

## CONTRIBUTION OF KAMALA DAS TO INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY: A STUDY

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### Abstract

*Kamala Das begins by self-assertion: I am what I am. The poetess claims that she is not interested in politics, but claims to know the names of all in power beginning from Nehru. She seems to state that these are involuntarily ingrained in her. By challenging us that she can repeat these as easily as days of the week, or the names of months she echoes that they these politicians were caught in a repetitive cycle of time, irrespective of any individuality. They did not define time; rather time defined them. The paper focuses on her contribution to Indian English poetry.*

**Keywords:** Poetry, English Poetry, Kamala, Kamala Das, contribution

Kamala Das, also known as Kamalay Suraiya, the sophisticated Indian poetess was born on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1934. She is a distinguished Indian writer who composes in English as well as Malayalam her native language. Kamala Das is looked at as one of the exceptional Indian poets writing in English even though her reputation and esteem in Kerala is based primarily on her short stories and autobiography. Much of Kamala Das's writing in Malayalam is published in the pen name "Madhavikkutty". Kamala Das was born in Malabar in the maritime state of Kerala. She was born to V.M Nair, an ex-managing editor of the widely distributed Malayalam daily Mathrubhumi and Nalappatt Balamani Amma, a renowned Malayali poetess. A notable feature included in Kamala Das's character analysis is that she is perhaps the first Hindu woman ever to blatantly and candidly talk about sexual desires of Indian women making her an iconoclast of her generation.

I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar, and she is very proud to exclaim that she is 'very brown'. She goes on to articulate that she speaks in three languages, writes in two and dreams in one; as though dreams require a medium. Kamala Das echoes that the medium is not as significant as is the comfort level that one requires. The essence of one's thinking is the prerequisite to writing. Hence she implores with all—"critics, friends, visiting cousins" to leave her alone. Kamala Das reflects the main theme of Girish Karnad's "Broken Images" the conflict between writing in one's regional language and utilizing a foreign language. The language that she speaks is essentially hers; the primary ideas are not a reflection but an individual impression. It is the distortions and queerness that makes it individual, in keeping with Chomsky's notion of 'performance.' And it is these imperfections that render it human. It is the language of her expression and emotion as it voices her joys, sorrows and hopes. It comes to her as cawing comes to the crows and roaring to the lions, and is therefore impulsive and instinctive. It is not the deaf, blind speech: though it has its own defects, it cannot be seen as her handicap. It is not unpredictable like the trees on storm or the clouds of rain. Neither does it echo the "incoherent mutterings of the blazing fire." It possesses a coherence of its own: an emotional coherence.

She was child-like or innocent; and she knew she grew up only because according to others her size had grown. The emotional frame of mind was essentially the same. Married at the early age of sixteen, her husband confined her to a single room. She

was ashamed of her feminist that came before time, and brought her to this predicament. This explains her claim that she was crushed by the weight of her breast and womb. She tries to overcome it by seeming tomboyish. So she cuts her hair short and adorns boyish clothes. People criticize her and tell her to 'conform' to the various womanly roles she explains her encounter with a man.

Kamala Das's journey from being an elegiac child to turn into a respected Indian poetess is pretty long one. Her love of poetry began since early childhood under the influence of her great uncle, Nalapat Narayan Menon, a well-known writer. Das had spent most of her early days in Calcutta, where her father was employed. Kamala Das corroborates this information and says that he always very understood. When Kamala Das wished that she should begin writing, her husband supported her decision to expand the family's earnings. Since Das belonged to the group of the fair sex, she could not utilize the morning – till – night agenda enjoyed by her great uncle. Hence she had to wait until night fall after her family had gone off to sleep, after which she would write until morning. There was the availability of only the kitchen table, where she would cut vegetables and after all the plates and things were washed up, Das would sit there and start typing. This scrupulous schedule weighed upon heavily upon the poetess/s health, but she viewed her illness gave her more time at home and hence, more time to write. Such was Kamala Das's dedication, only after which did she attain the elevated Indian poetess status. As her career escalated towards the high, her husband always remained her greatest supporter. Though he was sick for three years before he passed away, his presence brought Das remarkable joy and comfort. She avowed that there shall not be another person so proud of me and my achievements.

