

Expressing the oppressed voice in a rebellious way: A comparison of confessional poetry by Sylvia Path and Kamala Das

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ABSTRACT

Kamala Das is frequently likened to Sylvia Plath as one of the most influential protest writers in Indian English literature, since both of them adopted the confessional style of writing in their poems. Kamala Das has consistently spoken out against the stereotypical image of a woman in favour of a more honourable and respectable position for women as a whole. The confessional writings of Das and Plath have boldly expressed the oppressed voice of women and its universal anguish. Unlike male poets, they write with a rebellious tone that elegantly explores subjects like identity crisis, women's suffering, repressed love, and passion. Despite being born and raised in very different cultural environments, Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath share a lot of similarities. Without a doubt, both are the best confessional poets. They rebelled against society and their family, providing a suitable response to male chauvinism. Love is an uncontrollable concept for both, one that is characterised by deception, suspicion, betrayal, resentment, torment, and even hatred. A detailed comparison will be made in this study on their poetry in particular on their expressing the oppressed voice in a rebellious way.

Keywords: *Expressing, Rebellious, Confessional, Feminism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Kamala Das is frequently likened to Sylvia Plath as one of the most influential protest writers in Indian English literature, since both of them adopted the confessional style of writing in their poems. Kamala Das has consistently spoken out against the stereotypical image of a woman in favour of a more honourable and respectable position for women as a whole. In reality, the need to awaken women is the subject of her poetry, which speaks to the most pressing problem facing modern civilization (Goswami and Nagaon, 2). The confessional writings of Das and Plath have boldly expressed the oppressed voice of women and its universal anguish. Unlike male poets, they write with a rebellious tone that elegantly explores subjects like identity crisis, women's suffering, repressed love, and passion.

Despite being born and raised in very different cultural environments, Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath share a lot of similarities. Without a doubt, both are the best confessional poets. They rebelled against society and their family, providing a suitable response to male chauvinism. Love is an uncontrollable concept for both, one that is characterised by deception, suspicion, betrayal, resentment, torment, and even hatred. Their divorce led them into a phase of disdain for society and men, from which they eventually cut themselves off. They are confessional strain poets in large part due to their fragility, reaction to women's status, and betrayal of their husbands. Both experienced dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and drabness, which they bravely, firmly, and candidly communicate in their poetry (Anitha, 44). A detailed comparison will be made in this study on their poetry in particular on their expressing the oppressed voice in a rebellious way.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Oppressed voice of womanhood

According to Mishra Kamala Das gives voice to the maltreatment she endured in a society that was predominately male. A conflict between her honourable self and the cruel male society is not an easy task to invite. She acted bravely and without regard for any accusations. She illustrates how every woman may survive in difficult situations. Her poetry illustrates shared experiences and the miserable state of women. By virtue of being domestic and wifely, they are obligated to choose docility (Mishra, 2). She writes in-

“An Introduction”

Dress in Sarees,
be girl Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer,
be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants...

(Summer in Calcutta 59)

Karo et al. suggested that in a patriarchal setting, Plath's poetry serves as a mirror to reflect her own predicament. She incorporates feminist politics of her own into her writings. *Mushrooms* by Sylvia Plath shows the ongoing battle that women have with patriarchy. She serves as an example of the terrible circumstances that women face in a society that is ruled by men. The term “Mushrooms” refers to a helpless, persecuted group of women. They absolutely despise guys because of how they treat them. The poem's overall message emphasises the desire for control and power. Despite the fact that they appear to be severely oppressed and vulnerable, their fight against their oppressors is tremendous. When they speak as a single voice, they are at their strongest (Karo et al., 523-524).

Nair stated that in order to illustrate the physical and mental scars inflicted upon her personal life by the strict patriarchal or male colonialism - rules, Kamala Das revealed her feminine consciousness and the oppression of women in her rebellious and dissenting voice. Kamala Das strove to equalise female and male experiences rather than attempting to release women from constraints placed on them by men as she was aware of the indomitability of the masculine ego. She conveys the depth of the psychological or emotional scars and the experiences of oppression in a patriarchal culture (Nair, 2). The vulnerability and difficulties a woman encounters physically, psychologically, and sociologically are explored in Kamala Das' *My Story*. She makes repeated attempts to conform to the definition of a “culture woman,” but she is unable to firmly ground herself in these standards (Lal et al., 3).

