

# “Conflicting Gender Identities & “Coming Out” in Hetero-patriarchal paradigm: A Queer Analysis of Kamala Das’s selected short stories”

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**Abstract ;** This paper aims to analyse Kamala Das’s short stories from a queer perspective and also undertakes an enquiry into the factors that causes identity crisis in the lesbian characters of Kamala Das’s short stories. The main purpose of this paper is to conduct an analytical study of Das’s queer themed short stories. Kamala Das has written around seven queer themed short stories in her career out of which “The Sandal Trees”, “Woman”, “Deceit” and “Thirteen Year Daughter” are taken into consideration. This paper is also a humble try to re-establishes the fact that Kamala Das has made many unforgettable contributions in the field of queer literature.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper entitled “Conflicting Gender Identities & ‘Coming Out’ in Hetero patriarchal paradigm: A Queer Analysis of Kamala Das’s selected short stories” aims to analyze Kamala Das’s short stories from a queer perspective and arrive at a conclusion that women characters in Das’s queer short stories are undergoing an identity crisis and different factors like family, society, religion, education and internalized homophobia pave way to this internal conflict. Das’s seven queer themed short stories in her career out of which “The Sandal Trees”, “Woman”, “Deceit” and “Thirteen Year Daughter” which have a queer color are taken into consideration.

Queer theory developed out of an examination of perceived limitations in the traditional identity politics of recognition and self-identity. It is a known fact that homosexuals lack identity in our society. Queer theory therefore tries to help the individuals who do not belong to the normative category, to assert their identity in public and create a space for their kind. Queer theory provides gays and lesbians with a common platform to unite and call attention to their issues. Literature plays a crucial role in voicing the issues of the queer community around the world. In India, There was no pro-gay fiction, and most of the time the author’s failed to understand the complexities of queer issues. In such a milieu, In Kerala, Kamala Das addressed their issues both covertly or overtly.

Kamala Das, an iconoclast of Malayalam and English literature exposes the hidden anguishes of queer community in her short stories, some of them written way back in 1940s and 1950s. Being a unique literary figure in India, her greatness cannot be confined to a single definition. This might be the reason why she is known by different names like Aami, Madhavikutty, Kamala Das, and Kamala Surraiyya. Frank, bold and controversial in life and literature, she has unquestionably left an indelible mark in both Malayalam and English literature. She was always daring and forthright in her writing. She has criticized the tradition bound, conservative society which, of course, was always harsh on her unconventional lifestyle. She was undoubtedly far ahead of many other Indian writers in her ideas, unconcerned about what others thought about her. Das cites personal examples of patriarchal oppressions in her works, which has caught the attention of academic and lay readers alike.

Das's poetry has a huge impact in both English and Malayalam literature. Her poetry is suffused with a complex pattern of sentiments and feelings. She writes poetry in her unique style with a feminine touch and takes pride in the fact of being a woman. She is usually hailed as a confessional poet due to strong autobiographical vein in her poetry. She airs her views with boldness unparalleled and she hopes society might change their attitude to those who suffer and are humiliated. She is essentially a poet of modern Indian woman's ambivalence, giving expression to it more openly than any other Indian woman poet (Paul 2). *Summer in Calcutta*, *The Descendents* and *The Playhouse and Other Poems* are among her famous poetic collections. She won many awards in the field of poetry like Asian PEN Anthology in 1964 and the Kerala Sahitya Award in 1969. She was also short listed for Nobel Prize along with Marguerite Yourcenar, Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer in 1984.

Das's works have been studied in the scholarly discourse mainly from the post colonial and feminist perspective. Many comparative studies have also taken place comparing her with confessional poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Das's controversial autobiography, *My Story*, Published in 1976, when she was 42, was remarkably bold in its depiction of failure of her marriage and her quest for love through extra marital affairs. This work underwent several criticisms. She also wrote a novel *Alphabet of Lust* and her final work was *Ya Allah* in 2001 after her conversion into Islam. *The Kept Woman and Other Stories*, featuring the translation of her short stories, was published posthumously.

It is a known fact that Kamala Das's reputation mainly lies in her poetry, her notoriety on her autobiography and her near anonymity in respect of her short stories

(Selvalexshmi 60) Though she has written eleven volumes of short stories in Malayalam and one short story – “A Doll for the Child Prostitute” in English, she is still not identified as a short story writer. A customary reading of her short stories makes it clear that love and alienation are the major focus of her short stories. In all the short stories she is preoccupied with the theme of pain, in one form or another.

As T.N Geetha puts it,

Pain resulting from loveless living, aches dulled by routine, sobs stifled by unfeeling society, life blighted by disease and death, goodness soured into harshness by callous necessity- such are the themes of her stories which have the effect of disturbing the reader's complacency and heightening his awareness of the misery around him/her. (qtd. in Gupta 43)

So if the dominant theme of Kamala Das is taken into consideration; it is mainly about man-woman relationship and the various discordant notes struck in familial relations. She also utilizes her short stories to read the psychology of human relationships and render subtle issues affecting one's consciousness.

This paper has taken up queer themed short stories of Kamala Das as it is a theme that is not discussed much in scholarly discourse. Written way back in 1940s and 1950s in a society where homosexuality was unthinkable, Das once again proves her far sightedness. Homosexual relationships are prohibited even now and dismissed as unnatural in our society. Homosexuals are not even considered as humans. She has written around seven short stories on lesbian – gay relationship without passing any detrimental judgment over the issue. She depicts it as something common that happens in our society.

