

Kamala Das: A Writer Forged in Emotion and Language

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Abstract

Kamala Das, a poet renowned for her raw honesty and emotional intensity, carved her own path amidst societal constraints and personal struggles. This abstract explores the key themes that shaped her life and work. Das's childhood, marked by parental neglect and a yearning for connection, left an indelible imprint. It fueled her empathy for the marginalized and her defiant voice against injustice. From a young age, Das turned to poetry to express her unfulfilled desires and grapple with complex emotions. The "headless dolls" motif resonated with her sense of incompleteness and longing for wholeness. Das challenged societal norms, questioning feminine roles and advocating for women's autonomy. Her marriage, devoid of emotional intimacy, became a battleground against patriarchal expectations. Das's quest for love, initially idealistic, evolved into a yearning for genuine connection and emotional fulfillment. This exploration, often labeled "écriture feminine," transcended categorization and resonated with universal human desires. Despite societal disapproval and personal challenges, Das remained true to her voice. Her poems, infused with vulnerability and strength, continue to inspire readers with their unflinching honesty and emotional depth.

Keyword: Kamala Das's Childhood, craving for parental love, complex emotions, yearning for love

Introduction

Kamala Das, a courageous and honest poet, dared to express her desires and thoughts unabashedly, attracting both controversy and admiration. However, some find her openness unsettling, attributing it to either an inferiority complex or jealousy. They struggle to accept her assertive voice and directness, particularly regarding love. Nevertheless, despite their limited volume, Das's works stand out for their originality, authenticity, and unwavering honesty.

Kamala Das's writing breathes with raw emotion, capturing her desires, frustrations, sadness, and happiness with profound power. It's as inseparable from her as a dancer's movements are from the dance itself. This sentiment echoes Margaret Atwood's observation regarding female writers: "The rabbits they produce are only common rabbits after all; it is the hat that's magic." For Das, that "hat" is language, the conduit through which she fuels our curiosity by expressing experiences that might otherwise be inexpressible.

However, labeling this expression as "écriture feminine" – a distinctly female style – runs the risk of reinforcing unhelpful sexual categorizations. Nadine Gordimer reminds us: "By and large I don't think it

matters a damn what sex a writer is, so long as the work is that of a real writer." Das transcends labels; she simply is a "real writer."

The Shaping Forces of Childhood

In her autobiography, "My Story," Das sheds light on the emotional landscape of her formative years. Feeling neglected due to her parents' preoccupation, she describes both her and her brother being starved of the warmth and attention crucial for a child's development. This experience, marked by loneliness and a yearning for connection, undoubtedly left a deep imprint on her emotional being and artistic voice.

Talking of her father, she says, "He was not of an affectionate nature, so we grew up more or less neglected, and because we were aware of ourselves as neglected children in a social circle that pampered the young, there developed between us a strong relationship of love the kind a leper may feel for his mate who pushed him on a hand-cart when they went on their begging rounds.(MS.1,2)."

Here's a rephrased version of the text:

Kamala Das's use of the leper metaphor poignantly portrays the isolating nature of her loneliness. Loneliness can often lead to feelings of inadequacy or negativity, but for Das, it became a catalyst for strength and a powerful voice against injustice.

Kamala Das was deeply troubled by the way Indian children were treated in British schools. She found the humiliations and racial discrimination they faced to be unfair and barbaric, and they deeply wounded her pride.

One instance that particularly angered her was when her brother was bullied savagely at his European school. Unable to tolerate such injustice, she took action, even though her brother remained silent. In a defiant act against the colonial mindset of oppression, she scratched the bully's face, demonstrating her courage and unwavering opposition to cruelty and discrimination.

A sense of longing for deeper connection and recognition permeated Kamala Das's early life. Struggling to find true companionship, she poured her emotions into poetry even at the young age of six.

Her early poems focused on a poignant image: "dolls with no heads." This imagery evokes a deep sadness and a sense of something irreplaceable lost. The dolls become metaphors for experiences of incompleteness and a yearning for wholeness. While the specific meaning remains open to interpretation, it's clear that these headless dolls resonated deeply with Das's emotional state.