Sharma explained that Sylvia describes the suffering and isolation of a widow in her poem *Widow*. In this patriarchal society, it is extremely challenging for a woman to live alone, according to her. When her mother and she were abandoned following her father's passing, she was subjected to the dominance of men. She had a lot of trouble relating to the outside world. Without her husband, her mother endured hardship her entire life. She claims that the widow endures both physical and mental suffocation. Her heart is torn from her body by her pains. She struggles with her husband's memories, which results in emptiness. She lives alone and in pain by herself. Despite the fact that Sylvia wasn't a widow, she experienced loneliness as a result of her husband's adultery and abandonment. She compares her experiences of loneliness and sadness to those of a widow (Sharma, 5).

2.2. Rebellious tone in confessional writings

In a patriarchal society, their literary style had a strong rebellious undertone; it was not about assuming a man's position but rather about establishing a women's space where the importance of the individual self was paramount. Despite the fact that they were not affected by one another and lived at great distances from one another, their writings somehow provided a revolutionary voice for the universal pain of womanhood. Roy finds out that Kamala Das retaliates in “An Introduction” against individuals who tell her “Don't write in English... It's not your mother tongue”-

“Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you- Why not let me speak in
Any language I like.”(An Introduction, 8-11)

She wore a shirt, her brother's trousers, and shortened her hair as a form of rebellion against people who demanded her to “become” a lady (Roy, 3).

Tang et al. pointed out that Sylvia Plath writes about her personal recovery from surgery in the poems “Tulips” and “Daddy,” as well as the alleged oppressive control she allegedly suffered at the hands of her father. Plath passionately criticises the patriarchy using death imagery, which is significant. This is an allusion to Plath's use of death imagery as a kind of protest against the male-dominated societal structure in which women's identities are shaped. Plath's use of death imagery as a means of protesting patriarchy. By initially projecting a sense of passivity, Sylvia Plath's use of death images is maybe the first step in her attempt to evade the constraints placed on her identity (Tang et al., 1-2)

Nandi opined that the behaviour of her husband, which she finds intolerable, is once again the subject of Das' poetry “The Stone Age.” She is audacious enough to equate her husband in this instance to a spider, which is extremely dangerous to people. She uses the word “old” to define her husband because she is married to a man who is twice as old as she is. Another adjective, “fat,” implies that he had numerous sexual encounters prior to marriage, and that, like a spider, he became fatter from the previous prey. When a spider builds its web to capture its victim, the animal cannot escape the deadly trap once it

has been caught in it. In the same way, her husband physically captures her in order to sate his sexual appetite, making her his helpless target. Her husband's webs of carnal hunger start to bewilder her (Nandi,3). Das writes:

Fond husband, ancient settler in the mind,
Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment,
Be kind. You turn me into a bird of stone, a granite(67)

A spider imagery was also used by Plath in her *The Bell Jar*. She described a pregnant woman: "an enormous spider-fat stomach and two little ugly spindly legs propped up in the high stirrups, and all the time the baby was being born never stopped making this unhuman whooping noise." Plath instantly dehumanises the woman and the event of childbirth itself by comparing the woman to a spider and describing the "unhuman" noises she makes. She also distances herself, as a human, from it. Similar to how Esther finds Conway's allegedly picture-perfect family repugnant, she resists the idea of motherhood once more, shielding her ambition and self-worth from its stifling grip (Edger 7-8).

2.3.Feminist approach

Both of them possessed feminist ideas and a feminist perspective, which they combined with an aggressive tone to criticise the male-dominated society. Plath produced a poem of spooky imagery, morbidity, and feminist triumph in "Lady Lazarus."

"I do it
so it feels like hell/ I do it so it feels real. /I guess you
could say I've a call" (245).

She narrates her failed suicide attempt in the poem. Thus, her compositions and poetry incorporate her fascination with dying. By standing her ground against increasing commoditization and objectification, "Lady Lazarus" defeats patriarchy. "Eat men like air" and "have red hair" suggest a renewed enthusiasm and optimism for Lady Lazarus/Plath to restore herself (Fatima et al., 5).

