Chapter-V

Protest Against: Well - Established Social Conventions

It has been said in Sanskrit Literature “कव्य-कान्ता दर्शित”. Poets observe better than common observations of the world.

In ‘Romantic Age’ Wordsworth differ from his predecessors. David Daiches maintain "But if Wordsworth was unique in his view of what constituted poetry, this is not to say that he was uninfluenced by the philosophical, social and political forces of his time. His views were in fact hammered out with reference to the impact on him of the contemporary situation. The French Revolution and the social and political thought which preceded and followed from it; the eighteenth – century development of the psychological views implicit in Locke’s view of perception and knowledge; the rational and humanitarian principles of the Enlightenment.‖¹

Thus, we find revolted view in the poetry of Wordsworth. He exhorted the people, ‘Return to Nature’.

It was the challenge to the prevailing system of England at the time. Every great poet challenges the prevailing system of the time.

The example of Wordsworth is given only in the support of the protest of poets. It is well known fact that Poet does not give the carbon copy of society. His personality also reacts against the evils of society. In the last of twentieth century, many voices of women, against the disparity of women, have been heard.

After 1950, we clearly hear the protest of women. Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex says, 'Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists
have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth”: she points out that women are not a minority like the blacks and they are not a product of history like the proletariat. Even earlier the problem of inequality between the sexes was highlighted by Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and by Olive Scheiner in *Women and Labour* (1911), Virginia Woolf is another important writer who in her *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) examined the problems women face; she advocated a balance between a ‘male' self– realization and ‘female’ self–annihilation. She rejected the notion of a separate feminist consciousness and hoped to achieve a femininity of the unconsciousness and so that there is no conflict between male and female sexuality, an ‘escape from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness’². For women’s justice, there is advent of feminist movement. Thus, we may observe the women’s view about male, in society as prime factor of women’s writing.

As it has been mentioned about women’s movement of society it is well known fact that western women are more active and awakened. Therefore, we first see the challenge of women in Western countries at first sight. It is worth mentioning that Indian women have opened their account in proper on way after national movement took place. For Freedom, there was need of unity and it was not possible without awakening of women. Hence, we see the ideas of women about the justice of society in their perspective. It is remarkable factor in the realm of education that women have protested the injustice, either as a citizen or as an educated person in freedom movement.

In one of the meeting of Asian Nations, Sarogini Naidu Speaks, 'India has always honoured her women'. What is true in her statement, it does not matter but it is true that she was first women who could hold her ideas among the male and female meeting. Now-a-days there is great improvement in the condition of women in India. It may be observed as given below.
After Independence in India, there is great turmoil for women’s conditional-reformation. The First two decades after Independence were full of optimism over the achievement of goals. Quite a few women who had taken an active part in the Freedom Movement were occupying important position in Government, educational institutions and social welfare organisations.

The Indian Government also initiated certain policies of social welfare, which were trying to assist women to improve their status. Higher education among women was more widespread and upper middle class women were not only going in for higher education but were also planning their careers as active earning members of their families. The seventies turned out not only to be very crucial for different sectors of Indian society but also proved to be significant for the women’s movement. In 1972, the United Nations requested all member nations to prepare a report on the status of women. The committee toured round the country, met women from various strata and commissioned researches in different fields, and then prepared the report entitled *Towards Equality*. It was submitted to the Government of India in December 1974 and tabled in Parliament in March 1975.3

When we begin to study of Kamala Das’s protest against well–established social conventions, we find it at two levels, personal level and social level as for as personal level is concerned it is the part of social system. These two dimensions of expression are not separable in practical aspects. The divisions are theoretically provisioned. It is a clear fact that personal experiences become the part of social experiences. But to explain both types of experiences, there is the matrix of family. Let us first consider the position of women in family convention. It would give us proper idea of Kamala Das’s protest against conventions.

In patrilineal society, both boys and girls take their social identity from the father and are placed in his lineage– *kutumb*. But while a son is a permanent
member of this unit, a daughter is viewed as transient or not permanent member. A son is supposed to continue the patriline.

After marriage, a daughter is supposed to visit the parental home only for short periods. The cultural emphasis on the marriage of the daughter and her near permanent departure is well entrenched.\(^4\)

Our folk songs and folk lore are suffused with his message. Ordinarily, marriage does not take place among the near kin relations. Of course, some exceptions of marriages of cross cousins or between a maternal uncle and niece among the Hindu communities in Southern India and marriages between cross or parallel cousins among the Muslims do not substantially affect the concept of temporary membership of the daughter.

Another significant feature of the patrilineal society is the pattern of inheritance and resource distribution. By and large, property is inherited by male heirs and transmitted through them. According to the traditional legal practice, daughter have only the right of maintenance and to marriage, including the gifts and goods acquired at the time of marriage \((streedhan)\), which are determined by the status of the family and the caste to which the family belongs. Only sons acquire the right to property at birth. Of course, during the last few decades there have been some major changes in the inheritance rights of women, especially in self-acquired property but the predominant cultural value is that daughter's should not make any legal claim to the paternal property.

This pattern of thinking has its roots in the notion that a daughter is an outsider-someone else’s property \((parayadhan)\) and if she is given the right to inheritance, the property will go to someone else’s family. This feature of patriliny leads to a member of problems, which women have to face. Father – daughter, brother – sister relationships are couched in emotional overtones of love, sacrifice and duty but daughters have no claim on family assets.
A very crucial feature of patriliney is the pattern of residence. The ideal legitimised household in India is a patrilineal, patrilocal joint family. In this context, a joint family consists, ideally of three generations of male patrikins and their wives and children. They share many responsibilities and obligations. The head of the family—the eldest male member (Karta) – is expected to perform various rites and ceremonies on behalf of the family.

