

## The Issues Of Gender Discrimination And Women's Subjugation: A Comparative Study Of Kamala Das' 'An Introduction' And Eunice De Souza's "Advice To Women"

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### Abstract:

Since the day of creation both men and women have almost been playing equal role through continually populating the world and participating in the running of all the institutions of the humanity. Apparently they are in good terms. So far the lectures from the pulpit, cultural and academic dais are concerned, the advocacy for the balance relationship between men and women are heard. Even the bookish documents endorse the equality of men and women in every walk of life. But the reality speaks on opposite scale. Under the guise of the apparently good terms, the inherent cold war prevails between men and women of the society. But the war is unequal because women appear to be weak and vulnerable in the direct clash with men who are biologically stronger than women. They are being dominated and subjugated in every sphere by their male counterparts from the pre-historic time. The feminist movement is continually highlighting the issue in the broad daylight and the awareness of these injustices have made women combat vigorously against the hypocrite and chauvinistic men of the patriarchal society. Kamala Das has first-hand experience of this discrimination, whereas Eunice de Souza, being fortunately situated in economically, educationally and socially superior positions has second-hand experience of existing social evils. Even though they are addressing from different perspectives the same social issue, their target is the same i.e. the assurance of social, political, and economic equality for women. This paper will endeavour to make comparative analysis of the issues of gender discrimination and women-subjugation in the light Kamala Das' 'An Introduction' and Eunice de Souza's 'Advice to women'.

**Keywords:** Gender discrimination, Women-Discrimination, Subjugation, patriarchal society, Deprivation

### Introduction:

Gender discrimination means any exclusion or restriction made on the basis of gender that creates barriers for the discriminated beings. It patently fingers at the all sorts of discrimination imposed upon the females of the society. For this discrimination women are deprived of their full and equal human rights. Women- subjugation, on the other hand, is the active attempt by an individual or society to keep women inferior to men. In the name of religious and moral code of conduct, the patriarchal society imposes restrictions and injunctions upon the overall activities of women. Our society is smoothly running due to the equal contributions of both men and women in every department of human activities. But the steering of society has been in the hands of the male members of society thereby making the society as a patriarchal one. In this patriarchal society, women have been pushed aside and thrown over boundary. They are victims of social discriminations and subjugation. The males are enjoying all privileges and major benefits of society. The male child is sponsored and promoted to all the social status. But a female child is denied the access to the field she is aspiring. This injustice has been addressed, like many authors, by two female authors, namely Kamala Das and Eunice de Souza. With feministic standpoint and revolutionary spirit, these two Indian women writers have tried to cover up the universal feminine predicament in the patriarchal society in their poems.

In her 'An introduction', Kamala Das is verily revolting against the injunctions laid upon her by the phallogocentric society. She announces crusade against the gender discrimination and woman-subjugation. Here Das makes straightforward utterance of a soul which has been profusely bled in the hands of her familiar faces. The poem plunges into the inner chambers of mind and drags out injured and shattered inner self of the poetess herself in particular and every woman in general and projects her bold pleading for feminism. She observes: "A poet's raw material is not stone or clay, it is her personality. I could not escape from my predicament even from a moment." (Das, web)

The poem opens with Das' attitude to politics. Here the issues of gender discrimination and women-subjugation are very well-pronounced. The male dominated society realizes well that a woman with political empowerment cannot be subjugated. What Das says in the very opening concludes this:

*I don't know politics but I know the names  
Of those in power, and can repeat them like  
Days of weeks, or names of months, beginning with  
Nehru. (Das, 1-4)*

The patriarchal agencies also impose injunction on her use of language. The poet is vehement against this vile practice of gender discrimination and woman-subjugation in the name of language politics. She bursts into saying:

*Why not let me speak in*

*Any language I like? The language I speak,  
 Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses  
 All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half  
 Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,  
 It is as human as I am human, don't  
 You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my  
 Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing  
 Is to crows or roaring to the lions it  
 Is human speech. (Das, 9-19)*

But she is fed up with such types of restrictions posed by the domination of patriarchy. Hers is the opinion that the language which a man speaks easily and conveniently must be free from clutches and restrictions. The categorisers may give injunction, “....Do not write in English, English is not your mother tongue.” (Das, 6-7), but Kamala Das cannot help being vehemently revolutionary. She discharges her fiery words:

*Why not leave me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,  
 Every one of you? Why not let me speak in  
 Any language I like?” (Das, 7-10)*

Now Kamala Das recalls her adolescent age when she in on the threshold of puberty, neither child nor young enough to be married. But the patriarchy of her family gets her married to a youth of sixteen which, in turn, reflects the actual position of women in the society:

*“....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.  
 The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank  
 Pitifully.”(Das, 29-38)*

The expression *'And closed the door'* is euphemistic and suggestive. It connotes the sexual copulation between the husband and wife so as to procreate issues. Again it may also be interpreted metaphorically. The word *'door'* is a universal symbol of liberty and freedom. So here the closing of the door suggests the closing of liberty of a girl child. Now forward, she will have to live under the walls of patriarchy. It reminds us of the famous statement of Manusmriti, which says that a woman is never free. Before marriage, she is protected by her parents, after marriage, by husband and after the death of the husband, by her children. Rightly does Simone de Beauvoir also say in *'The Second Sex'* - *'One is not born woman, but rather becomes a woman'* (Beauvoir, web)

At the end of the first part of the poem, Kamala Das asserts boldly and frankly that after her marriage, she has to live in restrictions posed by the conservative men of the family. But she wanted to lead a life of freedom even after marriage. So, she often wore a shirt and her brother's trousers. She cut her hair short and ignored the womanliness. But it was against the attitude of the conservatives. So, they forbade her to do so. The poet observes:

*"Dress in saris, be girl.  
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,  
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in, oh  
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit  
On walls or peep in through our lace draped window"*(33-37)

The repetition of the verb 'be' again and again shows the chains and restrictions of masculine gender. The sentences are very short containing only two words, e.g., Be cook, Be girl, Be wife, Fit in etc. They suggest the confinement of women under the wall and their little activities in the other social, spiritual and political affairs. So, the shortness of sentences shows the shortness of women in the eyes of men.

The second part of the poem again shows the monopoly of the patriarchal society.

*"...It is time to  
Choose a name, a role, Don't play pretending game;  
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a  
Nympho, Don't cry embarrassingly loud when  
jilted in love."*(Das, 39-42)

Here again in these lines we find the dos and don'ts of the male dominated family. A woman in such a family is never allowed to play schizophrenia and cry loud when jilted in love. These lines are heavily punctuated. This has been deliberately done by the poet to

show the various gaps and bumps in the path of the women in a masculine society. This unwanted and undeserving restrictions made Kamala Das a rebel in her life. She boldly asserts that she wants a man who has love for her. She even goes to the extent of making an unbecoming, untraditional, illicit relation with a man:

*“I met a man, loved him.  
 Call Him not by any name, he is every man  
 Who want woman, just as I am every  
 Woman who seeks love. In him.... The hungry haste of rivers,  
 In me. The oceans’ tireless Waiting....”* (Das, 42-46)

It is to be noted that the sexual portrayal of Kamala Das cannot be branded as pornographic. In literature nothing is moral or immoral. The only thing that matters in art and literature is the presentation. In other words, in the domain of art and literature, manner is more important than matter. There are several nude and vulgar statues of men and women in the caves of Ajanta and on the temple of Konark, but they are recognized as fine pieces of art and beauty. So, in art and literature vulgarity may come, but it must come through poetic beauty. This is exactly what we find in these lines. The poetess has woven the vulgar theme of sex and pleasure through the medium of beautiful symbols and images. Kamala Das, the worst sufferer of male chauvinism earnestly searches for a man who can quench her desire, the desire for love and freedom. She is in search of a man to whom she may share her grief and sorrow, pleasure and happiness.

So, she asks each and every one the question. *‘Who are you?’* This question is very suggestive. She wants to be fully confirmed whether the man whom she is searching for is genuine or fake, conservative or liberal. And ultimately the man is found who calls himself *‘I’*. The poetess says that he is tightly packed like the sword in its sheath. Here the phrase *‘sword in its sheath’* is highly symbolic. It symbolizes the inner nature of behaviour of a man’s personality which is always covered or hidden. Modern psychology says that man’s mind is a complex organism which cannot be fathomed so easily. It is, in the language of Freud, an iceberg. Virginia Woolf also points out that man’s life is not a series of gig lamps, but it is just like a semi-transparent envelope.

