

## Interrogating the Male: A Reading of Kamala Das's Poems

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### Abstract

Reared in the tradition of Kerala, Kamala Das, in her poems, is found boldly asserting her rights to assess man and point out his limitations. She regrets how her desire to learn and grow has been mischievously turned down by the male in the process of imparting the lesson about his own self. The monstrous male ego leads her to lose her will power and reasoning ability. But she continues questioning the use of the male in the long run of life. Her bold feminine sensibility enables her to articulate the hurts that it has received in an insensitive world which is largely man-made. She writes of her private experiences candidly, for example, how she has been, for years, obsessed with the idea of death. She has come to believe that life, despite all emotional involvements, is as ineffectual as a mere dream, death being the only reality. From such pre-occupation with cessation, there is in her a tremendous transformation to the substance of life later, whereby she asks not to throw her meat and bones away but pile them up to suggest, by their smell, what life is worth on the earth. But the engagements with the body do not detract her from asking questions about identity. Poem after poem, the man-woman relationship moots incessant questions before her and she shares this interrogating pose with her readers. Whereas, men have cast women only in relation to the male identity, women include the male without destroying their sense of self. The male comes to be defined more in terms of denial of connections and relationships but the feminine personality follows the principle of inclusiveness. The poems of Kamala Das seem to echo such dictum of her experience. The method used in the article is a close survey of a good number of poems of Kamala Das that either directly or, in an oblique way, posits the argument reflected in the title, 'Interrogating the Male ...' While locating Das in the Indian English scenario as well as in the patriarchal set up, the article also purports to bring in the wider scope of feminism and takes up Das's dealing with the issue. Though not over elaborative in inter-textual and inter-disciplinary studies, it, however, attempts to focus on certain interesting aspects of Das's poems most of which are on man-woman relationship.

A certain kind of narcissism seems to co-habit Kamala Das's sensibility and this possibility may be a subject of further study on her. Another interesting area of research may be located in Das's soft chords relating her to the family, the grandmother, particularly, whereas a contrast may be drawn to her love-hate relationship with its male

members. Further study may also be conducted on her diction and versification, particularly the line and stanza structures she has employed and their significance.

The article here points to the age-old man-woman nexus and how Kamala Das deals with it in her own way. From the repressed and submissive identity that the patriarchal society ascribes on womanhood there emerges a bold feminine sensibility with all its modes of interrogation at the male. Literature, which itself was a male-dominated area, is softly but decisively mulled over by the asserting feminine self of Das which obviously paves the way for other female writers, particularly, female poets to write on the issue which is always pertinent in our society.

**Keywords:** tradition, the male, feminine sensibility, questions, life, inclusiveness

A common argument about the poems of Kamala Das is that she has continued to interrogate the male in her poetry. We don't know to what extent the tradition that brought her up was behind the interrogating pose she had adopted but there is no denying the fact that her intense feminine sensibility strongly determined her personality. Such a personality indirectly, it is obvious, contributes to the questioning pose in her poetry. She has written mostly about the man-woman relationship and the various facets of the experiences in love. This inseparable closeness with the male has evoked in her to searchingly look at the role of man in the humdrum as well as the non-conformist aspects of a woman's life in a country like India. Years before the American feminist poet and novelist Erica Jung outlined her voice in 'The Artist as Housewife: The Housewife as Artist'<sup>1</sup>, the age-old silence of a housewife had been broken by her.

She saw herself as a poet first and her first successful attempt at non-fictional prose, *Ente Katha / My Story* is seen presumably written out of financial compulsion. But her autobiographical venture was more important in another respect: it brought her face to face with her father who tried to stop its publication. She had to 'disown' a part of her autobiography, saying it was fictional, but she was happy at least for writing and not 'disowning' the 'unapologetic' preface to the English edition brought out by Sterling Publishers. However, the preface was dropped without any explanatory note in the later editions.<sup>2</sup> So, she had to face the opposing male in the form of her own father in publishing her story about herself. In a poem whose title is, indeed, interesting, 'Next to Indira Gandhi', she writes about her father and her upbringing whereby we find how the male ego succumbs to the female:

You chose my clothes for me  
My tutors, my hobbies, my friends,  
And at fifteen with my first saree you picked me a husband. (SP<sup>3</sup> 151-152)

The role of a father, a man, in the upbringing of a female child is brought under critical focus whereby the male is being severely admonished in picking for the daughter a "saree" as well as the so-called life-partner. The lack of sensitivity there in the father should be read in the context of the social construct of the male ego.

