

**MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT  
ON  
FEMININE SENSIBILITY  
AND  
SOCIO-POLITICAL CULTURAL  
REALITIES IN THE  
POETRY OF KAMALA DAS**



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये

**UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION  
NORTH EASTERN REGION  
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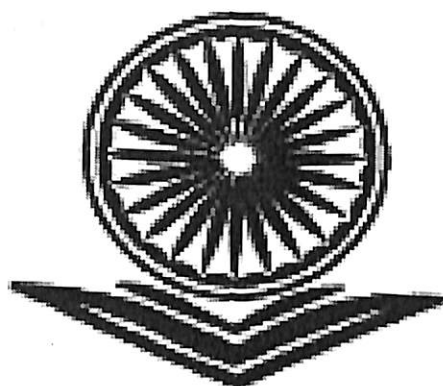
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## **Chapter - I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Introduction: Kamala Das, one of the chief contributors to the growth and development of Indian English literature, gives a new dimension to Indian English poetry. She is the first Indian woman poet who narrates so frankly and candidly in a tone of anger and anguish her search for love, her sexual feelings and experiences and her exploration of her own self in all its dimensions. She attacks the patriarchal society, its laws and conventions, breaks the so-called moral codes, and losing her identity under the monstrous male ego of her husband she breaks the wedlock and searches for love and emotional satisfaction outside it. She makes male's body her colony and tries to assert her voice with the colonized women community. She longs for her ideal lover Krishna in vain. She takes a turn from gender identity to suffering humanity and listens to the voice of the marginalized sections of the society. Ultimately she "transcending the body"<sup>1</sup> articulates her faith in a love beyond flesh.

The Problem: The poetry of Kamala Das mirrors the plight of a woman in a patriarchal society and her struggle with its unfriendly socio-political forces. Kamala Das fights for women and tries to uplift the subdued community from its victim position to a state where they can assert their voice. No doubt the strong feminine sensibility of Kamala Das is the life force of her poetry what is seen in her voice raised against feudal and patriarchal violence, imperialist father, colonizer husband, exploiter pseudo-lovers, the so-called conventions and male-made rules, moral codes and value system, predetermined roles of a woman,

marginalization and dehumanization of woman, gender discrimination, anti-woman tradition, the loss of matrilineal identity, unhealthy man-woman relationship, passive role of woman in politics etc. Yet it would be not safe to call her a feminist. Kamala Das undertakes an outward journey through body and an inward one through 'soul' with a view to establishing her 'self'. Her outward journey helps her to assert her voice with the colonized women community consuming the strong sex with her pretending lust, but results in a sense of uselessness and degeneration of herself. She searches for her ideal lover Krishna and longs for total merger with him and thus she leaves the basic question of feminism 'identity of woman' in jeopardy. In her inward journey she rises from her private voice and becomes a polyphonic text. She realizes that her plight is the plight of all suffering people and to establish her identity she needs to assert the voice of the marginalized sections of the society. Here she takes a turn from gender identity to suffering humanity. She cries at the plight of Nani as well as at the plight of poor old men lying on wet pavement and poor babies dying of hunger. The flag, the symbol of national pride, becomes the symbol of shame and poverty for her. She denounces any sort of terrorism and cries at the genocide of Sikhs in Delhi, at the killing of the Tamils in Sri Lanka etc.

So, the purpose of my project is to see how Kamala Das makes poetic exploration of her feminine sensibility on various socio-political cultural issues seen around her and appears a strong female writer committed to human cause rather than a feminist.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the proposed project are as follows:

1. To make a critical study of Kamala Das as a feminist.
2. To see Kamala Das' feminine sensibility explored in the outward and inward journey undertaken by her with a view to searching for her 'self', asserting her voice and establishing her identity.
3. To see how Kamala Das represents the colonized women community and tries to uplift the position of the victim community by colonizing the strong

sex with her pretended lust.

4. Kamala Das' search for ideal love and her longing for total merger with Krishna and also her search for a love beyond flesh give a different dimension to her feminine sensibility.
5. To see how Kamala Das moves from gender identity to suffering humanity.

### **Methodology :**

1. Basically analytical method is adopted. Comparative study is also made where found necessary.
2. Different approaches to literature such as socio-political, socio-cultural, feminism, humanitarian, post-colonial, subaltern etc. are adopted.
3. The four major volumes of poetry of Kamala Das and also her autobiography are thoroughly studied and analyzed in the light of her feminine sensibility.
4. Interview of Kamala Das taken by Eunice de Souza is examined in the light of her works and her feminine consciousness.
5. Feminine sensibility of Kamala Das expressed in her search for love, search for self, representation of marginalized women community, colonization of male's body, her longing for total merger with Krishna, and her turn from gender identity to suffering community etc. is critically examined in relation to the ideology of feminism and also other relevant approaches to literature.

Kamala Das and Indian English Poetry: Before going to study the poetry of Kamala Das it is necessary to make a quick survey of the Indian English poets of the post-independence era and place of Kamala Das among them. After Independence freedom plays a vital role and inspires the Indian English poets to look at their suffering, in their colonizer-colonized relationship, in their existential reality, in their religious beliefs etc more minutely and more reasonably and thus to accelerate their writings. Vilas Sarang in the 'Introduction' to an anthology of Indian English poetry edited by himself says - "...in the last decade or two, Indian English poetry has made remarkable strides, and experienced a sudden, vigorous

flowering. It is obvious that the departure of the British did not encourage Indians to give up seeking creative expression in English, on the other hand, political independence gave a fresh impetus to creative literary endeavour."2 As a result Indian English poetry gets self-confidence, new force and spirit. While speaking about Indian English poetry of the post-1947 scenario Iyengar says "....C.R.Mandy became the editor of the Illustrated weekly of India in 1947 and decided to publish some verse also in that widely circulated magazine, Indo-Anglian poetry suddenly acquired a new currency and even respectability. One gradually grew familiar with the names of Nissim Ezekiel, Lal, Dom Moraes, K. Raghavendra Rao, R.L. Bartholomew, Leo Fredericks, Mary Erulkar, A.K. Ramanujan, V.D. Trivedi, Leela Dharmaraj,...."3. Further the poetry of B. Rajan, Srinivas Royaprol, Kamala Das and a few others also figure early in the Illustrated Weekly. Among the early Indian English poets of post independence era the influence of Nissim Ezekiel and Lal is far-reaching in promoting the works of the new poets, giving currency to other writings, guiding and helping them in getting their works published and above all in uplifting the standard of Indian English poetry. The new Indian English poets like Pradip Sen, Dip Kumar Das, R. de L. Furtado, K. Saha, Mokashi Punekar, Pritish Nandy, A.K. Ramanujan, Sharat Chandra, R Parthasarthy, F.R. Stanley, Rakshat Puri, Adil Jussawalla, K.N. Daruwalla, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Gieve Patel, Jayanta Mahapatra, Vilas Sarang, Saleem Peeradina, A.K. Mehrotra, Manohar Shetty, Rodrigues, Shiv Kumar, Agha Shahid Ali etc. along with the new Indian English women poets like Kamala Das, Eunice ds Souza, Silgardo, Monika Varma, Margaret Chatterjee, Tapati Mookerji, Tilottama Rajan, Suniti Namjoshi, Sujatha Bala Subramaniam etc uplift Indian English poetry to its glorious height and provide it a respectable place in world literature. The most noticeable point is that they have played the vital role in making Indian English literature free from the umbrella of English literature. R. Parthasarathy says - "An important characteristic of Indian verse in English in the mid-twentieth century has been its emergence from the mainstream of English literature. It has been said that it is Indian in sensibility and content, and English in language. It is



rooted in and stems from the Indian environment, and reflects its mores, often ironically."4 Thus Indian English literature is no longer a literary sub-culture of English literature but growing and developing in all aspects like other literatures of Indian languages.

Kamala Das is one of the most 'aggressively individualistic' of the new Indian English poets. Iyengar says - 'There is no doubt Kamala Das is a new phenomenon in Indo-Anglian poetry - a far cry indeed from Toru Dutta or even Sarojini Naidu. Kamala Das's is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world. While giving the impression of writing in haste, she reveals a mastery of phrase and a control over rhythm - the words often pointed and envenomed too, and the rhythm so nervously, almost feverishly, alive. Her characteristic trick is to split phrases and meanings - even the infinitive - between two lines and this is surely symbolic of the fissured, or fractured sensibility she wishes to communicate. Of course, the endless reiteration of such hurt, such disillusion, such cynicism, must sooner or later degenerate into a mannerism."5 Spontaneity, candidness and frankness mark her expression, while use of enjambment and caesura give the impression of having no meeting point between her body and mind, or of her lost self. Similarly use of repetition and dash imply her anger and anguish. But the excessive use of repetition and dash and lack of interest in having organic unity degenerate her poetic style. Vilas Sarang says - "Kamala Das's work is extremely uneven in quality, and many of her poems suffer from carelessness, cliches and naive sentimentality. As Ramanujan's poetry suffers from an excess of intellectual control, Das's poetry is harmed by a lack of intellectual moulding."6 No doubt Kamala Das's greatness as a poet never lies in her style but in her treatment of the theme of love and lust, in her frank and bold expression of her personal life, in her role as the liberator of suffering woman community, in her polyphonic and post-colonial voices etc. Sharad Rijimwale says - "Her poetry constitutes not just a compelling expression of personal experiences and a forceful subjective voice; but more importantly, a phenomenon unlike any other in Indian English

poetry. She is the first woman poet to crack the mould, and establish an attitude and view point the Indian readers were quite unfamiliar with."<sup>7</sup> About the treatment of love theme in her poetry Vilas Sarang says - "A desperate obsession with love is regarded as the most prominent feature of Kamala Das's poetry. Along with the compelling intensity of emotion, she has displayed a frankness of manner in dealing with love and sex which, in Indian English poetry, was new and refreshing when she began publishing."<sup>8</sup> In her frank expression the theme of love and sex gets a new dimension. Iyengar also says that in her poetry "....sensuality lures irresistibly, yet it fails to satisfy; feeling and introspection but sound the depths of the oceanic sense of frustration; and the calm of fulfillment eludes for ever. Love is crucified in sex, and sex defiles itself and again and again. Life is a cruel mocking bird, like the dance of the Eunuchs....."<sup>9</sup> It is also true that she tries to escape from 'body's snare' and transcends the body. K. Satchidanandan says - "Kamala's whole oeuvre thus becomes a declaration of the greatness of love that even while being expressed through the body also transcends the body."<sup>10</sup> Kamala Das transcends her body, rises above her 'private voice', associates herself with 'others', feels oceanic sense of identification and gives a universal significance and multi-dimension to her poetry.

**Life of Kamala Das:** Kamala Das, the most popular among the Indian English poets, was born at Punnayurkulam in southern Malabar in Kerala on the 31st of March, 1934. Her mother, Balamaniamma, a renowned Malayalam poetess, was married to a Nayar who was an employee in an automobile firm in Calcutta. So her caste provided Kamala Das matrilineal background which ensured a women the basic framework for a superior position and gave them security and freedom of making choice and action what was not available by women in patriarchal societies all over the world. What makes Kamala Das sorry is to see that being a member of such a family her mother surrendered herself to the male ego of her husband who always tried to establish a patriarchal authority. In her interview with Eunice de Souza she laments that the women in her mother's poetry called their husbands 'master'. Her Gandhian father ordered her mother to wear khaddar

a day after their marriage and consequently her mother fell under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi what Kamala Das did not like for Gandhi's background was quite patriarchal. Kamala Das further says that she used to wake up from sleep at midnight hearing the sounds of their quarrel and lie in her bed trembling with unease and realised the hypocrisy behind the happy marriage of her mother.<sup>11</sup> In 'My Story' she says - 'My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched'<sup>12</sup>. It was responsible for much of the internal negative forces developed in Kamala Das and her sense of repulsion towards patriarchal set up.

