

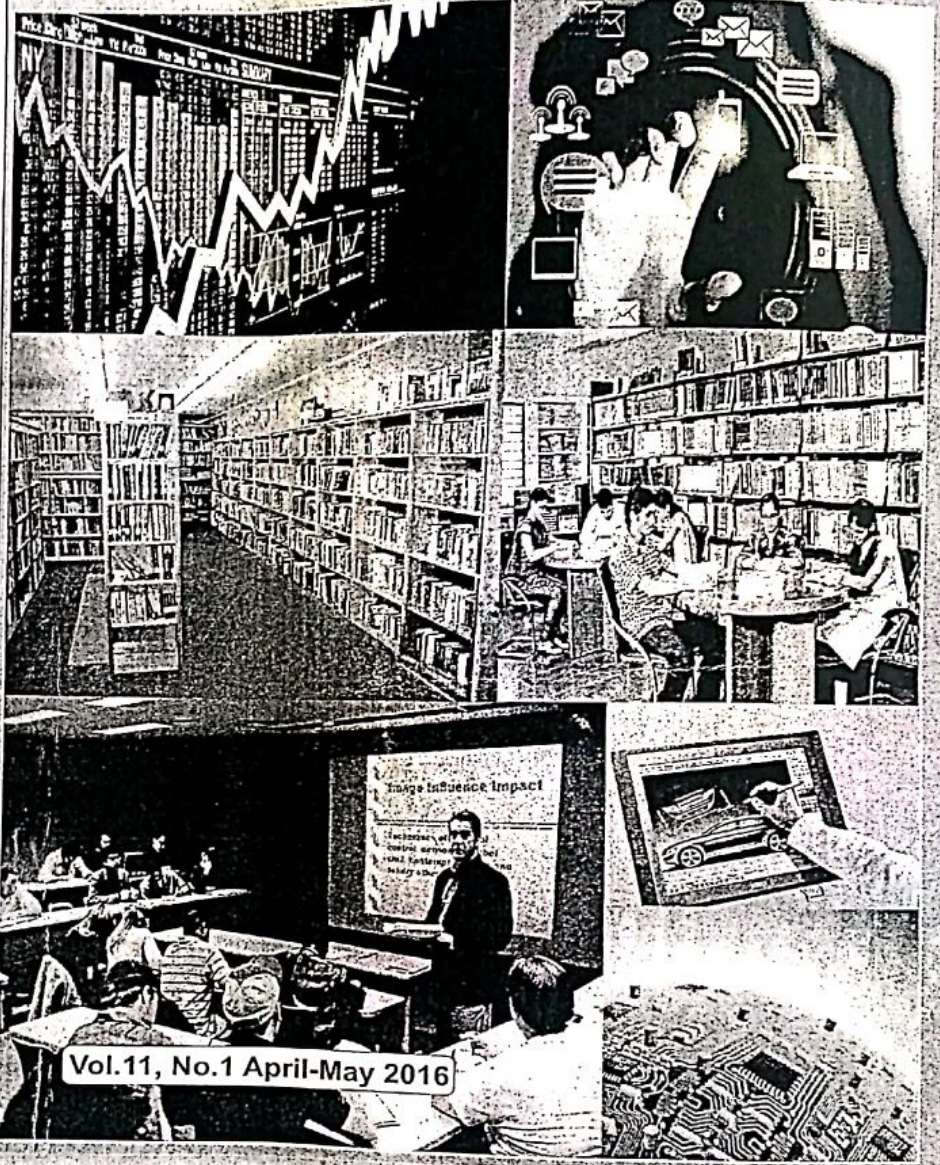
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## A Critical Study of the Poetic Devices in Kamala Das's Poetry

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### Abstract

Kamala Das, one of the great poetesses in Indian English Literature has published the poems which are full of frankness, symbols, and images. The reality of her poetry is remarkably enlightened because she has depicted her own experience in her poems.

Kamala's poetry moves around a limited number of themes. Depiction of her own experience has brought Kamala Das before the readers as 'a poet of felt thought'. She does not give importance to the political, social and financial subjects in the verse. One can witness the reflection of feministic approach in the poetry of Kamala Das.

