

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KAMALA DAS AND TASLIMA NASRIN AS CONFESSIONAL POETS

SRIKANTH. S

KARNATAKA STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY,
MYSORE, INDIA.

Abstract

Modern poetry at the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a new branch of poetry emerging called confessional poetry. It all started with a group of American poets who started writings poems on highly subjective matter where they could express their personality without any redemption, a group of poets who are ready to base their soul in order to get the psychic relief. These poets used 'self' as a poetic symbol, and often been dubbed as neurotics and also media savvy by the people. In a way in order to create a unique identity they opposed the conventional social set-up. These poets never compromise with themselves, and their poetry often display the moral courage with anti-establishment. By alienating themselves they started searching for the lost 'self' which is a common theme in their poetry. In this paper I have tried to compare both Kamala Das and Taslima Nasrin as confessional poets. The two famous poets of South Asia who have been always termed as the controversial figures for hurting the sentiments of Hindus and Muslims share a common pursuit when it matters displaying the feminist ethos and angst. Often termed as guileless guiltless and frank with regard to sexual matters, both the poets abandoned the poems on teenage girls fantasies, more over strongly focused on the themes of independence of mind and body in their respective poems. The paper explores the similarities that is common among confessional poets that is traceable among these two poets, it also focuses on how they see the outer world as hostile to their world of self, issue that these two poets deal with is the psychological suffering of the frustrated women, which is universal.

Keywords: Religion, marriage, subjective, self, hegemonic, feminist ethos and angst.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KAMALA DAS AND TASLIMA NASRIN AS CONFESSIONAL POETS

- SRIKANTH. S

Introduction:

Modern Poetry at the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a new branch of poetry emerging called confessional poetry a group of American poets who started writing poems on highly subjective matter where they could express their personality without any redemption. A group of poets who are ready to base their soul in order to get the psychic relief. These poets used 'self' as a poetic symbol, and often been dubbed as neurotics and also media savvy by the people. In a way to create an unique identity they opposed the conventional social set up. These poets never compromise with themselves, and their poetry often displays the moral courage with anti establishment. By alienating themselves they start searching for the lost self which is a common theme in their poetry.

The notable confessional poets who have left an indelible imprint in the history of world literature are Robert Lowell, John Barry man, Theodore Roethke, Sylvia Plath, W.D. Snodgrass and Anne Sexton. Even in South Asia we can name few of such confessional writers who have established their name silently with their works, to name few Kamala Das, Kishawar Nahid and Taslima Nasrin. Though all the three poets hail from different countries of South Asia which was a united India before independence, all the three have registered their dissent against man in strong words in their poetry.

• KAMALA DAS AND TASLIMA NASRIN AS CONFESSIONAL POETS

In this paper I have tried to compare both Kamala Das and Taslima Nasrin as confessional poets. The two famous poets of South Asia who have been always termed as the controversial figures for hurting the sentiments of Hinduism and Islam, both share a common pursuit when it matters displaying the feminist ethos and angst. Often termed as guileless guiltless and frank with regard to sexual matters, both the poets abandoned the poems on teenage girls fantasies, moreover strongly focused on the themes of independence of mind and body in their respective poems.

The modern day critics praise both Kamala Das and Taslima Nasrin for their fierce originality, bold images, exploration of female sexuality and intensely personal voice. Both of them often been criticized as the frustratingly, inconsistent, self-indulgent and equivocal poets. The two of them are truly revolutionary poets on the issue of treating some of the themes which are even today considered as taboos that normally women poets hesitate to deal with. Both the poets from the strong conservative set ups object the harsh criticism they are bound to face in their own divergent style. Their poetry highlights the miseries of women and the treatment meted out to her by the male dominated society. The candid disclosure of their personal life in their respective poetry gave an opportunity for critics to dub them as often “erotic” and “sexy”. Both the poets have an impulse to defy the gender code; they were the victim of patriarchal prejudices and discriminations since their childhood. While speaking against gender inequality both the poets share the common voice, but whereas when it matters the issue of religion Kamala Das converted herself from Hinduism to Islam in the year 1999, stating that Islam provides maximum security for women, she even endorsed Purdah, on the contrary Taslima Nasrin opines that no religion is safe for women, according to her almost all religious have failed to protect the rights of women, she even objects imposing Purdah on a Muslim woman. Both the poets emerged from different countries with a strongly rooted patriarchal set up, but they were successful enough to describe the whole world of women with stunning frankness. Both became popular for giving a glimpse of the unexplored female psyche which suffers in rather irrational conservative set up. Their works including poems and novels depict the deep psychological suffering of the frustrated women. They express the vehemence of their emotions, for them poetry is a vehicle of expressing personal resentments against all the males that they have encountered in their life. The kind of relationships that they had with large number of men was bitter and painful. Their poetry is so appealing and convincing for readers, because they are frank, honest, close and intimate in sharing every detail of their personal life experience.

