

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 1 (January-March 2026)



<https://doi.org/10.53032/tvcr/2026.v8n1.24>

Silence and Poetic Sensibility: A Mode of Transformation in the Poetry of Kamala Das and Momila Joshi

Srinewas Prasad Yadav

Research Scholar

Department of English,

BHU, Varanasi, UP, India

Email: Yadavsiddhant2073@gmail.com

Abstract

Silence is in itself a very profound, psychological and grave characteristic that a writer transfers to his or her characters in order to protest the intolerable atmosphere of the social condition and its disturbing issues that creates predicament in the inner and outer development of the portrayed character. It is unsaid emotion, absence of voice that keep repressed in the unconscious mind but when it explodes brings about tremendous transformation in the self or the social construction. This paper is an attempt to focus the becoming of an icon in field of poetic world of different nations- India and Nepal. Kamala Das and Momila Joshi employed this style in their poetry, but the former seems stronger than latter in use of it. Silence can be a powerful and rebellious. It is a form of resistance, oppression, and a mental attitude to consider someone as other that draws many critical perspectives. Simon de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Michael Foucault and other critics as well opined on various ways a woman is subjugated and how this silence is manipulated in the patriarchal framework. Language is the most essential tool for communication and an inseparable organ of literature but the silence that results from want of words and language creates a sense of estrangement in the characters. The poet or writer resorts various poetic devices or say literary devices: pause, ellipsis, gaps, to expose unexpressed emotions and unuttered fluttering voice that a character as a human yearns for sharing.

Keywords: Silence, Protest, Transformation, Patriarchal male Domination, Estrangement

Introduction

Kamala Das (1934-2009) and Momila Joshi (1967) are the poets from two different borderlands and exploited feminist issues and patriarchal manipulation in their works but the close study as I have endeavored resulted mental suppression more in the poetry of Das than

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 1 (January-March 2026)

that of Joshi. Though the society has undergone drastic change in the postmodern era because of advancement in technology and rapid progress made in education, the human condition and language toward the opposite sex doesn't seem to have amended much. The women still less or more suffer from patriarchal binary thought as opined by Helen Cixous (b. June 05, 1937) a French literary critic in a notable essay "Sorties" included in her book *The Newly Born Woman* (1975) head/ heart, father/mother, culture/nature, intelligible/palpable, sun/moon, and activity/passivity, bring back to man and woman (p. 63-64) and the woman occupies the right side this is what Kamala Das wanted to replace the position determined by the categorizers. Human beings cannot live without sharing emotions and reciprocal understanding and for that an astute and reasonable partner is a must. Kamala Das since her childhood (sometime she recollects her happy and joyous life in the company of her grandmother) struggled to disentangle herself from male dominated social system. She tried to kill the angel in the house as Virginia Woolf did but Das survived in the social system even after her husband's death. Her conversion to Islamic religion in 1999 might be her decision to extricate from conventional system. She was the spokesperson of silenced women of her time. Her silence enabled her to nourish her poetic potentiality. She diagnosed the manly nature, fought it yet confined in the Indian image but this confinement of silence did not remain to her for the long as he portrays a situation of silence of an Indian bride in one of her poems "With Its Quiet Tongue":

The night-wind walks my street
Tap-tapping, like a blinded
Man; its grief overcomes me; I crave
At this hour, not for faces that I knew
Or for the voices I loved but
For sleep- a sleep which has like an Indian
Bride, proud loveless eyes
And a quiet tongue. (lines 17-24)

Momila Joshi's poetic journey though she writes in Nepali language seemed to have emerged out of many social trials and tribulations. The society does not want a woman to become a man (manly gusto) nor do they allow them to behave like a man do and here silence prevails because the desire for becoming somebody can't be unrest for long time. It teaches lesson to escape oneself from traditionally programmed society even being speechless. This world one day admires the person who they used to criticize. Joshi despite many sufferings and obstacles did not surrender herself nor did she talk of suicide. Her silence is her poetic power to expose oneself in the mainstream. In a poem "Sufferings: Inside the Brackets" she utters:

Every single evening-
Light passes away by me
But, the light does not stay back with me
.
.
.
Every single morning-
Before the enlightening of HOPES

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 1 (January-March 2026)

Into my eyes

It collapses.

