Chapter-VI

Conclusion
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The life-story of Kamala Das is shaped by myriads of conflicts and controversies. But though she is beset by all such problems and hardships, she is able to resist them by her own, and can stoically stand against such forces and repress them. She is able to face and surmount these issues because of her undeflecting courage and bravery.

Her life is an odyssey from innocence to experience, ignorance to knowledge and youth to maturity. After her unending conflict between her and the society or, between her inner self and the outer world, she at last felt to be at home with herself. Her unceasing search for an ideal love ends up to be a 'fond conceit' like that of Coleridge's yearning for the lost youth, and finally, she turns for her Hope and Aspiration to Lord Krishna.

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Her revelation of her own life-story in the form of her own autobiography is unique and unprecedented in the genre of Feminist Writings in Indian English Literature. Such an effort by an Indian woman without bypassing or belittling individual experiences, would help women map out a new world of female space. Indeed, the works of Kamala Das have influenced many feminist writers writing in the post-colonial period particularly in the context of India. Her effort to carve out a new world of female space is of immense viability taking into consideration the subaltern structures of family hierarchy, where the woman often occupied a position of prime importance. Such a role of the delinfeation of women's autobiography would be conducive in the restructuring and the modifying of the accepted norm of patriarchal discourse in our society today.

In the contemporary literary works, especially written by women-folk, the feminine voice seems to claim for perfect freedom in personal matters, chiefly in relation to love and sex. Kamala Das, as an Indian woman, also raises her voice high so as to protest against the established order and tries to affirm her distinct identity breaking the traditional taboos of love and sex which is canoned by the power of patriarchy or the outcome of the age-old male dominated society.

Kamala Das, as a contemporary Indian writer, attempts to dismantle any pro-misogynistic psyche which would mar the true identity in a
woman. It is with this purpose that she launches a scathing attack, vouchsafed by her undeflected spirit, to the power and authority of the phallus.

Her mention of the words like adultery, nymphomaniac and other excessive feminine inquisitions though might have sometimes intruded the antique ethos and established conventions, are intentionally done, to drive home in giving an x-ray result of her true identity and individuality. Her autobiography, "My Story" will serve as a blue print for those who would like to follow her footnote or those who are desirous to reveal their personalities bare and naked, while upholding their own authentic individualism.

She is pure, original and a powerful contemporary Indian writer. As a poet also she is quite conscious of her artistic design and purpose as well as her responsibility towards her vision. She diminishes male domination and exerts her rights independently at the cost of altering her religion. Kamala Das has now taken her pledge on Islam. Her transformation of religion is also a clear indication that she enjoys woman's identity and liberty.

What women could not speak before the male super power in the past has undergone a change. These women can now raise their voice in
expressing what they want and feel taking cue of the daringness and the boldness shown to them by Kamala Das. Her poems and her works are a vehicle to bring out the suppressed tension in the minds of women, who are not able to speak like her. Her use of the Krishna-Radha myth is also a clear symbol of her indomitable courage. Because it is through this metaphor that she makes herself exalted to the level of the 'divine'. She considers Lord Krishna as her mate who comes to her in myriad forms and to whom she says:

_In many shapes shall I surrender to His desire._
_I shall be fondled by him. I shall pass through all the pathways of this world, condemning none, understanding all and then become part of Him._
_Then for me there shall be no return journey..._

_[My Story, p. 197]_

When Kamala Das is only a corporeal body, she has the valour to merge herself with Lord Krishna who is divine and ethereal. When she is only a human being of flesh and blood, she is fain to associate her sex-motif to a divine being like Lord Krishna and yet, it is done to show that she is a true feminist writer.

Most of the poems are explorations of the gender roles any Indian woman plays while mentioning her own roles – the embarrassment they
involve, the resistance they provoke, the conflict they create and the pain they cause – are all brought out vividly. She is truly confessional and this confessional mode becomes a device to formalize the process of analysis and adjustment of the problems that crop up from arranged marriage at an early age. In fact, the writing of her own autobiography, *My Story* can also be taken as a yardstick of her defiance against early marriage or force marriage. It is in this work that she mentions all her frustrations, doubts and anxieties stemming out of her early marriage.

Kamala Das, as a confessional poet, does not limit her concern only for herself. She has the capacity to transcend the purely personal and embrace the non-personal and finally merge with it. In her poem, "The Flag" she depicts the futility of national pride when poverty and blood-shed sow misery among the multitude. She says:

*Poor flag, dear one,*
*Your pride is lost, it is time to leave the sky,*
*And fall, fall and hide*
*Your shame beneath this blood-drenched Indian soil*
*And lie there and rot.*

*[Summer in Calcutta, p. 22]*

This expresses her deep concern for the people outside the personal circle. Her quest for her own identity makes her to be a confessional poet,
and in the process she expresses deep sympathy in the sufferings of others – be it about an old woman’s ‘longing look’ from behind the window bars, or be it about a bleeding brown comrade in Sri Lanka, her poems initiate or facilitate the fusion of her self with the surrounding. It would not be unworthy, therefore, to say that Kamala Das presents her views based on the broader regions of humanism where life is taken into account not as mere birth, copulation and death.

