POETIC STYLE ADDOPTED BY KAMALA DAS

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Abstract--Language serves two purposes: communication and identification. The Indian society under colonial rule experienced immense and pervasive influences in terms of culture, education, exploitation, technological progress, language, diseases etc. The colonizers designed language policies intended to develop national identities in the countries they had occupied. A widespread colonial practice aimed at discouraging the use of mother tongue. Language has always been the companion of empire," asserted the sixteenth century Spanish grammanian Nebrija (161,225). All the Colonial powers spread their languages to the countries that fell under their colonial power. Colonial powers often tried to supplant the native language with their own, with different degrees of success. The natives were thus under the control and suppression by the colonizers. This domination was not only on them physically but also on their identity, thoughts, culture, tradition, custom and most importantly on their language. British colonialism has spread English all over the world. India became an independent nation from Britain in 1947, and the English language was supposed to be phased out by 1965. However, today English and Hindi are the official languages and are the most spoken languages in India. English in fact has rooted itself in our culture and has fixed its place as a powerful medium of expression. Leaders, writers, historian, teachers and above all common man also have to resort to this language to make its mark in the outside world. However deviating from the trend of writing only in standard English, most of our Indian writers in English have made used of both the languages in their creations. Since the last quarter of the 20th century, Indian writing has increasingly received greater acclaim all over the world. The success of the Indian writing represents an enormous boost to the reputation of its authors outside the borders of the sub-continent, not to mention their bank accounts. A major source of disagreement concerns the very fact of writing in English and it is a problem present in all once-colonized nations. Prominent writers like Salman Rushdie, Kamala Das, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Upmanyu Chatterjee , Shobhaa De to name a few have always made an attempt to Indianize their writings. These writers with their style and language have achieved great heights not only within the country but also in the international world.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today Indian English poetry is no longer a poetry solely written by those living in India or necessarily by those born in India. It has become a global network of writers settled in many countries. There is Sujata Bhatt in Germany, Tabish Khair in Denmark, Saleem Peeradina, Meena Alexander and Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni in the United States, and Vikram Seth and Sudeep Sen going back and forth between India and England. The contemporary Indian English poetry marks a noteworthy development and an emphatic presence in the history of Indian English literature. Bandopadhyay writes:
The term "Indian English" refers to the variety of English which is learnt and used by a large number of educated (in the conventional sense, someone who has undergone an intellectual and moral training) Indians as a second language... Indian English has the status of an Indian language, serves the international role of communication with the global community of nations and intra-regional roles of link language among the Criterion people of diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Both English and Hindi have evolved as languages in our country and it is only in India, that one can hear the amalgamation of the two. We have created
a new language with their blend and strangely enough it is accepted by all. Chutneyfying English breaks all our perceptions of the spoken language. It leads us to think that: Is this a new language to be used in our country? Is it the best way to communicate, considering most of the population is familiar and comfortable with it? And then there is the other side of the perception, which in effect believes that if English is anyway a second language to the nation, why then it cannot be mangled and used to our communication advantage? Indian English poets are genuinely worried about the predicament of modern existence and are conscious of the challenges confronting life. Their poetry is the part of the process of modernization which includes urbanization, industrialization, mobility, independence, social change and increased communication in the form of films, television, journals and news papers. The post-independence Indian English poetry has gained in both strength and variety an appreciable position. The major poets of this period are Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra, Shiv K. Kumar, R. Parthasarathy, Keki N. Daruwalla and many more that are in fact instrumental in rediscovering values and latest trends rampant in Indian society which is a large body of concepts, ideas and feelings. These poets not only reflect India’s socio-cultural and political reality but also confirm that an Indian poet is firmly rooted in its culture and soil.

Kamala Das, the grandmother of Indo-English poetry, emerges as a staunch rebel in her poetry. Many woman poets have trod the path shown by her. The notable among these woman poets are Monika Verma, Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia, Eunice de Souza, Intiaz Dharker, Melanie Silgardo, Menka Shivdasani, Sujata Bhatt. Remarkable range of India’s most accomplished women writers of post colonial strand has brought a tremendous change in the trend of depicting women characters. Women writers as Kamala Das, Kamala Markendaya, Nayantara Saghal, Anita Desai, Sashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukherjee, Manju kapur, Gita Harirhan and the others have intuitively perceived the gender issues perturbing women and presented women as an individual who fights against suppression and oppression of the patriarchy.

Kamala Das is one of the most significant contemporary Indian poets writing in English. She has received wide acclaim and many awards for her poetic achievements. Her poetry has been both praised and criticized on account of her frank and uninhibited expression of sexual desires of a woman, and her satisfaction and frustration on this account. In this thesis an attempt has been made to analyze the conflict between morality and female sexuality in the poetry of Kamala Das.

Kamala Das was a bold writer and, irrespective of her traditional background, treated sex explicitly in her poetry. She was perhaps the first woman writer in India to express this conflict of morality and female sexuality. Though in her poems she clearly mentions her identity we should not assume that she herself is the protagonist of all her poems. As Chakravarty observes, “Kamala Das’s writings gain their vitality from her personality. It appears to the reader that the woman and the poetess merge in Kamala Das”.

