



Condition of Men and Women Relationship in the Poems of Kamala Das

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Introduction:

The emancipation of woman implies that as a literary endeavor, feminism should consist of the demand of justice, equality and honorable place to woman in male dominated social set-up. In India bold exponents like Kamala Das wants women to have all the privileges enjoyed by men in any matter, whatsoever including sex. She discards double standard of morality and sexual chastity. Some basic questions invite attention as to why woman be dependent on man. No doubt, nature has made her physically tender and weak. She is in perennial need for protection and financial support. She should not be expected to put in physical labour in as much measure as a male person can. Ancient social history of India shows that women, in those days, were treated as men's honorable life partners. They enjoyed equal status in the society and were not pent in closed zanas. . The greatest and noblest tribute to motherhood came from Adi Shankaracharya who's famous sloka begins with 'aastaam taavadiyam' and ends with 'tayasi Jananyai namah' which implies salutations to that motherhood. A woman has to play many roles which were glorified in ancient Indian culture. She is a wife, a counsellor, a play-mate, and a mother.

Feminism: Its Nuances- Concern for the emancipation of woman from oppression and exploitation falls within the range of feminism. However, it does not ignore the importance of a male person. However, it does not ignore the importance of a male person. It implies that as a literary endeavor, feminism should consist of the demand of justice, equality and honorable place to woman in male dominated social set-up. Whereas some of the critics admit that feminism has become a recognized genre in a literary creation and a recognized discipline in literary criticism, others believe that it has almost come to an end because it-

"..... has nearly won the war at most

of the fronts by achieving, for women, equality with men in all walks of life political, social, economic etc."

Of all the movements in human history, the great religious ones notwithstanding, feminism may be regarded as the most pervasive and persistent. However, the fact remains that it has had a non-violent and slow beginning and growth. It may be traced to much earlier times in the writings of foreign as well as Indian writers namely Plato, Locke, Didrace, Valmiki, Ved Vyas and others. Implicitly it is as old as human race. Part of it is there in the overall message of the French Revolution and the American Declaration of Human Rights. But it was

in the 1960's and 1970's that it assumed a forceful form. It aimed at shaking the age-old strong patriarchal foundation of society. It went quite strong all over the world. Recently world conference for the well-being of women was held in China. A large number of women writers too, are dealing with feminist themes. Their writings are significantly relevant and meaningful in matters of human relationships. However, a marked absence of feminist themes is observed during the 1990's in the advanced countries of the world namely England, America and France. It seems that the writers, though discussing feminist issues, are not sincere in their efforts. From the historical view-point, feminism emerged during 1960 and 1970 on the horizon of literature. Mary Wellstone Craft's *A Vindication of the Rights of a Woman* (1972) is the landmark in the history of feminist movement and which may be taken as a manifesto of modern feminism. The book stresses the importance of woman and her role in various spheres of life. In the series of feminist writings, there appeared Virginia Woolf's *A Room for One's Own* (1929) and *Woman and Writing* which seek to condemn male-chauvinism which has banned true display of woman's talents. The French writer Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) is a forceful attack on the long-cherished social evils. In India bold exponents like Kamala Das wants women to have all the privileges enjoyed

by men in any matter, whatsoever including sex. She discards double standard of morality and sexual chastity. She asserts that in matters of pre-marital and extra marital relationships, a woman should be allowed the same degree of freedom as is allowed to man in a patriarchal social set-up. Her book "My Story" is a document of her requests for the emancipation of woman from man's tyranny.

Some basic questions invite attention as to why woman be dependent on man. No doubt, nature has made her physically tender and weak. She is in perennial need for protection and financial support. She should not be expected to put in physical labour in as much measure as a male person can. However, intellectually she should not be considered to be inferior to man. Mary Wellstoncraft remarks in this respect:

"The minds of women are no different from the minds of men, but that only men and women differ in their bodies. Women become silly creatures because the goal of their education is to lure a man. A system based on one's sex's dependence is demanding to everyone."

Mary Wollstonecraft is recognized as the first feminist in England Subsequently, Sarah Grimke, Virginia Woolf, Helen Cixous, Resemarie Tong and Betty Friedan attempted to change the position of housewives. They are the major feminist

writers. Most of these believe that for a long-time oppression has been the common lot of women and that woman has been the first human being that tasted bondage. As such these writers have showed concern for the well-being of women in general. A number of Indian women poets and novelists too, have sought to deal with the theme of subjection and desecration of the women and also with how to get rid of these evils. Kamala Das has very prominently raised the issue of feminism. U.S. Rukhaiyar observes:

"Kamala Das plays the role of avante guard. Her well-known poem "An Introduction" very well brings out the candour and courage with which she made a fun of the inhibitions and taboos laid upon the Indian women. She gave birth to a long line of women writers in India, mostly in the realm of fiction."

