

Feminism in Kamala Das's "An Introduction"

Saurav Kumar

Woman is one of the most splendid creations of God. She has been endowed with physical and emotional softness. That softness has become dreadful for her. Taking undue advantage of it, the male dominated society has crushed the feminine values and sentiments with its boot of masculine lust and callousness. Feminism is an intellectual approach to restore the dilapidated status of the eves. It is a social movement which aims at promoting the feminine values which are taking last breath at present. In the literary arena, women novelists like Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have endeavoured to explore the female identity in their works and all of them have caught the appearance of woman as a mere material in the patriarchal society. Kamala Das stands unique in the interpretation of female identity because of her elegant poetic language and provocative sensibility. A true intellectual is that who deals an issue at his/her own expense. It completely holds good with her. Her poems portray the real plight of a typical Indian woman. Her condensed and grave thoughts are well-equipped with the genuine demands of a woman from the society.

"An Introduction" is an autobiographical poem of Kamala Das. In it, there is self-revelation which presents the important pages of the magazine of mortality belonging to a woman. It is a lyrical saga in throttled feminine voice which records how a woman strives hard to find the lost position of a girl, wife and mother in the world dominated by her natural counterparts. It, undoubtedly, opens a passage to the poetess's soul.

In the beginning of the poem, the poetess gives the prologue of her struggle with anti-feminine forces. She, at first, makes the reader aware of her childhood innocence. She hails from Malabar. She can communicate in three languages, but is able to express her poetic imagination in English only. She faces opposition from all her near and dear ones for her greater interest in English. But, she successfully tackles the linguistic chauvinism faced by her. Behind the attempt of forcing a girl not to use her favourite language, there may be the cruel intention of males to forbid her to facilitate best expression to her thoughts. Kamala Das depicts how a girl is forced not to use any language other than mother-tongue. Though the poetess, like other Indian girls, is not able to attain the accent of an Englishman and thus, her English may seem funny, there lies honesty and literary clearness in her narration of anything if she uses the language, to which

she finds herself most close, for the same. Das opines of her intimacy with English :

It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human.
(An Introduction 272)

English sounds her happiness, innate desires and optimism. It is useful to her as cawing to the crows and roaring to the lions. To her, it is the medium of evoking views of inner self.

When she attains puberty, she looks for motherly care and love. But, in lieu of it, her tenderness and longings are thrown into the marriage fire:

...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. (272-73)

The poetess reveals a bitter truth associated with the traditional segment of Indian society. A girl is treated as 'Paraya Dhan' from the beginning. She is considered curse and her parents want to get themselves liberated from it as soon as possible. Before the maturity of a fully grown woman is evolved in her, she is married to an unknown person who, pressing down her emotions, uses her for quenching the sensual fire which is common to every male. Thus, she is physically and emotionally assaulted. The poetess also tells about facing the same kind of humiliation :

...He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and womb
crushed me... (273)

Marriage should not be seen as a social institution merely. It is a matter of heart, a testimony which signifies the fusion of two hearts, one masculine and another feminine. It is the union of a man and a woman without any type of unwillingness from either side.

Like thousands of Indian girls, the poetess also falls prey to the ridiculous and senseless practice of child marriage. But the difference between a common Indian girl and the poetess is that the former tolerates

this tyranny considering it a part of her destiny, whereas the latter opposes it. In the words of courageous Das:

...I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness... (273)

The categorizers try their best to confine the poetess to her household duties. But, she is not like Aunt Jennifer of Adrienne Rich's famous poem. "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers", who bears 'The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band' and dies ultimately with 'her terrified hands', 'Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.' She is a lady of iron will and reformation. She wants to bring a change that the weaker sex longs for ages. She challenges the authority of the descendants of Adam which is responsible for the wrapping of numberless corpses of innocent women in red shrouds. She stirs up the frozen self-pride of eves with her revolutionary ideas. She wants every woman to choose her role in society on her own.

Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or better
Still be Madhavikutty. It is time to
Choose a name, a role... (273)

The poetess, with the passage of time, understands that what she experiences is the sorry tale of every Indian woman. She is desirous of making the woman denying society feel the worth of her individual existence in social milieu and spots the ideal feminine identity in the sense of 'I'. She herself accepts :

...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. (273)

Summing up, we may say that "An Introduction" is a dignified collection of lively words that sketches what a woman has and what she longs for in her life. Kamala Das has succeeded in vivifying the various aspects of feminism in a single poem with her sane views. She seems very deliberate to give a true shape to her dream involving the empowerment of woman in the world completely trapped in the vicious circle of males. Her appeal to every man that she makes on behalf of every woman is embodied in the following lines of her poem "A Request":

When I die
Do not throw the meat and bones away.
But pile them up
And
Let them tell
By their smell
What life was worth
On this earth
What love was worth
In the end. (A Request 274)

Work Cited

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