



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 13. Issue 1. 2026 (Jan-March)

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

## Sexual Poetics and Gender Mainstreaming

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[doi: 10.33329/ijelr.13.1.307](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.13.1.307)



Article information

Article Received:03/03/2026  
Article Accepted:28/03/2026  
Published online:31/03/2026

### Abstract

The struggle between a stereotype image and the 'raised consciousness' of women is the essence of the present article. It delineates direct and indirect influence of sexual poetics in gender mainstreaming. Women poets such as Sujata Bhatt, Suniti Namjoshi, Eunice d'Souza, Kamala Das and Imtiaz Dharker have been taken under consideration in order to study how a woman poet has to confront alone the problems of creativity under gender equation. In the context of India poetry for women is symbolic for the quest for roots, seeking new answers for the old questions, the courage to voice out dissatisfaction and insufficiencies. Indian poetesses are the poetic foundation in bringing out and resolving dichotomous dilemmas. They make the society to question on the belief system and to look anew to the voiceless women. This article is an attempt to connect the voice of women poets in consideration with the concept of gender mainstreaming, seeking to highlight common elements as much as individual sensibilities for the research aims at integrating women's marginalised poetry into mainstream poetic ethos it studies that depiction of a feminist sheet within a masculine syntax and celebrates the emergence of a new consciousness and new possibility for women.

**Keywords:** feminist, feminism, gender mainstreaming, raised consciousness, stereotype metaphor, women poets, patriarchal society, negation, sterility, marriages and relationships, suppression, pathos, sexual hungers.

A lot has already been said about women's perspectives and yet a lot has to say until women achieve their desired and deserving positions in society. Gender mainstreaming, by its very nature, sought out the benefit of both sexes by accepting the difference in the needs, psyche and philosophy of women. It is an attempt to bring out all aspects of women's existence into mainstream by enabling them to be a part of decision - making process be it politics or poetry, economics or home management, psychology or philosophy or any other field to be taken into consideration. This research article contributes in the process by bringing about women's point of view or feminist consciousness

presented through feminist poetry. The phrase 'feminist poetry' brought in a new dimension of feminism into play. It carries a unique perspective of womanhood that is at once topical and universal. It speaks about a 'raised consciousness'; the sense and sensibility that is solely feminist in nature. Crossing the fundamental threshold of anomalous writing, it is neither apocalyptic nor prophetic. Kamala Das presented the very simplicity of the vision in her poem "An Introduction":

I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,  
 I speak three languages, write in  
 Two, dream in one.  
 Don't write in English, they said, English is  
 Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave  
 Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,  
 Every one of you?  
 The Language I speak  
 Becomes mine, its distortions its queerness  
 All mine, mine alone. (Das, 1973, lines 4-13)

This is her own world view, her own new found liberation undercurrent throughout under the poetry taken into consideration in this paper it is an EDM sort to bring in light the common elements and sensibilities; And authentic diction with authentic imagery and attitudes yet each poet has her own different diction distinguished by her own worldview; While Kamala das gives voice to frustrated relationships and failings; Eunice d'Souza utters the bitterness of a single woman; Sujata Bhatt and Suniti Namjoshi in their profound visions, created a new feminist mythology by deconstructing ancient myths and Imtiaz Dharker explores women's own way of spirituality. The common element of their poetry is the expression of women's sadness, loneliness and despair that lies under the yoke of old traditions and stereotype beliefs of the society; and the healthy, positive resolutions that brings forth confidence, possibilities and realisation of new consciousness that accelerates the process of gender mainstreaming.

This paper explores the diverse and multi-voiced sensibility that is expressed by selected contemporary women poets. Inspired by the legacy of Sappho, they firmly reject traditional binary divisions of gender, region, time and so forth. They transformed poetry from patriarchal commonplace; 'There is a Garden in her face/ Where Roses and White lilies grow (Campion, 1956, p. 51) to a universal theme where 'The smell of a life and death mingle/ Into the terrible, raw smell of existence' (Modayil, 2009, p. 58). Years of suppressions have finally left women barren, of pride, of life. Considering Kamala Das- who have been considered the most flamboyantly sexual poet- her poems speak of sterility and of a tired lust, as is written in "The Suicide":

O sea, you play a child's game.  
 But,  
 I must pose.  
 I must pretend,  
 I must act the role  
 Of happy woman,  
 Happy wife.