In her effort to discover her own self, Kamala Das, unknowingly shook the norms of a male-dominated society. There had been almost no change made for hundreds of years under patriarchy before the emergence of Mrs. Das in the Indian literary scene. Though she has crossed some of the limits permitted for a lady in our society, she has properly given her feminine yearnings and curiosity in the proper perspectives. She says:

*The tragedy of life is not death but growth,*
*the child growing into adults and growing out of needs,*
*discovering that the old have black-rimmed nails and scalps that emanate a sweet, mouldy smell.*

["Composition", *The Descendants*, p. 36]
What she means by "growth" is not the growth of a girl into adulthood or a woman alone. Her "growth" here, signifies the growth of a girl into a wife and mother giving sketchy coverage of the experiences in terms of isolation, turbulence and depression wrought by the phases of time of a married woman.

After entering into the statehood of a married woman, she starts searching for an ideal love. But very soon she realizes the futility of her search. She finds the remedy worse than the disease. For example, she turns to a group of lovers when she fails to find or receive love from her legal husband. But "they said each of/ them, I do not love, I cannot love, it is not/In my nature to love, but I can be kind to you ...." What she needs is not kindness but love. They only toy with her physical body and do not fulfil her psychic needs.

The pain and the agony of not finding a true lover torments her and a sense of defeat oppresses her and she finds no way out of this limbo of sex and the vicissitudes of married life. She becomes aware of the fact that reliance on body cannot carry her far enough, or barge her to fulfil her ultimate desire; and begins to learn that it is rather a trap which prevents her from experiencing true love. She discovers that, after all, the pleasures body offers are of cloying and ephemeral nature. In this regard, the
Keatsian remark on the difference between Art and Real Life may be quoted as follows:

Happy Love!
Forever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.²

In real life, human beings enjoy the pleasures of love fully and to the maximum, but the pleasures of love, when enjoyed in excess give rise to a feeling of intense disillusionment. The enjoyment of the pleasures of love in real life leaves Kamala Das also in a most feverish and fatigue condition. She comes to the realization that love which thrives and flourishes on body is bound to wither with it and the search for true love in a world of philanderers and casonovas is a futile exercise. So she surrenders totally to the mythical world of Krishna and Vrindavan to seek lasting love and fulfillment. In this context, she imagines herself as Radha and finds comfort in the arms of imaginary Krishna.

Furthermore, she can also experience absolute liberty from the rigid social code and the constraints of super ego in the presence of Krishna.

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Contrary to her husband's love which chains and confines her, Krishna promises total freedom and security.

Ammalu, the younger sister of her grandmother, who was also a poet, exerted a great influence on Kamala Das. This grandmother, who worshipped Lord Krishna wrote several poems in His praise. Though she was pretty and eligible, she remained a spinster until her death. She remained very faithful to Lord Krishna to such an extent that she would fain preserve her chastity or modesty for His cause. In her last poem she wrote, "My Chastity is my only gift to you, oh, Krishna...." Her writings seem to have influenced and motivated Kamala Das very much.

Taking cue from her grandmother, Kamala Das surrenders her hopes and aspirations to Lord Krishna. The haunting image of Krishna becomes inseparable. She remembers him on her bridal night and when she is pregnant and also while playing with her son. He appears to her in so many shapes and continues residing in her consciousness. ".... whose blue face is/A phantom-lotus on the waters of my dream".

It is against the background that one can appreciate the significance of her Krishna poems. Her poem, Ghanashyam flashes in the following:

And each time my husband,
His mouth bitter with sleep.
Kisses, mumbling to me of love,
But if he is you and I am you
Who is loving who
Who is the husk who is the kernel
Where is the body where is the soul?
You come in strange forms
And your names are many.

[Ghanashyam, Tonight This Savage Rite, p. 19]

The above poem depicts very nicely the transformation that was wrought in her by her relentless search for love. She realizes that her husband can never establish a rapport with her soul, because "And each time his lust was quenched/And he turned his back on me...." What she seeks is a total merger in her lover. But since it is not possible in the actual world, she searches for Ghanashyam, the ideal lover. Dissolution of the individual self and the total identification is possible only with her mythical lover. This is clearly shown and illustrated by the poem, "Radha", where she depicts the ecstasy Radha experiences in Krishna's embrace. The poem is shown below:

Everything in me
Is melting, even the hardness at the core
O, Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting
Nothing remains but
You....

