

**NATIVISM, HUMANISM AND FEMININITY—A STUDY OF PANKAJAM'S POETRY**

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'Nativism' is not new. As a concept it came up from a set of writers/academicians writing both in English and our *bhashas*. These felt that writing should be centered on our politico-social- economic scenario which made them innovative, cerebral and nature loving originality. The present age of disharmony and discomfiture of the value system makes women poets unhappy and avidly critical of the actuality around. Serenity, compassion, feminine grace and tenderness are their hall marks. The ancient poet Bhartrihari's concept of *saddharma naari* of the traditional ethos and mindset are evident on the women poets' way of feeling, thinking and expression. It is unimpeded humane concern and empathy with love of nature, bird and beast with deep understanding and dignified resilience. Culture can never be static, it is like the water in the river, gushing forth or going forward with imminent dignity and grace towards its destination – the ocean. Things, conditions and attitudes may change or get transformed but the basic ethos and values remain the farthest attainable points attained. The mindset of the fair sex tends towards basic values.

K.Pankajam by profession is a Finance Officer but an imaginative poet by temperament. She has to her credit three volumes of poetries, two fictions in English and one in Malayalam. What sets Pankajam apart as a poet of great calibre, is her economy of words – her poems are never verbose. Each of them invariably leaves an imprint and an impact on our heart and mind. The present paper is a study of Pankajam's poetry on themes of Nativism, Humanism and Femininity.

Keywords: Nativism, Humanism, Femininity.

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*The best of my lines are written
not on the electronic wall
nor on the plain sheet of paper
but on the walls of my heart
and if you can't read them smart
my words are wasted, not my fault*

K.Pankajam's first book *Look Beyond* (which has not been dealt with here) was published in 2006 at Calicut by Yeti Books. The next volume *Echoes* (Window Publishers, Chennai, Dec 2009, pp 112, Price Rs 120/-) contains seventy-two poems. Whether it is just fortuitous or intensely deliberate, the grouping of this *Echoes* into seven sections each getting a separate title is meaningful. Obviously the poet grouped the compositions theme-wise.

The first section is called *Between You and Me*. It is about relationships. Wedding, the most stable of relationship generally figures prominently in the first section. *Eyes met each other/nurturing rudiments of love/sought each other's with seal of/hissing sounds, from hearts/and together they travelled/and slide softly unseen, /to another world. Zindagi Rocks is jubilant: No words,/yet they speak/. No language,/ yet they communicate...and the two slide away/to board the first flight/ two in one, one in two/.*

Treaty is a union without being stamped and sealed for all time but eventually for a life time.

The second section *Recall* is a bouquet of memories of persons and things unforgettable. Memories are multi hued. They may be sad or joyous. Once two friends departed never to meet again but they linger in each other's memories and are remembered with tears of thoughtful gratitude. *The Last Journey* is elegiac. *A page from forgotten past* is special: *No maudlin sentiments to be sauntered off;/Nevertheless, a little gratitude, in thoughts/at times, towards those visages in oblivion,/subtly strengthen bonds, secret and personal.* For the poet *Rain is fun. I want to play with flowers/bathed in the first showers/wish I could fondle in my arms/bubbles born to fresh rains.*

The third section *Soulful* is a group of ruminative compositions. *I am not kidding* traces the way the mother feels while looking for her end to come: *Days crawled, calendars changed/grey hairs*

increased in count/ Day by day my spirit grew brittle/ Numb in mind I waited for the shutter. The poet is given to intense cerebration. In *Haunting Memories* she records: *Having slipped into a frozen state/ I stood not knowing whom to charge/ the ruthless realities of fate/or the reckless rigidities of man!*

The narrative element in *Grandpa dies* is striking for its essential brevity. We are presented a durable portrait of the grandfather dead long ago. Echoes of jubilation are succinctly described in the poem where the poet describes *the bundle of joy/ when my baby was brought home.*

Reflections is a group of poems with subjects like genetics, patience, brides in shortage – all very short poems with a composition on Reflection itself: *You lie with me, dwell with me, never deceive me,/misled, or estrange me/ you are part of me. My friend, you are none,/but my real reflection. Brides in Shortage* is a piece of realism.

