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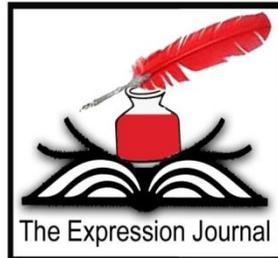
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VOICING OF PERSPECTIVE THROUGH CREATIVITY: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF DEVIKA DAS' WORKS

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**A Technical & Management College Under Techno India Group
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Abstract

This research paper focuses on voicing of perspective through creativity through the works of Devika Das titled, *7 Vows of Marriage (2015)*, *Reminiscence (2017)* and *The Mind Game (2018)*. Also the same theme has been revisited through her theatre works: *Dear Departed (2000)*, *Strait Black Jacket (2002)*, *Aashaad Ka Ek Din (2003)*, *River Rights (2003)*, *9 Jakhoo Hill (2003)*, *Jaati Hi Pucho Sadhu Ki (2007)*, *Dragon (2006)*, *Reptiles (2006)*, *Tin Tappar (2008)*, *Comrade Godse (2009)*, *Panchlight (2016)*, *Sipahi Ki Maa (2018)*, *Jaanch Padtaal (2017)*, *Kamala (2017)*, *Chauthi Ka Joda (2019)*, *Lihaaf (2019)*, *Arundhati – a monologue (2018)*, *Feminist 2019* and *Birjees Qadar Ka Kunba (2019)*. Specifically, it highlights the topics usually tabooed by the society. However, the paper scrutinizes that creative people, living in a democracy, must be allowed to voice opinions liberally.

Keywords

Institution of Marriage, Psychological Turmoil, Patriarchal Values, Liberty of Speech,
Voicing of Perspective through Creativity.

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Non-violence or *ahimsa* has been a part of our Indian tradition and culture since ages but it was Gandhi who transformed it into a social and political tool. Gandhi's philosophy of non violence was an amalgamation of many features. One of the main features of Gandhi's nonviolence is the correlation between nonviolence and truth. According to Gandhi the jewel of ahimsa was discovered in the search for truth. He compared truth and nonviolence as to two sides of a metallic disc. For Gandhi truth was both relative and absolute. Gandhi believed absolute truth, was way beyond human comprehension, though human beings were endowed and gifted with the ability to seek and find truth.

Gandhi was of the opinion that one must be willing to take all the consequences of bearing witness to one's truth upon oneself. That is the way of nonviolence. Thus, for Gandhi nonviolence was the only justifiable way to truth; not only to progress towards truth but also to vindicate truth. That was why he gave the dictum: "Truth is the end and ahimsa the means thereto." (From Yeravda Mandir, p. 7).

Most of my research pertains to our one is to one conversations, telephonic and email interviews. On one such occasion I had the privilege to learn about the author's early life. Writing came to Devika's life when she was a teenager. Though she had older siblings, she used to like to spend her time alone. There is a difference between loneliness and being alone. She chose the latter as her path of life. She likes meeting new people but also cherishes the moments that she spends alone and it's that time when she pens down her feelings on paper.

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During the Kargil war in 1996, she wrote her first poem titled 'For Those At Kargil' which was published in the HT Jaipur Live 'students' column – an initiative by The Hindustan Times, Jaipur, later republished in Devika's poetry collection.

"In another town, another place
The four-year old lights his father's pyre
He perhaps doesn't even know that
There'll be no more 'Papa' whom he admired."
(“For Those at Kargil” 1)

The poem was well received by the readers. Earlier, she used to write for herself as revealed by her interviewers and never thought of publishing books. However, the publishing journey began in 2015, when she published her first eBook titled '7 Vows of Marriage' on Amazon Kindle.

"My friends and acquaintances are inquisitive about my status of 'single'. "Oh! You are already above 30, and still single? Abhi nahin to kab shaadi karogi? (if not now then by when do you plan to get married?) You do not even have a boyfriend as yet, why?"

(7 Vows of Marriage 2)

Devika Das' *7 Vows of Marriage* is a personal experience driven observation of marriage and scenario in the Indian nuptial arena.

