

## “Indian Woman Challenging Patriarchal Biases with reference to the Poems of Kamala Das”

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### Abstract

*The prevailing patriarchal system has been challenged by modern Indian women like Kamala Das who not only opposes the restrictions and marginalization but also chooses a new path for her liberation from imposed limitations and typical roles assigned by patriarchy. The Process of womanizing by masculinity has been practiced since long categorizing their role, gender, status etc. which pretended to dominate and regulate the feminist domain in general. Restrictions and obsessions are imposed as synonyms to manipulate women's existence and identity by the patriarchal system. But woman like Kamala das stands firm in challenging the biases imposed by patriarchy and successfully creates a new identity for herself. She turns instrumental to express her grieves of being woman. Her poems accommodate her agony of extortion laid by her father and husband who prove themselves an agent of patriarchy whose imposed force exploited her life and affected deeply and adversely. Her poems also become mouth-piece of her pains and strives she put into to liberate herself from the imposed manipulations, violence and discriminations. Her trident ramifications couldn't resist her spirit to prove her strength and bring the social transformation of Indian women. Her poems are reflection of autobiographical projection of long journey of sufferings, manipulations and violence she encountered form her own home.*

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, Restrictions, Marginalization, Masculinity, Instrumental, Ramifications, Social transformations.

“Alas! A woman that attempts the pen  
 Such an intruder on the rights of men  
 Such a presumptuous creature is esteeme'd  
 The fault can by no virtue be redeemed”

Anne Finch

These are the superb lines by famous poetess Anne Finch which encapsulate the stigma of a woman challenging the prevailing gender hierarchy of the society. The progressive women have always been raised questions for her changed path she decides to move on. If she dares

to break the convention, society puts her on doubts raised by patriarchy as it appears unaffordable to masculinity to adopt. All the restrictions imposed on second gender seem to be broken by the acquired considerable growth by Indian women in all walks of life. She is assumed presumptuous esteemed creature in the contemporary social context. She has been achieving highest success in all the walks of life and has been setting highest bench marks in her world which breaks the all the rigid conventional categorizations imposed by the patriarchy. It is the credential of the poet who gave the poem a place of pride in the global literary world of academia. It has the power to move and entertain that ultimately ennobles the readers. Kamala Das is a world renowned poetess who is very sharp in penning down her emotions on white sheets which turn as the devices of social transitions in contemporary world. Her poem 'An Introduction' turns the very significant poem in revealing poetess's negotiations with marginality that the women have been imposed on. Her poem 'An Introduction' has been categorized as an autobiographical poem ostensibly similar to the poetic creations of John Theme in which speaker appears as a persona, dramatizing herself as a trilingual speaker representing her intense traumatic painful experiences intentionally and confidently written in English. Her act of composition in English is the first symptom of social transition as the consequences of her rebellion female. She courageously fights with all typical social beliefs and practices that discriminates a woman and restricts to a certain domestic spaces.

The poem 'An Introduction' by Kamala Das initiates the discussion with a description of marginal status of the speaker where her life is being governed by Indian socio- political system. Though she rejects her participation in politics but she has been deeply influenced by this political system. Rama Kundu, too, finds the same dilemma of her life like other Indian women which is reflected in her poem that begins likewise;

"I who rejects a political Identity"

The same has been realized by I.G. Ahmed and K. Satchidanandan who attentively raise the issue of marginalization of Indian women by the political system of the country to drag our attention. Poetess very genuinely confesses her stand by the following statement confessed by the female speaker;

"I don't know politics but I know the names

Of those in power, and can repeat them like

Days of week, or names of months, beginning with

Nehru..."

