

THE POERTY OF KAMALA DAS AND SYLVIA PLATH A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of comparative study of Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath is to find out common spaces in their poetry. It is surprising that the two poets, one born in Boston (USA) in 1932 and the other in a village in Kerala (India) in 1934 should have so much in common. In her poems we have Plath's vision of the plight of herself in a male dominated world. In the poem 'The Applicant' the poet is seen as a desexed object, a commodity for sale in a depersonalized and dehumanized society. The poems in 'Ariel' dealing with man-woman relations have been divested of the romantic trappings displayed by the poems written immediately after the poet's marriage with Ted Hughes. Love is presented as an unmanageable emotion characterized by distortions, suspicion, betrayal, bitterness, torture and even hatred. Her divorce drove her into a conclusive phase of disregard for men and society from which she alienated herself. Her vulnerability, concern for children. reaction to women's status and betrayal of her husband makes her a poet of confessional strain. The theme of alienation is also present in the poems written by her. Because of disillusionment and alienation from this physical world, she gives the note of protest with feminism in her poetry.

INTRODUCTION

Affirmation poetry explores personal details about the author's life without meekness, modesty or discretion. Confessional poetry emphasizes the intimate and sometimes unflattering information about quality details of the poet's personal life, such as in poems about illness, sexuality and despondence. Plath has often been regarded as a confessional poet, though her deeply personal lamentations often achieve universality through mythic allusion and archetypal symbolism.

Kamala is aware of both the beauties and cruelties of the male-body. She, like Sylvia Plath, is nearly disgusted with the ravaging lust of the male partner. The man is presented with scorn

and the poet's sexual union with him affords no satisfaction: rather it gives pain.

Kamala Das has faced frustration, disillusionment and drabness that she has expressed through every verse-line of her poetry in a bold, affirmative and confessional manner. A close study of her longer poems like 'Composition' reveal that she is a deeply distressed woman. As she remembers the frustrated bygone days of her married life; her feminine self, like a psychiatrist, begins to study the diseased- inner-self. Her feminine consciousness sinks, bit by bit, into the sea of sorrow. And it seems that her feminine self would not come out from the last layer of the sorrowful sea. She remembers the cold and dry days of married life; she complains of her man

and the tragic situation as she has stated in pessimistic poem 'Composition'. Her poetic self-reveals the pessimism throughout the poems.

Kamala Das' poetry speaks about the experiences she encountered through her bodily functions. For instance, she speaks of the "warm menstrual blood flowing" and "unfulfilled sexual fantasies". Her brash confessions, coupled with straightforward expression, are a distinctive quality of her poetry. The element of the body assumes importance here, but one shouldn't ignore the feelings trapped within that body. There are some more analogies between Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath. A version to the male principle of dominance, utter sexual subjugation and a desire to remain uninvolved are common to both of them.

Kamala Das nourishes a nostalgic fervour for the days and people left behind. Sylvia Plath also recalls with delight the time when she was little child and ran along the white hot beaches with her father. Plath is painfully disgusted at the loss of her identity and is reduced to a state when she very much in the manner of Kamala Das, only produces, 'mule bray, pig grunt and bawdy cackles'.

In Sylvia Plath's poetry, the suffering is vividly and intensely recalled as it is done in Kamala Das. Her poems lean on the cluster of associations and emotional implication with the past. The pangs of suffering as well as the hope of restoration are suggested through a formal structure, comprising rich ambiguities and subtle ironies. She reveals herself in all transparency and beauty. The poetry of both the poets can be seen as an exhibition of ironic self reflection in response to alienation and affirmation.

In the collection *Summer in Calcutta*, Kamala Das has been a

controversial figure, known for her unusual imagery and candour. In Poems, such as *The Dance of the Eunuchs* and *The Freaks*, Das draws upon the exotic to discuss her sexuality and her quest for fulfilment. In *An Introduction*, Das makes public traditionally private experiences, suggesting that women's personal feelings of longing and loss are part of the collective experience of womanhood.

The Dance of the Eunuchs objectifies, through an external, familiar situation, the poet's strangled desire within. It was written against the background of the poet's sudden contact with 'a man who had hurt me when I was fourteen years old; she wanted to get him at any cost.' *The Freaks* is about 'a grand flamboyant lust'. *In Love* brings the poet face to face with the question whether she could call her sexual experience 'love'. *In Winter* also carries the warmth of the sexual act of her soul 'groping for roots 'in his body'.

