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TENSION AND MORAL DILEMMA IN KAMALA DAS'S POETRY

Dr. RAGHUNATH SAHOO

Asst. Professor

Department of English

Naami College, Naami, Bhadrak, Odisha



Dr. RAGHUNATH SAHOO

ABSTRACT

Kamala Das Suraiya, one of the best known Indian writers who courted controversy with her unorthodox views died on Sunday May 31, 2009 at the age of 75. The 75 Year old Malayalam writer and poetess, who earned fame for her works in English, breathed her last in city hospital where she had been admitted on April 18, 2009, following a complain of respiratory distress. She is survived by three sons. Kamala, winner of many national and international literary awards had settled down in the city a few years ago, leading a secluded life. Known for her frank and explicit expression on matters of sexuality, Kamala Das focused on love, betrayal and resultant agony in her writings that unsettled the orthodox reader. Kamala hit the headlines when, though born in a conservative Hindu Nair family in Kerala with royal lineage, embraced Islam in 1999 at age 65, assuming the name Kamala Suraiya. The poet, who loved to tread the unorthodox path, had also made a foray into politics floating a party called 'Lok Seva Party' aiming at social and humanitarian work providing asylum to orphaned mothers and to promote secularism.

Keywords: controversy, unorthodox, respiratory, betrayal, secularism

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INTRODUCTION

Tension and Moral Dilemma occupies an important place, position and appears to be the kernel of Kamala Das's poetry. Kamala Das's projection of self is the projection of tension and dilemma in her life. Her projection is biological, psychological, philosophical, confessional, self-expressive, self-recordative, self-explorative and self-realised. Her autobiography "My Story" is clearly projected in her poems and she is exception to others. Her tension of life and symbioses of opposites form the nucleus, forte and fulcrum of her autobiography.

DISCUSSION

A mental state, tension is a psychic affair. It is a kind of duality (double-consciousness), uncertainty, schism and split in mind. Similarly, dilemma is a psychological concept of one's mind. It is a state of indecisiveness what to do and what not to do a Hamletian to be or not to be. It is a sort of qualm, query,

monotony, inner agitation and ambivalent attitude. In other words, Kamala Das's tension and moral dilemma is not only found in her poetry but also in her novels, prose pieces and autobiography in different stages of her life.

The real source of creative tension and dilemma in her poetry is between her pervasive philosophic preoccupation and an insistent awareness of the ties stemming from the surrounding milieu. Her problem of tension and dilemma is due to the dissonance and discrepancies of her present background and her own personal life or private self. Apart from this, her tension and dilemma lies in quest for identity, element of uncertainty, love and lust, schism in the poetic self, disgust and failure, frustration and disillusionment, love and hate relationship, marital and extra-marital relationship, revolution against male-dominated world, sex-humiliation, failure in her moral, religious, spiritual and philosophical gratification and in the problems of sin, salvation and redemption. She claims that her identity is to be sought in life and not outside it. It can be achieved through marital, extra-marital and human relationship.

Kamala Das is always assailed by doubts and tension regarding her love and marriage, her position as a religious being and the prospect of her redemption. She achieves satisfactory relation in extra-marital relations and hence her longing for unhappy domestic life. In her *My Story* she clearly expresses her uncertainty: "I am Sinner, I am Saint / I am the Beloved and the / Betrayed". (63)

Kamala Das's dilemma lies especially in her religious and philosophic concern for life. Broadly speaking, her dilemmas are religious, philosophical and spiritual in nature and content. She is not committed to any particular system of thought or a particular kind of religion. Her concept of God is not definite rather it is indefinite. It has neither beginning nor end. It is faceless, shapeless and colourless but she is always content to be a woman of God Krishna though she changes to Allah later on. She has no specific religion. Her religion is the vibration between the two i.e. Hinduism earlier and Islam at the later part of her life. In other words, her religion is a religion of love and charity which she receives from mildly orthodox Nalapat Family. In *My Story*, she writes, "In the morning, I went into the prayer room with my grandmother and sat for an hour listening to her read the Bhagavatam and the Gita." (92)

