CHAPTER-III

CATEGORIES OF THOUGHT
KAMALA DAS
The history of Indian poetry has been mainly a story of male voice. Women played negligible role to disturb the male tyranny. Torus and Sarojinis were few but they were emotional at filial and patriotic levels only. They do not have courage to revolt against their sufferings and sex humiliations. By writing about self the woman writer externalizes and universalizes her inner experiences to subverts patriarchal system of society. The personal experiences of an individual expressed through her writings becomes a part of the universal experience of womanhood. There is a common ground upon which woman could share their views and express their opinions, despite the uniqueness and individuality of each woman’s personal experience as Gail Chester and Sigrid Nielson explains, “We may not have identical experience, but that does not mean we can not share our different experiences. In writing for other women, we reinterpret our own experience in a way, which brings us closer together. And women’s experience is not only the sum total of each woman’s memories, but a collective possession, a tradition which shapes the way we view our individual lives”.¹

In the process of redefining the self, the woman writer often explores her body and biological sensations in sexual terms. But, it is not only female body that can be put at the centre of a search for female identity, other factors are also responsible which can not be ignored easily.
Women's imagination is inexhaustible and the stream of phantasms is incredible. Her imagery is broadened through her past experiences which were always present in her store house. The diversity of female experience differ from person to person and country to country. But there is always a quest in woman to rise above the level of subjugation, provided her by social ties. Her feminine ego hurts when she is suppressed by man. She want to free herself from his pre-defined codes. A woman need to expand by getting emotional sympathy, true love and affection. Her traditions and social backgrounds also play an important role to affect her psyche and to expand her thinking. In the absence of love, she explode like a blast to express herself fully.

Kamala Das is the most important poet among the women poets of India writing in English. Her feminine sensibility is manifested in her rapture and excitement in receiving pure love and in disillusionment when gates of paradise are bolted by males. "Kamala Das did display tremendous courage in revolting against the sexual colonialism and providing hope and confidence to young women that they can refuse and reject victim positions, that they can frustrate the sexist culture's effort to exploit, passivise and marginalise women," says Kaur. Kamala Das confronts in its ugliest and brutal forms. Her poetry shows agonies of women emerging from the state of bondage to find her true identity and the real self. Her poems are the expression of the pitiable plight of a defendless woman who needs love, consideration and sympathy of a loving husband.
Kamala Das's poetry presents Indian woman in a way that gives her pride for real sense of living. She started a new age for woman writers and draws Indian consciousness upon its own socio-cultural drawbacks. People like the poetry of Kamala Das because she frankly speaks about her sex life. This shows that the reader reacts what is in his mind and not what is in the poem. Kamala Das is a poet of new dimension of thoughts. Her thoughts and feelings are expressed in a very compelling way. She herself writes, "The language one employs is not important, what is important is the thought contained by the words". The dynamic current of her poetry flows from her ever-active and overcharged personality. I. K. Sharma says, "She is not a poet of verbal excellences; she is a poet of powerful thoughts."

Kamla Das's repetition of themes, subject matter and classes of poems, in poem after poem provides her emotional purgation, ultimate tranquility and serenity. According to Ramachandran Nair, "She is the silent devadasi who often tumultuous peregrinations through life realises that 'all faces look alike' and all things 'bear a common signature' and therefore, returns to the 'temple steps' of her own self in utter humility and serenity." She has written rebellions literature to purge out her painful sufferings completely and to win faithful sympathy from her readers. She is a poet of new millennium who dares to express herself against marital and social taboos associated with a woman. She wants to rise above love, lust and sexual frustration. Her painful past forced her to think deeply on the issues of life and on going streams of ideas, conflicting in her mind.
forced her to openly assert everything. Her powerful thoughts wants an outlet thus her poetry overflows. The poet's main concern is to achieve a new objective and it is not possible through a sensibility that is associated with traditions for its expression. The poet's past experiences helps to evolve from traditional norms. M. Elias says, "The poet's experiences act as the determining factor in its development". Her poems were born through her patient waiting in bitter experiences for delivering of thoughts in a rhythm. Hence, many reasons are responsible to write frank and shocking literature.

**ACTIVE STREAMS OF IDEAS:**

The Indian women poets with their love for the intensely personal confessional mode of writing and with the attraction for the feminist views were all actively writing poetry. Kamala Das is among them who are investigators of impulses. She is obsessed with the flow of her experiences. Being a natural poet, her poems poetically show different levels depending upon the space time effect on her senses and intellect. A natural poet like Kamala Das promoted by this spatio-temporal effect, continues writing till the inspiration fades away. In Kamala Das's words, "I write only at night when I am left alone and every one else is asleep. Then the world suddenly comes to focus, becomes more my own". It is only her creative writing through which she rescue herself from her suffering and humiliations. Iqbal Kaur says, "Kamala Das tried to falsify reality which made her feel helpless. It was only in creative writing that she could freely express her desire for a radical change in the existing social
reality which she thought was crippling." Writing for Kamala Das was an act of confrontation and not a means of an escape from the reality. Kamla Das’s poetry is spontaneous, straightforward and very simple in language. She opens up new spheres of feelings and emotions. The sudden excitement of the poet’s creative faculty by some impulses generated by any stimulus, results in poetry. N. V. Raveendran says, “What she presents before the reader is a synthesis of rare and contrasting thoughts of lonely minds. She perceives the world as one perceives it in a dream. Though she believes that she has not achieved the emotional maturity to write sublime poetry, her heart flows in words abounding in sensual rhythms and soulful laments. The experience she concretises is her’s as well as anybody else’s.”