Although old-fashioned to some extent, her accounts about marriage are based on sensible arguments. The author has been honest in narrating her personal ordeals. She believes "Exchanging such vows of duty, love, fidelity, respect and a successful union, the couple pledge to be companions forever. A Hindu marriage is incomplete without these seven vows. If every couple understands these vows, then why is the frequency of divorce increasing nowadays?" (Ek Mulakat Hitech TV Ke Saath Devika Das Hitech TV News, Hyderabad, 2019)

She terms the online matrimonial websites as 'technical ghatak', an apt expression indeed. She has also made surveys into the women's views regarding matrimony. The author explains how marriage can bring in more happiness throughout life. She provides her own differing views regarding 'woman empowerment' and 'feminism'. Readers and book critiques like Eva and Soham, agree with her views despite what the current trend portrays.

"Altogether, this book shows that love and happiness are the same in different cultures, although they might be expressed in different ways. Relationships should be based on mutual respect, trust, honesty, loyalty, and sincere enjoyment of each other's' company - and that is something I can wholeheartedly agree with."

Lazar, Eva. Amazon.com review, December 08, 2017

"The author has been candid in narrating her personal ordeals. She terms the online matrimonial websites as 'technical ghatak', an apt expression indeed. She has also made surveys into the women's views regarding matrimony..."

Das, Soham, Kolkata, India. amazon.in review, 23 July 2018.

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The author searches for the secret to a happy marriage. The book also has narrations of several successful love stories of ordinary people. She believes that marriage is an association between two families bonded by the couple. It is the responsibility of the man and wife to maintain a healthy relationship between the two families.

In an email interview I asked the author what message she wanted to convey through her work. Her answer explains why she chose to write about '7 Vows of Marriage', despite knowing it could garner reviews of both kinds.

"Try to understand my perspective in an unbiased manner. I am not asking you to accept my view 100% but as we are living in a democracy, you must allow me to voice my opinion liberally. If my views have hurt your sentiments in any way, I apologize for the same."

The back story for *7 Vows of Marriage* is quite interesting. A girl should get married before 30; it is a common belief in the Indian society. So, she was breaking this stereotype as she wanted to study, work, pursue theatre and explore herself before saying 'YES' to anybody. She believes that marriage is not a social obligation. One should be mentally ready because a partner completes you in the real sense. So finding a true partner is a time taking task. It is a lifetime decision as emotions are invested by both parties, so why not think about it carefully. Such discussions in her PG accommodation gave rise to the thought behind the book. In a one to one conversation with me she revealed, "I was also intrigued to explore what it takes to work out a successful marriage. Is it really necessary or can you just be satisfied with a Live-In relationship? Do families play a role? These are some of the questions that I have answered in the book."

The success of the book gave her the impetus to publish her poems and 'Reminiscence' came into being. Finding a publisher was tough though as she had composed only 25 poems. Blue Rose Publishers liked her writing style and agreed to publish the small book of poems. It is a collection of poems that she wrote in teenage so few of them may sound childish. Yet, she did not choose to edit those and kept it raw. The poems that carry a philosophical tone but do not sound preachy. They give hope to the readers. The simplicity much appealed to book critic Sandra,

"In this small book of 26 poems, Devika Das talks about life and people in general. Since English is her 2nd language, it is remarkable to have so many well-structured poems. Poetry relies very much on cultural references carried in the word choice and, as such, is difficult for even a native speaker to do well. Bravo!

Her two best poems in this book are "The Banyan Tree," and "Grey Days."

Jeffs, Sandra, USA, amazon.com January 30, 2018

Namita in her review of the book stated that the book is an amalgamation of greetings, life, nature, celebrations and even the patriotic feelings which melts hearts. Like many others, she too agrees that *Reminiscence* is a perfect gift for loved ones.

"Poems which are good for occasions that we cherish and celebrate like none other, poems easy to understand, and poems straight from the heart. One book which is an amalgamation of greetings, life, nature, celebrations and even the patriotic feelings which melts hearts. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the smooth transitions in Devika's poems. Must read and also must dedicate these poems to your near and dear ones because they are simply beautiful."

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Jain, Namita, USA, amazon.com
January 22, 2018

“From a sapling, I begin my journey
Dream to see the whole world around
The wind, sun and rain challenge my strength
My roots help me stick to the ground
Chirping birds perch on my branch,
Looking the sun at a glance
The shade one enjoys out of my leaves
Sigh of relief everyone heaves
Dry leaves shed in autumn
Filling my heart with despair.
New leaves give me hope
Horizons with a wider scope.”

