

KAMALA DAS' POETRY: A SYMBOL OF TERRIFIC TRUTHS BEHIND THE GORGEOUS CURTAIN

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Abstract

Kamala Das' poetry deals with the story of sex outside of marriage and volatility of woman's feelings. She chose innovative and controversial paths which mirror the story of women subjugation, as many men want. As far as she concerned, even the act of sex itself has the male as attacker and invader whereas women as receiver. She argues that women too have the feelings and sex desires but their ideas and emotions are neglected under male psyche. Her disappointment, dissatisfaction, and displeasure over the sexual mortification and exploitation that she suffers at the hands of her husband clearly explained in her poems. Her words in her poetry perform her quest, an exploration into herself and seeking of her identity.

Keywords: Feminism, desires, sex, love, freedom

Indian English writing started with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Raj Mohan's Life*. Most of the Indian novels are on social and some on historical issues. Feminism themes have also been used by recent writers. Regional fiction theme has been aptly used by Kamala Das, Anita Nair and Susan Viswanathan. After 1980's there are many English writers emerged on the screen. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Suniti Namjoshi and Anuradha Marwah Roy used realism and pragmatism as main theme of their novels. The other Indian women novelists also comprises popular names such as Bharati Mukherjee, Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Shobha De, Ruth Jhabvala, Namita Gokhale, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Gauri Deshpande, Malati Chendur and many more. They are known for the contemporary approach in their works. Most of these female novelists and poets are known for their courageous views that are reflected in their works.

Kamala Das is one of the greatest woman poets in contemporary Indian literature. She is the "icon of Indian feminism" (Nagarajan, 2011: 22). As a confessional poet, she describes feminist ethos in her poems. She is a bilingual writer. She knows English and Malayalam but writes in Malayalam, her mother tongue, under the pseudonym Madhavikkutty. She has published many poems and short stories in English too. She received Kendra Sahitya Academy Award. When she was married to Madhava Das, she was sixteen years old, he was thirty six. She was interested in writing poems. But after her marriage, her ideas and notions were gone in the air. With her willpower, she started to protest against cruel male domination through her writings. She explains in her works about her unwilling arranged marriage, her husband's obvious homosexuality and her problems with him. She had an unhappy and dissatisfied life

even from her childhood. She was a victim from patriarchal prejudices and discriminations as most women are. Frustrated by love and loneliness, she longed for an eternal life with her body and soul. Her autobiography *My Story* gives a number of her experiences. She talks about her critics. When she wanted to write in English, many critics and men opposed it because it is not her mother tongue. She says:

“...I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one....” (Das, 1976: 32)

Though she was with her husband, she always felt loneliness because she was neglected. Her personal life becomes obvious in her writings:

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)

She says about her early youth and how she asked for love but was deceived. Her husband pulled down her expectations and sprinkled water on her dreams:

“...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.” (Das, 1976: 56)

Kamala Das hates traditional sex roles assigned to women by the patriarchy. She did not like that a woman must be under the hands of men in the society and their body under the male body in the bedroom. Men desire that their wives must be beautiful and innocent. They think that women should not speak anything with others. Das wanted to be like men. She angrily says that:

....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)

Kamala Das mentioned that there is no freedom and liberty for a woman. There is no importance for girl's ideas and words in their mother's houses and husband's house. She was completely disregarded by her husband. She pointed out hard at her husband and wanted to escape from him to get freedom. A man or woman desires for love and affection. A woman who comes from her mother's house wants her husband's love. In most of the cases, man does not give love as he likes sex rather than love. Indeed, it should be mutual. Love is only sex for men. She thought to

get selfless and true love. Babu Adi Ramesh (2013: 3) rightly says that “like many Indian women, Kamala Das is also trapped in a loveless relationship with an insensate husband, she wants for the true love.” Das argues that spiritual and emotional satisfaction does not mean anything for them. She wanted to forget all the things happened to her, especially how she was humiliated in her bedroom and house. She was always treated as a sex worker. She cries herself. She sobs herself in her bedroom in day time in four walls. She recollects:

