

Creative Use of Language in Kamala Das's Poetry

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Kamla Das was one of India's finest authors, the mother of Modern English Indian Poetry, and the first Hindu woman to write frankly about sexual desire. She was favourably compared to Sylvia Plath, among other. Critics hailed Das for burying 19th Century diction, sentiment and romanticized love, as no Indian woman had done before. The present paper aims at analyzing the creative use of language made by Kamala Das in her poetry. It is true that she is bilingual, writing novels in Malayalam and poetry in English. She has chosen not her mother-tongue but English language for her poetic communication. As she says: "The language one employs is not important what is important is the thought contained by the words". The words and metaphors of Kamala Das pulsate with life since they embody feelings and not thoughts. She uses the words with their accepted meaning and import, and does not search for novelty. She herself says, "It is not essential that a good poet should change and recreate the language". Thus, it is quite significant to study creative use of language in Kamala Das's poetry.

Kamala Das believes that honesty of expression and sincerity to one's own feelings and emotions are more fundamental to poetry than the language employed. English could voice her joys, longings and hopes and it comes naturally to her 'as causing is to crows or roaring to the lions'. There is something more than mere expression of imagination in great poetry and it is futile to separate thoughts, emotion and expression in poetry as if they are irreconcilable entities. The expression of the self in poetic terms in a tangible manner requires the assistance of language and words. Thus form and content in poetry are interdependent and constitute the indivisible core of the poet's art. T.S. Eliot observes. "The notion of appreciation of form without content, or of content ignoring form, is an illusion; if we ignore the content of a poem, we fail to appreciate the form: if we ignore the form, we have not grasped the content- for the meaning of a poem exists in the words of the poem and in those words only". In the poetry of Kamala Das the distinction between form and content disappears because it works synergically on the several planes of our sensibility and consciousness. She is ignorant of the morphology or even the grammatical nuances of words but she recognizes their vital power and emotion effects.

There is a total fusion of thought, expression, rhythm and meaning in her verses. The 'Freaks' opens with a visual image that claps on the reader's consciousness with sudden impact.

He talks, turning a sun-
stained Check to me.....

"Nani" begins with a direct, plain statement that, nevertheless, haunts the reader.

Nani the pregnant maid hanged herself
In the privy one day.....

Kamala Das has remarked that every good writer is a sculptor with words. She has outlined here philosophy of writing and the methodology in the use of words in 'Without Pause' (Summer in Calcutta)

.....Write without
A pause, don't search for petty words
which dilute the truth, but write in haste of
Everything perceived, and known, and loved.

The poem 'Words' quoted in full reveals how words can be depositories of disturbed feelings.

All round me are words, and words and words,
they grow on me like leaves, they never
seem to stop their slow growing
from within..... But I tell myself, words

**International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Science, Engineering,
Technology & Management (IJMRSETM)**

(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed Online Journal)

Visit: www.ijmrsetm.com

Volume 6, Issue 5, May 2019

are a nuisance, beware of them they
can be so many things, a
chasm where running feet must pause to
look, a sea with paralyzing waves,
a flash of burning air, or
a knife most willing to cut your best
friend's throat. Words are a nuisance, but
they grow on me like leaves on a tree,
they never seem to stop their coming
from a silences, somewhere deep within.....

Then there is poetry and simplicity in lines such as

I know the rats are running now
Across the darkened halls
They do not fear the dead
I know the white ants have reached my home
And have raised on walls
Strange totems of burial

(Blood)

Though satire and pun are absent in her poetry, there is sensitive use of irony in several of her poems. In poetry verbal irony is more common. In Kamala Das's poetry irony serves four purposes: it clarifies the theme and deepens the impact; it functions as a comment on social practices, situations and persons. It expresses a mature sense of resignation and compromise with the sorrows of the world.

The poem 'Composition' has an ironic structure that enhances the significance of the theme

Husbands and wives,
here is my advice to you.
Obey each other's crazy commands,
ignore the sane.
Turn your home into a merry dog-house,
marriage is meant to be all this
anyway,
being arranged in
most humorous heaven

Moreover, her poem "The Dance of the Eunuchs" is a powerful poem of Kamala Das as it effectively expresses her state of mind in well-chosen words. There is an abundance of imagery in this poem. It was very hot before the eunuchs came to dance, wearing wide skirts and anklets, and carrying cymbals. When the eunuchs were dancing, their skirts went round and round, their cymbals produced rich clashing sounds, and their anklets jingled, jingled, jingled. The eunuchs danced, their dark eyes flashing: "they danced and oh, they danced till they bled". They had green-coloured tattoos on their cheeks, and jasmines in their hair. Their faces were harsh, and their songs melancholy. Some beat their drums, and others beat their "sorry breasts"; and they "writhed in vacant ecstasy". The phrase "writhed in vacant ecstasy" is very significant as a devastating image of the barrenness of Kamla Das own life. The poem ends also with some imagery which conveys the poetess's sense of the futility of her sexual experiences:

The sky crackled then, thunder came, and lighting
And rain, a meager rain that smelt of dust in
Attics and the urine of lizards and mice.

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Another poem of Kamala Das, "The Wild BougainVillaea" is a very depressing poem though it ends happily enough. The depression is largely produced by the kind of imagery which the poetess offers to us. It is mostly the imagery of decay and death. And the imagery is very vivid and realistic. One of the pictures n this poem is most striking though it is not a picture of decay or death. It is the picture of harlots walking the streets.

I walked on streets where the night-girls with sham
Obtrusive breasts sauntered
And under yellow lamps, up-and-down wandered
Beaming their sickly smiles
At men.

There is figurative use of symbols and metaphors in her the poetry. Kamala Das uses all types of symbols, though the open-ended type is more frequent In 'The Stone Age' the 'hooded snake' refers to the lustfully searching hand of the lover. 'Fire' and 'flame' are recurring fixed symbols in Kamala Das's poetry. As a child she saw a house burning down.

...Since then the littlest fire
Has had for me a very secret incantation

(A souvenir of Bone)

KamlaDas's language is natural, colloquial and is moulded by a confessional urgency. She does not burden the words with philosophical or spiritual implications. Often her language is a sophisticated form of everyday speech lifted to the point where the distinction between poetry and prose is obliterated. There is poetry and simplicity in lines such as

I know the rats are running now
Across the darkened halls
They do not fear the dead
I know the white ants have reached my home
And have raised on walls
Strange totems of burial

(Blood)

Further, her poem 'The Invitation' presents a paradoxical vision of funeral pyre and the cool sea.

....Think of yourself
Lying on a funeral pyre
With a burning head, Oh, just think, Batha cool,
Stretch your limbs on cool
Secret sands, pillow your head on anemones.

(The Invitation)

Thus, a brief study of language in Kamala Das's poetry brings forth this fact, that she has used language in her poetry creatively.

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