

**Male Chauvinism and Female Objectification: An Analysis of the
Select Works of Kamala Das**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the project entitled **Male Chauvinism and Female**

Objectification: An Analysis of the Select Works of Kamala Das is the record of bona fide work done by me under the supervision of Dr. Seba Susan John, and that no part of it has been presented before for award of any degree, diploma or any other similar title of recognition.

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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Male Chauvinism and Female Objectification: An Analysis of the Select Works of Kamala Das** is a record of bona fide work carried out by Aiswarya Vijayakumar, Register No. 200021001532 under my supervision. No part of this work has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, fellowship or other title of recognition.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

One of the most well-known feminists of the postcolonial era was Kamala Das. The poetry of Kamala Das is essentially feminist poetry. The focus of my research is Kamala Das as a woman-as a wife, a mother, daughter, writer and a sexual companion for many men besides her husband. The poems in which Kamala Das describes the personality and disposition of her husband are those in which her feminine sensibility comes through most strongly and eloquently. One of her poems, *The Old Playhouse*, is Infused with a feminine sensibility. Her husband's approach to making love to her infuriated her feminine sensibilities. Thus, only a strong woman would express her disgust at a husband who only wants to satisfy his lust. The feminine sensibility of Kamala Das forces her to characterize her husband In *The Sunshine Cat* as a self-centered, cowardly man who did not love her adequately. She claims that her husband had been treating her like a prisoner who had nothing except a "yellow cat" for companionship. Her poems are distinctly feminine due to the common female themes and even the images and symbols she uses. Both the subject matter and the tone of her poetry are feminine. Indeed, in her poetry, she skilfully combines feisty female protest with endearing feminine feelings.

Kamala Das, Malayalam pen name Madhavikutty, Muslim name Kamala Surayya was a prolific Indian woman writer of the twentieth century. She did not have a long term formal education, but literature had a very special place in her family. Her mother a well-known Malayalam writer and her great uncle was a leading poet and philosopher. She wrote openly and frankly about female sexual desire and the experience of being an Indian woman. Das was part of a generation of

Indian writers whose work centred on personal rather than colonial experiences, and her short stories, poetry, memoirs, and essays brought her respect and notoriety in equal measures. Das wrote both in English and, under the pen name Madhavikutty, in the Malayalam language of southern India. Das was born into a high-status family, she had access to a library of sacred scripts maintained by her matrilineal Nair community. In such an environment, Das grew soon as a capable writer both in English and Malayalam. She grew up in Kerala and in Calcutta, where her father worked. She began writing poetry when she was fifteen years old, she married Madhava Das, a banking executive many years her senior, and they moved to Bombay. Das had three sons and did her writing at night.

Feminism in Indian English fictions, as ordinarily considered, is an exceptionally glorious and over the-top idea dealt with unobtrusively under limited condition. It isn't at all another idea and throughout the years numerous authors and novelists have effectively raised the issue through their innovative compositions. Indian women novelists and different authors, forming their contemplations in English range from exhibit of essayists like Toru Dutt to Kamala Das and from Sarojani Naidu to Suniti Namjoshi, Arundhati Roy to Shashi Deshpande. These female Indian Writers have selected the surprising assortment of subjects in a style that normally poetry and novels are equipped for advertising. Indian women writers have frequently raised their voice against social and social inequality that obliged women's freedom and executed institutional segregation of women. In the present day situation of Indian women in literature and society, forces us to find how much women suffers to stand themselves in front of the patriarchal society to build their own identity, through the woman writer's works in feminism theory.

All of Das's works go through many researches because of her writing style and her way to introducing a social or a mental problems. Most of her works are researches under Feminism or Psychoanalysis. Tawhida Akhter analyses Das' poetry in a psychoanalytic way and says, "What a confessional poet gives us are the psychological equivalents for his or her mental state and it is such psychological equivalents, that we always get in the poetry of Kamala Das" and also Dr. Rituraj Trivedi says in his article "*The image of Feminine sensibility in Indian English Poetry*", "We discovered that she made the most of her works to eloquently capture the pleasures and sufferings of women folk. No matter what she wrote, Pan always aimed to depict some of the most contentious aspects of Indian culture, especially the pressing challenges facing women." This reserch tries to reread her words as how Das shows her self as a mother, daughter, wife, woman and a writer.

