



**Daffodil**  
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***Denial and Acceptance of Self: Study of Kamala Das's  
Selected Poems and "My Story"***

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## Letter of Approval

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To,

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Sub: Application for thesis report submission approval.

Dear Sir,

I have conducted the thesis entitled “Denial and Acceptance of Self: Study of Kamala Das’s Selected Poems and My Story” as a course requirement in my undergraduate degree. I have done my level best to work sincerely to cover all the aspects regarding the matter which I have been assigned.

I believe that this thesis has enriched both my knowledge and experience. I hope you will assess my report considering the limitations of the study. I will be highly grateful if you kindly accept my thesis. Your kind approval is solicited.

Sincerely yours,

*Sabikun Nahar Mim*

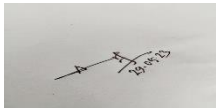
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## Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that Sabikun Nahar Mim, 192-10-2078, has completed her thesis under my supervision. Her work is authentic and it demonstrates the result of her own efforts. I approve the thesis and recommend its submission to the department for necessary action.



**Md. Ariful Islam Laskar**  
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## **Acknowledgement**

By doing the course "Thesis" a student connects with his/her theoretical knowledge to research fields. As a student of Bachelor of Arts in English at Daffodil International University, I consider myself fortunate that I get to go through the process of finishing my course curriculum.

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## ***Declaration***

I, Sabikun Nahar Mim, declare that the submitted research paper is my original work and has not been published elsewhere. I assume full responsibility for the accuracy, authenticity, and validity of the information and data presented in this paper. The research has been conducted with fairness, objectivity, and without any bias. I take full responsibility for its authenticity and agree that any form of plagiarism will result in disqualification.

*Sabikun Nahar Mim*

30-5-2023

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## **Dedication**

This paper is dedicated to my grandmother who has always been a path of guidance to me. She has dedicated many of the things of her life for me till now. Even if I dedicate this small book of my hardship, it can never be compared to her. This dedication only reflects the love and gratitude of mine toward her. As I have worked much for this research and have also gained and learned many things, all this might be impossible without her love and prayers for me. I always wish her good fortune and blessings of Allah.

## Abstract

Indian English poets are part of a glorious and long tradition of Indian English writing, which has 150 years long history. In Indo-Anglian poetry, Kamala Das is the first Indian woman poet who not only wrote extensively about the struggles of being a woman in a male-dominated society but also openly wrote about female sexuality, gender ideas, the desire of modern and the position of women in the Indian context. Her poetry deals with a wide range of global concerns. She exposes how the patriarchal culture always tries to rule and try to emotionally control a woman in the name of love and responsibility. Through her poetry and autobiography, she presents the world via the eyes of women, who are portrayed in a variety of positions, such as wife, lover, mother, and daughter, each of which has its unique requirements and viewpoints. She assumes all the roles channels her traumatic experience and uses fantasy to portray the feelings, relationships, and desperation of several other Indian women. This paper aims to analyze Kamala Das's poetry and biography through the lens of feminism, exploring the theme of the discovery of self and acceptance in the context of a patriarchal society. The study also explores the poetic techniques explored by Kamala Das to express the idea of emotion, and woman sexuality. Additionally, this paper also investigates the influence of Kamala Das's personal traumatic experience and identity formation on her poetic expression and the development of her feminist consciousness.

**Keywords:** Global concern, emotional abuse, the discovery of self, traumatic experience, identity formation, patriarchal culture, feminist consciousness.

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## Introduction

'Man is defined as a human being  
and woman as a female –  
When she behaves as a human being,  
she said to imitate the male' (Beauvoir, 1949)

when we are born, it is biological changes that make a person male or female. But our society creates the identity of a person as a man or woman. Being a female or male is a biological reality, but every human being's self or identity is different from others, which gives them the feeling of the individual. No matter who is a man or woman, every human being has their individual feelings, own emotions, and own identity as a human being. But the patriarchal system always tries to manipulate power and exercise power over the woman to control a woman's identity or emotions according to social-cultural norms. The patriarchal culture created the idea that whatever society decides for women is right. And they are born to accept all the decisions of patriarchal norms. According to Simon de Beauvoir,

“One is not born,  
but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, 1949)

In the context of South Asia, women are always symbolism of motherhood. It's an undoubted truth that motherhood is a very prestigious position, but society has the practice to create the definition of motherhood according to their preference. In the name of motherhood or love, society creates pressure to accept societal identity rather than an individual human being. She vividly exposed the concept of womanhood according to society in her poem '*An Introduction*',

"Dress in sarees, be girl, be girl,  
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,  
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in." (Das, 2014)

According to the societal parameter of a perfect example of womanhood, they should wear sarees, they should work in the kitchen at home, and society fits a woman to see her quarreling with their servants. Das discovered the major problem of woman

who depends on the domestic sphere is the difference the way a woman and man live their life and treated in the family. Das shows that political world is relevant world for the man: and the other hand docile, domestic, submissive world is for the woman. Women fight the real battles inside the door, of their bedroom, and their kitchen until their death. Because of the social expectations, they have to be a perfect mother, a perfect wife, a perfect sister, or a perfect lover. Due to this societal pressure women always forget to explore themselves as an individual human being.

In the history of Post-Independence of India, because of distinctive social experience, they become conscious about their own identity. And after the Postcolonialism of India literature played a great impact to raise a quest for women's identity. Especially the poetic work in 20th-century Anglo-Indian poetry introduced the reader unfamiliar form of poetry, which is about individuality and the quest for identity or self. In 20th-century Anglo-Indian poetry, Kamala Das is a poet who spoke loud about women's unspoken world which is forbidden to talk loudly in this male-dominated society.

