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BROWN-THE UNFADING COLOR: REPRESENTATION OF HUMILIATION IN *MY STORY* BY KAMALA DAS

Ms. Anjima Sasindran
Assistant Professor
St. Joseph's College Moolamattom

Abstract

Indian English Literature paved way for many writers to create their own space of words and self expression. Self expression of emotions and feelings has created the genre of confession through the renowned female writer Kamala Das. Holding the ancestral traditional values and the modern equations of society Kamala Das made her writings more unique. This paper is an analysis of how Kamala portrayed herself being tackled in the clutches color in *My Story*.

Keywords: Discrimination, colour, humiliation, self expression, authority.

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Humiliation of being a brown child can never be expressed or explained through words. In stories or novels such situations and scenarios can create sympathy and empathy to the readers. But when the writers present their own experiences of humiliation on the basis of color, it not only create realization about how pathetic the situation of society was but also makes it clear how humans were once treated. Kamala Das begins her novel *My Story* by narrating the humiliation she faced as a brown child. Novel's first chapter "The humiliation of a brown child in a European school", Kamala says how she and her brother was treated by classmates and school authorities.

My brother was plump and dark. His eyes were bright and circular. Although he was the cleverest in his class, the white boys made fun of him and tortured him by pushing a pointed pencil up his nostril. One day his shirt-front was covered with blood. He was stunned by the cruelty but even the tears seemed inhibited, staying suspended on his lashes while William the bully exclaimed "Blackie, your blood is red". I scratched his face in a mad rage, but was soon overpowered by the tough Anglo-Indians who were always on the other side, fighting for the White man's rights. We did not tell our parents of the tortures we underwent at school for wearing, under the school uniform of white twill, a nut-brown skin. (2)

School is where children learn how to treat people around them. Schools are an extended version of home from where the values and ethics for life is taught without discrimination. Here Kamala portrays the narrow mind set of children, though they are not aware how painful is their entertainment for young Kamala and her brother. The arguments and silly bullying of school students cannot be considered always as immature behavior. It can create scars on mind of the victim which cannot be healed. Injuries on mind get more and more deepened as days passes. Kamala and her brother were equally victimized for being brown skinned. Bullying was not limited within the four walls of classrooms. The school authorities treated the brown skinned students with discrimination. Kamala says:

Occasionally the school would get a distinguished visitor, a bird of bright plumage alighting for a short while, a Governor's wife, a white moustached admiral or lady in grey silks claiming relationship with the family at Buckingham Palace.

I do not know how our lady-principal, whom we called Madam, managed to lure such august personages' in. Ours was not a big school. Perhaps it was because we sang the National Anthem, Rule Britannia, louder than the others. In the morning while Madam sat at the British royal family and we raised our voices in song, singing Britons never never shall be slaves, even the postman slowed his walk to listen. King George the sixth, (God save his soul) used to wink at us from the gilt frame, as though he knew that the British were singing in India their swan song....

Shirley Temple was the rage then with her golden ringlets and her toothy smile. All the little girls copied her. Our school hung her picture on the wall behind the piano. We had in my class another Shirley. A Scot with pink cheeks and yellow ringlets. When the dignitaries arrived, it was always Shirley who carried up the bouquet.

Once she was asked to read a poem that I had composed and when the visitor asked who wrote it, our principal said, Shirely of course, she is a combination of beauty and brains, and then there was from the Governor's wife a special kiss. What a bright little moppet, she said.

When the visitors came the brown children were always discretely hidden away, swept under the carpet, told to wait in the corridor behind the lavatories where the school ayahs kept them company. None of us looked too pretty in those days. There were six in all, counting Louis the black Anglo-Indian who could not make up his mind which side to take. If we were hated by the white children, poor Louis was hated more but he followed them about, clowning to put them in good humour, barking like a dog and neighing like an ass... (3-4)

School is the place where children are framed to be citizen with values that never get expired. But, Madam the lady-principal itself became the model of ill-treatment. The treatment by peers and school authorities were same. They were not bothered about the feelings and emotions of children. Teachers are the guiding light of children after parents. Here Kamala gets an impression of her teacher which a teacher should never possess. Later, when Kamala was admitted in boarding school run by Roman Catholic nuns, she faced same kind of ill-treatment and was humiliated for her appearance.

My father introduced me first to the Mother Superior who wore round her waist not only a rosary with a silver cross but a tiny pair of scissors which was perhaps to snip off little hairs that might grow on her scalp. All the nuns had, under their black veils, clean-shaven scalps that shone pink in the dim lights of their dormitories while they undressed for the night.

When my father introduced me to the Boarding sister, Sister Philomene, she embraced me with her plump arms and whispered, don't worry my dear, I am here to look after you.. ..She was about fifty and had on her pale chin two scraggly hairs. Her round face was serene and her smile tender. Tears came to my eyes out of gratitude. When my father got into the car and vanished round the corner I followed Sister Philomene to the Boarding house which was half a furlong away.

When I first walked in, the Anglo-Indian girls seated in the hall stopped their sewing and began to sing: "She had nothing under when she came", and I wondered why they laughed looking at me. (33-34) Here it is evident that Kamala faces struggles and humiliation even for dressing as she is not aware about the new fashions.

My grandmother used to send someone or other once in two months to bring me to Nalapat for a week-end. When after one of those short stays I left home, my escort was my grand uncle's youngest brother-in-law. My grandmother wanted him to get for me from the city-bazaar some cloth for the frock which I was to wear for my birthday.

My grandmother could hardly afford to buy me silks. The sum she gave him must have been meagre, for the uncle told the shop's salesman that he wished to be shown some inexpensive cloth, something coloured but not too fancy. The salesman pulled down on the counter, bales and bales of beautiful poplins with prints of flowers and animals. Xs there nothing cheaper, asked my uncle in a loud, carrying voice and the people walking along the road, slowed down to see what was going on. I want for this child something really cheap, shouted the uncle. I felt humiliated. I wanted like Sita to disappear into the bowels of the earth. Finally some printed mill-khaddar was brought out which suited our pockets. A blue on white design which cost us two and a half rupees. (36-37)

As a child Kamala is facing ignorance even from her own family members. When a familiar person, who belongs to the family treats her as a child who is not capable of dress in expensive clothes creates an impression of her physical appearance and being fashion become an element of concern for her. An individual grows and develops to a complete human who is aware about the social, economical, historical and cultural changes surrounding him through various ages and stages of life. School and college plays a major role here. Different stages of schooling made different experiences of discrimination and marginalization for Kamala and her brother.

Kamala Das as a writer had been a tool of controversy for media and critics through her writings and personal choices. All those experiences she gained throughout her life were expressed through her writings. The confession of life is the writing tool Kamala used which is exceptional in Indian English Literature. The representation of herself and her brother as victims of discrimination for being brown skinned can be seen as a representation of Indians being tortured in the hands of British white skinned authorities.

Work Cited

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