

## Confessional mode in Kamala Das's poetry

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### Abstract

The word 'confessional' is related to the personal affairs. The confessional mode has become an effective technique in modern times it enables the poet to unleash the psychological pressure that overrides his sensibility. It is a fearless self-revelation and admission of private experiences of life. The poet is engrossed in an urge to peel off the layers of his self to reveal the terror, pain, miseries, vexations and frustrations that engulf it. Kamala Das represent modern Indian woman who is passing through a period of gloom, depression and frustration. Her poetry voices the existential anger of the age and reveals the problems faced by the modern Indian woman during her journey from tradition to modernity.

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Kamala das has been called a poet in the confessional mode. The confessional poets deal in their poetry with personal emotional experiences which are generally taboo. There is ruthless self-analysis and a tone of utter sincerity. The facts are not always true, but there no deviation at all from the emotional truth. What a confessional poet gives us is the psychological equivalent for his or her mental state, and it is such 'psychological equivalents' that we always get in the poetry of Kamala Das, and in this respect she is to be compared to such confessional poets as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Judith Wright and others.

Kamala Das's poetry is marked by a frightening frankness and searching exploration of the self. The unconventionality of her theme and the fervour of her conceptual imagination are matched by her utter sincerity of expression. There is no hiding behind the obscurity of phrases and images or taking refuge in the web of mysteries. Kamala Das's basic theme is the exploration of the true nature of love, of the rationale of man-woman relationship based on love and of the pains and pleasure of its realization. Every poem is a repeated experiment in this search for the meaning of love and the significance of the self.

Confessional poetry is all autobiographical, it is rooted in the personal experiences of the poetess. From the personal and the particular, she rises to the general and the universal. She transforms her intense personal experience into a general truth. Her own predicament and her own suffering become symbolic of human predicament and human suffering. Herein lies Kamala Das's greatness as an artist. She is both intensely personal and universal. Her poetry contains a wide range of theme, yet they are largely confessional in tone and tenor.

Kamala Das confesses a number of things exclusively related to her own self-her feminine sensibility, her whims and caprices, her frailties and virtues, her feelings as a proud mother and as an exploited wife and her delicate and precarious woman as a grand-daughter. She openly confesses: "...I must let my mind striptease. I must extrude autobiography". She frankly confesses the meaninglessness of physical love. She remorsefully confesses:

As the convict studies  
 His prison's geography  
 I study the trappings  
 Of your body my dear love  
 For I must someday find  
 An escape from its snare.

Kamala das exposes the hurt of domestic discord with a candour unknown hitherto in Indian poetry by woman, "Getting a man to love you is easy" she says, only you have to be "softer, younger, lovelier" (The Looking Glass). In the same poem she talks of "the musk of sweat between the breasts" and in 'The Sunshine Cat' she candidly admits to having turned to different lovers because the husband is unable to satisfy her. Through her poems she comments explicitly on male indifference, insensitivity, exploitation of the female and their inability to give love. In 'The Sunshine Cat' the husband punishes the woman for her demand for freedom. He callously shuts her in till she becomes "cold and half dead woman now of no use at all to men". In 'The Looking Glass' after having squeezed her of all her love and vitality, the men left her never to return and the woman who "gleamed/Like burnished brass," becomes "drab and destitute". The Invitation shows her assertiveness when she confesses to having been impelled by death-wish but reveals an inner strength in repelling the wish and voting for the life-principle. The persona of the poet has a distinct personality, "I am still young/And I need that man for construction and destruction, and destruction", she says.

The most obvious and colourful feature of Kamala Das's poetry is the uninhibited frankness with which she talks about sex, referring nonchalantly to 'the musk of sweat beneath the breasts', 'the warm shock of menstrual blood', and even 'my pubis'. Kamala das's persona is no nymphomaniac; she is simply 'every woman who seeks love'; she is 'the beloved and the betrayed' expressing her 'endless female hungers', 'the muted whisper at the core of womanhood'. The traumatic frustration, love and marriage result in her confessional poetry mulling over love, sex and the body's wisdom. Several faces of Eve are exhibited here-woman as sweetheart, flirt, wife, woman of the world, mother, middle-aged matron and above all, woman as an untiring seeker of the nature of psychological process behind both femininity and masculinity. Love too appears in several roles such as a 'skin-communicated thing', an overpowering force, an escape, a longing, and a hunger resulting in satiety.

Marriage and love are not, and need not to be mutually exclusive; but for Kamala Das, as she tells us repeatedly, they have proved to be so. When she speaks of love outside marriage, she is not actually propagating adultery and infidelity but merely searching for a relationship which gives both love and security. That is why she sometimes gives mythical framework to her search for true love, and identifies it with the Radha-Krishna myth or with Mira Bai's relinquishing of the ties of marriage in search of Lord Krishna, the true

lover: 'Brindavan lives on in every woman's mind,/and the flute, luring her/From home and her husband'. The tension of body in Kamala das's poetry issues from the pressure of her complex family background, neither properly cared by her parents nor by her husband after marriage. And her marriage, as she says, was doomed to failed right from the start: 'My husband was immersed in his office-work, and after work there was the dinner, followed by sex. Where was there any time left by him to see the sea or the dark buffaloes of the slopes?' The failure of love and the birth of poetry seemed to be significantly related to each other in kamala Das. In the poem Advice or Fellow Swimmers, she beautifully suggests, through the all-embracing uses of the sea, the cherished freedom of living, which involves a sense of the value of one's own body.

The confessional poet finds emotional refuge in distancing himself from the turmoil of involvement. Confessional poetry derives its tone from the conflict between the awareness of the present malady and the inexorable urge to seek joy through reminiscences of past experiences. 'One's own inner intensities and conflicts as well as the world's crushing injustices and uncontrollable laws (social and natural) are converted into the language of neurosis, hysteria and breakdown. This is counterpointed by a capacity for deep joy and peace, presented mainly as nostalgia or vision'. This is evident from her poems-My Grandmother's House and A Hot Noon at Malabar. A confessional poet is often obsessed with the feeling of decay, destruction and death. The fear of decay, destruction and death is all pervasive in Kamala Das's poetry. The poetess has been involved in life and death struggle throughout her life. The poem "The Sunshine Cat" shows that the plight of the poetess who feels almost half-dead in the company of her unfeeling husband. "An Introduction" is a remarkable confessional poem in which the poetess directly and unhesitatingly reveals her private life. The entire action of the poem revolves around the private life of the poetess herself. The "I" used in the poem has a direct bearing on the life of Kamala Das. The pathos of her ruined marital life is clearly presented in the following lines:

....Who drink lonely  
 Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns...

Kamala Das is the leading confessional poet in the field of Indo-Anglian poetry. Her poetry is highly subjective in its nature and scope. It is a fearless self-revelation and admission of the poetess's private experiences of life. It also dramatize the poet's disturbed state of mind. Kamala Das's poetry is an attempt to strike a balance between the inner and the outer worlds. Her poetry is also anti-establishment and anti-elegant like other well-known confessional poets.

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