The active and continuous stream of ideas arise in Kamala Das due to her painful past experiences. Absence of love in her childhood and sexual exploitation in marital life are the causes that made her frustrated and unhappy woman. In disillusionment she starts writing. Kamala Das’s life began with neglect, which affected the psyche of this hypersensitive child and our childhood determines our roles and purpose of our future of what is to come. The acute consciousness of social as well as parental neglect in the childhood of Kamala Das made her a person of different personality. She was always neglected by her parents and her husband. Iqbal Kaur is of opinion, “… she found that not love, not companionship not the union of two souls but neglect and neglect alone was in store for her”. Her rejection from everywhere pained her too much that utter disgust forced and activate her mind to purge out.
Right from her childhood there were several causes which led to the feeling of inferiority in her, the British rule being one of them. Kamala Das was a dark Indian child in her British School where she was neglected due to her dark complexion. The white children around her were "pampered" and "cared". Kamala Das herself was aware of her physical, social, marital and economic weaknesses. It is obvious that the British rule suppressed her self-esteem, self-expression and freedom. In her school white and beautiful children were pampered most. She herself says in My Story: "When the dignitaries arrived, it was always Shirley who carried up the banquet ... when the visitors came the brown children were always discreetly hidden away, swept under the carpet, told to wait in the corridor behind the lavatories where the school ayahs kept them company".\textsuperscript{11}

So, the Europeans reduced her to the sense of nothingness and inflicted her mind with the feelings of inferiority. She felt that dark colour complexion received nothing but rejection from the society as a dwarf man or woman receive. This results only in the feelings of inferiority and loss of self-confidence that made one powerless and insignificant. Her mental restlessness over her dark complexion were expressed in her writings. She felt that she was not beautiful and glamorous. She writes "I remember going to our cook in the afternoon and asking him secretly if I were really ugly",\textsuperscript{12} again "Am I ugly, I asked Carlo"\textsuperscript{13} Her physical inferiority gave her sexual inferiority too in male-dominated world where every man is interested only in physicality. Obviously, beauty for her had a great compensated value. She says, "I hated to see myself as I really was, in
mirrors which threw back at me the pathetic contours of my thin body and the
plain face with the protruding teeth".\textsuperscript{14}

Another aspect of inferiority in Kamala Das is economic inferiority. She talks about her "Sarees were patched up in places clumsily". She felt inferior to those who were fair complexioned and those who were loved. She also feel inferior to those who had enough money to dress up nicely. The inferiority in Kamala Das had another dimension of cultural inferiority. For her friends she writes: "They came from a background very different from mine. They thought it normal for children to wear good clothes and tie satin ribbons in their hair. They wanted to see me look as pretty as their sisters and cousins who were of my age."\textsuperscript{15} The condition of neglect remained same after her marriage. She never got love from her husband. She writes:

"...I asked for love, not knowing what
else to ask! For, he drew a youth of
sixteen into the bedroom and closed the
door. He did not beat me! But my sad
woman-body felt so beaten! The weight
of my breasts and womb crushed me..."\textsuperscript{16}

Kamala Das feels frustrated and disappointed about her marriage, as she had no part in the selection of her future husband, she writes, "My life had been planned and its course charted by my parents and relatives"\textsuperscript{17} Kamala Das could not love him whole heartedly, she remained a virgin for a fortnight after marriage while her husband was after some other ladies. Her expectations of happy married life were flopped because
her husband was only interested in her body. He never tried to fulfil her psychological needs. The sexual satisfaction for Mr. Das was the highest satisfaction. Thus, Kamala Das realized that she would not be able to satisfy her husband. Kamala Das always searched a right man who can provide her love and company. She thought if marriage is for any convenience then it is only for psychological convenience and emotional companionship and it is never for sexual convenience. She wants to hear “I love you” from husband but her husband can never satisfy her emotional needs. She herself gave the idea of a lover, in a later chapter of My Story:

Thus, being an unloving child, unloving student and also an unloving wife, she felt self-suffocated and lonely and in absolute negation of love her thoughts became more and more powerful. Then she start finding an outlet. Her writing sad poems at an early age of six reflects her overwhelming sense of deprivation which she wants to overcome with the help of bold creativeness.

Kamala Das confesses her guilt, and faults very open heartedly to empty herself. So that, she can purge out her all griefs and sorrows. As S. D. Sharma says, “Kamala Das’s poetry has a very strong element of catharsis.” But she never feels shy in expressing her frailties and virtues as a woman. She feels happy, “by confessing/ by peeling off layers” and says by admitting her guilt she reaches “closer to the soul/ and to the bone’s/ Supreme indifference.” She openly asserts: “I must let my mind striptease / I must extrude / autobiography.”
The portrait of the woman persona that emerges out of Kamala Das’s poems is a complex one because she reveals her feminine sensibility in different roles such as neglected wife, neglected child, beloved granddaughter, sister, mother, mistress and even a nymphomaniac. Hence, Kamala Das has more to say about the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role in society to the active role in culmination. The active streams of ideas are born through her painful experiences. The learning phase of her life may be called as ‘Preservation Phase’ or ‘Sthiti’ according to the Indian philosophy of ‘Dance of Shiva.’

**PASSIVE FORCES:**

There are some reasons, which are not visible on the surface but are passively active in a woman like Kamala Das to express herself. These forces work as the real strength of poet’s mind to write strong poetry and encourage for better perception. The female self of a woman like Kamala Das needs expansion from her limits and not extinction. Kamala Das has a quest to identity herself by expanding herself beyond the social limits.