As far as childhood days of Kamala Das are concerned, her ill health consumed much of its beauties. It is known from her autobiography that basically Kamala Das received education at home only. She attended a European school at Calcutta, an Elementary school at Punnayurkulam and also a catholic boarding school but her education remained incomplete. At last she was sent to Calcutta where private tutors were engaged to teach her fine arts. She felt that her father did not love her. She was also shocked to see her mother's indifference towards her. In contrast, she received true love and affection only from her grandmother. She says in her interview with Eunice de Souza that unlike her mother, her grandmother believed in demonstrating her fondness for her who kissed her, plaited her hair and slept beside her on the same bed.<sup>13</sup> She grew and her imperialist father subdued her spirit and made her subject to the so called rules and moral codes of patriarchal set up. Though she was a Nayar woman yet had no freedom of making choice or doing anything. About her upbringing she says to Eunice de Souza thus - "I was not brought up as a Nayar woman. My father was the family bread-winner and he treated us all like menials. The servants were paid salaries, we were not."<sup>14</sup> Thus Kamala Das passed her childhood days under suppression and free development of her spirit was not possible.

Kamala Das was married to K. Madhava Das when she was only fifteen. He was an official in the Reserve Bank of India, Bombay. He was a lusty man who paid no attention to the fulfillment of his wife's emotional needs. He remained

busy either with his files or in satisfying his lust. Her husband suppressed her spirit. She lost her will and reason and her identity to the monstrous male ego of her husband. Yet she continued to live with her husband and gave birth to three sons. Her husband gave her freedom which became her 'dancing shoe'. For a 'small change' she came out of her cage life, broke the framework of so called marriage and made relationship with others so that she could receive love and address her emotional needs. In her interview with Eunice do Souza she says -

"I'm not going to deny relationships. I couldn't have written without them. Of course, I wasn't having relationships to find writing material! I was trying to live a life with a little bit of love in it. Toast with a little jam! My marriage was dry toast. It didn't mean I stopped loving my husband. But I wanted someone to go walking with me, swimming with me, play badminton with me. My husband was not interested in these things. Why blame me for being happy? They ask me to deny these things. Why should I? I don't consider such to be a sin."15

So Kamala Das has been in search of a healthy man-woman relationship which would provide the female counterpart love and respect, security and free development of her spirit. She has been waiting for the man 'for construction and destruction'. She visits the 'Vrindavan' of her mind and hopes that one day her Krishna would lure her from her cage life and address her body, mind and soul duly and uplift her to a state of ecstasy to welcome her 'restructured perfection' and let her enjoy 'a love greater' than all we know. Finally she converted herself to Islam and became Kamala Surayya. She died on 31st May, 2009.

A critical study of the major poetic volumes of Kamala Das: Kamala Das writes in both Malayalam and English. She has published eleven books in Malayalam and is popular as a short story writer in her mother tongue. In English she has published four major volumes of poetry. These are *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973) and *Only The Soul knows How To Sing: Selections from Kamala Das* (1996). Apart from these four two other volumes of her poetry published are *Collected Poems Vol. 1* (1984) and *Encountering Kamala* (2007). She has published with



Prithvi Nandy Tonight This Savage Rite (1979), a collection of their love poems. In addition, a selection of her poems appeared posthumously in 2009 in Closure. She has published both her autobiography 'My story' and 'Alphabet of Lust', a novel in English, in 1976. Among her essays 'I Studied All Men', "Why Not More Than One Husband ?", "I Have Lived Beautifully", "What Women Expect out of Marriage and What They Get", "Sex : Mindless Surrender or Humming Fiesta ?", "The Gift of Roses", "Frigidity and the Sepia-Tainted Photograph", "Obscenity and Literature" etc. are mention worthy. She was awarded the PEN prize in 1964, the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award for fiction in 1969, the Chaman Lal award for Journalism in 1971, the Asian World Prize for literature in 1985, the Indira Priyadarshini Vrishamitra Award in 1988, and the Sahitya Parishad Award in 1998. In 1984 she was awarded Honorary Doctorate by the World Academy of Arts and Culture, Taiwan.

Summer in Calcutta: This poetical collection, published in 1965 gives world wide popularity and recognition to Kamala Das. The volume opens with 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' and ends with 'The Testing of the Sirens'. The tone of irony and nihilism and the themes pain of existential reality, meaningless search for true love, anger and anguish, helplessness, loneliness in life, a sense of uselessness of the self etc. set by the opening poem are characteristic almost to the entire volume. In the title-piece 'Summer in Calcutta', Kamala Das is quite ironical in experiencing defeat of love. Here her intimacy with Indian summer and its unbearable heat is symbolical to her bitter association with sexual torture and mental exploitation of her self. The poems like 'The Dance of the Eunuchs', 'The Freaks', 'Spoiling the Name', 'My Grandmother's House', 'The Fear of the Year', 'The wild Bougainvillea', 'My Morning Tree', 'In Winter', 'The End of Spring' etc. reveal meaninglessness and nothingness, pains and sufferings, helplessness and loneliness, distress and despair, hollowness and uselessness of the self in existential reality. In the poems of this volume like 'In Love', 'In Winter', 'A Relationship', 'Summer in Calcutta', 'Forest Fire', 'The Wild Bougainvillea' etc. Kamala Das tries to understand love through physical desire and searches for her

'self' travelling through her body. In the poem 'My Grandmother's House', Kamala Das juxtaposes and contrasts her happy past memories with her present plight of being a beggar of love at others' door. The poems 'Too Early The Autumn Sights', 'The End of Spring', 'An Apology to Gautama' etc. hint at the possibility of early decay of her physical self or at the end of her sexual desire and initiate a move from body to soul and to Gautama. The volume 'Summer in Calcutta' is also characterised with voices such as polyphonic, post-colonial, of a feminist etc. as expressed in the poems like 'An Introduction', 'Someone Else's Song', 'The Wild Bougainvillea', 'Forest Fire', 'The Flag' etc. Here Kamala Das universalises her private voice, represents the marginalised sections, and assumes a vaster identity with million and million people in her.<sup>16</sup>

**The Descendants:** This second poetical collection, published in 1967, reflects her journey through body, her futile desire for true love, and intensifies her sense of emotional suffering and frustration, sense of nothingness or meaninglessness or uselessness of her existence and also her death consciousness. This is well reflected in the poems like 'The Suicide', 'Shut Out That Moon', 'The Descendants', 'The Invitation', 'Composition', 'A Request', 'Neutral Tones', 'Captive', 'Substitute', 'The Looking Glass', 'Ferns', 'Luminal', 'Palm' etc. She reveals in the poem 'Composition' how she is haunted with a sense of decay and defeat, frustration and uselessness thus - 'To be frank,/ I have failed,/ I feel my age and my/ Uselessness'.

The poems like 'Suicide' and 'The Invitation' are quite metaphorical with the pedantic sea imagery. Hence she understands the call of the eternal blue sea but prefers to shrink or grow in her wretched existential reality. Such reality is well expressed in the 'body' poems of the volume like 'Convicts', 'Captive', 'The Looking Glass', 'Ferns', 'Substitute', 'The Invitation' etc. In these poems Kamala Das concentrates on sexual love and gives her poetry a very sensuous appeal. But the irony is that celebrating the sexual hunger and so traveling through the body Kamala Das realizes love as 'an empty gift' and herself as the pretender (captive). Interestingly a move from body to inner self is seen when Kamala Das feels the

joy of creation and enjoys light in midst of overwhelming darkness in form of her own son in the poem 'Jaisurya'. Similarly in the poem 'The White Flowers', Kamala Das places the newly born baby against the world of distress and despair and hopes in vain for the preservation of the white flowers.<sup>17</sup>

*The Old Playhouse And Other Poems* : This collection, published in 1973, contains 33 poems of which only thirteen are new poems while fourteen poems are included from 'Summer in Calcutta' and six poems are taken from 'The Descendants'. The new 13 poems included in this volume 'The Old Playhouse', 'Blood', 'The Inheritance', 'Nani', 'Gino', 'Glass', 'The Prisoner', 'The Stone Age', 'After The Illness', 'The Millionaires at Marine Drive, Vrindavan', 'Radha-Krishna' and 'Lines Addressed to a Devadasi' are well characterized with her sharp feminine sensibility and her representation of marginalized women community. The title-piece of the volume 'The Old-Play House' records her protests against male domination, sexual torture, and mental exploitation in marriage-system. The poem also reveals her anger and anguish at her realisation that she has lost her will and reason and become a dwarf leading a loveless, painful life under the monstrous male ego of her husband.

The poem 'The Stone Age' portrays the husband as the 'old fat spider' and also a 'bird of stone, a granite dove'. Here she crosses the sea and knocks at another's door. The poem 'Glass' mirrors how Kamala Das searches for true love experiencing sexual encounters with strangers and realises its fragility at the end. In the poem 'Gino', she compares the kiss of a lover to a bite of krait and experiences only lust in the name of love which makes her life more and more painful. In the poem 'The Prisoner', Kamala Das compares herself to a prisoner who tries to escape from the trappings of the body or lust and wants to address the call of her soul. Understanding the transient quality of physical love and realizing the timelessness of the soul's call, Kamala Das longs for Krishna, her ideal lover. She wants to be merged in him with a hope to have absolute freedom. Here she moves from body to soul and from soul to the Supreme Soul, the ultimate reality. Such a spiritual journey in search of an identity Indian in concept is well

reflected in the poems like 'Vrindavan', 'Radha-Krishna' and Lines Addressed to a Devadasi. The poem 'Blood' records her recalling of her past memories associated with her grandmother and her house. She received true love only from her grandmother and her house was the only place to enjoy love, shelter and security. Kamala Das contrasts such happy past memories with her present plight and her mind is haunted with a sense of defeat, emptiness, sense of nothingness and death-consciousness. The poem 'The Millionaires at Marine Drive' portrays her grandmother as the symbol of true love, tenderness and warmth what she experiences only from her grandmother. In the poem 'Nani', Kamala Das identifies herself with the pregnant maid who hanged herself and cries in agony at the comic dance or plight of the marginalised section at the hands of the cruel imperialists. This can be read as a by-product of her inward journey in search for herself.<sup>18</sup>

Only The Soul Knows How To Sing: This volume, published in 1996, contains 153 poems of which many are included from the other three volumes. Here are the poems like 'An Introduction', 'My Grandmother's House', 'Composition', 'The Old Playhouse', 'The Sunshine Cat', 'Convicts', 'Forest-Fire', 'Glass', 'Substitute', 'The Freaks', 'In love', 'A Phantom Lotus', 'Gino', 'The Prisoner', 'The End of Spring', 'Autumn Leaves', etc. where Kamala Das' feminine sensibility is explored in the tension between lust and love, external negative forces and inner spirit, happy past and painful present etc. These 'body' poems show her journey through body where Kamala Das pretends lust and lets it to spread like 'forest fire' and consumes the strangers one after another and thus mocks at the strong sex. However her use of body and its sexual hunger finally results in a realisation of her uselessness, a state of physical decay, nothingness, mental barrenness and spiritual vacuity. The poems like 'The Invitation', 'Vrindavan', 'The Maggotts', 'Radha', 'Krishna', 'Ghanashyam', 'Radha-Krishna', 'The Cobwebs' etc. reveal Das's concept of ideal love where she gives a mythical set-up, Radha-Krishna image to it. She visits 'Vrindavan' of her mind and identifies Krishna as her ideal lover to address duly both the body and the soul at the same time. Her Krishna represents



true love on earth and elevates the soul. But she becomes tired of waiting for her ideal lover to come and finally transcends the body and longs for a love beyond flesh.<sup>19</sup> The poems like 'The Suicide', 'Composition', 'The Prisoner', 'Anamalai Poems' etc. reveal her faith in a love beyond flesh. Here Kamala Das goes on maturing herself as a woman and as a poet trying to overcome her limitations, transcending the body and uplifting herself to a state of ecstasy, truth and beauty. Her strong feminine sensibility is reflected in the poems like 'An Introduction', 'Next to Indira Gandhi', 'The Suicide', 'The Descendants', 'A feminist's lament', 'In love', 'Daughter of The Century', 'After The Illness', 'Weeds', 'Summer In Calcutta', 'The Looking glass', 'I shall Somebody', 'The Confection', 'The Freaks', 'The Old Playhouse', 'Larger Than Life Was He', 'Radha', 'A Window's Lament' etc. In the 'Anamalai Poems', she reveals her willingness to undertake an inward journey which gets reflected in the poems like 'Composition', 'The Prisoner', 'The Suicide', 'Death Brings No Loss', 'Death is So Mediocre', 'The Testing of the Sirens', 'A Request', 'Loud Posters', 'Next to Indira Gandhi', 'My Grandmother's House', 'The Millionaires at Marine Drive', 'The Invitation', 'Vrindavan', 'Radha', 'Ghanashyam' etc. Further a post-colonial voice trying to assert the voice of the subalterns, the marginalised section or of the weaker sex is also heard in the poems like 'Nani', 'The Flag', 'The Wild Bougainvillea', 'A Losing Battle', 'The Freaks', 'The Dance of the Eunuchs', 'An Introduction', 'The Stranger and I', 'Terror', 'Smoke In Colombo', 'Forest-Fire', 'I shall Someday', 'The Conflagration' etc. Thus the volume records Kamala Das's exploration of her 'self' seeking for an identity, the identity of a woman.

