



Kamala Das: Confessional Poetry and Bold Themes

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Abstract

Kamala Das is a so massively renowned every day Indian English-speak poet and this she is, upon the top of the tiller of being the most renowned poet of the so 20 th Century who was a confessional style pioneer of poetry too. What makes her poetry so noticeable is its dramatic sincerity, its rule-breaking nature in addressing identity as a woman, and it's not afraid of issues like love, desire, marriage, betrayal, or loneliness. In contrast to most of her peers, Das employed poetry as an arena of self-consciousness, exposing emotional experiences, personal fears, and troubles openly. In this paper we will discuss how she utilized the confessional poetry mode as well as the daring subjects that gave her a literary identity. It claims that not only did she defy the patriarchy, but that her writing also expressed the shattered postcolonial feminine feelings in India.

Keywords: Kamala Das, Confessional Poetry, Feminism, Sexuality, Bold Themes, Indian English Literature, Identity

Introduction: Kamala Das (1934 - 2009) was one of the most silent figures in Indian English literature and can be remembered as one of the bravest and unashamed poets. She is generally regarded as the mother of the modern Malayalam and Indian English poetry as Madhavi Kutty in Malayalam and Kamala Surayya after her conversion to Islam. What is special about Kamala Das is that she has managed to put personal and general truths together, achieving poetry which is rough, touching, and incredibly human.

KAMALA DAS (1934-2009)

Kamala Das (1934–2009) was a prominent Indian poet, writer, and columnist known for her bold and confessional style of writing. She wrote in both English and Malayalam, using the pen name Madhavikutty for her Malayalam works. Her poetry and prose often explored themes of love, sexuality, womanhood, and personal identity, challenging societal norms and expectations.



In a time where female writers in India were supposed to produce work on domestic life, family values or morality, Das did not live up to that tradition. She talked without fear on topics considered European in the old Indian community: female desire, marital conflict, loneliness and identity search. Using her poems, she displayed the trauma of derailed love, the stifling of patriarchal marriage, and the voluptuousness of fulfilling physical desires and the internal. Her writing brought a voice to women who were denied a voice, particularly about the subject of sexuality and individuality, and she was one of the women writing boldly of her day.

Confessionalism is commonly referred to the confessional style of the American poet, namely Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Robert Lowell when compared with Kamala Das. But whereas the western confessional poets discussed the themes of mental illness, alienation and personal trauma, the poetry of Das takes its roots in the Indian cultural world. Her life became one of her writing as she revealed the inner desires of a woman torn apart by the conflicts of tradition and vestal self. Her books are part personal confession and part



subversion of social conventions. Being both personal and political presents her poetry with unlimited relevance.

Her debut book, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), was unique in its direct way of suggesting the female sexuality. Poems like *An introduction* and *the old playhouse* establish the authority of the woman to talk, to love and to live as she pleases. Das is also an autobiographer, with her *My Story* (1976) book proving as controversial as it remains quite consistently honest and revelatory about her personal life. She would be criticized on many occasions as being too frank but her writing touched the hearts of so many women who felt that their repressed feelings are captured in her poems.

The current research paper is devoted to the contribution made to the Indian English poetry by Kamala Das in the frames of the confession writing style and her approaches to the controversial issues. It addresses the ways in which her poetry defied a patriarchal system, stretching the limits of the voice of women in literature, as well as prefiguring feminist expression in India. With the help of the motifs of love, sexuality, betrayal and identity that she discusses in a confessional manner, this study seeks to define Kamala Das as the pioneer whose writings remains a beacon of literary and feminist literature to this date.

Literature Review:

Chavan, Sunanda in *Kamala Das: A Critical Spectrum* (2010) is a critical review of poetry written by Kamala das where she addresses her confessional mode and expression of negative feelings concerning women. According to Chavan, the compositions of Das has been viewed as a continuum of experiences: love, betrayal, loneliness, self crisis etc., viewed through a subjectively personal, unimposed lens. This book provides us with an idea of how Das transformed the voice of women in Indian English poems by shattering the conventions of femininity.

Vinay Dharwadker places Das in the context of the larger picture known as the modern Indian English poetry in *The Collected Essays of Modern Indian Poetry in English* (1995). Dharwadker shows how her writing has defied the codes of humility and propriety that have so often been superimposed upon the female poet. He explains some ways on how she has voiced Indian poetry as real and subjective and uniquely hers, an important fact to be noted in writing a pregnancy of modernism and the postcolonial writings.

