

Confession in Exile: Mapping Feminine Consciousness in Anamika and Nazik al-Mala'ika

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Abstract : *Confession in exile is not merely a literary gesture; it is a way of surviving, remembering and rewriting the self. As Mirza Ghalib remind us, “Dil hi to hai na sang-o-khisht, dard se bhar na aaye kyun? – the heart, unlike stone or brick, must overflow with pain. Between two linguistic universe – Arabic and Hindi – stand Nazik al-Mala'ika and Anamika, two luminous writers who transform personal wounds into cultural testimony. Their voices, though shaped by different geographies and poetics, converge on a shared terrain of feminine consciousness. This study-Chetna, the awakening of feminine interiority; through confessional and reflective modes. For Nazik al-Mala'ika, confession emerges from exile- physical, emotional and ideological. In poems like Cholera and The Night Ask Who I Am, she unveils a fractured self-grappling with love war and solitude. Her confession is both elegy and resistance, where private despair becomes a critique of collective trauma. Anamika, writing in Hindi, gathers forgotten women of myth, history and domesticity, reanimating them through a poetics of tenderness and invocation. While Nazik confesses her loneliness and longing, Anamika resurrects feminine memory; where one reveals the wound, the other guards the flame of continuity. Together, they reconfigure confession as an instrument of resistance – an exile from patriarchal narratives and a return to the sovereignty of voice. Ultimately, their writings from a cross-lingual duet, showing that a woman's interior world is never bounded by geography, but by the courage to speak from the wound itself.*

Keywords: *Feminine Voice; Confessional Literature; Comparative Writing; Stree - Chetna; Feminine Consciousness; Linguistic Resistanc*

Introduction

All beings seek unity in society, yet voices of power and conflict compel division. As Adonis³, the renowned poet suggests, exile is not merely geographical but a condition of the soul, marked by an enduring wound (142). To write is often to confess; and to confess, in a world unsettled by a woman's truth, is to rebel. As Sukrita Paul Kumar argues, women's confessional writing transforms this act of

³ Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said Esber, b.1930) is a Syrian-Lebanese poet, critic and leading figure of modernist Arabic poetry, renowned for revolutionizing Arabic verse through free form, philosophical depth and secular critique. His writings frequently explore themes of exile, identity and rebellion against cultural and political stagnation, positioning his as one of the most influential literary voices of the Arab world in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His work challenges traditional poetics and advocates for intellectual and artistic liberation in Arabi society.

self-revelation into a mode of resistance against cultural silencing (*Women and Confessional Writing in Modern Indian Literature* 112). In the works of Nazik al-Mala'ika⁴ and Anamika, writing thus emerges as a form of sacred disobedience; a quiet yet seismic gesture through which the self-steps out of inherited silences. Their texts articulate the exile of the feminine voice, long banished from cultural centres yet persistently returning through the written word, much as Kalil Gibran conceives expression as an act of inner unveiling, asserting that “*Speech is a deeper utterance than silence*” (*The Prophet* 31).

Nazik al-Mala'ika, a pioneer of Arabic free verse, reshaped modern Arabic poetry by infusing it with psychological depth, existential anxiety and feminine subjectivity. Her works unveils loneliness, war-time alienation and the wounded body politic with a candour that unsettled the literary traditions of her time. As Salma Khadra Janyusi observes, al-Malaika introduced into Arabic poetry a new tone of psychological introspection, transforming private emotion into a vehicle for collective experience (*Modern Arabic Poetry* 215-218). Although Nazik al-Malaika is not a confessional poet in the Western sense, several of her poems exhibits a pronounced confessional impulse. Poems such as *al-Koolira* (Cholera), *Unshoodat al-Huzn* (Song of Sorrow), *Shadaya wa Ramad* (Fragrant and Ashes) and *al-Qalaq* (Anxiety) foreground an inward psychological voice in which personal anguish is laid bare and transformed into poetic testimony. As M.M. Badawi observes, her poetry is “marked by an intense inwardness in which personal anxiety becomes inseparable from the larger crisis of modern Arab society” (87-92). *Al-Koolira* transforms private anguish into a collective lament, revealing a deeply introspective poetic consciousness that unsettled the conventions and stylistic norms of Arabic poetry. Naik al-Mala'ika's confessional impulses with their deep psychological introspection and ethical engagement, anticipate a literary consciousness that resonates beyond the Arabic literary tradition.