The structure of poetry, use of poetic devices like simile, symbols, imagery, free verse, and the themes have made Kamala Das on pinnacle of reputation and distinction. Kamala Das is in the front line of the Indo-English poets.

### Kamala Das as a Poet

The 'Sahitya Academy Award' winner Kamala Das is one of the renowned names in poetry written in English. By virtue of lyricism, openness and frankness she rested on the peak of literary world, who has three volumes to her credit: *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973) Use of frankness, genuine tone, symbols, images make her poetry interesting and pleasant. Kamala Das represents her own experience of life and it increases sharpness and reality of her poetry.

Writing short stories in Malayalam in the initial stage Kamala Das has written a lot for well-known periodicals and Magazines.

### Features of Kamala Das's Poetry

Before we begin to study any work of the writer it is obligatory to know distinctive features of her / his writings. When we think of Kamala Das's poetry we find she has caged all the poems in a limited number of themes. Whatever she writes is a result of her own experience in the life. It has great contribution in bringing her before the readers as 'a poet of felt thought'. (Dwivedi, 2006:20) She is far away from the political, social and financial subjects. Her success in the field of poetry is due to the themes related to her own self. The readers realize repetition of the same things again and again which leads to monotony and feministic approach is the prominent aspect in her poems. Therefore we name her as the leader of woman's cause and identity. Her sound voice against the male dominance is witnessed in poetry and prose writings. Kamala Das rightly projects fears and hopes of women community.

### Style

Being conscious of various meanings and standards of words Kamala Das's use of words in poetry is accurate and musical. Her selection of words, style and tone make her poetry very pleasing and exact. Kamala Das knows that 'the best poets wait for words'. (Singh, 2014:70) The poet's efforts are to tender beauty to the poems as women desire to look beautiful. She confesses that words are a source of trouble in love making. She writes:

I tell my-self, words

Are a nuisance, beware of them, they  
Can be so many things. (Das, 1965:11)

#### Use of language

She views that words reach to the poets from silence. The words are caged by the poets in silence. Kamala Das's thoughts on use of language are very valuable. According to her contents are more important than the medium. She provides this answer to her friends, critics and cousins because they raise a question regarding medium of writing. Kamala Das does not wish to minimize role of English language in the composition of poetry even though there are a number of short stories and poems in her mother tongue, Malayalam.

In 'Introduction', she speaks:

Why not let me speak in  
Any language I like? The language I speak  
Becomes mine, its distortion, 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? (Das, 1965:59)

Kamala Das is familiar with English language so she feels that the question why does she use English is stupid. Her use of English as a medium of expression has natural essence and lyrical quality. Anyone can understand what does she want to say? very easily because of simplicity and clarity of language structure. The purpose of avoiding complex language is to let the ordinary reader be understood her emotions and thoughts. All these lead Kamala Das to bring to

light womankind as a whole. The repetition of the words helps her to serve the intention of emotions. Monotony of words and phrases in the poems by Kamala Das allow the poems to be musical and rhythmical. She writes in the poem 'The Tempting of the Sirens': 'Ah, why does love come to me like pain, again and again?' (Das, 1965:64)

#### Use of simile

Kamala Das's use of poetic device 'simile' in her poetry is very superior. It is used in the poem 'Forest Hunger' in excellent manner. She wants to make comparison between her savage hunger and a forest fire. The example justifies her purpose: 'to take in with greed, like a forest fire that consumes...' (Das, 1973:39) The use of metaphor by Kamala Das is easily noticeable and moving. By using such metaphors Kamala Das want to express her bitter experience of love and strong dislike for it.

"Life is quite simple now

Love, blackmail and sorrow" (Das, 1967:6)

The choice of words by Kamala Das and structure of writing is chiefly expressive and seldom suggestive. All mental feeling and ideas are presented through her use of expressive language. The lines in 'The Maggots' are suggestive. They suggest that Radha is nobody but Kamala herself who combated her true love. Her husband's love to her is meaningless. She agrees that it is nothing but a strong pinch on her physical body. Radha-Krishna myth is the real source of Kamala's suggestive use of language:

At sunset, on the river bank, Krishna Loved her for  
the last time and left— That night in her husband's arm,  
Radha felt So dead that he asked, what is wrong? Do you



mind my kisses, love? And she said, No, not at all, but thought, what is it to the corpse if the maggots nip? (Das, 1967:22)

#### Use of imagery

Kamala Das's use of imagery makes her poetry picturesque and emotional. It leaves various shades of reflections like sense of hearing, pertaining knowledge and skill of handling different situations on the mind of the readers. The poetess describes a scene in which man and woman is participated in the sexual act and it is full of stimulating senses and sexual love. The poetess has had the same experience with the man. She describes very sensuous scene of 'nudity' of male and female who present themselves before a glass. There, we see them exciting and blush in love making.

