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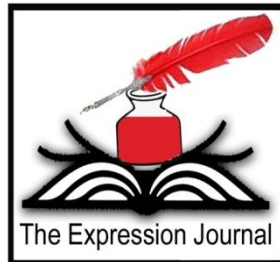


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**LANGUISHMENT THROUGH EXPRESSION: A STUDY OF THE UNFULFILLED DESIRES
AND ETERNAL CRAVINGS IN THE POETRY OF KAMALA DAS**

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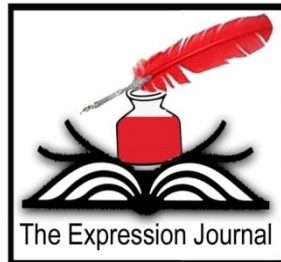
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ABSTRACT

It seems ridiculous to think that even after many years of independence women are exploited and is this society that all want? A society is consisting of man and women and what is one of the sublime importances to the society is the existence of a woman. But this view is ignored by the advocates and supporters of male chauvinism. A woman has to perform different activities and has to take different roles in this society and in return she gets humiliation, subjugation and oppression. It is the prevalent tendency of man to impose supremacy, superiority and power over man. Women feel cheated as they are denied of love, peace, family, liberation and ultimately being born as a human she has to find her own identity as that is also robbed from her. She hardly becomes a product rather an object in this male-dominated environment. She is continuously pushed from the centre to the margin of existence. But in order to find out who she is and what are the things she is deprived of, to salvage and define herself, she has to unlock her heart to show her innermost pangs of fears, doubts, misery, anxieties and sorrows being experienced as a second sex. She has to tell her story to explore rather create a space for her and openly by this the society becomes aware of her and of the structure called patriarchal system. She has to become the phoenix to reborn and feeling of self realization is the subject of most women writes and Kamala Das, one of the leading Indian English Women poets is no more exception in this case. This paper attempts to highlight the experiences of Kamala Das being born as a woman.

KEY-WORDS

Quest, Love, Peace, Identity, Death.



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INTRODUCTION

Any discussion regarding Indian English poetry will be incomplete without the discussion of women poets. Generally women writers are categorized into three sections. Bronte sisters, Jane Austen and others belong to the first category. Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickenson and others belong to the second category. The writers of first section or category have found it difficult to be simply acknowledged in the intelligentsia and the second category writers have started to revolt against the patriarchal domination. But there are some writers who are rebellious and confessional, feminist and feminine. They are tried to raise their voice and at a same time show the male what are they doing. In their works one can easily find the compassion, pleas for understanding from this male dominated world. Kamala Das along with Eunice de Souza, Mamta Kalia, Imtiaz Dharkar, Gauri Deshpande, Tara Patel, Lakshmi Kannan, Mukta Sambrani, Sujata Bhatt and others belong to this third category. With the change in Indian English poetry they come with a unique mission to show their life on order to establish identity through self-definition and self-realization.

One of the most significant Indian English women poets is Kamala Das. She lays the foundation for the young generation women poets as she is the grandmother of them. In

her poetry she shows her experiences and problems she has to face. She is somehow different from other women writers because while others are giving an appealing sketch of women, she describes a woman's mind, her dreams and aspirations. She is not only a feminist but also a psychologist. She is a bilingual writer as she writes in English and Malayalam, her mother tongue. Her poetry presents the real picture of Indian women and somehow she also wants to break all the orthodox conventional male generated decency, decorum and culture. In order to establish her identity she shows the life of women with all shattered aspiration and dreams. Her poetry is for all battered and bruised womankind as her inner world has captured the personal domain of all women suffering in this world. Poetic volumes that stir the new generation of women are *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *Collected Poems 1* (1984), *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996) and others.

