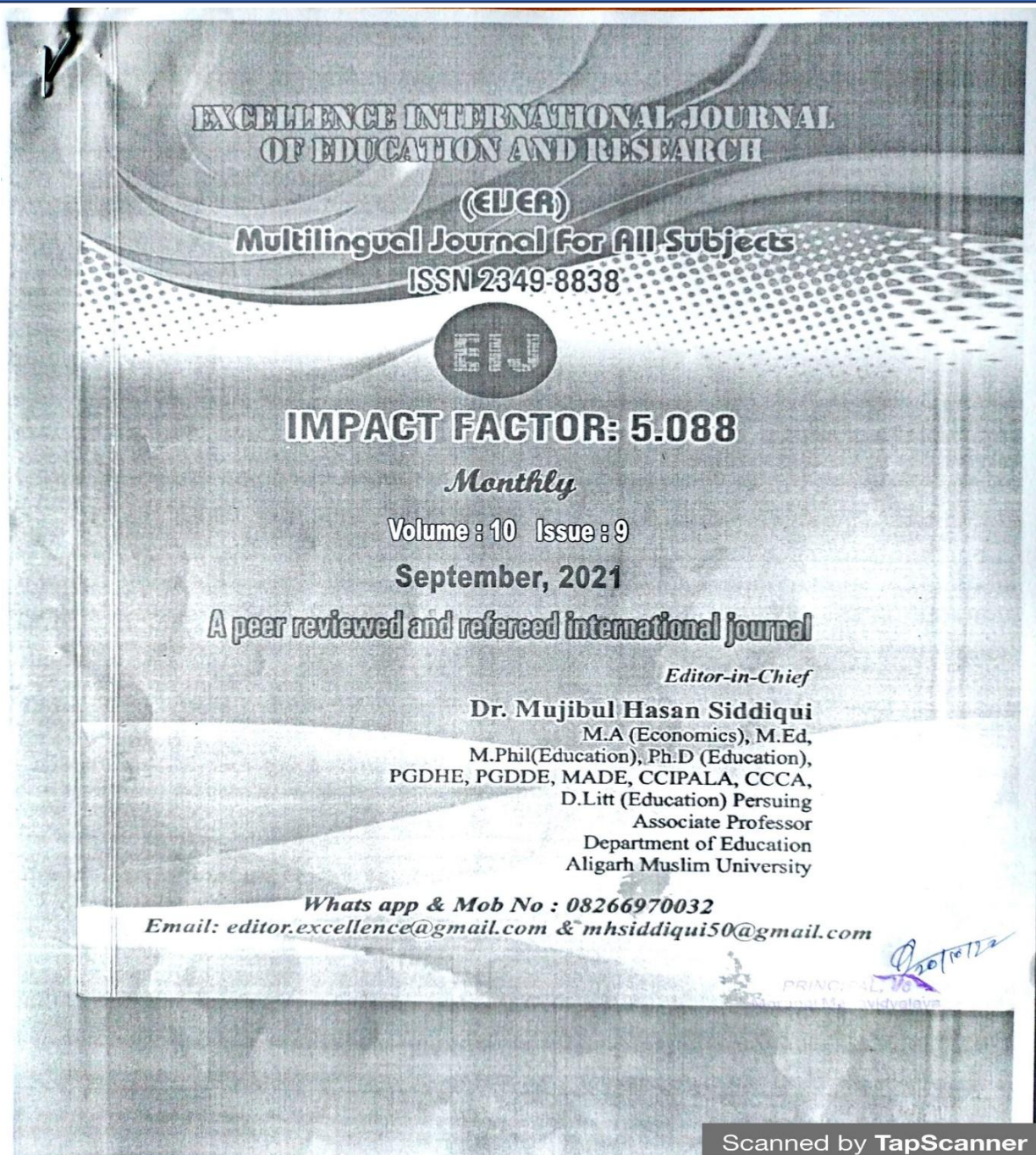


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Kamala Das Quest for 'Identity and her poetry



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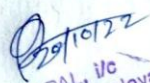
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Kamala Das Quest for “Identity” and Her Poetry

