"You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her in the long summer of your love so that she would forget not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless pathways of the sky".

All poets are sensitive, but women are especially so. Kamala Das is one such poet who represents the sensibility of the modern Indian woman. In fact, Kamala Das is the new feminist voice in the contemporary Indian poetry, voicing forth a woman's point of view. The focal point in her poetry is love which provides Kamala Das with the driving force to resolve her painful dilemma of tradition and modernity, so as to bring balance in her life. And till the balance is brought about, she goes through agony.

Kamala Das is a poet for whom finding, establishing and also coming to terms with her identity is very important and
she does it through love. "Her poetry voices to the full not only the existential pressures granted during the modern Indian Woman's journey from tradition to modernity, but even the Indian Woman poet's commitment to reality". For her, it has not been easy. In fact, her journey has been extremely tortuous, making her walk bare-feet on the naked, sharp thorns of emotions and draw her own blood like a thornbird. "Her poetic corpus configurates an inner voyage, an awareness beyond 'Skin's lazy hungers', to the hidden soul. It enacts her quest, an exploration into her self and seeking of her identity".

Kamala Das is an intense poet, celebrating an intense emotion through her poetry. And the emotion she lives and breathes is love, making her all the more sensitive. Her pre-occupation with the theme of love, lends her poetry an extra quality of vigour and vitality, while also adding to it a raw, earthy kind of appeal. A study of Kamala Das's poetry reveals that she is a woman who has a deep desire to love and be loved. She has grown up thinking that Love is a beautiful anguish and 'Thapasaya'. She seeks the perfect, but is unable to have that because reality for her always turns out to be different. The ideal eludes her and the frustration sets in. Her poetry is born out of her frustration and echoes the shattering of her dreams. It also voices her hopes and lives and relives with the poetess, and in the minds of the readers the nebulous
nuances and the cadences of the delicate aspirations of a man-woman relationship. Her poetry catches it all. Consequently, she comes out as a deeply sensuous poet.

The concept of trying to find one's 'identity', 'self' or 'Atman' through physical love is not something alien to Indian tradition. 'Erotica', has always been a part of our tradition, running parallel to the spiritual stream. Vatsyayana's, Kama-Sutra and the love poetry made alive in the sculpture of 'Khajuraho' is a part of our cultural tradition. Radha-Krishana love-lore, too, is a definite part of our culture. We have poets like Meera and Jaidev who dedicated themselves totally to the theme of love in different ways. And we have our religion solely based on love. Faiz Ahmad Faiz, the renowned Pakistani poet has said that "while one may recognise other themes for treatment in poetry - themes of political freedom, fundamental rights, justice and equality but the true domain of poetic experience has always been love".4 Kamala Das dedicates her poetry to love, but unlike other women poets before her, she does not merely dwell on the romantic love. It is the pursuit and approach to the emotion that makes Kamala Das stand apart. At the time when the importance of love is stressed, simultaneously there is a recognition that it is a snare, a trap-door from which an escape must be found. The ideal relationship becomes an illusion fast fading and
receding into the distance. In 'An Introduction' she speaks of the 'hungry haste of rivers' in the love of men and of the woman's love as the 'Ocean's tireless waiting'. It is the woman who wants something better and more lasting than lust, or sexual love. Traditional approach to love is tender, more romantic, wherein a woman plays a submissive role. The traditional upbringing which Kamala Das had tells her one thing; yet her modern education and all other influences have taught her to behave differently. Consequently, her soul is torn apart.

We had nineteenth and early twentieth century poets like Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, expressing love in an ornate style,

Their love poetry was based on frail, romanticised relationships, always localised into dreamy, the unreal. They hid the hollowness of their sentiments in rosy vignettes and sing-song cadence. In Sarojini Naidu's evocation of love in "If you call Me" there is a vague, unreal quality:

If you call me I will come
Swifter, O my love,
Than a trembling forest deer
Or a panting dove.
To the charmer's thrall....

Toru Dutt represents this aspect in 'Morning Serenade':

Still barred thy doors ! - The far east glows,
The morning wind blows fresh and free.
Should not the hour that awake the rose
Awaken also thee?
No longer sleep
Oh listen now:
I wait and weep
But where are thou?

But for Kamala Das it is not enough. She seeks the raw and the elemental,

Of what does the burning mouth
Of Sun, burning in today's
Sky remind me... oh, yes, his
Mouth, and ... his limbs like pale and
Carnivorous plants reaching out for me
And the sad lie of my unending lust.