[Radha, Tonight This Savage Rite, p. 23]
Critics opine that the treatment of Radha by Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das goes with a slight difference. Sarojini Naidu's Radha is not anti-sexual, yet sex is not the primary concern in the Radha poems. But in Kamala Das sex implies a deep sense of intensified relationship which is not devotional, it is very much human in its concern and very much down to earth.

In the hunt for an ideal love, the experiences she receives are innumerable and sometimes incongruous. Suffering and humiliation are undoubtedly the dominating themes in her works taken up for discussion. She airs her views with a boldness unparalleled and she hopes that the society might change their attitude to those who suffer and are humiliated. Kamala Das is obviously a poet of the modern Indian woman's ambivalence, giving expression to it more openly and frankly than any other Indian woman poet. The horizon of her expression seems to have no limit in the depiction and the investigation of the self. She can be claimed as one of the boldest women writers in Indian English Literature.

When it comes to the deliberation and the discussion of the depiction of anatomical images, she is frank and has no inhibition. Her lyric is erotic and there is a sparkle of exotica. Her language is always overwhelming and
energizing. See how she titillates her readers in the following lines taken from her poem, "An Introduction" as follows:

When
I ask for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.

[Summer in Calcutta, p. 59]

The works of Kamala Das basically lie on the podium of sex experiences. She is frank enough to speak about her sex life freely. Her body, with its numerous centres all over, records the contents of her daily experience. Her body is her Malgudi as everything seems to centre around it. It is her greatest curiosity shop. Besides, it is also her most indispensable and sensitive instrument of judging her world or the world around her. She accumulates evidence through its responses and records them in her own non-conformist and uninhibited way. It traps all sensations, all songs, all shifts and all situations. It also responds to all 'hurts' and 'stabs' that love can offer.

Kamala Das' oeuvre is a qualified dissertation and documentation of her lived experiences. And these are the experiences she encounters in the odyssey of her life of unusual distinction. Whatever experiences she records in her poems are also all intimations of genuine isolation and
turbulence and not of tranquility, which many readers might expect to hear from her. Her poetry, on this count, has also achieved a certain degree of uniqueness.

Her chief contribution to modern Indian poetry is not only the stunning frankness she shows in every line she writes, but also in making public a vast fund of agonies and information regarding woman's plight and psychic experience that lay hidden for too long in the private female sector.

She squeezes out all the feminine failures and success in a woman and etches out in all caustic details in full public view. And on that account, she has become, according to some critics, a female Pope of the brave new woman who can look to her with reverence for inspiration, guidance and commitment.

Kamala Das, in most of the occasions, might have been seen as a crusader of sex. But we are aware that when sex has been consummated it leaves the person bored and fatigue. In the like manner, one might not take her for granted that she is an epitome of sex-intrigue for all the time.

The impression her poems create may reveal her endless quest for love and sex. But the reader should be a discerning judge to understand the
posture she adopts. Behind the lines there lurks a figure with a glint of irony in her eyes.

Modern poets are in the habit of using irony. In their poetry, one finds that fair is foul and foul is fair. They say one thing and may mean another. Their appreciation may be ridicule and their ridicule, appreciation. All this means that an ironist is a conscious artist practising his art with circumspection and sometimes with ambiguity. Kamala Das has also used irony to suit her situations and sensibilities.

Whatever may be the case, a close reading of the whole corpus of Kamala Das' works reveal that her thought, style and tone have attracted a wider readership for their lyrical directness, immediacy, and quickness. She has in them all the female sensibility and the female desires with forcefulness and forthrightness. Through her works and especially through her poems she defines and redefines herself, her fluctuating moods, her amatory experiences in a world peopled by fond husband, lovers and flirtitious friends.

In conclusion one can easily see that Kamala Das is a modern Indo-Anglian poet, who is highly sensitive and feminine. Her works are a vast repertoire of feminist longing, yearning, and idealism. She has aired the sufferings and the humiliations of the Indian woman folk in the appropriate
perspective. She has also voiced her views and speculations with a boldness unparalleled. She is definitely a poet of the modern Indian woman's ambivalence, given expression without any hesitation, but with originality and authenticity.

Her contribution to Indian Literature basically shows that the female body can be celebrated to the fullest extent although it gets hurt and victimized by male domination, and for which she whole-heartedly resents. She has also vividly shown the insignificance of man's manoeuvrings by demonstrating her own struggles in the realization of his ideal. Kamala Das may or may not be serious about woman's emancipation from male domination, but as a poet and a writer she shows her seriousness and artistic craftsmanship concerned with her own identity as a woman. While exploring and introspecting her own identity, she has also explored the possibility of adapting the abilities of men poets to voice her own feminine grievances as a woman, wife, and a responsible mother. Indeed, she has broadened the horizon of women's psyche by delving deep into her own identity to give a new genre of post-colonial Indian writings in English.