Kamala Das's achievement does broaden well beyond her verse of Poetry. According to Kamala Das, 'I wanted to fill me as I can manage to garner because I do not believe that one can get born again'. True to her word, Das has made herself successfully involved in painting, fiction and even politics. Though she had failed to win a palace in parliament in 1984, yet she had witnessed much more success as a syndicated columnist. She has moved farther from poetry because she claimed that "Poetry does not sell in this country (India)." However, opportunely, her forthright columns did and still do. Kamala Das's columns were based upon everything from women's issues and child care to politics.

Kamala Das's mysterious honesty is wholly extend to her exploration of womanhood and love. According to her, womanhood calls for a specific set of collective experience. Again Kamala Das's attention towards eroticism is magnificently coupled with her exploration of women's determined by a fanatical kind of unconditional honesty. An encumbered love seems to be no love at all; only a total raptness in love can do justice such varied experience. Much like the makers of ancient tantric art, Das made no effort conceal the sensuality of the human form, her work appears to commemorate its cheerful potential, while acknowledging its co-occurring perils.

**'Love and Sex' the main theme of Kamala Das:** Love and Sex form the main theme in Kamala Das's poetry. She believes, love is the central emotion in woman's heart. She craves for union with man for the fulfillment of love but she is disillusioned and frustrated. When it degenerates into sheer lustfulness and bodily pleasures, her poetry is a record of her own unfulfilled love and her own sexual

exploitative world which is conspicuous by the sheer absence of love and predominance of sexual exploitation of woman by man. In poem after poem she is pre-occupied with love, sex frustration. They danced, oh! They danced till they bled. (Das 1965:10) The funeral imagery in the poem is symbolic of the inner vacuity and sterility of the eunuchs as well as of their decrepit bodies. The poetess uses the funeral imagery with a view to portraying the decrepit figure of the eunuchs: They were thin in limbs and dry; like half burnt logs from Funeral pyres, a drought & rottenness were in each of them. The image creates the visual impression of the eunuchs who survive and suffer endlessly like “half-burnt logs from funeral pyres”. Unable to find fulfillment as a woman or to give satisfaction as one, the poetess sees in the eunuchs ‘writhing in vacant ecstasy’ a devastating image of her own sterility. In the poem “In love” the drama of sterile love which brings no emotional fulfillment is enacted against the background of scorching heat of the summer scene, a symbol of the poet’s own scorching frustration as a woman. The title is ironic because poetess is not at all in love, but disgusted with the man who had her body. A sense of revulsion takes possession of the poetess and this is expressed through the use of powerful imagery.

### **Objectives of the study**

To get detail understanding of “kamala das’s Poetry”; To make an effective reading “kamala das’s Poetry” takes place mostly; To make easy and effective plot and summary of the topic; To inspire other towards other great story or book for reading like “kamala das’s Poetry”; To make an effective lecture or presentation; To make interest to students or learners by the book; To get the knowledge about kamala das’s Poetry; To get the detail knowledge of the writer of the book; To understand the characters of the book properly.

Kamala Das’s poems when upon love treat it within more panoramic ranges of themes, more realized settings and with deeper feelings, bringing to tit an intensity of emotion and speech. The rich full complexity of life is wholly grasped in Das’s writing. Her themes travel beyond stereotyped yearnings and complaints. Even her feelings of lonesomeness and distress are part of a larger than life personality, obsessive in its consciousness of its self, yet, weaving a drama of selfhood.

Significantly, many of her poems in English are the warmth of her childhood and the family home in Kerala. Similar to other South Indian writers, this Indian poetess has also fond of writing about memories of childhood, family, relations and the family’s great house. In Kamala Das’s poetry there lies an idealized time of childhood in my grandmother’s house, when she felt the sanctuary of love within familiar surrounding innocent of sexual fear and frustrations. Despite the fickle alteration of mood, attitude and self-respect in her poetry, her mother’s family, life in the south and her youth in contrast to her marriage.

