

IMAGES IN KAMALA DAS'S POETRY

THESIS SUBMITTED

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Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University,
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*FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis 'IMAGES IN KAMALA DAS'S POETRY' being submitted by Anita Mudkanna, submitted to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, for the award of Doctorate in Philosophy, is a record of bonafide research work carried out by her. She has worked under my guidance and supervision and has fulfilled the requirement for the submission of the thesis, which to my knowledge has reached the requisite standard.

The results contained in the thesis have not been submitted in part or in full, to any other University / Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

*Aurangabad.
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis titled 'IMAGES IN KAMALA DAS'S POETRY' being submitted to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, for the award of Doctorate in Philosophy is a record of bonafide research work carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. S.B. Deshpande, Professor, Department of English, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad.

The thesis has not been submitted in part or in full to any other University for the award of any degree / diploma.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation attempts to analyze the images in Kamala Das's poetry. She is a well-known Indo-Anglian woman poet for her confessional and autobiographical modes of writing. She is a poet of love and pain arising out of it. She writes mostly from her experiences of sexual humiliation, failure of love affairs, frustration and anger. Her sensuous writing about man-woman relationship makes her a controversial figure. Her poetry has different themes relating to her feminine consciousness. She revolts against the male-dominated society, unhappy married life, and the traditional role of a woman as a wife, as well as artificial urban life. She expresses her sense of alienation and the consequent quest for identity through the medium of her writing. She has been continuously in search of spiritual gratification.

In search of true love and self-identity she gives up all the rules made for women. She never wears the mask of a chaste and moral woman. As a bold writer she never hesitates to depict her adultery and all womanly secrets. Her writing may be autobiographical in

manner of writing but it seems to be universal because it deals with the inner personality of every woman.

My Story articulates the writer's personal experiences as well as the incidents in her life which force her to think about the condition of woman in the society. Woman is humiliated and neglected everywhere. She discovers through her life that the woman is a thing of attraction and seduction. In her autobiography she describes all the details of each and every situation which impacts on her mind.

(I)

She writes about the suicide of her maidservant Nani, which was unbearable and unforgettable for her. Who was seduced and become pregnant. But the society and her family members criticized her. They never understood her condition and never think of finding out the person who abused her. She was an immoral woman in the attitude of the society and not so the man who was responsible for her pathetic condition. The woman was helpless. She never found any solution. Therefore, the poor creature hanged herself and ended her life. There is no punishment for the person who impregnates but on the contrary the victimized lady is punished without any mistake. It creates an impact on the sensitive mind of Kamala Das. She never

forgets the death of Nani and never understands the reason behind it. She discovers to her dismay that the woman has no place, value in the attitude of male.

There are many more experiences like this. The chaparasi of her father's office had sent hundred rupees money order to his family by borrowing from Kamala Das's mother for the funeral his sick old wife who was said to be dying. Later on when he learnt that she had recovered, he started shouting that she had cheated him for hundred rupees. He asks Kamala Das:

If she decides to die after few months how will I be able to raise another hundred for the funeral? why didn't she die at the proper time he nodded his head and muttered, it is god's will¹

For him, hundred rupees are more valuable than the life of the woman. Her existence is nothing. It happens because of her dependent life. Women are never to be counted as a human being. They have to live per as their husband's wish.

One of the chapters from her autobiography depicts the bitter irony of woman's life. In the chapter 'Calcutta's Cocktail Season' she focuses on the condition of wives of middle class govt. servants. Who

used them for their progress in job. They bring their wives in the parties to give company to their officers, industrialists and the wives cannot react in any situation. She writes:

The Government servants drag their foolish wives to such parties, hoping that their comeliness and charm might impress the rich. The rich enjoy being introduced to the Government – wives, and to those who are still young and fresh, they hand glasses of sherry or vermouth with crushed ice and plead in sweet tones, please drink, please drink, let me see the drink put sparkle in those lovely eyes of yours ...²