The poetess, Kamala Das, very clearly, projects her feelings in these lines that how patriarchal system of the country creates such a hegemonic culture that neither accepts nor expects the women to know the politics and be aware of and empowered. Actually her knowledge of politics and power of penning the poems stand as a metaphor for her self-

empowerment. This creates a kind of strength to her that enables her to resist the marginality imposed by the patriarchy. For her, this prevailing hierarchy appears manipulating and exploitative that doesn't recognize her caliber and never ever grants liberty to choose the life of her choice. No doubt, there are other factors as well, namely her brown complexion, her Indian nationality and the new identity, which are responsible for creating this marginality for her. Being women appears a challenge for her as she is one who feels restless to find a place for herself where a woman is granted respect, recognition, participation and power to decide like men. K. Satchidanandan rightly asserts that "She is one who goes to unravel the other tapestry woven by politics, history, literature, language, patriarchy and gender." "Her identity as an Indian, as a woman, as a wife, as a poet- everything comes under attack." (P.P. Ravindran in Das: 1991). In fact when such a marginalized individual dares to resist her marginalization through poetic expression, and that too in 'English', becomes a very powerful weapon to defend, to attack, to resist and to represent. For this daring and her natural reaction on patriarchal discrimination, she receives commendable appreciation and approval from various quarters of society. This patriarchal censor appears fading in a very gradual manner from the society marking a great change. The rigid agents of this patriarchy who categorize culturally to such a women, suggest her;

"Don't write in English, they said,

English is not your mother tongue."

This is not a simple statement made by any individual but rather it is the expected command of domineering patriarchy. This "Don't write in English" is the expectation of typical Indian patriarchy. No doubt speaker in the poem disobeys such expected command of patriarchy by voicing her stand through her poetic compositions as she considers it as the power of expression in which her pleasures, longings, hopes, dreams and aspirations –all are strongly encapsulated. She never yields her courage before any social threat and critical censor. She dares to oppose the patriarchal biases created by the masculine domineering community. It is her self-consciousness, her power of being illuminated by knowledge and delight, and power of to be empowered that she turns as the feminist mouth piece representing the entire female's community and their dilemma of helplessness, manipulation and marginalization.

Her decision to write in English is worldwide appreciated by the community of poets, authors and the writers as she creates a new identity for herself where her strength is acknowledged by the scholarly world of academia. Her poems deliver her mental strength and speech. They represent her genuine poetic revolt and reflect her spatial variation of the mind. In fact Das seems to override the traditional limits suggested by the patriarchal beliefs for the exposition of feminine psyche. It is acute expression of her poetic awareness that she projects in her poems to be named as 'Tress in Storm', 'Monsoon Clouds' and 'Rain'. After many years of publication of her poems the same adoptions are found in authors like Helen Cixous Maxim who remarks;

"I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man."

The poetess not only refuses to obey the command of the patriarchy but also dares to rationalize and choose her linguistic medium English for the sake of artistic autonomy. English appears as the path of sovereignty for her individual existence that establishes her power roots deeply in the social space and brings an identity for her. She boldly claims of her stand to go with English language to articulate and express her ideas and emotions. She proves her superb poetic articulation in English language by that she gives strong message to the patriarchy and doesn't accept the imposed limitations, restrictions and marginalization. This act hits the orthodoxy gender hierarchy of the society signaling of some transitions and social reformations which have arrived at our door steps to take place. Woman like Kamala Das become instrumental for the change of status for the modern Indian women in contemporary society of twenty first century. She not only challenges typical assigned roles for the women in the society that strict them to be limited up to the kitchen and house chores but also she becomes role model for other women to ask for rights like education, liberty, choice and decision making power.

After accepting the challenge of linguistic mode for the expression, she takes up another challenge to turn up her agonized traumatic experiences in to the subject which powerfully encapsulate her emotions in the poems. The second phase of poetic fervor is loaded with her efforts, strives and tribulations she made and encountered at the hands of the patriarchy. She transforms her isolation and alienation in to the subject of her poems and articulates them in to her poetic compositions. She explores her social, sexual, and artistic marginalization which proves the best literature of the present century as the pain and agony of Indian women seeps in to her poetic creations intensely. She, very artistically, fills memories of her childhood in her poetic excellence which is overloaded with her discriminated, destabilized childhood. She, effectively pores her experiences of made realized her gender from a child to a woman. She is well categorized by the panoptic gaze of the society and reminded of her growth in to a woman;

... I was child, and later they

Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs

Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair.