In the collection *The Descendants*, the poem *The Maggots* frames the pain of lost love with ancient Hindu myths, while the poem *The Looking Glass* suggests that the very things society labels taboo are the things that women are supposed to give.

Poems like *'Suicide'*, *'Substitute'*, *'The Invitation'* and *'Composition'*, reveal the death burdened psyche of the self. They project, by and large, the self's confrontation with the complex emotional restlessness caused by the new recognition that despite the positivity of 'body's wisdom' the body itself is the subject to decay. Her feminine self

goes deep into her own self-revealing mysteries and that experience of frustration sets the psyche in the attitude of rebellion.

I must pretend
I must act the role
Of happy woman
Happy wife
(*The Descendants*
p. 2)

In *The Old Playhouse* and *Other Poems*, poems such as '*Substitute*,' '*Gino*,' and '*The Suicide*' examine physical love's failure to provide fulfilments, escape from the self and exorcism of the past.

O sea, i am fed up
I want to be simple
I want to be loved
And
If love is not to be had,
I want to be dead, just dead

(*The Suicide*)

whereas poems such as '*The Inheritance*' address the integrity of the artistic self in the face of religious fanaticism. In the '*Prisoner*' Das compares herself to the convict who studies his prison's geography with distrust and hope.

The title poem, '*Ariel*,' displays a forceful move from darkness to light that has been interpreted as a woman speaker transforming herself into the male image of the arrow. The poet's ongoing fascination with death is sounded in many of the *Ariel poems*, including '*Edge*,' which presents a vision of a

dead woman holding two dead children and noting the women's 'smile of accomplishment' The starkly direct poems in *Ariel*-many of which were written in the months and weeks prior to Plath's death -address similar subjects to those in *The Colossus*. Critics have pointed out that psychic distress issignalled through brutal self-revelation, violent imagery, and macabre associations.

The poems in '*Ariel*' dealing with man-woman relations have beendivested of the romantic trappings displayed by the poems written immediately after her marriage with Ted Hughes. Love is presented as an unmanageable emotion characterized by distortions suspicion, betrayalbitterness, torture and even hatred.

In [1940](#), when Sylvia was eight years old, her father died as a result of complications from diabetes. He had been a strict father, and both his authoritarian attitudes and his death drastically defined her relationships and her poems- most notably in her elegiac and infamous poem, '*Daddy*' Plath's obsession with the symbol of the father figure, who is treated with scorn and rage but who is also invoked as a muse. Plath presents the protagonist suffering from Electra complex in '*Daddy*'

There's a stake in your fat
black heart
And the villagers never liked
you.
They are dancing and stamping
on you.
They always knew it was you.
(*Daddy, line 76*)

It would be safe to attribute the speaker's depressive thoughts, and haunting images, to feelings that she is bound to her father's memory

despite the anger and resentment that she feels. Using this type of association one can feel the animosity with which Plath writes of her father, as distinct from her father in the flesh. On an unconscious level, Plath could blame her father for leaving she and her mother alone.

'*Lady Lazarus*' features the poet's conflict with '*Herr Doktor*'. It represents a struggle against male dominance that ultimately ends in defeat. The poem's central metaphor, the resurrected Lazarus from the Bible, has often been read as a reference to a woman who has survived several suicide attempts. The closing declaration of the woman's ability to 'eat men like air' sounds a note of revenge against the male figure the speaker identifies as her '*Enemy*.' Plath addresses a feeling of alienation and futility in the face of male domination.

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.
(*Lady Lazarus* line 82-84)

Critics have observed that Plath's first poetry collection, *The Colossus*, displays an overriding preoccupation with estrangement, motherhood, and fragmentation within contemporary society. The collection demonstrates Plath's mastery of traditional literary forms while bearing the influence of confessional poets such as Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton.

As is evident from the above discussion, Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath have many things in common despite their birth and upbringing in countries which are culturally different from each other. Both are undisputably confessional poets par excellence. They rebelled against their family and society and gave a befitting reply to male chauvinism. For both, love is an unmanageable

notion characterised by distortion, suspicion, betrayal, bitterness, torture and even hatred. Their divorce drove them into a phase of disregard for men and society from which they alienated themselves. Their vulnerability, reaction to women's status and betrayal of their husband go a long way to make them poets of confessional strain. Both faced frustration, disillusionment and drabness which they express through their poetry in a bold, affirmative and confessional manner.

References

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