Getting a man to love you is easy Only be honest about your wants as a Woman. Stand nude before the glass with him So that he sees himself the stronger one And believes it so, and you so much more Softer, younger, lovelier, --- Admit your Admiration.(Kamala Das, 1967:25)

#### Use of free verse

Using free verse Kamala Das has achieved freedom of utterances without losing emotions and their intensity. The same poetic device, versification is handled by the poetess in her poems which are written one after another e.g. 'The Sea Shore', 'The suicide', 'Substitute', 'Composition', 'The Dance of the Eunuchs', 'Blood' and 'The Stone Age'. In 'The Dance of the Eunuchs', the poetess says it is the time of hot summer when eunuchs arrive to dance and they produce sweet sound through the musical instrument i.e. cymbal and an ornament

and the ankle tinkle in their dance. This type of description is a gift of science.

It was hot, before the eunuchs came  
To dance, wide skirts going round  
And round, cymbals  
Richly clashing, and anklets jingling  
Jingling, jingling-----  
(Kamala Das, 1965:9)

Use of blank verse is not a part of kamala's poetry. But she has tried to apply it in prose poems. The poems like, 'The Swamp' and 'Sunset', 'Blue Bird' are the examples of blank verse which have been included in the collection, 'The Old House and Other Poems', 'The Swamp' is the best example of Kamala's use of 'vers libre':

In Malabar during the rains after one singularly dark week and one hot morning our backyard was a swamp my feet cracked the grey crust and I sank with a wail. (Kamala Das, 1973:52)

#### Kamala Das and themes

Kamala Das manipulates theme of love in regard to the theme of body. She is dark and has simple characteristics so she loves her body at the same time hates it. Due to complex family situation Kamala Das discusses issues which are related to her body. From her childhood to the married life she was not properly cared but ill-treated. Her married life was not successful "My husband was immersed in his office work, and after work there was the dinner, followed by sex. Where was there any time left for him to want to see the sea or the dark buffaloes of slopes?" (Dwivedi, 2006:22) Kamala's unsuccessful love is the cause of her poetry. The lines in the

poem 'A Relationship' depict Kamala's intentional celebration of the body.

My body's wisdom tells and tells again  
That I shall find my rest, my sleep, my place  
And even death nowhere else but here in  
My betrayer's arms...

The poem 'A Request' by Kamala Das presents her dislike for the body. One can underline her tiredness with life. Without hope she feels her life is meaningless and sterile.

When I die  
Do not throw  
The meat and bones away  
But pile them up  
And let them tell  
By their smell  
What life was worth  
On this earth  
What love was worth  
In the end.

The theme of decay and death is also represented by Kamala Das. Her autobiography 'My story' is a product of her serious illness. She is not afraid of death but welcomes it. Her poem 'Lines to a Husband' is full of aspects like decay, death, and love.

I shall not remember  
The betrayed honeymoon;  
We are both such cynics,  
You and I.

At the age of 19, Kamala Das seriously suffered from a nervous breakdown and was left alone in a room where she

witnessed sun shining through the house windows. In order to find relief from illness she was taken to the grandmother's house in Malabar. It was a source of comfort to Kamala Das. In the 'My Grandmother's House' Kamala Das says:

There is a house now far away where once  
I received love...that woman died,  
The house withdrew into silence, snakes  
moved  
Among books I was too young.  
To read, and, my blood turned cold like the  
moon  
How often I think of going  
There... (Das, 1965:15)

#### Conclusion

The poetry of Kamala Das is autobiographical and individualistic. She as a poet paints various sheds of moods, Kama's involvement in writing poems about seasons, children, bangles, the sea-shore, morning trees prove the difficulties of composition. They show that Kamala Das comes out from her well-chosen themes'. Kamala Das tries to impress diversity and variety.



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