Therefore the main objective of this dissertation is to analyze Kamala Das as the pioneer of Malayalam queer literature. It also attempts to carry out an analytical study of Kamala Das's queer short stories, analyzing the identity issues of lesbian woman who are trapped in the hetero-patriarchal paradigm. This paper plans to explore more on the issues of homosexuals in 'coming out'. Here 'coming out' is used as a metaphor for LGBT people's expression of one's own identity. A person who is in a process of coming out undergoes many issues mainly coming in terms with one's own identity. This paper tries to find the issues a person undergoes while embracing one's own identity.

This Paper entitled “Conflicting Gender Identities & ‘Coming Out’ in Hetero-patriarchal paradigm: A Queer Analysis of Kamala Das selected short stories” is divided into 2 chapters. The first chapter titled “Kamala Das as a Pioneer of Queer Malayalam Literature” familiarizes Kamala Das as a queer writer, discusses the contemporary relevance of the topic and also gives an idea about the short stories taken into consideration. Although Das has been identified as a feminist writer she has never given importance as a queer writer. This chapter tends to discuss about how far Das has succeeded in representing the consciousness of queer community.

The next chapter titled “Identity crisis and aspects of ‘coming out’ in hetero-patriarchal paradigm” analyses the short stories “The Sandal Trees”, “Woman”, “Deceit” and “Thirteen Year Daughter” by Kamala Das and evaluate the women characters of these stories that are undergoing an identity crisis. This chapter also traces the reasons for the identity crisis.

This paper discusses an issue that is still contemporary in nature. Queer people of today face prejudices mainly due to the ignorance of the society. Studies like this help in promoting awareness to people in our society and help creating awareness and tolerance towards them. Also it is high time Kamala Das who is portrayed as a feminist to be established as an important figure in Queer literature. This dissertation is a humble attempt to hail Kamala Das as a champion of Malayalam queer literature and assert the fact that Kamala Das’s lesbian characters are infact undergoing an identity crisis.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **KAMALA DAS AS A PIONEER OF MALAYALAM QUEER LITERATURE**

Kamala Das is usually acclaimed as a feminist writer. Her works conveys her aversion to male domination and to the artificialities of modern life in which she feels suffocated. But not many are aware of the queer themed Malayalam short stories that she wrote in her early literary career, some of them written way back in 1940s and 1950s.. One of them was written before India got independence when the author was just a fifteen year old teenage girl, depicting a very accurate and sympathetic portrayal of lesbian love. The arguments of its lesbian heroine remind us of the political speeches of a modern day LGBT activist. Kamala Das gay and lesbian

themed stories bring out many of the essential issues and predicaments faced by queer individuals within the Indian cultural context. This chapter tries to position Kamala Das as the Pioneer of Malayalam queer Literature.

Following are some of Kamala Das short stories which demonstrate the theme of same sex love, to be precise lesbian relationships. Of all works, the most perplexing one is a short story named “*Sthree*” (“Woman”) that has lesbian love as its central theme. “Woman” concerns a love triangle between Rema, Prasanna and Ravi. The story is told from Ravi’s point of view describing his feelings for Prasanna and how he was made to back out from the relationship by Rema. After Rema’s threat he was scared of all woman and their peculiar behavior. The story ends with the death of Rema who died of some disease and Prasanna committing suicide. This work is Das’s third published work written as a 15 year old teenager. It was published way back in 1947, much before western societies started taking a liberal view towards homosexuality or medical science accepted it as a normal variation in human nature. Rema, its lesbian protagonist asks the poignant question “Brother, can’t a woman love another woman?” to the society through the story published in *Mathrubhumi* weekly. The story makes it very clear that this love between women is not just friendly-love. Because when Rema’s same-sex lover Prasanna gets proposed by Ravi for marriage, Rema protests emotionally saying “Prasanna is mine” and asks him to back off from the proposal.

The main thing to be noted from the year of publication of this story is that the positive stance that Kamala Das takes towards same-sex love is not derived from any western-colonial originated notion of LGBT-rights (141 Vadakoot). It emanates from an original intuitive knowledge about human psyche developed through social observation at a very young age itself. When Rema says to Ravi that him marrying Prasanna will make her go mad and pleads to not marry Prasanna, she is addressing him as “brother”. So, utmost care has been taken by the author to not make the lesbian character of this triangle-love story appear as a male-hater. Rema who puts up a very convincing and reasonable argument to Ravi about her same-sex love for Prasanna reminds us as a prototype of a modern day LGBT activist. Even though Ravi is scared of the mad love that Rema feels for Prasanna and backs off from his marriage proposal, he considers her as an unusual lady who deserves sympathy. In the climax of the story, the author extols lesbian love to utmost purity by portraying Prasanna dying of illness and Rema committing suicide in grief.

