

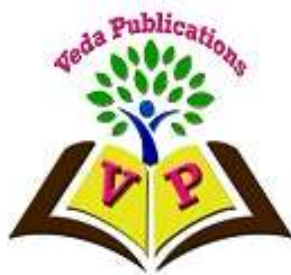


DEPICTION OF CULTURE OF WELL-BEING IN THE VERSE OF IMTIAZ DHARKER

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ABSTRACT



Every culture and country has its own articulation for well-being, and its personal standards for existing well. Well-being exists for everyone and fits everyone differently, and it's important to understand what is good for one and also for those around. According to Pramod K. Nayar 'well-being therefore, a state to aspire not only in terms of one's personal, mental or spiritual and physical health but also in terms of one's affective sociality'. So individual well-being is acquired through personalized efforts and then proceeds to construct cultural fables of collective well-being. The poet opted here is Imtiaz Dharker to present her views on the culture of well-being in Indian context. Imtiaz Dharker is a pak –Indo-Brit poet. She is a versatile artist, poet, social worker and also film maker. Dharker picturises the sentiments of people about happy marriage, family in the collection *Leaving Fingerprints*. She sketches the expectations on a bride, wife and a woman, who is the centre of well-being of a family, in the Indian cultural context.

Keywords: *Culture of Well-Being- Indian Woman- Traditions- Identity*

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Every culture and country has its own articulation for well-being, and its personal standards for existing well. Well-being exists for everyone and fits everyone differently, and it's important to understand what is good for one and also for those around. Cultural well-being is just one of four types of well-being. The others are social, environmental and economic. Well-being is a personal state of psyche and sentiment, but one internalises it to be

joyful or booming from a cultural context. Luo Lu and Gilmour emphasize:

Culture can be a major force constructing the conception of happiness and consequently shaping its subjective experiences... culture influences subjective well-being in the way it gives shape and form to the



self. Different self views (Independent self vs. interdependent self) function as regulatory mechanisms when the individual attempts to judge her/his well being¹.

So 'the individual judges one's self-achievements, success-based on the criteria circulating in the cultural texts of the time.

According to Pramod K. Nayar "well-being therefore, a state to aspire not only in terms of one's personal, mental or spiritual and physical health but also in terms of one's affective socialit"². So individual well-being is acquired through personalized efforts and then proceeds to construct cultural fables of collective well-being. The poet opted here is Imtiaz Dharker to present her views on the culture of well-being in Indian context. Imtiaz Dharker is a pak –Indo-Brit poet. She is a versatile artist, poet, social worker and also film maker. She has written 6 books of poetry *Purdah* (1989), *Postcards from God* (1997), *I speak for the Devil* (2001), *The Terrorist at my Table* (2006), *Leaving Fingerprints* (2009) and *Over the Moon* (2014). The main themes of Dharker's poetry include home, freedom, journeys, geographical and cultural displacement, communal conflict and gender politics. Most of her poems are autobiographical in content.

Imtiaz Dharker, after experiencing all the states of sentiments: 'Suffering', 'Aversion' and 'Hope' reaches the state of 'Well-being', which is an icon of success, happiness and satisfaction. The transformational citizen is one who has reinforced her/his capabilities and thereby set new aspirations and goals. She opines that 'feeling good' is a 'feeling-good-with-oneself-and-therefore-with-the-world'.

Thus a happy identity for the self is the new goal to the poet. To express her thoughts about well-being or smile culture, she takes up the topic of the characteristics of a happy family, where a woman's role is deemed to be centric. Her focus is also on the culture of palmistry. Dharker picturises the sentiments of people about happy marriage, family and palmistry in the collection *Leaving Fingerprints*. She sketches the expectations on a bride, wife and a woman, who is the centre of well-being of a family, in

the Indian context. Somehow her tone is sarcastic in these poems about the society's expectations on women. They are burdened with these hopes and sentiments in Indian culture.