For Dwivedi, A. N., in *Kamala Das: A Critical Study* (2000), takes the time to examine her work on an intimate level as he lingers on the psychological and emotional corpus of her poetry. Dwivedi not only emphasizes the raw honesty of the literature written by Das but also her ability to convey inner female emotions through outer discourses. This piece is especially valuable as far as seeing the context of her confessional form that is inclined to blur the line between the autobiography and the work of art.

Some historical and literary background of Kamala Das is provided by the *Indian Writing in English* (1985) of K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar. However, in his commentary on her work, Iyengar speaks of Das as one of the most powerful female authors in Indian post-independent literature, despite her being seemingly the most varied writer by far. He notes how bold her claims on love, sexuality, and identity were, which is almost a taboo when women writers existed.

She directly addresses the confessional mode of her poetry in the article *100 Confession as Technique in the Poetry of Kamala Das* (*Indian Literature*, 1980): He examines how Das reshapes western confession traditions, with the works of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, yet gives them an Indian twist to. A particular interest as to why confession in Das poetry acquires literary worth and anti-social inclination may attach to the Kumar work.

Finally, in *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1980), P. Lal writes of Das as emblem of the new generation of Indo-Anglian poets who unleashed themselves in response to tradition. Lal



introduces the frankness, simplicity and emotion density her poetry would bring to Indian English poetry. He particularly likes how boldly she has treated the themes of devices like desire, frustration and marital war, a theme that poetry of her time never addressed.

In her work, *The Poetics of Desire: The Feminist Perspective in the Poetry of Kamala Das* (2004) Rukmini Bhaya Nair presents a critique of the poems of Das that is in itself feminist in the way that it is executed. Nair states that by discussing sexuality and passion and longing openly, Das reformulated the definition of female desire in Indian English poetry. She pays attention to the action the poet takes to endow the silences of patriarchy with a headache, and how she appropriates in the centre of her poetry word the female subjectivity.

Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Pirro Paolo Piciucco to provide more critical context in terms of which Indian Women can be read in *Writing in English* (2002). In this regard, Kamala Das is presented as a literary woman of revolution, who brought out repressed emotions of women. In placing her in the context of a feminist literary tradition, the editors highlight that her confessionalism influenced subsequent female writers.

Indira Bhatt Singh employs both the narrative facts of her life and a critical analysis of her writing in *Kamala Das: A Critical Biography* (2012). These details of her life would have a particularly significant impact on the poetry of Das; her marriage, love quest, identity crisis, etc. Singh demonstrates these facts. In her life she could not get over the life she experienced, the works she describes in her biography are the confined writing works by which she confuses the life and the literature which she now experiences.

Das is framed in a larger context of postcolonial women writers of literature written by Sunita Sinha in *The Post-Colonial Women Writers: New Mutations* (2008). Das employs a confessional approach to authority, argues Sinha, which is not only personal but also political in the sense of addressing postcolonial freedom of speech orders across gender. She emphasizes that in her new poetry, Das has created a dialogue between personal misery and depression on one hand, and the common misery of women on the other.

One of the most renowned poems of Das, *Revisiting the Past: Nostalgic Experience in the Godmother(s) House*, is dedicated by Rashmi Rekha Saikia to the idea of nostalgia and memory which is published in the magazine article format (*The Creative Launcher*, 2020, doi:10.53032/tcl.2020.5.2.06). Raising the idea of a childhood memory as a place and a cinematic refuge, Saikia relates nostalgia and identity to the act of expression.

In the article, *Unburdening the Self: A Therapeutic Study of Kamala Das* Gibson-Heldman: Composition, S. Saha (*Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 2016,

It is psychological and therapeutic, doi:10.1080/08893675.2016.1176161). Saha also interpret the confessional poetry as a form of self-treatment by Das because in his words, the writing is the trauma, anxiety, and conflict processing agent. Curative powers of confessional art are under stress in this world.

Many articles about the same topic deserve deep comparison, yet this particular *Expressing the Oppressed Voice in a Rebellious Way: A Comparison of Confessional Poetry by Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das* by Shikha Dutt Sharma (*Journal of Neonatal Surgery*, 2021, doi:10.52783/jns.v14.3322) is written on a comparative basis with which the same author wrote and described what was or was not accomplished by the respective authors and how they managed to do it in such a way that Sharma goes on to say that these confessional forms serve these two poets in their desire to express the oppressed female frustration and rebellion albeit that Das modifies her way by the Indian culture climate.

