



Patriarchy and Literary Creation: With Special Reference to Sylvia Plath & Kamala Das

Submitted By: Ms. Sumitra Joshi & Ms Kavita Dubey

- Ms. Sumitra Joshi
Associate Professor, Dept. of Humanities
Acropolis Institute of Technology and Research, Indore
Contact No. +918817444594, email; sumitrajoshi@acropolis.in

- Ms. Kavita Dubey
Assistant Professor, Dept. of Humanities
Acropolis Institute of Technology and Research, Indore
Contact No. +9630466619, email; kavidubey@acropolis.in

Abstract

Patriarchy, a political, social system emphasizes on male superiority that deems everyone weak, especially females. It endows men with right to rule over the weak through their dominance in forms of psychological terrorism and violence. Hailed from vastly different culture Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath experienced more or less the same setbacks and difficulties as women. This suffering of both the women provides common elements to their poetry that displays their resistance to culture and patriarchal society. Condemning the patriarchal society that prevents women from realizing their creative identity and real potential, they tried to bring a radical change in the traditional understanding of marriage and the very meaning of life. The efforts of these women and their agitation against patriarchy inspired women writers to pen down their personal experiences in family relations and positions in society.

Key-words: Patriarchy, Creativity identity, radical change



“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”(Beauvoir, 301) The rich locution by Simone De Beauvoir in “The Second Sex” speaks volume about women’s status in Patriarchal system and asserts that women are not born fully formed rather they are shaped by their upbringing. A woman is not the one who designs her role rather it is configuration of man-made society.

Cambridge dictionary defines patriarchy “A society in which the oldest male is the leader of the family, or a society controlled by man in which they use their power to their own advantages.”

Oxford dictionary explains patriarchy, “A society, country etc. controlled or governed by men.”

Patriarchy, a political, social system emphasizes on male superiority that deems everyone weak, especially females. It endows men with right to rule over the weak through their dominance in forms of psychological terrorism and violence. Though Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath rose in vastly different culture yet as women they experienced more or less the same setbacks and difficulties. This suffering of both the women provides common elements to their poetry that displays their resistance to culture and patriarchal society. They realized that they are the product of their culture and their true identity is smothered by the tradition and patriarchal society and also marginalized their female experience

Though, Sylvia Plath doesn’t belong to any wave yet her brief but exemplary life has left an indelible mark on the literary world and society. Through her work she delves into the troubled minds of women. Commonly referred to as the wife of Tade Hughes, Sylvia Plath endures a great deal of rejection from the literary world. Her autobiography The Bell Jar and her volumes Colossus, Ariel and priceless journals reveal her frustration of rejection in literary world. Her poetry represents female voice strongly and emphatically:

But in twenty-five years she’ll be silver
IN fifty gold A living doll, everywhere you look
It can sew, it can cook
It can talk, talk, talk (The Applicant, 7)

Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath both had unhappy married life that made them rebellious and forced them to expose their personal experiences through their writing and unburden their tortured soul. Sylvia Plath shows her frustration on being a doll whereas Kamala Das finds herself caged like a bird in social culture: You have planned to tame a swallow to hold her

In the long summer of your love so that I would forget
Not the raw season alone, and the homes left behind but
Also her nature (The Old Play House, 1)

Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath give voice to the injustice done upon women in patriarchal system where man desires for the perfect woman.

Kamala Das with all her different background from Sylvia Plath represents the female voice- the voice of Indian women that is choked and suffocated in the traditional Indian system. Her poetry raises 'woman question' against the injustice being done upon women in family and society. Kamala Das' poetry begins in pain and pang and expresses her agony of loss of her freedom to live her life in her own way.

Her poem 'An Introduction' is a paradigmatic statement on the predicament of the Indian poets writing in English. It is a poetic plea to break the chains of tradition and liberate poetry from the constraints of all sorts. Her poetry exhibits her tortured psyche; her suffering and her woman sensibility. Remembering her miserable childhood and her humiliation in family and in school, she calls herself painfully "a misfit everywhere" (Das, 109). Her reminiscences of her childhood days tortured her so much that she was labeled as a rebelion.

Her life experiences gave her feeling as if she was a commodity and her man a consumer who considers her as a body; a living doll of flash.

Struggling between tradition and passion Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath both want to get freedom from man-made boundaries.

Sylvia Plath an ambitious poet cannot stand this subjugation of women in society. She rises from ash like Phoenix:

"Beware
Beware
Out of ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air" (Lady Lazarus,8)

Kamala Das expresses her disgust to the traditional sex roles and responsibilities assigned to women by the patriarchy. In the poem Introduction she registers her resentment and refusal:

. . . Then I wore a shirt
And a black sarong, cut my hair short and ignored all of
This womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl or be wife,



They cried. Be embroiderer, cook or a quarreler
With servants. (The Best of Kamala Das 12-13)

Kamala Das through her poetry not only expresses her experiences but also raises her feminist poetic voice that yearns for dignified place of honour.

Das' poems such as 'An Introduction', 'The Old Play House', 'The Looking Glass', 'The Freaks' not only reveals her tortured self but also mirrors her fighting spirit to establish her individuality.

Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das both registered their voice against injustice done to women. While Plath inspires women to explore their uniqueness, Kamala Das focuses upon establishing their identity as women. Their poetry rebels against male chauvinism and inspires women to come out of their shell.

Plath's poetry depicts her struggle against male-oppression and this rage against patriarchal system makes her poetry an easy anthem for the feminist movement. Both Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath have established their uniqueness by becoming vital in the development of poetry in their own ways. Their larger than life persona has been mirrored in their work. The cult figure in their creative writing, Plath and Das suffered and wrote, wrote and suffered but left a treasure that inspires women till date to get out of their houses to live equal to men.

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