

MISERIES OF “SECOND SEX”, FROM COVERT TO OVERT: RE-READING OF KAMALA DAS’ MY STORY (ENTE KATHA) THROUGH THE LENSES OF HER POEMS

RAHUL KAR

M.A in English Literature from University of North Bengal, West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT

Kamala Das hails from an area which was the then British-occupied, thus started nourishing a sense of counteraction in her. The present paper focuses on the subject of how Kamala Das being a woman born and brought up in a male-centric world negates all convivial values and projects herself as a rebellion who can raise her voice for those who are long subjugated. The paper shows how Kamala Das opens up a new way of looking and evaluating life, human emotions, and psyche just not reach up to “self” rather radical alteration of acceptance in society. Struggling in between two strikingly opposite worlds, Das’ intention was merely to create identity distinguished in terms of all kinds of epithets.

KEYWORDS: *Feminist, Post-Independence, Indo-Anglian, Education, Post-Colonial, Second Sex, Spiritual, Hegemony, Sati, Confessional Poet, Lesbian, Fertility, Psychology, Psyche, Ideologies, Gender, Sexuality, Islam, Muslim, Burqua & Colonizer*

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INTRODUCTION

“I am an Indian, very brown, born in Malabar; I speak three languages, write in two, and dream in one. (An Introduction by Kamala Das)

Madhavi Kutty aka Kamala Suraiyya, better known amongst his readers as Kamala Das is undoubtedly regarded as one of the robust feminist tones in Post-Independence India. She practiced not just to become voices for those voiceless’ but also tried for firm establishment of feminist rights. Her Indo-Anglian forms of writing bears the marks of evidence of her radical re-thinking of the doing-away-with all social and political discriminations and patriarchal hegemony.

Kamala as a Writer

Das wrote My Story in 1976 at the age of 42, full with her anguish psychological conflicts, imaginative instincts, desires and their unfulfillment. This Sahitya Academy Awardee set out in the path of writing at very early stage around 18, having no University education. My Story exemplifies Das in search of identity, love as being driven away in the sea of frustration.

Plight of Women

This story of Das reverberate the plight of every woman in Post-Colonial India, which was present since the time of practicing “Sati” as spiritual unification which later was uprooted by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. having been vilified and censured for being erogenous and over-expressive regarding sex, das never ceased to be called a “Confessional Poet”.

Passive Resignation

Kamala had an arranged marriage at the malleable age of sixteen which was absolutely against her will. Having no choice in front, Das passively resigns herself to her insensitive husband, Madhava Das who mauled her body as his own occupied colony. [“He did not beat me/But my sad woman-body felt so beaten. /The weight of my breast and womb crushed me./I Shrank pitifully. (An Introduction by Kamala Das)]

Homogenous Sexuality

Das describes her encounter of a lesbian girl an ardent admirer of the most gorgeous of her room partners, Sharada while she was in her boarding school at the age of nine. She described how that girl entered into their room when Sharada was having a bath and half-agitatedly unnoticed Kamala involved in the activity of kissing her pillowcases. (Chapter, 10)

Das’ Denial

Transmogrifying the concept of Taboo in society, Das disaffirmed herself as vestal lady merely by her volition and bold narration of subject matter in this book. Kamala tries to over pour herself in this book as she herself proclaimed. [“I must pose, /I must pretend, /I must act the role/of happy woman, /Happy wife.” (The Suicide by Kamala Das)]

Unmasking Selfhood

Das further proceeded ahead about her lesbian rapport with a girl “*tall and sturdy with masculine grace*”. She patently unmasked herself about her “*joy like honeymooners*” and corporeal adventures (or of first kiss). (Chapter, 20) Softly in the course of the account, Das is explosive of her first night otiose cohabitation than about her pregnancy and of her becoming bodily untrue to her husband.

Feminist Psyche

Leaving behind the visor of diffidence, Das kept on with her fiery lines, setting trends and emulating all banal notions of femininity. This book opens a fresh avenue into female psychology and breaks a clarion-call to break all, ale impositions down, rightly as French Intellectual Simon De Beauvoir thinks “one is not born, but rather becomes ,a woman” (The Second Sex).