It is difficult for a new woman like Kamala Das to accept the male as the “whole” and the female as only the “other” or “alien” in society. Her feminine ego hurts due to these suppressions. It is for this reason her poetry and prose, especially her autobiography is a very strong feminist revolt against male superiority and sovereignty. She laments for the degradation of real feminine glory of woman who has been always seen through men’s eyes just as a womb, an ovary, and nothing more than this.
The woman persona of Kamala Das wants to expand her for this purpose her creative writing helps in opening up the mysteries that are kept hidden in the man's society. She wants to present the truth of self-selfish man who wants to keep woman inferior to him and hence, tied her into fetters of social bondages and traditions. But it is Kamala Das who made man's power weak and expanded herself to be strong. Her writings gave her a platform and a new voice that forced man to listen her. Her expansion lies in creative writing, in associating herself with the elements of nature, in escaping from the burdensome and in relating her selfish present to her happy past and in pursuing a quest for an immortal, ideal love.

Kamala Das wants to be "essential" and "powerful" through her writings. She chose to write to falsify the male view that women are incapable of intelligent tasks and they are only machines of producing children, which is also not possible without male active contribution. Iqbal Kaur says, "... Kamala Das cannot accept the male idea of the intellectual inferiority and irrationality of women. She can not accept, the view that woman are not capable of imaginative thinking." She used creative writing as a tool for exposing the sexiest culture in which women live. My Story is an honest approach of Kamala Das to expose man. She loved her readers more than any other thing. She says, "I learnt for the first time to be miserly with my energy, spending it only on my writing, which I enjoyed more than anything else in the world" and "Large areas of my ignorance had been obliterated by the lessons I had learnt from my life and
I want my readers to know of it. I had realised by them that the writer has none to love her but the readers.24

There is a quest in Kamala Das to emerge very powerful in her poetry. So that the things lying concealed under social disorder should come out by her and a woman who is subjected only to be exploited so inhumanely, should be exposed completely. She is so honest in writing her private experiences in love and in sex that they are candidly confessional and absolutely forthright. Poetry is strongest outlet for her. The best confessional poetry rises above subject matter to achieve victory over pain and defeat that shows triumph over life. Kamala Das raises her confessional traits to the level of a specific universal appeal. Hence, the struggle of oneself ultimately becomes the struggle of the whole womanhood.

Kamala Das is a true confessional poet because even suicide is a subject she is ready to confess. But she never made serious attempt of suicide. A person who is obsessed with the idea of death must believe in life after death. Kamala Das explains in an interview: "I sincerely wish to believe in re-incarnation... There must be an unbroken chain linking us with ourselves, our future avatars."25

In re-incarnating and expanding herself Kamala Das endears sea as a nature's element because of its vastness, its innocence and its immeasurability. She compares the vastness of her pains, feelings and emotions to the vastness of the sea. She finds sea as a place for redemption and thinks its water will wash out her painful passions and involvements. She realizes that she has proved herself a failure in her life and could not
achieve anything permanent. All her ties and bondages mean nothing. Hence, she chooses to go to the sea:

*All I want now/ Is to take a long walk/ Into the sea/ And lie there, resting/ Completely uninvolved.*

Kamala Das sees a compassionate human companion in the personality of the sea to whom she can open out her unbearable sufferings and pains. Das finds an escape in sea for her own release and desired expansion. Making sea intimate, she writes:

*Holding you is easy, / Clutching at moving water/ I tell you sea, / This is easy, / But to hold him for half a day/ Was a difficult task / It required drinks/ To hold him down/ To make him love.*

Thus, the poet is more comfortable with sea and replaced the place of her husband by it. Hence, a shift in male-figure and its substitution rather than rejection can be seen. But sometimes her identity is quite different from sea and an inner conflict of suicide in the sea is seen while at other times she reduces the function of sea to a child’s game:

*How easy your duties are/ How simple/ Only roar, a hungry roar,/ Leap forward,/ And retreat,/ You swing and you swing,/ O’ sea you play a child’s game.*

Again, she becomes fed up with her life and begs sea to take away her body and release her choked soul:
Bereft of body/ My soul shall be free

In ‘The Invitation’, Kamala Das tries to retain her own identity as being ego-centric to define her final union with the sea for the significance of her own consummation:

O Sea, let me shrink or grow, Slosh up, / Slide down, go your way/ I will go mine.

Thus, sea expands her personality. She feels the vastness and immeasurability of a woman like sea. Expansion of self can also be possible by relating herself to her happy past where her grand mother gave her love and affection. When her present becomes burdensome and painful, partly because of the futility of the selfish bodily relationships and partly because of the fear of ageing and death. And when future of uncertainties approaches, the poet is left without any direction to expand its self but to fall back on the past memories which never loses its meaning. It’s a kind of fruitful escape from the loneliness of the body to the loneliness of mind where the past has already acquired a definite dimension. This love for the past is used as a mode of relief that remains central to the creative consciousness.

Kamala Das no longer needs the ties of relationships she wants only tenderness:

Love/ I no longer need, / With tenderness I’m most content, / I have learnt that friendship/ Cannot endure/ That blood-ties do not satisfy.
She finds tenderness in the personality of her grand mother that brings the poet the vistas of childhood's long innocence. She recollects:

*We shall talk, she said/ Darling, / We shall talk all night, / And in the evening. / She kept a lighted lantern/ On the window sill,/ And sat up waiting for me.*

In "Blood" Das realizes the pain of losing her great grandmother:

*When they burnt my great grandmother over logs of the mango tree/ I looked once at the house/ for I thought I saw the windows close/ Like the closing of the eyes/ I thought I heard the pillars groan/ And the darkrooms have a sigh.*

Whenever Kamala Das feels lonely she fly back in the lap of her grand mother who provided her love and tenderness both. Das represents her allegiance to the grandmother in such a manner as through the grandmother was always present there to share her own burden of ageing and loneliness.

