



Research Paper

Marriage as a Part of Systematic Oppression: Through Kamala Das' 'My Story'

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ABSTRACT

Marriage has always held a very important role to play in the Indian society and contributes to its already existing patriarchal norms. Marriage, when it comes to the Indian context, has not just been confined to the union of two souls, but has been believed to be the union of two families. This is the first place where societal standards interfere to induce a sense of oppression within marriage. The institution of marriage is flawed, and it is known to the people of the Indian community. Despite this, they turn a blind eye towards it and choose to follow the same path in the attempt to create a "balance" in the society. This is done by oppressing the women and holding them down with the many constraints a marriage is bound to bring in the newly formed relationship. This paper aims to throw light on the dehumanisation and emotional torment a woman goes through under the oppressive institution of marriage, and studies it through the autobiographical novel of Kamala Das titled "My Story". The text exhibits the side of a woman that seeks to produce feminine writing out of the female body as a positive, creative and liberating experience. Her writing in her autobiography is a means of feminist intervention and activism in the structures of patriarchy.

KEY WORDS: Marriage, Patriarchy, Oppression, Confessional

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I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism is one such concept that incorporates several conjectures and explores the dilemmas faced by the marginalised female population. When it comes to breaking the shackles of society and accomplishing success in life, men have the boon of being a "man", whereas, women on the other hand are confined to a "glass ceiling". Feminism as a movement had begun in the late 19th century and it was only until recently this movement had gained momentum. One of the major hindrances that compromised the rapidity of this movement was the lack of a woman's expressiveness towards her trials and tribulations. The very understanding that feminism is not a concept that has to be blended with calculative politics, but that it must examine the variables of caste, creed, race, and religion in a dynamic approach, is what contributed to the evolution of feminism.

II. 'MY STORY' AND ELEMENTS OF MARRIAGE

Being in the constant investigation of exploring the dimensions of her childhood and womanhood, Kamala Das is in the constant quest for her true identity. This quest is what leads her to build an artifact through her writings. She attempts to inculcate the surroundings with her self-identity and exhibits a metaphor of her mental state through her poetry.

Virginia Woolf has rightly mentioned that it is under two vital circumstances that leads a woman to take up writing as her profession, one being to kill the "Angel in the House", and the other to express her experience as a living being. Kamala Das' "My Story" explores the vulnerabilities and challenges a woman

faces physically, psychologically and sociologically. The novel reflects on Das' smooth deviation from the norms set forth by the traditional Indian society to the stepping up for a bold choice of choosing what she wants with utmost honesty. Despite her several attempts to gel with what a 'cultural woman' defines, she is unable to concretely establish herself on these norms.

It is a constant battle between the harsh realities of her society and her desires. She throws in aspects of religion and domestic imagery to publicise her voice on what she longs for in her marriage. Without the incorporation of any fictitious elements, we see that Kamala Das exposes us to the harsh realities of the society through the expression of both the external and internal aspects of herself. Through "My Story" Das exposes us to two polarities, one being the dominance over herself and the other being the deep-rooted fear of her being a Hindu woman. She however makes a courageous attempt of choosing to explore the ethos of her dominant self in truthfulness. Das' autobiography represents the emotional and psychological deprivation of almost every woman hailing from an Indian household.

Sex during that time was considered a parameter to satisfy the husband's needs and make him happy. In Das' case, her husband had begun losing interest after the birth of their first child. Even though she wanted to commit suicide or file a divorce, she could not do so as she belonged to the renowned "Nalappat" family. Her thoughts to commit suicide for the second time occurred with greater intensity not only because her second son was very ill, but because her husband had an affair with one of his acquaintances. It was during this time a realisation dawned upon her that she was meant to defeat her atrocities.

This was when she continued her life to express her struggles through her writings. She splits her identity into her "feminine self" and her "poetic self". While her feminine-self explores her capabilities as a woman. It also considers a man to be deficient in his emotions, and someone who lacks a passion to face reality. It voices her desire as a woman; at the same time voices the hardships that go past her when she must forcefully submit herself to fulfil her husband's desires, despite them going against hers.

Her poetic-self craves for freedom. Many men desired her for several reasons, one among them, Carlo was in love with her. All these years of Das' life being void of love and affection was now being fulfilled. However, she believed that she must return to her husband and sons because the taboo of marriage was instilled in her. Also, after being struck by severe illness, Kamala Das makes a promise to God to live an 'acceptable' and 'respectable' life if she survives. The concept of a respectable life being associated with the fear of God is evident here. She eventually deviates herself into the path of love again.

III. CONCLUSION

"My Story" created such ripples in the conservative Indian society mainly because it was hard to accept the fact that a woman belonging to a reputable and 'respected' Hindu family could find her own voice amidst the noise of oppression surrounding her. Kamala Das' style of writing and her material might not be the ones providing comfort for everyone, as it aims to address the issues faced by women in the Indian realm. It also depicts how society and its 'norms' contribute to keeping women confined and chained down to marriage and family. The idea that a woman could write so openly about the reality of her married life was not quickly accepted and Das had to face her trials for the same reason. Her autobiographical novel highlights the fact that marriage is an institution where the women have to keep working for it to be a successful one. It holds utmost relevance to the Indian readers as marriage is considered to be a 'sacred and divine' bond that is imposed upon the woman, and this is heavily reflected through this autobiographical work.

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