Ingenuousness

Das remained herself absolute bare to the readers just as an open text, giving a scope into her own psyche, she described herself in love with a lady doctor who saved her from death, once she hemorrhaged after being operated. She avouched it her husband too but his immediate reply was, “she is a woman, she will not exploit you”.

Brittleness of Love

The poetess here presents such experience (“half an hour”) also experience of the body. With her sense of pathos Das says in “*Glass*”:

“I went to him for half an hour
As pure woman pure misery
Fragile glass, breakin
Crumbling.....

The house was silent the heat
Only the old rafters creaking.
He drew me to him
Rudely
With a lover’s haste an armful
of splinter’s, designed to hurt, and,
Pregnant with Pain.”

Anti-Colonial Distress

Things that have never been paid attention to and never given prominence to be publicized became the phenomenon of withering magnitude for Das. In her battered life of womanhood, she found solace in Indianised form of writing in Indo-Anglican English language which was rather a post-colonial resistance against her childhood, she spent under British regime and she took deep plunge in the pond of writing in exploration of her “self”, long chained and tamed by societal customs.

Neo-Stylistic Approach

Das pens down the way of methodology and too the patterns of neo-stylistic projection of women and their plight. Kamala by writing her ‘self’. She basically takes exception to the banal (mis)conceptions of femininity and radicalizes feminine power. Her anomalisticity in writing as well as in her personal life sets her up a mutineer standing courageously against society.

‘Otherness’ in ‘Self’

Being raised in a post-colonial world, Postcoloniality was a ‘natural’ phenomenon of Kamala, according to Homi K. Bhaba (Bhaba, *The Location* 85-89). In *My Story* Das’ exchanges of words with both her father and husband was just like she was getting ready to face the grim faces of colonialism, the prolonged misfortune of Indian women which is profusely poured out in all her writings more or less. The “otherness” in Das always pushes her (‘Self’) forth to come out as someone who can bear the ability to deliver voice to the voiceless’ so as to stand in similarity in front of constructive socio-cultural hierarchy to dismantle the structure (re/de) constructing it again.

Antagonism

Das had her strife between mores and newness in convivial outlook. She being a passive charade always sought for an anchorage and found her paralytic maternal grandmother to be a slothful communicator whom she could elicit her inert noisiness to.

Nuptial Agony

Das’ hapless life after having been wed locked with Mahadeva turned out fictional and such is evidenced in her representation of underhand swains only to get recourse and thus the illustrations of lovers are turbid and hardly can we get truth aloof from fancies. After the death of her husband Kamala created a lunacy – accepting Islam and changing herself into a Muslim, Kamala Suraiyya and next the world underwent Das in Burqua and started putting herself in guise unlike

her barefaced attributive through writing. [“it was our father’s lunacy speaking,/In three different tones, babbling:” (*The Inheritance* by Kamala Das)]

Voice for the Margins

Das’ argumentative autobiography *My Story* concretized in a way never said before a newer one as she intended to project every time ignited and aviated those ideologies held long ago. Voicing for the decentralized(s), the author here paved the ways for her fellow authors to put their foot in the same boot, silently pioneering to bring forth the covert issues like gender, caste, class and sexuality as overt.

Suppression of Women

“Women do not set themselves up as subject and hence have erected to virile myth in which their projects are reflected; they have no religion or poetry of their own: they still dream through the dreams of men.” (*The Second Sex* by Simon de Beauvoir) And the same resonates from Das’ *The Conflagration* where she paints women as buried under ‘six-foot frame’ that is men and gives a clarion call to come out as alive and to have an extensive world beyond such suppressive prototypical figure.