Bridal prices soaring in the market/as 'demands' increase skyward /Parents unable to meet listed 'stocks/ Result – shortage of 'would-be brides. Marriage is not of romance, but of rupees/ The affluent conclude deals fast.

Veils are symbolic as well as functional in many cultures. In this section Pankajam deals with veil as a symbol. She has her own definition of poetry as most poets do. *A journey of words/transcend/inside the womb/ of muddling thoughts/Struggle for birth,/a craze in itself/as labour intensifies,/contents come pouring.* She goes further: *Call it a gentle breeze,/Carrying secret wishes,/a painting of words/capturing deep emotions,/Bliss of solitude/culminating/in peace and passion, or/pleasure within/finding/a way of expression. Vacuum* is a poem about a long wait: *Heart in her eyes/she looked back and forth/thro' the long station platform/rippled with/teeming crowds/ piles of gunny bags/yet so empty without the one face/ She searches for.* The poems on craving and bliss may be considered companion poems, waiting to catch upon the thread of joys past and the bliss of lingering music.

'Around us' is a section on the woes that stare in our face all around. The triggers are a young widow, domestic violence and bondage. In the poem



Liberate she expresses her yearning for liberation poignantly: *Let light of prudence enter right/so that shadows of aggression be withered out.* Reminding us of Kushwant Singh she has poem on elections with the caption *With Malice to None and Apologies to All.* This sensitive poet does not miss the trauma and horror of Nithari. Devoid of all humaneness: *'Nitharis' soaked in grief/ count skulls to trace missing tots/ A shame on human race/ And my heart sinks in pain.*

The very titles of some of the poems are striking: Gallows, Evil Spirits, and Mental Asylums.

In the section *Acumen An Intruder Within* is an insightful poem powerfully describing how the creative urge in the poet went through all tribulations and is brought to a grinding halt. Poetry leaves spaces for interpretation. It lends itself to diverse explanations each appearing plausible and powerful. The intruder within is compulsive and vibrant. *Life Punctuated* is a clever poem. Gaps, curves, marks of punctuation are all communicative. *Dots with curves, interrogate readers/ sharp at the end, with concealed hints/Questions, you make one sit and think/who solves (sic) get but rightly rewarded.* Pankajam's poems offer rewards diverse leading readers into ever changing vistas and avenues.

Pankajam's next collection *Whispering Waves*, 2013 was published by Writers Workshop, Kolkata in 2013. Qualitatively, this collection portrays femininity with a scintillatingly impressive mindset. The poem 'My Soul Sings' is a dainty woman's song. Jasmines enthrall women, young, going middle aged or old. Here is what the poet tells us:

Chiseled blades of wind
that came robbing the jasmines
touch me with their soft ends
murmur something in my ears
.....
The crescendo lifts me heavenwards
And I sing in delight. (p.9)

Robbing is no offence here. The feeling is like that of a celestial damsel.

For the mother her baby's acts are like tasting manna. 'A Guiltless Tale' is captivating to the reader too.

Looking at his parents' wedding stills the cherub asks: "Why am I not in these pictures?"

The mother is exalted and writes:
My effort to ease his predicament
Fails in efficacy, nor to distract him.
Exhausting the last tool in my artillery
I make him choke in a deep embrace. (p.10)

Lajwantis are always great attractions to all, especially for women.

At the face of a simple breeze
it droops and collapses promptly,
veils its succulent leaves, girls-like,

.... ..

Once for hours I sat watching it,
my playmate in lonesome days
engages me even in this cityscape
without a moment of dullness. (p.13)

Childhood is unforgettable since it the best period in one's life. In 'Nostalgia' this poet describes the feeling of a lost childhood.

Mind is a child at times
obstinate
Yearns to possess lost things

.... ..

I own them still
Hold near to my heart. (p.15)

War is described in short in 'Multi-tasking'. It is so for it is many things to many and assignments to everybody: for mothers, husbands, wives, orphaned kids besides being medal-winners for Generals and themes for penmen and poets. 'A Stone Melts' is grimly thoughtful. The mountaineering son comes back home to his mother:

Upon the ledge of his shoulders
rests two hands softly. He looks back.
Eyes with the cold stare of mountains
never seen with moisture, have in them
the sorrow of a lifetime;
waiting to melt down. (p.17)

Tears need eyes. As age advances the eyes lose their capacity to see. 'I Want to Cry' says the speaker of the poem.