Kamala Das portrays the concept of self-exploration in a confessional mood. Through the concept of "I" in her poetry, she holds the idea of a woman's self-identity, individuality, and also the individual struggle of a human as a human being. She presents the bitter reality of love, relationship, woman's sexuality, gender idea of society, and her traumatic experience through her poetry. The feminist approach of her poetry not only deals with twentieth centuries women in society, but the poetic theme of her poetry also deals with the contemporary issues of a patriarchal society that deals with a woman's inner world. She introduced emotional abuse the most discussed issue in 21st century through her poetic journey.

Das's motive is to represent a woman's inner world which they taught not to express to the outer world. From childhood, women are never encouraged to express their inner self. The life of a woman seems like a puppet rather than a human being. And this kind of silent abusive treatment is enough to kill a human being's inner strength and spirit. The death of a body might be visible but the death of a soul is invisible at all. And this inner pain seems like a psychological war to Kamala Das. In Das's confessional poetry, there is no place either for religion or morals. Kamala Das does not expect from society any redemption or retribution as there is no remorse. She only bears her soul to get psychological relief. She selected pen and paper as the best weapon to explore herself and accept herself as she is. In her poetry '*An Introduction*' it's visible that-

"I wore a shirt and my  
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored  
My womanliness"(Das, 2014)

Kamala Das declares through her poetry that she denies all the socio-cultural norms, rules, and regulations that forced her to accept womanliness created by societal parameters to be a perfect woman. Self-exploration through her writing gives her the courage to celebrate her womanhood and deny the definition of femininity in society. A famous French feminist H el ene Cixous wrote for women that-

"Write! Writing is for you.  
You are for you; your body is yours, take it." (Cixous, 1976)

Here Cixous encourages every woman to raise their voice for women self. She also encourages the women to come out of the bedroom and kitchen to explore their selves as a human. Kamala Das understood that no one in the society will care about her inner pain. In the patriarchal system, if a woman feels unhappy, she is compelled to feel that either she is mad or guilty. She uses her poetry as the medium by which she speaks loudly for herself against all the injustice treatment played by her family and society. Kamala Das quests for her identity and explores herself, her own identity, and her individuality. She became the voice of the other Kamala Das's problems that has no name in society. She expressed and accepted herself the way she is.

## Literature Review

In South Asia, women's independence and identity have been shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors. Traditionally, women have been expected to fulfill certain roles within the family and society, which have limited their autonomy and agency. However, over the years, there has been a growing movement towards greater gender equality, with women asserting their rights to education, employment, and political participation. After Independence of India Poetry and writing biography became the best medium to express inner feelings and deny all the suppressive social culture norms towards women. In Anglo-Indian poetry there are many poets who had great contribution to create a spirit to talk about self and identity and Kamala Das is one of them. Gail Chester and Sigrid Nielson declare in *Introduction to a Collection of Feminist Essay* in 1987,

Writing plays a vital part informing our perceptions of our lives as women, in working out our feminist views and in communicating them to others. (Chester & Sigrid Nielson, 1987)

Women's self-discovery and acceptance in patriarchal societies, particularly in South Asia, have been a topic of discussion for decades. The cultural and social norms in these societies have often led women to deny their own selves, disconnect from their identities, and conform to societal expectations. Since several centuries women have always been marginalized and suppressed by the patriarchal mindset of society. Time and again one comes across various writers who have attempted to redefine the position of women and their identity in the patriarchal setup. That's why many researcher and literary enthusiasts did so many critical discussions on women's sufferings and position. According to Amalendu Bose,

...as readers of poetry we have to steer clear of non-aesthetic issues, content with considering poetry as poetry irrespective of the inherited or acquired character of the language used... (Bous, 1970)

Before independence of India Sarojini Nandu was a woman poet who was a poet of passion and emotion. She mostly wrote on common Indian themes like love and sorrow. But after independence of India the scenario of Anglo-Indian poetry became changed. Indian Poetry, which are written in English, those themes shifted from the romantic, socio-cultural and spiritual-transcendental to a new kind of theme which based on personal experience. He represents woman as a symbol of tolerance and protection. In his poem "*Night of the Scorpion*" it's vividly seen,

I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the  
poison with an incantation.  
After twenty hours  
it lost its sting.  
My mother only said  
Thank God the scorpion picked on me  
And spared my children. (Ezekiel, 1965)

Nissim Ezekiel is a poet who introduced the theme quest for identity in a confessional mood through her poetry. Ezekiel explores man-woman relation, role of woman in relationship to men, role of mother. His poetry explores the self – poetry to him is the expression of personality but he doesn't explore the way to getting away from inner sufferings of human life. But in the history of Indian English poetry Kamala Das is a confessional poet, who confesses the bitterness of women's life through her own experience. Her poetry is not only confessional it also has therapeutic value with harsh expression and less unconsciousness. Because of Das bold Poetic style and expression to talk about women's identity; many researcher and literary enthusiasts did so many critical discussions on Kamala Das's poetry and autobiography. Through, their elaborate discussion the focused on different aspects like man woman relationship, woman sexuality, quest for self, position of woman and female experience. We found that, Kamala Das poetry and autobiography have great contribution not only to inspire a woman to explore her self as individual, her poetry also have great value to deal with 21<sup>st</sup> centuries most discussed issues like emotional abuse of women. The main focus of this research is to explore a woman's inner world through the lens of the previous study of Kamala Das's confessional poetry and autobiography. Through the lens of previous analysis and discussion on Kamala Das we further revealed and connection with 21<sup>st</sup> centuries most discussed issues, and find out the answer is it possible for a woman to explore her individual self in patriarchal society? Or how much it's possible for women, who live in patriarchal culture to deny patriarchal norms to accept her discovered self.

