

**A REBELLIOUS ANGEL:A THREAT TO HEROISM IN KAMLA DAS'S POEMS**

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“When a woman is widowed, her bangles are broken into pieces. But why when a man becomes a widower, his glasses and wrist watch are not broken?” (Farrukhi, 2015)

**ABSTRACT :**

Kamla Das was one of the most well-known feminists of the postcolonial era. The poems of Kamla Das are essentially feminist poems. The main focus of these poems is Kamla Das as- a wife, a mother a woman and a sexual companion of many men besides her husband. Kamla Das is considered as a woman who was much ahead of her times because of the explicitness she used in her poems. The present paper explores and highlights various themes like identity crisis, love, dichotomy between self and the other, tone of confessional mode autobiographical elements and the bluntness with which she progresses in her poems.

**Key words:** Frankness, confessional, love, hegemony

Kamla Das, is one of the most distinctive and original poet writing in English. She was born on March 31, 1934, in Malabar, Kerala, with her maiden name, Madhavikutty. Together with a traditional upbringing. She was open to intellectual influence to open knowledge. She was the daughter of Balamani Amma, a poet and Mr. V.M. Nair, a former head of the popular nationalist daily, 'Matrubhoomi'. She was known by different names: to her Malayam readers as Madhavikutty, to her English audience as Kamla Das and her latest avatar as Kamla Suraiyya, but the spirit as the same bold, forthright and often painfully honest. She was one of the very few writers from Kerala who writes effortlessly both in English and Malayalam, yet maintaining high standards in both. Through her bold self-expression, she has established her distinctive personality. C.V. Venugopal rightly states:

...it is Kamla Das who touches us immediately is the reason is not far to seek. She is the first and foremost honest to the core. The blatantly frank manner in which she talks her heart out an activity denied through centuries woman and her intimate conversational tune charged with impatience, tenderness and sensitivity startle us and compellingly draws us towards her.<sup>1</sup>

She is not only a poet of India, but a poet of world Literature who has left mortal earth a number of great poems which “no hungry generations tread thee down”. She is a confessional poet in tone and modern style. She is a nucleus from which all poetry originates. She is considered as a vocalist with a feminine sensibility that rejects traditional social norms and customs. K.R.S. Iyenger writes: “Kamla Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man made world.” Her poetry is remarkable for honesty and courage. As a poet, she has no hesitation to confess her unfulfilled love and her emotional involvement and her yearning for love. In her poem “An Introduction”, she says: “I am everywoman who seeks love”. (De Souza 1997: 10). She observes the maternal relationship of her mother and father. She writes very frankly in her autobiography: “My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horrible mismatched” (My story 40).

The main premise of My Story is how difficult it is for woman to find love in so called system of arrange marriage. Her poetry is also explores the dynamics of men and woman and how a man uses a woman's body for his own purposes. According to Sunita. B. Nimavat: “Kamla Das is the first bold

voice of feminine sensibilities; she was a rebellious spirit with profundity and deep concern for the deprived, the poor, and the exploited". Kamla Das writes also:

"Poets cannot close their shops like shop men  
and return home,  
Their shop is their mind and as long  
As they carry with them  
they feel the pressures and torments. A poet's raw  
material is not stone or clay,  
it is his/her personality."

She craves for true love in her poems. She was a social rebel, and rebels against all the social norms. She refuses to follow the traditional role, which a girl a daughter and a wife are expected to play. She states:

I wore a shirt and my  
Brother's trousers cut my hair short and ignored  
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl, be. Wife,  
They said, be embroiderer, be cook,  
Be a quarreler with servants<sub>2</sub>

Family members, chidings and imposing unwanted morals, duties and obligations made her frenzied and angry and in an interrogative manner, her heart bursts out;

... Why not leave me  
Alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,  
Everyone of you?<sub>3</sub>

She recalls her adolescent age when she was on her threshold of puberty, neither child nor young enough to be married. Under the sweet shadow of her parent's house, a girl child enjoys all liberties, freshness and agility; but as soon as she married, all her child like sentiments, her innocence, even her education disappear and the blooming bud withers before full maturity. This is what happened to Kamla Das in her early age. Kamla Das observes:

For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the  
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me.  
But my sad woman body felt so beaten  
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.<sub>4</sub>

The line 'he drew a youth of sixteen' is very evocative and connotive. 'He' stands for the male domination. We know that the word 'door' is a symbol of liberty and freedom. So here the 'closing of the door' suggests the closing of liberty of a girl child. Now forward she will have to live under the walls of patriarchal domination. Manusmriti<sub>5</sub> which says that a woman is never free. Before marriage, she is protected by her parents, after marriage, she is protected by her husband and after the death of her husband, by her children. With her artistic style, she is able to communicate her readers the mental agony she is going through. No wonder literary critic A.N. Dwivedi remarks: Kamla Das is a typical confessional poet who pours her very heart into poetry. She is largely subjective and autobiographical, anguish and tortured, letting us peep into her sufferings and tortured psyche." The pitiful agony which is bestowed upon women by the society can also be seen in the poem 'The Stone Age':

"You turn me into a bird of stone, a granite  
Dove, you build round me a shabby room,

And stroke my pitted face absent-mindedly while  
You read.”

She does not want to remember those things which happened with her in her past. She exults at the thought of being called ‘Mother’ by the new generation.