For Kamala Das love is primitive, passionate and elemental. She needs it for a deeper and fuller experience. She focuses on the vagaries of the complex emotion that love is, depicting its bitter sweetness, her peculiar fascination for the illusion that love is and her subsequent disenchantment, leading to cynicism towards her need of love for what it finally turns out to be. Reading her poetry one always experiences a sense of crisis as she has a way of dramatising her personal emotions. Commenting on this aspect of her poetry Bruce King remarks:

... the poems of Kamala Das when focused on love treat it within a broader range of themes, more realised settings and with deeper feeling, bringing to it an intensity of emotion and speech and a rich, full complexity of life. Das's themes go beyond stereotyped longings and complaints. Even her feelings of loneliness and disappointment are part of a larger-than-life personality, obsessive in its awareness of its self,
yet creating a drama of self-hood.7

Her quest for love leaves her breathless and uniquely sensitive, making her so vulnerable and almost too tender to touch. She is shy, she is Coy and she becomes brazen, a woman panting with desire, longing for the union with her beloved to take place. The cynics may refer to it as wanton lust but Kamala Das is uncaring. She pursues love with a relentless fervour, without a tinge of remorse or shame.

Love desires, lusts, genuine love on various planes— is Kamala Das's main pre-occupation, her obsession.

... Even my soul, I thought must send its roots somewhere
And, I loved his body without shame
On winter evenings as cold winds Chuckled against white window-panes. 8

Love is abstract. It is only her sexuality which she flaunts as a badge makes it so pungent. Her lust 'this skin communicated thing' like the 'multicoloured flags of no particular country', stands out. It is the sheer physicality of her emotions that makes it so concrete, i.e., the importance of love whatever she thinks it to be:

... 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 Before it clasps my pubis. Ask me why like A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breasts,
And sleeps, ask me why life is short
And love is shorter still.

Her craving for love is immense. In fact, it seems to be her total existence. Love rules her and lures her on as a mirage, like the proverbial magician's lamp on the hilltop. Love for her has to be in the sense of physical union with the beloved. She explores and trudges along lanes and bylanes of emotion but almost always reaches a dead end. Her disappointment is total, throwing her into the dark abyss of utter helplessness. She almost dies, because:

I want to be loved
And
If love is not to be had
I want to be dead
Just dead.

Love resurrects her. Hope stirs afresh in her, and once again she is all set to explore the myriad emotion of love. She becomes Radha worshipping her object of love. He is the Krishna, the ideal, mythic lover and love becomes the medium uniting both:

The long waiting
Had made their bond so chaste, and all the doubting
And the reasoning
So that in his first true embrace, she was girl
and virgin crying
Everything in me is melting, even the hardness at the core
O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting
Nothing remains but you....
There are times when she is the great temptress who must have her lover at any cost, lacing her love with intensity and all womanly wiles. Physical love does become her prison. She fails to see beyond that: her body always riding over her wiser mind and good sense. The poet appears basically insecure and so she tries to seek security in physical love as a temporary solace. She goes on to justify her actions thus, "Physical love must carry with it a certain pride that is a burden to the soul. Perhaps it was necessary for my body to defile itself in many ways, so that the soul turned humble for a change".  

II

Friedrich Nietzsche has written, "Every deep thinker needs a mask: even more, around every deep thinker a mask constantly grows, thanks to the constantly wrong, i.e., superficial interpretations of his every word, his every step, his every sign of life". So it is with Kamala Das. The strain of deep spirituality which she had inherited in herself during her tender, formative years, coupled with the sense of being unwanted, and the rejection she experienced at home and in school, filled her with a deep rooted loneliness and a deep seated insecurity. There is in every human being a natural need to be loved and accepted unconditionally, which in the case of Kamala Das turns obsessive and takes the form of a defiant revolt, wherein
she refuses to conform. Her revolt takes many forms. But on a deeper level, it continues to bother her deep spiritual self. Commenting on this aspect of her poetry Bruce King writes, "In her poetry love and hate are often neighbours, just as an assertion of sexual freedom sits near feelings of self disgust, expressed through depressions". For her love and hate are both involvements and she becomes a prisoner of her loneliness. What her poetry reflects and the way it is reflected, makes the critics raise eyebrows. She has often been misunderstood, criticised and even mocked at, for writing so openly; hiding nothing that makes her poems appear like 'bold confessionals', yet she feels:

I know it is no use regretting now
Or feeling ashamed
I also know that by confessing
By peeling off my layers
I reach closer to the soul and to the bone's
Supreme indifference.