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I must keep the right distance  
 Between me and the low.  
 And I must keep the right distance  
 Between me and the high.  
 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,... (Das, 1973, lines 39- 55)

Indian women, however, often remain silent about such experiences because of the pressure of social norms. Coming out from the confinement of a private misery, Kamala Das brings these hidden emotions into the open, expressing a deep sense of yearning and emptiness that goes beyond personal sorrow. She refuses to accept the silence and gives voice to certain collective experiences. Her poetry breaks the shackles of society's rigid expectations of what is acceptable, embracing honesty and emotional truth. Her poetry could not be accepted by conservative critics because never before in Indian poetry has anyone been so fearlessly honest. Her poetry is shocking to them not because they overrun stereotype man - woman relationships but because they bluntly express those aspects of women, they could never give voice to by breaking all protective barriers of politeness that isolate one human from another and utter the notions lie behind so called civilised patriarchal society. She writes in "The Old Playhouse":

I remember the rudder breezes  
 Of the fall and the smoke from the burning leaves. Your room is  
 Always lit by artificial lights, your windows always  
 Shut. Even the air-conditioner helps so little,  
 All pervasive is the male scent of your breath. The cut flowers  
 In the vases have begun to smell of human sweat. There is  
 No more singing, no more dance, my mind is an old  
 Playhouse with all its lights put out. The strong man's technique is  
 Always the same, he serves his love in lethal doses,  
 For, love is Narcissus at the water's edge, haunted  
 By its own lonely face, and yet it must seek at last  
 An end, a pure, total freedom, it must will the mirrors  
 To shatter and the kind night to erase the water. (Das, 1973, lines 18 to 30)

The dissatisfaction and frustration of a woman's part sets the tone for their consciousness of this fertile sterility. The lines utter the legendary gilded barriers and the cloisters a woman finds herself locked in. This internalization of a woman's loneliness is a scar on humanity where they are struggling to fit into patriarchal society. Self-negation is the individual fulfilment for a woman in a traditional Indian ethos where she seeks fulfilment not in her own desires but in the desires of others. The phrases

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of a 'happy wife', 'happy mother', 'happy sister', 'happy daughter', 'happy beloved' kill the notions of a 'happy woman' and prompts the outward thrust of life in its primeval struggle for survival and the silences that counterpoise for the noise of existence. Kamla Das reiterates it in her poem, "The Old Playhouse":

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. It was not to gather knowledge  
Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn  
What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every  
Lesson you gave was about yourself. 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, 1973, lines 1-17).

A relationship is expected to last for life but the burden is supposed to be carried out by women. Entering into a new millennium, thinking of a new age, the world is seen joining together. Different countries are learning to combine into bigger forces taking lessons from the past mistakes and stupid wars. In such scenario, marriages and relationships are also changing. Most people set a deadline to their relationships; there has been a decrease in the stigma associated with divorce following the Women's Movement and Sexual Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, both men and women generally seem to feel more entitled to being happy.

If a woman dares to ask for her freedom of thoughts and action, she is said to be rebellious. Her status in so called cultured society is turned towards suspicion; even she becomes a victim of cruel criticism and social denial. A man always wants to subjugate a woman and if a woman refuses the subjugation as says Shashi Deshpande,

...they are stalked, objective to even acid attacks, domestic abuse, marital rape, sexual harassment at home and outside; they are trolled on social media, judged by what they wear, what they do. Legislation is unable to keep up with these crimes. They say that the condition of women spells out how civilised a country is by this measure, we have failed (Deshpande, 2022).