It is an irony that when he is dead and she has nothing to fear from him, she is not happy:

..... You are dead, nobody fears you now  
And I, freed from fear at last,  
Feel no relief at all. I feel dead. More dead than you.... (SP 152)

The poem, 'Next to Indira Gandhi', is an interesting pointer to the fact that whatever suppression / oppression the female self might have undergone under the formidable male ego, the underlying

compassion and a sense of belonging which the conscious feminist perspective nullifies in respect of an attributive facet of the female identity as ascribed by men, cannot be brushed aside. The proximity of the male self cannot be denied although the critiquing posture always remains a curious reminder of the relationship.

Her success in voicing the emotional and sexual life of a middle-class housewife in the form of autobiography, which has also been evident in the poems she has written before writing candidly about herself in prose, paved the way for further outspokenness in her poems. It is a fact to be reckoned with that she has written her autobiography only at the age of thirty seven or thirty eight. She put her creative energy in founding 'Bahutanrika', 'a club of talents',<sup>4</sup> whereby she met poets, playwrights, editors, publishers and others related to different faculty of arts and performance for reading and performances in her apartment in Bombay (Now, Mumbai). The meeting was discouraged during the Emergency (1975-77) as it was dubbed anti-government. Again we find her father in a role of suppresser as, through him, she was asked to discontinue the meetings. Her father was, then, the president of the Indian Newspaper Society (1976-77).

In her poems, her concern was with love, not with sex, though sex had been a part of it. In his illuminative edition of her poems, Devindra Kohli has narrated how Kamala Das was treated after the success of her autobiography and asked to write on pornography in Indian Literature. Her male acquaintances might have some role in it.

In a conversation with me she mentioned that she had been dismissed as a fake or compulsive fantasizer, since she had refused the overtures of some of her male acquaintances. (Kohli Introduction to *Kamala Das: Selected Poems* xxx)

Poem after poem, she has interrogated the male in different aspects. In the well-known poem, 'An Introduction', the male voice, taking the garb of the authoritative society, says:

Don't write in English, they said,  
English is not your mother tongue. (SP 5)

The voice makes her alert about her feminine identity with an undercurrent of the imperatives of conformity:

... later they told me I grew. (SP 5)

It takes on a frightening, formidable form when, as a youth of sixteen, exercising the authority of the bridegroom, it asserts itself:

..... He did not beat me  
But my sad woman body felt so beaten.  
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. (SP 5-6)

The dictations are made obvious:

..... Dress in sarees, be girl,  
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,  
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,  
Belong, cried the categorizers. (SP 6)

A clear sense of apathy is heard when it says:

.... Don't cry embarrassingly loud when  
Jilted in love... (SP 6)

The poem is, as a whole, a comprehensive pointer to the whole gamut of conformist trappings of the male she has found herself in. Speaking about it, Devindra Kohli has written: "An

Introduction' is not only a candid and witty piece of self-revelation, but a state of her credo, her attitude to language and experience" (Kohli *Kamala Das* 83)

The interrogating tone is obvious in 'The Freaks':

..... Can this man with  
Nimble finger-tips unleash  
Nothing more alive than the  
Skin's lazy hungers? (SP 9)

M. K. Naik writes about her stance in the poem: "Another complaint one of Das's women makes against her man is that what he has to offer is not true love, but merely sexual satisfaction..." (Naik *Indian English Poetry* 47) This is a common charge brought against men by Das's women but what is more significant is the tone of curiosity in the speaker while wording her inner turmoil. Even mutual love, the platform on which desire and passion get fulfillment, is also subject to critique as "skin-communicated thing", as in the poem, 'In Love'. It is interesting to note what Naik has to say in this regard: "The word "lust" occurs frequently in Das's poetry..." (Naik 45) This love – lust binary is a point on which Das's speakers are found to oscillate.