Commenting on the confessional element in her poetry Adil Jussawalla observes,

She writes almost exclusively of love, Sex, loneliness in the tone of an insistent confession. I suppose the value of the confessional is that by exposing those dark areas which are normally concealed, it might touch some of the deepest points in the reader's own subconscious and so uncover what is worth uncovering. But, the confession may also be part of an elaborate private therapy, a literary drug used to make the poet feel better, of little concern
to the reader and about as interesting as a hypochondriach’s complaints. This she herself acknowledges....

Though you may have no need of me, I go on and on, not knowing why...

One of the longer poems of Kamala Das, entitled 'composition' talks about such varied moods as passionate attachment, agonising guilt, nauseating disgust and inhuman bitterness. While celebrating the most sublime experience she becomes aware of the most mundane as its counterpart. She does not try to idealise or glorify any part of the self. Same thing has been done in 'Blood'. Here too self-questionings and self-assertions intermingle to form the dominant confessional tone. Often Kamala Das has been accused of building up the 'sensational aspect' of her poetry consciously as a gimmick to attract attention. There are critics who have tried to find a purpose and a definite method behind her writing like this. "The poems show that through her sexual confessions her writing has made her a self-conscious celebrity: and she plays up to it, often bragging and celebrating".17

Commenting on the charge of obscenity, Anisur Rehman writes, "The sexual mud that has ever clung to the image of Kamala Das has led her critics, pitifully enough, to associate lust with her personality and her poetry".18 Devendra Kohli says: "Here is the unending lust, the ocean's
tireless waiting: First the woman's sexual lust for experience, for sights as well insights.\textsuperscript{19} But on the other hand, a critic like Bruce King, maintains:

Rather than a poet of free love, she expresses the disappointments of sexuality. She describes a void to be filled with others or with alternative passions. In 'Freaks' she laments a lack of deep sexual passions of the kind that go with love; there is mere appetite without feelings of intimacy.\textsuperscript{20}

To many critics, her sexuality is a mere put-on, a sham as hollow as the frenetic activity she describes in her poem 'The Dance of Eunuchs'. It is, in fact, a deeply evocative poem in that sense. The whirling movements and the extended frenzy of the Eunuchs is sharply contrasted with their inner vacuity and emotional sterility. Life becomes a cruel, mocking bird. Kamala Das finds an 'objective Correlative' in the dance of the Eunuchs, to represent the theme of suppressed desire within. It suggests a hiatus between the external, artificial passion and the sexual sterility and rottenness inside. Talking about her continuous disillusionment in love, she writes: "I was perhaps seeking a familiar face that blossomed like a blue lotus in the water of my dreams".\textsuperscript{21}

And also:

Any stone can make
An idol, loving this one, I
Seek but another way to know
Him who has no more a body
To offer, and whose blue face is
A phantom-lotus on the waters of my dreams.

III

The quest of Kamala Das assumes a deeper significance, giving an existential stance to her search and final discovery. By resolving the tension and the conflict between the spirit and the body she seeks to resolve the struggle between tradition and modernity. But before this actual resolution takes place, she goes through a lot. She can not reject tradition, but also fails to negate the reality and the rawness of her passion. She could not conceal or even underplay the discordant note and the disharmony which has crept into modern man-woman relationship. Her modern education has taught her to question and rebel. The dilemma and conflict of Kamala Das are no different from the dilemma faced by the modern Indian Woman standing on the brink of twenty-first century, who is out to prove her own capacities to her own self; yet still wishes realisation as a woman, too. She is under continuous pressure to make a mark in life, and asserts equality on all levels.

I have a man's fist in me today
Clenching ... unclenching.
She questions,

Woman, is this happiness,
this lying buried beneath a man?  

Her soul, her total existence is in turmoil because she cannot do without a man. There is in her an ambivalence towards freedom too. She desires a man to love her and she asserts her right to total and absolute fulfilment in every sense of those 'endless female hungers'. She can not negate body which asserts over the sublimity of traditional love experience. She wants it all. One moment she seeks tradition and in another, she rebels against it, and her voice emerges as a modern woman's refusal to fit in the mould or to play a traditional role specially in the husband-wife relationship she becomes a 'swallow', with her immense, innate urge to fly and difficult to be tamed. She describes in detail what happens when a woman lets herself fit the mould as her destiny,

You called me wife
I was taught to break saccharine
into your tea and
To offer at the right moment the vitamine.
Cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the
magic loaf and
I became a dwarf. I lost my will and
reason to all your
Questions I mumbled incoherent replies.  

