

Gender Discrimination in the poetry of kamala Das

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Abstract

India, the country of 'flora and fauna' has visualized dazzling dawn for itself through the progress of female universe. The problem of gender discrimination still prevails in all spheres of life. Though Indian Constitution has granted equality to women in principle but in reality majority of Indian women are facing the problem of inequality and discrimination. Indo-Anglian female literary figures raised a voice against such injustice. Kamala Das is one of the modernized writers to assert feminity. She brought forth a new feminine consciousness and quackened their intellectual and creative capabilities. She has subverted patriarchal stereotypes by externalizing her inner most self.

Keywords: discrimination, feminity, patriarchal, stereotypes etc.

Introduction

You took away my innocence, My hopes, my dreams, my youth

You took from me my very soul, what could have been, I never knew

Your words would cut me deep inside, Deep to the very core Dankness.

Cold I could not feel, why did you hate me so?

You crushed me as I screamed in pain; your words ripped

out my heart, the world grew dull.

I felt insane; did you ever care about that part?

Is that what you wanted all along?

"I win!" "You lose!" A game?

Control, submission, guilt, defeat Yet, I still remain

Breter Inner Mento.

India, the country of 'flora and fauna' has visualized a glorious dawn for itself through the development of female universe. Since the beginning of human civilization, women have emerged out as depressed, discarded and neglected souls. Why such injustice to the most beautiful creation of God? Is it not to be meditated? However, a drastic alteration has been noticed in present competitive scenario where women have acclaimed world-wide recognition- domestically, socially, economically and of course politically. The problem of gender discrimination still prevails in all spheres of life. Though Indian Constitution has granted equality to women in principle but in reality majority of Indian women are facing the problem of inequality and discrimination.

Gender based violence against women is very common as most gender based violence is inflicted by men on women and girls. "Violence against women" is considered as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender based violence that results in, or likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring publically or privately.

Woman in India is a typical social character who has to perform various roles in Life Drama. She serves as a mother, sister, wife and daughter, all rolled into one and she has to act and perform in all the capacities in her life time. To perform all these roles in Indian society is a complex feat. Woman, as an entity, has been the focal point for philosophers, thinkers, authors and artists. The question of feminine identity is a live issue for women poets and strikes a sympathetic chord in their hearts.

Kamala Das is one of the great Indo- Anglian poets, India has produced. She is one of the modernized writers to assert her feminity as a human of Indian Literature. Her poetry in English is a real depiction of gender discrimination. Her poetry explores the depressed status of women, emotional turmoil, unspoken grievances etc. Kamala Das has something of a cult figure in her home and a source of great inspiration and emulation for women with literary aspiration. Her poetry gave the version of the real facts of the female psyche. She brought forth a new feminine consciousness and quackened their intellectual and creative capabilities.

The most outstanding and unique beauty of her poetic Career is her portrayal of mysterious frozen sea of female universe. Through her poetry, she awakened the numb heart, soul and psyche of female creatures through a vivid presentation of the pungent realities of their troubled lives. Being a confessional poet, she felt no hesitation in digging the ground of taboo subjects. She appears as a scientist who experimented again and again in order to bring forth the bloody universe of female tribe and consequently, she came out as a triumphant figure.

Undoubtedly, Kamala Das's poetry has delineated women figures through original colours of life. As a feminist write, she is riddled with emotions at the miserable and pitiable journey of the women in a patriarchal society. In our country like India, where rape, dowry deaths, female foeticide, and various other forms of exploitation have become common features of everyday lives, the female consciousness cries for articulation. Kamala Das poetry unveils some more hidden aspects of truth either forbidden or unexplored. Mark the comments of Devendra Kohli:

"Kamala Das is essentially a poet of the modern Indian woman's ambivalence, giving expression to it more nakedly than any other Indian. Woman poet with possible exception of Amrita Pritam in Punjab"

Kamala Das's "An Introduction" from her first collection "Summer in Calcutta" (1965) presents Kamala Das as a rebellious poet in the tradition of confessional poetry. The poem deals with the poet's quest for cultural, linguistic as well as sexual identity in a post cultural reality, so oppressive and overbearing. In the poem, how drastically she depicts that girls/ladies are expected to enjoy their lives in kitten only, they are not permitted to speak freely and to express their desires. They are the creatures who are appreciated when they are deaf and dumb. Marriage is the only destination predecided by male figures for them.

"An Introduction" shows the lack of freedom of speech for women in an independent country. The problems she faces regarding her identity are universal ones faced by women in the entire universe even today:

I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,
 I speak three languages, write in
 Two, dream in one.

