

## The Poetry of Kamala Das: From Gender Identity to Suffering Humanity

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### Abstract

Modern feminist concepts entered Indian English Poetry via Kamala Das, a fierce opponent of the patriarchal system that has long dominated Indian society. Among the best Indian English women Poets is Kamala Das. Like many other progressive people from all backgrounds who have helped advance gender equality and women's empowerment in India, Kamala Das has a special place among Indian women poets who have fought for women's rights and their place in society. The poem highlights how identity and violence are intertwined, dismantling cultural norms, assigned identities, and established positions in order to create new ones via aggression. Her poems reveal the poet's deep research of marriage dynamics and her desire for love. She uses her writing to express the other woman's hopelessness and misery. The recurring topic in Kamala Das' Poetry is definitely the search for identity. Her agony came to represent the suffering of all people. Her Poetry imply that women's individual longings are a component of the communal experience of femininity. She attempted to establish her uniqueness in order to preserve her feminine identity in a society dominated by men. The tendency towards candour in addressing taboo subjects was initiated by this ground-breaking poet. Since Kamala Das is a poet, the article focusses on her personal journey and whether or not her confessional Poetry served as a vehicle for her quest for feminine identity in a culture dominated by men.

**Keywords:** -Personal Quest, Identity and Violence, Female Identity, Empowerment, Indian English, Marital Relationships, Human Suffering.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Literature has the special ability to transcend the boundaries of time and place, making it the ideal medium for promoting ideas and expressing emotions. Even the most bizarre individuals and the most distant locations are connected by the way it handles a certain topic and gives it a common meaning.

In a strict, patriarchal culture, Kamala Das, one of India's most captivating and candid poets, made a name for herself by unapologetically examining the self, particularly the feminine self. Gender, identity, sexuality, and emotional vulnerability are major topics in her poems, short tales, and autobiographical works. Over time, what starts off as a fearless expression of a woman's fight against social expectations transforms into a more universal meditation on human suffering. The agony, loneliness, and existential questions that all people confront are covered by Das's voice, which was previously seen as a radical female scream. This study looks at how Kamala Das's writing evolves from a personal depiction of

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gendered identity to a more inclusive, wider story of pain that speaks to the universal human condition.

Identity provides a framework for considering the connections between the social and the personal, the intersection of the social and the psychological, and the relationship between the psyche and society. However, the majority of people often define violence as the use of physical force and sometimes words against another person with the goal of inflicting them bodily or psychological damage. For instance, violence is defined by Kit Christensen as when an agent injures someone or something directly or indirectly.

Kamala's assertion on women's identity manifests in a variety of ways. In the poem "An Introduction," she first exposes the hypocrisy of society and the oppressive position of the female child. Then, at the poem's conclusion, she introduces the aggressive identity creation of contemporary women as human beings.

Kamala boldly responds to the stereotypically dominant society's attempts to disrupt her freedom of choice by giving her "fit in" and "belong" directives, recognising that they should accept her unique identity and individuality as she is in "An Introduction.":

*"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 a sinner; I am a saint.  
I am the beloved and the  
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours,  
No Aches which are not yours,  
I, too, call myself I."*

As a consequence, Kamala Das's fearless writing, candid self-identification, and unbridled presentation of her feminine feelings and experiences caused a great deal of damage to the female world. Through her work, she has influenced her own identity and inspired other women to write in both their native languages and English. She refuted the belief of the Indian men's world that the writing kingdom could only be ruled by them. Since Kamala Das's passing, more Indian women poets have stepped out to publicly share their work, which has improved women's writing in a number of ways. It would be hard to discuss the Poetry of Indian women poets without including Kamala Das. Her writings have been saved as a wealth of knowledge for future generations of Indian women writers.

As the title implies, Kamala Das' "An Introduction" records the speaker's experience of trying to define herself while introducing her as an individual. As it revisits the many phases of the speaker's development from a kid to a lady, the poem illustrates her quest for identification and self-discovery.

Additionally, it is a statement on the many limitations that women face, which prevents them from defining their own identities as women and human beings. She talks about how she was moulded and how her identities were created in a harsh setting.

Her violent protests and rejection of old identities in favour of a new one, however, are clearly evident, as is her resistance to her harsh environment. As readers get to know the speaker over time, their comprehension of her and her environment provides a window into the three main facets of her identity.

First, the speaker's identity is shaped by their relationships with those with whom they are not in solidarity. Second, the speaker is always developing her identity, which becomes more developed by the poem's conclusion. Finally, by recognising a universal identity, the speaker identifies with it.

