read, when we write, when we travel and when we do so many other wonderful things. And why would it be necessary to choose one or the other to focus on; we can fill our life with countless scattered colors. During the times when Padma grew from mere a small child to charming adult, no lady took sufficient time away from being on watch to read a book, let alone to write one. But Padma did; and it didn't make much noise right away, it didn't hurt anyone, and most importantly, it didn't reduce her to being a powerless creature any further. Sachdev's fondness for her mother tongue has always beyond limits and as a sole female Dogri poet; she is an ideal personality for others. Once she

has been requested by a friend to write some of her works in Urdu but she has ignored it by saying:

This can be done in prose, but not in poetry. There shouldn't be a mixture. What comes from the heart can find expressions only in one's mother tongue. The poem comes when you are holding the Dogri pen in your hand. Then to do that in Urdu or Hindi seems like a betrayal to me. (326)

In the book, *Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir laments the idea created by the dominative proportion of society that nominates females as a second or other sex. Sachdev's autobiography portrays the patriarchal notions that have been incorporated so tightly in our social actions and it is nearly impossible to mark it separate from a human's basic needs. Ultimately, women shape their life to get fit in the constructive idea of being an ideal. Still, their actions and desires get questioned, on stepping out a specific preferred social construct. They are evaluated and understood only within that explicit framework. It is also true that for definite time period, they do acknowledge and celebrate this as an autonomy but under the markings of these provided border-lines only; they do feel a sensation of utmost freedom. But when actual independence arrives at their footsteps, it gets labeled as a deceitful resignation from their responsibilities, by the fellow 'society-mates.' Some do call it a pseudo-activism, and others label it as an outcome of 'era of wokeness' but with great deal of negative tinge. Such categorization is mostly been done by the 'ideal women' of the communities. They play a vital role in incorporating these spurious ideas in the mind of other females and then molds their ways of perceiving life. But the choice to break every chain that links Padma to her past has allowed an unimpeded access to resourceful and euphoric future. One such fictional instance could be picked from Charlotte P. Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories*, as she writes

"Women are pretty much people, seems to me. I know they dress like fools - but who's to blame for that? We invent all those idiotic hats of theirs, and design their crazy fashions, and what's more, if a woman is courageous enough to wear common-sense clothes - and shoes - which of us wants to dance with her?" (268) Later, she did fall in love with Vedpal deep, a prominent senior writer and a usual drunkard and got married against the objections of relatives on both sides. The series of miserable occurrences has followed her content life, mostly after her decision of getting married at a young age. Sachdev's spontaneous behavior soon turns into passivity. It is the most accurate instance showing how she got transformed from a young and naïve teenage Dogri girl to distress and pessimistic person.

Sachdev has held her pen firmly since the time the act of fulfilling primary passions and desires are tough for women in a Dogri society. She has won a distinct place for herself and Dogri poetry on the Indian literary scene and repudiated being other or submissive to anyone; as she knows, otherwise she would be answerable for life to others. Evidentially, it couldn't be denied that the general populace has a tendency of preferably agreeing more to a two-year-old boy's perceptions, rather than a girl's viewpoint of same age. It is a demonstration of community's role in lowering one's worth at the expense of other! If one is going to aspire for great prospects, other is going to assent confinement and constrains. As they get older, the brother must be guided through all the extravagant scientific paths, while the girl must be completely house-trained. But a woman should rise above this as Elizabeth Cady Stanton said in the topic of bettering oneself, "self-development is a higher duty than self-sacrifice."

We have wasted far too much time blaming or sympathizing with the moms and their habits that consume their children and sow the seeds of progressive dehumanization; they

themselves were never truly considered humanoid. If “ideal women” are to blame, why can’t we break the cycle by encouraging all of these Sleeping Beauties to grow up and live independent lives? There will never be enough ‘pattern-breakers’ to break this cycle. Each lady should handle it independently. Insofar as it is possible, our culture pushes boys to mature, go through the discomforts of puberty, pursue an education, get employment, and move on. Our society makes male and female genders to go through different stages of maturity, respectively. If we look at Padma, her act of divorcing her first husband with a firm mindset and stands against many negative reactionary inputs from society and relatives, was rebellious yet bold. She truly did validate her stand throughout this phase. But she did question the extent of effect on Vedpal Deep as well. She conforms with Andrea Dworkin’s statement in her work *Intercourse* that, “men too make choices. When will they choose not to despise us?” (177) She explains her viewpoint, “I was free. The credit went to Deep Sahab. I am grateful to him for that.... I was familiarized with the word ‘divorce’ through his letter to me in the hospital. At that time the same word seemed to me childish, stupid, and impossible. Later, it was through this route alone that my future opened out for me” (254). She divorced her husband and ruptured a social code that has been constructed for women only like she does not have any authority to leave her husband or to get married again.

