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Abstract: *Kamala Das has won renown as an Indian Poet writing in English overcoming the handicap of using an alien medium. As a poet of moods, rather than methods, she has reiterated her attachment with the language she chose to write poetry. She writes with a frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context. Most Indian poets in English do not have the candour of Kamala Das in creatively analyzing and evaluating their experience. Confessional mode of writing has its virtual origin in the mid 50s in America, John Berryman, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath being its chief exponents. The confessional mode in Kamala Das is a dramatization of the self, to place itself in focus with itself. The confessional mode becomes a device to formalize the process of analysis and adjustment of the problems that crop up from arranged marriage at an early age. A mild sort of irritation and an anxiety to assert one's hold over the medium of articulation are combined to create a strongly felt need to confess and to communicate. The success of the confessional poems seems to depend on the honesty of the self and Kamala Das impresses by being very much herself in her poems. In most Indian homes a young house-wife is expected to be an embroiderer, a cook, and a manager of the domestic establishment.*

Key Words: : won renown, handicap, alien medium, chief exponents, dramatization, confessional mode, formalize.

Kamala Das has won renown as an Indian Poet writing in English overcoming the handicap of using an alien medium. As a poet of moods, rather than methods, she has reiterated her attachment with the language she chose to write poetry. She writes with a frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context. Most Indian poets in English do not have the candour of Kamala Das in creatively analyzing and evaluating their experience. Just as the American confessional poets such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton she exploits the confessional mode in order to discover the images that evoke the joy and frustration of achieved womanhood.

Confessional mode of writing has its virtual origin in the mid 50s in America, John Berryman, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath being its chief exponents. Confessional poetry is a hybrid mode of poetry that came into existence as a consequence of the popularization of the psychological studies, the spread of the Freudian and Jungian theories, and the emergence of the feminist movement. Confessional poetry means objective, analytical or even clinical observation of incidents from one's own life whether tinged with comedy or irony, self-loathing or compassion. One thing that these writers have in common is the conception of the self as passive: the confessional poets alternately flagellate and flaunt, punish and cosset themselves. They see themselves as victims and heroes-sufferers through their sensitivity, heroic in their suffering which renders a peculiar tone-or rather ranges of tones-nervous and hardboiled, sullen and self-pitying, the nervous breakdown often ending up in suicide. Suicide as the guarantor of integrity and the procurer of authenticity is the true identifying preoccupation of the school. The chaos of the psychic situation becomes the ground of a reoriented art in which the beset self is the testing ground and the embodiment of all human possibilities -the terrors, pains, early miseries, regrets, vexations, (and lassitudes) remain as the proofs of one's existence, the degree of the intensity confirming one's reality." The artistic problem is to make a genuine poetry out of the language of untrammelled self-awareness."

Kamala Das, who writes in the tradition of confessional writers indulges in a great deal of heart baring. "The poetry never reaches a stage of sickness and breakdown but in her morbid moods Kamala Das comes close to the more pathological states of confessional poetry when she steers clear of self-pity on the one hand, and the exhibitionism on the other, she is profoundly moving, and the loneliness and despair come through." Self-pity and exhibitionism are somewhat unpoetic; but loneliness and despair are poetic. Kamala Das seems to be profound when she makes loneliness and despair come through.

Most of the poems by Kamala Das are explorations of the gender roles an Indian woman plays-the embarrassment they involve, the resistance they provoke, the resistance they provoke, and the pain they cause. The confessional mode in Kamala Das is a dramatization of the self, to place itself in focus with itself. The confessional mode becomes a device to formalize the process of analysis and adjustment of the problems that crop up from arranged marriage at an early age. She confesses in her autobiography, My Story all her frustrations, doubts and anxieties stem from her early marriage.

A desperate obsession with love is one of the prominent features of Kamala Das's poetry. The failure to arrive at it leaves her in the claustrophobic world of the self, the wounded self. "The Freaks," "The Old Playhouse." "An Introduction,"



"The Looking Glass," are some poems in which the wounded self, which has to struggle hard to achieve its own identity, is not only the central theme but the principal of organization as such.. erotic indulgence keeps the itself within the orbit of a relationship without making it lament over its wounds. Isolation leads to despair through fear. In "The Freaks," the speaker says: "who can help us who have lived so long and have failed in love." The speaker says that she is a freak and the freakishness is an internalization of the speaker's urgently felt need to save her face.

"The Old Playhouse" seems to provide the key to her dialectical attitude to the male-oriented discourse, and helps the reader familiarize himself/herself with the poet's complex calculus associated with love and lust. The title of the poem constitutes its central image, and the speaker feels that love-making has made her mind an "Old Playhouse with all its lights put out." The self is blocked choked, and it finds itself in a state of emotional darkness. The man is presented as a deliberate tactician in taming a free bird, his plans succeed in making the bird forget her nature, i. e. the urge to fly. The male ego reduces her to the level of a dwarf. Her contact with him makes her aware of her body, which is not an asset to her but a liability.

"Calcutta" is a poem which, besides making a general reference to the gender roles, specifies the essence of a wounded self in an angry mood wherein she refers to her residence as "my husband's home." The image of a "trained circus dog" makes obvious the short of home in which she says. But she does not forget to ask, "Where is my soul, my spirit, where the muted tongues of my desire?" Her creative concern seems to find her soul, her spirit, to articulate her muted desire and thus to make herself in the process of which she learns the poetics of confessional mood.