A pair more I need
to see those unheeded.
Send me two more
so that I can cry,



their sorrow

thus I can share. (p.18)

The emotive appeal of a poem depends on the sincerity of feeling describing an experience. A woman's concern for her hubby and her pain on long separation are delicately expressed in 'forbidden Fruit'. The spouse's worry is not understood by the husband:

News of his overseas job

puckers her face into a frown

for the onus she alone owns.

She stands with charred dreams

Bathing his gusto with her tears. (p.19)

Egoism is a detestable, dangerous trait. 'Ego' describes how difficult it is to keep under firm restraint;

How hard you try to put it aside,

dump into a closed well to perish,

discard it into a desolate land

....

it shows itself every now and then

staining the glass through which you look. (p. 20)

Intense cerebration leads one to look into the inner-self. This is in the introvert female too. Pangs of separation are hard for the fair sex. Truth is expressed in the short poem 'Absence'.

Ad distance increases

heart grows fonder. (p.22)

This is a truth applicable to all affectionate couples. 'Grief can wait' is about the agony of a bereaved wife. Hubby departing passing away, the wife's responsibilities multiply. A strong willed woman can say this with courage:

The void is big, life bigger

ship to be propelled ashore.

Forte (sic) she gathers to be at the helm

And marshal the voyage

Only then

She can grieve.

Grief can wait. (p.23)

Finding surrogate mothers has come to be the order of the day. But the reason behind finding a surrogate is different for the speaker of the poem 'Future Martimonial Ads' here.

Parents of male babies

rush to register now

Surrogating or adoption

ensure (sic) your son gets a life partner.

Colour, caste or creed

can't be of any heed.

Let the classic tale remain

girl babies we do hail.

Leave us the pains

And live with your sins. (p.24)

Some women wouldn't want the baby to be grown in their wombs.

The title of this collection 'Whispering Waves' is remarkably related to the poem 'Secrets of Love'.

Seeing the butterflies kiss the flowers

the wind swings and sways in delight

stealing a look,

the shuddering leaves whisper

in the ears of the passing wind

"Don't be so curious, invasive." (p25)

The whispering waves are those of the wind.

Humour is a feeling that's easily expressed in a hyperbole. The speaker of the poem 'Onion' remembers Draupadi's discomfiture in her own daily chores.

Peel after peel

the pale onions, as I unpeel

jog may recall to (sic) an epic tale,

my eyes wear a wet veil,

now I can't even get

their skin to leave.

The sudden rise in onion prices brings laugh to the reader's lips. The speaker of the poem doesn't know which lord to pray to bring back the soaring price of onion.

Daya, anukampa, karuNa, are all of one category in the nine rasa's. Poet Bhavabhuti went to the extent of declaring "*ekoh rasah karuNayeva*". There is only one *rasa* – that is *karuNa*, compassion. 'Children of Streets' is poem of pathos. Moved by their condition the poet writes:

Plight that pierces true hearts

pricks scruples,

escapes eyes of lens

and tip of pens. (p.28)



The poems 'Flute', 'A Leader's Wife Laments' 'The Flower Vendor' are replete with compassion.

Ashoka, was touched by compassion after the bloody Kalinga war. The poet has a sensitive, positive religiosity expressed in her poem 'King of Kings'

Red waters of diver Daya flow quiet
not affected by the carnage at Kalinga.

..../.

Despite destruction,
the battle gifted history
an emperor, the Great. (p.29)

In 'My India' the poet brings the soul healing hymn in the Sanskrit scripture 'Naaraayaneeyam'. The note after the poem explains the devotional temperament of the poet who is the speaker.

Patriotism is love of the country with a feeling of devotion. 'We Salute You' is a song of honour to Ma Bharat.

To the musical mellow of *Jana Gana Mana*
our tri-color flutters high, and we salute you,
the fighters of freedom, the immortal heroes,
glory to you we sing, for you made our flag high.
Reverent is your sacrifice and in million hearts
you live,
death can't mar you, dear ones: Mother India
salutes you. (pp40-41)

Nature, birds and animals all, hold the poet's love and affection. *Koel* and it's offspring in the crow', the way nature holds classes for man are lovable. Song birds are almost neglected what with man's heartlessness. Trees are felled to raise high rise buildings.

