

A HOT NOON IN MALABAR - A POEM OF REMINISCENCE

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ABSTRACT

Kamala Das is considered as one of the best known women poets in the cannon of contemporary Indian writing in English. The sixties of the twentieth century saw the upsurge of poet writing in English and writing as a woman on the women issues closely related to women. To Kamala Das, poetry serves as a handy tool of social criticism and social consciousness and thus makes her poetry truly confessional in nature. Taken from the collection of poems, *Summer in Calcutta* (1915), Kamal Das's poem, *A Hot Noon in Malabar* deals with her happy childhood days spent in her grandmother's house in Malabar. The nostalgic poem, *A Hot Noon in Malabar* shows her longing for the days in Malabar as an escape from the torturing experience of city life she lived after her marriage. She feels nostalgic of those golden days of her ancestral house where she spent a carefree life, not bogged down by worldly or domestic responsibilities. Apparently, the poet who is now living far away from her ancestral home recalls every minute detail of that place. Malabar is not only the place where her loving grandmother lived. It was the place which was associated with love and emotion. The Poem is conspicuous of autobiographical element with a pouring of personal sorrows and feelings etc. Through the vivid description of her childhood days, the poem beautifully records the eternal bond of attachment between the grandmother and the poetess, Kamala Das.

Keywords: Childhood, Grandmother, Noons, Nostalgia, Reminiscence, Love

INTRODUCTION

English poetry written by Indian writers has gained a new momentum by manifesting a new quest of establishing national identity. The sixties of the twentieth century saw the upsurge of poet writing in English and writing as a woman on the women issues closely related to women. To Kamala Das, poetry serves as a handy tool of social criticism and social consciousness and thus makes her poetry truly confessional in nature. English poetry started with Henry Louis Derozio whose writing mostly incorporates the writings of the lives of the English Romantics. To be more specific, there took place a new kind of romanticism – Indian version of romanticism. After Derozio, the poetical world was dominted by Kashiprasad Ghose and Madhusudan Dutta. The study of poetry is incomplete without the study of the women poets. The literature which gained prominence with the upsurge of the women writers after the World war is entirely the 'new literature' which heralded a new dimension with the inclusion of new themes and issues. The literary scenario demanded a renaissance in poetry and urged the need of an authentic rendering of poetry about Indian lives. It is only in 1960, Indian poetry came to establish its existence. The pre independence period showed the presence of only two female poets namely Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu whose poetry reflect mostly the female's identity and establishing of individualism. The emergence of a number of poets, writers and scholars writing in English

establish the identity of their own writings as a distinctive force of their own cultural heritage and literary enterprises. Kamala Das excelled herself as one of the best known women poets in the cannon of contemporary Indian writing in English. Das has asserted her identity in firmament of the poetic world by her honest and candid poetical lines. A poet of many moods and facets, Kamala Das is recognized as one of India's foremost poets. Kamala Das has served the Indian English Literature immensely. A post modernist, Kamala Das is certainly the significant voices of Indian English poetry.

Taken from the collection of poems, *Summer in Calcutta* (1915), Kamala Das's celebrated poem, *A Hot Noon in Malabar* deals with her happy childhood days spent in her grandmother's house in Malabar. The nostalgic poem, *A Hot Noon in Malabar* shows her longing for the days in Malabar as an escape from the torturing experience of city life she lived after her marriage. Considered as a pioneer feminist poet, Kamala Das adored nature in all its form, colour and settings. Nature forms an organic presence in her celebrated poems. Nature in her poems is highly embedded with interacting and influencing with the people's lives. In her poems, nature plays an active participant thereby presenting and influencing the existence in totality. Kamala Das, an ardent seeker of happiness in the lap of nature admires the nature in its myriad colours, shapes and contour.

In the poem, *A Hot Noon in Malabar*, the poet recalls her early years of childhood days at an ancestral house in Malabar which not got lost in silence with the death of her grandmother. It is in this house that the poet received the pure and unconditional love from her grandmother amidst the carefree life that she spent in her childhood.

There is a noon for beggars with whining
 Voices, a noon for men who come from hills
 With parrots in a cage and fortune card

(1-3)

The lines describe the climate as well as the daily routine life and activities in Malabar street. It is a nostalgic and emotional reminiscence of her ancestral home in Malabar. She longs for the hot noon in Malabar. In her extreme desire to seek refuge in her heavenly house in Malabar, the poetess imaginatively created the scene of hot noon in Malabar busy with people and manifold activities. Nostalgia is considered to be one of the main themes of the poems by Kamala Das. The poem takes her back to those golden days of her pre marital years when she lived happily in her ancestral home with her grandmother in Malabar. Memory is used as a powerful and creative force in her poems. The poem, expresses Kamala Das's nostalgic yearning for her happy childhood and make her emotional at the thought of her love connected with her ancestral house and her parents. Tinged with pathos, the poem is a moving story between memory and desire, between nostalgia and estrangement. The nostalgic essence of this work highlights the unrestricted life Das experienced in Malabar as a young child.

