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An Attempt to Trace the Linguistic Liberation in Some Poem of Kamala Das

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ABSTRACT

The 60's of the previous century was a radical decade in the history of 'ecriture feminine' as the wave of feminine assertion was distinct throughout the world. In the west, this assertion of feminine self started, however, much earlier and the lineage could be drawn from Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) to Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own (1929). In Indian socio-cultural context, though, such lineage cannot be traced distinctly; the poetic expression of Kamala Das establishes the brave new world of feminine sensibility without inhibition and with a conscious jolt at the male chauvinism and Indian orthodoxy. With a view to achieving emancipation of expression she prioritizes linguistic liberation as she seeks an arrangement of words that can best articulate feminine array of contemplation.

KEYWORDS Feminine voice, linguistic liberation, female diction.

Introduction:

T.S.Eliot in his essay ***Tradition and Individual Talent*** presents the idea that the man who suffers and the mind that creates are different things. He opines that poetry is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. As an artist kamala Das poles apart such view and observes: "*A poet's raw material is not stone or clay, it is her personality. I could not escape from my predicament even for a moment.*" With this philosophy and faith on art, she goes on digging the depth of her entity and exploring the unexplored in her unique way. Indeed, Kamala Das in her poetic practice has been true to her emotion and aspiration.

It is explicit that she has been quite conscious about her feminine voice in her writing. An ardent singer of feminine aspiration and expression, Das undertakes a crusade against masculine perception of women in a typical male linguistic flavour. In fact, she rebels against the patriarchal imposition of linguistic domination and questions

"…why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
All mine, mine alone."
….(An Introduction)

Hers is the attempt to have linguistic emancipation as she realizes it well that to break the narrow boundary of masculine perception of women, one has to make herself free from the stereotype means of male expression. One cannot criticize or jeopardize a system or a tradition by means of accepting the same tools of representation that embody the same system or tradition. In that case, it would only be a blind exercise, only to be trapped unmistakably in the same loop. Das, hence, attributes serious importance to linguistic liberation and undoubtedly succeeds in her endeavour.

Her poetic exercises are abundantly tinged with the feminine articulation. Quest for a new diction is necessary for her as unlike Toru Dutt or Sarojini Naidu she walks on altogether different avenue of life. A reader of her poems, howsoever unconscious of her linguistic freedom is not unaware of her deliberate attempt to make her expressions expose the narrow-minded appreciation of women by men. She says:

"… these men who call me
Beautiful, not seeing
Me with eyes but with hands."

The insinuation of physicality is explicit and this appreciation of women '*with hands*' is a sharp attack on the callousness and unemotional response of men in their realization of beauty. The nuances of the phrase 'with hands' strike the bullseye and quite effectively embody her understanding of the myopic male appraisal. The language is typically feminine that underscores her originality of expression.

When she realizes that, she is just a commodity to feed the biological urge of her husband and she has to go through a life of self-annihilation, she defies stooping down like an average Indian housewife and ventilates her pent up emotion in her poems. Her sense of individuality coupled with the then waves of feminism makes her open the floodgate of feminine outpouring of love and carnal desire for the first time in Indian literature. Her boldness stupefies when she says '*I met a man, loved him*' – love that is extramarital. Being '*jilted in love*', she is not going to succumb to the emotion of lovelessness; on the contrary, she tables a question unprecedented in Indian Society "Why Not More than One Husband?"Herein lays the individuality and strength of her character to question the monopoly of patriarchy to practice polygamy.

The description of female body as a source of some erotic or aesthetic sensation has been there in literature since inception. However, in all such cases the description smacks of masculinity and is distinguished by *male gaze*. A woman is reduced to an object of flesh and blood, a tool to satisfy the sudden eruption of male carnal desire. She is valued because of the beauty and bounty of her physicality; her complexion and attractive attitude- negating hear mind, dream, desire and individuality. The poet does not undervalue the presentation of female body; she, however, depicts physicality with such diction that makes it clear a woman is at work in the creative process. Quite uninhibitedly she refers to '*my pubis', 'breast'*, and even '*menstrual blood*'; but in all such uses she has presented or rather exposed the depreciation and degeneration of masculine mindset. In fact, by canvassing the private world of feminine identity she deconstructs the myth of suppression of female clandestine and makes feminine desire, urge and physicality vocal. Her diction in this respect hits the center of the dartboard.

