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Openness in the Poetry of Kamala Das: A Study with Special
Reference to Some Selected Poems

Abstract

Kamala Das, one of the poetic-trinity of Indo-Anglian poets, is also one of the most distinctive and original Of all Indian poets. She published only three volumes of poetry: *Summer in Calcutta*(1965)*The Descendants* (1967) and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973). Her success as well as failure mainly rests on these Volumes of poetry. Her poems are characterized by extreme sincerity, love-longingnes, frustration, disillusionment and frankness. The main reasons of her popularity as a poetess are confession and open expression. She confesses all her sin and crime, guilt & punishment, and openly discusses all her private matters as well as outer activities. She expresses her inner life so clearly that it seems as if she lost her feminine sensibility. Her free verse freely argues the liberation of Indian woman. Quest for love, sex and emotional fulfillment and failure in sexual life also find clear expression in her poetry. She also gives a detailed description of some female organs. As her art grew matured and she became aged, Kamala Das became so courageous that she did not feel hesitation to stand against social authority and tradition. Thus, she frankly and nakedly expressed the guilt of her parents and the responsibility of male dominant society upon her life. So, Devendra Kohli rightly remarks “Her poetry mirrors her life in all its nakedness” (76)

Keywords: Frankness, nakedness, confession, hesitation.

Although Kamala Das’ conversion to Islam raised controversy in the society and among her literary critics, they did not reject her as a great writer. All her literary critics as well as readers praise her talented nature. The awards she won – The Asian Poetry Award (1963) and Karela Sahitya Academy Award (1984) – make her immortal. After the declaration of the Asian Poetry award (1963), critics had duly outgrown their interest in her

poetry and it was the award that helped her to win the Sahitya Academy Award in 1984. After this fame critics had focused their attention to art and technique of Kamala Das' poetry. For instance, Anisur Rahman deals with The Expressive Form in the Poetry of Kamala Das, E.V. Ramkrishna with confessional mode, & Srinivas Iyenger with feminine sensibility, etc. The present paper will discuss the issue of openness in the poetry of Kamala Das' poetry which also contributes to the popularity of Kamala Das as a poetess.

Kamala Das appears as a poetess of open tongue in various poems in various way. In

An

Apology of Gautamala which belongs to Summer in Calcutta (1965), She deals with the theme of divided love. The poetess here clearly highlights her desire to use more man instead of her husband which we find in the following lines_

Another voice haunts my ear, another face
 My dreams, but, in your arms, I must today
 Lie & find an oasis where memories
 Sand winds don't so much blow, and I must
 Here you say, "I love, I love, I love."

(An Apology of Gautamala)

Here, 'another voice' and 'another face' indicate the person whom Kamala Das loves, whereas 'but in your arms' indicates Kamala Das' husband in whose arms she must rest today. Thus, Kamala Das being in her husband's arm is haunted by her lover's voice and face.

In The Testing of Sirens she did not also feel hesitation to write that belonging to ones she

falls in love with another handsome man.

I am happy; just being with you.but you...
 You love another,
 I know he said, perhaps a handsome man
 A young and handsome man.

(The

stone Age)

The duality of sexual life also find clear expression in The stone Age. Here she is haunted by the tension that is arisen out of the fact that love is offered by another man, not by the husband. She expresses this view in the following lines:

Other man haunt her mind & sink

Like white suns in the swell of my
Dravidian blood.

(The

Stone Age)

The theme of divided love also finds expression in her poem An Introduction. Here she

Writes:

I meet a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any man, he is everyman
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Women who seek love

(An

Introduction)

Earlier in this poem she said, "For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the/Bedroom & closed the Door" now she meets a man and love him in spite of her bedroom youth chosen by her parents

Quest for love and sex or rather the failure to find emotional fulfillment through sex, is the central theme of Kamala Das' poetry, and this theme is so frankly expressed in her poems that she did not keep privacy. In The Invitation which belongs to The Descendants (1967),

Kamala Das frankly expresses her experience of sex. The poem opens with the image of a male

Clenching and unclenching' in her head. The words 'clenching and unclenching' stand for 'headache' which is resulted from her sexual encounter with her lover, on a Sunday evening. A few lines later in this poem, she gives a detailed description of the bed in which they laid. She Says that the bed was so small in size i.e. only six feet by two feet. But it was paradise for her. The poetess keeps thinking of her love about the sex experience they had enjoyed in the past. They would lie together all through summer afternoon and they would enjoy the pleasure of sex.

Kamala Das not only frankly confesses her sexual interest, but she also gives a detailed description of female organs .It is manifested in the following lines of An Introduction:

'The weight of my breast and womb crushed me'

Here she frankly admits her female burden of pregnancy. Again, in 'Jaisuraya' Kamala Das so frankly describes her childbirth pain that lost the meekness of womanhood:

They raised him
To me then, proud Jaisurya, my son
Separated from darkness that was mine
And in me.

(Jaisurya)

Here the word 'darkness' means 'womb' from which the baby has come out. Kamala Das is a firm believer in life and this belief in life encourages her to stand against the social authority. With a frankness and openness unusual in Indian context, she raises the guilt of her parents and breaks the social tradition. In 'An Introduction' Kamala Das write: "Don't write in English, they said, English is not your mother tongue". Here by 'they' she means 'her parents' who forbid her to write in English. Again she writes:

I was a child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I become tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two place sprouted hair
.....
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door

(An

Introduction)

Here she frankly blames her parents for her early marriage to a sixteen years youth, which she finds herself in difficult to unite to such hollow relationship.

Kamala Das did not feel hesitation to break the social codify of religions. She protests against the religious fanaticism in *The Inheritance*. It deals with the hatred and intolerance that go in the name of religion. She said:

What man has inherited is not love but hatred:
This ancient
Virus that we nurtured in the soul.....

(An

Inheritance)

Here, Kamala Das openly criticizes religion and she regards it as ancient virus. Kamala Das' literary merit has been recognized and her poem finds honourable place in the Anthology of Indo-English poetry. She is a poetess of confessional mode. A confessional poet deals with personal experiences and Kamala Das is not exception to this. Kamala Das confesses her guilt and crime. She keeps nothing secret in her heart, and she mainly concerns with sexual humiliation. She is quite alive to feminine sensibility and she gives its expression more nakedly than that any other Indian woman poetess does. With a frankness and openness Kamala Das expresses her need for love. To conclude, Kamala Das is a great and original poet with a distinctive poetic personality of her own. Although some critics say that Kamala Das lacks self-control and not knowing when to stop, she always remains unequalled and matchless Indian poet for openness.

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