⁴ Nazik al-Mala'ika (1923 - 2007) is widely recognized as one of the foremost pioneers of Arabic free verse (al-Shi'r al-Hurr). Emerging from the Iraqi literary renaissance of the mid-twentieth century, her work combines classical prosody with modernist thematic concerns, including exile, existential anxiety, nationalist consciousness and the evolving role of women in Arab society.

Similarly, Anamika's poetry embodies a parallel confessional ethos, wherein the feminine self emerges from silence, negotiating personal desire, societal constraints and historical memory. Both poets transform private anguish into a form of cultural testimony: while Nazik foregrounds existential anxiety in the face of collective crises, Anamika situates individual subjectivity with the political and social margins of contemporary India. In this way, the confessional mode becomes a vehicle for resistance, allowing both poets to articulate the exile of the feminine voice and assert a literary space for women's interior worlds.

Anamika, writing from within the northern plains of Hindi literature, inherits a different yet resonant fire. Her poetry retrieves forgotten women from myth and memory; rebels, mystics and dissenters and restores them to the Centre of cultural imagination. As Rama K. Trivedi observes, feminist writing by women performs an act of cultural reclamation, challenging patriarchal narratives and re-inscribing woman's lived experience into literary history (*Feminism and Women's Writing* 62-68).

Where Nazik al-Mala'ika speaks from within edge of exile, Anamika invokes from within belonging; yet both converge upon *Stree-Chetna*⁵, a feminine consciousness shaped not by abstract theory but by lived experience and intergenerational memory. As Nirmala Jain argues, women's writing articulates a form of consciousness grounded in everyday life and emotional truth rather than ideological abstraction (*Stri Lekhan: Parampara aur Smasyaen*, 41- 55). Confession becomes creation; the private diary transforms into cultural text and the intimate body becomes metaphor for a generation's unspoken desires. This study reads them not as regional figures but as architects of a transnational feminist sensibility-where Arabic melancholy meets Hindi lyricism and where women write not merely to be heard, but to become.

⁵ Stree-Chetana refers to the awakening of feminine consciousness in Indian feminist thought, a growing awareness of women's agency, identity and emotional interiority. It marks a shift from silent endurance to articulate selfhood, where women begin to question, resist and rewrite the structures that shape their lives.

The Confessional Mode and Its Universal Heritage

Confession, in its finest form, is not mere revelation; it is a resurrection. From the trembling tones of the mystics to the tormented verses of modern poets, confession carries the pulse of human truth.

In the West, St. Augustine's *Confessions bridged sin and salvation, while poets like Sylvia Plath⁶ and Anne Sexton transformed that intimacy into psychological candour.*

In the East, confession found refuge in Sufi metaphor and longing; Jalaluddin Rumi's yearning and Ibn al-Farid's surrender. Nazik al-Mala'ika inherits this heritage through modernist rupture: the individual voice trembling within collective grief. Her language confesses not guilt alone, but loneliness, exile and the scattering of identity across wars and borders.

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⁶ Sylvia Plath (1932 - 1963) was an American poet and novelist, a central figure in confessional mode of literature. She known for her intense, emotional, imagery and her exploration of identity, mental struggle and female experience

⁷ Mirabai, the sixteenth-century Bhakti poet-saint, wove her unwavering devotion to Krishna into songs of longing, rebellion and surrender. Her verses blur the boundaries between the earthly and the divine, turning feminine desire into a sacred, defiant form of spiritual freedom.

A Feminism of Wound and Witness

Feminism⁸ in the work of Nazik and Anamika, is not a borrowed banner but a lived pulse. Nazik al-Mala'ika's feminism is forged in the aftermath of war and displacement, where poetic utterance emerges from historical rupture. Her voice is solitary yet defiant, personal yet unmistakably political. As Salma Khadra Jayyusi observes, al-Mala'ika's poetry rejects ornamental lyricism in favour of an austere inwardness that transforms private anguish into ethical and social consciousness (215-218). Womanhood in her work thus appears as a mode of awareness rather than decoration and love itself becomes a form of resistance against dehumanization.

Anamika's feminism emerges from memory and myth. She rewrites epics to return speech to the silenced, restoring women from the margins of legend to the Centre of narrative authority. Her rebellion is compassionate, transforming domesticity into critique. As Meenakshi Sharma observes, Anamika's poetry reconfigures mythic imagery to articulate a feminist consciousness rooted in lived experience rather than overt polemic (24–33). Together, Nazik and Anamika craft a plural feminist vision; intimate, introspective and deeply rooted in Eastern sensibility. Their feminism is not a cry of anger alone, but the music of awakening: a reclamation of self and story.

