



KAMALA DAS: A FEMINISTIC APPROACH

Dr. Narender Dahiya. Asstt. Prof. in English (P.G), A.I.J.H.M College, Rohtak

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, Prithvi 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

ISSN : 2348-5612 © URR





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.

Women are calmer and more enduring by nature, in comparison with men under identical circumstances. They can exhibit more patience, restraining the outward eruption of their emotions. Though this is a necessary quality for nurturing harmonious relations, male ego often treats this as a weakness of women. Precisely, this is why masculinity forgets that women too can have feelings burning in their hearts, just as men do. It gives men a 'reason' to treat women as second grade and they trivialise the need for liberal environment of interactions.

Modern Indian women writers in English have become more conscious of their identity crisis. They understand the need of independent existence with appropriate outlet for their potentials. They tread a path different from that of the earlier women, squarely facing any resistance to their ideology. They find writing and Modern Indian women writers in English have become more conscious of their identity crisis. They understand the need of independent existence with appropriate outlet for their potentials. They tread a path different from that of the earlier women, squarely facing any resistance to their ideology. They find writing and

exhibiting their feminine experiences as a means of breaking the silence of the sufferers. They draw their themes from the personal lives of their own, as well as, of those around. They revolt against longstanding traditions by fearless expression of their feelings in their writing. Their works give a new dimension to the image of women, opening a new world, as seen by women.

Women novelists like Kamala Makandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Rama Mehta, and Ruth Praver Jhabvala have dealt with women issues that come up in various situations of life. Women poets like Monika Varma, Gauri Deshpande, Sujatha Modayil and Sunita Jain have made remarkable contribution to feminism. They have shown deep understanding of problems and predicaments of women. With changing socio-cultural ethos in India, they have become more self-conscious and self-assertive. They reveal different facets of women and succeed in giving a definite image of feminine sensibility. Their works provide a better glimpse into female psyche and deal with female experience. They articulate the changing perceptions of man-woman relationship. They portray the new woman, who refuses to be a slave of the family and society, shedding away the myth of male sovereignty.

A remarkable achievement of Kamala Das has been, to free the women in the society from the shackles of bondage and invoke a new awareness, by voicing their hidden and suppressed feelings that have been accumulating ever since. She is the pioneer feminist of India, who articulates the oppressions and tensions faced by the womankind very candidly. She stands in the vanguard of those writers who fought for the emancipation of women. I. K. Sharma aptly briefs her contribution to modern Indian poetry as, 'not only the stunning frankness, but also in making



public a vast fund of agonies and information regarding woman's psychic experience that lay hidden for ages in the private female sector'.

Kamala Das has written prose as well as poetry with equal mastery, in English and also in Malayalam. Writing in English language has been instrumental in propagating her feministic ideas over a much wider horizon.

Kamala Das as a feminist writer provides an altogether new awareness of the woman's role in the modern world. She projects a new device to liberate a woman from the bondage of slavery. She shares her feelings with her readers in total frankness, without any hesitation.

Kamala Das is a confessional poet, free to confess with total honesty, without remorse. Her poetry is self-revelatory, mirroring her feelings and experiences, guilt and hate, love and lust. She is able to transcend beyond herself and catch those fleeting moments of high emotion, within words.

Kamala Das is a unique literary figure of India in the post- independence period, who has made a very significant contribution to Indian English literature and feminist causes. Her writings have inspired many contemporary women in different walks of life to follow her example, to approach and face the problems courageously in a direct and spontaneous manner. Her works have enabled Indian, women guiding them to move in the right direction.

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