



## **KAMALA DAS'S SIMPLICITY AND SPONTANEITY AS THE HALLMARKS OF HER POETIC DICTION AND VERSIFICATION: AN APPRAISAL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper establishes Kamala Das as a notable poet projecting simplicity and spontaneity as the hallmarks of her poetic Diction and versification and examines how such qualities get reflected in her poetical works.*

**Keywords :** *simplicity, spontaneity, poetic diction, versification, hallmark*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Poetry can be regarded as the foremost, novels all other creative arts. As dramas, prose-pieces, novels and short stories echo the feelings and emotions of their writers, so does poetry. It is not just a group of words, decorated for an external form. They too serve as vehicles poetic devices and techniques adopted by the poets serve this purpose. For a clear understanding of any poetry, a profound reading seems essential. Poetry invites the reader to probe into the deep-rooted ideas and thoughts. Kamala Das is one such poet – who invites the reader to probe into the deep-seated thoughts and feelings expressed in poetry.

Truly speaking, Kamala Das's treatment of the themes like love, lust and death express thought – provoking ideas, which are common to all men. It is clear that some specific event occasions a poem but she omits these matters. Nowhere, she unwraps her life and inner most feelings in a confessional way. Her world is both deeper and more intense. Reading her poetry may not be an availability, struggle but the only way to grasp the ultimate nature of

**T. SARAVANAPRIYA**

1P a g e



experience. She probed into the contents of her own mind to grasp the ultimate nature of experience.

Kamala Das is a confessional poet who outpours all her realistic experiences, her likes and dislikes, poetry appears to be an outlet for the suppressed frustrations and miseries. She expresses herself without inhibitions and she does it in a poignant tone. Universal significance can be acquired even from her poems. Almost in all her poems, she cries for women's liberalization. Her famine sensibility is manifested in her attitude to love, in the ecstasy she experiences in receiving true love and the agony which she feels when humiliated in it. By picturing the short-comings of her husband, she pleads new to respect women as a fellow human-being, who is not only flesh and blood, but also has a heart which yearns to be loved for her spirit. With surprising openness and honesty, Kamala Das unravels the mysteries of the finer sex. She affirms to a form of a life which is characterized by the unconventional and extremely modern point of view. Das's this form of life is truly reflected in her poetic practice.

Born in a Hindu Nair family which boasts of customary and traditional practices, she got married in the very early age of fifteen. She belonged to the Indian society, which is orthodox in its thinking and is dominated by male chauvinism. One of the major problems she encounters at the onset, is a meanwhile consciousness coming from a basically patriarchal group. Being a member of the subordinate group, Kamala Das reflects the environmental forces of this highly structural tradition within which she has to operate. Her powers have to be studied in this light. Das is a poet of feminine longings who desires to shatter the limitations laid around her. Her poetry reflects her restlessness as a women moving in the male-dominated society. She raises her voice against the male tyrannies in many poems.

Melancholy, romantic fervor and feeling for freedom are communicated in the poetry of Kamala Das. She published three volumes of poetry. They are **Summer in Calcutta** (1965), **The Descendents** (1967) and **The Old Playhouse and other poems**. Her poems appeared in various magazines and other anthologies too. Das's **Collected Poems: Volume: I** won a Sahitya Akademy Award in 1985. Kamala Das is not associated with any writer. She writes what she knows. There are not many to home English is as natural a medium of expression, as it is to Kamala Das. Her choice of English for her poems is a testimony to her greater mastery of that language than that of her mother tongue, Malayalam. Words which are outside the range of common use of an educated Indian, are employed by her. Writing her poetry in the free verse form, her style is characterized by the unconventional and extremely modern point of view.

No doubt, Kamala Das is the one who pictures her own experiences – joys and sorrows, likes and dislikes in the form of words. Since she is a confessional poet, her themes move around

**T. SARAVANAPRIYA**

2P a g e



a small circle. Love and lust and childhood memories are the human themes. Even though she herself never generalizes the themes, universal significance can be acquired from her poems. The poems bearing her personal themes reveal her feminine sensibility, in her roles as grand daughter, daughter sister, mother, wife and beloved. The theme of love and sex are central in almost all the poems of Kamala Das. In her three volumes of verse, there are a number of poems that breath an air of love and sexuality. Kamala Das wrote about her unhappy married life in **My Story**, and she transforms the same feelings in the form of poetry. Since she is a confessional poet, she moves around a small circle. In **My Story** emphasizing the validity of poet's pre-occupation with his own self, she writes:

*"A poet's raw material is not stone or clay;  
it is her personality. I could not escape  
from my predicament even for a moment" (p. 70).*

Kamala Das has written a few poems on decay, disease and death. Mostly in all the poems she considers death as a welcome relief from the clutches of her husband. She does not probe that with a poetic insight. Instead, she treats it as a reality which is common to all men. The poet expresses her desire when she fails to find true love, in the poem "The Suicide". She narrates all her miseries and frustrations and wishes to be freed from her husband. A pure love is necessary for a happy life; when she finds herself being rejected, she desires to die:

*O Sea, I am fed up  
I want to be simple  
I want to be love  
And  
If love is not to be had  
I want to be dead.... (The Descendants, 2)*

Kamala Das has written a few memorable poems on her childhood memories. They are associated with Nalapat House, her family home in Malabar and her grandmother whom she loved the most. Her family have symbolizes for the poet, love, innocence and traditional values. With the crumbling of the hold house and the death of her grandmother her own life of innocence and traditional values' crumbled. In "Composition", she writes:

*"Before the red house that had  
Stood for innocence  
Crumbled  
and other old women died..." (The Old Play House, 3)*



Kamala Das always aspired for the life of freedom. This idea is conveyed in pomes like “The Suicide”, the days she enjoyed swimming in the sea. “Punishment in kindergarten” and “To a Big Brother”, are notable among the poems describing her childhood memories. The poems dealing on this theme were also written with great pain because the futile relationship that prevailed between Kamala Das and her husband, forces her to recollect the happiness she enjoyed as a child. Simplicity and lucidity are the hall marks of Kamala Das’s diction. All superfluity is avoided and terseness and condensation achieved. Kamala Das is economical in her use of language but is never obscure. Using words from the common everyday vocabulary, she imparts them a new emotive significance. She carefully avoids the use of archaic, obsolete and grandiloquent words. These characterizes make her poetry easily understandable. As A.S. Dwivedi puts it, “it is hardly ever wrapped up in philosophical broodings or mystical abstraction”. (p.53).

Kamala Das is mainly guided by impulse and instinct in her hunt for precise and harmonious words. She expresses her feelings and emotions with minimum words. The choice of words, phrases and expressions render her poetry beauty and preciseness. In her well-known poem “An Introduction”, Kamala Das speaks out her mind concerning the use of language. She writes:

*“..... the language I speak  
Becomes mine, mine alone. It is half English,  
Half-Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest.  
It is human as a human, do it.  
you see?”* (The Old Playhouse, 26)

With great simplicity and clarity of expression, she beautifully lays bare her woman’s heart when she says in “Composition”;

*“What I am able to give  
Is only what your life is qualified  
to give.  
We are all alike a  
We women  
I our wrappings of hairless skin”* (The Old Playhouse, 6)

With the simplest words like ‘give’, ‘wrappings’, she creates a tone of utter sincerity and fidelity in the above times, the simplest and humblest words are enriched with meaning. Unlike other Indo-Anglian poets, Kamala Das writes in English with on easy command and skill. She achieves lyricism, inspite of her simple language. High sounding words are not



used for this purpose but only words from our everyday vocabulary. The poem “The Suicide” is a marvelous piece of lyricism and simplicity like the following lines:

*O Sea, I am fed up  
I want to be simple  
I want to be loved  
And  
If love is not be had  
I want to be dead....” (Descendants, 2)*

The repetition of the simple phrase, “I want to be” composes a musical tune, in the above lines. The last four lines have the rhyme scheme CCCC. In the words of A.W. Dwivedi, the device of repetitiveness, “suits the urgency of purpose and the velocity of emotion” in Kamala Das’s poetry. In “The Stone Age”, a whole of set of expression “ask me” has been repeatedly used:

*“Ask me, everybody, ask me  
What he sees in me, ask me why he is called a lion,  
A libertine, ask me the flavor of his  
mouth....” (The Old Playhouse, 51)*

The repetition of the expression reveals the poet’s discernment and the sorrow in her mind. This device has been used in other poems like “Drama”, “Substitute”, “Radha” and “Composition”. In “Substitute”, the link “It will be all right” is used in different contexts. The repetition of words suits her highly sensitive and extremely emotional nature.

Kamala Das has made effective use of epithets. In the short poem, “Lines addressed to a Devadasi”, the epithet “Silent Devadasi” occurs. A devadasi is placed in the name of religion. Das has made effective use of words also. In “The Old Playhouse”, the diction is charged with irony and pathos. Words like ‘fame’, ‘planned’, ‘swallow’, ‘hold’ and ‘long summer’ are used to heighten the emotional effect. The poem begins with a sharp note:

*“You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her  
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget..” (63)*

Kamala Das produces harsh and grating sounds as a means for expressing her discernment and dislike, again in the same poem. “The Old Playhouse”, when she narrates her husband’s behavior:

*“You dribbled spittle into my mouth, your poured,*

**T. SARAVANAPRIYA**

5P a g e



*Yourself into enemy nook and crunny, you embalmed  
My poor lust with your bitter- sweet juices” (The Old Playhouse, 1)*

The frequent use of the consonant sounds ‘b’, ‘d’ and ‘t’ in words like “dribbled” “poured”, “bitter”, “lust” and “embalmed” heighten the emotional effect. Moreover, ‘the frequent use of punctuations suggests the poet’s unwilling participation in the act of love (Radhman, 8). The arrangement of long and short lines can be found in such poems of Das as “Composition”, “Suitable”, “Radha”, “Luminol” and a few other poems.

The conclude, Kamala Das’s diction appears to be simple and her confessional poetry in anti-structural and anti-elegant. Simplicity and spontaneity are the hallmarks of her poetry.

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