

Unfulfilled Passion and Unyielding Truth: The Boldness of Kamala Das

Shriya Mishra¹, Dr. Monika Jaiswal²,

1-Department of English, IFTM University, Moradabad, U.P.

Corresponding author-*(monikajaiswalmjp@gmail.com)

Abstract:

Within the intricate fabric of postcolonial Indian literature, numerous voices have emerged, critically interrogating and challenging prescribed boundaries. Kamala Das stands preeminent among this diverse array, distinguished by her profound articulations of female desires and veracities. The current research endeavours to meticulously explore Das's oeuvre, focusing on her motifs of 'unfilled passion' and 'unyielding truth.' By employing an interdisciplinary methodology, the study seeks to ascertain how Das's narratives juxtapose personal histories with larger sociocultural discourses. Her confessional technique, notable for its candidness during its era, offers an incisive portrayal of female sexuality, individual identity, and the multifaceted dimensions of love. It is posited that Das's representations of unfilled passions extend beyond mere personal disclosures; they symbolically encapsulate the broader realm of women's stifled desires and aspirations within a patriarchal framework. Her commitment to an "unyielding truth" can be interpreted as a metonymic manifestation of resistance, an endeavour to challenge normative structures and advocate for the marginalised. Through rigorous textual analysis and contextual readings, this research underscores Kamala Das's position as a significant literary figure and a cultural luminary who exemplifies the potency of candid truth in literature, particularly when confronted with societal constraints. By situating Das's contributions within the broader trajectories of feminist and postcolonial literature, this study seeks to enrich current academic dialogues on the interplay of literature, gender, and cultural studies.

Keywords: Confessional technique, postcolonial discourse, female veracities, patriarchal framework, suppressed desires.

Kamala Das, subsequently known as Kamala Surayya following her conversion to Islam, is a venerable figure within the annals of Indian literature. Born in 1934 in the serene locale of Punnayurkulam, Kerala, her distinguished familial connections undoubtedly influenced her literary proclivities. Notably, Nalapat Narayana Menon and Nalapat Balamani Amma, both luminaries within Malayalam literature, were among her kin. By the mid-1960s, Das's distinctive literary voice began to resonate within the Indian literary milieu. One seminal work that exemplifies her academic prowess is *Summer in Calcutta*. Proficient in both English and Malayalam, Das also wrote under the pseudonym 'Madhavikutty' for her Malayalam oeuvre. Her autobiographical tome, *Ente Katha* or *My Story*, is a testament to her audacious narrative approach. Scholarly examination of her works reveals a courageous exploration of themes often regarded as illegal, encompassing facets of feminine subjectivity, sociocultural norms, and the complexities of interpersonal relationships. Personal experiences, including her marital life with Madhava Das and her role as a mother, frequently imbued her literary endeavours. Furthermore, her 1999 conversion to Islam and consequent name change to Kamala Surayya also marked a significant inflexion point, both in her trajectory and within the broader cultural discourse. Although 2009 witnessed the end of her literary epoch, her indelible legacy, characterised by its audacity and introspective depth, persists. Thus, she remains an indispensable figure within the corpus of Indian literature.

In meticulously examining Kamala Surayya's literary contributions, one discerns a profound commitment to authenticity and multifaceted exploration. Rather than merely committing words to paper, this esteemed author immersed herself in the lived experiences she portrayed, most notably her spiritual transition to Islam whilst maintaining a profound connection to her Hindu heritage. Such a decision underlines her ceaseless journey for deeper understanding and self-definition, irrespective of societal gaze or critique. Surayya's oeuvre consistently demonstrates a delicate balance between palpable reality and imaginative abstraction, affirming her unparalleled ability to meld life and artistry in an evocative symphony. Through her works, she ventured into the intricate dimensions of femininity, offering a potent critique of the prevailing male-centric perspectives and redefining traditional narratives surrounding femininity and desire. Her adeptness at elucidating the intricacies of the human psyche grants her work a universal resonance, rendering her writings relevant across diverse cultural landscapes. Specifically, in compositions such as *Voice*, Surayya provides a profound

commentary on the symbiosis of her dual religious affinities, underscoring her prowess in melding personal experiences with broader themes.

