

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Vol. 7, Issue-5 (October 2016)

The Criterion 

7th Year of Open Access

Editor-in-Chief
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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Masochism and Melancholy in the Poetry of Kamala Das

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Abstract:

From this paper, I want to focus the confessional aura of masochism and melancholy in the poetry of Kamala Das, the poetess of three poetic volumes of poetry; *Summer in Calcutta*, *The Descendants*, and *the old Playhouse and Other Poems*. Her maiden name was Madhivika Kutti and known as the name of Kamala Suraiyya. From the beginning of her career, she has started to express her own emotional and psychological attitude against the male-dominated society. She had married at the age of fifteen with a perfectly mature man K. Madhav Das and with him she could not comminute with emotional fulfillment due to the torture of sexual gratification. She had become the toy of enjoyment and entertainment. The dissatisfaction and abnormality of personal life are able to create inside her a revengeful desire that's why she tried her hand to express herself with a confidential way so that she can disclose the false identity of male dominated society and the relationship of physical and spiritual. By her point of view, she succeeds to make the icon of female sensibility. Her poetry has the impression of her frankness and openness. Through her poetry, sexuality and masochism have become two pillars of human behavior that are to say that her erotic sense of human relationship explains the concept of feminine sensibility and women psyche and on the other hand the torture and insisting attitude of a man elucidate inside her the confusion and illusion.

Keywords: female psyche, masochism, melancholy, sexuality, patriarchy.

When I'm raped, people say that I've lost my honour. How did I lose my honour
My honour is not in my vagina. It is a patriarchal idea that my rape will defile
the honour of my community. I'd like to tell everyone, why did you place your
Community's honour in ait is the rapist who loses his honour, we don't"

(Kamala Bhasin, Indian feminist & Activist)

The following confidential and vibrating statement of the author Kamala Bashin who is also an Indian feminist activist can express the pain and marginalization of the suffocative women where

she tries to break the chain psycho- neuro disorder which spreading in the entire world like an untreatable disease.

Kamala Das was a famous novelist and poetess in the history of Indo-Anglian Literature. By using the concept of frankness and descriptiveness, she could mark her name with an elegant and enormous style among the system of the male-oriented world. Kamala das has got married at her early age and till then the abnormal and rude behave of her husband, given her the expressive reason of her cries. A woman always used as the thing of pleasure and sensuality along with there is no doubt that the marginalization of a woman is at its end. It has been growing day by day. Whether it happening with a working woman or a housewife. Recently the poetry of Kamala Das has proved her a true feminist and also shows the hidden face of female masochism and unreal identity of the men. On this K. N. Daruwalla points out that, "Kamala Das is pre-eminently a poet of love and pain, one stalking the other through a near neurotic world. There is an all-pervasive sense of hurt throughout. Love, the lazy animal hunger of the flesh, hurt, and humiliation are the warp and woof of her poetic fabric. She seldom ventures outside this personal world."¹(Dr. Satish Kumar,133) The manner of her writing has similarity with the works of other Women Writers such as Toru Dutta, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, and Shashi Desh Pandey. Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock* in which she clearly expressed her philosophy towards the most questioning trenchantly the pseudo irrationally resulting in their hibernation, masochism, narcissism, schizophrenia, exile and loss of identity. In order to give it the originality, she never tried to suppress the nuance of female psyche² (Pandey, 25) She has used the psychological genre of Freud in the perspective of gender and sexuality³ (Bocock, 41), which determine the theory of femininity. Regarding this point of view, it can descript that Das's attitude towards sex is akin to Freud's discovery of sexuality in which the step by step open the reality or psychology behind sex and fantasy. In this reference we can take example of D.H. Lawrence's sexual harmony which was an essential condition for attainment of happiness in life.⁴ (Prasad, 214) likewise Lawrence, Das has chosen the concept of sex differently, and she did not use it as dry, monotonous and vulgar way, which we generally see in pornographic literature. Her sexual portrayal is always tinged with verbal overtones, metaphor, and symbols. She says; ⁵(Prasad, 215)