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## **Chapter - II**

### **In Search of 'self' of a Colonized woman**

Kamala Das's search for 'love' as reflected in her poetry can be read as a search for 'self' of a colonized woman. In her search for love she not only realises how she has lost herself, but also tries to rediscover her 'self' and establish her identity. Kamala Das, the worshiper of love, searches for it throughout her life in all its aspects or dimensions. The unexpected girl child Kamala Das receives love only from her grandmother. Soon she misses her grandmother and her love remains as only a haunting memory in her mind. When she becomes tall and her limbs swell, she is made subject to brutal patriarchal laws and so-called moral codes. Her imperialist father brings the first 'saree' to her and also picks up a husband for her. In their first sexual encounter she feels her sad woman body well beaten. She expects love but receives only lust. She loses her will and reason and finally her identity to the monstrous male ego of her father and the husband, the two big bosses of the patriarchal society. Here her feminine self or consciousness springs up and becomes ready to answer strongly to colonization of woman self.

Kamala Das appears as the representative of the colonized woman community and undertakes an outward journey through body with a view to rediscovering her lost self, uplifting it from its victim position and asserting her voice and identity. In her outward journey she travels through her body and its physical hunger, goes through her sexual encounters with different individuals of the society. Here she lets her body and its sexual hunger to be at the centre and uses

it in her search for her identity. So it is not to satisfy her lust that she breaks wedlock and visits a few strangers. In her interview with Eunice de Souza she makes it clear that she never speaks about women's lust<sup>1</sup>. What is more she is worried with her frigidity as she reveals in her autobiography 'My Story'<sup>2</sup>. It becomes clear that her 'flamboyant lust' is a pretended one with a definite purpose. What I.K. Sharma comments on the use of the theme of sex by Kamala Das, is also thought-provoking. He says - "The theme of sex which she generally throws up (the cheapest bait) is only a gilt-edged device to pin down the reader. From there she takes him to a 'higher meaning' by offering evidence after evidence of that inside the body of the poem. But to know that evidence the reader (if he is initiated, well and good) has to work a little. Otherwise, he will miss much of the charm of her poetry and will not be able to differentiate between the gloss and the teakwood<sup>3</sup>." Sharma rightly hints at the ironical significance of the theme of sex in Kamala Das's poetry. So while going through the 'body' poems of Kamala Das, a reader needs to be careful of the ironical use of the body and its sexual hunger what may lead a reader to a 'higher meaning'. Therefore, before going to study her use of her body and its hunger, we need to understand the cause and nature of her repulsive attitude towards male's lust and sexual hunger and her consumption of male's body.

In her childhood days Kamala Das enjoys freedom, sees 'endless pathways of the sky' and remains happy with love and affection received from her grandmother. Her thoughts and feelings, wishes and aspirations, hopes and dreams play merrily in her mind, the colourful play house. When she becomes tall, her limbs swell and at one or two places hair sprouts, the patriarchal society declares her physical maturity and makes her subject to the brutal patriarchal rules and so-called moral codes. She says in the poem 'An introduction' thus -

".... they

Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs

Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)



Even her grandmother, otherwise remains the source of love and affection for her, strictly prohibits her from bathing in the pond being naked<sup>4</sup>. Thus the patriarchal society comes forward to protect (!) the body of the girl child and to keep it fresh and virgin for the interest of the males. For the first time Kamala Das realises the prime importance of her 'woman-body' and the fact that the society expects her to behave according to the norms made for woman. Here her journey through body starts when she realises well that her 'body' is at the centre and her life is expected to revolve around it. She is not allowed to have real-life exposure as she wishes and naturally free development of her spirit is badly hampered. She cannot speak in the language she wants to, cannot put on a trouser, and cannot make friends of her choice. She has to follow the rules and regulations made for woman framed by the males for the sake of themselves. She comes in direct confrontation with her father, the imperialist, the most feared person in her family. However Kamala Das grows and becomes 'every woman' who seeks love. She says in the poem 'An introduction' thus -

".... I am every

Woman who seeks love."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

But the irony is that the patriarchal society allows her to make a choice of nothing, even the man to be called her lover or her husband. One day her father brings to her the first 'saree' and also a man for her to live with as her husband<sup>5</sup>. Without knowing what love or marriage life is, being not ready to accept the man as her husband, she finds no way left but to sleep with him. And her first sexual encounter with her husband is a horrible, heart-rending experience for her. That tragic experience where she feels her woman-body well beaten gets expression in the poem 'An introduction' -

"He did not beat me

But my woman-body felt so beaten

The weight of my breasts and womb crush me. I shrank pitifully."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

Such a bitter experience felt since the first night is the cause of her repulsion towards her husband and lust of strong sex. Her husband, the indifferent, insensitive person never tries to address her emotional needs and remains busy either with his files or with her body's response and uses it to satisfy his lust. He tames Kamala Das like a swallow and makes her forget her 'urge to fly' and endless pathway of the sky', so that she remains forever as the means to satisfy his lust. In utter hatred Kamala Das reveals her husband's brutal sexual behaviour in the poem 'The Old Playhouse' thus -

"You were pleased  
with my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow  
convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured  
yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed  
my poor lust with your bitter sweet juices."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 30)

This reflects how a husband rapes his wife. Kamala Das gets married to the man to learn about her, to develop her spirit freely and to make her wishes and aspirations a reality. But her husband compels her to learn every lesson about him and to forget her own wishes and aspirations. With him she only gets the male-scent which makes her feminine self dry. Leading a lifeless, painful life under the monstrous male ego of her husband she loses her will and reason and becomes a dwarf. She reveals her plight in the poem 'The Old Playhouse' where she realises how she has lost her 'self' or 'self identify' -

"You called me wife,  
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. I lost my will and reason, to all  
your questions I mumbled incoherent replies."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 30)

This is the sad song of every woman who is leading her wretched life of

martyrdom under the monstrous husband. Such inhuman behaviour, sexual exploitation and humiliation make Kamala Das repulsive to her husband and sexual hunger as well. She feels herself frigid being engaged continuously in brutal manner in sexual communication without love. She finds affinity of herself with the eunuchs<sup>6</sup> and calls herself a freak. No longer she has her own lust, but pretends to have, as she says in the poem 'The Freaks' -

"The heart,  
An empty cistern, waiting  
Through long hours, fills itself  
With coiling snakes of silence...  
I am a freak. It's only  
To save my face. I flaunt, at  
Times, a grand, flamboyant lust."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 48)

Thus Kamala Das hides her frigidity, and pretends to have a grand flamboyant lust and the purpose is surely to use it as a weapon in her outward journey to fight with the lust of strong sex in her search for 'self'. She is sorry to see how the strong sex with their unending lust makes woman's body a colony and consequently 'man-woman' relationship turns into a coloniser-colonised or exploiter-exploited or a user-used one. She travels through her body with her pretended lust with a hope to hurt and humiliate every lusty man physically, mentally and emotionally and thus to unmask his real nature and fleshy character who is responsible for pathetic life of every woman. Her pretended flamboyant lust helps her in her outward journey to make the males her colony, to mock at their lust, to feel oneness with the weaker sex and above all to have the joy of triumph over the strong sex. Bruce king says - "While the poems describe a longing for a man to fill her dreams with love, she is also proud of her conquests and ability to make men love her. Having taken a lover she will mock him. Rather than the seduced, she often appears the seducer, the collector, especially of those men known as lady killers. Driven by a need for an all-encompassing love to fill

her days, she is also someone involved in the game of sexual triumph with its trophies<sup>7</sup>." Sex is only imagery and her role of a seducer or ruler in sexual encounter implies her wishes to uplift and transform woman from her victim position to the position of a ruler where she can assert her voice or identity. Here Kamala Das appears a hard headed feminist who goes on colonizing the strong males one after another in response to colonization of woman community and uplifting the victim to an advantageous position.

Kamala Das says that every virtue requires a fancy dress which suggests ironical implications of her use of body and its physical hunger (The Fancy Dress). That is why she wears the 'body', i.e. pretends to own its lust, a fancy-dress to fight with the lust of the strong sex. She says in the poem 'Gino'-

"This body that I wear without joy, this body  
Burdened with lenience, slender toy, owned  
By man of substance, shall perhaps wither, battling with  
My darling's impersonal lust."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 92 )

She wears the 'body', shatters the patriarchal rules and regulations, violates the so-called moral codes and comes forward to take revenge for the wrongs done to the women in a patriarchal society. So in order to activate and use in her mission her 'most intimate and sensitive instrument' i.e. her body, first of all she makes it free from her husband's net. In the poem 'The Conflagration' she says -

"Woman, is this happiness, this lying buried  
Beneath a man ?....  
The world extends a lot beyond his six-foot frame.

(The Descendants, 20)

And in the poem 'The Stone Age' she says -  
When you leave, I drive my blue battered car  
Along the bluer sea. I run up the forty  
Noisy steps to knock at another's door.  
Through peep-holes, the neighbours watch,



They watch me come  
And go like rain."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 67 )

Thus Kamala Das breaks the wedlock, violates the social norms and the so-called moral codes, shatters the male ego of the husband and knocks at another's door. She is not worried with the society, the neighbours who watch her come and go like rain. She runs forward 'forty noisy steps' and overcoming the obstacles she goes forward to make the males her colony. In the poem 'My Grandmother's House' she says how she uses the strangers for a small change. She says -

"....I who have lost  
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to  
Receive love, at least in small change ?"

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 119)

In reality she no longer needs love and is content with 'the small change' received in their sexual encounter. She says in the poem 'Composition' -

Love,  
I no longer need,  
With tenderness I am most content,  
I have learnt that friendship  
cannot endure,  
that blood-ties do not satisfy.

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 23)

The strangers are interested only in the 'Skin-communicated' business, i.e. in satisfying their lust. They never show any inclination to make emotional contact with her. After their lust is quietened, they put their backs to her<sup>8</sup>. Kamala Das too never expects to establish anything beyond that. She only wants to play with their body. So she lets her hunger, her pretended lust to spread like a 'forest-fire'. She possesses the most 'burning-mouth', becomes carnivorous, consumes every lusty man whoever comes on her way and enjoys a wilder brighter charm. She says in the poem 'Forest-Fire' thus -

"Of late I have began to feel a hunger  
To take in with greed, like a forest-fire that  
Consumes, and, with each killing gains a wilder,  
Brighter charm, all that comes my way."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 134)

In her mission to consume the lusty males Kamala Das lets them to come in and go one after another. In the poem 'Substitute' she says -

"After that love became a swivel-door,  
When one went out, another came in."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 54)

Thus Kamala Das lets her body to be at the center in her outward journey. She knows well that her search for true love has little possibility to be fulfilled. Her Ghanashyam disappears whenever she feels him near to her<sup>9</sup>. So she first of all makes herself free from the colonisers, such as her father, husband, lovers etc. and goes forward with her pretended flamboyant lust, and makes the lusty males her colony. She makes a good survey of the strangers, studies their nature and also the form of love in their hands and understands her 'self'. In this respect I. K. Sharma says - "She looks to herself and into herself. Her body is her Malgudi. That is her greatest curiosity shop. Also, it is her most intimate and sensitive instrument of judging the world. She collects evidence through its responses and chronicles them in her own non-conformist, unhackneyed way<sup>10</sup>." Her 'Malgudi' is the microcosm in macrocosm and in reading the strangers there she judges the world, man-woman relationships, the form of love and above all the position and plight of every woman there.