Das's works are significant in many ways. Her writings subtly hint at her profound understanding of gender fluidity in poems like *The Stone Age*, challenging rigid gender roles and heteronormative expectations. Although her works are deeply personal, they are always rooted in the broader socio-cultural milieu of India, as seen in pieces like *The Old Playhouse* and *Inshallah*. Her works on love, sexuality, and identity resonate in current debates on feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and personal freedoms. Kamala Das' vulnerability and strength intermingle in pieces like *An Atlas of the Body*. Kamala Das never hesitated to confront established societal norms and resisted the categorisation imposed on her as a poetess and a woman, as seen in *An Introduction*.

Kamala Das's *An Introduction* is a heart-wrenching dive into passion left wanting and the stark realities she has lived. Let us unravel the poem and see what beats beneath its lines:

It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
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 sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. (Das, 6)

In a meticulous examination of the line, "It is I who drink lonely drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns," one discerns an overt expression of solitude. Upon closely examining Kamala Das's poetic articulation, one discerns a profound sense of yearning, suggesting a deep-seated desire for genuine connection or perhaps an elusive comprehension. In the striking assertion, "It is I who laugh, it is I who make love and then feel shame," Das thoroughly examines personal experiences juxtaposed against societal standards, shedding light on the vast emotional terrain she navigated. The phrase, "It is I who lie dying with a rattle in my throat," elicits profound imagery, potentially alluding to stifled ambitions, a yearning for recognition, or contemplating life's fleeting nature. With her introspective admission, "I am sinner, I am saint," Das underscores the duality and intricacies inherent within the human condition. Furthermore, her statement, "I am the beloved and the Betrayed,"

dives deeply into the complexities and fluctuations of human bonds. Kamala Das's poetic offerings, replete with deep self-reflection, exemplify a confessional literary style that challenges and critiques societal expectations, further establishing her as an eminent figure in the annals of modern poetry. Through this, she emerges as a voice and a formidable force in literary discourse, championing authenticity and unmitigated self-expression.

The lines beneath from Kamala Das's *The Freaks* are like an intricate mosaic of metaphors and visuals. They paint a scene of closeness, but there is a haunting undertone of yearning and emotional detachment:

*He talks, turning a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam, his right
Hand on my knee, while our minds
Are willed to race towards love;
But, they only wander, tripping
Idly over puddles of
Desire.Can this man with
Nimble finger-tips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skin's lazy hungers? (Das, 9)*

In the excerpt, the man appears familiar and distant as he turns his sun-stained cheek to her, and his mouth seems like a dark cavern, suggesting depths that are neither explored nor understood. Their minds want to delve deep into the territory of love, but they aimlessly skim the surface of shallow "puddles of Desire," portraying unfulfilled passion. Instead of being deep and fulfilling, the power is superficial and transient; despite the physical closeness and the potential for intimacy suggested by "Nimble finger-tips," there is a lack of emotional and passionate depth. Her rhetorical question underscores the unfulfillment she feels. Kamala Das portrays her feelings fearlessly and candidly, characterising the entire excerpt. Her

descriptions are not coated with euphemisms but present a raw, unvarnished truth. "Stalactites of uneven teeth" and "Skin's lazy hungers" reflect her perceptions and emotions at that moment. She fearlessly touches upon the theme of unfulfilled passion and how external actions do not satisfy the deeper emotional and passionate yearnings. In these lines, Das exemplifies her boldness by candidly describing a moment where physical proximity does not translate to emotional intimacy. The unwavering truth of her sentiments is presented with clarity and frankness, characteristic of Das's poetic style, making her a unique voice that challenges traditional norms and conceptions of love, intimacy, and womanhood.

Summer in Calcutta by Kamala Das is like a sultry, vibrant dance of words. Dive into its lines, and you will feel the tug between raw desires and those piercing moments of brutal honesty:

*I sip the
Fire, I drink and drink
Again, I am drunk
Yes, but on the gold
of suns, What noble
venom now flows through
my veins and fills my
mind with unhurried
laughter? My worries
doze. Wee bubbles ring
my glass, like a bride's
nervous smile, and meet
my lips. (Das, 26)*

Upon close analysis of the lines, "I sip the Fire, I drink and drink Again, I am drunk," there emerges a palpable depiction of fiery passion and insatiable longing. The deliberate repetition in the act of drinking underscores an unyielding, perhaps even compulsive, desire. The capitalisation of "Fire" is noteworthy, accentuating the fervent intensity of this yearning.