The characters' inner lives and delicate impersonal interactions are subtly and logically delineated. In the smallest details, it documents truths and fiction, aspirations and fears, and hopes in order to comfort and soften humanity during times of suffering. The current generation of Indo-Anglian women authors is setting new records. They are fervently committed to being unique.

New social trends are being established by their main characters. Through their works, authors such as Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Shobha De, Kamla Das, Mamta Kalia, Imtiaz Dharker, M. Silgado, Eunice de Souza, and Smita Agarwal assertively promote uniqueness and self-identity. They depict the nation's women's tribulations and hardships in striking detail. They argue that conventional family expectations, social duties, sex exploitation, hypocrisy, and stealing personal freedom only led to identity crises. They have no qualms about assigning sufficient weight to libido and bodily desires, and they will not put up with any unscrupulous behaviour in the romantic sphere.

This study aims to shed light on Kamala Das's Poetry's deepest need for uniqueness and self-identity. Historically, women have been portrayed as inferior and subordinate. The prejudice against her is evident from the moment of conception. Man was supposedly made in the likeness of God. The idea is that God is a man.

It is also said that God formed woman from a man's rib after creating man. This belief holds that women are taken from males once they have been made. In other words, guys come first. Since women's voices in literature have seldom gotten the attention and recognition they deserve from men, modern women have spoken out against the injustice and horrors done to them. Late 20th- and early 21st-century women's literature often addresses individuality and self-identity. The new woman is bold enough to voice her opinions. The emergence of contemporary feminist thought and the appropriate acknowledgement of the female voice were primarily attributed to the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s.

Kamala Das, a fervent opponent of the traditional patriarchal structure of Indian culture, introduced contemporary feminist ideas into Indian English Poetry. Her work has a very feminine tone, and her viewpoint is dissenting and completely feminist.

Her works in Poetry include – “**Summer in Calcutta**” (1965), “**The Descendants**” (1967). “**The Old Playhouse and Other Poems**” (1973), “**Collected poems**” (1985) and “**Only Soul knows How to Sing**” (1996).

The majority of Das's Poetry is introspective and autobiographical. Her Poetry's leitmotif is her discontent and annoyance with marriage, sex, and love. As she herself discloses, some of her favourite poems were written:

*'I was disappointed in love. Wanted nothing but death' ('Suicide');*

*'I made up my mind to liberate myself from an old bond' ('An Old Play House');*

*'A terrible love affair in Calcutta' ('In Love').*

Relationships between the self and others, as well as between the personal and the social, are important to identity. Given the variety of identity markers—racial, linguistic, political, gender, professional, cultural, etc.—it is very challenging to provide a straightforward response to the issue of who one is. As a result, every individual is unique. Identity may be a source of strength and confidence in addition to pride and happiness. However, identity may also kill, and murder indiscriminately. Violence and identity are inextricably linked.

Kamala, in her poem "Loud Posters," declares her preparedness to be the loudspeakers that can voice out on behalf of the whole suffering community:

*"I am today a creature turned inside Out.*

*To spread myself across wide highways of your thoughts,*

*a stranger like a loud poster*

*Was always my desire."*

Das's life story is fascinatingly told via her writings. She was never able to see beyond herself in a wide range and make an unbiased judgement. Das was unable to distinguish between her artistic or lyrical and everyday self. Because of this, the majority of her short tales are really paraphrases of her life. As a result, we can comprehend that a person's life experiences and their sorrows are different. Only when there is separation can a lesson become an experience.

Since the beginning of human civilisation, man is searching for a pervasive question, "Who am I?" In different cultures and religious texts, this puzzle,

*"Who am I "or*

*"Who are We?" and*

*"What is my place in this universe?"*

Man has been fascinated by the task of answering such questions from the beginning of time. Mythologies may be interpreted in a variety of ways, yet humans have been struggling with this identification challenge and it remains unsolved. "Identity" refers to disparities between individuals or groups, as well as a particular distinctiveness of character. It represents the oneness of the individual with respect to the community or society.

An individual is defined as a group member by a collection of personal and behavioural traits. Identity in humans is always complex. Every human being is classified according to his nationality, religion, caste, creed, sect, and sex. It has always been crucial to the evolution of humanity as it establishes the individual in relation to society.

But identity cannot be summed up in a single statement or line. The phrase is wide. Individuals are born with a certain identity, and as we mature, we are bound by other identities in the name of customs and authority.

Our diverse identities are shaped by several elements. Terry Rambler, the quest for self-discovery is among the most prevalent themes in literature. All literature is infused with the

concept of identity as every fictional character created by authors and writers has a distinct identity.

