

**EXPLOITATION AND RESURRECTION IN THE FEMALE-CENTRIC  
POEMS OF RANJANA SHARAN****Dr Pranjali Kane**

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**Abstract**

Gender discrimination and exploitation of women has a long history. It is well-captured in the works of artists of all ages. It is also evident in the poems of Dr Ranjana Sharan Sinha who has described the condition of women who have undergone the heinous acts through various images. She has described the plight of the victims in words which carry with it the trauma of all the past generations. The paper tries to capture the horrors of acts and the effects of these crises on the rape victims. It would be worth studying these poems of Ranjana Sharan who is otherwise well-known for her nature poems. For the purpose, the researcher has chosen five poems based on physical abuse faced by women and the resulting resurrection. The paper would also deal with the recurring images, symbols and words used by the poet to describe the crisis.

**Introduction**

Crisis can be of various types. There were the two World Wars, the Holocaust, the Partition, the Plague of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century so on and so forth. These have larger connotations: things out of the reach of individual persons. But the fairer sex has been meeting crisis points in their lives through known and unknown men around them. India has witnessed many horrific cases of rapes and exploitation of its daughters over the centuries; the last decade specifically. Sometimes justice is meted out and sometimes justice itself is stifled by the perpetrators. Popular media, in the form of films like 'Pink' give a strong message about the importance of 'will' of the female in the sexual act since it should not be just a mechanical act. How many of us got the message right? Has it changed the attitude of the perpetrators? Are there less number of cases after the release of the film? Such questions are better left alone. Literature has always mirrored real life. Poems are carriers of compressed emotions which if unveiled properly can bring in the changes. With this intention, the poems of Dr Ranjana Sharan are going to be studied in this paper. The crisis point reached by women in their life and the aftermath captured here needs a closer look.

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The poet under study, Dr Ranjana Sharan, has written a poem 'Stri Shakti' as a part of the adi-shakti, the goddess mentioned in the Hindu Mythology. It is a powerful eulogy which by mere reading grants strength and endurance to the readers. And, in contrast, her other poems chosen for study here, portray the pain, shame and insult that majority of the women who have not realized the Shakti within themselves suffer every day of their existence. Their helplessness is construed as meekness. In the end they rise from the ashes as the phoenix. But to rise from the ashes they have to fall, burn and turn into ashes first. They have been doing this since ages, sometimes at the hands of their husbands and at other times, at the hands of strangers. And every time a woman falls, poets like Dr Ranjana Sharan are born. They sense the silent cry of the victimized souls seen everywhere and get affected by their plight. They capture again and again the stories of their myriad fellow sufferers to sensitize the world. Their intention is surely didactic and therapeutic.

### **The Context**

Ranjana Sharan has written the above mentioned poems as a kind of reminder to the other women. The moment of crisis comes and goes. What was before the moment, is never taken into account by society. What happens after the crisis is over, stays with the woman forever. It is the physical pain, mental agony, social stigma and a hopelessness stretched beyond the horizon of life. Things never come back to normal for them. Everyday thousands of women all over the world are subjected to various kinds of exploitation. It has become imperative for work places to form a 'Sexual Harassment Committee'. But does it report the snide remarks, the male gaze, the virtual rape that majority of the women employees undergo? And what about the marital rapes so rampant in the world? The authorities are doing their work. And the artists do theirs. The pen is mightier than the sword and by chronicling the condition of exploited women, they would help ignite a revolution that would change the course of the world.

Let us see the poems in terms of the reaction to the crisis, namely, exploitation captured in them. The poems chosen for the study can be divided into three sections. The first section is the description of the women before the act. The second section contains the plight of the rape victims. And the third section deals with the emancipation from the bondage and



optimism even after the devastating act. In the first poem, *The Flaming Flag*, the poet describes the state of the rape victim. In the end, she fights the demons of her mind and finds hope:

She summons her inner strength, and shoots the hounds dead! She finds life reaching out to her with brand-new experiences.

In the second poem, ‘*Sea Change*’, the poet has beautifully captured the attitude of society towards the rape victim. Instead of sympathizing or demanding justice for the girl, people blame her for her state and ask her to quietly accept her fate. They even want to negate her existence after her colourful life has become dark and dingy, as if she is not human.

She became a sapless trunk: Alive but a dead woman!

The poet wishes that she should like Medusa teach the culprit a lesson he would remember for a lifetime.

In the third poem, ‘*Lantana*’, the poet gives us a glimpse of the exploitative male gaze wherein the young maids working in mansions are regularly subjected to physical abuse as if they are employed for that. They are ‘created and destructed in the dim interiors’. In the end, there is hope and determination though.

Now the woman wants to stop her oscillation between frost and fire.

In the fourth poem, ‘*Lovage*’, the poet writes about marital rape. The woman, as has been conditioned by her mother who is conditioned by her mother to consider husbands as Gods, wakes up to a rude shock. She breaks free of the bestial marriage bond by wiping her sindoor and breaking her glass bangles. There is emancipation from the bondage.