In Kamala Das we find two strains pulling her in opposite directions as also we discover a blend of love for
tradition and revolt against tradition. For instance, in the lines quoted above, there is a clear protest against male domination and man's attempt to curb her free spirit, yet she yearns for the love of a man because only that will make her feel complete,

Oh yes, getting a man to love you is easy but living without him afterward may have to be faced."

When loved by a man, her body gleams 'like a burnished brass'. Without a man, she feels like a destitute and almost without life. She needs a man both for 'construction and destruction', yet wifely love is to her 'lying nailed to his bed in imitation of the great crucifixion'. The bond of marriage suffocates her and the idea of sex in marriage seems to her tasteless and unbearable.

She refers to the husband as 'Fat Spider'. She tries seeking love and solace in various extramarital affairs, maybe as an attempt at revolt or just to assert her independence of spirit. She is ambivalent towards her husband because marriage to her is also an intrusion on her creativity. She has contempt for the husband, yet, she cannot do without him. Maybe, she had been looking for a father figure. Her poem 'Glass' relates the traumas of a sense of loss in relation to father, where she laments her tendency of looking for a father figure in all her relationships. There is in her a strong urge for freedom.
from the compulsion of living with the husband that makes her declare:

I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me with
morning tea,
Love words flung from door ways and
of course
your tired lust.27

Thus, Kamala Das refuses to conform to the traditional role which a woman and wife is expected to play. In 'An Introduction', she tells us how she was asked 'to belong', 'to conform' and how she rebelled and tried to be even with the male world on its own terms. She becomes a fierce feminist:

Then...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, be embroiderer,
be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in
Belong, cried the categorisers.28 Oh,

Kamala Das does not just need love or love-experience for itself. She needs it for a fuller realisation of her own personality and to establish her own identity. Kamala Das seems obsessed with her own personality. In her love-experience 'I' or 'My' always remains at the centre. In this connection Eunice Desouza writes, "The cumulative impression is of a rather relentless whine".29 Certain expressions in her poetry keep recurring, 'My Heart, the
wretched thing...', 'My smile, a half, dead, fraudulent thing...', 'My poor moody mind' and 'My tired lust'.

Commenting on her self obsession, Bruce King writes,

Alongside Das's unfilled need for love, another prominent subject of her poems is the need to assert, to conquer, to dominate. There is for example her obsession with an older man who 'hurt' her in her teens and whom she obsessively feels she must capture as her lover. In her poetry love and hate are often neighbours, just as an assertion of sexual freedom sits near feelings of self-disgust expressed through depression. The theatre of Das's poetry includes self revelations, the confessions, the various contradictory bits and pieces. While the poems describe a longing for a man to fill her dreams with love, she is also proud of her conquests and ability to make men love her. Having taken a lover she will mock him. Rather than the seduced, she often appears to be the seducer, the collector, especially of those men known as lady killers. Driven by a need for an all encompassing love to fill her days, she is also someone involved in the game of sexual triumph with its trophies.

The question which arises is why should the reader be interested in the 'self' of Ms. Kamala Das unless the reader is able to identify with the self of the poet or if it arouses 'Shocks of recognition' in the selves reading her. While going through her poems, it is not really the emotion that compels attention as also the obsessiveness with the poet's own reaction to the emotion which is rather self-indulgent and theatrical:
When I die
Do not throw the meats and bones away
But pile them up
And
Let them tell
By their smell
What life was worth
On this earth
What love was worth in the end.

In Indian society, a break with convention almost always arouses some comment. There is no doubt that Kamala Das has chosen to walk the lonely path in a bid to undo all masks, to find her destination and her real self which she seems to have lost somewhere on the way because of her terrible disillusionment. The cynical sadness, the pose that she assumes in her poetry seems to be her destiny because she is a poet.

The poems in 'Summer In Calcutta' and even the later sometimes more sombre, depressed verses, written after serious illness reveal someone younger, more questing, more sexually driven than the author of 'My story' with its claim that being treated brutally led to adultery and its self-apologetic and spiritualist conclusion.

