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Narrative Techniques: Judith Wright & Kamala Das

Abstract

The Poetry of Judith Wright and Kamala Das draw the attention of the researchers across the globe. There are several reasons to club them. Themes, style, diction, tone, tenor, attitude etc. are strong indications of their similar thought, vision and objective creativity. They hail from two entirely different culture, history and upbringing. In my research paper, I tried my best to highlight their similar feelings, emotions and passions. Distress, unrest and consciousness are common in taste and effect.

It is a well-acknowledged truth that poetic techniques play vital roles in the composition of poetry. Actually, those techniques are the tools of creations and play key role in the identifications of a particular genre of the poet. However, it seems very difficult to draw water-tight lines in literature but there exist certain structures, styles, patterns, diction and way of

expression. Literary ethics expects that every poet or writer should be confident about his/her genre.

It has never been a childish assignment to understand and articulate gender discrimination through poetic compositions. To attain nearness or perfection, a poet will have to think about inequalities in general instead of being particular. Her personal experiences should be generalized up to the extent to make it general or common. This demands the elevation of poets and a complete self-sacrifice.

Judith Wright, acclaimed Australian & Kamala Das, a fire-brand Indian by birth, are committed and dedicated feminists. They dedicated their life for their vivid objective. Liberation has remained the core concern of these poets. Despite geographical and cultural differences, they kept upholding the value of global sisterhood for self-identity. Pride is in the state of being a woman. This essential quality is available in their writings. They experiment with different forms of consciousness in their poetry. They were fully conscious of their being.

Emerging out of such ferment, the articulated subject position of a woman writer gives voice to her suppressed emotions and unbinds her from patriarchal bondage in both literary and social articulation. Although Judith Wright is an Australian and Kamala Das an Indian by birth, they have close affinity in their confessional style of writing. Both of them express their lives caused by the existential crisis of living. The confessional mode has become an effective technique for women writers who are acutely sensitive to their personal issues. Kamala Das and

Judith Wright are such voices, who among the post-colonial women poets, express their worlds. They address in a self reflexive manner

Confessional Style & Attitude

The expression and demonstration of personal pain has been the hallmark of confessional poets and poetry. The real subject matter of confessional poetry is the poet's own self. Confessional poetry is the poetry which springs from the personal compulsions of a poet. It has no leader and no manifesto. This emerged in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Private experiences and feelings about death, mental-trauma, broken marriage, recurring mental breakdown, alcoholism depression and relationships are the themes of this type of poetry. In confessional poetry, poets reveal directly or indirectly their personal experiences, problems and psychological concepts.

Kamala's confessional urge is found in many of her poems. Let it be her pain or anger, joy or frustration, feelings or reactions and satisfaction or dissatisfaction, readers find these as the dominant part of her writing. Two examples are cited below :

.....Can't this man with
Nimble finger – tips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skin's lazy hungers.¹

¹ Kamala Das, "The Freaks" Summer in Calcutta, New Delhi: sterling publishers pvt. Ltd,1976 , P.10.

&

“When I got married
Many husband said’
You may have freedom,
As much as you want.
My soul balked at this diet of ash.
Freedom became my dancing shoe,
How well I danced,
And dance without rest,
Until the shoe turned grimy on my feet
And I began to have doubts,
I asked my husband,
Am I hetero
Am I lesbian
Or am I just plain frigid?²

As per the trends, confessional poets have great interest in death, despair, loss, and suicide. In Kamala Das and Judith Wright, the pessimistic and suicidal wishes have always been strong. Judith Wright has been a true confessional poet. To understand her work, her biographical or historical material is absolutely necessary. Kamala Das also writes with a frankness and openness unusual in Indian poetry. Most Indian poets in English do not have the

² Kamala Das, *Old Playhouse and other poems* (Madras: Orient Longman Ltd. , 1973) P.4.

confidence of Kamala Das. Similar to Judith, Das exploits the confessional mode in order to discover the image that evokes the joy and frustration of achieved womanhood.