The uniqueness of Kamala Das’s English poetry is not the story of sex outside marriage but the volatility of her feelings, the way they rapidly shift and assume new postures, fresh attitudes of defense, attack, explanation or celebration. Kamala Das’s poem are placed neither in the act of sex nor in feelings of love; they are instead entangled with the self and its wide ranging often conflicting emotions. They often range from the yearning for security and intimacy to the assertion of the ego, self-dramatization and feeling of humiliation and depression. Writing is a means of self-

assertion. Das had opened domains in which previously outlawed or ignored emotions could be elucidated in ways which reflected herself in the public world. Kamala Das brought a sense of locality to her poems.

### **Structure of the Study**

No other words better define the contours of poetry as these words of Kamala Das. It is an acknowledged fact in the Indian English Literature Scene that her poetry makes it difficult for her to be placed simply or singly. She cannot be marked or tied down biographically or professionally and yet she has been one of the stalwarts of Indian English Writing for more than four decades. From the deep abyss of herself, gushes forth an oeuvre of poems, which proclaims its refusal to be categorized. Right from her first collection "Summer in Calcutta" her poetry has offered a wide horizon of her thoughts on what is life and conversely it has raised more than anew controversies. Her openness to the experiences as a woman, much against conventional 'Indian Sensibility', reflected in her poems, was a major point of debate. Nonetheless, reading Kamala Das in the present critical scenario opens up new vistas on her poetic output. It is possible to read her texts foregrounding the feminine in a new light. She is adeptly using English language at communicating something beyond what she has written down. She manipulates the strategies of writing poetry and invents the metaphor to suit her purpose. Her poems have a vibe of deliberate ambivalence. Some lines from her poem "Death is so Mediocre" can highlight this: Like an elephant not bidding goodbye while Taking off for that secret edge of forests Where they slope into a sure but invisible Sea, I shall go too in silence leaving not Even a finger print on this crowded earth.

In this, Das presents herself as being able to use writing as a way to communicate her own confessional need. The personal need that inspires her own work is to convey "certain weaknesses" and her own exploration of these are able to connect with both audience and her own sense of identity. It is here where I think that Das can be seen as a confessional poet. In doing so, one realizes why her work was so widely accepted and understood in that it spoke of an authenticity and transparency in construction that resonated with many. All in all, Kamala is one of the pioneering post-independence Indian-English poets to have contributed immensely to the growth and development of modern Indian-English poetry. She is one of the modernist writers to assert her femininity as a human in Indian literature. she has been something of a cult figure in her home state and a source of great inspiration and emulation for women with literary aspiration. Her life has been long drawn battle against a religious and cultural orthodox that frowns upon the somewhat uninhabited life style of his apparently forthright persons.

To conclude, Kamala Das is a typical confessional poet who pours her heart into her poetry. Which is largely subjective and autobiographical anguished and tortured, letting us peep into her suffering and tortured psyche. Thanks to her that a reliable poetic voice has been heard in contemporary Indo-English verse at long last. Dwivedi remarks "there is strong autobiographical touch in it, which makes Mrs. Das a confessional poet of the first order".

**Feminine Sensibility Presented by Kamala Das:** Kamala Das is a singer of feminine sensibility and rebels against the conventions and restraints of the society which are meant to exploit woman king in a man-made world. R.R.S.Lyengar writes,

'Kamala Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world'. In her poetry she is intensely conscious of herself as a woman. Her vision is vitally particularized by a woman's point of view. Men do not see woman as women but as objects or play things. She says,

"These men who call me  
Beautiful not seeing  
Me with eyes but with hands"

She is a rebel who opposes all conventions, traditions and accepted norms of society. Her failure to realize fulfillment in love turned her into a social rebel. She has been unconventional both in her life and poetry. In her own life she sees the reflection of her entire suffering womanhood. Lyenger remarks, "This claim for economy really flows from the felt sovereignty of her individual existence. She is always and uniquely herself". In her poetry she violated, chiseled systematic and traditional norms and values and she affirms to a form of life which is characterized by the unconventional and extremely modern point of view". Her poetry is a frank and straight forward feminine sensibility.