Because

My eyes invite: Tears of rains. (1-9)

This melancholic note as a matter of fact invites solitary inhabitation, simultaneously it sharpens the poetic sensibility of poets. In many of Joshi's pottery, the readers find suffering as a part of life and this life is suitable place to live in as that of John Keats in "Ode to a Nightingale". Silence embodies alienation and fragmentation caused by psychological barriers banned on characters and the writers. Unsaid things should not be taken as a weakness of the individual rather it is mental functioning where the character's brood over the situation and finds a way out. Das, an outspoken poet established herself as highly eminent figure in the history of Indian English Poetry though there were others women poets, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu but they did not write as open as Das did. They remained the silence of subaltern women repressed, enjoyed in Romantic of 19th century. So silence as a social control is shattered by Kamala Das who confronted her own family system. The transformation that their poetic personality achieves through their poetry is name and fame. A writer makes his or her work a medium to unveil the social evils. Das's muteness in was not her pitfall as society perceived but her strength to judge the ambience of her surrounding that she showed calmly.

Methodological frame works that I have applied to elaborate the silence and poetic sensibility are critical perspective of renowned and notable critics. Sigmund Freud 's negative view on women as seen in the notion that "women's sexuality is based upon feelings of narcissism, masochism, and passivity, and the idea that they suffer from an innate form of inferiority complex known as 'penis envy'". (qtd.in Barry, 103). On the contrary, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) condemns Freud as a prime source of the patriarchal attitudes against which feminists must fight. (qtd.in Barry, 130)

A woman's silence is exercised even in terms of language. It is a medium of power exercise as Julia Kristeva in her book *New French Feminism* (1981) uttered that "Woman can never be defined" (in her 1974 interview). She argues that women's identity resists fixed definitions; silence may show what can't be expressed in male dominated language. The same view has been given by Luce Irigaray that in a patriarchal culture, much of women's subjugation occurs in the form of psychological repression enacted through the medium of language. And this why, Kamala Das first fought for language which was banned from the society. In a poem "An Introduction" She asks the social categorizers that:

Why not me speak in

Any language I like? The language I speak

Becomes mine. Its distortions, its queerness

All mine, mine alone. (9-12)

Das evolved from silence to an outspoken poet whose posture was subjugated in colonial domination of patriarchy. She is a post-colonial poet, she writes in introspection of the past and tries to find out her voice. As the Eurocentric ideology was imposed on native people, so was on the women case. The language she used was controlled by patriarchal norms. A

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 1 (January-March 2026)

woman should speak a man's language and should remain honest and duty-bound even by concealing her emotion. The society defines her, force her to live in a man's world, she is made wingless, as Simon de Beauvoir in her famous book in the second part of the first sentence says "one is not born a woman; rather, one becomes a woman..... her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly" (*The Second Sex* 1949, p. 130)

Poetic sensibility of Das and Joshi is sharpened by unrest desires. The society has its own style of observing women as weak, stupid, backward, margins, poor as those of colonizers did on indigenous people. This gives an approach to "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). The silence is as powerful as spoken, as Michael Foucault writes in his book *The History of Sexuality* (1978) that "there is no binary division to be made between one says and what one doesn't say" (p.27)

Silence since independence began questioning the social authority for its fundamental rights as Kamala Das did in her poetry. Silence appears from different images: linguistic utterance, eye expression, superficial smile and isolation. It also a form of spirituality, gut truth is that spiritual meditation reaches to understanding of the material and selfish world. Momila Joshi confronts the battle of life even if silence follows her. Now the question is what makes one to become a poet, a writer and social critic? Is silence a mode of regression or progression? Is silence always silent? This situation answers the existing identity of the poetic sensibility of the two poets. One who remains unspoken is supposed to be insane, stupid and an epithet generally conferred to them as *shanaki* (italic mine). Laxmi Prasad Deokota was also taken to Ranchi hospital thinking that he went mad, but the doctor profoundly knew his ingenuity which was nothing but geographical mistake. Suicide is not an act that is committed deliberately rather the society denies the being of the sufferer. One must fight with the bad system of the society as Joshi says in her poem "Celebration of Suffering:

Even if
I can forget suffering, but I won't
Or
Try to forget, but I can't.
In the climax of suffering too
I am unable to commit suicide
This is my probably my flaw.
Perhaps! I desire to do something
That I love the soil! (lines 24-32)

The idea of suicide inhabits in the mind of Joshi or say some where pinches her one's self. There is a vast gap between the stanzas shifting which critics think as a symbol of silence. Belonging to an indigenous community to middle class family in Biratnagar, Koshi Province, Nepal, she faces many challenges through her life. A sense of post-modernist perspective is seen to guide her poetic sensibility because She believes in what She perceives on the surface. The metaphysical existence or say unseen power does not fascinate her personality. Joshi's silence as a symbol of poetic weapon emboldens her to do better and strides farther and farther

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 1 (January-March 2026)

in the journey of life. She best knows 'where the shoes pinch' and have a friendship with the suffering as Joan Didion does in with 'migraine headache' in her essay "In Bed."

