Chapter-I

Introduction
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The open and bold expression of Kamala Das makes her find a niche amongst the literary artists of India. She became the talk of the town when she published her autobiography, "My Story"¹ in the mid-seventies at the age of 42 during her serious illness of heart disease. It is also equally interesting to note that this artist professes an honest disclosure of feminity as far as women's issues are concerned.

Her revelation has made the whole Indian society dazed and awesome. It is because of her forceful expression of the problems of women by citing her own story that she came to be accepted as the most daring and controversial poet.

The mention of 'sex' as a word was a taboo to the Nair families. But, to the amazement of her relatives and everyone, she freely mentions it and

All the subsequent page references are to this edition.
breaks the traditional canons only to add to the uniqueness of the kind of personality she possesses.

This woman shows her true selfhood successfully by portraying her true identity at the cost of discarding conventional beliefs and practices. She exposes herself by emptying all her feelings and secrecies. In doing so, she also gives vent to her unceasing search for genuine love and experimentation which she thinks must be explored to the fullest extent. She has not only made her personality bare but also has contributed, a sizable magnitude, to the growth of Indian poetry in English. She will be remembered more as a poet though she has made equal effort in the realm of fiction writing too.

When her autobiography, My Story was first published in 1976 raising a lot of hue and cry, some of her relatives were not happy at all. The very publication had rather invited hostile attitude from them. Nonetheless, the pain and anger imbibed to her kith and kin by penning her autobiography has become responsible in boosting her up to a stage of colossal cognizance.

Kamala Das was born at Punnayurkulum in the southern part of Malabar in 1934 as the daughter of V.M. Nair and Balamani Amma, the Malayalam poetess. She got her education from the Convent School,
Calcutta, but could not receive higher education due to her early marriage to K. Madhava Das at the tender age of fifteen. She is known mainly for her collections of poems published in three volumes: *Summer in Calcutta*, *The Descendants*, and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*.

Her autobiography, *My Story* is an unprecedented piece of literary work as far as women’s writings in India are concerned. This is the reason why the attention of the whole world was attracted and the publication got translated into not less than fourteen different languages of the world. She is a bilingual writer; and her short stories are very popular in Malayalam. Her works in Malayalam include more than fourteen books and the majority of them are collections of short stories. She has won the Poetry Award of the Asian PEN Anthology in 1964, and the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award 1969 for *Cold* and a collection of short stories in Malayalam.

The publication of *Summer in Calcutta* has given a different shape to Indo Anglian poetry. Its coming into being has revolutionized the attitudes, especially of the women folk. Women writers, for the first time, began to realize the indispensable need to unravel the deep-felt emotions and secrecy without inhibition as was found expressed in the works of Kamala

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Das. Her launching of the book was also at a time when India was experiencing a status free from colonial powers. Earlier poets had looked at the Holy Books or Historical characters for their themes, while she looked into her own self. Her writings are tinged with the spirit to liberate herself from any cultural or patriarchal dominance established by tradition. She, therefore, writes with the spirit of the Renaissance. Despite the constant male domination which she experienced after her early marriage at fifteen, she desired for freedom and her wish to free herself from the dull routines of domesticity and lust – is voiced in the following lines:

_I shall someday leave, leave the cocoon_
_You build around me with the morning tea,_
_Love words flung from doorway and of course,_
_Your tired lust, I shall someday take_
_Wings, fly around, as often petals_
_Do when free in air, and your dear ones,_
_Just the sad remnant of a root, on double-beds_
_And grieve._

_("I Shall Someday", Summer in Calcutta, p.52)_

She displays the capacity to determine her own destiny in the overwhelmingly patriarchal framework, and this is one of the essential tenets of all types of feminism – both liberal and radical. Her writings constitute both an act of protest and self determination. Though her creative writing did generate hostility among the relatives, and sometimes
even among friends, she went on it doggedly sustained by the feeling that it was through her writing that she could achieve her true being. She exercises in this a free and moral choice and faces the consequences of this choice which again is an important feminist principle. No doubt, she felt betrayed, disappointed, sad and lonely at her situation, but she did not get bogged down. Her love was like alms looking for a begging bowl that sought for a receptacle. She did not find enough love in her husband's house and this is implicitly shown by the following lines:

... I who have lost my way
And beg now at stranger's door to
Receive love at least in small change?5

Kamala Das' search for ideal love and the resultant disappointment seem to involve the psychological phenomenon of 'the animus' struggling to project the masculine imprint as interpreted by Jung. The attempt to seek in every lover the perfection of masculine being is destined to end in failure because of the impossibility of realizing the ideal in human form. The poet reveals this awareness in:

... I met a man, loved him call
Him not by any name, he is everyman
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love.6

6 Ibid., p. 60.
The very first collection of her poems has established her as a very different kind of Indian – English woman poet, specially from the earlier generation poets like Toru Dutt or Sarojini Naidu. Her fierce individuality challenging the cultural and traditional systems is shown by the following lines:

I wore a shirt and my
Brother’s trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl,
Be wife, they said.\(^7\)

It was something the Indian readers did not use but against which they could not protest. In a male-dominated world, the earlier women poets had acquiesced with the situation and had rarely felt the subdued position they had been allotted. Whatever may be the standing of Kamala Das as a poet – and hers is certainly high enough to be among the leading poets of today, inspite of her repetitive themes – credit should solely go to her for rebelling so gloriously against the unjust domination of the so called ‘Stronger Sex’.

The poetry of Kamala Das has a special force and appeal that ring deep to the reader’s sensibility. The force is primarily because of the honesty and candour with which she asserts her right to exist as an individual with a distinctive identity. She tries to be on her authentic self

\(^7\) Kamala Das, “An Introduction” in Summer in Calcutta, p.44.
even if this involves breaking the moulds of traditional ethics and propriety. Her poetry voices, a vehement protest against the senseless restrictions which compel a sensitive and intelligent woman, to lead a vapid kind of existence broadly indicated by her in "An Introduction":

    Be embroiderer, be cook
    Be a quarreler with servants, fit in, oh
    Belong, cried the categorizer.  

Kamala Das refused to fit into any scheme devised by the categorizers. The frank and confessional quality of her poetry is her main strength, though in the absence of a mature self-restraint we can also notice in it a dash of callous exhibitionism, particularly when she has to flaunt her flamboyant 'lust' in order to retrieve her undermined dignity.

The bitter irony and anguish of a woman who finds herself tied down to a meaningless routine of household activities can be noticed in many of Kamala Das’ poems.

One can see how she struggles to assert her individuality and her own existence in all her poems. She is often grouped under the group of confessional poets. She has succeeded in going into the subconscious

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8 Ibid., p.60.
needs, desires and aspirations of the feminine mind. In this regard, Anisur Rahaman comments:

*As a poet, she implores her psychic
Geography with an exceptional female energy
and achieves the capability to express her
inimitable vision through the technique of
sincerity. Of all the women poets of the
present in India, Das projects herself as a
fervent feminist poetic voice always exacting
the naturalistic, freedom and choices. Her
poetry contributes for the most needful
awakening of woman as a living entity in
being – in – the world.*

The modern Indian English poetry with all its aggressiveness finds boldness and culmination in the works of Kamala Das. No other feminist poets in India could achieve the absolute rebellious dimensions of Kamala Das in their poetry. In fact, she makes a poetic revolt by making introspective pondering upon the unfortunate state of existence of Indian women. From the beginning, she demonstrates a continuity of theme and expression concerning her feminist ideals. Kamala Das speaks out her heart both as a woman and as a poet. She struggles to cope with problems and dilemmas. She does not attempt to intellectualise rather she makes a discovery of human existence and narrates her experiences vividly and

passionately. She tries to reject masks and roles; and refuses to accept the limitation of her biology too.

