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The Flow of Kamala Das – Poetry: Towards An Eco feminist Confluence

Abstract

An attempt to read Kamala Das's poems from an ecofeminist point of view is made. Her love is not usual or common and her stream of sexism is not just phallic. Das' obsessions with insects, birds, seasons, trees and sea record her identification with nature. Her fight against gender atrocities crosses the normal styles of feminism. Her struggle for the total emancipation of women is revealed in her poetry in small proportions, obscured by heaps of expressions of love, sex and gender- emotions. The comprehensive struggle of feminism against male-oriented social structure is termed 'ecofeminism' in the literary world. Efforts are made to study her poetry and elicit examples to qualify the ecofeministic concerns in Kamala Das' poetry.

Introduction

It is now a foregone conclusion that feminism is not just a protest against male-arrogance or patriarchal indifference towards women. It is realized that the anthropocentric dualism of humanity and nature and androcentric dualism of man and woman share the common logic of 'domination' (Warren, 1994). Analysis of the phenomenon revealed that women are associated with nature-material-emotional and particular aspects and men are associated with culture-non-material, the rational and the abstract. This should suggest a common cause between feminism and ecology (Davion, 1994). In fact, a feminine fact without feminist aspirations is ruled out. The fight against masculinity has developed the truths of naturalism and the holistic proclivities of women. The pragmatic feminist-perspective developed the idea that neither gender shall be taken uncritically. Woman's identification with nature is accepted in two ways, as an exploited community subjected to violent ambitions of males and nature is soft and deserves to be treated as 'Second sex' (Charlene Spretnak, 1989, Simon de Bonveir). Very few poets could answer the question whether a woman needs protest against male-violence or submit as 'Second sex' trying to adjust to the masculine-vagaries. Kamala Das is the lone champion of the, Indo-Anglian poetry in the stream of sexism (Biehel, 1991). Kamala Das elevated feminism to the universal levels of sociological orientation.

Poetic Expressions of Kamala Das:

It was satchidanandan in his foreword to 'My story' (1988). Who observed that her autobiography has tumult of colours and turbulent poetry. Love for her poetic genius apart, the presence of multiple people and feelings is apparent. The themes and contents of Kamala Das rise from 'here to infinity', from the mundane to sublime:

“For a human being, his body is his shame as he must somehow conceal it

with wrappings of Cotton... silk or the mythological big leaf". (Amavasi)

Though superfluous with images of love and sex, she is never content with the ecstasy of flesh and mind but cries foul against the injustice, inherent in the conjugal matters. When Kamala Das expressed "Love was the only religion, I ever recognized..... fearing the wrath of your commanders, you left me." (March of mercenaries) She conveys that her love is crucified in the mercenary behavior of men in general. Nature for her is not just a metaphor for amorous imagery but a co-convict to fight for justice together.

"The crumbling of my world thumps against my ear the trees descend
flowers drop..... ripened fruits fall" (M. Mercenaries)

As Plumwood (1998, 2011) advocates "that in spite of the varied series of dualisms, similarities and differences in human nature continue and can be distinguished as reason and emotion, man and woman without the obsession of the main stream of tradition in Euro-American culture that superior and inferior things exist". This leads to the suggestion that humans are superior to nature with the corollary that 'he' is destined to rule the 'she' nature. Kamala Das refers to this plight.

".....but my sad woman body felt so beaten the weight of my breasts and
womb crushed me". In him the hungry haste of rivers... in me... the Ocean's
tireless waiting....." (An introduction)

This is not a simple arrow from Cupid, but a burning love-lava to be extruded from a volcano.

The expression of Kamala Das, though unorganized and tumultuous, initially looked confessional and autobiographical with unsatiated love and sex-desires. Her poetic soul rose from the dust of disease and destitution to the philosophical heights of justice to 'other sex'...

further to the justice of universal womanhood. When Kamala Das gave a 'class' touch to her ubiquitous sex-stream,

“Richmen dance with another’s wives
and eke out a shabby secret ecstasy
and poor old men lie on wet pavements
cough and cough their lungs out”.

Pepper (1993) remarked “that as per the eco-Marxian analysis, patriarchy and environmental exploitation will wither away in the post-revolutionary communist society”. As the world moved towards market economy towards the beginning of the 21st century, all relations, more so man-woman sexual and familial, are determined by market utility. Hence a decentralised global movement out of common interests and opposing all forms of domination and violence is needed (Inestra king...) and ecofeminism is such a movement. It is a realisation in the 'second sex' that the androcentricism of the first sex should be annihilated with an all round attack ecofeminist literary and cultural arsenal within the ecocritical field shall play an important role (euomo-1994).

