

**THE LIFE AND WORKS OF KAMALA DAS WERE THE  
AMALGAMATIONS OF PRISON AND DESIRES****SUGANDHA AGNIHOTRI**

Research Scholar

Department of English &amp; MEAL

Faculty of Arts &amp; Humanities

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Language University,

Lucknow.

&amp;

**DR.TANVEER KHADIJA**

Professor

Head of Department of English &amp; MEAL

Faculty of Arts &amp; Humanities

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Language University,

Lucknow.

**ABSTRACT**

*The existentialist problem is gripping every man and woman, making science's advancement more intricate. Human life's psychological and social aspects face more challenges and bottlenecks than ever. In this context, a woman's position is not an unenviable one, given the oppressive forces working against them. Their marginalized position at home and on the social ladder makes them more vulnerable to assaults. And the suppressed and shackled mind wants to release from the prison of oppression. Across the world, many women began to break the shackles, began to express their hidden feelings and emotions, and wanted to say their identities. In India, too, many women attempted to speak their identity boldly, and one among them was Kamala Das. What did Kamala Das make to come out brazenly and break the social taboo? What were the obstacles and difficulties she faced? How was the writer ostracized in the Nair society, which is matriarchal basically? And how was she received in the feudal-like community with her new writings, which some termed sexual, obscene, and sometimes pornographically explicitly and graphically portrayed in her works of poetry, autobiographical novels, and short pieces of art? Some of these emerging issues have already been taken care of, but a relook has become essential. Revaluation must become critical as new books have been published about her after her death. And as any canonized literary work needs to be re-evaluated in a new context to ferret out the inner and hidden meanings as the author intended. Now and then, articles and news items appear in newspapers about the author's creativity.*

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Women's problems need a different lens and a unique semantic set to express women's emotions truly. Being women and love poets, they regret and are disappointed that critics neither acknowledge nor realize the absolute values of her works. They take boldness and frankness to stand against the odds of patriarchy, scandal, indignity, inferiority, and character assassination of females. They are fighting together as liberated women and creative writers. It is inevitably undeniable that all the works of Kamala Das have their stamp on identifying themselves as feminine in the male society. With their liberated spirit as they examine more aggressively and boldly than a man would, the bias and frustrations of love from her various profoundly personal and subtly physical angles. Her poetry reveals the dilemmas, helplessness, and poignant situations she faced under her longing for true love, sex, and loneliness. She is deeply obsessed with passions such as love and sex. She meets the excruciating pains of loneliness and alienation even in her childhood days. Neither Das' parents nor the society in which she grew up helped her free herself from this loneliness.

Kamala Das, the renowned poetess, was born on March 31, 1934, in Malabar, Kerala. Das is one of the well-known contemporary Indian Women Writers. English and Malayalam were the two languages in which Das has authored many autobiographical works and novels, including several well-received and famous collections of poetry in English, many volumes of short stories, and essays on a vivid spectrum of drastic subjects. Since her first collection of poetry, "Summer In Calcutta" (1965), Das has been regarded as her contemporary generation's essential and influential voice. She became an example by a break from the past by writing a distinctly and highlighting Indian persona rather than adopting or impersonating the techniques of the English modernists. Her poetry is quite moving and instigating. She is celebrated as the most outspoken and even controversial writer and earned fame as the "Voice of Women's Sexuality." Apart from writing in English as Kamala Das, she also wrote under the pen name Madhavikutty in Malayalam before her conversion to Islam. Her popularity in Kerala was mainly credited to her short stories and the autobiography "My Story," which was translated into fifteen languages, including a book where she openly discussed her unsatisfactory sex life with her husband, Madhava Das.

