

**LOVE AND WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF
KAMALADAS**

Dr. Kanderi Sridevi

Associate Professor of English ,Government Degree College, Puttur Tirupati Dist.

Paper Received on 01-07-2025, Accepted on 02-08-2025
Published on 04-08-25; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.10.3.334

Abstract

Kamala Das is a prominent Indo-English poet. She had explored the problem of her position as a woman and a writer in post-colonial India. The main themes of Kamala Das's poetry are love and women's identity and through them comes the women's voice. The present study analyses some of the most powerful poems of Kamala Das, explores the way in which she voices the discontent of the marginalised women, and the man-woman relationship in a frank and straight forward manner. She protested against male domination, imposed sex and discriminatory social norms which made her feel lonely. Kamala Das writes incessantly about love or rather the failure of love, her unhappy personal life her unsuccessful sexual encounters and relationships. Kamala Das's poetry has withstood barrage criticism and critical analysis for long because there is an honest protest in it. This study focuses primarily on the inner mind of the poet and the mystic tensions of a woman seeking her identity and the journey of self from the blazing light and heat towards a lucid darkness and a sense of disintegrating into nothingness.

Keywords: Women's voice, marginalized women, discriminatory social norms, barrage criticism, mystic tensions.

Introduction:

This paper presents a view on the voice of protest in the selected poems of Kamala Das. Kamala speaks of the women's identity in many of her poems. The major poems of Kamala Das are all to be found in her three collections viz., "Summer in Calcutta" (1965), "The Descendants" (1967), and the "Old Playhouse and Other Poems" (1973). The very first collection established her as a very different kind of Indian English woman poet. Her fierce individuality was something to which the Indian readers were unused but against which they could not dare not protest. She has come on the Indo-English poetic scene at a time when there has been a heightening of interest in the works of women the world over. This is because there has been a rethinking and interpretation of the traditional role of women in a male dominated society. Whatever may be the standing of Kamala Das as a poet and here is

certainly enough to be among the leading contemporary women artists and she expresses frankly what a woman thought of being a woman. Hence the theme of voice in her poetry is not androgynous but essentially feminine.

Kamala Das's poetry has withstood barrage criticism and critical analysis for long because there is an honest protest in it. "When I was growing up, there was no tradition to fall back on, no model to emulate"—thus confessed Kamala Das, and she followed her instinct as her Guru and poured out her emotions in a poetic form. Her poems were labeled as "confessional" and she was grouped with American school of confessional poets like Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and others. The two main themes of Kamala Das's poetry are love and the woman's identity and through them comes the woman's voice. Kamala Das writes incessantly about love or rather the failure of love, her unhappy personal life, her unsuccessful sexual encounters and relationships. The intensely personal confessional quality of Kamala's work recalls in some ways Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. Anne Sexton's volume "Live and Die" includes such titles as "Wanting to Die," "Suicide Note," "Menstruation at Forty". Both Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath try to work out in their poetry traumas in relation to their parents, particularly their fathers. In Kamala Das's case, it is often the husband who is at the core of disturbance.

The dominant emotion in Kamala Das's poems is 'love'. In Kamala Das's poetry, two aspects of love have been described, the real fulfilling love and the pure carnal or commercial love. The woman's voice coming from the two kinds of love amply clarifies that mere carnality is never sought after, nor is it fulfilling. Many men enjoy it, but not women.

Kamala Das did not take long to draw a poetic line between love and trust. She expresses herself with an utmost candour. "He takes turning a sun stained/ of uneven teeth gleam his right/ Hand on my Knee, while our minds/ are willed to race towards love/: But they only wander tripping/ Idly over puddles of /Desire..... Can this man with/nimble finger-tips unleash/Nothing more alive than the skin's lazy hunger?" "(The Freaks)". "The strong aversion to lust gets a form in Convicts" What is/ the use, what is the bloody use/? That was the only kind of love/. This hacking at each other's parts/ like convicts hacking, breaking clods/ at noon....." ("Convicts")

The poetry of Kamala Das makes a discovery of many levels of paradoxes such as female-male physical or sensual, subjective-objective to help in shaping the vision of Das. When we come to Das's later poetry, we discover that her vision comprehends such paradoxes and attempts to transcend them. Although early poetry of Das advocates for a feminist perspective, it dissolves in the later poetry. Such dissolution is the result of the maturing vision of Das as an artist, not necessarily as a woman writer. She is sentimental and idealistic when she speaks in mythological metaphors. In 'My Story' she records her yearning thus.