The project is divided into four. First chapter is an introduction to the research is an overview of the life and writings of Kamala Das. The second chapter explains the theory of Feminism. Third chapter is the analysis on how Kamala Das shows her self as a mother, daughter, wife, women and a writer in her works with feminism theory. The fourth chapter is the conclusion that summarises the major findings of the present research.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Aspects of Feminism

Feminism is a political and social movement that seeks to challenge and change patriarchal systems of oppression and inequality, particularly as they affect women and other marginalised gender equality and the recognition of women's human rights. There are many different schools of thought within feminism including Liberal, Marxist, Socialist and Social feminism each with its own distinct perspective and approaches to achieving gender equality. However, all forms of feminism share a commitment to challenging the ways in which patriarchy affects women's lives and to advocating for women's rights and empowerment. Feminism has had a profound impact on society, shaping the course of political, social, cultural change and helping to bring about important advances in areas such as reproductive rights, equal pay and the representation of women in leadership positions. Despite these gains, however gender inequality remain a pervasive problem and the feminist movement continues as an important force in the on going struggle for gender equality.

Since the last 20th century, many newer forms of feminism have emerged. Some forms, such as white feminism, have been criticised as taking into account only white, middle class, college educated, heterosexual or gender perspectives. These criticisms have led to the creation of ethnically specific or multicultural form of feminism, such as black feminism and intersectional feminism. Some feminists have argued that feminism often promotes misandry and elevation of women's

interests above men's and criticise radically feminist positions as harmful to both men and women. Simone de Beauvoir wrote that “the first time we see a woman take up her pen in defense of her sex” was Christine de Pizan who wrote *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love) in the 15th century. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and Modesta di Pozzo di Forzi worked in the 16th century. Marie Le Jars de Gournay, Anne Bradstreet and Francois Poullain de la Barre wrote during the 17th.

Feminists and scholars have divided the movement's history into three “waves”. The first wave refers mainly to women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (mainly concerned with women's right to vote). The second wave refers to the ideas and actions associated with the women's liberation movement beginning in the 1960s (which campaigned for legal and social rights for women). The third wave refers to a continuation of, and a reaction to the perceived failures of, second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990s. The history of modern western feminist movement is divided into four “ways”. The first comprised women's suffrage movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, promoting women's right to vote. The second wave, the women's liberation movement, began in the 1960s and campaigned for legal and social equality for women. In or around 1992, a third wave was identified, characterised by a focus on individuality and diversity. Additionally some have argued for the existence of a fourth wave, starting around 2012, which has used social media to combat sexual harassment, violence against women and rape culture. It is best known for the Me too movement. It is manifest in a variety of disciplines such as feminist geography, feminist history and feminist literary criticism.

Feminism has altered predominant perspectives in a wide range of areas within Western society, ranging from culture to law. Feminist activists have

campaigned for women's legal rights like rights of contract, property rights, voting rights, for women's right to bodily integrity and autonomy, for abortion rights, and for reproductive rights including access to contraception and quality prenatal care; for protection of women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape, for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; against misogyny; and against other forms of gender-specific discrimination against women. In our daily life we can see in many places men and women have same work but different pay scales.

The society always treats women as a second class and men are superior to women. The belief that men are superior to women is male chauvinism. Also we can see the female objectification, according to Emmanuel Kant, sexual love makes the loved person as an object of appetite, as soon as that appetite has been stilled, the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon which had been sucked dry... as soon as a person becomes an object of appetite for another, all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an object of appetite for another a person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by everyone.

Many people incorrectly believe that feminist theory focuses exclusively on girls and women and that it has an inherent goal of promoting the superiority of women over men. In the reality feminist theory has always been about viewing the social world in a way that illuminates the forces that create and support inequality, oppression injustice and promotes the pursuit of equality and justice. Since the experiences and perspectives of women and girls were historically excluded for years from social theory and social science, much feminist theory has focused on their interaction and experiences within society to ensure that half the world's population is not left out of how we see and understand social forces, relation and

problems. Most feminist theorists throughout history have been women but people of all genders can be found working in the discipline today. But shifting the focus of social theory away from the perspectives and experiences of men, feminist theorists have created social theories that are more inclusive and creative than those that assume the social actor to always be a man. Part of what makes feminist theory creative and inclusive is that it often considers how system of power and oppression interact, which is to say it does not just focus on gendered power and oppression but on how this might intersect with systemic racism, a hierarchical class system, sexuality and nationality among other things.