Naik al-Mala'ika: The Language of Exile, Desire, Imagery and Social Critique

In the writings of Nazik al-Mala'ika, language becomes a landscape; sombre, lyrical, sensuous and defiant. Desire, memory and loneliness are not abstractions; they are living images-war- shadowed streets of Baghdad, the stillness of night interrupted by distant echoes of grief, or the trembling metaphor of a solitary lamp

⁸ Nazik al-Mala'ika and Anamika share a feminist vision rooted history and culture. Nazik's feminism emerges through modernist critique-using free verse, rational introspection and social reform to challenge patriarchal hypocrisy and the emotional isolation of women. Anamika's outlook, by contrast, transforms domesticity and confession into resistance, re-inscribing myth, memory and everyday labour as sites of agency and collective female consciousness. Together, they demonstrate that feminist expression may arise through both reformist critique and intimate reclamation, revealing how exile, desire and voice can converge into a transnational poetics of resistance.

facing the wind. Her poetry shimmers with tensions of exile, inner fragmentation and feminine longing; where each image is charged with emotional and philosophical significance (Badawi 87-92).

The beloved's absence becomes not merely silence but estrangement; the homeland becomes both shelter and wound; and the act of writing itself grows into a ritual of resistance and remembrance (Allen, Roger. *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*, 2000, pp. 145- 152). Her imagery is never ornamental. Each symbol—a nightingale silenced by oppression, a lonely shore, a flickering candle; carries the weight of existential and social rebellion. These images, delicate yet uncompromising, illuminate the inner struggle between yearning and cultural constraint. In portraying female subjectivity, Nazik neither conceal or romanticize; she renders it with urgency; haunted, reflective and deeply human, even when society seeks to mute its tones or diminish its depth.

Beyond desire and exile, her work pulses with social criticism. Patriarchal morality, political upheaval, war and cultural stagnation are interrogated through the confessional lens. The homeland, often idealized; is shown also as locus of abandonment, displacement and constraint. Even the smallest image, a deserted street or a darkened home, becomes a battleground where the individual confronts both personal and structural oppression.

Nazik's genius lies in intertwining imagery with critique; making longing inseparable from protest. Her landscapes and objects are not passive; they speak, resist and remember. A broken bridge and mourning city, a restless night; all become metaphors of rebellion and sorrow. Through this, she offers a poetry that is confessional yet universal, intensely personal yet socially engaged and profoundly Arab in sensibility and modernist in form (Allen *An Introduction to Arabic Literature* 145-152).

In Nazik, imagery⁹ is a lens for social critique and desire is a tool of introspection.

⁹ 'Imagery' refers to the use of concrete, sensory and symbolic language through which abstract emotions, ideas or psychological states are rendered perceptible in literary texts. In poetry, imagery functions not merely as decoration but as a structural device that mediates between inner experience and external reality, often carrying cultural, emotional and ideological significance.

Every sensuous or somber line carries both private ache and public consciousness, enabling readers to witness not only an individual woman but the cultural and

political world that shapes, confines and challenges her (Badawi 87-92).

Anamika: Imagery, Feminist Consciousness and Social Critique

In Anamika's¹⁰ poetry, imagery is both mirror and hammer; reflecting inner life while sculpting social consciousness. Her words conjure the mundane and the mythic, the domestic and the divine, weaving them into a tapestry that celebrates womanhood while interrogating its constraints (*Feminism and Women's Writing* 62-68).

Kitchens, courtyards, rivers and ancient goddesses are not mere backdrops in Anamika's poetry; they pulse with memory, resistance and longing. Anamika's imagination arises from collective female memory. Where voices of mothers, widows, mythic figures and unnamed women echo through her poems, forming a chorus of lived experience. As one cultural critique patriarchal norms but brings to life the dignity of women in village and small-town settings, weaving social and historical consciousness into the poetic fabric (*Aaj Tak* 12-18). A lamp-lit room becomes the stage of rebellion; while the river mirrors both societal inevitability and the persistence of desire.

Her poetry embodies feminist ideologies though she avoids declarative slogans, choosing nuance over proclamation. Desire, ritual, domesticity are rendered as sites of both constraint and agency. Through layered symbolism, she critiques inequities hierarchies and invisibilities. Even gentle pastoral imagery carries political weight, reminding readers that oppression is intimate and pervasive ("Imagery and Feminist Consciousness in Anamika's Poetry" 24 – 33). Where Nazik's imagery foregrounds exile and existential confession, Anamika expands the frame to include collective memory, revealing that personal and social narratives are inseparable. Domestic and divine, historical and intimate merge to trace a feminist vision. As Nirmala Jain

¹⁰ Anamika, a contemporary Hindi poet, novelist and academic, was born in Bihar and has emerged as a leading voice in modern feminist Indian literature, known for intertwining myth, history and everyday womanhood. Her writing style is lyrical yet incisive, blending confessional tones with cultural memory to transform domestic and ordinary experiences into powerful symbols of resistance and agency. Through this fusion, she reclaims silenced narratives and reimagines feminine identity with nuance, tenderness and intellectual depth.

observes, Anamika's poetry demonstrates how imagery becomes insurgent, transforming everyday metaphors into statements of presence and agency (41- 55).

