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An Analysis of the Treatment of Love and Sexuality in the Poems of Kamala Das

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Abstract

Kamala Das, a renowned Indian author and poet, has been widely acclaimed for her bold and confessional style of writing. The research article aims to explore the multidimensional portrayal of love and sexuality in her works, juxtaposing them with the social norms and cultural backdrop of postcolonial India. In fact, everything else is secondary and this subject takes center stage. In reference to Kamala Das' poetry, the term "love" refers to both passions, which her husband and a number of other men were fully and even excessively satisfied, as well as real love, which she never experienced. Her poetry primarily expresses her dissatisfaction with love. The spectrum of her writings is laden with autobiographical elements. In her works, love is depicted not only as an emotion but also as a tool for self-discovery and liberation from the shackles of conventional society. Despite fully meeting her sexual desires,

her husband never believed that a woman should expect true love from her spouse, which is why their marriage failed. There were several sexual partners for her, but none of them ever showed her true affection. Kamala Das discusses her unfulfilled love often in her poems, and she repeatedly confesses her longing for love. At this point, Kamala Das admits that love is a strong emotional connection between a man and a woman, and she also thinks that their physical relationship is significant but secondary. The sexuality of a woman is addressed by Kamala Das, who views it as a crucial component of her overall physical and psychological composition. The article further explores how Das's portrayal of female sexuality acts as a rebellion against the traditional gender roles and societal expectations placed upon Indian women during her time. The intimate and sensual expression in her works is not only a testament to her unique voice but also reflects the underlying themes of self-assertion and search for identity. It brings to light how her exploration of female empowerment through sexual liberation was both groundbreaking and controversial within the context of Indian society. It highlights her as a trailblazer in bringing the discourse on female sexuality into the mainstream and as a proponent of women's agency in postcolonial Indian literature. The article illuminates the enduring relevance and the multifaceted nature of Das's writings.

Keywords: Dissatisfaction, Affection, Unfulfilled, Perspective, Component, Gender Roles, Confessional Poetry, Social Norms, Female Sexuality, Identity, Rebellion, Subversion, Sexual Liberation, Sensuality, Tradition vs. Modernity, Cultural Context, Erotic Literature, Womanhood, Patriarchy, Self-Expression

Introduction

Kamala Das claims that her husband only saw wives as domestic helpers and sexual partners and that he had no idea what love and affection for a wife actually meant. During the act of sexual intercourse, he used to kiss her ferociously, forcing his lips against hers and allowing his saliva to seep into her mouth. He used to violently force his entire body up against hers, arousing her sexual desire. He completely penetrated every area of her body in a physical way, causing his physiological fluids to mix with hers. He was unaware that, despite her sexual urge being totally satiated, she was still emotionally restless and physically hungry. Because he never considered that a woman needs love and affection in addition to sexual fulfillment, he proved to be an absolute failure in both an emotional and spiritual sense. Never did she feel a sense of unity with him:

Shut my eyes, but inside eye-lids, there was
No more night, no more love or peace, only
The white, white sun burning, burning, burning...
And why does love come to me like pain
Again, and again.

(The Testing of the Sirens: poemhunter.com, 19)

As she pursues liberation and love, Kamala Das universalizes pain. The poem turns into a critique of gender inequality and an effort to break free from the limitations placed on women by pursuing personal liberation, a love that acknowledges the requirements of the body, and a self that is free to revel in the genuine splendor of love. The poetry in confessional form with the highest renown is this one. Kamala Das' poetry centers on the pursuit of sex and romantic love. The majority of her poetry is autobiographical. Kamala Das portrays herself as capable of communicating her own personal desire through writing. She mostly writes about love, its betrayal, and the ensuing pain. Her guiltiness and candor about sexual topics elicited empathetic responses from the Indian reader. Her poems are about the search for genuine love, which has resulted in disappointment and dissatisfaction. Her poetry is a vivid reflection of who she is, with a strong protest against the patriarchal culture. Her poetry captures the voices of oppressed women throughout the world as well as her own failures in love. She asserts that love must result in self-understanding and development. When it meets both her romantic desire and emotional need, it is referred to be pure love.

Kamala Das describes her quest for the ideal lover in her poem "The Losing Battle," which details her relationships with numerous men while searching for him. She is adamant that sexual intimacy with a guy cannot produce the kind of love that she believes exists in the perfect world. Similar arguments are made against the males by Das, who contends that they are equally susceptible to moral corruption and can be duped.