Before going to her personal experiences and her search for true love, identity and liberation, there must be a background of Kamala Das. She was born on 31st March, 1934 in Southern Malabar. She has experiences agony since her childhood. She is not liked by many people due to her dark complexion and also her prolonged illness. All her dear and near ones even her mother neglect her. She is led to live a life of utter darkness, gloom and melancholy. Actually girl child is considered as a burden and curse in the then family. This scenario is even unchanged after girl's marriage. She has faced humiliation at European school where she has studied. Her parents are careless and she is accompanied with a cook when she goes to school. At school she along with other Indian students is tortured, mocked and humiliated. They are treated very badly with corporal punishment and they can't even lodge a complaint. From this point her fight begins. A fight to create self identity and in doing so she has rediscovered the mystic and primitive dimensions of her mind and also of the world. Once Kamala Das says, "If I had not learnt to write how would I have written away my loneliness of grief? Garnering them within, my heart would have grown heavy as a vault, one that only death might open, a release then I would not be able to feel or sense..." (Bhaduri, 3)

She is married at a very early age to a person who is double of her age. Her husband is vainglorious, egoist and selfish. He does not pay too much attention to Kamala Das. He always takes her as a sex object and bestows pain and suffering to her. She is searching for true love through out her life. She is premature and thus she becomes a premature wife, a school girl and would be mother at a same time. She says this as she wants liberation from these:

"I was sent away, to protect a family's
honour, to save a few cowards, to defend some
Abstraction, sent to another city to be
a relative's wife." (Of Calcutta)

Her life after marriage is a life of violence, suffering and unwanted sex. She is exploited at

home by her husband. Her husband has no time for her and she starts to write to give vent her expression. It becomes her duty to show the world about the inner life of an Indian woman after marriage. It is really an unhappy relationship with her husband and for these she always seeks true love. She says:

“My husband was immersed in his office-work
and after work there was the dinner, followed by
sex. Where was there any time
left for him to him to want to see the sea or the dark
buffaloes of the slopes?” (Debonair, 41)

She is confined and chained. Her post married life brings utter destruction as she becomes solely dependent upon that heartless husband. In so many poems she shows her pitiful experience as her husband shows indifference to her miseries. In her ‘The Stone Age’, she says:

“You turn me into a bird of stone,
a granite dove,
you build round me a shabby drawing room
and strike my face absentmindedly while
you read.” (The Stone Age)

In her poems, she shows her concern for an ideal love rather true love. What Iyer says about this really perfect, “For her ideal love is the fulfillment of the levels of body and mind? It is the experience beyond sex through sex. The tragic failure to get love in terms of sexual-spiritual fulfillment from the husband leads to search for it elsewhere. Each relationship only intensifies her disappointment faced with the sense of absolute frustration and loneliness.” (Iyer, 203) Actually her relationship ends in a disappointed note and this creates a frustration and a sense of quest in her. In her ‘The Descendants’, she says:

“I must pretend
I must act the role
Of happy woman
happy wife.” (The Descendants)

She is not always talking about the physical love but she needs a emotional support and bonding from man. She expects this from her husband but in return gets only carnal pleasure:

“That was the only kind of love
this hacking at each other’s parts
like convicts hacking, breaking clods
at noon. We are earth under hot
sun. There was a burning in our
venus and the cool mountain nights.
nothing to lessen heat.” (The Descendants)

She wants love and love and nothing else. But every time she gets physical love and this somehow changes her concept regarding true love. This love enables her to create a shape of new Indian women who knows does and don'ts. A kind of mental illness creeps her mind because of the ill treatment she receives from her husband. She says once:

“my love is an empty gift, a gilded
empty container, good for show, nothing else.”

(The Descendants, 17)

She has suffered the male domination and her mind is filled up with all these. She is not quite tough and bold and for this reason she finds it impossible to subdue her husband. But this can't go in the same way through out her life. It becomes impossible for her to stay with her husband as his company only brings boredom, tiredness and frustration. So she wants to break that corridor to give vent her feelings, to nourish her emotions. She does not want any barrier and restrictions. As she says:

“I shall someday leave, leave the cocoon
you built around me with morning tea,
Love-words flung from doorways and of course
Your tired lust. I shall someday take
Wings, fly around” (Summer in Calcutta, 52)

