



Assertion of Self- Identity in the Select Poems of Kamala Das

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Abstract

Kamala Das, a very remarkable poet of Indian English poetry, expresses her personal emotional experiences in her autobiographical poems. Her poems express the poet's craving for love and an intense study of marital relationships. She articulates the despair and dejection of the fellow woman through her writings. Quest for identity is undoubtedly the perennial theme of Kamala Das' Poetry. Her suffering became symbolic of human suffering. In her poems, she suggests that women's personal feelings of longing are part of womanhood's collective experience.

In a male-dominated world, she tried to assert her individuality to maintain her female identity. She is a revolutionary poet who started the trend towards frankness in treating the issues that were considered taboo. Thus, the paper focuses on the personal quest of Kamala Das as a poet and whether her confessional poetry was a medium of searching for her feminine identity in a male-dominated world.

Keywords: Confessional, Autobiographical, Quest, Self-identity marginalized.

Since the beginning of human civilisation, man is searching for a pervasive question, "Who am I?" In different cultures and religious texts, this puzzle, "Who am I "or "Who are We?" and "What is my place in this universe?" is explained. Man since time immemorial has been engrossed in finding a solution to such queries. Different interpretations are available in mythologies, but we have been grappling with this identity question, and it is still unanswerable. "Identity" involves a specific distinctness of character, a specificity of differences between persons or groups. It signifies the unity of the self in its relation to society or community. It is a set of personal and behavioural characteristics that define an individual as a group member. Human identity is always complicated. Every human being has his own identity categorised by sex, caste, creed, sect, religion and nationality. It has always played an essential role in developing the human race

because it defines the individual viz-a-viz society. However, we are not able to define identity in one line or sentence. It is a broad term. As individuals, we are born with a specific identity, and as we grow, different kinds of identities shackle us in the name of authority and traditions. Multiple identities based on various aspects define us. (Terry Rambler)

The theme of the search for self-discovery is quintessential in the world of literature. Entire literature revolves around the concept of identity because every fictional character created by authors and writers has their own identities. Every human being is struggling to assert his own identity. For a long time, many women writers have voiced women's quest for identity in society's patriarchal setup. In Indian English Literature, several women writers have emerged as the advocate of women rights and questions society's discriminatory attitude towards its womenfolk. Kamala Das has been the foremost among those who raise women's identity in a male-dominated society. Her poetry acknowledges the beauty and courage of being a woman and an assertion of voice and identity.

This paper attempts to trace the traits of the quest for self-identity in the poems of Kamala Das, a widely known Indian English poetess. Her emotional experiences find expression in her poems. So her subjective element is very much visible in her poetry. Her poems are the best example of an autobiographical tone with womanly passion. Kamala Das poems are tinged with nostalgia. Her style is confessional. She often indulges in self-awareness, self-exploration and self-introspection to find out her real identity. We see her longing for true love and at the same time, she struggles to create her self-identity in this male-dominated society. She wants to grab the moments of her childhood days and wants to receive the same affection and warmth in her relation with her husband. She was against women's suppression and wants to break the stereotypical image of the fair sex in our society. She articulates the despair and melancholy of fellow women through her writings. She wrote confessional poetry to relate the private experiences with the outer world to share her ideas and feelings with the society to maintain her identity as an individual in Indian society where women are marginalised.

Her autobiographical tone expresses her sufferings, but it became a symbol of shared human suffering. In most of the poems, she shares the collective experience of womanhood. She asserts that if a woman does not choose or the freedom to live her own life. Kamala Das is a revolutionary poet who set a trend of frankness in treating the issues that were considered taboo and no woman writer feel confident in dealing with it. Her poems have Indian sensibility and rooted very much

in the Indian environment and create an example of frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context with a distinctively feminine tone. She says that her poems are indeed an intense study of women's psyche. She felt lost in this cosmopolitan crowd, and she tries to assert her existence through her graphic poems.

Her writing includes a diverse range of topics. She expressed her emotions and feelings uniquely and exclusively, although She shared her struggle and personal experiences. She bares her heart in her poems and comes out with natural expression "I, who have lost my way and beg now at strangers' doors to receive love, at least in small change?" Her craving for true love is evident in her poems. She emphasised the necessity of love and understanding for a long-lasting relationship, especially in husband and wife.