But the question of 'self identity' is still on. Going through the very personal 'body' Kamala Das is still out of her reach of her true destination or of her expected position where she can assert her personal identity with much proud. She succeeds in using every trap of lust in making the lusty rules the subject of her lust and a stranger a temporary home. She says in the poem 'Glass' -

"...I enter others' lives, and make of  
every trap of lust a temporary home."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 104)

The irony is that the 'temporary home' she builds cannot provide her much expected peace and happiness. What is more agonising is that when the autumn comes to her 'too early' her lips no longer show the sign of physical hunger and she misses the singing birds, the strangers on her way. She says in the poem 'Too Early the Autumn Sights' -

"Too early the autumn sights  
Have come, too soon my lips  
Have lost their hunger, too soon  
The singing birds have  
Left."

(Summer in Calcutta, 26)

No doubt, her 'temporary home' provides her some sort of mental relief in conquering the strong rulers of female sex, but as a byproduct of her outward journey through body she develops in her a sense of sorrow and degeneration of herself. She says in the poem 'Substitute' -

"Life is quite simple now -  
Love, blackmail and sorrow."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 53)

Her sense of sorrow develops and makes her feel shame at her 'dying' self. Consumption of strangers also consumes her own 'self'. Mere colonisation of male's body does not help her to uplift her 'self' to an ecstatic state where she can get the ultimate pleasure of life. However she overcomes her personal grief, her anger and anguish and takes great pride and pleasure in discovering herself and feeling oneself with the marginalised, exploited, ruled woman, the weaker sex of the society. She reveals such discovery in the poem 'An Introduction' -

"...Who are you, I ask each and everyone,  
The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and

Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself  
I; in this world, he is tightly packed like the  
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely  
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,  
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love  
And then feels shame, it is I dying  
With a rattle in my throat, I am 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"

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

Travelling through the 'body' Kamala Das finally calls herself 'sinner' or the 'saint', the beloved and the betrayed. She realises that her joys and aches are those of every suffering woman and takes pleasure in asserting her identity with those marginalized, weaker sex of the society. But at her very personal level apart from her satisfaction in her final association with the marginalised woman community she gets nothing beyond some sort of mental relief felt in conquering the lust of the strong males. Her final realisation in her outward journey through body is best expressed in the following lines of the poem 'The Bats' -

"From stranger to guest, from guest to  
Lover, my beloved, when you take,  
When you at least win, ignore the stain  
Beneath dead eyes, the fatigue in my smile."

(Summer in Calcutta, 46)

Thus the outward journey of Kamala Das through her body ends with double note. On one hand she wins the strangers, the lusty lady killers but on the other hand she loses the game well reflected in the fatigue of her smile. It is interesting to see how the suffering woman leading a painful meaningless life under the monstrous male ego of her husband, getting her physical and mental selves tortured all day, finally revolts strongly against patriarchal suppression and sexual

colonialism. She undertakes an outward journey through body and pretends to have flamboyant lust. In her outward journey she discovers her lost self and with a view to rediscovering and establishing her 'self' she violates the social norms, the moral codes, breaks the wedlock and visits strangers. She gets mental relief in making the strangers her temporary home, in turning the rulers into her colony and in conquering their lust. The final outcome of her outward journey lies not in her winning of the lusty males but in transformation of her 'self' from its victim position to a state of winning note where she establishes her identity with the marginalised, exploited, used, ruled female community of the society and asserts their voice. Her journey through body leads her to have sexual triumph over the lusty males and inspires the suffering woman community to transform themselves from their miserable life to advantageous position in order to assert their voice. Of course, one should not miss 'the fatigue' in her smile even in winning the lusty males which implies the sense of sorrow, anger and anguish developed in her mind caused by the degeneration of her physical self and more importantly for the fact that her journey through body fails in providing her the platform to address the cry of her soul and to realise the real meaning of life.

#### **Notes and References :**

1. Eunice de Souza (Interview), *Talking Poems* (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1999), p36.
2. Kamala Das, *My Story* (New Delhi : Sterling, 1976), p 109.
3. I. K. Sharma, *The Irony Of Sex : The Gloss or The Teakwood* (A Study of Kamala Das) *Indian Writings in English*, ed. M.K. Bhatnagar and M. Rajeshwar (New Delhi : Atlantic, 2000), p23.
4. Kamal Das, *Only The Soul Knows How To Sing* (Kottayam : DC Books, 1996), p87.
5. Ibid, p118.
6. Ibid, p70.
7. Bruce King, *Modern Indian Poetry In English* (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2001), p150.
8. *Only The Soul Knows How To Sing*, p94
9. Ibid. p94.
10. I. K. Sharma, op. cit., p16.

## **Chapter - III**

### **A Feminist Voice with a Difference**

Kamala Das may be read as a feminist with a difference. Kamala Das in her poems exposes the sufferings of women in male framed socio- political cultural situation. She raises her voice against feudal and patriarchal violence, the so called moral codes and value system, pre-determined roles of a woman, woman's meek submission of mind and body to man, oppression and exploitation of women, marginalisation and dehumanization of women, gender discrimination etc. She advocates for equality of women, right of women, empowerment of women, and respectful place of women and thus she becomes the champion of women's cause. But she is different from the western feminists in the sense that she moves from gender identity to suffering humanity. She is committed to a poor women's honour as well as to the sufferings of a male servant. She is also different from them for her belief that matriarchy too like patriarchy reinforces gender inequality. Further she goes far away from western feminist writers and appears quite a typical Indian when she looks for total merger with her ideal lover Krishna. Here her wish to be dissolved in Krishna leaves the basic question of feminism 'the identity of woman' in jeopardy. Yet no one can deny the fact that the strong feminine anguish or consciousness or sensibility seen in her narration of a woman's tale of woe, her exploitation, and humiliation etc. is the life-force of Kamala Das's poetry. Her autobiography 'My Story' also records her sufferings as a woman and as a writer. Shashi Bhushan Mishra says - "The image of woman has undergone a change in the last three decades. Throughout this period, woman writers have moved away

from traditional enduring, self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity. The autobiography 'My Story' is remarkable because it presents a new concept of woman and self before us. Her boldness reveals the truth<sup>1</sup>." Shashi Bhushan Mishra further says - "But it is the fact that the truth with Kamala Das is truth with every woman. In our male dominant society female folks are bound to suffer.... Because in our society to be a woman means to suffer from autocracy, exploitation and bad behaviour of men<sup>2</sup>." Her poetry like her autobiography records her sufferings, humiliation and exploitation, anger and anguish. Her poetry shows she is the first modern Indian woman who is not ready to live a life of martyrdom under the monstrous male ego of her husband. She comes forward, attacks the social rules, conventions and so called moral codes, flies from her cage life, makes male's body her colony, mocks at the lust of the strong sex with her pretended hunger, fights to assert the voice of the suffering women, the marginalised section of the society. Thus the bold and aggressive lady with her strong feminine sensibility appears as the liberator of women and fighting with the negative forces she asserts the voice of the weak, exploited, and colonised woman community.

The poem 'An Introduction', first appeared in Summer in Calcutta', focus Kamala Das's spirit of feminism in her own distinctive way. Jayakrishnan Nair says that 'An Introduction' is the most representative of her poetic genre that is the exclusive feminist rebellion<sup>3</sup>." The poem starts thus -

"I don't know politics but I know the names  
Of those in power, and can repeat them like  
Days of weak, or names of months,"

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

K. Satchidanandan rightly observes - 'The opening statement 'I don't know politics' has an ambiguous tone that comes from a woman's marginalised position in society. Outwardly it is a confession of ignorance, but it also conceals in it a potential irony as the society does not expect a woman to deal in politics. She is never the master in politics, only the victim, hence her knowledge of the names



of those in power who have no content for her<sup>4</sup>." No doubt these lines express woman's marginalised or pitiable position in society, her ignorance of politics or the society's ill design not to let women engaged in politics, but the point is that these lines tell women's growing understanding of the importance of the game of politics, the power structure for their own empowerment. The question comes how she can repeat the names of those in power like the names of days or months. The answer lies certainly in her growing interest in the field. She wants to overcome her ignorance and proceed on that way so that she can uplift her position. She knows such interest growing in the positive way will lead them to knowledge and take part in power structures. Here the feminist voice warns the woman race that knowing the names in power is not enough. She appeals them to get involved in politics so that she can see the transgression of woman from their marginalized position to active worker and master in the game of power what may be instrumental in their total empowerment.

Here is the presentation of the first modern Indian woman who chooses her language by her own instincts and never succumbs to any external negative force. She develops oneness with English language and feels that it is the language of her instinct and her inner soul. She says in the same poem 'An Introduction' -

"I speak three languages, write in  
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,  
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave  
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,  
Everyone of you ? Why not let me speak in  
Any language I like ? The language I speak  
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses  
All mine, mine alone.....  
....It voices my joys, my longings, my  
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing  
Is to crows or roaring to the lions."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96.)

K Satchidanandan says - "She also justifies her choice of English as she believes she is using it with her own angularities and eccentricities, her human joys and longings. It is the voice of her instinct as it is the lion's roar and the crow's cawing<sup>5</sup>." But it is ambiguous in which language she dreams in. It may be that woman's language in which the woman reveals her plight and fights for her right and due position in society. Thus the woman is coming forward to dream in her own language and speak in the language which suits her instinct. Here Kamala Das appears as the spokesman of feminism.

Kamala Das was born in a high caste Nayar family, a matrilineal and matriarchal community. But her mother was ordered to wear a khaddar a day after she married a Gandhian man. Kamala did not like her mother's timid behaviour and meek surrender to her father which went against matriarchal norms and freedom of woman as well. In her interview with Eunice de Souza Kamala reveals her dissatisfaction thus - "Although born a Nayar, that is, into a matrilinear and matriarchal community, She fell under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi whose background was unashamedly patriarchal<sup>6</sup>." In the same interview she speaks about freedom and privileges of a Nayar woman - "Nayar women were different. A wife could just leave the husband's clogs outside the door if she no longer wanted him. I am fully aware of a woman's privileges. But some families went out to patriarchal areas and learnt bad habits<sup>7</sup>." No doubt her parent was one of them and the result was that her mother lost her freedom and privileges and their daughter Kamala Das suffers throughout her life. She even misses her father's love and affection, who probably did not want a daughter, especially of black colour. She expresses her mental agony thus which is ironically an attack on male homogeneous society. In the poem 'Next To Indira Gandhi' Kamala Das asks her father -

"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."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 118)

In Kamala Das's poetry, such mental agony goes side by side with every chapter of male's violence on women in a male-dominated society. Such a society always keeps a close look at the girls and makes them the subjects of their socio-cultural conventions when the girls get maturity. Kamala Das reveals the tragedy of being a girl in such a male-dominated society. In the poem 'An Introduction' she says -

"....I was child, and later they  
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs  
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

Even her grandmother, who really loves her, warns her in the poem 'The Suicide' -

"My grandmother cried,  
Darling, you must stop this bathing now.  
You are much too big to play  
Naked on the pond."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 87)

Thus the male-dominated society tames a girl in her very early stage and prepares her to lead her life according to its masculine value system. J. Nair also feels the same when he says - "This physical change is but no ecstatic experience for her but is only a prelude to the onset of social and cultural complexities of adjustments<sup>8</sup>." Here Kamala Das exposes how the girl, the master of her own will and instinct, is compelled to be the subject of male framed rules.

Kamala Das's strong feminine consciousness is clear when she laments that she has no right to live her life according to her will. Her father chooses cloths for her, chooses tutors, hobbies, and friends and even picks up a husband for her. Kamala Das reveals the mental agony of a girl in a male-dominated society in the

poem 'Next To Indira Gandhi' -

"You chose my cloths for me  
My tutors, my hobbies, my friends,  
And at fifteen with my first saree you picked  
me a husband."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 118)

The more male's violence she experiences, the more she suffers from mental anger and anguish. She is compelled to live with a man whom she does not know or does not love or does not want as husband. She has to define love under a negative compelling situation. Kamala Das portrays such a cage life of a woman where she receives only sexual torture and humiliation quite typical to every woman in a male dominated society. When the girl, by her instinct, asks for love, the irony is that her tendered woman body feels so beaten in the name of love, as she says in the poem 'An Introduction' -

"I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask  
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the  
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me  
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.  
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank  
Pitifully."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

In this respect K. Satchidanandan says - "Speaking of adolescence her female body inscribes itself on the text and she remembers too her first encounter with masculine violence that belongs to the same frightening world of trees in the storm and the mutterings of the funeral pyre." 9 This bitter experience shatters all her adolescent dreams, gives birth to unending mental anguish and anger in her mind and makes her repulsive to male's authority.