Transitioning to the phrase, "but on the gold of suns", Das introduces an almost celestial imagery. This denotes that her passion is not derived from mundane or terrestrial origins but from something as glorious and vast as the gilded luminosity of the sun. Yet, despite this ethereal brilliance, there is an implicit sense of unfulfillment or incompleteness. The simile in "Wee bubbles ring my glass like a bride's nervous smile" is particularly evocative. The transient bubbles are likened to fleeting moments of joy, perhaps delicate and interspersed with uncertainty. This hints at the transient and sometimes uneasy nature of passionate ecstasy. The line, "What noble venom now flows through my veins," presents a dichotomy, portraying passion as holy and potentially dangerous. With "fills my mind with unhurried laughter," there is an intimation of temporary euphoria, a fleeting respite from overwhelming fervour or tumultuous emotions. The brief statement "My worries doze" subtly alludes to a transient cessation of concerns, not their eradication. This underscores the cyclical and often unresolved nature of internal conflicts or apprehensions. Kamala Das offers a profound exploration of passion's multifaceted dimensions through these meticulously crafted lines. She artfully balances the exhilaration of genuine emotions with their inherent complexities. Das's candid portrayal, both euphoria associated with passion and its concomitant uncertainties, is emblematic of her commitment to authentic emotional expression, affirming her stature as a distinguished voice in literary circles.

The Looking Glass by this female writer hits you right in the feels. It is like a haunting melody about desires left hanging and those hard-to-swallow truths:

Oh yes, getting

A man to love is easy, but living

Without him afterwards may have to be

Faced. A living without life when you move

Around, meeting strangers, with your eyes that

Gave up their search, with ears that hear only

His last voice calling out your name and your

Body which once under his touch had gleamed

Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute. (Das, 54)

The lines "Oh yes, getting a man to love is easy, but living without him afterwards may have to be faced" evoke the fleeting nature of passion. While the initial phase of attraction or love might seem simple, the aftermath of such relationships, especially when they end or when the passion fades, can be devastating. "A living without life when you move around, meeting strangers" depicts a life devoid of the same passion and enthusiasm, suggesting a sense of emptiness and a void that remains unfulfilled. "With your eyes that gave up their search, with ears that hear only his last voice calling out your name" indicates the intensity of the past relationship overshadowing any potential new encounters, emphasising an everlasting yearning and a passion that, though in the past, remains unmatched. "And your body which once, under his touch, had gleamed like burnished brass, now drab and destitute" highlights the unfulfilled desire. Her body, which once radiated with his touch, now feels lacklustre without it, emphasising the depth of her passion and the void his absence has created. Kamala Das's frank acknowledgement of the complexities of love and passion is bold and straightforward. Her portrayal of the realities of an intimate relationship, both its peaks of power and the valleys of desolation post-separation is raw and unfiltered. The descriptors "drab and destitute" do not mince words about the emotional state post-relationship. It is a stark, honest portrayal of how deeply one can be affected when passion fades or is lost. These lines from *The Looking Glass* exemplify Kamala Das's unique voice. She does not romanticise love or relationships; instead, she presents them with all their intricacies and challenges. Her unyielding commitment to expressing the truth, especially the less rosy aspects of love and desire, solidifies her position as a bold and authentic poet.

Das's creation, *The Old Playhouse* feels like a storm brewing, capturing the weight of a love that pushes one down rather than lifting them. Drenched in desires left unquenched and hard truths, it is pure Kamala Das – unapologetic and fierce. She says:

You were pleased
With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow
Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth; you poured
Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed

My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices. You called me wife,
I was taught 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 and
Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
Questions I mumbled incoherent replies. (Das, 69)

Her oeuvre explores intimacy's dual nature—its fervour and occasional shallowness. In delineating the physical response, she moves beyond mere human encounters, directing the reader's attention to deeper emotional undercurrents that often remain unarticulated. Her vivid imagery of "dribbling spittle" and "bitter-sweet juices" is not merely a portrayal of raw passion, but a commentary on the complexities inherent in intimate relationships—those moments that oscillate between exhilaration and intrusion. Das's reference to daily rituals, such as sweetening tea, underscores the transition from spontaneous passion to predictable domesticity—a transformation resonant in many literary examinations of long-term relationships.