An Indian Hindu wedding is strictly pragmatic. It is performed according to the ancient cultural norms laid down in the Vedas. In the Indian society a wedding is not just the coming together of two people rather two souls. In fact, a wedding also brings two families closer, which thereafter share a bond of respect and affection. As a result, there are a number of traditions and customs associated with the Indian Hindu wedding ceremony. These traditions are the essence of the marital institution, thereby strengthening the significance, chastity and faith in the same. In this collection Dharker talks about marriage and sentiments attached to brides and wives in the poems like "Thumb ring", "When you come into my house", "The mark of a wife", "What she said", "Recipe, never written down", "Such a perfect bowl of yoghurt" and "What she said later".

Indians have faith in the traditional marriage. They believe that through marriage and rituals, a tradition is carried forward to generations. An authenticity to marriage and relationships is given through the symbols of thumb rings, sacred dye, bangles and even burn marks on the wrist of a good wife. In "Thumb ring" the sanctity of ring is explained. It is a symbol of relationship between husband and wife. The mother of the protagonist hands over her ring to her newly-wed daughter. This action encompasses whole gamut of life and relationship. The mother narrates the sentiment towards the ring which is both a custom and an emotion. By presenting the ring, she transfers the tradition of accepting the husband as the prime relation. She says:

..... This ring
Is not a mirror for a crowd.
In it the rest of the world splinters.
The carved room loses all its arches
and its galleries, the uncles and aunts
and cousin-brothers scatter like the dolls
that you will leave behind. (P. 78)

When this impression is treasured, the daughter accepts this and there is no coming out of it for her. She leaves all her other relations heartily and goes to



her mother-in-law's house, where she is welcomed traditionally. In "When you come into my house" the mother-in-law asks her to step into a dish filled with sacred dye and walk across her threshold, she says with sentiment:

That is when the house will
take in your red footprints
and know that they have come
to stay. (P. 81)

She believes the relationship to be permanent. The bride is advised by her friend to be a good wife and gives examples of women, who are good wives; 'The one by the window there/with no bangles, she is no good'. Her mother-in-law said:

..... I look for the woman with burn marks
on the wrist. She is the one who will always
be too busy to notice the tava is hot, she will
not feel pain. When the flame is high she
will hurry to turn the chapatti as it roasts,
her fingertips unaware of the heat. Yes she
is the one who will have the brown marks
across the front of the wrist, across the
veins, the badge of honour, the mark of a
wife. (P. 82)

In "What she said" the wife is advised not to cook her anger with the food because 'It will cause indigestion and disturbance'. In "What she said later" the wife answers that she cooked with anger but complimented by the family as 'it tasted good'. In "Recipe, never written down" the poet talks about cooking rice in the milk of coconut. She adds a spice, which is kept secret and it is revealed to her daughter only that secret becomes a tradition, and it is revealed to future daughters of the family. In "Such a perfect bowl of yoghurt" Dharker writes about Asian notions and sentiments. She prepares different food items with yoghurt by adding different ingredients. She says:

I could complicate this bowl of yoghurt.
I could add mint and cucumber and call it
raita.
I could whip it and add salt, black pepper
and water to make lassi.
.....
In all these ways I could take this yoghurt
and give it a new identity. (P. 85)

In different shapes the item yoghurt gains a new identity, without losing its natural quality. This is also a sort of reincarnation. Though the shape and taste changes, the source yoghurt remains unchanged. Hence a woman plays many roles in her life but she remains the same. Here the poet mixes both life and philosophy. Thus Dharker pictures the Indian Hindu traditional woman, who plays different roles for the happiness of her family but without losing her identity as a woman. An Indian woman symbolizes the culture of well-being and her status is strongly connected to family relations.

