



## STYLE AND THEMES IN POETRY OF KAMALA DAS

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**Abstract:** Das explores powerful themes of feminism/equal rights, freedom, and marriage in 'An Introduction'. This poem is a very clear feminist statement that advocates for free choice for all women. This is in regards to every aspect of life, but the poet puts a special emphasis on marriage. She compares and contrasts the roles of men and women in society and explains for the reader how her life, the rules she's forced to obey, infringe on her freedom. Readers should be able to ask themselves while moving through the poem how, if at all, the things Das is talking about apply to their own life. If nothing matches up, they might ask themselves why and if some kind of unaddressed or unacknowledged privilege is making their lives better.

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### Introduction:

Kamala Das is one of the most original Indo- Anglican poets. Her poetry is the poetry of introspection and self-analysis. She has made a mark as a female Indo- Anglican poet. She has achieved greatness as a poet not only because of the contents of her poems but also because of her technique of writing poetry. She has certainly made a name for herself by virtue of her craftsmanship.

A command of the English language is naturally the first requirement of an Indo- Anglican poet. Kamala Das's command over English language deserves to be admired. This command has duly been recognised by most of the scholars. She has a vast range of vocabulary. She understands the precise meanings of words. She can differentiate between the shades of meanings. We may take any poem by Kamala Das, and we shall find evidence of her command on the English language.

One of the stylistic devices employed by Kamala Das is the frequent repetition of words, lines and even sections of a poem. It emphasizes an idea or an emotion. Repetition of words works well in the poem 'Substitute'. This is a device that reminds us of D. H. Lawrence and Dylan Thomas.

Some critics are of the view that Kamala Das is not a perfect artist in the use of the English language or in her craftsmanship. According to them much

of her poetry is marred by her omission of punctuation marks. Due to this her poetry becomes difficult for the average reader. In the technical sense, her poems are extremely irregular and often bewildering. But this is not true to the poetry of kamala Das. **CONCLUSION:** On the whole Kamala Das is a great poet. Her contribution to Indo- Anglican poetry will always be remembered. It is she who has made a new path for the female poets of India.

### Style of Kamala Das:

1. **Confessional Poetry:** Kamala Das is frequently linked to confessional poetry, a literary genre in which the poet shares their feelings and experiences in a close-knit manner. Her poems provide readers a very intimate and reflective journey by acting as a canvas for her deepest desires, thoughts, and struggles. In pieces such as "An Introduction," Das fearlessly challenges conventional norms and expectations, showcasing her unabashed identity.
2. **Free Verse and Conversational Tone:** Das uses free verse extensively, which enables her to stray from conventional poetic forms. Her poems frequently have a conversational tone that draws the reader in right away and reads like an honest discussion. In "My Grandmother's House," she

revisits her past in a nostalgic yet assertive manner, demonstrating this style.

3. **Sensuous Imagery:** Das's poems are known for their sensual and moving imagery. She creates a tangible atmosphere in her poetry by using sensory-rich, vivid descriptions that captivate the reader. She uses sensual imagery, for instance, in "The Sunshine Cat," to examine the complexities of physical intimacy and desire.
4. **Symbolism and Metaphor:** Kamala Das often relies on symbolism and metaphor to convey profound meanings within her poems. The use of symbols adds layers of interpretation to her work, allowing readers to engage with multiple levels of meaning. In "The Dance of the Eunuchs," she employs the metaphor of the eunuch dance to explore themes of gender identity and societal expectations.

#### **Themes in Kamala Das's Poetry:**

1. **Female Identity and Empowerment:** The study of female empowerment and identity is a major theme in Kamala Das's poetry. In "An Introduction," she challenges traditional roles and asserts her right to individuality as she battles the social constructs that are imposed upon women. The poem is a potent statement of feminist consciousness that promotes women's freedom from social conventions.
2. **Love and Desire:** Das frequently explores the theme of love in his poetry, both emotional and physical. Her investigation of desire is characterized by candor and a rejection of social norms. "The Sunshine Cat" explores the complexities of intimate relationships, expressing the intensity of desire and the fleeting nature of love through metaphorical language.
3. **Nostalgia and Cultural Identity:** Kamala Das often reflects on her cultural roots and the changing dynamics of society in her poetry. In "My Grandmother's House," she nostalgically revisits her ancestral home, invoking a sense of loss and a longing for a bygone era. The poem becomes a poignant exploration of cultural identity in the face of modernity.
4. **Critique of Patriarchy:** Das's poetry is marked by a fierce critique of patriarchal norms and the restrictive roles assigned to women. In "The Dance of the Eunuchs," she employs the image of eunuchs engaging in a dance as a powerful metaphor for breaking free from societal

expectations. The poem challenges conventional gender roles and advocates for a more inclusive and accepting society.