The girl revolts against male framed rules and male's violence. As a means she ignores womanliness and wears shirt and brother's trousers. She says in the same poem 'An Introduction' thus -

"Then I wore a shirt and my  
Brothers trousers, cut my hair short and ignored  
My womanliness."

(Only The Soul Knows To How To Sing, 96)

This is quite symbolic of her rebellious mind set against all powerful male ruled society and male centered cultural conventions. The categorizers of the society cannot tolerate such revolt and cry in the poem 'An Introduction' -

Dress in sarees, be girl,  
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,  
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,  
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit  
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.  
Be amy, or be kamala. Or, better  
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to  
Choose a name, a role."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

The poem reveal the woman's thought process how she is revolting against any sort of categorization. The male community for their sakes wants the woman to choose a name and play a role of various roles of a woman prescribed by the society. Kamala Das raises her voice against any pre-determined role of a woman and wants her to play or do whatever she likes or wishes. K. Satchidanandan rightly observes - "The woman cannot change her body; So the poet changes her dress and tries to imitate men. But the voices of tradition would force her back into sarees, the saree becoming here a sign of convention. She is pushed back into her expected gender roles: wife, cook, embroiderer, quarreler with servants : the gender role also becomes a class role. The elders fill her world with taboos asking her to be her parents' Amy, her friends' Kamala or her reader's Madhavikutty (her pen name in Malayalam). Every deviation from the norm is looked upon as perversion or mental illness<sup>10</sup>."

Reacting to the effect of the brutal patriarchal rules on the female psyche

S.D. Sharma says - "Kamala Das performs anatomy on her own self, on her own female psyche. Her own self emerges so powerfully in her poetry that even the moribund system, lying concealed under the veneer of social sanctity, is totally punctured by her virulent attacks. The carnal exploits, a woman is subjected to so inhumanely, is fully and exclusively exposed<sup>11</sup>." Kamala Das is not the woman to behave as expected by the male-centered society. She is not born to be exploited and colonised. She cannot give up her own dreams and aspirations for the sake of pleasure of the male community. She cannot surrender herself meekly to the monstrous male ego of her husband. So she comes forward and attacks the patriarchal society. S.D. Sharma says- "Kamala Das openly revolts against the traditionally accepted, strange, queer womanhood concepts in the Indian society, which is so awkwardly full of abominable shams and cants. Rigid trammels of tyranny, she does not like at all. In a bitter, piercing, cathartic tone, Kamala Das ridicules traditional imposters, show of masculine strength and also man's lust<sup>12</sup>." There comes the conflict between the male framed socio-cultural conventions and a woman's awareness of her own self, her existence. Here the woman projected wants to live her life for herself not for others. She wants to make the end of the plight of women and transform her from her victim position to her due righteous position in the society.

In her search for self or totality or the real meaning of life, she appears as the every woman who seeks love from every man. She feels in her 'the ocean's tireless waiting' and in him the 'hungry haste of rivers' who would merge in herself. She says in the poem 'An Introduction' -

"....he is everyman

Who wants a woman, just as I am every

Woman who seeks love. In him the hungry haste

of rivers, in me the ocean's tireless

waiting."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 97)

Kamala Das appears a feminist who wants man to be dissolved in woman.

She finds in him the male ego tightly packed like the sword in its sheath. On the other hand she discovers the woman dying in the hotels of strange towns who makes love and then feels shame. The males pretending to be true lovers always remain 'strange town' for the love seeking woman who feels her identity crushed at the end of their encounter. Then she universalises her existence and becomes a polyphonic text with the voices of every man and woman, the lover and the beloved, the sinner and the saint, the seeker and the betrayed etc. within herself. She says thus in the same poem -

".... I am sinner.

I am 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."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 97)

Here the woman goes beyond her woman identity, rather is satisfied with her final dissolution in others and discovers that her joys and aches are the same as those of her readers. In this respect K. Satchidanandan says - "This discovery has a social as well as a metaphysical dimension both of which in different ways have grown along with her poetry to constitute a spiritual politics of the body and beyond<sup>13</sup>." Thus in Kamala Das, her realization of anti-woman social rules and conventions in her encounter with male's violence through her body leads her to the realisation of metaphysical and polyphonic dimensions of her self which certainly takes her away from the western feminist group and makes her a feminist with a difference.

Kamala Das represents every woman who suffers in a male hegemonic set-up. N.V. Raveendran says - "Kamala Das, while seeking to establish an identity of her own, expresses her concern for the woman in general."<sup>14</sup> She is the mouthpiece of every woman who is in search of true love and ironically experiences unending lust of their pretended lovers or unkind husbands. She is the every woman when she says thus in the poem 'An Introduction' -

"....I am every



Woman who seeks love."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 97)

In the poem 'The Suicide' she says -

"I want to be loved

And

If love is not be had,

I want to be dead, just dead."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 87)

She is ready to offer her husband or her lover everything what makes her woman, to make him pleased bodily and mentally with all her endless female hungers. She says in the poem 'The Looking Glass' -

"Gift him what makes you woman, the sent of  
long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,  
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your  
Endless female hungers."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 55)

What she does not do for him ? In the poem 'The Looking Glass' she reveals what she does to make him feel strong and love the lovelier -

"Stand nude before the glass with him  
So that he sees himself the stronger one  
And believes it so, and you so much more  
Softer, younger, lovelier...."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 55)

If ironically studied, these references reveal the wretched condition of a woman of being a beloved or a wife. Yet she does so with a hope to have true love. But she meets only sexual torture and humiliation in the name of love. She says in the poem 'An Introduction' -

"He did not beat me

But my sad woman body felt so beaten"

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

How can she live with her husband or her lovers' grey, pitiless eyes which know no love ('The Bangles'). How she can tolerate when her husband or her lover comes forward with lust only. She reveals her pain in the poem 'In Love' -

"oh, yes, his  
mouth.... and his limbs like pale and  
carnivorous plants reaching  
out for me...."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 89)

This male with his unending lust without love gives her no true love but only frustration and humiliation. She says in the poem 'The Freaks' -

"Can this man with  
Nimble finger-tips, unleash,  
Nothing more alive than the  
Skins lazy hungers ? Who can  
Help us who have lived so long  
And have failed in love ?"

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 48)

She desperately wants to see herself and her husband a proud pair. She says in the poem 'Substitute' -

"It will be all right if I put my hair,  
Stand near my husband to make a proud pair...."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 53)

Her quest for emotional rapport and her failure to have it with her husband or lovers is seen when she says in the poem 'The Suicide' -

"I must pose  
I must pretend  
I must act the role  
Of happy woman  
Happy wife".

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 86-87)

In return the love-seeking woman meets from her husband or her lover only sexual titillation and humiliation what makes her loose her will, reason and identity and makes her a dwarf. She reveals such heart-rending love-seeking experience in the poem 'The Old Playhouse -

"You were pleased

with my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured

yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed  
my poor lust with your bitter sweet juices. You called me wife,  
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. I lost my will and reason, to all your  
questions I mumbled incoherent replies."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 30)

Kamala Das never feels a bond between her and her husband and they remain to her only a mismatched pair. She says in the poem 'Longer Than Life Was He'

-

"There are no memories that enthrall  
no fond phrase capsuled in thought,  
It was never a husband and wife bond.  
We were such a mismatched pair,"

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 112)

Thus she realises meaninglessness and futility of marriage system prevailed in Indian society, a male framed set-up. She is extremely worried when she learns that she has no right to choose her man and her father picks up a husband for her. In a patriarchal form of society the girl hardly can do anything according to her will. She has to talk, behave, dream, develop herself and get married according to the will of her parents. She is sent to another home in the name of marriage belonging to a patriarchal form of society where she has to live the life of

martyrdom under the monstrous male ego of her husband. Before marriage she lives under her father's male ego and spends her days after marriage under her new master namely the husband. Kamala Das beautifully portrays such marginalised position and plight of woman in a male framed politics, socio-cultural conventions in her poetry. She attacks the imposition of every social norm, marriage system, and value system or codes relating to sex, morality, etc. made for woman. Arun Kumar Mishra also feels the same and goes a little ahead when he says that through her poetry Kamala Das "attacks the institution of marriage which gives a man a legal right to commit marital rape on his teenage bride. She rebels impulsively and defies the gender code<sup>15</sup>." As a part of her rebellion against the gender code, sexual exploitation of woman, Kamala Das visits a few strangers for a small change and to see love. She makes the lady killers her object and makes them her colony. Yet she has a little hope in visiting the strangers that he may address her emotional needs and satisfy her search for meaning in life. But every stranger puts his back after his lust is quietened. Shashi Bhuyan Mishra states that her 'My Story' also "records her emotional wandering searching for meaning that she never found as a wife"<sup>16</sup>. Supporting Kamala Das's visit to strangers to receive love he says - 'Actually her thirst for love was not fulfilled in the home and by her husband and the result was to go outside, search for love. If a man who is also married can love more than one woman, why woman is not? Why she should be 'Pativrata' in that condition<sup>17</sup>." In this respect one should be careful that Kamala Das in her poetry does not advocate adultery or free sex but looks for a healthy man-woman relationship, full of love, warmth, affection, respect, understanding etc. like that of Radha-Krishna. Kamala Das senses hypocrisy even in the so-called happy marriage of her parents. In her interview with Eunice de Souza, she frankly says - "I sense the hypocrisy so evident in my parent's marriage and decided never to emulate them. Although my mother wrote incessantly of her happy marriage, I heard her quarrel with my father every night. I used to wake up from sleep at midnight hearing the sounds of their quarrel and lie in my bed, trembling with unease. My mother had been

ordered to wear khaddar a day after she married my Gandhian father"<sup>18</sup>. Here the 'khaddar' metaphorically means the garb, collectively all the norms laid on wife or woman which solemnly and gradually consume the inner self of a woman in a male dominating set-up.

Kamala Das protests against socialization of woman by confining them to predetermined roles to serve the male dominated society. She expresses her total disgust at the patriarchal authority and the brutal social rules. When she becomes tall and her limbs swell, she is declared of her physical maturity and made subject to the male made social rules. Her father brings to her the first saree and also picks a husband for her who was 'not the right most grove' for her. In her first sexual encounter with her husband she felt her sad woman body so beaten -

"The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.

I shrank pitifully."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

Since then her husband has been exploiting, torturing and humiliating her and never tries to address her emotional needs. The relationship between them is not of love and affection, warmth and compassion but of lust and frigidity, dominance and submission, ruler and ruled, exploiter and exploited, user and the used. Thus her husband develops a sexual colony in her. In this respect Shilpi Saxena comments - "Among the noted female writers of the century Kamala Das occupies a central place by seeking to liberate female sex from the attitudes of the conventions ridden patriarchal society. She expresses her resentment against sexual colonialism that refers to a relationship between the sexes which is a relationship of dominance and subservience. Men are the colonizers, the women are colonised...."<sup>19</sup>. Kamala Das protests strongly against this sexual colonialism and cage life of woman and advocates freedom, and she reveals her willingness to take wings and fly around. She says in the poem 'I Shall Some Day' -

"I shall someday take

Wings, fly around...."

(The Old Playhouse and Other Poems, 48)

Das's plea for liberation of the weaker sex from the clutches of male's strong lust is also reflected in the poem 'The Conflagration' where Kamala Das urges the women, the suffering community to be conscious of their own happiness, wishes and aspirations and with a hope to make those a reality she calls them to break the wedlock. Her rebellious voice is heard loudly in the poem -

"Woman, is the happiness, this lying buried  
Beneath a man ? It's time again to come alive  
The world extends a lot beyond this six foot frame"

(The Descendants, 20)

This 'six foot frame' namely the husband with his lust without love has marginalised her 'self'. She loses her will and reason and becomes dwarf. Such husband-wife relationship based on the concept of domination and subordination is termed by Iqbal Kaur as sexual colonialism in its most overpowering form where women do not feel that they are being victimised<sup>20</sup>. That is why Kamala Das, championing the cause of the suffering woman community, rejects any predetermined role of a woman to give the message that the women are not born to serve male made society; urges the woman community to play active role in politics so that they can transcend themselves from their position of victimization to be the ruler; urges the suffering women to break the wedlock to end their life of martyrdom under the monstrous male ego of their husbands and try to make their own dreams a reality. What is more she appeals to break sexual colonialism and opines that women should not love the males but use their body, "the cheapest bait of all" in order to trap the males and make the strong sex the ruled and the sufferer. She says in the poem 'A Losing Battle' -

"Men are worthless, to trap them  
Use the cheapest bait of all, but never  
Love, which in a woman must mean tears  
And a silence in the blood."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 48)

Here Kamala Das urges the woman community not to let their body to be

used by the males, but to use it to trap the males and make them subordinate or a colony in sexual communication and use them for transferring their own dreams into a reality. Thus in attacking the institution of marriage, imposition of social norms and so called value codes on woman, breaking the wedlock and knocking at other's door in search of identity Kamala Das goes near to the western concept of feminism, but sinks into typical Indian woman when she longs for Radha-Krishna type of love and a total merger with her ideal lover Krishna.