Through the above lines it is very much clear that she now takes her own stance rather she turns towards other man to seek peace, love and emotional security. Even she confesses that a man comes to her to help her to break down the resistance. In her 'Summer in Calcutta', she tells again and again about love which is sexual and mental. She wants to receive love by no means. As in 'My Grandmother's House' she says:

“I who have lost
my way and beg now at stranger's doors to
receive love, at least in small change?” (My Grandmother's House)

Really by turning to others, she projects herself not only as a modern man but also as a postcolonial woman who has now become aware of her colonial condition and tries to subvert it. It is considered as a taboo in her times to seek love of a married woman from other man. But she breaks the tradition. Even in her poems she frankly says about sensual, physical and sexual urges and cravings of a woman. These are not common in that time but she does it without hesitation and her craving for love goes side by side in her poems. In her 'Glass', she wants to portray this kind of love:

“I enter other's
lives, and
make of every trap of lust
a temporary home.” (Glass)

The craving to get pure love enraptures her so much that she even turns to Lord Krishna and assumes herself as Radha. She becomes philosophical rather religious and tells that she wants to surrender herself to Lord Krishna and thus she seeks true love. Really her quest

for true love breaks the barrier between god and people and it is very much disappointing that she has not got a mortal being from whom she can get love and nothing else. She says once:

“Everything in me
is melting, even the hardness at the core.
O Krishna! I am melting, melting, melting.
Nothing remains but
You...” (A Request: The Descendants)

But it is very much true that she becomes unable to lift herself to such stature to attain this kind of pure love. So her love becomes a fractured and battered one. In her autobiography ‘My Story’, she says, “I was looking for an ideal lover. I was looking for the one who went to Mathura and forget to return to his Radha. Perhaps I was seeking the cruelty that lies in the depths of a man’s heart. Otherwise why did I not get my place in the arms of my husband?” (My Story). Actually by telling these problems she wants to ascertain her identity. She is caught in a world where everyone possesses a soulless individuality. From the very beginning she experiences humiliation and after marriage she tries to create her own identity. A quest for self is very much present there. Women have their own life, choice, aspirations and sentiments. But they are treated as sex objects and Das through her less submission in sex and unhappy marriage tries to break the shackles. In her ‘The Prisoner’, she says:

“As the convict studies
His prison’s geography
I study the trappings
Of your body, dear love
For I must some day find
an escape from its snare.” (The Prisoner)

Das always speaks for women who are cheated in their relationship and with her frank discussion regarding love and sex; she wants to give power to those victims to rise against all kinds of ill treatments. Actually her unfulfilled desires and cravings for identity is not only her own but of all Indian women suffering like her. She reveals the carnal desires of a man and how he makes a cage for a woman to fulfill his desire. Das wants to liberate woman from this kind of cage in order to create own identity. This is shown in her ‘The Freaks’:

“Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam, his right
Hand on my knee, while our minds
Are willed to race towards love:
But, they only wander, tripling
Idly over puddles of desire...” (The Freaks)

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Das always tries hard to cope up with the situation in that she is thrown. She finds herself alone in this patriarchal world. She understands that only by showing the inborn passivity of the male she shows the identity crisis of Indian women who flaunts a lust which is grand and flamboyant at the same time. Therefore there she feels a need to go beyond the conventional rules and norms set by the male. She makes herself a woman with iron determination who can face everything, every experiences in order to survive in this world.

As she says in 'Forest Fire':

"Of late I have begun to feel like a hunger
to take in with greed, like a forest fire
consumes and with each killing gains a wilder,
brighter charm, all that comes my way.
A little later, the fury of passions gets the most of her
My eyes lick at you like flames, my nerves
Consume." (Forest Fire)

She sometimes lays some foundation for women to secure love from the man. But in doing so she is not upholding the supremacy of women but rather she shows how women try different want to secure a place in a man's heart. She knows that only by securing a place in a man's heart can sometimes give a woman a place in the society. She says in 'The Looking Glass', "Getting a man to love you is easy/ only be honest about your wants as/woman." She knows that without love a woman can't live a peaceful life. So in order to get love and peace she suggests some idea for the women and it feels very sad to think how a woman tries her best to attain her unfulfilled desire. She says in 'The Looking Glass':