Suman Singh focuses on the poems of Das and breaks them down by gender in his writing *Woman Perspective in Kamala Das poetry* (*International Journal of Engineering Research and Technology*, 2018 (doi:17577/IJERTCONV3IS10004). By talking about female repressed desires and frustrations, Singh remarks, Das represents their voices and helps them not be



placed totally marginal on the world stage despite being women who truly constitute the Indian literature. In study, it is emphasized that Das has devoted his life to be honest because he does not worry about the response of societal people.

Methodology:

This is a qualitative research consisting of usage of the textual analysis. Since the thought of discussing the issue of the use of confessions poetry and the use of crude subjects as the channel of finding the expression in the poetry by Kamala Das it can be thought that in the methodology we will examine with the help of deep examination of the literature she chooses and the critical literature the society has written about her poetry. They did the following:

1. Selection of Primary Texts

Original content of this paper would have been the major poems of Kamala Das, especially, the poems that reveal the outstanding autobiographical nuances and start the speech on the odd subject. These include:

An Introduction (Summer in Calcutta, 1965) - where Das is open about issues of identity, gender, and social pressure.

My Own Grandmother House - a poem, that demonstrates her emptiness of some place to go, is lonely and never at home.

The Old Playhouse - which offends the marriage institution and oppression of females.

- The Looking Glass - where she does not speak specifically about feminine sexuality and sensuality in a fearful way.

These poems are chosen because they would be the most successful her confessional writing style poems and the most suitable among her themes of inquiry.

2. Analytical Framework

The theory of confessional poetry is employed as a direction in the paper. Characteristics of the confessional poetry are the following:

Subjectivity and intensive revelations.

- explain taboo subjects (sexual behavior, traumas, self-conscience, etc.).
- Two-fold voice: autobiographical, where personal experience is combined with artistic poetry.

Within this frame, the poems of Kamala Das are interpreted in terms of how they manifest her own experience, as well as how they articulate concerns of the female potential in general.

3. Strategy with Textual Analysis.

The discussion is conducted through the reading of the few poems and analysis with special attention to:

- Language and imagery: The display of emotion by the brash, spare and relatively unattractive use of language.
- Rather, it needs to review the topic discussed in the texts, and it is: Love, marriage, sexuality, loneliness, and freedom.
- Autobiographical factors: the ways in which the experience of the person finds its reflection in the poem of the writer.
- Feminist settings: The manner in which her poems challenge the principles of patriarchy, address women as people.

4. Use of Secondary Sources

This would be the right way to go as the poetry of Kamala Das says a lot about herself and it can never be viewed through quantitative methodology but through qualitative and interpretive methods of approach. Confessional poetry is the kind of poetry which involves a lot of concern about not only the analysis of the great is increased with reference to secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and literary criticism. And cultural readings exist,



created by scholars, including: P. Lal, Rukmini Bhaya Nair and Vinay Dharwadker, which relate to works by Das and contribute to either support or refutation of arguments used in this paper.

5. Rationale for the Method

subject matter (what she reveals) but also its form (how she reveals). Taking a closer examination of the text, it is possible to examine her poetic ability, brand of emotion, her absence of restraint in expressing her feelings.

Discussion:

Kamala Das is a popular poet due to the autobiographical nature of her work and her bold treatment of subject, which, in Indian society, is a taboo. The confessional style of her inner conflict addresses her as well as millions of women who are oppressed by patriarchal traditions. Her poetry is examined both in viewpoint with what she pays sincere expression through writing as per the confessions school of thought of writing, and delineation of the themes that recur by and large throughout her body of literature to render her a unique voice in Indian English literature.

1. An Introduction - Identity, Language, and Gender Roles.

The most famous poem of Kamala Das and the perfect definition of her confession genre is An Introduction. The poem reads more like an autobiography where she uses her body, emotions, and identity crisis to portray herself. She does not stop to discuss the disease with the social norms:

Confessional: in the poem she confesses that it hurts to be dumped into intellectually pre-determined roles. The extreme openness of her mind about marriage at that young age, combined with the fact that she has already been introduced to premature sexual relations groom her to leave the personal ahead of the poetry.