Significantly Nasrin makes a tirade attack on Muslim fundamentalists for marginalizing women in Islam. In one of her poem ‘So let Them Rule the World!’ she blames the Muslim zealots for using the name of religion to corner women she says.

Let them torture women until death,
After wrapping their obedient heads with veils,
And confining them to their rooms.
Let the rapists go berserk door to door
To copulate in their erect hysteria,
So that they can beget male babies to over crowd the world.

In these two stanzas Nasrin criticizes the men of Islam for doing all kind of atrocities on women under the banner of religion. This poem has the traces of Nasrin's personal experience as a doctor where she used to encounter the parents who never wished to have female babies as their children. They used to openly demand Nasrin to do the gender identification, which for Nasrin as a woman was very painful. She being a Muslim woman after undergoing so much of trauma within it feels that the followers of Islam particularly men are breeding hatredness across the world. She does not like the whole world to be the citadel of Islamic terrorists.

On the contrary Dr. V. Alexander Raju about Das conversion to Islam says,

"In the poems of Kamala Das, we find a rare body and its feeling and she seems incapable of thinking of eternal life as bodiless existence. This peculiar stance may be the reason why she is drawn to Islamic religion with its different concept of life after life" (P-25, Raju)

Both the writers are confessional at the same time have divergent views about Islam as religion. If one accepts Islam to attain moksha or peaceful solace, the other denies religion as a whole. Nasrin opines that,

"Religion, society and the state have not given women her due honour. Religion is solely responsible in creating inequality and indifference among men and women" (p-61 selected columns)

These contradictory opinions about religion by the two prominent feminist writers of the sub-continent is truly interesting.

Both Kamala Das and Taslima Nasrin is devoid of getting any emotional attachment from their husbands. In search of pure and spiritual love, both the writers had an acquaintance with many men, which was in a way the futile attempts. In one of her poem titled "Acquaintance" Nasrin speaks about the hallow martial relationship, so does Kamala Das in her poem "Captive". Nasrin writes,

A life goes by
And you may sit and lie with a man,
but how much can you come to know a real man?
He whom I so long thought
I knew

He whom I know is nothing like that,
In fact, he's the one I most don't know.

(P-11)

Kamala Das also expresses the same mood and trauma experienced in connection with the concept called marriage, which betrays her and puts her in solitude, there is a tone of despair, a total dejection in her words she writes.

"My love is an empty gift, a glided
Empty container, good for show nothing else"

(P-18)

In another poem titled 'For Some Years Now' Nasrin speaks about the concept called death, she has no longing to live, Nasrin expresses her desire to sign off from the miserable life eternally, she feels that she is standing close to death for some years, the dismayed Nasrin does not like to lead a life of fear, she writes.

"For some years now the being that inhabits me within and without
Has been a horrible, dumb creature,
The last leaf long gone from its tree,
Spring gone forever from its life,
If I die tonight, don't speak a word,
Only bury an epitaph under a Shivlitree somewhere.

(p-26)

In the poem 'The Suicide', Kamala Das expresses her desire to die, as she is unable to find genuine love. She too like Nasrin is under severe agony. When she could not cope-up with the failure of love in her life, she too longs to be dead like Nasrin. She writes,

"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....."

(p-17)

The lines picked from the poems of both the poets prove that they are confessional poets who pour their very heart into their poetry. They appear to be largely subjective and autobiographical. They let us peep into their sufferings and display their anguished and

tortured psyche. As a good reader of poetry we can see how both the poets strive very hard to establish their individual identity as women through the poems.

The poem titled 'The Freaks' of Kamala Das and "Granary" of Taslima Nasrin acknowledges both the poet's failure to achieve a required dimension in man-woman relationship. Their criticism of man in both the poems is appropriate because both the poets in these two poems expect complete spiritual, divine and pure love from their loved ones, the shallowness of man's nature hurts women's emotional urge and psyche. Nasrin writes in her poem 'Granary'

"You are my love's granary
I pour out my water-steeped fertility
Unstintingly, to stop does nor occur to me.
Suddenly I see you've slipped away,
I search for you, my heart-usurping boy, then
find you've fled, there was a ladder in back to
step down" (P-30 Poem Hunter)

The words and the phrases employed by Nasrin in these lines are noteworthy. They are effective in conveying poet's reaction of disgust to her lover. There is a sign of wounded self which is delineated in this poem. The poem explores the poet's strong feminine sensibility. The poet reveals how her excess of love proves costly to her as her love gives her a rude jolt to her woman sensibility.

