

Breaking the Silence of the Suppressed, Subdued and Devalued Female in the Poetry of Kamala Das

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Suppression or devaluing a woman is not confined to one religion in India. It is regardless of caste, class, creed and religion. Only the degree of suppression varies. Kamala Das embraced Islam, hoping to live a refined and dignified life in it. But she is disillusioned. The status of woman is the same everywhere.

The kind of sublime love, a love beyond flesh and physical attraction was what she craved for. It could not be fulfilled in either religion. In her poem “Krishna” she depicts her emotions very strongly. She pines for higher, divine love. In his essay religious Motifs in the poetry of Kamala Das, Purnender Chatterjee says that, “Das attempted to humanize and idealize Krishna and Allah. Kamala Das humanized Lord Krishna. In her treatment of Islam, Das is akin to the Sufi Sect.”. She never saw Krishna as a God. Indeed she was searching for the ideal lover in Krishna. She pined and craved for the ennobling and pleasurable experience of love, while what she received was lust in abundance and mundane loveless relationship in “An Introduction”, she says, “he beat me, and called it love”, strongly expresses her shock and disillusionment of conjugation in married life.

She rebelled against this kind of coded and framed status of women in the society. She wanted to live a life of freedom and fulfillment as per her choice. As a young girl too, when she wore western dresses, it was not approved. “Be like a girl, gossip, complain, do knitting and be at home”, are the statements she would hear. She revolted, rebelled and very vehemently expressed her feelings loudly in her poems and in deeds by choosing to marry again and convert to another religion. In one of her interviews she says;

“God has no connection with any religion. There is no respect for women anywhere. Women are just an object of sensual pleasure... you begin to seek spiritual freedom after the end of the menstrual cycle as I was, but there was none. I give no importance to religion now. God has been appreciated by a few people for their own selfish ends.

Her themes go beyond the ordinarily and stereotyped feelings and cravings. She boldly professes free love and doesn't hesitate to practice it. This was considered outrageous during her time and she is far ahead from the time she lived. As Bruce King puts it, “The theatre of Das's poetry includes the revelations, the confessions, the various contradictory bits and pieces. While the poems describe a longing for a man to fulfill her dreams with love, she is also proud of her conquests and ability to make men love her. Driven by a need for an all-encompassing love to fill her days, she is also someone involved in the game of sexual triumph with its trophies”.

Thus Kamala Das tried to break the silence of the subdued, devalued female in the Indian Society through her poems. Born in an Orthodox Nair family in Kerala, where women are “supposed to gossip and complain”, she craved for superior love in marriage. The love she craves for is not mere body relationship. It is far more superior and higher as she expressed in “Krishna”. Her dissatisfaction with her first marriage and the bitterness against the male dominated society made her leave the first husband and marry again and convert to Islam. But she realized that a woman is devalued and suppressed irrespective of religion and faith. She loudly rebelled against it and tried to establish a woman’s place in the society, not merely as a home-maker, mother, sister, daughter but as an individual. All her poems reflect these thoughts and she was at her best in trying to break the silence of the suppressed and devalued female in the Indian Society.

Today women are able to establish their position in the society and are coming out to speak about the injustice meted out to them. Though the law is there against “Domestic Violence and Harassment,” still many uneducated women are unaware of it. Education must be given to each and every girl both in cities and villages so that they are aware of their rights and protection they are entitled to. Women also need support from the society when they are ill-treated. Society also should change their perception of women. For fear of being scandalized, many women keep silent. They must be given moral and legal help, so that they can voice out and ask for justice.