Dharker talks about the culture of palm reading in some of her poems in the same collection. Palmistry, or chiromancy is the claim of characterization and foretelling the future through the study of the palm, also known as chiromancy, or in popular culture as palm reading. The practice is found all over the world, with numerous cultural variations. Those who practice chiromancy are generally called *palmists, hand readers, hand analysts, or chirologists*. Palmistry is a practice common to many different places on the Eurasian landmass; it has been practised in the cultures of India, Nepal, Tibet, China, Persia, Sumeria, historic Palestine and Babylonia. Several thousand years ago, the Hindu sage Valmiki is thought to have written a book comprising 567 stanzas, the title of which translates in English as *The Teachings of Valmiki Maharshi on Male Palmistry*. In a group of poems about prediction and reading the palm the poet opines that life is a mystery, one cannot imagine or expect when a sudden turn takes place i.e one cannot foretell the future. Still people practice this culture.

Astrology, Astrologer and palmistry are the themes in "Panditji Will Predicts", "Paring your fingernails", "According to the palm reader", "What she asks the palm reader", "What the palm reader said then", "What the palm reader says now", "What they think she said" and "What she says now". She writes about the Indian sentiments in these poems. She relates the interest to know the unknown, to know what happens in future and try to make improbable probable to be happy and content; if one knows one's future or not, it will happen certainly. One cannot shun or get away the fate. "In Panditji



will Predicts" the poet narrates the business of the Panditji and lucky gemstones, the 'Devine Remedies' for all the problems. In "paring your fingernails" she describes how the Panditji reads the 'map of your life, your personal scroll', even without asking the name. The poet feels that one loses interest in life, if s/he knows about all happenings in life. She says:

In the face of such knowledge words get up in your throat and sit down again. Even the flickering tube light stops to fix you with a sick green stare.

You give up the ghost. Your fingernails stop growing. Beyond repair. (P. 115)

The growth of a person is curtailed when his future is revealed. In "According to the palm reader" the palm reader tells the speaker 'your thumb shows you will be /difficult, headstrong, stubborn/ your have a strong life line. In "What she asks the palm reader" the speaker/poet asks the palm reader:

But which life shows up on my palm?

The one I live, the one I try to live,
the one I live in dreams?

.....

Which one are you reading now?

The one I am passing?

The one that is passing me?

Which of these lives belongs to me? ((P. 119)

She tries to know exactly what type of life she is going to lead. After some years when the palm reader tries to read her hand, he finds, 'Strange. Your lines have changed as if / they have forgotten where they are going'. In "What the palm reader says now", the palm reader is perplexed. He comments:

I don't understand this palm.

It is telling me stories that surely could not have happened.

.....

I have never known the lines to lie

but they are telling stories with pictures

I can not comprehend.I can no more read this hand than I can read running water. (P. 141)

The palm reader fails to read her hand and tell exactly what her fate is. So the poet concludes in "What they think she said". She asks the palm reader or Panditji, instead of telling the future, they have to:

Teach me to believe
that nothing lasts,
to wear my life
like a skin of glass
or water that will borrow
my shape and pass.(p.142)

She expects the Panditji to enlighten people with the reality of life but not with unrealities and temporary and materialistic things they are going to attain in future. In "What she says now" she declares:

Unfixed at last, I become
the tumbling stream,
the river that gives
itself away to the sea.

I want nothing.

I own nothing.

The people I love

have only been loaned to me. (P. 138)

Thus the poet increases the idea of oneness with the world. Her hope makes her to step outside herself and constitutes an engagement with the world. She wholeheartedly declares that she has no desire, she has nothing in the world, which she can call her own and the all in the loved ones in her life are only lend to her for support. When she understands the attitude of life that one has to merge oneself in the universal soul after death and "I" won't survive, she mixes with the stream of life, which will finally reach the sea, the universal soul.

Hence the poet suggests that well-being or happiness lies not in the culture of traditions or sentiments but in our attitude of life. We have to adapt ourselves to the changing realities of life and make the culture of well-being our philosophy of life. It broadens our outlook on people, society, culture and life.

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