



**PG & RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**  
**BISHOP HEBER COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)**  
Nationally Reaccredited with 'A' Grade by NAAC with a CGPA of 3.58 on a 4 point scale  
Recognised by UGC as 'College of Excellence'  
Tiruchirappalli;



## Certificate of Participation

This is to certify that **Dr. V. Ashakumari**, *Assistant Professor*, Muslim Arts College, Thiruvithancode, Tamilnadu, presented a paper titled The impact of Africana Womanism exposed in select work of kamalasaraya in the National Virtual Seminar on Encumbrance to Emancipation: The Alchemy of Women's Writing in India, held on 17 March, 2021.

**Dr. G. Parvathy**  
Organising Secretary

**Dr. S. Sobana**  
Convenor & Head

**Dr. D. Paul Dhayabaran**  
Principal



ISSN 09730524

# **LITERARY EXPLORER**

**An Annual Publication of Critical Studies in  
English Language and Literature**

**A Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
BISHOP HEBER COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)  
(Nationally Reaccredited with 'A' Grade by NAAC with a CGPA  
of 3.58 on 4 Point Scale)  
(Recognized by UGC as "College of Excellence")  
TIRUCHIRAPPALLI - 620 017  
Tamil Nadu, India**

**Volume 16**

**Number 1**

**November 2021**

### *About the Journal...*

Literary Explorer (ISSN 0973 0524) is an annual literary journal, published by the Department of English, Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli, TN, S.India. It looks forward to publishing quality work by teachers and research scholars who are motivated to write well-researched articles, book reviews and also interviews with renowned writers. Articles submitted for publication are reviewed and selected by a panel of experts in the field of English Language and Literature.

The writing should adhere to the 8<sup>th</sup> Edition MLA Handbook specifications, and should be between 1500 and 2500 words. It must be original and should not have been previously published in any other magazine or journal.

Articles for publication in Literary Explorer, November 2022 should reach the Editor by the end of May, 2022.

The annual subscription for individuals and colleges is Rs.1000/-which can be sent to the following bank account: A/C: No.:4134000100132021 /IFSC: PUNB0413400

Please mail your articles, queries and suggestions to:

Dr. S. SOBANA, Editor  
Editor  
Literary Explorer  
Head, Department of English  
Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli - 620 017.  
Tamil Nadu, India.  
E-mail: litexplorer66@gmail.com

## LITERARY EXPLORER

11. Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night: An Exploration of Gender Issues in the Journey of Self-discovery* 91  
- Divya P
12. Ms. Militancy by Meena Kandasamy as a Narrative of Identity, Gender and Resistance 99  
- Sangamithirai C
13. Sisterhood of Suffering: Interrogating Violence in Polie Sengupta's *Mangalam* 106  
- Neha Rohilla
14. Gender Trouble in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* 112  
- Lizmol Joseph
15. Theme of Amoraliry: Sexuality Decoded in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* 124  
- Murugan R
16. Confession as Emancipation: A Study of Select Poems of Kamala Das 132  
- Elizabeth Cherian
17. Mythology and Women Empowerment in Usha Narayanan's *Awaken the Durga Within* 140  
- T. Kanchana Devi
18. Man into Woman: The Life of an Indian Transwoman in *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi 148  
- Reshma V.R.
19. The Impact of Africana Womanism in Select Works of Kamala Suraiyya 155  
- Nayana.N.V, Dr.V.Ashakumari

## The Impact of Africana Womanism in Select Works of Kamala Suraiyya

Nayana N.V, Dr.V.Ashakumari  
Muslim Arts College,  
Thiruvithancode

\*\*\*\*\*

### Abstract

This paper explores and analyses the elements of Africana womanism. Kamala was among the first women in India to speak frankly about sex and negatively of marriage in a deeply conservative society. *My Story* instantly drew criticism after its release for being 'obscene' and designed to encourage adultery. Africana Womanism is an authentic theoretical concept designed for all women of African descent. It is family centered, rather than female centered, and advocates race empowerment, rather than female empowerment. It, then, appropriately prioritizes race, class and gender, as Black men and women have the ultimate responsibility of securing family survival and thus, cannot afford the luxury of gender exclusivity when the whole race is at risk. All this will be discussed in detail in the paper.