I met a man, loved him, call
Him not by any name, he is every man,
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love. In him....the hungry taste
Of rivers in methe oceans' tireless waiting. (*An Introduction*)

Kamala Das's poetical central figure Persona also compared with Maya in *Cry the Peacock* as for not fulfillment of her desires as she had been living apart from her father where she gets a sudden change in her life that her husband Gautam never pays attention to her emotions. The fecund nature of Gautam or another male in the poetry of Kamala Das arise tension and agony in the life of central figure. In addition to other depressive and pathetic works of other female writers among them Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock* (1936) in which Anita Desai clings to her aesthetic attachments, despite the fury within and transcends her masochistic suffering in *Voices in the City* (1965) follows a course of alienation, a death by herself, and discomfort. *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), there we find the expression of past which affects the forthcoming incidents of life. The works of Kamala Markendiyas *Possession* (1963) has tried differentiates between the incompatibility of the Eastern spirituality with Western Efficiency while her *A Silence of Desire* (1959), confirm is a clash between rationally and faith. Santha Rama Rao's *Remember The House* (1966) is an evolution of our ancient's culture. Balachandran Rajan also expressed a cynical behavior in *The Dark Dancer* (1959).⁶ (Balachandran, 25-26) Kamala Das also reveals the truth behind the falsehood and artificiality expanding in the entire society. Kamala Das' poetry is a recordation of her experience and observation, her own unfulfilled love and her own sexual exploitation, frustration, and disillusionment that she had to suffer in a male-centered world. She creates the world which is emotionally barren and unproductive, a world where she treats like an animal. The world where they have no freedom of themselves instead seduce by men for their manhood. The poetess reveals her own frustration and agony in love through her own poem entitled *The Dance of the Eunuchs* in which the eunuchs symbolized with the dance of sterile and dissatisfied love of a woman which can be used as follow;⁷ (Satish,134)

Their voice

Were harsh, their songs melancholy; they sang of

Lovers dying and children left unborn...

Some beat their drums; other beats their sorry breast

And wailed and writhed in vacant ecstasy. (*The Dance of the Eunuchs*)

Consequently, Kamala Das' poetry has the clear expression of love and lust. She neither want to surrender her nor able to boycott but shares her views through the power of words. In the mythical concept of Radha Krishna love and Meera Krishna love also able to show her need for spirituality. To express Radha Krishan love, she tries to explain her attitude towards true love she was not religious in that sense but totally devoted herself to enrich her soul with God and we can say next meaning of it a true love that can only perceive when we have to drop our lust and desires in a materialistic phenomenon. In that sense A. N. Dwivedi observes that, when she had become a mother of three children her husband goes to near her only for sexual pleasure not for emotional fulfillment as a woman has desired. She had become only a productive thing that can be used only producing children and quench his lustrous satisfaction. In order to reveal her

secure love, she elucidates the myth of Radha Krishna and Meera Krishna, through them; she has reached near the last point of spirituality. In other words, we can say that her need for spiritual love, always grown herself into the depth of darkness and hopeless. Her another prose works also have the same expression of spirituality such as *My Story* and *The Alphabet Of Lust* ⁸(Dvewedi, 3);

Vrindavan lives on in every woman's mind
 And the flute, luring her
 From home and her husband
 Who later her asks her of the long scratch on the brown
 Aureole of her breast and she shyly replies,
 Hiding flushed cheeks,
 It was so darkout side, I tripped and fell over
 The brambles in the wood.

(Vrindavan)

Sooner or later she becomes the icon between the sensuousness and absurdity of the mind where she acts as a puppet in the hands of the men. According to the reviews of book *Indian Poetry and Fiction: Critical Elucidations*, Kamala Das has an edge over other an Indian woman. She belongs to the matriarchal society of Kerala, where women have been somewhat liberated. Her husband, Madhav Das, has played not more than a passive role, has played not more than a passive role, as far as her creativity is concerned. However, he has allowed her to give expression to her despair I love and matrimony.