## **Methodology**

This research paper focuses on qualitative research, which involves a deep exploration and understanding of the subject matter. Qualitative research aims to gain insights into the experiences, perspectives, and meanings associated with a particular phenomenon. It typically involves analyzing textual data and relies on subjective interpretation rather than statistical analysis. The primary sources utilized in this paper are a selection of Kamala Das's poems that are relevant to the research topic. To supplement the primary sources, secondary information has been gathered from a variety of credible sources. These include internet sites, research journals, online newspapers, periodicals, books, YouTube lecture videos and discussion, and other academic publications. The selection of secondary sources was based on their relevance to Kamala Das's biography and literary works, particularly themes such as feminism, identity, and others. The availability and reliability of these sources were also taken into consideration. To ensure a comprehensive understanding and diverse perspectives, the author sought the viewpoints of teachers in the field. These discussions provided valuable insights and helped enrich the research paper. The main objective of this paper is to present Kamala Das's "Denial and Acceptance of Self" in a new and innovative way. The author aims to offer a fresh perspective on this particular work, highlighting its significance and pioneering nature within Kamala Das's literary contributions.

## *Chapter 1*

### **A Journey from Innocence to Experience**

Human life is a journey from innocence to experience, which begins from birth and ends in death. The journey from innocence to experience is not linear, it can be triggered by different events of life such as personal struggle, loss, trauma, or exposure to new cultures and ideas. Childhood is the period of innocence when a child is not conscious of the dark reality of life. It's a period when a child always feels free that's why children always consider everything around them as love. But when an innocent soul becomes exposed to the real fact of life and started struggling to survive in society the innocent soul turns into an experience one. Kamala Das's poetry traces a journey from innocence to experience. She explores the complexities of love, sexuality, and gender role through her poetry. Her work is a deeply spiritual and honest portal to show a woman's journey from innocence to experience. And through her poetry, Kamala Das creatively portrays the dualism of a woman's life.

The dualism of her poetry results from the fall from childhood innocence and turns into the complex adult world of sexuality, marriage, and loss of identity. She creatively presents the thought of home and women's identity formation through her writing. A home is a place where a human feels safe and free. But Das shows that home is the first place where a woman first loses her identity. During childhood, a male figure like her father always plays the role of a protector or hero of a woman but in the period of adolescence to adulthood she discovers her father plays the role of an oppressor. Her quest for self-knowledge turns into her painful realization that she is a stranger in her place.

"The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved  
Among books, I was then too young  
To read," (Das, *My Grandmother House*, 2014)

Through those lines, Das presents her journey in a very creative way. This poem is a kind of idealization of the poet's past. In her one autobiographical book 'My Story' she wrote very openly about her childhood and her sexual, and marital issues. In her most of writing she noticeable her representation of her grandmother. Through the representation of the different generations of women, Das wants to show that the societal pressure of a patriarchal society is not only kill a woman's

inner spirit, but it's also destroying her total sphere of existence. During her young age, she wasn't aware of social politics. To her, all the restrictions and suppression that her mother or grandmother faced, that was the actual scenario of every woman's life. But when she experienced the same suppression inflicted upon her, she could be able to understand all social politics which were forcefully imposed by patriarchal society. The journey from innocence to experience, makes her conscious about her individuality and which helps her to differentiate the difference between love and politics of patriarchal culture.

In her biography '*My Story*', through the reference to her grand-uncle, Das tried to show how males treat a woman in society,

"I have heard my grand-uncle tell his wife that she was the most empty headed he had known" (Das, *The Village-School*, 2010)

In the South Asian context, it's very much common that men use so many neglectful and abominable words towards the woman like 'empty headed'. In a patriarchal society, they use neglectful words to establish women as weak and fools and tries to establish their superiority in society as males. Males have that kind of thought that a woman is born to serve their family, husband, and children. And their prime responsibility is to meet the demand of their husband and give sexual pleasure to them. The ill treatment she received from the society didn't push her back; instead, it motivated her to revile her own individual self. Moreover, she felt it for the other oppressed women in the society. That quest for her individual self as a woman influenced her much to speak out loudly against the injustice treatment of patriarchy.

### **1.1: Sweet and Sour Memories of Childhood**

Childhood is a period of life full of sweet and sour memories like a glass of lemonade. The sourness would make the mouth pucker but the sweet taste of sugar would balance it out. Das's poetry and her autobiography both contain sweet and sour experiences of her childhood. Through her childhood experience, Das creatively presents the journey and struggle of a woman's life from childhood. In her poem "The Suicide" Das shows a creative mixture of sweetness and sourness of childhood.

O sea, I am happy swimming  
Happy, happy, happy...  
The only movement I know Well



Is certainly the swim.  
It comes naturally to me.  
I had a house in Malabar  
And a pale-growing there  
In the bright summer month.  
I swam about and floated,  
I lay speckled green and gold  
In all the hours of the sun,  
Until  
My Grandmother cried,  
Darling, you must stop this bathing now.  
You are much too big to play  
Naked in the pond.” (Das, *The Suicide*, 2014)

In this poem, Das portrays the image of the sea as her consciousness right from her childhood. To Das childhood is a period when there was a harmony between the soul and the body especially when she used to swim in a pond near her house in Malabar. In some other poems, Das shows that the harmony between soul and body breaks away with the intervention of adulthood. In adulthood, she discovered that her physical maturity is destructive which doesn't give her any mystical -experience. The more she finds herself a conscious one she discovered the conflict between her soul and her body. In Das's writing, she describes a childhood which filled with both love and conflict. Through her poem, she reflected the sweetest moments of life by swimming. Running through a sprinkler or playing in a pool on a hot summer day which is one of the sweetest memories that reflects in Das's poetry. The representation of cool water is the symbol of relief and carefree and happy feelings of childhood. But in her childhood, some treatment of her family became the cause of her inner pain. In her autobiography *"My Story"* it's visible that-