"Stand nude before the glass with him
so that he sees himself the stronger one
and believes it so, and you so much more
softer, younger, lovelier...Admit your
Admiration...Give him all
give him what makes you woman." (The Looking Glass)

The above quoted lines show that she wants total surrender from a woman before a man. But at the same time her self-esteem prevents her from doing so sometimes. She says that it is too tough for a woman to sacrifice even her language, a language which is her own, a language which is her medium of expression, a language which she can confirm as her own. She tries to confirm her own identity and quest for freedom and she says these:

"Why not leave
me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
every one of you? Why not let me speak in
any language I like?" (An Introduction)

In her 'The Sunshine Cat', 'The Old Playhouse' and in other poems she upholds herself from her personal sufferings and assumes a subjective voice in a forceful way to subvert her anguished feelings. Protest against the conventional rules is again shown in her words. All

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these she does for herself. As she says, "Dress in sarees, be girl,/ be wife..be Amy, or be Kamala. Or better/ still, be Madhavikutty." (An Introduction). Sometimes she wants to be a male to dominate the world or to dominate the male or to experience the feelings that man undergoes while torturing a woman. Here her quest and cravings take the voice of anger, resentment and sometimes languishment. She even does not care for the criticism that she has to receive for doing all these. She says:

"...Then I wore a shirt
and a black sarong, cut my hair short and ignored all
of this womanliness...Be embroiderer, cook or a quarreler
with servants... I am saint, I am beloved and the
betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
aches which are not yours. I too call myself I." (An Introduction)

In order to emerge the woman from the bondage and subjugation of male dominated society, she always makes a cry, a cry in the form of protest and this can be seen in his 'A Relationship', 'Summer in Calcutta', 'Marine Drive' etc. The struggle for her own self and for the freedom is the essence of her poem. A close reading to some of his poems will show the journey of a woman from margin to the centre, from victimization to consciousness, from the self to the ultimate. She once says, "One's real world is not what is outside him. It is the immeasurable world inside him that is real. Only the one, who has decided to travel inward, will realize his route has no end." (Das, 109). In his 'Afterwards', she says this with a dilemma, a dilemma between the fear of womanhood and secret hope:

"Son of my womb,
ugly in loneliness.
You walk the world's bleary eye
Like a grit-your cleverness
Shall not be your doom
as ours was." (Afterwards)

Actually throughout her literary career she raises her voice for the quest of identity and she needs a settled life with love, understanding and security. When she finds her life colourless, then she starts to find true love and peace. She realizes the futility of love, human values and the sublime truth and reality of human body and the decay of this body. In this process of attaining love and identity, she realizes the ultimate truth regarding the mortality of human beings. That is why in her poem 'A Request', she forbids to throw her flesh after her death. She wishes to pile them up in order to give a message about the supreme reality of life. She says here:

"When I die
do not throw the meat and bones away
but pile them up
and let them tell
by their smell

what life was worth
on this earth
what love was worth
in this earth." (A Request)

But in spite of all these facts, she is never happy and she finds no such true love. Frustration and disappointment engross her as she realizes that it is not on her hand to search love. It is her destiny and she has to accept it. As in 'Summer in Calcutta', she says:

"Ah, why does love come to me like pain
again and again and again?" (Summer in Calcutta, 64)

From the above lines it is very much clear that she gets pain repeatedly from her love and in this process she finds it very hard to cope up with this situation. So she wants death in order to end her suffering. She wants death because only death can bring that mystical experience for her which she longs during her life and through death only she can begin a new life in a new shape. She even wants to drown herself in the sea to attain peace. If there is no such thing called true love then death becomes desirable for her. She says:

"If love is not to be had
I want to be dead...
While he enter deeper
With joys discovers
The sea's hostile cold
In after all skin-deep
The sea's inner chambers
Are all very warms
There must be a sum slumbering
at vortex of the sea." (The Old Playhouse and Other Poems)

