KAMLA DAS AS A CONTROVERSIAL BUT AN HONEST INDO ANGLIAN POETESS

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ABSTRACT

As far as post–independent Indian English poets are concerned Kamla Das is one of the pioneering Indo-Anglian poets who has contributed immensely to the growth and development of modern Indian English poetry. Her life has been long drawn battle against cultural and religious orthodoxy. But without carrying for the restriction created by the society she mirrors her life in all her nakedness. With a frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context, Kamala Das expresses her need for love. The uniqueness in her poetry is the frustration of a woman devoid of sexual satisfaction. There was a considerable age difference between Kamla Das and her husband. This marriage was not a happy one. The age difference caused her frustration just after a few years of marriage. Their relations became hollow. Having the thirst for a sea at the age what she got were hardly a few drops of stinking water. All sweet moments were turned to bitter curses. What was missing in her life is well expressed by her poems.

KEY WORDS: Pioneering, Orthodoxy, Stinking.

INTRODUCTION

Kamla Das (1934-2009) has written under the pseudonyms Madhavikutty and Kamla Suraiyya.) Indian poet, novelist, short story writer, dramatist, essayist, is one of the best-known contemporary Indian women writers. Writings in two languages English and Malayalam, Das has authored many autobiographical works and novels, several well-received collections of poetry in English, numerous volumes of short stories, and essays on a broad spectrum of subjects. Since the publication of her first collection of poetry, summer in Calcutta(1965), Das has been considered an important voice of her generation, exemplified by a break from the past by writing in a distinctly Indian person a rather than adopting the techniques of the English modernists. Das provocative poems are known for their honest explorations of the self and female sexuality, urban life women's roles in traditional Indian society, issues of post colonial identity, and the political and personal struggles of marginalized people.

Das work in English has been widely anthologized in India, Australia, and the West, and she has received many awards and honours, including the P.E.N. Philippines Asian Poetry Prize (1963), Kerala (Sahitya) Academy Award for her writing in Malayalam (1969), Chiman Lal Award for fearless journalism (1971), the ASAN World Prize (1985), and the Sahitya Akademi Award for her poetry in English (1985). In 1984, she was nominated for the Nobel prize in literature.

As Das is a significant Indo-Anglian poetess who is known for honesty and frankness, her poetry is obsessed with herself, about her intensely felt desire for love, for her
emotional involvement and her failure to achieve such a relationship. Poetry was in her blood as both her parents were poets of Kerala. She constantly speaks of her Dhavidian blood and of her Nair heritage. Kamla Das was married at an early age of 15, but she failed to find that fulfillment in her married life for which a woman craves. The result has been frustration and disillusionment, which we see in her poetry. Her poignant story of life and the psychological traumas she suffered is narrated in her autobiography 'My story'.

Kamla Das is one of the members of the poetic trinity of Indo Anglian poets, the other two being Nissim Ezekiel and Ramanujan. Her poetry is characterized by extreme sincerity and integrity. She writes for the raptuepurposes as her own self is the center of her three anthologies of poetry. Her poetry shows that in male dominated world She tried to assert her individuality, to maintain her feminine identity, and from this revolt arose all her troubles. Kamla Das works are unconventional and rather shocking in the Indian context. Happy or unhappy, Kamla Das continue to like with her husband and kept writing both prose and poetry in English and Malayalam. Her poetic output in English is rather thin. It consist of three slender volume; Summer in calcutta 1965, The Descendants 1967 The old play house and other poems.

"Self is the nucleus from which all her poetry originates." But like Jane Austen she recognized the limitations of her range and achieved excellence by working on her "Three inches of ivory". She presents the portrait of her feminine self as a tortured young woman. Most of the poetry is concerned with the poets intense passions. The dominant out cry in her poetry volume summer in Calcutta contains to be herself, her exploration and her various experience. It reveals the dilemmas and poignant situation faced by the poet under the stress of her longing for love, sex and loneliness. She pines for what is not there. She faces the pains of loneliness even in her childhood. Neither her parents nor the society in which she grew helped her to free herself from this alienation. As she complains about her parents.

"They took us for granted and considered us mere puppets, moving our limps according the tugs they gave us ............"