The painful soul-searching resulting from male apathy is the subject of query in the poem, 'My Grandmother's House':

..... I who have lost  
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to  
Receive love, at least in small change? (SP 13)

Naik reads Das's poems in term of a traumatic frustration in love and marriage the result of which is the confessional poems obsessively mulling over love, sex and the 'body's wisdom'. He makes an assessment of Das's poems in such observations:

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 the psychological processes behind both femininity and masculinity. (Naik *A History of Indian English Literature* 209)

She speaks about the predicament of her persona in 'The Sunshine Cat':

..... Her husband shut her  
In, every morning; locked her in a room of books... (SP 23)

In the poem, 'I Shall Some Day', she wistfully desires to fly away from such male confines:

I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon  
You built around me with morning tea,  
Love-words flung from doorways and of course  
Your tried lust. (SP 25)

The poems are not all amorousness but seem to blink towards a destination of peace and rest. A. N. Dwivedi writes:

In Kamala's three volumes of verse, there are a number of poems that breathe an air of love, amorousness, and sexuality. But these should not lead one to believe that she has been pleading all along for promiscuity and adultery. They rather articulate her strong desire to get liberated from the clutches of a male-dominated society and pass a happy, healthy life of peace and rest. (Dwivedi 29)

However, if we look at Kamala Das's life and career, we find her unsuccessful foray into politics, losing in the election, then forming a political party to promote secularism and the cause of the

orphans and also her conversion to Islam, and then, what Kohli has mentioned about her acquaintance with feminism. Canadian writer, Merrily Weisbord wanted Das to collaborate with her on a book on feminism, as mentioned by Das in her letter, as referred to by Kohli. In another letter of Das written on 22 July, 1995, Kohli quotes:

The Canadian publishers have sent me a Dictaphone & tapes. I have yet to operate it. Feminism tastes like saggy cardboard. I am bored with it all. I wish I could eat cyanide & die. Looking around for a way out. (Kohli Introduction to *Kamala Das: Selected Poems* xxxiv)

Was Kamala Das a feminist? We may cite here a poem like 'A Feminist's Lament':

What was courage worth  
at the very end?  
Even Phoolan the dacoit queen  
finally threw down her guns  
to settle for weekly orgasms. (*SP* 150)

In this context, we can gloss over the enterprise of women's writing, particularly the feminist writing that included what Susie Tharu and K. Lalita termed

....questions about the context, structured and restructured by changing ideologies of class, gender, empire, in which women wrote and the conditions in which they were read; questions about the politics, sexual and critical, that determined the reception and impact of their work; questions about the resistances, the subversions, the strategic appropriations that characterized the subtlest and most radical women's writing. (Tharu Introduction 11)

Considering the kind of response Das had received from the readers as a woman, reminds us what Mary Ellmann has said about the ways women's writing is treated:

With a kind of inverted fidelity, the analysis of women's books by men will arrive punctually at the point of preoccupation, which is the fact of femininity. Books by women are treated as though they themselves were women, and criticism embarks, at its happiest, upon an intellectual measuring of busts and hips. (Ellmann 6)

We know how a writer like Kamala Das has overcome the anxiety of authorship, struggling with the upsetting male prescriptions and recovered the receding energy in remembering the lost mothers, in her case, grandmother, who indirectly helped her to restore her distinctive female power. We may refer to what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their epoch-making book *The Madwoman in the Attic*, published in 1979, have argued how the female writing has come out of its containing strictures and, in the process, a "distinctively female literary tradition" is formed. They developed a theory of "female literary response to male literary assertion and coercion", built on "female literary creativity". Their work is considered to greatly contribute to the cause of the respect paid to women writers not only in their own country, the United States, but also in those countries where English literature is read and studied. (Gilbert xii)

In respect of this, we have to interpret Kamala Das and her writing. Her struggle within the strictures of her society that is voiced in her poems along with the questioning pose she has adopted about the role of man in her life and career constitute what *The Madwoman in the Attic* calls "female literary creativity". But such a creative reality seems incongruent to what she writes in the poem, 'A Relationship':

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

My betrayer's arm.... (SP 14)

Are the contrasting lifestyles she had to cope with – colonial, urban, cosmopolitan, English - speaking and Bengali – speaking environment, the rural, idyllic Malayalam – speaking Malabar – behind her dwindling position? She is subject to such interrogation. She has to face the contradiction that, being born into the matrilineal tradition, both her grandmother, whom she has so many times fondly remembered in her poems, and her poet – mother, seemed to have compromised or conformed to patriarchal values / male dictations. We may quote here how young Kamala was addressed by her mathematics teacher: “Kamala, why do you take delight in always doing something different? Can't you behave like everyone else? Do you want to make yourself conspicuous?”<sup>5</sup>

Coming back to the male – female nexus, we find her clearly putting forth the male requisition in ‘The Looking Glass’:

..... 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.... (SP 54)

Her personal experience suggests this before the readers and it appears a kind of deception practiced by the part of her woman – persona, almost in the role of a seductress. The male demand seems to be well-known to her and she advises:

..... Gift him all,  
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of  
Long hair, the musk of sweet between the breasts,  
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your  
Endless female hungers. (SP 54)

The ally of love, sex is described so barrenly in ‘Convicts’:

That was the only kind of love,  
This hacking at each other's parts  
Like convicts hacking, breaking clods  
At noon. (SP 55)

The simile is so bold but we must have to appreciate its shameless unequivocal expression. Often she uses the word, “lust” for love, as evident in many of her poems. But ultimately she has to court the love – sex binary, and it is beautifully voiced in ‘The Testing of the Sirens’:

Ah, why does love come to me like pain  
Again and again and again? (SP 33)

In ‘A Looking Glass’, too, the kind of agonizing life, what life without the loved one means, gets manifest:

..... Oh yes, getting  
A man to love is easy, but living  
Without him afterward may have to be  
Faced. (SP 54)

Her desire to learn and grow, she said, had been duplicitously nullified by the male in the guise of training her about his own self. It is presumed from her account of her experience that the horrendous male ego is responsible for the loss of her will power and reasoning faculty. Questioning the use of the male in the long journey of life has become a benchmark of her poetry. Her strong feminine sensibility enables her to articulate the injuries that she has received in an

insensitive man-made world because she possessed a bold feminine sensibility. A sociological perspective can be offered in respect of this aspect of her sensibility.

Heterosexual patriarchal society functions on the divisions of the masculine and feminine gender roles where men ought to display their valour, machoism, sexual prowess and even brutality. Women, on the other hand, must remain repressed, cowardly, an emblem of servitude. (Puri 41)

Such a position presumably leads her to a strong, bitter criticism of men, as in these lines from 'The Old Playhouse', which describe her personal experience.

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her  
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget  
Not the raw seasons alone and the homes left behind, but  
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless  
Pathways of the sky. (SP 69)

In terms of sexuality, the same domineering – repressed image seems to lurk behind the gentlemanly façade. Ann Oakley, in *Sex, Gender and Society*, candidly writes about it:

... Along with the male's greater aggression in other fields, goes his aggression in the sphere of sexuality: males initiate sexual contact, ask females to go to bed with them, or marry them, or both: not vice versa. The female's sexuality is supposed to lie in her receptiveness and this is not just a matter of her open vagina: it extends to the whole structure of feminine personality as dependent, passive, unaggressive and submissive ... (Oakley 99-100)

We are surely reminded of the Preface to the original English edition of *My Story* where she compared herself to a sparrow. The urge to fly, implying the flight of imagination in a poet, toward the sky, beyond all kinds of limits, suggesting emancipation, is planned to be "tamed" by the male self. She has forgot, all married girls are supposed to forget, the home where they have been brought up in the bosom of nature what she terms "raw seasons" and later, he plans to force her to forget her nature. A clear parallel can be drawn here between the poet and her persona.

Interestingly, she wants herself to be interrogated along with the male in the context of the male lust in the poem, 'The Stone Age':

..... Ask me, everybody, ask me  
What he sees in me, ask me why he is called a lion,  
A libertine, ask me the flavor of his  
Mouth, ask me why his hand sways like a hooded snake  
Before it clasps my pubis. (SP 78)

The idea recurs in her poems. Only here the simile of "hooded snake" calls our attention which is obviously of phallic overtones. The recurrence of male lust leads her to scold him and send him away. But she finds herself in a disquieting state, as described in 'Flotsam'. Loneliness is not comforting.

When at last he left, scolded, sent away, alone  
On the white desert of my sheets I wondered if  
I should have fought at all to save this dubious  
Asset, my aloneness, my terrible aloneness. (SP 112)

It is significant to refer to what she has written in the preface of her autobiography in its original English version. Entitled 'The Sorrow on the Glass-pane', published in *Dialogue*, she recalls a sparrow there flying through the ventilator of the room, hitting the fan, bleeding, wounded, still trying to fly to the window and finally stuck to the window. She compares this to her process of

composing her autobiography. Like the sparrow, her bleeding self writes her autobiography. It is contextual here to quote what Bruce King has said about her rebellious nature. He is of the view that Kamala Das has achieved freedom from the fetters of a formalized British speech and diction in the mid-1960s. In this, she has shown a greater naturalness than the male writers. On the other hand, she also displays her non-conformity to the role the so-called Indian tradition has ascribed to women. She is said to represent their “fight against the kind of diction which was associated with a conformity of behaviour and attitudes”. (King 135)