On the other hand, Ruhi explained that the main theme of gender consciousness is a recurring one in Kamala Das' writings. Her writings gained strength from her treatment of female sexuality, which was open and honest and free of any sense of shame. In all of her poetry, the subjective aspect is also quite strong and predominant. She exhibits her feminine sensitivity in at least three distinct ways. She begins by outlining the long-standing pains, exploitation, and humiliation that women have experienced in patriarchal societies. Second, she also demonstrates her lack of interest in men's bodies. Thirdly, she vents her displeasure about her feminism objective, in which she ironically exhorts women to submit to man's dominance, and also she instills feminine intuition in the readers who are primarily women, inspiring them to rebel against masculine dominance (Ruhi, 26).

In her book "Letters Home," Sylvia wrote to her mother that, if she had to choose a slogan for her life and for herself, it would be "The Girl Who Wanted to Be God," a reference to her drive and ambition to become a well-known poet. Plath interestingly chose the word 'God' rather than Goddess when interpreting her word choice (Rahmani, 52).

Majumder stated that through her confessional writings, Kamala Das lashes out at patriarchy. Das had hardships throughout her life as a result of her backdated family background, her husband's sexual obsession, social prejudice, and the unending repression of feminine inclinations. The majority of her descriptions are honest, highlighting her feelings of annoyance and isolation. Her young marriage turned out to be a misfortune since it prevented her from valuing her feminine intuition. She experienced voice suppression in both her father's and her husband's homes since, traditionally, in patriarchal society, a woman is compelled to adhere to the arbitrary limits of the family. Because the relationship between men and women is one of domination and subservience, which ultimately relates to sexual colonisation in which males are the colonisers and the women are the colonised, a woman is like a puppet in the hands of patriarchy. Because her father dominates her before marriage while her husband takes over thereafter, marriage is nothing more than a simple change of masters (Majumder, 67).

2.4. Finding self and identity

Through their confessional poems, they have portrayed personal suffering. In a society where men predominate, women strive throughout their lives to find their identities. Poetry that is confessional portrays the struggle that women have in discovering who they are inside.

According to Siddiqui the intensely autobiographical poetry of Sylvia Plath addresses her mental anguish, her loveless and complicated marriage to Ted Hughes, her unsolved issues with her parents, and her self-image. One needs to be aware of at least three key biographical details that have an impact on Sylvia Plath's poetry in order to comprehend it. First, her father's untimely passing. Secondly, she was separated from Ted Hughes, her lover and husband. her three attempts at suicide come in third. These incidents can be linked to Sylvia Plath's most famous poems. They lament her helplessness, shifting between wrath and a sombre dejection. Her dismissal of these motifs is motivated by her narcissistic concern for her unique self. Plath eventually succeeds in giving voice to the cries of her heart thanks to the adaptability and freedom provided by the

confessional method of poetry (Siddiqui, 3)

Suganyalakshmi remarked that Kamala Das, who is known for being the most outspoken and controversial writer, has earned recognition as the “voice of women's sexuality.” She was candid about her bad sexual relationship with her husband, Madhava Das, in her poems. Her poetry depicted a marriage as lifeless, empty, and dull. In her book *My Story*, she makes frequent references to her own marriage as being unhappy and unfulfilling. Despite feeling lonely and living alone in her own world, Kamala Das upheld her customs and the safety of her home. She has always believed that poetry is a very realistic analysis of life and its objectivity (Suganyalakshmi, 6-7).

Garcia stated that the protagonist of Sylvia Plath's autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood, decides to use an effective tactic rather than merely withholding information from her psychiatrist when she discovers she can choose to do so: “I thought I only need tell him what I wanted to, and that I could control the picture he had of me by hiding this and revealing that, all the while he thought he was so smart” (125). Like her fictional character Esther, Plath was skilled in the practice of deliberate concealment. Much of Plath's most well-known work typically uses personalities rather than an uninhibited personal “I,” even if her later works would come to represent confessional poetry, a kind of poetic writing defined by unvarnished autobiographical rawness. Many of her poems' speakers, including “Lady Lazarus,” “Ariel,” and “Daddy,” seem to have dual identities (Espinoza, 5).

