

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF FEMINISTIC ASPECTS IN KAMALA DAS'S “AN INTRODUCTION”

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Introduction

The literature emerging in the twenty-first century furnishes examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, some offering an analysis of the family structure and the caste system as the key elements of patriarchal social organization. Kamala Das is one of the pioneering postindependence Indian English poets to have contributed to the growth and development of modern Indian English poetry. Kamala Das originated a vigorous and poignant feminine confessional poetry, in which a common theme is the exploration of the man-woman relationship. Curiously, Kamala Das was driven by a common motive in writing both her autobiography and poems, which was divulging the secrets of her life. In the preface of *My Story* she thus says: ...I wrote continually, not merely to honour my commitment but because I wanted to empty myself of all the secrets so that I could depart when, the time came, with a scrubbed-out conscience.

Theme of Kamala Das

Quest for love, rather the failure to find emotional fulfillment through love and hunger to belong is the central theme of Kamala Das's poetry and her greatness as a love-poet arises from the fact that her poetry is rooted in her own personal experiences. It is an outpouring of her own loneliness, disillusionment and a sense of frustration. Kamala Das introduced a sexually frank genre of writing with boldness. Though she presented a very slender set of poems, if studied thematically, the main theme underlying the whole corpus of poetry produced by her is a complaint against the male-dominated society in general and her unfulfilled dreams of true love and care in personal.

Clear distinction in her poem

A remarkable thing about Kamala Das, poetry is that she maintains a clear distinction between love and lust. She does not favour free love. In her poem “An Introduction”, she writes,

“I asked for love when 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.”

Above lines express her longing for love that is never fulfilled. Kamala Das is not only a feminist revolting against the male hegemony but she rebels even against the demands of joint family. She experiences frustration in relationship. She misses mutual understanding with love and respect. She feels emotional sterility, barrenness and meaningless of life. Kamala Das expresses her despair and the torments faced by a woman. She expresses a woman's craving for the true love but her husband doesn't provide it to her. She rebels against the cruelty of her husband but gets trapped into male ego. She rejects the role of a conventional wife. Das is brave enough to show her feminine sensibility and rebel against the system. She takes pride of her femininity. She reflects her consciousness towards the need for love, security and liberty. She is truly a liberated woman. She identifies her right

to even sexual fulfillment and psychological security. Expressing his views on the importance of the above, though with a word of caution, Nair (1993) in the preface of his book writes: It is inevitable that in any study of Kamala Das's poetry, her autobiographical work *My Story* is not a totally factual autobiography, I believe that the critic has to make a judicious use of the information given in it. He should not, in a blind of enthusiasm, pounce upon each juicy bit, as if catching the criminal red-handed, and pretend to know everything.

Thus, in view of such an emphatic clam of her works being autobiographical there should hardly be any doubt as to whether or not the incidents related and the woman depicted therein represents somebody else than the poet herself. But it goes to the credit of her many critics, who perhaps out of personal sympathies for the poet, do not want to discredit her by accepting her disclosures, particularly those about her extra-marital sexual relations as really belonging to her and treat them as having been spoken on behalf of the women fallen victim to the male oppression. She openly depicts the feminist concern and her views in her poetry. According to Sunanda P. Chavan, "Kamala Das is the embodiment of the most significant stage of development of Indian feminine poetic sensibility that has not been reached by any of her contemporary's yet."

Feministic notion in poem An Introduction

An Introduction is itself a polyphonic text with several of the poet's voices seeking articulation in a single verbal construct. The opening statement, "I do not know Politics" has an ambiguous tone that portrays women's marginalized position in society. Outwardly it is a confession of ignorance, but it also conceals an irony that the society does not expect a woman to deal in politics. She is never the master in politics but just a victim of it and hence her knowledge of the names who in power have no impact of her personal life. Then she brings into account more specifically showing nationality, complexion, place of birth and the language known, an ironic filling up of an ungiven form. The "language she dreams in" again is ambiguous enough to warrant many interpretations: It could be that of imagination, woman's language, English or Malayalam and many more. She also justifies her choice of English as the medium of expression in her poem lines "Don't write in English, they said, English is not your mother tongue. Why not leave me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins. Everyone of you? Why not let me speak in any language I like? The language I speak"

She believes that she has the right to use it with her own angularities and eccentricities, her human joys and longing. It is the voice of her instincts as is the lion's roar and the crow's cawing. She recalls the unconscious terrors of her childhood from trees, monsoon clouds and the rains.

