

Front Cover

Indian English Poetry

A Critical Evaluation

Edited by

Dipak Giri



PRINCIPAL
SAVITRIBAI COLLEGE OF ARTS
Pimpalgaon Pise, Tal. Shrigonda,
Dist. Ahmednagar

Indian English Poetry: A Critical Evaluation

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The Presentation of Female Marginalization in the Poetry of Kamala Das

Dr. Ghegade Shantilal Indrabhan

Das's poetry is set with female experience of unhappy marriage, disgrace of longings and her revulsion at the male power. She has commented love and lust in radical voices. Women are depicted in various roles like beloved, wife, sister, daughter, mother, mistress and grandmother. Her writings reveal a strong feminist line in various forms. In her poetry the subordination and dishonour of women forms a prominent image.

Kamala Das is a confessional poet as Sylvia Plath. In her poem, it is clear that she is fighting against the subaltern image created by the Indian society in particular and Indian culture in general. Subaltern means of inferior rank is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to hegemonic power. In other words hegemony means a social class achieves a predominant influence and power not by direct and overt means, but by succeeding in making its ideological view of society so pervasive that subordinate classes unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression.

Kamala Das established herself as a feminist. It is obvious that she fought against the male dominated Indian culture and thereby helped Indian women of her time to liberate themselves from domestic restrictions and from social taboos. The poems such as "An Introduction", "Sunshine Cat", and "My Grandmother's House" reveal her protests against the way she has been treated by her husband. It is evident that she emphasized the rights of women. According to the critics Kamala Das's poetry is the poetry of protest, of anguish, of disgust. It also reveals the hurts of Kamla Das received in a male dominated world. She started fighting against the image created by Indian culture which gives significant to the submissiveness, chastity and dependence on men. In the poem "The Conflagration" she advocates the liberation of women from male domination. Kamala Das's advocacy of rights of women locates her as a feminist. According to the critics such as Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Wollstonecraft and Elaine Showalter there are different shades of feminism such as 1) Radical feminism which rejects the symbolic order. 2) Liberal feminism which demands equal access to the symbolic order. 3) Rational feminism that challenges the notion of male and female identity of masculinity and femininity.

The persecution of woman is evident but woman doesn't even become conscious that she is a victim. She blames the need of male to humiliate woman. Her question is that why women show a submissive settlement with the male? She feels that male who treats her as a slave and the female has always been exploited by man.




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The resentment and indignation in Kamala Das's poems show her own sense of injustice against the social order but it also stresses the need of recognition of the rights of women. "The Stone Age" reveals her resentment about the loss of her identity through marriage. She cannot tolerate male domination. At the same time she is optimistic about her liberty. In the poem "The Prisoner" she says that she will come out of the snare of her husband's physical attraction. Kamala Das fought against the injustices and cruelty to which women have been subjected.

After all sexual and mental harassment and economically exploitations of women are not new issues in Indian society. These are age-old issues, which are deliberately neglected by the male dominated society. Indian constitution has given equal status and equal rights to women. At the practical level, women are still struggling against male domination and social taboos. As per the laws of Indian constitution, women are not to be harassed sexually and mentally. Roy unmasks the double standard of the so called "cultured" elites who glorify their uncultured culture and keep hold on the masses who are really the custodians of human values and cultures.

She was of the opinion that Indian women should not play secondary role to men. She advises women that the world offers a lot beyond the love of a husband. In a poem "The Conflagration", she has expressed her view that there is a lot to do in the world beyond the six-foot frame of a husband.

Woman, in this happiness, this lying buried
Beneath a man? It's time again to come alive,
The world extends a lot beyond his six-foot frame. (The Conflagration)

Kamala Das considers herself a victim of male dominated society. She fought to establish her identity through her poems. She cannot forget the bitter and sad experiences which she has received from her husband as well as her friends. A famous critic M. K. Naik writes women poets form a sizable school in modern Indian-English literature ; and the most outstanding work expressive of the bitter service of womanhood is by Kamala Das; a bilingual writer.

Liberal feminists always fight for existing social prejudice against women. They claim that women should have the same rights and the opportunities as men. Due to their subordinate position in society, women suffer a lot in terms of economical, social, cultural and religious rights. So gender discrimination needs to be acknowledged for promoting common culture and equality among the sexes. The idea of gender difference is very much central to the contemporary feminism, where as the discourse on multiculturalism also speaks about the principle of differences- may be gender, cultural, religious or ethnic and gives call for accommodating all those differences. It means, at certain level, both feminism and multiculturalism speak in their own ways for respecting 'differences'. So instead of imposing a set of man-made rules of dominant culture, women should allow to grow independently in society on the basis of equality and common culture which is more accommodative.




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Kamala Das gives the first person account of women's sexual encounters, description of the private lives of women have suffering. At the same time she has confessed that her poems emerged as a rash of prickly heat. However, her feelings and emotions are based on actual experiences of life. It would not be wrong to point out that whatever she has written is in confessional tone. Her poetry concentrates self-discovery and expressing the different layers of double standards which got over quoted in today's life. Similarly, her idealistic ideas of love and domesticity became a cause of rash criticism for which she was not fully prepared. To conclude, the poetry of Kamala Das advocates freedom and self-respect for women. Kamala Das presents the emotional picture of woman and restricts that she should not be treated as a commodity or a subaltern. She demands her respect in the society.

The present paper provides a brief overview of the male dominated Indian Society and the treatment which Kamala Das particularly and Indian women generally received from the time immemorial. The status of woman and the recognition of her female identity are still questionable in the postmodern India. In India, gender equality and recognition of differences in terms of identity are not considered. Legally men and women are recognized as equals but socially, culturally and economically women are not free to enjoy their life due to the dominant patriarchal culture and social taboos. A remarkable aspect of post-colonial writing in English has been the pre-occupation with the issues of women and downtrodden.

Kamala Das has given vent to her resentment regarding the male dominated culture in her poetry. Most of the feminist critics pointed out the role of language, the role of gender in subjugating women. According to them one's sex is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concept of gender-of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in identity and behavior are largely; if not entirely cultural constructs that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of civilization.

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