

Imagery In The Poetry of Kamala Das

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Abstract- In this paper light is thrown on the art of imagery by Kamala Das in her poetry. In general Imagery is a creation of the picture in terms of words. It serves the purpose of making experience of life vivid and life-like. Poets, who are incapable in this art of creating imagery, fail in their profession. In literature, imagery can be defined as “covering those uses of language [. . .] that evoke sense-impressions by literal or figurative reference to perceptible or ‘concrete’ objects, scenes, actions, or states as distinct from the language of abstract argument or exposition” (Baldick 164). In poetry, imagery is the representation of mental pictures appealing to senses rather than sight; and it is the depiction of qualities through words and pictures. For poets, imagery is the primary vehicle utilizing to transport their readers to a new experience. They can draw their readers into a sensory experience by the use of imagery. Imagery sharpens the impact of the words by poets as they show us with their words rather than just telling us what they feel. Imagery in poetry can be defined as a name given to the elements that spark off the senses. Imagery is the literary device employed in poetry which provide message or theme to a poem. Imagery is used for the strong sensory words for creating clear mental picture for the readers which enables them to feel what the poet thinks and feels in composition. Kamala Das has employed abundant images and symbols in her poetry. Imagery of Kamala Das is succinct, sensory, metaphorical, and evocative. Imagery in her poetry includes more than six senses, sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Her artistic craftsmanship is revealed through her use of imagery and symbols. Kamala Das has borrowed images in her poetry from her daily life and mostly are symbolic. She has employed functional imagery rather than decorative. Ezra pound remarks: “An image is one which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (qtd. in Singh 132). Kamala Das’ ancestral home and her grandmother, plays an important role in the maximum images she has employed in poetry. In poem, “The Sea”, Kamala Das reminiscences her past through the imagery of sea. She remembers the fortunate time of her past and feels nostalgic in the present. The imagination or the usage of images has been outstanding in her poetry that fulfills the desire to understand the subject of sensuality. Every reader—critic or mere entertainer can comprehensively grasp her poetry through usage of poetic devices. Her attraction for it, she clarifies later, is ‘a childish whim, ‘a thing associated with her dreamy past:

But,at the basement of the sea (The Descendants 34).

1 INTRODUCTION

In this paper light is thrown on the art of imagery by Kamala Das in her poetry. In general Imagery is a creation of the picture in terms of words. It serves the purpose of making experience of life vivid and life-like. Poets, who are incapable in this art of creating imagery, fail in their profession.

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In poem, “The Sea”, Kamala Das reminiscences her past through the imagery of sea. She remembers the fortunate time of her past and feels nostalgic in the present. The imagination or the usage of images has been outstanding in her poetry that fulfills the desire to understand the subject of sensuality. Every reader—critic or mere entertainer can comprehensively grasp her poetry through usage of poetic devices. Her attraction for it, she clarifies later, is ‘a childish whim, ‘a thing associated with her dreamy past:

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Introduction: - Kamala Das has borrowed images in her poetry from her daily life and mostly are symbolic. She has employed functional imagery rather than decorative. She resorted to the devices when it became necessary and was not always in knack of making images. She has drawn her images from the familiar and daily life which are symbolic and expressive in diction. Singh comments:

The sun and heat, house and window, cremation and burning, objects of nature, human anatomy, sleep, sea, the mythic grandmother and Krishna constitute her whole range of imagery. One of the dominant images in Kamala Das' poetry is that of 'the human body' while male body is a source of corruption and exploitation where, the female body is a storehouse of beauty and chastity misused to the maximum (132).

J. A. Cuddon, writer of a book on literary terms remarks that when an "image recurs in a work of art as a leit motif of the thematic concern, it becomes a symbol" (316), similarly Rene Wellek says that "an image, if it persistently recurs both as presentation and representation, it becomes a symbol (189).

In poetry of Kamala Das, such as "The Freaks", the subtle analysis of the male physiology is presented. "The male anatomy furnishes her with images of horror and ugliness. It is represented as repulsive and destructive" (Singh 133). She compares the mouth of her lover to the sun that brings, in turn, both the heat and loss of love. The similar theme is found in the poem below:

My love is an empty gift, a glided
Empty container, good for show, nothing else (The Descendants 17).