Postcolonial feminism emerged from the gendered history of colonialism: colonial powers often imposed Western norms on colonized regions. In the 1940s and 1950s, after the formation of the United Nations, former colonies were monitored by the West for what was considered social progress. The status of women in the developing world has been monitored by organizations such as the United Nations and as a result traditional practices and roles taken up by women sometimes seen as distasteful by Western standards could be considered a form of rebellion against colonial oppression. Postcolonial feminists today struggle to fight gender oppression within their own cultural models of society rather than through those imposed by the Western colonizers. Indian writing in English is growing rapidly, In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era and has earned many laurels. Indian women writers have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal system. It is a matter of pride to state that the women novelists constitute a major group of the Indian writers in English. Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Kamala Das, ChitraBenerjee, Rama Mehta, BapsiSidhwa and Mahasweta Devi are the prominent Indian women writers

who have dealt with women's problems in their works. Many Indian women writers have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity and their novels present the picture of women at all stages from childhood to woman-hood. The feminism theory is very important in our world today because it shows how unequal society is when it comes to gender. Women get treated unfairly across the world every single day. This needs to change, we could use more women in government positions, more publicity of women's sports, more management positions for women in the workplace, and start expecting more out of women. It is highly unlikely that we will ever have a completely fair world, but the thought of it is quite nice.

CHAPTER III

Voicing Her Self: Das as a Mother, Daughter, Wife, Woman and Writer

Being a woman, Kamala Das reflects her own attitude on the man-woman relationship in her poetry. In the following lines taken from “*A Relationship*,” Das investigates the psychological aspect of love in man-woman relationship:

This love, older than I by myriad
Saddened centuries, was once a prayer
In his bones...
Yes,
It was my desire that made him male
And beautiful, so that when at last we
Met, to believe that once I knew not his
Form, his quiet touch, or the blind kindness
Of his lips was hard indeed. (*Summer in Calcutta* 18)

The poem has an interesting insight into the nature of an unsolved problem in man-woman relationships, namely love: “older than I by myriad/saddened centuries.” Reflecting on her extramarital relationship, Das equates love with physical desire, a blind attraction to the opposite sex. She

adds that, “It was my desire...” to state that she is in control of this relationship. However, the same line points to a psychological fact of a child’s observation of the self in the mirror, developing a love for one’s own image which finally brings about a narcissistic love. Unless this love is checked and controlled at the onset, it develops into ego and, in turn, makes the individual selfish and introverted. The child begins to believe that being a male entails him to everything without exerting any effort and that is rightfully his due. Therefore, there should be no protest from anyone. This is encouraged by the mother or other elders. So, when Das says “It was my desire...” she indicates the typical behaviour of many a woman who bring up their male children in this way that apparently influences their relationships with women. In *My Story*, Das provides an example of such a relationship. “My Mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched.”(11) Dwivedi comments that “her mother’s timidity created an illusion of domestic harmony, and produced some half a dozen children of swarthy skin and ordinary features” (KDP 1). It is something that Das does not like, yet she has no choice but to accept it. The idea is echoed in “With Its Quiet Tongue.”

My heart – the wretched thing – is today

Cold, like those pale green mirrors

One sees in corridors...

They looked in with timid eyes, hungry

Perhaps for flattery, and smiled

Their happiest smiles before they

Walked away...

They left the mirror cold, and so
 Beautiful; how much kinder to have
 Left a great, sprawling crack, shaped
 Like a spider's web... (*Summer in Calcutta* 32)

The word 'cold' is thought provoking because it indicates a state of lifelessness. The pronoun 'they' refers to the lovers, who sought her approval, found happiness through her, but left her cold and dissatisfied. She feels that it would have been better, had they hurt her, instead of leaving her 'cold' and so 'beautiful.' Had her heart broken, she would be more alive to the situation. Also, the comparison of her life to a cold mirror signifies the writer's paralysed life in matrimony where she is treated as an object. Another significance of the mirror is its capacity to reflect the reality. Hence, the mirror stands for Das – as a woman and as poet. Not finding love in her marital life, Das seeks love outside marriage. "My Grandmother's House" shows her misery through the last lines: "I who have lost / My way Beg now at stranger's doors to / Receive love, at least in small change" (*Summer in Calcutta* 15). Das depicts herself as the lost one, pleading for love and solace. However, all she gets is petty responses, a temporal pleasure from strangers, nothing more than physical love in her extramarital relationships. Therefore, she expands her personal experiences to the public domain by drawing a general picture of man-woman relationship. In "An Introduction" she says:

I met a man, loved him. Call
 Him not by any name, he is every man
 Who wants a woman, just as I am every
 Woman who seeks love... (*Summer in Calcutta* 60)