Another critic analyses it all thus:

Kamala Das's 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 realising the ideal
Talking about suffering, Jean Paul Sartre writes, "One suffers and one suffers from not suffering enough". Precisely, this is what one experiences while reading the poetry of Kamala Das. There is too much dramatisation of emotions, and the effect is almost lost on the reader after a while. For Kamala Das, her own 'persona' is the most important object or subject. "Her 'persona' is always present, playing its varied roles which define her as woman, sexual partner, or lust object". Even while loving, she is not prepared to let go of her identity. She seems to long for a kind of love experience which will turn into spiritual, through meaningful sexual relationship without the loss of her own identity. According to her, love should provide one with the opportunity of development of one's own personality:

I came to you but to learn
What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow.

It is possible that through her various relationships, she seeks self knowledge, baring her heart to each lover in quest of self discovery. She remains self-obsessed and that
is why she fails in her relationships because her men too are self obsessed,

For, love is Narcissus at the water's edge, haunted
By its own lonely face, and yet it must seek at last
An end, a pure, total freedom, it must will
To shatter and the kind night to erase the
night Water.

No wonder then that the poet Kamala Das is doomed to loneliness, arising out of dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

\[ V \]

Nietzsche writes that a thinker has to bear with his loneliness and the immense and the echoing solitude, his soul is doomed to. A poet is a thinker too. Loneliness is the legacy of all mankind and the environment only offsets it. Kamala Das, the poet is on a journey in a process to know herself. And it is through her poetry which mirrors all the secret longings, yearnings and even the agonising loneliness of her heart that she tends to find herself. But I do not think that she does it consciously. She is on the other hand, quite unaware of it like she states in her My Story: "One's real world is not what is outside him. It is the immeasurable world inside him that is real. Only the one who has decided to travel inwards, will realise that his
soul has no end". On a deeper level the quest of Kamala Das becomes existential. In the words of Soren Kierkegaard:

An existing individual is constantly in process of becoming: The actual existing subjective thinker constantly reproduces this existential situation in his thoughts, and translates all his thinking into terms of process. It is with the subjective thinker as it is with a writer and his style; for he only has a style who never has anything finished, but moves the waters of the language every time he begins, so that the most common expression comes into being for him with the freshness of a new birth.

So Kamala Das, the woman, is in the process of becoming self in her own eyes. She is troubled by her own self, her own yearnings. She is full of strange restlessness which fills her with confusion. Life with its ordinary trappings stifles and suffocates her. She seems to be on an eternal journey, with no end, yet seeking an end, forever looking into the depths of her loneliness. The moment she turns inwards to accept herself, she comes to discover peace. Earlier, in her confusion, she had not realised that one's real ends or destinations are only one's beginnings. Writing about her quest, she avers:

I had desired to possess the sense, the courage to pick myself an average identity, to age through years of earthy din gently like a cut flower until it was time to be removed but I had
wandered, fog-eyed seeking another, to be mine, mine own to love or destroy and to share with me the dimlit gloom where I moved like a fawn.

Once the fog of confusion clears, Kamala Das, returns to the cherished memories of the Nalapat House:

In her poetry there is an idealised time of childhood, when she had experienced the security of love within familiar surroundings, innocent of sexual fears and frustrations. It was a period of love, roots and freedom in contrast to her present insecurity:

...you can not believe, darling, Can you, that I lived in such a house and Was proud, and loved ... I who have lost My way and beg now at stranger's doors to Receive love, at least in small change.

The contrast between a familiar, secure, loving home and the world she now experiences since leaving her family for marriage and its various dissatisfactions, also her love affairs, becomes the theme of the poem 'The Corridors':

Why do I so often dream Of a house where each silent Corridor leads me to warm Yellow rooms - and, loud voices Welcome me, and rich, friendly Laughter and upturned faces.

VI

We find dualism in the poetry of Kamala Das which clearly points out to the bicultural influence of her
childhood. After an initial spell of Western education when she returned to her native place it was as if she had died a cultural death and was getting reborn into another kind of world where the hard-eyed British were no longer her co-rivals. She became aware of her traditional heritage, mythology and even the rituals connected with living a conventionally religious life. This took deep roots and also she felt totally loved, accepted and secure with her grandmother.