At that time that the woman looked towards her husband with hopes but he was engaged in discussion with other girls and he deliberately neglected her. It means that the women are used to please someone. As Germaine Greer says:

For women, there is one aspect which is common to both situations: demands are made upon them to contour their bodies in order to please the eyes of others. Women are so insecure that they constantly take measures to capitulate to this demand, whether it is rational or not.³

That women are helpless, they cannot save themselves from the sensual eyes and touchings. In Hindu religion the husbands are the protectors of their wives life but they smoothly forget it for their own business. Kamala Das's anger comes out through these words:

Such are the kind of games that are being played in Calcutta during its winter. The players are practised liars.⁴

These incidents which she has been observed in the society and experienced throughout her own life strengthen her resolve to struggle against the male domination. She challenged all the concepts that are made for women to suppress their feelings.

Kamala Das was born on 31st March, 1934 in Malabar, Kerala. As her autobiography tells that her maiden name was Madhavikutty. She first attended a European school in Calcutta, then the elementary school at Punnayurkulam and then a boarding school run by the Roman catholic nuns, but in each of them she stayed for a short while.

Kamala Das was proud of her ancestral home in Malabar which was called the Nalapat House. She had never forgotten her glorious childhood which she had spent in Nalapat House with the lovely family members, aunt Ammini, grand uncle Narayan Menon who was

a “poet philosopher”, her great grandmother and her two sisters. The members of Nalapat family were steeped in Indian epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana and had a belief in Lord Siva and Lord Krishna, whose stories are naturally impressed on the innocent mind of Kamala Das in her childhood. Her grandmother always told her about the purity of their ancestral blood.

When we were children

My brother and I

And always playing on the sands

Drawing birds and animals

Our great grandmother said one day,

You see this house of ours

Now three hundred years old,

.....

She told us

That we had the oldest blood

My brother and she and I

The oldest blood in the world

A blood thin and clear and fine. (OP, 17)

In her childhood Kamala Das was very fond of her great grandmother. She was the only daughter of a wealthy chieftain, the Raja of Punnathore Kotta. She was married to Raja of Chiralayman, came to Nalapat House and became a good wife, good mother and good grandmother. While writing about her grandmother she says:

She was really simple.

Fed on God for years

All her feasts were monotonous

And the rest mere condiments.

She told us how she rode her elephant

When she was ten or eleven

Every Monday without fail

To the Siva shrine

And back to home again.

And told us of the jewel box

.....

And her marriage to a prince

Who loved her deeply for a lovely short year

and died of fever, in her arms. (OP, 17)

Her grandmother was good care-taker, psychologist and adviser who guided Kamala Das and took care of her personality. She taught her the manners of their oldest blood. She was the dearest person of the poetic persona who understood the psyche of Kamala Das and helped her to make it stable. All the secrets which she had, were shared with her great grandmother. The repetition of the adjective “great” regarding her grandmother suggests Kamala Das’s feeling of gratitude and the place of the grandmother in her life. When her grandmother died, she felt a vacuum in her life and felt alone in the world. The Nalapat House, its memories and of her grandmother continuously mentioned by Kamala Das many times. It symbolizes her attachment of Nalpat family and her past glory.

While speaking about her parents Kamala Das was not so happy. They are not ideal for her because they were a mismatched pair. Her mother Balamani Amma, a renowned poet in Malayalam was always lying on bed and busy in writing. Her father belonged to a traditional Nair family who never loved Balamani Amma. It has the negative effect on her.

Kamala Das was married at the early age of fifteen to Mr. Madhava Das, an Executive Director of the Reserve Bank of India,

Bombay. Her married life was unhappy. He was experienced in sex with his maidservants. It compelled her to enter into extra-marital relationship in search of true love. But it was unsuccessful and fruitless. The result was that she became frustrated. It stimulated her to write her own story and coloured her poetry. It was filled with different shades of her life.

Kamala Das has lived in many metropolitan cities as Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi and written about them. She has contributed to Malayam Literature and Indian English Literature.