"My grandmother was worried about the duskiness of my skin and rubbed raw turmeric on Tuesdays and Fridays all over my body before the oilbath" (Das, *A Children's Theatre*, 2010)

Here her grandmother's treatment reflects that from childhood girls face so many bitter experiences because of their skin complexions. And it's a common scenario that woman faces in the South Indian context. That also creates social and psychological suffering for a woman from her childhood that she has to look

beautiful. Because in patriarchal culture male always demands a beautiful woman as their wife. In her writing and poetry, she speaks fondly of her father, who was a successful businessman and loving parent. She also speaks of her mother, who was a strict and traditional woman who disapproved of Kamala's free-spirited nature. Kamala Das recounts instances where her mother's disapproval and harsh punishments left a sour taste in her mouth. She found out different treatment of her parents between she and her brother.

Kamala Das's poetry is a kind of idealization of the past. In her poetry nostalgia is a sentiment for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations. In Das's famous poem 'My Grandmother House' she ruminates on the past, telling of a house that still exists but is far away in her memory. But through her poetry, she is not running away from herself, from her past she is confessing herself. Although the word grandmother may she is trying to mean two things- one is mother's mother and another one is her father's mother. In her poetry, she specifically refers to her mother's mother. By referring to her maternal grandmother she is trying to draw a matrilineal lineage or a line where the story is a reflection of her female predecessors. She brings out the history of mothers through her unique and creative representation and also, Kamala Das's poetry reflects both the sweet and sour experiences of her childhood. In her poems like "The Dance of the Eunuchs" she speaks of the vibrant and colorful world she grew up in, filled with music and dance. In other poems, like "The Old Playhouse," she reflects on the bitterness of her parents, her failed marriage, and her mother's attempts to control her life.

## **1.2: Growing up Under Social Pressure**

As a young girl, Kamala Das was expected to conform to traditional gender roles, which meant she was expected to be subservient to men, get married, and have children. However, she had an independent spirit and was not satisfied with the limited expectations that patriarchal culture imposed on a woman. She struggled to find a sense of identity and freedom, especially as she came of age in a conservative society. Kamala Das was born into a traditional Nair family in Kerala, which had its own set of societal expectations and restrictions. Her family was well-respected and influential, but they also expected her to conform to the traditional roles and responsibilities of a Nair woman. This included getting married at a young age and being a dutiful wife and mother. In her poem "The Suicide" Das represents the scenario of the position of a woman in family and society.

"But,  
I must pose,  
I must pretend,  
I must act the role  
Of happy woman,  
Happy wife.  
I must keep the right distance  
Between me and the high.  
I must keep the right distance  
Between me and the low" (Das, *The Suicide*, 2014)

The reflection on Das's life as a woman is visible that, she grew up under significant social pressure, particularly regarding gender roles and societal expectations of women in the Indian context. The essence of Das's life is love but the scenario in real life is different, a male-dominated society forced her to wear the mask of a happy woman and wife. Where she wants to be simple but her family and society forced her to keep a distance between herself and lower-class people.

Das also shows how societal pressure can be the cause of an unhappy marriage. Because of the pressure of her family, she has to accept all the things which are held firmly by her family. Through her experience, she shows that most of the girl in the Indian context has no freedom to select an ideal lover for her. At the same time, the family never feels necessary to know a girl's preference at the time of her marriage. In Kamala Das's words, "My life had been planned and its course charted by my parents and relatives". (Das, p.68). Societal pressure forced her to accept all unhappiness of her marriage and play the role of a puppet that society wants to see. In her poem "Glass" she shows how a woman lost her identity because of growing up under social pressure.

"I give a wrapping to their dreams,  
A woman-voice,  
And a woman-smell.  
And I do not ever bother to tell,  
I have misplaced a father  
Somewhere  
And I look for him now everywhere." (Das, *Glass*, 2014)

Das shows that society not only imposed societal pressure on her, but society is also a place where she lost her identity. Despite the social pressure she faced, Kamala Das refused to be silenced. She became a feminist voice in India, challenging societal norms and breaking down barriers for women. Through her writing, she explored themes such as gender, sexuality, and personal freedom, and she advocated for women's rights and empowerment.

### **1.3: Lament for Lost Innocence**

Through Das's poetry, she often explored love, sexuality, and the complex role of women in a patriarchal society. The body of work that Das explicitly touch upon in most of her poetry is the loss of innocence or lament for the loss of innocence in a different way. In many of Das's poems, there is a sense of longing for lost innocence, particularly concerning the experiences of women in a patriarchal society. Her poetry often delves into the conflicts between societal expectations and personal desires, highlighting the loss of innocence that occurs when one is forced to conform to societal norms. One such poem is "An Introduction," where Das reflects upon her journey as a woman and writer. She discusses the societal expectations placed upon her, saying,

"I am very  
Woman who seeks love. In him... the hungry haste  
Of rivers, in me ..." (Das, An Introduction, 2014)

This line suggests that the loss of innocence is not only personal but also collective, experienced by countless women who have had to navigate societal pressures and expectations. Poet shows that the needs of a woman are not much, in her whole life she runs after seeking love. But in reality, she never gets it the way she wants. That's why Das compares this seeking of love with the hungry hast of a river. On the other hand, the more she becomes conscious, she discovered herself alone and nameless. The lamentation of the loss of innocence is seen in her poem 'Composition'. She says,

