
Portrayal of split persona in the poetry of Kamaladas

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a pen portrayal on split persona in the poetry of Kamaladas alias Kamala Surayya also known by her pseudo name Madhavikutty in her Malayalam writings. Split-self in female poetry can be described as opposition women feel between essential aspects of the self, what is socially prescribed on the basis of gender and what is defined on the basis of the self, what a woman feels she should be and what she feels she is. Kamaladas poetry has boldly revealed the splitself of the Indian women in the realm of Indian English writing.

She indulges in self-awareness, self-exposure and self-introspection in order to define herself poetically. The aim of the poet is not self-exposure; but self-discovery and self-examination. She structures self-exploration in order to search her lost identity as a woman and as a poet. Thus one can see an obvious split personality in the works of Kamala Das which can very well be attributed to suffering and humiliation meted out to women.

The poetic work of Kamala Das demonstrates a continuity of theme and expression concerning central division of the self. Her work is a compelling account of presence of split. She speaks out her heart on her own premises. She redefines herself and liberates herself both as a woman and a poet. She struggles to cope with her problems and dilemmas. She does not attempt to intellectualize, nor does she attempt to spiritualize. She makes a discovery of human existence and narrates her experiences vividly and passionately.

KEYWORDS : *Split-self, duality, dualism, womanhood, childhood, frustration, self, lost identity, exploitation, liberation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The split-self, in the broadest sense of the word is a universal phenomenon in literature. Yet it is only spottily recognized in the domain of literary criticism. The phenomenon extends back to the great Greek philosopher Plato, at least in terms of the recognition that the self contains parts which can function quasi-independently, that is, each as a whole and as well as separately.

Kamala Das, who was born in 1934, was a renowned Indian poet, novelist, short-story writer, essayist and memoirist. She was also known as Madhavikutty, the pseudonym she used when writing in the Malayalam language. Then there was Ami, the pet name with which she referred to herself in her memoirs. Much later in life, she gave herself yet another name, Suraiyya, to mark her conversion to Islam. Straddling many names was one way in which Das straddled multiple identities.

She had a gift for writing with lyrical beauty in both Malayalam her native language as well as English .

2. DISCUSSION

Split with regard to female poetry can be described as opposition women feel between essential aspects of the self. It is opposition women feel on the basis of gender and what is defined on the basis of the self. It is opposition between what a woman feels she should be and what she feels she is.

“Splitting” is a term that belongs to the domain of classical psychoanalysis and psychiatry. It refers to an unconscious ego defence mechanism by which a fairly complex entity cannot be accepted into consciousness in its entirety because it contains aspects that are both acceptable to a person as well as unacceptable. Relatively underdeveloped personalities, most especially borderline personalities, have a hard time incorporating into consciousness seemingly contradictory aspects of the same person or thing.

So, they unconsciously separate or “split” objects into two categories, seeing the “good” side of a person or thing as the part they find acceptable and the “bad” side of the person or thing as the part they find painful or unacceptable. And, it’s much more than just seeing both a good and a bad side to everything. They actually “split” a single entity into two opposing realities, conceptualizing for example a mother who has both a gentle and a terrifying side as alternately “good mommy,” or “bad mommy.” As a result, they will often alternate between over-idealizing and devaluing the same person.

Underdeveloped and poorly integrated personalities not only separate difficult to integrate external “objects” or persons this way, but they also “split” into disparate parts aspects of themselves that are hard to integrate into a cohesive whole. So, extreme degrees of internal splitting can result in a fragmentation of the self through such mechanisms as dissociation or even multiple personality formation.

Kamala Das has written a substantial number of poems exploring this duality of self, the pain and frustrations resulting from such splitting of the self.

In one of her noted poems “An Introduction” She proclaims

...I am the Sinner

I am a Saint, I am the beloved and the Betrayed,

She particularly identifies the two selves with the domestic gender role and the artist.

The domestic self occupies a safe position accepted and esteemed by society in general and males in particular. The artist self in her haunts the fringes of human intercourse, isolated from men and women alike. She identifies herself as such a repressed character of whose psyche she is a part. Kamala Das’ personae are contemporary women beset by an identity crisis which works at two levels.

First, she tries to mend an identity for herself by her nostalgic yearning for her ancestral past represented by her grandmother and ancestral home, a place of childhood innocence where she

feels at home with her self. The ancestral memories are the vital “symbols of undefiled purity which she left once and lost forever”.

