KAMALA DAS – WOMAN AND HER MIND

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ABSTRACT
This article intend to analyze Kamala Das not merely as a feminist or a confessional poet but intend to concentrate much on the mind and human values of the poet in spite of her revolt against social taboos, male domination and injustices meted out to the women but at the same time we simultaneously find the indians in her attitude when we look into her personal life. One thing that makes her exceptional is her endurance, sacrifice and above all respect to the traditions. This aspect of Kamala Das makes me feel something unique about her. Thus, in her we find not only the condition of the female in India but also what they should be in future, she takes her revolutionary decision but never dishonored human values but simply admit personal human values and give it expressions by accepting the veil as she mentions in the interview.

Keywords: Women and Mind; Human Values

INTRODUCTION
When we come to Anglo- Indian poet Kamala Das we see confessional elements in her poetry. When we look at her poems we see all her personal feelings or experiences are poured in it. According to A.N. Dwivedi, “Kamala Das is a typical confessional poet who pours her very heart into poetry. She is largely subjective and autobiographical, anguished and tortured, letting us peep into her sufferings and tortured psyche”.

Kamala Das-Woman and her mind
Most of her poem as we see deals with the problems of women which prevailed at her time. In her poems she talks about her feelings and experience which is also the problem of women in general. In India after sixties the problem of women became more complex and moreover due to women rights movement and impact of science and technology replaced the old values. The craze for reason has played a type of skepticism resulting into a conflict of mind. We can analyze the conflict at different level, conflict between old values and modern values, passion and reason. Such mental conflict produced in anguish in the minds of the women for being deprived and exploited breeding an identity or personality crisis. These anguish made them feel the need of violent protest.

However they felt how their early social customs made them suffer and even the sufferings and humiliation were due to their lack of courage to protest. So, there is a kind of a sense of self regret brewed in Kamala Das’s poem as I feel represents more the above aspects than any other female poets of India. Earlier poets due to their romantic disposition could sublimit their position being aided by traditional faith while the poets after sixties breathing in the
atmosphere of modern skepticism has failed to do so and therefore we find the absence of “early indianism” in their poem.

Before sixty the question was only of the status of women, but now it has become more complex. Indian society as we know is patriarchal society, since ages women are dominated by male. Here I would like to quote lines by Manna Herma Sistra, “A women may live without a choice regardless of whether she is a little girl, a young lady or a mature woman. A young girl is under the command and choice of her husband. A widow is under the command and choice of her male children and she may never remarry after the death of husband, but rather she must neglect all that she likes in terms of food, clothes and make up until she dies. A woman may not own or possess anything, as whether she may gain or acquire shall go straight and immediately to the ownership of her husband”. But earlier as the society was not much complex even the women were accepting it. But with the growth of globalization woman and man work in hand to run a family. Women however independent she is she has to be under male domination. Even in the poems of kamala Das we find she tries to ask for equality with men. In Kamala’s poem we see her quest for freedom to live her life according to her will. Even the woman has desires which she wants to enjoy but sometimes she has to surrender her desire because of convention and even has to ignore that ethical lapse in the male persona.

At the age of sixteen when Kamala was asking for love she got the responsibility of marriage. In her poem introduction we find she goes against traditions. Because she had to suffer as a woman she tried to be like man wearing her brother’s dress.

“So ……………… I wore a shirt and my
Brother’s trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
my womanliness”.

But then she was not allowed to do so rather she was asked to be woman bearing tradition. Dress in sarees, be girl, be wife, they said
Be embroiderer, be cook. Be a quarreler
with servants. Fit in.

Another thing we can find in this poem is suppression of the freedom of women. Women do not have the right to cry when jilted in love.

“Don’t sit on walls or peep in through our
Lace-draped windows.

We see all her freedom are now gone as she is married at an early age i. e. sixteen, better choose a role. If she wants to fulfill her desire, wants to live her life according to her will it seems that she is schizophrenic or nympho.

Syd Harrex, about Kamala Das says- “Kamala Das’s poems epitomize the dilemma of the modern Indian women who attempts to free herself sexually and domestically from bondage sanctioned by the past.

Such protest however common but the first part, second part of the quote implies certainly not found or if found in whimpering voice- more a prayer for the mercy or even to the extent of cursing oneself for being something irreligious and ought to be depressed but the mood, I
mean to say changed after sixties and Kamala Das perhaps the first dared to raise her voice in the field of poetical literature which we find absolutely absent in the work of the earlier poets. If the literature is mirror of society one is here tempted to say that Kamala Das’s poems mirrored the society not from the surface but from within. Inner current of changes and the complex social changes have been rightly voiced by her in her poem.