Another work that should be mentioned is “Deceit”. The central plot of the story revolves around the relationship between the lady doctor and her husband. The doctor believes that her relationship with her husband is perfect and that her husband is still interested in her. She blindly believes that her husband loves her until she finds another woman in her bed with her husband. Even though same-sex love is not the central theme of Kamala Das’s short story “*Chathi*” (“Deceit”) published in 1959, it juxtaposes the deceitful marital relationship that a husband has towards his wife who is a lady doctor, to the pure unexpressed lesbian love that a young nurse has towards the doctor. All gays and lesbians go through the torment of inexpressible same-sex desire that dare not speak its name laced with pangs of guilt, at least in the initial stages of their love-life. The newly joined youthful nurse feels intense attraction towards the fifty year old lady doctor with soft demeanor and very caring attitude towards patients and the author describes her feelings and self-realization very accurately: “That love was lying in her mind as guilt. It gave her pain again and again and reminded her: “You are not an ordinary woman. You love another woman” (Das 252 “Deceit”). It is always a bitter-sweet moment when a queer person realizes for the first time about their different kind of desires. Author’s accurate capturing of it here alludes to the fact that homosexual love is not a intentional ‘personal choice’. It is highly likely that the very first desires experienced by a homosexual might be to someone not having similar orientation. Hence most of the times it goes unexpressed or even if it is expressed, it can’t be reciprocated by a heterosexual. It is from this pang of inexpressible or unrequited love that a homosexual realizes and accept their own homosexual identity. And also realizes that only another queer person is capable of reciprocating their love. The response that the nurse gets when she talks about her feelings for the doctor to another lady friend Leela is so typical of how dismissive common people are about same-sex love.

More than overt homophobia, what is more common in Kerala society is the family and friends regarding same-sex love as funny or stupid. It is viewed by the majority as a child-play that should be terminated before maturing and getting married. Towards the end, the poor doctor witnesses her loving husband having sex with his mistress. And the story becomes a comparative juxtaposing of the sex-centric heterosexual love of male and the sincere unexpressed homosexual love of female.

The issue of homosexual desire perceived as child play is visible in her most famous short story “*Chandanamarangal*” (“The Sandal Trees”) also. “The Sandal Trees” charts the complex love life that spans

five decades of two Nair women who are unable to ignore the attraction and love for each other even as they fall in and out of love from their heteronormative married life. A young Nair girl, Sheela, from a wealthy family, is seduced by and falls in love with another young Nair girl, Kalyanikkutty, from an impoverished family. When their attachment to each other is discovered, Sheela is given in marriage to a family friend who is twenty-one years her senior. Subsequently, Kalyanikkutty marries a young man who adores her. Both women become doctors, and while Sheela's marriage survives many problems, Kalyanikkutty soon divorces her husband. The two women remain deeply attached to each other, for, as Kalyanikkutty tells Sheela, "I became your man and girl at the same time" (Das 9 "Sandal Trees"). Frustrated by Sheela's refusal to leave her husband, Kalyanikkutty immigrates to Australia; she returns twenty-six years later the rich widow of a white Australian. The narrative time frame for this story is in the present when both women are in their fifties and Kalyanikkutty's return forces a reassessment of their lives, of time spent together and apart. Kalyanikkutty is still in love with Sheela, but realizes that Sheela is not likely to leave her husband. At the close of the story, Sheela has accepted her as the one true love of her life and her husband says that he was aware of this from the beginning of their marriage life itself. In this short story also the decisions of the two main characters are controlled by their families either directly or indirectly. Even after their marriage Sheela lacks agency, she is trapped in the invisible chains of marriage. Whereas Kalyanikkutty who has broken away from the system of marriage through a divorce is able to make her own decisions and she has total control over her life. It is also about the life-long lesbian love and bonding between two childhood friends. The story breaks the popular notion that homosexual love will terminate or get cured after heterosexual marriage.

*"Pathimoonnu Vayassaya Makal"* ("Thirteen year old Daughter") is another short story which calls attention to on the familial conditions of Queer people. It deals with the worries of a father about his teenage daughter's unusual personality. The daughter's skeletal figure, dark complexion and average looks have already distanced her emotionally from her beautiful mother. In the school drama, she had to do an unimportant role of a boorish male construction worker. Father feels insulted and furious about this but mother just finds it funny. Father reminds the daughter about Mary teacher's warning on her lack of involvement in that maths. One mid-night, the daughter falls asleep without putting out the light and the father enters her room to switch it off. He happens to see a love poem that his teenage daughter wrote to her beloved Mary teacher:

My love is like a crazy bee

My love is approaching you like a crazy bee

My beloved Mary teacher

My love is like a rain

My love is like a crazy rain (my trans; 126)

Father is disturbed by this strange love poem. Nevertheless, he kisses good night on the sleeping daughter's forehead and goes to sleep. But on that night, he experiences a disturbing dream: he and his wife along with his daughter as a two year old infant are riding a wooden boat all by themselves and his daughter is trying to sink the boat and drown the whole family. The author tactfully ends the story here and leaves the interpretation of the dream to the reader.

Even after realizing about the same-sex love desire of his daughter, the father still lovingly kisses her. But the fear that his daughter's sexual orientation will destroy his family sinks into his subconscious mind and manifests as a nightmare later. Kamala Das foresees the household issues that are to occur in families when an individual 'comes out' and reveal their sexual orientation.

