

Confessional Manner in the Poetry of Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath

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ABSTRACT

Confessional poetry is a part of modern poetry. There is no place either for religion or morals in this poetry. The poet does not expect any redemption or retribution as there is no anguish. It is just, that they bare their soul to get a psychic relief. It is of some therapeutic value. The confessional poems are intensely personal, highly subjective. There is no 'persona' in the poems. 'I' in the poem is the poet and nobody else. The themes are nudely embarrassing and focus too exclusively upon the pain, anguish and ugliness of life at the cost of its pleasure and beauty.

KEYWORDS: Confessional, redemption, psychic, therapeutic, personal, pain

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INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Plath is one of the remarkable figures of this genre. Kamala Das, a well-liked Indian poet was not influenced by Plath or any other confessional poet. These two women responded in a similar way to similar themes. Plath is an American, educated and liberated. Kamala Das is a traditional Indian woman. Both have chosen poetry as their genre to express their strong feeling, as it gives them a lot of scope. They have an autobiographical novel to their credit. Plath wrote 'Bell Jar', under the pseudonym of Vicotria Lucas. Kamala Das' 'My Story' was published when she was convalescing in a nursing home.

The confessional poets were dubbed as neurotics by the society, as they did not follow any tradition nor respected any conventions. They wanted to be unique and not a part of the conventional social set up. This conflict with the society lead them to introspection. In the course, comes a breaking point when they could not compromise with themselves. They loose themselves helplessly in the battle and start searching for the lost self. This conflict has given birth to a number of beautiful poems. The sensitive poet cannot

take failure for granted. At this poit, life becomes unbearable and the call of death becomes irresistible. They are more than convinced that death can offer them more comfort than life.

Nostalgia for childhood is one of the characteristic qualities of confessional poetry. As confessional poets, both Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das have produce vivid pictures of their childhood in their poems. Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath, both the poets, can be termed as child prodigies. They started writing poetry at a very young age.

Plath was just eight years old when her first publication appeared in "Boaston Newspapers". She is aware of and responsive to natural surroundings and described the early childhood poems as—

Nature, I think; birds, bees, spring, fall all those subjects which are absolute gifts to the person who does not have any interior experience to write about. I think the coming of spring, the stars

overhead, the first snow fall and so on are gifts for a child, a young poet.

[Peter Orr, The Poet Speaks]

Kamala Das was barely six, when she started writing her poetry. There is a vivid description of her childhood days in her autobiographical novel 'My Story'. She wrote tragic poems about her dolls who lost their heads and limbs and confesses that "each poem of mine made me cry".

Failure in love as a theme is more powerful in the poems of confessional poets, than its consummation. Kamala Das' shocking confession about the theme of love has startled evenly the critics and the laymen. It was more shocking because it comes from a traditional, Indian woman. The search for ideal love is continued throughout her poetry. She was sick of love which was just skin-deep:

..... what is

The use, what is the bloody use?

That was the only kind of love,

This hacking at each other's part

Like convicts hacking, breaking clods

At noon

[Convicts]

Sometimes, she unables to draw a line between love & lust and gets

vexed

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, just dead

[Suicide]

Sylvia Plath also has handled the theme in a brilliant way. She has very few poems on this theme of love, compared to Kamala Das. Plath belongs to the permissive society of the West where no brows are raised either at extra or pre-marital relationships. The normal love which she ought to have experienced as a young girl, does not make an impression on her as poetic themes.

"Death" is the common theme where both the poets meet, though, in their own different style. Of course, Plath valiantly met her goal and Das was saved. Sylvia Plath, in her poems has sketched 'Death' in many colours without sounding morbid. For her, dying is not a painful end, but an art.

Dying is an art, like everything else

I do it exceptionally well.

[Lady Lazarus]

Kamala Das considers death a reward for all her pains in surviving upon the earth. Her autobiography gives ample evidence to her idea of death by water, drowning oneself in the sea. The relevant passage reads thus;

Often I have toyed with the idea of drowning myself to be rid of

my loneliness which is not unique in any way, but is natural to all.

I have wanted to find rest in the sea and an escape from involvements.

[My Story]

The strong individuality of Plath was an asset to her as a poet but a handicap in real life. The basic ingredients of high intelligence and extreme sensibility made her different from everyone else. Plath could not be happy as a wife. She didn't like the idea of being an typical housewife. Her contempt towards this idea is beautifully expressed in the poem "The Applicant". She ridicules the institution of marriage where the woman is treated as 'an object'

It can sew, it can cook

It can talk, talk, talk.

It works, there is nothing wrong with it.

You have a whole, it's a poultice

My boy, its your last resort.

Will you marry it, marry it, marry it.

[The Applicant]

Her inability to identify herself with the society and refusal to accept the tragedies as part of life, lead to a struggle of self and society.

Kamala Das' early marriage with a man much older to her creates an aversion. His demanding nature made her frigid. Kamala Das was a rebel and does not make any attempts to hide it. She looks every where for love but she gets it only in her dreams.

Why do I so often dream

Of a house, where each silent

Corridor leads me to warm

Yellow rooms-

.....

They love ... and once awake, I See the bed from which my love

Has fled, the empty room, the

Naked walls, count on fingers

My very few friends ...

[The Corridors]

Kamala Das writes, in her usual frank open-mindedness, about married life or man-woman relationship in many of her poems. She frequently complains about man's callousness and wantonness

and woman's suffering on that count. In the poem titled 'Of Calcutta', she says that her people had sent her away to another city as;

A relative's wife, a housfrau for his home, and
Doll for his parlour, a walkie talkie one to
Warm his bed at night....

... he folded

Me each night in his arms and told me of greater
Pleasure that had come his way, rich harvest of
Lust, gleaned from other fields, not mine the embers
died.

Within me then.

She has thus, a strong grievance against her
husband's infidelity and lust.

Conclusion

Both Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das have distinguished themselves by becoming essential, familiar landmarks in the development of poetry in their respective native cultures. Both of them hire highly self-conscious

idioms, depicting their own peculiar sensibilities. They have also tended to assume a larger-than life 'Persona' in their poems, to comment on a extensive variety of concerns, especially as a women belonging to particular traditions. The roles they have played as creative writers have rendered them almost as cult figures, who will also, unquestionably, continue to exercise a considerable influence on women in general and future poets in particular.

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