

Kamala Das: A Voice against Conventionalism

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Abstract

Kamala Das, the poet of post-war period expresses her inner-most feelings through poetry that not only displays her inner turmoil but also presents vivid glimpses of cotemporary conventional society. Kamala Das, has been ranked with such poetesses of dissatisfaction and discontent as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton among the modern Indian poets writing in English. The creative expression of Kamala Das seems very much similar to them, when she raises her voice against conventionalism. Through her autobiographical expression in her poetry, Kamala

Das displays her agitation against social conventions that hamper a woman to express her individuality. Her poetry raises the women question regarding her actual position in man-made society. This paper expresses her agitation against conventionalism that sets different norms for men and women.

Key-words: Conventionalism, patriarchal society, agitation, individuality

Kamala Das (1934-2009), an Indian English poet, an iconoclast in her era, has been known for her bold and frank expression. Born in South Malabar in a Nair family, Kamala Das found her life challenging and difficult, and being a girl found herself misfit in contemporary society. A poet at the age of six, Kamala Das' subjects of writing were always grave and vocalizing her disagreement with conventional society.

In the poem, 'An Introduction' Kamala Das attacks on conventionalism-

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

Advocating the rights of women, she expresses her anger on being brown due to which she has to face many insults.

Her longing for freedom makes her restless and she expresses her resentment to leave her alone and let society allow her to express herself freely without any restriction-

Why not leave Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,

Every one of you?

Why not let me speak in

Any language I like?

Kamala Das rejects the poetic expression of the male-culture and depicts the Indian women in a way who celebrate their body, their womenhood and asserts the need of expression and self- identity.

She celebrates body but her relationship with her husband makes her spiteful as she finds her body as an instrument of conquest and exploitation.

Woman is this happiness, this lying buried Beneath a man?

Its time again to come alive.

A world extends a lot beyond his Six foot frame.

Her poems reveal body- soul conflict as the main concern in many of her poems. Women's longing for a pure and perfect love that goes beyond the body is presented strongly in her poetry.

Though, she could not get the desired love instead had to face exploitation and humiliation in. She expresses:

When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door.
He did not beat me
But my sad woman badly felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.
I Shrank Pitifully.

Kamala Das vocalizes her resistance to the tradition based on male construction. *My Story* expresses her rage against conventional patriarchal system. She protests against the social conventions where a woman is treated as puppet since her childhood.

Das expresses her pain of her marriage to an elderly man when she was just fifteen.

Das writes:

I was to be the victim of a young man's carnal hunger
and perhaps, out of our union, there would be born a few
children. I would be a middle class housewife, and walk
along the vegetable shop carrying a string bag....

Kamala Das' poetry depicts Indian women's rage in a very bold and unusual manner. She rejects the conventional style of writing in the man-oriented world. Instead of projecting the stereotype of women who is submissive and suppressed, Kamala Das women raise their voice against the dominant culture and establish their individuality.

Kamala Das speaks against the patriarchal society and stereo typed role of women-

Dress in sarees, be girl

Be wife, they said. Be embroidered, be cook,

Be a quarreler with categorizes, don't sit

On walls or peep through our lace-draped windows

Be Amy or be Kamala or better

Still, be Madhavicutty. It is time to

Choose a name, a role

Kamala Das presents Indian woman in a way that has opposed the usual male sense or norms of decency and decorum for women.

Kamala Das opposes this traditional role expected from women and became rebellious. Her resentment and refusal to accept the conventional role of women is reflected in many of her poems. Her rage against patriarchy echoes in her poem

Introduction:

. . . Then I wore a shirt

And a black sarong, cut my hair short and ignored all of

This womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl or be wife,

They cried. Be embroiderer, cook or a quarreler

With servants.

Kamala Das' titles "What Women Expect out of marriage and What They Get", "Why Not More Than One Husband" express loudly her revolutionary attitude towards social conventions. Kamala Das advises women to break the silence and vocalize against the conventional protocols made for women and advise them not to lose their identity in patriarchal society by following man-made norms.

It seems that Das' dissatisfaction in her life made her revolutionary and forced her to express herself against conventions in a way which was actually found by many very unconventional, but were unable to silence her bold voice that still echoes in the air through her poetry.

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