Subalternism

Das here is the tone of the marginalized, Spivak’s subalterns and words in replacement of the long drawn wailings and meanings of the procreative being. Being a woman in the house and beside the hearth Das experiences enough ideas about women plight, anguish and more than anything else feminine sensibility. Das’ battered sexual life and love-sickness in life merely reduced herself to be a despondent wife. The angst in Das, despite having all internal clashes pull her outwardly with a view to penning down her encounters in patriarchy.

Apprehension of Beauty

Das writes: Happiness

Yes,

That was a moment or two

And beauty

A short season...

For what hazy cause we outlive

Live gnarled fruit trees.....

(“*Beauty Was a Short Season*”)

Unlike Keats who apprehends beauty synonymous to truth, Das’s beauty is nothing but a short season besides that happiness for her is momentary too. Beauty and happiness in reality are both fleeting and temporal constancy of such ignites a momentary stay against confusion and restores in consciousness once both perish and exist in transience.

Celebration of Complacency and Impregnation

Without any inducement if contravention lines of grievance the kind of celebration of Das’ complacency and impregnation are evident in her poem “*Love*” and expressed as:

"Untill I found you,
I wrote verse, drew pictures,
And went out with friends
For walks.....
Not that I love you,
Curled like an old mongreal
My life lies, content
In you"

Dismantling the Banality

K.R.S. Iyenger remarks: "This claim for economy really flows from the felt sovereignty of her individual existence.... She is always and uniquely herself!" Das is more of a rebel and fuelled against masculine oeuvre. As she grew up and oppressed to observe womanly performances and such banality gradually aggravates her voice lessons putting forth her explicit voice.

Love of 'Mira'

Utterly unsatisfied with monotonously dull and bleak routine of game of sex, Das necessitates an extra-marital for completion. She draws a line of comparison between loves of Radha for Krishna beyond any institutionalization of love of Mira for Lord Krishna. In "Vrindaban", she writes:

"Vrindaban lives on in every woman's mind,
And the flute luring her
From home and her husband
Who later asks her of the long scratch on the brown?
Aureola of her breast, and she shyly replies
Hiding flushed cheeks,
It was so dark outside, I tripped and fell over
The brambles in the wood."

Feminine Consciousness

In the introductory note to *Psyche: The Feminine Poetic Consciousness* (New York, 1973) Barbara Seyniz and Carol Rainey write that "a conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male oriented universe" is one of certain topics that absolutely occupies such women writers.

World of Boredom

Das' feminine psychology being chiseled and systematized sought a break through the whole traditional domestic dogma,

marital brutality and tries to create a world rather unknown within the known periphery. Her feminine self makes obvious her known world, boredom, abomination in solvent world and wounds she has been gifted so far by the ruling class.

Obsession with both Decay and Love

In Das' "*Lines of Husband*" the obsessiveness with both husband and life go hand in hand and such lead the poetess to the life of both hope and helplessness. In her abysmal anguish she wails:

"From the debris of house wrecks
Pick up my broken face,
Your bride's face,
Changed a little with the years.
I shall no remember
The betrayed honeymoon"

Spokes womanship

Kamala's poems and her prose too celebrate her spokes woman ship of women 'lib' movement and feminine sensibility against the established societal foundation. She expresses her monotony tiresomeness in marriage:

"I shall someday leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea,
Love-wards flung from doorways and of course
Your tired lust. I shall someday take
Wings fly around" ["I Shall Some Day"]

Likeness of Browning

Das' nature of hopefulness and objectivity are never found in her poems albeit, like Browning she observes herself in any different situation and the incidents mould her soul. In this autobiography, she clears that there is always an area of liberty and it is all encircling. Through this process of composition, Das' agonized self exposes the ignoble realms which are really hidden and she makes herself subject to stand against any oppressing action.

Confessionality

Being a confessional poet she explores her mourning, frankness, ailment and honesty and intimacy too. She cuts her hair short and dresses in male attire sternly repudiating the masculine impositions. She is "a misfit everywhere". The zeal of manifestation and emotion possibly are responsible for her empirical improvement of her visibility. Confessional poetry is strikingly opposite to structure and what is called establishment. The stanza below of "*An Introduction*" bears these marks:

"In him. the hungry haste.
of rivers, in me ...The ocean' tireless
Waiting...Anywhere and,

Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
I in this world, he is tightly packed like the
Sword in its sheath.”

