

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KAMALA DAS AND SYLVIA PLATH'S FEMININE SENSIBILITY

B.Vasumathy, Assistant Professor and Head,
PG Department of English, St. Anne's Arts and Science College, Chennai.

Abstract

Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath are the two distinguished writers who are well-known for their confessional mode of expression, for their honest views of man—woman relationship, for their unconventional approaches to some of the burning issues of the day, such as love and marriage and their effects - good or bad on individuals. They are the two woman writers of talent imbued with a typically feminine sensibility. Though they were born in different climes and cultures, they have certain ideas in common in articulating their thoughts and feelings. This paper attempts to find the peculiar feminine tone and their poetical utterances.

Keywords: Confessional poetry, feminine sensibility, sexual humiliation, woman

Kamala Das is the most prominent confessional Indian English poet. In the confessional poets, voicing out their personal feelings has become the main characteristic of their poetry, and Kamala Das is no exception. Emphasising the validity of poet's preoccupation with her own self she opines in her autobiography *My Story* that 'A poet's raw material is not stone or clay; it is her personality'(Das 157). However, like American poet Sylvia Plath the predicament of her inner self manifests itself in her poetry as she stated 'I think that personal experience shouldn't be a kind of shut box and a mirror-looking experience. I believe it should be generally relevant, to such things as Hiroshima and Dachau, and so on '(Hardy 65).

Kamala Das is the leading champion of feminism in the field of Indian Poetry in English. Her vision is vitally particularizes by the woman's point of view. She exclusively follows the female's perspective to present the miserable plight of the women in her poems. She is extremely conscious of herself as a woman.

My Grandmother's House is a remarkable example of feminine sensibility. The poetess has adopted an exclusive woman's point of view in highlighting the futility of loveless and hopeless love relationships in life. She openly criticizes her husband who cannot think beyond satisfying his lust and denies her the desired emotional and spiritual satisfaction. She is forced to beg for love as in the following lines:

I who have lost

My way and beg now at stranger's doors,

to receive love, at least in small change?(Das lines14-16).

The duties of the lady enumerated in Sylvia Plath's poem are also similar with those of the lady in Kamala Das' verse. Like Kamala Das, Sylvia Plath laments the loss of personality in her husband's home in the poem *The Applicant* in the following lines:

Here is a hand

To fill it and willing

To bring tea-cups and roll away headaches

And do whatever you tell it (Plath lines 11-14)

In both the poems there is a reflection of the role of wife and consequent reduction of personality.

A Hot Noon in Malabar is a powerful articulation of feminine sensibility which shows Kamala Das' total disillusionment with her marital life in her husband's house in the city where she is merely treated as an object of lust and denies pure and genuine love. She has imaginatively revisited the scene in which she actually participated in the past. Unlike her present hostile and uninteresting city life, her past life in Malabar was very enjoyable and moving. Her separation from her parental house has totally deteriorated her life. The poetess is nostalgic about the days of her childhood spent in the company of her caring and affectionate grandmother:

To

Be here, far away, is torture. Wild feet

Stirring up the dust, this hot noon, at my

Home in Malabar, and I so far away (Das lines 20-24).

Being fed up with this unending lustful life, she longs to go back to her parental house where she received pure emotional and spiritual love. This shows that she is not ready to forego her feminine identity and feminine self-respect.

Like Kamala Das, Sylvia Plath also recollects with delight the time when she was a little child and ran along the white hot beaches with her father in the volume *The Winter Tales*. In this collection some poems give an account of her childhood tenderness and others are about her children.

Kamala Das' poetry is not only personal but also impersonal or universal in its nature and scope. This has sufficiently enlarged the poetic range of her poetry. Kamala Das frequently uses the first pronoun "I" both for herself as well as other woman in her poem. It is this generic use of "I" that imparts a touch of universality to her poems. Das' plight is in no way different from the plight of women who become the victims of males' atrocities in the world. *An Introduction* shows that Kamala Das is the authentic voice of the victimized women in the male dominated world. She expresses their joys and sorrows through her. This is rightly called self-extension. She clarifies her role as a feminist in the following lines:

I have no joys which are not yours, no

Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I (Das lines 60-61)

She protests at the passive role that a woman is forced to play in the traditional anti-female society.

In the small poem *Winter Trees* Plath compares the trees beyond her window to women and find that the trees have a comforting stability which the women lack. The poem, sketches the agonies, and complications Plath experienced in her real life like Kamala Das:

Memories growing, ring on ring
 A series of weddings.
 Knowing neither abortions nor bitchery
 Truer than Women,
 They seed so effortlessly (Plath lines 4-8)

The poem *The Freaks* further presents Kamala Das' predicament as a married woman, who has to feign love to safeguard her image as an active participant in the sexual act:

It's only
 To save my face, I flaunt, at
 Times, a grand, flamboyant lust (Das lines 18-20)

The female persona realizes the futility of prolonging their relationship. She is totally disenchanted with this lustful relationship and is always an unwilling participant in it. She is filled with stillness and boredom because of this lifeless sensual relationship. It makes her heart an 'empty cistern filled with coiling snakes and silence'.

Sex repels both and the colossus figure of a male as a primitive terror with distinguishing hypocrisy and duplicity is envisioned. In the long poem *Three Women* Plath suggests that the fertility of the women is opposed to the flatness of the man.

When I first saw it, the small red seep, I did not believe it.

I watched the men walk about me in the office. They were so flat! (Plath lines 15-16)

In Kamala Das's poem *Lines Addressed to a Devadasi*, an image of lake and mountains appears which shows sign of exhaustion:

"Ultimately there comes a time
 When all faces look alike
 All voices sound similar
 And trees and lakes and mountains
 Appears to bear a common signature"(Das lines 1-5)

Parallel to this idea, Plath also creates an image of lake in the poem *Mirror*.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me

Searching my reaches for what she really is (Plath lines 10-11)

However in Sylvia Plath's *All the Dead Deers*, the longing for the grandmother and love for the past overwhelm us:

From the mercury backed glass

Mother, grandmother, great grandmother

Reach me, hug hands to have me in (Plath lines 19-21)

Similarly, Kamala Das' love for the house and the grandmother recurs again in the poem *Composition*. A wishful longing for the past characterises the poem:

When I was home on vacation

Some thirteen years ago

My grandmother asked me to spend

One night

In the old family-home (Das lines 122-126)

Conclusion

Both Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath represented their personality through their poems and in addition to it they also projected the psychological motives behind it. Their writings described that there is a hope and chance to be free from the male dominated world. Their search for independence is a way in which they can free themselves from the fetters of patriarchal structure and liberation is possible only through literary struggle.

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