Although Kamala Das seems to be intensely aware of the self, the critical consideration is whether she has succeeded in discerning appropriate language and structure to communicate it.

"An Introduction" is one poem the analysis of which seems to clarify doubts as to the poet's capacity to discover an adequate linguistic medium.

The poem has a double theme; it deals with the language of identity and the identity of a woman as a woman. Like most poems of Kamala Das, "An Introduction" begins with a statement:

**"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. I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queenesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
you see? ("An Introduction," 1-15)**

A mild sort of irritation and an anxiety to assert one's hold over the medium of articulation are combined to create a strongly felt need to confess and to communicate. The success of the confessional poems seems to depend on the honesty of the self and Kamala Das impresses by being very much herself in her poems. English Language, as the speaker of the poem unemphatically and without any sort of irony, says,

**Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and heres and
Is aware. ("An Introduction," 18-20)**

What the speaker tells us is that she has a mind that sees, heres, and is aware. The task of a poet is to find a linguistic structure and a frame of references to communicate what he or she of the speaker's experience as a marriage is, and what it demands of her as a woman:

**I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs**



**Swelled and one or two places spouted hair. When
I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt to beaten. ("An Introduction," 23-29)**

The lines reveal the fact that the poet's early marriage seems to have given a rude jolt to her sensibility as a woman. The "he" of the poem did not beat her, but her "sad woman-body felt so beaten." The speaker seems to consider her "sad woman-body" as the source of trouble. It appears to be a very humiliating experience. For a woman, her body seems to stand in the way of establishing her identity. To revive the self from the humiliating experience, the speaker changes her dress, wears a shirt and trousers, cuts her hair short, ignores her womanliness. The categorizers think that her behavior smacks of a rebellion against male authority. They advise her, "Dress in Sarees, be girl / Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook, / Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in, oh, / Belo. ("An Introduction," 33-36).

In most Indian homes a young house-wife is expected to be an embroiderer, a cook, and a manager of the domestic establishment. She is not expected to "sit on walls or peep through lace draped windows." She has to be identified with a name. "Be Amy or be Kamala or, better /still, be Madhavikutty" ("An Introduction" 38-39).

Suppose a house-wife is not at peace with herself or with her husband society would tell her to play "pretending games" like, a schizo or a nympho. Till this point, the poem is a mild satire on the male attitudes and the conventional gender role assigned to a wife in terms of the dos and don'ts. From this the rest of the poem follows as the mild protest of a woman who very much wishes to have an identity of her own and earnestly seeks it:

**I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is everyman
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love. In him...the hungry haste
Of rivers, in me...the oceans' tireless
Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,
The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and,
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
If in this world, he is tightly packed like the
Sword in its sheath. 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 then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am a sinner,
I am a 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. ("An Introduction," 43-59)**

The concluding section of the poem brings to the surface the problematic of a woman's identity, the male identity is everywhere taken for granted as suggested by the image "the sword in its sheath." The poem ends with the enumeration of unconventional roles a woman is not expected to play by categorizers. But not with standing moral-socio-political categorization, every woman has a self and the subjective need to call herself "I". In Kamala Das's poems, the quest for identity of a woman as a woman goes a long way in making the self out of various disjunctive psychosomatic pressures which make her sometime a victim and sometime a crazy woman in whom we find an evaluating reason. Writing on the motif of isolation in contemporary American woman's poetry, Deborah pope says,

**"In modern confessional poetry, as an extension of
the Adamic tradition, the stance of Everyman is
readily available to the male poet. It is expected that,
personally alienated and desperate as his voice may
be, it is still the voice of his time. By articulating the
personal psychoses of his experience, he is**



simultaneously relaying the social fabric of his world
Yet, for the female confessional poet, there is not
the same extension. She is not Everyman, and is
hardly Everywoman. Her experience only serves to
reinforce her sense of isolation and freakishness.
She cannot even believe in a solidarity or community
with other woman. Although in a very real sense
male confessional poets do bespeak trauma of their
times, poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton remain
individual "crazy women."

But in case of Kamala Das's poems, her experience of isolation, instead of being internalized, surfaces and becomes part of a woman's experience in its macro-cosmic implication in the concluding lines of the poems. This could be seen clearly in the poem "The looking Glass" in which Kamala Das exhorts women to be cautious in matters of love; it is a poem which suggests that woman's weakness lies in her body, which has its needs..

Oh yes, getting
A man to love is easy, but living
Without him afterwards may have to be faced.....
His last voice calling out your name and your
Body which once under his touch had glared
Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute. ("The looking glass," 16-24)

The possibility of living without satisfying its endless hungers is depicted in a sad state. The poem underscores male exploitation. The poem also shows that the female body seems to make her a victim of male domination, which she wholeheartedly resents. The anatomical images found in the poem seem to have their source in her intrinsic dislike of body, which seems to limit the horizon of the self. The anatomical images, free and frank erotic lyricism are part of the creative repertory of Kamala Das as is the case with other women poets. Kamala Das may or may not be serious about women's emancipation from male domination, but as a poet she is seriously and creatively concerned with her own identity as a woman. While exploring the theme of making the self she also explores the possibility of adapting the language of men poets to voice her own feelings as a woman, wife, mother, and citizen.

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