Kamala Das considered Abbe Prevost’s *Manon Lescaut* the only book to have touched to her marrow. Manon’s character challenges the patriarchal and class politics of the time. Kohli dwells, at length, how Walt Whitman has been a potent influence in moulding her self. Kohli writes,

Whitman, she felt, invited her to recognize her own self, in body and in soul, free of an inhibiting sense of hierarchy. In contrast to the stories of silently suffering women she had heard about in her family, Whitman struck a revolutionary chord, declaring ‘I am the poet of the woman the same as the man, / And I say it as great to be a woman as to be a man, / And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.’ (Kohli Introduction to *Kamala Das: Selected Poems* lix)

But it seems strange that a poet like Whitman is behind the self – discovery of a poet like Kamala Das. He is not considered as a favourite poet for the feminists but Kamala Das said that she felt Whitman close to her heart because he answered the unasked questions lurking in her mind.

Had she been enjoying a satisfactory love life, her questions and interrogating pose before the “monstrous male ego” would not have been there. She was found speaking about that possibility in 2006, in a documentary film on her by Suresh Kohli:

If I had been a loved person I would not have become a writer. I would have been a happy human being. I would write about the calm. I would write about happiness, and a lovely love life and to want to live so that it would be an incentive for life.<sup>6</sup>

If we compare her to other female poets, we observe that some love poems of Gauri Deshpande recreate the drama of man – woman relationship as evocatively as Kamala Das but those poems are surely on a limited scale and in a less interrogating manner. Gauri writes:

Sometimes you want to talk  
about love and despair  
and the ungratefulness of children.  
A man is no use whatever then. (‘The Female of the Species’)<sup>7</sup>

It is so obvious here that the interrogating pose is not at all pungent.

The idea of death preoccupied her mind for years. In her autobiography, she describes death as the only reality whereas life, despite its emotional ambience, is ineffectual like an unrealized dream. She writes in *My Story*:

I have been for years obsessed with the idea of death. I have come to believe that life is a mere dream and that death is the only reality. It is endless, stretching before and beyond human existence. To slide into it will be to pick up a new significance. Life has been, despite all emotional involvements, as ineffectual as writing on moving water. We have been mere participants in someone else’s dream. (Das 213)

From such pre-occupation with death, there occurs a tumultuous change in her towards the realm of life later. In a poem, ‘A Request’, her pensive supplication is voiced clearly:

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.<sup>8</sup>

But her attachments with the body do not prevent her from being inquisitive about her identity. Her poems, with their concern with the man-woman relationship continues, life-long, to raise questions before her and she shares the interrogating stance with her readers. K. Satchidanandan, in introducing *My Story* to the readers in the HarperCollins edition of the autobiography, writes about her mode of writing it:

Men have cast women, as Simon de Beauvoir observes in *Second Sex*, in the role of the 'other', existing only in relation to the male identity, but women recognize the full autonomy of the other (male) without destroying their sense of self. The basic feminine self is connected to the world; the basic masculine self is separate. (Das xi)

In other words, the male comes to be defined more in terms of denial of connections and relationships but the feminine personality follows the principle of inclusiveness. The poems of Kamala Das echo such dictum of her experience in which the Pursuer-Persuaded / Interrogator-Interrogated myth is diluted finally, as in 'Wild Honey':

Today  
I do not even know  
if I am pursuing you  
or you are pursuing me. (SP 163)  
Critiquing the male seems to have remained her recurring forte:  
Like a magnolia bent with  
excessive bloom was my frail form  
burdened with desire. But  
you humbled me with coarse words, made  
me feel old and inadequate. (SP 'The Magnolia' 218)

Kamala Das's poems are sometimes read as the blending of two of her versions, the loved and the unloved ones. Her poems record her attempts to reconcile the two versions in her writing though the unloved persona seems to clearly dominate in most of the poems. Kohli refers to a characteristic feature of her poems as to "voice" questions, as if she is conversing with herself. (Kohli *Kamala Das Selected Poems* lxix) She works this interface between the two versions in the form of envisaging a dialogue between the unfinished woman and the unfinished poem in this way: "A woman writer unfrustrates herself by writing of a life she desires .... She seeks to complete her life and to perfect herself through her writings".<sup>9</sup>