Kamala Das undoubtedly was stoic and consequently her silence became a mode of transformation of self or say 'I' for which she fought. Das emerged as a 'savior of her sex' lead her species towards light from darkness of patriarchal subjugation. It was transparent that patriarchal subjugation was an analogous to colonial subjugation of native people. She protested strongly to elude this power manipulation till her last breath. What makes a person to be successful is his or her power of silence. The society thinks this silence as weakness but ironically, it transforms the look of the social way of life. Das as postcolonial Indian poet prioritizes a sense of psychological independence, decolonize male centric hegemony, opts to choose her own language which is under the control of patriarchal circulation and desires to avoid 'mimicry' as opined by Homi K. Bhaba. She killed an image of subalternity, weak, undeveloped and backward and evolved as bird with wings. She confronts the society for her identity retrospectively as post colonialists poets do like- Nissim Ezeiel, Kayanta, Mahapatra and A.K. Ramanujan. Transformation made in terms of identity, societal and as a whole position of women in the mindset of male dominated society is an aftermath of patience, speechless and commitment through her poetry. Joshi's grievances in one of her poems "Perhaps" for border demarcation in the family somewhere stands as an obstacle that is initiated by parents at home as William Shakespeare's statement "Charity begins at home." It is hard to for a woman writer to strive for desired achievement that is in her poetic of literary journey. The representation of women image in the social framework is a huge hurdle that neither supports the male nor female, it must invite hybridity of culture as undersigned its importance both postcolonial critics- Homi. Bhabha and Edward Said that opens the door to connect male and female. Das's silence persists in her entire life even after the death of her husband as we see in her poem "The Looking Glass":

Oh yes, getting
A man to love is easy, but living
Without him afterward may have to be
Faced. (lines 16-19)

Getting recognition in poetic world is a complicated exercise, one has to undergo various trials and tribulations. The way society is structured affects everyone. Education has changed the perspective but mentality is sprouting buds. History says that silence has brought about many transformations in the poetic persona of the poets. Kamala Das and Momila Joshi are of no exception.

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 1 (January-March 2026)

Objective of Research:

This paper comparatively exposes the poetic sensibility and transformation made through muteness regarding Kamala Das and Momila Joshi Poetry. It helps establish communion and to know more about them because silence in literature atavistic journey proved to be a source of tremendous transformation in the spiritual or individual mode. As it said that it is better to remain silent than unnecessary drama. This provides a new perspective to postmodern atmosphere and rapid globalized society where hybridity plays the role of ultra-modernism that may cause risk to the present generation and the forthcoming. In an interview, Keki N. Daruwalla who returned his Sahitya Akademi Award in 2015 to protest increased intolerance and injustice in India said that Our atmosphere is very odd. Anybody can say I am hurt. I am hurt. This reference shows the silence of somebody. A man cannot suppress one's silence for long time and so is to Jayanta Mahapatra who returned his Padma Shri Award in 2015.

Literature Review:

Virginia Woolf through her stream of consciousness technique unveils the psychological trauma of her characters: the character monologues and silence expose a real state of her soul that a man fails to understand. Virginia Woolf killed the angel in the house as we get to see in her essay "Professions for women" (1930) –

"And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish." (p. 165)

This courageous attempt was also made by a female protagonist in a play of George Bernard Shaw's "Candida" Where she bids to be chosen by the two- her possessive husband and a man who understands her emotionally. Likewise, Coventry Patmore in his book Angel in the House (1854) silence of a woman is suppressed in the form of angel whose language the male dominated society does not understand. She writes in the following lines:

A woman is a foreign land,
Of which, though there he settles young,
A man will ne'er quite understand
The customs, politics, and tongue. (lines 1-4)

The silence emerges simply because the male perception on women is psychologically fragile nor tries to read her mind and her identity that even a woman has the similar taste as that of man. A man should psychologically treat with a woman as a doctor in a novel of Kate Chopin says remarkably: "Pontelier," said the doctor, after a moment's reflection, "let your wife alone for a while. Don't bother her, and don't let her bother you. Woman, my dear friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism- a sensitive and highly organized woman, such as I know Mrs. Pontelier to be, is especially. It would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them..."