I am the red carpet unrolled,
 I am eager host
 Awaiting the ultimate guest. (*the Red Carpet of My Blood*)

The red carpet embodied by her is made accessible to many of her kind and fellow poets. It has encouraged a number of women to voice their discontent and inspired many female writers to express their exploitation, anger, and revenge.⁹ (*Indian poetry and fiction: critical Elucidations* page no- 96) Machos and melancholy are the two salient features of her poetry that clears her mindset upon the male-centered world. When we observers her poem or a word, we find the secret of her a nominal and despondent heart which she had suffered by her own personal point of view. In addition to the confession and acceptance of her torture and tension, she reveals the

fact of her own freakiness that she would the symbol of meekness and act, what her husband desires to her such as,

Notice the perfection

Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under

Shower the shy walk across the bathroom floor,

Dropping towels and the jerky way he

Urinate. All the fond details that make

Him male and your only, man. Gift him all. (*The Looking Glass*)

The following lyrics can easily reveal her attitude toward masochism where she accepts the priority and manhood of a man. These lyrics conclude with the introvert and extrovert idea of her thought in the ironical and satirist tone. Dr. Satish Kumar also stated that the poetry of Kamala Das is the direct way to experience the exploitation and torture through the lust and hunger of male dominated society. The women in the poem are every woman that seeks love; the man is every man that wants a woman to satisfy his lust. The lyrics mirror a real picture of the lustful relationship between every man and every woman and disillusionments and frustrations that follow such a relationship, especially for the woman.¹⁰ (Satish Kumar, 134). In the respect of her disillusionment attitude towards the suffocative role of the mutual relationship between man and woman is able to prove the psychology of a woman who tolerates masochism inside her soul. In spite of it always satisfy his hunger sexual gratification and has no claim to prove her own wished whether she ready to do or not. It can be said that Kamala Das was feel uneasiness and uncomfortable with the tradition and rituals of society spread through generation by generation with hypocritical method of social system that the double morality of girls and women have not allowed leading their life from their own perspective, neither girls have allowed choosing their life partner as their own wish in spite of it, they have no right to meet them before fixing their marriage, it is totally rudeness and hardness of the society where she has no right to present her identity, on the other perspective women are the victim of tolerance. Against it, men are free to do anything they can rape an innocent girl or woman and it is the mindset of the society that they directly blame to that person who suffers such melancholy and depression. Men freely involve in homosexuality, adultery was really uncommon for him after admiration such kind of crime he much more gets confidence and can live freely. Neither girls, their unexpected pregnancy much affected on that person who just thinks it as the part of their entertainment and pleasure nor the childbirth process can harm at the manhood of the male dominated society. So victim girls were made to suffer the social stigma. Women were discouraged from writing and were expected to seek fulfillment in domestically. So disgusted was Kamala Das with this kind of social set-up that she wanted to totally bury the past and build up a new order founded on social justice, and equality between both the men and the women.¹¹ (Malik, 93).

The pain and lust we can observe thoroughly her poetry where she stands as the voice of other women's obsession and suppression such as the theme of love, sex and frustration reveals in her early poem *Freaks* where she reaches the anxiety of abnormality and behaves;

An Empty cistern, waiting
 Through long hours, fills itself
 With coiling snakes of silence...
 I'm a freak. Its only...
 Times a grand, flamboyant lust. (*Freaks*)

Through this point of views, she expresses her own frankness and openness while involving in the act of sexual pleasure. She says the mind of the man set upon the female flesh as gratifying only his Idly over puddles of and Desires skin's lazy hunger.¹² (Satish, 130)