To the poet, memories of her childhood remain fresh in her mind and whenever, the poetess is in state of sadness, she takes refuge in her childhood golden days. She recalls those moments after so many years and the pure love she got from her deceased grandmother. Childhood memories becomes something to look back to relieve from the current experience. *A Hot Noon in Malabar* is about the memories of her childhood that come flooding to her mind. She feels

nostalgic of those days when she led a carefree life, not bogged down by worldly or domestic responsibilities. Apparently, the poet who is now living far away from her ancestral home recalls every minute detail of that place. Malabar is not only the place where her loving grandmother lived. It was a place which was associated with love and emotion. The sentimental reminiscence of her family home puts the poet in a state of worry. The nostalgic journey down memory lane ache her as she looks back on her pre-marital years when she lived an unrestricted life and cheerful days.

Childhood memories are a much needed relief. Her soul now yearns to go back and recreate those cheerful days. She remembers those times vividly and feels that they were the best days of her life. The choice of words, the verses used by the poet carefully pour at the same feeling of the experiences she is devoid of now and apparently longs for them. The nostalgic feeling evokes the poetess's memories of the exotic people that the hot noon draws them to the porch arousing much curiousness by their strange action.

She misses the hot noons of Malabar. She remembers the crowded streets of Malabar with the interesting people and sounds, beggars, bangle sellers, fortune tellers who used to throng the streets. The outside world seems to be joyful though the poet enjoys calmness inside her house. The hot noon draws stranger to her porch being exhausted by the hot summer. The beggars unpleasant voice, the men from the hills pour in with parrots in cages and with dirty stained clothes to tell fortunes of others, the Kurava girls coming to Malabar to carry on their livelihood and the bangle sellers selling bangle to varied colors are the regular pictures that make the poetess to memorize the idyllic times of her childhood at Malabar. It helps in creating a panorama of varied experiences she had in her childhood. As these people came from a long distance on foot they developed cracks on their heels and so when they struck their heels on the floor, it sounded grating. The exotic people travelling from a distance become a fantasy for her as they carry their fortune cards and parrots locked in cages and entertain her in contrast with her mundane and boring life of her. The barren mountainous life in a city stands sharp contrast to the busy tight schedule routine she had when she resided in Malabar. The strangers are drawn to the porch by the scorching rays of the sun. Getting disappointed, they peep through the window. To quench their thirst they turn to the back-ledged well to feel some respite from the scorching sun. These exotic people come with a hope that somebody will buy their goods. But the doubt always rest with them whether they could convince their customers or not:

There is a noon for strangers who part
The window drapes and peer in, their hot eyes
Brimming with the sun, not seeing a thing in
Shadowy rooms and turn away and look
So yearningly at the brick ledged well

(13-16)

The strangers look dark and silent and recalcitrant. They are doubtful at everything they look. These strangers hardly spoke and even if they spoke, their voice sound unfamiliar and wild. One may get annoyed and disturbed by the pulsating heat, dust and unpleasant noise. But the poet always yearns to go back and to feel the hot noons in Malabar because she is closely

associated to that place. In a nostalgic mood, she enthusiastically remembers all the happy incidents which she spent in that loving place.

A *Hot Noon in Malabar* is an intensely poem which reminded the poet to her parental home in Malabar, where things were quite different about the people stirred about in the hot noons there or elsewhere. To the poet, the hot noons were essentially different in Malabar. Though Calcutta also gives her a chance to see similar type of people, but the poet finds a difference between the noons in Malabar and those in Calcutta. The noons in Calcutta completely presents a contrasted picture with all its maddening and strange heat of the noons. She rightly remarks: "From very childhood I have lived, I have remembered the noon in Malabar with an ache growing inside me, a home sickness." (Dwivedi 98). Only a single sentence in the poem, mark a transition in the thought of the poetess,

To Be here, far away, is torture.

(21-22)

Nostalgia dominates the entire poem, *A Hot Noon in Malabar* where the poet dreams about her ancestral home during the hot noon. The poem is read exactly like a prose piece. It is not free from syntactical and stylistic lapses and abounds in dots and dashes. The Poem *A Hot Noon in Malabar* is conspicuous of autobiographical element with a pouring of personal sorrows and feelings etc. Though strange in appearance, every people carry with them their typical characteristics of locale. The exotic people also carry parts of their lifestyle and culture. The hot noon belong to the wild men, their wild thought and their wild love. Those days passed away and the poetess is now far away to recall those days in a nostalgic manner. The poem is replete with local colour and scenic splendour. Every detail of the hot noon presents the poet's intense struggle to resolve herself in identification with the strange people. The poet made abundant use of images of windows and doors in the poem. Every microscopic image symbolizes the poetess's connection to her inner self with the outer world. But a sort of double meaning pervades all the lines; though the speaker is in a nostalgic mood but without a sensual feeling. The splendid landscapes of Malabar "offer a mixture of exotic splendour to the scintillating 'hot noon'". (Rajeshwar Mittapalli, Pier Paolo Piciucco 159). The poem is enchanting for its nostalgic appeal which is reflected in the entire poem. It beautifully captures the nostalgic desire of the poetess for her ancestral home at Malabar in Kerala. Through the vivid description of her childhood days, the poem beautifully records the eternal bond of attachment between the grandmother and the poetess, Kamala Das. *A Hot Noon in Malabar* is thus, a poem of reminiscence of all the events in that splendid place in a nostalgic mood that finds meaning through her poetry.

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