

POETRY OF KAMALA DAS: MORE THAN MERE FEMINIST PROTEST**Uma**

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Abstract

In the post independence Indian literary scenario, women writing has become a very strong literary phenomenon. Women are expressing themselves through various genres and in different languages-Hindi, English and the regional ones. Mainstay of women writing continues to be women related issues and delineation of inner and outer world of a woman.

Kamla Das is one such voice that has consistently taken up the cause of women in her significant poetry volumes, exclusively dedicated to women issues. At one level the poet has registered a very strong protest against the prevailing sexist colonialism manifesting itself in gender discrimination.

At the same time the poet also lays bare a woman's inner world by exploring how the female psyche is adversely affected by various anti-woman socio-cultural religious influences. However, the poet goes further beyond to present a futuristic egalitarian vision for humanity.

Keyword:-

genres – type; delineation – description; colonialism- acquiring full or partial political control over another country; Egalitarian-a person who advocates or supports the principle of equality for all people

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In the post-independence Indian literary scenario, women writing has become a very strong literary phenomenon. Women writers are expressing themselves through various genres poetry, novels, short stories. But main stay of women writing continuous to be women related issues and delineation of inner and outer world of woman.

Kamala Das, the spokes man of women, is one such voice that has consistently taken up the cause of women in her poetry.

Her poetical collections in English are: *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), and *The Old Playhouse and other Poems* (1973). She has collaborated with Pritish Nandy in *Tonight, This Savage Rite* (1979), a collection of their love poems, *Collected Poems Volume I* (1984), *The Annamalai Poems* (1985), and lastly *Yaa Allah* have brought her a world wide recognition and secured her a significant place in the national and International literary area.

her themes go beyond the traditionally accepted thought and embrace the vast hidden areas of experience. Her poetry is not merely like that of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu before her but a passionate expression of universal experience of love, despair, anguish and failure apprehended through a feminine Indian sensibility. Her feminine sensibility is revealed in her poems, woman's relationship with man in the male dominated society.

Sree Kumar Verma in his 'Tribute' to her in the *Deccan Herald*, June 2009, titled "Kamala Das: The Ignited Soul", writes: "When the soul ignites, words are often a balm. And from those words rise others with other words. Das inspired a young nation of poets. Her fiction too threw up several stark, aching movements" (Deccan Herald June 2009).

In her book entitled "Kamala Das – Feminist Study" Smita Padmanabhan says in her tribute to Das :

The demise of Kamala Das on 31st May 2009 took the literary world to shock. The legend has departed, but the legacy will live on. Kamala Das, popularly known as Madhavikutty, in her native land in Kerala, has left behind an enormous volume of literature that needs to be read, analyzed and mediated by every Indian. Not only have Indian woman lost one of their strongest spokesperson but also one who had spread the fragrance of Indian literature at an international level through her confessional and poignant writings (Padamnabhan 9).

In *Summer in Calcutta* the poet protests against her subordinate position of being a woman, she rejects being treated as a toy of lust. In *The Descendants* the themes are channeled into the broodings over futility, ageing and death. In *The Old Playhouse and other Poems* we find the poetic self pondering, dissecting, evaluating her position as a woman, who wants love, security, emotional fulfillment but distastes sex thus, bringing the conflicting and confusing statements on love and life. In “A Loosing Battle”, Das’s feminine sensibility reacts once again:

Men are worthless, to trap them
Use the cheapest bait of all, but never,
Love, which in a woman must mean tears
And a silence in the blood.

Das is a poet of love and sex. One perception that strikes even a casual reader is that it deals primarily with the theme of getting and receiving love. She is a celebrant of human body and in poems the metaphors of love and lust scattered in every nook and corner. She wants to be an equal partner in love where ‘giving’ is as important as ‘receiving’ To her dismay, the traditional society wants from a woman to conform, to adjust to fit in. “Be embroiderer, be cook / Be a quarreller with servants. fit in, oh, / Belong, cried the categorisers”

A.N. Dwivedi comments: “She is aware of the world around her and gives a living expression of modern Indian woman’s thoughts and feelings” (122). Though her poems are personal in tone yet they relate to the universal issues, which Das herself has undergone and believes women around the world also face in their every day lives.

The poet gives vent to her humiliations and frustrations in the poem “The Looking Glass”. The woman protagonist in the poem is every woman who seeks love, and the man who wants a woman to satisfy his lust. It is very difficult for a woman to carry on her life after he is gone away forever. She longs for independence and wants to get herself from the clutches of unhappy relationship finds expression in “The Sunshine Cat”, “I Shall Some Day” and “The Bats”. In “The Bats” she says: “My soul today is on its blinded, most / Frightened flight, like the bat that finds it self / In an alien zone of light.

Her poetry is the mirror of her emotional and psychological state. The central theme of her autobiography is sexual humiliation. In “The Sunshine Cat” same theme is dealt with. It recounts the tale of a woman who is sexually abused by the man who so ever met including her husband. She got lust in place of love. None appreciated her delicate feelings:

They did this to her, the men who knew her, the man

She loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor
Used her, but was a ruthless watcher, and the band
Of cynics she turned to, clinging to their chests where
New hair sprouted like great – winged moths, burrowing her
Face into their smells and their young lusts to forget,
To forget oh, to forget

(Summer in Calcutta 49)

She wanted to forget those miserable movements. One can easily guess her suffering and humiliation when she expresses :

...I shall build walls with tears
She said, walls to shut me in...

(Summer in Calcutta 49)

She now realized that ‘tears’ were her only companions and that she would have to pass the rest of her life in a sad and miserable way. She is completely lone and frustrated. The only companion is the sunshine. She is no better than ‘the sunshine cat’, all pale and diseased. In the male dominated society male partners do not bother about the individuality and freedom of the female partners. On her confessional mode A.N. Dwivedi concludes:

Kamala Das is a typical ‘confessional’ poet who pours her very heart into her poetry. She is largely subjective and autobiographical, anguished and tortured, letting us I peep into her sufferings and tortured psyche. Thanks to her that a reliable poetic voice has been heard in contemporary Indo-English Verse at long last (Dwivedi 50).

Das is a contemporary Indian poet quite conscious of her artistic design and purpose as well as of her responsibility towards her vision. Here, is undoubtedly a feminist voice articulating the hopes and oppressions, the concerns and tensions, of womankind. Explicitly, she writes about love, sex and marriage – all well within her experience and awareness. Her poetic voice imbued with a feminine-cum-feminist sensibility is typically her own and it cannot be confused with anyone else.

Kamala Das goes further beyond to present a futuristic equalitarian vision for humanity. Her feminism seems to enter a phase of spiritual feminism where not ‘Body’ but ‘Soul’ is evoked to create new enlightened and independent new women. Her poetry is a strong protest against sexist colonialism.

She appears as a rebel against the traditional society and attempts to project herself as an individual, distant, separate entity and concentrates with her private voice on the 'self' in her poetry. It would be beneficial to read her autobiography- *My Story* along with the poems of Das because the autobiography provides various aspects leading to her life. The autobiography concerns itself with the constraints of Das's being a woman, in the traditional bound Indian society.

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