Joshi discussed that Kamala Das appears to concretise her identity through her own bounds and markers, rejecting the definition and measure of a woman's aches and joys being subsumed in her affiliation with the masculine presences in her life. Due to her gender, she textually resists fitting into the dichotomous identity markers imposed by sociocultural conditioning. The contrast between her candid exposition of the limitations of domestic life and the experience of various degrees of exploitation in arranged marriages in “The Sunshine Cat” is a major example of this. As the title suggests, the woman's self has been dehumanised and deteriorated. Because of the institution of marriage, a woman's agency is regulated by her husband, and her own will is disregarded:

Her husband shut her

In, every morning; locked her in a room of books
With a streak of sunshine lying near the door, like
A yellow cat, to keep her company, but soon,
Winter came and one day while locking her in, he
Noticed that the cat of sunshine was only a Line, a hair- thin line (51)

The poet-speaker exposes the degradation of her identity as a woman that comes along with the sensation of othering from men in lines like-“They did this to her, the men” and “...the husband who neither loved nor Used her, but was a ruthless watcher,” (51). Husbands are implicated in advancing the patriarchal violence that men are perceived as perpetrating against the psyche and body of married women (Joshi, 7-8).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to assess how the two authors “Sylvia Path” and “Kamala Das” express their oppressed voice in a rebellious way through confessional poetry, this paper has adopted a secondary data collection approach. Secondary has allowed to unveil the writings of the two authors and further elaborate on the manner in which these writings are different yet similar in their approach. In accordance with this, a qualitative research approach is adopted. Qualitative research approach facilitates acquisition of in-depth information about a given phenomenon. Through the use of the prevailing literature in concern to the writings available of the two authors, the study will strategically outline the key oppressions that women face in a society. Moreover, it will assist in portraying how the two authors have raised their voices in different ways to mitigate these oppressions of women in the community. For analysing the differences between the writing styles and thought processes of the two authors, content analysis approach will be implemented. Content analysis will guide in drawing the study's interpretation of confessional poetry by Sylvia Path and Kamala Das.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Sylvia Plath's writing style and Kamala Das's writing style

Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das used the pen as a weapon to raise a voice against male dominated patriarchal society. They talk about breaking the chain and embracing freedom.

Sylvia Plath- Sylvia Plath, one of the most prominent poets of the postwar era, is regarded as a key character in the Second Wave Feminist Movement's literary strand. Reading Plath's writing allows the reader to empathise with her powerful prose because it is full of both intense personal and societal criticism. As she critiques the restrictive society she found herself in at the turn of the 20th century, her poetry has received substantial feminism-related study (Boffano, 4). Sylvia Plath wrote

about the crucial events in her life with a strong emotional tone; her suffering was expressed in a rebellious voice. The confessional movement resonated with her feminist perspective. Her poems frequently aroused desires for happy marriage, finding real love, and motherhood. The events of Plath's life have been reflected in her writings, which is the cruellest fate that can befall an artist. Her life story has been told by many authors with horrifying fascination, and some of the authors have made attempts to identify the mental disorder she has. Such emphasis on Sylvia's mental state and the mental pathologies that she had, which were the primary inspiration for her poetry, is seen as a novel literary criticism (Lec et al., 3).

According to Obeso, Plath is not just a fantastic poet; she is one of the best short story authors in English literature. The short story by Plath exhibits binary meanings that are based on particular literary theories. Many academics read her works extensively, and many researchers give her works careful consideration. The short story by Plath has some examples of the author-to-text connection. However, Plath's depression torments her. In fact, the plot frequently reflects her vengeful sadness. Binary significations are revealed in Plath's "Jonny Panic and the Bible of Dreams," which are based on certain literary theories like historical-biographical theory and psychoanalytic theory (Obeso, 2).

Kamala Das- The main theme of Kamala Das' poetry is the dejected attitude of disturbed women. At times, the tone was disobedient and attempted to communicate repressed passion. Her poems frequently dealt with women's desires for unrestricted love, their search for identity, and their struggle to discover who they are. She can express her ideas and emotions clearly thanks to her exuberant and magnificent writing style. She had a great sense of self-expression and was an exceptional poet. She can express her feelings, sentiments, memories, love and sexual encounters, disappointments, and disillusionment since she is most at ease using English. She was a poet whose writing will endure in the minds of readers for many years (Purushan et al., 9).

