

# Woman Perspective in Kamala Das's Poetry

Suman Singh<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Applied Sciences,  
Ganga Institute of Technology and Management,  
Kabana, Jhajjar, Haryana, India

**Abstract:** Kamala Das holds the distinction of being the most celebrated and most anthologized of Indian English women poets. A versatile genius a poet, a novelist, a short story writer, a columnist and a painter she has been a favourite with her readers and critics alike. She is known for her bold expression of social behaviour which otherwise is labelled as taboo. Kamala Das is a legendary woman poet who epitomizes the modernization of the Indian feminine poetic psyche. She talks about women who have passed through a period of frustration, depression, gloom, depression, pain, suffering, rootlessness, agony and torture. Her poetry is a very strong expression of feminine sensibility. Devender Kohli finds it to be 'celebration of beauty and courage of being a woman. She is 'every woman' expressing all that comes with the territory of being a woman the strong 'wants as a woman', the beauty of filial Love, the dependence on man for the happiness, the concern with physical decay, the identity crisis, the unwilling acceptance of allotted roles and lamentations against the insensitive male and wale dominated society. Infact, hers is a unparalleled example of feminine-cum-feminist sensibility.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In her poetry, one finds an expression of herself abasement and woman is treated as a toy to play with. Woman figures in her poetry just like a skeleton of flesh and bones. Kamala Das has not only portrayed the flux of mind and thoughts of a woman but also efficaciously projected the wages,

dreams and desires of Indian Woman.

Kamala Das is pre-eminently a Poet of Love. Her poetry incarnate her quest for a fulfilling relationship and the anguish over her inability to find such a relationship inside or outside marriage. Her concept of love is all-inclusive where she wants not only physical but also emotional & spiritual fulfillment. Mr. C.N. Srinath observes, "Love desire, genuine love, love on various planes is Kamala Das's main pre-occupation, her obsession."

A corollary to this is the poet's pre-occupation with the theme of Body. She celebrates body but loveless relationship makes her revile body as an instrument of conquest and exploitation. Poems of desire and love form a major chunk of Kamala Das's poetic corpus.

Body- soul conflict also emerges as the central concern in many of her poems. Woman's instinctive fascination for man, her longing for a sacred and perfect love that goes beyond the joy of sex, the disillusionment that men only lust after her body; the man-woman relationship in Kamala

Das's poetry operates within this emotional triangle.

Her poetry is equipped with female experience of emotional shock of an unhappy marriage, humiliation of desire less surrender in sex and her disgust at the male domination. Kamala depicts the entire class of women in Indian society. She herself expresses it when she affirms:

.... *I am every*

*Women who seeks love (Summer in Calcutta :60)*

Kamala Das is a Rebel poet- a feminist rebel against the patriarchal forces imposing stereo typed role on women ' Dress in saris, be girl', a rebel against the male's inadequacy to provide a meaningful and fulfilling relationship 'nothing more alive than skin's Lazy hungers' and a rebel Indian English writer protesting against the carping critics.

Kamala Das shows her resentment against the dominating attitude of man. She describes about the bond between her granduncle and grandaunt ; She tells us that her uncle looked every inch a king, although he didn't have ample amount of money to buy discernible that her uncle expected some sycophancy from his wife:

*Besides his chair was a hookah which my grand-aunt meticulously cleared every morning. (Firestone !167)*

Kamala Das's poetry also accentuate women's psyche of rebellion against male supremacy and ego when she identifies love either with physical relationship or an unfulfilled longing. She has commented love and lust in radical voices. Kamala remarks that sometimes a woman feels that mere ardor is a mere waste and there is a desire to free herself from this "soul killing" vanquish.

*Woman is this happiness, this lying buried*

*Beneath a man?*

*It's time again to come alive.*

*A world extends a lot beyond his Six foot frame.*

*(Iyer : 145)*

Love is the recurrent theme of Kamala Das's poetry. An eternal quest for true love is the pivotal concern in the writings of this 'High priestess of love.' Her forte is not cerebral complexity, intellectual stamina, philosophical musings but her emotionally rich poetry and profoundly

deep feelings expressed in forceful intimate verse. Her achievement is her daring and unconventional portrayal of the emotion of love in its countless number of shades.

Women are depicted in various roles like beloved, wife, sister, daughter, mother, mistress, grandmother and nymphomaniac. This picture of woman persona is really very complex. In Devendra Kohli's words, "Kamala Das has more to say about the pathos of a woman emerging from passive role to the point of discovering and asserting her individual freedom and identity....." (Kohli:188), Kamala Das is primarily considered to be a poet of feminine longings. Her poetry reflects her restlessness as a sensitive woman who is moving in a male dominated society to champion the cause of woman. She has forcefully raised the voice against male tyrannies in her poems such as "An Introduction," "Summer in Calcutta", "Marine Drive," "A Relationship etc. In her poem "Afterwards" she gives voice to the secret hopes and fears of woman kind when she says:

*Son of my womb,  
Ugly in loneliness,  
You work the world's bleary eye  
Like a grit, your cleverness  
Shall not be your doom  
As ours was  
(Das : Summer in Calcutta:55)*

According to a simple and broad definition, anyone who recognizes the existence of sexism, male domination and patriarchy, and takes some action against it is a feminist. Kamala Das's expression of feminism is at times explicit and at times implicit. She has been celebrated as a 'champion of women's' causes. Her writings reveal a strong feminist streak in various forms. In her poetry the subordination and humiliation of women forms a prominent motif. For instance, in "The Looking Glass", she portrays the stark reality of the life of women:

*Stand nude before the glass with him  
So that he sees himself the stronger one  
And believes it so , and you so much more  
Softer, younger , lovelier ....  
Dropping towels, and the jerky way he urinates.  
( Das: The Descendants: 10)*

