



## A VISIONARY PANORAMA OF FEMALE PERSONA IN KAMALA DAS'S POEMS

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### **Abstract**

*Among the Indian poets writing in English today, Kamala Das exhibits a new perception for women poets to establish her voice and identity in a male dominated society. Self is the crucial point in which Kamala Das asserts her right to obtain a distinct identity as an individual. Her strong voice assumes wider significance in her poems. Her female journey from victimization to consciousness unveils free individuality to her woman persona. Her poetry is the celebration of the beauty and courage of a woman against patriarchal prejudice. Through her writing she tried to uplift the position of women from their stereotype roles which they are forced to play against their wishes. This paper is intended to throw light on the role of woman played in the male dominated society since ages.*

**Key Words:** *Self, Identity, Freedom, Male Domination.*

**Methodology:** The present paper is a descriptive and theoretical based on secondary data. The data is taken from different research journals, research papers, relevant books and websites.

**Objective of the Paper:** The paper is divided into two parts. Part 1 examines Kamala Das as a poet of every woman and Part 2 deals with the role played by the woman in the poems of Kamala Das and their consciousness of individuality in a patriarchal society.

### **Introduction**

Better known as “Madhavikutty” in her poetic world, Kamala Das is the leading woman poet in India who epitomizes the dilemma of the modern Indian woman. Woman tries to challenge the established norms of the society and assert themselves. The French Feminist Simone De Beauvoir in her book “Le deuxieme Sexe” (1949) says “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in a society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature ..... This is described as feminine.”\*<sup>1</sup> in the poems of Kamala Das the very thought has been interpreted in different manner signifying Kamala Das’s own individuality and feminine identity. Devendra Kohli writes “Courage and honesty are the strength of Kamala Das’s character and her poetry and the courage lies in not being able to admit that one has aged, when one has, but in also being able to assert in the face of it that in the final analysis one has no regrets and that one, has lived beautifully in this beautiful world.” Kamala Das is intensely conscious of herself as a woman. She talks about her feelings and experience which is also the problem of women in general. In her poetry, her vision is distinctly revealed from woman’s point of view. Being a poet she expresses and unfolds the truths quite openly than any other Indian woman poet.

“Kamala Das’s story is the story of a woman who was denied love, when she valued nothing but love in all her life. Love and affection remained a craze, a longing and a dream for her . She got almost everything in life name and fame, a degree of wealth but she could never get love, as she saw it. It is in this background that she writes about love in all her writing.”\*<sup>2</sup>

The woman in Kamala Das’s poems is simple, pure, innocent and lovely. Her heart is filled with life nourishing emotion of love. She portrays the character of her grandmother who has been a source of affection and inspiration to her. Her grandmother is in her inner mind gives her the strength to face the realities of life. It is in this feeling that her recollection from childhood affords a soothing effect in the burden of her later life. With the passage of time the sharing moments of warmth and affection faded away. Under the sheltering care of her grandmother she spent some happiest years of her life and so states nostalgically:

There is a house now far away  
Where once I received love      -My Grandmother’s House.



The recollection of her memories with her grandmother not only tormented her but also left her in a sense of loss. Now she does not have any one to love her and she longs for love while she utters:

The only secrets I always  
Withhold  
Are that I am so alone  
And that I miss my grandmother                      -Composition

Her grandmother is presented as an embodiment of tenderness and warmth. The happy security of her childhood under the loving guidance of her grandmother is contrasted with her tender feelings and yearnings for her love. Her sincerity and at the same time her wishes against the established order of the society made her to realize the emptiness of all her natural mirth and clarity of thinking:

My grandmother cried  
Darling, you must stop this bathing now  
You are much too big to play  
Naked in the pond                                      -The Suicide

According to M. K. Naik , her woman character in the poetry plays the role of “women as a sweet heart , flirt, wife, woman of the world , mother , middle-aged mature of psychological processes behind both femininity and masculinity.” Motherhood cannot be separated from a woman and it is an inseparable part of womanhood. Woman is hungry of love and the very woman is within her. The woman not only adores the child but only for love she forgets her pains of bearing it. The intensity of maternal love is distinct and vibrant :

Love is not important, that makes the blood  
Neither carouse nor the man who brands you with his  
Lust, but is shed at end of each  
Embrace, only that matters which forms as  
Toadstool under lighting and rain, the soft      -Jaisurya

Her poems are strong representations of the feelings of women who are very often mere puppets in the hands of the ever dominating men. She felt insecure and out of sheer despair she is unable to proceed with her thoughts for quite some time. This suffering made her to move to desolation.

In the male dominated society, man shows no understanding of a woman’s aspirations. Her female persona is always suppressed under male ego. In her life her expectations of a caring, understanding and authoritative kind of husband in all her deeds was never fulfilled. There is no escape for her from conflict and she is confined to the boundaries to explore her own self. She feels frustrated when her husband offered her “freedom”. The sense of disappointment is however realized and the attitude thus outcomes:

When I got married  
My husband said  
You may have freedom  
As much as you want  
My soul balked at this diet of ash  
Freedom became my dancing shoe  
How well I danced  
And danced without rest  
Until the shoes turned grimy on my feet  
And I began to have doubts.                      -Composition

She had dreams of a loving husband with whom she could lead a better and joyous life and she expected that her husband could provide her the bliss of a paradise. But she spends her life in agony and frustrations where there is neither life nor hope. Her husband hurt her feelings and evoked a sense of disappointment in her. She had no



freedom in selecting an ideal lover for her. She remained all through her life searching for love and understanding. She considered herself a helpless victim:

Nothing more alive than thee  
Skins lazy hungers? Who can?  
Help us who have lived so long  
And have failed in love. - The Freaks

But the perception is somewhat different from the expectations one can have and to be equalized when it has to be performed:

We are all alike  
We women  
In our wrappings of hairless skin.

“Woman” in Kamala Das’s poems suffers the humiliations those are posed to her. She should accept unquestioningly male superiority and should admire him. Kamala Das sees the reflection of the entire suffering womanhood in her own life. She is every woman:

It is I who laugh; it is I who make love  
And then feel shame, it is I who lie dying  
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,  
I am saint. I am the beloved and the  
Betrayed. -An Introduction

She has expressed her disappointment time and again to tell the world that women are individuals with their own preferences. Her dissatisfaction is clear and has profound insights into the inner depths of her mind:

Beneath your monstrous ego, I ate the magic loaf and  
Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason to all your  
Questions, I mumbled in coherent replies. -The Old Playhouse

According to Bruce King “Das’s themes go beyond stereotyped longings and complaints. Even her feelings of loneliness and disappointments are part of a longer than life personality obsessive in its awareness of its self, yet creating; a drama of selfhood.”\*<sup>3</sup> Love is the essence of a woman’s life. It is through love that Das endeavors to discover herself. She confesses ‘I was looking for an ideal lover .I was looking for the one who went to Mathura and forgot to return to his Radha.’\*<sup>4</sup>

### Conclusion

The experiences expressed in Das’s poems are of depression , isolation and of suffering. The sense of helplessness and alienation that she felt in her life made her to see all her relations with contempt and disgust. The unfulfilled desires and her dissatisfaction for having being prevented from exercising her free will are clearly visible in her poetry. She expressed her feelings and emotions freely as well as distinctly to highlight the sensitivity of her mind. Kamala Das remarks, “The language one employs is not important what is important is the thought contained by words.”She wanted to forget her womanliness and in her poems the very thought has been established with a definite sense that women have no separate existence free from men.

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