Gunny bags gone, plastics all over,
Spill of grains, a thing of the past.
Loss of eco-wealth, a cause for fear,
these tiny birds become dear to us.
As men flock to smoky cities
Sparrows fly in the reverse.
Robbed of their nesting spots
we listed them in the red. ('Song Birds, where
Are You?' - p. 48)

House Sparrows are no longer there either in houses or in cities.

In 'Short Verses' the speaker makes an appeal

A caress, a word or an embrace
shall make her regaled
but make it as fast as you can,
as sorrow will make her grow old. (p.50)

Existence is a puzzle and there is a poem on that which makes the poet serenely philosophize:

Vastness, time and existence
vacuum, air and gravity
all run to infinity
a phenomenon
most challenging,
most inconceivable,
beyond guess,
beyond imagination,
Mounting thoughts
Only well up.

The egg or hen argument
Goes on for ever ... and ever...(p57)

The poet Pankajam is a humane thinker, looking into herself, looking around all and almost everything with heart in the right place. She is high-thinking. She says in the poem 'If':

If the roses I my garden
rejoice mournful hearts,
candles I light
remove darkness from minds,
chatters of my anklets pacify ailing bodies
.... ..

I'll proclaim
I lived here. (p.64)

Pankajam's latest collection, *Sum and Substance*, (Authorspress, New Delhi, 2014, Price Rs 200/-) is a welcome development and the most desired one too. Now Indian poetry written in English has been undergoing a paradigm shift in the choice of subjects, imagination and expression which are near our cultural ethos. The contemporary actuality around us has been the basis of thematic content. The language is English but the imagination is Indian. Poems written in English are about our culture and our way of thinking..

Sum and Substance the title of this collection is not yet the *summum bonum* since it is not the end piece. The pith and quintessence may appear more piquant in further efforts. As a poet



goes along the freshness of feeling may reveal further depth of understanding, poetic imagination and expression.

The first poem *Sum and Substance* is about the delectable quality of words which have fragrance, coolness, smiles, caressing in a life like a flowing river.

'Words are like feathers
dropped by birds
to remember you were here;
love, like forest breeze
scented by sandal trees;
smile, the summer showers
patting, cuddling, caressing
and life, a flowing river
carrying all the silts at its depth. ('Sum and Substance')

Poets are sculptors too and what they sculpt in words in the past, present and future surely live longer than the poet in flesh and blood. if they survive in all the three they live longer than me. 'Sculptors'

The nature of love it is to know what goes on in the loving one's mind. Knowing that brings the other party in the duo a very sweet, pleasant feeling called surprise.

I kept gazing at the sky
thinking if I could buy that earring
the one I could not pay for.
Responding to a loving pat
and a birthday gift nicely packed
I opened it to my pleasant disbelief
How could he guess my wish so precise?
'Surprise'

This poet has set an example by displaying the theme statement right under the title of the poem. Under 'Resolutions' is the theme statement (We all have the same 365 days in a year. The only difference is what we do with them.), under 'Three in One' (The race is not over, because I have not won.) Persistence is a positive quality in putting forth effort till its fruition. Under 'Faith' there is this: (Sorrow looks back, Worry looks around, but faith looks up!) The conclusion of this poem is memorable.

It's there in the
firmness of the first step

for journeys to alien lands
and our expectation of a daybreak
after pitch-dark nights,
while our existence next moment
seems beyond prediction.

'The Pipal Tree' has the statement of St. Bernadette of Lourdes as an epigraph -

(For those who believe an explanation is unnecessary. For those who do not believe an explanation is impossible.) This is the finest of the poems stating the faith and practice of our women folk. The Pipal is the child-bestowing goddess. A custom in our tradition is presented here:

women circumambulating it
with prayers for offspring,
hang cradles on its branches.
Its heart-shaped leaves
napped in the sea breeze
dwell with loads of faith
unaware of the stories behind.

'You are (not) a Working Woman' is a poem about the way the un-salaried women undergoes trudging drudgery with no let-up. The poem is a graphic portrayal of the housewives who are supposed wrongly to be workless for the simple reason that they do not bring home a salary on the first of every month. It is only a woman who can bring this to the fore to educate male lords and even wrong-headed mothers-in-law.

