

KAMALA DAS: QUANTUM OF SOLACE

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ABSTRACT

With the accelerated pace of paradigm changes in individual and social life, mental health is something that needs to be addressed drastically, particularly when we are not all the more unsure about what unfolding of each day brings. Poetry, among other genres of self expression like painting and singing, is a prime medium to find solace and vent outlet for packed emotions. Poems that stir us have become a vital part of our lives today Poetry has been a literary genre that started as strict rules, regulations, rhythm, meter, and style to go on to become free verse. From Kalidasa to Kamala Das, a shift in reconstructing of the nature of poetry as it intertwines with forms and genres has been seen since the past. Present paper aims at explaining the most representative work by Kamala Das- her poem "An Introduction". Analysis of the poem reveals that the confessional feminist Indian poet is in search of a solace that each line of the poem is equivocal of. Whether it is her gender, her role, her language, intelligence, emotions and even her identity, Kamala Das arrived to terms with them in her discreet own way.

Keywords: Poems, Vital, Solace, Confessional, Feminist, Indian, Discreet.

Introduction

Kamala Das, one of the most prominent feminist voices in the postcolonial era earned the label - 'Mother of Modern Indian English Poetry' on account of her extensive contribution to the Indian English poetry in our country. Kamala Das wrote in her mother tongue Malayalam as Madhavi Kutty and in English as Kamala Das. Her literary work earned her a lot of recognition and won her quite rave reviews and prestigious awards including short-listed for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984. Much of her work has been widely reached and so translated into number of foreign languages like French and German.

Early Life

After Kamala received most of her education at home, she was married at the early age of fifteen to Madhav Das, a man quite older to her. She entered her married life as she moved towards the stage of puberty. Yet her soul was immature she was drawn into bedroom by her lust filled husband. This association cast a negative image of men on her young mind that constitutes the focal point of her unquenched search. Often it is quoted that Kamala Das writes in quest for true love, identity and place for herself as she writes for her English speaking audience. (Dwivedi, 2013)

Vision and Technique

Since the publication of her first collection of poetry, "Summer In Calcutta" (1965), Kamala Das has been considered an imperative voice of her generation, writing in a distinctly Indian persona rather than adopting the techniques of the English modernists. Her poetry is considered the most moving and tormented piece of creative spurge. Credited as the most outspoken and even controversial writer, Kamala Das earned fame as the 'Voice of Women's Sexuality'.

Research Gap

Kamala Das as a poet has often been portrayed as non conventional, rebellious and fiercely feminist poet who finds dissatisfaction and discerns while living a very comfortable life by material aspects in metropolitans. This gap between the poet and poetry has been very rightfuy asserted by T S Eliot, the famous critic as poetic impersonality and the relationship between the poet and poetic tradition when he says:

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'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.' This statement from T. S. Eliot is one of his most famous critical pronouncements, but what Eliot meant by 'escape from personality' in particular has often been misinterpreted. He goes on to qualify this statement: *'But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.'*

Objective

Present paper aims to find as to what brings solace to the nonconformist and unapologetic Kamala Das, while she writes on different themes to escape emotions.

- **Solace in the Heirloom:** Born on 31st March 1934, Kamala Das belonged to a culturally enriched family considered the literary royalty of Kerala- her mother Balamani Amma and her grand uncle Nalapat Menon were both respected poet and writer. Her fascination with writing began at a young age at six when she started a manuscript magazine where she would write *'sad poems about dolls who had lost their heads and had to remain headless for eternity'* while her brother would illustrate the verses.
- **Solace in Creative Passion:** Kamala was married to Madhava Das, an employee at the Reserve Bank of India, at the age of fifteen and moved to Bombay with her husband. At a very young age, she had to find a way to pursue her passion for writing while being weighed down by the expectations of her husband, her family and the society at large of her 'duties' as a wife and mother.

My husband appreciated the fact that I was trying to supplement the family income. So, he allowed me to write at night. After all the chores were done, after I had fed the children, fed him, cleaned up the kitchen, I was allowed to sit awake and write till morning. And that affected my health".