“Woman... is the happiness..... this lying buried
beneath a man? It is time again to come alive.

The world extends a lot beyond his six-foot frame”. (The descendants)

It is obvious that Kamala Das gives a call to womankind to rise, to wake up and think of the 'larger world' than mere sex-activity. One who is craving for love with sex every minute and searching for a paradise is 'his arms', tells the fellow women to think of a larger world, presumably for emancipation.

When Vandana Shiva (1989) claimed that ecofeminists provided criticism of globalization, free trade and international maldevelopment, she means that the movement is linked to social, political, ethical and spiritual orientations of deep ecology. The ontology of

man dominating woman and nature develops maldevelopment, which has at its root the ‘death of feminine principle’ under a regressive and violent masculinity. That is why Kamala Das said in lyrical terms,

“A man is no use whatever then

you want them; your mother or sister,

or the girl with whom you went to school

or your first love and her first child.... a girl.....

and your second...”

(The female of the

speaker)

The poem suggests the universal need for a feminist presence to rescue and patriarchal futility. Kamala Das is not speaking as a victim but her voice is the voice of signal for transformation under the ‘third word’ category where familial relations dominate phallic connections. (Shiva.....) “I remained a virgin for a fortnight after marriage while he was after some other lady leaving me alone...” in the poet’s own words.

The paradigm that Simone de Beauvoir conceived is a world when the woman is free to assume masculine values, and try to ‘catch-up’ with men syndrome. Sure, they did. Kamala Das said,

“I wore a shirt and my brother’s trousers cut my hair short and ignored my

womanliness”

(An introduction)

Which was proved to be a futile exercise but de Beauvoir is followed in another sense that Kamala Das gathered courage of conviction to question “Why not women have more husbands?”, echoing the absolute truth that men are polygamous beyond all limits of social decency (Deane Curtin, 1999). The Nizam, the Nawab of Hyderabad province in Andhra Pradesh of South India had three hundred wives (not knowing at times their names too) until 1948, when the princely state was merged in Indian Union.

The patriarchal myth of ‘man-the hunter’ implies many levels of violence in nature. Wherein he can appropriate not only plants and animals but females too (the producers of nature) with his arms. (Maria Mies...)

“Ask me why his hands away like a hooded snake
before it clasps my pubis. Ask me why like a great
tree felled, he slums against my breast and sleep.....
ask me What is bliss and what is its price.....” (The Stone Age)

Philosophical Essence

Very rarely any poet, worth the name, decides a philosophical path and pursues it in his or her poetry. The emotional outburst over a time exhibits a value system, rising from local to global, from personal to universal. If the poet does not convey such a theme of worldly relevance and depends on the ‘technical exuberance’, however great it be, ends up as a damp squib. In case of Kamala Das, many critics have taken the boisterous images of ‘love and sex’ seriously and end up in putting her in high pedestal of confessionalism. Ignoring her expressions like (My story, P.213)

“ I liken God to a tree.... Which has its parts
leaves, the bark, the fruits and flowers..... Quiditus ...each component obeys
its own destiny ... the flowers blossom...
scatter pollen.... The fruits ripen... the bark peels... each of us shall
obey that colossal wisdom, the taproot and the source of all consciousness”.

Kamala Das is clear to claim that the source of universal consciousness is a ‘tree’, part of nature and has the audacity to declare ‘God is a tree’! Indian spiritual ethos claims that Shakti is feminine creativity (pakrithi) of cosmos, in conjunction with the masculine principle, purusha, the inert male, the shiva, shakti and shiva being the ‘ancient couple’:

(Danielon, A 1985). Kamala Das identifies herself with Radha and Mira in their celestial love for Lord Krishna. She is not religious nor had any reverence for it when she remarked in verse... “What man has inherited is not love but hatred.....not wisdom but babble... this ancient virus that we nurtured in the Soul”. (The Inheritance)

Sharad Rajiniwala (2001) rightly observed that Kamala Das’s inner world “has not remained her personal, it has acquired profound symbolic significance for all bruised and battered womankind”.

