

KAMLA DAS' POETRY: AN ECO-FEMINIST READING

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ECOFEMINISM describes movements and philosophies that link feminism with *ecology*. The term is believed to have been coined by the French writer FRANCOISE D' EAUBONNE in her book *LE FEMINISME OU LA MORT* (1974). Ecofeminism also called *ecological feminism*, branch of feminism that examines the connections between women and nature. Ecofeminism is an off-shoot of Eco- criticism that uses the basic feminist tenets of equality between genders, and a view of the world that respects organic processes, holistic connections, and the merits of intuition and collaboration. Some of the key features of ECO-FEMINISM are:

- An approach to empower women in the preservation and conservation of environment.
- It links ecology with feminism. It views the domination of women as stemming from the same ideologies that bring about the domination of the environment.
- Also, eco-feminism connects the exploitation of and domination of women with that of environment.

ECO-FEMINISM is a new tool in literary tradition and encompasses a list of writers such as Toru Dutt, Nissim Ezekiel, Rabindranath Tagore, A.K. Ramanujan and one among such pioneers is Kamala Das. The paper is dealing with Kamala Das and how her poems apply the concept of Eco-Feminism. Kamala Das (31 March-31 May 2009) also known by her one-time pen name Madhavikutty creates a peculiar ecosystem in her works and the various elements of that system and the mutuality of these elements will be

highlighted in the paper. She is considered as a pioneer feminist poet among the group of Indo-Anglian authors including Imtiaz Dharkar, Menka Shivdasni and Adarsh Mishra. The modern Indian attitude to woman has become ambivalent; it varies between awe and contempt, respect and scorn. Das, thus, portrays the miserable predicament of woman who struggles to reconcile herself between society's expectations of womanhood and her expectations of feminine fulfilment. Kamala Das was a feminist poet with a deep rooted environmental awareness. The environment created by her is an environment not only for the cohabitation of man and woman, but for the entire animal and inanimate forms on the earth. She adored and accepted nature with the age old Indian reverence for nature. Also, kamala Das does not approach nature like a romantic or pantheist. Nature is an organic presence in her poems, interacting with people and interfering in their lives. The first poem which clearly portrays Eco-feminism is *THE ANAMALAI HILLS* where the lofty Anamalai hills are contrasted with the puny behaviour of man. The poem was written in January 1985. It is taken from her collection of poems titled as *THE ANAMALAI POEMS* that was written during her sojourn at the hills of Anamalai in Tamil Nadu following her defeat at the Parliamentary Elections of 1984. The *ANAMALAI POEMS* celebrate the self in the tradition of the classical Tamil *AKAM* (interior) poems. In as much as the seemingly unchanging hills of Anamalai constitute an escape from the ever-changing world of politics in the wake of her debacle at the polls, these poems can be regarded as embodying the ahistorical other of what politics implies.

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*Wrapped in the shrouds of betrayals,
the woman Walks along.
No longer seeking comfort in human speech.*

The Mountain

*Seems deaf –mute, but the flesh of her spirit is
but*

Its flesh,

*And her silence, despite the tumult in her blood,
its*

Destined hush.

The woman is comforted not by the man, but by the mountain. The mountain is part of eco-system which clearly links nature with woman which both shares the common ground of subjugation and victimisation. Here, the poet is in affinity with nature. The mountain is the representation of the eco-system which should protect the woman. The mountain is also an internal one; the presence of the gentle warmth of nature in the mind of the woman. Nature and woman have often been compared and substituted with each other, making their relation with man a common concern to both. Kamala Das uses the 'first person narrative', which is a characteristic of eco-feminist writings, and thus speaks for all woman kind. Her poems highlight the experience that is 'felt' to convey environmentally ethical conclusions. Kamala Das' agony, her 'yearning' is for identical of herself with nature, which is her ecological consciousness. Reminiscence and yearning for the past in poems of Kamala Das are trends of Eco-centeredness.

Another poem of Kamala Das that deals with the ecological aspect of Eco-feminism is 'A HOT NOON IN MALABAR'. The poem is taken from the collection of poems titled 'SUMMER IN CALCUTTA' (1965). It deals with her happy childhood spent in her grandmother's house in

Malabar. The poetess here longs for the hot noon in Malabar which was full of life as compared to her torturing experience of noon in a big city where she settled after her marriage.

This is a noon for beggars with whinnying

Voices, a noon for men who come from hills

With parrots in a cage and fortune-card...

These lines depict the climate and the daily routine of a busy street in Malabar. The poetess is in a stage of nostalgia which brings her face to face to face with her ancestral house at Malabar. She has imaginatively recreated the live picture of the 'hot noon' in Malabar filled with life and multiple activities.

This is a noon for strangers who part

The window-drapers and peer in, their hot eyes

Brimming with the sun, not seeing a thing in

Shadowy rooms and turn away and look

During the progress of the summer noon, the strangers used to pass by the poet's parental house. The poetess is in mood of reminiscence. It shows her total identification with the description of the noon in Malabar.

She has given us the very feel of the place which is filled with hustle-bustle of chaos and rural activities. She has imaginatively revisited the scene in which she had actually participated in past.

Thus, through the poem, she presents a comparative picture of her life at ancestral home in Malabar and her life in cities. Here, also Nature and Woman is fused together. The poet has given us the exact feel of the Indian locale in the poem which is rich in creating the typical colour of life in Kerala. The beggars have "whining voices", fortune-card are "stained with time", feet are "cracked" causing "grating and strange" noise and strangers have "mistrust in their eyes"

showing that Kamala Das affirms life with all its limitations.

The paper concludes by stating that NATURE is not merely a background in the poems of Kamala Das, but it is an active participant in her poems. Poetry becomes not a mere tool for confessional self-expression, but it attempts to present the totality of existence in nature. A new definition for the identity and existence of man in nature and a new perspective in man-woman

relationship is noted in her poems. It can be rightly said that Kamala Das as a feminist poet has nurtured in herself a special grievance against nature. In her poetry it is difficult to come across direct attack against nature in the sense of the external natural world of our habitation. She loves nature as a vivid and life-giving property in all its wildness, primitiveness and purity. Even as a grown up woman, she looked at nature in its myriad colours, shapes and movements with a child-like awe and dread.