Kamala Das on the other hand in her poem 'The Freaks' writes
He talks, turning a sun-sustained
Cheek to me, his mouth a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleams his right
Hand on my knee, while our minds
Are coiled to race towards love,
But they only wander, tripping, idly over puddles of

Desire..... (p-25)

This poem which is also confessional in nature and tone also presents the man-woman relationship. Here too man is projected as a being who is only concerned with the physical needs whereas Kamala Das is to sensitive and emotional. She is in search of love that is ideal. She is sick of love that is just skin-deep. Both the poets look for ideal love everywhere but could not find it anywhere from anyone. That is the reason why their

marriage life was utter failure. Because according to them men are men, wherever they are and women are always debunked everywhere.

Confessional poetry frequently takes resorts to personal failures and mental illness of its composer. The poets in most circumstances feels the victims of social disorders and often get humiliated. Such poetry obviously is an expression of her private experience, and a strong autobiographical touch cannot go missing. The poet's presence is felt quiet often when we read such poetry.

These two poets are serious about women's emancipation in their respective poems. They rise their voice against man's domination over women, but Nasrin is more vocal and vibrant in attacking men than Kamala Das. The Malayalam poet appears to be subtle and fragile in condemning men for their fault play. In her poem 'The Old Play House' she present the pathetic and gloomy state of a girl, she is compared to bird called Swallow. The husband tries to dominate over this married girl. Who becomes a victim of her husband's ego and false vanity. The girl has no time to pay attention on fulfilling her ambitions and pleasures, instead her focus is only on her husbands needs. Finally the poet who is termed as a girl in the poem alienates and suffers at the hands of her husband. The protagonist's freedom is encroached and her life compared to a old play house where there is no light.

The poem ends in a despair and Gloomy note.

"There is no more signing, no more dance my mind is an old
Playhouse with all its lights put out"

(P-23, Poem Hunter)

Nasrin in her poem 'The Game In Reverse' bullies man's domination over women in stronger words in her own unique style. As a poet and a woman Nasrin refuses to accept social order. She tries to deconstruct the age old tradition of treating women as commodity where men buy women for sex. She writes in the last stanza of the poem,

"I really want to buy me a boy
A fresh, nubile boy with a hairy chest
I'll buy a boy and rough him up all over.
Kicking him hard on his shriveled balls,
I'll shout, 'Get lost, bastard!'"

(Page 59-Poem Hunter)

The language and tone she uses in this poem is too aggressive and attacking. She in a way wants to give a hard kick to man's hegemonic attitude by belittling him. She wants to give the same treatment to men as men would do on helpless women. The difference between the two poets is quite visible but both the poets are extremely confessional in expressing their inner feelings. They don't hide such feelings which exactly is the reason for being in controversy and popular. There is a category of readers who literally like such open minded writings. Their feminine self finds the man emotionally deficient and incapable of possessing a passionate regard for the concrete reality. A woman always longs for love and equality which cannot be out sided. It should be naturally mutual. If Taslima strongly revolts against the male domination in the society and present a bitter reality of life through her poems, Kamala Das draws upon the exotic to discuss her sexuality and her quest for fulfillment.

CONCLUSION

The theme, tone and the language of confessional poetry is intensely personal and particular. The poet rises to the general and the universal. Her own suffering and predicament becomes symbolic to human suffering and predicament. Both the poets use the letter 'I' quite often in almost all their poems which comes from the predicament of confessional poets. They see the outer world as hostile to their world of self the major issue that these two poets deal with in their poems is the psychological suffering of the frustrated women, which is universal.

WORKS CITED:

- Das, Kamala, Poems – Publisher: Poem Hunter. Com – The World's Poetry Archive, 2012.
- Nasrin, Taslima Poems – Publisher: Poem Hunter.com – The World's Poetry Archive, 2012.
- Raju, Dr. V. Alexander. "The Inevitable Metamorphosis: The Cocoon Breaks and 'Surayya' comes out of 'Kamala Das'". *Indian Journal of Post colonial Literature* 2.1 (July 2001): 23-36 Print.
- The Old Playhouse and other poems. Mumbai: Orient Longman private limited, 1973, Print.
- Nasrin, Taslima: No County for Women: Collection of Essays Vitastra Publication, New Delhi, 2010.
- Nasrin, Taslima: All about women, New Delhi: Rupa and Co, 2005.