The modern world mostly in the post-colonial era had begun seeing things as an ecological web and not just a food pyramid, of bigger ones eating smaller ones. Rajani Kothari excellently summarized this praxis when he said... “The feminist principle is associated with the non-patriarical category of creative non-violence...as Gandhi was to formulate through his life that freedom is indivisible..... and oppressor male too is caught in the culture of oppression...the gender struggles are totally inadequate for liberation and the third world women are leading ecological struggles based on communities, regions, sex distinction, working patterns, traditional habits and political faiths”. With enormous love for masculinity, the loving men and the sex-habits, Kamala Das belongs to Kothari’s group of non-violent feminism aiming for “indivisible freedom”.

Kamala Das minced no words in her identification with poor and helpless, hungry and the downtrodden...

“.... When my communist friends ask me... should I not have written solely for the poor and downtrodden... I remain silent..... I watch the young mad woman tormented by loafers.... the poor emerge from invisible holes looking for edible garbage....the poor, but for their fatalist attitude, would have risen like a locust storm and thrown us, the rich tax payers on garbage heaps, having torn us to pieces..... I shudder...for a moment but a shudder in

delicious anticipation.... Both my eldest son and I believed in socialism...”
(Mystory, P. 189..205)

The above remarks, (though in prose and as good as free verse) confirm beyond doubt that she means social and universal in her attitudes... With due regard to class, nature and exploitation with the sole aim of a total emancipation for womankind.

Iqbal Kaur (1993) pronounced the final verdict in lucid terms. “Kamala Das gave confidence to young women that they can reject and refuse the victims position, frustrate the efforts of the sex exploiter to passivise and marginalise women”. When Kamala Das wrote about the corpse of a maid servant, frenzied dance of eunuchs, smell of death in the hospital, Lankan Bombings, Vigorous loveless lovers, lustful husbands, child prostitutes, call-girls of sham with obtrusive breasts, poor and houseless people, superstitious villagers, loving grandmother and indifferent fathers, it is evident that her theme is a universal emancipator of women what is called ‘ ecofeminism’, the confluence of all rivers of feminism like race, colour, gender, third world, sexism, political segregation, social and cultural marginalisation under the banner of “weaker sex”, deserving to be treated as ‘naturally’ soft and needed to be explanted by man’s chivalry. Her conversation with the sea, conveys the suicidal desire and her wish to live in the vortex of the sea reveal Kamala Das’s total identification with nature. She went to the extent of saying “Oh Sea...you and I are utter flops...”.

“When I went deeper with joy, I discover sea’s hostile cold is after all skin-deep...the sea’s inner chambers are very warm.... there must be a sun numbering at the vortex of the sea....” The example of her poem ‘Jai Surya’ should stand witness to her identification with nature as total: it was about the labour pains for the delivery of her second son ‘Jaisurya’. It was rain.... On every weeping tree... that lush moss spread like Eczema and from beneath the swashy earth the fat worms surfaced to explode under rain...the first of labour pain...sighing...wailing and roaringthe first tinge of blood seemed like dawn

breaking... for a while I too was earth.....” the woman being treated as a metonym for earth is quite old in Indian literature.

Conclusion

Kamala Das does not belong to the group of poets, perhaps a majority, who preconceive the themes premeditate the structure and conscious in creating the text. She belongs to the rare few who, as Eliot, T.S(1950) observed that mind creates when life is in pain. For Kamala Das, the pain in her life is continual until the end, spectral in variation from a lustful husband devoid of love to the chronic heart disease. The poetry, extruded in the heightened form of emotions suffered hiccups too and finally looked tumultuous, where in the critics picked up ‘love-sex’ imagery, available in abundance. Kamala Das is neither a nymphomaniac nor a radical ecofeminist of anti-masculine trait. Her ceaseless quest for love is not just phallic but a realisation of the purpose of life, transcending from mundane couples to the celestial pair of Radha-Krishna. The agony, she has undergone on her way to catch the eternal love, made her to create the penury and pathos of womankind in particular and the humanity in general. The weak and, soft nature of women are nature-like to be exploited by arrogant masculinity. Kamala Das loved a plant, a tree, a flower, an insect, a bird, a pond and the sea and identified herself totally with segments of nature. Her feministic friends assumed ecofeministic dimensions of comprehensive method in the anti-patriarchal movement. The soul of Kamala Das, the river of love for life thus flowed into the ecofeministic confluence.

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