Boldness: Das challenges the patriarchal assumptions concerning womanhood and asserts her right to be free- linguistically as well as on a personal level. The poem is personal, but it is also political when she explains that the decision to write in English is the opposition against the criticism.

Das connects the personal feelings of her personal life with more general feminism with this poem and embraces the spirit of the confessional poem.

2. My Grandmother Goes Home to the House of Loneliness and of Emotional Steel.

In My Grandmother's House, Das omits any erotics and writes of a sense of loss, loneliness, and nostalgia. The house is a symbol of a place of warmth and unconditional love and a symbol of emotional safety that she lacks in her adult life.

People: The first one talked about confessional connotation: The author builds the poem where her childhood memories are the background, it is said, that she is insatiably desiring to feel love and that she experiences suffering of being deprived emotionally in her current life.

Presenting a meaningful commentary on the norms of the culture at that period of time, Das attacks the stereotype concerning females in force becoming victims of feeling and keeping silence about it. By this she portrays herself as a human, imperfect and in need thus obliterating the image of an ideal Indian woman who hides all her sorrow.

The angularity of this poem is changing a subjective memory to an everybody cares about buried grief in women.

3. The Old Playhouse 1 Marriage, Domination and Female Identity.

The Old Playhouse is one of the sharpest observations of Das regarding patriarchal marriage. The poem reveals the helpless wife as a slave and sex object, deprived of her personality and composed by the voice of the woman who is trapped in an inappropriate relationship.



Confessional The poem is very autobiographical however, as it deals with Das herself having an unhappy marriage. She is telling a tale of love and marriage as manipulation and destruction of herself, not realization.

The poem is stridently composed: it is a direct indictment of the institution of marriage, which is holy in the traditional Indian society and sacrosanct. Das describes the woman body as the stage upon which the will concerning the satisfied consummation of the husband is to be performed, and by which the self is to be sacrificed at the altar of the two-faced lords of man.

The poem is also one of the most telling instances of her fearlessness as she introduces the poem as a feminist challenge.

4. The female desire, sexuality of the looking glass.

One of the risky poems by Das praising female sexuality devoid of shame is, perhaps, The Looking Glass. The poem challenges women to embrace their lifestyles and not to overlook their sexual interests in the name of belonging to some society.

Confessionalism: This poem is built by her own experience as well as her shameless recognition of female desire which was at that juncture virtually inaudible in Indian poems.

- Scandalous Theme: Das defies all the taboos because she puts female sexuality at the center of her poetry. She resists the society where only men have the right to claim sexual agency, but instead she dashes at females to recognize their right to pleasure and to do things themselves.

By openly praising the female desire, Das demolished the ancient rules of gender distinction and helped to pave the way to a new writing of feminism in India.

5. Feminist Resistance Confidential Mode.

Throughout these poems every form of the confessional that Kamala Das engages in is a type of protest. By speaking to the audience first-personally, she will be able to recover her right as a woman, lover and writer. She does not even try to abstract her tone, as her male compatriots have been doing, in order to speak plainly, in inappropriate language. She is not afraid having opened intimate lives of women, marrying, sexual, infidelity, isolation, something no one is discussing in the society.

She possesses in her poetry therefore evidence in two planes:

- Personal- based on her life, her struggles and wants.
- Political - threatening the patriarchal regulations and empowering the voices of women.

Findings

Comparative study of the poems chosen by Kamala Das depicts a number of significant conclusions in the ways makes her confessional and reaches for provocative issues.

1. Kamala Das confessed poet.

It verifies that Kamala Das can be regarded as one of the first and the strongest confessional poets in Indian English literature. She relied on poetry as a form, like Sylvia Plath or Anne Sexton in the west, to communicate her inner struggles, personal experiences and heartfelt revelations. But she does not share her counterparts in the West; instead, her confessional mode is greatly influenced by the Indian social and cultural setting. Based on her own life, her poems are explicitly autobiographical; she gets married too young, has trouble with words, can find a suit, feels foreign.

2. Redefining Female Identity

The poetry of Das is a bold reclaiming of female identity: she is defying the demands of patriarchy. She will not believe in being the submissive and silent wife. Rather, she demands her right to freedom, individuality and self-expression. In poems such as an introduction and the old playhouse, she does not want to be tied into traditional gender roles. It is implied in



the findings that her writing led to the opening up of the new identity of women in Indian English poetry- an identity that is self-assertive, questioning, and rebellious.

