

The Political Exploitation of Feminine Sensibility in *Alphabet of Lust*

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Abstract

Kamala Das is one of the great voices of feminine sensibility in the history of Indian English literature. She wrote poetical and non-poetical works on love and sex very openly and frankly. Political issues have also been a concerning matter in the personal as well as political life of Kamala Das. Her poetical or non-poetical works have the source of political issues in the form of feminine exploitation to the core of life in the patriarchal society all over the world. Her literary works have a great source of such exploitation in not only her social views but also in the politics, extending from the local to the upper level of cabinet ministry. The present research paper is trying to explore the political exploitation of the feminine sensibility in her novel, *Alphabet of Lust*, 1976.

Keywords- Feminine Sensibility, Political Exploitation, Lust, Love, Sexual Encounter.

The present novel of Kamala Das talks about the political lust or sexual discourse, as a valid theme, prevailed in the Indian society, from the very upper society of civil services to the meanest of the common ladies for her fulfilling ambitions to raise themselves for power and pelf in which everybody lost to the ways of human values. The novel is supposed to be dedicated to the third son of the writer, Jasurya. This novel can be read in a sitting really, as it has only 148 pages and the story is so interested in the contextual background of Indian politics that the reader can't leave it without having its close reading completely. This publication of the Orient Paperback has the unity of purpose and thought, dealing with the concentration of irony and politics, very openly yet symbolically.

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In this novel, one can see how for sexual desire can lead a misleading personality, Manasi Mitra and Vijay Raje to secure the pride of place in the historical background of Indian politics. The novel describes a sizzling story of a beautiful woman, Manasi, who is also a poetess by heart and her sexual surrender before the great personalities, among whom some of the best placed cabinet ministers in Delhi. For raising herself to the power and pelf, out of her greed and ambition, she loses herself in an unimaginative way of personality, without having the concern of her well wisher husband, Mr. Mitra and her only daughter, Suparna who is getting her education in a boarding school at Lucknow. It also describes the misleading activities of a young leader of the youths, Vijay Raje who has no morality for his deeds and who wishes for his sexual satisfaction with many young and beautiful girls and women, alluring them for the visit of beautiful places like of Simla. Vijay is also the most political personality who not only raises himself for the cabinet ministry but he also makes his most protective guardian and path obstacle in politics, Sadasivrao, poison through an injection very diplomatically, which could not be investigated by the government body from the incident occurring to the last of the chance for Vijay to get the post of Cabinet Ministry.

In this story of the novel, the readers find Manasi, the protagonist of the novel, was married to Mr. Amol Mitra, a Bank employee. She had a love affair with the elder brother of Vijay Raje, the most political personality of the novel. She loved Vijay Raje's elder brother too much. Even after his death in an air crash, she continued loving him with his child in her womb and gave birth a female child who is named Suparna in the house of Amol Mitra who knew about her pregnancy from Vijay's brother yet he married her because "Kindness is his virtue" (AOL, 18).

Vijay Raje is the symbol of a corrupted leader who wishes for the sexual desire hither and thither without having the sensibility of humanity. He has dominated Sadasivrao, the old political leader who has the real sense of nation and nationality. Very politically, he destroyed the understanding between the Prime Minister and Sadasivrao by imposing the charge of smuggling on the old man. Vijay has also exploited not only the relationship between Amol Mitra and Manasi but he has also exploited Manasi sexually by taking her in Simla with the alluring prestigious award by the Cabinet and the offer of a pair of diamond earrings. Very cleverly, Manasi took benefit of the chance and after losing her character before Vijay, she also presented herself openly and sexually before the P. M. who not only exploited her but also made her the Home Minister first and then the acting Prime Minister going to the last phase of the novel.