In fact, the descriptions of sexual adventures in her autobiography My Story so closely resemble those of her poems that it will not be wrong to assume that she herself is the persona in her poems. Iyengar observes, “Kamala Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world”. Dwivedi also asserts, “Not only in her poetry, but also in her essays Kamala Das comes out as an unofficial spokesman of the Indian counterpart of the women’s ‘lib’ movement in the West…” . She candidly lays bare her experiences of love and sex with her husband and with lovers. Dwivedi says, “As a poet of sharp feminine sensibility, Kamala Das gives vent to the hopes, fears and desires of womankind. She has been the champion of woman’s cause in all her writings…” . But obviously she is confined to the amorous hopes and fears of an Indian female. In most of her poems she is least concerned with their social, economic and familial plight. In her poems she seems to be advocating the cause of women. Mohapatra says, “But in common, these poems [Kamala Das and Plath] speak about feminism and emancipation of women”. Undoubtedly, Kamala Das challenged the typical silence of Indian woman
regarding her sexuality. Nayak observes, “Sex repels them both [Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das] and they visualize the colossal figure of the male as a primitive terror in identical terms”. The general critical opinion regarding her poetry is that she is obsessed with love or that her love is unrequited and so she turns to unbridled sexual relations with various people. Her poetry alternatively describes her ecstasy when her sexual desires are fulfilled, and the despondency and the frustration when they remain unfulfilled. But the tension due to the unfulfilled desires is visible so clearly in her poetry. Moreover, the tension created by these wishes on the one hand and social taboos, restrictions and family demands on the other is the real source of her mental torments. In A Hot Noon in Malabar she remembers with nostalgia her childhood days at her ancestral house. For about nineteen lines she describes the normal and ordinary society and objects. But suddenly her mind drifts to “wild men, wild thoughts, wild love” which upset her tranquility and in the end for her “To / Be here, far away, is torture” (21-22).

There Eroticism also lies in Das's Poetry. Coupled with her exploration of women's needs is an attention to eroticism. The longing to lose one's self in passionate love is discussed in The Looking Glass from The Descendants. The things which society suggests are dirty or taboos are the very things which the women are supposed to give. The spiritual streak visible in these poems is a kind of alternative to fill her inner void. The Looking Glass is replete with sexual images as if arising out of hot passion of physical lust. If the man mentioned here is husband, the persona is happy and satisfied with him and there is no ground whatsoever of her grumblings against him as we find in The Sunshine Cat and The Freaks.

II. POETIC STYLES

Kamala Das has cultivated a poetic style – conversational, colloquial, fluent and graceful, which fits in the confessional nature of her poetry. Sometimes she uses repetitive vocabulary to emphasize her anguish and intensity of emotions. A stylistic device which reinforces the predominantly emotional quality of her poems is Kamala Das’s frequent repetition of words and lines. This is a device which she reminds us of D.H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas and the Bible. However, Kamala Das does not always use this device skillfully. One of the poems in which this device works effectively is ‘Substitute’ in which the repetition of the phrase ‘it will be all right” conveys the futility of her attempts to disguise the emptiness of her life. She uses repetitive vocabulary to emphasis her anguish and intensity of emotions in her poems The Dance of Eunuchs and The Testing of Sirens.

“… wide skirts going round and round cymbals Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling, Jingling ….” (The Dance of Eunuchs)

“No more night, no more love, or peace, only
The white, white sun burning, burning, burning.” (The Testing of Sirens)

The Realistic Imagery in The Old Playhouse: The imagery of the tasks which a housewife has to carry out is given by Kamala Das in the poem entitled The Old Playhouse. As a housewife, Kamala Das had to put saccharine tablets into her husband’s morning tea, and to give him the vitamins at the fixed time. She has felt like a prisoner in her husband’s house, the windows of which were always shut and which was lit by artificial lights with even the sounds of the air-conditioner being of no use to relieve her distress. And very vivid and very effective imagery are employed by Kamala Das in her to her husband:

“All pervasive is the male scent of your breath.
The cut flowers
In the vases have begun to smell of human sweat.”

The Imagery of the Sights Witnessed by Kamala Das: The imagery of sights which the poet had witnessed in her grandmother’s house and in Malabar where she was born and where she had spent her childhood is vividly portrayed in some of her poems. After her grandmother’s death, the house had become a silent place, where snakes moved among the books which she was then too young to read, and where her blood turned cold like the
moon. In her poem *A Hot Noon in Malabar* one gets a whole catalogue of the sights which she had witnessed when she lived there. Almost each line here is a picture- men coming from hill with parrots in a cage and fortune-cards; brown ‘Kurava’ girls with old eyes reading palms; bangle-sellers spreading their red and green and blue bangles on the floor; and so on.

Regarding images, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks, “The images are icy, stony, steely, dark- “settle time like a paper weight” or “dies with metallic sighs” or “the night, dark cloaked like a procuress” and are meant perhaps to insulate the true self from the surface life.”

