Preface

To assert that Kamala Das is one of the two or three most important living English poets in India is almost a critical commonplace. Though Das’s poetry is not easily available for literary interpretations, yet taking it up for research work is an exciting task, particularly when she has been variously interpreted/misinterpreted owing to her unabashed tone of anger and violence in expressing the feminine concerns, and demands for feminine freedoms and choices. For all such readers whose reading habits are soaked in the centuries of representative writings, all kinds of suggestions through delicate gestures of language and life become puzzling matters. While the writer intends to indicate, just indicate towards a certain abstract essence of life, the reader in vain searches for a literal label for all such assertions. Gone are the eras of assertions. Only we have indications of inner anxieties to be evacuated through the same old botched language nurtured by a botched culture.

Manipulating the subtleties of language for the purpose of artistic expertise is the unique privilege of the creative writers. Kamala Das, for whom English is a second language, could acquire for herself a first rate creative expertise in handling English language for her enviable poetic purpose. Since all the tell tale stories of cultures and societies are half-truths pleasantly fabricated into plasticized facets of language, the whole truth, as and when uttered, as in Kamala Das, becomes an unw withstandable fact that undercuts the superstructure, and pulls down the multi-storeyed mansions built on bleak plinths or no plinths at all.

Kamala Das had picked up most of the forward-looking ideas concerning women’s liberation from the European avant-garde feminist writers like Simone
de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf. Insofar as her poetry takes its life-blood from the European feminist liberation movement, there is a profound point, that too an urgent one, in what all she talks and chatters ragingly like an inspired schizophrenic. In fact her schizophrenia is not a psychological deformity. On the other hand, it is a poetic fact that conformed her poetic themes into the most urgent issues that needed apt resolutions and answers. In her poetry she untiringly argues that there is a great need for a humanistic and humanized reformation in the attitudes and dispositions of men towards their women, and that only such an understanding atmosphere can ultimately pave way for a better state of happiness for humanity in the future. Therefore, it is high time an altogether different readership was built up for Kamala Das’s poetry, which demands a serious and sympathetic attempt on the part of the reader to assume upon himself the actor’s trunk of interior paramour in being one with her subtle and vibrant exposition of woman’s psyche.

This work is a concentrated study on Kamala Das’s treatment of her psychic violence in her poetry. It becomes pertinent to clarify that in the whole thesis, the word ‘violence’ is taken as a syndrome representing a sort of metaphysical rebellion, anger, and angst, manifesting itself as vehement poetic fury with the help of powerful images and symbols. Violence as such can be understood as fallout of inexpressible emotions and the ensuing suffocation.

The whole thesis is divided into a seven-chapter format. The first chapter is an attempt to introduce Kamala Das as one of the few living Indian poets of
substance, and also as the only woman poet of international standing in the Indo-Anglian poetic milieu. A brief study of the feminist movement of the West is also attempted in this chapter in order to project Das as the Indian counterpart of the feminist writers of the West. Also a succinct historical perspective of the earlier Indian women poetry in English is taken up in order to show how Das distances herself from the earlier poets. This chapter also attempts to view Das as a modern poet displaying all the properties of modernism in her poetry. A small biographical sketch and her quantitative achievements in Indian writing in English are given at the end of the chapter.

The second chapter discusses the main sources of her poetic violence from both the angles of Indian woman’s predicament and from the poet’s own biographical particulars. The third chapter is a natural sequel of the previous chapter in the sense that after the ‘sources,’ it instantly becomes pertinent to look at the targets towards which her poetic violence is directed. So it is tried to juxtapose at the receiving end the two main targets of her poetic violence, viz., nature and fellowmen. The fourth chapter puts a glance at the journey of the poet’s own self through the labyrinthine grooves of life, and the frustration she has had in her experiments with love and lust. The fifth chapter explores the essential philosophy behind violence and rebellion in general and also as to how this philosophy works in Das’s poetry. It is tried to base her poetic violence on instinctive aberrations and also on theories of metaphysical rebellion as suggested by Albert Camus. The sixth chapter takes up a new but essential question as to
how all this poetic anger and violence is converted into a profound aesthetic formula of expression in Kamala Das. An attempt has been made to explore and unveil the poetic self, struggling between the creaturely dispositions of earthly life and the unattainable transcendental heights. The seventh and concluding chapter initially deals with some unfounded charges of pornography and exhibitionism on the author by her negative critics. However, the chapter sums up the overall discussion with a suggestion to look at the entire poetic property of Kamala Das as a humanistic and aesthetic document intended to enlighten and educate the fellowmen for a better understanding of feminine predicaments and demands, and thereby pave way for a better future of human society.

As regards the mechanics of composing and documenting the text, the thesis strictly follows the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Fourth Edition. Accordingly, for citing quotations from secondary sources, generally the names of the authors are incorporated in the text; and each quotation is followed by a parenthetical reference of the page number of the work from which it is taken. Also, each quotation from the primary sources is followed by a shortened name of the work and the relevant page number. Then, an alphabetical list of “Works Cited” is given at the end of the thesis. The “Select Bibliography” is an additional document showing the complete list of works consulted for the purpose of the research.

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