



SOCIETY AND WOMEN CONDITION FROM ANCIENT TO THE CONTEMPORARY TIMES: A JOURNEY FROM *MRICHCHHAKATIKA* TO THE POETRY OF KAMALA DAS

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ABSTRACT



In the drama *Mrichchhakatika*, Sudrak is not only displays the reigns of kings or queens but also had portrayed all sorts of characters in the society. The wisdom of Charudutta and the natural love for Basantasena makes her a housewife from Hustler. Although, she is a harlot and she becomes the embodiment of all qualities in terms of holiness. Here in this drama, she is treated as a heroine.

In contemporary times, Kamala Das *My Story* relates how she has denied love and treated as a sex object by her husband Madhav Das in her autobiography 'MY Story'. Her poetry talks about "endless female hunger" with untainted honesty and represents the reality of female sexuality. She questions the marginalized status of women, gender construction, and oppression. Her suicidal urge reflects her desperate desire to renew herself.

The existence of an Indian entity is also reflected in her poetry: "I am an Indian, very brown, born in / Malabar, I speak three languages, write in/Two, and dream in one." The distinct post-colonial female identity formation is also there in her poetry.

Keywords: harlot marginalized, gender, post-colonial female identity

**INTRODUCTION**

Sudraka had written his play *Mrichchhakatika* dealing with the various stratus of society. The hero, in this play a poor Brahmin businessman named Charudatta. The protagonist and the heroine of this play is Vasantasena. In this play, the heroine Vasantasena takes the profession of harlotry. The definition of the heroine as describe in the book *Dasarupaka*:

“

Swanyasadharanstrititadgunanayikatritha”.

1

Therefore there are three types of the heroine in a play *Swiya*, *Anya* and *Sadharanstri*.

In the book *Sahityadarpana* it is said that the definition of the heroine of the *Prakarana*:

“Dhirapragalbhisyadveshyasamanyanayika”.²

Here, the norm of an ideal wife is portrayed in the character of Dhuta in this play, but the protagonist here is the harlot (Ganika) Vasantasena. The bravery of the dramatist is shown by his selection of a harlot (Ganika) as the main heroine in the play. The definition of a harlot (Ganika) describes in the book *Dasarupaka* as:

“Sadharanastriganikakalapragalbhyaadhourtyayuk”.³

Manu refers to the case of those men who make money by allowing their wives to act as a prostitute and says that people holding a conversation with such women are not to be severely punished but have to pay only a small amount as a fine. This clearly shows that Manu had a very low opinion about such women. But in spite of such severe condemnations, the institution of prostitutes persisted and laws had to be made with regard to them also. *Yajnavalkya* lays down if a prostitute after

getting the fee refuses to receive the customer she shall pay twice the amount of the fee and the same shall be imposed on a man who does not pay her fee after having had intercourse with her. The *Matsya Purana* dilates upon the duties of the prostitutes and the special clauses of law applicable to them. The *Kamasutra* defines a Ganika as a *Vesya* who is accomplished and proficient in the 64 Kalas. The *Mitakshara* says that the *Skanda Purana* regards the prostitutes as the fifth caste beyond the four recognized ones.

In Gupta period, The ganikas were generally more educated and better-skilled in the arts than the married women, and the nagarakas , though they had devoted wives at home, as the ideal of a wife drawn by Vatsyayana shows, were attracted by the intellectual and artistic qualities of the educated ganika.

In this play, the protagonist Vasantasena is not only the richest person of Ujjayini but also the ornament of Ujjayini. Her home is located in the aristocratic area of the city. Farceur (Vidushaka) Maitreye opines about the palace of Vasantasena comparable to that of the heavenly Eden garden and the house of the deity Kuvera :

“*Kim**tavatganikagrihaathavaKuverbhavanparichchhedoiti*”.⁴

The harlot (Ganika) Vasantasena is varied character when she is not greedy by the economic concern. The brother-in-law (Sakara) of the king Palaka gives her ornaments and a car only getting her favour; but she does not accept the proposal. When Charudatta's son was crying for the golden car, Vasantasena gives her all golden ornaments without any hesitation. These facts are actually the proof of the greedless character of Vasantasena.