These lines show the typical expectations of a man and a woman from each other. The man wants the woman to offer him sexual service and attend to his lust, whereas the woman seeks love. Distinguishing between the verbs 'want' and 'seek,' Javed Khan mentions that "whereas want is a strong verb involving authority, power and a desire or need bordering on almost being an exclusive right, the verb seek is a meeker option meaning a search or an effort to find or obtain, something in all humility and submission." He also states that Das has described this act of seeking to be tapasya which means self-mortification or self restraint (*Khan* 263). Though the quest of the sexes seems to be totally different, the non-conformist Image has a different implication, too. It suggests a dialectic balance of power between the male and female in a life without the supposed superiority of any sex and gender hegemony. This echoes the expectations of liberal feminists who stress the need for social equality in the status of man and woman.

"*The Looking Glass*" is another example of Das' poetry that publishes the manifesto of sexuality and love in man-woman relationship from a woman's perspective. Javed Khan states that the looking glass has often been symbolically compared "to man or mind in the context of various Indian literatures." He comments that the image reflected in the looking glass is the real estimation of the truth of Life (257). In another sense, the mirror is a metaphoric reflector of the psychology of man and Woman by which the reality behind their relationship is

unveiled. Das warns women that getting a man to love is easy, but retaining his love is difficult. She means that only the woman suffers and pays emotionally on his abandonment. Yet, to assure the success of those women who crave for a man's love, she explores male psychology. She asks women to build upon the ego of men by admiring their physical strength, and stimulating the men to passion by convincing them about the softer, younger and lovelier female body. Lines such as "Gift him all" and "Endless female hunger" reflect raw sensuality and eroticism. There is pride in the uniqueness of the woman's body and there is no inhibition. It is interesting to observe that the woman knows her power over the man and it is from her body that she derives this strength. The poet is not ashamed of her sexual want and it is by gifting her beautiful body to the man, that she wins his love. N. Ramadevi believes that such "erotic indulgence keeps the writer's self within the orbit of a relationship without making it lament over its wounds" (141). This poem echoes Maya Angelou's poem, "*And Still I Rise*" in the reflection of the woman's body and sensuality:

Does my sexiness upset you?
 Does it come as a surprise
 That I dance like I've got diamonds
 At the meeting of my thighs? (42)

"*The Doubt*" is another poem by Das in which she scrutinises the assumption of gender in her society:

When a man is dead, or a woman,
 We call the corpse not he
 Or she but it. Does it
 Not mean that we believe

That only the souls have sex and that
Sex is invisible? (*Descendants 16*)

The poem echoes the views of many radical and liberal feminists. In this context, Rosemarie Tong describes the feminist belief that femininity and masculinity are exclusively products of society or environment. She cites the experiment of Margaret Mead who studied people of three primitive societies – the Arapesh, the Mundugumore, and Tschambuli – and identified that both Arapesh sexes were feminine, both Mundugumore sexes masculine, the female Tschambuli masculine, and the male Tschambuli feminine (*Feminist Thought 4*). Similarly, Das opines that the body without soul is only a corpse. She wonders if it is the soul that determines the sex. Das' destiny, in her prolonged and hectic search for true love, reorients her search towards the eminent figures of Indian mythology. "An Apology to Goutama" is a turning Point in this respect.

When other eyes haunt my eyes, I kiss your
Eyes...
Another voice haunts my ears, another face
My dreams, but in your arms I must today
Lie...
...and I must
Hear you say, I love, I love, I love. It was
Another who made me lonely, not you. (*Summer in Calcutta 19*)

Dwivedi believes that the poem constructs a contrastive analogical opposition between the Binaries of ascetic and sensual love represented by Goutama and her own man respectively. Also this binary projects oppositions that identify two

kinds of eyes, voices, and faces, rather than two modes of living. He adds that the genuine love of Das is manifested through the Radha-Krishna myth or Mira-Krishna relationship (*KDP* 6). Anisur Rahman believes that Das “relies on the poetic strategy of contrast to accentuate the effect of her pain and suffering.” This contrast between her man and Goutama is a part of the writer’s attempt to find peace and tranquillity away from the prevalent patterns of love (21). However, in lines mentioned above, the writer expresses her desire for a man of her choice. The assertive voice of Das is heard when she chooses to be with her loved one.