The decision on marriage alliances of daughters and son, buying, selling and maintaining family property, day-to-day behaviour are all controlled by the patriarch in alliance with other male members. The domestic front, especially household maintenance, is in the charge of the eldest female member. It is her duty to look after to day-to-day domestic needs of family members and to control other younger female members of the family. It has often been mentioned that young daughter is always inhibited by shadow of a mother–in–law or a sister–in–law.

A newly married bride enters this setup of patrilocality after marriage. This transfer of residence can often be traumatic. In the husband’s home, she is an outsider; though all special ceremonies to incorporate her into this family have been performed. Her real incorporation occurs when she gives birth to a son. The normative expectations in this pattern emphasis that new bride has to be controlled, to be trained into the lifestyle of the husband’s family. The bride givers are always lower in status than bride takers. The mother-in-law who was once an outsider has become an insider over a period and exercises dominance over the new female entrants. Quite often, she becomes an ally for instituting patriarchal authority over the other female members.

There is a tussle for power among the female members and patriarchy uses the unequal power relations to suppress the young bride (bahu), manipulating the agency of mother–in–law and or sister–in–law. Regional
literature, folksongs, films and television serials are suffused with these themes. In fact, quite often they valorise this power struggle.

Traditional membership of a daughter may be observed as below: Leela Dube maintains “Her (bride’s) living in the new home is in a way conditional, depending on ‘proper’ behaviour, efficiency in household work, amicable relationships, service to elders, husband’s pleasure, the gifts that she brings and perhaps her earning. It is not uncommon to be driven out of the affinal home for serious as well as trivial reason”.

Leela Dube highlights the transitional membership of women in society. Her husband controls even the women as earning member of a family completely. She has no right to expense the money at her will.

The social attitude towards a son-in-law staying at his wife’s residence is derogatory and insulting. Thus, a woman's place after marriage is in her husband is house. The women’s movement after the seventies has taken up all the issues resulting from this pattern of household.

What is crucial is that the norms and practices – concerning residence, obedience, internalising the pattern of the husband’s family, serving all claims from the paternal family-have led to the domestic violence, which is perpetrated on women. Dowry harassment, stigma on separation and divorce, meagre maintenance, tussle over custody of children and day-to-violence, both physical and mental, are largely results of the patriarchal value structure.

The steel frame of the family has undoubtedly been seriously jolted by macro developments. The ideal joint family hardly exists, yet the concept of joint family still dominates the psyche. Social scientists face a serious challenge while constructing the typology of family. For a long time it was believed that, there are two major types of family, joint and nuclear. From the sixties on, with
more and more field studies on family being conducted, it was noticed that there were many more types of households.

Pauline Kolenda distinguished 11 families, while A. M. Shah refers to six to seven household types. For instance, after marriage, a son who has been living with parents and occasionally uncles, aunts and cousins, may set up a separate household. Later, when one parent or both parents grow old and cannot live alone, all of them stay together and a joint family emerges. Thus, there is a developmental cycle in family living.\(^6\)

Most joint families are two–generational, but the earlier preferred pattern was the joint residence of all brothers with their children. Besides, a family where a man, his wife, his children and his unmarried sister or a widowed aunt lives together is not rare in the Indian context.

Another striking reality is the growing number of female-headed families, especially when men have migrated to some place for a job or when the man is not working and the family is maintained and looked after by a woman. It has been estimated that in India nearly one family in three is female headed.

Family sociologists have further observed that the joint family pattern is often visible in the upper castes, in business communities and in the peasant proprietor class in rural areas. In the poorer communities and among tribals, generally the nuclear pattern prevails. In fact, for some decades now, the urban middle class, especially the educated and professional classes prefer the nuclear family pattern.

Besides, in the rapidly changing economy, transformed marital relations and the growth of individualism, has thrown up single parent families where mother and children, or father and children, stay together. Likewise, households where a single woman lives alone in urban areas are not rare.
It is worth mentioning that in the course of social changes there is impact of western pattern. The macro changes have done development in the pattern of society.

Whereas macro changes in matrilineal societies have affected women’s right in an adverse manner, the changes in patriliney have not completely empowered women. Of course, winds of change are shaking some of the basic norms of relationships, which in turn are causing serious anxiety to those who hold patriarchal value. The first tremor experienced by the family was the introduction of industrialisation and modernisation initiated during the Colonial rule. The macro changes in Western society led to nuclearisation of the family, which meant that the household constituted of husband, wife and unmarried children. The value of individualism and personal betterment encouraged the advancement of personal growth rather than subordination of the self-giving priority to the needs of other kin members. For the development of personal growth and prosperity, an individual’s advance, career, mobility, priorities are considered most important. A nuclear family is believed to be a fit institution in the changed socio–economic conditions.