Kamala Das has been awarded the prestigious awards like P.E.N. prize in 1964, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for her insightful Malayalam short stories in 1969, she got Chaman Lal Award for Journalism in 1971 and Asian World prize for Literature in 1985. She was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the World Academy of Arts and Culture, Taiwan, 1984 and the Indira Priyadarshani Vrikshamitra Award in 1988. She has published a full length autobiography *My Story* in 1976 which was first serialized in *The Current Weekly* of Bombay from January to December, 1974.

Her poetical collections in English are:

- i) Summer In Calcutta (1965)
- ii) The Descendants (1967)
- iii) The Old Playhouse and other poems (1973)
- iv) Tonight, This Savage Rite : The love poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy. (1979)

She has also published two novels in English under the title, *Alphabet of Lust*, 1976 and *A Doll for the Child Prostitute*, 1977.

She has also written some prose which is almost autobiographical. Her prose writings are controversial; her essays have a bitter comment on male dominated society. Her essays like “*I Studied All Men*”, “*What Women Expect Out of Marriage and What They Get*”, “*Why Not More Than One Husband?*” and “*I Have Lived Beautifully*” are unconventional in manner.

Besides her poetical and prose works, she has written for various popular magazines and periodicals, such as *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Poetry East and West*, *Opinion*, *Debonair*, *Eve’s Weekly*, *Femina*, *Imprint*, *Weekly Round Table* and *Love and Friendship*.

According to Kamala Das any language doesn't any matter. She has also said that the caste, religion, language and geography to which the writer belongs is not important. While replying to P. Lal she says:

I do not like to classify writers as Indians, English or Indo-Anglians. The language one employs is not important. What is important is the thought contained by the words.⁵

Kamala Das's writing is considered as autobiographical and confessional. Her work is not to be separated from the moments of her life. Whatever she felt and experienced, is put before the world. It is her sincere attempt to describe everything that happened with her.

A Pre-Marital Life

In an interview with Atma Ram, she explains the sources of her writing.

I am very honest with myself when I write poetry. Life has influenced my poetry.⁶

Her poetry is an honest appeal. It is her revolt against the social norms and her assertion of right to exist as an individual with a distinctive identity. Dr. Sharada Iyer rightly asserts:

The poetry of Kamala Das must be viewed in the light of her feminine consciousness. She acquired this consciousness under hostile circumstances dependent upon the society of her childhood days. Repressive attributes caused fragmentation to her/self. As a poet, she is conscious of her creative faculties and tries to break chains and restraints. She indulges in self-awareness, self-exposure and self-introspection in order to define herself poetically. The aim of the poet is not self-exposure; but self-discovery and self-examination. She structures self-exploration in order to search her lost identity as a woman and as a poet.⁷

She has designed her humiliated and neglected personality through the media of writing. Her writing is the weapon to struggle with society. She brings the vivid picture and focuses on her own self as a woman. She is rebellious in nature which is highlighted in her poetry. She has a tremendous courage to demand all the feminine needs.

Kamala Das is certainly the most considerable Indian woman poet writing in English today. She has created a permanent place for herself in the contemporary Indo English poetry through her bold writing. Poets like A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthsarthy, Arun Kolatkar, K. N. Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, Shiv K. Kumar, Nissim Ezekiel have written about the subject of childhood, alienation, love, sex, sensuality, as well as on political, social, mythical issues. But among them she has her own range, popularity and feminine sensitivity. The thematic concern may be same in their writing but Kamala Das's autobiographical and confessional touch in her writing makes her different. Her writing is based on the realistic approach to her own life. It is her honest description about her own life dealing with her lesbian relationships, homosexuality, extra-marital relations and her husband's brutality and his indifferent nature.

i) Initial Hetrosexual Attractions:

Kamala Das has had a sensuous personality from her childhood. In her autobiography, *My Story*, she writes explicitly about her sensuous experiences. When Kamala Das was the student of the

elementary school, she fell in love with Govinda Kurup, a student of eighth standard. While speaking about him she says:

He was handsome and had dimple on his right cheek which appeared only when he smiled. I could hardly take my eyes off his face. I was so infatuated with his charm.⁸

She never had any clear idea of love but had physical attraction towards the male friends. She told her grandmother about her attraction towards Govinda and her ambition of marriage to him. She was not able to control her feelings of attachment towards the opposite sex. She never kept aside any secrets of her life regarding her love affairs and her physical attraction.