In her poem “the old play house” we find she has compared the life of woman with a bird

“You planned to tame a swallow. To hold
Her in the long summer of your love so that
She would forget not the raw seasons alone
And the homes left behind, but also her nature,
The urge to fly and the endless pathways of the sky.

In this poem we cannot deny the influence of earlier poets. It is truly a romantic poem but if we analyse the poem in the light of her other poems we would certainly find as symbolic implication in the image “but also her nature,
The urge to fly, and the endless pathways
of the sky”.

It is not only crave for eternal freedom but implication of a freedom of choice in fact if we look into the later phase of poet’s life we would realize the true topic. It may also be added that the poem bears the touch of the inner conflict of social tradition and inner urge of life and these aspect of the poet certainly be considered as unique contributions that female poets intend to give to their readers.

In the poem “My Grandmother’s House” we see she misses the beautiful memories of her childhood, where she was being loved and cared by her grandmother. Now she doesn’t have anyone to love her and she begs for love at strangers doors. From here we can see, she was not able to get love or satisfaction from her marriage. Instead of tolerating it she goes against the convention and tries to fulfill her desire. This poem again is a typical piece of confessional poem. Here we find Kamala Das when sought her dissatisfaction for having been prevented from exercising her free will. Kamala Das in her other confessional poems narrates how she has been dissatisfied at the treatment meted out to her mother in spite of she being a woman of potent and even in her own life how she was treated and tortured by her husband. Her dissatisfactions in marital life have found a restrained expression in the poem especially as she mentions “can you that I lived in such a house and was proud, and loved ……. I who have lost my way and beg now at strangers doors to receive love, at least in small change?

In her poem “The freaks” we find her dissatisfaction in men. As through most of her poem we can understand that her only desire is to get love from her beloved but instead of love in everymen she get is lust. She craves for love. She says-

Who can help us who have lived so long
And have failed in love? The heart
An empty cistern, waiting
Through long hours, fills itself

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With coiling snakes of silence.

Instead of waiting love for long time her heart remains empty cistern which is filled with coiling snakes of silence and snakes can be considered as poisonous. Because of her dissatisfaction in male persona in the poem she describes him as disgusting men.

In her another poem “A losing battle” we can see her feminist spirit or her hatred towards men. She says when other flaunts a gaudy lust her love cannot hold the men. She described men as worthless; they cannot love rather uses cheapest bait to trap her.

Again in her poem “The Stone Age” we find she describes men as a fat spider and love as a web which trap the women.

“Fond husband, ancient settler in the mind,
Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment.

We can find here in this poem is loss of freedom after marriage which is mentioned in her poem “the old playhouse” also.

You turn me into a bird of stone, a granite
Dove, you build round me a shabby
Drawing room (the stone age)

Birds are made to fly but here in the poem bird is converted into showpiece which is kept at home for showcase, which is very common in Indian society, where women are considered as pride of the home but in reality they are deprived of their freedom and not treated with respect. Women are just treated as an object. And she says- “you stick a finger into my dreaming eyes” Dreams of her life is disturbed by him. She doesn’t have chance to fulfill her dreams because of marriage. From here we can understand after marriage she has lost freedom to fulfill her desire and if we see Indian women in general there are many who are in this same situation. The same feeling we can find in the following lines of her poem “The old playhouse”-

“You called me wife
I was thought to break saccharine into your
Tea and to offer at the right moment vitamins,
Cowering beneath your monstrous ego I ate
The magic loaf and became a dwarf. I lost
My will and reason to all your questions
I mumbled incoherent replies”

“Being a woman and wife she has a minute and thorough knowledge of feminine sensibility, its exploitation, its hurts, its anguishes and its suppression in a male-dominated society.”

According to K.R.S. Iyengar “Kamala Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate that the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world.”

Kamala Das is the first Indian woman writer who dared to say something different which none of her predecessors did. She comes out of the trend of love for nation and romanticism
which were prevalent in the poem before sixties. As we know second wave of feminist movement started after sixties and its intention was to fight against gender discrimination. “Feminist use terms like patriarchy, male domination, female subordination and women’s oppression to explain gender discrimination which operates in our society.”

