



Reflection of Feminine Sensibility in Kamala Das' Poetry

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Abstract:

After gradual receding of the romantic tradition, a new wave came in the field of Indian poetry in English. It appeared in the beginning of the post-independence Era. Among these new Twentieth century Indian poets Kamala Das is one of the most audacious poets in her protests against patriarchy and exploitation of women. Kamala Das is often referred to as the icon of Indian Feminism.

Kamala Das, a bilingual poetess established herself as a strong new voice. Her poems are confessional in tone. In her poems, feminine sensibility and yearning for true love is continually reflected. This paper is an effort to study some of Kamala Das' Poems dealing with the theme of feminine sensibility. In her poem "The Freaks'", movement is slow but Das depicts her indifference to sex clearly and at the end, she compromises. Her tone becomes impulsive when she says that she hates his love making as she has to surrender like a victim but at the same time, she has to pretend that She enjoys it. She is compelled to do so because of the demand of social customs. In a male dominated world, a married woman has no right to raise her voice against filthy experience she has. She writes that she feels like being an object, a property and can't give voice to her inner feelings. Kamala Das accepts a new standard of expression reflecting denial and rejection of the conventional poetic expression. She is an honest poetess in the expression of anger while attacking male dominance. For her, motivating force is her frustrating experience of love.

In "The Freaks' she depicts disappointment, torment of a woman who craves for true love. She revolts against cruelty of her companion. Her poems are a revolt against the male dominance. She bravely emphasizes feminine sensibility too. Kamala Das is truly a free Woman representing the modern woman who feels that it is every woman's right to get fulfillment of sexual desires and psychological security. In "My Grandmother's House" Kamala Das depicts nostalgic desire for her family home in Malabar, Kerala. She misses love and affection of her grandmother. Thus the close study of "Freaks" and "My Grandmother's House" reflects Das' feminine sensibility clearly.

Keywords: *Feminine Sensibility, Bilingual poetess, Confessional tone, The most audacious poetess, Yearning for love*

In Indian social system, women have been exploited by male dominated society. Indian women have always fallen victims in the hands of male society. But many post independence educated Indian women got support because of spread of education and the influence of feminist movement. Education and feminist movement supported women's liberation from the slavery. In modern feminist literature, there is a typical reflection of alienation and separation from the mainstream. This isolation is the outcome of culture and neglect of women. For sure, the women protagonists in the modern literature based on feminism are the mouthpieces of common woman in India who has been treated by male hegemony ruthlessly.

Kamala Das is one of the most significant authors in indo-Anglican literature of the post independence age. Kamala Das was awarded the PEN international Award for her poetry. She was also conferred with Kerala Sahitya Award for her literary contribution. Kamala Das has a deep

understanding of the various aspects of social life of India and this understanding of hers gets reflected in her works. She openly depicts the feminist concern and her views in her poetry. According to Sunanda P. Chavan,

*Kamala Das is the embodiment of the most significant stage of development of Indian feminine poetic sensibility that has not been reached by any of her contemporary's yet.*¹

Kamala Das is commonly known as Madhavi Kutty in Kerala. Kamala Das is one of the most reputed Indian English poets of Twentieth Century. The second wave of Indian English poetry came in the beginning of the post-independence era. Kamala Das is the most audacious poet especially in her protests against patriarchy. She bluntly favours matrilineal culture with romantic fervors. She explores female sexuality and sexual desires of women. According to K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "Kamala Das is "aggressively Individualistic".

Kamala Das was a bilingual. She wrote poetry in English. She wrote her memoir in Malayalam. Kamala Das succeeded in establishing herself as a significant new voice using her confrontational style and profusion of details which are normally prohibited. Devindra Kohli who edited a book titled "Remembering Kamala Das". In this book, Kohli calls Das a "Natural Poet". He opines that Kamala Das did not have any impressive academic background, neither she had much knowledge of scanning verses but we can still say that the origin of her poetry can be seen in the search of either lost or unattainable love and affection. Her works are marked by feminine sensibility but her feminine sensibility is different from that of any other Indian Women poets. Deeper study of Das' poetry reflects herself loathing, her anger, her distress, her pang and frustration.

