

Kamala Das as a Confessional Poet

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Abstract : There is no doubt in denying the fact that Poets like Jayanta Mahapatra, A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Arun Kolatkar, Gieve Patel and Kamala Das are some of the well-known Indian poets writing in English who have won name and fame abroad and in our own country as well. Kamala Das is perhaps the most prominent and distinguished figure in Indian English poetry. She writes with frankness and openness which we find very unusual in Indian context. Her personal experiences and observations depicted in her poetry seem to become universal. Her voice also symbolizes the modern women's voice who wants to free her from the religious orthodoxy (dos and don'ts). Being a confessional poet, Kamala Das takes the reader into the world of her private life and unveils the delicate facts and even the bedroom secrets. A true confessional poet places no barriers between herself and direct expression of that self. Kamala Das does the same, places no barriers and expresses herself without any restriction.

IndexTerms - Autobiographical, confessional, emotional.

The whole poetic endeavour of Kamala Das poetry, whether it is the poetry of protest, love poetry, autobiographical poetry, unfolds itself within a powerful mode of poetry called confessional poetry.

Confessional poetry is the mode of poetry writing where the poet expresses his or her psychological and spiritual outbursts in order to achieve a kind of ethartic relief and therapeutic consolation. This type of poetry came in to vogue with the publication of Robert Lowell's *Life Force* which was further picked up by the writers like Anne Saxton, Sylvia Plath and Berryman. Anne Saxton was advised by her doctor to write poetry in order to unburden her mind and heart of pains and torments that she experienced in her life. Kamala Das was married at the age of fifteen due to which she could neither understand the import of marriage nor the significance of sex at such an initial stage of her life. In other words, because of the unhappy marriage life and also due to the orthodox and conservative Nair heritage, Kamala Das turned to confessional mode of poetry writing where she poured every inch and corner of her personal and private life in to a frank and bold poetic idiom.

This is what Pashupati Jha means when he says that the poetry of Kamala Das is an unconventionally bold and shockingly autobiographical. There is no doubt that Kamala Das suffers from the confessional madness, but there is a design behind her psycho-spiritual being than with her socio-cultural matrix of Dravidian blood. In confessional mode of poetry, the stock themes dealt with are the personal humiliation and suffering which, in the poetry of Kamala das are more a matter of tone as in one of her poems, she expresses ironic consolation when she says:

It will be all right if I put my hair
Stand near by husband to make a proud pair

That is why, the whole poetic endeavour of Kamala Das' seems to be an expression of loneliness and emotional vacuity which are inevitable outcome of the failure in love and feeling of betrayal. In many of her poems, love has been treated as humming fiesta which, in turns, degenerates in to a fore state of paradise, but all her quest for love ends in disaster of lust as the poet herself remarks: I am saint, I am the beloved and betrayedI, too, call myself I'

In this way, the whole poetry of Kamala Das is a powerful endeavour of a superb expression of the tensions and conflicts between the outer world which is hostile to the inner world of the poet's 'I' or self, Kamala Das seems to say that this loneliness is external, and we are born with great hollow that needs to be fulfilled.

In the same way, Kamala Das' poem, *The Freaks*, is a powerful effort describing a sexual experience and the feelings accompanied with it, but her feelings are ambivalent when she is lying with a man. She did experience the gratification of her sexual desire, but she feels disappointed by the lack of love for him in his heart. There is a strong imagery in which the husband is symbolized with her deep cavern mouth and uneven teeth as skin lazy hunger where the poet, too, feel herself to be an empty vessel waiting to be filled in with the water of mutual love and understanding as the poet also puts it as :

He talks, turning a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam, his right

In this way, we find that Kamala Das makes use of the confessional mode of poetry for psychic –striptease. The poem, *The Looking Glass*, is replete with rich imagery and symbolism to express the ugliness, barrenness, and spiritual sterility of a lustful relationship which is living without life as the poet herself asserts:

“Getting a man to love you is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Woman, Stand nude before the glass with him”.

Similarly, *The Sunshine Cat* in a powerful exploration regarding poet's inner psyche and inner feelings in which Kamala Das complains about the pains and torments which, first her husband, and then a number of other men caused her with whom she had had a sexual experience. She accuses her husband of being selfish and coward who neither loved her nor used her properly. He was a ruthless watcher of her sexual acts with other men. The poem contains a confession which no woman would ever reveal to anybody as the poet herself points out:

I do not love, I cannot love, it is not

In my nature to love, but I can be kind to you...

As a result of this, the woman loses her mental equilibrium and sanity, and degenerates in to a half dead woman, none of use at all to man. A similar confession of seeking love outside marriage life is also found in my grandmother's house, where the poet knocks at the stranger's door to receive love at least in small change as the poet says:

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

So, the whole confessional poetry of Kamala Das, in fact, becomes an object co-relative of personal emotions and experiences where the wrenching passions of anger are directed more against the male dominated society than against any individual, e.g. in the poem, *An Introduction*, the categorizers are motivated by male superiority, and she wants stringent codes for women when she asserts herself:

Be wife, they said, be embroiderer, be cook fit in
Oh! Be long said the categorizers"

Similarly, the poem *The Old Playhouse*, is a remarkable poetic expression regarding its confessional quality describing the feelings of suffocation for the poet in her husband's house because of selfishness and egoism. The poem reflects the poet's protest against the domination of them males and the consequent dwarfing of the females when the poet says:

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget"

In this way, after making a hurried and close survey of Kamala Das' poetry, we can safely and rightly aver that the whole poetic endeavour of a successful exploration and expression of the injured psyche and injured sentiments of a woman exploited and maltreated by a gender biased society which have powerfully been conveyed in the form of a powerful mode of poetry called confessional poetry.

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