To forget, Oh, to forget... and they said each of
 Them, I don't love, I connect love, it is not
 In my nature to love, but I cannot love, it is not but I can be kind to you
 They lit her slide from pegs of sanity into
 A bed made soft with tears and she lay there weeping,
 For sleep had lost its use, I shall build walls with tears
 She said walls to shut me in. (Das, 1976: 48)

Since Das always longs for love, some critics think that she is an egotistical lady. Dwivedi (2000: 303) criticizes Das for this “self imposed and not natural” universality; this feeling of oneness permeates her poetry.” She considers love to be a fulfilment of soul realised through body—an experience of sex, beyond sex. She finds herself that her body admitted at the cost of her soul. She says that: “My affairs have not been sexual. I am frigid by nature. Sex, I can get enough from my husband. It was something else that I hungered for.” That is love and affection.

She certainly wanted companionship and closeness. She wanted to be helped from any problems. She wanted to get a good conversation from her mates. Das (1976: 87) says: “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 used to do whatever her husband said. She never opposed him in any manner. She protested against the male domination and the resultant humiliation. As there is twenty 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)

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)

Das was shocked to know that her husband liked homo-sex very much. He, many times, openly displayed of homosexual advances in her presence. In the evenings he brings his friend and they spend the time together. They are very closer and like passionate and sexual desired couple. Das (1979: 110) says: “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.” He never asked how she feels and what she wants and what her opinions are. Since she is a delicate woman, she fails to control her husband, and this fact makes her married life really boring and tiresome. She now desires to flee and live without any restrictions:

I shall someday leave,...
.....
..... I shall someday take
Wings, fly around... (Das, 1965: 52)

Marriage did not offer her any solace, instead she found – and faced – a male-oriented world of sex and lust. Das (1965: 52) herself wrote: “...every morning I told myself that I must raise myself from the desolation of my life and escape, escape into another life and into another country”.

In Das’ eyes, womanhood involved certain collective experiences. Indian women, she argued, did not discuss these experiences in deference to social mores. She expresses her desire to commit suicide but she does not dare for it.

She says that women finds male lust and indifference, and, therefore, rejected the very institution of arranged marriage. She advises husbands and wives as:

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)

Ms. Das’s husband died in the 1990s. In an interview with Shobha Warriar, Kamala Das indicated that her husband was the greatest supporter of her progressing career. He encouraged her to write works. Although it is for financial benefit, it is for their family. She criticized her husband but liked him indirectly. She for the sake of name and market of her books attacked on him. She should have raised it when she had faced the problems. He never objected her and her writings. Why can’t a writer and well educated ask her husband what she wants from him at the time of sex? Since he had helped her in many ways, he would have understood the realistic things. When her career progressed, her greatest supporter was always her husband. Even when argument came around Das’ sexually charged poetry and her husband was very proud of her. Though he was sick for three years before he passed away, his presence brought her tremendous joy and comfort. She had many poems and many interviews where she talked about the

oppression of the marriage and sexual torture of women. Other side of the coin, she loved him very much but the male domination from him made her write her poetry. She mentioned about her husband and how much she loved him and how much he loved her and how much she missed him when he died.”

Conclusion

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. According to Eunice de Souza (1997: 31), “women writers owe a special debt to Kamala Das as she mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms.” She wrote her poetry against a more conservative and tabooed society. Dwivedi (2000: 21) writes, legitimizes the fact: Kamala Das 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 rise as though in a mood of revolt.” Her poetry was concerned mostly with herself as a fiction of circumstances. Sexual humiliation is one of the radical subjects in her poetry. Bhatnagar Manmohan (2002: 7) rightly says that her poetry embodies “agonies of women emerging from that state of subjugation and bondage, and seeking to establish their identity and the self.” People think that it was her problem with her husband that was written in her works. Indeed, it is universal subject and universal experience of women. In most of the countries, women faced these problems. Zide Arlene (1981: 239) opines that “Kamala Das’ themes transcend the ‘personal’ because what she attempts to poetize is the ‘Universal experience’ of a woman.” Everyone should accept what Kamala Das has argued is true and at the same time, sex and attraction are universal subjects. It is created by God about between boy and girl. There must be equal importance for both. Das poetry is really a bitter satire on male dominated society.

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