When there is no sense of meaningful participation in the social life and the individual is condemned to lead a purposeless existence with no challenging responsibilities to shoulder, she is likely to be haunted by a sense of hollowness and futility. Kamala Das' poetry, as has been mentioned earlier, does have an authenticity and force to the extent that she honestly brings out the triviality and shallowness of the life she has been pushed into to live as a middle class woman. Nonetheless, it is also to observe that the positive human substance of the experiences of such an individual is bound to remain limited so long as he does not boldly repudiate the senseless curbs imposed on him by the situation. Kamala Das does give expression to the restlessness and irritation of a person who has been shut off from the larger currents of social life, but we also notice in her poems a timid attempt to assuage her bitterness by an easy Arnoldian recipe of personal fidelity and intensities of love-experience. In her candid moods Kamala Das admits that love as an anodyne is sadly inadequate so long as the individual's role in the social environ does not alter.

Readers will not fail to see to the fact that Kamala Das' poems are tinged with the elements of both the external and internal worlds, and her
response to the external world is sharper in particular than her inner restlessness.

Her husband Mr. Das, an official in the Reserve Bank of India, Bombay was an experienced man in sex especially with his maid servants. His contact with his wife was, therefore, usually cruel and brutal. He talked with a tone of boastfulness for his acquaintanceship with the type of women who were nymphomaniacal and sluttish. The attitude of the husband made Kamala Das frustrated and disappointed and as a result, she grew revengeful towards him, and reacted in a non-traditional fashion in love-making, offering herself to any handsome or resourceful man whom she came across, and forgave even her rapists. Her husband had no soothing words for her, no time to spare for her and was ever busy sorting out his files and affixing his signature on them. The traditional duties of a Hindu wife were to offer respect towards her husband; she was expected to discharge her duties well and to look to the needs and comforts of her husband.

This eroded her own distinct personality and dwarfed her forever, as she makes clear in the poem, “The Old Playhouse”:

... You called me wife,
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
Questions I mumbled incoherent replies.\(^{10}\)

This is actually a strong protest against a hollow marital bond which
she cannot untie. In India where marriage and love go hand in hand, it is
most unfortunate that such a sensitive woman as Kamala Das is tied to a
stake where she cannot fly. Such occurrences are not uncommon in the land
of Gandhi and Nehru, turning many a woman tragic and gloomy in their
attitudes towards life. Kamala Das has made repeated protests against this
sort of situation in her poetry.

The parental home of Kamala Das was influenced by the movement
of Gandhiji. They wore khadi clothes, spun khadi yarn, especially her
grandmother, to whom this girl was deeply attached in her early age and
whom she remembered so sweetly in her later life. Mahatma’s photos hung
in every room. Even the servants felt his presence in the house and began
wearing khaddar. The Nalapat House which she called her ancestral home,
consisted of seven occupants in all, who were her grandmother, her aunt
Ammini, her grand-uncle, the poet, her great grandmother, her two sisters,
and Mahatmaji.

The life of Kamala Das, as penned by herself in her works, shows a search for man-woman relationship which should guarantee both love and security to a woman. She lives with her husband and looks after her three children who are all sons.

When she speaks of love outside marriage, she does not advocate for the kind of infidelity women should possess nor does she insist to commit adultery; she simply has the curiosity to explore love to the utmost possible level. And it is also important to note that she gives a mythical framework to her search for genuine love and identifies it with the Radha-Krishna myth or with the Mira-Krishna relationship. There are several poems on the Lord Krishna in her volumes, supported by references to this Lord in her prose writings especially *My Story* and *Alphabet of Lust*.

The period from 1968 to 1973 seems to have pushed Kamala Das to a situation giving less poetic power and fecundity. She remained more prosaic during these few years. Her prose works written after *The Descendants* are almost exclusively autobiographical. Frigidity and the "Sepia-tainted Photograph" clearly show her personal experiences and with the subject of love and emotional discontentment in an empty married life. Though her prose writings are controversial, her essays like "I Studied All

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Men”, “What Women Expect Out of Marriage and What They Get”, “Why Not More Than One Husband?” and “I Have Lived Beautifully” tend to consolidate her image in public as feminine, forthright, unconventional and yet honest.