A Syrian Christian Spinster was one of her tutors who was a short and aggressive lady. One day when she was at Kamala Das's home to take her tuition, she stood at the window and watching behind that curtain and she suddenly felt restless. The reason behind it is that she had a sight of that man who had ruined her life and that of many other girls. Kamala Das looked at him and felt him attractive. She told her tutor that, "I like his looks".⁹ Her lady tutor warned her that the person had ruined the lives of several girls. Even

after the knowledge about his wicked personality Kamala Das thought that,

..... I ought to meet him when I grew up,
and perhaps become his mistress.¹⁰

This incident clearly indicates the irresistible temptation that sex was for her throughout her youth. Further she describes about her another male attraction at the age of thirteen when she went to Malabar for the summer vacation. She fell in love with a student leader who had been jailed for his revolutionary activities. He was interested in politics. He never had any attention towards Kamala Das. But she was interested in him. Her grand-aunt tried to keep her away from these affairs. As she describes,

She must have deduced from my behaviour that I had become infatuated with his charm. I tried to spend as much time as I could get in his company, but he did not once touch my hand or show any particular fondness to me.¹¹

It was the nature of Kamala Das that she could not control her craze for opposite sex. At the early age of her life she was interested

in physical satisfaction before knowing the meaning of love. In her hunger of physical attraction / satisfaction she had forgotten the age limits. At the age of fourteen she fell in love with the art-tutor and never thought about the age difference and the relationship between the teacher and the student.

The art-tutor came to teach her every Wednesday. She was crazy for him. She watched his face with intense feelings of physical attraction. Every Wednesday she had a good make-up and became busy to make herself attractive. Her parents noticed the changes in her personality and the tuition was discontinued. She had never forgotten the last rainy day of her life when she went to the art tutor's home to express her emotions to him. She was totally drenched due to sudden rain. He raised his eyes and invited her in. He says:

You are wet, you must change your clothes, he mumbled. He pulled my tunic over my head and wrung the water out through the window. His fingers were warm on my skin. Then with a handtowel he dried my hair and put the tunic on my body again. And without another word he took me by taxi to my house and shook my hand at the gate.

..... that was the last time I saw him.
But off and on I remembered the tenderness
with which he pulled aside my dress and
dried my body.¹²

However, she continues to crave for the physical
satisfaction through encounters like this:

Why did he not kiss me? Why didn't
he make love to me? I asked my friend in
school why my first adult meeting with him
gave me only disappointment.¹³

ii) Her Initial Lesbian Attractions:

Her immature physic and psyche is continuously searching for physical satisfaction. She has also had some of the experiences of lesbian relationships when she was a teenage girl of twelve years. She was living at a hostel where she had friendship with Sharada Menon, Raji, Meenakshi and Annie. Sharada Menon was the prettiest among them. One of the lesbian admirers from Goa fell in love with her and kept watching the beauty of Sharada Menon. But Sharada Menon was not interested in all these things. She lost her temper and shouted at her. One day Kamala Das had observed the behaviour of that admirer. She writes:

The lesbian admirer came into our room once when Sharada was away taking a bath and kissed her pillowcase and her undies hanging out to dry in the dressing room. I lay on my bed watching this performance but she was half-crazed with love, and hardly noticed me.¹⁴

Kamala Das took an interest in these things and also had a habit to read the love letters of other girls and their love stories. She had always accompanied Annie who had a boyfriend. She had enjoyed the gossips with Annie. Once Sharada Menon warned her to keep her away from these gossips. But Kamala Das's sensitive mind was not ready for it. It was her nature that she was attracted towards these things easily.