In this way her sexuality realizes the matrix of power and discursive relation that effectively produce an impact on the mind set and belief system of Indian women to regulate her intelligibility on the pre-assumption basis. It is quite considerable point that what constitutes the possibility of effective inversion, subversion or displacement within the terms of constructed identity is the prime important factor in categorizing the females in to a typical Indian women. If the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are the different sites of meanings, then this will hold the possibility of a disruption of the women's univocal posture to be presented before the society. It is ongoing discursive practice that becoming a woman is open to an intervention and resignification practiced by patriarchy. Her gender turns as a site which is regulated by various social means. And this regulation is nothing than the efforts to place

her as the second one inferior gender to masculine community. This patriarchy, very rigidly, looks upon to intervene, dominate and govern to the entire female domain. Butler is very true in asserting that “The Das’ persona falls prey to the matrix of patriarchal power under its gaze and mercy.”

Her physical growth precludes her true mental growth which was proved disastrous as speaker of the poem undergoes to trident of her ramifications- premature marriage, premature pregnancy and premature motherhood. She becomes a site of multiple extortions laid by the agents of patriarchy. She is one undergoes traumatic experience and painful journey where pain liberate as the source of her poetical strength. Her trident ramifications even fall short to reverse her strengths to challenge the patriarchal hurdles. She never surrenders her quest to free herself from patriarchal biases. K. Satchidanandan also opines that, “Speaking of her adolescence, her female body inscribes herself on the text and she remembers, too, her first encounter with masculine violence.” If her father decides to marry her early in premature age prompted by the perception of her physical growth, her husband also hastes ruthlessly to enjoy her body motivated by her swelling limbs. Both the figures destroyed her pleasure of being woman as both of them manipulated and imposed violence by their haste decisions which manipulated her life. She was oppressed by the patriarchy in a very adverse manner which appears a curse to the woman like her. She is over-burdened under the weight of her breast and womb. Both the men in her life turned as the agents of patriarchy who succeed in destroying her identity.

Even except these presumptions of the woman’s role, these categorizers categorize much more about the cultural constructions of the femininity. They even don’t hesitate to speak on the other issues related to females like prescribed attire, occupation and identity for the speaker that amount to a constructive bulwark of patriarchy against female’s assertiveness. This categorization of females is made to middle class women which formulates heterosexual and domestic foundation. To refuse these domestic categories is to refuse the sense of belonging and shelter offered by hetero patriarchal system.

To be girl, daughter and wife are the terms exclusively place her in to different individual roles determined by the patriarchy but for her, all these appeared unacceptable and unaffordable to the woman of her like individual. To abide by the societal fatwa, she can only be Ame (the pet name denoting her private identity) to her husband and to other close relatives. The love-lorn woman speaker feels hazards loving another man as an assertion of her indomitable femininity.

In the course of her love, the speaker dwindles into secondary role and becomes passive in her part. She cannot run/flow like a river but she has to wait like the ocean. According to N.V. Ravindran, “the male tendency to view himself as unique and to subordinate the female as mere medium for pleasure is thwarted in her poem” like her predecessors she too tries to reach out to her fellow human beings through love, understanding and companionship but she feels somewhere thwarted in her place and feels the need to speak representatively. Her

passiveness remains an object for cultural inspection and judgment. Therefore she either can be saint or sinner, beloved or betrayed as the case may be but never an individual free to assert her femininity. Her poems like 'An Introduction', 'The Descendants', 'The Old play House', 'An Widow's Lament' express the pangs and poignance associated with a woman's existence and at the same they stand as canonical identity of poetess Kamala Das which stand equally powerful as is the case with men's writing. Therefore the poems by Kamala Das present the poetess as one who resist the imposed marginalization by patriarchy and challenges the typical and traditional role for the Indian women assigned by the masculinity of the society. She disoblises all the manipulative commands and exploitative practices practiced by the patriarchy. She dares to oppose all the patriarchal biases and impositions laid by masculine community of the society.

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