As it can be observed Das has tried to address different kinds of issues of Homosexual people. She has also written stories on gay relationships. *Chandra Rashmikal (Moon Rays)* published in 1969 is the first gay male story that Kamala Das wrote, based on gay relationship. It was later published in *Debonair* magazine as "Iqbal". "Iqbal" concerns a love triangle between a husband, his wife, and his male lover. *Raaja Veedhikal (Boulevards)*, a crime story published in 1984 with male homosexuality also in the plot, reflects the post-stonewall era of increased visibility of LGBT people in the western world. Apart from gay and lesbian stories, Kamala Das has written one transgender story too called *Napumsakangal (Eunuchs)* published in 1983. It is a story that take place in a colony in Mumbai where only 'hijadas' or transgender people live. The story recounts an old gujarati lady's search for her daughter, who was abandoned by her husband nineteen years ago. This story also shows the predicament of people who are considered as outcasts by the society. Here the baby is abandoned by the father because it was born as a third gender. Das voices the issues of such outcasts through her works. She has also mentioned the theme of homosexuality in her poems like "The Doubt".



It is also important to mention that it is in her autobiography that we encounter the very first usage of the term “*Swavargapremi*” in Malayalam literature, which is a gender-neutral term used for Gay/Lesbian that loosely translates to “Homo Lover”. Though many writers wrote about homosexuality before Kamala Das, majority of the writers used derogatory terms to address these people. In spite of all these offensive terms used by today’s society Das chose a word that was in no means offending to the Queer community. This act shows her attitude towards queer community.

Biographer Merrily Weisbord aptly addressed Kamala Das the “Love Queen” (Thiruvoth 12). She has always been in search for love and it is through this love that she tries to discover herself. Even though not a homosexual herself, she has always searched for love outside the confines of traditional marriage because of many other reasons and even she can be considered as ‘queer’ in an extended sense. Das once herself said in an interview, “I always wanted love, and if you don’t get it within your home, you stray a little” (qtd. in Kapoor 156). As it can be observed, she has never been confined to boundaries. Therefore it can be said that Das has always considered homosexuality as a viable option to both men and women who are in search of ‘love’ (Kumar 22).

Kamala Das is a genius with far vision. She wrote a Malayalam short story on homosexual liberation even before India got liberated from colonial British powers. Her gay and lesbian themed stories bring out many of the fundamental issues and predicaments faced by queer individuals within the Indian cultural context. Hence it can be said that it is impossible to write Kerala’s LGBT history without mentioning the works of Kamala Das.

Chapter two entitled “Identity crisis and aspects of ‘coming out’ in hetero patriarchal paradigm” analyses the queer short stories of Kamala Das and discusses on the factors of coming out. It emphasizes on the fact that the main characters in her selected short stories are undergoing an Identity crisis and traces the factors for it.

## CHAPTER 2

### IDENTITY CRISIS AND ASPECTS OF “COMING OUT” IN HETERO PATRIARCHAL PARADIGM

Identity in general describes a person's conception and expression of his/her individuality or group affiliations including national and social identity. Identity of a person can be analyzed on the basis of psychology and sociology. A person's psychological identity relates to his/her self image, self esteem and individuality (Sdb 3). Gender identity is an important part of one's psychology as it dictates to a great extent how one views himself or herself both as a person and in relation to other people, ideas and nature. Gender Identity of a person refers to one's sexual orientation. It is a person's own discretion and choice with whom one prefers to have a sexual relation. But in our current milieu, especially in Kerala, society seems to be much more interested in these matters than one self. Therefore, nowadays a person who practices homosexuality is identified as a homosexual just as one who practices law is a lawyer. However, on the other hand it can be noticed that one who is heterosexual does not need a special identification as a heterosexual. A prompt deduction that can be made from this analysis is that, homosexual practices lead to homosexual identity but the case is different for the person who practices heterosexuality. Thus, the homosexual practices become the primary identity of the person and the person is marked as homosexual because heterosexual relation is accepted as a norm in our patriarchal society. Sociologists on the other hand, stress social identity that defines him/her as an individual.

A person who identifies himself/ herself as a gay or lesbian, undergoes a difficult process of embracing one's own identity and revealing it which can be theoretically called “coming out” of the closet. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her highly influential book *Epistemology of the Closet* discusses how ‘coming out of the closet’ is not a single absolute act. Sedgwick's point, then, concerns the way subject identity is necessarily a complex mixture of chosen allegiances, social position and professional roles, rather than a fixed inner essence” (Barry 140).

In Kamala Das's short stories majority of characters fail to completely embrace their identity and thereby lacks sexual agency. In Kamala Das's short story “The Sandal Trees”, the protagonist Sheela undergoes

a major identity crisis. Throughout her life she is in search of her real gender identity. Gender identity may be affected by a variety of social structures, including the person's family, ethnic group, religion or irreligion and employment status. Definitely these are the factors that hold back Das's women characters from 'coming out' of the closet and understanding oneself.

Primary factor that holds back same sex love could be identified as family. In "The Sandal Trees" the protagonist, Sheela was born in a highly hetero patriarchal Nair Tarawad and she was brought up in that culture. Anything other than heterosexuality was considered a taboo. And once Sheela's family became aware of the bond between Sheela and Kalyanikutty, they decided to marry Sheela off and thereby break the bond. Sheela's family did not even bother to whom she was married to. Sheela was married off to a man who was twenty one years older than her. As there was complete discrepancy in age and interests, he can never give her the pleasures that Kalyanikutty could, as evidenced from Sheela's declaration to her husband: "You are twenty-one years older than me . . . I could never see you as my husband" (Das "The Sandal Trees" 16). She fails to form any kind of bond with her husband for three decades. She says, "In fact I cultivated silence, it grew and stood between me and my husband like a sandal tree, giving me much happiness" (13).