5. **Existential Angst:** Existential themes pervade some of Das's poems, reflecting a deep sense of existential angst and a quest for meaning. In "Forest Fire," she contemplates the transience of life, using the metaphor of a forest fire to explore the inevitability of change and the fleeting nature of human existence. The most outstanding and the most striking concern of Kamala Das as a poet is sexual frustration and the failure of marriage as a means of happiness in the life of a woman. The theme, namely the failure of a woman to achieve happiness through her sexual relationship with her husband and even through a similar relationship with other men, recurs in poem after poem by Kamala Das. Her poetry is largely autobiographical and confessional. The frustration resulting from total failure of her marriage and search for happiness through indiscriminate sexual relationships with other men constitute a very large component of her poetry.

#### **Her Husband's Shabby Treatment of Her**

The failure of her marriage has most vividly and candidly been described by Kamala Das in the poem entitled The old Playhouse. Addressing her husband in this poem, she bluntly reminds him that he had been allowing his saliva to flow into her mouth and had poured himself into every nook and cranny of her body. She points out to him that, although he used to call her wife, he had compelled her to live under conditions in which she felt almost suffocated. She accuses him of having been a most self-centred and egoistical kind of husband who had been tyrannizing over her till she become a dwarf, with all her will power and thinking power completely gone. The result of all his shabby treatment of her is that her mind has become entirely non-function like an old playhouse with all its lights put out. Towards the end of this poem she tells him that, although he had certainly been gratifying her lust and yearning for sexual pleasure, he had failed to give her the kind of love and affection which a woman expects from her husband.

#### ***The Want of Any Real Love or Affection in Her Husband's Attitude Towards Her***

In the poem entitled Ghanashyam, Kamala Das is addressing Lord Krishna and, in the course of this monologue, she speaks of the relationship between her husband and herself in terms of disappointment and frustration, saying that she had once played a husk-

game because her husband had needed her body to satisfy his lust for her and because, each time his lust had been satisfied, he used to turn his back on her to indicate that he did not want her any more that night. The consequence of her husband's lack of any real affection for her had led her to believe that, each time he had pressed his mouth against hers, she used to imagine that it was Ghanashyam in disguise who was making love to her. And, of course, there are several other poems too in which Kamala Das frankly and even bluntly speaks about total collapse of her conjugal life.

#### ***The Failure of Her Relationship with Other Men***

In the poem entitled in Love, she tells a lover that, although he had been gratifying her unending lust, he had never felt the kind of love which she expected from him. She describes his sexual desire for her as "this skin-communicated thing". In his relationship with her, she says, there had been no room, no excuse, and even no need for love, and that every embrace between them had been like "a finished jigsaw". In the poem entitled The invitation, Kamala Das says that her lover had been coming to her in the pauses or intervals of his office-work to make love to her, and that all her pleasure and his own pleasure too had been confined to their bed which, six feet long and two feet wide, had been a kind of paradise to them. Her sense of betrayal by him has now produced in her a desire to jump into the sea and first speaks about the sexual relationship between a man and a woman in general terms but towards the end of the poem she left her, never to come back. This is evident a reference to some lover's desertion of Kamala Das after desertion of her. There is a poem entitled Glass in which Kamala Das again expresses her feelings of disappointment and frustration, comparing herself to glass which is fragile and is easily shattered. A lover of hers had handled her roughly in bed drawing her to himself with lover's sense of urgency, and treating her like "an armful of splinters", designed to hurt her. At the end of all this, she had felt like a person who has misplaced her father faithless from her unemotional and lustful husband to Lord Krishna, thus turned trying to sublimate her love. In this connection the poem entitled Substitute is also noteworthy. Here she speaks of the anarchy of her sex-life, caused by her feeling of frustration with every lover with whom she had slept. In this poem her love, or to call it by its proper name, her lust had lured her into a situation comparable to a swivel-door through which one lover went out and another came in.

#### ***In her Marriage, a Disaster***

In connection with her marriage, the poem entitled The Freaks and The Sunshine Cat are also

noteworthy. In the former poem Kamala Das says that although she had lived for many years with her husband, she had found no love in this relationship. At the end of the poem she calls herself a freak who flaunts, at times, a grand, flamboyant lust. In the second of these poems, she nor describes her husband as a selfish and cowardly man who neither loved her nor used her properly, and who was a ruthless watcher of the sexual act which she performed unscrupulously with other men. Her husband had been treating her so callously that ultimately the streak of light, which had looked like a yellow cat, became so faint, because of the onset of winter, as to look like a "hair-thin line". And as a consequence of his having held her as a kind of prisoner, she ultimately became a half-dead woman, of no use at all to any man. In the poem entitled My Grandmother's House, Kamala Das misses her dead grandmother and says that, having received no love from her husband, she now feels lost and has therefore to beg at stranger's doors to receive love, at least in small change.

