

Feminine Sensibility of Kamala Das's Poetry: *The Freaks & My Grand Mother's House*

**Grishma Khobragade,
Assit.Prof.
Dept of English,
Birla College, Kalyan**

Indian women have been exploited and victimized by male dominated social system in India. But with the spread of education and the influence of a feminist movement which have supported for women's liberation from the slavery. The awareness of the need for liberation from the slavery of male dominate system has been realized by many an educated women in the India of the post-independent era. The typical aspect of modern feminist literature is the pervading sense of alienation, separation from the mainstream of history and civilization. This sense of isolation is not a product of feminist imagination but rather the result of a past, cultural and literary neglect of women and their activities. The women protagonists of the modern feminist are the mouthpieces of Indian common woman who ruthlessly treated by male hegemony and prejudiced culture.

Kamala Das has emerged as one of the most significant writers in Indo-Anglican literature in the post independent India. She is a winner of the PEN International Award for poetry and Kerala Sahitya Award for her literary contribution. She writes with understanding and insight on the different aspects of social life in India. She plays a very significant role in making the feminist concern and points of views depicted openly in her poetry. In this context Sunanda P.Chavan comments:

Kamala Das embodies the most significant stage of development of Indian Feminine poetic sensibility not yet reached by her contemporaries. ¹

In a male dominated society, she has tried to emphasize her feminine identity and her personal identity. Her poetry is poetry of revolt, and the revolt is the outcome e of all her dissatisfaction and psychological traumas. The major theme of most of the poetry of Kamala Das is quest for love and her failure to find fulfillment in love in life. Her poetry depicts intensely, an expression

of feminine sensibility with frankness. She articulates of her love longings, frustrations and disillusionments.

Kamala Das`s poetic sensibility can be reveal in her all type poems it may be positive or negative poems and in personal poems about her grandmother and childhood experience .In this context K.R. Srinivas Iyenger observes:

“Kamala Das is a new phenomenon in Indo- Anglican poetry, a far poetic cry indeed from Toru Dutt or even Sarojini Naidu. Kamala Das`s is fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive man-made world. While giving the impression of writing in hast, she reveals a mastery; of phrase and a control over rhythm –the words often pointed and envenomed too, and the rhythm so nervously, almost feverishly alive.²

She is basically a poet of the modern Indian woman`s ambivalence giving expression openly than any other Indian Woman poet. She is not any woman or the manifestation of Woman. She is an Indian poet, writing in English. Kamala Das, bilingual poet, writing both in Malayalam and English is her profession.

Kamala Das is commonly known as Madhavikutty in Kerala and she continues to write short stories in Malayalam in the name. “Amy” is the pet name through which her near ones know her. She desires her critics, friends and visiting cousins to let her alone and allow her to “speak three languages, write in two, dream in one”.

Important aspect of Indian English poetry is the feminist perspective portrayed in it. There is a whole body of poetry written by women who raise their identity in their poetry. This aspect of Indian poetry in English can be best expressed as the boldest affirmation of the modern Indian woman. These women were influenced by the western culture.

Tatu Dutt and Sarojini Naidu were the first women poets in English exposed to the western culture directly and intensely. It goes to their credit that in spite of this; they remained

traditional in their responses to their own situation and the Indian situation. The Indian woman occupied her identity as a woman only in the post-independent period.

This paper is an attempt to have a close look at some of her poems where she successfully deals with this theme. The poem *The Freaks* begins with a slow movement, representing her indifference to sex and ends on an impulsive note, in keeping with the compromise. She must not only surrender herself to his love making however she hates it, she must also pretend to like it. Her self-respect insists it; the social customs require it. This is a male dominated world. A married woman cannot articulate her voice to the filth of her experience. She must follow the social rules which man has made in a world. She is his subordinate, his property, an object; she has no right to raise her voice.

Kamala Das's poetry proves that Indian woman has irritated the typical male sense of courtesy and modesty. Kamala Das initiates a new age for woman poets by accepting new idiom, a new standard and new way of expression which reflects a entire denial of the conventional form of poetic expression of the male dominant culture. Kamala Das is honest and at times full of anger when she projects and attacks on male domination. She is a poet of the modern Indian woman, giving expression to it more openly than any other Indian woman poet.