To expand herself the poet also tries to make a relationship with Lord Krishna, which cannot be corrupted by selfishness, body and time. Hence, there is a shift in her attitude from body or self has taken place. This shift is from passion to devotion, body to soul, from information to knowledge and wisdom.
Kamala Das depicts the situation in the poem ‘The Maggots’, where, when her husband kisses her, poet reminds of her invisible lover Krishna. This happened because the self of the poet is no more interested in body. Thus, her love has been transformed into devotion. In the other poem “Krishna” Das shows her intensity of love for Krishna, as it is not the physical pleasures she tries to get from her eternal lover. But the significance of the body cannot be divided easily as the formless can be given a farm only through the body. She writes:

Your body is my prison, Krishna /
I can not see beyond it, Your darkness
blinds me/ Your love words shut out
the wise world’s din.34

Here, Kamala Das expands herself and her vision upto the prismatic body of Krishna where she herself gets baffled like a wanderer in search of peace. In ‘Ghanashyam’ she reflects a very different personality of her lover. Krishna who is the eternal lover has no body but can embody all light and colours.

But at each turn when I near you/
like a spectral flame you vanish.35

The poet then metamorphosis the ‘spectral flame’ into a fisherman whose enchanted net attracts the fishes of Radhas, generation after generation. And finally, Das is successful in giving a definite human form to the eternal lover.
Shyam, O Ghanshyam / you have like a
fisherman cast your net to the narrows/
of my mind/ And towards you my thoughts
today/ Must race like enchanted fish.  

Thus, in ‘Ghanshyam’, Kamala Das talks not only about physical evolution but also about spiritual evolution:

Ghanshyam,/ you have like a koel
built your/ Nest in the arbour of my
heart/ My life, until now a sleeping
jungle/ Is at last astir with music /
You lead me along a route: I have
never known before.  

Some of Kamala Das’s poems on Radha Krishna myth namely ‘Ghanshyam’, ‘Radha’, ‘The Maggots’, ‘Radha Krishna’, etc. shows her belief in spiritual evolution of man. In the lines which reflects her nostalgic reminiscence reverberates throughout a conflict between the body and the soul as in the poem ‘Blood’:

O mother’s mother’s mother/ I have
plucked your soul/ like a pip from a
fruit/And have plung it into your pyre/
Call me callous/ call me selfish/ But do
not blame my blood/ So thin, so clean,
so fine/ The oldest blood in the world/
That remembers as it flows/ All the germs
and all the gold/And all the perfumes and
the oils/ And the stately/ Elephant ride ....
Also in ‘Contacts’:

*When I/sleep, the outside/ Would Crumbles,
all contacts/ Broken. So, in that longer sleep/
Only/The world/ Shall die and I/Remain, just
being/ Also being a remaining.*

Thus, a systematic idea can be made through a careful and discriminating perusal of her poetry and also because of her helplessness in the stark realities of life. The quest for identifying herself through expansion shows an enlightenment and illusionment phase. This shows ‘Samhara’, the destruction of worthless.

**SOCIAL PREDICAMENT vs. BIOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL TRUTH:**

In the present age, male-dominion women have forced to occupy a secondary place in the world, since patriarchal times, in spite of the fact that woman constitute at least half of the human race. Iqbal Kaur described this difference and termed it as sexual politics. He says “Man is superior God live: female is inert passive ‘doomed to immanence by man’”

This phenomenon of male dominance is universal. Eve was made from “a supernumerary bone of Adam”. Aristotle believed that the female is female by virtue of certain lack of qualities. Plato thanked God that he was created a man not a woman. This kind of sexual politics and partiality in the society always received the bonds between men and women, but since women is the creator of mankind, she should not be considered inferior.
Woman is defined as "the sex", the "absolute sex" and nothing more than this, by the man made society. Kamala who dislikes this definition of womanhood, revolts against sexual exploitation of female body. She hates when somebody calls a woman "the second sex" a "doormat" or a "prostitute". As Margaret Atwodd's Bodily Harm shows that being a woman means being powerless. Similarly Kamala Das says, "I felt then a revulsion for my womanliness. The weight of my breast seemed to be crushing me. My private part was only a wound, the soul's wound showing through."  

When sexuality is written frankly in a society by a woman, which expects a women to be modest and submissive, it forms an act of rebellion like Kamala Das's writing. Her principle achievement has been to define and expose, the prison in which a woman finds herself trapped. Kamala Das is basically a poet of feminine problems. Her works reflects a restless and sensitive woman moving in the male-dominated society. She appears as a champion of woman's cause.

Kamala Das revolts when a woman is only supposed as a commodity of man's use. She revolts against masculine character of our civilization but at the same time shows her helplessness and restlessness over women's passive acceptance of all those things which are appointed for a woman before her birth, by the society to suppress her. Kamala Das feels uneasy with her mother's "timidity" in father's relation. Her father who thought himself sovereign expected total positively and submission from his wife. Kamala Das felt trapped, imprisoned in a hostile world,
realizing that for a woman, howsoever brave she may be, it is difficult to create a reality other than what society created for a woman because of the teachings instilled from her childhood.