As it can be seen, lesbian relationships never get consent from families and often they find 'marriage' as a solution to this problem. Generally there is a misconception that homosexuality is like a 'psychological disease' and marriage can cure it. Here Das clearly shows how these women were struggling in their heterosexual relationships. Sheela continued to love Kalyanikutty and kept on comparing her husband to her. These thoughts of Sheela reveal her mental agony in adjusting with her husband. "I kept comparing the two. When I compared his mouth that smells of beer, cigarette and onions with hers that had the sweet smell of durva leaves, he failed" (5). Sheela was not happy in her relationship with her husband but for the sake of duty alone she pretended to love him and take care of him. And in the case of Kalyanikutty she couldn't love Sudhakaran and divorced him later. As it can be seen the glory usually attached to family as an institution is disrupted by Das in this work. She reveals the false sanctity attached to familial relationships through this short story. Similarly, all normative relationships in the story are broken inside. Even Sheela's father has an illegitimate relationship, which shows the hollowness of marriage.

Das critiques the heterosexual marital life when she shows how ridiculous and inadequate are the yardsticks used to measure an ideal marriage. When the local Rotary club asks Sheela and her husband to participate in a contest held to choose an ideal couple, she says, “Why not? Our marriage has lasted so long. I haven’t betrayed you, and you haven’t betrayed me. We haven’t slept apart for a single night. We can certainly win this contest.” (17).

Kamala Das’s another short story “Thirteen year daughter” portrays the reluctance of a father to accept his daughter’s unusual identity. Here also ‘Family’ stands as the main problem. As the father realizes his daughter’s love for her teacher, he tries to understand the situation. He kisses his daughter to bed but the fear that is deeply entrenched in his mind comes out as a bad dream. The father sees a dream in which the family is travelling in a boat and the daughter is trying to sink the boat. This dream shows how much the father fears the consequences of his daughter’s sexuality. The boat here symbolizes the institution of family and the father fears that his daughter’s unusualness would result in breakdown of familial relationships. It can be definitely said that family is one of the main enemies that prevent a homosexual from ‘coming out’. The family here fails to understand the individual and support her. Homosexuals as a marginalized category stand out from other marginal categories like dalits in this aspect. If an individual is a dalit then his entire family is likely to belong to the same community. Therefore they would not be alienated from their family. But in this case, a homosexual while ‘coming out’ already faces issues with society, in such a situation family is the last resort of comfort for them but as Das has rightly pointed out in her stories, families also fail to understand them and tries to force a gender identity on them, which is the most predicament a homosexual can undergo. Their Identity is being suppressed for the sake of status and other reasons.

Religion and tradition also play a pivotal role in the identity formation of an individual. Morality of an individual is deeply rooted in one’s religious beliefs. Almost all religions basic testaments deny freedom in human sexuality. Keeping aside the uncivilized ancient men, all religions are alike. Religious texts especially sacred texts have condemned the practice of homosexuality, these texts preached severe morality. Women are the usual preys to these systems. Many religious texts like *Manusmriti* and *Vedas* attack homosexuality and forbid such practices. Manu in *Manusmriti* gives an outline of civil and criminal law, discusses at length punishments to be meted out to sodomists and lesbians. Manu dictates severe penalties to sodomists. But with

lesbians he is even harsher (Devi 50). Definitely people who belong to Hinduism are controlled by these texts. In “The Sandal Trees” Sheela who belongs to an orthodox Hindu Nair family is definitely influenced by the teachings of her religion. Her family background is highly hetero-patriarchal in nature therefore she is interpellated to practice these things without question. Her traditions and customs force a certain identity on her which causes quandary.

The third component of gender identity is society. Society still finds it difficult to conceive the very idea of homosexuality. Gender identity is generally believed to be constructed through one’s relationship with and understanding of cultural norms, values, ideals, and gender rules. Society certainly regulates and structures gender expression through a framework of gender roles and occupational distinctions. Heterosexual society dictates to the world how people should live and what they should do. Heterosexual society is based mostly on authoritarianism. The authoritarians are judges, priests and professors and their weapons of control are guilt, justice, punishment and fear.

Taking into consideration Kamala Das’s another short story “Woman”, Das clearly portrays the identity crisis the main woman characters undergoes due to societal constraints. Rema, its lesbian protagonist asks the poignant question “Brother, can’t a woman love another woman?” to Ravi another character in the short story(my trans; 39). Ravi here stands as the representative of societal attitudes. The story is narrated from the perspective of Ravi, who was in love with Prasanna the protagonist of the story. Whereas Prasanna is undergoing an identity crisis. She is unable to understand to whom she is attracted to, whether it is Rema her loving companion or Ravi who has approached her parents for her hand in marriage. She is also aware that her relationship with Prasanna would never work out as society would never accept their relationship which causes a resigned acceptance of Ravi’s love. Here Prasanna is not ready or does not feel strong enough to fight the societal norms whereas Rema is a bold woman who tries to fight all the taboos for her love. This is the reason why she approaches and threatens Ravi to back out from this alliance. It is evident in her tone when she says, “You cannot understand anything right? Then atleast try to understand it now. She is mine. I loved her. I spent night and day taking care of her. I sacrificed my happiness for her. I might be a woman but brother; can’t a woman love another woman?” (my trans; 39).

