



DEFINING THEMES USED BY KAMLA DAS IN HIS POEMS

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ABSTRACT

It is always stated that man is a social being who lives in a society. But to be a part of a society is not always so easy and compatible for the individual. One is compelled by the self to live after one's own ways and likings and the society, on the other hand, that has certain norms and traditions forces one to conform for maintaining a healthy relation. The social sense predominates over the individual sense and the individual has to make many compromises to survive in the society. Women all over the world have been treated as the 'other' by the Patriarchal social order. The paper focuses on personal writing of Kamala Dass and hears her voice from within. It can be done through a selected poems authored by poetess herself.

Keywords: - Themes, Kamla Das, Poems, love, Relationship.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the title of the poem suggests, it gives an introduction to the realm of Kamala Das's poetry. It deals with the notion of the self, identity of the individual and concept of language and writing. The persona in the poem is the mouthpiece of the poet expressing her very pains and predicaments. Though written in a colloquial language, the poem is highly suggestive and it provides issues to ponder over the human condition. The poem seeks universal acclaim for focusing on the existence of women in male-dominated society which is the nature of all human societies across the globe.

The poem opens with the assertion by the persona that she has no knowledge about politics. Though she can recognize and recollect names of some popular politicians like Nehru. Her lack of knowledge and understanding of politics reflects that she has no hold over the institution of power and authority. It also shows that such domains are beyond the reach of women and are preoccupied by the men. The persona introduces herself as a brown Indian born in Malabar.

“I don’t know politics but I know the names

Of those in power ...”

In this paper light is thrown on the art of imagery by Kamala Das in her poetry. In general Imagery is a creation of the picture in terms of words. It serves the purpose of making experience of life vivid and life-like. Poets, who are incapable in this art of creating imagery, fail in their profession.

II. ABOUT KAMALA DAS

Kamala Das (Madhavikuti) was born in Malabar in 1934. She was educated privately at home and at schools in Bengal and Kerala and belonged to a writers’ family. Her mother Padma BhushanNalapatBalamaniAmmamma was an outstanding Malayalam poet and winner of the SahityaAkademi Award and the SaraswatiSamman and her father was the editor and Managing Director of Mathrabhumi, a leading Malayalam language newspaper. She was only fifteen when she was married to K. Madhava Das, who rose to become an R.B.I. Officer.

Kamala Das began writing poetry at the age of six. She was only fourteen when P.E.N. India, edited by Sophia Wadia, published her first poem. But her poetry got recognition when she was awarded the Asian Poetry Prize instituted by P.E.N. Phillipines in 1963. From 1971 to ‘72 and again from 1978 to ‘79, she was the poetry editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India.

Kamala Das was a writer of versatile genius. She handled essays, fictions, short stories, criticism and journalistic features very successfully in both the languages, Malayalam and English. Her writing in English is as varied as in Malayalam.

III. THEMES OF KAMLA DAS POETRY

- **The Failure of Her Marriage and Sexual Frustration**

The most outstanding and the most striking concern of Kamala Das as a poet is sexual frustration and the failure of marriage as a means of happiness in the life of a woman. The theme, namely the failure of a woman to achieve happiness through her sexual relationship with her husband and even through a similar relationship with other men, recurs in poem after poem by Kamala Das. Her poetry is largely autobiographical and confessional. The frustration resulting from total failure of her marriage and search for happiness through indiscriminate sexual relationships with other men constitute a very large component of her poetry.

- **Her Husband’s Shabby Treatment of Her**

The failure of her marriage has most vividly and candidly been described by Kamala Das in the poem entitled the old Playhouse. Addressing her husband in this poem, she bluntly reminds him

that he had been allowing his saliva to flow into her mouth and had poured himself into every nook and cranny of her body. She points out to him that, although he used to call her wife, he had compelled her to live under conditions in which she felt almost suffocated. She accuses him of having been a most self-centered and egoistical kind of husband who had been tyrannizing over her till she become a dwarf, with all her will power and thinking power completely gone. The result of all his shabby treatment of her is that her mind has become entirely non-function like an old playhouse with all its lights put out. Towards the end of this poem she tells him that, although he had certainly been gratifying her lust and yearning for sexual pleasure, he had failed to give her the kind of love and affection which a woman expects from her husband.

- **The Want of Any Real Love or Affection in Her Husband's Attitude towards Her**

In the poem entitled Ghanashyam, Kamala Das is addressing Lord Krishna and, in the course of this monologue, she speaks of the relationship between her husband and herself in terms of disappointment and frustration, saying that she had once played a husk-game because her husband had needed her body to satisfy his lust for her and because, each time his lust had been satisfied, he used to turn his back on her to indicate that he did not want her any more that night. The consequence of her husband's lack of any real affection for her had led her to believe that, each time he had pressed his mouth against hers. She used to imagine that it was Ghanashyam in disguise who was making love to her. And, of course, there are several other poems too in which Kamala Das frankly and even bluntly speaks about total collapse of her conjugal life.

- **The Failure of Her Relationship with Other Men**

In the poem entitled in Love, she tells a lover that, although he had been gratifying her unending lust, he had never felt the kind of love which she expected from him. She describes his sexual desire for her as "this skin-communicated thing". In his relationship with her, she says, there had been no room, no excuse, and even no need for love, and that every embrace between them had been like "a finished jigsaw". In the poem entitled The invitation, Kamala Das says that her lover had been coming to her in the pauses or intervals of his office-work to make love to her, and that all her pleasure and his own pleasure too had been confined to their bed which, six feet long and two feet wide, had been a kind of paradise to them. Her sense of betrayal by him has now produced in her a desire to jump into the sea and first speaks about the sexual relationship between a man and a woman in general terms but towards the end of the poem she left her, never to come back. This is evident a references to some lover's desertion of Kamala Das after desertion of her.