Kamala Das revolted against the male tyrannies in poems like “A Relationship”, “Summer in Calcutta”, “An Introduction” and “Marine Drive”. Kamala Das’s effect was electrical, she shows a deep distaste towards male superiority in her poetry. She wants to rise above the social, religious and marital taboos associated with a woman in the society. Hence, she always wrote on the theme of independence as in the poem ‘The Conflagration’:

*Woman, is this happiness, this lying
burried/Beneath a man? It’s time again
to come alive,/ The world extends a lot
beyond his six foot frame.*

This type of frank and inhibited independence becomes the focal point of her prose writing too like essays, ‘Why not more than one husband’, ‘What women expect from marriage and what they get?’. She writes: “I plead for the return of a social order that allowed a woman to have more than one husband and if she so desired. ‘Only a writer who has brought up in a narrow society or in a passive atmosphere, could write like this. She comes out as a leader of women’s liberation movement in society. The secret hopes and fears of womankind are expressed in her poem ‘Afterwards’:
Son of my womb, / Ugly in loneliness. / 
You walk the world's bleary eye / 
Like a grit. Your cleverness/shall not 
be your doom/As ours was.\textsuperscript{43}

Similarly, the monotomy and tiresomeners of a married life can be seen: 

\textit{I shall someday leave, leave the cocoon/} 
\textit{You built around me with morning tea,/} 
\textit{Love-words flung from doorways and} 
of \textit{course/You tried lust. I shall someday} 
take/Wings, fly around....\textsuperscript{44}

Here, Kamala Das speaks as a ‘Liberated’ woman who wants to break ‘the cocoon’ built around her and desires to fly. She talks about the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role of married life to get liberty. According to Kamala Das marriage was love and hated the idea of marriage for sex. For her, love and marriage both are something more than physical relationship. She actually wants sympathy, companionship and understanding from her husband. Her need for love and care could never be understood by her husband. Iqbal Kaur says, “… Mr. Das failed to handle her psychologically. The mutual rapport was missing right from the beginning.”\textsuperscript{45} Emotional love alone could make her feel secure. Kamala Das always need emotional love but her husband terribly obsessed with sex.\textsuperscript{46} According to Iqbal Kaur, ‘She had a feeling that if marriage was for convenience at all, it was for psychological convenience. She could not bear being alone. Therefore, her idea of marriage was marriage for
companionship, not for sex. She craved to hear "I love you". In strong need of love, she writes:

I want to be loved/And/If love
is not to be had/ I want to be
dead, just dead.47

Kamala Das wants to bloom fully and spread fragrance all over. She is drawn towards the physical, the mundane, the materialistic aspects of life. As a woman in love, she surrenders every bit of her physical possessions to be fully consummated. She tries to revolt the traditional bondage given to women in marriage. She openly articulate of her sufferings due to loss of her liberty. Therefore, the freedom, becomes an obsession with her. In the poem ‘Of Calcutta’ she exposes her inner pangs arised from the traditional custom or ritual called marriage:

I was sent away, to protect a family’s/
Honour, to save a few cowards, to defend
some/ Abstractions, sent to another city
to be/A relative’s wife, a hausfrau for his
home, and/A mother for his sons, yet another
nodding/Doll for his parlour a walkie talkie
one to warm his bed at night.48

A terrible sense of freedom arised when her freedom is lost. She realizes her utter helplessness when none other than her own husband sexually exploits her. She condemns her husband who was only concerned with her organic body:
You were pleased/ With by body's response,
it's weather, its usual shallow./ Convulsions.
You dribbled spittle into/My mouth, your
poured/Yourself into every nook and cranny/
you Embalmed, / My poor lust with your
bitter-sweet Juices.49

The woman persona inside her rises above in a mood of revolt.
Her love poems are unconventional. In her essay, "I have Lived Beautifully," she says her married life was doomed to fail right from the beginning:

"My husband was immersed in his office work, and after work there was the dinner, followed by sex. Where was there any time left for him to want to see or the dark buffalocs of the slopes?"50 Hence, the failure of love is linked with the birth of poetry in Kamala Das. The following is a fine piece of poetry from the poem 'A Relationship' written to celebrate the body:

Yes, / It was my desire that made him male/
And beautiful, so that when at last we met/
To believe that once I knew not his/ Form,
his quiet touch, or the blind kindness/ Of his
lips was hard indeed. Betray me? Yes, he can,
but never physically ... My body's wisdom
tells and tells again/ That I shall find my rest,
my sleep, my peace/And even death nowhere
else but here in betrayer's arms....51
The hatred of poet for the body is seen in the poem ‘A Request’:

When I die/ Do not throw/ The meat
and bones away/ But pile them up/ And
let them tell/ By their smell/ What life was
worth/ In the end.52

It shows that she is fed up with the present way of her life where no hope for redemption itself.

A feminist vision is coiled by the female biology. She feels uneasy with burden of a female body. Perhaps this is one way of articulating the desire of liberty rooted very deep inside the unconscious of the female psyche. She writes:

I was not told what would happen when a girl entered puberty. Then one day while the blood flowed between my thighs I wept out of fear, assuming that some internal organ had ruptured and that I was going to die. Nobody had even told me of a woman’s menstrual cycle and of her magical secretions, to prepare me for womanhood. And at fifteen as a bride, wearing braces on my teeth, I saw a man’s nudity for the first time, and was shocked. It was so horribly menacing like a snake about to strike, I envied then the nuns, their security, the privacy of their genitalia. Of course I had no courage then to talk of the exercise in bed. Or of the soreness between the legs, which burned when I bathed the morning after. (“From a Writer’s Diary”, 26) Thus, her writings given ample proof of the poet’s dependence on the female body.
Kamala Das is a poet of love and sex. The theme of love is related to the theme of body in Mrs. Das verse. She both likes and dislikes her body. A woman is always conscious about her body, sometimes she feels exploited due to her body while other times she feels proud as she can make a man love easily due to her body. Thus, feminist critics argue that the women’s writing always proceeds from their bodies.

