

INFATUATION FOR SELFLESS SEX AND QUEST FOR VOLUPTUOUS LOVE IN KAMALA DAS POETRY

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the hunger for love, identity and freedom in Kamala Das poetry. Her poems deal with women's liberation from sexual exploitation, dehumanization, suppression and depression. She yearns all through her life for true love and affection. She has been enormously free and confident in expressing her physical needs though she is seriously criticised. She points out the unspoken gender partiality and male chauvinism which have an effect on the lives of women in all the aspects such as their standing in society, security, education. This paper explores her intention in her poetry for gender identity in various aspects.

Key words: feminism, love, identity, freedom and gender bias,

I

Numerous Indian women English writers attempted feminism themes in their works. The list of Indian women writers are such as Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Namitha Gokhale, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Anitha Desai, Githa Hariharan, Kamala Das etc. They generally protest against male domination in the society through their writings and give more importance to the problems of women under male psyche. There is a unique success in feminist writings of Indian English literature for some years but today's generation, most of the women writers are from abroad. They, who migrated from India, settled in America or England. They are rich and mostly highly educated. Though they are not experienced some problems, they write it in their works. Some others provide new subjects such as cultural and psychological women problems with intra-personal sexual problems. The book, Ten Twentieth-century Indian Poets, which was edited by R. Parthasarathy, noted that the most daring writer is Kamala Das. In her works, she "protests against patriarchy and embracing of matrilineal culture with a romantic fervour, the exploration of female sexuality and the sexual desires of women" (Nagarajan, 2011: 1).

Kamala Das was born on March 31, 1934, in Malabar in the state of Kerala. She is one of the greatest woman poets in contemporary Indian literature. A confessional poet, she describes feminist problems in her works. She is a bilingual writer. She writes in Malayalam, which is her mother tongue, under the pseudonym Madhavikkutty. She has published many novels and short stories in English also. She received several prizes and awards such as Kerala Sahitya Academy Award for fiction, Asian World Prize for literature and Kendra Sahitya Academy Award. She has served the Indian English literature hugely. Her most remarkable achievement is writing an Indian English. Like Salman Rushdie and R.K. Narayan, her vocabulary, idioms, choice of words and some syntactical construction are also part of what has been termed the Indianization of English. This is a great achievement. Alvin King (1987: 98) says that "It is important in the development of the national literature that writers free themselves from the linguistics standard of their colonizers and create a literature based on local speech" Since she is a daring lady, she never takes any kind of criticism into her mind. She writes whatever her mind says. She has shown the way to other feminist writers who want to write about their ideas. According to De Souza (1997: 54) women writers owe a special debt to Kamala Das as "she mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms." That is why, she is called as a confessional poet. Her poems are compared with Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath etc. Her poetry is self centred.

Many writers touch the problems of women but they may not write how they are oppressed in their home by their husband or fathers but Kamala Das discusses about the sexual things also which Indian women cannot discuss in the society. She is a courageous lady who writes about all unexplainable issues with people. Dwivedi (2000: 21) says that Kamala Das wrote her poetry against a "more conservative and tabooced society...She has, therefore, more to say about the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role to the point of discovering and asserting her individual liberty and identity. More often than not she concentrates on sexual love, and her woman-persona rises as though in a mood of revolt" As a poet of love and sex, Kamala Das is hardly ever conventional or conservative. Her poetry reveals the hurtful pain of women. Bhatnagar (2002: 7) says that "Kamala's poetry embodies agonies of women emerging from that state of subjugation and bondage, and seeking to establish their identity and the self." Quest for freedom and love for women from the family and society is also core theme in the poetry of Kamala Das.

II

Virginia Woolf, a notable feminist writer, describes women's place in the male domination society. She laments the brutal condition of women. In her words: "A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She provides poetry from cover to cover: she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband." (Woolf, 1999:41) We should accept that it is true. These entire one can find in the poems of Kamala Das. She had an unhappy and dissatisfied life even from her childhood. She was a victim to patriarchal prejudices and discriminations as most

women are. Frustrated by love and loneliness, she longed for an eternal life with selfless body and soul. Her personal life is given in her poems directly and sometimes indirectly.

As I wrote more and more, in the circle,
I was compelled to move in, I became
lonelier and lonelier. I felt that my loneliness
Was like a red brand on my face (Das, 1976: 87)

When she wrote her works in Malayalam, no body objected her but when she started to write in English which is not her mother tongue, many critics begin to pour the criticism on her. What happens if she has written in English? Regarding this issue, she quotes:

“.... I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one....” (An Introduction)

Hence she says that she knows three languages and writes in two—Malayalam and English. She thinks that one should have freedom to deliver his opinions. The poem, shifts to a different mood where the poet talks about her young age. At the age of sixteen, she was married to a thirty six years old man. Like many Indian women, Kamala Das is also trapped in a loveless relationship with an insensate husband, she wants for the true love. Marriage did not offer her any kind of freedom to her. She faced the same problem which is a male oriented world of sex and lust. She says:

“.....When
I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
But my sad woman body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breast and womb crushed me. I
Shrank pitifully” (An Introduction)

Kamala Das hates traditional sex roles that assigned to women by the patriarchy. In the poem “Introduction” one finds resentment and refusal:

...Then I wore a shirt
and a black sarong, cut my hair short and ignored all of
this womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl or be wife,
they cried. Be embroiderer, cook or a quarreller
with servants. (Das, 1976: 12-13)