Kamala Das caricatures the feminine role to emphasize the plight of being a woman in this world. Her quest for self-knowledge only leads her to the painful realization and she compares herself to an Old Playhouse with all its lights put out. The conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male oriented universe is a theme which preoccupies her most.

Women in the present world seem to search for some kind of identity amidst all the existing problems trying to suppress them. The search for feminist identity has, therefore, become an interesting topic in the realm of research. Under the patriarchal structure, women’s manner, ideas and their very souls are modified by the constant pressure of masculine standards. “Economically”, quotes Juliet Mitchell, “women are the most highly exploited group; they are also the most physically determined as inferior. This is of course, their position within each race or class. But as a sex, despite national, racial or class differences, they share the overall inferiorization which is total”. But with the rise of feminism, women began to discern and discover values of life and rhythms of vitality of their own,
without submitting to their criticism of any task-master. For the first time, they had an opportunity to be themselves. Therefore, despite the variation in the biological set-up women must be given an avenue to stand upon and be treated at par with menfolk. In the light of the interpretations and definitions of feminism made above, the writings of Kamala Das are interpreted and investigated in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Kamala Das is a great writer, who tries to create an identity of her own self by breaking down the existing social power structures and create a place for herself in the world of masculine hierarchies. As a woman writer, she could thereby assert her emotion boldly; she writes with a force to alter her existing marginalized position and accepts her rightful role as a significant part of the society. By accepting the self, she could challenge the accepted notions of the female and redraft a general opinion on the feminine mystique.

In her book, *My Story*, she successfully shows her true selfhood and insists on being herself in the midst of all kinds of pressures, mounted on her by the embedded patriarchal values. She discards altogether, the weakening and constricting conventional taboos which she thinks deteriorate against her essential self and thus breaks open her own cocoon
and comes out from it to have a better glimpse of the world around her. The would-be-poet in her is already evident when she says:

*I was very sentimental. I wrote sad poems about dolls who lost their heads and had to remain headless forever. Each poem of mine made me cry.*

Kamala Das' autobiography, *My Story*, clearly shows how her urge for identity and liberation finds its fruition and fulfilment in her creative writing. On her emergence as a poet by overcoming her domestic self, she is also compelled to play a role of duality basing on the monotonous enslaved wife and mother. Her such condition is explained by Raji Narasimhan in the following words:

*The heroine of My Story is a semi-educated girl, rudely pushed into marriage, into premature sexual experience, to be left floundering in the quick and of repeated pregnancies and childbirths. This doomed girl overcomes her destiny. There is a heroism about this effort in an earlier age which gives a period weight to the book. It also makes one overlook its mixture of good and bad prose, and its emotional kite-flying.*

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The ever struggling self in Kamala Das which is desperate for release and fulfilment makes her tone of confession thrilling and enchanting. Her quest for identity often occurs as a theme in several of her poems. She is always on the track to discover her true self. For example, "The Old Playhouse" describes that love aims at achieving an insight into one's own being, not into another's; its essence lies in the realization of one's own self, and not in the loss of one's freedom. Her situation to gain more experiences of life and her own selfhood is seen in the following lines:

*It was not to gather knowledge of yet another man that I came to you but to learn what I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, . . . For, Love is narcissus at the water's edge, haunted by its lonely face, and yet it must seek at Last And end, a pure, a total freedom, it must Will the mirrors To shatter and the kind might To erase the water.*

Kamala Das becomes the mouthpiece for exposing the inherent right of every woman to protest and revolt against all those forces in society which conspire to hinder the development of her personality. She presents a fine and relevant example of being a woman by delineating her own trials and tribulations. We find in her the confronting and overcoming nature of the contrasts a woman faces and a woman who seeks self-awareness and