"The tragedy of life  
is not death but growth," (Das, Composition, 2014)

Through those lines, Das shows that, the more she grew up she found herself more alone. Here the word "growth" means by her the journey of a girl into adulthood or a woman alone. Here the "growth" doesn't refer to the physical growth of a woman. She shows the psychological growth of a girl into a wife and mother. In the

patriarchal society, it is visible that the habit of thinking of society is always from a male point of view but Das explored the hollowness of women's inner world with a strong female vision. The tone of her poetry is mostly unkind and unadorable, where she expresses her traumatic experience of isolation, depression, and turbulence. Which becomes the cause of the lamentation of the loss of an innocent soul. In the age of childhood, when she was unconscious of the dark politics of society, she found love and warmth. But in the stage of consciousness, she realized that a girl runs in search of love of her whole life but this search for love becomes the reason of her loss of identity. The lamentation of her loss of innocence and childhood memories creatively brings into her poetry. According to I.K Sharma,

"Very often it is noted, she leans heavily on her memory (and her grandmother and her old house come alive) and from thereon she leaps on to a new subject in the poem. Thus, the past may be seen as a symbol of old human ties. Placed alongside the present where she is searching for love, the past recalled throws light on the contemporary values." (Sharma, 1986)

In most of Das's poetry, especially "The Looking Glass," Das portrays the loss of innocence through the lens of a woman's sexual awakening. The poem explores the narrator's experiences and desires, reflecting on the loss of her innocence as she embraces her sexuality and confronts societal taboos. Through vivid imagery and introspective language, Das captures the complexities and struggles of a woman coming to terms with her desires and the societal consequences that follow. Throughout, her poetry, Kamala Das often mourns the loss of innocence that comes with societal restrictions and expectations. Her introspective and honest exploration of female experiences challenges conventional notions of innocence and encourages a reevaluation of societal norms. In Das's poem "My Grandmother's House" this is vividly seen.

"There is a house now far away where once  
I received love....." (Das, My Grandmother House, 2014)

Here the house is kind of personified by Kamala Das through her poetry. Kamala Das shows here that, once the house was the center where she once felt free, warm, and received love from the people who belongs to the house. But when she becomes conscious, she finds herself alone. Now all the person around her seems like stranger that's why in adulthood she is not feeling any bonding with her home that's why she addresses her house as "a house now far away". Here through the word "Far away"

Das is trying to portray the internal dysconnectivity with her closest persons. And now love has become a symbol of death, of silence, of loneliness, of the coldness of her psyche.

## *Chapter 2*

### **Desire Vs Real Experience**

Kamala Das explores the dilemma between desire and reality in women's life. Through her poetry, she shows the tension between the idealized, passionate longings of the heart and the stark realities of life. Das delves into the complexities of desire and also portrays it as a powerful force that can consume and define a person's existence. She vividly expresses her longing for love, emotional fulfillment, and liberation from societal constraints. Through her sensual and evocative language, Das captures the intensity and yearning associated with her desire. In her biography "*My Story*" she says,

"I was looking for an ideal lover. I was not looking for the one who went to Mathura and forgot to return to his Radha" (Das K. , *My Story*, 1988)

In Das's writing the desire for love or search for love is the main principle. Through her writing she shows two worlds, one is her inner world, which is connected with her soul and spiritual desire and another one is the actual world, where love is replaced with lust. When Das experienced rejection of love, psychologically abusive treatment from her family and society, and traumatic experience in her sexual life she became able to discover the bitter difference between the desire and the harsh reality of life. She discovered that in she is the person who desired to get love from her family, and from her husband but in reality, when she failed to achieve love society started to blame her. And it's not only the reality of Kamala Das's life, it's the harsh reality of women's life in the South Asian context. In her poem "An Introduction" she expressed her disappointment in this way,

"I am saint. I am the beloved and the  
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no  
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I." (Das, *An Introduction*, 2014)

Das explicitly expressed her disappointment in marriage. She shows her personal experience what a woman desire from marriage and what's the reality in the patriarchal system of marriage.

Das confronts societal norms, gender roles, and the constraints imposed on women, which hinder their autonomy and freedom. Das depicts the struggle between

personal desires and societal expectations, exposing the dissonance between idealized fantasies and the limitations of reality. The desire of Kamala Das from her marriage is kind of great expectation for society; that's why society is not ready to meet up her expectations. To express the harshness of reality, she writes in her poem "*Composition*",

"My first school-house  
is now a brothel," (Das, *Composition*, 2014)

Das confronts the consequences of desire, highlighting the pain, disillusionment, and vulnerability that can arise when desire clashes with the harsh realities of life. She exposes the gap between the imagined and the real, delving into the complexities of human emotions and the disappointments that can accompany the pursuit of desire. Kamala Das reveals that She is not allowed in her family to choose a lot for herself but it's the male who forced her to choose her identity according to patriarchal choice. Kamala Das's poetry is her greatest creation of her where she shows a woman's journey of life in society and how the social bitter treatment of a woman makes them an experienced one. When a women quest for her self-identity, she finds that social pressure killed her individual self.

## 2.1 Love Vs Sex

In the South Asian context, because of social taboos, it's not allowed to talk openly about sexual desire, man and woman relationships, intimacy, etc. it's obvious that South Asian girls are not much conscious about sexual education and though they are not much open up they have lots of questions and fear to intimate with someone. Kamala Das openly talks out unspoken part of her life which was not allowed for a woman to talk in South Asian society. As a life partner, a girl always expects someone who will understand her feelings, and will want to know her wishes, and desire before touching her. But in a patriarchal society, a woman always considers an object whose only responsibility is to fulfill a man's sexual desire. Das's poem 'An Introduction' is a poem where she expressed not only herself but also talks about other women in society who seek love.