Rekha Moni Kutum¹
Dr. Papari Kalita²

Abstract : Kamala Das called as the ‘Mother’ of Modern Indian English Poetry, and this is due to her extensive contribution to the poetry in our country, India, thy earned this label. She is also the first Indian woman poet who narrates so frankly and clearly about her own self with a tone of anger and anguish of her sexual feelings and experiences gained in her life. Kamala Das search for love, emotional satisfaction, and explores her own ‘self’ in all its dimensions seen in her poetry makes me interested to study on her. She attacks the patriarchal society directly, its laws and conventions, thus breaks down the so-called moral codes at the contemporary period which was so hard to place her words in front of the same male society. And due to losing her identity under the male ego of her husband first hand, and then the patriarchal society, gone on searches for true love and emotional satisfaction. Kamala Das writings consist of vivid descriptions of Mensuration, Puberty, Love, Lust, Lesbian encounters, Child Marriage, Infidelity and Physical intimacy. Kamala Das introduced her readers to the concept of female sexuality, nonexistent until then.

Keywords: Identity, patriarchal society, feminist voice.

Introduction :

Kamala Das, one of the most popular among the Indian English poets, was born at Punnayurkulam in southern Malabar in Kerela on 31st of March, 1934. Not only a poet but also renowned as novelist, short story writer, essayist and memoirist. She born into a literary family as her father, V.M. Nair was the former Managing Editor of the Malayalam daily ‘Mathrubhumi’. And her mother, Nalapatt Balamani Amma was a well-known Malayalam poet and her great-uncle, Nalapatt Narayana Menon, he was a writer and translator. Schooled mainly at home, she was a voracious reader, and spent her childhood between Punnayurkulam, her ancestral village

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in Kerala, as well as Calcutta. Kamala Das converted to Islam in Dec, 1999 and assumed the name of Kamala Suraiya. In later years, she also dabbled in painting and politics, and wrote on a syndicated newspaper column on a wide range of topics including religion and politics. Kamala Das passed away in May 2009.

Methodology :

My research study calls for a critical analytical method, and understanding personal concept of identity in general. It is based on secondary data collection.

Kamala Das quest for 'Identity' :

Kamala Das started writing from her teens. A prolific writer, she wrote several taboo-breaking collections of poems, short stories, novels, and memoirs, in which she explored a woman's quest for freedom from sexual and domestic sufferings, and examined the paradoxes of life and relationships with great emotional depth. She is best known for her controversial and provocative autobiography, *'My Story'*.

"Identity" quest started from her home itself by experiencing through her mother at the very beginning of her childhood. Her mother, Balamaniamma, a renowned Malayalam poetess was married to V.M Nair (Kamala Das's father) who was an employee in an automobile firm in Calcutta. So her caste provided a matrilineal background. Matrilineal in Kerala provided women the basic framework for a superior position and gave them security and freedom of making choice and action what was not available by women in patriarchal societies all over the world at that time. What makes Kamala Das sorry is to see that being a member of such a family her mother surrendered herself to the male ego of her husband who always tried to establish a patriarchal authority. In her interview with Eunice de Souza, Kamala Das laments that the women in her mother's poetry called their husbands 'master'. Her Gandhian father ordered her mother to wear khaddar a day after their marriage and consequently her mother fell under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi what Kamala Das did not like for Gandhi's background which was quite patriarchal. Kamala Das shared her feelings that she used to wake up from sleep at midnight hearing the sounds of their (parents) quarrel and lie in her bed trembling with unease and realized the hypocrisy behind the happy marriage of her mother. In *'My Story'* she says: "My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched". It was the responsible for much of the internal negative forces developed in Kamala Das and her sense of repulsion towards the patriarchal set up.

Grandmother plays another important role in Kamala Das life who believed in demonstrating her fondness for Kamala who kissed her, plaited her hair and slept beside her grandmother on the same bed. She grew and her imperialist father subdued her spirit and made her subject to the so-called rules and moral codes of patriarchal set rules. Though she was a Nayar woman yet had no freedom for making choice or taking decisions.


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