Being defeated in the love of Manasi, Vijay not only exploited Suparna emotionally but he also raped her in the same room of the hotel in Simla, where he enjoyed the beauty of her mother, Manasi. Suparna's boyfriend Cyrus Contractor was a truly well being, who not only observed the

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political incidents very closely but he also abruptly married to Suparna who was pregnant from the rape of Vijay. The novel is remarkable at both sides, politically and literally. If at one side the readers find Manasi, Vijay and the Prime Minister sensually corrupt and indulged in the sexual activity for the sake of themselves, on the other side of the novel, they can find the old Sadasivrao, an honest political leader, Mr Amol Mitra, the most kind personality towards women like Manasi, Cyrus Contractor, the really admirer of Sadasivrao and life protector of Suparna, the symbol of innocent feminine sensibility. The Minor characters of the novel are also too much admirable for their minor roles. All of these minor characters have played their roles at the par of excellences. The whole novel can be read in the contextual and conceptual framework of Indian political and social background in Indian English literature.

The story of the novel started from the presentation of the protagonist, “MANASI who was meeting him (Vijay) after a lapse of twenty years” (AOL, 7) and during these days she “had heard from her political minded friends that he had become an influenced person” (AOL, 7). The protagonist of the novel, Manasi was married to Mr. Amol Mitra in a huff after a sudden and unexpected air-crash death of her fiancé who “had inconveniently gone ...leaving her to face the shame of mothering an illegitimate child” (AOL, 16) He was also the elder brother of Vijay Raje, by whom she has a pregnancy.

After this crash, the readers are informed that Vijay Raje, “a hefty man, bronzed in the face with the sun and with the straight black hair neatly back, revealing the smoothness of his brow” (AOL, 7) grows up into an adult and makes up his mind to seize political power and thereby with his love, he would dominate Manasi. Undoubtedly, till the winning favour of Manasi, he wants to win the race by hooks or crooks. Before the entry of Vijay, Kamala Das informed its readers that Manasi has to live with “a struggling government official” (AOL, 9) and “a loving husband” (AOL, 8), Mr. Alok Mitra, “who looked old enough to be her father” (AOL, 9). So, how Vijay “wished then that you (she) would stop living him and get attracted to me (her)” (AOL, 8) and also she did not want to narrate her “short love affair (with his elder brother) which lasted until he died in an air-crash.” (AOL, 9)

Furthermore, the readers are informed that Manasi was a poetess and her poetry has come out from her situations as “if she had been happy in her marriage, if she had had a man to take her out walking near the sea or to browse in old bookshops” (AOL, 9), she would not have been awakened at night in writing books rather she “would only have lain near her husband nestling her face against the hair on his chest...” (AOL, 9) Another complexity of Manasi is that “It is not right for the child to grow up in this torrid atmosphere.” (AOL, 9) and also the economic condition of the family is not so powerful that they “can hardly afford the fees” (AOL, 9) but on the query of Vijay whether she is not

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happy in her marriage, Manasi said “I am sorry to hear this” (AOL, 9) with her explanation of her marital relation in which they are happy all right yet the problem was: “But we are not suited to each other. He is busy with his files all time. I like people, conversation, some show of affection...” (AOL, 10). At this, Vijay felt a surge of pity for Manasi whose “long sleeved blouse did look home made” (AOL, 10) while he was neck deep in political manipulations and “If his stratagem succeeded, the Prime Minister would take him into the Cabinet within a short time.” (AOL, 10) At the next hour, he wished Manasi for his wife because “With Manasi as his wife, he would again gain the purity of soul that was born with. She was always an idealist. She resembled a flame that could never get soiled. She was destined only to burn out impurities” (AOL, 10-11).