"I was looking for an ideal lover. I was looking for the one who went to Mathura and forgot to return to his Radha. Perhaps I was seeking the cruelty that lies in the depths of man's heart. Otherwise why did I not get peace in the arms of my husband".

Kamala Das questions the very basis of socially accepted marital love. This is remarkable that a married woman in a rather traditional society speaks of and admits extra and premarital love. She seeks sexual and spiritual fulfillment in extra-marital relationship with other men. She questions and probes what kind of woman is she — frigid, or nymphomaniac or lesbian. But such questions can't be answered by anyone, not even by the husband. Behind carnality of love or mere physical love lie many questions. But a still greater question is "Why life is short and love is/shorter still ask me what is bliss and what its price." (The Stone Age). Before she escapes into the immortal world of love, manifested in her longing for a vision with Lord Krishna, she escapes into a world of innocence through recollection. This recollection becomes a mode of redemption. She remembers her grandmother. She feels her absence acutely, because she discovers in her a feminine solace and retrieving care and love. She is no longer in the need of love. All relationships, bondages seem to be meaningless "Love/I no longer need with tenderness I am most content/ I have learnt that friendship/cannot endure/ that blood-ties do not satisfy" (The Old Play House). The loss of her father creates a vacancy within the poet. "I've misplaced a father/some where and I look /for him now everywhere". She breaks down and admits honestly: "I loved you father, "I loved you all my life....." (Collected poems) up to this particular point, the poetry of Kamala Das retains of feminist perspective. Such a perspective seems to lose ground when one looks into her later poetry.

The unity of subjective vision is also evidenced by various images which are drawn from nature, and from all dimensions of life. Her mental association with the sea made her feel lonely. She looks upon sea as a friend, Philosopher and guide - "I tell you sea/ I have enough courage to die/ /But not enough to disobey him/ who said do not die/And hurt are that certain way" (The Suicide). The frustration was because she failed to act as a happy woman - "I must pose/ I must pretend/I must act the role/ of a happy woman (The suicide). She wanted to take refuge in death. "When I die/Do not throw the meat 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. Love and death come to her in one surge, thus marking the quickening rhythm of human existence. She can thus universalise her joys and sorrows and correlate her own emotions with those of others. The poetry of Kamala Das like that of Judith Wright, Erica Jong and Anne Sexton drawing heavily on the personal life, shows an involvement in intimate feminine experience. It is her sincerity of feeling and her honesty to own the incongruity that creates pain. The cry of heart is the cry of an ailing and ageing wife and this is how the universal blends with the personal.

The speaking voice in the genre of the poetry of Kamala Das is unmistakably the poet herself. In most of her poetry she does not differentiate between "the man who suffers and the mind which creates". This is what one finds in one of her most candid and witty poems, "An introduction"-

Where her poetic self struggles to keep her identity against the "categorizers" who ask her to fit in. The poignant and provocative autobiography of Kamala Das, "My story" contains many open statements about the poetry efforts to define and expose the prison in which she finds herself trapped. The chief criticism against Kamala Das is that her poetry has too much of the poet's personal ego and as such is limited in appeal. This has been interpreted to her advantage and she has been regarded as a confessional poet.

To conclude, Kamala Das's response to the gender question is not the studied or calculated analysis of a feminist. It is spontaneous, more of a great response and hence highly ideological. The poetry of Kamala Das is characterized by a daring frankness, a total lack of inhibition especially with reference to love and sex. This has made her a highly controversial figure. At one end she has been condemned for her sensationalism and cheapness bordering on vulgarity. At the other she has been regarded as a truly authentic feminine voice of power with the "conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male oriented universe."

References

- Akhter, T. (2013). Kamala Das: "The Voice of Indian Women's Quest for Liberation", *International Journal of Innovative Research & Development*, 2(5), 1622-1633.
- Ansari, M.S (2012). "Depiction of Women's Dilemmas in Select Poems of Kamala Das". *A Review, Language in India*, 12(2), 677-686.
- Nabar, V. (1994). "The Endless Female Hungers: A Study of Kamala Das", Sterling Publishers.
- Sarma, H. (2016). Feminist Assertions in Kamala Das's "A Study of Introduction and the Sunshine Cat": A Study & an Introduction, *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, 6(8), 660-662.
- Ramakrishnan, E.V. "Kamala Das as a Confessional Poet", *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Vol. 5, No.1, Jan 1977, Print.