The feministic perspective portrayed in the Indian English poetry is an important aspect of Indian English poetry. It is expressed at its best as the bold affirmation of the Indian Woman of the modern times. Many women were influenced by the western culture. Women poets like Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu who exposed the western culture and intensified it in their poetry but Kamala Das still emerged as a poet of love and sex as she depicted a variety of moods and shades of love. Love has been treated differently by various poets.

Kamala Das is the exponent of the modern Indian Woman's ambivalence. She openly expresses her feelings and reflections compared to many other Indian Women poets. We witness an expression of poetic sensibility in her poems. It is visible in all her poems including the personal poems about her grand mother and her experiences of childhood. Concerning this K.R. Srinivas Iyengar observes:

*"Kamala Das is a new phenomenon in Indo-Anglican poetry, a far poetic cry indeed from Toru Dutt or even Sarojini Naidu. Kamala Das's is fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions or articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive man-made world. While giving the impression of writing in haste, she reveals a mastery, of phrase and a control over rhythm the words often pointed envenomed too, and the rhythm so nervously, almost feverishly alive."*²

Craving for love is the most significant aspect of Kamala Das's love poetry. Her poetry reflects hidden pains of her life and neglect and inevitable loneliness she had always suffered. This idea occurred in her mind at a very early age when she realized that her father did not love or care for her. She felt that he was not affectionate at all. As a result, her heart was filled with a kind of vacuum which remained unfulfilled throughout her life. even as a child she felt neglected. Later in her marital life she experienced the same kind of loneliness. Neglect grew more intense and unbearable after her marriage because her husband remained insensitive towards her needs. Kamala Das said that her life was monotonous as her husband was busy in his office work, after work they used to take dinner and the day ended with sex without any presence of feeling of love. She felt like an object. This gave birth to the Quest for liberty in his mind. She felt like escaping the male dominated society. In her poem "A request," her pang gets reflected intensely when she writes,

*“O Krishna, I am melting, melting.
Nothing remains but you”.*

Krishna is a symbol of pure love. Melting refers to the end of human body which meets in the absence of real love. We witness her search for ideal love. This Quest inspires her to feel the beauty of Krishna in every man. Her poems reveal the painful Quest for the ideal love. A remarkable thing about Kamala Das' poetry is that she maintains a clear distinction between love and lust. She does not favour free love. In her poem "An Introduction", she writes,

“I asked for love when 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.”

Above lines express her longing for love that is never fulfilled. Not only has this, even the poem depicting her personal life experience liked 'My Grandmother's House', she depicts her nostalgia about her childhood at Malabar She writes influenced by the memories of the childhood.

*“Here was a house now far away where once I received love..... That woman died,
the house withdrew into silence, snakes moved among books I was then too young.”*

The above lines express strong despair. Das feels that love is not present for her love is a memory. She justified her Quest for love here also. Very often Kamala Das expresses clear distinction between love and lust in her writing. The poetess is very happy and proud while enjoying the memories of her grandmother's house as she received love and affection in its purest form as a child. She enjoys the same emotions and feelings through her recollection. She is proud of the love she received at her grandmother's house. Kamala Das openly opined that a man who doesn't love a woman but only feels lust for her body has no right to touch her and defile her. She said that he had no right to enter her. In her poem 'The Sea shore', she writes,

*“I see you go away from me and feel the
Loss of love I have never once received.”
(The Sea Shore)*

For her, relationship without love is like a prison. She feels the agony of a prisoner in the absence of pure love. So, in her poem, 'The Prisoner' she writes,

*“As the prisoner studies his prison's geography,
I study the trappings of your body dear love, for
I must someday find an escape from its shore.”
(The prisoner)*