... Men are worthless, to trap them use
The cheapest bait of all, but never love,
Which in a woman must mean tears and a
Silence in the blood.

("The Losing Battle": poemhunter. com,14)

Real satisfying love and sensual love are major themes in Kamala Das' poetry. It is adequately made clear by the woman's voice that arises from the two types of love that simple carnality is never desired or satisfying. Women may not love it as much as men do, and in such cases, the woman only feels exploited. The male's quick aggression stuns and degrades Kamala Das, who feels unworthy of being called a lady. In "An Introduction" she writes:

I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
But my sad woman's body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and wombs crushed me. I shrank
Pitifully.

(*An Introduction: Selected Poems*, 6)

The human body, in all its forms and hues, is a recurring symbol in Kamala Das's poems. The poet connects the manifestations of the body to his investigation of passion and love. Because the body's interference in pure love constantly obstructs its flow, her compulsive pursuit of it has frequently resulted in misery. She appears to believe that the body reflects passion and the soul represents real love. She has, however, always been a fan of physical beauty when it is

maintained pure and unimpaired by vulgarity. When lust fills the human body, she considers it a sign of repulsion because she is aware of both its beauty and its ugliness. Lust, illness, suffering, and eventually death are all inflicted upon the body. Physical attraction is only one part of love; it also entails emotional ties and a spiritual union that goes beyond carnality. According to Das, the ideal relationship goes beyond sex and is full of pleasure. This tension impacts the bodily, mental, and spiritual self. When love is reduced to sexual gratification, it turns into desire, depriving the lovers of the ultimate fulfillment that exists in every successful man-woman relationship. In Kamala Das's poetry, there is a never-ending search for the ideal guy, and every interaction with that man—who may be her spouse or a lover—is an experiment in learning what genuine love is all about. Her poetry demonstrates an Eastern dialectic of the body and spirit. In love, she seeks both sexual and spiritual fulfillment. A sense of estrangement that is ingrained in her mind fuels her search for this kind of love.

Kamala Das' poetry frequently explores the subject of love. The main theme of this High priestess of Love's works is the never-ending search for real love. Her poetry is emotionally rich and genuinely deep sentiments are communicated in strong personal language, not cerebral intricacy, intellectual endurance, or philosophical speculations. Her success is the bold and unorthodox way in which she has captured the emotion of love in all of its varied manifestations. Women are portrayed in a variety of positions, including nymphomaniac, mother, mistress, grandmother, sister, and cherished. This woman's character is actually rather multifaceted. Most people think of Kamala Das as a poet who expresses the desires of women. Her poetry captures the restlessness of a sensitive lady attempting to advance women's rights in a patriarchal environment. In poems like *An Introduction*, *Summer in Calcutta*, *Marine Drive*, *A Relationship*, etc., she has vociferously spoken out against the oppressions of men. She gives expression to the deepest hopes and concerns of womankind in her poem *Afterwards*.

Raising the problem of marriage failure and sexual frustration by Kamala Das in her poetry. As a poet, sexual dissatisfaction and marriage's failure to bring women happiness are Kamala Das' most notable and striking concerns. Kamala Das' poems frequently return to this issue, which is the inability of a woman to find happiness via her marriage or even a comparable connection with another guy. Her writing is generally candid and autobiographical. Her poetry contains a significant amount of frustration about the collapse of her marriage and her hapless pursuit of happiness via indiscriminate sexual encounters with other men.

Kamala Das' poetry "The Old Playhouse" has one of the most frank and evocative descriptions of her marriage's demise. In her poem, she addresses her husband directly and tells him that he had been pouring himself into every pore and crevice of her body as he had been letting his saliva run into her mouth. Although he used to refer to her as his wife, she makes clear to him that he had forced her to live in circumstances that made her feel virtually smothered. She claims that he was an extremely egotistical and self-centered spouse who had been controlling her until she had entirely lost all willpower and mental capacity, turning her into a midget. Her mind has completely stopped functioning as a result of all of his shabby treatment of her, much like an old playhouse with all of the lights turned off. At the end of the poem, she confesses to him that while he had undoubtedly satisfied her desire for sexual

gratification, he had fallen short of showing her the type of love and devotion that a wife deserves from her husband:

You were pleased
 With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow
 Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured
 Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed
 My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices. You called me wife,
 I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
 To offer at the right moment the vitamins.