Religion, thus in its essence is a means of self realisation. It doesn't reside in temples, mosques, churches or gurudwaras, but in the soul of human beings. Religious consciousness lies not in performing numerous rituals and going on pilgrimages but in being able to go beyond the limitations of flesh and blood to the realisation of the soul and in being able to distinguish between the spiritual not the sacred and the profane not the unholy. It is this universal concept of religion that underlies the autobiographic oeuvre of Kamala Das. She is a believer of "Nirguna Brahman" the Distinction Reality (attributeless). God is one, unified force the primal flood, the moving fount of being in Hindu mythopoeia, the Brahman of the Advait Philosophy "The undying reality/which does not dissolve though ? / All being dissolve". (150)

Kamala Das's inward journey is the effort to go deep into the soul in the process of self-realisation. The journey is difficult because it involves the shedding of ego, severance of material and earthly associations and a complete merger of the mind and the soul. Das is too honest to deny the domain of the body and room is the vague regions of metaphysics. The body is as true as the soul and in order to reach the soul, one must go through the body. Das is covertly positing the universal concept from physical to spiritual.

Her decision to abandon religion shows a keen, analytic rational mind wedded to an individual system of belief. Since religion is what the individual does with his/her solitariness, it is her personal desire. It is fairly obvious that Kamala is of a contemplative turn of mind and ponders frequently on the problems of sin and salvation. Her autobiography reveals that she is neither a saint negating the sensual pleasures nor a yogi wandering in the thick jungle to attain spiritual light but a man of parts, a being of the world, participating and belonging. To be specific, she is earthy.

Kamala Das's notion of religion posits an ambiguous and controversial issue. Being disappointed in her domestic life, she has surrendered herself to God ultimately as most do. Each and everyone is imprisoned in the cell of ego during one's youth but towards the end of one's life, one can realise one's own past follies and foibles of neglecting God ultimately. One can surrender oneself to God in order to purify one's sinned soul

like W.B. Yeats in "Sailing to Byzantium". But in the case of Kamala, it has two reasons i.e. ultimate surrender to God naturally and surrender to God out of disappointment in domestic life. She surrenders herself to Krishna and Radha of Hinduism earlier and to Allah by converting to Islam later on.

On the whole, one can't fail to discern the note of tension and moral dilemma in Kamala Das' poetry. In fact, the note of tension and moral dilemma is the forte and fulcrum of her poetry providing, as it were, the binary and balance with her autobiographical theme, diction and technique. It is central to her poetry. Thus, her moral vacillation between right and wrong, good and evil, redemptive and damnable is justified and inevitable. She is not complacent and naive in her psyche. Born and brought up in the questing Nair culture with a sceptical, rational and scientific family background and an urban life, character and moorings, hers is to ask and probe and posit and explore the truth and again the ultimate knowledge about things. These queries and qualms are existential and ontological in nature.

But she doesn't vacillate for long. She comes out with a vision and conviction. She is not an atheist or agnostic. Nor is she frozen between to be or not to be, whether to act or not to act. She arrives at a conclusion. Her conviction is not shallow or facile. It is a deep intense realisation and arriving. Her vision or belief is essentially moral and spiritual, broad humanistic and Islamic based on the blend of the tenets of Islamic and Hindu views of life. As such, she is essentially a humanist, a character of enquiring into the basic plight and predicament of man, her relationship with God, problems of sin, salvation, suffering and redemption.

She problematises man's existential issues, subverts and deconstructs the text and tenet of traditional bias and belief. Her realistic approach to life in order to envision and arrive at a sound, tenable, rational humanistic code or frame of things, which includes and embraces all right/wrong, good/evil, godly/ungodly, flesh and spirit is commendable. She has not discarded God. In the final submission, she has surrendered to God Krishna, and Allaha and the image swims in colours and illumines her Islamic consciousness.

CONCLUSION

A close scrutiny of Kamala's poetry gives us the impression that tension and dilemma form a major strain and content in it. It lies in her background, milieu, consciousness, in the quest of life's meaning and identity. It takes diverse shapes and forms, different phases and levels, ultimately, envisioning a state of harmony between the inscape of her inner life and the landscape of outer life. However, Kamala's tension and dilemma is not only a psychic problem but it is part of her life.

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