

Portrayal of Trauma and Memories in Kamala Das's Nani

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Abstract

Kamala Das's poem "Nani" speaks about the death of Nani, a pregnant maid. She hangs herself in the privy. The children think that she shows us a puppet show by hanging on the rope. No one knows 'how she dies?' and 'what is the reason?'. The truth of her death is hidden. The main theme of the poem is social inequality and the exploitation of marginalised individuals. The title itself symbolises a poor, marginalised, and victimised woman. The poet, Kamala Das, is characterised as a child in the poem. Still, there is no solution for her death. Low class or marginalised women are treated as a slave to higher authority people. Even, there is no help from the people who are in power too. So, Kamala Das raises her voice against the persecution of women in a male dominated society. As a feminist, she is ready to assert herself in a new and indifferent way.

Keywords: Identity, Family and Heritage, Cultural Expectations, Femininity and Womanhood, Intergenerational Conflict, Personal Freedom, Emotional Isolation, Memory and Nostalgia, Social Change.

Trauma and Memories in Kamala Das's 'Nani'

Kamala Das is a great women poet in Indian poetry in English. Women poetry takes a sudden turn with the advent of Kamala Das who frankly acknowledged the fact that a poet's raw material is not a stone but it is her personality. The confessional poet Kamala Das's poetry deals with the Man's inner life. Kamala Das exhibits and takes 'Endless female hungers'. She is undoubtedly the most powerful person of women issues.

In this poem 'Nani', the title itself signifies the protagonist name Nani. This poem has three parts. First stanza deals with the suicide of Nani. The second part deals with the question asked by Kamala Das to her grandmother and the last part deals with the poet's view. Here, Kamala Das represents as child. The pregnant woman, Nani works as a maid in Kamala Das's house.

"Nani, the pregnant maid hanged herself in the privy one day..." The opening lines convey that Nani has hung herself with a baby in her womb as she was working as a low class woman. As a reader, the poet makes us to think in a different way. The reason of her suicide may be the burden of having a child would make her to do so as she doesn't have anything to provide for her child. The other reason may be, she works as a maid to high class people so that the reason of her pregnancy may be a man from the working place. The police reach at the spot after three hours. This shows their lethargy in dealing the case of a low caste woman. The children enjoy and amuse as it resembles like a puppet show. Being kids, they are unaware of her

eath. This symbolizes that Nani is really a puppet to that family where she works for and her life gets worse day by day. The first part throws the light on the incident of suicide.

“Dance, the shrubs grew fast, before the summer’s end”

This is a contrasting one here, because someone’s death usually makes the surrounding gloomy and dull. But here, Nani’s death doesn’t have any effect on the people. Because she is from poor class society and there is no one to speak for her. But at the same time, Nani is referred as goddess and it symbolizes Nani as kindhearted and a sensitive woman. These features make the children and Kamala Das to love her.

“Year or two, I asked my Grand mother”

Year passes, Kamala Das asks her grandmother, ‘Don’t you remember Nani?’, the one who makes me to bath near the well. The grandmother stares at her and she asks, ‘Nani, Who is She?’, with that question the conversation ends. Through this question, Kamala Das doubts her family, who might be the reason for Nani’s death. This conveys the readers that the higher authority man uses the working class woman as a slave. To protect their self respect, those oppressions make the lowest or marginalised woman to commit suicide. Each truth ends with a query like this. It is heartbreaking to know that how the grandmother forgets the incident but the kid remember sit.

“Deafness that turns mortality in to Immortality, the definite into

The soft in definite. They are lucky

Who asks questions and move on before”

The poet writes about the ethical aspect of the poem. Before listening and analysing the point, people ignore it casually. This turned mortality into immortality. Eventually, people who ask questions are luckier because they move on before getting the answers, that is they would not prefer to go deep in to the truth.

“In life, like music in the koel’s egg,

Like the lust in blood, or like the a pina tree...!”

Nani may be a victim of this lust, though it is not mentioned in the poem, the ending lines of the poem symbolizes human nature in some ways, ‘All the humans are the same’, ‘All of them have a lust in the blood just like the coil’ who break the egg and used to sing. There would be a sap in the tree which we can’t see but it is there. This poem brings out the in humanity in humanity and shows us the way to retain our own true nature.

As a reader, I have compared Kamala Das’s poem “Nani” with Mahesh Dattani’s play “Seven Steps Around the Fire”. Both have some similarities despite being different forms of literature. This poem, ‘Nani’ says about the low caste woman or marginalized woman. Even at the end, there is no solution for the suicide committed by the woman. Likewise, the play, “Seven Steps Around the Sea” by Mahesh Dattani is about the Hijra as that is transgender. For the uncommitted mistake, the hijra is kept in prison but the murder is done by the minister. The police act as a puppet to the high class people. Mistakes are hidden and there is no solution for low class people. Both ‘Nani’ and ‘Seven Steps Around the Fire’ convey the exploration of Indian culture and tradition and strong female protagonists.

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