The Excellence of her Diction in *The Freaks*: The poem entitled *The Freaks* contains several words, phrases and lines which illustrate her excellence in usage of diction. Kamala Das describes her husband’s mouth as a “dark cavern” inside which his uneven teeth can be seen gleaming. Her diction is not only appropriate but extremely satisfactory and even felicitous. And the closing line of this poem is an excellent specimen of the kind of impressive vocabulary that she is capable of commanding.

The Exceptional Artistry or Craftsmanship: Kamala Das’s choice of words and her skills in combining words into phrases, clauses, and sentences also distinguished her from other women poets writing in the English language. Even when writing in a hurry, she reveals a mastery of phrase and a control over rhythm. She often employs words in such a way as to express the vehemence of her emotion and the intensity of her resentment. Here are a couple of examples of the forceful use of words and phrases:

“Cowering Beneath your monstrous ego I ate a magic loaf and “ (The Old Playhouse)
“The heart
An empty cistern, waiting
Through long hours, fills itself
With coiling snakes of silence. (The Freaks)

At the same time, it is true that much of her poetry is marred by her omission of punctuation marks, especially commas, thus making her poetry difficult for the average reader. The omission of inverted commas in some of her poems like *The Invitation* to indicate which words are being spoken by persona, which by the sea, and which by the absent lover makes this poem somewhat bewildering. Here poetry is also marred by the varying length of her lines – some long, some too short, some hardly consisting of a word or a two, and it is further marred by the deliberate, perverse omission of capital letter at the beginning of lines. This unconventionality of modernity is taken far; but every Indo-Anglian and many British poets too do the same thing without bothering to enlighten the reader on this innovation.

III. CONCLUSION

Kamala Das is a great and original poet with a distinctive poetic personality of her own. When at her best, she remains unequalled and matchless. She shows remarkable command and ease over the use of English and has cultivated a style that is characterized by a colloquial simplicity and clarity. Words effortlessly come to her. Since English is most dear to her, she naturally and skillfully uses it to express her emotions, her feelings, her reminiscences, her love and sexual experiences, her frustrations and disillusionments most effectively. Kamala Das remarks:

“The language one employs is not important. What is important is the thought contained by words.”

Commenting on Kamala Das’s use of language David McCutchion writes: “…her effortless casual style shows nothing remarkably Indian in structure, rhythm or choice of words. It is possible, however, that future, scholars going over this material by computer methods, will discover specially Indian turns of phrases, rhythms, and sentence structure, and even associate them with predominantly Indian emotions in certain situations.”

Two prevalent but contrasting features characterize Kamala Das’s poetry: one, her desire to love and be loved and two, her wish for death when life appears
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quite frustrating. The theme of love in all its divergent forms and shapes dominates her poetic arena. Sometimes love takes the form of her nostalgia for her grandmother who symbolizes a happy, loving home, and at other times, it becomes a woman’s quest for love from a lover or a husband. She in famous poems, The Freaks (1965) published in Summer in Calcutta and The Invitation (1967) in The Descendants feels plunged into dire straights from where she endeavors to extricate herself but social and mental restraints do not lend moral and spiritual strength to make her feel encouraged. As a result, negative thoughts start creeping into her psychological ambience. Soul searching to achieving mental peace in loveless environment remains the dominating factor in the poems. The Invitation is a descriptive exploration of the psychic conflict of a terribly upset and love-sickened woman whose lover has left her in the lurch without giving her any promising assurance of his comeback. The analytical process was conducted over the course of three readings. The first reading paid attention to the repetition of themes and metaphors and aimed to establish issues of concern for Indian women that transcended time and space. The second reading explored the textual expression of existent cultural norms related to religion, marriage, caste, love, sexuality and quest for self, as well as, textual silences that shroud certain cultural taboos, such as female sexuality. In the third reading, the focus was on the expression and continuance of themes of conformity such as man’s god-like image and woman’s self-sacrificing image. The social pressures implicit, all influence the manner in which Indian women define themselves and their desires. With regards to the new trends and techniques in women’s poetry there is a remarkable movement connecting the domestic with the public spheres of work. Increased metropolitan activities, sophisticated life styles, globalization, urbanized influences of pop, disco and cafe culture, Anglo-Americanization and the public and convent education of the present generation of women poets have made their poetry a formidable area of study and research. Other than the skillful use of standard poetic devices, the semiotic, symbolical and metaphorical properties of language help to emphasize the feminist strategies of interrogation. The fissures and fragments of post-modern life are questioned and reflected in the highly experimental diction. The problems of sociological vis-à-vis literary politics, of gender inequities of margilization and sub-humanization of women, of their social and artistic exclusion and of the dominant need for inclusion and democratization, all contribute towards the distinctive character of this poetry. For the first time, mapping out new terrains the poetry of such Indian women poets bring forth the suppressed desires, lust, sexuality and gestational experiences. This new poetry is new forms of new thematic concerns of contemporary issues have changed the course of human civilization as the country entered the new millennium.

REFERENCES
[8] Ibid., p.92.

