
Poetic Techniques and Imagery of Marital Conflict in Kamala Das's Poetry

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Published by Infogain Publication.

Article Received: 13/05/2026

Article Accepted: 16/06/2026

Published Online: 17/06/2026

DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.06.323

Abstract:

Kamala Das has a niche in Indian English poetry because she stated so frankly the female experience, emotional vulnerability and opposition to male standards. Marital conflict, which she does not depict as a personal failure but as a highly social and psychological conflict largely based on gender inequality is one of the most recurrent themes in her poetry. In this paper, the poetic elements and images that Kamala Das has used to bring out marital conflict are explored with specific reference to her confessional voice, the use of diction, imagery, symbolism and structural innovations. The analysis of the chosen poems like An Introduction, The Looking Glass, My Grandmother, House, and others shows that by means of a close textual analysis, the study will prove that Das manages to convert personal suffering into a strong poetic discourse. Marriage as an arena of emotional alienation, unfulfilled desire and identity crisis is shown in her poetry, and at the same time, poetry is provided as an option of resistance and self-assertion. This paper has held that the way Kamala Das addresses marital conflict can be seen as central to her feminist vision and contribution to the modern Indian English poetry.

Keywords: Kamala Das, marital conflict, imagery, poetic techniques, feminist poetry, confessional poetry

Introduction

One of the most significant speakers in Indian English poetry is Kamala Das (1934-2009), who in her poetry often used a confessional voice, was full of emotion and did not hesitate to explore the inner world of women. Das made waves in the literary circles she wrote in at a period when Indian women poets were in many ways supposed to uphold dignity and chastity, when she preempted the themes of female desire, marriage misery, solitude, and emotional infidelity. Among them, marital strife comes out as a common and a characteristic issue in her poems (King; Naik; Iyengar; Mehrotra; Gokak; Sharma).

Marriage, a sacred and satisfying institution, traditionally being romanticized in the Indian society, is frequently described by Das as a place of emotional turmoil and loss of identity. The myth of marital harmony is defied in her poems because it reflects the disproportionate power dynamics, emotional abandonment and subjugation of women in marriage. Das reveals marriage to be an emotionally claustrophobic environment that heightens the alienation of the woman instead of portraying it as a sanctuary and a place where one finds fulfillment (Singh; Raveendran; Beauvoir).

This research paper discusses how Kamala Das employs poetic techniques and imagery to portray the conflict in marriage. Instead of his use of narrative realism, Das uses metaphor and symbolism, fragmented syntax, confessional voice, and images to depict the psychological and emotional aspects of marital discord. Her poetry is her suffering as well as her self-assertion (Abrams and Harpham; Nair; Pandey).

Confessional Poetry And The Representation Of Marital Conflict In Kamala Das

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The Autobiographical “I” And The Politics Of Selfhood

One of the most notable traits of the poems by Kamala Das is her use of the first-person pronoun that she uses consistently, i.e., the word I. This autobiographical I produces

an immediate direct contact between the speaker and the reader, erasing the gap in between poetic persona and lived life. In other poems like *An Introduction*, Das unashamedly reveals her own history, language identity, emotional vulnerability, and social resistance. The voice of the speaker is not apologetically personal as the cultural norm asks women remain silent about their personal lives, particularly about their experiences in the marriage (Das, *My Story*; Nair; De Souza; Patel).

In the introduction, the speaker explains her experience as a girl and a woman and emphasizes that her biological transformation is closely accompanied by social control, in this case, marriage: "swelled and one or two places sprouted hair" (Das, *Summer in Calcutta*). This text is an indication of how a female physical development is strictly checked and regulated within society. The beginning of womanhood is equated to being marriage ready, which makes the female body a venue of social anticipation. Marriage in this context is not a choice but a destiny that is thrust towards her in order to redefine the identity of the woman. The confessional style reveals the mental struggle that ensues when the selfhood is submissive to the social expectations of the roles involved in marriage (Das, *Summer in Calcutta*; Beauvoir).

Emotional Honesty And Female Vulnerability

The confessional approach by Kamala Das is characterized by the high level of emotional sincerity. In contrast to traditional forms of portraying marriage (that include persistence, sacrifice and silent suffering), Das reveals the lack of emotion, isolation and discontent of women in any marriage. Her poetry does not idealize marriage but rather is a place of emotional disinterest and unsuccessful desire (Nair; Patel; De Souza).

Through the expression of frustration and desire, Das criticizes the patriarchal system that a woman has to endure marital agony without a murmur. Her openness in expressing emotions makes intimate pain a political and social statement. By so doing, she makes herself consistent with an ethos of feminism that cherishes the emotional truths of women and their subjectivity. This weakness in her poetry is not the weakness because it turns into the strength and the opposition (Choudhury; Beauvoir; Showalter).