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15 *Summer in Calcutta*, p. 16.
self-fulfillment. And this conception is one of the important aspects of all feminist theories. Unfortunately, the scholars have overlooked or ignored such aspects of her creative personality which are inconvenient to them. A slightly more discreet perusal of this huge scholarship reveals that her love poetry has been misread strategically in fragments to substantiate a thesis which does not hold true in respect of her total output. Conceding that there are several milestones in her evolving sensibility, it is unfair to play up one phase of development to the detriment of the entire creative ambience. The present paper is an attempt at setting the critical perspective right about her appropriation or otherwise of the male space in her poetic oeuvre.

It is true that most Indian women poets treat their theme of love with an intensely personal confessional mode and certain amount of attraction for the feminist views. While their attempt was to explore the 'self' in depth, most of them could scratch only the surface level. However, the poetry of Kamala Das has been hailed as excellent because of the apparent daring imagination, stylistic innovation, richness of energy and moving force. All these qualities spring from her poetic genius; she is a natural poet, not a semi-skilled craftsman trying to construct poetic artifacts. She is an investigator of the impulses, one who is obsessed with the flow of inner experience. Being a natural poet her poems may show different levels of
poeticality, depending upon the nature of the spatio-temporal effect on her senses and intellect. The following words of the Soviet poet Bella Akhmadulina throw light upon the way the natural poet would generate poetry:

    After I have lived in some faraway place for about
ten days, I suddenly hear a sound ... the necessary word
is found. And then I write and write and for twenty four
hours a day without a break until the guiding sound has
faded away.\textsuperscript{16}

An idea almost similar to the above quotation is also found in the words of Kamala Das when she says:

    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.\textsuperscript{17}

The poetry of Kamala Das is spontaneous, straightforward and simple. She paves the way for the reader to approach to the new fields of feelings and emotions in an earnest manner. 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 attained the emotional maturity to write sublime poetry,


\textsuperscript{17} Atma Ram, Interviews with Indian English Writers (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1983), p.81.
yet, her heart flows in words abounding in sensual rhythms and soulful laments. The experience she concretises is hers and it could also be anybody else’s. Kamala Das has glorified love in her poems. Love to her is a kind of beautiful religion of which sex is an indispensable part. She views that her love is not mere lust; but gives her inclination to her preference for the sexual kind.

We also find in her poetry an alert and inquisitive approach to life. She draws inspiration from the simple, the sad and the gorgeous events in everyday life. The evenings in the old Nalapat house, the silence around the hanging corpse of a maid servant, the frenzied dance of the eunuchs in the scorching Calcutta afternoon, the smell of death in the hospital wards, the Lankan Street, a vigorous but loveless lover, all inspired her to write. And she writes, dipping the sharp end of her imagination in her simple but sensitive, sensual but sad heart, about the mundane and the ethereal; and the reader witnesses the coalescence of various emotions in her published books of verse.

Kamala Das has succeeded in writing delightful poetry by depicting her personal experience as the main base. She has also gained the applause of the people who once showered on her the venom of negative criticism. It is with extreme sincerity that she pictures her quest for identity. Her
writings are filled with the song of a heart that longs for sexual satisfaction, the recollection of the purity and playfulness of the childhood, the broken womanhood, the love of the grandmother, the cruelty and hypocrisy of men, the painful realization of failing youth and the approaching old age and the despair of gerontion itself.

Though many critics have pointed out the failures and limitations of Kamala Das, she still finds adequate expression to translate the various vicissitudes of life. She occupies an important position among the poets who constitute the modern tradition of Indian poetry in English. The poetry of the modern writers like Kamala Das is recommendable to the students on the ground that it successfully meets the basic requirements of all good literature. She possesses clarity of thought, intensity of feeling, refinement and subtlety of expression. She is a woman who knows of her own authentic self and as such would not be guilty of any looseness in thought or feeling or in the handling of language.