In the Sixties when scholars from abroad started studying the Indian family, they felt that if Indian society opts for development through the path of modernisation, it would have to opt for nuclear family. For Indian society, it has been a trying situation: on the one hand, individual advancement and prosperity are being appreciated and on the other hand, the loss of joint family, value of duty, obedience, respect to elders and other are being lamented. The Indian scholars, however, noted that though family size might become smaller it does not inevitably indicate fragmentation of family. Even if due to various reasons, the residence becomes separate, joint obligations and responsibilities persist. Thus, two brothers or a father and his sons may live separately for a variety of reason, but on various occasions, they come together and also recognise certain
filial obligations. In the event of marriage, death or sickness, all members try to combine both their material and emotional resources to meet the situation.

As I have examined the social system of this country, there is tremendous change in outer pattern of life. But one thing is clear that there is no major change in the condition of women. It is the striking point for a writer or poet to mark the condition of women. Kamala Das has marked the condition of women in the mirror of her own experience.

In all three collections, we find the mark of poetess. She has examined the social condition of women with open eyes. Her observations become the protest against the well-established conventions.

In 1984, Kamala Das published her *Collected Poems*. Several of these poems had been written since 1973, after the publication of *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*. The new poems, now presented, show Kamala Das at her best. A more mature and sober poetic voice is audible in these poems. They are marked by a wider variety of themes and sentiments, a greater hold on the employment of poetic symbols and metaphors and a foray into hitherto unexplored areas of experience. Though love and lust, agony and frustration continue to dominate, there is also frequent concern with social issues and pure familial passions. There are five poems inspired by the poet’s Sri Lankan experience, an indication that she is capable of breaking the self-made cocoon of brooding over male iniquity and female vulnerability and flying into the ‘end-less pathways of the sky.’ The collected poems present a diversified richness of themes encompassing death, disease, fate, social justice, personal sorrow, familial memories and compassion for mankind.

In several poems, the love – lust – frustration syndrome is given a temporary respite and the poet involves herself with more explicit issues both personal and social. Kamala Das is not a social analyst; she does not suggest remedies; she is not even a social satirist as Nissim Ezekiel is in some of his
poems. Kamala Das focuses attention on the dehumanising effect of social injustice and inequality and on the deterioration of the human psyche under the impact of social and moral conventions.7

‘The Housebuilders, the first poem in the Collected Poems is an intensely contemporary statement on the sufferings of hired labour. The poem is inspired by the sight of Telugu labourers working on a house–site in Bombay.’ In My Story, Kamala Das makes a reference to these builders in Bombay. They came from Andhra Pradesh to help construct those buildings we see now at Nariman Point. ‘They were dark wiry people with loud voices’ and during Ganesh Chathurthi festival they elected a crude stage and installed an idol.

Then there is loud music in the evenings after the work is over and the bath and the cooking. Some of them use little symbols of brass and clang–clang to the tune of the hymns while the round–eyed children squat on the ground and watch in admiration.8

The poem begins with a homosexual suggestion in the first two lines:

    The cicadas in brambled foliage

    Naturally concave.

    Then it breaks into a contrast between the miserable life of the labourers and the ‘scraps of Telugu songs’ they sing in order to hide their misery. They are the poor who build houses for the rich and their joy are momentary for.

    ... In merry tunes

    Their voices break

    After sunset their innocent joys grow ribald, their lust becomes robust. They are the ‘toymen of dust’ and the ‘mythic hoodoo tree’ with withered boughs suggests the agony of their existence, for the hoodoo tree brings only bad luck.
The Housebuilders is inspired by compassion for the poor. In contrast, ‘Honour’ is a powerful expression of unmuzzled wrath and righteous indignation at the cruelties that have been heaped upon the depressed class people. (Dalit Panthers of the poem) by the feudal society of Nairs. The title of the poem is ironic and sarcastic and the poignancy of the poet’s condemnation is all the more genuine as she herself belongs to the Nair community of Kerala. Historically, the Nairs in Kerala have been treated as an upper caste though they are not Brahmins. Several Nair chieftains and landlords used to adopt a feudal attitude towards the so-called lower caste like the ‘paraya’ and the ‘pulaya.’ Exploitation of these depressed classes has been a part of the feudal culture of the elite sections in the Nair community. The feudal Nair held the pulayas as slaves with authority to sell them or kill them. Nairs were the principal slave–holders of the country. Kamala Das’s bitter condemnation of the feudal attitude of the Nairs and their distorted notion of honour are to be viewed in this social context. The poem ‘Honour’ is an ironic exposition of the theme of suffering and dishonour to which a particular group of people has been subjected by a quirk of history. The tension of irony is set in motion when the Dalit Panther activist with head injuries and ‘bandage round his arm’ visits the poet to seek her blessings unaware of the fact that she herself belongs to the Nair caste which till recently indulged in atrocities against the downtrodden. The feudal concept of honour, which her community entertained, was distorted.

...Honour was a plant my ancestors watered

In the day, a palm to mark their future pyres. At night

their serfs –

Let them take to bed little nieces . . . .
‘Honour’ for the Nairs included sexual exploitation of the serfs under them. They indulged in ‘brutal games’, but no laws punished them. When the poor were ravished, strangled, drowned buried at midnight behind snake shrines.

Cheated for their land, their huts and hearts,

In the light of above lines, we can easily observe the protest of Kamala Das. She condemns all those things, which are unjustified for society. It is clear that Kamala Das is a person who wants justice in the society. Wherever she finds injustice, she protests by her presentation of feelings. She does not abuse directly to evil customs and traditions of the society. She presents the scene and observes the materials. She speaks what her spirit inspires her. For example, she opens the evils of Nair’s society wherewith she has suffered. The poem Honour is exposition of suffering and dishonour. The ironic style of the poetsess sweeps here in the unjustification of this class.