However, it is to be borne in mind that all women writers are not exclusively feminists. Whereas some of them attempt to discuss their problems as a whole, the others are interested in highlighting particular issues related to them. Moreover, all the feminists are not similar in views regarding feminism. A great variety of degree and shade in their respective approaches is discernible. Kamala Das, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Nayantara Sahgal have shown concern for women's emancipation. They covertly or overtly interpret and mention

the issues related with love, sex and marriage. They seek to portray the aberrations created in the women suffering exploitation, Kamala Das's autobiographical book *My story* exposes the sexual tortures inflicted upon her by husband. Her marriage for the second time with a Muslim political leader, and that too in old age, is the projection of her frustration as well as resentment against long-established patriarchal society.

Traditional Hindu Society And Women:

Ancient social history of India shows that women, in those days, were treated as men's honorable life partners. They enjoyed equal status in the society and were not pent in closed zanas. They were free to receive education and participate in debates and discussions with men. To gain knowledge and wisdom, they joined Gurukuls and schools widely known as centers of learning. The strict rules of discipline were not imposed upon them discriminately. They lived and enjoyed life freely.

One should not hesitate in admitting that women are not treated at par with men in all spheres of life and activity. It is equally true that this grim spectacle of woman is not to be witnessed in India alone; this is a world-wide phenomenon while like men she possesses mental and moral powers, and enjoys or suffers with her family, society and country. But paradoxically she is expected to be an ideal wife, a mother

and an excellent home-maker with multifarious roles in the family. Her individual self has very little recognition: self-effacement is her normal way of life. She is instructed to be shy, submissive, obedient selfless and faithful. Highlighting the predicament of women, S.Prasanna Sree writes:

"As a woman grows, she is inculcated with the ideas of self-abnegation of pride in patience, of the need to accept a lower status through the mythical modes of Sita, Savithri and Gandhari."

In ancient India woman was looked upon as an honoured member of the family. The greatest and noblest tribute to motherhood came from Adi Shankaracharya who's famous sloka begins with 'aastaam taavadiyam' and ends with 'tayasi Jananyai namah' which implies salutations to that motherhood. A woman has to play many roles which were glorified in ancient Indian culture. She is a wife, a counsellor, a playmate, and a mother. According to Acharya:

"Karyeshu Mantri, Karaneshu Daasi Rupecha Lakshmi, Kshamayaa Dharitri Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayentu Rambha Shat karma yukta, Kula Dharma Patni"

Actually speaking, the institution of purdah introduced in India with the advent of Islam was responsible for downgrading woman. The Muslim invaders captured the Indian women to satisfy their carnal lust. Subsequently it became a way of life of Indian women.

It is still today that the orthodox Muslims and Hindus support Purdah which bans women's freedom of thought and speech.

Feminist movements for the emancipation of woman from masculine tyranny were launched from time to time by male persons. Traditional ideas firmly based on the belief that women are not suited to share power with men, began to be challenged. Those who initially clamoured for reform in women's position, though liberal, were radical. Miti Pandey comments:

"However, patriarchal attitudes still have their sway, this male biased order is not susceptible to the feelings of the other sex. The protagonists of patriarchal order are not intent upon performing roles purely domestic, involving and providing some kind of care and service."

With the change of time, circumstances have changed. The feminists have begun to criticize the scriptures upholding patriarchal set-up. They are challenging the male-language and imagery and are pleading for its substitution by female terminology. Psychologists too seem to attach Freud. They condemn Freud's view, that a woman can be glorified only in her femininity. Kamala is an upholder of liberty and equality for woman. She is liberal with the institution of marriage. Miti Pandey interprets Byatt's views saying:

"She asserts the need for autonomy, self-fulfilment, self-realization and

independence for women. However, she does not discard the institution of marriage unlike the militant feminists of a later period."

Feminist movements, from time to time, have been launched to lessen the dependence of woman on man. Social reformers have worked to eradicate social evils. Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Dayanand are prominent figures in Indian social history. Several forms of feminism- French feminism, American Feminism, Afro-American Feminism, African Feminism, English Feminism, Australian Feminism, Italian Feminism, Canadian Feminism, third world Feminism, Socialist Feminism, Lesbian and Hitherto-sexual Feminism came into being with a view to reforming the position of woman in male-dominated societies. Print media and electronic media too, have contributed largely in this regard. Creative writers are involved in producing literature giving voice to the predicament of woman. However, Bourgeois was a less popular movement. Kamala Das's Parents and Grand Parents: Men-Women Relationships in the poems of Kamala Das:

Kamala Das hailed from a traditional South-Indian family which was indirectly very much a part of the patriarchal society. Punnyurkulam, her native place in Malabar, Karala, was both physically and spiritually a traditional village. This traditional Nair Brahmin family had full faith in the established

social values which rendered women a secondary place in almost all spheres of life. Though the family was known for its literary activities and achievements yet it did not seem willing to break off the shackles of superstitions and long-cherished customs.