Once Annie showed Kamala Das the letters of her lover who wrote about her attractive figure and desired to touch her breasts. Kamala Das was shocked when she read it. Annie too became angry with him and shouted:

..... Didn't I tell you he was a worthless lecher? He does not love me. He only wants my body¹⁵

and then next morning she showed Kamala Das a bruise on her upper lip and whispered:

... he climbed over the wall and came to my bed at last night when all of you were asleep.¹⁶

But during the third term Annie was ejected from the boarding school. Later on Sharada Iyer told Kamala Das that all the letters were written by Annie herself. It was the nature of Annie that she liked to live in the world of fantasy. It proves that all the hidden desires of the girl are to be fulfilled through the imagination. It underlines the fact that girls can't openly express their sexual needs and have to suppress them. They caught in dual psychology, the desire to enjoy the sex and hide them smoothly from the world.

Once Kamala Das got a love letter from her schoolmate Devaki. She had an intention to read that letter but her grandmother found the letter in her bag, read it and became upset. She was angry with Kamala Das. But there was no change in her personality. Again she fell in love with her Austrian teacher. As she describes:

Her voice was strange, fractured in the middle and I thought it beautiful. It was easy for me to fall in love with her, for I had at that time a need to squander, but there were no takers. I wrote a poem addressed to my teacher in which I likened her to a rose.¹⁷

She had an interest to discuss physical secrets with the elders. Mr. and Mrs. Kunhappa was one of the couples who always visited her house when she was at Calcutta. One day Mrs. Kunhappa came there and she had a very frank discussion with Kamala Das. Kamala Das writes:

She was frank with me and to my frank questions she gave frank answers although at that time I did not even believe all that I heard. I could not for a moment believe that all the dignified couples coming to my house to discuss politics and literature with my parents, could in the dark perform sexual acrobatics to get what my dear friend called the great orgasm. She made me laugh in disbelief. Was every married adult a clown in bed, a circusperformer?¹⁸

Once Kamala Das had enjoyed lesbian attraction towards a young girl who lived in the college hostel. Kamala Das's mother had professor friends of that college. One of a family friend warned Kamala Das against accompanying that hostel girl who was different

from others. Kamala Das wished to meet her but she did not wish to displease her mother's friends.

One day her mother went to Malabar so that after some days Kamala Das's father decided to send Kamala Das home for vacation with the batch of professor friends and students. Kamala Das described the sensuous lesbian encounter which she had enjoyed with that college girl. She describes :

She looked around first to see if any one was awake. Then she lay near me holding my body close to hers. Her fingers traced the outlines of my mouth with a gentleness that I had never dreamt of finding. She kissed my lips then, and whispered, you are so sweet, so very sweet, I have never met anyone so sweet, my darling, my little darling.....¹⁹

In the same journey this college batch and the professors visited to Major Menon's house, who was the family friend of Kamala Das's parents. Again the poet and her girl-friend enjoyed a bath together. She said, "Both of us felt rather giddy with joy like honeymooners."²⁰ The affair left a deep impression on her mind. As a result even after her unwilling engagement she had phoned the same girl and invited her at home and had wished to give her company.

The description throws light on the intense feelings of love and sex that she has. In her discussion with her relative Mr. Das before the marriage, she mentions that Oscar Wilde is her favourite writer. When she speaks about him she says:

My favourite author at that time was Oscar Wilde and my favourite poem the 'Ballad of Reading Goal.' He talked about homosexuality with frankness.²¹

Regarding her interest in Oscar Wilde as well as the lesbian and homosexual relations, Mr. Das says: "Many of us pass through that stage."²²

Kamala Das was afraid that her grandmother might hear her frank discussion which was not suitable for the girl of a Nair family. Where the women of Nair family never mentioned the word sex. On the contrary Kamala Das was very opposite to that situation. After the frank discussion with Mr. Das they were on a walk to the hedge and she had a shocking experience.