3. The Place of Marriage and Love.

The second important finding is the fact that Das describes the marriage and love as a place of mobility, conflict, domination, and disappointment rather than as the location of help and peace. Marriage is then equated to loss of freedom as seen in poems like *The Old Playhouse*, at which point the woman is diminished to an instrument of male gratification. In a parallel manner, love is shown in its unfulfilled and painful state, which relates to her own sufferings. This brings out clearly her boldness to bring out the ugly realities about relationships rather than making them perfect as the conventional Indian poetry of those days did.

4. Women and sexuality and desire as the key motifs.

Kamala Das was also among the earliest poets in India who wrote extensively on female sex. She exalt the fact that in the era of *The Looking Glass*, women were allowed to desire and have physical sexual relationships and she broke the silence that generally surrounded such things. The results indicate that each time she foregrounded feminine sexuality, she destabilized the masculine mainstream discourse of love and desire. And this made her poetic works revolutionary because women were now empowered to assert their sexuality because they no longer felt guilty or ashamed.

5. Vulnerabilities and Loneliness, Emotional.

Another motif coming out of her confessional mode is feeling lonely and lost and desiring to touch someone emotionally. *My Grandmother House* is a good example of this desire, because the lack of love in her current life is juxtaposed with the health of her childhood home. Those findings prove that she not only writes about strength and rebellion but also understands the sensitivity and frailty of feelings. Such candor renders her work very human and familiar.

6. The contribution to Feminist Discourse.

Lastly, the results suggest that the content of poems by Kamala Das despite some not being primarily specified as feminist in frame made significant contributions to feminist discourse in India. Telling about her individual problems, she articulated the unity of all women who became victims without raising a finger. Confessional style was turning personal anguish into political protest turning the personal into the political.

Conclusions:

As is ever witnessed in the physical body of Indian English literature poetry by Kamala Das, this was an individual who was an experimental confessional poet and whose poetry dominated the order of the day in presenting women in poetry. Das also erased the distinction between personal and public by authoring, without scruple, about herself, and it became a feature of the literary language. And when she writes in her confessional mode, she is not simply putting her voice out there, but is actively attempting to resist silence and repression.

Among the most important conclusions regarding which is that Kamala Das altered the terms of female identity when she wrote about the topic without fear of saying what she did. A woman, in a social manner which would conduct her life, women were passive, submissive and silent was demanding her personality and her independence. The systems that treated women as wives and mothers were criticized through the poems she wrote such as the introduction and *Old Playhouse*. By exposing the shackles of marriage, of love, of social ought, Das spoke of millions of women whose history had been overshadowed.

The alternative conclusion is that, through Kamala Das, the treatment of female sexuality in Indian poetry was changed. Her poems like *The Looking Glass* placed female desire in the centre of her creative imagination. She discussed the subject of sexual needs and frustrations in public, she broke all the historical cultural taboos and showed that female sexuality cannot



and must not be crushed and covered, on the contrary, it must be used and exalted. This is the milder form of innovation that separated her amongst the workers she worked with and that made her a radical innovator.

There and momentarily as well the primeval mores of self-dependence and emotive unconsciousness which shape such a poem on the framework of My Grandmothers House structure disposes our memory of the way she was sensibly amenable to being found out of being pin-picked by human presence. Does her poetry objectify women as a figure of strength or weakness does her poetry portray women as a real human being with her wants and her shortcomings and all the richness of human emotions. It is the expression that is delicate that makes the work seem real and familiar across cultures and centuries.

It can also be concluded that the poetry revealed by Kamala Das is very personal, yet common to all. Her open-minded approach to marriage, love, identity, and sexuality correlates personal experience with situational social facts. She gave the Indian female a tongue with which to lend their stifled feelings and she was well part of the worldwide feminist style or expression of saying no by way of her art.

The conclusion of Kamala Das is that she was a revolutionary when it came to Indian English poetry. A distinctive poetic shape and avenues of confrontation defined her own niche in the female literary set that survives and is still emulated by critics, feminists and imaginative producers. Through her songs, she demonstrates how a poem could embody inner reality and could serve as the tool of social reform.

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