Like Meerabai, the influence of Radha-Krishna myth has been on Kamala Das since her childhood days. In her interview with Eunice de Souza Kamala Das says - 'My grand mother would say Krishna is your greatest friend. I thought nobody would be as good as Krishna.'<sup>21</sup> In her earliest stage Krishna's personality as presented by her lovable grandmother influences Kamala's mind. Slowly she identifies herself with Radha and considers Krishna her ideal lover. In her autobiography 'My Story' Kamala Das says - "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>22</sup> Kamala Das gets married and hopes - "he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms the loneliness of my life...."<sup>23</sup>. She wants to see Krishna's image in her husband and the irony is that she loses her will and reason and finally her identity to the monstrous male ego of her husband<sup>24</sup> who is interested only in her body's response and never tries to give her warmth, love and affection. She receives no love from her husband, but only sexual exploitation and humiliation. She is convinced that her husband is not her ideal lover. She visits 'Vrindavan' of her mind what every woman's mind possesses and hopes that one day her Krishna's flute would lure her from her home. She sings in the poem 'Vrindavan' -

"Vrindavan lives on in every woman's mind  
and the flute luring her  
from home...."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 101)

Kamala Das identifies herself with Radha. In her interview with Eunice de Souza Kamala Das Says - "I love the character Radha, I've written plenty about



her in my stories in Malayalam as well. I always think of her waiting for him who never comes back. I don't think any love is completely reciprocated. In one of my stories Radha smeared sandalwood paste on her breasts. She fell asleep, and when she woke up, he still hadn't come and the sandalwood paste was dry. She felt it was such a waste of sandalwood. I understand her. I see her as a human being."<sup>25</sup> Kamala Das feels her plight is the plight of Radha, the love-seeking woman. Without Krishna she has no meaning of life and grief like a cobweb grabs her totality. In the poem 'The Cobweb' Kamala Das says -

"Do not look into Radha's eyes O friends  
For her soul lies dead inside  
As cobwebs block the doorways, unused,  
Grief now mars her lonely eyes"

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 123)

Here Kamala Das asks her friends not to look at her eyes, the grief-stricken lonely eyes, which tell that her soul is dead inside. She feels she is still young and needs the man, her ideal lover for construction and destruction. She says in the poem 'The Invitation' -

"I am still young  
And I need that man for construction and  
Destruction."

(The Descendants, 14)

When Eunice de Souza asks Kamala Das about the theme of adultery in Radha-Krishna stories, Kamala Das frankly says that adultery has always thrilled her. She further says that if she commits a sin it is in a sinless way.<sup>26</sup> So her Krishna is not the super-human being or the Supreme Soul but stands for the ideal lover on earth who can address duly both the body and mind of the beloved, can elevate her soul and uplift her to a state of ecstasy. No doubt Kamala's emotional self is badly in need to be addressed by. Interestingly her body too is waiting for Krishna's touch. That is why Radha-Krishna's physical love, which is in tune with the satisfaction of her mental self and provides full meaning to their

love, thrills Kamala Das. She wishes her cheeks also to be flushed like those of Radha when Radha lies on being asked by her husband about the long scratch on the brown aureola of her breast. She says in poem 'Vrindavan' -

"....the flute luring her  
from home and her husband  
who later asks her of the long scratch  
on the brown aureola of her breast  
and she shyly replies  
hiding flushed cheeks, it was so dark  
outside, I tripped over the brambles in the woods...."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 101)

Thus Kamala Das gives a mythical set-up to her concept of ideal love. She identifies herself as Radha and her ideal lover as Krishna and longs for a Radha-Krishna type of love. In this respect A.N. Dwivedi says - "It is this framework that saves her, in some degree, from the charges of obscenity and promiscuity, otherwise her poetry is replete with shocking and unorthodox details about love and marriage and sex. ....Apparently Kamala is pricked by an inner urge to rise above the mere earthly and give vent to her mystical longing or purity and nobility. She has undoubtedly a soul within her body and she can't ignore its calls completely."<sup>27</sup> But one should not miss Kamala's Krishna for any super human heavenly being. Instead her ideal lover is a flesh and blood on earth searched for and expected to love Kamala as mythical Krishna loved Radha. She hopes that her ideal lover travelling through her body and mind would give her real pleasure of life. Naturally in the treatment of 'Radha-Krishna' myth Kamala Das is different from other devotional poets like Meera Bai, Sorojini Naidu etc. In this respect M. Rao rightly observes - "In Sorojini Naidu the Radha-Krishna relationship is a metaphor for that between Atma and Brahman; in Kamala Das the relationship, though one of ideal lovers, is realised in human terms, and as such it does not rise to "the divine level."<sup>28</sup> About the role of sex in Radha-Krishna relationship for Sorojini Naidu and Kamala Das, M. Rao says - Sorojini Naidu's Radha is not

anti-sexual, yet sex is not the primary concern in her Radha poems. But in Kamala Das sex implies 'a deep and intense relationship', which is not devotional; it is very much human in its concern".<sup>29</sup> Thus Kamala Das does not ignore the body's call, instead she wants to travel through the body and addressing the soul's cry simultaneously she longs for the ultimate pleasure of knowing the self in its fullest form.

Kamala Das, by ideal love, means the kind of bond or relation that was between mythical Radha and Krishna. They overcame all obstacles, their egos and knew no limitation and let themselves to be merged absolutely in each other. It provided them total freedom and real pleasure. In this respect M. Rao again says - "It is in the second phase of ideal love that the lovers transgress the boundaries of their egos or narrow selves to merge with each other, as such merger ensures total freedom. The poet beholds such an exemplary relation in the love between Radha and Krishna. She surmises herself as Radha who goes in search of Krishna the ideal lover, in spite of her marriage. This brings into her poetic context the Abhisarika tradition of Sanskrit poetry."<sup>30</sup> If Radha and Krishna represent Atma and Paramatma respectively, the wedlock suggests all the obstacles seen on the way of Atma in getting reunited with the Paramatma. So the wedlock provides Kamala Das no pleasure but appears as a cage. In the poem 'The Maggots' Kamala Das depicts the picture of her plight through the plight of Radha where Radha feels herself like a corpse in the arms of her husband and desperately longs for her union with Krishna. She says in the poem -

At sunset on the river bank, Krishna  
Loved her for the last time and left  
That night in her husband's arms Radha felt  
So dead that he asked what is wrong  
Do you mind my kisses love, and she said  
No, not at all, but thought, what is  
It to the corpse if the maggots nip?

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 42)

In reference to this poem M. Rao says - "Krishna has a therapeutic role to play in the poet's life. Her thoughts about Him give her relief from the asphyxiating male chauvinism."<sup>31</sup> Here Kamala Das with her unkind, unloving, lusty husband remains a corpse, a dying self in a male-framed set-up and longs for total merger with her ideal lover to be uplifted to a state of ecstasy where she can realise real pleasure of life.

The poem 'Radha' shows how Kamala Das identifies herself with Radha and longs for total merger with her ideal lover Krishna. In Krishna's first embrace Radha feels herself melting and only melting in Him. Kamala Das too wants to melt in her ideal lover and hopes for a total merger with him. She says in the poem 'Radha' -

And virgin crying  
Everything in me  
Is melting, even the hardness at the core  
O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting  
Nothing remains but  
You.

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 63)

Thus Kamala Das seeks total merger, dissolution of her 'self' and total identification with her ideal lover Krishna. M. Rao says - "What she seeks is a total merger in her lover. But since it is not feasible in the actual world, she searches for Ghanashyam, the ideal lover. Dissolution of the individual self and the total identification is possible only with her mythical lover. This is illustrated by the poem 'Radha', where she somewhat sentimentally depicts the ecstasy Radha experiences in Krishna's embrace."<sup>32</sup> Here Kamala Das is out and out an Indian woman in her concept of love and goes away from western feminism.

Reacting to Kamala Das's longing to get herself melting in her ideal lover Bhabani S. Baral says - "What Kamal Das laments in her poetry is the absence of this 'losing oneself', i.e. the Shringara Rasa in the lives of Indian women. It is not strictly the ideology of feminism rather her individualism as a female writer that

comes to the fore when she advocates a concept of love that does not impede her impulse to freedom<sup>33</sup>."

Here Kamala Das is far away to be called a feminist who seeks total merger, dissolution of herself and total identification of self with her ideal lover Krishna. Yet we cannot ignore her feminine sensibility even in her longing for total merger with Krishna on the ground that she advocates total merger only when it leads the woman-self to be elevated with realization of true love. For Kamala Das, true love no doubt comes from total merger but leads to absolute freedom 'an end, a pure, total freedom'. Here her feminine sensibility is to be felt in her state of experiencing true love which leads every woman's oceans tireless waiting to her physical and mental satisfaction and soul's elevation. Finally the female self searching for her Krishna in vain in a male framed social set-up turns herself to the song of her soul. As a result she discovers her 'self' torn between her sense of belongings to time-bound existence and timelessness, her social and divine communication or her existential and eternal reality. Finally she throws her body out and decides to go close to the soul and listen only to its call (Composition). So she wants to be safe in the great blue sea swimming beyond the body, as she says in the poem 'Advice to Fellow Swimmers'-

"go swim in the great blue sea  
where the first tide you meet is your body  
that familiar pest  
but if you learn to cross it  
you are safe, yes, beyond it you are safe"

(Collected Poems, Vol. I., 100)

Now Kamala Das knows nothing but her soul's longing and the soul longs only for a love beyond flesh. She is convinced that love beyond flesh is the greatest of all and says in the poem 'Anamalai Poems' -

"There is a love greater than all you know  
that awaits you where the red road finally ends  
its patience proverbial; nor for it

the random cares or the lust  
that ends in languor.  
Its embrace is truth and it erases  
even the souls ancient indentations so that  
some unknown womb shall begin to convulse  
to welcome your restructured perfection."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 111)

Kamala Das in her inward journey feels that she has finally crossed 'the red road' and is on the verge to have a love beyond flesh, the greatest of all which will uplift her to a state of ecstasy, truth and beauty and enable her to enjoy the real meaning of life and to establish her ultimate identity in her reunion with the Supreme Soul. Her search for identity beyond flesh especially with the Supreme Soul gives her feminine consciousness a touch of spirituality and leads her to realize ultimate destination and real meaning of life.

Thus the poetry of Kamala Das with her physical and spiritual journey as seen in her poetry can be read "as a woman's tale of woe"<sup>34</sup>. The mental anguish and agony of the marginalised sex which go side by side allegorically with every portrait of her sexual life, with every chapter of exploitation and humiliation of her self, reveals her feminine consciousness or sensibility and her strong desire to make woman free from their 'betrayers' arm'. What Anisur Rahman says is also notes worthy. He says that Kamala Das's feminine sensibility "is not to be explored in her frank confessions of her sexual life or in a detailed description of female organs. It is expressly manifested in her attitude to love, in the ecstasy she experiences in receiving love and the agony which she feels when jilted in it"<sup>35</sup>. Both her pleasure of receiving true love and the agony of not finding it convey her feminine sensibility only.