Kamala Das’s body is dark with ordinary features. She is very conscious about her physical appearance the tension of her physical appearance is most important part in her poetry. The imagery which arises from the physical or sensual aspect of body encompasses the vision of transcendence. This vision immortalizes love rather than immortalizing the female’s ego. Nirnajan Mohanty holds the view, “Das in her early poetry seems to romanticize the gender difference through her frank revelation of the anatomical imagery. In her later poetry she idealizes and immortalizes the gender differences by way of sublimating her feminine ego at the altar of Lord Krishna.”

The self of Das’s poetry is feminine that tries overcome the fetters of taboos and conventions of old society. It wants to free itself from the domination of the male dominated society. This self tries to seek it own identity, independent of the burdens of conservative society. But is it attainable? From an Indian context, this ideal feminine self hood lies not in assertion but it lies in her capacity to endure all the burdens of the family with patience. She is the only active member who
can hold every member together to achieve the domestic peace by providing them infinite love and care.

Kamala Das tries to by establish a permanent bondage with Lord Krishna who is the eternal love, to immortalizes her love. She tries to identity herself with the immortal lover.

A woman experiences her sense of joy in love, not by maintaining the distance from her lover, but by surrendering herself totally giving all her physical possession to him. It is love that melts all sorts of ego whether it is feminine or masculine. Its ultimate mission is union. It overcomes all that comes in the way of its consummation as kamala Das dismantles all her feminine ego in love and offer everything to the man to whom she loves:

"Give him all, Gift him what makes you 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."\(^{54}\)

The act of the body is a ritual for Kamala Das where one intends to maximize the satisfaction. She compares herself and her needs with every woman.

*Call, Him not by any name, he is every man,/ Who wants a woman, just as I am every woman who seeks love/ In him hungry haste of rivers, in me the ocean's tireless waiting.*\(^{55}\)
Here, man is like a river and woman is like sea but by comparing man-woman she does not try to prove the superiority of woman over man. Perhaps she tries to assert the complementarily of the man-woman relationship at the altar of love. Her major obsessions is loss of a woman’s freedom in an Indian society, she perpetuates her quest of freedom in many poems and often raises her move against the male-dominance and its bondage called as ‘marriage’ where she feels like an imprisoned soul she cries in anguish and pain for the loss of her liberty:

\[ I \text{ was sent away to protect a family's/} \\
\text{Honour, to save a few cowards, to defend} \\
\text{some/Abstractions sent to another city to be/} \\
\text{A relative's wife, hausfrau for his home, and/} \\
\text{A mother for his sons, yet another nodding/} \\
\text{Doll for his parlour, a walkie talkie one to/} \\
\text{Warm his bed at night.}^{56} \]

She realizes that marriage degenerates slowly and eats away her sense of liberty:

\[ \text{Here in husband's home, I am a trained} \\
\text{circus dog/Jumping my routing hoops} \\
\text{each day, where's my soul, My spirit, where} \\
\text{the muted tongue of my desire?}^{57} \]

Her suppressed anger burst when her liberty is lost, she feels insecurity and helplessness. She raises her voices against the “skin-communicated thing.”
Kamala Das feels the need of tenderness in relations but in the process of living and loving, the tenderness gets lost. In place of tenderness she receives an illusory bondage.

*You turn me into bird of stone, a granite/
Dove, you build round me a shabby drawing
room/And stoke my pitted face absent
mindedly while/You read with loud talk
you bruise my pre-morning sleep/You stick
a finger into my dreaming eye.*

This type of open hearted confession shows her honesty and purity in her poetry.

Kamala Das is the first woman poet to write about the problems of Indian woman in general. Her poetry gives energy, strength and a vision to the other Indian women writes or poets to explore the tortures hidden embedded in the Indian tradition, Indian female body and her psyche. Her writings reflects several humiliations encountered not only by her own self but by the whole womanhood. It is through her poetry that she makes an honest attempt to unravel the secrets of her own self or of her identity as a woman. The manner of celebrating her identity as a woman reminds one of the poem of Gallagher, “Instructions to the Double”.

*Let/
The man follow you on the street/
With their clumsy proportions, their/
Loud hatreds of this and that Keep/
Walking Keep your head/
Up.*
In the same poem she advises:

If any one calls you a witch/
Burn for him; if any one calls you/
Less or more you are/
Let him burn for you.  

Gallagher transcends the geographical limits of her country and becomes universal. Kamala Das assumes such a pioneering role to alert other women in her poetry. She cautions them on the basis of her own experiences for their biodegradation by the male. To alert and to present the truth she confessed her most intimate experiences also. For this Niranjan Mohanty says, "... through confession only the self that confesses crosses the margins of the self and merges with the rest, and becomes universal."  

Through the medium of poetry, she seeks to be recognized as herself, she want to be free from the male-dominance. She wants to be a self that realizes the oppressive forces which deny her dignity as a woman. But realization of the limitation of such a self and of the means to overcome those limitations therapeutic in itself. Das finds out that a woman's body is generated by the male-dominance in Indian family and society. But Das has courage to protect against the forces which reduced her to the status of a commodity. A woman experiences exploitation and suppression, most due to her own body. Thus, Kamala Das tries to suggest through her poetry that woman does not exist merely in her bodily form. There are various ways by which society has taken away the freedom of a woman. This became the central theme of Das's poetry that proves the
necessity of her freedom. Therefore her protest is focused against the marriage system in India, as in “Of Calcutta” the frankly and honestly describes the pangs of an Indian married woman.