Here Rema is questioning the whole of society for their rights to love, but unfortunately she becomes powerless before the hetero patriarchal society. She is silenced by the existing norms. The fear that is generated in Ravi by seeing this ‘unusual’ relationship also shows the homophobic nature of our society. When a woman identifies herself as a lesbian she is immediately doubly oppressed, she suffers from greater conflicts because of her dependent role in society, since men see women as erotic objects, as beings who are socially, physically and sexually inferior to themselves, and as a result the governing attitude to lesbianism in a male dominated society is one of loathsomeness and contempt (Devi 108). This is the worst scenario faced by a lesbian in our community. Society alienates her and deals with this person as an ‘other’. She is denied help and support even from her own family. These reasons prevent a woman from embracing one’s own identity.

In “The Sandal Trees” also the societal influences on the individual is evident. Especially in Sheela’s cultural background it is understood that her family is highly caste based and patriarchal in nature. Sheela was always conscious about her ‘forced’ identity and she was always scared to break that. She even stayed with her husband without divorcing him because she had this feeling that divorce would be considered a huge sin by the society and Sheela was always bothered about her public image. This is the reason why she refuse to accompany Kalyanikutty to Australia. Sheela’s adamancy is evident from this passage:

“No, Kalyanikutty,” I said. I’ll stay back here.”

“Come, Sheela. I’ll take care of you. You shall be my very life till I die,”

Kalyanikutty whispered .

“I won’t leave my husband and go anywhere,” I said.

“Your old husband! I don’t believe that he really loves you. He came after you thinking if he married a rich girl he’d get plenty of paddy fields and coconut groves as dowry” (Das, The Sandal Trees 9).

Here Kalyanikutty divulges the hypocrisy of marriages. Sheela is also aware of this but she is trapped in the societal constraints and cannot find a way out of her situation. Kalyanikutty says that Sheela is not aware that she is being betrayed by her husband and calls her a moving corpse. Sheela abjectly responds to this, “That’s right. Everybody says I am alive. Because my name has not appeared in the obituary column in the newspapers. When there are visitors, I still open the door for them. So I try to convince myself that I’m not yet

dead” (Das 23). This remark by Sheela shows how she has become the prey of societal convictions and continues her life as a living corpse.

Another story that must not go unnoticed is “Deceit” another short story by Kamala Das which portrays a newly joined youthful nurse’s intense attraction towards the 50 year old lady doctor. Though homosexuality is not the central theme of the story, Das accurately portrays the issues the nurse face in identifying herself while she initially develop feelings for the doctor. Her love for the doctor is a silent one as she cannot disclose her feelings to anyone. She is well aware of the homophobic attitude of the society which forces her to hide her feelings. Rather than the homophobic attitude, more people are inclined to take this as a joke or stupidity. The response that the nurse gets when she talks about her feelings for the doctor to another lady friend Leela is so typical of how dismissive common people are about same-sex love:

One night, her lady friend giggled out loud.

“What kind of love is this? Woman loving woman? I don’t want to hear such rubbish!”

“No dear Leela, this is true. I feel like seeing her all the time. I want to [ . . . ]”

“Want to?”

She hesitated to express her desire to touch and kiss the doctor. So she said:

“I want to always see her”

“Don’t you want to get married? Is it enough to worship this lady all your life? (my trans; 252 ).

As it can be observed the nurse is unable to reveal her true feelings to her friend. The nurse is undergoing confusion about her identity and she is incapable of understanding herself. In such situations people around them should be the ones who should be able to help them and support them but just like what happens in the story society does not try to understand these things and laughs them off. Leela, the nurse’s friend is a representative of the society.

It is a truth that homosexual in India cannot state his or her case while the activity itself is criminal, and the individual himself or herself is regarded as a freak. Public bias is based on a lack of knowledge, and an unwillingness on the part of society to tolerate anything that does not conform to its family based heterosexual

structure, and this attitude is fostered by a culture that has unhealthy, exaggerated feelings of shame and guilt over all forms of sexual expression, whether it is normal or abnormal .

The fourth factor taken into consideration is education. Education is a factor that is usually overlooked while analyzing the factors influencing identity crisis. Although homosexuality is the subject of wide popular mythology, remarkably little is known about it in a scientific or factual way by the ordinary people. Majority of Kamala Das's woman characters of the selected stories are well educated, specifically connected to the medical field. In "The Sandal Trees", both Kalyanikutty and Sheela are doctors and they are well aware of the biological aspects of lesbianism. Homosexuality is commonly considered as a psychological disease by the ignorant public and these assumptions can be changed only through education. In "The Sandal Trees" both women are educated and they don't find anything unusual with their same sex love relationship. But the identity crisis is formed when there is a constant fight internally about the already acquired notions about homosexuality and learned knowledge. Most women in such situation adhere to the common morality. Though they do not psychologically accept the heterosexuality, in order to survive in the society they conceal their identities. Their minds will be always grueling with thoughts about their identity.

