

# Feminine sensibility: a critique

WRITING THE FEMALE — A Study of Kamala Das: N. Prasantha Kumar; Bharatiya Sahitya Pratishthan, Post Box No. 2111, Cochin University P.O., Kochi-682022. Rs. 125.

Being a lecturer in English, the author has delved deep into literature, both prose and poetry, on feminist themes. He has utilised his unique exposure for presenting this comprehensive study of Kamala Das — first as a poet, and second as “one cast in a confessional mode”.

The long list of references and bibliography gives an insight into the exhaustive preparatory work of the writer to project Das in the proper perspective, namely the “complex ambivalence of the Indian housewife who is at once rebellious and submissive.”

Personal admiration for this feminist poet is evident in the manner the extensive analysis has been attempted, attributing several psychological factors for Das's emotional writing, which acquires a “new humanistic dimension on the strength of the latent liberating strategy.”

It is quite natural and common that nearly all the writers, especially poets and essayists, draw data from their own personal background. An autobiographical trend is, therefore, seen in the poems, as has been rightly pointed out by the author.

The works emphasise the miserable predicament of the woman who struggles to reconcile herself between the society's expectations of womanhood and her own expectations of feminist fulfilment. They reflect her own personal experiences of life as a continual torture.

As a consequence, a deep distrust and disgust towards the patriarchal system seems to have developed, urging her to take refuge in poetry, at least to satisfy a bursting desire for self-expression. Descriptive interpretations by the author go to establish how a non-conformist attitude of Das right from her youth led her to believe that the family “is a socially entrenched institution that keeps a woman as a domestic drudge.”

Several lines have been quoted by the author from her poems grouped under themes such as self-discovery, identity crisis, grandmother, mother, father, hus-

band, and children. In particular, extracts from *My Story*, *In Calcutta*, and *Grandmother's House* appear more frequently, probably because Kamala Das derived a great deal of satisfaction in recollecting the early days of her life.

He stresses repeatedly that the urge for emotional fulfilment ends in poetry, that unflinching would “bestow personal benefit of release and recognition” to the sufferer.

The concluding chapters and especially the final pages of this volume have, in fact, succeeded more than the others in providing a critical appreciation of Das's contributions to feminine writing.

In an overall review, the author has highlighted the poet's predominant technique shaping in three distinct areas, namely, the child versus the woman, the woman versus the woman and the woman versus the artist. The split-self conflict is seen occurring throughout her works.

In a nutshell, what is really portrayed in the book is of Kamala Das as a highly sensitive person, who “has experienced much pain and little joy.” And, therefore, the poems are replete with startling revelations aided by imagery and comparisons, all making a recreation in the form of poetry — a significant gift to the literary world.

Although the writer has claimed to have steered clear of being swayed by a personal admiration of Kamala Das, he has not been able to maintain a clinical detachment, for, the study leans considerably towards a one-sided eulogistic narrative, overlooking the tortuous style exhibiting anger and hatred.

He has, however, admitted, “when the poet loses control the work ceases to be poetry and becomes automatic neurotic writing”.

As a work of literary criticism, this publication is quite thorough and analytical. That the reader can imbibe a lot of the underlying truth in the poems of Kamala Das in these pages, is itself, a commendable feature and a tribute to the author's presentation.

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