She wiped clean, the red sindoorin the parting of her sticky hair, smashing the colourful glass bangles encircling her hands!

In the fifth poem, ‘*Mongata*’, the poet celebrates the strength and glory of being a woman. In spite of miseries and hardships, women rise from the ashes as phoenix and soar high up in



the sky. They emerge as victorious beings, perhaps more humane than their lesser counterparts.

I remain alive, indestructible. Like phoenix I know How to resurrect--I spread my wings amid flames and soar up to fiery new heights!

### Analysis

**Objects of Nature:** The poet has used recurrent images. In the poem ‘Lantana’, the

Lantana is a a kind of shrub with small bright flowers that grow even in dry and rocky soil. The young domestic worker is compared to the shrub. She faces hardships everyday and yet finds courage in the light of the early Sun. She has a strength to go on. In the poem, ‘The Flaming Flag’, once an ivory-white tulip bloom:

A flaming flag with lovely waves of lavender--Vibrant vernal beauty blooming...breathing, now sits devastated broken apart by the brumal blast!

In the poem, ‘Mongata’, Mongata embraces the duality of light and dark as it is the road-like reflection of the moonlight on water. It represents a combination of glory and misery. And between these starlit dreams and bitter truths, the woman still survives. In the poem, ‘Lovage’, Lovage is a kind of aromatic shrub whose leaves, stems and seeds are all used for eating purposes. The poem is about a poor woman who believed in the essence of being a woman. Her heart was full of love for her spouse. But she found that the person was no better than an animal. Unlike a traditional poor Indian woman, she doesn't accept it as her destiny and makes herself free. In ‘Sea Change’, the woman becomes a sapless trunk after the rape as if life is sucked out of her. These images of nature are rampant in the poems thereby comparing the delicate, beautiful, untarnished lives of these women before the villainous act of rape has devastated them. It is interesting to note that it is always the purity of women which is at stake and not the villainy of the men. What is ravaged is the body of the woman, not her soul. The soul is pure and untarnished.

a. **Helplessness of the women:** Even though the poet has shown resurrection and emancipation of the women at the end of all her poems, there is helplessness of the victim



that leads her to the state of abject surrender. There is no way that the victims could save themselves before the act. Women represented in all the above mentioned poems, are not aware of the tragedy that is going to strike them or have accepted the tragedy as their destiny.

b. **Powerful Perpetrators:** The recurring theme of men as perpetrators, complete masters, insensitive, irresponsible and barbarous are present in all the poems. They are not individual men but they are representatives of all the past generations of male mentality. They crush innocence and are not even aware of the effects of their actions.

c. **Assertion of individuality:** This is another recurring theme. The assertion of individuality by the victims happens to come at the end of every poem. The poet wishes for poetic justice. It is the inner evolution of the women that lead them to look at the brighter side of life and move on. No female succumbs to the act. This assertion of the self is the redeeming feature of all the poems. The crisis comes and goes, but the individual does not bow down. No man will ever be able to obliterate the woman. She would still blossom like the lantana shrub in the rocky land. She would still be pure and happy in her own skin.

d. **Optimism and Hope in the end:** The poems under study do not exhibit a case of epiphany but it is a gradual reaching to that level of complete acceptance of the situation and breaking the shackles of the age-old concept of being lowly. The women become powerful in facing the crisis strongly and realizing their true potential.

### Comments

The poems deal with victims and victors. They are one and the same beings. They are victims of the age old patriarchy. They are victims of their own inactivity. Women are compared to flowers or shrubs in the poems. Simple, beautiful, ephemeral, delicate, fragrant, helpless and innocent flowers, once crushed lose their beauty, form, life. And yet the women emerge victorious in the end with a hope for the future or with a light at the end of the tunnel. The crisis over here is not the one that comes once in a while like the tsunami or the earthquake that shakes the earth from its slumber. The crisis in the poems of Dr Sharan is faced by women every minute of their existence. The poet uses the following words in her poems: rape, nakedness, full round breasts, blooming beauty, bruises and scars, ghostly



nights, claws and teeth, offensive book, trauma, ghost-like haunting memories, filthy residues on her soul, like viruses ravaging the body, dark shadows dragged her to the field, sapless trunk, lecherous beasts, image of Medusa (Greek mythology, monstrous winged female - those who would look into her eyes would turn to stone). These are not words used in poems unless it has some purpose like evoking fear, horror, disgust, hopelessness, sympathy and at times, revenge. Like the poet herself writes at one place that I wish the victim should become a Medusa and and take revenge by turning the villains into stones. As they have negated her existence, she should theirs. But in reality, not all victims get a chance of taking revenge. They can atleast not succumb to the machinations of the bad. They should not let their soul be tarnished. They should win by shrugging off the cover of victimhood. And this is precisely what the women of Ranjana Sharan do in the end.

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