Womanhood is formed; no one tends to born that way. As it is being established, her humanity gets destroyed eventually. She takes on several personas, a mother, a wife, a sister etc., but never herself as it would be illegal for her to do so. Such an example that has been illustrated by Padma Sachdev, of breaking stereotypes is comparative to Charlotte Bronte’s attempt to highlight women’s capabilities in her famous novel *Jane Eyre*. Bronte concluded her novel “Reader, I married him. A quiet wedding, we had: he and I, the parson and clerk, were

alone present” (462). In both situations, women are the only individuals holding power. She truly believes that if she treats other women like logical individuals in contrary of praising their attractive traits and categorizing them as perpetually naive and defenseless, her fellow individuals would absolutely forgive her. She genuinely wants to emphasize the fundamentals of equal treatment and happiness, and encourage women to put in the effort necessary to develop mental and physical toughness. She urges them to realize that we often mis-label weakness, naivety, and weakness, with sentimentality, tenderness, and tenderness. Men often react rudely to the verbal and written remarks of women, sometimes even acting aggressively in retaliation. Resultantly, women tend to do everything with more tenderness. Women whisper. Women repent. It mostly echoes within the walls of our mechanically constructed social order that, a girl or woman should always stay quiet. Women disregard the entirety of knowledge that they possess. Women retreat. Male domination that includes anger, authority, and exploitation, has typically been encountered by enough women and parades the threats that no longer seem empty. The majority of people do not comprehend sexism or, if they do, they believe it is not a problem. Many individuals believe that feminism’s primary and unwavering goal is the pursuit of equality between men and women. Furthermore, several of them believe that the movement is against males. Because most individuals hear about it from patriarch mainstream culture; hence, they lack understanding of feminist ideology.

Virginia Woolf demands a space for the personal and artistic growth of a woman. And she focuses on the idea that any individual can carve a nominative artistic identity irrespective of gender if all the provided resources for them are the same. But Padma Sachdev has taken the idea of Woolf in an affirmative manner but even extended it further. Sachdev has created advances by her passion rather than provided

chances. She has overturned the misfortunes of her life into an origin of enlightenment, which has ultimately pushed her thought process to take major decisions. She had truly done a great deal of literary legendary labor, that lead to its profuse growth, as Jane Austen has ensured in her contemporary times. As Betty Freidan has said in *The Feminine Mystique* that, "the only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own." (472) Also, an American literary critic and Jane Austen scholar, Devoney Looser, has scribble down in her work *The Making of Jane Austen* that, "she was not born, but rather became, Jane Austen." (14) And so does the worth of Padma Sachdev! Apparently, it is suggestive that writing and punctuating each paragraph of *The Handmaid's Tale* inside the kitchen walls would be absolutely logicless and tough. One can't expect wonders if one is writing while attending all the calls to the pantry and other everyday domestic obligations. If one has a personal space and a quietness of mind, the process of discovering literary depth would be slow and quiet. The dream of acquiring the same position as Rimbaud and Nietzsche, would have for sure thrown women in a low-ridden brothel or a dubious lobotomy. Although, Padma has used her misfortunes as a significant weapon that solely ignores the demands of patriarchal society. In her book, *A Room of One's own*, Woolf has talked about the need for a room and an annual income for women to get independent as a writer. Similarly, Sachdev has felt the need for money as well as space, a home, which entirely belongs to her from a spacious balcony to the aromatic kitchen. She has mentioned in her book:

There was always a search for a house. The house we had with father was taken away with his death. The house in the village also did not belong to us.... That house was also not ours. Deep Ji could give neither a husband's support. Now I was in a hostel. What's the use of living

in this world without having been once in your own house! Actually, a woman never has a home of her own. At any moment she can be told off- go, get out. But the woman does not pay any heed to this. (277)