In “*The Maggots*”, Das takes the role of Radha and searches for eternal love and the home of Lord Krishna. Das successfully highlights the distinction between the selfish love of her husband, and the Ideal love of Lord Krishna through Krishna’s emphasis on the pronoun “our” which substitutes her or them. She uses the word “our” in that a poem for the existence of true love with its unifying effect between the lovers as opposed to the ruptured relationship between Das and Her husband. This love is mystical, in the sense that the union between the lovers takes place by the elimination of their bodies that grants freedom to their souls “to return someday” and enjoy the real purity. The physical love gives her freedom to flee from the real world, but she would return some day, to regain her body. The raw image of the hanging bats becomes an emblem of her physical desire and lust.

In “Radha,” Das draws on the first embrace of the two divine lovers. According to Krishna Autar Agrawal, in this poem, Das speaks of spiritual love and evolution of spirit as it happens for Radha through her physical surrender to Lord Krishna. The image of Radha’s “melting” in Krishna depicts this evolution through the union of Radha’s self with Krishna’s (88-89). D. Murali Manohar, on the other hand, believes that the first embrace of a virgin girl is often painful. Das, as a worshipper of

Krishna, gets solace from him during her first sex with her husband for the relief of her pain. He adds that, the repetition of the word “melting” indicates that Das invokes Him for help in the form of a chant (20).

However, regarding the poem “Radha”, the erotic image of a young woman waiting for her loved one is significant. All the frustrated waiting becomes sheer joy, when Radha embraces Krishna. Radha’s self becomes one with that of Lord Krishna and the physical union leads to spiritual awakening. The word “melting” chanted three times by Radha suggests a metaphoric reference to the stories of the Bhagavata Purana. It recalls the unconditional devotion of the gopis, or the cow herd girls, to Lord Krishna, and it is a reference to the Bhakti tradition. Speaking of Das’ love, Manohar points to two types of love in Indian literature. One is the true love, as characterised by Toru Dutt through the story of Savitri and Satyavan. This love, according to Manohar, has often been admired in Indian classical literature and has remained dominant in the pre-independence era. The soul occupies a central position in this love, and the lovers are selfless. Savitri and Satyavan proved that true love is capable of defeating the doomed fate and making the bonds of love immortal (4). Savitri and Satyavan deeply believed in each other. Hence, it was always possible for them to communicate intimately. In this love, physical submission of the lovers does not instil the sense of inferiority in them (8). Contrary to such love, there exists a second form of love with sensual implication. This love with carnal attraction gives foremost priority to the body rather than the soul and is associated with possessiveness and selfishness. Nissim Ezekiel is the main literary figure who advocates this love, in Indian modernist poetry.

Das experience a troubled childhood, often in want of positive masculine emotions such as paternal love, filial love and affection from other male members of

the family. She criticise her father, often fiercely, for her failures. Husband are the other targets of her criticism. Soon after marriage, the sparks of hope disappear from the optimistic minds of the Das because the arranged wedlock of Das fulfills their marital expectations. She is paralysed in a mechanical relationship. The only positive factor for Das Is the uncomplicated love that she shares with her grandmother whose her death marks the end of this love, too. Articulating their personal problems as daughter, wife and mother, Das and criticise social psyche in their poems. In the following extract taken from Das' autobiography, she describes her parents and Their relationship with her:

“My father was always busy with his work at the automobile firm... my mother, vague and indifferent, spent her time lying on her belly on a large four-post bed, composing poems in Malayalam ... He was not of an affectionate nature. So we grew-up more or less neglected, and because we were aware of ourselves as neglected children in a social circle that pampered the young, there developed between us a strong relationship of love, the kind a leper may feel for his mate who pushed him on A hand-cart when they went on their begging round”. (*My Story* 9)

Das reflects on the lack of support from strong male figure in the family, in a number of poems. In “*Next to Indira Gandhi*”, Das overtly blames her father for his failure to sustain her with his paternal love:

Next to Indira Gandhi my father I feared the most...

Father, I ask you now without fear

Did you want me

Did you ever want a daughter

Did I disappoint you much
 With my skin as dark as yours...
 You chose my clothes for me
 My tutors, my hobbies, my friends,
 And at fifteen with my first saree you picked me a husband...
 And a life of suburban dullness
 Brightened with embroidery and crochet work ya
 And the Thursday Cookery class...
 It wasn't my cup of tea...
 ...You are dead, nobody fears you now... (*Only the Soul* 118)

In the first couple of lines, she finds herself as the 'Other,' placed on the margins of her father's attention. Fear is the cause of the emotional gap between Das and her father, which symbolises the fear for patriarchy in the family. In the third line, she links her father's behaviour to his gender preference in the family. The same line is worthy of elaboration due to the rejection of an old assumption of patriarchy regarding the inferiority of women. Like liberal feminist writers such as Christine de Pisan or Mary Wollstonecraft, Das questions the male-biased attitude. In the fourth line, she exhibits her deep felt longing for love and in the fifth and sixth lines, she ironically implies that she is not different from her father to be treated otherwise.