Thus, we find protest in the lines of the poetess. The poetess has given the pen portrait of her protest. In this way, Kamala Das’s style mostly runs in ironic mood. It is to say that her protest immerges her as a great thinker of same pain of which many women experience in their life.

If only raised a derisive laughter in the feudal Nairs. They were such comedians on the lush stage of that feudal age. Kamala Das closes the poem with a cryptic referece to the death (or murder) of the alluring Mophal wench. Even the police is bound to protect the Nair honour for it is the ‘dearest word of all in the Nair dictionary’. Obviously, the Dalit Panther came to the wrong person for redress. ‘Honour’ is a merciless exposure of the seamy side of Nair hegemony. The extended lines of the poem and their slow-moving rhythm are
deliberately contrived devices to focalise the age old social injustice into the compelling attention of the reader.

Another aspect of Kamala Das’s broadening sympathy with humanity’s pains finds expression in 'The Lunatic Asylum'. Soft human sentiments are expressed through the psychedelic picture of a night at the asylum. The single electric bulb shaped like a teardrop is at once a metaphor for despair and hope. It burns harshly, but ‘chases the moody shadows from the inmate’s beds. Though treated harshly by the world, the inmates in the asylum retain the essential light of humanity in them. ‘The lamps in their skulls’ cannot be destroyed by the ‘bromides or the electric whiplash'. The poem closes with a note of affirmation in the essential sanity of these insane people. They do not need our pity; in fact, they deserve our admiration because:

...they

*Were brave enough to escape, to*

*Step out of the*

*Brute regimentals of*

*Sane routine...*

The meaning of the poem lies in the implied contrast between the world of the insane and that of others. However, the contrast narrows down to a perception not flattering to the everyday world of the sane.

Kamala Das’s human sympathies are stirred up even by individual tragedies. This is a mark of the poet’s readiness to get involved and to share the sorrows of others through compassionate response to human situations. Such a mood of regenerative sympathy is hardly seen in the earlier poems in which the obsession is her wounded psyche. ‘Requiem for a Son' written on the death of Sanjoy Gandhi in a plane accident is wet with the wail of a mother. The poet, with her unmistakable feminine sensibility, probes into the mechanism of a
mother’s defense against inconsolable grief. A personal sorrow is transformed into a universal experience of agony and the poet’s meditation is focussed on the courage, required to live and the terror that envelops human destiny.

...

Death is

Ordinary. To live on an earth built upon layers and

Layers of bone requires an extraordinary

Courage....

The slow – moving lines with their penetrating rhythm carry with them the passion and the urge, the agony and the ecstasy of unfulfilled vision, unrealised dream with which the son died. The air that he once called his father betrayed and scattered him over the trees and on earth. Death is ordinary, but life demands extraordinary courage. The son lived and died like a flash; he was impatient with old wisdom’s slow narrations. He was in a hurry.

I have no time at all to waste.

Death shattered a world, which the mother had been shaping around this symbol of a son. It took away her own world too leaving only widow’s weeds, wet graves and wreaths. Her sleep is now ‘the hangman’s troubled pre–morning slumber’. The son is dead but a mother’s love fashions a kind of eternity around his memories.

The poem attains universalness in its attempt to portray the passion that unites the mother and the son. It unlock the mystery and folly of human aspirations and stirs up a momentary disenchantment with mortal endeavours. The foreboding presence of fate is felt throughout and Death hovers over man’s destiny.

Kamala Das’s childhood memories are mixed with her experiences in the city of Calcutta. The city had an ambivalent fascination for her and several of
her early poems reflect this consciousness. Among the poems, Of Calcutta is a return to the old theme. It is essentially an autobiographical poem like An Introduction. It is as sprawling as the city itself and its prosaicness is forbidding. The inordinate length of the poem and its sluggishly moving lines disperse the sentiments and destroy the aesthetic impact. The poem is a loose chain of memory-vignettes. It moves from the poet’s childhood in the ‘incurious city’ to her final transformation into a frustrated housewife.

Here in my husband’s house, I am a trained circus dog.

Jumping my routine hoops each day.

The degeneration from the status of a free-romping child to the despicable canine status of a housewife is feelingly portrayed. A more serious concern springs towards the end of the poem—the concern about soul and death.

...where is my soul.

My spirit, where the muted tongues of my desires?

In the above illustration of Kamala Das’s view/poem, we find her sympathy and sympathy is protest against unexpected happening. In this order, we may take the example of the poem Of Calcutta, An Introduction. These poems present the feelings of Kamala Das about social happenings. She presents her view in a form of memory and her frustration as a housewife. For example, she says:

Here in my husband’s house. I am a trained circus dog

Jumping my routine hoops each day.

Thus, we find her protest in her memory as well as in her thinking. How a woman survives in society with unhonoured status. Kamala Das has observed life in and out both sides, where injustice is generated in the form of custom and
tradition. How a common person penetrates it, therefore, penetration of Kamala Das is valuable and appreciating. She lived in society and experienced will and woe, joy and sorrow with observation of sifting evils from running raw material of society. She has done a work of a philosopher or harbinger who gives new direction to society. Just it may be observed in soul with terms of desire.