That night lying with her book under his pillow in his air conditioned room, he had wept like a child for he started to imagine “Honest men like her husband could hardly afford any luxury... Then in love and in physical anguish, he had kissed the book with his lips, hot and swollen in lust.” (AOL, 11) Furthermore, the readers are informed about the conversation between Manasi who had heard the news that Vijay was going to be a Cabinet Minister in Delhi but Vijay, very cunningly ignored the news and pretended for his chances in the absence of Sadasivrao. At this Manasi wished for his greatest desire to be a Cabinet Minister but Vijay exposed his greatest desire for marrying Manasi “but when that could not be fulfilled, I settled for power.” (AOL, 12) But because political issues are also the concerning matter of the novel that’s why, very aptly, the text narrate the purpose of youths in this novel: “If you can not subjugate your woman, subjugate at least the country....” (AOL, 12)

Knowing the reality of her husband’s condition, Manasi started to think foolishly, over the physical appearances of Mr. Mitra which are much more disappointed: “he looked like a clown, bearing his old stripped pyjamas, ... his teeth had become discolored with the betel stains. There was a mist in his eyes all the time wrapping in it cornea, and making him look as if he had cataract. And the skin of his face was yellow and dead” (AOL, 14). In the comparison of Mr. Mitra, Manasi thinks about: “Vijay had looked spruce and handsome in his white Khaddar kurta, pyjamas, and brown Jawahar jacket.” (AOL, 14-15) After thinking a lot, she comes to conclude that she with Vijay “would have made an excellent pair. Poetess and politician” (AOL, 15).

As far as the emotional bond of Manasi in her relationship is concerned, “She had never been passionately in love with her husband, but she had got used to him sentimentally as one would get used to one’s old hair brush or towel... she used to keep her eyes shut while he made to love her.” (AOL, 15) Mr. Mitra had not had any other woman in his life so “he did not detect in her response anything unsatisfactory while for Manasi, “it was an act of self-mortification” (AOL, 16) Further, the readers are informed that Manasi was started to think about Vijay who was “alleged to be a corrupt

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man, an astute manipulator” (AOL, 19) while she ought to hate such men as she was the “only poetess of the country who wrote with a social conscience” (AOL, 19). Vijay was a cabinet minister now and he was dealing with iron and steel: “Literature was out of his manoeuvring clutches... Only the political intrigues reported in certain papers delighted him” (AOL, 19). When the Prime Minister looks in tension and wants to entertain himself with some newest poetry of the coming generation, Vijay Raje introduced the poetry of his Bengali beloved poetess, Manasi who was an Indo-Anglican poetess, perhaps representing Kamala Das herself. At the next hour, Das has narrated the importance of literary figures in the eyes of political leaders who read literature from the political point of views: “If we manage to recruit such conspicuously idealistic people into our party our image will improve.” (AOL, 25) Mrs. Manasi Mitra comes from Bengal where the young readers have great taste in her poetry, “She has a good following among the students of Bengal” (AOL, 25) and she can be used in the politics in the opinion of Vijay Raje: “If we could get her to stand for election as a candidate from Bengal,... the Marxist candidate will withdraw in her favour, and our party will pick up a leftist image” (AOL, 25).

In this way, the plot for Manasi in politics was constructed by Vijay Raje who wants to kill two birds with one stone. If he succeeds Manasi to the politics, he will win her favour for his love and sexual desires. At the same time he will win the favour of the Prime Minister which may construct his pave of glory to his remarkable place and post. With the well constructed plot for Manasi he sends Mr. Krishnan, as his messenger to persuade her for Vijay who “was asking her to share a week with him at Simla and offering her in return a pair of diamonds earrings” (AOL, 28). Showing reluctant, she accepted the offer for “diamonds she was to shed her shyness, her long cherished chastity” (AOL, 29) because “she was not the kind of woman who liked sexual acrobatics” (AOL, 29). When she reported her husband about her plan to visit Delhi and Simla, he felt guilty at times: “With your talent you would have been a millionaire in an affluent country like America” (AOL, 30). Now, Manasi thought to surrender herself before Vijay for: “This was to be a business transaction. A week at Simla with you (Vijay), some love making and in return I get my diamond earrings” (AOL, 35). The statement of business transaction made her “the cruelest woman” (AOL, 35)