#### ***Her Social Concerns and Two Other Themes***

Kamala Das has hardly any other concerns so far as her poetry is concerned. There are certainly two poems in which she tries to express her awareness of the social conditions in this country. One is a poem entitled The Flag which is about the Indian poor, and the other is entitled Sepia, dealing with the Indian rich. But both these poems are full, in the words of a critic\*, of clichéd observations and sentiments which cannot compare with the sharpness of other poets such as K. N. Daruwalla. An important theme in Kamala Das's poetry is motherhood, though she has again written only two poems on this subject. One of these poems is entitled Jaisurya which describes the glory of child – birth and expresses, in frank terms, her own feeling when she lay in the delivery-room, suffering from labour pains and waiting for the child to come out from the darkness of her womb into the golden light of the sun. Then there are two poems in which her grandmother is the central figure. One of them is entitled My Grandmother's House which opens with the words; "There is a house now far away where one/I received love. That woman died." The other poem is Blood and here, again, Kamala Das recalls her grandmother's house with its cracked walls and describes her grandmother as a really simple person, "fed on God for years" and proud of her ancient blood. Besides Kamala Das's sentimental and loving memories of her grandmother, the poem also expresses Kamala Das's sense of decay and death.

#### ***Her Spiritual Love for Ghanashyam or Lord Krishna***

Finally, there are the poems of Kamala Das's later phase of her poetic career. Ghanashyam has

already been mentioned: but there are other poems too . All these poems round the divine person of Krishna with whom Radha had fallen deeply in love .In these poems Kamala Das has tried to transfoem her lust into love and to exalt and glorify that love by dedicating herself to Ghanashyam or Lord Krishna .In other words, Kamala Das has outgrown her lust and has risen above the demands of her body ,thus imparting a spiritual quality to her love. We may regard there poems as representing her spiritual evolution ,and as expressing her devotion to Lord Krishna.

#### Selected Poems:

1. **“An Introduction”**: This poem serves as a manifesto for Kamala Das’s literary and personal identity. In it, she boldly rejects the labels imposed on her by society and declares her autonomy. The poem reflects her feminist stance, challenging the norms that confine women and proclaiming her right to self-expression.
2. **“My Grandmother’s House”**: Nostalgia and cultural identity take center stage in this poem as Das reflects on the home of her grandmother. Through vivid imagery and emotional recollections, she captures the essence of her ancestral roots and laments the erosion of traditional values in the face of modernity.
3. **“The Sunshine Cat”**: In this poem, Das explores the themes of love and desire with intense sensuality. The poem employs metaphorical language to convey the transient nature of love and the complexity of physical intimacy. It is a testament to Das’s unapologetic approach to the exploration of desire.
4. **“The Dance of the Eunuchs”**: Using the metaphor of the dance of eunuchs, Das critiques patriarchal norms and the limitations imposed on individuals based on gender. The poem calls for a breaking away from societal expectations and celebrates the possibility of liberation from oppressive structures.
5. **“Forest Fire”**: Existential contemplation characterizes this poem, where Das reflects on the impermanence of life. The metaphor of a forest fire serves as a poignant analogy for the inevitability of change and the fleeting nature of human existence. The poem captures a sense of existential angst and a search for meaning in the face of mortality.

#### Conclusion

The poetry of Kamala Das is a notable addition to Indian literature because of its bold examination of social conventions, vivid imagery, and confessional style. In poems like “An Introduction,” “My Grandmother’s House,” “The Sunshine Cat,” “The Dance of the Eunuchs,” and “Forest Fire,” Das explores themes of love, cultural nostalgia, female identity, empowerment, and existential reflection. The limitations of traditional poetry are challenged by her unreserved and honest approach to self-expression, giving readers a profoundly intimate and reflective experience.

Discuss the style and themes of the poems of Kamala Das with special reference to the poems- In “An Introduction,” Das bravely asserts her independence, rejecting social labels and fighting for women’s freedom from oppressive conventions. “My Grandmother’s House” is a melancholic look at cultural identity that captures the spirit of her ancestry while bemoaning the decline of conventional values. “The Sunshine Cat” deftly conveys the fleeting nature of love while delving into the sensuality of desire. “The Dance of the Eunuchs” is a powerful statement against patriarchal conventions, urging people to defy social norms. Last but not least, “Forest Fire” explores existential themes, reflecting on the transience of life and the certainty of change.

Discuss the style and themes of the poems of Kamala Das with special reference to the poems- Through her diverse themes and unique style, Kamala Das has left an indelible mark on the literary landscape, particularly in the realm of Indian poetry. Her work continues to resonate with readers, inspiring discussions on feminism, cultural identity, and the human condition.

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