Summer in Calcutta, (1965) the first slander of her poetic gems and have consisted of fifty poems, that is able to present the background of the continent of Circe. It is an Indian poet's reaction to the torture of the Indian summer and symbolized what Kamala Das' reaction against the unconscious intimacy with her torture. Further, it can conclude that the poetess feels a sense of sensuous relaxation and a warm intoxication which warms as well as relaxes so that my worries doze in the image of April sun. The sensuality of Kamala Das can compare with the sensuous luxury of John Keats' *Ode on Indolence* also the same theme as the short-lived celebration of the gay mood.¹³(Kumar, 126)

The hollowness of sexual love and skin communicated relationship can observe from her poem *In Love* that shows the memory of the experience lingers in the mind and puts the question remain unanswered. A systematic recitation of her poem *An Introduction* which helps to reveal her confessional and autobiographical attitude and it also deals with the poetess's assertion to establish her feminine identity in the male-dominated culture and her performance for writing in English. She frankly able to disclose about herself on the tremendous loveless sexual assaults is committed on a woman in the name of marriage;

It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
 And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
 With a rattle in my throat....I am the beloved
 and the
 Betrayed. (An Introduction)

In another anthology of *The Descendants* (1967), have the collection of twenty-nine poems which are all based on the theme of tension and suppression by male-oriented psychology. In *Suicide*, *Composition* and *The Invitation* are the eminent example of confessional talent one of them poem *Suicide* is based on the symbolical poetry where the sea is symbolized with the regeneration and a motif of depart from the passion of lustrous desires. *The Looking Glass* is about the sadistic tone of the poetess where she externalizes the humiliations and frustrations the women have to suffer in a male dominated culture. Further, she transforms her psyche that persona suffers sarcastically that a woman should accept the cruel reality that has physical gratification satisfied by a man. Sooner or later women are not allowed to present their concern but have to accept it unquestionably in order to quench the thirst of man's lust and superiority. For the man, they are free for celebrating their manhood. Besides it, they forget the emotional fulfillment of the female side and involve themselves in other works. On this condition, she imagines herself as "*gleamed like burnished brass*", *grows old and decrepit*.¹⁴ (Kumar, 130)

Kamala Das has become the icon of world fame for the sake of her bold, uninhibited articulation of feminine sensibility along with other women poets like Gauri Deshpande, Mamata Kalia, de Souza and others. In this sense her anguish and quest for identity, is directly the progeny of an old social set-up. Moreover, Love and Sex are, used as the "leitmotif" of her entire collection of poetry, but the depth of her distress seems to have a constant sting in her soul, and that does invest her identity with a certain tincture of pangs. In further observation of this ideology K. R. S. remarks her that;

Love is crucified in sex, and sex defiles itself again and again.

Along with M.K. Nayak has explained her pain of feminism as;

The most oblivious (and to casual reader, colorful) feature of Kamala Das's poetry is the uninhibited frankness with which she talks about sex referring nonchalantly to the 'musk of the sweat between the breasts', 'the warm shock of menstrual blood; and even pubis.'¹⁵ (Gupta,23)

In the world of the patriarchal system, the women become the subject of marginalization so she needs a plight to overcome. With the emergence of feminist ideas after the publication of Simone de Beauvoir has stated in her book entitled, *The Second Sex* (1949) that, the concept of feminine sensibility has well explained and elaborated with the emergence of women writing, arises a question by the masculine authenticity in order to suggest what criteria enforces on them or what genre of writing they have to be use. Along with, the importance of women's body and feminine mode of regression and suppression is not being the subject of their expression. However the concept of feminine sensibility has expanded into other areas such as exposing the woes and worries of women in the confinement of domestic life, the anxieties and depression they undergo, the exploitation, obsession, discrimination, and marginalization are grown after the cruel involvement of male-oriented world.¹⁶ (Shodganga)