Judith Wright appears as a modernist. She applies the 'stream of consciousness' technique. She reveals her sharp observation in her bare functional and economic style. Judith Wright's poetry is of a unique and distinctive style. A few examples are *Women to Man*, *To Another Housewife*, *Eve to her Daughter*, *Legend*, *Remittance Man*, and *South of my Days*. Her poetry speaks of diffident, fugitive ideas that do not often have a voice. Below are the few lines from *Remittance Man* :

The spendthrift, disinherited and graceless,
accepted his pittance with an easy air,
only surprised he could escape so simply
from the pheasant-shooting and the aunts in the close;
took to the life, dropped easily out of knowledge,
and tramping the backtracks in the summer haze
let everything but life slip through his fingers.³

Autobiographical Note

³ <https://maddeningmutterings.wordpress.com/2014/08/13/judith-wright-remittance-man/>

Like Judith Wright of Australian literature, Kamala had also the same love and attraction for writing. According to Iyengar, her writings are “*aggressively individualistic*”.⁴ She opened a new concept in poetry writing. It was surprisingly a new concept in Indian Writings in English. Sex and Sensuality have remained the major concerns of her writings. Unfulfilled love and unsatisfied desire have remained the heat of her writing. Warmth and passion of relations were interwoven with love and affection. As Kamala writes in her poem “Only Soul Knows How to Sing”

Each night the moon cools the sun-cooked
 Goodies of the world, pats and shapes
 With weathered hands the dough of grief,
 And swathes gently the embarrassed
 Loneliness of middle age, so
 That again the desired words
 Are said on balconies, and faded
 Eyes glitter with hope.⁵

As confessional poet, her poems show that she is *every woman who seeks love*. She makes use of any subject for her poetic treatment. Judith Wright’s ‘*Woman to Man*’ and ‘*Woman to Child*’ make a powerful claim for this female understanding. *Her* poetry seems to challenge contemporary western values. She is against consumerism and rationalism. Her urge for self-realisation, self-identity and knowing the self are well-known. Our close examinations of many of Wright’s poems explore the ways that imagination and feeling are now devalued at the cost of rationalism.

⁴ Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. 5th ed. Bcmabay: Asia Publishing House, 1973

⁵ Kamala Das: *Only Soul Knows How To Sing*, D. C. Books, 1996. Page 168

Satire and Irony

Satire and Irony has remained one of the best choices of women poets. A technique commonly used by Kamala Das & Judith Wright is satire and irony. The satire used could be that of situation or plot or it could be in the expression of feelings in a monologue or dialogue. Irony is also used situational or verbal. Satire could be biting and sarcastic, it could be gentle and humorous. Irony is used to give rise an unexpected twist at the end of some stories. Subtle satire and irony are used by Judith Wright, while forceful satire is used in an outspoken manner by Kamala Das. Das has emerged as one of the leading female poets in Indian Writing in English language. In other words, the duo satirized the existing system, convention, practice and dominance. At one hand Kamala das has made a mark as a female Indo-Anglican poet on the basis of her substantial contributions so has been done by Judith Wright in Australian Literature at another hand.

Stylistic Analysis

For technical and stylistic examinations, I have randomly selected a few poems of Kamala Das. She is a bilingual poet writing both in English and Malayalam. Her choice of English was by no means a deliberate one. She recognises the immense possibilities of English language to convey the various shades and colours of feelings and emotions. Similar is the case of Judith Wright. She writes on various issues. Some of them are of contemporary burning issues and some others are about ethnic significance, human values, gender inequalities. Style of the

due - kamala & Judith - is confessional, Self-expressive, Self-responsive, Self-reflective and Repetitive. The tone of writing appears as they are struggling to bring something which has been snatched from women since millennia. Clarity of expression, candid thoughts, challenging style and fire within are some common merits that bring them together for a broad common cause – betterment of women.

