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KAMALA DAS' POETRY AS NOTHING BUT THE INDELIBLE IMPRINT OF HER PERSONALITY: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

This paper attempts to highlight the literary qualities of Kamala Das by picturing her as a singer of feminine sensibility who rebels against the conventions and restraints of a male-dominated society exploiting womanhood in all possible ways. Kamala Das often mentions the incompatibility of her parents as marriage partners. Her mother who hailed from the Nalappat family boasted of its royal heritage and her father on the other hand belongs to the peacock stock. Thus, there is a rare combination of 'rajas' and 'Nairs' in her parents. This promoted a perverted family atmosphere which terribly impinged on her tender mind. Present paper neatly examines how she, as a sensitive artist and woman, has a minute and thorough knowledge of feminine sensibility, its exploitation, its hurts, its anguishes and its suppression with a strong poetic bent of mind being confessional and autobiographical.

Keywords

Bilingual, Feminine Sensibility Confessional and Autobiographical,
Unquenchable Urge, Bondage.

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Born in Southern Malabar on March 1934, Kamala Das was a bilingual poetess who had poetry in her blood. Being educated first at home, she was denied the privilege of regular school and college education. Getting married to K. Madheva Das even at the prime age of fifteen, she could no longer find emotional fulfillment in marriage and so she craved for love which was fully absent in her married life. Being a bilingual poet, she wrote the Malayalam and English with equal ease, master and command. Her poetic output consists of such three volumes as 1. *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) 2. *The Descendents* (1967) and 3. *The Old Play House and other Poems* (1974). In addition to these three volumes she has to her credit publication of her autobiography *My story* and a collection of Short stories under the pen name Madhevi Kutty. *Summer in Calcutta* won her name and fame from all literary circles.

As a singer of feminine sensibility, Kamala Das rebels against the conventions and restraints of a male dominated society exploiting womanhood. Being a women and sensitive wife, she has a minute and thorough knowledge of feminine sensibility, its exploitation, its hurts, its anguishes and its suppression. Her poetry being confessional and autobiographical, her frustrations, want of love and sufferings are frankly and sincerely expressed in many of her poems and her autobiography *My Story*. The Poems "I have studied all Men" "What Women expect out of marriage and What they get", "Why not more than one Husband", "I have lived beautifully" have left the impression about her as 'feminine but fortnight, unconventional but honest'. In many of the poems in the anthology *The Old Playhouse and other Poems*, Mrs. Das reveals a note of protest against male domination. Her protest is nothing but the protest of the entire womanhood against male domination.

"A Poet's raw material is not stone or clay it is her personality, through this is true with all creative artists, this is most true in the case of Kamala Das, the very texture of whose writings is

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the indelible imprint of her personality. Kamala Das considers poetry as “a full-time job” (My story 124) and a conscious subjective art and comments thus:

“A writer derives inspiration from his life. What else? A writer is like a mirror that has learned to retain the image reflected in it. Indelible reflection. Those who do not write retain nothing of life ultimately life runs through their figures like fine sand” (Nabar 13)

Kamala Das sees her poetry as a demanding art as the drive within her is powerful. There is always an unquenchable inward urge for poetic output. The necessary base of her wiring is her feel of the pressures and torments that circumstances inflicted upon her. The circumstances that catered to her subjectivity have varied elements in them. Most of them are her childhood experiences acting as a formative influence on her poetic career. Kamala Das often mentions the incompatibility of her parents as marriage partners. Her mother who hailed from the Nalappat family boasted of its royal heritage and her father on the other hand belongs to the peacock stock. Thus, there is a rare combination of ‘rajas’ and ‘Nairs’ in her parents. This promoted a perverted family atmosphere which terribly impinged on her tender mind. In her own words, “My mother did not fall I love with my father. They were dissimilar and terribly mismated” (P5). This developed in her a condescension which perpetrated a sense of uneasiness in her poetry.