In the anthology of *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973) which have thirty-three poems in all and they are the source of her new dimension and artistic maturity. Still, she preoccupied with the theme of love in spite of the concept of personal decay and death. The meaning of the title has the symbolical meaning which refers a note or protest and revolt against male domination. Through this poem, the situation of a wife suffers much individual conflict after marriage. Here poetess's boycott against the whole male dominated society has come to light when she says; ¹⁷ (Kumar, 131)

You called me a wife /I was called to break saccharine into your tea and /
To offer at the right moment the vitamins, cowering/ Beneath your monstrous
ego I ate the magic loaf / Became a Dwarf, I lost my will and reason ... (*The
Old Playhouse*)

The next poem *The Stone Age* is one of the finest example of her male-oriented psychopath where she elucidates that the wife resents the restraints imposed on her and the husband describes as an "old fat spider" weaves "webs of bewilderment" around her and confines her within the four walls of domesticity and this same conflict deals with the Persona of The Sunshine Cat in which she use to live in a dark room that has been locked by her husband. The similarity of both poems is able to pour the complaint after the departure of her husband in symbolically and melancholically; ¹⁸ (Kumar, 132)

You turn me into a bird of stone, granite
Dove, you build round me a shabby drowning room,
And stroke my pitted face absent mindedly while you read.
She dislikes him as other men haunt her mind. (*The Stone Age*)

According the deep observation of K. Balachandran about the attitude of Kamala Das, it can be said that the issue of gender bias always makes obstacle into the path of Indian women, they always tease and tackle by her name of being a girl. In the other aspect, we can say that the politics of gender is that of control and the creation of the "other" such as the third world in the phase of development women marginalized from the very beginning of their life. In other words the international women writers like Alice walker, Toni Morison, Beatrice Colleton, Joan Crate and Lee Maracle have been engaged in an earnest effort to overcome the icon "other" installed by "gender" along with it all dangerous props like class, close sex to regain the subject position of women. ¹⁹ (Balachandran, 131). There is no doubt to say that Sarojini Naidu's poetic talent has been compared to Kamala Das. In addition, to present her equality of womanish expression and fulfillment, it is necessary to compare Naidu's Poem *Indian Dancers* with Kamala Das's *The Dance of the Eunuchs* have a contrast between vivid and dizzy portrays of human personality as

the aspect of Naidu' poetry. On the second way the poetry of Kamala Das there is a blur of generalized ecstasy²⁰ (Lyric Spring, 26) which can be seen as follows;

Their jewel-girl arms and warm
Wavering lily-long fingers
Enchant through melodic hours
Eyes raised with rapture

From the very passage of the article, it has already mentioned that Kamala Das's poetry is the voice of suppressive and marginalized women where women treat like the animal. As the point of view, the dramatization of adolescent growth and the tone of voice have been used in the conflict between a song of innocence and the view of Naidu's nuptial aspiration. Besides, the catalog of the role of the sensual coquette and female fatal clears the way of Das's sensuality upon the subjective obsession.²¹(the lyric Spring pp.25) She faced disillusionment in her life span and it can be taken from her autobiographical note of her personal identifications where she stands apart at the age of fifteen, gets merry with a rich and busy man who remain busy in his daily doing and has no time to understand it recognizes the meaning of true love. She always attentive in the search of spiritual love and find hopeless and a wave of dejection after the passing night with her husband. The disgust of her attitude for brings her sexuality and emotional gratification she converts her religion as the name of Kamala Surayya. In concluding, she could not find the relaxation of mind and peace of her soul. Surely it can reveal through her autobiographical note Kamala Das speaks about herself when she was involved with her husband on the wedding night but she becomes remain a victim of failure after the breaking the dreams of emotional gratification in place of lust and hunger of her husband. He seemed to be solely interested in sex and never presented her a kind word or glance.²² (*critical essays on commonwealth literature*, 131) She confessed that;

At night he was a chieftain who collected the taxes due to him from his vassal simply and without exhilaration. All the parijata that I wore in my curly hair was wasted. The talking was brutal and brief. (*My Story*, 95)