Her language is simple, lucid, vivid and straight forward; but precisely strikes the cord of the meaning intended. Most importantly her diction is well in tune with the feminine expression and assertion. She realizes it well that one of the reasons of such deplorable condition of women is that women do not talk of such issues of personal wounds openly or publicly.

Consequently such burning issues lay dormant in the depth of their mind and gradually cool down. She seeks to bring these issues to light without making them complex or intricate. Hence, hardly one finds erudite or pedantic expression in her exercise. Almost like sharing the wounds of loveless heart, the poet in a colloquial and daily language converses her life-story. However, each of her words contributes to stir the emotion and thought process of our being.

Her quest for true love because of her sense of being loveless in life is well worded in poems like ***An Introduction:***

"Don't cry embarrassingly loud when
Jilted in love…I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is every man
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love."

and she is absolutely candid in her communication. Such decisive use of language that registers a breakthrough from the traditional poets makes her honest and original. Her advice not to '*cry embarrassingly*' when '*jilted in love*' is an appealing approach to life and when the advice is followed with her personal confession '*I met a man, loved him***'** she becomes an epitome of female voice that does not hesitate to tear off the thread of matrimonial bond in the name obligatory morality. In fact, her confession raises a direct insinuation that women are not going to be the scapegoats on the altar of fake morality. If morality has to be maintained in life, it should be a mutual responsibility for men and women alike. In ***Stone Age***, the note of rebellion and defiance is explicit as the husband, devoid of love, is addressed as:

"Fond husband, ancient settler in the mind,
Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment". Addresses like *ancient settler, Old fat spider* etc. undoubtedly, correspond to the heaped up contempt of women for their husbands who only value their flesh and not the finesse of their emotion.

In fact, hers is such unique use of language that makes her apparently unrefined words with raw connotation true to feminine experience, and once the reader lands on that realization the raw becomes rare gift of expressing verity. Hence when she says:

"Ask me, everybody, ask me
What he sees in me …
ask me why his hands sways like a hooded snake
Before it clasps my pubis. Ask me why like
A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breast,
And sleeps…"
…… *(**The Stone Age**)*

The references to '*my* pubis', *'breast'* are evocative and erotic, but the spirit of the appeal in this poem is suggestive of some forceful physical relationship of the husband without being emotionally attuned. The repetition of the phrase 'ask me' makes it obvious that she grows desperate to expose the brutality of love-making, as also expressed in ***The Old Playhouse "*** *love in lethal doses*"**.** In fact, the male appreciation of female love is merely prized in terms of **'***pubis', 'breast'* and that's why she appeals to womankind quite ironically:

"Gift him all,
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your
Endless female hungers. "

…….(The Looking Glass)

Her poetry displays an adventure with words and their innumerable combinations open the wide vista of a world where experience scuttles to be expressed. Poetry for her is a means of unfolding the knots of her troubled self and unleashing the strangulation of her pent up emotion to attain 'blessed mood'. It is a kind of emancipation or liberation of her identity; a platform to express and assert herself.

It is interesting to note that her language does not throb with rhyme, as to be found in poetry in general. The architecture of her words in a sentence definitely does not meet usual rhythmic pattern. However, that hardly cripples the sense. In fact, the lack of rhyme or rhythm amplifies the poignant vacuum that she carries with her**:**

"…The heart,
An empty cistern, waiting
Through long hours, filling itself
With coiling snakes of silence…"

Her waiting for the true love that would fill in the *empty cistern* of her heart turns out to be journey in the void. This emptiness of feminine aspiration echoes throughout his diction.

Conclusion:

In her language there is a distinct absence of the element of humour or pun that is often attributed as an important drawback of her expression. However, it is to be remembered that her traumatic experience in love clouds the sunny welkin of her life. As a mode of retort, satire could have been close to her expressive art; however, she banks on sensitive use of irony that quite artistically lashes on the gross masculine sensibility. The way she makes use of her deft delineation of her ironical nuances, establishes her attempts at linguistic feminization. In fact, her ironical diction registers an edge over the otherwise straightforward satirical use of language. No doubt, this ironical sting of kamala Das with all its subtlety of art establishes an attitude of female understanding of the social and moral imposition of patriarchy and the import of the blunt address of such tabooed aspirations in public domain. The magnitude of her language is unmistakably this vocalization of a so far unearthed feminine world through a feminine diction in Indian literary arena. Not only she ventilates the private emotions of women, she also emancipates women from linguistic dependence.

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