Saha finds out Kamala Das expresses her protest against patriarchal hegemony by choosing English as her primary language of production. Her decision to write in English rather than her native language can be viewed as purposeful because she is an equally successful writer in both languages. The customary practice of making women into dwarfs under the burden of male ego is denounced with vehemence by Das in "An Introduction." She identifies herself in this poem as a "Indian, extremely brown, born in / Malabar," (4-5) as the title suggests, and she speaks in "...three languages, write in / Two, dream in one" (5-6). She is quite open about who she is. Additionally, she is well aware of the current political controversy surrounding the Indian Government's three language policy with relation to the language she utilises in her day-to-day activities (Saha, 3)

4.2. Comparison between Plath and Das's writing

Das is an Indian, while Plath is an American, and they both come from separate countries. Despite having various backgrounds and cultures, their poetry has a similar tone. Physical and mental agony are well depicted in their literature. Although Kamala Das's selection of themes is somewhat more constrained than Sylvia Plath's, Das is more autobiographical and personal while Plath is more symbolic and embodies gender.

In Confessional writings the reader takes on the role of a listener, taking in what the narrator has to say. The author's life is made available to the reader, who can then observe firsthand what they underwent. As a result there is an open and forgiving connection between the reader and the writer. Sylvia Plath gets right to the point and does not mince words, but Kamala Das elaborates on her confession with several examples and details. When it comes to confessional writing, the reader is still the passive one who must just keep reading (Ahima, 9).

Kamala Das' poetry has originality in both subject matter and form, painting the true portrait of Indian sensibility. In essence, her poetry makes a significant contribution to the development of an Indian English vernacular that allows us to discriminate Indian English poetry from English poetry published anywhere else in the world. The search for love and her failure to achieve fulfilment in love in life are the main themes of the majority of her poems (Rao, 2). On the other hand, Sylvia Plath uses a woman's identity to explore women in her work, and she incorporates her personal experience and emotion into the poem. Plath has made an attempt to write for and speak in the voices of women (Chen and Chi, 5).

With only three volumes, Kamala Das' poetic output is slender. However, most of the poetry in them convey her need for love, emotional breakdown in a marriage, disillusionments, frustrations, and failures in a world ruled by males. The poet's personal identity feels suffocated and yearns for new life. She expresses her opposition to patriarchy in this way: "I must let my thoughts striptease/I must exude autobiography," she adds, in order to demonstrate her individuality and feminine identity (Parveen, 2). On the other hand though Plath's first poem was only published when she was eight years old in the Boston Herald, Plath attended Cambridge on a full scholarship and had always written poems. She did not stop, she simply never felt content and believed she would never be a true writer. Writing confessional poetry was Plath's method of celebrating the weight of her past and present experiences. She was a master of the form, making it impossible to read her poetry without thinking about her. In a journal she wrote "I felt if I didn't write nobody would accept me as a human being. Writing, then, was a substitute for myself: if you don't love me, love my writing & love me for my writing. It is also much more: a way of ordering and reordering the chaos of experience" (Abbas, 4).

5. CONCLUSION

Writing on women's confessions was pioneered by visionary authors Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das in the twentieth century. They established the guidelines to enable women to express the ethos that ignites within them and to get a voice. Their memoirs have many parallels to the lives of women in our community. Women all around us are deteriorating, while having the capacity to one day rule the world. Women have suppressed their aspirations for generations out of fear of patriarchy. The majority-male society has consistently distorted and misread the needs and desires of women.

Patriarchal culture has a constant desire for man to be more powerful and superior to all other creatures. He constantly wants to feel stronger than the woman while she is in front of him, even though she is delicate and beautiful. Through a qualitative secondary method an analysis has been made on Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das' writing and it can be concluded that confessional feminist writers like Plath and Das serve as the modern world's embodiment of the revolutionary ladies. They demand that women take a position and fight against the immorality that they find intolerable in order to combat the vices that are pervasive in society.

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