So, on the psychological plane, this phrase shows the unfathomable and invisible self which is seldom present in man’s actions. But Kamala Das is able to search for that man who was the same in both his inward and outward appearances. So she frankly observes that she enjoys the pleasures of life with him:

*“...It is I who drink lonely  
 Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,*

*It is I who laugh, It is I who make love  
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying  
With a rattle in my throat.”(Das, 53-57)*

In these lines, we see the confession of Kamala Das on the metaphorical plane. Here the word, 'I' represents the inner soul of Kamala Das. It may suggest the inner longings of an average woman who wants to be loved by her husband free from the do's and don'ts of the categorizers. And now, the poetess has got what she wanted. But by doing so, she is both ashamed of and happy, sinner and saint:

*“...I am sinner.  
I am saint. I am the beloved and the  
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no  
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.”(Das, 57-60)*

This paradoxical rendering of the inner psyche of a deserted woman has a close conformity with the poetry of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats in the modern period. Kamala Das uses the word 'sinner' because she thinks that she has committed blunder by breaking the age-old rule of the religious bondage of marriage. But after the marriage, her husband treated her like an inanimate object. He was only concerned with the body of the poetess. So, there was only a sexual or physical union. But in the second part of the poem, we get love, the identification of emotions of the lover and the beloved, the physical as well as the spiritual reunion of the two souls leading to a state of parmananda or the cosmic bliss which a Yogi attains through penance. But the case of Kamala Das is opposite. She gets it not through penance but through pleasure. Perhaps this is why she says that she is both sinner and saint, beloved and betrayed.

### “Advice to women” by Eunice de Souza

. Eunice de Souza is equally vehement against the gender discrimination and woman-subjugation which have been deep-rooted in the patriarchal society. She cannot take it easily that the tender-hearted and flowery girls are smashed physically and mentally by the stony-hearted men of the society. Hence she tries to inculcate the stamina into the mind of women going to be entangled in the man-woman relationship. In her 'Advice to Woman', she tries to make women fit in their respective relationship with men and thereby advocates freedom and self-respect for women. She shows the dislocation of mother, daughter, and wife in a same way as the different roles of woman suffered different problems in her poems. 'Advice to Women' is one of such poems. The poem by its length and structure is very short and straightforward. The poetess advises women to keep cats at their homes to get accustomed with the strange behaviour of their lovers. The practice, according to De Souza, will also help them to handle the situation effectively. The poem advises or rather forbids women to bother about the enemies of those cats and to cuss out at



them. She advises women to notice the perpetual surprise in those great green eyes of cats, because those eyes and expression will help them to die alone.

A feminist poet usually encourages her reader, the women, to stand firm on their ground and to speak and act without fear and hesitation. In Indian context, feminist attitude is still relevant. Women in India, still have to fight for their right -both in social and domestic arena. Eunice De Souza by her life and work has set an example of self-dependent woman. Many of her poems speak of the deplorable and dependent condition of women. But her poems also give advice to those ill-fated women.

In this poem, Eunice De Souza talks about the necessity of independent and self-confident mind in a woman. She feels that the social and domestic life of women cannot be changed until women themselves free themselves from any kind of dependence on male partners. She advises them to practice to be indifferent to male atrocities. This indifference would surprise men because they always feel themselves superior to women for their physical power and so they use this weapon to dominate women. De Souza criticizes this inferiority complex in women and advises them to be brave and bold. She advises women to ignore men and in order to do that they should practice how to bear with the otherness of their lovers.

In this context, she gives example of rearing cats at home. Eunice de Souza begins her 'advice' in a decisive and confident tone

*“Keep cats  
if you want to learn to cope with  
the otherness of lovers.”(Souza, 1-3)*

The readers at once get surprised at the suggestion. It is clear that the subject of the poem is the otherness of the lovers towards their beloved ladies. It is expected from a feminist poet to speak about the deprived condition of women in both domestic and social fields. Women are jilted in love; they are suppressed, robbed of their right to speak and to act according to their wish. It has been an elemental duty of a feminist author to speak for the equal right of women and protest against all injustices against women. But Eunice de Souza, in this poem does not tell women to protest against these injustices. She advises to rear cats as pets to cope with means to manage or to handle something effectively. That means, the poetess suggests that women can handle this situation through rearing cats. But why? Why does not she suggest a verbal protest? Why does she suggest such apparently irrelevant means? Does she think that women have no other choice but to make a truce with her situation and her lover? Does she accept that women are inferior to men and it is their destiny to adjust with all the adversities? The interest in the reader about the poem grows further with this dilemma. The poetess further explains that – *‘Otherness is not always neglect’* (Souza, 4). That means, she does not include the act of neglecting in the behavioural otherness as only criteria, so the lover can behave otherly even without neglecting his beloved lady. Then, the poet again mentions the case of cats –

