

Feministic Approach in Kamala Das's Poetry

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Kamala Das must be commanded rather than command. Femininity she realized, was associated with inferiority, passivity and total submission to authority. Men, since antiquity, has viewed woman as his property. Woman is created to be a toy of man, his rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused. The position of woman till now, is worse than that of slaves. Women can't even revolt, can't dream of exterminating the males. The situation of a woman has been pitiable though they accept their anatomy as their destiny and modeled themselves upon the dreams of man. But now things are changed and we can notice in women a real sexual awakening. This is exactly happened with Kamala Das.

Kamala Das is a born rebel. She loves defiance and loves being unconventional. In fact, for her there can be no other destiny than what one really creates for oneself. Kamala Das must defy, she must challenge, she must reject, she must make efforts to go beyond her situation and seeks the position of an autonomous being. She is not one to be influenced by the opinions of others. We are now aware of the new woman who is all out to falsify the old belief:

It is man's world.

Woman's place is in the home.

The new woman is trying to deconstruct the myth of male sovereignty. She is trying to come out of the margins and to occupy the subject positions. Thus, the construction of gender has changed with the changing historical situation and literature is now in a position to depict women as heroes rather than as victims or as the commodities to be sold or bought. Kamala Das was conscious of her identity, her body, her soul, her dreams and her feelings. She is probably the first Hindu woman to talk about sexual desires openly and honestly. We find in her poems, Dickensian dissent, the power and descriptive felicity of Whitman, the fearlessness of Plath but forgot somehow to remember a woman who was like no other. Who transcended her mutinous body, her battle weary soul, her endless search for ocean that could quench her thirst for a life deeper than the one where ennui lives in "sleep-walking trees, with owls on their shoulders, pensive ones with feathers ruffled by the wind." She has been considered as an iconoclast of her generation. She knows:

One's real world is not what is outside him. It is the immeasurable world inside him that is real. Only the one, who has decided to travel inwards, will realize that this route has no end.

What may be in her mind, in her work, there was no division between the personal and the universal. It was all the time same. She wrote:

The language I speak in becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness, all mine, mine alone. It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest.

Kamala Das's *My Story* is full of sensationalism only to those who read in it the story of a single, lust obsessed woman, seeking a life of physical pleasures. But Kamala Das is a woman trying to reject male lust which turns a woman in to an object. Her work narrates the story not only of Kamala Das but any and every self determined woman who, in spite of all the odds, she has to fight against in a man's world. She projects the struggle of a new woman determined to establish her identity, her self worth. She focuses on how a self willed woman confronts her destiny, how the inner and outer pressures lead to insanity.

Kamala Das writes about several social problems and maladies the writers society is obsessed with. She has drawn attention to the power-imbalance in sexual relationships, animal like existence of women, male treachery, infidelity in marriage, society double standards, especially of morality, purdah system, child marriage, position of widows, rape and society's attitude to the raped woman, inhibitions and taboos regarding sex, lack of sex education or faulty sex education, socialization in patriarchy, prostitution, sexual exploitation of poor, illiterate women workers, complete denial of a freedom to women who are expected to show strict compliance of gender-defined roles, the problems, marriage and motherhood as institution pose to the women, society attitude to divorce. Kamala Das has highlighted the problems women face in a sexist culture and has tried to show how women feel choked, stifled in a 'man's world'.

Man-woman relationship depicted by Das in *My Story* do not show men and women as partners in a game. These are rather victim-victimizer kind of relationships in which women occupy the victim positions, Kamala Das does not consider women as an innocent in an act of their victimization. They are guilty too in so far as they show their complicity in the act of their victimization. Women are considered capable of only biological creativity and are expected to remain confined this area. She has made best possible efforts to suppress women's writing. Literary creativity among women is discouraged by the male critics who are rather harsh on women writers. The women who still insist on writing are treated as abnormal because they do not conform to their 'angel in the house image'. She writes:

Dress in saris, be girl. Be wife, they said.
Be embroiderer,
Be cook, be a quarreler with servants. Fit in, Belong, cried the categorizers.

These lines express Kamala Das's defiance against pre-established canons of feminine identity. Formerly women, generally princesses, political leaders and social workers had been writing their life narrative but they were not provocative. Such life narratives delineated of their social-relations, religion, family or at most politics. Several women write revolted against the pre-established patterns. With Kamala Das, we come across a new kind of woman's writing which is bold, daring, tantalizing and self assertive. Here is a woman conscious of her but determined to vindicate it against male supremacy. For Kamala Das it was important to be a woman and a lover with body and a soul.