"I met a man, loved him. Call  
Him not by any name, he is every man  
Who wants woman, just as I am every  
Woman who seeks love. In him ...the hungry haste  
Of rivers, in me..." (Das, *An Introduction*, 2014)



In the poem 'An Introduction' Das speaks out about her bitter experience of getting rejected in love. Every woman desire to have a mate who will take her in his arms where she will find peace and the sweep of his benign arms will remove the loneliness of her life. She desires someone who will whisper loving words for her and open conversation, companionship, and warmth. But in a patriarchal culture, no one cares about the hunger for love. In 'My Story' Das openly talks about the brutal treatment of a male. In her biography, she wrote that -

"Whenever he found me alone in a room, he began to plead with me to bare my breasts and if I did not, he turned brutal and crude. His hands bruised my body and left blue and red marks on the skin." (Das, *An Arrange Marriage*, 2010)

Here Das expressed her own experience of the brutal treatment of her male partner to her. At this age when she is not aware of sexual relationships between men and women. In the age, when she only desired love but she got mentally and physically abusive treatment from her partner. during the age, when she was confused and had lots of questions in her head, she found no one beside her to talk with her with love and ready to understand her feelings. In Das's biography "*My Story*", she expressed a woman's desire this way-

"I had expected him to be all that I wanted my father to be and my mother. I wanted conversation, companionship, and warmth. Sex was far from my thought. I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of benign arms, the loneliness of my life". (Das, *An Arrange Marriage*, 2010)

For Das, the meaning of Love is the union between two personalities to understand each other. To her, the concept of love is something that is connected with two souls, not with the body. Woman desire to be loved by their father, mother, or husband and they need not pretend to be happy. Through Das's poetry, she shows that love is an authentic mixture of both conceptual and perceptual context but all the time she found rejection of love. In "Composition" Das shows her replacement of love in this way,

"I have replaced love with guilt  
and discovered  
that both love and hate are  
involvements". (Das, *Composition*, 2014)

The disappointment of love is visible here. She described different shades of physical love in a confessional mode. Her unpleasant sexual experience replaces her feelings of true love with guilt. In the South Indian context, women are always blamed because of their unhappy marriages. Society forces them to feel guilt because of this failure of the relationship. On the other hand, her quest for an emotional bond and the failure of her relationship makes her realize that every woman desire to have someone, who will love her from her heart not keep her beside to fulfill his sexual desire.

## 2.2 Bitterness of Marriage

"Man for the field and woman for hearth  
Man for the sword and for the needle she  
Man to command and woman to obey" (Tennyson, 1985)

In the South Asian context, the patriarchal system wants the woman to live in the cocoon of four wall of the kitchen and should look after their child. Marriage is an important part of a woman's life, where a woman decides to live her whole life with a person. Here Das disclosed her inner feelings through her writing, especially the events after her engagement and before her marriage. She got engaged in her teenage. Normally, the thinking, taste, choice, and desire of a teenage girl and an adult one is different. It's almost common in the South Asian context that when it's time to marry a man or choose a person for intire life, all the arrangements of marriage become more important than knowing the inner feelings, choices, and decisions of a woman. Family in the South Asian context, almost forced a woman to live with an unknown person without loving him. In the age of exploring herself, to know the world she is preparing herself to marry an unknown person with lots of questions and doubts. In Das's autobiography *'My Story'* she exposed how social pressure forced her to accept an unknown person as her husband. And this pressure is kind of an emotional abuse to her. In her poem *"Next to Indira Gandhi"* she writes that,'

"You chose my clothes for me  
My tutors, my hobbies, my friends,  
And at fifteen with my first saree you picked me a husband."  
(Das, Next to Indira Gandhi, 2014)

Through her words, Das shows that there is nothing that she can decide for herself. Everything in her life is planned by her family or relatives. In the Indian context, it's forbidden for a girl to refuse a boy who is selected by a girl's family. She is not allowed to express her feelings and chose a life partner for herself. And there is no way except marry a guy without love, affection, and feelings for him. In her biography she says,

"My life had been planned and its course charter by my parents and relatives. I was to be the victim of a young man's carnal hunger and perhaps, out of our union, there would be born a few children". (Das, An Arrange Marriage, 2010)

In the history of India, there is so much evidence of the suffering of women, especially in rural areas where Indian Hindu married women experienced brutality in the name of customs, religion, and tradition like 'Satidaha'. 'Satidaha' is a custom where women were burned with their late husbands. This kind of brutal action was treated with pomp and ceremony in the name of sanction of religion, thereby denying women's basic right to life. Through this kind of custom and tradition, society enslaves woman. According to Ann Foreman,

"Man exists in social world..... for the woman, however, her place is within the home.....Men Seek relief from their alienation through their relations with woman; for woman there is no relief." (Foreman, 1977)

Through Das's poetry she not only expressed her disappointment of marriage she speaks out loudly for others women in society that women are not a mere toy, every woman has their own individual feelings with their preference. Das discovered that patriarchal culture is created in a way to control the freedom of a girl. In Das one of poem "Composition" she says,

"When I got married  
my husband said,  
you may have freedom,  
as much you want.  
My soul balked at this diet of ash.  
Freedom became my dancing shoe,  
how well I danced," (Das, Composition, 2014)

Through this poem, Das shows the reality of marriage in a patriarchal culture. In the South Indian context, in the family male has the power of the economy. That's why there is a belief that male has all right over woman to rule over them according to their choice. They don't celebrate marriage as a union of two souls, society creates a definition of marriage that woman's only responsibility is to satisfy her husband and a man will rule over his wife.