**Keywords:** Africana Womanism, Black feminism, Afro centrism

Kamala Das is a reliable voice expressing the female born out of felt experiencing and true participation. Her poetry, though rooted in her personal crisis, private disgrace and failures, reflects the emotional, psychological and social crisis experienced by women at large. A part of her childhood was spent in her ancestral home in Malabar, Kerala and the other part in Calcutta where her father was posted for work. Kamala Das belonged to a family considered the literary royalty of Kerala. Her mother Balamani Amma was a famous poet and her grand uncle Nalapat Narayana Menon a respected

writer. Das' childhood as described in her autobiography was very culturally enriched. The book *My Story* is about her personal and professional experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society and her quest for love in its rightest form. Her writing consisted of vivid descriptions of menstruation, adolescence, love, lust, lesbian encounters, child marriage, infidelity and physical intimacy. She introduced her readers to the concept of female sexuality, a notion that was non-existent until then.

Africana Womanism is an authentic theoretical concept designed for all women of African descent. It is family centered, rather than female centered, and advocates race empowerment, rather than female empowerment. It, then, appropriately arranges race, class and gender, as Black men and women have the ultimate responsibility of securing family survival and thus, cannot afford the luxury of gender exclusivity when the whole race is at risk.

The eroticism expressed in Das' poetry was merely an outgrowth of an insecurity born of not getting the love she yearned for—from her parents or her husband. Her father was always busy with his work at the automobile firm where he was employed, selling Rolls Royces, Humber's and Bentleys to Indian princes and their relatives. Her mother, she says, was unclear and indifferent and spent her time lying on her belly on a large four-post bed, composing poems in Malayalam. Her husband, an employee at the Reserve Bank of India, was 20 years older than her and turned to her mostly for sex. She talked of her 'brush with love' with an eighteen year old girl, right before Das was about to be married of. She talked of having to look for love 'outside its legal orbit' because she was unhappy in her loveless marriage. She talked with a bravery never seen before as she wrote unapologetically about everything the conservative Kerala society had managed to box in for very long. It managed to evoke such a

widespread reaction which was equal parts tremor and equal parts adoration that it has become a cult classic in the genre of Indian autobiographies ever since.

On being asked why her book shocked the Malayali audience, she felt that it never really did, that they were pretending to be shocked to prove their 'innocence'. She believed she was merely being vocal about things that had been happening for years. She was married off to Madhava Das, an employee at the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) at the age of 15 and moved to Bombay with her husband. At a very young age, she had to find a way to pursue her passion for writing while being weighed down by the expectations of her husband, her family and the society at large of her 'duties' as a wife and mother. In 1973, her autobiography '*Ente Kadha*' (*My Story*) was released in Malayalam. It consisted of a gathering of her weekly columns in Malayalanadu that had already become a sensation across the state. Fifteen years later, it was translated into English with more text added, many parts rewritten and published with the title *My Story*. K Sachithanathan, in his forward for the book, concludes: "I cannot think of any other Indian autobiography that so honestly captures a woman's inner life in all its sad solitude, its desperate longing for real love and its desire for transcendence, its tumult of colours and its turbulent poetry" (xviii).

With her poems she tried to give voice to a generation of women who were confined to their households, and considered a product to be exchanged through marriage. She portrayed the women in her poems as human; with desires, pain and emotions just like men. With her poems she tried to give voice to a cohort of women who were confined to their households, and considered a commodity to be exchanged through marriage. She portrayed the women in her poems as human; with desires, pain and emotions just like men. Paradoxically,

the more she was disrobed of her fantasies, the more she took refuge in them. The more her husband disenchanted her of notions of love, the more she invented imaginary refuges for the immense love she wanted to give and receive. "Like alms looking for a begging bowl was my love which only sought for it a receptacle," she wrote. "At the hour of worship even a stone becomes an idol. I was perhaps seeking a familiar face that blossomed like a blue lotus in the waters of my dreams. It was to get closer to that bodiless one that I approached other forms and lost my way. I may have gone astray, but not once did I forget my destination... <https://www.theweek.in/webworld/features/society/kamala-das-feminist-writer-was-so-much-more.html>)" Kamala Das says, that the female ego is not harmful to make dominated society. So she increases her agitation defining the oneness between the two worlds- one masculine, the other female. The Indian poets writing in English use English language rather efficiently for presenting effective pictures of India. In all respects, Indian civilization and culture are not at all omitted in their writing. Their approach is entirely different, but despite this fact they never do aloof and go reserved from Indian traditional way of thinking and writing as these people have started some new colour and vitality to literature in general and Indian literature in particular.

Her writing was both fantastical and feminist, but I think it was the fantasy that defined it and the feminism was merely incidental. As she wrote: "The essence of the writer eludes the non-writer. All that the writer reveals to such people are her oddities of dress and her emotional excesses. Finally, when the muscles of the mind have picked up enough power to read people's secret thoughts, the writer shies away from the invisible hostility and clings to her own type, those dreaming ones, born with a fragment of wing still attached to a shoulder". (<https://www.theweek.in/webworld/features/society/kamala-das-feminist-writer-was-so-much-more.html>).