Kamala Das was nurtured in an atmosphere of poetry. Her mother Balamaniamma is a well known Malayalam poet and her grand uncle Nalappat Narayana Menon was a doyen among Malayalam poets of his day and was recognised as a poet of touching originality comparable to the Stalwarts of modern Malayalam Poetry such as vallathol and G. Sankarakurup. Thus, poetry comes to her effortlessly. Calcutta formed as important phase in her poetic development despite her most powerful emotive links with Bombay. Her intense and emotional romantic ideas of marital life proved to be a more dream. She describes her wedding night as “brutal, insensitive and unfulfilling” (Nabar 17). The personality permeates into art giving shape to the coalescence of the romantic, the tragic and the mythic elements. It is easy to detect romantic elements in her writings and its coalescence with her personality. The bent of mind to seek solace outside marriage can be attributed to one of her romantic traits:

“Another voice haunts my ear, another face my dreams, but in your arms, I must tacky. Lie and find on oasis where memories, Sad winds do not so much Here you say, I love, I love” (Dos. 3)

The emphatic verb ‘must’ and the dramatic triple repetition of the phrase ‘I love’ display the poet’s deep-rooted yearning to be loved. In her autobiography, she speaks of her relationship with a gray-eyed man carlo in whose hands she seeks to take refuge one romantic trait which is reflected in her poetry in her subjectively. She is basically concerned with her ‘being’ and her becoming the embodiment of perfect love. No doubt, she possesses a “larger-than life” personality which encompasses in itself unlimited emotional pressure obsessive in its awareness of its self. Bruce King writes:

“She is a natural poet with an excellent feeling for sound, rhythm, phrasing, image, symbol, world play and drama” (P. 145)

There is a Keatsean sensuousness in many of her poems. It is resplendent with sensuousness imagination of the heat and sweat of love. Her sensuality is often regenerated with

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her passionate imagination is coupled with installation of sensuous metaphors and symbols ennuco, Siven, Nallappat house, the April Sun, Cat are some of the haunting symbols in Kamala Das. Her metaphorical expressions and Indianized usages contribute a lot in unravelling the taboos in her mind. In her poetry one can find the ascetic aspects of life. "They are contrasted through a parallelism of images until they culminate in the strange merging of the two aspects" (Nair 15). 'An Apology for Gantama' is a case in point: "... While your hold many women form, his hurting arms hold my very soul" (P 36). Here Gantama is symbolically compared to the lover juxtaposing the sensual and the ascetic. The ironic cultivation is that Gantama holds only her body whereas the lover still holds her soul. The romantic trait of pining for what is not forms the central impulse of many of Kamala Das' poems, The loss of childhood bliss and the visionary gleam are the sources of some of the most haunting poems of Kamala Das. She believes that the loss of childhood is worse than death.

"The tragedy of life
is not death but growth
The child growing into death" (Composition 20)

Kamala Das bewails quite sentimentality, the loss of a warm and affectionate phase of her life, describing herself almost as a beggar for love. The house where she received emotional tranquility is now desolate and withdrawn into silence with the death of her grandmother. Thus, the innocent past in juxtaposed with the defiled present;

"...I lived in such a house and was proud and loved I who have lost my way and beg at strangers does to received love" (My Grandmother's House)

The strange amalgamation of religious and passionate love is visible in many of her poems. Her devotion to lord Krishna amply proves her religion of love. She used to go to the temple of Krishna and pray to Him asking whether it was time for him to take her back to him. This point to the fact that for some time, she tries to be fully spiritual as she workshops love as the basic human feeling. She even tries to use the Krishna myth to highlight her concept of ideal love. The mystification of Lord Krishna in a way suggests the female quest for transcendence. She views the love between Radha and Krishna as the exemplification of primordial love. The poem "Radha" is expression of her total surrender to Krishna. Kamala Das identifies Lord Krishna with her divine lover:

"God is in love with the soul and the soul with God. In this divine love affair God is necessarily the male. He soul, the female God takes the initiative and the soul must passively wait for the divine embrace" (Zachner 129)

The real life force of her creatively is love and love to her is divine and through which she communicate to feel creative. Each poem of Kamala Das is a circumscribed experience. Poetry to her is not a logical argument; it is a world in itself with definite experience which throb life and love.

To conclude, here is a poet who has fallen upon the thorns of marital life and is bleeding. Her bleeding state of mind makes her loom large as a matchless and uncompromising rebel. Indeed, her poetry is a bugle of rebellion, quest for love and freedom. No doubt, Mrs. Das' position as a modern Indian English poet is something unique in all respects.

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