*“Cats return to their litter trays  
when they need to.”(Souza, 5-6)*

Now this litter-trays are a kind of trays containing some absorbent granules to absorb the excreted of cats when they are indoors. The indispensable questions that arise in the mind of the reader after reading the first six lines of the poem are – What is the relation between a cat and the deplorable situation of a woman? How can the practice of rearing cats enable women to cope with the otherness of their lovers? To find answers to these questions, first, we have to find answers to another set of questions – Why does the poet suggest to keep cats instead of dogs? What is special about keeping cats or how do cats behave as pets? Cats behave very uniquely as pets. There is a strange type of majesty and haughtiness in their movement and they never become obedient completely to their keepers. They are slaves of their own whim. To train those cats the keeper has to possess enormous depth of patience and perseverance. To speak more elaborately, cats are not as faithful as dogs. Cats demand pampering, they enjoy the coziness of the household and the lap of their keeper, but they never endure complete obedience to their keeper. So cats, in this poem, are a symbol of a kind of unique psychology. Cats do show otherness in their behaviour time and again.

So if women practice rearing of cats in their houses, they would definitely grow the habit of keeping patience and perseverance. They will have the habit of facing behavioural otherness of dear ones as cats will become dear to them as pets. They will have to consider that cats will not always behave according to their wishes. Gradually, a habit of mutual sustenance of parallel existence will evolve. According to Eunice de Souza, this psychological transformation is the primary requirement for a woman to answer back the otherness of her lover. With this resolution of being indifferent to the indifference of lovers, the poet asserts that – ‘*Otherness is not always neglect*’ (1.4) – as the woman has already seen that her pet cats return “*to their litter trays/ when they need to*” (II. 5-6). If we dive deep into the metaphor of returning to litter-trays, we find that the men are compared to the pet cats in this stanza and the women are compared to fond but resolute keepers of those cats. As cats cannot stay away from the litter-trays at their most urgent need, men are also compelled to return to their ladies to refresh themselves in body and mind. A woman should have confidence in herself about this moment and, perhaps, Eunice de Souza suggests women to utilize that urgent moment to answer those men back, in their own manner. That will teach those men a proper lesson.

The poetess becomes serious from her sarcastic tone of the first stanza. She analyses the problem more psychologically in the last six lines. Behind the metaphor of cats, she continues her discussion about how to deal with the fickle attitude of men. She advises women not to be hostile to external provocations to those men their enemies. Metaphorically, the enemies are the stray cats which envy the domestic coziness and comfort of the pet cats, and they try to provoke those pets to leave behind the security and comfort of household and become wild like them. The keepers cannot resist their pet cats unless they themselves want to stay back. It is because the cats are slaves of their own whims. The poetess, tries to make women clear about the fact that they should not get aggrieved at the otherness of their lovers and blame the Vices and provocations from outdoors. Instead, they should once again put in



use their experience with their pet cats. They should see into ‘those great eyes’ of those pet cats.

Women, thus, should come out of the false faith on patriarchal shelter. They should feel individual and establish themselves independent of any emotional pampering. In this light of interpretation of the poem, we can conclude that the poem, “Advice to Women” is, thus, a fine example of feminist poem.

### **Conclusion:**

Finally, after comb-searching the poems of both the authors, thorough perusing of the poems in question and ransacking the works of other poets on relevant matter, I have seen that both the poets are heading towards the same goal in their respective poems mentioned in the title of my paper. They may slightly differ in some respects, but overall, they are working for decolonizing the women from the colonial snare of patriarchal society. My findings are both the poets differ in respect of religion, economic independence, social sway, academic achievements, experiences in own marital life etc. but their literary missions are same. They fight through their works with the male members of the patriarchal society for the equality, liberty and fraternity for women in general. Their theme and approach are same, but Kamala Das is comparatively sincere, passionate and faithful than Eunice de Souza because Kamala Das is co-sufferer with the suffering women. This comparative study, I believe, will open a new vista to the readers and researchers of Kamala Das and Eunice de Souza.

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