

Confessional Element and Crisis of Woman's Identity in the Poetry of Kamala Das

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze Kamala Das as a confessional poet and her presentation of the dilemma of the Modern Indian woman who struggles to set herself free from the chains of the patriarchal society and to find her level of existence in the society. Kamala Das, all through her life, longed for true love and affection, which is also present in her poetry. Das's hopelessness in marriage and in life sharpened her consciousness, and therefore she decided to air out her distress through the poetry. Nostalgia for childhood is also one of the distinctive qualities of Kamala Das's poetry. This research paper would unfold Kamala Das's sincere study of her 'self' and her search for identity expressed through her poetry.

Key words: Confessional elements, Childhood experiences, Women's identity, Daring portrayal, Controversial poet, Women poet.

Introduction

Kamala Das is a pioneer modern Indian poetess in the sense that she liberated Indian verse from the romantic crooning of the 19th century poetry. Das is representative of feminine Indian sensibility and through the Indian milieu, her approach attains the universality of themes. The modern Indian English poetry with all its aggressiveness finds boldness and culmination in the works of Kamala Das. Kamala's 'aggressively individualistic' confessional mode she enables us to probe into the complexities and intricacies of man-woman relationship especially in the male dominated society. According to Devinder-Kohli, "Kamala Das is essentially a modern Indian

woman poetess's ambivalence, giving expression to it more nakedly and as a thing in itself than any other Indian woman poet".^[1]

Discussion

Kamala Das is an outstanding Indian English poet who writes in the tradition of confessional writers who indulges in a great deal of heart-rending. Confessional poetry means objective, analytical or even clinical study of incidents from one's own life whether tinged with irony, self-loathing or compassion. The confessional poets alternatively hide and flaunt, punish and cosset themselves. Kamala Das always speaks out her heart both as a poet and as a woman. She never attempts to intellectualize rather makes a discovery of human existence and unfolds her experiences passionately.

Kamala's upbringing by careless parents, marriage to the self-absorbed man at an early age of 16, her disappointment in love, and her illicit love-affairs with men rendered her tragic vision. In her poem "*An Introduction*" she goes against the old tradition and tells about her bitter experience of getting rejected in love which shattered her adolescent 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 breasts and womb crushed me”.

Another thing in this poem is the exploration of womanhood and love. She says

“I am every woman who seeks love”.^[2]

Anisur Rahman emphasizes when he comments that “Das views the male body as an agent of corruption” and also regards it “as a symbol of corrosion, the destroyer of female chastity”.^[3]

Das tries to create her own identity by breaking down the existing social power structures and create a place for herself in the world of masculine hierarchies. She was totally against masks and roles and refused to accept her limitations. Her autobiography "*My Story*" shows clearly how

her urge for identity and liberty finds its fulfillment in her creative writing. Her such condition is best explained by Raji Narasimhan;

The heroine of “*My Story*” is a semi-educated girl, rudely pushed into marriage, into premature sexual experience, to be left floundering in the quick and of repeated pregnancies and childbirths. [4]

Das as such doesn't have animosity against male gender and she desires to find comforts in their company. She only wants expression of her true selfhood; the yearning for the kind of expression to revealing her feminist identity. In her essay “*My Instinct, My Guru*” she writes;

I don't want to be “emancipated” because I have seen so many of them [Women] “totally emancipated”. They irritate their husbands. I hear complaints from men, their wives have becomes “so emancipated” that they dictate and they frighten them, all there is much difference between a man a man and a woman. [5]

Much later in her married life Kamala meets a man who shows much affection and love for her which she misses from her married life. So Kamala started seeking comforts in an extra-marital relationship about which she writes openly in her poem “*An Introduction*”:

“Later, I met a man. Loved him. Call him
Not by any name, he is every man who wants his
Woman, just as I am every woman who seeks love.”[6]

In the words of K.R.S. Iyenger, ‘Kamala Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an intensive largely man-made world.’ [7]

Confessional poets often write about death, disease and destruction. Kamala Das's poetry also shows that she is fed up with the present way of her life and is hurt deep down within without a ray of hope for redemption. She writes about obsession with decay and death and in deep anguish she cries out:

“From the debris of house wrecks
Pick up my broken face,

Your bride's face,
Changed a little with the years.
I shall not remember
The betrayed honeymoon;
We are both such cynics,
You and I'

[Lines to a Husband] ^[8]

Das develops a realm where no amount of patriarchy can dominate a woman for example, in poems such as “*Substitute*”, “*Gino*” and “*The Suicide*”, she examines physical love's failure to provide unity and satisfaction. She writes that no matter how much a man might wish to sexually dominate a woman, he might have her body, but he will never have her mind or soul.

Conclusion

Kamala Das can be called the conscience of her generation. Committed to the belief that wrongs must be righted, she has a moral aim that validates her work. Kamala Das raises a very serious question before the traditional society which restricts the woman from asserting her own identity. Das is chained right from her birth to death and not allowed to same freedom as her male counterpart in the family. It becomes difficult for her to adjust the barrenness of her married life. Her poetic voice inculcated with a feminine cum feminist sensibility is typically her own and cannot be confused with anyone else's.

References

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