Diction And Language: Simplicity, Shock, And Subversion

Kamala Das makes every word choice very simple, conversational, and sometimes shocking. She does not indulge in descriptive or fancy words, but is straightforward with her statement that reflects the crude nature of her feelings. This stylistic decision is very important in describing the conflict within marriage as it enables emotions to look raw and direct (Pandey; Abrams and Harpham).

Plain Language And Emotional Depth

The language Daisy uses is very simple which adds the emotional touch to her poems. Love, hunger, skin, loneliness, and silence are words used repetitively creating a

vocabulary of deprivation of emotions. These words are repeated to indicate how dissatisfaction in marriage is unresolved. The emotional suffering is simpler and closer because of the lack of complicated metaphors and higher language (King; Nair).

Breaking Linguistic Norms

Das tends to destroy the grammar and trite syntax, forming disjointed and disproportional lines. This language defiance is an echo of the emotional discontinuity of the speaker in marriage. The interrupted flow of the language indicates the internal disintegration, tension, and conflict in the mind. Through this, language as such is brought to play as means of marital conflict being enacted and experienced (Pandey; Abrams and Harpham).

The Body As A Site Of Marital Conflict

Bodily imagery is one of the most prominent elements of the poetry by Kamala Das. Marital conflict, desire and alienation are experienced and expressed in the body which has become a central location. In contrast to traditional types of representations that glorify physical intimacy in marriage, Das introduces the body as the place of vulnerability and exploitation (Raveendran; Gilbert and Gubar).

The Female Body And Desire

In poems such as *The Looking Glass*, Das portrays the female body as an object of male desire within marriage, often stripped of emotional significance:

“Gifthimall,

Gifthimthescentof

Longhair,themuskof

Sweat between the breasts” (Das, *The Descendants*).

The issue of imperative makes it very clear that women are expected to fully sacrifice themselves in marriage. This gift-giving, however, is an unrequited and one-sided one. The woman is also struggling with needs that are not emotional in character and physical intimacy has become a point of exhaustion and resentment, instead of satisfaction (Raveendran; Singh).

Marital Conflict And Emotional Alienation In The Poetry Of Kamala Das

The poetry of Kamala Das offers a vision of marriage as a harmonious relationship rather than a very conflictual emotional place full of alienation, silence and the lack of fulfilled desires. She reveals the difference between physical intimacy and emotional attachment through a confessional mode that emotional attachment does not always serve to give emotional satisfaction to women through the relations in marriages. Her poems turn the personal experience into a national commentary on the issue of patriarchal marriage, where emotional deprivation is an order of the day in the life of a woman (Singh; Choudhury; Das, *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*).

The Body As A Site Of Alienation

In the works of Kamala Das, even in marriage physical proximity does not result in emotional intimacy. The body often becomes an object of alienation instead of the means of comfort or connection. This is not because the physical presence of the speaker and her husband can lead to emotional understanding or affection. Instead, the body acts as the reminder of the emotional barrenness and desire without any answer. The collapse of marriage as a means to fulfill emotional and psychological needs of the speaker is brought out through this disjunction. The body that is traditionally linked to love and sexual closeness turns into a symbol of the isolation that makes the speaker even more lonely in the marital relationship (Raveendran; Singh).

Domestic Space And Emotional Confinement

The Das poetry that relates to marriage is directly linked with household areas including the house, bedroom and drawing room. Such spaces, rather than of warmth or safety, tend to be images of emotional imprisonment. This makes the home environment to be restrictive which promotes the entrapment of the woman. The claustrophobic quality of the rooms and the interiors indicates the psychological suffocation that the speaker goes through. It is not the emotional health that is fostered, but domesticity turns out as a tool of containment that restrains the liberty of the woman, her desires, and self-expression. In these depictions, Das is able to criticize the conventional belief in the innate comfort that women are supposed to find in marriage and home (Singh; Beauvoir).

Home As A Prison

The home that is portrayed in the poetry of Kamala Das often looks more of a prison than a home. The domestic area has strict positions of the woman, diminishing her identity to the wife. This limitation stifles her emotional development and kills her individuality. The monotonous character of the domestic life makes the feeling of stagnation and hopelessness even greater. The house is the place where the wishes of the woman are disregarded and her voice is silenced, which is a manifestation of an emotional asymmetry of the relationship between the partners (Singh; Showalter).

Silence Within Domesticity

The theme of silence is also another motif in the marriage life depicted by Das. The inability to communicate on a deeper level between husband and wife makes the difference between them and their misunderstanding even deeper. Silence is used symbolically to refer to the repressed feelings and implicit pain of the woman. In marriage the woman has to tolerate pain silently without demonstrating anger and dissatisfaction. This imposed silence strengthens her marginalisation and isolation of emotions. Das employs silence as a solid metaphor of the oppression whereby lack of dialogue leads to the disintegration of emotional intimacy (Choudhury; Showalter).