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 1 (January-March 2026)

Silence in the form of spiritual strength as found in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. Prof. D. R. Patanaik writes: it is obvious that an understanding of the Oriya sain-poets like Achyutananda and Bhima Bhoi is necessary to understand Mahapatra's Silence in proper perspective, for them the use of silence, in art is the recurrent touch of divinity. The play of sound and silence, action and inaction, poem making and living life, involvement and withdrawal, good and evil are not the negotiation of the one by the other but part of the divine *lila*. Even assertion and negotiation, faith and doubt are interchangeable categories. (vol. xxvi, 1991)

Similarly, in a novel *That Long Silence* (1988) that won Shashi Deshpande Sahitya Akademi Award in 1989 reflects the silence in the character of Jaya who is married to Mohan. Her silence at the suspend of his job not ask any questions pertaining the the cause of accusation, she remains silent at the behest of her husband. Her voice is silenced here but the matter of this reticence was nurtured or say planted in the mind of her since the married hood as Jaya's mother utters to her: "A husband is like a sheltering tree. Keep the peace in the house." (Chapter Four)

Judy Brady's essay "I want A Wife" (1972) also focuses on women's voice that kept repressed in the patriarchal society. A wife needs the desire all that a husband need to get. This is how she exposes a husband's desire: I want a wife who is sensitive to my sexual needs, a wife who loves passionately and eagerly when I feel like it, a wife who makes sure that I am satisfied. And of course, I want a wife who will not demand sexual attention when I am not in mood for it." (p.255, par.7)

The silence in Kamala Das and Momila Joshi are as reviewed above is patriarchal against which they fight. Das is no more in this world but the way she showed the women species work as defense mechanism. Silence becomes the compulsion for the female characters. Kamala Das in one of her poems "The freaks" says:

The heart
An empty cistern, waiting
Through long hours, fills itself
With coiling snakes of silence. (lines 14-17)

This silence is what Judy Brady spoke in the above mentioned essay. It means that everything should be endured by the female and the male should let free. Ups and downs in life provides ample books of experience so does silence for the poetic attainment. Patience and resolution is a must to succeed in one's life. Das achievement of grand success is an outcome of her assiduous endeavors. In most of her poems, she uses the word- sea that stands for this materialistic world. her poem "Composition" is an exposition of freedom promised by her husband which ironically becomes silence as she writes in the following lines:

The tragedy of life
Is not death but growth,
The child growing into adult
And, growing out of need,
Discovering

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 1 (January-March 2026)

That the old have black-rimmed nails
And scalps from which emanates
A sweet, mouldy smell. (lines 37-44)

Momila Joshi's silence, alienation but new hope boosted up her poetic talent. At hour of sorrow, her poetry stands by her. Some time, she thinks death is diviner than life, but in the end of the poem she opts this world to live in as she writes in one per poems "The Starry of Night":

But remembering the love-laden rest of civilization
This cyber nighty!
I shall not talk of suicide anymore!
Night after all is shadow
Spilled over the face of light! (lines-38-42)

Life after all is an amalgamation of weal and woe and keeps on changing on the tune of time, as P.B. Shelley in the ending of his poem entitled "Ode to the West Wind" that "if winter comes, Can Spring be far behind?" Despite all the complexities in life, Joshi's silence celebrates it and get reinforced like that of Das who seeks love in the social periphery.

Conclusion:

Silence in poetry is not merely the absence of speech rather it is a powerful expressive desire. Poetic characters often use silence to communicate emotions, resistance, suffering, mystery and spiritual death. Many feminist and postcolonial critics opined on the issues of silence manipulated by various elements- patriarchal subjugation, language power, and colonial like hegemony. Kamala Das appeared to be more sensitive and robust than Joshi because Das put everything as open as sky and make the readers to pass out the proper judgement if her protest is appropriate or inappropriate? This poetic silence has transformed the inner self of the poets to flow constantly. Women writers best delineated the issues of silence since they are well experienced in this field. They write from their own perspective as Simon de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Susan Sontag advocated for women's emancipation and highlighted the core intricacies.

References

- Beauvoir Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, Vintage Books, 2011, p.283.
- Brady, Judy. "I want a Wife". *Ms.*, vol. no.1, 1971, pp.114-116.
- Das, Kamala. *Selected Poems*. Penguin Book, 2014.
- Despande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*. Penguin Books, 1988.
- Faucault, Michael. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol.1: An Introduction. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, 1990, p.27.
- Green, David. Editor. *The Winged Words: An Anthology of Poems for Degree Courses*. Macmillan, 2002, p.100.
- Joshi, Momila. *Selected Poems*. Edited by Govind Raj Bhandari. Translated by Kumar Nagarkoti, et al., Nepal Kalasahitya DCP, 2013.

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 1 (January-March 2026)

Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Time". *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi, CUP. 1986, P. 209.

Shaw, George Bernard. *Candida*. Act.iii.1897. Penguin Classics, 2000.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008, p.100.

Woolf, Virginia. "Professions for Women". *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. Harcourt Brace, 1942, pp. 235-242.