After leaving the house of her in-laws in Srinagar, her actual journey towards excellence got started. Like any other unfortunate Indian bride, she yearns for the love of her husband and naively believes that one can change for the sake of love as she writes: "I argued to myself that after marriage he would give up alcohol. How innocent and stupid I was! So confident of myself! To think that this great poet would give up his drinking because of me!" (144). She has suffered her first bout of serious illness in the form of Tuberculosis, which dragged her to the hospital and got her bedridden for the next three years. In the hospital, she has written poems for various occasion with varied themes and also got opportunities to proceed further. The zeal of writing has empowered her individuality and could be visualized as a precedent that how women should use writing and her personality as a source of power. Women who have gained the most prestigious positions of authority are charged with the duty of consistently upholding the classic sanctitude of existence in one hand and a flame of light to showcase the way for generations to come. Michel Foucault states in his book *The History of Sexuality*, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (95). Power is not independent as it relates to knowledge. Knowledge always exercises power and power is always a function of knowledge. Sachdev's knowledge of her native language has provided the uniqueness and ardor in her texts which favors the essence of Helene Cixous's *Ecriture Feminine*. She has used this term in her essay, "*The Laugh of the Medusa*" and it could be defined as the unique feminine style of writing. Her works have the power to start a discourse on Dogri language and its significance.

After a full recovery, she does a job as a staff artist in radio Kashmir, Jammu. It is the time when she has divorced Vedpal Deep, and most everyone around her started talking ill about her. Her act of disintegrating a social norm has tangentially molded her decision to further pursue her career in Delhi instead of her native city Jammu. Most cultural theorists define norms as socially accepted standards of behaviors and she is breaking them throughout her entire life. Women are still viewed as second-class subjects in almost every business enterprise, including those in the fields of art and social science. It would be an outstanding favor to inform women who want to work further in such workforces, should look for biases, disturbing and subtle. They shouldn't wait and hope for these biases to go away. Moreover, it is a girl's duty to be more self-sufficient and not to expect gender-based special treatment. And, contrarily, she shouldn't 'conform' quietly to favoritism and intolerance. The bitterness in the relationship between Padma Sachdev and Vedpal Deep has been caused by the notion of certain intolerances; there were indeed different values attached to their social positioning based on gender role. In his book, *Visual Culture: The Reader*, Stuart Hall has said that, "Culture comes into play at precisely the point where biological individuals become subjects, and that what lies between the two is not some automatically constituted 'natural' process of socialization but much more complex process of formation." (312)

Again, she got married to her long-time friend Surinder Sartaj, by going against most of her friends, sisters, and relatives but this time, her previous encounters with the complexities of life have made her mature to take a better decision for her own life. In 1969, Sachdev publishes her first collection of poems with an introduction by a prominent Hindi poet, Ram Dhari Singh Dinkar. He has written that "What the Padma is writing is real poetry. All of us have become alienated from such poetry. After

reading her poems I felt I should throw away my pen that would be better" (302). Finally, efforts have been rewarded by the Sahitya Akademi Award for her work eventually.

Structuralist theorists favor the division of linguistic subjects into supplementary binary opposites. They believe that binaries make sense concerning one another. Hence, some words gain imposing impact and others descent to the inferior status like the day becomes more important than night, life has more importance than death and man is consummate but the woman is imperfect. However, English poet and polemicist Rachel Speght, tried to revise the inferential mythological claimed origin of woman as a gender. She has claimed that, she wasn't created from Adam's foot, where she would have been his too low inferior, and nor from his head too, where she would have been his superior. On the contrary, she was born from his side, next to his heart, where she would have been his equal. This is because, "while man was created from the dust of the earth, woman was made from a part of man after he was a living soul." Sachdev elaborates such factors that cultivate distance between the social significance of male and female counterparts in society, concerning each other. It has become fundamental for a woman to be always in subordination to man. Man is particularly defined by psychological analysts as a human, while woman is precisely defined as a female. We can actually witness that all around us that anytime a woman acts like a human being, it is said that she imitating a male. Similarly, Padma has to create her happiness around the men in her life or her happiness should always concern men. It would be her silent agreement with Crystal Eastman as Marlene LeGates quoted her in book *In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society*, "Men will not give up their privilege of helplessness without a struggle." (308) In contrast, Sachdev herself has created her sphere of happiness and becomes the focal point of a blissful life. She did make best of everything that came in her life; all the

choices and decisions she made, eventually led to a content and prosperous life eventually. She states that, "I have cherished both my friends and foes. I have learnt that if it is the job of a flower to fill the world with fragrance, a thorn must prick to justify itself, and at times entangle your being in a bid to hold you somehow. But it has been my detractors and critics who have inspired me more in life." (IX)