In her interview with Eunice de Souza, to a question whether she thinks of herself as a feminist, Kamala Das confesses - "Others see me as a feminist. I see myself as a feminine creature who loves the company of brilliant men and women. I am not very gender conscious. I don't believe in the feminist demand for

abortion<sup>36</sup>." The fact is that Kamala Das simply explores herself as a woman and never tries to identify her with any form of feminist theory. In this regard P.P. Raveendran says - 'Her response to the gender question is not the studied analysis of a feminist. It is spontaneous, more of a gut response, and hence not highly ideological. But although her answers to gender problems do not coincide with the standard answers of feminist activists, a strong feminist self-consciousness runs through all her writings'<sup>37</sup>. Kamala Das opposes all gender bias which discriminates men from women, one from the other.

Thus in Kamala Das's poetry we hear a female voice with strong feminine sensibility representing the hopes and dreams, the humiliation, and exploitation, oppression and tension of every woman. Kamala Das the poet succeeds in universalizing the plight of Kamala Das the woman. She is the every woman who discovers her female identity in jeopardy in male homogeneous set-up and tries to liberate her from her marginalized life characterized with voiceless, bondage, slavery, martyrdom, colonisation etc. Thus her strong feminine consciousness marks her discovery of her lost self, her representation of the colonized women community, colonization and consumption of strong sex, and her asserting of her voice and identity with the marginalized female community of the society. Of course her feminine self searching for total merger with Krishna and finally an identity beyond flesh takes a touch of Indianness and spirituality and gives a different dimension to her poetry.

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## **Chapter - IV**

### **From Gender Identity to Suffering Humanity**

The world of Kamala Das is the world of duality, a world inhibited by the body and the soul and she passes her days without the meeting point between the two. Such inhibitors being looked after separately under compelling situation have their own distinctive demands and naturally they appeal her to respond accordingly. Owing to some internal or external negative forces or due to the effects of the hopeful past, painful present and uncertain future on her working mind or whatever the reason, the truth is that Kamala Das is unable to keep her body and spirit in good balance. When one gets responded, the other gets hurt resulting in conflict and confusion in her mind. As a result she remains confused, disturbed and is unable to possess a balanced self. She needs to project her identity in the face of the world. She engages herself in writing poetry or other forms of literature, a workshop in her mind, where her 'self' is the protagonist who explores itself and makes a two-pronged journey - the outward through body and the inward through soul. Her journey from gender identity to suffering humanity is a by-product of her inward journey, the journey from body to soul, undertaken with a view to realizing the real meaning of life.

In her inward journey Kamala Das rejects her body and its physical hunger and travels through her soul and listens to its calls only. She delves deeper and deeper into her own mind or psyche and wants to lead her life according to the call of her soul. Being haunted by a sense of 'lost-identity', she probes deeper and deeper in her soul and tries to rediscover and establish her identity. But the question

comes, what makes her to take a turn from body to soul? Though her journey through body helps her to assert her identity with the humiliated, exploited, marginalised weaker sex and to have some sort of relief and satisfaction in consuming the strong sex with her pretended lust, she cannot deny the fact that her journey through body develops in her a sense of sorrow and degeneration of herself what ultimately makes her realise her uselessness in existential reality. She reveals the truth in the poem 'Composition' -

"Let there be despair in every move.

Excavate

deep, deep pain.

To be frank,

I have failed.

I feel my age and my

Uselessness.

All I want now

is to take a long walk

into the sea

and lie there, resting,

completely uninvolved."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 26)

The poem throws light on her willingness to have the interior journey as she wants rest and wants to remain completely uninvolved in existential affairs owing to her despair and deep pain, the result of her sense of uselessness. She discovers herself a captive of her own body and resolves to escape from its snare, from the trappings of lust, as she says in the poem 'The Prisoner' -

"I study the trappings

of your body, dear love,

for, I must some day find

an escape from its snare."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 102)

She realises the transient quality of the body and the timelessness of soul. So she decides to peel off her layers to give up all her codes or modes of existential reality and travel inward into her soul. She says in the poem 'Composition' thus -

"I also know that by confessing,  
by peeling off my layers  
I reach closer to the soul  
and  
to the bone's  
supreme indifference."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 25)

Thus Kamala Das wants to reach closer to the soul. She throws her body out and knowing that only the soul knows how to sing she lets her soul enter the vortex of the sea, the eternity, her absolute destination and establish its ultimate identity. The poem 'The Suicide' revels -

"I throw the bodies out,  
I cannot stand their smell.  
Only the souls may enter  
The vortex of the sea.  
Only the souls know how to sing  
At the vortex of the sea."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 86)

Kamala Das's inward journey is not merely a journey from body to soul or from soul to the supreme soul. It is an exploration of self where transcending the body she delves more and more into her inner self and searches for her identity. Harimohan Prasad also echoes the same when he says that in her poetry there is an inner voyage, an awareness beyond skin's lazy hungers to the hidden soul. He further says that it enacts her quest, an exploration into herself and seeking of her identity<sup>1</sup>. In her exploration of self she travels through her soul and delves into it, transcends the body and listens to only her inner self. She moves forward and backward, recalls her past memories, laments at her painful present, discovers

where she has lost her identity and tries to recover and establish it, seeks a balance between her existential involvement with life and an intellectual quest for meaning, becomes death conscious, realises her uselessness, meaninglessness and nothingness and then tries to overcome it associating herself with the plight of the subalterns she involves herself in a psychic and intellectual quest for real meaning in life.

Kamala Das asserts the voice of the marginalised sections of the society urging them to speak in the language they like. She overthrows any sort of restriction and advocates for free development of their spirit -

"Why not let me speak in  
Any language I like ? The language I speak  
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses  
All mine, mine alone."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

Kamala Das adopts in her inward journey the tiresome sounds of the typewriter and decides to make the world listen to the unheard voices of the marginalized sections of the society, the coarse voices full of pain and agony. In the poem 'Loud Posters' she says thus -

"....I' ve put  
My private voice away, adopted the  
Type writers click as my only speech; I  
Click-click, click-click tiresomely into your  
Ears, stranger, though you may have no need of  
Me, I go on and on, not knowing why...."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 51)

Kamala Das develops a relationship or oneness with 'others' and associates herself with the marginalised sections of the society irrespective of sex, cast, creed or religion. Here Kamala Das appears as a post-colonial voice who takes a turn from her body or her 'self' to 'others' and represents not only the weaker sex but the all oppressed and suppressed and associates her voice with that of

their urge for a respectable life, equality and freedom. In this respect K. Satchidanandan says-

"Kamala's poetry shows a gradual widening of concerns over the years as she liberates herself from her initial obsession with her gender identity and extends her sympathies to entire sections of suffering humanity- the marginalised, the poor, the minorities, the fighters for justice, women, children, abandoned youth, victims of war and oppression...2". She feels oneness with the 'marginalised others' irrespective of their caste and creed, gender or religion. She immediately raises her voice when she sees a soul suffering. She sees her image in others and feels the voice of million, million people in her. She says in the poem 'Someone Else's Song' -

"I am a million, million people  
Talking all at once, with voices  
Raised in clamour, like maids  
At village-wells."

(Summer In Calcutta, 22)

Thus Kamala Das becomes a polyphonic voice with million and million people talking all at once and with their voices raised in clamor. In the poem 'An Introduction', a polyphonic text, where Kamala Das calls herself sinner and saint, beloved and the betrayed and feels that she has no joys, no aches which are not of others. She says thus in the poem -

"I am sinner, I am 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."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 97)

Even when Kamala Das calls herself 'I', she is not away from others. It implies that she wants to be merged in others and assume a 'vaster identity'. A.N. Dwivedi also points out the same when he says -

"In 'Summer in Calcutta', we have a different category of poems like 'The Flag', 'Someone Else's song', 'Forest Fire', 'An Introduction' and 'The wild

Bougainvillea' in which there is an attempt to rise above the 'private voice' and depict a larger panorama of experience. The technique is almost always one of assuming a vaster identity....3".

Kamala Das while associating herself with others takes a turn from gender identity to suffering humanity. In the poem 'The Flag', the flag which is the symbol of national pride, becomes the symbol of shame and poverty. She says -

" Poor flag, dear one,  
Your pride is lost, .....  
.....  
Your shame beneath this blood-drenched Indian soil"  
(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 50)

She says when the rich men are enjoying themselves with one another's wives; the poor men are lying in wet pavements and are suffering from severe cough. In the same poem she says-

"....and poor old men lie  
On wet pavements and  
Cough, cough their lungs out."  
(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 50)

She again says in the same poem -  
"As those poor babies who die of hunger  
And are buried,"

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 50)

Here Kamala Das characterises the picture of Independent India with poverty, disease and death. She becomes one of the poor people and mocks at such freedom which cannot provide the poor people a piece of bread and asks the flag to fall and hide. Similarly in the poem 'Nani' Kamala Das identifies herself with Nani, the pregnant maid who commits suicide. Kamala Das feels herself as the Nani, the symbol of every suffering woman, who is exploited and humiliated socially, economically, sexually, politically etc. When Nani represents the suffering community, Kamala Das cries for the marginalised, oppressed, suppressed,



exploited sections and asserts the right to live for the subalterns. She becomes rebellious against the existing social structure where the marginalised, the poor people like Nani is made to perform 'a comic dance' to delight the user, the powerful, the exploiter, the ruler, as she says in the poem 'Nani' -

".... She was hanging there,  
A clumsy puppet, and when the wind blew  
Turning her gently on the rope, it seemed  
To us who were children then, that Nani  
Was doing to delight us, a comic  
Dance...."

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 76)

Here Nani is not simply a woman but a representative of all poor, subdued people who, according to Kamala Das, is a clumsy puppet compelled to sacrifice his or her 'right to live' for the strong and the powerful and has to dance as they want and delight them. Kamala Das is shocked to see the indifference, inhuman attitude of the rich people towards the poor when her grandmother forgets Nani. She says in the same poem -

"I asked my grandmother  
Oneday, don't you remember Nani, the dark  
Plump one who bathed me near the well ? Grandmother  
Shifted her reading glasses on her nose  
And stared at me. Nani, She asked, who is she ?  
With that question ended Nani. Each truth  
Ends thus with a query"

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 76)

Kamala Das is also sorry to see the plight of the male servant or the plight of the poor, needy people. She realises that the rich and the powerful people never try to share the sufferings of the suffering community. She identifies herself with others and tries to assert their voice. Kamala Das hates terror and terrorism for it makes all human languages paralyzed. In the poem 'Terror' she says-

'Fear

Is our leader, leading us into  
High exitless hills, standing tall  
As a mountain goat upon the snow, and  
All the languages paralyzed  
On our tongue.'

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 41)

She again says in the same poem-

'Terror hides behind

Thickets of pubic hair, all men are  
Impotent, all women barren, the sky  
Is taut like the face of a drum. We  
Go round and round singing the national  
Nursery rhymes, we are kids with souls  
Tied into tight hypnotic knots.'

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 41)

Kamala Das also feels oneness with the pains of the eunuchs as she says in the poem 'The Dance of the Eunuchs'-

..... They danced and

They danced, oh, they danced till they bled.'

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 70)

In the poem 'Fathima' Kamala Das draws the mind-storming picture of pain of a common woman belonging to religious minority who is suffering from cancer. She says thus-

' Fathima has cancer. A breast removed,  
And lulled by the pay-wards soft palaver  
She fattered around its gain of sand, a pearl, ripe

For plunder, with the sheen of a gull's wing  
And the autumnal brilliance of the sea.

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 35)

Kamala Das also feels sorry for and oneness with the Tamils in Sri Lanka who have been fighting for justice and freedom for a long time. In the poem 'After July' she is sorry to see their plight-

'After July, in Colombo there was  
No Tamils in sight.....  
Like rodents they were all holed up in fear,

.....  
They were hunted; they cowered behind  
Doors, in the murky twilight of their rooms  
.....

The dark Dravidian laid his three year old child  
On his lap. Little mother, he cried, close your eyes and sleep'

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 75)

In an another poem also 'Smoke in Colombo' Kamala Das attracts attention of all depicting the picture of the Tamils in Sri Lanka the wronged community consuming by a lingering grief. She says thus-

'On that last ride home we had the smoke  
Following us, along the silenced  
Streets, lingering on,.....

.....  
Lingering on as grief lingers on  
.....

..... there was no space  
Between us and their guns, but we were  
Too fatigued to feel fear, or resist

The abrupt moves  
Of an imbecilic will.'