In the story "Thirteen year daughter", the girl 'Baby' is just thirteen years old, a sensitive age where children learn many things. Here Baby cannot be considered as a learned woman. She is unaware about the moral codes that are waiting to strangle her. This is the reason why she writes about her love and desire for Mary teacher in her diary. Baby has just started to understand her identity, therefore it can be said that she hasn't yet reached a place where she understands that she is different from others, but she is soon to reach such a position. Das highlights in the title itself that Baby is just thirteen. If the story is taken further, very soon there will be a day where she realizes the conflicts around her gender identity. In that moment her education would determine her view point towards her sexuality.

The final factor responsible for identity crisis is internalized homophobia. Most of the individuals who live in this society are affected by this. They themselves are homophobic which prevents them from accepting their own homosexual identity. In the short story "Deceit", the nurse is thinking about her feelings for the doctor; "How many days have it been since doctor rested properly? My doctor, my poor doctor. . . the love she had for the doctor formed a guilty feeling in her" (my trans; 252). As it can be noticed the nurse has a guilty



feeling in her mind. Similar guilt can be observed in Sheela in the short story “The Sandal Trees”. Sheela though married still has feelings for Kalyanikutty and Sheela feels guilty for her desire. In the story she interrogates herself, “Is there anyone in this world who doesn’t commit mistake?”(Das “The Sandal Trees 13). Here she is indicating about her love for Kalyanikutty. She refers to her desires as a mistake committed by her and this guilty feeling might be the product of internalized homophobia or homo-negativity which is caused by unconscious internalization of negative ideologies about sexual minorities.

As it can be seen majority of Das’s women are undergoing a identity crisis. They are neither able to accept their hetero normative rather can they embrace their lesbian identity. As it can be rightly seen in” Deceit”, the young nurse is incapable of understanding the changes in her. Das talks about the self identification that is taking place in the nurse. Das describes her feelings and self-realization very accurately, “That love was lying in her mind as a guilt. It gave her pain again and again and reminded her: “You are not an ordinary woman. You love another woman” (my trans; 252 ).

Taking into consideration Vivienne Cass Identity model which is formally known as the Homosexual Identity Formation Model, he demonstrates a 6-stage process for “coming out”. It describes the stages that an individual may go through as they come to terms with their sexuality, both internally and externally. The six stages are as follows: Identity Confusion, Identity Comparison, Identity Tolerance, Identity Acceptance, Identity Pride and Identity Synthesis.

Based on this model it can be said that the nurse is going through the first step that is the Identity confusion. And in “The Sandal Trees”, Kalyanikutty is having a pride about her identity which can related to step five and Sheela is still in the stage of Identity acceptance. Even Rema in the story “Woman” can be grouped with Kalyanikutty as they both are bold and open about their sexual identity. They both are willing to do anything for their love and have no guilt feelings. But here Rema and Kalyanikutty represent only a minor group of lesbians who are ready to embrace their identity but majority of women in Kamala Das short stories are undergoing Identity crisis and they lack sexual agency to chose their sexuality.

As Kalyanikutty in “The Sandal Trees” reminds Sheela about the inescapability of sexual orientation “I know who you are. You know that I know. And I know that you know that I know” (Das 6 Sandal Trees). Later she remonstrates;

Sheela, you are repeating untruths over and over. And you end up believing your own lies. You don't dare be yourself. You have never been bold enough to admit that you love me. You too know that you will get peace and happiness only when you live with me (21).

Das speaks through Kalyanikutty encouraging women to understand one self and come out. Kamala Das's characters are well aware of the suppressions or subjugations they undergo and throughout their life they are trying to escape the existing norms forced onto them. She believes that women are not just sexual objects but as human as men and have their own sentiments and aspirations. Therefore, she describes her women characters in such a manner that they assume the special power and significant status. She presents them as true lovers, mothers, sisters and saints. According to Das, The Indian women are caught in the vortex of a soulless world of fading individuality. Through her works she wishes to reassert the identity of Indian woman and help them come out.

## CONCLUSION

Kamala Das through her writings have succeeded in sowing the seeds of a new culture which is tolerant to LGBTQ community. Kerala compared to other states is much tolerant to queer community and this change can be considered as a starting point of a much bigger change. Now also a large part of India is homophobic in nature. Only a few writers have shown the guts to address the issues of the homosexuals especially lesbians. Malayalam works during her time like *Randupenkuttikal* by T.N.Nandakumar published in the year 1988, portrayed lesbian relationship in a complete negative light claiming it to be a disease which was cured after marriage. Just like a response, to these notions in the same year, Das wrote "The Sandal Trees" portraying two women doctors who continue their lesbian relationship even after their marriage. Das here confirms that homosexuality is not a 'disease' which can be cured by marriage whereas it is a permanent state. Majority of our society still believes homosexuality to be a disease which will change after marriage.

