

Challenges and New Directions in Kamala Das' Poetry**Dr. A. D. Akhade**

Associate Professor, Department of English, G.T. Patil College, Nandurbar.

Article Received: 30/09/2025**Article Accepted:** 29/10/2025**Published Online:** 31/10/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.10.532**Abstract:**

Feminist writing in India flourished in the postmodern period. Many women writers have emerged in recent decades, but not all of them are feminist in the sense that feminist critics assume. On the other hand, there are male writers, such as Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, who employ feminist writing in the sense that their literature is grounded in feminist principles. This is the criterion that those literary works are called feminist literature that advocate for the right of equality for women, which would save their honor from the male-dominated condition of society. It doesn't matter whether the writer is a man or a woman. To be a feminist, the writer is expected to advocate for women's rights as human beings with an objective approach. Kamala Das's poems are autobiographical. So there is a deep sense of feminine experience of social treatment of women. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Kamala Das is representative of the feminist class (of women).

Objectives

- i. To observe social attitudes towards women (especially men's attitudes towards women).
- ii. To trace women's search for love.
- iii. To trace women's resistance against traditional attitudes.

Hypotheses

- i. The society (especially men) considers women secondary.
- ii. Women are disappointed with their relationships with men.
- iii. Women's search for everlasting peace and self-existence.

Methodology

The paper studies select poems, An Introduction, The Seashore, The Latest Toy, The Freaks, The Conflagration, and The Prisoner, of Kamala Das. problems related to women are discussed and analyzed with references to the poems.

Introduction

Kamala Das is a well-known poet for her writing with boldness. Her poetry is personal. It depicts man's approach to woman, and the dejected woman in Das's poetry rebels in search of her identity and freedom. The woman in Kamala Das's poems plays various roles as a daughter, a sister, a wife, and a mother, but the identity of a woman is not determined by these roles in Das's poems. Her (woman's) identity is first revealed as a woman, and then

they are associated with their various roles.

The researcher has selected some poems of Kamala Das to trace the challenges that women face in society. Men consider them as objects. The researcher also explores how Das's poetry speaks against this attitude of men.

Significance of Love and Sex Theme

Kamala Das's poetry seems sensual on the surface, but the poetess's mind travels from the physical level to the spiritual. She does not find peace in bodily pleasure. She finds herself inferior to man, neglected by him, and frustrated by him. So, it makes her contemplate her loneliness and death. She is a representative of the women's class that represents women's sufferings. In An Introduction, she writes:

.... 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....

The Patriarchal Attitude towards Women

Indian patriarchal attitude towards women is conspicuous to note. Kamala Das's writing is taken here for consideration in reference to the women in Indian society. Patriarchal society in India has underestimated the importance of women. Actually, the root of this is in the traditions (patriarchal assumptions) granted by men (and accepted by women blindly) from ancient times.

In the poem "An Introduction", we find men's attitude towards women. Men think of women as inferior to men. So they expect them to be subjected to men. They do not think women should live the way they like. They think that whatever they think about women is for the good of society. So they interfere in women's personal lives as in An Introduction.

Don't write in English, they said,

English is not your mother tongue.

In the above lines, we see that Kamala Das wants to express her feelings in the English language, but the patriarchal system forbids her to use English (a foreign language) under the name of patriotism.

Parents' eyes are on every movement, behavior, and change in the body of their daughter. They become worried as their daughter grows up. So they warn her as in An Introduction.

I was child, and later they

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

Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair.

When the poetess ignores her womanliness, the traditionalist society defines, the advocates of the traditions order her to be a good housewife in An Introduction.

.... Dress in saris, be girl,

Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,

Be a quarreler, with servants, fit in.

The patriarchal system bans the freedom of women. They have tried to treat women slavishly.

.... Don't sit

On the walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.

Be Amy, or be Kamala or better

Still be Madhavikutty.