Kamala Das has protested against male domination and the consequent dwarfing of females. The woman in our society is expected to play specific conventional roles, and her wishes and aspirations are not considered. The intensity of her protest is conveyed in conversational idiom and rhythm, making it symbolic of the demonstration of all womanhood against the male ego. She tied the knot at fifteen, and her marriage failed. The failure of her wedding compelled her to enter into extra-marital sexual relationships in search of the kind of love that her husband had been unable to give her. Her husband was a believer in sex as a matter of routine; his wife was therefore by no means starved of the pleasure of sex. She, on the contrary, believed in marriage as an emotional and spiritual bond. Her husband's coldness in this respect led her to feel acutely dissatisfied and disappointed in life and, not finding real love even in her extra-marital affairs, she slid into a life of sexual anarchy, with one lover following another and with her discontent becoming more profound till it assumed the form of utter despair. Her poetry is called confessional because it records her personal experiences, chiefly in marriage and sex. However, it certainly has a broader range and includes a few other aspects of life. Kamala Das is always sincere, always true to herself in prose and poetry. As a wife, she was expected to look to the comforts of her husband, minister to his needs, and

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play the conventional role of a Hindu wife, which has dwarfed and stunted her personality. It was her immense suffering that led her to seek a place in another's arm to knock at another's doorstep-

"...yearned for a man from another town", as she writes in "The Wild Bougainvillea."

In an interview with the Warrior, Das once said, "I always wanted love, and if you don't get it within your home, you stray a little."

Das has lived alone in her world with feelings of loneliness and hopelessness. Like other children in the Nair family, Kamala was almost wholly neglected during her childhood except by her grandmother. She tells it in her autobiography. Kamala Das is one of the prominent figures in the history of Indo-English literature. She intensely tells her personal experiences, including her growth into womanhood and her unsuccessful quest for love in and outside of marriage. She "pines for what is not there" when she complains about the wrongs her parents did to her: ".....they took us for granted and considered us puppets, moving our limbs according to their tugs. I felt myself an intruder in any room rather than mine every morning. I told myself that I must raise myself from the desolation of my life and escape into another life and into another country".

Marital life does not provide her any spiritual solace or psychological comfort from her loneliness. Her disfigured married life faces lust, dominance, and non-consent sex. She got no freedom and was not allowed to select an ideal lover for her as she belonged to a conservative family. Kamala Das never liked the way her parents moved about and fixed her marriage without even trying to know about her ideas and aspirations, and she finds herself as a helpless mute victim:-

".....I was  
A victim of a young man" s Carnal  
Hinges & perhaps out of our  
Union, there would be  
Born a few children."

While remembering the first sexual experience from her first night, she says:-

".....then, without any warning, he fell on me, surprising me by the extreme brutality of the attack."

This "brutal attack" lends her a sense of helplessness and alienation, which prompts Kamala Das to become a rebel, and she looks down upon all her relations with contempt and disgust. The immature sexual approach of her husband developed hatred against the bonds of married life and male domination. Her injured feminine self attempted to explore identity and freedom. She experimented with different sexual adventures for this task and even attempted suicide. Her longing for true love and identity gives her neither peace of mind nor emotional fulfillment. She complains about her failure to love within and without the bonds of marriage. One cannot help others without helping oneself. In her poetry, she immortalizes the splendor of nature and human relationships, where personal experiences turn into universal passionate expression. Kamala Das's voice and her earthy and direct light shed a harsh light on the patriarchy around us, revealing insane stuff that we never knew existed. In her poetry, Kamala Das strongly recommends that true love is necessary to make any peaceful, healthy,

and long-lasting mutual relationship between partners no matter whether it is a bond between husband and wife or lover and beloved, or a bond of mother and son, all types of man-woman relationships can be made only by love.

The works of Kamala Das must be viewed through the lens of equality and in the light of her feminine consciousness. She has acquired these parameters depending on the societal experiences of her childhood. As a confessional poet, she is conscious of her creative faculties and tries to break shackles and restraints. She indulges in self-awareness, self-exploration, and self-introspection to define her true self poetically. She is condemned to play the part, apart from her feminine self. The male society compels her to choose her roles according to their convenience. She is forced to act either as an enslaved person or an idol. Her personality reflects her worse condition as a woman. She highlights in her autobiography, *My Story*:

".....often, I have toyed with the idea of drowning myself; to get rid of my loneliness which is not unique in any way but: is natural to all. I have wanted to find rest in the sea and an escape from involvements".

