

Sylvia Plath & Kamla Das: A prelude to their Poetry

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Abstract:

Confessional poetry being a genre that breaks down the traditional definition of poetry and explores new poetic style, where a poet vents out his inner feelings and unspoken words through his writings.

This paper examines the lifecycle of Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath, their personal trauma, childhood suppression, their mental and physical sufferings.

Keywords: *confessional poetry, Child prodigies, Oppressed, Frustration.*

In the 20th century, when in American patriarchal society women were bound to write under some rules and regulations, Writers and poets like Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath went against this feminine decorum and vented out their frustration and sufferings through their writings. One being an American, educated and liberated -other a traditional Indian women. To explain the gender bias and social inequality, most women writers make use of confessional poetry which paves way to express their self-sufferings. Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das communicated the physcho-diagonastic and magical thoughts without religious conviction and moral principles through their confessional writings. Confessional poetry thus becomes not only self-awareness therapy but the representation of all oppressed voices. It in fact relieves the writer as well as the reader from the stress of humdrum existence.

Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das though from different backgrounds, their use of genre from expressing their oppressed voice in a rebellious way was same and unequivocal. For them life held an intensity of personal experience that became the focus of their work. Confronting the



chaos of their own lives with a vital sense of their inner self, they built up their art. Both of them constructed the boundary between life and art and divulged themselves in their expressions.

This paper examines the complexities of the lives of Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath, how their lives transcended from a beautiful childhood to a youth of mental illness, frustration and agony.

During the early childhood Plath received undivided love, care, affection from her parents until her brother was born. From then she started to feel lack of attention from her mother's side, thus grew close to her father. She became a companion to her father in his hobbies and the picture of her father imprinted on her mind became a great one. Plath described the figure of her father herculean as she writes in 'The Colossus'.

Scaling little ladders with glue pots and pales of Lysol

I crawl like an ant in mourning enter over the weedy acres of your brow

To mend the immense skull-plates and clear

The bald, white tumuli of your eyes.

Your fluted bones and acanthine hair are littered

In their old anarchy to the horizon-line

It would take much more than a lightening stroke

To create such a ruin

Nights, eye squat in the cornucopia

Of your left ear out of the wind,

Counting the red stars and those of plum-color

The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue.



When she was thinking of her father as god, his sudden death shattered her tender mind. She could not have imagined her life without him and thus she felt that part of her life associated with her father died along with him. She was in such a state of mind that only a false- self remained behind to mourn his death. The death of a godly figure in her family made her feel as if the center of their family had collapsed. For her mother she developed a sense of hatred after she took the responsibility of their family.it was further enhanced when her mother's parents came to live with them. Plath kept her father alive in her mind. The mental state of Plath started to take dangerous dimensions as she developed a sense of responsibility for her father's death. It got itched on her memory so deeply that she could never be free from it. She started mourning not as a normal daughter but like 'Electra'. She had developed incestual love for her father.Now she expresses her triumph over her mother for her father's love as,

Here is a queen ship no mother can contest.

She continued to be in a state of depression, loneliness and started looking for her fatherly figure in other men.

Kamala Das grew in a family too where she did not find love. Her childhood was devoid of fatherly love, his father being a Nayar and thought to be an emotionless person, she felt lack of affection from her childhood. She even felt humiliation due to the brown color of her skin. In 'An Introduction' she writes

I am an Indian, Very Brown, born in Malabar

Here Kamala Das expresses her concern for her skin color, as she must have noticed a sense of rejection in the surrounding due to this. The lack of love and care from her family gave her a ground to express her feelings through her poetry. Kamala felt loved only in her Grandma's house. As recalls of her Grandma's house as:

I lived in such a house where I was proud and loved.

Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath both started writing in their early childhood. Plath was eight when her first poem appeared in Boston Newspaper, while Das was six when she wrote her first poem. It can be said that Plath and Das were child prodigies. The poetry of both is contemplative of their childhood. The beginning of their confessions starts right from their childhood.



Das says,

The poet's raw material is not stone or clay,
it is her personality.

While Plath writes it as,

One's real world is not what is outside him
It is immeasurable world inside him which is real

Both of them felt like their childhood was devoid of love. The emotions of love and affection were to be found only in grandparents. The men of the family only used to notice the physical growth of the girl child.

The lack of fatherly love in the lives of Das and Plath made them search for an ideal relationship in marriage. Both of them wanted true love from their partners. Plath fell in love and got married to Ted Hughes. Her longing was not only for physical love, which only a strong man like her father, a big man could give her, but for guidance and support. All of this she found in her husband. After her marriage she found herself to be totally stuck in a domestic life and could not see any growth towards her literary career. She seemed to be caught between marriage as social obligation to fulfill her womanly hungers and the urge of creativity which needed independence. This conflict damaged her already split-self further. Consequences being the separation in marriage. Plath could not bear the separation from the man she loved and married. As she was already distressed and mentally unstable after her Father's death, she could not cope with the separation with her husband and chose -to end her life.

On the other hand, Kamala Das got married to a man selected by her father. She had no say in the selection of her partner. She had sought tenderness in love in the man to whom she was married off. 'An introduction' beautifully describes her life after marriage,

....I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall
.....
.....
I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the

Bedroom and closed the door. Hedid not beat me

But my sad woman body felt so beaten.

The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.

Since Kamala Das was in need of love but all she could seek from her marriage was his husband's haste for physical satisfaction. Das's husband was a kind of egoistic man and for this reason in her married life she did not feel loved to her husband. The sense of negligence increased her urge to search for her eternal love in other men.

Conclusion: Both Sylvia Plath and Kamal Das revealed their self through their poetry. It is a record of their own experiences and observations. They portrayed their life as emotionally sterile and unproductive. Theirs was a world where outward ecstasy conceal inner vacuity.

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