A woman is considered a medium of sexual pleasure. She is taken as a toy that has no feelings. So, it is expected as in An Introduction.

Don't cry embarrassingly loud when

Jilted in love....

The woman in the poem, The Latest Toy, accuses her lover of treating her like a toy.

It was indeed awkward for him

When the latest toy

Began to speak after the day's best

Games were over.

Man's ego does not permit him to devote himself to a woman with a heart full of love. His ego is mightier than love. Like a sword in the sheath, man is tightly fitted in its ego.

Anywhere and

Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself

I; in this world, he is tightly packed like the sword in its sheath.

The woman in Kamala Das' poem is disappointed and frustrated in search of love. She can't find the love in a man that would satisfy her heart forever. Man disappoints her with his lustful treatment, as in the poem The Seashore.

Not knowing what

Else to do, I kiss your eyes, dear one, your lips like,

Petals drying at the edges, the burnt cheeks and

The dry grass of your hair, and in stillness, I sense

The tug of time, I see you go away from me.

And feel the loss of love I never once received.

Trying to find love, a woman comes close to a man. The man who has a hunger for a woman's body cannot give her the satisfaction of love.

.... while our minds

Are willed to race towards love;

But they only wonder, tripping

Idly over puddles of

Desire. Can this man with

Nimble finger-tips unleash

Nothing more alive than the

Skin's lazy hunger?

Rejection of the Patriarchal system

In the poems of Kamala Das, women do not accept the traditional female role determined by the patriarchal system of society. Women in her poems are bold to make their own decisions, to express their personal choices, and to do as they think is good for them. They are also ready to face the results that would be produced by their custom-breaking behavior.

A man is just attached to the body. A woman tries to seek release, as there is no place for love. This is expressed in Kamala Das' poem The Prisoner.

As the convict studies

His prison's geography

I study the trappings of your body, dear love,

For I must someday find

An escape from its snare.

As a woman is disappointed in life with her life-mate and is frustrated by his pitiless, lustful treatment, she finds herself smothered under a man's suppression. Her smothered self tries to be free. In the poem *The Conflagration*, the woman in Kamala Das feels that having a physical relationship without love is wasting her life.

Woman, is this happiness, this lying buried

Beneath a man? It's time again to come alive

The world extends a lot beyond his six-foot frame.

New Directions in Feminist Writing

Boldness in expressing women's psyche in Kamala Das' poems is a new direction in feminist writing in India. Whatever Kamala Das thinks and feels as a woman, she expresses it with frankness. There was a time when women couldn't dare to express their emotions openly. Women were pathetically suppressed under the patriarchal system of society. So, it was not easy for Kamala Das to express her feminist feelings in literature. To make a new path in the old patriarchal system, one would have to face that system bitterly. Those who attempt to make a change in the old traditions are taken as harmful to society. Naturally, such selfish people, who benefit from that patriarchal system, torture the writer who writes against them.

Conclusion

Kamala Das writes about the relationship between a man and a woman. Her autobiographical note runs through her poems. She herself was disappointed in her married life, which we find in her poems. Her experience of man is as a pitiless, lustful, egoistic, selfish, and domineering man. In her search for love, she is disappointed by her husband/lover. Then, feeling frustrated and lonely, she tries to search for the 'essential woman'.

There are many problems to be solved concerning women. Here, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the problem of the relationship between man and woman is greater than all other relationship problems. If the man can understand the psyche of the woman, he will satisfy them by treating their womanliness properly. If men succeed in understanding the psyche of women, the problems related to relationships will be easy to solve.

References:

Dwiwedi A. N. *Kamala Das and Her Poetry*. Doaba House: New Delhi. 1983.

Sharma R. R. *Feminism and Post-Feminism*. Bhaskar Publication: New Delhi. 2012.

Das, Kamala. *Select Poems: An Introduction, The Seashore, The Latest Toy, The Freaks, The Conflagration, The Prisoner*, etc.