Therefore her feminine self is traditional, associated with the enclosed world of domestic life and household responsibilities disguised as a mother, a wife, and a helpmate. She wants to escape from her frustrating memory in 'Substitute' where the reaction of her body shocks her feminine self; she says:

".....our bodies after lovemaking turning away rejecting our works began to sound like the clatter of sounds in the fight."

Her psychic credo and painful marital experience during her struggle and quest for emotional involvement along with her husband instigated her to take steps for freedom in the name of suicide. The definition of love for her has become a mechanical affair only, and lovers are series subjected to substitutions: She says again:

"After that, love became a swivel door; when one went out, another came in.

"Dress in sarees, be girl,  
Be wife, they said, Be embroiderer, be cook, Be a  
Quarreler with servants. Fit in, oh!  
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't Sit  
On walls or peep in through lace-draped windows. Be  
Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better  
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to Choose a  
Name, a role".

In the old playhouse, the playhouse is the poet's mind in which there are numerous floating sensations like regrets, frustrations, and floating pieces of thought and memory are the actors who act their part in the dark with all the light shut out. "The Old Playhouse" is the poet's protest masked rebel against the male domination, and the consequent was dwarfing the female as -

"You called me wife.

I was taught to break saccharine into my tea and To  
Offer at the right moment the vitamins.

Cowering Beneath  
your monstrous ego,

I became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason. To all your Questions I  
Mumbled incoherent replies,".

A sharp, heart-rendering bitter note which is a symbol of her frustration and disgust, is struck  
from the very beginning:

"You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her

In the long summer of your love so that she would forget Not  
the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but Also her  
nature, the urge to fly, and the endless  
Pathways of the sky".

Kamala Das finds death desirable because her life is not going to be redeemed, or  
made renew. She states -

"O sea, I am fed up. I want  
to be simple, I want to be  
loved And  
If love is not to be had

I want to be dead, just dead".

The escapes she seeks in physical love are also suicides in the sense that they can  
affect a temporary merging of the dualities within oneself. Das has no hesitation in admitting  
that she has miserably failed on every front. She even can hardly believe that she has lost  
everything in her life. She feels all "lost" in losses:

"It is hard to believe That I only lost  
Lost all, lost even What I never had".

Kamala Das's married life was an utter failure, and it ended in deep frustration and mental  
agony. She feels no hesitation in admitting that her marriage has been an utter failure; it is a  
the fake drama of love only:

".....who can Help us who have lived so long And have failed in love"?

In her personal life, Kamala Das had always faced frustration, but her poetry proved to be the  
medium for the outlet of her feeling of frustration, and the purgation of this feeling is quite  
evident:

"You let me use my youth like coins  
Into various hands, you let me mate with shadows, You  
let me sing in empty shrines, you let your wife Seek  
Ecstasy in other's arms".

Kamala Das writes about herself, imparting a personal touch to words like -

"Chose my clothes for me  
My tutor, my hobbies, my friends  
And at fifteen, with my first saree  
You picked me, husband".

The new writings have put Das on a higher pedestal than earlier. There are more fresh  
avenues to research and reassess her literary works regarding new approaches and principles  
such as cultural and ecocritical theories. Since most of her works are replete with the place,

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she loves Kerala, known as God's Own Country. Kamala Das' literary works are erotic, sexual, confessional, feministic, and psychological, but a voice for the Indian women to show the world the suppressed cries, and she took upon herself the task of working as a mouthpiece for women's freedom and the psychologically and emotionally oppressed women.

In conclusion, one can say from the feminine perspective that Kamala Das's poetry is about her alienation, societal imprisonment, and failure to get real love in life. She expresses in her poetry awareness of her surroundings, their sordidness, ugliness, dirtiness, poverty, and selfishness. Her search for ideal love branches into an unloved person revolting against one. She feels agony for her imperfect self; she wants to seek union with the divine self. Her frankness in *My Story* about her extra-marital love affairs has sent shock waves to her family members and close relatives. In her autobiography, she mixes fact with fiction. She finds city life civil and corrupt.

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