

## **WOMAN AS A RUBBER BALL IN INDIAN ORTHODOX SOCIETY IN POETRY OF KAMALA DAS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Patriarchy is a social system which refers to the dominance of male and by which woman is kept subordinate in many ways. Patriarchal practices impose control over women's bodies and restrict their mobility that leads either to protest or complete silence. In Indian society, a woman is viewed as a threat. She has to undergo a social bond which is called marriage. But this social bond is nothing except loss of her freedom and dumpage of her wishes and even self. As per rule of this bond , she becomes the property of her husband. It is her husband's will to use her mentally, physically or sexually. Most women writers have tended to depict women as passive objects rather than as active creators due to marriage system. Kamala Das is an Anglo-Indian writer who has been the victim of this social bond marriage. She feels so tormented due to this ,that she breaks all grounds of morality and gives a vivid picture of her husband's treatment to her.

Kamala Das is beyond doubt the greatest woman poet in contemporary Indo-Anglian literature. She in her effort to discover, her own self, unknowingly shook the norms of Indian society i.e male dominated society. She has crossed all limits permitted for a female in Indian society. This literary firmament of Indian English Poetry was born on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1934 in Malabar, in Kerela. She has credited many prizes for her prose and poetry both. She is a distinguished writer who \*Research Scholar, JIT University, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan compose in English as well as in Malayalam, her mother tongue, under the pseudonym Madhavikkutty. Her poetry is a reservoir of her confessions, her love and lust and her quest for self and many more. All these issues can be observed in her volumes of poetry namely, Summer in Calcutta(1965), The Descendants (1967), The Old Playhouse and Other Poems(1973).

Kamala Das was only six years old, when she started writing her poetry. Her journey from being an elegiac child turn into a familiar Indian poetess is an interesting one. She had an unhappy, dissatisfied life even from her childhood. She was a victim of prejudices and discrimination of Indian patriarchal society. She was married at an early age of fifteen to a bank employee. The age at which she couldn't differentiate between right or wrong. Her husband was maturer than her. She was an innocent child at that age. She got married, not exactly knowing

what marriage is, and what it demands of her as a woman. She frankly discloses how loveless sexual assaults are committed on a woman in the name of marriage. She says in her poem “An introduction”,

I was child, and later they  
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs  
Swelled and one or two places sprouted 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 so beaten.

In her autobiographical book *My Story* she writes that her father was an autocrat and her mother was vague and indifferent. She got married when she was only a school girl. She was compelled to become a premature wife and mother. She says in her autobiography, “My Story”, “I was a burden and a responsibility neither my parents nor my grandfather could put up with for long. Therefore with the blessings of all, our marriage was fixed”.<sup>1</sup> Kamala’s marital life was not good. Her early marriage with a man much older to her creates an aversion. His demanding nature made her frigid. Kamala Das was bound to do the domestic chores in the family against her wishes. Kamala Das was a rebel and does not make any attempts to hide it. She looks everywhere for love but she gets it only in her dreams. In her poem “The Corridors”, she laments:

Why do I so often dream  
Of a house, where each silent  
Corridor leads me to warm  
Yellow rooms-  
.....  
They love ... and once awake, I  
See the bed from which my love  
Has fled, the empty room, the  
Naked walls, count on fingers  
My very few friends ...

The marriage in male-oriented societies turns out to be both physically and spiritually dissatisfying for the female partner. Even it creates a confusing state for a woman. As it becomes difficult for her to decide what should she do. Whether she choose path of submission or rejection, both end in a state of discontent. About the marriage Kamala Das expresses her disappointment again and again to tell the world that women are not mere toys, they are also individuals with their own preferences. She is not a toy to be kept beside a man to be married. She feels as if she is marginalized. She is subordinated by her husband and not free to do what she wants. She writes about her marriage in “Larger Than Life was He”

“It was never a husband and wife bond,  
We were such a mismatched pair”

.....  
He was like a bank locker  
Streely cold and shut  
Or a filing cabinet that  
Only its owner could unlock

Not for a moment did I own him

She revolts against the traditional restraints under which women in India have always been kept. Poetry is a mode for her to explore her identity. This recalls S.Murali's view "Poetry, for her, is certainly a mode of asserting her identity and at the same time a self- conscient penitence. From the earliest to the latest poem it is one long, unending, stream of misery and sexual humiliation- an endless tale of a woman too much wronged by the obsessively male world around her".<sup>2</sup> Kamala Das frankly even boldly describes her sexual experience with her husband. In her poem "The Old Playhouse", she remarks her sexual experience with her husband almost shamelessly:

You were pleased  
 With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow  
 Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured  
 Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed  
 My poor lust with your bitter –sweet juices,

Her husband stands for suppression and cruelty, while Kamala wishes 'to fly', to attain freedom. As a proud husband conscious of his glittering gem called 'wife' he totally annihilates her identity and individuality. He takes her as a rubber ball to whom he can mould as per his wish and use for his selfish motive. She is treated as no more than a domesticated woman who is required to look after his house and children and attend to his whims and freaks. Further she adds:

You called me wife,  
 I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and  
 To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering  
 Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and  
 Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your  
 Questions ....