In the second level the crisis assumes the form of a psychic conflict in which the alluring past is at war with the bleak present.

The modern Indian-English poetry with all its aggressiveness and boldness begins and culminates in Kamala Das. No other feminist poet in India could achieve the absolute rebellious dimensions of Kamala Das in their poetry. In fact, Kamala Das makes a poetic revolt by way of introspectively pondering upon the unfortunate state of existence in which Indian women conduct themselves.

Like a seasonal artist she penetrates her imaginative potential to sympathetically understand the possible average grievances of Indian woman as extremely exploited agent in the social, domestic circumstances. Her grandmothers’s sister ammni or ammalu was also great writer of traditional Hindu religious scriptures.

Kamala Das has written a substantial number of poems exploring this duality of self, the pain and frustrations resulting from such splitting of the self. She particularly identifies the two selves with the domestic gender role and the artist. The former occupies a safe position accepted and esteemed by society in general and male in particular, while her counterpart haunts the fringes of human intercourse, isolated from men and women alike, and repressed by the women of whose psyche she is a part.

When we come to the Indian scene we find that the problem of the split self is taken up quite seriously by Kamala Das. Her personae are contemporary women beset by an identity crisis which works at two levels. In the first, she tries to mend an identity for herself by her nostalgic yearning for her ancestral past represented by her grandmother and ancestral home, a place of childhood innocence where she feels at home with her self. The ancestral memories are the vital “symbols of undefiled purity which she left once and lost forever” (Rahman, P. 31).

In the second level the crisis assumes the form of a psychic conflict in which the alluring past is at war with the bleak present. The poet’s self frequents the past and present in a commendable effort to redefine her identity. Her rebellious posture against the patriarchal world extricates herself from the crisis of identity. Kamala Das’ poetry is a contemporary Indian woman’s relentless quest to evolve a personal identity distinct from her identity as a sexual object that traditional society has constructed for her.

From the beginning Kamala Das demonstrates a continuity of theme and expression concerning central division of the self. Her work is a compelling account of presence of split. Kamala Das speaks out her heart on her own premises. She redefines herself and liberates herself both as a woman and a poet. She struggles to cope with her problems and dilemmas. She does not attempt to intellectualize, nor does she attempt to spiritualize. She makes a discovery of human existence and narrates her experiences vividly and passionately.

She indulges in self-awareness, self-exposure and self-introspection in order to define herself poetically. The aim of the poet is not self-exposure; but self-discovery and self-examination. She structure self-exploration in order to search her lost identity as a woman and as a poet.

Thus one can see an obvious split personality in the works of Kamala Das which can very well be attributed to suffering and humiliation meted out to women.

Kamala Das' poetry originates from self which functions like a poetic nucleus. An analysis of her poems reveal that the woman persona of her poems represent her 'own mutilated self' tormented by both past and present and resulting in deep sense of crisis. She feels exploited and cheated by the civilization of which she is a part. The "Suicide" is a long poem which throws light on the poet's problem of identity. She is disturbed to see the erosion of her personality.

But
I must pose
I must pretend
I must act the role
Of happy woman
Happy wife
I must keep the right distance
Between me and high
I must keep the distance
Between me and the low
O sea, I am fed up
I want to be simple
I want to be loved
And
If love is not be had
I want to be dead....

Her sense of identity is so fragile that she thinks there are many 'I's' residing within her every thought and impulse claiming its own identity. In "An Introduction" She proclaim

...I am the Sinner
I am a Saint,
I am the beloved
And the Betrayed,
I have no joys which are not yours,
Or aches which are not yours.
I too call myself I.

3. CONCLUSION

There is an intended dualism in the writings of Kamala Das. The dualism results from the all from childhood innocence into the adult world of multiple roles, marriage and social life. Thus one can see a resultant split personality in the works of Kamala Das and the cause of this split self can be broadly attributed to this intended dualism.

If one wants to categorize her it should include many sorts of self such as - Artistic self, poetic self, inner self, ego self, feminine self, personal self, young self, sexual self, herself, and mythical self, which can be categorized into three groups, poetic self ,it consists of artistic self

and creative self. Inner self, it consists of ego self, mythical self. Feminine self, it consists of herself, young self, sexual self, love self. She wants to emphasize the fact that one's ultimate aim should be to overcome one's own self so that there is liberation from worldly sufferings which brings joy and peace.

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