



CROSS GENRE: BREAKING THE BOUNDARIES BY BREAKING THE GENRE: AN ANALYSIS OF AMRITA PRITAM'S *THE REVENUE STAMP* AND KAMALA DAS'S *MY STORY*

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Abstract:

Cross genre arises from the research, experience and imagination. As a proliferation of genres and subgenres, cross genre is the outcome of the merger of experience and imagination. In creative works, cross genre or hybrid genre refers to a combination of two or more stylistic, thematic categories. In it we find the author's multiple voices. Despite of the multiplicity of genre, there is the unity of theme. It is useless to argue against a fact that autobiographies are the perfect medium for expression. It imparts the writer an ample space to flourish his/her views. In combination to that, the inclusion of hybrid genre gives an opportunity to the author to make him/herself as a versatile genius.

Both Amrita Pritam and Kamala Das are masters in genre crossing which clearly reflects their subversion of patriarchal writings. As a writer their indulgence in cross genres truly reflects the multiplicity of their selfhood as a writer. The proliferation of their selfhood becomes the distinctive quality of their autobiographies. While Kamala Das's autobiography *My Story* is the combination/ mixtures of both prose and poetry, *The Revenue Stamp* is the combination of diary, memoir, travelogue, poetry and prose. Their style of writing does not conform to the conventional style of autobiography. By introducing cross genres in erstwhile conventional non-fictional prose model, Kamala Das not only redefines her artistic self, but she also improvises the genre of autobiography by feminizing while the (male) intellectual, universalized mode of self-writing.

Each chapter with a title reads like a short story, which is generally episodic in nature. On the other hand, Amrita vests it with her artistic versatility through poetic prose, the inclusion of her poems, short stories and allusions to her fictional and nonfictional works.

The present paper is an effort to explore Amrita's and Das's versatile genius in the context of genre crossing in their respective autobiographies.

Keywords: genre, hybridity, subversion, patriarchy, feminization, autobiographical writing.

To quote Dino Franco Felluga, "The future calls for perverse crossings: between genres, between periods, between theories. Although critics have responded to the demand for interdisciplinary and cultural studies for many years now, there are a few boundaries that have, nonetheless, resisted transgression" ("Novel Poetry: Transgressing the Law of Genre").

As a proliferation of genres and subgenres, cross genre/hybrid genre arises from the research, experience and imagination. In creative works, cross genre or hybrid genre refers to a combination of two or more stylistic and thematic categories giving rise to author's multiple voices. Despite of the multiplicity of genre, there is invariably the unity of theme. It is useless to argue against a fact that autobiographies are the perfect medium for expression. It imparts the writer an ample space to flourish his/her views. In combination to that, the inclusion of hybrid genre gives an opportunity to the author to prove him/herself as a versatile genius. It must also be noted that the transgression of the law of genre is more or less a violation of the specific rules of a specific genre. Derrida too is of the opinion that one must not cross the line of demarcation or try to bring impurity or variance. He says that there is "always an inclusion and exclusion" with regard to genre in general and that no text can truly fulfill its generic designation.

Amrita Pritam, a prolific and versatile genius is widely considered as the first prominent woman Punjabi poet, novelist, essayist, and the leading 20th century poet of the Punjabi language who is equally esteemed on both the sides of the India-Pakistan border. Among the contemporary Indian writers she occupies a unique position. This 'uniqueness' arises because of her attack into both lovely and harsh imaginative world which, apart from being confessional outpouring of a sensitive soul, is also a reflection on the patriarchal social constrains. Her autobiography *The Revenue Stamp* is a fair galaxy of her re-presentation and representation of her selfhood. She does not confine herself in any decree of writing and thus genre crossing becomes the significant aspect of her writings. Amrita Pritam's autobiography is a master piece. She is basically an artist and her artistic sensibility continually comes to the fore front in her autobiography. Through her artistic touch, she has revealed herself as a writer as well as a woman. Time and again, we find the illustrations from her poems in her life-story. Her vision of life is broad and all pervasive. Each page of her life story appears as an individual poem. Reading an author like Amrita Pritam clearly proves the scantiness of western feminist literary criticism, who like Bachmann has been the center of a great deal of 'journalistic and critical attention, and in whose

earlier works, like in Bachmann's later prose, issues of gender relations and women's oppression have been focused. She gives her desires, dreams and idealism in her autobiography. It was written in Punjabi and later on translated into English as *The Revenue Stamp* by Krishna Gorowara. Retrospectively, when she disclosed her plans to write an autobiography to Khushwant Singh, he commented: "what is there to your life? Just an incident or two...you could use the back of a revenue stamp to write it" (qtd. in Kumar 54) Then she decided to write the realistic things happened in her life. In a brief prologue to *The Revenue Stamp*, she shot back, "Whatever happened in my life happened between the layers of thought that found their way into novels and poems. What was left? Still, I thought I might write a few lines – something to complete the account book of my life and at the end, seal it with this revenue stamp as it were. Or am I with this revenue stamp setting a seal to my novels and poems . . . my entire, literary work . . . I wonder" (Pritam *The Revenue Stamp*, ii). The title of the book symbolizes the writer's own soul. She recalls her memory and begins her life story thus: "Is it Doomsday? Moments of my life in the womb of time lived a while and after Time's span, seemingly entombed are today alive again, stalk past me . . . However all the graves yielded to resurrect those moments? It must indeed be Doomsday . . ." (1).