"My father had bought tickets for us for every afternoon show and had booked tables at the best hotel for our meals. We were left alone and probably my father thought that I would enjoy being alone with the young man". (Das, *An Arrange Marriage*, 2010)

Here Das shows her father's activities that father ensuring all arrangements to spend quality time with her fiancé, like buying tickets for them for every evening show and booking a table at the best hotel. But her father never feels any interest to know his daughter's feelings, is she feeling awful, or better to spend time with that unknown person? Here the better reality is that in her childhood where father or family protect the girl from strangers or advise a girl not to go or mix with a stranger person because it might be dangerous for her but when it's time to marry a person, her family almost forcing her to go outside and spend time with an unknown one without her consent. The conflict between the desire and reality of marriage brings a bitter experience in her life that she expressed boldly in her writing.

## Chapter 3

### Rebellion Against Mask

The timeline of Das's life when she was growing up and she reached adulthood it was the time when India got freedom but she found that this freedom was not without its failings. This freedom was probably only for the male citizens of India. The women were not free at all. This difference between men and women in a free country is something that disturbed her. That's why through her poetry she shows the conflict between passivity and rebellion against the mask of a male-dominated universe. In her poetry "*An Introduction*" it's vividly seen that,

"I don't know politics but I know the names  
Of those in power," (Das, *An Introduction*, 2014)

Through those lines, especially the word "politics" refers to a male domain. She pulled out that, women had access to the names of the people in power which means that they were not participating in the major decision that the post-independent India was making. She talks about not her individual self she talks about her knowledge of politics. The poem "*An Introduction*" published in 1965, which is taken from her first anthology "*Summer in Calcutta*". According to Indian political history, till 1965 Indian politics was mostly dominated by males. In 1966 the year after the book "*Summer in Calcutta*" was published the center stage of Indian politics was taken by a woman figure (Indira Gandhi). Till then India didn't have a prominent woman leader in leading the whole nation. When India became Independent Kamala Das was only 13 years old which was the beginning of her adolescence, so she saw the transition of the nation from a state of colonial Slavery to a state of independence. But it is regretting that She didn't find that same emancipation in the woman folk where she belongs. Through her poetry, Das tries to expose her own identity in a Post-Colonial way. Das breaks out the idea of a Western nation through her poetry. Frantz Fanon a psychiatrist, and political philosopher also brings out his ideas about nation in his book '*Black Skin*', where he also rejected the Western concept of nation like Kamala Das. According to Frantz Fanon "to make the totality of the nation a reality of each citizen" (Fanon, 1967, p. 200). He also pointed out in his book that-

"National consciousness is the only thing which helps us to have our own identity. Ha says that national consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension" (Fanon, 1967)

Das and Fanon both bring out the idea about the white mask of the nation and nationalism, national consciousness which is much influential. The nation. But through Das's poetry, she shows her attitude towards the nation and accepts her own identity of Indianness. Das pointed out in her poem "An Introduction" that-

"And can repeat them like  
Days of weak, or names of months, beginning with Nehru."  
(Das, An Introduction, 2014)

When a human being repeats the days of weak or name of month that means they don't consciously do anything, they do it out of habit. So here Das points out that politics is a domain of men and the only knowledge that women have any access to repeats like parrots the name of people in power. She chooses pen and paper to pull out woman's struggles, sufferings, and all brutal treatment with them in patriarchal societies, especially in South Asia. Kamala Das is the first Indian woman poet who not only wrote about the common woman and their needs, domestic desire, and their independence she also encourages all women to find out their self and accept it.

Her motive is not only to disclose the political position of a woman in society, her motive is also to disclose the position of a woman in society and family and encourage them to find their individual identity and deny it. She speaks out the traditional thought that females should associate themselves with the enclosed world like a household and satisfy their husbands. She breaks out all the shekels that are created by patriarchal norms for the woman to control their dream.

### **3.1 Finding Self**

Kamala Das's poetry has therapeutic value. In her poetry, she not only confesses her personal traumatic experience she expressed her individual self and finds herself through pen and paper. Her poetries are the medium where she expressed, discovered the reason for the hollowness of her soul, and celebrates her womanhood. She finds out the meaning of love and introduced her readers and encourages women to talk loud about their selves, body, and their inner world which is forbidden to express in a patriarchal society. Not only Kamala Das many other poets like Sylvia Plath also took poetry as a path to come to find herself. "*My Story*" is Kamala Das's

autobiography where she expressed her views and frankly talks about adultery. In "*A Relationship*" Das says,

“While  
My body's wisdom tells and tells again  
That I shall find my rest, my sleep, my peace  
And even death nowhere else but here in  
My betrayer's arms...” (Das, *A Relationship*, 2014)

According to Das, when she explores the body, she found it hated and distasteful which ruins the beautiful relationship between individuals, and finds a conflict between desire and the reality of society and also in her married life. Though she has lots of ups and downs and traumatic experiences in her life neither she gives up nor ignores her traumatic sexual experience. In her poem "*Suicide*" she says,

"of soul  
My body shall be bare.  
Bereft of body Bereft  
My soul shall be bare" (Das, *The Suicide*, 2014)

Through those lines Das expresses her painful utterance of her lost soul, which she is trying to find out through her poem, that's why she repeatedly laments for the lost harmony between her soul and body that she found in her childhood. Her poetry has the essence of love where she is open about herself but in reality, she has to wear the mask of a happy and perfect woman. Through poetry, she could reveal the complex mental stage. Das establishes her identity through her poetry. Kamala Das establishes her identity in terms of being an Indian. By celebrating her Indianness Das find herself and encourages her readers to accept themselves.