Marriage does not provide her any solace or comfort from loneliness. The immature sexual approach of her husband developed contempt against the bond of married life and male domination. So she tries to find comfort in love outside marriage but she failed in the attempt to find a relationship which could give her love and security. Most of her poems deal with the theme of unfulfilled love and yearning for love 'The dance of the Eunuchs' is a good instance of a poem in this context. The dance of eunuchs is a dance of the sterile and therefore the unfulfilled and unquenchable love for women in the poet is seen. Her quest for fulfillment leads her only to sterility and vacant ecstasy. The dance of eunuchs is a symbol of her inner self, which is humiliated by all husband, lover, society. 'A hot noon in Malabar' is good example where herself moves between memory and desire. In her volume 'The Descendant' tries to seek a smooth way of her life Journey on an ideal path. She addresses the sea in 'The suicide' to know the intuitive knowledge of life and death. Here her poetic self rises above mundane problems. Her poetic self neither want to leave her body nor Soul. The old play house and other poems are addressed to 'you' i.e. to the husband. He wants to encompass her action, movement and activity of which her young self is desirous. The poetic self does not like this just as her young self does not like him or his ways. Her poetry shows that she has to make her identity. She has to create a place for herself in a public world in her home and even in her bedroom. 'The old Play house' is variation on the same theme. All her quest for love end in disaster of lust.

Her greatness as a love poet arises from the fact that her love poetry is rooted in her personal experience. It is an outpouring of her own loneliness, disillusionment and sense
of frustration. When she speaks of love outside marriage she is not actually propagating adultery and infidelity but merely searching for true love and security which she identifies with Radha-Krishna myth or with Mira bai's. Her love poetry is unconventional and shocking to the orthodox. Kamla Das acted as a rebel against the male oriented universe in her poems. Like all rebels she was against the social norms frustration and disillusionment. Her poetry mirrors her life in all her nakedness. Kamla Das lite itself violated the systematic and traditional norms and values and affairs to a form of life which is characterized by the unconventional and extremely modern point of view. So she was unconventional in life and equally unconventional in her diction 'The looking glass,'The stone age' are some instances of her unconventional diction. Countless are the poems in which her uninhibited treatment of the human anatomy and Physical aspects of sexual love are exposed.

Kamla das is also a confessional poet, who struggles to relate the private experiences with the outer world. Confessional poets deal in their poetry with personal emotional experience which are generally considered as taboo. There is rootless self analysis and a tone of utter sincerity. What a confessional poet gives us is the psychological equivalent for his or her mental stage and 'It is such psychological equivalent' that we always get in the poetry of Kamla Das E.V. Ram Krishnan rightly stresses that in her poetry Kamla "has always dealt with private humiliations and sufferings which are the stock themes of confessional poetry." Kamla Das is concerned with herself as victim. Sexual humiliation becomes a central experience in her autobiography 'My Story'. Confessional poetry is fully autobiographical in which poets even courts death and disintegration so that a higher level of preception may be possible. The long for death and disintegration as well as for psychic wholeness and insight. This tension between two opposites is reflected in the constantly shifting moods of confessional poetry. As a confessional poet she narrates her personal experience but slowly from the personal and the particular she rises to the general and the universal.

CONCLUSION

Kamla Das is intensely conscious of herself as Woman. Srinivas Iyenger writes "Kamla Das is fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurt it has received in an intense, largely, man made world". In her typical poems the male desire is quickly apprehended and described but emphasis is largely on sexual love and female organs while feminine sensibility in the real sense implies stress on emotional bond and an attitude which the women poets alone can achieve. Kamla Das feminine sensibility is not to be found in her frank confessions of her sexual life. It is expressly manifested in her attitude to love, in the ecstasy experiences in receiving love and the agony which she feels. As stated earlier Das is a poet famous for her honesty. Her book 'My Story' created some controversy for its frank discussion of her search for love inside and outside marriage. She writes critically of the traditional conservative society in which she lives. It has shocked the mainstream Kerala with its candid accounts of her encounters with men. As an artist, her paintings included nudes. In 1999 she converted to Islam, an action she said she has been contemplating for many years. She said "Two plain reasons lured me to Islam one is the Purdah. Second is the security that Islam provides to women. In fact, both these reasons are complementary. Purdah is the most wonderful dress for women in the world. And I have always loved to wear the Purdah. It gives women a sense of security. Only Islam gives protection to women. I have been lonely all through my life. At nights, I used to sleep by embracing a pillow. But I am no longer a longer. Islam is my company. Islam is the only religion in the world that gives love and protection to women. Therefore, I have converted".

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As a feminist writer. She says "I don't think any genius can survive caught in the machine of formal education." Kamla Das never tries to escape from the harsh realities. Courage and honesty are the strengths of Kamla Das character and poetry. Kamla Das has shown an increasing concern with disease, sickness, decay and death. In "The Sunshine Cat" poetess grow old and becomes "A cold half-woman of no use to man." And in "The Invitation" the poetess is preoccupied with the thought of suicide. In her poetess she revolts against social norm with courage against male dominated world but she never tries to escape from harsh reality. She has no regrets for her honesty but her final analysis shows that she has lived beautifully in this beautiful world.

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