PREFACE

Kamala Das needs no formal introduction, as she is very well known, inside and outside India. As early as 1985, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar included her name as the only representative from Asia in their Norton Anthology of Literature by Women. Though she has been recognised as a great writer, not many scholars or critics have paid any attention to the fact that besides being a gifted writer, she is also an extremely talented painter.

The general tendency of writers and research scholars on Das has been to look at the poet, who is also a painter, only from the angle of literary importance, leaving aside her paintings as belonging to a separate discipline. A.N. Dwivedi classifies her poetry as "confessional", Devindra Kohli interprets her poetry as personal and maintains that she is a "personal poet" (Virgin Whiteness). Non-Indian critics such as Syd Harrex, Vincent O'Sullivan and Dorothy Jones, in a manner similar to Indian critics like Mohan Lal Sharma and Lakshmi Raghunandan, argue that the theme of Das's heterosexuality receives its highest apotheosis in Das's identity as a devotee of Krishna.

An attempt has been made in this study to scrutinise the poems and paintings of Das in order to bring out their relationship and literary
importance. To the best of my knowledge, no such study of Das as a poet and an artist has been carried out. Mohamed Hasan (71) rightly points out that Literature has often been talked about as one of the fine arts; yet, its intrinsic links with Painting, Music, Dance, Architecture and other arts have often been ignored. There undoubtedly exists a communion of spirit between these arts and a comparative study collating motifs common to Art and Literature is bound to bring out several new aspects of relationship between Literature and Society. Such a study becomes even more interesting, when it is the different creative talents of one artist that is taken up for scrutiny. In the case of Das her great eminence as a poet and short story writer caused the scholars to overlook her skill in colours. Hence, I have made an earnest effort to look at her paintings and see whether they are extensions of her poems or whether they stand independent and unrelated to her poetry.

T.S. Eliot in Contemporary Criticism has said that comparison and analysis are the chief tools of a critic. He further added “In giving proper weight to the second, we should not allow ourselves to neglect the first” (124). I have chosen to work on Das as a painter-poet and in keeping with Eliot’s advice. I have not only analysed Das’s poems and paintings but also compared the two or contrasted them in order to see, whether and if so, where and how words had failed her in her quest for
perfection in artistic creation and to what extent colour has helped her to fill the gaps.

Das is not the only writer who experienced this sense of creative incompleteness. A number of great writers in this world took up the brush in order to seek creative fulfilment. I have devoted one whole chapter for the analysis and comparison of the works of a few other painter-poets.

The introductory chapter serves to provide a deeper insight into the personality of Das and the environment, which helped to shape it. The second chapter of this study deals with the sense of incompleteness probably experienced by Das, the possible causes and the resulting changes in her creative life. Das's achievements as a poet are dealt with in detail in the third chapter. Her evolution as a poet takes us through her nostalgic, confessional, social, philosophical and religious poems. Das's style of writing and the poetic devices that she makes use of are also discussed. Das's paintings are the subject of analysis in the fourth chapter. The various influences on her painting and her painting techniques have also been considered in it. Besides this, some of her individual paintings have been critically examined and compared to her poems. This enabled me to portray the growth of Kamala Das as a painter. The fifth chapter concentrates on other painter-poets such as
Michelangelo Buonarotti, William Blake, Rabindranath Tagore, Dante Gabriel Rosetti, Jaya Appasamy and Arpana Cour in order to locate Das's place among them. In the sixth chapter, I have added the second interview I had with Das after the completion of my work. This may further enlighten the discussion and arguments given in the preceding chapters.

This study, it is hoped, will be of interest to the students of Indo-Anglian writing. It may also prove to be particularly interesting to students of Art and to those interested in inter-disciplinary studies. This work, I believe embraces an area not explored very much by scholars or research students in India and one that offers a lot of possibilities for further researches. My graduation in Fine Arts and Post graduation in English Literature were the inspiration to embark on a venture like this. However the real confidence came when my guide took me to the painter-poet, Kamala Das, who was kind enough to give me an insight into her artistic career and also encourage me to pursue my work.

I got my registration as a research student with the title “Kamala Das as a Painter Poet: An Analysis of Her Paintings and Poems”. But as I now submit my thesis I know that she has changed her name to Kamala (Das) Surayya. I retain the name Kamala Das for two reasons;
one is that I should stick to my university registration and the second is that I have not taken any material written by Kamala Surayya.