After the failure of her marriage life, she had got totally frustrated and freak and she presents a glance of her husband' humiliation attitude towards sexual gratification while giving her no real love or affection and behaves as a mechanical way which brings not only disappointment to her but also misery and even torture. Consequently, the black shadows of a chipping world around her began to darken her dreams of a happy, settled life. Her childhood innocence got scattered after not receiving the perspective of emotional attachment on behalf of her husband. After a sharp review of her poetry and prose, the reason of her disillusionment creates the psychopath of gloominess and melancholy in her outlook life.²³(Balachandran, 132.) concerning of his confessional mode and the stigma of masochism can describe through the ideology of American

Deborah Pope says ; In the modern confessional poetry, as an extension of the Adamic tradition, the stance of everyman is readily available to the male poet. It is expected that, personally alienated and desperate as his voice of his time. By articulating the personal psychoses of his experience, he is simultaneously relaying the social fabric of his world. Yet for the female confessional poet, there is not the same extension. She is not everyman, only serve to reinforce her sense of isolation and freakiness. She cannot even believe in solidarity of community with another woman. Although in the very sense male confessional poets do bespeak trauma of their times, poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne sexton remain individual crazy women.²⁴(Bhattakker,40) This trauma and pathetic tone of women crises also appears in the novels of Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock*, and *Where Shell We Go This Summer?*, are the finest example of internal and external injury with pointing the question at the dignity of pseudo-masculine in reason of with these sentiments create the conflicts of women hibernation, masochism, narcissism, schizophrenia, exile and loss of identity. She presents through the women the misery and the lugubrious experience. Her vision is caught by the tainted world of women, who bring the other of man's self is irrevocable of the positioning of woman as a gender class in patriarchal society²⁵ (Pandey, 25) The conceptual philosophy of Sharada Iyer, Head of the Department English, describes in her article *Split-self* in the Poetry of Kamala Das that this term *Split-Self* has taken for poetry in *No More Marks* by Florence Howe in which it describes an opposition women feel between essential aspects of the self, between what is socially prescribed on the basis of gender and what is defined on the basis of the self, between what a woman feels she should be and what she feels she is. Oh this ways Kamala Das has followed the concept of *Split-self* throughout her poetry to give it the impression of identity crises with psyche marginalization and has written a number of themes what she feels in her surrounding and divided into two emotions as; the domestic gender role and next is used as her counterpart haunts the fingers human intercourse, isolated with men and women life.²⁶ (Piciucco, 114). So on the basis of emotional and libido of Kamala Das, it can be said that she wrote what she suffered in her entire life. Moutushi Chakervaratee differentiates two conflicts on behalf of women suppression these are hypocrisy and paradoxical attitude toward a woman beside it, entire structure of socio-religious system has able to make her the victim of torture and punishment and they are treated as the puppets in the hands of the men-made world. The radical autobiographies of these women writer Shuda Majumdar's *Memoirs of an Indian Woman*, Sita Rathnamal's *Beyond the Jungle* and Kamala Das's *My Story*(1976) is able to disclose the secret of male dominated society with their tolerance expression and the shadow of orthodox cal including egoism.²⁷ (Mautuhsi, 139-151)

Conclusion:

To Conclude it can be said that the voice of Kamala Das has reached the ears of other women and make them able to struggle for their emotions and desires through her art of composing powerful confessional poetry. Although Das faced my hardship and suppression in her life but she could never stop her running feet as reaching the ground in the male-centered

literature. As soon as she reaches the step of maturity, she engaged in married life as I have already mentioned it but it was her super willpower that she get as the rays of sun in this patriarchal system and reserved her fame in the world of Indo-Anglican Literature. In this way the marginalization and hindrances are not for accepting, it depends on us that we choose the way of melancholic and masochist or accept her as the true feminist spirit.

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