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Feminine Sensibility in Kamala Das's Poetry: An Overview

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Abstract: *Feminism is the advocacy of woman's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes. The various feminisms, however, share certain assumptions and concepts that underlie the diverse ways that individual critics explore the factor of sexual difference and privilege in the production, the form and content, the reception and the critical analysis and evaluation of works of literature: The basic view is that Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal (ruled by the father)- that is, it is male-centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains : familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. As Kamala Das is known for its extreme frankness in its nature of writing which encompasses all her sufferings and grievances, this present paper will traces out this feminine sensibility in her poetry with special references to her poems- An Introduction, Summer in Calcutta, My Story and The Sunshine Cat.*

Keywords: *Feminism, Patriarchal, Privilege, Feminine Sensibility, Subordinate Woman, Equality.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Kamala Das (1934-2009) was born in Punnayukulam, Thrissur District in Kerala. The poetry of Kamala Das gives the evidence of being autobiographical as it exposes her sufferings, psyche which is tortured, the complexion of woman's sensibility. Her poetry is the result of her childhood experience that she considers herself miserable and "a misfit everywhere". It is confessional poetry through which she expresses her humiliations. Harimohan Prasad has rightly remarked about Kamala Das's poetic works: Her poetry has often been considered as a gimmick in sex or striptease in words, an over expose of body or "snippets of trivia". But the truth is that her poetry is an autobiography, an articulate voice of her ethnic identity, her Dravidian culture. In her, the poetry is fully obliterating Eliot's distinction between the man suffering and the mind creates.

Kamala Das, an Indian born is most remarkable poetess of the modern age. Kamala is primarily a poet of feminine longings. Her Feminine Sensibilities may be observed in the themes of her poetry. Her poetry and prose reflect her restlessness as a sensitive woman moving in the male- dominated society and in them, she appears as a champion of woman's cause. She raises her forceful voice against the male tyrannies in such poems as *A Relationship, Summer in Calcutta, An Introduction, and Marine Drive*.

II. FEMININE SENSIBILITY

It is worth noting that the themes of Kamala Das's Poetry focus the background of feminine sensibilities. Kamala Das wrote about the woman who suffers in the society. Almost all her works depict her concern for the social and cultural construction of gender, raising her voice against marginalization and exploitation of woman. She has shown that woman have no separate existence free from men. Thus, Sainivasan Iyenger writes;

"Kamala Das has a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an intensive, largely, men-made world".

Kamala Das's Feminine sensibility is not been found in her frank confession of her sexual life or in a detailed description of female organs. But it is expressly manifested in her attitude to love, in the experiences receiving love and agony etc. The poem 'An

Introduction’ has variously been interpreted as intensely autobiographical. The poem is an attempt to assert the poet’s individuality and feminine identity against social and cultural conformity. She wrote:

“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.
I shrank pitifully.
Then ... I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
my womanliness.”

This is how Kamala Das asserts herself. The woman in Kamala Das challenges the society and chooses to cut short her hair and wear a shirt. She wants to forget her womanliness which makes another cry.

“Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be a cook,
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty.”

Kamala Das speaks here as a liberated woman, who resents 'the cocoon' built around her and desires to flit about without any restrictions. The fairer sex receives a better deal from this sensitive poetess, who airs out its grievances and sufferings in a striking fashion.

Unquestionably, Kamala Das is a poetess of love and sex. As such, she is not so much preoccupied with the metaphysical quest of a restless soul, nor with the formulation of any theory of poetry. She writes almost invariably about the power of love and the appeal of the body. She confesses that she wrote the poems in the book *‘Summer in Calcutta’* to “make a man love me, to break down his resistance.” As an honest poet of love, she looks very frank and naive, without the intellectual pride and the domestic air of the well-known Australian poetess, Judith Wright. It should, however, be remembered that Kamala Das wrote her poetry against a more conservative and tabooed society than that of Judith Wright. She 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.

Kamala Das’s poetry contains an acute concern for decay and death. Her autobiography, bordering on fiction occasionally, was actually written during one of her serious illnesses. It is not that she is afraid of death, and the last portions of *‘My Story’* tell us that she was sometimes even ready to welcome it, but physical decay and destruction definitely haunt her inescapably. In her *‘My Story’* Kamala Das tells us that she, at the age of 19, suffered a nervous breakdown as a neglected wife and that she was commanded to live all alone in a closed room with sunshine peeping through a window. Kamala Das in her poem expresses her ideas against arranged marriages, which are usually inspired by the parent conveniences more than those of the couples are.

‘The Sunshine Cat’, in this poem, too, like the previous ones, finds a berth in *‘Summer in Calcutta’* (1965). It is sans warmth, sans love. Sexual humiliation, which forms the main theme of Kamala Das’s autobiography, *‘My Story’* is the central experience herein. It recounts the tale of a woman too much wronged by the male world around her.

The poem directly highlights the miseries of a forlorn woman. The men treated her very badly—the man she loved did not reciprocate her feelings and he was basically selfish and a coward, the husband, who neither loved her nor used her, but who was a ruthless watcher, who also made of the same grain; the band of cynics. She ultimately turned to for her emotional gratification was all selfish and egotistic. These cynics with monkey-like hair on their chests subjected her to all kinds of humiliation and torture, including physical and odorous; their smells were sickening and they were mostly driven to her for quenching their raging lusts.

Kamala Das is blatantly frank about her personal and private relation within and without marriage. The writers like Kamala Das do believe that not all relations are necessarily sexual. Her account of marriage in *My Story* is crucial for many reasons. First, it is this theme in her story that becomes a central ground to hold the resultant ironic conditions, paradoxical codes, and phases that change her selfhood.

Secondly, it is the marriage of Kamala Das that made her youth not simply sad and isolated but helpless and doomed to the loss of warmth, as if she had to pay the price of her spontaneity and innocence to the negative attitudes of husband, the related and not-related people around her.

Thirdly, it is through marriage that Kamala Das’s emotional conflicts were fused with her physical struggle and intensified her creativity. Next, it is only because of marriage that sincerity and sensibility of her delicate mind were bruised. Her integrity was cracked due to her suffering in the marital life.

CONCLUSION

Thus her poem epitomizes the dilemma of the modern Indian woman who attempts to free herself in all the possible ways; she is a woman poet actually conscious of her femininity with all the contradictory demands made on it by the family, society and her radical companions. To sum up, she is essentially a poet of the modern Indian woman's ambivalence, giving expression to it more openly than any other Indian woman poet. Courage and honesty are the features that mark her poetry. She takes a rather independent view of things and never wants to idealise woman. Most of the time woman in her poems challenge the established norms of the society and asserts themselves.

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