Every human being is struggling to assert his own identity. For a long time, many women writers have voiced women's quest for identity in society's patriarchal setup. In Indian English Literature, several women writers have emerged as the advocate of women rights and questions society's discriminatory attitude towards its womenfolk. Kamala Das has been the foremost among those who raise women's identity in a male-dominated society.

Her Poetry celebrates the strength and beauty of being a woman, as well as the assertion of one's individuality and voice. Kamala Das is a well-known Indian English poetess whose poems include characteristics of the search for self-identity, which this study aims to explore. Her Poetry expresses her emotional feelings.

As a result, her subjective side is evident in her poems. She is the best example of a woman's desire in an autobiographical style in her poems. There is a touch of nostalgia in Kamala Das' poems. Her style is one of confession. To find out who she really is, she often practices self-awareness, self-exploration, and self-introspection.

She strives to establish her individuality in this male-dominated world while also expressing a desire for real love. She longs for the love and affection she had as a kid and wants to relive those moments in her marriage. She opposed the repression of women and aimed to dispel the negative stereotype of the fair sex in our culture.

The sorrow and despair of her fellow ladies are expressed in her writing. In order to preserve her identity as an individual in Indian culture, where women are disadvantaged, she composed confessional Poetry to articulate her innermost thoughts and emotions to the public.

Though it became a symbol of universal human agony, her autobiographical tone conveys her own experiences. She shares in the majority of the poems the common experience of being a woman. She claims that women are not free to make their own decisions or live their own lives.

The ground-breaking poet Kamala Das established a precedent for candour in addressing topics that were previously forbidden and that no female writer felt comfortable speaking about. Her Poetry has an Indian sensibility, is deeply anchored in the Indian surroundings, and has a distinctly feminine tone while setting an example of candour and openness that are uncommon in the Indian context. She claims that her Poetry is a thorough examination of the psychology of women.

Through her visual Poetry, she attempts to make her presence known since she felt lost in this multicultural throng. Her work covers a wide variety of subjects. Even though she spoke about her struggles and personal experiences, she communicated her thoughts and sentiments in a unique and distinctive way. She expresses herself naturally and reveals her emotions in her Poetry.

*"I, who have lost my way and  
beg now at strangers'  
doors to receive love,  
at least in small change?"*

Her writings show her longing for real love. She highlighted that love and understanding are essential for a sustainable relationship, particularly between a husband and wife.

*In her poem "The Sunshine Cat",  
she frankly admits the man she loved,  
who loved her not enough,  
being selfish and a coward.  
This husband neither loved her nor used her".*

She said that rather than treating her like a live, breathing human being, her spouse treated her like a commodity. He is domineering and unable to give her the time she needs. She claims in her memoirs "My Story" that her spouse didn't care about her sentiments since he was too busy at the workplace to have supper at home during the day and then go to bed. Her experience has been reflected in her philosophical outlook. Through her writing, she has developed the ability to delve into her inner self and the world around her. Through her poems, she expresses her predicament and repressed feelings.

In her Poetry, she describes her early years, her adolescence, and eventually the latter stage of her life. She uses her writing as a way to express her feelings. Her life seems to be a journey from youth to maturity, from ignorance to knowledge, and from innocence to experience.

In her Poetry, she portrayed deep experience, the fruitless search for love, and longing for her ancestral home. She uses reflection on the past to give the appearance that she is at ease with the present. She describes every event in her life, including her early fantasies, anxieties, fascinations, and expectations as well as her interactions with her parents, family members, men, and other people. She fervently believed that women's independence was violated by the patriarchal societal structure.

Das comes to terms with her fundamental nature as a woman. Her Poetry conveys her innate need for love as well as the feelings of embarrassment and annoyance that come with not getting it. Her Poetry is a powerful way for her to describe the hardships and traumas she endured throughout her marriage.

She discusses her dissatisfied relationship with her partner. She thinks that emotional needs should be met in addition to physical ones. Her Poetry demonstrates her audacious handling of personal situations. Kamala Das makes an impression by being really herself in her Poetry.

She experienced homesickness as a result of her post-marriage lack of affection. In her Poetry, she recalls her early years spent in her parents' house, Nalpat House,

*"My Grandmother's House,"*

Kamala Das talks about her childhood days with a kind of satisfaction in her life. She tries to discover her identity through childhood memories.