Although, she is a harlot (ganika), she is holy in terms of monogamy and purity in

¹Basu, Anil Chandra.“Dasharupaka”.Sanskrit Book Dipo. Kolkata.2012

²Bandyopadhyaya,Uday. “SahityaDarpana”(part-III). Sanskrit Book Dipo. 2014

³Basu, Anil Chandra.“Dasharupaka”.Sanskrit Book Dipo.Kolkata. 2012

⁴Bandyopadhyaya, Dr. Uday Chandra and Bandyopadhyaya, Dr. Anita. “Mrichchhakatikam”.Sanskrit Book Dipo. Kolkata.2007



relationships. There is no hesitation to choose one's partner in prostitution but in this respect, Vasantasena is not common to all. When Vasantasena first saw Charudatta in the temple of Kamadeva, she feels heart bonding and attraction to him. But when she knows about the poor economic condition of Charudatta she feels no objection to that. When Sakara forced her to sexual intercourse, she comments that:

"Gunahkhaluanuragasyakaranamnapunahbalatkarah".⁵

Vasantasena states to clearly Sakara about her love Charudatta :

"
Yatnasevitabyahpurushahkulshilvandaridr
opi
Shobha hi
panyastrinamsadrishjanasamashrayamkama
h".⁶

By this statement, we can have the bravery of Vasantasena.

Although she is the harlot (ganika), she maintains the purity of her character. But the identity of a harlot causes her pain and disappointment:

*"Mandabhaginikhalwahamtababhyantarasya."*⁷

Vasantasena is intelligent, skilled in various art crafts and women of wisdom. In the fifth act, what we have the practice-expression from Vasantasena's mouth; from it, we can get the poetical creativity the heroine. The behaviour towards the wife Charudatta, named Dhuta, shows the great heart of Vasantasena. She is so warm to her relatives that she can give away everything for the freedom from the slavery of her domestic relatives:

*"Yadimama
chhandastadabinarthamsarvamparijanambhujishya
mkarishyami"*.⁸

⁵ibide

⁶Ibde

⁷Ibde

When the ornaments are stolen from Vasantasena, we see that Charudatta gives the necklace of his wife to her; but surprisingly it is returned by Vasantasena politely. Here she gives her self-identity as:

*"Ahamshreecharudattasyagunanirjitadasitathayush
makamapi"*.⁹

She is so much attracted by the qualities of Charudatta and even gives her identity as the slave to him:

"
Tepituhgunnirjitadasi".¹⁰

When Vasantasena proposed Charudatta, she is so much anxious about the lack of money factor. She tries to manage the factor politely. She even says that she can engage death for Charudatta. This shows a very peculiar note for a harlot like that of a very wise wife:

*"Balamstriyanchanagarasyabibhushanancha
Veshyamabesha-sadrishapranayopacharam.
Enamanagasamahamyadimarayami
Kenodupenaparalokanadimtarishye"*.¹¹

In this drama, Vasantasena is projected as a deity. The beauty of Vasantasena is even gleaned by the tiny light:

*"Ayekathamdevatopasthanayogyayuvatiriyam"?*¹²

For this very wise character of Vasantasena, Charudatta is happy to recognize her as his wife. Therefore, it can be said that the character of Vasantasena, although slammed by the common societal culture, is projected by the dramatist here the light of heaven.

⁸ibde

⁹ Singh, Kuljeet. "The Mrichchhakatika of

Sudraka". Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Delhi. 2017

¹⁰ Bandyopadhyaya, Dr. Uday Chandra and Bandyopadhyaya, Dr.

Anita. "Mrichchhakatikam". Sanskrit Book Dipo. Kolkata. 2007

¹¹ibde

¹²ibde



Kamla Das is one of the most eminent poetesses in Indian English poetry. She portrays many aspects of Indian life such as love, culture, womanism, feminism etc. Kamla Das's poetry centers on woman, wife, sexual partner. She was a feminist in her poetry. There are many poems of Das which show the sensibility of feminism such as- *The Looking Glass*, *The White Followers*, *Composition* and *The Old Playhouse*.