**The Poetic Style of Kamala Das:** Kamala Das shows remarkable command and ease over the use of English has cultivated a style that is characterized by a colloquial simplicity and clarity. Words effortlessly come to her and she begins to write when emotions and experience. She remarks, "The language on employs is not important. What is important is the thought contained by words she select. Words effortlessly from a rich stock but like Nissim Ezekiel, she does not wait for words. When an idea occurs to her, words suddenly come to her. It does not mean that she uses words which carelessly. She recognizes the value and significance of words and uses words which best describe vividly her emotions. The felicity of diction is an outstanding quality of her poetic style. She has cultivated a conversational poetic style. Then diction has nothing to do with mystical and philosophical musings or religious chants. Her poetic style is personal which grabs her emotions. David McCutchan points out, " Her primary concern is to convey to her readers the intensity of her feelings, her frustrations and her disillusionments and this concern determines her use of language, as well as frequent repetition of words and her frequent eclipses which have attracted a great deal of criticism".

**Kamala Das: The Old playhouse and other Poems:** The Old playhouse is a wholly autobiographical poem in which Kamala Das has described her unhappy conjugal life or the misery which she experience in her husband. It is also a confessional poem because Kamala Das here readers into confidence by telling them about the matters relating to the sexual relationship between a man a woman. Further more, this poem shows Kamala Das as a feminist poet because in demanding her release from the cruelty of her husband and asking for "a pure and total freedom". She is indirectly ad vocation the right of women to assert themselves and thus to get the opportunity to develop their potential. The playhouse is thus a key poem in Kamala Das's poetic works.

Women's literature is different from Feminist literature. Women's literature which results out of women's identity struggles creates new awareness in men and women whereas feminist literature expresses the shared experiences of women's oppression.

“Feminist literature highlights and condemns the inequalities and injustices in the treatment of women—the disadvantages women have to bear on account of their gender”. Its emphasis is on the ideology rather than on the literariness of the text. Feminism evolved as an opposition to patriarchy or the dominant sexist ideology.

It is customary for the much-centered aesthetic to consider artistic creation as act analogous to biological creation. Thus an art work is the product of the interaction between the male artist and the external world which is regarded as feminine. A literary text in this view is the outcome of a generative act involving the phallic pen and the virgin blank page. A woman writer feels artistic creation as a form of violation, resulting in the destruction of the female body. In women’s writing sexuality is identified with sexual. As a woman judges herself through her body, the female self is always identified with the female body in women’s literature.

A woman considers her role of mother more important than a wife. Wholly dependant on man in the world of his making, woman craves to have a child for self-expression as self-affirmation. In addition to sexual exploitation and betrayal the lack of love in man-woman relationship is an improvised form of male oppression. Loveless relationships are unbearable for women. Kamala Das conceives of the male as beast wallowing in lust with a monstrous ego under which the women loses her identity. The strong desire for freedom, including the freedom to rebel, forms the central strain in many of her poems. She enumerates the male felonies in her poems and builds up a structure of protest and rebellion in her poetry.

Even as a child, Kamala Das experienced the bitterness of sexism. She was a victim of patriarchal prejudice. In her autobiographical book *My Book*, her “father was an autocrat” (91) and her mother “vague and indifferent” (20). Her parents considered her “a burden and responsibility and she was given in marriage to a relative when she was only a school girl (82). Thus she was compelled to become a premature wife and mother.

**Images and Metaphors in Kamala Das ‘s Poetry:** Image in poetry is the making of a picture terms of words. It is device for making the experience of life vivid and lifelike. Poets deficient in this area of image making fail in their vocation. It exploits different sensory perceptions and pins down his experiences with precision and thereby evoke a living and pulsating picture of life. The process of ‘image-making’ involves the skilful use of metaphors. Similes, contrasts, and may be ‘picture-making’ or concretization of emotions, symbol is the use of an object for signifying that is beyond the literal denotation of the object.

It is a potent tool arising out of the vibration imaginative perception of reality. A work of art without proper symbolism is as worthless as a flower without fragrance. However rich and profound a though may be, it has a very little significance in the help of putting thought into the pattern of images and symbols.

