

An Ontology of Permeability: Tracing Radical Nonduality in the Poetry of Nabina Das

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Abstract: The philosophical idea of nonduality proposes an understanding of being as permeable, relational and interdependent. Radical nonduality within ecofeminism seeks to emphasize the essential and holistic ontological connections between women and ecology by bringing to the fore the ways of consciousness, experience and identity that inalienably link the socio-cultural place of women in societies worldwide with the politics of environmental knowledge and representation. In the oeuvre of Nabina Das, an established voice in contemporary Indian English poetry, one comes across a potent poetic articulation of such ecological nonduality along with a transgressive feminist criticism of masculine models of development and globalization. Hailing from Guwahati, Assam, Das writes with a strong regional inflection. The colours, myths, songs, politics and sufferings of her native land constitute a significant subtext in her work even as its cosmopolitan overtones carry the reader into geographies and worldviews beyond. The proposed paper, placing Das's poetry under an ecofeminist lens, shall attempt to explore how the subjectivity of her Anima poems offers an unitive and unbroken view of women and ecology.

Keywords: Ontology, feminism, ecology, human, nonhuman, interconnectedness

From a notebook, March 7, 1974:

The poet today must be twice-born. She must have begun as a poet, she must have understood the suffering of the world as political, and have gone through politics, and on the other side of politics she must be reborn again as a poet.

But today I would rephrase this: it's not a matter of dying as a poet into politics, or of having to be reborn as a poet "on the other side of politics" (where is that?), but of something else - finding the relationship. (Rich, 21)

The relationship between poetry and politics ever connotes poignancy. To make poetry a potent political tool without impoverishing its strength, force and value as poetry is a daunting poetic accomplishment for one realizes that where politics finds a home, poetry may, in all probability, be extinguished. To confront politics with poetry requires a human commitment of the highest order. As Czeslaw Milosz writes in his Introduction to his *Collected Poems*, "to remain aware of the weight of fact without yielding to the temptation to become only a reporter is one of the most difficult puzzles confronting a practitioner of poetry." (xxiii) The poet aspiring to make a statement that is both significantly political and poetically memorable, must ceaselessly and wholeheartedly confront the world as it is and from these multiple interactions, achieve a distillation in thought and expression that mirrors the sufferings of the objective world through its acute internalization by the crucial subjective self. This is easier said than done and every poet who desires to speak to the world's agony must negotiate this relationship in distinct and unique ways to arrive at one's own poetic voice and signature.

In the oeuvre of Nabina Das, an established voice in contemporary Indian English poetry, one comes across an admirable case of poetry as politics. Even a cursory acquaintance with her poetry is enough to bring home to the reader her overt and intense engagement with political questions.

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