Apart from other things, the woman bargains for a dubiously precarious love at the price complete surrender:

*Gift him makes what makes you a woman ,  
the scent of long hair,  
the musk of sweat between the breasts,  
The warm shock of menstrual blood,  
and all your endless female hungers.  
( Das: 59)*

No doubt, the victimization of woman is evident but woman doesn't even realize that she is a victim. It appears that she blames the need of male to humiliate woman and wonders why women show a submissive reconciliation with the female servitude. She feels that the feminine mystique has always been exploited by man who treats her as a slave. The fact of male dominance has been reflected in her autobiography, "My Story":

#### **'The Old Play House'**

expresses Kamala Das's contempt for all that marriage entails – the man, his activities, the act and her loss of identity. Like a feminist who seeks growth of self in a man-woman relationship, the poet went to her man:

*I came to you  
But to learn  
What I was  
And by learning  
To learn to grow.*

However, her man sought to 'tame' a swallow', and make her forget her very nature and the urge to fly. She was dwarfed by his overpowering

#### **Cowering**

*beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf  
and  
became a dwarf,lost my will and reason,to all  
your  
questions I mumbled incoherent replies*

The wifely chores performed for such a man nauseated her. It was only a violent physical relationship and the poet, always looking for tenderness, recalls the details of his sexual exploits with abhorrence.

In 'The Swamp' she regrets "I am a puppet on his string and avers:

*I shall rise one day I shall stalk out of his bed.*

In 'A Man is a Season' she chides her husband for 'letting your wife/seek ecstasy in others' arms."

In 'Substitute' the poet satirises the pseudo-life a married woman is expected to lead in the name of making adjustments :

*It will be all right when I learn  
To paint my mouth like a clown's  
It will be all right if I put up my hair*

*Stand near my husband to make a proud pair...*

In 'The Suicide' the poet unmasks the mask that a woman is supposed to wear all through her life:

*I must pose*

*I must pretend*

*I must act the role of happy woman*

*Happy wife.*

There is no denying the fact that Kamala Das revolts against the masculine character of our civilization but she also shows her restlessness towards women's passive acceptance of subjugation as the appointed lot. To quote Specks(93): Suppression as a legitimate form of self control has long been recommended to women. She feels uneasy with her mother's "timidity" which helped her create an illusion of domestic harmony which satisfied the relatives and friends. Kamala Das exposes her restlessness with the better of femininity in her poem "The Suicide" where she writes:

*But,*

*I must pose*

*I must pretend,*

*I must act the role of*

*A Happy Woman,*

*A Happy wife*

*(Descendants:2)*

In the aforesaid lines, the derision of woman's emotions is evident that even if a woman is not happy as a wife or as a woman she must pretend herself to be a happy wife.

Kamala Das is not in favour of physical love that her strong husband showers or her rather she pines for emotional identity which is not afforded by him.

The poetess hammers hard at her husband and articulates her intense desire of escaping from his clutches and attaining 'freedom'. This has been incorporated in the poem "Substitute":

*Yet I was thinking, lying beside him,*

*That I loved, and was much loved.*

*It is physically thing, he said suddenly,*

*End it, I cried, End it, and let us be free.*

*This freedom was our last strange toy.*

*(The Descendants :7)*

However, this 'freedom' does not provide her 'pride', 'joy' 'a sense of security' and 'a name' but in great despondency she spells out:

*After that love became a swivel-door,*

*When one went out, another came in*

*(Summer in Calcutta: 11)*

Kamala Das, in her poems, gives the first person account of women's sexual encounters, description of the private lives of women have thoroughly made the picture of suffering woman complete. Thus, the protest of the feminist critic in case of Marvell's poem becomes the staple content of female speaker's narration in Kamala Das's poetry.

A close examination of the contribution made by Kamala Das through her poetry is specifically the relationship that prevailed between man and woman. Her society expected total surrender and silence on the part of woman. Although the woman in her culture was reconciled with her inferior position vis-s-vis man yet this attitude towards the treatment received by her family members and the society. As a woman she has been intensely conscious of herself; she is found focusing attention on woman in her different roles as a wife, a mother, a mistress and even as a prostitute. Some of the critics hold the opinion that her poems are a mere pouring out of her emotions. Simultaneously she has confessed that her poems emerged as a rash of prickly heat. However, her feelings and emotions are based on actual experiences of life. It would not be wrong to point out that whatever she has written is in confessional tone, exposing the raw moods of experience. It is because of this she cannot be dubbed as unfeminine. Her poetry concentrates on her own self-discovery and expressing the different layers of hypocrisy which got over quoted in today's life and she has been bitterly criticised for that by the high preachers of social morality. Similarly, her idealistic ideas of love and domesticity became a cause of rash criticism for which she was not fully prepared. In nutshell, the poetry of Kamala Das advocates freedom and self-respect for women. Kamala Das staunchly etches the emotional picture of woman and succinctly reiterates that she should not be treated as a commodity or a subaltern. She should be bestowed with respectable position in the society.

-----  
REFERENCES:

- [1] Bernikov Louise, "Introduction" in Bernikov, The World Splits Open : Four Centuries of Women Poets in England and America 1551-1950 (New York, 1974).
- [2] Das Kamala, Summer in Calcutta, (New Delhi: Rajinder Paul, 1965).
- [3] Das Kamala, The Descendants, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1967).
- [4] Das Kamala, My Story, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.1991).
- [5] Firestone Shulamith, The Dialectic of Sex, (New York and London: Bantam, 1971).
- [6] Spacks Patricia Meyer, The Female Imagination, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973).