(The Old Playhouse: Selected Poems, 69)

The poetry from Kamala Das's final period of her poetic career is the last group. There are more poems, however, Ghanashyam has already been highlighted. All of these poems are centered on Krishna, a holy being for whom Radha had experienced profound love. By committing herself to Ghanashyam or Lord Krishna in her writings, Kamala Das attempts to turn her passion into love and elevate and praise that love. In other words, Kamala Das has transcended her libido beyond the needs of her body, giving her love a spiritual character. These poems might be seen as a reflection of her spiritual development and an expression of her love for Lord Krishna. Kamala Das addresses Lord Krishna in the poem Ghanashyam. She claims that she once played the husk game because her husband needed her body to state his lust for her and because she had to play the game again every time his lust was satisfied to express her disappointment and frustration with her husband and their marriage. He used to turn his back on her that night to show that he no longer desired her. Her husband's lack of genuine passion for her had caused her to assume the following every time he had forced his mouth against her:

And each time my husband,
 His mouth bitter with sleep,
 Kisses, mumbling to me of love.
 But if he is you and I, am you
 Who is loving who
 Who is the husk who the kernel
 Where is the body where is the soul
 You come in strange forms
 And your names are many.

(Ghanshyam: Selected poems, 58)

She used to think that Ghanashyam was actually making love to her in disguise. Of course, there are also a number of other poems in which Kamala Das speaks openly and even bluntly about the complete breakdown of her marital life.

The poem The Freaks and The Sunshine Cat is significant in relation to her marriage. In the earlier poem, Kamala Das claims that after spending many years with her husband, she had never experienced true love. She refers to herself as a freak who occasionally flaunts a huge, showy passion toward the poem's conclusion:

An empty cistern, waiting

Through long hours, fills itself
 With coiling snakes of silence...
 I'm a freak. It's only
 To save my face, I flaunt at
 Times a grand flamboyant lust.

(The Freaks: Selected Poems, 9)

In the second poem, she characterizes her husband as a weak and self-centered guy who neither loved her nor utilized her appropriately and who was a relentless observer of the immoral sex acts she had with other men. Due to her husband's cruel treatment of her, the light streak that had first resembled a yellow cat eventually became so dim that it resembled a "hair-thin line" as winter set in. She eventually turns into a half-dead lady who is of no value to any guy as a result of him holding her like a prisoner:

A bed made soft with tears and she lay there weeping,
 For sleep had lost its use. I shall build walls with tears,
 She said walls to shut me in. Her husband shut her
 In, every morning, locked her in a room of books
 With a streak of sunshine lying near the door like
 A yellow cat to keep her company, but soon
 Winter came, and one day while locking her in.

("The sunshine Cat": poemhunter.com, 15)

In the poem, My Grandmother's House, Kamala Das laments the loss of her deceased grandmother and laments that she no longer feels loved by her husband and must therefore knock on others' doors to ask for affection, if only in the form of spare coins.

Kamala Das takes up the problem of the failure of her relationships with other men in her poetry. She informs a lover that even though he had been sating her never-ending need, he had never experienced the type of love she anticipated from him in the poem In Love. She calls his sexual desire for her "this skin-communicated thing". She claims that in their relationship, there was no place, justification, or even need for love and that their embraces were each like "a finished jigsaw." She says:

O what does the burning mouth
 Of sun, burning in today's,
 Sky, remind me.... oh, yes, his
 Mouth, and.... his limbs like pale and
 Carnivorous plants reaching
 out for me, and the sad lie
 of my unending lust.
 Where is room, excuse, or even
 Need for love, for, isn't each
 Embrace a complete thing a finished
 Jigsaw, when mouth on mouth, I lie,
 Ignoring my poor moody mind.

(*In Love: Selected Poems*, 112)

In the poem titled *The Invitation*, Kamala Das claims that her lover had been coming to her during the breaks or intervals in his office work to make love to her and that all of her pleasure and his own pleasure had been contained to their bed, which was six feet long and two feet wide and had been a sort of paradise to them. She begins by speaking generally about the sexual interaction between a man and a woman, but towards the conclusion of the poem she leaves her, never to return because of her sense of betrayal by him. She now wants to leap into the sea. This is clear from a mention of a boyfriend who abandoned Kamala Das after she deserted him. In a poem named *The Looking Glass*, Kamala Das conveys her disappointment and annoyance once more by likening herself to delicate glass that is easily broken. Her partner had treated her harshly in bed, luring her to him with the intensity of a lover and treating her like “an armful of splinters” with the intention of hurting her. As a result of all that had happened, she felt as though she had abandoned her father in the hands of Lord Krishna after losing her lusty and emotionless husband:

Stand nude before the glass with him
 So that he sees himself the stronger one
 And believes it so, and you so much more
 Softer, younger, lovelier. Admit your
 Admiration. Notice the perfection
 Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
 The shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,
 Dropping towels, and the jerky way he
 Urinates.