Kamala Das was influence by these writers and while she was composing her own poetry, she resorted to the imagist and symbolist techniques in order to render it impressive, precise and compact. Kamala Das’s diction is marked by simplicity and clarity. It is the language of her emotions and she speaks to her readers as one human being to another. In this lies her originality and her distinction. There are no abstraction, no complexities and no intricate, tortuous constructions. Her images are drawn from the familiar and the commonplace are symbolic and thus they increase

the expressive range of her language. The sun and heat. House and window, Cremation and burning, objects of nature, human anatomy, sleep, sea, the dominate images in Mrs. Das's poetry is that of the human body. While male body is a source of corruption and exploitation the female body is a storehouse of beauty and chastity misused to the maximum. The poetess in her poem "The freaks" present subtle analysis of the male psychology.

He talks, turning a sun-stained  
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark  
Cavern where Stalactites of  
Uneven teeth gleam, his right  
Hand on my knee Can't this man with  
Nimble finger tips unleash  
Nothing more alive than the  
Skin's lazy hungers...?

The male anatomy furnishes her with images of horror and ugliness. It is represented as repulsive and destructive. A lover is generally attractive and pleasant to the beloved but here he is repulsive to the woman. His cheeks are sun-stained and so brownish in colour, and to her, his mouth seem to her to be like the while calciferous growth which often forms on the roofs of caves. Images of ugliness here focus on her attitude of rejection and negation. It is symbolic of her revolt against male ego and the male dominated world. It is obvious that her relationship with her husband is a forced one there she brings out the emotional emptiness and sterility of her married life and the intensity of her misery as a wife who had to submit to her husband whom she found repulsive and with whom she had no emotional contact at all. She is conscious of the beauty and glory of the human anatomy and is attracted by it, but its ranging lustfulness disgust her and hence cited above. She is also conscious of disease and decay to which the human flesh is heir to, and this awareness also colours her imagery.

### **Conclusion**

We may affirm that Kamala Das's wide ranging application of images and symbols in her poetry is impeccable. Her images are functional rather than decorative. They are quite stroking and arresting and are used with dexterity and aptness. She is not always in the knack of image-making and creating symbols and she resorts to this device when becomes necessary. Kamala Suraiyya formerly known as Kamala Das , was a major Indian English poet and littérateur and at the same time a leading Malayalam author from Kerala, India. Her popularity in Kerala is based chiefly on her short stories and autobiography, while her oeuvre in English, written under the name Kamala Das, is noted for the fiery poems and explicit autobiography. Her open and honest treatment of female sexuality, free from any sense of guilt, infused her writing with power, but also marked her as an iconoclast in her generation. The critics generally admire as for her franker treatment of love and sex, bold presentation and the confessional statements given, but on the reverse she transgresses into rampant sexuality and the butt of publicity and joke. There is nothing new as that she has written. Most of the writers have already as for gaining cheap popularity and Kamala is no exception to that. As for to be a feminist she can even rebuke, scold and insult her husband allegedly calling him one of a loose character. Something of a tomboy is

in her. She likes to dress as March of The Fox novella of D.H.Lawrence. Love and sex, give and take, attraction and repulsion, attachment and detachment are thing of her consciousness. Magnetic love full of sensation and thrill is the thing of her poetry and above all, sex satisfaction burning her into flaming flames. She also loves to watch eunuch-dancing as for poetry's sake. Kamala Das as a poetess is very, very sexual, bodily and sensual and barring sex and lover there is nothing as that to tone up metaphysically, spiritually. It was utter foolishness to submit so many dissertations on Kamala's poetry rather than other neglected and sidetracked Indian English poets. She appears to be a nervous girl; an abnormal babbling by, a drugged hippie girl. A gipsy woman's gipsy living is therein in her. People praise Pt. Ravishankar, but the treatment meted out to Annapurnadevi does not show him in a good light. Kamala here has crossed the lakshmanrekha. We generally like to hear her, not the quite humble husband and she goes lodging complaint after complaint.

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