In an astute examination of Kamala Das's oeuvre, one cannot help but observe her intelligent commentary on the overshadowing presence of a dominant ego within relationships. Das adeptly captures the transition experienced by many—from a state of assertive vibrancy to one of subdued compliance. This dynamic indicates the imbalances often evident in partnerships where power is unequal. Das's poetic creations warrant meticulous study, urging readers to explore the convolutions inherent in romantic liaisons. Her amalgamation of candid emotionality, combined with precise scholarly introspection, enriches the reader's interpretative journey. In modern poetry, her contributions stand as pivotal reference points, especially when examining the intricacies of human interactions. Furthermore, Das's portrayal of intimacy is characterised by a nuanced duality. She delves into its fiery depths while shedding light on moments of superficial engagement. Her vivid descriptors, such as "dribbling spittle" and "bitter-sweet juices", represent unbridled passion and profound commentaries on the multifaceted nature of intimate relationships. As she presents, these moments can vacillate between deep connection and uncomfortable overfamiliarity. As

sweetening tea exemplifies, Das's allusion to everyday practices subtly emphasises the evolution from spontaneous romantic engagement to the more habitual rhythms of domestic life.

During the transformative epoch in India's historical trajectory, Kamala Das emerged as a seminal voice, her life and oeuvre mirroring the complexities of the post-colonial period. As India endeavoured to sculpt its post-colonial identity, Das, too, embarked on an intricate journey of self-exploration. Demonstrating unparalleled fortitude amidst critical scrutiny, she eschewed conventional societal mores in her relentless pursuit of personal integrity. Her literary contributions, reminiscent of the enduring imprints of oceanic tides, remain poignant and memorable. With her audacious engagement with taboo subjects, adept lyrical prowess, and unwavering allegiance to introspective truth, Das has firmly established herself as an iconic figure in 20th-century literary circles. In her own words, a statement that aptly captures her literary ethos, "I speak the truth, not to hurt anybody but to share it." Through this dedicated act of sharing, she has irrevocably secured her stature within global literature.

The intricacies of her legacy are multifaceted; she emerges not merely as a poet or raconteur but as a maverick, defying conventions and championing the cause of unfettered self-expression. By audaciously challenging patriarchal paradigms and offering accurate portrayals of the female experience, she has cemented her status within feminist discourses—never explicitly self-identifying, yet resonating powerfully. She is commemorated as an emblem of resistance, resilience, and profound introspection. Engaging with her works is akin to traversing a labyrinthine tapestry of emotions, insights, and lived experiences. Whether verse, narrative, or personal revelation, each composition invites readers into an expansive realm where profound feeling aligns seamlessly with consummate artistry. Beyond her literary identity, Kamala Das was a composite of diverse roles—a matriarch, spouse, spiritual aspirant, and astute observer of her socio-cultural milieu. These various roles imbued her writings with unparalleled depth and complexity, transcending traditional literary classifications.

WORKS CITED:

1. Das, Kamala, *Selected Poems*, Haryana, Penguin Books, 2014.
2. Shukla, Dinesh K., *Poetry of Kamala Das: The Aesthetic Dimension*, New Delhi, Adhyayan Publishers & Distributors, 2010.
3. Doley, Sarat Kumar, *Sexual Liberation in the Poetry of Kamala Das Feminism and Kamala Das*, Mauritius, LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2012.
4. Dinesh, Diwakant, *Feministic Consciousness in the Poetry of Kamala Das: A Critical Study*, Jaipur, Aadi Publications, 2020.
5. Bora, Hemant, *A Treatise on Kamala Das's Poetic-Eroticism: A Life-Line Beyond*, United States, Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014.
6. Das, Kamala, *My Story*, Haryana, HarperCollins Publishers, 1977.
7. Suraiya, Dr. Kamala, *The Path of The Columnist*, Kerela, The Book People, 2000.