In her many poems, Kamala Das rebels against the exploitation of woman in male-oriented society. She is a social rebel who protests all conventions, traditions and accepted norms of society. She asserts her protest in poem after poem. Here we observe her protest in some of her poems. In her poem *The Suicide*, Kamala Das comments:

*Bereft of soul*

*My body shall be bare*

*Bereft of body*

*My soul shall be bare.*

Her violent pleading for the balanced understanding of a relationship runs through the dark continents of love wherein her ‘ideal lover is nowhere to be found’. A necessity of finding such a lover, however, is perceived in her creative utterances in her poem *Love*:

*Now that I love you*

*Curled like an old mongrel*

*My life lies content*

*In you.*

It was her realisation of fallacies in married life that carried Kamala Das to both the trends of love and protest in her journey of self. Cohabitation in marriage ended in her boredom of sexual encounters and her eternal craving for
true love resulted in her yearning for elusive ‘Krishna’; and she finds it impossible to visualize her dream – love in reality:

_Ghanshyam,_

_You have like Koel built your nest in the arbour of my heart . . . you lead me along a route that I have never known before_

_But at each turn when I near you_

_Like a spectral flame you vanish._

Kamala Das’s expression of love and protest overlaps her sense of guilt and loss but she is not an apologist. In her autobiography ‘My Story’, her self-respect finds its full space, so much as that many critics discover feminist interpretations of her statements inevitable. Like love, protest too is ambivalent in Kamala Das’s writings. Her treatment of love and protest as a philosophical principle can be stated as love, unrequited fuelling the unrest and protest in the mind of an individual. Kamala Das is an outstanding poetess indeed but in her personal narrative, it is noticed that her creative efforts did not evolve any hope of peace, solace or happiness for her.

The poetess spaces her bitter feelings against society. It is remarkable to note that she writes emotionally but with control of her art. She remarks the evil of traditions customs and malice feeling of sex. In a nut shell, She expresses her ideas against disaster and appeals for required justice.

Kamala Das’s title-piece, _The Old Playhouse_, tells us that love is perhaps no more than a way of learning about one’s self or the completion of one’s own personality. It is addressed presumably to the husband and is largely personal. It lodges a protest against the constraint of the married life: the fever of domesticity, the routine of lust, artificial comfort and male domination. ‘You’ in the poem is possibly the husband, who wants to tame the swallow who is the
woman and thus deprive her of her natural freedom. As a result of his egotism, she feels emptied of all her natural mirth and clarity of thinking:

\[\ldots \text{You called}\]

\[\text{me wife,}\]

\[\text{I was taught to break saccarine into your tea and}\]

\[\text{To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering}\]

\[\text{Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and}\]

\[\text{Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your}\]

\[\text{Questions I mumbled incoherent replies.}\]^{12}

Here the woman suggestively protests against the male ego and assertion.

A different kind of protest—against the fanaticism of – religion is obvious in another poem of Kamala Das, *The Inheritance*. This poem is bitter, ironical, but not cynical. It deals with the hatred and intolerance that goes in the name of religion, whether it is Islam, Christianity or Hinduism. What man has inherited is not love but hatred, not wisdom but babble: ‘this ancient / Virus that we nurtured in the soul…’

In the flow of religious fanaticism, she finds her tortured and expresses her anguish. The poisonous custom is used like a wine to make a woman mad. Kamala Das marks the cunning application of rituals and customs. She confesses Kamala Das as Surraiyya in the course of her life. Name changes but there is no change in tendency. It seems the old bottle is filled with the new colour wine but it is the same as it was before.

Kamala Das’s poem *Gino* starts on a note of warning and fear comparing the kiss of a lover to the bite of a krait who ‘fills the bloodstream with its accursed essence’. This makes her think of the all-pervasive essence of love and of the sense of death, which is also the sense of life:
a July, full of rain, and darkness

Trapped like smoke, in the hollows of the sky, and

That lewd, steamy smell of rot, rising out of the earth.13

There is a conflict between the desire to experience this poisonous love, possibly love outside marriage and the difficulty to dislodge the inherited memory of a touch.

Kamala Das questions about the love, which has no spirit. She finds animal’s expression of love, lack of spirit. Really, she has touched the pulse of society. No doubt, physical actions are the part of spiritual feelings but physical expression without spirit is poor expression of love. One side she gets pleasure and other side, feels torture.

It is obvious that Kamala Das is the pioneer of protest; she inaugurated the mission of exploring women’s increasing issues and suffering of feminine psyche, in Indian context. Kamala Das startles and provokes, thrills and appeals, clarifies and cleanses through her language. Like a web of truly tragic empathy, she weaves pity and fear with irony and ridicule. The essays she wrote, like, I studied All Men or Why Not More Than One Husband? And What Women Expect of Marriage and What They Get? Brought her the same share of notoriety. In her taunting of ideas against the moral fervour and linguistic authenticity, she sounded desperate and offending.14

To observe her revolt, we take some another poems.

Kamala Das another poem The Stone Age, like The Old Playhouse, deals with the reality of love being offered to the poetess by another man rather that by her husband. This poem portrays the husband of the woman- persona as ‘old fat spider’ who weaves ‘webs of bewilderment’ around her and erects the dead, dull stony wall of domesticity comfort lassitude and thus turning her into ‘a bird of stone, granite dove’. The husband is the perpetual irritant, an unwelcome
intruder into the privacy of the wife’s mind, which is haunted by other men. When
the husband goes out, she drives along the sea and climbs ‘the forty noisy
steps to knock at another’s door’. Now the act of defiance having taken place,
the deed done, freedom asserted and the dull cocoon of domesticity assaulted,
the lines suddenly come alive with the energy of questioning:

...Ask me, everybody, ask me
What he sees in me, ask me why he is called a lion,
A libertine, ask me the flavour of his
Mouth, ask me why his hand sways like a hooded snake.\textsuperscript{15}

The freedom that we come across in these lines is the kind of freedom the
poetess longs for. Hereby, Kamala Das expresses her protest towards married
life.