Each image; a flowing river, a fading lamp, a sacred courtyard-emerges as critique of social erasure. Though such imagery, feminist consciousness unfolds as aware, luminous and defiant and poetry becomes not merely a space of longing but a map of resilience and justice.

Comparative Synthesis: Imagery, Exile, Confession and Social Critique

When the voices of Nazik al-Mala'ika and Anamika meet across language, culture and decades, they form a dialogue that is both intimate and universal. Both convert personal experience into literary testimony, making confession a bridge between self and collective identity.

Where Nazik's Arabic verse bears the scars of exile, war and alienation, Anamika's Hindi verse grounds itself in memory, myth and domestic consciousness. Imagery becomes a shared language of resistance. Nazik's deserted streets, flickering candles and mourning cities pulse with existential longing and cultural despair. Anamika's rivers, courtyards and mythic landscapes carry history and feminist critique. In Nazik, the self is emblematic of a nation's fragmentation; in Anamika, the collective memory becomes the lens for feminine dignity and resistance.

Both articulate feminist consciousness not as ideology alone but as lived reality; where longing interrogates tradition and confession reveals the contours of power. Nazik's voice insists on acknowledging the wounded psyche shaped by war and patriarchy. Anamika expands this insistence into a chorus of mythic and modern women reclaiming narrative space.

Together they demonstrate that feminist literature can be lyrical yet radical, confessional yet socially conscious. Imagery becomes revolution. In their dialogue, readers witness the transformation of the personal into the political, the intimate into the universal. Their shared legacy is one of poetic resistance; where to confess, to remember and to imagine is a radical act.

Methodology of Study

This research employs a comparative and interpretive methodology designed to illuminate how Nazik al-Mala'ika and Anamika transform confession into a mode of resistance and how they articulate a distinctly feminine consciousness shaped by emotional, cultural and linguistic exile. The approach is qualitative, analytical and reflective, combining textual analysis, thematic interpretation and cross-cultural contextualization. Primary text includes Nazik al-Mala'ika's *al-Kulira* (Cholera)¹¹, *Thawra 'ala al-Shams* (Revolt Against the Sun)¹² and selected modernist poems from her Arabic corpus, alongside Anamika's *Tokri Main Digant*¹³ and her essays on *Street-Chetna* and *Mythic womanhood* (Sharma, Meenakshi "Imagery and Feminist Consciousness in Anamika's Poetry," *Journal of Hindi Literary Studies*, 12 (1) pp. 24 – 33). These works were chosen for their shared preoccupation with alienation, desire, displacement and social critique. Close textual readings form the core of the method, focusing on how each writer employs language, imagery and narrative structure to articulate female subjectivity (Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The perishable Empire*, 2000, pp. 17-23).

Particular focus is placed on:

- **Confessional modes**—self-exposure, emotional vulnerability and autobiographical inflections as act of reclaiming the voice.
- **Exilic experiences**—expressions of estrangement from homeland, cultural belonging or linguistic comfort.
- **Imagery and symbolism**—the transformation of personal experience into critique and cultural reflection.

¹¹ *Al-Kulira* (1947) is one of Nazik al-Mala'ika's most celebrated poems and is widely regarded as a foundational text of modern Arabic free verse. She wrote it in response to the devastating Cholera epidemic that swept through Egypt, using fragmented rhythm and urgent imagery to mirror the panic, suffering and social despair of the moment. Through this poem, al-Mala'ika sought to break traditional poetic constraints and give voice to collective grief, marking a turning point in modern Arabic poetics,

¹² *Revolt Against the Sun* (*Thawra 'ala al-Shams*) is a bilingual collection of selected poems by the Iraqi poet Nazik al-Mala'ika, edited and translated into English by Emily Drumsta, which presents her Arabic originals alongside English version for the first time.

¹³ Anamika's *Tokri Mein Digant* (*The Horizon in a Basket*) is a celebrated Hindi poetry collection that explores the intimate intersections of womanhood, memory and everyday resistance.