Girding the Romantics

Like the Eunuchs, Das’ impetuosity her feminine being remains perpetual appetite for eternal irony. (*Dance of the Eunuchs*) In the departure of the eunuchs through the earthly life they are nothing more than a damnation or death in life. In Das there is a evident bantering of the Romantic writings initiated particularly by Wordsworth, projecting immaturity as serene a s nature unlike Das who shows childhood as state of releasing death and fear.

Nihilistic Das

Das zeroes on her nihilistic attitude in “*The Descendants*” that antagonizes the essential continuum of life and projects exactly the opposite. The poem concludes with a circle of finality:

“no god lost in
Silence shall begin to speak
Claim us, no, we are not going to be
Ever redeemed, or made new.”

Deep-Rooted Torment

Das’ feminine ‘self’ knows nothing but the object of harassment from her own one. This kind of feeling is prevalent in many of the poetries in “summer in Calcutta”:

“You ask of
me silly thin, carry
This gift of a name like a corpse and
Totter beneath its weight
And perhaps even fall...I who love
This gifts of life more than all. (“*Someone Else’ Song*”)
My heart--- the wretched being is today
Cold like those pale green mirrors
One sees in corridors.....” (“*With its Quiet Tongue*”)

Wisdom of Body

Das celebrates the elegance and elegance making corporeal love which is susceptible of “groping for roots in body” and making a man “male and beautiful”. The body’s wisdom:

“tells and tells again

That I shall find my rest, my sleep, my peace
 And even death nowhere else but here in
 My betrayer's arms.....”

Familial Frustration

In *My Story*, her personal fizzle in familial life due to being wed-locked with a haughty and masterful man, her flatness in love and sexual life makes her to escape from anxious drudge life. Having a rare gift of outspokenness and forthrightness, her writing remains best treatise on woman's salvation.

Politics of Body

Kamala identified how women have been subdued simply through their bodies, and how sexist ideologies and sexist reasoning stem from age-old conceptions of biological differences between the sexes which are given support by dualistic paradigms. For Aristotle women are “afflicted with natural defectiveness”, for Aquinas a woman, “imperfect man” (de Beauvoir, 1974) According to de Beauvoir, “In woman dressed and adorned, nature is present but under restraint, by human will mould nearer to man's desire” (ibid)

Sensuality in Marriage

Even when Das exemplifies her lewd universe, there in her feminine self produces the conscious of an existential being. The inquietude in Kamala as a poet exhibits the consequences of her existing commitments. In the world of lewd sensuality, she identifies herself with her husband's love with corporeality. For her such identification is redefining selfhood in a meaningful relationship.

Solitariness in Life

In *The Wild Bougainvillea*, Kamala writes, “groaned/ and moaned and constantly yearned / for a man from / another town [...]” Her poetic persona transforms into a limited one in the peripheral fence of familial relationships. Her constant awareness of being satisfied in the peculiar need of personality pulls her feminine persona to derail herself from gloomy and mood of loneliness.

CONCLUSIONS

Kamala wore Colonizer-popular dress and adapted the same kind behaviorism .She chooses it her response-ability to show the sub-continental scenes, giving the same milieu to her writings and image of an alternative poet to herself solely to disprove the banality of colonizer-conjectures, positioning a challenge to western subject and inverted the opposite. In *Summer in Calcutta*, Das shows what Spivak has named ‘strategic essentialism’- portraying the summer she pictures the rare beauty of the season summer what the Americans and the British too always detest.

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AUTHOR PROFILE



RAHUL KAR, is an M.A in English Literature, specializes in POST-COLONIAL INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE, pursues interest in Critical Reading and Writing. He neither has any publication experience nor is he associated with any research work nor possesses any membership affiliation. The author is a CBSE-NET qualifier.