"I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,  
I speak three languages, write in  
Two, dream in one” (Das, *An Introduction*, 2014)

By 'very brown' Das is asserting the uniqueness of herself. However, she is, whatever her skin color is, she is not ashamed of it. She is talking about a language that is beyond regional boundaries that is the language of her dream.

The dream has no particular language which deals with the human inner world of the psyche. Her language is her individual way of expressing herself. Her language is something that is not outside of herself here language is indicating all about her inner soul. through her poetry, she is rejecting all the agents of patriarchy, who are defining her role defining the path that she should follow, the language she should write in, and the expression she should use. She discovered that accepting her individuality and celebrating her womanhood through her writing is the best way to express herself and find her individual self.

### **3.2 Emancipate from mental slavery**

Das expresses her innermost thoughts, emotions, and experiences without inhibition through her poetry. She fearlessly delved into her personal life, addressing societal norms, her desires, and her struggles, which allowed her to break free from the constraints of societal expectations. In the history of Anglo-Indian poetry, she is the first woman writer who speaks out boldly about woman's position in a patriarchal society. She a discovered way to emancipate from mental slavery through her poetry. Writing in a confessional style provided Das with a form of catharsis and emotional release. By openly discussing her personal experiences, traumas, and desires, she could confront her inner conflicts, make sense of her emotions, and find a sense of healing and peace within herself. Her poem According to Jayakrishna Nair in "*Kamala das, A critical Spectrum*",

"The modern Indian-English poetry with all its aggressive and boldness being and culminates in Kamala Das. No other feminist poet beings and culminates in Kamala Das. No other feminist poet in India could achieve the adult rebellious dimensions of Kamala Das in her poetry. Kamala Das makes a poetic revolt by way of introspectively pondering upon the unfortunate state of existence in which Indian women conduct themselves" (Nair, 2001)

"An Introduction" is a poem where Das shows that in the early part of post-Independent India, English was still considered to be the language of the master although the masters were gone. Through this poem, she tries to write about the choices when it comes to language. Though the colonial state receives its independence but still those state has elements of slavery ingrained in their mind.

“Don't write in English, they said, English is  
Not your mother tongue. Why not leave  
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,  
Every one of you?” (Das, An Introduction, 2014)



Here Das refers that, English is the language of the master, and being a woman in society is always considered as a secondary category when it comes to writing, patriarchal culture creates a boundary for women that they should write in their mother language. Woman's writing in English means an open challenge to society. To society writing English means controlling the authority and that control should not be provided so easily to women. In society, everybody has different opinions about women and how a woman should express herself. She directly tries to stop all opinions of people that make from giving her any codes which she is supposed to follow. Das defines her language as her individual way of expressing herself. She again says,

"Why not let me speak in  
Any language I like? The language I speak,  
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses  
All mine, mine alone.  
It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,  
It is as human as I am human, don't  
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my  
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing  
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it  
Is human speech," (Das, An Introduction, 2014)

Das said that she is not aping, she is not imitating the formalities and the integrities of the colonial masters but she is challenging the English speakers. She also makes herself powerful to challenge society which is limiting her creativity. She is asking for the freedom of expression which is a primary basic right that is allowed to every human being. Das presents language in a symbolic way where she tries to establish language as an individual domain and it indicates her rights too. She is associating her identity with the language she uses. Language is an instinctive desire to express herself. Like her language, her feelings are also very natural and honest to her.

In a patriarchal society for a woman, it's not so easy to accept or establish her individual self. As it's natural that the human mind is full of dilemmas but when it comes to discussing women, especially in the context of South Asia, the patriarchal culture is injected into their minds in a way that women suffer much to explore themselves and express themselves as her choice. Das challenged traditional Indian

societal norms, especially those related to gender roles, sexuality, and marriage. Through her confessional writing, she rebelled against the patriarchal structure and voiced her own opinions, experiences, and desires, thus emancipating herself from the restrictive expectations placed upon women in her society. In her poem "Suicide" she said,

O sea, I am fed up  
I want to be simple  
I want to be loved  
And  
If love is not to be had,  
I want to be dead, just dead

Through those lines, Das reflects the Indian Sensibility where river or sea represents the symbol of redemption and search for life. In the stage of consciousness when she realized that the innocence of her childhood is no more and her soul is full of guilt and burden, she surrenders herself to the sea which means she confesses herself through her writing to find out her individual self and purify it. Through her confessional writing, Das discovered and embraced her own identity and voice. By openly sharing her vulnerabilities, she empowered herself and others who resonated with her experiences. Her boldness and authenticity in addressing topics considered taboo in her society became a source of strength for many readers.

## Conclusion

The profound investigation of self-denial and self-acceptance in Kamala Das's poems is astounding. Das explores the difficulties of self-discovery, societal expectations, and the ambiguities of identity throughout her works. As a poet, she is conscious of her creative potential and makes an effort to overcome limitations. Instead of exposing themselves, poets aim to study and scrutinize themselves. She structures self-examination in an effort to restore her lost sense of herself as a woman and as a poet. She learns that amid the bustling world of men and women, she is entirely alone. Since there are tensions and inconsistencies involved in one's path to self-acceptance, she bravely questions accepted conventions. Her goal is to portray the traumatic process of denial, when people, particularly women, hide their actual selves in order to fit in with social expectations, using her expressive language and raw emotions. She reveals the negative effects of this denial, emphasizing the inner conflict and emptying sensations brought on by leading an untrue existence.

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