- **Situational solace:** On being a female writer in that day and age, she said:
And perhaps I was lucky.
"A woman had to prove herself to be a good wife, a good mother, before she could become anything else. And that meant years and years of waiting. That meant waiting till the graying years. I didn't have the time to wait. I was impatient. So I started writing quite early in my life.
- **Solace in Equality:** With her poems Kamala Das tried to give voice to a generation of women who were confined to their households, and considered a commodity to be exchanged through marriage. She portrayed the women in her poems as human; with desires, pain and emotions just like men.
Her writing consisted of vivid descriptions of menstruation, puberty, love, lust, lesbian encounters, child marriage, infidelity and physical intimacy. She introduced her readers to the concept of female sexuality, a notion that was nonexistent until then.
- **Identity Solace:** In one of her earliest works, in the poem 'An Introduction' she expresses her resentment in being confined to gender roles that she did not choose for herself and her desire to break out of them. The frustration arises when she fails to act as happy woman the problem is, she observes-
*'... Then I wore a shirt and a black sarong, cut my hair short and ignored all of this womanliness.
Dress in sarees, be girl or be wife, they cried.
Be embroiderer, cook or a quarreller with servants.'
I must pretend
I must act the role of happy women*
- **Confession Solace:** In 1973, her autobiography 'Ente Kadha' (My Story) was released in Malayalam. It consisted of a compilation of her weekly columns in *Malayalanadu* that had already instantly became a sensation across the state. Fifteen years later, it was translated into English with more text added, many parts rewritten and published with the title 'My Story': For Jaydeep Sarangi, doyen Indian English critic, Das was a *'champion voice of confessional poetry'*.

- **Solace in Solitude and Desire:** Poet and litterateur, K Satchidanandan said, "I cannot think of any other Indian autobiography that so honestly captures a woman's inner life in all its sad solitude, its desperate longing for real love and its desire for transcendence, its tumult of colours and its turbulent poetry."

*As I wrote more and more, in the circle,
I was compelled to move in, I became
lonelier and lonelier. I felt that my loneliness
Was like a red brand on my face*

- **Love Solace:** Kamala Das talked of her 'brush with love' with an eighteen year old girl, right before being married off. She talked of having to look for love 'outside its legal orbit' because she was unhappy in her loveless marriage. Sometimes, she fails to draw a line between love and lust and gets vexed:

*Ah, why does love come to me like
pain
Again and again and again?*

- **Solace in Death**

*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*

- **Solace of Resurgence:** On being asked why her book shocked the Malayali audience, Kamala Das felt that it never actually did, that they were pretending to be shocked to prove their 'innocence'. She believed she was merely being vocal about things that had been happening for years.

- **Solace in Attention:** Whatever Kamala Das decided to do in her life stirred a controversy in her home state. In her later years when she decided to turn from writing to painting, her nude paintings caused yet another rumpus. Her critics would often speculate that most of her actions were to seek attention. Addressing the controversies surrounding her she once said in an interview with Shobha Warrier:

"[It is] probably because I have some courage to be what I am, and I don't see my faults as faults – I see them as characteristics; strengths too. Why not, if you realise that you are only a human being?"

- **Affiliation Solace**

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

Kamala Das also stirred society with her decision to conversion to Islam and to be called Kamala Surayya in the late 1990s in her 68 years of age.

- **Solace in Imperfection:** But she wonders why society ignores the mistakes or even blunders of men and questions the mistakes of women although the fact is that every person in the world is imperfect.

It voices my joys, my longings, my Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the Incoherent mutterings of the blazing Funeral pyre.

The language expresses her joys, grief, and hopes like cawing is to crows and roaring is to lions as an essential part of her expression.

- **Solace in the exotic and the esoteric:** The gulmohar is a beautiful tree that is juxtaposed against deemed like eunuchs

To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals

Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling

They were green tattoos on their face. They have to carve tattoos on their face, as the face of the eunuchs will be the only place that will be explored, that too, by disinterested eyes.

- **Solace in the familial bond:** Kamala Das' poems always have an appealing direct voice that lingers in the mind of readers without any exaggeration. In "My Mother at

Sixty-Six." she deals with such a critical topic when Kamala Das is troubled by the thoughts of her aging mother and tries to console herself by looking outside the car. The sight is full of youthful whim and vigor and the trees 'sprinting' past her speeding car, the children, full of life and activity, running out of their houses to play. For a moment she ponders over past memories to find solace.

- **Solace with Divine:** In *Ghanshyam*, poet affirms that Ghanshyam (Lord Krishna) is her ideal lover who occupies her heart and all her lovers are the shadows of her real lover, God. She is also in intense love with Nature which is another name of God Krishna:

Ghanshyam

You have like a koel built your

Nest in the arbour of my heart,

My life, until now a sleeping jungle,

Is at last astir with music

Conclusion

Thus the poet Kamala Das was trying to find solace and in the journey and she created memoirs as poems, articles and stories. The readers can now very well relate to what Quantum of solace was delivered to the writer while she was leading her normal life while creating superfluity for her fans

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