Punishment in Kindergarten

Kamala Das was born in Punnayurkulam, Kerala in 1934. Kamala spent several years in Calcutta, where she went to Catholic schools. She was married fairly early, before she finished her college. So she happens to be the only leading Indian English poet without a degree to her name. She began writing early and published her first poems in *The Indian P.E.N.* The first volume of her*Collected Poems*  published in 1984 won her the Sahitya Academy award for 1985. Kamala Das has been typecast as a confessional poet. It is her brutal frankness of her verse that shocked and attracted readers. Kamala writes about sexual frustration and desire, of the suffocation of an arranged love-less marriage, of numerous affairs, of the futility of lust, of the shame and sorrow of not finding love after repeated attempts, of the loneliness and neurosis that stalks women especially.

**Analysis, Explanation and Theme of Punishment in Kindergarten  By Kamala Das**

The poem is warm and muffled, and recounts the picnic of the poetess at Victoria Gardens to which followed it (as Kamala Das tells us in her autobiography). She was all alone near the hedge, while other girls were playing at a distance. The poem demonstrates the poet’s capacity to smell the flowers as well as the pain of being slighted. It has hardly any suggested larger meaning.

“Punishment in Kindergarten” is a little autobiographical poem by the famous Indo-Anglian poet Kamala Das.  She recalls one of her childhood experiences.  When she was in the kindergarten, one day the children were taken for a picnic. All the children except her were playing and making merry.  But she alone kept away from the company of the children.  Their teacher, a blue-frocked woman, scolded her saying.

“Why don’t you join the others, what

A peculiar child you are!”

This heard, all the other children who were sipping sugar cane turned and laughed.  The child felt it very much.  She became sad at the words of the teacher.  But the laughter by the children made her sadder.  She thought that they should have consoled her rather than laughing and insulting her.  Filled with sorrow and shame she did her face in a hedge and wept.  This was indeed a painful experience to a little child in the nursery school.

Now after many years she has grown into an adult.  She has only a faint memory of the blue-frocked woman and the laughing faces of the children.  Now she has learned to have an ‘adult peace’ and happiness in her present state as a grown-up person.  Now there is no need for her to be perturbed about that bitter kindergarten experience.  With her long experience in life she has learned that life is a mixture of joy and sorrow.  She remembers how she has experienced both the joy and sorrow of life.  The long passage of time has taught her many things.  She is no more a lonely individual as she used to feel when she was a child.  The poet comes to a conclusion that there is no need for her to remember that picnic day, when she hid her face in the hedge, watching the steel-white sun, that was standing lonely in the sky.

The subject matter of the poem has two parts, the first of which being the description of the painful experience of the kindergarten days and the second, the adult’s attitude to the incident at present when she is no more a child. Thus the major theme of the poem is nostalgia and the sense of moving on with life.

The poem is very simple in its construction and even colloquial in diction. Yet in its delivery its very much like the narrative of a film which goes back and forth in time to bring out a small incident in the life of the poetess which sets off her introvert nature that gets all the more pronounced as she grows up. In fact the incident is a reminder of the fact that the talented usually spend a lonely life right from their beginning. Thus from the psychological perspective too the poem is simple only on the surface level. The tone of the poem is pensive if not sad. It is a tone of compromise in the face of inevitability. Kamala believes in letting go and she does exorcise the minor ghost of her past only to bring out the one she is still haunted with – isolation.

Kamala seems to be saying that though sometimes in times of crisis or loneliness we tend to remember some long forgotten incident of humiliation and pain it is better to forget and forgive and move on. The poem is also a testimony to the fact that with time people tend to forget their pain and moves on in life for better things.

The images used again are deceptively simple. In tune with the theme of the poem the images are evocative yet blurred. The teacher’s identity gets shrinked to a blue skirt but the words she ‘threw’ at her are still remembered as pots and pans. Though the image is a humorous one it shows the obnoxiousness of the assault. Words had hurt the young girl more than real hurts and today after so long they have taken a more materialistic from in the memory of the grown person. The image of the hedge and the sun is quite symptomatic of the introvertive nature of the poet and the subtle projection of her chronic loneliness unto a celestial object. The synaesthetic evocation of the image the smell of pain is remarkable for its zeugma.

It’s not only the above mentioned zeugma that adds the ting to the poem but also the simile, the metaphor, the metonymy and the personification in the following lines respectively – “throwing Words at me like pots and pans”, “That honey-coloured day of peace” “A blue-frocked woman”, “The years have Sped along, stopping briefly at beloved halts and moving sadly on.” Add the necessary and indispensible ring of poetry to the lines.

Thus the poem is a true modernist poem which at the same time nostalgically remembering an incident of childhood remembers it not in a moment of glorification but as an insight into an event of pain due to inborn desire for isolation and of difference. Kindergarten thus transforms from a site of celebration of innocence to the mourning of the loss of innocence yet with a positive note of the desire or capability of letting go.

**Keywords:** analysis of punishment in kindergarten by Kamala Das, summary of punishment in kindergarten by Kamala Das, theme of punishment in kindergarten by Kamala Das, explanation of punishment in kindergarten by Kamala Das, central idea of punishment in kindergarten by Kamala Das,

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