She writes:

I was sent away, to protect a family’s
Honour, to save a few cowards, to defend
some Abstractions, sent to another city to be
A relative’s wife, a hausfrau for his home, and
A mother for his son, get another nodding
Doll for his parlour, a walkie talkies to one
Warm his bed at night.\(^{62}\)

She realizes that because of her husband and marriage, she gets back a serious setback and a sense of insecurity born in her. In “Substitute” she intensifies her agonized state:

It will be alright when I learn
To point my mouth like a clown’s
It will be a alright If I put up my
hair Stand near my husband to
make a proud pair. \(^{63}\)

She knows the fact that in an Indian society, woman has to raise their voice against the old conventional rules. Das’s protest is directed against those cultural values with have rooted in man a certain kind of superiority and not really directed to man in general. She is always hopeful that the time will come when Indian situations will change, she wants to fly away into a world where she can have freedom and respect as a woman.
I shall someday leave, Leafe the cocoon/
You built around me with morning tea/
Love words flung from doorways and
of course/Your tired lust, I shall some
day take/Wings, fly around, as often
petals/Do when free in air. \(^{64}\)

She realizes the futility of physical pleasures and willing to
transcend the world of the body, of infinite female hungers. As in “Gino”:

This body that I wear without joy,
this body/Burdened with lenience,
slender toy, owned/ By man of substance,
shall perhaps wither, battling with
My darlings impersonal lust. \(^{65}\)

She knows very well the nature of time and what time does to
human body. The process of ageing captures the poet’s mind. She is no
more interested in celebrating the body, even if it is of female body.

Oh, what is the use now recounting
this, O’ what’s the bloody use my
knowing now when all the young
Years have sped along and I stand
before you like the wreck of your
dreams, the sad debris of storm,
breasts sagging, hair greying,
and the fine lines forming
Beneath my eyes. \(^{66}\)
RATIONALITY vs. TRADITION:

The concept of womanhood in the poems of Kamala Das would certainly seem to be quite unusual in the Indian society. She openly revolts against the traditionally accepted, blind and strange customs prevailed in Indian society. In the Indian tradition, the woman in general, required patience and courage to avoid any disequilibrium in the family relationship. Thus, the family in India is still more stable and family relationships are more gratifying and also encouraging. Victor S. D. Souza observes: "One may therefore, say that Unity and integrity of the joint family are maintained through the sub-ordination of woman by man. Infact, according to the traditional Hindu code, woman is always deemed to be subordinate to man, first to the father, then to her husband, and finally to her son".67

The Indian woman, does not mind this subordination in patriarchal family where man is head. It gives her an extra strength, patience and tolerance that makes her a key figure in bringing order, harmony, peace and prosperity to the family. But, in the changing pattern of society a woman, specially the educated one in India, is likely to feel uneasy to this burden of suppression. So, she tries to define her identity in terms of her rights and responsibilities.

Kamala Das never glorified this difference, she realizes a need of freedom. In a good number of poems, Das creates a self that would not submit to the social and traditional forces which suppress her sense of liberty from male dominion. With such a self, she protested with hidden
anger. Her value seeks to establish its identity independent of male-chavenism. She wants to bloomfully and spread fragrance all over.

Kamala Das ridicules traditional masculine strength and also man’s lust. It will be useful to consider the impact of the cultural heritage deriving from her community, the Nayars of Kerala. It is interesting that the society to which Kamala Das belongs is a matrilineal Nayar society (where woman is head) where sex is banned, she herself says in My Story, “No wonder the women of the best Nair families never mentioned sex. It was their principal phobia”.68 But is seems that Kamala Das mainly talks about sex. Perhaps it is because her feminine ego which gets hurt due to her Nayar traditions of sexual exploitation of females. Although, Kamala Das belong to matrilineal society she suffered being a woman because matrilineal society is not an exception to patriarchal rule, it simply carries the power held by males through female decline. Hence, females are only carriers of the customs made by man. In The Decline of Nayar Dominance. Robin Jeffery has noted: “According to the Brahminical tradition the creation of Kerala resulted from the banishment from India of the god Parasurama. Having nowhere to live, he won the permission of Varuna, the god of the sea, to reclaim all the land within a throw of his axe. Parasurama threw his axe from cape comorin to Gokarnam, th sea receded and Kerala was formed. To populate the new area, Brahmmins, the Nambudiris, and gave them ownership of all the land and unique customs which prevented their return to the India on the other side of the western ghats. Next, he brought Sundras – the Nayars – to act as the servants and
bodyguards of the Nambudiris. He bestowed on the Nayars the Marumakkattayam or Matrilineal system of family inheritance, and decreed that Nayars should have no formal marriage and that the women should always be available to satisfy the desires of the Nambudiris.\textsuperscript{69}

But the situation in which Nayar lived during the preceding centuries seems to change with time and their role as bodyguards. They gradually acquired the privileges of a military class. This transformation of the lowly Nayar from bodyguard and servant to administrator and ruler was inevitable because the head man of village in Kerala was usually a Nayar.\textsuperscript{70} Thus, it would appear that in an otherwise caste bound society, the Nayars possessed a remarkable social mobility which enabled the men of the community to rise according to their merits while the women had no hope of a similar advancement.

