

A Search of self: Reflected in the work of Kamala Das

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Abstract

The poetry of Kamala Das has the unique place in Indian poetry in English particularly written by women poets. This paper “A Search of self: Reflected in the work of Kamala Das” is concern with the identity of women, her search for self respect, and equal rights for women. Kamala Das expressed agony, frustration, and tragic trauma of women against patriarchal society. Her work is confessional; in her work she expressed her own life experiences as women. Das focuses on “womanhood” is socially structured by this masculine society. She is in search of love or true love; she experienced only frustration, agony, flamboyant lust, masculine power in relation with the male. In her work she exposes “womanhood” that is the result of her own experiences. Kamala Das’s work is a strong protest of feminism against patriarchal society. In the present paper it is try to analyse a tragic trauma of women that makes the “Women” as a minority; this paper also focuses on Kamala Das’ protest against patriarchy.

KEYWORDS: Agony, Frustration, Tragic Trauma, Patriarchy, Womanhood

Simone de Beauvoir rightly said in her book *The Second Sex* (1949) that “One is not born a woman, but becomes one”. Womanhood is created by social, political and economical way. Society is governed by patriarchy or by masculine power. Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* in 1969 which condemns Freud as a prime source of the patriarchal attitude against which feminist must fight. Millett defend, especially the distinction, so crucial to feminism, between sex and gender, the former being a matter of biology, the latter a construct, something learned or acquired, rather than ‘natural’. The concern of identity, self respect and equal rights of women are concerned with the term ‘Conditioning’ and ‘Socialisation’ underpins a crucial set of distinction, that between the terms ‘feminist’, ‘female’, and ‘feminine’. As Troil Moi explains, the first is ‘a political position’, the second ‘a matter of biology’ and the third ‘a set of culturally defined characteristics’. The picture of women in the society and representation of women in the literature is the prime concern of protest of women against ‘socialisation’. Kamala Das is the chain to protest for women against ‘socialisation’. She has developed the feminine poetic sensibility. There is an expression of her personal and public experiences in her poetry. Her poetry is confessional because therein she has revealed her secrets thoughts and feelings. Kamala Das the poet, the woman has a strong personality which is the source of the strength of her poetry. She has twisted, played with the age old concept of love. She has defined the complexity of man women relationship and its physical aspects. Her love experiences does not revolve round the traditional ideal of womanhood, instead it revolves round the extra marital sexual relationship which is unfulfilled theme of certitude and precariousness which is reflected both in prose and verse.

Kamala Das enforces and expressed strongly in her poem *An Introduction* women is culturally constructed by the society; by enforcing womanhood on her; she is socially deprived and socially figured. To express her anger she writes:

*“Dress in saress, be girl
Be wife, they said
Be embroiderer, be cook, be quarreller
With servents. Fit in. oh
Belong categorizers.”*

(An Introduction)

Society categorises women and men into two different spheres; where womanhood is enforced upon women. The society is governed by the masculine power; Kamala Das experienced that patriarchy from the age of sixteen; when she married and had three children; she realised that men are bound to be flamboyant lusty, selfish and use their power upon women to show them women are helpless, tender, softer and younger; her understanding of ‘patriarchy’ is expressed in her work; she writes:

*“Stand nude before the glass with him
So that he sees himself the stronger one
And believes it so, and you so much more
Softer, younger, lovelier”*

(The Looking Glass)

The above quotation expresses Das’s attitude of ‘Penis envy’. As women she is in search of her own identity. But her womanhood is crushed under the man made society; where women are to submit, women are to suffer and women are suppressed under the masculine hardness. The submission of women to men she expressed in her writing:

*“All the fond details that make
Him male your only man
Gift him all, Gift him what makes
You woman”*

(The Looking Glass)

As women Kamala Das is stigmatised and banished by the society. Das, felt locked and blocked by social attitude of men. She pointed out loneliness of women, unexpressed emotions and feelings, helplessness and her struggle for freedom. She writes:

*“He returned to take her out, she was cold and
Half dead woman, now of no use at all to men”*

(The Sunshine Cat)

Women are socially repressed and politically suppressed; she is economically banished by manmade society. In this condition Kamala Das always, all time remember her childhood at Malabar. She remembers true and pure love of her grandmother. In grandmother's house she is free, frank and lovable to all. With the age everything lost and she chained in worldly matters of womanhood. She expressed her nostalgic feelings and her pining for true love in her poem *My Grandmother's House*:

*"I who have lost
My way and beg now at stranger's doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?"*

(My Grandmother's House)

Kamala Das's feminism and her protest against masculine power are expressed in her work; her agony in search of self respect is expressed in her work. Das's frustration and longing for equality with men is reflected in her work. As a woman she tried to disguised herself as a male for equal rights; she writes:

*"I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and
Ignored my womanliness"*

(An Introduction)

Above lines are urge for equality. It shows that women are not only biologically stigmatised but socially bound. The protest of Kamala Das is expressed in above lines. In that same poem she used "I" for men, the power goes with him; that "I" is using power to crush women and to pin them to be passive to men. To express her anger she writes:

"I too call myself I"

(An Introduction)

Since the centuries women are in search of their identity; they are in search of their own language; they are in search of their own place and status in the society. 'Ecriture feminine' is the language women used to express their anger; the language that do not govern by the rules and regulations. to refuse marginality and otherness women used literature as a weapon to destroy image of womanhood created by the men. Kamala Das is a bold, frank writer uses pen as an instrument to struck masculine power. In her writing, she always sticks to feminism; where she empty her heart; to put down the burden she carries as women; to kick the masculine power. Her language, her words are picture of her life.

Kamala Das is controversial figure in literature and society for expressing freely, frankly personal life; she is always in controversy for her focus on sex and men women relationship. Das's poetry has two aspects of love can be seen; the real fulfilling love and purely carnal or commercial love. She boldly confesses the futility and meaninglessness of physical love. Her own traumatic experiences in love and sex

reflect or more aptly are described in her poetry. She is longing for true love throughout her life but she is ruined, buried by this selfish patriarchal society; so she writes:

*“I shut my eyes, but inside eyelids, there was
No more right, no more love, or peace only
The white, white burning, burning.....
Ah, why does love come to me like pain
Again and again and again?”*

(The Testing of the Sirens)

Kamala Das and her tragic trauma of womanhood as minority is reflected in her every line and each work. It is her struggle against patriarchy; it is her search for own room; it is her urging for equality. As a woman she realised bitter experiences in her life and she share her life in the form of her work with the reader; to protest and defend patriarchy against image of women as a minority.

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