Kamala Das (1934-2009), a distinguished personality in postcolonial Indian English Poetry, lashes at patriarchy through her confessional writings. Das suffered throughout her life due to her back-dated family background, her husband’s obsession with sex, social discrimination, and unlimited suppression of feminine instincts. Most of her portrayals are realistic focusing on her sense of frustration and alienation. The marriage in her early age became a curse for her as it denied her the opportunity to cherish her feminine instincts. In both her father’s house and her husband’s house she found her voice stifled, as, traditionally, a woman is forced to follow the unfeeling restrictions of the family in patriarchal society. A woman is just like a puppet in the hands of patriarchy because man –woman relationship is the relationship of dominance and subservience which ultimately refers to sexual colonization under which men are colonizers and the women are colonized. Because, before marriage she is dominated by her father and after marriage the authority goes to her husband, and thus marriage becomes nothing but just an exchange of masters.

The suppression and violence she faced in her life assembled a terrible image on her mind towards patriarchal society which strengthens the position of a man but weakens a woman to marginal areas. Das devoted her time to writing poetry so that she could overcome the traumas of suffering, violence, frustration, and alienation. She, like many of her contemporaries, raised her voice against social and cultural principles that constrain women’s freedom. She believed that women need to explore their collective consciousness and shared experience to transcend the fragmentation and isolation of their lives. In her poems, Kamala Das distinctly voices her wrath and reaction against the patriarchal superiority and dominance, and so she is rightly called an iconoclast. Kamala Das’s first attack against patriarchy comes from her back-dated family background. She started writing poetry when she was just six years old. She wrote poems about her personal feelings and experiences. In fact, her poetry is out and out an exhibition of her “I” and she emphasizes it in her autobiography, My Story: “I wanted to empty myself of all the secrets” (Preface). She in her autobiography gives the account of her home as ‘a house of card’ s and her father as an ‘autocrat’ and her mother as ‘vague and indifferent’. Kamala Das who struggled for establishing a positive world for women felt happy by confessing her secret thoughts through her poetry. Das’s poetry introduces us with her unhappy childhood which did not allow her to lead a life as she wanted. Das desired to lead her life as she pleased. She used to avoid traditional womanly attitude and often played with the boys in the field and wore pants and shirts instead of wearing sari or salwar-kameez (traditional dress for women in India) but her tradition-bound patriarchal family was reluctant to let her do it. The poet was a free will personality and never conformed to family constraints and adverse practices about which her poem “An Introduction” gives evidence:

Then …… I wore a shirt and my Brother’s trousers,

cut my hair short and ignored My womanliness. (31-33)

The quoted lines show that the poem is a clear declaration of her freedom loving mind that posses a threat to the existing family rules which humiliate a woman in every possible way. Yet, her humiliation which began in her childhood continued throughout her life due to conventional family ideologies. She felt a sense of disgust to her family as she always faced an unwelcoming situation there. In fact, she was completely neglected by her family members during her childhood. In My Story, she writes about her father, “He was not of an affectionate nature. So we grew up more or less neglected and because we were aware of ourselves as neglected children in a social circle...”(2). Her poetry also conveys that her superstitious family, like most of the traditional families of her time, believed that a family’s honor depends on the marriage of its unmarried girls. Thus she became a victim of conventional belief of her family as she was forcefully married off in her early age. “Of Calcutta” minutely depicts her plight:

he poet becomes a ‘dwarf’ and she has lost her ‘will and reason’ as her husband’s ‘monstrous ego’ inflicted upon her. She objects to his domination, which makes her life bored and irritated. It is one of the protest poems which addresses mostly to her husband and the limitations of married life which Das found fairly offensive. As said by Devindra Kohli, Das’s poetry describes “the fever of domesticity, the routine of lust, artificial comfort and male domination” (qtd. In Dwivedi 164). Hence, her poetry epitomizes particularly her strong grievance against her husband’s infidelity and lust, and generally against male-domination. She demonstrates the entire male-folk of the society through the image of her husband. Her sufferings are the sufferings of every woman and her husband’s oppression is the oppression of every man as the poet articulates in “An Introduction”:

He is every man Who wants his woman,

just as I am every Woman who seeks love.

In him … the hungry haste Of rivers,

in me . . . the ocean’s tireless Waiting. (44-48)

The poem, “An Introduction” expresses every intense feeling of the poet. It minutely voices the poet’s quest for identity and fulfillment threatening the patriarchal supremacy over the women, who are in most of the cases voiceless. For Ramachandran Nair, “the poem asserts the speaker’s individuality and feminine identity against patriarchal conformity” (qtd. in Kumar 43). The protest weapon for the poet is her poetry in which she expresses her distortion, but sexual colonization where men are superior sex and colonizers, mocks her. According to her critics, what she writes is funny and inappropriate but the poet answers them very boldly and intellectually. She says that the language in which she writes is ‘honest’ and ‘it is as human as ’she is ‘human’. It is seen that the poet boldly criticizes her critics. The actual purpose of the critics is to stop her so that they can continue their patriarchal control over women but Kamala Das, definitely, realized women’s mute lamentation and unveiled it to the society through her poetry feeling that mutiny is destroying their rights and individuality. About the poet Srinivas Iyengar rightly comments when he says, “Kamala Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibition to articulate the hurts it has received in an intensive, largely man-made world”

To sum up, for Kamala Das, male-sex is the image of a beast craving for physical pleasure with an outrageous ego under which a woman loses her own identity. Almost all of her poems focus on the freedom of women by which they can establish their individual, familial, social, religious, financial, and political rights. Hence, through the depiction of her family back-ground, the nature of love and sex, her conjugal unhappiness, social discrimination, unlimited suppression, and man-woman relationship, the poet challenges the phallocentric idea of society. There is, therefore, no doubt that Kamala Das’s poetry is a lash at patriarchy and her antagonistic feeling and revolution against it, is the eventual outcome of her frustration, sufferings, deprivation, and exploitation, which are regular companions to every woman in the Indian subcontinent.