It is Kamala Das only who echoes the age-old sense of insecurity of Nayar women, condemned to a matrilineal system and their ways of living. The marriages were performed in a very strange manner. She writes in \textit{My Story} that the marriage of the Nayars was very simple the ritual lasts only a minute or two, all that the man had to handover a length of cloth to the woman and when she accepts it she became his wife. Even though she does not elaborate this, the Nayar women go bare breasted. According to Jeffrey, “although they had the right to wear a scanty cloth, [Nayar women] were required to bare their breasts before temple deities and caste superiors.”\textsuperscript{71}
All this sort of forced nakedness have engendered a sense of helplessness and insecurity among the more sensitive women of the Nayar community like Kamala Das. She talks about these sexual humiliations in *My Story*. She says:

It was customary for the Nair girl to marry when she was hardly out of her childhood and it was also customary for the much older husband to give her a rude shock by his sexual haste on the wedding night.\(^72\)

Being a 'new women' she objected these old customs prevailed in her society when she got married at the age of fourteen. She first met her husband as a teenager, she supposed him intellectual companionship and love. But, in bed the fears of a Nayar woman seemed to materialized; "...without warning he feel on me, surprising me by the brutality attack".\(^73\) In her poem 'An Introduction' same attitude can be seen where she writes:

...... When/I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask/ For he drew a youth of sixteen into the/ Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me/ But my sad woman body felt so beaten.\(^74\) She felt guilty for this type of an immature sex. Indeed when she expressed a fear that perhaps she was not normal he held her close to him and said, 'even if that is so, we shall be happy living together', she says, 'seeing him and sleeping near him had become precious to me'.\(^75\) But these true confessions of tenderness are invisible to a cruel Nayar male. The experiences of Kamala Das brought her to the awareness of her offended feminine. Thus,
her poetry emerges from the interaction between the female consciousness and the external world. During her intense search for love she becomes aware of the "pathos in the life of a common woman playing a very passive role in the traditionally bound society of India."76

Indian critics found the voice of a new liberated woman in her poems. This is obviously not a woman speaking only about her own special experience, but she is rather Nayar woman, fighting the burdens of her traditions. M. Eilas says, "... author’s vehemence is yet another manifestation of the inner urge of a Nayar woman to stigmatize her menfolk by turning the psychic sore of the inherited sexual humiliations into their degradations."77

Being fed up with Nayar heritage and the humiliations given by her husband who is a Nayar, she says:

From her search for ideal lover i.e. Krishna begins who can provide her emotional peace of mind. This is also because polyandrous germs running with blood in her veins Hari Mohan Prasad observes:

She goes in search Nayar Heritage acts like the dynamo constantly supplying energy and tumult to her poetry. The history of Nayar community in Kerala is ambiguous. The Nayar began as the body guards of the Nambudiris. In course of time they sprang to the highest rank of rajas. The Nayars women were marriage ..... This history of sexual humiliation is written the circuits of the brain of the sensitive women of this race. Sex was their principal phobia but their blood carried the irresistible germs of polyandry.78
In the search of true love she drifted from lover to lover. She wants to break all her social and traditional cultures to get pure love in the form of Krishna. Therefore, her later poetry has the imagery of Krishna, the symbol of spiritual love. The source of Kamala Das’s sexual philosophy thus, only lies in her own cultural heritage derive from south or Dravidian India. Devendra Kohli suggests, “It is perhaps in keeping with the matrilineal tradition to which she faces her ancestry and with her general criticism of the male character for its failure to give her tenderness and warmth, that the only figure whom she presents as an ideas is her great grandfather.”

With the advent of the British and the gradual infiltration of western patriarchal paradigms, these traditional and indigenous patterns of acceptability were seen as outdated. The Nayar youths goes ashamed for their woman centred society and rushed towards patriarchal systems of their colonial masters. That is to say that the breakdown of matrilineal institutions from Kerala was an indirect consequence of colonization women become educated and their attitude changed. Now they do not want to be married in early age. Hence, years after, when the question of Kamala’s marriage raised, when she was only 15 years old, the women inside her felt restless. All the women were now educated and could express their thoughts and emotions without restraint if they chose to. By the time author goes forward to her own life. The education for women became natural course. As a consequence, they were able to express themselves freely by writing down their emotional inclination and
frustrations. Similarly, Kamala Das awaringly connects westernization to old Nayar heritage which is a part of great Indian culture. Thus, being a modern woman Das’s obsession with the sexual exploits is perhaps because of her roots in the Nayar tradition which validates her link with her own culture. Thus Kamala Das’s voice reveals the mind, the body and the soul. She uses a language that can assert her female identity as a writer. Das’s protest against the male chauvenism gets softened in her later poetry. There is a quest to go beyond the body, to transcend the physical and the material. Her escape from the hurt, wound and discontent into the world of tenderness and joy, shows her growth and development as a poet, what perpetuates beyond the glamour of body becomes her concern.

I throw the bodies out/I cannot stand
their smell/only the souls may enter the
vortex of the sea. ⁸⁰

Her ultimate objective is not to celebrate the physical existence but to glorify the men’s immortality:

The ultimate discovery will be / that
we are immortal,/ the only things mortal
being systems and arrangements/even
our pains continuing/in the devourers
who constitute the world. ⁸¹

Her attitude towards life changes in her later poetry. There is a shift from man-woman relationship to mortality-immortality because she realized that total assertion of the feminine ego in Indian culture is
meaningless. She belongs to a tradition and culture which lay emphasis on
the inter dependence of the male and the woman. It never allows to
separate both the two genders. But gender difference cannot be rejected
simply because it is the creation and ultimate law of nature. Thus, her
search for ideal lover goes on to infinite and she keeps waiting for the
immortal lover:

Shyam, O Ghanashyam/you have like a
fisherman cast your net in narrows/of
my mind/And towards you my thoughts
today/must race like enchanted fish.82

This transformation from the 'caged bird' in 'The stone age'
to the 'enchanted fish marks a progress of her poetic vision. Her poetry can
be fully understood only by the ways of its total sublimation and not by
asserting her ego. Thus, it is always instructive to know the views of a
poet. So that, we will be familiar about their thought pattern and working
of creative mind.
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