Kamala Das is a victim of Indian orthodox society, where after marriage a girl becomes property of husband. She has to live under her husband. She becomes a subordinated person under her dominating husband. The desires, wishes, friends, hobbies all have been left behind. In India after her marriage, a woman becomes property of her husband. This is also a value that is made understand to the woman who is going to her In-law's house. She is told that her husband will be the writer of her fate now. He will be her owner. She has to take care of her husband in every way either by serving him food or serving her feminine. The same idea is expressed by Shashi Deshpande in her novel "That Long Silence". She says :

"A husband is like a sheltering tree , without the tree you are dangerously unprotected...equally logically and vulnerable and so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lives. This is too followed, equally logically..."<sup>3</sup>

Kamala lodges a complaint against this in her poem " Next to Indira Gandhi",

"You chose my clothes for me  
 My tutors, my hobbies, my friends,  
 And at fifteen with my first saree you picked me a husband."  
 only the soul knows how to sing

Kamala Das's husband has dominating nature. His brutal treatment to her and his dominating nature both torures her physically and spiritually. It shakes her heart many times. She gets frustrated and starts to compare herself with that of lifeless things. In the poem 'Loud

Posters' her frustration can be seen when she compares herself with the 'typewriter, a machine having no individuality since all typewriters 'click' alike. She feels that she has been reduced to a "trained circus dog". Her spirit essentially feminine is being forced to accept chastisement. She laments:

Where is my soul,  
 My spirit, where the muted tongue of my desire?

Iyer says "Kamala Das's aim as a poet is to underline the predicament of contemporary women beset by the crisis of divided selves. She wants to bring harmony out of this existence. Her poems are remarkable because they reveal her feelings of anxiety, alienation, meaninglessness, futility, acute sense of isolation, fragmentation and loss of identity. Modern Indian woman's ambivalence is presented through her poems. She seems to have a good deal of the conventional woman in her. She seems to have the combination in herself wish for domestic security and the desire for independence. Alongside her unfulfilled need for love there is the need to assert, to conquer and to dominate. While her poems describe a longing for a man to fill her dreams with love, she is also proud of her being the seducer, the collector especially of those men who pose as lady killers".<sup>4</sup> The condition of female in India has been changing. In ancient times she enjoyed a reputed status. But after that her condition has been degrading day by day. In India, on one hand women are placed on pedestal and worshipped as Goddess Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi devi and on the other hand they are enslaved and treated brutally. Indian women has fixed place to work for and i.e looking after her kitchen and children. The same condition of women was in Europe that is expressed by Tennyson in his poem "The Princess":

"Man for the field and woman for the hearth  
 Man for the sword and for the needle she  
 Man to command and woman to obey".<sup>5</sup>

Focusing on the marital relationship Kamala seeks to expose the tradition by which a woman is trained to play subservient role in the society. The married life of Kamala Das does not move on a smooth track. Her husband was a monster of lust that crushes her feeling everyday to enjoy her body. Kamala Das gets frustrated from this so called bond- marriage. She feels it burdensome. Alka Nigam says "She finds herself reduced to a mere archetype, a 'finished' woman. Her marriage demanded a surrender of her self and a surrender of her personal desires. Love and marriage seemed to her to be two opposites poles".<sup>6</sup> Her marital experience seems to be so unhappy that like a bitter satirist she advises in a poem "Composition":

Husbands and wives,  
 here is my advice to you.  
 Obey each other's crazy commands,  
 ignore is the sane.  
 Turn your home into a merry  
 dog-house,  
 marriage is meant to be all this  
 anyway,  
 being arranged in  
 most humorous heaven.