The Revenue Stamp is the true account of her confirmation of her artistic talents. It affirms how she lived her life as a woman and as a poet; her autobiography proves like a stamp on the cognitive life vision of a woman, who has not only loved poetry, but also lived poetry. *The Revenue Stamp* reflects her rebellious ideas and expressions of romantic mind and the sufferings of woman in her. It is an autobiography in the sense of the word, since it is self-discovery of a mind. Amrita reveals an uncommon sense of self-analysis with no conscious regard for social criteria of moral judgments. Being a poet, she maintains the grace of her creativity while narrating the story of her life. Her vision of life is broad enough to make her story the 'Stamp of Truth'. Her unusual feminine awareness explores a process of development and she visualizes this process as a fulfillment of her quest for life.

In the similar vein, Kamala Das's autobiography *My Story* too is the combination/ mixtures of both prose and poetry. This style of writing does not make an analogy with the conventional style of writing. This shows Das's genuine desire to go beyond the set rules of writing. Somewhere she writes like short story which is generally episodic in nature. She also combines the genre of poetry in most of the chapters of her autobiography. But despite the differences in the language and the genres of her writing one cannot ignore her exceptional continuity of her concerns regarding theme. She does not divert from the main concept even though diversion in the style.

Kamala Das registers her resistance by writing herself and challenging social definitions by openly retaliating against the hegemonic tools that have kept women oppressed. Her family and other near dear ones were not against her unconventional writing. She writes:

I withdrew into the cave I had made for myself when I wrote stories and poems and became safe and anonymous. There were books all round me, but no friend to give me well meaning advice, no relative telling me of my discrediting my family name by my unconventional ways of thinking . . . (*My Story* 170).`

Also, she has given voice to her unexpressed self in *My Story* in a poetical manner. Poetry makes that experience more intense. Primarily being as a poetess, she cannot resist expressing her poetic self. The poetic way seems to heighten the pain and anguish. The depth of her thoughts, feelings and emotions is in best way reflected through her poetry. Her *My Story* is teemed with such in-depth thoughts and feelings. In the chapter entitled “The Bombay Hospital” of *My Story*, she offers an image of autumn for her sickness. She writes:

The Beginning of Autumn:

She floats in her autumn,

Yellowed like a leaf

And free. (Das 171)

Wordsworth rightly says that the origin of poetry takes place in the tranquil mind or in the reflective mood. In the later half of the autobiography of Kamala Das we find her more serious and obsessed with her problems. She becomes a lyrical writer giving musical quality to her predicament. Her theme and experiment with style runs parallel. Describing the sensual nature of her husband, she exposes the bitter reality connected with phallo-centric society. She writes:

Madness is a country

Just around the corner/whose shores are never lit

But if go there

Ferried by despair

The sentries would ask you to strip

At first the clothes, then the flesh

And later of course your bones

Their only rule is freedom (Das *My Story* 105)

The self of Kamala Das, like that of Amrita Pritam, is primarily that of a poet too. She inherited her poetic sensibility from her mothers whose poetry was an expression of a repressed self. She was robbed of the authorship of her first poem by one of her teachers when she was just a child. The poet mother hardly groomed Kamala as a child or as a poet. The repressive atmosphere and lack of love and self confidence stifled the poet in Kamala. The poet in her appeared as a defense mechanism of a mind and heart on the verge of explosion. She groomed her self as a writer at a later age when she started realizing her true self. Her poetic creativity may be called the outcome of the stifled self. Likewise Amrita, her multiple selves gets revealed through versatility of her autobiographical outpourings. Her poetic self gets imprinted in the body of the text in the form of cross generating, various symbols and elemental images. While Kamala's autobiography combines the autobiographical narration with her poetic works, Amrita vests it with her artistic versatility through poetic prose, the inclusion of her poems, short stories and allusions to her fictional and nonfictional works.

Both Amrita Pritam and Kamala Das are masters in genre crossing which clearly reflects their subversion of patriarchal writings. As a writer their indulgence in cross genres truly reflects the multiplicity of their selfhood as a writer. The proliferation of their selfhood becomes the distinctive quality of their autobiographies. While Kamala Das's autobiography *My Story* is the combination/ mixtures of both prose and poetry, *The Revenue Stamp* is the combination of diary, memoir, travelogue, poetry and prose. Their style of writing does not conform to the conventional style of autobiography. By introducing cross genres in erstwhile conventional non-fictional prose model, Kamala Das not only redefines her artistic self, but she also improvises the genre of autobiography by feminizing while the (male) intellectual, universalized mode of self-writing. Each chapter with a title reads like a short story, which is generally episodic in nature. On the other hand, Amrita vests it with her artistic versatility through poetic prose, the inclusion of her poems, short stories and allusions to her fictional and nonfictional works.

To conclude, the autobiographies of Amrita Pritam and Kamala Das are the clear index of their versatile genius as far as the feminist potential in the context of genre crossing is concerned.

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