In fact a large number of short stories, novels and poems were produced during this period from 1940s to the 80s that contained open depictions of alternative sexualities and sexual practices within and outside the

heterosexual frameworks. In 1947, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's Malayalam novel *Shabdangal (Voices)* was condemned as immoral, because it depicted male homosexuality. It told the story of a soldier, and his love for a cross-dressed male. At the end, the soldier dies in a sexually transmitted disease. The end of the story shows the attitude of the writer himself who believes that homosexuality is strictly physical and can lead to communicable diseases. Some of the short stories written by Lalithambika Antharjanam (1909 --1987) and K. Saraswathi amma (1919--1975) concern the double standards of sexuality and other gendered issues entrenched in the social morals of upper caste Malayalis.

In Ayyaneth's story "*Thiruseshippu*" ("Divine relics") written in 1967, he depicted the story of a nun who possessed quenchless desire for sexual intimacies even after her initiation. In yet another story "*Bhramanam*" ("Revolution"), written by the same author and published in the year 1977, a young woman was depicted as having strong sexual feelings for her female hostel mates whom she seduces one after the other. She eventually commits suicide as a result of her failure to backout from the "unnatural pursuits".

P.G. Johnson in his novelette *Nercha* ("Oblation") similarly narrates the story of a nun who desired for a married, worldly life and whose dreams were destructed with her father deciding to offer her services to the church as nun. She finds solace in same sex relations with other sisters inside the same cloister and in masturbation. However these narratives could not initiate any vibrating discussions in the prevailing public sphere of Kerala, as the theme of same sex desire was sidelined in the stories and portrayed according to conventions. In those days, there were a clearly defined field that a writer, especially a women writer was predominantly expected to explore through writings. Any work outside the expected paradigm created uproar in the society. Kamala Das was perhaps the only writer who managed to survive through this turbulent environment despite the exclusive depictions of alternative and non hetero normative issues in her writings.

In Satchidanandan's introduction to a 1997 anthology of modern Malayalam short stories, he makes the following remarkable assessment of Kamala Das's work: "Madhavikutty (Kamala Das) explores the innermost recesses of the female psyche in her uninhibited portrayals of man-woman and woman-woman relationships" (qtd. in George 118). Rosemary Maragnoly George in her essay "Queerness All mine" observes that "this one phrase inclusion of "woman-woman erotics" is the only serious mention in literary criticism of same-sex dynamics in Das's work" (George 118). As Maragnoly has mentioned, keeping aside Satchidanandan's

comment, Das was never recognized for her queer themed short stories. Analyzing these queer short stories it can be clearly understood that Kamala Das has succeeded in representing the exact queer consciousness in her short stories better than any other writer of that time. She presents the issues her lesbian characters undergo while trying to embrace their lesbian identity.

The objective of this paper was to analyze Kamala Das as the pioneer of Malayalam queer literature and also carry out an analytical study of Kamala Das's queer short stories analyzing the identity issues of lesbian woman who are trapped in the hetero-patriarchal paradigm, using queer theory. Queer theory has enhanced the study by helping to look beyond the simple categories of sexuality and get a much wider perspective of human sexuality. Through a detailed analysis of Kamala Das short stories, the identity crises innate in the characters have become evident and also the evidences regarding the factors affecting the identity crisis is also found.

The major factors that affect gender identity were thought to be variety of social structures, including the person's family, ethnic group, religion or irreligion and employment status. Further analysis has enabled in finding out that internalized homophobia is also another major reason for Identity crisis. The main characters of all four short stories are undergoing identity crisis.

In "The Sandal Trees", Sheela is incapable of embracing her identity and 'coming out'. 'Coming out' is used here as a theoretical term referring to self awareness of same sex attractions and also revealing ones identity. In Das's short stories all characters in trapped in the hetero normative paradigm and in turn lacks sexual agency. In "Thirteen year daughter" also Baby falls short of understanding her own identity. She keeps her desires to herself and expresses her desires through a poem;

My love is like a crazy bee

My love is approaching you like a crazy bee

My beloved Mary teacher

My love is like a rain

My love is like a crazy rain (my trans; 126)

Baby in these lines portray herself as a "crazy bee" or a "crazy rain", which shows that Baby herself feels her feelings to be crazy. This poem mirrors the identification process undergoing in the girl. Though she is currently untouched by the societal conventions, a time of containment is not far away for her. It can be said

that Baby as she grows up would face the same predicaments faced by Rema in the short story “Woman”. In the story, Rema is in a constant fight with the society for continuing her relation with Prasanna. and Prasanna is unable to take a decision about her relation with Rema.

In the ultimate short story “Deceit” also the nurse is undergoing identity issues. After understanding the feelings she has for the lady doctor she is unable to understand herself. In the short story the nurse seems to be repeatedly question herself about her feelings for the lady doctor. Nut she fall short of answers. But she is very well conscious about her feeling which proves that she is undergoing an identity formation. Therefore it could be concluded that lesbian characters in Das’s short stories are undergoing a identity crisis and the factors affecting each person is various, ranging from family to society.

The mental agony due to identity crisis, results in depression or suicide or permanent imprisonment of one’s own identity. This is certainly a serious issue that needs quick attention. Supporting and understanding a person who is undergoing such a situation is best thing the society can do to help them come out of the closet. Advanced studies can be conducted in this topic in regarding the problems faced by queer people in the hetero patriarchal paradigm. As queer theory is a relatively new theory and the possibilities it offers is immense, comparative studies can also be undertaken analyzing the representation of homosexuals in Malayalam literature and how it affects the Kerala queer community.

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