''Miriam the prophetess and women's liberation''

By Jeffrey M Cohen

Sing your song, sweet Miriam,
Though only one line long;
Let your liberation dance
Invigorate the throng
Of womenfolk
Who braved the yoke
Of a slavery most cruel,
In the spirit of the midwives
Who defied King Pharaoh's rule.

''Sing to the Lord for having excelled;
Horse and rider He overwhelmed''
As the Red Sea claimed them as its own,
To Israel,
Was His great hand shown.

Even a handmaid, at that time,
Felt the Spirit of the divine
More clearly than Ezekiel, the seer -
Reward for their faith,
He brought them near.

How sure you women were just then
That woman's role was firm;
That she had earned for her sex
Equality, long term.

You handed down your mantle
To Deborah the judge;
Displaying her feminine mettle,
No issue did she fudge.

Women's Golden Age survived
Into Solomon's reign.
In his poem,
'The Woman of Worth',
He extols her brain,
Her skill at fabric weaving
And at selling to the trade,
At assessing fields before she bought –
Astuteness on parade.

O Miriam, how proud you'd be
Of your daughters of today;
Of those immersed in Torah law,
Promoting its way.

But freedom comes at a price,
With struggles,
Tough and long,
With zealots baying to stifle
Miriam's vigorous song,
To confine the daughters of Israel
To unenlightened tents,
And turn deaf ears to their tears
And to their just laments.

It's the battle of the sexes –

A veritable tug-of-war;

With some believing in a God

Who's male to the core!

So now you know, dear Miriam,

How apt was your one line,

Praising a liberation,

Mature as a fine wine.

But it's not the length of a song

That measures its power,

But the passion of the singer -

Cometh the woman,

Cometh the hour!

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