Furthermore, we see some different facets of protest as given below.

The protest of Kamala Das may be observed at different levels, as for as
her confessional poetry is concerned, it gives mirror of vision of her protest. She
expresses her anguish for personal life, for social life, traditions and customs. In
the same way, in love, lust and frustration, we find strong protest against society.

The central experience in Kamala Das’s poetry is an encounter with pain
in relation to love, sex and family. The \textit{Freaks} is one of the early testaments of
despair, the poetess announces in \textit{Summer in Calcutta}. The poem is conjured up
within the fierce boundaries of despondency. The several harsh metaphors enact
the meaning of the poem. The lover can excite only physical passion, nothing
more than the ‘skin’s lazy hungers’. While ‘a sun-stained cheek’, mouth like
‘dark cavern’ and ‘puddles of desire’ suggest the lustful nature of male love,
‘coiling snakes of silence’ at the end sum up metaphorically the poisonous and
revolting nature of lust.
In *The Sunshine Cat* Kamala Das, in a shockingly outspoken rendition, analyses the process and procedure of cruelty:

. . . . . . Her husband shut her

*With a streak of sunshine lying near the door, like*

*A yellow cat, to keep her company...*16

Very few other poems of Kamala Das is so painful, shocking and revelatory as this. Thus the woman is nothing more than a passive partake in the ritual of sensuality planned by man. Graces of love are unknown to him.

*Men are worthless, to trap them*

*Use the cheapest bait of all, but never*

*Love...*

Kamala Das protests in many ways, Confession is one of them. She is a confession poetess. In her confession, she presents the value, position and importance of a woman in the family, in married life and in society. By presenting the situation of a woman, she rebels against the conditions, in which woman have to suffer.

Confessional poetry is concerned with the disrupted self of the poet and its reaction to the impact of a world in the process of disintegration. For the confessional poet the entire world is a manifestation of his own disturbed consciousness. For him the reality is manifest in his tautened relationship with his own self. Mostly the core of confession expresses protests. Kamala Das’s experiences, feelings towards male-society and manmade-prison are the subject of her protest.

Kamala Das’s poetry is termed as a ‘sort of compulsion neurosis’.17 In it love experience is a kaleidoscope of numerous tensions. Their several alignments form the basic design in the general pattern of Kamala Das’s
explorations into the meaning of love, lust and sexuality. For her ideal love is a fulfilled experience attained through sex but beyond its constrictive dimensions. It is a tension that envelops the body, the mind and the soul. When love stops with the intimacies of the body, it becomes lust and the lovers are deprived of the ultimate bliss, which is a part of every ideal man-woman relationship. In Kamala Das’s poetry, there is an untiring search for the perfect masculine being and each encounter with the male, the husband or the lover, is an experiment in discovering the meaning of true love. The repeated failure of such experiments make her resentful and defiant and she looks upon each encounter as merely a substitute for the real experience.

\[\textit{After that love became a swivel-door}\]

\[\textit{When one went out, another came in,}\]

\[\textit{Thon I lost count, for always in my arms}\]

\[\textit{Was a substitute for a substitute?18}\]

Perhaps, love has no substitute. It is the spirit for a particular person. It cannot be replaced by other. It is the abuse of love to have the substitute for it. Love is not a business. As R. N. Tagore has expressed “Every woman weeps for a ideal man and everyman weeps for a ideal woman”.

The statement is true in a sense that often marriage is not based on love. It is arranged by society on the base of money standard and employment.

Kamala Das’s poem \textit{The Invitation} included in \textit{The Descendants}. This poem opens with a very touching image of meaningless sexual encounters of the poetic persona. The poetic persona is in great despair due to failure in love and married life and she receives an invitation from the sea to commit suicide. The whiplash of memories drives her back to the man whom she loves.

\[\textit{...No I am still young}\]
And I need that man for construction and
Destruction... 19

In this poem, we can observe that how a woman tortured by the empty and meaningless tradition and customs of society. She made so irritated and disturbed that she thinks to commit suicide and often she commits suicide.

Commenting on this poem, Devinder Kohli observes: “Kamala Das is not romanticising death by comparing it to the ecstasy of love, but by approaching the language of delirium suggests the feelings of torture that seems to accompany her more recent treatment of sexual love. This is perhaps unconscious”.20

In the poem An Introduction, Kamala Das says:

I am every

Woman who seeks love 21

In Kamala Das eyes womanhood involves certain collective experiences. Indian women, however do not discuss these experiences in deference to social mores. Kamala Das consistently refuses to accept their silence. Feelings of longing and loss are not confined a private misery. They are invited into the public sphere and acknowledged. Kamala Das seems to insist, they are normal and have been felt by women across time.

It is noteworthy that in every expression, there is a ting of protest. She presents her feelings, what she doesn’t like. This negative feeling creates the protest. The poetry of Kamala Das mirrors the protest of her soul in various forms. Sometimes, we get her protest for unnatural love, unnatural sex and unnatural social behaviour. It is said that poetess never appreciate the social happenings. It is the point of protest that makes a poet to poet. Kamala Das’s
protest has been emerged in confession point in love and sex and in social tradition.