The different cultural influences in her personality come into conflict with each other, inside her. She keeps fighting one or the other and this struggle takes myriad shapes. Cut off from roots, she very much feels the corrupting influence of urban western education. She feels unnatural and miserable because in a way, it is also the loss of her innocence. Her ancestral home 'Nalapat House' stands for innocence. Again and again, she keeps walking the tormenting path of 'self-discovery' through love which ultimately takes her back to her 'Dravidic Roots' and the 'Nalapat House'. Tradition is associated with self acceptance which finally fills one with peace and serenity. Time and again we find her lamenting the now-lost innocence. When her Grandmother's trunk was opened after her death, Kamala Das found dolls. Dolls stand for childhood and innocence but now all she is left with is the:
Womb's blinded hunger,
The muted whisper at the core
For years I have run from one gossamer
lane to another
I am now my own captive.

Her pre-occupation with her childhood echoes her subconscious anguish of a frustrated psyche to return to that state of innocence. The childhood stands for that period:

Before the skin,
Intent on survival
Learnt lessons of self-betrayal.
Before the red house that had
Stood for innocence
Crumbled.

Peace eludes her till she walks away from her beginnings but once she comes back, her restlessness ends. Even racially, she reaches the conclusion: "If you have to survive, sanity and all, you must stick willy nilly to your own intellectual caste. Others can only misjudge you". So, whatever happens, Kamala Das remains a proud 'Dravida'. Once again, she returns to the 'Nalapat House' and regrets the time she had spent living away from it. Her metaphysical return to the 'Nalapat' also unveils for her the true longings of her heart, giving her search a spiritual meaning and peace to her restless spirit. There are critics who even explain the particular love-experience of Kamala Das with reference to the sociological dimension offered by her Nayar lineage,
Her frankness in expressing love owes its origin to the tradition of her ancestral family connections. In keeping with the tradition and the practice of Marumakkathayam (Matrilineal system of inheritance and succession) Nayar women are uninhibited. Kamala Das's bold and straightforward treatment of love and sex comes from such a background.

VII

The poetry of Kamala Das is rooted in her background; though not consciously, yet she remains very much Indian and catches very well the heat and dust of the Indian background. Although she revolts against the tradition-bound society she lives in, especially its sterility and false facades, yet she is attached to her environment. What Judith Wright observes in this context is also pertinent, "Before one's country can become an accepted background against which the poet's and the novelist's imagination can move unhindered, it must first be observed, understood, described as it were, absorbed. The writer must be at peace with his landscape before he can confidently turn to its human figures".

What makes a poet belong to a particular country, necessarily involves nationality and the poet's identity is to be found in being rooted in the soil. A poet's response to the landscape of his country, his sense of tradition and the culture of the land of his birth and many
other factors go together to make him assume an identity of his own. Kamala Das is not an Indian sensibility poet in the sense that she consciously writes about India or seems bent upon bringing about a social change but she is Indian to the core, in a subtler way, accepting her Indianness and being at peace with it. Indian milieu forms the background of her poems and she seems aware of the social problems, the injustice, the discrimination and the crushing poverty. The misery of the hungry children moves her sensitive soul. And she does not seem to be fighting her Indianness in any way.

Born in Kerala and brought up in Calcutta, she has lived in Delhi, and Bombay, in a way she has felt the pulse of the whole of India. In her poetry one detects a certainty of touch that seems to reflect a confidence in the direction and purpose of her writing as well as an integrity of images in India, style and subject matter.

Devendra Kohli comments:

She does not consciously draw on her Indian heritage, the great reservoir of philosophy and mythology, and an appreciation of her poetry does not necessitate making a special plea for such mysterious element as Indianness with such vague generalisations as the world of her powers is thoroughly Indian, or a world that she has made her own.

Kamala Das, the poet, is bilingual having written many short stories and poems in Malayalam, her mother-tongue, successfully. She seems to have taken to English language
as her own, adapting it to her needs and giving it a peculiar Indian Idiom. Bruce King writes: "Kamala Das's most remarkable achievement, however, is writing in Indian English". Infact, the revolt of Kamala Das against the traditional concept of how a woman should be, is matched by her revolt as a poet who is being forced to stick to the conventional medium of expressing oneself in one's mother-tongue for writing poetry. She just chose English as her poetic medium, to express herself although she happens to be quite at home in Malayalam too. Kamala Das, defiantly takes on her critics:

...The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness
All mine, mine alone. Its half English
half Indian,
Funny perhaps, but it is honest.
It is as human as an human,
Don't you see?

So, Kamala Das, the woman and the poet, is able to find peace as her journey comes a full circle. The realisation dawns that a journey outward is only an illusion, taking one away from oneself. It is only the journey inward which results in self-discovery and self-knowledge. And it is this self-knowledge which finally helps in granting serenity to her restless soul.
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