The motivating force of her notion is love that is frustrating experience All her efforts to establish meaningful relations with other show to be fruitless. In *Freaks*, poet depicts the disappointment, senselessness and the torment of a woman who longs for true love but it is denied by her husband who is insensible to her psychological desires. She is revolted by cruelty of her companion. She feels trapped by her male ego. Therefore she refused to play the traditional role as a wife. It is natural that her poems represent a rebellion against male dominated social system .It shows that in a male dominated world she has courage to emphasis her feminine sensibility and to revolt against the system. She is proud of her femininity and does not fail to claim it. She is conscious of a primary need for true love, psychological need and a desire for liberty within the family system. In this sense, she is truly liberated woman and a representative of modern woman who identify her right to sexual fulfillment and psychological security.

Kamala Das has a more interesting dimension that she is not only a feminist who revolts against male hegemony but the demands of joint family. Therefore her relationship is nothing but the frustrating experience because though they have shared their life together as life-partners for so long, they have not been able to establish their mutual understanding with love and regard for each other's needs. They feel each other like a stranger. In such a situation, there is no optimistic approach about life and love. Empty hearts show emotional sterility, barrenness and the utter meaninglessness of life. In this poem, the poet searches for true relation and the quest is for an emotional relationship with her lover. She expresses her grief for lack of sexual passions. There is only hunger without feelings of understanding.

This is the central theme of Kamala Das's poetry. From this point, it is easy to see that her poetry begins from a dark end. There is no hope. There are only struggles and failures. It is her awareness of this hunting between the ideal and the reality, her hope and her experience which offers a catastrophic force to her poems.

Her male partner is totally insensitive to her emotional desires. The last three lines prove a genius of which Kamala Das is competent. She says:

I am a freak. It's only
To save my face, I flaunt at
Times, a grand flamboyant lust.

There is a swift which indicates the change in the approach of the poet to stand the odds rather than turn away from them. There is courage with hatred at the whole situation in which she finds herself.

The woman character in her poems plays various roles- the unfulfilled wife, mistress to lusty men, silent long-suffering women etc. Her main concern is the pathos of women. Her poetry becomes confessional and a form of protest against a male-dominated society. No other Indian poet has expressed herself as frankly, as clearly on the subject of a woman's right to object and revolt and on the subject of love in its various forms and moods as Kamala Das has in her poetry. She is a representative, of fervent Feminist voice and she becomes the spokeswoman of all the victimized women in society.

In the society to which Kamala Das belongs it was unfeasible for a woman to revolt against the male domination because the male occupied the position of a superior. It is considered that woman has always belonged to the deprived categories of humans. This kind of gender discrimination troubled her. She realized that woman is not a slave and she has every right to seek freedom. She found pleasure in moving away from the established norms of the society. According to Harish,

“She tries to return to her culturally defined self and then discards it realizing that it is not meant for her, that she cannot live her life in accordance with the cultural prescription”³

This poem is considered her poetic manifesto and it reflects her use of the language and diction. She recognizes the potential of English to take diverse mood of the poet and record the shades of feeling. Her poetry recognizes for special reflection because of its unique place not only among the moderns but even in Indian poetry in English by women as a whole. Kamala Das's poetry focused on themes like the memories of childhood life in the family house, her love-hate relationship with her husband, man woman relationship. Pritish Nandy observes:

“It is strange that Indian poets in English were usually not concerned with what was going on around them”.⁴

In real sense , Kamala Das is genuinely devoted to humanism. Her poetry exhibits that she is conscious about social problems around her. She comments harshly to social injustices and the inequality among the poor. Kamala Das`poetry not only presents existing problems of modern woman` and her view and attitude but also of all other oppressed communities.

Her most remarkable strong point lies in confronting the reality of her experiences which reflects in poems the misery of common women. As Ms Margaret Dickie rightly comments:

If the voices of women are not mute, neither are they the voice of the dominant culture, They are rather new voices at the fringes of society, where language changes and develops, Woman`s poetry has always been a channel for such voices.⁵

The language is the communication of the conscious mind. The self-consciousness has been a agonizingly achieved awareness, doubts, confusion, distress. It has been a humiliating experience that has turned her in fear from recognizing her identity. By rejecting the traditional accessories of a woman she tried to forget her identity above gender definitions.