At the hedge, beside the Damson tree, he embraced me, and puzzled by his conduct I ran back to my house.²³

Later on her marriage was fixed with Mr. Das. Before he went to Calcutta he pushed her into a dark corner and tried to crush her body. It was a sudden shock for her which she never imagined about her future husband. While telling the truth about her husband's nature, she also had accepted the another truth that she could not control her lustful nature even after the engagement and the marriage.

One of her family friend arrived in Malabar with her daughter and an 18 year-old son with whom Kamala Das enjoyed same sensuous moments. She liked to give him a company.

I felt beautiful when he was with me,
arranging my limbs shyly with a blush
pinking his cheeks. He was stocky and fair-
skinned.²⁴

He was unhappy when he heard that she was going to marry in the month of February. She would like to give him company but she was not ready to marry him because he had no job. He came to attend her marriage, expressed his feelings through eyes and went out.

B: Maratial Life: Adultery As Rebellion.

The married life of Kamala Das was totally different from what she had earlier thought about it. When she understood that she was merely an object of sex for her husband she was totally collapsed. He openly told her about his relations with maid-servants. The wedding night was an unforgettable painful night for Kamala Das which she has never forgotten. Her humiliation was continued. He neither cared for his wife nor for the children.

When Kamala Das was in Malabar at the time of delivery she invited him for some days. She had a lovely son, Monoo. He came to Malabar on leave for some days but he could not bear when the baby was crying at night. He shouted to Kamala Das and told her to take him away. In those days he was very aloof from his wife. He was indifferent to her emotions and enjoyed sex with other women.

During his stay in Malabar, he spent most of his time with his cousins and his sister-in-law, paying me little attention and never bothering to converse with me. At night he was like chieftain who collected the taxes due to him from his vassal, simply and without exhilaration. All the Parijata that I wove in my curly hair was wasted. The taking was brutal and brief. The only topic of conversation that delighted him was sex and I was ignorant in the study of it. I did

not have any sex-appeal either. I was thin and my swollen breasts resembled a papaya tree. How much more voluptuous were my maidservants who took for my husband his bath-water and his change of clothes while he waited impatiently in the dark bathroom at Nalapat!²⁵

All the dreams which she had seen were washed out. He could not prove himself to be a good husband. Her expectations were belied. While describing about the expectations of any girl about her future husband Germaine Greer says:

Any girl who was personable, healthy and good-natured, was likely to be heartily wooed, but love was always subject to firm considerations of suitability and advantageousness. Her husband must not be old or disfigured or cruel or whoremaster. She was not married away vilely for money, for the heroes of ballads and their admirers strongly condemned the practice of the nobility in disposing of their children like stud cattle; on the other hand a girl could not be married out of her father's house until a suitable groom presented himself in a proper manner. She agreed to treat him well, respect him and joyfully to do his will in bed, but there is no indication that she expected her life to be transfigured by love. She considered herself to be, as others thought her, a sexual creature ready for mating and her husband was chosen as likely in this fashion too.²⁶

Kamala Das was nervous due to her husband. She thought that he married her,

.....only because of my social status and the possibility of financial gain. A coldness took hold of my heart then. I knew then that if love was what I had looked for in marriage I would have to look it outside its legal orbit.²⁷

Further she decides, “I made up my mind to be unfaithful to him, at least physically.”²⁸ She turns herself to become an adulteress. During her stay in Malabar she was attracted towards a young bricklayer who came to build the new house for the Nair family. When the work was nearly over Kamala Das sent her maid-servant to the place where he was staying. She had invited him to meet her near the shrine of the Bhagwati in the evening. She had given a gold coin to her maid-servant for giving the message to him. But unfortunately he had left for his village. It made the poet nervous. But her search of new friends for physical satisfaction was continued. She had many friends during her life. Carlo was one of them. He was an Italian and very close to Kamala Das. He understood her feelings. He knew that

the memory of her grey-eyed friend were painful for her. She could not forget him. At that time he advised her:

You can forget your grey-eyed friend, leave
your indifferent husband and come with me
to my country.²⁹

She was not ready to leave her children and divorce her husband. But her affair with Carlo was continued and yet she never got satisfaction in it. She was continuously tossed from one lover to another by the restless moments. She had many friends but none of them gave her a permanent company. Due to that bitter experience and her husband's indifferent nature she became a suspicious woman. She lost her faith in love and marriage. She was not able to involve herself with her husband. Due to her past experiences of her husband's affairs with the maid-servants and his cruel nature, she had many questions about his personality. She could not bear his male company. Once his old friend came home and the poet became restless. Again her moody mind kept moving from normal to abnormal thoughts. As she describes:

At this time my husband turned to his old friend for comfort. They behaved like lovers in my presence. To celebrate my birthday, they shoved me out of the bedroom and locked themselves in. I stood for a while, wondering what two men could possibly do together to get some time, my pride made me move away. I went to my son and lay near him. I felt then a revulsion for my breasts seemed to be crushing me. My private part was only a wound showing through. Why are you weeping, Amma, asked my little son and I shook my head, saying nothing, nothing³⁰

Her mind was not stable that she could not believe in love and husband. She became very emotional and sensitive. She was feeling herself alone and searching for love. She enjoyed physical relations with many but no one made her life secure and provided her love for which she had been searching throughout her life. But one of her lovers whom she loved very much appeared to be significant. While describing him she writes:

What was happening to me, I wondered. Was it no longer possible to lure a charming male into a complicated and satisfying love affair with the right words, the right glances, the right gestures? Was I finished as a charmer? Then with the force of a typhoon he conquered me, the last of my lovers, the most notorious of all, the king of all kings, the bison among animal, the handsome dark one with a tattoo between his eyes.³¹

He was one of her attractive lovers with whom she enjoyed many nights. Her physical desire was fulfilled by him. She again met him after her sickness and re-lived the sweet moments which she had shared with him in the room of eighteen mirrors. At last she felt that it was not her physical attraction but she had really fallen in love with him. She writes,

There were eighteen mirrors in his room, eighteen ponds into which I dipped my hot brown body. Beyond that room was enclosed verandah where we stood together to look at the sea. The sea was our only witness. How many times I turned to it and whispered oh, sea, I am at last in love; I have found my Krishna....³²

She had very deep feelings about him. But she thought that she met him too late. She writes:

.... he and I met too late, we could get no child of our own, my love for him was just the writing of the sea, just a song borne by the wind³³

But her last love was not successful because he was not sensitive like her. He liked her body but did not love her. Whenever

she wrote him sentimental letters and expressed her emotions he never took it seriously. Because all these sentimental things were foolish things for him.

It is her first and last love but her journey of physical satisfaction is endless. She never changes her sensual mind. It is attracted easily towards any one who comes in her contact.

Repeated illness was the part of her life. Once again she lost her weight and fell sick. She soon became the patient of room no 565 of Bombay hospital which was familiar to her. There she had an affection towards one of the doctors. She says,

“I liked the smell his thick fingers left on my hands.”³⁴

Besides her lustful nature and her love affairs, she has had some of the bitter life experiences. Which she has expressed in her autobiography. One of her cousins held her in his arms and kissed her in a disgusting manner. It was unbelievable for her. She writes:

He panted with his emotion when he kissed me on my mouth I disliked the smell of his stale mouth.³⁵

She feels that people look at her as the object of sex and a woman of vast sexual hunger. In chapter 26 Kamala Das describes the very dark night of her life when she was trapped in an unsuccessful rape. One night her ayah had invited a stranger in their house in the absence of Mr. Das who was away in Assam on an official tour. That stranger entered the room with the ayah. After a few minutes the ayah had closed the door leaving that man in the poet's room. She writes:

The man threw himself down on my body with two strange groans. He smelt of stale liquor and under his weight my limbs became rigid and I wished to raise myself to vomit. Soon enough, after an incomplete rape, he rolled off my body and lay inert at the foot of the bed, hugging my cold feet. He kissed my toes.³⁶

C: Death and Suicide moving from the physical to the spiritual.