"I was six and very sentimental. I wrote sad poems about dolls that lost their heads and had to remain headless for eternity. Each poem of mine made me cry" (MS.8).

Here's a revised version of the text:

Kamala Das's poetry often explores themes of longing and loss, reflecting both a sense of deprivation and a yearning for joyful growth. Through her words, she bravely confronted the emotional impact of neglect. Poetry became a powerful outlet for expressing the raw emotions surrounding her unfulfilled needs and desires.

It's understandable that a lack of parental love can significantly impact a child's emotional development. While Das clearly craved her mother's warmth and affection, her needs remained unmet. This longing extended even to everyday figures like a "full-time maid," highlighting the depth of her desire for connection and care.

Defiance against Patriarchal Society

Even as a young child, Kamala Das recognized a sense of disconnection within her family. The strained relationship between her parents, marked by a lack of understanding, created a palpable absence of warmth and closeness. This distance likely left Das feeling a sense of longing and unmet emotional needs. Kamala Das, even as a child, exhibited a tendency to challenge social norms. This was evident in her willingness to address elders by name, which was typically considered disrespectful in her culture. She also admired boldness in others, and there are accounts of her expressing disapproval of her mother's perceived timidity.

She understood her timidity as she was born in a male dominated society where mantried his level best to establish his supremacy and sovereignty over woman. She wrote how her father had imposed on her mother his Gandhian principles immediately after betrothal and how he made her remove all her jewelry without even asking for her consent. After the wedding he made her remove all the gold ornaments from her person, all except the 'mangalasutra'. To her it must have seemed like taking to widow's weeds, but she did not protest(MS.4).

This was the pitiful predicament of women who held a lesser status than men. The ladies never once stopped looking to males for their sustenance. the notion of demonstrating against the unfairness inflicted upon them. "Domestic harmony" has thrived because of their submissive attitude, claims Kamala. Even if women possess more skills than men, they will still need to submit to patriarchal notions of gender roles and hierarchy and maintain their inferiority over males.

Her life took a new turn due to her father's authoritarian inclinations, when he arranged Kamala's marriage to Mr. Das, a considerably older man. Her greatest dislike was her father's strict methods. Her father and mother didn't seem to care about how she felt. She was so depressed, as she could no longer control her own life. Her parents and other family members had meticulously planned and mapped it out. She quickly got married, at the age of fifteen, to Mr. Madhava Das." Love for this fifteen-year-old was all poetry; to her it meant music, and moonlight, bird song and bed of roses, it was a beautifully sweet, intimate relationship between a man and a woman" (Harish 47).

The Pursuit of Love

She became more and more detached from her husband the more she yearned for emotional intimacy. She hoped her spouse would be nice, sensitive, and delicate. But she was deeply upset by his harsh and impolite actions. She imagined her partner to be unique and exceptional. However, she was completely deflated because he was an extremely insensitive and common man. She had such a strong sense of her deprivation that she sought her husband out as a surrogate parent, which in turn caused her to have several arguments.

The humiliation of being viewed as a servant and sexual object in the home emphasizes how weak the marriage is. Her spirit is in revolt against the absence of sincere bonding on an emotional and spiritual level. Regarded as an object of sex, "The requirement, she realizes with shock is to conform and to become domesticated to cater to the master, children and kitchen, and whenever necessary be on display as a showpiece" (Parmar 71).

A married woman's freedom is savored by her husband's ego. She longs to fly away from that situation and discover the hidden gems and mysteries of life. She is unhappy with her loss of personality and identity. Her desire is for genuine love. After being unable, to connect emotionally with her partner, her pursuit of unadulterated love turns into lust.

We never get what we expect out of life. Surprising and unexpected components are present. It takes guts and self-assurance to deal calmly with catastrophic circumstances. Women seek support from their male counterparts in the early stages of life since they lack this. They begin to support themselves as they go through life. This component is emphasized and seen as a feminist feature. Perhaps we should refer to it as the fundamental urge of survival rather than feminism.

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