"Her poetry has often been considered as a gimmick in sex or striptease in words, an over exposer of body or 'snippets of trivia.' But the truth is that her poetry is an autobiography, an articulate voice of her ethnic identity, her Dravidian culture. In her, the poet is the poetry fully

obliterating Eliot's distinction between the man suffering and the mind creating 'A poet's raw material,' she says, is not stone or clay; it is her personality. I could not escape from my predicament even for a moment".<sup>7</sup>

Male-dominated society is the theme which can be seen in many poems of Kamala Das. Because she had undergone many problems due to this social order. Man enjoys woman sexually and on the other hand woman gets nothing. She wants only one thing i.e. the emotional fulfillment. 'The Looking Glass' is another poem with the same theme of patriarchal society. In this poem Kamala Das externalizes the humiliations and frustrations the women have to suffer in such type of society. She says that the yearning for emotional fulfillment can never be realized. So, a woman must not crave for it. She is destined to play only a lustful role. So a woman should accept the bitter reality that she is, merely an object that is used for the satisfaction of man's lust. Thus why to think about on such kind of matters which are never be taken care of. She should clearly understand that her primary duty is to satisfy the male ego by admiring his masculinity in this male-dominated world. Kamala Das further says that a woman should accept male superiority without asking any question or without any debate. And she should accept her own feminine weakness:

...All the fond details that make  
Him male and your only male. Gift him all,  
Give him what makes you woman, the scent of  
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts  
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your  
Endless female hungers.

Her major concern is to depict the agony and trauma of an Indian woman who is caught up in a conflict between patriarchy and individuality. Her husband turns Kamala into a stone as she was not allowed to go anywhere. Her life is limited to her house. He does what he likes. He never cares about his wife and her feelings. She urges her unfeeling husband to 'be kind' to her and not treat her as a mere object of pleasure and lifelessness She reverts to the complaint in the poem "The Stone Age". She utters loud:

Fond husband, ancient settler in mind,  
Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment,  
Be kind. You turn me into a bird of stone, a granite  
Dove...

Although husband of Kamala used her as she is a rubber ball to whom he can mould as per his will, but spirit of Kamala awes like a bird, that could never be caged. So she writes unflinchingly of her sexual encounters and her splitted self. Kamala Das articulates a woman's life- long yearning for fulfillment through love. But from male's point of view love is lust only. They never think of emotions of a female. They take female as an object to play with. They look upon women as a weaker sex. She tries to break chains of patriarchy. So to quench her thirst for true love she develops extra marital affairs. Although she admits her extra marital relationships but she finds all of them to be loveless sexual beasts. All men are cast in the image of her husband. The poem 'Conflagration' is the proof of Kamala's confessions in which lust is pictured with a brutal realism:

...But I saw each  
Shadow cast your blurred image in my glass, somehow  
The words and gestures seemed familiar.

Kamala Das, in her poem 'Conflagration' says about the other males that they belong to the category of her husband. She also confesses her relations with other men. The same idea is laid in another poem 'The Sunshine Cat'. In this poem she narrates the pathetic story of a woman who suffers much sexual humiliation in her life. But when we do close reading of the poem, we come to know that it is none other than Kamala Das' own story. Her husband as well as other men with whom she had close relations used her sexually but none of them loved her. All of them were equally lustful. All of them were the hungers of flesh. She yearns for love but they refused to love her. The poetess says:

They did this to her, the men who knew her, the man  
She loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish  
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor  
Used her...

Kamala's painful cries come out from her inner self that has disturbed her psyche. Her wish, her desire does not matter. She has to live her life under her husband. She seems to lose her sanity when she is forced on to the bed against her desire as bed is no more a place that can offer her comfortable sleep:

A bed made soft with tears and she lay there weeping,  
For sleep had lost its use...

Kamala Das is a woman poet with a narrow range of experience of life. Yet she used her experiences in a graceful way. In this context she is same as another woman writer Jane Austen, who is well known for her 'two inches of glory'. Like Austen, Das moves within limited range skillfully. This limited range of experiences in the form of poetry convinced the readers about the personal feelings of the writer and also ensures that nothing had been borrowed from another source. The work either prose or poetry is authentic. Her poems speak the unspeakable sounds. She herself is one of the victims of Indian Orthodox Society. She because of cruel treatment of her husband feels neglected and thus choose poetry as a vehicle to give vent to her grievances. Thus the influence of patriarchy is found in all religions as well as their scriptures. The women, in the roles of wives have to obey their husbands and be subservient to them. Thus this venomous ideology of male dominance is injected into even women's veins through the scriptures and they are destined to be inferior till they die. Even in this twenty first century women have no right to worship their Creator in mosques and some temples. This legacy of patriarchy has to be questioned. Women have every right to get out of their kitchens and houses and live equals to men. It is against this injustice in families and societies that feminists like Kamala Das fight against. Her poetic taxonomy brings out her desire for something that is absent but lies at the surface of her consciousness. She vociferously articulates her voice against the dominance of male and desire to re-discovered an identity of Indian women.

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