Kamala Das reveals that a woman is naturally creative and if given a room of her own, she can defend her selfhood and narrate the story of her life boldly. There is nothing unnatural in woman's literary creativity, though it can not be a rival to her biological creativity. She herself describes:

...the literary professions were first to be opened to women, the status of the women Writers has long served as an index of a society's views on female abilities and rights. Although writing has never been regarded as an unfeminine accomplishment. Women writers have always encountered more critical resistance than men.

Kamala Das too, had to confront the critics of her time and negative gazes of so called civilized society. She kept writing candidly about her physical hungers and innermost feelings. Kamala Das has tried to depict her inner self in the most candid manner. While searching true self, she is aware of her being as a woman and expresses the limitations of her gender in the poetry. she observes:

Woman is this happiness, this lying buried beneath a man?
Its time again to come alive. The world extends a lot beyond his six foot frame.

The gulf that divides her from the rest of the world is freedom. So, it is difficult to imagine Kamala Das as a puppet on the strings, dancing to the commands and instructions of the elders. She cares for no social constraints or conventions and she must have her own way, she must seek and establish her identity, must acquire her being. Like any other existential being, Kamala Das is a being who thinks, who examines, who is hyper sensitive- a being is always busy realizing her own existential self, her proper place in this universe. Kamala Das poetry is an act of violence, an intellectual violence- an effort to liberate women. The longing to the freedom was so deep in her psyche that she rejected all beaten tracks and chose to tread the untrodden paths, in spite of all the risks is involved. This is a situation of a woman in the culture in general whose part Kamala is. The entire culture seems to be supporting masculine authority and the position of a woman is comparable to that of the colonized people. Kamala was also critical of the fact that the society, she grew up in was obsessed with its desire to keep women chaste and pure, and completely deprived them of sex education. While the society expects women to be chaste, it imposes no such limits on the freedom of men. Men have freedom to flirt around. Here is a woman who is at war with society and its so called standards. We find internal as well as external conflict in her life story. Kamala's account clearly expresses that her husband was all for lust. Kamala is much bothered about public opinion, she sticks to her marriage while suffering within. O.J. Thomas writes:

Kamala Das's story is the story of a woman who was denied love, when she valued nothing but love in all her life. Love and affection remained a craze, a longing and a dream for her. She got at most everything in life name and fame, a degree of Wealth but she could never get love, as she saw it. It is in this background that she Writes about love in all her writing.

Kamala's early poetry praised its fierce originality, bold images, exploration of female sexuality, and intensely personal voice, lamented that it lacked attention to structure and craftsmanship. She converted to Islam in 1999, taking a new name Kamala Surayya. By conversion, she reserved a life after life where she could attain spiritual fulfillment in man-woman relationship which she missed. Kamala has surely Victorian models and accepted sex and sensuality as an integral part of poetry. Many of her poems are suffused with warmth and passion, with heat of an unrequited love and unfulfilled desire of woman. Her life has been long drawn battle against a religious and cultural orthodox that frowns upon the somewhat woman's liberation and dreaming. In the words of Prasantha kumar:

Kamala Das conceives of the male as beast wallowing in lust with monstrous ego under which the women loses her identity. The strong desire for freedom, including the freedom to rebel, forms the central strain in many of her poems. She enumerates the male felonies in her poems and builds up a structure of Protest and rebellion in her poetry...

An Introduction is her masterpiece in the sense ,here she celebrates the needs of woman. It voices the longing and complaint of a woman who represents all women and she complains against man who represents every man:

...I met a man , loved him. Call
Him not by any name he is everyman
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love (lines 43-46)

Even as a child , Kamala Das experienced the bitterness of sexism. She was compelled to become a premature wife and mother. She complains in her poem *Of Calcutta*:

I was sent away , to protect a family's
Honour , to save a few cowards , to defend some
Abstraction , sent to another city to be
A relative's wife. (Collected poems I 56-60)

Thus , It is proved that Kamala Das tried her best to uplift the position of a woman and resist the dominance of man. She hates traditional sex roes assigned to women by the patriarchy. Her aim as a poet is to underline the predicament of contemporary women beset by the crisis of divided selves. Her poems are remarkable because they reveal her feelings , acute sense of isolation , fragmentation and loss of dignity.

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