We find a reference to the Krishna myth even in her poem 'Maggots'. She expresses strong sense of consciousness for the feminine psychology by depicting Radha's experiences. Radha feels like being a corpse after her marriage. According to Satya Dev Jaggi Kamala Das is intensely conscious of herself as a woman and the same are reflected in her poetry.” The climax of pain and agony is reached in the poem 'Love'. In this poem Das writes,

*“Until I found you, I wrote verse, drew pictures and went out with friends for walks..... Now, that I
love you curled like an old mongrel, my life lies content in you”. (Love)*

In 'The Freaks', Poetess' Scorn for man gets expressed intensely. It reduces the love to lust and there is no content. The poem becomes intense as a result of contrast between the exalted and common place. It is obvious that the poet was left with no other option except to suffer and endure. Kamala Das reminds us of some of the most reputed metaphysical poets like Donne and Marvell concerning her use of death imagery. Of course, the function in her poetry is different. The death image used by Kamala Das is poignant but its function is distinct. Kamala Das has been accused of vulgarity and advocacy for lust but she rejects sexual pleasure if emotional fulfillment isn't there in the love. "In Love" is one such lyric dealing with the same theme. The presence of scorching sun, heat refers to the scorching soul of the poetess. It is really ironical that many critics have referred to Kamala Das' poems as poems expressing lust. Her images have been neglected always. In her poem 'Summer in Calcutta', she introduces the image of April Sun which symbolizes heat and intoxication while the

juice of April Sun shines out with sensuousness. In "The Freaks", Kamala Das expresses her despair and the torments faced by a woman. She expresses a woman's craving for the true love but her husband doesn't provide it to her. She rebels against the cruelty of her husband but gets trapped into male ego. She rejects the role of a conventional wife. Das is brave enough to show her feminine sensibility and rebel against the system. She takes pride of her femininity. She reflects her consciousness towards the need for love, security and liberty. She is truly a liberated woman. She identifies her right to even sexual fulfillment and psychological security.

Kamala Das is not only a feminist revolting against the male hegemony but she rebels even against the demands of joint family. She experiences frustration in relationship. She misses mutual understanding with love and respect. She feels emotional sterility, barrenness and meaningless of life. In "The Freaks" her quest for true relation and emotional love is visible. She feels hopeless. She gets disappointed between ideals and the reality, hope and the real experience which provides catastrophe to her poems. In the last three lines, she writes,

*"I am a freak, it's only to save
My face, I flaunt at Times,
A grand flamboyant lust."*³

In her poems, woman plays various roles like that of an unfulfilled wife, mistress to lustful men, suffering woman etc. She focuses on the pathos of women. The tone of her poetry is confessional. Kamala Das has succeeded in expressing herself clearly, frankly and bravely. She is the spokeswoman of all the female victims in the society. In "My Grandmother's House" she depicts nostalgia of their ancestral home at Malabar. She remembers the house where love and affection resided in abundant. Her tone is that of despair when she writes,

*"How often I think of going there, to peer through the blind eyes of windows or just listen to the frozen
air, or in wild despair pick an armful of Darkness to bring it here to lie behind my bedroom like a
brooding Dog."*

The window is an image that suggests relationship between the past happy life and present real life full of agony and pain. It presents suffering. She feels darkness within her heart. Das uses personal pronoun 'I' that makes clear her own poetic voice. 'House' symbolizes value system and culture. The description of the house is nostalgic. She feels miserable while memorizing the house. Kamala Das' works show her concern for the social consciousness of gender. She raises her voice against the neglect of a woman. She revolts against the sexual colonialism and exploitation of woman. In this way, Kamala Das is a poetess who acquired a great success in depicting the agonies of human relations in the world today. Her poetic excellence can be obviously witnessed in the use of diction, idiomatic usages and images in her poems. Kamala Das not only revolted and raised her voice against the exploitation of woman and male hegemony but provided hope and faith to the young women of the modern times who can reject the victimization.

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