In the following part of this poem, Das, like Simone de Beauvoir, portrays the making of femininity in family by assigning certain roles to a female figure. Finally, in the last lines she articulates her dearth of choice in life as a typical daughter in a male dominated environment. In the poem quoted above, Das

highlights “the cultural mind set” (*Barry 122*) in her father through a set of binaries. These binaries expand into opposite poles of centre and margin, male and female, and the self and the other. On the whole, the viewpoint of Das resembles that of radical feminism which questions the socio-cultural institution of patriarchy within the family.

“*My Father’s Death*” also contains similar messages for the readers:

He was generous with money
 As generous as I was with
 Love. There was a cloud of tension
 Between him and me. I brought him
 Shame, they say. He brought me on each
 Short visit some banana chips
 And harsh words of reproach. I feared
 My father. Only in coma
 Did he seem close to me... (*Only the Soul 116-117*)

The above poem shows how the family operates as the first source of emotional turbulence in Das’ life. It is evident, especially in the first three lines, which depict the lack of emotional support. The last two lines indicate that the father and daughter never reached a compromise. Naturally, in such a family environment, Das fails to build a positive picture of herself as the other half of humanity in childhood. It makes her emotionally dependent on her grandmother. Das embraces the first beams of pure love and affection from her, in the absence of paternal love. This is reflected in “*My Grandmother’s House*”. The only filial love that Das receives in childhood is from her grandmother – a person of her own gender.

At the onset of her marriage, Das, unaware of the role assigned to a wife, looks at this social institution optimistically expecting a reciprocal relationship with her husband. The Poem “*Love*” reflects this attitude along with her fleeting delight and contentment at that Moment. Comparing herself to an old mongrel, Das paints a sorry picture of her marriage. From an accomplished poet, artist and a fun-loving person, her life is reduced to dull domesticity. Her independent self has lost its identity, and she must seek her ‘self’ in her husband. Mojgan Kahen, the contemporary psychologist, in her explanation of ‘unhealthy love’ states that such loss of affection in life, leads the affected person to lose the sense of individuality and experience a vacuum of identity. She calls this type of love as intermingled (*Television Interview 13 March 2009*).

“*An Introduction*” reveals the first symptoms of disillusionment or awakening into reality experienced by Das. In this poem, Das explicitly describes her victimisation in an arranged marriage. Dealing with man-woman relationship, she verbalises her lack of choice and lack of consent in marriage. Commenting on her maturity, D. Murali Manohar argues that physical and mental maturity of a man and woman are essential parameters to understand each other (15). O. J. Thomas quoting from Das’ book of autobiography says, “I was victim of a young man’s carnal hunger...” and “Again and again he hurt me and all the while the Kathakalidrums throbbed fully.” Thomas states that Das’ immediate sexual experience with her husband, after marriage, along with his extra marital affairs with another lady made her switch off her emotions towards him (181-182). In an account of her wedding night, Das reveals that she could not control her partner’s vast hunger for physical gratification. She tried “unsuccessfully to climb out of his embrace.” She adds that “The rape was unsuccessful ... I was at that time deeply in love with

him ... but my body was immature and not ready for lovemaking” (*My Story* 72-73). Das’ use of the word rape, instead of lovemaking in the context of marriage is quite meaningful. Evidently, the poem shows that to her partner, love is summarised in lust within conjugal life. Deprived of her husband’s love, she feels lost, powerless and defeated. Above all, Das bemoans the loss of her identity as a woman in the institution of marriage. It is significant, she mentions, that she has played roles all her life as instructed by others. Das’ marriage happened at sixteen, in spite of her full-fledged physical and mental readiness. It was the minimum legal age of marriage for a girl stipulated by Indian government during the 1950s.