'Mother's Grief' is a poem which makes the pain of the mother intense and unbearable.

Earth beneath, mute
receives cadavers,
but can't peep into
a mother's heart.
The place
her little one rests
is sacred to her.

In 'What is in a Name?' the poet brings in the significance of the name referring to Hindu deities: the lotus the seat of the Goddess Lakshmi and then takes the reader to Lord Shiva:

A flower in whose velvety petals
Lord Shiva took asylum, morphing into a bee,
to escape the wrath of Saturn,
that adds to its divinity.



'What I Overheard' is an enthralling dialogue.

Wind: How do you look so gorgeous?

Jasmine: The delight of others gets reflected on me.

Jasmine: How do you blow so gentle?

Wind: The melody of mine I want you to enjoy.

Sea: How can you sing and dance all the while?

Waves: Feel great in amusing the viewers.

Waves: How do you look bluish and beautiful?

Sea: I am happy taking away the viewers' grief.

Cloud: Why do you chase me till I dispel?

Wind: I want you to be blessed gifting life to all.

Wind: Why do you change colour and content?

Cloud: The aim of my birth is so fulfilled.

Sky: Why do you take flight to the skies?

Birds: The flap of our wings fills music in the space.

Birds: Why is your space so open and still?

Sky: It appeals to be modest even at this zenith.

The speaker describes her passion for the daily newspaper in the poem 'Before the Ink Dries'. It is about the normal first thing almost all of us do in the morning. She says

I grab the day's newspaper.

Words smelling fresh ink

plead for my eager watch.

Do they speak to me...?

Yes, I hear them.

'The Music of Soul' has this as an epigraph. – 'You don't stop laughing because you grow old. You grow old because you stop laughing.' (Michael Pritchard) Here is the poet's advice:

Roll on the floor like a child and laugh,

let the silver bells drop and clang

till your belly aches and you gasp.

Your mirror will show you soon

roses on your cheeks in bloom,

The merit of Pankajam's poems is in simplicity and most of the time she makes her reader a listener listening to her intimate personal feelings trusting that the reader loves to listen to the poet's feelings and experiences with affectionate concern. There is humour and good understanding in the

assessment of human weaknesses too. 'Bus Journey' stands testimony:

In peak hour metro bus journeys,

flanked by people like sticks in a matchbox,

keep an eye behind your back,

make sure the one behind is not a pervert.

You may be caressed for free

target bare skin, an open massage,

and at that moment

you can't but envy the women in *burqas*.

Usually all of us wish that we walk back and become a kid but unfortunately Time has a one way movement. 'Language of Childhood' is a poem revealing that one can never become a child again for the simple reason that one has no grace or ability for that. We have lulled our feelings to sleep or even stopped to think of them accepting certain things are not true. The poet speaks about signboards and we don't think of the possibility to act some way. Many of those public notices are noted in this poem for the readers to grin and bear them. "May I help you?" "In Case Of Emergency Please Contact _____"

"No Entry", "Drunken Driving Is Punishable" "No Entry".

The poet has a good sense of humour and she displays it sumptuously. 'Rain Skills' makes the reader giggle that these experiences are not giggle-worthy when they have to be experienced in the first person:

Step in cautiously with toes first

and then drag your legs slowly

one after the other, as if injured,

else you may soak fully

or even nosedive into their open cracks.

And once you reach home

don't forget to check the wet shoes

now twice in weight

whether they are good enough

to bear the same ordeals the next day

'A Monument' is a chair used by the speaker's father long ago dead. Sentiments have their place in life for those who have the habit of cerebration. The bereaved woman holds the chair dear:

She sits by it every day,

wipes it with her own cloths(sic),



her way of reverence,
to last till the day of their reunion.
...the chair has become
a monument
filled with memories and sentiments.

A married woman's daily household chores are innumerable and 'Morning Blues' are part of a housewife's everyday living. Almost all the poems are fair-sex based or related. '*Sum and Substance*' is a little compendium of feministic tribulations, the small beauties and pleasantly laughable situations in the actuality of a modern woman's life in our country. The poet ranks high in the domain of women's poetry.