The large size of Kamala Das's family was reminiscent of traditional families. It consisted of her grand-uncle, Mr. Narayan Menon; Grand-Mother Kanji, father Mr. Menon; mother Balamani Amma; elder brother Ammini and Ammali. The family treated the servants and maid-servants as members of the family. They were the cook; the maid servant; Kunhukutti the kitchen maid; Lazar the oil seller, pariahs the blanket weavers; Kalani Amma, a 70-year-old chief maid. The devilling-place called 'Nalpat House' and 'Ambazeth House' reminded of the royal buildings of feudal age. The life style and activities of the family were guided by the established social norms. The concept of man-woman relationship in the family was apparently based on gender-pattern i. e. male-dominance. The myth of male superiority dominated the cultural background of the family. However, Kamala Das did not find favour with the exiting state of affairs.

But for her patience Kamala Das could bear to see the kind of 'victim-victimiser' relationship that existed between her mother and father, grand-father and grand-mother. Her father took himself to be an autocrat or a demi-god,

and her mother was treated like a slave, a servant. The dehumanization of women in this male-dominated family moved Kamala Das to pity. She felt sad to witness the predicament of her mother, grant-mother and maid-servants who were bound live under perennial dependence of male-persons: fathers, husbands and sons. The long-cherished so-called ideals of womanhood 'neck-bent' 'suffering in silence', 'obeying elders without any its and buts'-guided women to live and behave. Kamala Das was disillusioned with this sorry sight of woman misery. The 'second sex', 'door-mat', the 'other' and the 'alien' were the phrases considered suitable to be used for women while men were the referent. She was shocked to witness the relationship between her mother and father as 'an arid union':

"Her father behaved like a monarch and her mother was treated as a slave. She unhesitatingly called it a victim-victimiser relationship'."

Obviously, Kamala's conviction against male-chauvinism was strengthened further when she witnessed that her mother yielded to male commands even though illogical and irrelevant. She could not bear to see that grand-uncle too behaved sternly and her grand-aunt obeyed him without fail. He looked every inch in a king, and she, his subject. This aroused in Kamala's mind a sense of disillusionment against patriarchal set-up that inflicted untold miseries upon women in general. She

was shocked to find that male-dominance had prevailed for centuries. Commenting on one particular event, that was an integral part of retiring life, Kamala writes:

"Grand uncle looked every inch a king although he did not read ... beside his chair was a hookah, which my grand-aunt meticulously cleared every morning."

Quest for identity has been a searching issue which need be discussed meticulously. Kamala Das seeks to probe the problems of the married as well as unmarried woman who is required to follow her husband and her in-laws who may be idlers, laymen or anti-social beings whose habits, tastes and temperament may not match hers. She yearns for free communication of ideas with them but no body seems to honour her feelings. Treated like an object or a piece of furniture she is doubly dehumanised. Kamala Das makes an attempt to assert her femininity as a human being M.K. Naik observes:

"The intensity of Das's utterance sometimes results in a lack of verbal discipline and she has her moments of sentimentality too, but her best work reveals a ruthless honesty tearing passionately women within."

Kamala Das realizes that in an Indian convention-ridden society, the husband, though a layman, illiterate or idler, is superior to his wife. He dominates her even though wise, educated or competent she might be. The

long-cherished ideals of womanhood are to be maintained by her. Kamala Das witnessed all these qualities in her grant-aunt and mother. The maid-servants too were like minded while the male-servants behaved like superior over them. Kamala's mind was filled with a sense of grief when she observed this sorry state of affairs. These particular events became a general issue for her when she herself experienced the same kind of dehumanization in her married life. Anita Mahajan's comments on the miserable plight of Indian woman in the modern middle-class Hindu society seem to be justified:

"A woman yearns for a free communication of ideas with her husband but feels isolated and ignored like a piece of furniture used only for physical comfort whenever needed"

Kamala Das's observations regarding man-woman relationship are based on first hand information as well as experience. The misery of Indian woman moves her to sympathize with the oppressed class of humanity at large and woman in particular. Her auto biographical book *My Story*, though the parody of the self, is intended to highlight the bitter experiences of a married woman. Conventional morality has one meaning for man and another for woman. The principle of double standard of morality glorifies the principle of male aggression, assertion and adventure. Kamala Das regrets to say:

"Woman's lot in India is still a matter of tears. But one cannot weep every day."

Disillusioned with the existing sort of man-woman relationship, Kamala Das turned a dissenter against this glaring social evil. Her exploration of the so-called ideal cultural sanctions of social interactions gradually began to result in a contextual questioning of the long-established social set up. She attempted to line up with those who gave voice to the pangs of women in general. Iqbal Kaur interprets her views saying:

"Kamala Das revolts against the masculine character of our civilization but at the same time shows her restlessness with women's passive acceptance of servility as their appointed lot."

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