The pathos in the situation is common across all women. In search of an ideal love, Das' woman goes after one to another man, from lust to lust. In this one wandering, sometimes, she even forgets her name, her identity and she feels: "life is quite simple now.../ Love, blackmail and sorrow" (Raveendran, 1991, p57).

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Unfulfilled physical desires of a woman make her rebellious and when she moves beyond the confines of her sexual hungers to more existential matters, she comes up with 'raised consciousness'. The poems of Kamala Das focus on not just the 'female hungers', she again and again reiterates the concept of gender equality by giving parameters of a good relationship that can attain satisfaction to both men and women involved.

The concept of happiness for a woman lies in companionship. For men it is social stigma, they love to rule. In a highly complicated network of systems, which privilege the activities of man in the scheme of things, women feel lost, desolated, desperate and distorted. They are in search of a support structure which can point out the insufficiencies and negligence of explorations of the woman's psyche. In search of the self, a woman wistfully looks at a relationship where couples know each other with their names. Her unsatisfied emotional and physical needs; The irresponsible behaviour of her husband, her urge for companionship and affection and her search for fulfilment takes her into the unknown adventurous paths that seems to her the silver lining in the cloud of an affair. She agrees to try anything to get the rush of emotional fulfilment:

The lover asks...

I want your photo lying down, he said...

Will you? Sure, Just arrange my limbs and tell me when to smile (Raveendran, 1991, p. 59).

Although it also ends in the men's desire to dominate. The hurt in the part of woman and the unfulfillment is presented by Das in her poetry. She brings out the age-old instinct of a man to subjugate a woman and when she refuses the dominance, he questions the hurt and betrayal. Das points out how the lack of understanding in a relationship is responsible for failure yet in most of the cases a woman is alleged for the failure. Do freedom is cleaned for women and society but freedom without understanding and partnership is a near charade. His 'monsters' ego' does not accept her freedom. She loses her with to reason and accepting the current rhythm of life much like a caged animal she mumbles incoherently. Das reiterates the anguish of a woman in the poem "The Playhouse" drawn on the lines of Ibsen's "A Doll's House".

Losing her reasoning ability, a woman stops searching identity and confines herself into Das's playhouse with all its lights put out. The transcendental component of freedom is derived from the reflective status of women where the distance between the self and the other is annulled. The poetry of Kamala Das is an attempt to dismantle this blanketing generalization about female 'love' as a socially produced concept, role, metaphor and fantasy. In a patriarchal society 'love' is an ideological illusion defined by masculine prerogative. The overthrowing of such internalization of value took a long time to appear. Kamala Das successfully could give voice to the issues of women acknowledging women's experience and problematising it. The problem then is given the conditions of female subordination. Das's blunt articulation helps women in honestly claiming of the submerged self and the reintegrate of a schizophrenic identity. Kamala das who boldly led the blame at men's door retorts her women to rise for themselves. Women who still are entrapped in dilemmas, following the enduring code of conduct laid down by patriarchal society; need to go back to their bodies and think through them. The transcendental component of freedom is derived from the relative status of women. Kamala Das provides a viewpoint to the Indian women declining the sole burden of the sustenance of family bond upon women only. She rejects the traditional concepts off womanhood decided by orthodox society and its dogmatic condition rejecting the predetermined roles of women, she searches for an identity created by a woman herself

The feminine sensibility of Kamala das advocates for redefinition of man - woman relationship which should not stand on an imposition or obligation. She is a critic of unfavourable social customs and system. She exposes its follies. Being a woman writer, she basically gives emphasis on the vices

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related to women's subordinatory conditions. She appeals all women particularly Indian women to come together in her fight with the follies. Through her writings she makes women aware of their rights and possibilities to grow. She never hated man but the hypocritical society. In this way, she chose to revolt against the heterosexual sex along with the emotional and social burdens that came with them. At the same time, she challenged the rigid and often limiting ideas or the stereotype of being a woman in Indian society. In doing so, she carved out her own path, quietly and in her own way, she asserts for women empowerment and gender equality.

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