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**Exploration of Feminine Sensibility in Kamala Das'
'An Introduction.'****Dr. Smt. Neeta S. Dhumal**

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Abstract

Kamala Das is known as a poetess of feminine sensibility. Without any inhibitions, very boldly she unveils the hidden hurts of woman received in the male dominated society. The present paper focuses on Kamala Das' urge to explore feminine self and her sensibility with the special reference to her poem "An Introduction". She rebelliously opposes all the conventions, norms and restrictions thrust by society. Social taboos are overwhelmed by her when her very being is suffocated and so exploitation and abuse is not fore borne by her. Reading her poems is a unique experience which gives insight to every woman to look at her self and the society in which she lives.

Kamala Das, a poetess of sharp feminine sensibility portrays the world of Indian woman through her poetry. Dissatisfaction and discontent of woman has been disclosed very vividly and boldly for the first time by Kamala Das. No woman writer had ever before ventured to voice aspirations, desires and fears of woman in so direct a language. Kamala Das never wanted the accepted subjugation of woman. She hates silence of Indian woman and gives vent to her longings and feeling of loss. In spite of her strong inclination towards feminine world, she never tried to identify herself as a feminist activist. Her condor in dealing with women's desires and longings establish her a feminist poetess but rather it is the exploration of self. Her urge to discover her self and her own independent identity is reflected in her poetry. As Bruce King says :

Das opened areas, in which previously forbidden emotions
could be expressed in ways which reflect the true voice
of feeling. She showed how an Indian woman poet could
create a space for herself in the public world.

In the pursuit of self discovery, Kamala Das shakes the pre-established norms of male-dominated society. In her master piece 'An Introduction', very frankly yet candidly she expresses the psychological as well as her biological needs. It is an autobiographical poetry encompassing the whole female world in a miniature form. It is a journey of a woman from innocence to experience. The poem begins in a colloquial manner with the poetess introducing herself as an innocent girl :

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 ...

Indian feminine sensibility is reflected in her ignorance to politics. Even though she can name the leaders, she doesn't find politics interesting. In Indian context, traditionally women are kept aloof from politics considering them to be incompetent. They are considered to be incapable of decision-making. Hence, the girls' ignorance to politics is no big issue and even if she develops same distaste for politics, it makes no harm because that is what expected from her. She should always keep herself away from these

matters. The following lines tell us about the poetess, her nation, nationality and about her mother tongue. In this introduction the striking aspect is the mention of her complexion. She describes herself as 'very brown'. In other words she is not fair. Again, in India brown complexion of girl may be problematic from the point of view of her parents. In her poem 'Next to Indira Gandhi' she asks :

Father, I ask you now without fear
Did you want me
Did you ever want a daughter
Did I disappoint you much
With my skin as dark as yours.

As a woman she can not forget this. Compared to the life that followed, childhood for her was not so troublesome.

The real tension begins as she grows up. They tell the girl that she is 'grown-up' which has different implications. She is in her puberty and her journey towards womanhood has been started. She is not allowed to grow according to her choice, there are restrictions on every movement and expressions of hers. Even though she is well versed in English 'Critics, friends and visiting cousins, everyone advised her not to write in English'. The rebellious woman in her can not bear this encroachment on her freedom of expression. The morbidity that seems to hamper her literary vision is violated by her. There comes strong assertion to her voice to write in the language she desires. The question 'why not let me speak in any language I like?' that comes from her pen strikes the readers most for no woman writer before has asked such a question, so directly to those who levy burdens and restrictions on women.

Kamala Das boldly resents the encroachment not only on her freedom of expression but also on her self. She remains honest to her self and continues writing in English. She feels it is her own language with '... its distortions, its queer nesses.' Because the language is human it voices her 'joys', her 'longings' her 'hopes'. The repetitive use of 'my' reflects her possessiveness about the language and it also reflects her urge to establish her own individual identity. Her language may be funny for it is a combination of two languages. Yet she chooses to write in the language for her strong flair for it. Giving a touch of fun she establishes how indispensable the language is for her' ... as cawing is to crows or roaring to the lions.'

Kamala Das wants to emphasize the importance of human communication from the point of view of woman's sensibility. According to her being a woman or human her speech is not ...

... deaf, blind speech
of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent muttering of the blazing
Funeral pyre ...

The images used by Kamala Das are applicable to the Indian woman's speech. The basic function of communication is to create awareness. Since ages women have not voiced their feelings openly. Therefore, the 'incoherent muttering', here, indirectly refers to the inexpressibility of women. They have feelings but their feeble utterances are not taken into consideration. Their existence itself is negated by ignoring their feelings.