(*The Looking Glass: Selected Poems*, 54)

The poem *Substitute* is also interesting in this context. Here, she discusses the chaos in her sex life that resulted from her displeasure with each partner she had slept with. In this poetry, she had entered a scenario akin to a rotating door through which one lover left and another entered because of her love, or to use its official term, her passion.

Kamala Das’s poems depict the sexual experience without love for a sexual partner. Kamala Das claims in her poem “*The Freaks*” that despite the length of time she and her husband had been married, their love had failed and her heart had turned into an empty cistern. She claims in the poem “*My Grandmother’s House*” that while she was shown a lot of affection by her grandmother, she has since lost her path and now knocks on random people’s doors “to beg for love, at least in small change.” In “*The Sunshine Cat*,” Franky claims that her husband, a selfish and cowardly man, had neither loved her nor used her properly and that, in the end, the streak of sunshine, which had appeared to be a yellow cat, was reduced to the hair-thin line and that she herself was reduced to “half dead woman,” no longer of any use to any man seeking sexual pleasure:

The cat of sunshine was only a
 Line, a half-thin line, and in the evening when
 He returned to take her out, she was a cold and

Half dead woman, now of no use at all to men.

(“The Sunshine Cat”: poemhunter.com, 15)

She also expressed her dissatisfaction with her previous sexual partners in the same poem, who she believed were incapable of loving her and who never expressed their love. She used to cry herself to sleep in her bed as a result of her disappointment, attempting to “build walls with tears.” She acknowledges in the poem *The Invitation* that when in bed with a man, she had a great sexual experience but that he had not shown her any true love or affection. If she simply considered the level of her sexual gratification, the bed she used to share with him would have looked to her to be a paradise; but, his robotic or emotionless performance of the sexual act and his subsequent desertion of her gave birth to suicidal ideas in her mind.

Kamala Das has openly acknowledged in each of these poems that her sexuality is just motivated by lust, and she has also declared in each of these instances that the sexual partners in each of these instances lack love. Therefore, it is evident that she perceives a sensuous or sexual encounter to be meaningless if a sexual partner does not feel love for her. Since none of her sexual lovers showed her love, she said in the poem *Substitute* that she eventually stopped considering sensual fulfillment to be important at all. Instead, love became a swivel door: when one person left, another entered. Her sexual experience had evolved into a merely mechanical process that satisfied her body’s needs but did not bring her any joy or fulfillment.

Conclusion

In her extramarital relationships, Kamala Das has always looked for sexual and spiritual fulfillment. She has never been embarrassed to acknowledge that her husband permitted her to treat her youth like money, that he enabled her to have sexual relations with other men, and that he desired for her to find joy in other men’s embraces. This admission is made in her poem *A Man is a Season*. Additionally, she confesses in a poem titled *The Sunshine Cat* that her spouse was a “ruthless watcher” of her sexual behavior with other men. The poetry of Kamala Das discusses both the important details and the more subtle facets of marriage. In a patriarchal society, women suffer more in a marriage when there is no love and no respect. Her poetry depicts the variety of emotions that one experiences during a marriage. Most of her poetry expresses her disillusionment in love, which is something that many women experiences. Her poetry conveys the unsatisfied hunger she feels as a woman. The majority of Kamala Das’ poems speak about her frustrated sexual encounters with her spouse as well as the feelings that resulted from those events. She has discussed her sexual encounters with other guys and the ensuing dissatisfaction in a few of the poems. She has used terms like “pubis,” “pubic hair,” and “womb” in a couple of the poems, in contrast to other poets who would even be hesitant to use terms like “breasts” or “sexual intercourse” in their poetry out of fear of offending their audience. Because of the freedom or license, she uses in her explicit references to the sexual act and to the sexual organs of both men and women, Kamala Das’ poetry has occasionally been considered pornographic, dirty, or even obscene.

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