

KAMALA DAS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEM EXPLAINING FEMINISM, EQUAL RIGHTS, FREEDOM AND SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS: 'AN INTRODUCTION'

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Abstract:

In the post-independence era, women began to challenge their agitation, emotional repression and discriminatory practices. Kamala Das was one of those women writers who protested against society, using the confessional writing style to speak openly about female sexuality. She is known as an iconoclast. Her honest celebration of sexual desire created a stir in society. She was a rebellious and controversial poet in the post-independence era through her autobiographical writings.

Women in pre and post-independence India have been going through various transformations on all fronts such as personal, social and workplace. In a patriarchal society, it was and is the job of a woman to cope with all the transformations. She has to maintain balance and not let her inner sufferings be exposed. Women were subjected to oppression, oppression, injustice, inhuman treatment, the list is long. Words like freedom, independence were not for women. Yet in the pre-independence era, social reform was the main concern rather than women empowerment or gender equality.

Key words: Pre-independence, Post-Independence, Challenge, Female Sexuality, Rebellious, Controversial, Literature, British rule, Femininity.

Introduction:

Kamala Das's father was a senior officer in a world-renowned company in Calcutta. Her mother, Balmani Amma, was a writer. Due to this, Kamala Das developed an interest in literature from an early age. She was educated in a missionary school in Calcutta. Her experiences there regarding caste and religion were very painful. She was married off at the age of 15. Her husband, Madhav Das, was a senior officer in a bank. It was Madhav Das who encouraged her to write. Kamala Das started writing in English and Malayalam. An English newspaper called her 'The Mother of Modern English Indian Poetry'.

There was not much difference in the plight of women in the Pre-independence and the Post-independence era. In Pre-independence era the focus was on getting freedom from the British rule. In Post-independence era, it got shifted to more personalised frame which was not much welcomed in the society. In the Post-independence era, Kamala Das became one of the women writers in the field of literature to bring a change in the status of women through her confessional mode of writing who openly talked about femininity, female sexual desire which created havoc in the patriarchal society.

Kamala Surayya popularly known by her one-time pen name Madhavikutty and married name Kamala Das was an Indian poet in English as well as an author in Malayalam, India. She wrote poems and autobiography in English with the name Kamala Das. Most of her writing deals with love, betrayal, the consequent anguish and an independence of mind and body. Her writing was away from the sentimental and romanticised love which was the characteristics of the literature at that time.

She is known as the Mother of modern English poetry. She was a rebel fighting against the age-old beliefs about women as affectionate sister, loving wife, submissive daughter-in-law and dutiful mother but without her own identity; not even the identity of a human being. She was an iconoclast struggling to step away from various traditional roles of a woman and establish her identity. Her poetry is known for its open exploration of women's lives, sexuality, oppression, contemporary Indian life and inequality between men and women. She boldly wrote more about her personal experiences than the colonial ones. She got fame and the notoriety because of her autobiography 'My Story'.

'An Introduction' is an autobiographical poem from the collection "Summer in Calcutta" 1965. It is conversational in tone. It is a confessional poem. She confesses and also questions the readers. Feminism, equal rights, freedom, confines of marriage and societal restrictions are some of the themes which are explored in the poem 'An Introduction'. Emphasis of the poem is on marriage. She talks about the state of being 'behind the bars' of the so called roles of men and women forced upon by the patriarchal society. The poem is an expression of the mental and emotional state of the writer and the complexities of her feelings. The poem begins with the lines:

"I don't know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru."

Here she talks about the Rulers of Country are Men. And she can't forget this fact that just as we don't forget Days and Months in fact we have to remember: that the power is in their hands Le. Men! At the same time she says, "I am Indian, very brown" implicating as if I'm no less patriotic than men just because I'm a woman!

Poet's tussle to get freedom is evident when people dictate terms for her in the use of language. She will use any language because that is HER language, may it be with "its distortions, its queerness's", and it might be "half English, half Indian, funny perhaps"! Because no one is perfect in life. In fact she adds that the language she uses is the honest expression of her feelings, emotions and hopes. It is the language of what she sees and also what she doesn't see, of what she hears and also of what she doesn't hear!

"a mind that sees and hears and

Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech"

She talks about her coming of age which others had made her aware of. She says she asked for love "not knowing what else to ask for" in the age puberty and before she understands it, she was drawn into a "Bedroom and closed the door". This is a reference to her miserable married life at the age of sixteen. 'Closing the door' symbolises the confinement within the four walls of the house without any freedom of any kind. She was too young to know what an intercourse is. She says she was not beaten by him but "my sad woman-body felt so beaten" implying she was ignored by her husband and she was just an object to fulfil his sexual desire. The condition that Kamala Das has depicted in these lines is the condition of the girls as well as the women in India who are married off an early age not to know what actually marriage is! The patriarchal domination suppresses their sexual as well as social freedom. They are denied the basic humanitarian treatment. At one point she decides to be what she wants to be and ignores "My womanliness".

She rejects to fit in any traditional role that the male-dominated society had framed. She remakes herself outwardly by cutting her hair and wearing shirts and trousers, etc. and inwardly when she says "It is time to Choose a name, a role" rather than playing games. She honestly and truthfully confesses that she met a man but doesn't name him because "he is every man Who wants. a woman, just as I am every Woman who seeks love." She goes beyond the traditional suppressed woman and openly she talks about her passionate sexual desire but without satisfaction when she says,

"In him... the hungry haste

Of rivers, in me... the oceans' tireless

Waiting."

She sees that the men identify themselves as 'I' symbolising the 'male ego', maintaining their superiority and dominance over women! It's she who drinks "lonely Drinks at twelve, midnight". In the end, trapped in the taboo feelings that the society doesn't approve of, she does talk about her loneliness and the twists and turns, and the turbulence within her mind:

"It is I who laugh; it is I who make love
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys that are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I".

But in the pursuit of liberty, affirms that whether 'love' or 'betrayal' or 'joys' or 'aches' everything is only HERS and no one else's! And so she makes a verdict that, "I too call myself I".

The pain, anguish that Kamala Das depicts through her autobiographical poem is the outcry of majority of the women in the male-dominated society. She played a critical role in the establishment of the Indian feminist movement. The poem is of 59 lines written in free verse with only one stanza. Das does not use any metrical pattern, rhyme scheme. The lines are uneven. The structure of the poem also implies the liberation from any kind of bondages.

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