The poem “*Larger than Life Was He*” indicates that Das’ dream of romantic love has transformed into disillusionment as her husband fails to fulfil her emotional expectations. The poem is a direct reference to the lack of understanding between the couple. They live together like strangers. Being “free,” in the above lines, accentuates the detachment of affection between Das and her husband. Das rejects porn love in “Convicts” and calls it a communication of skin aimed at hacking at each other. Das compares the physical bonding with her husband to “multi coloured flags of no particular country,” which indicates that it was a mere expression of lust without any true love or commitment. Similarly, the word hacking, meaning a rough and violent cutting, has a strong negative connotation in describing the sexual act. It implies that love has been reduced to the brutal fulfilment of the sexual instinct. Das’ predicament in marital life brings her many times to the edge of committing suicide, but that she chooses to remain married might sound strange to her readers. She explains:

“I could not return home to the Nalapat House a divorcee, for there had been good will between two families for three generations which

I did not want to ruin. My grand-uncle, the poet Narayana Menon had married from my husband's family and, besides, my best friend in the world, Malati was a member of that family" (*My Story* 82)

She also mentions other reasons for suffering the loveless marriage. The obsession of her parents and relations to public opinion, and her two-year-old child might have prevented her from walking out of her marriage (82). Das' is a case of internalising the social norms in a woman who cannot make decision for herself. Her persistence at gaining love in her marital life reflects her hopes for security, but much to her disappointment, the marriage into the Nalapat household resembles a social contract and fails to satisfy her needs.

Of what does the burning mouth
Of sun, burning in today's
Sky remind me...
... his limbs like pale and
Carnivorous plants reaching
Out for me, and the sad lies
Of my unending lust. Where
Is room, excuse or even
Need for love... (*Summer in Calcutta* 14)

"*In Love*" depicts the absence of love in her conjugal life. Lines quoted above indicate the passivity of the female persona in the course of the sexual act. Most physicians agree that suppressed libido is often associated with emotional and psychological problems. In the case of Das, her passivity is due to her unfulfilled yearning for love. On the other hand, her husband's active role, compared to

“Carnivorous plants,” depicts his attention to the flesh or body that is symbolically opposite to the bone, which stands for the soul in the same poem of Das. Being trapped in such a relationship, she candidly chooses to expose to her reader certain hidden facts of her life. “*The Freaks*” is another poem which reflects the mechanical nature of relationships between Das and her husband. For Das sexuality within marriage has become unsatisfactory. She is reminded of a dark, gloomy cave with stalactite formation, an image that instils deep fear when her husband talks to her. He appears predator like with his menacing teeth, and a hand possessively holding her knee. Further, it reveals that she does not expect love to happen only at a physical level. Similarly, the poem “Suicide” reflects the writer’s view on genuine love in her marital life. The poet discusses earthly love with both the soul and the body as complementary and essential parts. Yet, she can partially attain such a love, only at a corporal level, which adds to her crisis of identity. Hence, her search for true love is oriented towards the soul. Das strongly opines that she would discard the ‘bodies’ bereft of soul which might connote her several sexual relationships. Her soul is crucial to her identity because it allows her to sing. To Das, the soul is capable of establishing harmony and stability although she experiences turbulence in life, referred to metaphorically as “the vortex of the sea.”

The poem “*Substitute*” is a reflection of love and sexuality in matrimony. The poem explores the difference between men and women, in their definition and expectation of love in marriage. While Das seeks the solace that branches out of being loved, her husband thirsts only for sexual gratification. Das cries for freedom from this situation. She refuses to be a passive receiver of the loveless attitude of her husband. Mary Nirmala believes that in the poetry of post-colonial women writers including Das, love and sex oscillate between two different views; one shaped by

patriarchy and the other, against patriarchy. Therefore, the husband loves his wife not for herself, but for himself. Nirmala also adds that while love in the Indian context is a sadhana or a spiritual discipline for a woman, it is only passion for a man (63).

Motherhood in the poetry of Das is almost a rare issue. Renate Papke states that “In general, Kamala Das did not integrate her own motherhood and her children into her fiction and her poetry.” Papke states that “My Son’s Teacher” was the only exception. In this poem “her four-year old son witnessed the sudden death of his young woman teacher at school and could not understand it” (58). However, Das as a mother reveals the biological and institutional perspectives of motherhood in poems, such as “*My Grandmother’s House*,” through the character of her grandmother. The direct example of motherhood in her poetry is evident in “Jaisurya” in which she articulates her experiences during child birth. In the poem “*My Grandmother’s House*” the inborn affection of motherhood helps Das overcome the hardship of pregnancy and child birth. She hopes that her child will fill her vacant heart with his love. Like all mothers, Das admires her new born baby for its beauty, but ironically states that the right is born out of the wrong. By this, she questions social codes of morality. Another poem that reflects her attitude on motherhood is “*My Sons*,” which looks more like a complaint. In this poem Das’ deep disappointment in getting filial love from her sons and the completion of masculine habit in her sons.