Firstly I am a mother. I don’t want temples and gods.  
I take my children as their substitutes.<sup>6</sup>

The poem ‘The old playhouse’ reveals a note of protest against male domination. The wife’s position is belittled in married life. She is exploited and humiliated. The poetess’ protest of the entire womanhood against male domination.

‘You called me wife,  
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and  
To offer at the right moment the vitamins cowering  
Beneath your monstrous ego, I became a dwarf.  
I lost my will and reason, to all your  
Questions I mumbled in coherent replies.<sup>7</sup>

She wants to forget her past but want to get remembered by her writings. She reveals the quest of the woman for love in general terms. It is her intense longing to find fulfillment in love. In one of her poems, the sexual union is described in full frankness. But she realizes that her partner loves her only for sexual desires. Sex is another name of her partner. She laments and asks question with this world, dissatisfied with dull and joyful routine of loveless sexual game, the poetess, pleads for extra marital relationship in order to find fulfillment in love. She compares love beyond marriage ties with Radha’s love or Mira’s love for Krishna. In “Conflagration” lust is pictured with a brutal realism. A man who indulges in sheer loveless sex lets his wife go astray. Noted critic Devinder Kohli had once noted:” Kamla Das is essentially a poetess of the modern woman’s ambivalence”. In her pursuit of finding love she goes one man to the other but to her utter dismay and disappointment she finds all of them to be loveless sexual beasts. All men are cast in the image of her husband.

Ask me, everybody, ask me  
What he sees in me, asks me why he is called a lion;  
A libertine, asks me the flavor of his mouth,  
Asks me why his hands sway like the hooded snake  
Before it clasps my pubis. Ask me why like  
A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breasts,  
And sleeps, ask me what is bliss and what its price...<sup>8</sup>

It is to be noted that T.S. Eliot, the great exponent of modern criticism points out that the man who suffers and the mind which creates are different things. He is also of the view “Poetry is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality”<sup>9</sup>. But a thorough and critical study of the poems of Kamla Das reveals the fact that no one can taste the real flavor of poetry of Kamla Das if he has no idea about her personal life, her constant search for moorings, her bearing the blunt of patriarchal domination without any rhyme or reason. The poems of Kamla Das present the truthful picture of her personal life, her emotion of love and sex and her bold and candid argument for feminism. She herself observes: “A poet’s raw material is not stone or clay, it is her personality. I could not escape from my predicament even for a moment”.<sup>10</sup> It seems that she composes her poems with full justice. She observes that the tragedy of woman is to grow. As a girl child grows, she begins to lose her happiness, her

freedom and her life. This society being to enchain her in the shackles of old traditional norms. She writes; 'The tragedy of life is not death but growth? The child is growing into adult'.

Shanthi Pradeep reviews the problems northern Indian women faced after marriage. She also focuses on the poems which highlight the issue of subaltern. It is also analyzed that men want control over women's body. Pradeep wrote: "Every woman is expected to live according to the wish of their husband and she has to sacrifice everything after marriage". All the poems of Kamla Das show that it is an ultimate goal of a woman to make men around her happy; women through advertisements are made to believe that they are incomplete or unsuccessful without men, her lover, her husband, her boss etc. A fear of social insecurity revolves around women. They are incomplete without men. They either keep their men happy or they will lose them. Here the confessionalism of a poetess has been expressed plainly. She does not speak about herself but about the whole women in the world. A confessional poet usually gives the psychological equivalents for his mental state in poetry. We get such psychological equivalents in the poetry of Kamla Das. Her poetry records her experiences and struggles she had to undergo in order to maintain her identity. She does not hesitate to stand naked with him before a mirror in order to make him feel stronger and superior. She advocates admiring him for his perfect body, his red eyes full of passion. She suggests not hiding anything from one's beloved and lover. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." The sentence with which Simone De Beauvoir initiates a discussion of childhood could be said of all the women characters in Kamla Das's work, including Kamla her-self.

In "The Invitation", she is pre-occupied with the thoughts of suicide. She cannot understand the inner desires and the outer reality. The sea seems to talk to her and invite her to come and drown herself in its water. Life seems to her meaningless and empty without love:

O sea, I am fed up  
I want to be simple  
I want to be loved and  
If love is not to be had,  
I want to be dead, just dead.<sup>11</sup>

She searches true love in her whole life. But she never got it. She engaged herself in her children. The liberal feminists consider woman's role in the social construction through her contribution to family and domestic life is as important and as valuable. This exposure to motherhood helps her to exercise her option to achieve happiness and harmony in her otherwise empty life. Thus, all the poems of Kamla Das, are modern in both theme and techniques. In her every poem she tries to cope up with the struggle which was flowing in her heart and successfully get victory over them. She has a very sharp grip of feeling and form, matter and manner. The portrayals of the plights and persecution of women, their search of identity, the gender discrimination, the customs and traditions of the patriarchal society and the rebellious attitude of a New Woman are some of the most striking themes of her poems. Through her positive attitude, she deviates her thoughts through her writings and came out from the situation, where she had even contemplated upon committing suicide. She mulled suicide as a means of escape from frustration and inhibition of life. Kamla Das is no more today physically among us, but her confessionalism and candid attitude and symbolism will ever get a warm reception in the hands of the connoisseurs of art and literature.

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