Comparative mapping is employed to trace convergences and divergences between the two authors: how confessional expression challenges patriarchal surveillance; how imagery negotiates exile, desire and social injustice; and how feminine consciousness is shaped by region, language and historical memory.

Secondary sources – including feminist theory, biographical studies and scholarship on modernist and confessional writing—provide a broader interpretive framework, positioning the authors within a transnational, feminist literary tradition (Moi *Textual Politics* 17-23). This methodology to linguistic and cultural particularities, enabling a nuanced cartography of feminine consciousness that reveals how confession becomes a pathway through exile toward self-definition and literary liberation.

Suggestions and Recommendations.

The comparative study of Nazik al-Mala'ika and Anamika demonstrates the enduring power of confessional and modernist writing in articulating feminine consciousness and negotiating emotional and cultural exile. Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge:

- **Cross-Linguistic Studies of Confessional Feminist Modernism:** Future research may explore how women writers across Arabic, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu and Bengali deploy confession to critique displacement and reclaim subjectivity.
- **Exile as Feminist Critical Lens:** Scholars may deepen inquiry into forms of exile-geographical, linguistic, spiritual and domestic-to contextualise women's writing within broader social structures.
- **Expanded Thematic Study:** Intergenerational trauma, political conflict and the metaphysics of desire merit further exploration with comparative feminist poetics.
- **Translation and Accessibility:** More nuanced translations of both writers are essential to preserve emotional cadence, rhythm and confessional intensity, enabling wider readership.
- **Pedagogical Integration:** Their texts should be incorporated into university curricula on feminist literature, modernist poetry and comparative poetics to cultivate

critical empathy and cultural literacy.

➤ **Creative and Scholarly Dialogue:** Literary workshops, seminars and research collectives can use their work to inspire young women writers navigating identity, exile and self- authorship.

➤ **Digital Archiving and Collaboration:** Establishing digitised repositories of Arabic and Indian feminist writing; poetry, letters and diaries would foster preservation and promote multilingual feminism.

Ultimately, Nazik al-Mala'ika and Anamika remind us that literature is not merely art; it is a sanctuary of return, where confession mends exile and where women reclaim history through voice, memory and courage. These recommendations seek to sustain and expand this legacy.

Conclusion

Silence and exile represent two sides of the same coin, each constituting a form of resistance against societal misconceptions; neither can be transformed in isolation. As Nazik al-Mala'ika declares: *"I am the voice of the woman who has been silenced, and I rise so that words may become freedom."* Nazik al-Mala'ika repeatedly positions herself as poetic voice speaking from enforced silence, transforming muteness into articulation and language into a space of freedom (58-62).

In the shifting terrain of exile – emotional, cultural and spiritual – Nazik al-Mala'ika and Anamika demonstrate how confession becomes both refuge and revelation. Their writings show that exile is not always geographical; it may lie in the estrangement from one's own homeland, from one's mother-tongue, or from a tradition that falters before a woman's truth (Devika 36-44). Through this lens, the personal becomes inseparable from the collective and confession emerges as the passage through which feminine consciousness is mapped with profound clarity.

Nazik's modernist verse reveals the exiled psyche shaped by war, displacement and patriarchal constraint, transforming sorrow into critique and longing into resistance (al-Malaika, Nazik, Qasa'id, 1962, pp. 58-62). Anamika, in her Hindi poetry, gathers the dispersed memories – myth, domestic labour and intimate rebellion; where tenderness becomes subversive and the ordinary emerges as luminous with political meaning (Anamika 21-34).

Though separated by language, nation and historical moment, their confessional voices echo across these distances with urgent resonance: the need to name, to reclaim and to resist erasures imposed on women (Showalter *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* 3-6). Imagery becomes their map of consciousness, deserted streets; flickering lamps, remembered goddesses-each symbol tracing the contours of exile and return. Through such metaphorical landscapes, desire and dissent are not adversaries but intertwined forces exposing injustice while preserving the sanctity of lived experience (*The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and The Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* 73-78). Their work contributes to a universal heritage of feminist confessional literature, where vulnerability becomes defiance and revelation becomes healing.

Confession becomes a bridge between silence and voice, between wound and witness, between marginality and self-recovery. In the long run, Nazik al-Mala'ika and Anamika do more than narrate-they testify. Their voices rise as enduring echoes, reminding us that literature is a vessel of memory, exile, resilience and return. Through their luminous testimonies, we learn that confession is a call – to awaken, to empathise and to resist. Their legacy remains a map of feminine consciousness, drawn not in the ink of certainty but in the trembling, transformative courage of truth.

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