Domesticity is one of the most common-place experiences of the Indian woman. The poem “*The Old Playhouse*” represents a typically subjugated Indian wife who is no more than a sexual object and an unpaid servant.

You were pleased
 with my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow convulsions...
 I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
 To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering
 Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
 Became a dwarf...
 All pervasive is the male scent of your breath... (*Old Playhouse I*)

In the lines quoted above, Das elaborates on the roles expected from a woman. Providing sexual services is the duty of a wife. She is also expected to work as a servant and the society begins training the woman for this purpose while she is still young. The last few lines of the above poem thematically present the same idea of humiliation presented by Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) in his "*Gulliver's Travels*". Gulliver in Lilliput island meets the dwarf people. Yet, Dwarfism in Lilliput is due to the people's own devilish nature. These people symbolise rulers of England, whereas, dwarfism of Das is because of her husband's devilish character that rules as the agent of a man-made society at home. The "pervasive male scent" evidently points to this idea. Das protests against this mechanism by choosing English as the medium of her poetry, instead of her mother tongue and negates her role as woman in "*An Introduction*". Some words used in the poem like 'Dos' and 'Donts' clearly determine the role allotted to a wife in a tradition-bound society. Das attempts to break the barriers that demarcate her as a woman. She cuts her hair and wears men's clothes. Das is unhappy with society's stereotypical expectations of a married woman. "A Feminist's Lament" is one of the profound poems of Das in which she overtly displays society's expectations of a woman. The poem artistically represents the ways of making a woman subservient. It begins at woman time of infancy and is

extended throughout her life. Such a woman is an ideal female in a patriarchal system. In “Flag,” a strong social criticism, Das condemns patriarchal system for its role in creating financial gap between the poor and the rich and driving poor women to prostitution. Highlighting poverty as a danger that threatens the national unity, the poem reflects social feminist views on emancipation of people, in general, and women, in particular, from patriarchy which imposes economic dependency and sexual slavery.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

One of the most well-known contemporary Indian poetesses is Kamala Das. She is also well known for her confessionalism. One of her poetry's strongest subjects is feminism, every poem addresses feminism in a female-oriented manner. Writing that is feminine differs from writing that is feminist. The writing by women in Indian English literature that focuses on women's identities and resistance also fosters a modern consciousness in both men and women. However, feminist writing conveys a general understanding of female dominance. The philosophy underlies its importance rather than the textbook's literary quality. The study of the feminine emerges as a reaction to patriarchy or the prevalent chauvinist ideologies. Kamala Das is a poet who writes in the love and sexual subgenres. It is not necessarily conventional or outdated; it is pertinent to include or make an appearance in the vast majority of her love poetry. In addition, a summary of doubt, love, and gender engage that it is a well known stance in her poetry as well as comes into view as one of its intervening themes.

The poetry of Das reveals various concerns of Women, nevertheless we cannot categorise her as feminist writer. Partly, it is because, Certain brands of feminism were not born when she published her works. Further, works of Das do not suggest a specific theory for exploration. Even If it was true, many feminists, according to Raman Selden, do not believe in theory because they reason that in academic institutions, theory is often male. They also indicate the exposure of the fraudulent objectivity of male science, such as Freud's phallogentric assumption of

the female sexuality (135). Therefore, it seems more convenient to describe the poetry of Das in terms of an eclectic feminist criticism, since they share a number of ideas with feminists of various schools in their works. Another reason is that the same feminist notion in one geographical place may be interpreted otherwise in another place, for instance, a liberal attitude in the USA may be considered as radical in India. Nevertheless, the act of publishing confessional poetry in the traditional Indian societies in the middle of the twentieth century is good enough to call Das as radical feminist in the context of her country.

In conclusion, Kamala Das express her feelings as a mother, daughter, women and a writer in her works. All of her works have a autobiographical touch, the main theme of her works is her own experiences in life. The feminist aspects of the poetry of Das show many points of convergence and a few points of divergence in her attitude to loge life and art. I think the bad and good experience that she experienced from her childhood make her self more courageous to express her feelings through her works. A victim of child marriage she can connect people who suffers as a early married. She shows that how a woman treated as a thing only for sexual satisfaction.

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