It is to note that every great poet has protest against society. In Abhigyan Shakuntalam, in 7th chapter Kalidas denounced the habits of Kings. Kings were very luxurious. They take the women as part of luxury. Women were not more than a glass of water. In the same way, T. S. Eliot denounced his age for corrupt traditions and customs that may be observed in Wasteland. In the same way, the protest of Kamala Das has proved her originality. She is only poetess of her age who champions the freedom of women from every yoke of slavery. Though some critics have not paid honour to this great poetess yet she is the queen of her field. She administers her emotion against injustice of women. Once Tulsidas admits:

कत विधि सृजी नारि जग माहि ।
पराधिन सुख सपनेहूँ नाहि। २२

These lines are the evidence of women’s disaster.

Thus we find the revolt against injustice in every literature i.e. English, Sanskrit, Hindi etc. In this way, the protest of Kamala Das as it has been mentioned in above illustration is remarkable evidence of her humanism. She is most modern in moderns and she is most humanitarian in humanitarians. Above all, she is the leader of crust women. In her poetry, there is not sweet sound of love. Here we find the cry of women for justice. She leaves no space for her opponents in criticism of humanity. Since childhood to adult age and to old age, she never changes her propensity towards women and their belonging society. She takes the tender field of life like love and sex and manifests it in its bitter exponents.

It is true that when a person challenges to destiny, history changes its speed. She challenges the society like Krishna and presents the intellectual
Mahabharata of women against prevailing society. She never weeps, she cries and cries, sometimes roars; other times attacks the rotten system of society. She takes inspiration from earthly life and exhales it into a divine freedom. Her poetry is her weapon, her autobiography is her missile through these she has collapsed many bastions of male-governed society. She has generated the feelings among the people that the women have their right and status. The time has come to awake the society.

In this way, her protest is the slogan of revolt and change. Though Saint John was burnt for her country but she became immortal. But the case of Kamala Das is different from that of Saint John. Kamala Das stands on a platform and champions the freedom. Everyone has to listen not to protest her. In India, there is a need of such a writer or poet who can make the country awake in the light of freedom. Kamala Das has become the spirit of age.

Having observed the protest of Kamala Das, we are bound to consider the ground of protest. Today, the matter of protest is more relevant in the comparison of the past. Kamala Das has faced the problems of life. These problems were generated by customs and traditions. She was the victim of patriarchal society since the beginning to today, the role of a woman is second fielded.

She was never at first rank. In Vedic Ages, she was honoured but in few numbers. Commonly, woman found no freedom. If we look the history of India, we find that patriarchal society was existing with the dawn of civilization. Whenever we find the description about the greatness of women, we find it in the background of male–serving society.

A very remarkable book, Hindi Sahitya Ka Adha Itihas, written by Suman Raje. In this book, she presents the history of women’s consciousness. Since Vedic Age to Today, woman is in the search of her identity. It is notable that we find the revolt of a woman since the beginning to today but its way
differs from age to age. In *Theri Gatha*, Theri, the Baudh Nun, has presented her feeling towards life. Women explore their satisfaction in earthly world. They were unable to declaim the male but the indication of their feelings say something. In the same way, we find their pronouncement against injustice in their description. We do not want to go in deep in this context to Theri’s life but *Theri Gatha* is evident of it.

The great book of *Ramayana* tells the story of Seeta. *Ramayana* is one of the ideal books of Hindus. The great poet Valmiki described everything in *Ramayana*. One may marks here closely: Tears fell from the eyes of Valmiki when he saw the crying of the female Kraunch bird for male bird but it is pity to say, he could not experienced the tears of Seeta. She was exiled with Rama (her husband). When Rama defeated Ravana and got his Seeta, she was not treated well by Rama. Rama abused her and took the evidence of her virtue through putting her in the fire.

In the light of above example, we find the patriarchal society was always prevailing in this nation. For evidence, we take the example of Draupati of *Mahabharta*. In a gamble, Yudhistir lost the bait of Draupati. She was treated as a thing not as a better half. She was disrobed in company of all Kauravas and Pandvas. To save the value of Bhagwan, it was added that Krishna saved her from her nude but the reality was different.

In our country, there is a dramatic vision of the thinkers. Narmda (a pativrata stri) took her husband to a prostitute because her husband desired to meet with a prostitute for his sexual feelings. She carried her husband on her shoulders because her husband was a victim of leprosy. In her story, the dramatic thinker proved that she controlled the universe for the night because when she was carrying her husband to meet the prostitute, in the way, the feet of her husband touched the mouth of a sage who cursed him to die in the morning. Narmda challenged the sun not to arise in the morning if arises she would make
him to ashes. It is worth mentioning that she was unable to prevent her husband to meet a prostitute but she prevented the sun from rising. Wonderful thought, virtuous women can do everything except following the orders of her husband.

It is noteworthy that patriarchal society made a trap or cultural net in which a woman has to live, what they have written that is the destiny of a woman. Women have no their own destiny. Later on, we find, women were provided facility in the name of freedom. Bernard Shaw says: ‘Facility is not freedom’. But we also know it well that facility can not replaced the freedom.

