



KAMALA DAS : A WOMANISM APPROACH

Dr. Narender Dahiya

Asstt. Professor of English, Govt. College Dujana (Jhajjar)

The poetry of Kamala Das has justly been labelled as confessional or feminist poetry, but it may, with equal justice, be labeled as the poetry of protest. The bulk of her poetry consists of her confessions with regard to the failure of her marriage, her vain search for love and affection by forming sexual relationships with other men, her giving free reins to her sensuality.

Kamala Das may be regarded as a champion of the rights of women and as a strong supporter of the movement for the liberation of women from the chains of slavery to men. When Kamala Das wrote these poems (in the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century), the movement for women's liberation from male domination was in its initial and intermediate stages, though today the success of that movement has gone beyond the wildest dreams of women themselves.

Today the Indian woman is as liberated as her counterpart in Britain and the U.S.A.; but, at the time Kamala Das wrote her poetry, the Indian woman was subservient to her parents or her husband, while the question of having extramarital relationships did not arise at all, Kamala Das was among the foremost women to claim such freedom; and she was one of the very few who attained this freedom and exercised it to the fullest possible extent.

One of the most well-known feminists of the postcolonial era was Kamala Das. The poetry of Kamala Das is essentially feminist poetry. The focus in her poetry is Kamala Das as woman – as a wife, a mother, and a sexual comparison for many men besides her husband. The poems in which Kamala Das describes the personality and disposition of her husband are those in which her feminine sensibility comes through most strongly and eloquently. One of her poems, *The Old Playhouse*, is infused with a feminine sensibility. Her husband's approach to making love to her infuriated her feminine sensibilities. Thus, only a strong woman would express her disgust at a husband who only wants to satisfy his lust. The feminine sensibility of Kamala Das forces her to characterize her husband in *The Sunshine Cat* as a self-centered, cowardly man who did not love her adequately. She claims that her husband had been treating her like a prisoner who had nothing



except a yellow cat (or a ray of sunshine) for companionship. Her poems are distinctly feminine due to the common female themes and even the images and symbols she uses. Both the subject matter and the tone of her poetry are feminine, indeed, in her poetry, she skillfully combines feisty female protest with endearing feminine feelings.

The poet Kamala Das is inextricably linked to Indian feminism's past; in fact, hers is the country's first and most significant feminist movement. We discovered that she made the most of her works to eloquently capture the pleasures and suffering of women folk.

Kamala Das is recognized as a vocalist with a feminine sensibility who rejects traditional social norms and customs. These customs do not benefit women in any way, instead, they severely undervalue females in this society that is pre dominantly male. Under a man's authority, a woman's sensitive sentiments and emotions are completely repressed.

K.R.S. lyengar writes: "Kamala Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world, "She says:

Kamala Das is a bilingual writer who has written both in Malayalam and English. As an Indian English poet and as a feminist, she has secured a significant place in most of the anthologies of English literature. She voices the pains and pressures of a typical Indian woman who is suffering behind the thick veil of conservative traditions and customs. She asserts that women, including herself, are victims of sexual humiliation under the male domination. Her works nurture a ray of hope in the hearts of women suppressed under male domination.

Kamala Das expresses her feelings and experiences frankly. Her works are characterized by high level of sincerity and integrity. She is regarded a confessional writer on par with Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, John Berryman and Theodore Roethke and the like.

Kamala Das is an enthralling poet of love and sex. Such honesty and openness are rarely seen in the works of other Indo-English women poets, except perhaps of Gauri Deshpande. In this respect, Kamala Das easily surpasses her male contemporaries like Shiv K. Kumar, Pritish Nandy, Nissim Ezekiel, R. Parthasarathy, Jayanta Mahapatra, A. K. Ramanujan etc. Her poetry is the discharge and outpour of her intense and immediate emotions. She writes that she is not influenced by any



poet in this matter, that she hardly read any one's poetry. This is how she could dig deep into herself, resulting in the originality of ideas and expressions.

Indian English poets convey a new awareness of life, love, sex, problems of cities, poverty, social injustices, exploitation, corruption, politics, marriage, black-marketing and riots. In some poets, we find melancholic mood, disappointments, distress, frustration, death and search for the Self. The Indian English Poets of 20th century have a number of burning issues before them and they have capitalised these themes effectively and convincingly to the literary world. The 20th century poets have succeeded to a certain extent in creating new Indian English idioms, distinct from the English or American idiom.

Nissim Ezekiel's poetry directly emerges from life. Poets like Keki N. Daruwalla, Margaret Chatterjee and Laila Ray seem unable to share indigenous traditions. Keki Daruwalla's poetry is committed to social awareness. It also brings out the multiple faces of contradictions of Indian culture. R. Parthasarathy, A. K. Ramanujan and Kamala Das turn inward to get into their roots. A. K. Ramanujan's poems reveal his quest for the tradition and highlight Indianness. Kamala Das writes about love from a woman's outlook and reveals her Self in her poetry, which is the main theme in most of her poems. She reveals hot-blooded sincerity of feelings in them. She expresses emotional and sexual problems with openness and frankness. Aran Kolatkar also deals with the Self. L. N. Mahapatra's poetry highlights strong and genuine nativism. Jayant Mahapatra and Gieve Patel deal with Indian ethos.

Feminism is a profound emotion. It is a live issue of fundamental importance to humanity. One cannot hope to express the whole truth. The more one discovers, the more remains unsaid. None can question its importance in guiding individuals to form their attitudes, as a mark of progress of the society as a whole. When more individuals identify themselves with the feministic experience, it becomes a universal human experience. Therefore, it is highly essential that we make a conscious effort to review this subject from time to time, making an assessment of the latest progress and continuing trends in the right direction.

Honest and confessional approach of Kamala Das allows the readers to interpret finer points of her intense emotions at different circumstances in a variety of ways.



Through her writings, Kamala Das tries to dig deep into the roots of all the discriminations against women and tries to throw light on the hidden facts that make the lives of women miserable. She reacts to the existing social norms of womanhood, how the imposed obligations and the sex role suppress women to the bottom. She tries to deny these precincts, challenging them throughout in her writings. Such an effort, at times, leads her to a confrontation with herself. She becomes very outspoken, honestly admitting her difficulties, trying to find appropriate solutions by the ‘manipulation of concerned minds’.

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