*"There is a house  
now far away from  
were once  
I received love...  
Pick an armful of darkness to bring*

*it here to lie behind my bedroom  
door like a brooding dog" (Das)*  
In the poem,  
**"An Introduction"**,  
*she asserts her identity by saying,  
"I am Indian very brown born in Malabar,  
I speak three languages,  
write in two,  
dream in one." (Das)*

Kamala Das suffers badly from identity crisis. She was displeased with the kind of social conditioning and gender stereotyping a woman is given since childhood. She feels that it is the gender discrimination and certain predetermined and male defined roles imposed on girls that construct her feminine identity.

In the poem, 'An Introduction' she talks about such a bigoted gender based 'categorization' prevailing in the convention-ridden Indian Society-

*"Dress in sarees, be girl Be wife,  
they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,  
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,  
Belong, cried the categorizers."*  
- **'An Introduction'**

It is an introspective Poetry. The poem not only conveys the hardships, enslavement, and tribulations of women, but it also makes a strong stance against the supremacy of males in Indian society. She describes herself and her background. Her age reaches adolescence.

She didn't seem to comprehend the restrictions placed on her because she was a woman, however. She said that while she was not prepared for marriage at sixteen, social convention required her to be a loyal wife who was obedient to her husband and family.

She made an effort to fight against the limitations placed on her because she was a woman. How to dress in a sari, wear Mangal sutra, and act like a married lady. She disapproved of every socially mandated standard for women. To establish her identity, she began dressing like a guy and chopped off her hair.

To express her repressed feelings, she started penning Poetry. In this sense, the writing served as a kind of spiritual therapy to help her overcome the disappointment brought on by the incomplete treatment of women.

She is not influenced by local biases. She uses our nationality to identify herself. Das writes on her difficult self-discovery as a writer and woman. Devika Nair said that she gave us a peek of her various personalities, including poet, lover, devotee, kid, woman, wife, mother, middle-aged woman, urbanite, and Keralite. She avoids hypocrisy and petty-mindedness.

Against societal norms, she rebelled. In her poems, love takes on a more expansive connotation, suggesting a shared understanding between two people rather than physical closeness. She has developed a lyrical, conversational, informal, fluid, and elegant style. When her spouse satisfies his cravings without getting her permission, she feels as if she lacks her own identity. She attempts to free herself from societal constraints as a poet.



According to Kamala Das, women are forced to live in subordination within the family and community by male culture. Her Poetry "The Invitations" portrays her ambivalent feelings about her marriage.

According to Kamala Das, the sea was urging her to plunge into the waves and die. In this speech, her refusal to accept the sea's invitation serves as an illustration of the positive aspect that prevents her from ending her life; even the uncaring attitude of the guy she loved cannot cause her to lose hope in life. However, when forced to do anything against her will, she loses her feminine identity.

Kamala Das has spoken out against the superiority of patriarchy and male supremacy over women. Nevertheless, she is not a feminist poet since she wanted a man who would treat her as an equal in all spheres of life and who would really love and care for her.

*She was against any kind of exploitation, mental or physical, as a woman and Condemns' dominance of one on another.*

Kamala Das, as a bilingual Indian English poet, protested the discrimination against women. She criticised loveless marriage and deplorable situation of women in contemporary society. She emphasised her identity as a woman who is not under the shadow of a man through her autobiographical poems.

Thus, her writing paved the way for women empowerment and gender sensitisation. Her poems are the medium of expression of women's emancipation from women's stereotypical image in contemporary society. She asserts her identity as an individual and gives voice to her thoughts through her Poetry.

## II. CONCLUSION

Kamala Das was unquestionably a rebellious poet who did all in her power to fulfil her artistic mission and to expose the suffering of modern-day man-woman relationships. Her understanding of life's challenges and her straightforwardness of language are examples of her lyrical greatness. The image that Kamala Das's Poetry conveys is one of a fearless, brutal honesty that fervently tears at traditional beliefs to expose the ideal woman within. Although Kamala Das and her poems are deemed pornographic by many critics, what she has written is a reflection of her own life and, in many cases, the lives of the majority of Indian women. She has poured a significant portion of her life's wine into her Poetry. Her enthusiasm for uniqueness and self-identity is evident in every sip.

As it progresses, "An Introduction" keeps putting forth the notion that in a society where the dominant class—in this case, the male class—creates and upholds the hierarchical structure, identities are created via violence; in order to achieve a position of privilege, the dominant class need only go about their daily lives.

The story of the poem reveals a person's battle with life's toxins as she investigates and shapes her identity via violent encounters.

The violent process of a woman's identity creation in a male-dominated culture is chronicled in Kamala Das' "An Introduction". She overcomes exploitation, hardship, and deprivation, and she challenges patriarchal societal standards by identifying with the dominant male "I."



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