



## Plight of Indian Women as Sketched in the Poetry of Kamala Das

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**ABSTRACT:** *Kamala Das displays feminist ethos in her poems. She is confessional poet, dauntless and audacious in expressing the prejudices prevailing in society against women. Her poems present her fearless voice in condemning the inequalities and injustice in the treatment of society towards women. As a poet she considers it her duty to report every detail in real life faithfully. Renaissance in modern times began with the abolition of Sati System in Indian society in 1853, but tragically even today women are treated as an object without their own identity. The control of women is still in the hands of men and this male chauvinist society still holds the right to restrict her to the four walls of house. Psychological, social and cultural proscriptions have unleashed tremendous amount of miseries and hardships to them. The present paper studies the pitiable and deplorable condition of women in the light of feminism as echoed in the works of Kamala Das.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The journey of Indian literature commences from the social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy who protested firstly against the exploitation of woman and advocated the rights of press in his writings as well as actions and movements. According to M. K. Naik, Roy wrote A Defense of Hindu Theism which was 'the first and original publication in the history'. Born on 22nd may 1772 he was the torchbearer of social reforms for the women. He was strictly against the evils prevalent in society in his time. He was against the practice of Sati and helped to abolish it and it was due to his efforts that Lord William Bentinck banned the custom of Sati in 1829. Though this law was not a great deterrent but it changed mindset of people to some extent. Ram Mohan Roy also did great work in the field of women's education. He was against child marriage and favored widow remarriage. He married a widow thus setting the example for the whole society.

Along with 'Dwarka Nath Tagore' he founded the "Brahmo Samaj" for the reform of Indian society and emancipation of women. Later on Henry Derozio (1808-31) who wrote first original poetry in English was less social conscious but more patriotic. Derozio and Kashiprasad set the tone for the love of India which was followed by Toru Dutt, R.N. Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, M.M. Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Kashiprasad Ghosh and many more. 'The third quarter of 20th century has seen the further strengthening of modernist as well as new symbolist's trend. But few poets cum social reformers protested against the social evils and ills that had taken birth in the medieval age. Post independence Indian English poetry is genuine because it is deeply felt and addressed to the whole community; Indian situations form a vital part of it. In fact, these 'Indian Situations' of post-independence period which were full of struggles, sufferings, protest of new India against the age old dogmas and customs and traditions which have already lost their grace, sanction and hold on society in the medieval ages, were responsible for giving birth to 'protest' - a voice which discard all the vices present in the society. These societal changes are loudly audible in the work of Kamala Das.

In fact her poetry highlights and condemns the inequalities and injustices in the treatment of women- the disadvantages women have to bear on account of their gender. Feminine Sensibility has been identified in the poems of Kamala Das. She suffered a lot in the society of traditions and conservative outlooks and her life of sex with her husband was lacking vitality. Her husband, much more advanced in years than her used her as "laboratory" in the matter of sex, and therefore, her womanhood cried out. She represents a common woman of Indian society who goes through the same heinous experiences in her life. Thus Kamala Das writes on her particular life and transform it into a universal, allowing female readers the ability to identify with her. According to her both man and woman should get equal chance to get their individuality.

### II. DISCUSSION

An Introduction, a poem included in Kamala Das's first volume of poetry, *Summer in Calcutta*(1965), poignantly displays how patriarchy-dominated society has always tortured women. Even if she opts for male clothing to hide her femininity, the guardians enforce typical female attire, with warnings to fit into the

socially determined attributes of a woman, to become a wife and a mother and get confined to the domestic routine. She is threatened to remain within the four walls of her female space lest she should make herself a psychic or a maniac. She confesses "Then ... I wore a shirt and my brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored my womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl, be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook, be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh, belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit on walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows."(1)

In India women are still restricted to do the household chores. Women of India have been living in the culture of silence through the centuries. They have remained mute spectators to their exploitation, oppression and barbarity against them. They do not have any control over their own bodies, earnings, and lives. They are even not free to wear according to their choices. In fact the so called civilized and honoured group of male individuals still restrict female in the selection of their dress. Thus through her dauntless fervor Kamala Das states the pitiable and pathetic condition of women in Indian society. Kamala Das's poetry marks a significant phase that the feminine poetic consciousness of India has reached in its development. Dr. Konnur rightly points out when he says,

"Kamala Das' autobiography clearly shows how her urge for identity and liberation finds its fulfilment in the superimposition of her poetic self over the domestic self which compelled her to play the monotonous and enslaved role of a wife."(2) They are one among the worst sufferers of socio-cultural, political and economic exploitation, injustice, oppression and violence. Their woes and miseries are boundless. They do not enjoy any social security As Kamala Das said-

"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."(3)

Violence against women in India has never been uncommon phenomenon. Women in the Indian society have been victims of humiliation, torture and harassment as one can observe from written records and newspaper reports. Kamala Das too have experienced the same though she was victim of psychological and mental stress. H.M. Williams call it "a witty and moving apologia which with economy, deftness and artful simplicity is both a vivid self- analysis and a poignant assertion of her individuality against social and cultural conformity."(4) In her poems there is a note of protest and resentment at the lustful exploitation of woman. The tension in man- woman relationship, the inadequacy of love and intolerable sexual tyranny enable the poetess to protest against sexual subjugation. She yearns for liberation-

"Must seek at last  
An end, a pure total freedom it must will the mirrors  
To shake and the kind night to erase the water" (5)

She has lost her identity in the presence of the domineering male and craves for liberty as

"Cowering  
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and  
Became a dwarf." (6)

Poems of Kamala Das epitomize the dilemma of the modern Indian women who attempt to free her sexually and domestically from the role bondage sanctioned to her by the patriarchal society so Kamala Das has portrayed the true picture of changing Indian society.

### III. CONCLUSION

Thus Kamala Das has truly reflected the societal changes in context of the living and psychological conditions of women in the society. In fact she not only draws forward the deplorable condition of women in society but she also raises her voice for demanding equal human rights for them. Kamala Das dared to reveal the changing attitude of women in the society. She audaciously and boldly faced all the criticism that came on her way, but as a true literary figure she started demanding rights of women in this patriarchal society.

It is being felt that sincere and honest efforts are urgently required for the improvement in women's status. The vast untapped power of women needs to be utilized fruitfully to make this earth a better place to live in. Nonetheless, poet Eunice de Souza claims that Das has "mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms."(7) Das has ventured into areas unclaimed by society and provided a point of reference for her colleagues. She has transcended the role of a poet and simply embraced the role of a very honest woman. Kamala Das tried her best to uplift the position of woman and thus resist the dominance of man.

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