Male figures – the father, the husband and the lover related with her unloved version – her constantly interrogated in her poems. But, at the same time, we also find her desire for fulfillment through their love. Such contradictions mark her poems. It is also found, as noted earlier, in her discomfort when she is described as a feminist for strongly criticizing the male dominion for its insensitive and loveless form. She seems rather desirous of mutual respect and love. Her poems manifest a kind of, what Kohli has said in the edition of her selected poems, "male-centred love-ethic" and this is differently interpreted by Vincent O'Sullivan and Shirley Geok-lin Lim, two of Das's admirers who were both poets, too. Sullivan attempts to find the inspiration behind her poems in the form of the myth of Krishna that is expressed in the description of love pursuit and bold unfaithfulness. She has, indeed, written that "Vrindavan lives on every woman's mind / And

the flute luring her / From home and her husband.....” (SP 131) but neither her Krishna worship or her identification with Meera, the devotee, mark her attitude towards them as the male poet exhibits to his muse. Shirley Geok-lin Lim points to this in a different way as she finds in Krishna worship an opposition to what Das’s persona represents. She is rebellious against the patriarchal authoritarianism which the mythical paradigm of Krishna suggests.

At key stages of her life, she has composed poems on Radha-Krishna paradigm and that is why the reading and interpretation of Kamala Das’s poems are obviously related to her attitude to Krishna worship. In a poem, ‘Radha’s Dream’, we find her persona, in the form of Radha conveying her woe in a tone that inevitably draws us:

How could I, poor Radha,  
believe that you were  
but a dream,  
was paradise to be,  
yet another dream? (SP 205)

A reading of such poem definitely builds an impression in us that the poet of these lines has merged her identity in her portrayed Radha, as elsewhere she is found drowning herself in the devotion of Meera for Krishna.

We may refer to what Susie Tharu and K. Lalita have to say about the respective position of male writers and female writers. They do not think that women’s writing warrants separate attention.

Women articulate and respond to ideologies from complexly constituted and decentered positions within them. Familial ideologies, for instance, clearly constitute male and female subjectivities in different ways, as do ideologies of nation or of empire. Further, ideologies are not experienced- or contested- in the same way from different subject positions. (Tharu Introduction 35)

Kamala Das’s poems can be interpreted as impressions reinforcing dominating ideologies of gender with the gestures of defiance and subversion inherent in them. Her aesthetic pursuit is designed on the liberation of her persona, if not the woman kind in general, but her poems, as a whole, posits a curious study of her contest and engagement with the male. The texts of her poems, on another level, display a powerful but complex feminist inheritance, though she seems not much conscious about it. They invite us to read them both as narratives of suppression and a chart on which her urge for freedom is carefully jotted down.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Erica Jung, ‘The Artist as Housewife: The Housewife as Artist’, in *Ms.* (October 1972), reprinted in *The First Ms. Reader*, ed. Francine Klagsbrun (New York: Warner, 1973), 111-22.

<sup>2</sup>Later editions refer to the 2004 DC Books edition and the 2009 HarperCollins India edition.

<sup>3</sup>I have followed, throughout my article, *Kamala Das: Selected Poems*, ed. Devindra Kohli (Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2014) for citing the text of Kamala Das’s poems. Citations are abbreviated as SP in the article and given within parenthesis, along with page number.

<sup>4</sup>Kamala Das, ‘A Writer’s Diary’ (Undated and unpublished typescript in the editor’s collection), 2.

<sup>5</sup>Kamala Das, *A Childhood in Malabar: A Memoir*, trans. Gita Krishnakutty (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2003), 77.

<sup>6</sup>Kamala Das in *Kamala Das: An Introduction*, a Sahitya Akademi documentary film, directed by Suresh Kohli and in Kamala Das and Suresh Kohli, *Closure: Some Poems and a Conversation* (Noida: HarperCollins, 2009), 74.

<sup>7</sup>See Contemporary Indian Poetry in English: An Assessment and Selection, edited by Saleem Peeradina (Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd., 1972), 89.

<sup>8</sup>For the text of the poem, I have cited from *An Anthology of Indian English Poetry* (Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1995), 56-57.

<sup>9</sup>See Kamala Das, 'I Believe', *Savvy*, December 1990.

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