She increases our awareness of how the dead weight of outworn values can block the emotional and intellectual growth of an individual. Through the images of the night girls with sham obstrusive breasts walking on the streets and beaming the sickly smiles at men, she brings into a vivid focus the sterile and wasted existence of the wrongly adjusted individual on
whom a false role has been imposed. Kamala Das has a sharp nose for the sense of smell and she has the honesty to recognize the happenings around her.

"The Dance of the Eunuchs" shows how painful and irrelevant the life of an ill-adjusted sensitive individual can be in the rotting and decaying society. The atmosphere and the rhythms in the poem convey the central image of a group of sterile and harassed individuals, overwhelmed by a sense of destitution and helplessness, dancing their strange and unnatural dance:

Their voices
Were harsh, their songs melancholy; they sang of
Lovers dying and of children left unborn ...  
Some beat their drums; others beat their sorry breasts
And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstacy. They
were thin in limbs and dry; like half-burnt logs from
Funeral pyres, a drought and a rottenness
Were in each of them.

(Summer in Calcutta, p. 9)

The vacant ecstatic wrought by these figures symbolizes the restless turmoil experienced by the poet herself. She also discusses the general condition of our society in a poem like 'The Flag' in which the intensity of the feeling shown in the poem is not backed by an adequate understanding
of the issues involved. She registers from the outside that there is something wrong somewhere but she fails to pierce beneath the surface and cannot understand the lines as follows:

The
Rich men dance with one another's wives and
Eke out a shabby
Secret ecstasy, and, poor old men lie
On wet pavements and
Cough, cough their lungs out. Yet there is whiskey
On the breath of winds
And channel Number Five, and the cooking's smell

(Summer in Calcutta, p. 21)

Kamala Das seems to have an audacity and a naivety in the course of the problems of the poor as if she had drawn up a plebiscite with them, and the feeling that she sides with the poor may be seen in the following words taken from her autobiography.

I have often wondered why the government cannot pass an order that all huge buildings must be let out their basement hall for the homeless during the harsh monsoons and during the winter. Every hotel can be made to spend one tenth of its daily earnings in feeding the poor. Charity is India's ancient tradition, there is no harm in serving it when the times are hard.

(My Story, pp. 200-201)
A close reading of her works tells that she is sometimes haunted by a sense of hollowness and futility since there is no sense of meaningful participation in the social life. She brings out the triviality, vicissitude and shallowness of the life she is destined to live as a woman belonging to the middle class. She gives an expression of the restlessness and the irritation of a person who has been scrapped from the larger currents of social life, but we also notice in her poems a timid attempt to rise above all these lonely experiences.

In her candid moods Kamala Das hunts for true love. She analyses and synthesizes the meaning of love; but love cannot be found in the human form. She, therefore, focuses her search for true love to the divine, Lord Krishna.

Whatsoever the case may be, Kamala Das enjoys substantial visibility today as a woman writer and her works are widely read. It is also the responsibility of such a feminist writer to arouse the inactive, lethargic women from their slumber, so that they shed their baseless fears and inhibitions and stand up against the forces which are curbing their progress and freedom. These women should come together and unite themselves to fight against the unjust forces of patriarchy.
Love, respectability and freedom are some of the indispensable passions that go along with life; and, these are the desires which almost every individual runs after. However, they cannot come so easily to a person especially to the women folk. Women must work hard for the attainment of these passions. Freedom will afford them a chance to improve their lot. The effort of a handful people will be ineffective, a mass movement is what is required.