The Imagery of Nature and the Landscape of Emotion.

Kamala Das often uses nature as a way of portraying the emotional situation of the speaker. The sea, the moon, rain and night are metaphors of internal storms, desire and emotional instability. These pictures of nature give a release to the restricted domestic setting and the emotions of the speaker can be more than the scope of marriage (King; Das, Summer in Calcutta).

The Sea As A Metaphor

Das is a poet who has the sea playing an important role in his poems as the image of depth, restlessness and uncontrollable emotion. Within the framework of marital conflict, the sea is regarded as a reflection of the emotional conflict and unfulfilled wants of the speaker. Its grandeur and motion is contrasted with the small stagnant room of marriage life. The sea symbolizes freedom, intensity and emotional truth, which emphasized the lack of balance between the inner world and the real world of the speaker (Das, Summer in Calcutta; King).

Moon And Night Imagery

Das uses moonlight and night motifs in his poetry, which use them to depict loneliness, introspection, and increased self-awareness. Night turns into a place in which the speaker is facing her emotional sufferings and recalls her unmet desires. Compared to the everyday household world where routine and anticipation control the day, it is in the night that solitude and self-realization is possible. These pictures help to stress the emotional alienation of the speaker, as well as provide the area where the speaker can explore themselves (Das, The Descendants; Raveendran).

Hunger and Thirst as Figures of Emotional Denial.

As symbols of emotional and psychological deprivation, hunger and thirst reoccur in the poetry of Kamala Das. Although the speaker is physically close to her husband, she is still emotionally starved. Hunger is a representation of un-met emotional and sexual need, which strengthens marriage as a state of continuous aching and dissatisfaction. The fact that hunger persists only highlights the fact that there is no real emotional feeding in the marital relationship and thus the marriage relationship is a place where the basic emotional needs go unfulfilled (Raveendran; Singh).

Dumb, Spoken, and Poetic Resistance.

One of the main conflicts in the poems of Das is the conflict between the silence and voice. Women are usually expected to remain silent in marriage and this pushes down any feeling and individuality. It is into poetry that this silence is disturbed. By using her confessional tone, Das expresses feelings that cannot be allowed to manifest in marriage. The very process of writing turns into opposing the rules of a marriage and society. Das reinvents herself and makes her emotional truth by turning her personal pain into communal manifestation (Nair; Showalter).

The Feminist Consciousness and Marital Conflict.

Even though Kamala Das had not specifically identified herself with feminist movements, her poetry speaks of a strong feminist awareness. Her portrayal of marriage struggle reveals the patriarchal systems of power that do not serve the needs of women emotionally. The marriage is characterized by unequal power relationships where the husband is emotionally detached and the wife is the one who has to endure emotional workload. Such imbalance causes resentment, identity crisis and burnout. It is the fight of the woman to be self-asserted against the marital roles she is supposed to play that becomes both the focus of poetic vision of Das (Choudhury; Beauvoir; Showalter; Gilbert and Gubar; Kolodny; Tharu and Lalita; Walker; Rao).

Technique Structure and Free Verse.

The use of free verse is a stylistic choice that Kamala Das makes on purpose and it fits her thematic interests. The poetry lacks strict order indicating her opposition to the restriction and emotional liberation. Jagged lines and non-rhyme are reflections of psychological instability and emotional struggle. The poem itself is structured in a way that the tension it talks of is placed in practice, supporting the theme the author is illustrating in terms of marital strife (Abrams and Harpham; King; De Souza).

Closer Interpretation of Selected Poems.

In his introduction, Das introduces a manifesto of self and resisting. Marriage is also represented as one of the numerous forces that are trying to define and limit the speaker. The confident tone and the confessional style is an indication of not being suppressed. The mirror imagery in *The Looking Glass* shows that marriage is/was erased, but this erasure is psychological: the erasure of emotions. *My Grandmothers House* plays the contrast on the emotional security of the past and the loneliness of the present, which indirectly focuses on alienation in marriages (Das, *Summer in Calcutta*; Das, *The Descendants*; Nair; Pandey).

Conclusion

The poem by Kamala Das is a radical and unsparing examination of matrimonial disharmony by the confessional means. Through autobiographical voice, imagery, symbolic language, and free verse, she introduces marriage as an institution that is emotionally rich and usually repressive. Her poetry turns individual pain into poetry and feminist action. The conflict of marriage in the work of Das is a wider social reality that contradicts the conventional notions of love, marriage and femininity. Kamala Das and her emotional truth expressed without any fear can be considered a strong force that will continue speaking in the Indian English poetry forever (King; Choudhury; Singh; Raveendran).

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