The Life of a Tree, pg 26 *Reminiscence*

Reminiscence is a collection of verses reflecting the poet's learning from her experiences. The poems are an assortment of style and genre without confining to a specific tone and style. The poet has exercised freedom in illustrating various facets of our life along with the significance of nature and other living beings. The poetries have a sweet blend of rhythm and blank verse to avoid monotony.

Happiness, stress, ecstasy or depression, it's all a mind game. As long as our mind is under our control, everything else is. That's what *The Mind Game*, Devika's 3rd book is all about.

"The transition from poetry writing to Non-Fiction is an interesting one. To my surprise, I did not face any challenges as I did not mince any words and wrote straight from the heart." Devika confessed in her interview with *Litgleam* magazine, July 2018

It is not an average self-help book that preaches life-enhancing methodologies based on complex science or long philosophical verses. The book's genius lies in its simplicity.

"It's clear that emotions are too complex to understand. Though abstract in nature, the term 'emotion' has attracted several definitions. It is an extreme mental state arising subjectively without any conscious effort. It is a real experience depicting an individual's interpretation, perception and choice of response to a specific situation. Emotions are very different from "feelings". Feelings are in fact the response of an individual to a specific emotion."

Page 6 *The Mind Game*

It offers quick, actionable and instantly applicable tips that help readers lead better lives - instantly. The book begins with five ultra-practical steps that will help readers master their emotions. Emotions are strange. They make us human. They make our lives real. They make us different from robots. Yet, many disasters in our lives result from uncontrolled emotions or because of emotional wounds from painful experiences. Arvind, in his blog post "The distance between a problem and a solution" calls the book 'Clinical'.

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".... Adults may find the book interesting for completely different reasons as they obviously have their own treasure of experiences to refer to..... This book is akin to an army of multiple situations analyzed and lined up in neat regiments, battalions, platoons, and sections. Clinical, if I may add." Review by Passey, Arvind, passey.info , 06 August 2019

Devika is an ambitious lady and has a disciplined approach towards life. The same is reflected in her writing as well. The outline of her content is well-planned and Mind Game clearly shows that she does not like to exaggerate or tell the same thing in different words repeatedly.

"I try to make my content an interesting read. For instance, The Mind Game has received a common feedback: 'Despite being a self-help book, it is not preachy.' I take this comment as a huge compliment because I have always wanted to be honest in what I write. I don't think about the sales or marketing aspect when I am writing the book. I write because I feel that the topic should be discussed and my honest views should be communicated to the public."

By helping readers master their emotions, this book aims at making them strong, enabling them to make rational decisions. Readers are additionally trained on how to feel, face, control and protect their emotions. They are also enlightened on the importance of EQ and how they can upgrade it.

"When we feel insecure and uncomfortable about ourselves, we are likely to judge others unjustly. We tend to blame others for our problems rather than acknowledge that our own actions or decisions might be a possible cause" (pg 16)

The book then acquaints readers with techniques of analyzing people through effective questioning in routine conversations and understanding personality traits. By applying these methods, readers can develop fruitful relationships at work and home. 'Adopting the strategies described in The Mind Game, one transcends oneself into the realm of the strong-minded.' As mentioned by Anu in his blog post:

"We are bound by the belief that our mind is something that exists within the body. Like this belief itself, we expect our mind to be limited and invisible. Therefore, we tend to overlook our emotional responses when faced with challenges in life. At every stage in our life, emotions are triggered due to various reasons. We tend to overlook the emotional reflexes when we consider the various environmental factors that influence us." Review by Lal, Anu. Blogspot.com, 13 June 2019.

The third section of the book deals with living better lives with lesser resources. Using famous examples of Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg, readers are made to understand the value of simple living and high thinking. It will also help readers make the best first impressions and use non-verbal communication to their benefit.

Next, readers are led into understanding the secret of happiness. It first explains how readers can attain divine happiness, how to tackle stress and depression and how to become happy in a jiffy. The book devotes an entire section to anger and anger management as well.