The poetry of Kamala Das is based on her undaunted effort to fight against the unjust male hegemony. She is all bent to expose her feelings and emotions without any inhibition and as a result, her poetry is full of eagerness and questions that are rarely answered. They are queries about truth which, at certain situations, seem incongruous and unbearable. Her forceful question on sex, rarely appreciated by her admirers and friends alike, is also seen in the following lines:

*When a man is dead, or a women,*
*We call the corpse not he*
*Or she but it. Does it*
*Not mean that we believe*
*That only the souls have sex and that sex is*
*Invisible?*

("The Doubt", The Descendants p.22)
Among the contemporary literary figures, Kamala Das occupies a prominent position as a poetess of talent and artistry. She, as a major Indian poetess of English, has attracted international attention by virtue of her bold and uninhibited articulation of feminine urges along with other poets like Gauri Despande, Mamata Kalia, de Souza and others.

Kamala Das is in fact a woman substance. There is always that search for feminist identity in her works. She goes on delving deep into the sub-conscious mind of a woman by diving into her own self, and unraveling mysteries which were never known to Indian women, or frankly speaking, nobody dared to ravel them in the past, in such a way, in such an orthodox and custom-ridden conservative society.

For centuries together women had suffered mentally and physically under the patriarchal domination. But Kamala Das does not suffer quietly like other women of the past; she tries to fight against all these suppressions.

In the forthcoming chapters, an attempt will be made to show how Kamala Das advocates feminist ideals. Knowing her place and position, she never fails to claim it. The crux of the problem of the so called man-woman relationship in the established society is that man is born to rule and woman to obey; man, the master and woman the slave, man for the field
and woman for the hearth and so on; and such pattern had been followed for many centuries. However, with the rise of Indian women writers in the literary world in or around the sixties, a new awakening is dawning and the century old mutely followed relationship is now challenged by feminist writers such as Anita Desai, Sashi Despande, Rama Mehta, Jai Nimbkar and poets like Kamala Das, Gauri Despande and others.

The word ‘feminism’ has aroused great interest amongst people all over the world. A somewhat detailed treatment will be unveiled in the next chapter of my thesis. When we talk of ‘feminism’ it does not mean that we are talking of equality in the sense that women start dressing up as males or that there should be a reversal of the roles adopted by men and women in the society. Feminism demands, as Kamala Das demands; love, respect, compassion and understanding from the males. If the love of men towards women would stem from devotion, the problems faced by women would be easily solved. Love is a very tender emotion, which comes after much devotion. Love is the essential emotion which binds people together. Everybody craves for such kind of love. Kamala Das also craves for such kind of love but she never got it from her husband.

The search for her identity in a male-dominated society was a hard task but she’d been able to express her pent-up feelings through her poems.
I was somewhat surprised when I first read some of her poems. The way she had exposed man-woman relationship, the sex-intrigues she penned, in an unusual manner, the uncontrolled assertion of the various parts of a woman's physique, the freedom she'd exercised in expressing the remorse of her mind, etc., aroused a kind of enthusiasm on the part of the reader. And this is the standing evidence as to why I have chosen the unparalleled artistry found in her especially amongst Indian women writers.

Feminist concern in Indian writing in English, is one of the most striking topics to be discussed upon. The word 'feminism' seems to refer to an intense awareness of identity as a woman, and interest in feminine problems. The subjugation of women is a central fact of history and it is the main cause of all psychological disorders in society. The meaning of the word 'feminism' has so many connotations and has been wrongly interpreted. According to Janet Radcliffe Richards, "feminism has a strong fundamental case, is intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting the essence of feminism".¹⁸

All through history a woman has been in a position to seek fulfilment in her submissive domesticity. Women who were frustrated and

disappointed with the aura set for them were considered subversive or neurotic. The same thing happened to Kamala Das. She was not satisfied with the limits set for her and she became restless and neurotic. She thus endorses a scathing attack on male domination and the subjection of women. A number of scholars have also been devoting their time on the study of Indian writings in English. So many books have been published in this regard. Indian writings in English are gaining momentum and popularity day by day. Kamala Das too, as one of the Indian writers writing in English and gaining popularity in a gradual manner, has contributed a lot and her writings have become a context for investigating the term feminism which is broadly discussed in the next chapter i.e. Chapter II and minutely, in the remaining chapters.