In her poem "The Sunshine Cat", she frankly admits the man she loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish and a coward. This husband neither loved her nor used her".She expressed that her husband abused her as a commodity, not like a living and emotional being. He is dominant and unable to provide valuable time to her. In her autobiography, "My Story" she states, that her husband was busy in the office during daytime dinner at home and then went to sleep, without caring about her feelings. She has mirrored her experience in a philosophical frame of mind. She has nurtured to probe her inner self and the world around concerning herself in her writings. She displays her dilemma and compressed emotions through her poetry.

Her poems express her childhood experiences, continues through youth and finally arrives at the last phase of her life. Her writings act as an outlet to vent her emotions. Her life story appears to be a journey from innocence to experience, ignorance to knowledge and youth to maturity. She depicted intense experience, the unsuccessful quest for love, and nostalgia for her ancestral home in her poems. She creates an impression of being at peace with the present through introspection into the past. She narrates all her experiences right from her childhood dreams, fears, fascination and expectations to her relationship with her parents and relatives, men and women in her life and herself in the surroundings. She intensely observed that patriarchal social system was against the freedom of women.

Das realises her essential identity with womankind. Her poems express her natural need for love and the sense of frustration and humiliation that arise from being denied it. Her poems are the intense expression of her traumas and tribulations, which she faced in her married life. She talks about her unhappy relations with her better half. She believes in fulfilment of emotional needs

apart from physical. Her bold treatment of private experiences is visible in her poetry. Kamala Das impresses by being very much herself in her poems. She suffered from homesickness due to lack of love in her post married life. Her reminiscence of childhood at Nalpat House (her parental home) in her poem "My Grandmother's House," Kamala Das talks about her childhood days with a kind of satisfaction in her life. She tries to discover her identity through childhood memories. "There is a house now far away from where once I received love... Pick an armful of darkness to bring it here to lie behind my bedroom door like a brooding dog" (Das)

In the poem "An Introduction", she asserts her identity by saying, "I am Indian very brown born in Malabar, I speak three languages, write in two, dream in one." (Das) It is a self-reflective poem. The poem is a strong remark on male domination in Indian society and expresses miseries bondage, pain, and sufferings of women. She describes herself and tells her life history. She reaches the age of puberty. However, she didn't seem to understand the shackles which were imposed on her being a woman. She told that she was not ready for marriage at the age of sixteen, but she had to be a devoted wife, which is dutiful to her husband and family members due to social custom. She tried to oppose the restrictions imposed on her as being a woman. How to behave like a married woman, dress herself up in a sari, wear mangalsutra. She objected to all the norms set by society, prescribed for women. She cut her hair and started wearing manly clothes to assert her identity. She began writing poems to give voice to her suppressed emotions. In this regard, the writing was a spiritual therapy to cure her disappointment generated due to women's partial treatment.

She is far from regional prejudices. She defines herself in term of our nationality. In her writings, Das recounts her painful self-awakening as a woman and writer. She shuns hypocrisy and Petty Mindedness as Devika Nair stated that she allowed us to have a glimpse of her many selves' poet, lover, devotee, child, women, wife, mother, middle-aged woman, urbanite and Keralite. She rebelled against social conventions. Love acquires a broader meaning in her poetry; it implies a mutual understanding between two human beings rather than physical intimacy. She has cultivated a poetic style- conversational, colloquial, fluent and graceful. She feels that she does not have any individual identity when her husband fulfils his desires without her consent. As a poet, she tries to break the social shackles.

Kamala Das believes that male society compels a woman to live in a subordinate position in the family and society. In her poem "The invitations" she expresses her bittersweet memory of her married life. Kamala Das says that the sea was inviting her to jump into the water to end her life.

Her rejection of the sea's invitation in this monologue expresses an example of a positiveness that stops her from committing suicide, even the indifferent attitude of the man she loved cannot lose her faith in life. Though she loses her feminine identity when she is compelled to do anything undesired.

Kamala Das had raised her voice against male dominance over female and Superiority of patriarchy. Still, she is not a feminist poet as she desired a genuinely loving and caring male partner who would consider her equal in every walk of life. She was against any kind of exploitation, mental or physical, as a woman and Condemns' dominance of one on another. Kamala Das, as a bilingual Indian English poet, protested the discrimination against women. She criticised loveless marriage and deplorable situation of women in contemporary society. She emphasised her identity as a woman who is not under the shadow of a man through her autobiographical poems. Thus her writing paved the way for women empowerment and gender sensitisation. Her poems are the medium of expression of women's emancipation from women's stereotypical image in contemporary society. She asserts her identity as an individual and gives voice to her thoughts through her poetry.

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