Why mental health? Devika answered it to aid my research:

"Mental health is a subject very close to my heart. In 2015-2016, I read a lot of articles wherein people were suffering from stress and peer pressure due to several reasons. It came as a shock to me that how can such a scenario develop in India? Why are we

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succumbing to stress and depression? I started my research and 1 year later published my third book 'The Mind Game', published by Blue Rose Publishers. I am glad that readers have appreciated the book and it has managed to create a difference in people's lives. I have been a keen observer and thinker from a young age and minor issues, if nipped in the bud, can reduce social stress. We have become highly insecure and our insecurities are increasing manifold day by day."

She has also edited few books – *Absolute Love Letter* and *Diamonds in the Rough*

Relocating to Hyderabad in 2016 was a turning point in her life as a writer. She joined a book club and was able to publish her first short story in an anthology *String of the Garland*. Pepperscript Publishers also selected her short story for their anthology 'Undo'. She also contributes articles and poems to *Gyan Vitaranam*, *Muse India* and *Story Mirror*.

Overall, her writing style and especially the language she uses stands out because of its unique balance between dignity of the language and the ease of reading level. While most authors do not consciously moderate that, Devika surely does:

"I don't write unless I feel passionate about the topic. As I said, I write for myself first. Then, if I feel I have a story to tell the world, I choose to publish my work. As far as similarity is concerned, all my works bear a personal touch which helps the reader to connect with my content. It is not hard for me to write in a language that can be understood by all regardless of the mastery levels in terms of language. But yes, I don't write crass. I keep a balance between the dignity of the language and the ease of reading level. I cannot use cuss words while writing."

Originality is vital because while good story telling makes a story sell well in the immediate moment, in the long range view of how important a piece of literature is, originality is how a piece is judged. Not just our conversation, Devika has always been a very frank and honest person throughout her career. She's someone who has her own thought process and isn't concerned about 'other people's opinions'. That makes her an ideal to follow for the aspiring women writers and artists in general."

Q: One thing you would say is missing in today's writing?

A: Genuinity. The youth is misguided into easy fame, the writing suffers."

Verse of Silence, Issue 6, Volume 1, New Delhi, India

That was Devika as an author. But there's another side to this talented lady, comparatively less spoken of.

With over 15 years of experience in Theatre, Devika has performed in more than 500 shows across India. She is currently a Freelance Actor in Hyderabad and has worked with several theatre groups and award-winning Film Director, Anshul Sinha. An artist with over 15 years of experience in the field of theatre, Devika Das has worked with several eminent theatre personalities – Sabir Khan, Subhash Gupta, Sandeep Sahu, Nasreen Ishaque, Sunit Sinha, Ali Ahmed, Arvind Gaur, Arundhati Raja, Anish Victor, Diana Thoor, Quasar Padamsee are among few of the people she has been directed by. Currently, she is the Director of Navarasa, the theatre wing of a youth group in Hyderabad – The Nation's Rock Beat. She is helping young aspirants learn the craft of Theatre in a holistic manner.

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She believes that theatre has helped her in personality development. Her experience in acting began during her student life when she participated in inter-school and inter-college drama competitions. Professionally, Devika has been an active theatre artist since 2005.

Devika wants to remain a student all her life and believes that learning is a continuous process. She has participated in more than 200 theatre workshops all across India. She wishes to act in Telugu plays and short films.

“People who are close to me can understand what I am trying to say as they know about the source of the thought.....I wanted to communicate my perspective about topics which are only limited to discussion rooms or debates. But, we need more than that. If you want to change the society the public must voice their opinion fearlessly. That is what I am trying to achieve through my work. As I am not a people pleaser, I have presented my views which may contradict the views of the general public.”

Devika an author, Devika a performer, Devika an artist.

But what binds all these personalities into one concise character? De Mode Magazine magazine says that the answer is nothing but ‘Being original’.

‘Q: Do you try more to be original or to deliver to readers what they want?

A: Yes I am absolutely original. That’s been the USP for my books.’

Interview by *De Mode Magazine*, Jan-Feb 2018 edition

The conclusion of this research is that if one does not approve of what one is being told, one should be able and of course, also allowed to voice his or her own opinion, without being trademarked with some made up expression that attempts to put the person into a certain bracket. Devika is a great inspiration in that respect. She doesn’t write unless she feels passionate about the topic. She writes for herself first, and she focuses on the topics which she feels should be talked about. She does not expect others to accept her views entirely, but living in a democracy, she believes everyone should be allowed to voice their opinions liberally.

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