The woman cannot change her body; so Kamala Das changes her dress and tries to imitate men. But soon our culture and tradition bring her back into sarees, here saree is a symbol of convention and symbol of tradition. A common notion is that a lady should cook for family so she was asked to do the same job. Moreover she is shocked beyond measure by her husband’s

open display of homosexual advances in her presence. “At this time my husband turned to his old friend for comfort. They behaved like lovers in my presence. To celebrate my birthday, they showed me out of the bedroom and locked themselves in. I stood for a while, wondering what two men could possibly do together to get some physical rapture, but after some time, my pride made me move away. I went to my son and lay near him. I felt then a revolution for my womanliness. The weight of my breasts seemed to be crushing me. My private part was only a wound, the soul’s wound showing through mouth.” (Das, 1976: 110)

Man and woman relationship is only a physical act. Man wants sex with a woman as he likes. Most of the men do not think of woman at the time of sex. He is curious to show his strength on each part of her body. Though sex is a combinational activity between two people, it became one way because of male hypocritical and tyrannical attitude. Each love relationship between a boy and a girl surely consist sex. Das started to protest against the resultant humiliation. As there is 20 years difference between her and her husband, she did not experience a happy union with her husband. About her unhappy relationship, she says:

My husband was immersed in his office work,
and after work there was the dinner, followed
by dinner, followed by sex. Where was there any
time left for him to him to want to see the sea or
the dark buffaloes of the slopes? (Das, 1975: 41)

He never asked how she feels. He never asked her what she wants. He never asked her what her opinions are. Regarding this, the male critics criticized her in many ways and the feminist critics said, ‘No, she’s protesting patriarchy, and the sexual content is part of this protest.’

Most of the husbands transform their wives into disgraceful. Kamala Das too becomes a machine. She knows only three things—writing, cooking and giving her body to her husband. She spends monotonous life. She is asked to repeat the duties. She says:

“Here in my husband’s home, I am a trained circus dog
Jumping my routine hoops each day.” (Of Calcutta, 56-57)

Men, as we take psychological factor, want to satisfy women physically. Though they prefer to women’s feelings and ideas for some times, the main aim is to have sex with them and they need physical love. It is not the physical love that Das longs for. What she craves for is an emotional bonding with her man. But, to her surprise, she receives the carnal pleasures from him:

That was the only kind of love,
This hacking at each other’s parts
Like convicts hacking, breaking clods
At noon. We were earth under hot
Sun. There was a burning in our
Venus and the cool mountain nights.
Nothing to lessen heat. (Das, 1967: 26)

Her husband could not provide her a paradise of love she had dreamed of. She finds it difficult to adjust the barrenness of her married life.

Her husband shut
her
In every morning; locked her in a room of
looks
With a streak of sunshine lying near the
door...
.....
.....
when
He returned to take her out, she was a cold
and
Half-dead woman, now of no use at all men. (Das, 1965: 49)

She looks for a soul mate in her lover, the one who loves her body as well as her soul. She enters her conjugal life with some legitimate expectations and innocent dreams: "I had expected him to take me in his arms and stroke my face, my hair, my hands and whisper loving words. I had expected him to be all that I wanted my father to be and my mother. I wanted conversation, companionship and warmth. Sex was far from my thoughts. I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms, the loneliness of my life." (Das, 1976: 87)

Many of her poems reflect her own marriage as unsatisfying and unfulfilling. There are many women who do not express their personal life such as sex, love, romance between husband and wife. Of course the image of a marriage which grew lifeless, empty and dull. Man needs woman body for sex whereas woman thinks romanticism from her husband. Sometimes men may not tell how much they like their wives but they encouraged them in their career. How can one know what a lady or a man needs from somebody? Sex is two way activity. Both will express their views and take one's body into others. It comes under the name of marriage. A few men want to torture ladies sexually. If husband and wife understand each other, problems will be vanished. She says:

"Husbands and wives
here is my advice to you
Obey each other's crazy commands,
ignore the sane.
Turn your home into a merry
dog-house,
Marriage is meant to be all this
anyway,
being arranged in
most humorous heaven." (Das, 1967: 22)

Since she is a delicate woman, she fails to control her husband. She felt bore with him. Finally she wanted to flee from him but unfortunately she cannot run away. Her optimism in her words are:

I shall someday leave.....
.....
.....I shall someday take

Wings, fly around..... (Das, 1965: 52)

Exhausted Kamala Das expresses her desire to commit suicide. In her poem ‘The Suicide’, she articulates:

O sea, I am fed up
I want to be simple
I want to be loved
And
If love is not to be had,
I want to be dead..... (*The Suicide*, 2)

She did not commit suicide but her husband was dead due to ill health. As Hindusim could not assure her a beautiful life, she converted to Islam in 1999. She is called Kamala Suraiyya. Many Hindu fanatics started threatening her through letters and phone calls. She supports herself and says: “Two plain reasons lured me to Islam. One is the Purdah. Second is the security that Islam provides to women. In fact, both these reasons are complementary. Purdah is the most wonderful dress for women in the world. And I have always loved to wear the Purdah. It gives women a sense of security. Only Islam gives protection to women....Islam is my company. Islam is the only religion in the world that gives love and protection to women. Therefore, I have converted.” (Das, 2007: 120)

Kamala Das is a prototype of postcolonial Indian woman and, hence, her style of living and thinking is different and unconventional. Through her writings, she wanted to show the problems of women in India. Her tone says that women must be given importance in all the aspects. They should not depend on men. Indeed, she put down the realistic things that happened in the women’s lives but some male critics understand it as the protest. Till the end of her life, she is never afraid of any kind of comments.

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