Talking about woman's body is not permissible in the given society. Women are not supposed to speak about it loudly and openly. For Kamala Das, it is no more a forbidden affair. She talks of physical changes those overcame in her puberty. It unknowingly shakes the norms of male dominated society. She crosses the limits of a traditional Indian woman. Kamala Das represents every woman while shading light upon the process of getting matured. It is manifestation of changes in feminine body which is naturally followed by 'longing for true love'. Like any other woman, the poetess, too expresses her urge for it. And the solution for it is marriage. In India, early marriage of girls is not considered odd. As a result of it, the poetess' earnest yearning for love is denied and the only practice which is prevalent in the society. i.e.

making her marry is thrust on her. The inexperienced world of girl and her husband, who is not expert in the art of love-making, unaware of feminine psyche, frustrates her. Her aspirations are crushed down. Instead of getting true love, she receives sexual exploitation and humiliation. This wounded self makes the poetess restless. Even though Indian woman accepts subjugation and exploitation meekly considering it to be her predicament, Kamala Das is not ready to accept it so easily. She cracks the mould and establishes very bold attitude with which Indian readers are unaware of. Breaking the norms she writes :

.. I wore a skirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness.

But Indian society does not allow woman to behave according to her choice. It is followed by many promptings :

... Dress in sarees, be girl,
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in, Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty

The typical female roles must be performed by woman. She is instructed to put on saree and look attractive, beautiful. She is prompted to master all the skills of a home-maker. Her role is restricted to looking good, making her home beautiful using her artistic skills. She ought to be a good cook. She should learn to dominate servants and thus she should 'fit in' the mould of a perfect woman. Like a puppet she has been moved by the society. They hold the strings of her every move in their hands. Thus individual identity and freedom is denied to her. She has to forebear heavy burden of traditional orthodox norms. Kamala Das portrays the wounded woman very vividly.

Talking about sexual experience is another social taboo observed in India. Woman talking freely about her sexuality and sexual experiences is not only considered a bold gesture but also morally corrupt. Kamala Das overwhelms this taboo and narrates her own experience openly for which she was criticized. In male dominated society it is unusually indecent that breaks the pre-established decorum. This definitely, would have enraged the orthodox masculine sensibility and least she is bothered about it. It is Kamala Das' total rejection of so - called beautiful, delicate conventional feminine expressions. Without any inhibition she explores her self and gives way to the undercurrents of her mind.

Kamala Das, further, attacks self-centered male tendency. Man's counterpart, woman, has the same wants, feelings and desires as that of man but these are completely neglected by him. He always wants a woman all submissive to his wants and desires. Kamala Das comments man for his self centeredness. Man, a self-serving conservative agent shows no concern to his counter-part. Against woman's submission he

is tightly packed like the
Sword in his sheath.

She never experiences pleasure in the context of union of man and woman. The poetess uses metaphor of river and sea to show the basic difference of desires between man and woman :

... In him ... the hungry haste
of rivers, in me ... the ocean's tireless
waiting.

It shows his aggressive, thoughtless, unconcern towards female sensibility. Whereas in her, 'the ocean's tireless awaiting' shows her endurance and tolerance for every thing. In other words, it focuses

woman's passive acceptance of the desires of man which also reflects broadness of her mind. In this matter, woman's approach seems mature than that of man's.

The last part of the poem exhibits failure, disappointment and reconciliation.

'Who are you, I ask each and every one,
The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
I ...
It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And when feel shame, it is I, dying
With a rattle in my throat
I am sinner, I am saint
I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I

In a permissive society woman can enjoy freedom to some extent. She can wander wherever she likes or can laugh loudly, at some occasions she may not feel repentant and, thus, can enjoy autonomy. There is sharing and caring between man and woman. But it is not applied rule for all Indian women's condition. Subjugation is so rampant that any bold gesture of Kamala Das is looked at with an inauspicious awe. The woman portrayed by Kamala Das is ever seeking to establish her identity and the self-exploration is never-ending.

Kamala Das' *An Introduction*, therefore, remains a document of universal appeal voicing female desires and aspirations. The poem becomes an instrument to explore the hidden inner world of Woman. Her bruised womanhood represents the subjugated and battered womankind. The pathos of woman's world is all pervading but Kamala Das does not give up so easily. Her feminine sensibility does not allow her to be passive and submissive. She rebels, takes a bold stance and expresses her self freely. This fiercely feminine sensibility in her makes her bold to give vent to the suppressed urges and questions of the man made world.

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