Men have always used the females for the sake of their power and prestige by bargaining them. Vijay tried to use Manasi for the same while “She wanted to nurse him at her breasts as though he were her baby” (AOL, 38) because “there was an ache in her breasts which only his red lips would satisfy” (AOL, 38). Vijay tried to bargain her but the present lady like Manasi is very conscious about: “In this bargain, I am gaining much more than you have gained” (AOL, 38). She tried to pursue the reality of her sexual surrender which is considered by Vijay as his victorious deed over her

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reputation, but she explained: “it was the conquest of my heart... it is like an organ separate from my body, something I seem to have left at home before I embarked on this journey... we are both ablaze with lust. Simple, honest, human lust” (AOL, 38). Very aptly, she explains her views on the sexual exploitation of women: “I rented out my body for a pair of diamond earrings. And hereafter for power I shall rent it out to the most influential tenant I can hope to get.” (AOL, 41) He tricked her in politics and now, she is going on to follow further the learning of Vijay for her power and pelf. When such concept of trick came to him, Vijay accepted the fact and called her bitch: “We were victims of pure animal lust. But in my behaviour and attitude there was a redeeming factor. I loved you. I love you, Manasi, you bitch....” (AOL, 41) At this, Manasi realized that “lusting for his young body was not love” (AOL, 42).

When she joins politics, she comes to know that “Delhi is full of schemers...Politics is such an unsteady arena. Everyone’s legs wobble on that stage.” (AOL, 42) Sadasivrao like leaders are murdered in the tricks of Vijay Raje like post hunger leaders: “Peace is a dead dove rotting in my alcove” (AOL, 43). Manasi like females are also found crying out over the loss of her respects and regards for their husbands but these corrupt political leaders tried to calm down these husbands by granting awards or promotions as here, one can find Vijay thinking: “Amol Mitra could be compensated for his loss by the grant of an unexpected promotion” (AOL, 44).

A critical study of the novel tells its readers about this story of incest which runs the subplot of political corruption, prevailed in the government of any country. On the death of the previous honest Prime Minister, Mr. Desai, the nation got a new one weak kneed Prime Minister who is governed by the most corrupted leader Vijay Raje who not only raped many young and beautiful girls and women but also Manasi, the beloved of his own elder brother and Suparna, his own daughter like in Simla. Vijay took over his post for representing the youths in the government while he starts to rampant the political issues most complicated as he spreads canards about the older politician, Sadasivrao and engages men to hurl bomb in his public meeting in Bombay. Not only this but after a month’s hospitalization when Sadasivrao was about to return his home, Vijay Raje visits him in the hospital and conspiring a ward boy at the medical men, he also makes him inject poison to this old and honest politician. Consequently, Sadasivrao dies.

Cyrus Contractor, the lover of Suparna and the admirer of the old politician complains against it to the Prime Minister individually but Vijay makes him understand very politically and dramatically. He accepted the facts of Vijay not Cyrus because Vijay was an instrument in getting his beloved, Manasi who was elevated to the highest government post which becomes the matter of jealousy for Vijay in the last phase of the novel, when he comes to know that Manasi is going to be

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the acting Prime Minister of the country. Politically, the novel is full of issues and Vijay Raje is looking represented as the villain of the piece who is despicably black and wicked to the core. The Prime Minister is also exposed to love and lust and Manasi is seen as his weakness in this novel, *Alphabet of Lust*.

In this sense of political exploitation, one can read about the present Prime Minister who wants to reward Manasi not for her only poetry but for her sensuous beauty. In the matter of Manasi, she is awarded by the Prime Minister not with a medal but with a credited post, the Home Minister first and the acting Prime Minister last so that she could be nearby him. Here, the readers also find the P. M., annoyed at the most honest personality, Sadasivrao for no reason only for his frankness and wellness for his nation. The P. M. is also annoyed at his own son, Mukesh for his disloyalty to the credit of his father not for the premature pregnant Rohini. He also pressurized Mukesh to marry Rohini not for his loyalty but for saving the credit of his post and party.