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 58)

Kamala Das denounces terrorism. She cries at the genocide of Sikhs in Delhi following the murder of Indira Gandhi in 1984. In the poem 'Delhi 1984' she says thus-

'The turbans were unwound, the long limbs  
Broken and bunched to seem like faggots  
.....

..... No breast was left  
Unfondled, no ripe pubis overlooked,  
As terror, fleet of foot, did rampage  
The sedate suburbs, while in the queen's  
Funeral pyre the embers lay cooling.'

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 36)

In the poem 'An Introduction' Kamala Das projects the marginalised position of woman in politics, the main power structure -

"I don't know politics but I know the names  
Of those in power, and can repeat them like  
Days of week, or names of months,"

(Only The Soul Knows How To Sing, 96)

About the projection of woman in these lines, K. Satchidanandan says -  
"The opening statement, 'I don't know politics' has an ambiguous tone that comes from a woman's marginalised position in society. Outwardly it is a confession of ignorance, but it also conceals in it a potential irony as the society does not expect a woman to deal in politics. She is never the master in politics, only the victim; hence her knowledge of the names of those in power who have no content for her4."

Here Kamala Das warns the woman community that mere knowing the names

in politics is not enough, but they must play active role in politics, the main power structure, so that they can transform themselves from their position of victim to the position of a ruler. Kamala Das involves herself in active politics to serve the cause of secularism and suffering communities. But in male-centric Indian politics it is not easy task for a woman common by birth to be the decider or the most powerful in the ultimate game of power structure.

Thus Kamala Das's poetry can be studied as an account of 'subaltern anguish'<sup>5</sup> what Usha V.T. connects with her autobiography 'My Story'. It is seen that in her poetry Kamala Das refuses to be weak and submissive and tries to assert the voice of the marginalized communities. In her interview with Eunice de Souza, Kamala Das frankly says that she does not understand a word when in Germany a professor interprets one of her poems from post-colonial perspective<sup>6</sup>. It is clear that she is not a conscious post-colonial artist but what is striking is that with a hope to have some meaning in life she rises above her 'private voice' and associates herself with the suffering community, protests against marginalisation or dehumanisation or colonisation of women and other weaker sections of the society, condemns their meek submission and urges the suffering communities to revolt against any injustice or wrong done to them and to fight for their right and justice. Thus she tries to assert the voice of the subalterns in the society. It is understandable that the post colonial voice heard in the poetry of Kamala Das is only a by-product of her inward journey into her soul undertaken in search of her identity. She rises above her 'private voice' and fight for only their right. Her association with the marginalised sections gives her relief from her personal agony and thus she enjoys real meaning of life asserting her voice and identity with the suffering humanity.

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2. K. Satchidanandan, 'Transcending The Body', Only The Soul Knows How To Sing (Kottayam : D.C. Books, 1996), p13.
3. A.N. Dwivedi, Kamala Das And Her Poetry (New Delhi : Atlantic, 2006), pp8-9.
4. K. Satchidanandan, op. cit. p10.
5. Usha V.T. "One Woman's Autobiography : Kamala Das's My Story," Kamala Das A Critical Spectrum, ed. R Mittapalli and P.P. Piciuccio (New Delhi : Atlantic, 2001), p3.
6. Eunice de Souza, Talking Poems Conversations With Poets. (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2002), p39.

## **Chapter - V**

### **Conclusion**

The poetry of Kamala Das means exploration of the 'self' of a wounded woman. In her poetry, that 'self' is the protagonist who has been on a voyage either in its internal realm or external, existential or spiritual one. Her each poem is a heart-rending melancholic song of the wronged community, energized by anger and anguish. Her poems record the sad story of the wounded woman, her exploitation and humiliation, her mental sufferings, her lost self, her urgent willingness to rediscover it, her confrontations with so-called social norms and moral codes, her hunger for fulfillment of her physical and emotional needs, her aspiration for free development of spirit, her search for true love, and for an emotional bond, of search for her ideal lover Krishna, of her move from body to soul and then from soul to the supreme soul, the ultimate destiny. Kamala Das's poetry records a two-pronged journey of the 'self' of a marginalized woman undertaken with a view to rediscovering her lost self, uplifting it from its victim position and asserting her voice and identity and realizing the real meaning of life. As a result, the 'self' being explored expands into several directions and gets manifested in different forms giving subtlety to Kamala Das's thought process and unity to her poems as a whole.

The 'self', the poetic image in the poetry of Kamala Das, gets multi-dimensional colour in the tension between present and past, internal positive longings and external unfriendly forces and in uncertainties in future. It remembers

its happy, respectful, self-dependant, matrilineal past and contrasts it with authoritative, imperialist, disgraceful, patriarchal present. When the 'self' sees the 'endless pathways of the sky' and dreams of her own happy home and thinks about her own wishes, the patriarchal society declares that no longer she can bathe in the pond being naked. She comes in direct confrontation with the male made social rules and so called moral codes. She has to speak in a language, dress-up herself and behave as the society wishes. She can make a choice of nothing, even the man to be called her husband. She represents every woman who waits for the everyman to love and to be loved by. Ironically one day her father brings to her a new 'sarree' and a man to live with as her husband. And her 'self' gets itself crushed and feels so beaten in its first sexual encounter with her husband. She gets married to learn about her own self, but her husband makes her learn every lesson about him. Slowly and gradually she is made to forget her own wishes and aspirations, her dreams and feelings. The over-whelming male scent makes her feminine self dry. She loses her will and reason and becomes a dwarf leading a lifeless, painful life under the monstrous male ego of her husband. In fact she loses her own self, her own identity. So the 'self' sings the sad song of every woman living the life of martyrdom under the monstrous rules and agents of patriarchal society and wishes for an identity of her own. Naturally her feminine sensibility springs up and revolts against any sort of injustice done to her community.

The 'self' of Kamala Das, as projected in her poetry, is the self of a modern Indian Woman who is not born to satisfy the males, not born to suffer. She may not know the 'politics' but tries to understand the game of power structure and the ways the exploiter or ruler plays their roles to make somebody the victim. The sexual torture, exploitation and humiliation met at the hands of her own husband makes Kamala Das repulsive not only to her husband but to those men who are proud of their strong lust. That repulsion grows and gives birth to a revenge motif in her mind against sexual exploitation and colonisation of woman. So she decides to have an external voyage through her body. She lets her body to



be at the centre and pretends to have a 'grand flamboyant lust' with a view to making every lusty man her colony. So her physical hunger is only a means to mock at the unending lust of the males. She breaks the framework of marriage and knocks at the strangers' doors. They tie themselves only to the skin-communicated business and as expected they never try to go beyond it. To establish an emotional bond is not the concern of both the parties. For her, love becomes a swivel door and when one goes out, another comes in. But everyone's nature is the same and puts his back towards her after his lust is quietened. The autumn comes to her too early, and she misses the singing birds on her way. She finally realises that she is the sinner and the saint, the beloved and the betrayed. Her anger and anguish at mental and sexual exploitation and humiliation of her self or at the plight of the marginalised women is the point of focus in her poetry. Her each poem is the tale of woe of every suffering woman. Her anguish is the anguish of every marginalised woman whose spirit is not let to be developed freely. She feels belongingness to the colonised woman community. She revolts against all patriarchal canons, breaks the so called social rules and moral codes and makes males' body her colony in a protest against sexual colonisation of women. So her poetry cannot be called the glorification of sex and body, but is an apotheosis of the self of a colonized woman. Here Kamala Das representing the colonized woman community establishes another colony consuming males after males and thus behaves like a hard headed feminist. However, her external journey in search of her own self through physical hunger results in her discovery of meaninglessness and uselessness of her self and such realisation leads her to listen to the voice of her soul and to have an inward journey to arrive at the ultimate reality of her self.

In her inward journey, undertaken with a view to searching for self-identity, Kamala Das rejects her body, its sexual hunger and travels through her inner self. She delves deeper and deeper into her own soul and tries to assert her identity. She throws away the trappings of lust which have taught her every lesson of self-betrayal. She travels closer to the soul that 'hide somewhere between the flesh

and the bone'. She understands futility of the body and realises that only the soul knows how to sing at the vortex of the sea. So Kamala Das takes the inward path, 'the longest route home' in search of her own 'self'. In her inward journey she goes back to her childhood days, she takes refuge in the soothing realm of her matrilineal past and recalls her happy memories with her grandmother. Then she discovers how her spirited self is suppressed and subdued and her woman-ego is hurt and crushed continuously and constantly by different unfriendly forces like her imperialist father, coloniser husband, exploiter and user strong pseudo-lovers, the so-called social rules and moral codes etc. She realises that these negative forces have consumed her 'self'. When she grows the society declares her physical maturity and makes her subject to brutal rules and moral codes only to subdue her spirit. Even her grandmother, who otherwise has been the source of love and affection for her, asks her not to bathe in the pond being naked. When she wants love without knowing what it really is, her father brings to her the first saree and also a man to be her husband. She wants love but receives only lust and finds her woman body beaten so badly. Under his monstrous male ego she loses her identity. So she revolts against all sorts of suppression and exploitation of her self. She urges the woman community to take part in politics and to be the leader in power structure. She asks the women not to lead the life of martyrdom under the monstrous husband but to live according to her own will. She appears here as a feminist who fights for the right of women and tries to uplift them from their victim position to a state where they can assert their voice. She speaks in her own language and leads her life on her own way. She rejects any predetermined role of a woman and breaks the wedlock. In the tension between lust and love she knocks at the strangers' door. But her tension grows because emotional bond is not their concern and each of them puts his back on her after his lust is fulfilled. The more she feels her body degenerating the more her mental self goes dry. She begins to believe herself a misfit everywhere. A tragic consciousness resulting from her sense of meaninglessness and uselessness in life develops in her mind. With a view to realising some meaning in life she listens to the voice of the

million and million people in her. She associates herself with the subalterns and raises their voice. She cries at the plight of her Nani, the servant, the poor old men lying in the wet pavement, poor babies dying of hunger, the poor eunuch, the Tamils in Sri Lanka, Fathema the diseased woman, the Sikhs in 1984 etc. and asserts her voice with the marginalised sections of the society.

Thus the poetry of Kamala Das is a search for the self of a wounded woman with all its varied forms lost or subdued in different juncture of life. She involves herself in a psychic and intellectual encounter with the patriarchal and colonial authority seeking a balance between her existential reality and her intellectual quest for meaning of life. In the tension between love and lust, past and present, expected and experienced ones, personal wishes and social codes etc. Kamala Das loses her identity in existential reality. She starts her journey from 'wounded ego' and lost-identity to the assertion of her ego and establishment of her personal identity. If her outward journey enables her to associate herself with the colonised women sex and to assert their voice by colonising and consuming the strong male's body with some authority; her inward journey lets herself to move from body to soul, from a few strangers to million and million voices within her and finally to develop oneness with all marginalised sections of the society and to assert her voice and identity with them. She revolts against the user, the ruler, the exploiter of not only the woman community but of all marginalized sections of the society irrespective of cast, creed, religion etc.

Thus it is clear that the patriarchal society with all its agents, socio-political ethical rules which are meant to suppress and not to let free development of the spirit of a woman is the author of the wound of the self of the woman. She becomes gender conscious and repulsive towards male community. She makes males' body her colony and consuming the strong males one after another she appears a hard headed feminist but sustains not for a long time. Representation of the colonized women community and assertion of their voice give her some meaning of life. Soon autumn falls and she realizes the futility her journey through body and takes a turn from body to soul. She wants women empowerment through

their involvement in politics and decision making. Of course her longing for a total merger with Krishna shows her feminine consciousness in Indian cultural context and takes her away from the ideology of feminism. Further in her longing for a love beyond flesh Kamala Das swims in the great blue sea beyond the body and discovers herself on the verge of a love, the greatest of all and hopes for the establishment of her identity with the Supreme Soul. Here her feminine consciousness takes a touch of spirituality. On the other hand the physical journey through body consuming the males one after another finally gives birth to a sense of uselessness and meaninglessness in her which leads her to take a turn from gender identity to suffering humanity with a view to realizing real meaning of life. But her oneness with all the marginalized sections of the society is quite temporary and not a sustained one. Thus Kamala Das can neither be called a feminist nor a conscious post-colonial artist. She reads her socio-political cultural realities with her strong feminine consciousness and finally taking a turn from gender identity to suffering humanity she appears a strong female voice championing human cause rather than a feminist.

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