In poem "Freaks" Kamala Das says:

He talks, turning a sun – stained

.....Are willed to race towards love (Summer in Calcutta 10). Kamala Das has depicted her male partner's features in quite horrible way like his sun-stained cheeks which are quite brownish in colour and have a symbolic significance. Images of ugliness here focus on her attitude of rejected and negation and show the woman' disgust with the man. Generally a lover uses to be attractive to his beloved, but here it is opposite of that.

The image of sun as evoked in "The Freaks" is not favourable but oppressive; it does not illuminate the world of the poet, but rather turns her unkind. The oppressive and benevolent power of the sun is to be felt in "The Dance of the Eunuchs" and "Summer in Calcutta": its 'harshness' is to be witnessed in "A Hot Noon in Malabar": it fully mingles with the atmosphere of the poems- the contemptible condition of the dry ribbed eunuchs, the frustrated and depressed plight of the poetess herself, and her temporary relief through love and sex. The image of the sun in the poem "Summer in Calcutta"

is highly charged with sensuousness and sensuality. This is what we find in it:

What is this drink but

....Of suns (Old Playhouse 24).

The image of the April sun in these lines brings to the poet a sense of sensuous repletion, of warm intoxication which inspires as well as relaxes so that 'my worries doze', she compares the sun with the ripe orange which seems to enjoy even the harshness of the heat. Though she compares the sun shine with an orange juice she tells that even the juice makes her drunk. In the poem "The Sunshine Cat", the sun becomes a companion of the despondent and the helpless, but it offers her no health or comfort in her depressing situation; She is rather left 'a cold and /half-dead woman'. "The Sunshine Cat" projects the picture of the poetess' mental illness in the company of a cruel husband. Sample the excerpt as:

Her husband Shut her

...Half dead woman, now of no use at all to men (Summer in Calcutta 49).

Kamala Das has drawn images for poetry from human body which are employed by her most frequently. She revolts against the male dominated society through her use of imagery which are symbolic and related. Only emotional fulfilment is difficult to find and woman must not long for it. In the following lines from "The Looking Glass" which is another of Kamala Das' hymns to sexual love is both patronizing and indulgent in tone:

Notice the perfection

...Endless female hungers (The Descendants 25).

Kamala Das has made use of such striking images that are essentially symbols having meaning only in India- the mango leaves and the bangles. In India, the bangles are the symbol of integrity to married women, when someone's husband dies among Hindus; they break their bangles which is their custom. Similarly the mango leaves on the threshold supposedly brings good luck as the poem says. She brings in many such conventional elements that take us back to the roots of India, as portrayed in "The Bangles".

Over the

Front door producing into stree

....Or sulk (Sumer in Calcutta 34).

Although Kamala Das employs simple language yet her imagery do stand out with certain Indian nationality.

In poem, "The Sea", Kamala Das reminiscences her past through the imagery of sea. She remembers the fortunate time of her past and feels nostalgic in the present. Her attraction for it, she clarifies later, is 'a childish whim, 'a thing associated with her dreamy past:

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In Kamala Das' poetry image of saturation in sex-act are found. Her sense of bitterness in his contact is genuine and right. Her sexual contact with him is conveyed by the image of a 'hooded snake' which is a dangerous thing. Whether, she is interested in him or not, but he thrusts himself upon her in a mood of violent passion. This is contained in the image of 'a great tree, felled.' Naturally he is very heavy for her, and yet he 'slumps' against her breasts and 'sleeps' in their warmth. Through the arresting images Kamala Das has made it very clear that he is largely a man of lust and cruelty, having no regard for her own feelings. That's why she has again and again raised her voice against physical love. Kamala Das depicts the patriarchal dominance of the time in "The Stone Age":

Ask me, everybody, ask me,
And sleeps (The Old Playhouse 51).

To conclude it can be said that her use of imagery is in fact the rebellion against the patriarchal society of her times. Her use of images have proved to be terrific in giving voice to the human agonies of the modern relationships, as she herself was a victim of that milieu.

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