Vijay Raje is the single man rotten to the core of corruption. In the beginning of the novel, Manasi Mitra found him a corrupt man, but later, she found herself entrap to his freakish love offer. Vijay Raje is found here as an irresistible womanizer who applies all sorts of tricks and policies in trapping the fairer sex in his net. It can be exemplified with the lady, Manasi who refused his love for the sake of her husband, accepted his invitation of going to Simla for a week and enjoy life in her greed and ambition for power. Vijay knows well how the beautiful girls or ladies can be exploited without being harmed a little. He has great trick to entrap Suparna in his very first visit of her hostel in the college. Being a great politician, he took revenge over Manasi by seducing and raping her only daughter, Suparna when she allured him for the Prime Minister. He kills Stella, a poor and deaf orphanage for no fault. Mr. Krishnan like businessmen is to blame for having sent the young and beautiful girls to him for a suitable job. Shrinivasachari and Anusuya Devi are fully aware of Vijay's weakness of beautiful women and hence they have decided to send the charming dancer, Sita to him. The character of Vijay Raje can be understood in the real sense of lust because he made sexual encounter with many young women that's why his so-called love is nothing but his lust. He can enjoy Manasi, rape Suparna, and kill Stella after his sexual pleasure. He is also being awaited by the dancer, Sita for enjoying her accompany. He has no sense of loveliness but the sense of sexual desire fulfillment by fair or foul means. He also established himself as a pure politician who spoiled many politicians by applying his politics. In the characterization of Vijay the Indian sayings of 'Koi Aisa Saga Nhi, Jisko Maine Thga Nhi' comes to true, which means 'there is no relative who has not been entraped by Vijay in this novel yet for Mr. Krishnan, Vijay is "a saint" (AOL, 100) and "a man of great generosity" (AOL, 101).

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Industrialists and businessmen play a seductive role in pleasing the politicians and such spirit of seductiveness is also found in this novel of Kamala Das. Mr. Krishnan is one of them who collected beautiful girls with the cocktail parties from all parts of the world on the special occasions. In this novel, he is found collecting the beautiful girls from the various countries and offered them to Vijay Raje who can be pleased with and kept in good cheers otherwise his permits and license will be stopped. For the better understanding of the readers, it would be confirmed about that Mr. Krishnan was the messenger of Vijay Raje. He comes to seduce Manasi in the favour of Vijay Raje with the remarkable words of his love and praise for her. His another work of pleasing Mrs. Noronha for Padamshree award on the coming Republic Day and asking for a beautiful girl, Estella who was a deaf and mute inmate of an orphanage to Vijay, is also the most seductive example of such businessmen. Similarly, Shrinivasachari is also found in the same shoes of Mr. Krishnan as he is also an ageing chairman of a leading Public Sector. He was constantly encouraged by his mistress Anusuya Devi, the Principal of the best women college in Bombay to entrap Vijay Raje by supplying the most beautiful and charming dancer like Sita. If he fails in supplying girls or women as his loyal job, he may lose his post of chairman for his lucrative job. In this novel, there are Mr. Krishnan, Shrinivasachari and Anusuya Devi who did their best to please his political leader, Vijay for the sake of their business and license. Among these, one can find Stella and Sita like innocent characters who have their misfortunes of being destroyed into the crucial hands of Vijay Raje like political leaders without having any rivalry against these leaders.

Thus, the whole novel looks to be surrounded from the political exploitation of the feminine sensibility and the analytical study of the novel compels its readers to think in the words of A. N. Dwivedi, “Alphabet of Lust is a titillating story of an ambitious woman’s rise to power through her sexual surrenders (before many politicians like Vijay Raje and the Prime Minister). It is a powerful novel of lust and illicit love,... if Manasi is an embodiment of sexual debasement, Raje is that of political corruption. Both combine to give a brilliant flash to the social and political malaise in the Indian context” (Dwivedi, 121).

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