

Eunice de Souza as a poet

Date _____

Page _____

Eunice de Souza (1940-2017) is a celebrated Indian poet and educator whose works often reflect deep engagement with the complexities of gender, identity and societal expectations.

She was born in to a Goan Catholic family settled in Pune.

After her initial schooling, de Souza attended Sophia College in Mumbai and subsequently earned a Master's degree in English literature from Marquette University, Wisconsin, and her PhD from the University of Mumbai. She started teaching at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai in 1969, where she headed the Department of English for several years.

In a career spanning four decades, de Souza published five collections of poetry and a couple of novels, compiled anthologies of Indian women's writing, edited volumes of folk tales and poems for children, and contributed review articles on art, literature and culture for a weekly column to the Mumbai Mirror. She was also actively involved in organizing stage plays for the annual theatre festival "Ithaka" hosted by St. Xavier's College.

Like Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza also offer compelling insights into feminine sensibility through her works.

Her poetry delves into themes of identity, sexuality and societal expectations often challenging traditional norms and stereotypes.

Through the exploration of personal experiences and emotions, de Souza provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities of womanhood. Her poetry often focuses on the experiences of women in Urban India, exploring issues such as alienation, loneliness and search for identity. In "The City", de Souza portrays the city as a metaphor for the impersonal and alienating nature of modern life. The poem reflects the struggles of women to find their place in a fast paced and competitive environment.

De Souza lost her father at the early age of three - a trauma that left her feeling "damaged" for many years to come - it was

his interest in literature and art to which de Souza traces her own literary inclination. Her exposure to the American civil rights movement in the 1960s may also have had a formative influence on her response to gender inequality in Indian society. Her poetry is imbued with a sense of the personal, distilled from the lived experience of being a Catholic woman in a patriarchal set up, and is simultaneously also political in its trenchant critique of the oppressive forces of the family and the church that constitute her cultural milieu. De Souza's first collection of poems, *Fix* (1979), established her as a poet with a distinct voice, irreverent, unsentimental and steeped in savage irony. Her other poetry collections are — *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988), *Ways of Belonging* (1990), *Selected and New Poems* (1994), *A Necklace of Skulls* (2009) and *Learn from the Almond Leaf* (2016). Apart from it she also wrote two novels — *Dangerlok* (2001) and *Dev and Simran: A Novel* (2003).

De Souza's poetry is marked by its uncompromising realism. She does not shy away from portraying the harsh realities of city life, including poverty, inequality and the challenges faced by marginalized communities. Her poems often delve into the gritty details of urban existence, such as sights, sounds and smells of the city. This directness allows her to create vivid and memorable images that capture the essence of her subject matter. In "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner" for example, she delves into the emotional toll of isolation and the search for connection. This introspective dimension adds a layer of complexity to her work and makes her poetry relatable to a wide range of readers. Through her evocative language and unflinching honesty, de Souza has made a significant contribution to Indian English literature and continues to inspire readers with her unique and compelling vision.