The French Feminist Simone De Beauvoir in her book Le deuxieme Sexe (1949) says “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological , psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in a society, it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature…which is described as feminine”. At the same time in Das’s poem we find she talks about man-woman relation and how the desire of women are suppressed. Though she did not like to be called feminist but then indirectly her poems has the spirit of feminism. As we see number of laws in favor of women were there but not enforced. But after sixties we see its implication. Even in the five year plan welfare measures for women were included. At the same time Kamala too raises the voice on behalf of women folk. She encourages the women to come out of their suppression. In her poem she says, “I am every women who seeks love”. “It is in the writings of Kamala Das that the Indian- English poetry acquired for itself a real substantity that western confessionalists like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton of America. Of all the women poets of the present in India, Das projects herself as a fervent feminist poetic voice always exacting for a dignified place of honour, a respect for the naturalistic freedoms and choices. Her poetry contributes for the strong reactions and justifications for the most needful awakening of women as a living entity in being- in- the needful world”

In almost all her poems woman is presented as main character. In her poem “My Grandmother’s House” she talks about loving grandmother. In her poem “My mother at sixty six” she talks about a mother and poem like Introduction , The old playhouse, Stone Age talks about a wife and her poems like Krishna , The Maggots female character is presented as beloved. Thus, her poem deals with different roles which women play in the society and especially Indian society. According to M.K. Naik, her woman character in the poetry plays the role of “women as a sweet heart, flirt, wife, woman of the world, mother, middle-aged mature of psychological processes behind both feminity and masculinity”. Thus, her poem has the characteristic of feminism. In the poem of Kamala Das we find the pain of women being not able to enjoy equality with men. As women is not equally treated or get what she wants she tries to go outside to search for it, which we find in her poems –

I who have lost, my way and beg now at strangers
doors to receive love, at least in small change? (My Grandmother’s house)

I run up the forty
Noisy steps to knock at another’s door
Through peep-holes, the neighbours watch,
They watch me come and go like rain. (The Stone Age)

Whatever abnormal behavior her female persona does, tries to go against convention the reason is ,she is not able to get what she wants, and that is love and equality with men. Even in some of her poems she regrets her anti-social behavior. In the poem invitation we find a talk between woman and sea. We find her frustration in love and in order to end her frustration she wants to kill her by drowning in the sea. In the poem invitation we find though in the earlier phase of her life, she tried to fulfill her desire for love in extramarital affairs but from this poem we can see that even those relationship has become burden to her.
So, in order to come out of that burden she wants to end her life. From this we can understand even after going against the tradition to fulfill her desire she is not happy with that freedom. Her desire was to get love or equality but she could not get it. Here I would like to quote-

“A feminist questions and fights against a male dominated social system of which women are also often part of. Their struggle is against injustices being done to women and all those who are responsible for this, be they men or women. The goal of feminism is not to set women against men, but to create a gender sensitive society, which treats men and women as equals. The ultimate goal of feminism is to establish a society which is committed to gender equality in thought.” So, in the poems of Kamala Das also we can see it is not her desire to go against tradition or convention but to ask for equality with men. We find in her poem her female persona is always suppressed under male ego which is the characteristic of patriarchal society. Kamala dares to speak for the desires of women which are suppressed by patriarchal society. She dares to speak boldly because she has experienced it personally, suppression of her desires, which is clear from most of her poems. In Poem like Introduction, suppression of her desire to write in English and suppression of her freedom. She being from very orthodox family couldn’t go against the tradition. Though she had lots of desire as from her interview regarding conversion to Islam, she says- I was interested in Islam for many years but then I couldn’t convert as my children were not settled. Now, as they all are settled I have decided to convert. From here we can understand though she had desire but because of bonding to convention she couldn’t fulfill it. So, in her poems we can see she has grudge against tradition but then she is bound to it. She couldn’t go against it in her personal life. So, this is reflected in her poems.

There is another aspect of story as well and that is the question whether Kamala Das in fact admits or denies the womanish values – the basic principal of love and affections not only as conjugal one but a love in wider sense that demands sacrifice for a greater cause and those beyond personal sufferings in giving due weight age and respect to mother in particular and women in general as in mentioned interview she admits that she has to wait for her children to grow and settle in life and readily waited for years to get them married. So, Kamala Das’s revolt is against the custom but in spite of negation we find a positive example in her life that would be treated as an example to keep the society in the real. Her proclamations if positively assessed and valued we would find how her poems teaches the positive values to the women without being irresponsible both in personal and social level. Here we find how being a confessional poet Kamala Das proves herself an ideal Indian woman.

CONCLUSION

In Kamala Das’s poem we find highlighting of passion I mean love as a human instinct but at the same time she never belittle this passion by propagating licentious love. She only wants if we take positive account of it a social recognition. We know her poem perhaps never find a revolt and an attempt to break the prevailing values if studied from positive point of view. We would rather find she simply and bravely demanded the right for the women to select her own fortune and give value to their own choice. This aspect of Kamala Das’s poem has often been overlooked. But what I feel this positive aspect of Kamala Das’s poem can give a proper direction to the women activists who often make a mess of recklessness and licentious life in the name of women liberation.
REFERENCES