Kamala Das has been considered as an important voice of her generation who exemplifies a break from the past by writing in a distinctly Indian persona rather than adopting the techniques of the English modernists. In the words of Archana Singh, "Das' provocative poems are known for their unflinchingly honest explorations of the self and female sexuality, urban life, women's roles in traditional Indian society, issues of postcolonial identity, and the political and personal struggles of marginalized people. She writes in both Malayalam and English and has published eleven books in her mother tongue and three books of poems in English." The combination of her 'royal' and 'peasant' identities, along with the atmosphere of colonialism and its pervasive racism, produced feelings of inadequacy and alienation of Das. Das published six volumes of poetry between 1965 and 1985.

In the poem *An Introduction* she remarks on patriarchal society and advocates the right of woman like other poems it despises. Here, she is against the conventionalism and

"I was child, and later they
Told me I grow, for I become tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted
hair"¹³

Das' expression is a strong criticism of child marriage which pushes children into such a

predicament while they are still very childish at heart. Though he did not beat her, she felt beaten and her body seemed crushed under her own weight. This is a very emphatic expression of how unprepared the body of sixteen years old is for the assault it gets subjected to. She shrank pitifully, ashamed of her femininity: -

"Then... I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and
ignored
My womanliness."¹⁴

In *Forest Fire*, Kamala Das tells the tales of human lust and greed in a feminist's terminology. A woman thinks over her life and times, just supposes and places under situations. She may be frank and bold here, but her 'U' turn it is very difficult to take to her volte-face. She is a master artist, a double-speaker. The loss of innocence and the attainment of puberty are the things of deliberation.

"Of late I have begun to feel a hunger
To take in with greed, like a forest fire that
Consumes a with each killing gains a wilder,
Brighter charm, all that comes my way."¹⁵

In the poems, *The Looking Glass*, Kamla Das suggests to the woman about how they get the pleasure then more. She remarks:

"Woman. Stand nude before the glass with
him
so that he sees himself the stronger one
and believes it so, and you so much more
softer, younger, lovelier. Admit your
admiration.
Notice the perfection of his limbs, his eyes
reddening under"

The poem "*The Old Playhouse*" tells about the advice of Kamala Das in it, she gives the details of her unsatisfactory and disappointing conjugal life and compares her like to a Swallow. She says;

"You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her

¹³Sen, S. Kamala Das: Selected Poems.. New Delhi: Unique Publishers, 2012.

¹⁴ibid
¹⁵ibid



In the long summer of your love so that she
would forget
Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes
left behind, but
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the
endless
Pathways of the sky. It was not to gather
knowledge
Of yet another man that I came to you but
to learn
What I was, and by learning, to learn to
grow, but every
Lesson you gave was about yourself. You
were pleased
With my body's response, its weather, its
usual shallow
Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my
mouth, you poured"

In *the Colombo* poem, Kamala Das describes the effort that comes from the distraction of love and chastity by the onslaught of racial hatred. In the poem, the *Sea at Gall Face Green*, she represents with memories of a once beautiful city, Colombo. Now the city is like half-burnt Corpse. Another poem *Smoke in Colombo* describes the inconsolable affliction after the distraction of human lives and environment: -

"... as grief linger son within women
Rocking emptied cradles.
Women rocked the cradles without
children."¹⁶

The poem shows Kamala Das's compassion towards women by the onslaught of men due to racial hatred. One of the most favourite endear ours of an artist is to get included in her search for value, the social consciousness, interactions between man and the universe. With this aspect in her mind, Kamala Das voices out against hypocrisy, male tyranny the existing moral codes, human predicament and human fatalism.

CONCLUSION

To sum up above points, it can not be wrong to say that this paper find out that a journey from *mrichchhakatika* to the poetry of kamala das: society and woman from ancient to the contemporary times. Kamala Das is one of the most poetess in Indian English literature to present her views on feminism. Her poems are the reflection of her struggle to break all the shackles and set new laws of existence. Thus, from ancient to the contemporary Indian literature presents the status of women like morality, feminism, anger, harlot etc.

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¹⁶ibed