



MORE ASSERTIVE THAN CONFESSIONAL: AN EXPLICATION TO THE LANGUAGE OF KAMALA DAS' POETRY

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ABSTRACT

Kamala Das, an Indian Poet, is a unique figure in poetry. Being a confessional poet, the subjectivity or 'I' get prominence in her poetry. 'I' being the prime speaker, the language of Kamala Das' is assertive and intense in nature. When we go through her poems, we feel shaken by her the burning fire of her language. One of the major features of confessional poetry is its unabated strength of its language. So this article tries to explicate her poems, its language and style. And how much the language intensified her subject matter.

Keywords: confessional, subjectivity, identity, femininity, imagery, language.

INTRODUCTION

I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. (*The Introduction*)

Kamala Das speaks about her identity, language and perspective. Her candour and frankness towards the subject matter runs flowy through her words with all its vigour. She is a trend setter and experimentalist in every spirit of life and literature. She has criticized the tradition bound conservative society which of course, was always harsh on her unconventional lifestyle. And the strength of protest and revolt against the existing social taboos and conventions can be well expressed through her powerful language.

Many of her poems are suffused with warmth of passion, with heat of unrequited love and unfulfilled desire. She offers us vivid image of love couched in felicitous language. Kamala is obsessed with writing autobiographical poem which are, Iyengar says 'aggressively individualistic'. This aggressive truthfulness towards her makes her poetry unquestionably truthful and her words are highly sticking to mind. The feminine identity is expressed in well assigned style and language.

Asserting Femininity through Poetry

Most of her poems are based on the theme of love, amorousness and sexuality. The female persona in her poems yearns for pleasures and emotional warmth beyond sexual gratification.

.....Can't this man with
Nimble finger – tips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skin's lazy hungers.

(*The Freaks*)

Asserting femininity means not only the expression of vigour and pleasures of a woman, but also her subtle feelings of fear, loneliness, passion for love, disappointments, failures etc... In every emotional state, she finds herself, identifies herself and on the whole celebrates herself. The poem "Glass" states clearly that finding no emotional identity or satisfaction with her man, Kamala is driven into others' arms:



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I enter others
Lives, and
Make of every trap of lust
A temporary home.

She mostly confines herself to the reasons of her own experience. By show doing she becomes very frank and honest, close and intimate, in her details. He hardly ever writes about 'old, unhappy, far-off things', as words worth and his band of followers did. That's why 'confessional' poetry sounds so appealing and so convincing. The poet's failure in love is displayed clearly in the poem in "My Grandmother's House". That is:

I who have lost
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?

She has shown a great capacity of being the one who reveals her life as such to the readers. She even goes to the extent of speaking about her unsatisfied marriage life through poetry, in the context of conservative and patriarchal Indian society. Her hollow marital relationship comes under fire in the poem "Captive":

My love is an empty gift, a glided
Empty container, good for show nothing else.

"Composition" brings to the fore rottenness of her body and the uselessness of her love pranks. In it she states:

To be frank
I have failed.
I fill my age and my
Uselessness.

Sometimes the total detachment and depression come out through her poetry. Kamala Das has cultivated a poetic style –conversational, colloquial, fluent and graceful, which fits in the confessional nature of her poetry. Sometimes she uses repetitive vocabulary to emphasize her anguish and intensity of emotions. In the poem "The Old Play House", we find her depressed psychology. That is:

There is
No more singing, no more a dance, my mind is an old
Play house with all its lights put out.

(The Old Play House)

Stylistic device which reinforces the predominantly emotional quality of her poems is Kamala Das' frequent repetition of words and lines. This is a device which she reminds us of D.H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas and the Bible. However, Kamala Das does not always use this device skilfully. One of the poems in which this device works effectively is 'Substitute' in which the repetition of the phrase 'it will be all right' conveys the futility of her attempts to disguise the emptiness of her life. She uses repetitive vocabulary to emphasize her anguish and intensity of emotions in her poems *The Dance of Eunuchs* and *The Testing of Sirens*.

It was hot, so hot, before the eunuchs came
To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals
Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling
Jingling... Beneath the fiery gulmohur, with
Long braids flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced and
They dance, oh, they danced till they bled...

(The Dance of Eunuchs)

The words 'hot', 'round', 'jingling', 'dance' etc... are repeating to intensify the subject matter.

I am happy, just being with you.
But you . . . you love another,



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I know, he said, perhaps a handsome man,
a young and handsome man. Not young,
not handsome, I thought, just a filthy snob.
It's a one-sided love,
I said. What can I do for you?

(The Testing of Sirens)

The theme of death is penned down with high felicitous language and she makes love with death. In the poem "The Suicide", the poetess expresses her desire to die when she is unable to find true love. She says:

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

Palamis another poem dominated by the thought of decay and death:

Walk-off from me into lonely night
With my finger-prints on you,
My darling, go, while like
Blood

Running out.

And death beginning, this day of ours is helplessly ending.

Being autobiographical, she uses very realistic imagery in every poem and it may make us feel more close to heart. The imagery of the tasks which a housewife has to carryout is given by Kamala Das in the poem entitled *The Old Playhouse*.

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.

The exceptional artistry or craftsmanship can be seen in her poetry. Kamala Das' choice of words and her skills in combining words into phrases, clauses, and sentences also distinguished her from other women poets writing in the English language. Even when writing in a hurry, she reveals a mastery of phrase and a control over rhythm. She often employs words in such a way as to express the vehemence of her emotion and the intensity of her resentment. Here are a couple of examples of the forceful use of words and phrases:

To forget, oh, to forget, and, they said, each of
Them, I do not love, I cannot love, it is not
In my nature to love, but I can be kind to you.
They let her slide from pegs of sanity into
A bed made soft with tears, and she lay there weeping,
For sleep had lost its use.

(The Sunshine Cat)

We also find the poetry of protest in her. She strives to establish her identity as a woman through her poems, and she, in fact, tried also to impact an identity to Indian women as a neglected class of Indian society. She writes:

You let me use my youth like coins



Into various hands, you let me mate with shadows,
You late me sing in empty shrines, you late your wife
Seek ecstasy in others' arms.

(A man is a season).

CONCLUSION

Some critics opine that Kamal Das is not a Confessional poet like Sylvia Plath or any other confessional poet. But her poetry has the anger, the frankness, and the willingness to confront unpleasantness in social as well as personal relationship. So she is more assertive than confessional in every manner that is in subject matter, language and style.

When at her best, she remains unequalled and matchless. She shows remarkable command and ease over the use of English and has cultivated a style that is characterized by a colloquial simplicity and clarity. Words effortlessly come to her. Since English is most dear to her, she naturally and skilfully uses it to express her emotions, her feelings, her reminiscences, her love and sexual experiences, her frustrations and disillusionments most effectively. Kamala Das remarks: "The language one employs is not important. What is important is the thought contained by words?" She is largely subjective and auto-biographical, anguished and tortured, letting us peep into her sufferings and tortured psyche. Thanks to her that a reliable poetic voice has been heard in contemporary indo-English verse at long last.

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