In this regard, pronouncement of Sorojini Naidu is worth mentioning: ‘Comrades and Kinderd of Asia. You will wonder why a woman has been chosen to occupy great place today. India has always honoured her women’. At the time her pronouncement reflects the call of freedom struggle. When Indian leaders were fighting for freedom of India. Kamala Das [1934-2009] was developing her growth of writing. She experienced the pain of Indians. At this juncture of time, she was earning the ability to speak about society. The discriminate path, which attracts our eyes, is her protest of prevailing society. It is considerable to think, man and woman are the two wheels of society. If one is broken, other cannot survive.

The protest of Kamala Das may be observed at different levels. If we observe minutely her expression, we find that she presents the social venue where women are made victims. The social status of women in India is always questionable for a thinker who considers man and woman are equal parts of the society. We would like to put up some prevailing system of society. Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar have written Women in Indian Society. Their introduction is worth noting.
The history of women is not linear nor does it have a well-organised structure. It is, in fact, an integral, though mostly invisible, part of the saga of civilization. Its threads are closely interwoven with those of culture, society, state and above all with the lives of the people. Untangling the threads through multiple layers of traditions is a fascinating enterprise.

Women’s duties as good daughters, good wives and good mothers are well – defined in the Indian patriarchal society. Wifehood and motherhood are accepted as pivotal roles for women by implication. These roles complete in themselves and women need not peruse any specialised discipline of knowledge, art or profession. The good woman is sweet, gentle, loving, caring and ever sacrificing. The mainstream concept of the role of a woman seems to be best described in the anonymous. Sanskrit couplet:

[She (in relation to her husband) is like a mother while cooking and serving food, secretary while he working, servant at his feet, courtesan in his bed and earth-like in forbearance.] The historical sources often tend to be elitist and present a glorious picture of the Indian woman in the past (Altekar).

In the above-mentioned qualities of women are something more than reality. Woman should be humble, devotee and kindred. No doubt, these qualities had been found mostly in past women but the women have paid heavy cost for these qualities as few lines of Kamayani indicate in this connection:

क्या कहती हो ठहरे नारी, तुम को सब कुछ सहना होगा।
आंसू से भींगे अंचल पर, यह सन्धि पत्र लिखना होगा।

Kamala Das attacks the society, in many of her poems. She gives the situation of women in one of her poem Substitute. In this poem, she openly blames the male society for women’s attitude and activity. Woman does everything for man because man has decided her destiny. She has to dance, she
has to kiss, and she has to attend the society in a manner, which is prescribed by male – society. It is a travesty of human history that half part of civilization has nothing her own. She attends every programme of society to please the man. It is another factor that she also gets pleasure in doing these things. In *Substitute* Kamala Das gives her feelings for women class:

*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.*  
*It will be all right if I join clubs*  
*And flirt a little over telephone.*  
*It will be all right, it will be all right.*  
*I am the type that endures.*  
*It will be all right, it will be all right.*  
*It will be all right between the world and me.*  
*It will be all right if I don’t remember*  
*The last of the days together...²⁷*

Kamala Das has presented her personal life as an individual but this individuality becomes universal. Her pain is the pain of women, her suppression is the suppression of women, and her cry is the cry of women for women. Whatever she experiences in her life, she presents in her poems (All Three Volumes) and in autobiography. Her protest spreads like a rainbow on the cloud of her observation. Her feeling falls like a raindrop on the ground of reader’s heart. No doubt, sometimes she goes on extreme but it is essential and eminent.
In the poem *The Invitation* and in *An Introduction*, we may see the different aspect of life in the form of protest. Sometimes, she describes emotionally, other times normally but in every chain, we find her protest for society. In simple description she employs irony and in emotional she attacks directly. In *The Invitation* she highlights the staggering situation of a middle class wife in the clutches of male domination. It is to say that she finds no solution of personal dilemma. She presents the hellish life of a domestic woman. In *An Introduction*, she presents the destiny of a woman. Having taken her own life, she reflects the condition of a woman:

*Dress in sarees, be girl,*

*Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,*

*Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,*

*Belong...Don’t sit*

*On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.*

*Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better*

*Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to*

*Choose a name, a role.*

This example does not cite the personal life of Kamala Das but it represents the women’s destiny. We do not like to go in wide range of illustrations due to limits of Research. Yet we have to say that the protest of Kamala Das, at various levels, is the protest of women. Now a day many Women’s Movements have come in present India and it is the tribute to kamala Das. One’s greatness cannot be measured only through her activity but its feature prospect should be noticed also. It is the glory of poetess and writer that gives the light to present the women.
Thus Kamala Das, with her three poetical collections, is quite secure in the realm of Indo-English verse. She may not have written much like Pritish Nandy or Nissim Ezekiel, like Monika Varma and Lila Ray among the Indian women writers and she may also not be as witty or intellectual as some other Confessional poets of the world, or as some 'academic' Indian poets like Shiv K. Kumar and A.K. Ramanujan, but she excels them all in popularity and feminine sensitivity. R. Parthasarathy remarks, "Kamala Das impresses by being very much herself in her poems", and that her "tone is distinctively feminine".29

No doubt, there may be defect in her protest and method but there is no doubt for her genuine and honest thinking for women. ‘O’ Kamala Das! You have given the beacon’s light to all the women who have awakened their conscious for women’s development. Your cry is the beguile, your observation is the light. In nutshell, we get mechanical and electromagnetic energy through your personality.

REFERENCES

2. N. Krishnaswamy etc.: Contemporary Literary Theory, p. 74-75.
4. Ibid. 73.


27. Kamala Das: “Substitute”, in *The Descendant*,