In the above lines one can see a sense of resentment and languishment at the same time. Her cravings for attaining peace finds the way in death and she prefers sea as her medium through which she can rise above bodily existence and can merge into the divine essence. She wants to liberate her soul from the bondage of body. In her poem 'Invitation', there is a dialogue between the sea and the poetess. Here the sea is a symbol of her sad mood and emotional disturbance. She wants to melt into the sea and by doing this she can achieve nothingness in general; sense but peace actually. The sea offers her the way to attain her goal. Here she says:

"The sea garrulous today come in,
come in, what do you lose by dying, and
besides, your losses are my gains." (The Invitation)

Haunting by the idea of suicide, she repeatedly turns towards the sea because it is the sea which works as the objective correlative for her to attain peace. Her unfulfilled desires and her eternal cravings are melted in a same point. She says in her autobiography that she wants peace and she wants to find rest in the sea in order to escape from involvements. She

often toyed with the idea of drowning herself. She wants to end her loneliness and for this reason she wants to commit suicide. In her poem 'Suicide', she expresses this wish of her:

"O sea, I am fed up
I want to be simple
I want to be loved
And if love is not to be had
I want to be dead, just dead." (The suicide)

But at the same time she echoes a fight for survival and for the deliverance of women. She assumes the role of Christ and wants to help others for their resurrection and regeneration. Her poetry seems to be the outlet of her personal experiences, frustration and she writes for the purgation of her feelings. But she goes on with her struggle and finds to seek solace in this life which is for her nothing but a general drama of pain. She writes for herself:

"The tragedy of life
is not death but growth." (Composition)

Really her life is a miserable one. Her unfulfilled desire and her eternal cravings to get love and peace torment her to such a point that she converts himself and becomes a Muslim. She says that she wants an eternal life with her soul and body after life on this earth and she hopes for herself a kind of spiritual fulfillment b after life. It is all because she spends a long time with loveless, restless, peaceless life. Loneliness is her only company. She loves both her body and soul. Her bodily pleasure is not satisfied and her soul and body seeks love and emotional attachment. But due to a Hindu woman, she is not allowed to marry or to do extra marital affairs. So she changes her religion and takes a new name Kamala Surayya. But later she realizes her folly and it is this action for which she contemplates for many years. Eventually she gets threatened by the society, gets threatening phone calls and complaining letters. As a result she leaves her own native place, ancestral house and takes shelter in Mumbai in his son's house. She says,

"Two plain reasons lured me to oslam. One is the Purdah. Second is the security that Islam provides to women. In fact, both these reasons are complementary. Purdah is the most wonderful dress for women in the world. And I have always loves to wear the Purdah. It gives women a sense of security. Only Islam gives protection to women. I have been lonely all through my life. At nights, I used to sleep by embracing a pillow. But I am no longer a loner. Islam is my company. Islam is the only religion in the world that gives love and protection to women. Therefore, I have converted." (Bhaduri, "Kamala Das: Resistance from Margin, 3-4)

CONCLUSION:

So from the above discussion it is very much clear that Kamala Das takes the lead and stand for the women to resist male domination and also to secure a position for the women. Even in the world of writing women are given less chance because the scriptures are basically written by men for the men. From that point of view, she is really a new phenomenon.

Throughout her poetic career she expresses her feeling of anxiety, her unfulfilled desire to get love and peace and her eternal cravings to attain identity and liberation. A sense of meaninglessness, alienation, loneliness, acute sense of isolation, futility and fragmentation haunt her and thus her poems present the ambivalence of modern Indian women. The desire for independence and wish for domestic security are the two aspects that run in her verse. Apart from her failures and frustration, to some extent her poetry creates a place where one can find a hope to dominate, to assert and to conquer.

With her bold confession about her battered dreams and desires and humiliations, she becomes successful to assert the subjectivity of women in this male dominated and oriented world. Das chooses a different path because she realizes that there is neither escape nor any extinction of personality. She begins to share her view and in doing so she opens a space for her younger generation. In this context she conforms the view what Hilne Cixons says, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have driven away as violently as from their bodies- for the same reason, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into this text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement." (The Laugh of the Medusa, 80)

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