

# “An Introduction” – Societal Dominance from “Her” Eye

Akshara Gera

Jindal Global Law School, Haryana

**Abstract**— The article is based on the autobiographical poem of Kamal Das, and attempts to express the pain, dominance, societal pressure and dominance from the point of view of a woman. The article attempts to describe the sacrifice and questioning of ones’ identity caused by the pressure and the so-called norms and rules of the society enforced upon individual, to an extent that one forgets themselves, and dies within.

**Keywords**— feminism, gender discrimination, Kamala Das, societal dominance, struggles.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Can a society question a woman’s humanity on the basis of the language she uses in literary writings? Can the so-called society dominate a woman’s life to the extent of eradicating her identity? How can the word “I” make a woman struggle? In the literary works of Kamala Das, she portrays her sufferings induced by the society, and reflects on the lives of women in the patriarchal society. In her autobiographical poem “An Introduction”, she uses a confessional tone conveying the betrayal a woman faces from the society she is taught to love, the society that has indeed given her unforgettable pain. In the poem, she sheds light upon the women’s sufferings by questioning the term “human”, by the constructive usage of the expression “they” and by portraying different perspectives of the word “I”.

In ordinary terms, the term “human” might be a living being or someone who acquires instincts of human. But the speaker questions the term “human” when her freedom is questioned by the means of baseless restrictions. In the poem...

*“Don’t write in English, they said, English is*

*Not your mother-tongue...*

*...It is as human as I am human, don’t*

*You see”*

...poet’s freedom is restricted by imposing linguistic restrictions on her literary works. She was prevented from writing in English with an excuse, just to make her feel guilty. Just like her, women in the society were not approved of exercising the behavior they wanted, they were rather criticized and even if they did something as per their wish, society would make them feel guilt. The

speaker asks why she doesn’t have the liberty to do whatever she wants, even if it is imperfect or strange, for her to do it. Isn’t a human made up of mistakes? The speaker, the dominated woman, asks and fights for the liberty of being imperfect, being queer, committing mistakes, being liable for her own actions, the freedom she has a right towards, having the liberty to be a human she is!

Not only is her own growth as a human affected, but also the society which is referred to as “they” has affected her identity, her real self. The role of “they” has resulted in a radical change in the speaker, from her thoughts of love to hate, from her dressing to writing, basically everything. The society has controlled her from the very beginning, which is from her childhood. Firstly, the speaker in the poem conveys a message from the line...

*“they said, English is*

*Not your mother tongue.”*

...that she is restricted from writing and speaking in a certain language, depicting the restrained freedom of speech she has. Then, in the poem...

*“later they*

*Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs*

*Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair.*

*When I asked for love, not knowing what else to*

*ask*

*For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the*

*Bedroom and closed the door*

*He did not beat me*

*But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.*

*The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.*

*I shrank Pitifully.*"

...she is told by the society that she is ready for marriage, just because she has entered the stage of puberty. She is not even given a chance to explore herself, and taking advantage of her childish immature soul seeking love, she is married in the disguise of love, the poor child has no option but to face whatever her husband does, just because the society considers it right, might it be an unknown marital rape! "Her dissatisfaction with her woman's body is read as the familiar 'woman's complaint' under the yoke of patriarchy rather than a rejection of the hetero-gendered" (George 2000, 731-763)<sup>1</sup>. The speaker gets so depressed by the society's dominance that rather than fighting with the society for equal rights, she starts blaming herself and her body. She starts complaining about herself due to the circumstances created by patriarchy. The taunts, the pressure, the abuse, the commands and so-called rules made by society don't let her make independent life choices. Her voice is hushed, her thoughts are suppressed, she is even told to accept the grief of her married life. "They" control her life!

In addition to society restricted human-growth and societal dominance affecting her identity, she even faces the tragedy of word "I" in her life, the speaker suffers from a miserable experience in her life related to men, she seeks love, craves love, but in the real world, she just remains as a source of quenching lust. In the poem, the lines

*"Who are you, I ask each and everyone,  
The answer is, it is I."*

...convey that she asks about the man's identity and gets a reply "I". She notices the liberty "I" has, she notices his activities, the comparison and discrimination. The speaker compares "I" to the "male-ego", which at the end leads him into losing the woman who loved him, and get the drastic end as the woman does but in a different sense. She compares it to the male ego, because in the society she lives, the right identity just lies with the male-sex, which has led into the increase of their ego. She sees that the right of identity just lies with the men and not women, men are defined by "I" and women's world lies in the hands of "they". She compares the "I" to herself too, as said in the poem...

*"I too call myself I."*

...Just like the men she faces a drastic end too, as she is being betrayed by the society and the man she loved. The only difference is that "he" faces it due to the excess of liberty and myth of superiority in mind, and "she" faces

it due to the restrictions imposed and domination faced during her life. Anyhow, both face a drastic end.

## II. CONCLUSION

In Kamala Das's poem, the dominance has led to the questioning of "human" existence, control by "them" and the questioning of even "self" identity. "Kamala Das is not only the poet of love, she is the poet of body." (Das 2010, 240-248)<sup>2</sup>. The statement is proved right as, she describes the sufferings of the mind and the body very effectively and makes the reader feel the sufferings itself. She has impressively expressed the hardship caused to women in her poem "An Introduction", one can even question the meaning of the title whether it's the introduction of poet's life, or of every woman of that era, whether she's speaking about her state or the state of every woman. Regardless of many revolutionary transformations, one might agree improvement in a woman's status, but the harsh truth is that the dominance of society still exists in one form or another, unknown to the majority, and sometimes in the names of safety, precaution and possessiveness, too.

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