Diction

Kamala Das exercises a special care in her words and the combination of those words into phrase, clauses and sentences. Her diction is colloquial. She shows a rare understanding of the meanings, the appropriateness, and the subtleties of words. She is a poet in the confessional mode and her diction is, therefore, most often colloquial. Diction is not a tool in her hands but a poetic medium, pure and simple. The words come to her effortlessly, and become one with her emotions. Her poems '*My Grandmother's House*' and '*A Hot Noon in Malabar*' provide ample substance to prove her strength and competence.

Through the following table, I like to make a list of similarities and dissimilarities in the applications of diction. In the field of using personal pronoun, definite articles and assonance both the poets are at the top. Judith is very intelligent in giving new meanings by applying simply a [-] and a new meaning is coined. For example, we can examine the following poem '*The Bull*' of Judith Wright :-

When I went through Kamala's poem, for example '*An Introduction*', I found that she used personal pronoun at least 30 times. She has achieved greatness as a poet not only because of

the contents of her poems but also because of her technique of writing poetry. Following table is indicative of richness and vastness of their diction.

| Kamala's Diction | Judith's Diction |
|---|--|
| Trousers/ Embroidered/ Womanliness/ Monsoon/ Bedroom/ Bathroom Hotels & Floor ,Towns, Limbs Gift / Female hungers / Menstrual blood / Jingling / jingling / Tattoos/ Vacant ecstasy / Sorry breasts / Funeral Pyres / Window panes / Granite/ Peep- holes / Libertine/ Hooded Snake / Queerness's / Distortions / Half Indian / Half English / Womb crushed / Sarees / Incoherent /Clouds / Hair / Chance / Towels / Burnished Brass / Feelings / Sword / Sheath / Betrayed / Urinates / Empty House / Drums / Emotion / Impression | Eyeless / labourer / selfless / shapeless / resurrection / unimagined embrace / heavy-shouldered / thirsty / drought / chilled with rain / weathered / wider shins / in lurching / straining / apocalyptic / suffering / stubborn / sightless shadow / maker / butting at the dark / the blaze of light / spinning / sounds / silences / fringe of foam / currents / quicksilver / thistledown / curled lashes / hermaphrodite |

(The above list is indicative regarding both the poets.)

Tone

The Poetic Tone of kamala & Judith are conversational and argumentative. Both have the similar ground to agree and disagree. Mention can be made some of Kamala's poems such as 'An Introduction' 'A Lasting Battle', 'Love', 'The Suicide', 'The Looking Glass', 'In

Love' etc. Similarly, Many poems entitled 'Legends, 'Five Senses', 'The Trains', 'Bullocky', 'The Sisters', 'Draught Year', 'Woman to Child', 'Woman to Man' etc. of Judith Wright convey the same line of tone.

Imagery

This is quite true that Kamala Das was very choosy in selection of imageries for her poetry. Her selections are very common and from day to day life. She makes use of colour imagery like yellow, red and green colours to denote different moods of the characters. She makes use of metaphors that stand for life, death and liberation. Imagery is one of the focal techniques used in Judith Wright. She has used at least three kinds of imagery; abstract imagery, figurative imagery and literal imagery. "*The eyeless labourer in the night*" "*The blood's wild tree*" etc are glaring examples of abstract imagery. Similarly, "*the intricate and folded rose*" represents figurative imagery.

Conclusion

Both the poets, Kamala Das & Judith Wright, create a sense of spontaneity, naturalness and freshness in their poems through narrative techniques. Their poetic art is expressly feminine. They reveal the two-fold power of poetry- the reality of the self and the insistence on life. Their poetry breathes life with an ardour of the self and owes its success to the discovery and fusion of the elements that constitute great poetry.

Surprisingly, Judith and kamala come closure in their various artistic applications. They prove that literature transcendent geographical boundaries and cultural distinctions. In the application of style, diction, tone and tenor, they show sisterhood. The main objective of this research paper is to establish their similar characteristics, confessional attitude, quest for self and dominance of self. It equally appreciable that they kept serving literature, society and their respective nations without losing their national identity. They transcend all limits to sing the anthem of the New woman, New society, New world and obviously New literature globally.

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