- **In her Marriage, a Disaster**

In connection with her marriage, the poem entitled The Freaks and The Sunshine Cat are also noteworthy. In the former poem Kamala Das says that although she had lived for many years with her husband, she had found no love in this relationship. At end of the poem she calls herself a freak who flaunts, at time, a grand, flamboyant lust. In the second of these poem, she nor

describes her husband as as a selfish and cowardly man who neither loved her nor used her properly, and who was a ruthless watcher of the sexual act which she performed unscrupulously with other men. Her husband had been treating her so callously that ultimately the streak of light, which had looked like a yellow cat, become so faint, because of the onset of winter, as to look like a "hair-thin line".

- **Her Social Concerns and Two Other Themes**

Kamala Das has hardly any other concerns so far as her poetry is concerned. There are certainly two poems in which she tries to express her awareness of the social conditions in this country. One is a poem entitled *The Flag* which is about the Indian poor, and the other is entitled *Sepia*, dealing with the Indian rich. But both these poems are full, in the words of a critic*, of clichéd observations and sentiments which cannot compare with the sharpness of other poets such as K .N .Daruwalla. A more important theme in Kamala Das's poetry is motherhood, though she has again written only two poems on this subject. One of these poems is entitled *Jaisurya* which describes the glory of child – birth and expresses , in frank terms , her own feeling when she lay in the delivery-room, suffering from labour pains and waiting for the child to come out from the darkness of her womb into the golden light of the sun . Then there are two poems in which her grandmother is the central figure. One of them is entitled *My Grandmother's House* which opens with the words; "There is a house now far away where one/I received love. That woman died." The other poem is *Blood* and here , again , Kamala Das recalls her grandmother's house with its cracked walls and describes her grandmother as a really simple person , "fed on God for year "and proud of her ancient blood . Besides Kamala Das's sentimental and loving memories of her grandmother, the poem also expresses Kamala Das's sense of decay and death.

IV. THEMATIC CONCERNS OF KAMALA DAS POETRY: THE OLD PLAYHOUSE AND OTHER POEMS

Kamala Das (1934-2009) is primarily a poet of feminine longings. Her poetry reflects her restlessness as a sensitive woman moving in the male-dominated society, and in them she appears as a champion of woman's cause". She raises her forceful voice against the male tyranny in her poetry. Her poetical collections in English are: *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), and *The Old Playhouse and other poems* (1973). The present paper deals with theme of the poetry of Kamala Das particularly *The Old Playhouse* and other poems.

The anthology contains thirty-three poems in all, of which twenty have been taken from the two previous volumes. Thus there are only thirteen new poems which reveal new facets, and a further artistic maturity. The love-theme is still there, but an entirely new dimension and a new intensity are added to its treatment. Further, the poems of the volume reveal the poet's pre-occupation with death and decay not noticeable in the earlier volumes. The title piece is the poet's protest against the domination of the male and the consequent dwarfing of the female. The woman is expected to play certain conventional roles, and her own wishes and aspirations are not taken into account.

The intensity of the protest, conveyed in conversational idiom and rhythm, make it symbolic of the protest of all womanhood against the male ego:

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 ate the magic loaf and
Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
Questions I mumbled incoherent replies.

‘AN INTRODUCTION’ (1965) - THE POEM

‘An Introduction’ is obviously an autobiographical poem written by Kamala Das which first appeared in her summer in Calcutta (1965). The poem is a brilliant example of her confessionals wherein she unfolds her entire self with extreme frankness and candor. In this poem, the poet describes her experiences which were strictly private and personal. The poem is a revolt against conventionalism and the restraints imposed on Indian women. In this poem the question whether or not Indians should write in English is put to rest. The poem is also remarkable for its daring innovativeness.

The poem you are going to read is written in free verse in a colloquial style which appropriately allows the free flow of writer’s thoughts and feelings. The poem is highly revealing of the poet, her political knowledge, her linguistic abilities, her physical growth, the sad experience of her marriage and her quest for fulfilling love. What M.K. Naik says of her poetry in general also applies for this poem: “Kamala Das’s persona is no nymphomaniac; she is simply every woman who seeks love and she is the beloved and betrayed; expressing her female hunger”.

V. CONCLUSION

In this unit you first read about Kamala Das - her life and works, and then two poems in detail. You will note that unlike some other poets you may have read, she is modernist in her approach and her poems formed part of the trend in experiments in Indian English poetry after 1960.

In the concluding lines of the poem, the persona fully analyses her lot. She explores herself going through different phases. The repetitive use of first person pronoun “I” emphasizes the idea of selfhood. The persona with complete ripeness of her personality claims her own identity in her own terms. The ending of the poem with words “I too call myself I” is the very gist of the poem. The female persona asserts strongly that like her male counterparts, she has her own individuality.

Though she is not perfect yet she is herself with some virtues as well as vices. She has a worthwhile individual existence.

Her poems show her failure in love and voice of the victimized women of the world. According to her love must lead to self-realization and self-growth. It is pure love that satisfies her romantic aspiration and emotional need.

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