



## **KAMALA DAS: A CONFESSIONAL POETESS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Confessional poetry is primarily written in the subjective form. It is preoccupied with the personal lives of the poets. It explores/exposes the inner feelings/psyche of the poet. "In the confessional poems" writes M. L. Rosenthal, "the private life of the poet himself, especially under stress of psychological crisis, becomes a major theme writes." The confessional poetry is the poetry of introspection, self-analysis, self-expression and self-revelation. A confessional poet more often takes the reader into confidence about his/her personal and private life, and unravels those facets of life which an ordinary man, though that person is a poet, would keep strictly to himself/herself because of the intricate nature of those facets. A confessional poet has to shed all of his/her reservations and to write straightforwardly, candidly, and in an unequivocal manner, thus flouting the restrictions and restraints which the social/ethical code and the customs of society foist upon him/her. Kamala Das is primarily a confessional poet, and in this context, she may be regarded as a remarkable Indo-Anglian poet comparable to the American poets such as Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath.

***Keywords: Confessional poetry, psychological crisis, customs, society, Indo-Anglian poet, American poets.***

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In the confessional mode of writing, the writer writes in a highly personal manner and lays bare his/her emotions, even his/her apprehensions. The inevitable fact of women being more emotional than men facilitates writing in the confessional style. While men feel generally reluctant to express their emotions, women on the contrary make little effort in this aspect. Prof. Rosenthal is one of the earliest poets to invent a new kind of poetry called confessional poetry. He was of the opinion that this kind of poetry expresses Romantic aestheticism. The confessional poetry deals with the private life of the poet. Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Judith Wright and Kamala Das are essentially the confessional women poets. Plath's famous poem "Daddy" is certainly one of the striking poetic achievements of the confessional mode. The most often quoted lines of this poem are: "Daddy, I have had to kill you, You died before I had time."

The confessional poet uses his/her particular experiences for the following reasons—to record the immediacy of their experience and its specific nature, to suggest that such experience might be relevant to men/women universally and to possibly explore ways and means of transforming them into the positive. Confessional poetry is a monopolistic field for poetry and such a genre requires qualities like sensitivity, understanding and empathy, but most of all a passion to liberate oneself from the complexity of life and male domination towards a life of hope, liberty and meaning. Kamala Das is well known for her bold and forthright expression. Kamala's poetry is confessional and autobiographical. She shows in her poetry about her own frustrations and failures in a male



dominated world, and shows how she tried to maintain her individuality and feminine identity and how from this rebellion issued all her troubles, frustrations and psychological traumas. She herself says

I must let my mind strip tease  
I must exclude autobiography.

Lover and sex are the main theme in Kamala Das' poetry. She created a world which is emotionally sterile and unproductive, a world where there's only lustfulness and bodily pleasures. Poem after poem she hammers hard at the husband-lover and articulates her intense desire of escaping from his clutches and attaining freedom. She confesses candidly the lustful love in these words:

Love became a swivel-door  
When one went out, another came in.

Kamala's poems show us that she is every woman, who seeks love. She is the beloved and the betrayed, expressing her endless female hunger. A confessional poet often writes about death, disease and destruction. Kamala also has written number of poems on decay, disease and death. The confessional poets are in love with death for they fail to see the harmony between the inner and the outer life or the body and the soul. This is how Kamala expresses the same feelings in a poem called "The suicide":

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

Kamala Das has a style of her own. Her language is simple but the tone is very emphatic and full of assertion. Love is her favorite theme. She is frank, honest and forthright in describing different kinds of experiences in her poetry.

Like many poems, "Punishment in Kindergarten" is an autobiographical poem of Kamala Das. The poetess in this poem recounts her picnic to Victoria Gardens when she was a girl child in the kindergarten. All the children were playing and making merry except Kamala Das. But she alone kept away from the company of the children. Their teacher, a blue frocked woman, reprimanded her saying:

Why don't you join the others, what  
A peculiar child you are!"

This admonished remark of teacher was heard by other children who were sipping sugar cane and laughed. Kamala as a sensitive child felt it very much. She was very sad at the words of the teacher. But the laughter by the children made her sadder. She thought that they should have sympathized her rather than laughing and insulting her. Filled with sorrow and shame she hid her face in a hedge and wept. This was indeed a painful experience to a little child in the nursery school. Now after many years she has grown into an adult. She has only a faint memory of the blue frocked woman and the laughing faces of the children. Now she has learned to have an 'adult peace' and happiness in her present state as a grownup person. Now there is no need for her to be perturbed about that bitter kindergarten experience. With her long experience in life she has learned that life is a



mixture of joy and sorrow. She remembers how she has experienced both the joy and sorrow of life. The long passage of time has taught her many things. She is no more a lonely individual as she used to feel when she was a child. The poet comes to a conclusion that there is no need for her to remember that picnic day, when she hid her face in the hedge, watching the steelwhite sun, that was standing lonely in the sky.

"Punishment in Kindergarten" is written in three stanzas, each having different number of lines – the first with seven lines, the second with six and the third with nine. Like many English Romantic poems, this poem does not follow any regular rhyme scheme. The theme of the poem can be categorized into two parts, the first of which being the description of the painful experience of the kindergarten/school days and the second, Kamala's adult attitude to the incident at present when she is no more a child. She seems to be nostalgic about her childhood days. There are certain expressions in the poem that are worth remembering. The poet says that the child buried its face in the hedge and "smelt the flowers and the pain". "Smelt the flowers can be taken as an ordinary expression, but "smelt the pain" is something very evocative and expressive. In the first stanza of the poem, the poet describes the pain caused to the child, "throwing words like pots and pans". This again is beautiful. The phrase used by the poet to describe the child's teacher, namely, "blue frocked woman" can be justified from the child's point of view. But to the poet who is an adult the use of the phrase looks a little too awkward. On the whole, the poem can be taken as the poet's interest in remembering her childhood days.

The tone of Kamala Das' poetry is distinctively feminine. She is a confessional and autobiographical poet who writes about her own experiences of frustration in love and drudgery in married life. In one of her best poems "Summer in Calcutta" she candidly writes about her first sexual encounter with man. All her famous poems such as "The Testing of Sirens," "My Grandfather's House," "The Descendants," and "The Looking Glass" are confessional in character. She expresses over the deep loss of female identity in the presence of domineering male. She craves for liberty. In "The Playhouse" she boldly and straightforwardly reveals tension in man-woman relationships, the inadequacy of love and intolerable sexual tyranny and subjugation. Kamala Das in her poems communicate a powerful female sensibility which does not find expression in the male counterpart poets.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

Like other confessional poets, such as Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson, Emily Bronte, Hilda Doolittle, and Maya Angelou, Kamala Das makes her own life, her personal emotional experiences, disillusionment and frustrations the center of her poetry. As a confessional poet she depicts with phenomenal frankness the wrongs, exploitation, oppression and humiliation that she endured/faced in the male dominated society. Sexual humiliation and exploitation is one of the main subjects of her writings. Her poems beautifully describe how she fails to incorporate/blend the inner and the outer, the body and the soul. Kamala Das frankly writes about love, sex, failures, frustrations, marital relations, extramarital sex, emotional sterility etc. She is considered one of the first Indo-English poets who adopted the method of confessionalism in her poetry.

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