Really, these are the emotional lines of the poem which digs deep the heart of each and every woman. Mark the lines:

I have no joys that are not yours, no
 Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

The poem has reflected the suffering of a thousands of a lady who has no option in that existed patriarchy - dominated society. She boldly asks questions to those who want to cut the feathers of girls because of the narrowness of thought:

Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends,
visiting cousins,
Every one of you?

Kamala Das was an Indian writer and poet who inspired women to shape their own lives at their own choices. "She did not feel compelled to stay on the topic and never shied away from announcing a charge of mind or heart. Das's spontaneity often translated into whimsicality and earned the ire of critics but it allowed her to explore the paradoxes of life and relationships with emotional honesty."

"The Looking Glass" by Kamala Das explores the complex issues of self quest and self perception. The poet depicts the various roles and identities where the existed by societal norms. The poem delves into the themes of femininity, social pressure and the inner fight for self acceptance. The dilemma between self and society in which female figure is trapped is shown with original odour and cadence. How boldly, she describes that male figures consider female figures simply toys:

Getting a man to love you is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Women stand nude before the glass with him
So that he sees himself the stronger one
And believes it so, and you so much more
Softer, younger, lovelier...Admit your
Admiration.

The beauty of the poem lies in its psychological perception and its underlying irony- the best psycho analysis of the male mentality in the first part the female mind and heart in the second part. This poem is a superb comparison with American Poet Sylvia Plath's "The mirror"

In "My Story" (1976), Das recounted the trials of her marriage and her painful self-awakening as a women and writer. She became an icon for women in India and elsewhere struggling to liberate themselves from sexual and domestic oppression. The uniqueness of Kamala Dar's poetry is not the story of sex outside marriage but the volatility of her feelings. Her poems often range from the yearning for security and intimacy to the assertion of the ego, self dramatization and feelings of humiliation and depression.

Kamala Das's 'Old Play House' depicts her journey towards self. Her search for a desirable relationship brings a lot of woe and disenchantment. In this poem, she explores the male personality as well as her own anguished self. A woman is just like a puppet in the hands of male figure. She points out as how her husband does not lend her fondling hands, instead he exploits her tender physical self and destroys her mental health. She says:

You embalmed
My poor lust with your bittersweet juices,
You called me wife.

Her protest is not only against the superficiality of married self but against the essential nature of Hindu Domestic life. Man's inhumanity is portrayed in almost every poem of Kamala Das. A number of other poems

like “The old Play House” are addressed to ‘You’, to the husband. He wants to suppress her, humiliates her and makes her life hell by taking all the rights and freedom by her. His “monstrous ego” comes under fire, since it has entirely reduced her and disappointed her. Consequently, her mind becomes an “Old play house” with all its light put out. She says:

You called me wife.

It was taught to break saccharine into your tea

To offer at the right moment the vitamins cowering.

Beneath your monstrous ego, I ate the magic loaf

And become a dwarf.

Her married life becomes an intolerable journey to her. Mark the following lines:

...Other

Journeys are all so easy but

not inward one...

It's really pathetic to her to realize as how she has become a prey in the hands of not only her husband but in the entire society so called male dominated society. She remarks: “Dress in Saree, be girl. Be wife the said. Be embroiders, be cook... Be any, or be kamala or better still, be madhavikutty. It is time to choose a name, a role....” Kamala Das poetry reveals her quest for self identity. As her quest is the quest of each and every female that's why her poetry has the universal appeal also. Her poetry is always ‘self be getting’ Jussawala opines:

“Her self as woman and her self as poet and artist are tied together. The feminine sensibility can be described as her personal self, her feelings as a women, her physical desires and her evolution from teenage bride to adulteress and mother figure.”

Poem after poem, she is pursuing after true/real love based on the union of two souls. Her self sometimes touch the height of spiritualism where she tries to unite with God. Kamala sometimes provides a mystic glory to her search for true love. Her private/personal journey gains world-wide acclaim, consequently achieves universal appeal.

To sum up, Kamala Das has made a niche in the literary world. She has emerged as one of the leading female poets of Modern Indian Poetry in the English Language. Her poetry is one of the finest textures of the variegated threads of confessionalism, feminine mystique, Psycho-analysis and religious consciousness. The novelty of her poetry does not lie in the revelation of the unconscious. It lies in providing the first hand experience of female life. She has ventured into areas unclaimed by society. She has transcended she role of a poet and simply embraced the role of a very honest women. Her life story, however, truly exhibits her inner voyages and a woman persona within and without. The most unique feature of Das's poetry is her confessional tone. She has subverted patriarchal stereotypes by externalizing her inner-most self. Undoubtedly, Kamala Das poetry survives as a voice of inspiration and enlightenment to the entire female universe.

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