Men like her second husband, brothers, and the doctors who treated her, were her ultimate pillar of sustenance as they did support her throughout her entire life-journey. But the artistic wealth is the yield of her hard work and passion only. Similarly, her dignity always remained undamaged irrespective of multiple pessimistic attempts by people around her. She has attained knowledge from institutions as well as from wisdom of her life; this stipulates power and aids her to get flourished at different stations in career and positioning in society. Women couldn't be a victim anymore; they ought to stand for themselves. It is overwhelming that even every bit of our languages is infused with male superiority and celebrates it. Due to the fact that beliefs and opinions are primarily incorporated in language, and it is laced with linguistic and conceptual principles that were developed intentionally to oppress women. Men have established all guidelines and restrictions on subjects, mostly powerless sections of the society. All feminist arguments either support or dispute assumptions that are innate to the male-dominated structure, which is granted legitimacy or validity by the capacity of males to identify, regardless of their radical objectives or results.

The struggle that Padma undergone throughout her life, could be acknowledged as a battle for earning justice against every wrong happening; if someone had to symbolize justice as a mystical goddess, it would be referred as the goddess of fire. Truth would be the only guiding principle that directed Padma's actions,

and equity was the only factor that could limit her hustle. Her dedication has directed many other prominent personalities to praise her. A renowned singer like Lata Mangeshkar has sung many Dogri songs in her melodious voice, specifically whose lyrics have been written by Sachdev. Her only aim is to popularize Dogri as a language on every stage instead of fulfilling her own desires and motives. The development of Dogri language always moves parallel to varied occurrences of her life. She has never restricted herself to a particular genre. If one looks back in time, they will see that the women who have made a name for themselves were neither the most attractive nor the gentlest of their sex. Andrea Dworkin curated a catalogue of influential women from history who were not defined by their meekness, but rather by their strength and complexity. In her text 'Woman Hating,' she presented a roster including Lilith, Eve, Hagar, Jezebel, Delilah, Pandora, Jahi, Tamar, Kali, Fatima, Artemis, Hera, Isis, Mary, Ishtar, Bathsheba, Vashti, Cleopatra, Helen, Salome, Elizabeth, Clytemnestra, Medea, Joan of Arc, Circe, Morgan le Fay, Tiamat, Maria Leonza, and Medusa. These women were both feared and revered, hated, and desired, embodying a multitude of conflicting emotions and roles. Padma was also that witch, which carved her name for perpetuity in the history of Duggers and Dogri literature. She was a prominent figure in creating a beautiful painting of Dogri language on a larger canvas. She truly reconstructs the trends of fading Dogri literature in every possible form. Padma Sachdev has inspired every Dugger to respect and praise their Dogri language as it is important to showcase the true self through literature.

Slowly but surely, both men and women are coming to the realization that life has given birth to great situations, accomplished feats, and the most profound disclosures of all the components that compose the cosmos for both of them. Men are coming to this realization more quickly than women. Any female

nevertheless needed a great deal of time in order to let go of ingrained behavioral habits that undermined her ability to give and consent to love. One trend that made the practice of love particularly difficult was the pervasive tendency to choose to be with emotionally disturbed men who were not very engaged in loving even though they desired to be loved. And this is what happened with Padma as well in her early times. She has mostly witnessed all sort of hurdles that can provoke a human being to renounce his or her faith on humanity and oneself as well. But it is quite interesting and thought provoking to witness, that things which should make Padma tired, instead made her the strongest of the women. She has created a prominent niche within a newly awakened literary direction; Dogri literature was evidently fast growing but quite under developed during her times. She is a pioneer for female writers in a true sense. Her work, and passion and enthusiasm for Dogri language has really carved her a crown full of diamonds, which 'is' and 'will' be going to gleam forever. Every Dugger is going to remember her name; and unquestionably, it will be going to echo in the mountains of the state perpetually.

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