Speaking of adolescence her female body inscribes itself on the text and she remembers too her first encounter with masculine violence that belongs to the same frightening world of trees in the storm and the muttering of the funeral pyre. Reference to the swelling limbs, growing hairs, the pitiful weight of breasts and womb and the sad woman body "emphasize the corporal ground of woman's experience female physicality often identified with female sexuality. It has been said that women suffer cultural scripts in their bodies and women writers are like the mythic woman warrior who went into battle scarred by the then blades which her parents literary used to write fine lines of script on her body. The women cannot changes her body, so the poet changes her dress and tries to initiate men. But the voices of tradition would force her back into saree; the saree becomes a sign of convention here. She is pushed back in her expected gender roles: wife, cook, embroider, quarreler with servants: the gender role also become a class role. The elders fill her world with taboos asking her to be her parents' Amy", her friends Kamala or her reader's Madhavi kutty (her pen name in Malayalam). Every deviation from this fixed rule is looked upon as perversion or mental illness. Her humiliated sent begs for real love, the nature similes of the hasty river and the waiting ocean re-emphasize the element of

instinct that drives the woman in her. The many ontological dimensions of her being – lover’s darling, drinker of the city nights, one who makes love, feel shame, sinner, saint, beloved, betrayed – are tied together at the end of the poem where the poet’s ego dissolves in others as soon as it is asserted. If the poet finds the male ego, “tightly packed like the sword in its sheath”, violent, arrogant and exclusive, she finds her identity to be a moment of deference before a final dissolution in others as she finds that her joys and aches are the same as those of her readers and common women. Prof. K. R. S. Iyenger characterizes this poem as confessional. And Devindra Kohli calls it “a candid and witty piece of self-revelation.” The poem encompasses the whole of Das’s poetic „journey including the obvious post-colonial agenda. It raises the key post-colonial feminist question of identity of women of substance who also happens to be a poet. It voices her firm refusal abandon English as an alien tongue and, on behalf of those choosing to use this language as a poetic medium, she identifies it as a vital and inseparable component of the Indian Identity.

Her Queerness in poem

Her work is centrally preoccupied with sexuality and female pleasure that breaks out of a hetero normative matrix. Her work exemplifies the “resistance to the regimes of the normal” that Michael Warner has identified as the hallmark of queer. In her most widely anthologized poem, “An Introduction”, first published in 1965, Das uses “queerness” in the plural to indicate her multiple deviance from multiple norms. She writes of her choice to write in English and Malayalam as follows:

“Why not leave/Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,/Every one of you ? Let me speak in any language I like. The language I speak becomes mine, its distortions, it’s queernesses. All mine, mine alone.”

The confessional element in her poem

Confessional poetry is like a struggle to relate one’s private experiences with the outer world. Similar Struggle is evident in Kamala’s poems even at a very initial stage of her poetic career .In “An Introduction” she struggles to keep her identity against “the categorizers” who ask her to “fit in” .Having refused to choose a name and a role she feels it necessary to define her identity: “I am saint .I am the beloved and the /Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no/ Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.” The painful assertion , “ I too call myself I” comes from the predicament of the confessional poet .Her experiences are common and ordinary, in fact too common to give her my special identity. But the “I” which experiences them, she insists, is separate and unique. This, to her, is the only way to retain her sense of personal worth in the world of categorizers .She sees the outer world as hostile to the world of the self .

Conclusion

Thus, Betrayal in love and physical exploitation underline the agony of Kamala Das in her poems .In Poem” An Introduction”, Kamala Das ‘s protest is not only against the superficiality of married-self but the culture of domestic wives in homes in most parts of India. Though this phenomenon is quite old as these days the ‘new woman’ has got new dimensions and new identity .Still we find some hidden and suppressed voices to come out.

References:

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