Kamala Das wants the overall liberty that language can give to articulate herself fully in all her contradictory poems. Her revolt as a woman against the traditional concept of womanhood is matched with her revolt as a poet against the conventional medium of mother tongue for poetry. She has preferred English as the poetic medium although she is at home with Malayalam in prose. It is difficult to separate Kamala the poet from kamala, the woman, who suffered and expressed. King Bruce rightly observes:

“Writing is a means of creating a place in the world, the use of the personal voice and self-revelation are means of self-assertion.”⁶

Kamala Das uses her own terminology, choice of words and some syntactical constructions are part of what has been termed the Indianization of English. This attainment is evocative in the growth and development of literature that the poets free themselves from the linguistic principles of their colonizers and produce a literature based on local language.

In her poem *My Grandmother's house* Das presents a world of women as it appears to a woman- feminist perspective woman who has known that it is to accept humiliation and frustration. Poet memorizes with a sense of loss and the moments of her childhood days in the company of her grandmother. She is total free from the problems of life and these memories make terribly nostalgic.

This poem reflects a vivid description of her childhood days when her grandmother was everything for her. Her grandmother had given her a sense of security and protection which she vanished in her married life. She lives in a metropolitan city to find a new future for herself. This poem gives a glimpse of the house which made an impact on her personality. After the demise of her grandmother, the house lost its kindness and majesty. Her sign of her security now stands as a wasteland for her.

My Grandmother's House reveals Kamala Das's nostalgic desire for her family home, Nalappat House, in Malabar, Kerala. She memorizes the house where she acknowledged love and affection from her grandmother. But one will not ignore tone of despair and suffering in this poem also. She says:

How often I think of going
There, to peer through the blind eyes of windows or
Just listen to the frozen air,
Or in wild despair, pick an armful of
Darkness to bring it here to lie
Behind my bedroom door like a brooding Dog.

Image of window in poem is a relationship between past happy life and present realistic life. The window image represents suffering need of the poet for conscious look into her past happy life in the company of her grandmother. In this poem window and air are images are resembles with the two prefixes blind and frozen respectively. Poet is in dilemma and her heart is itself like a dark window where in air does not below.

The impact of woman characters and the use of personal pronoun I, in Kamala Das's poetry help to recognize the poetic voice. She confesses in her autobiography *My Story* that

I write with a lot of detachment, I do figure in my writings,
unless when I am writing a short story⁷

In this poem when she realized the security of love around surrounding innocent of sexual fears and frustration. It was a time of freedom, love in contrast to her present insecurity:

....you cannot believe, darling
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved...I who have lost

My way and beg now at strangers' doors to

Receive love, at least, in small change?

Poet utilizes the imagery of the house as a symbol of cultural and value system and a symbol of freedom. The grandmother house is a picture of Indian house where shapes her personality. The description of house is a full of concern and melancholy. The memory of house makes her miserable and nervous.

Kamala Das depicted about woman who victims in the society. Her works reflect her concern for the social and cultural consciousness of gender, raising her voice against humiliation and neglect of women. She has also exposed that women have no separate identity free from men. Her poems reflect the feminine sensibility.

“Kamala Das did display tremendous courage in revolting against the sexual colonialism and providing hope and confidence to young women that they can refuse and reject the victim positions, that they can frustrate the sexist culture's effort to exploit, passivism and marginalize women”⁸

Thus, Kamala Das is a pragmatic poet who has left no stone unturned for her poetic achievement and also to separate the agonies of human relationship of the modern world. Her poetic excellencies can reflected in her understanding of dilemma of the life and in the categorical use of new diction, natural, idiomatic power in which she surpasses even the male contemporary poets

END NOTES:

1. Chavan, Sunanda P. The Modern II Kamala Das, *The Fair Voice: A Study of Indian Women Poets in English*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt.Ltd, 1984.p.60.
2. K.R.Srinivas Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1985, p-680.

3. Harish Ranjana, *My Story. An Attempt to Tell Female Boys Truth” Perspectives on Kamala Das’s Prose.*, New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1995.
4. Nandy, Pritish, *Indian Poetry in English Today*, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1981.
- 5..Margaret Dickie The Alien in Contemporary American Women’s Poetry- Contemporary Literature ,Wisconsin University/ xxviii,3,1987.
6. King, Bruce, *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, p-152.
7. Kamala Das, *My Story*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt.Ltd, 1977.p.60.
- 8.Kaur ,Tejinder.Images of Indian Women in Kamala Das’s ‘A Doll for the Child Prostitute’ *Perspectives on Kamala Das’s Prose.*, New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House 1980.