Kamala Das had all these bitter experiences which taught her that every man thought that a woman was the object of sex. Even her neighbours have looked at her as a sensuous woman. One of her

neighbours to whom she called uncle had once brought the pornographic book for her. It was shocking for her.

Her flopped marriage, unsuccessful love affairs, bitter experiences of life lead her to think of committing suicide. Her search of love outside marriage is fruitless. In addition to that the reputed illness brings nervousness in her life. Her mind turns physical to spiritual she tries to find out the truth of life and sometimes she wants to end all these momentary things which don't provide any security to life.

This seems to have shaped her personality. Her autobiography and her poems are the reflection of her inner personality. She has tried to clear all the ideas and reasons which develop her personality as a sensuous girl, a betrayed wife and an adulterous woman.

Kamala Das becomes conscious that her writing becomes controversial and it will be harmful for her well-known family but it provides her pleasure. In the preface to *My Story* she writes:

I had disgraced my well-known family by telling my readers that I had fallen in love with a man other than my lawfully wedded husband. Why, I had even confessed that I was chronically falling in love with persons of flamboyant nature. ---- This book has cost

me many things that I held dear, but I do not for a moment regret having written it. I have written several books in my life time, but none of them provided the pleasure the writing of *My Story* has given me.³⁷

Kamala Das is different from the other poets of her time. She has always been a controversial figure in literary circle for her uninhibited portrayal of female sexuality. Jaikrishnana Nair says:

The modern English poetry with all its aggressiveness and boldness begins and culminates in Kamala Das. No other feminist poets in India could achieve the absolute rebellious dimensions of Kamala Das in her poetry. In fact, Kamala Das makes a poetic revolt by way of introspectively pondering upon the unfortunate state of existence in which Indian women conduct themselves. Like a seasonal artist she penetrates her imaginative potential to sympathetically understand the possible average grievances of Indian women as extremely exploited agent in the social, domestic circumstances.³⁸

Kamala Das is never ready to admit the submissive and sympathetic framework of woman. She doesn't fit herself in it. Her opinion about it in *The Sunday Review* is obviously remarkable:

People think that the ideal woman is like a Hindi film heroine, with a drought in her genitalia and over – moist eyes. But real women are different. We are courageous. The creator's confidence is within us. It's the womb that gives that inner courage.³⁹

She deals with her failed marriage and frustrating love affairs. Her poetry is the open chart of her painful life and her hidden passions. She always feels that she is alone. Her feeling of loneliness and nothingness plays a prominent role in her life. Her hunger for love is endless which she cannot get throughout her life. That is the reason behind her adultery. In composition she writes:

Love

I no longer need,

with tenderness I am most content,

I have learnt that friendship

cannot endure,

that blood-ties do not satisfy.

and so

with every interesting man I meet,

be it

a curious editor,
Or a poet with a skin yellowed
like antique paper,
a skin older than Jesus Christ,
I must
most deliberately
whip up a froth of desire,
a passion to suit the occasion.
I must let my mind striptease
I must extrude
autobiography.
The only secrets I always
withhold
are that I am so alone
and that I miss my grandmother (OP, 5)

Adultery is a kind of her revolt against her husband and the male dominated society. It also helps her to get free from her feeling of isolation. She is aware that it is a temporary escape. Sometimes she hates all these things. In the same poem she says:

It may be
that in my heart
I have replaced love with guilt
and discovered
that both love and hate are
involvements. (OP, 4)

Love is the essence of life. So she admits that it comes in different shapes. As she replies:

I used to think love was only like a boil – intensely concentrated on one spot, but now I feel it's also like a rain, spreading out, touching many people. Love is politics, love is food, love is everything.⁴⁰

She was nervous in her childhood due to the strict nature of her father and lack of attachment with her own mother. From those days she was in search of love which was fulfilled only by her grandmother whom she would never forget in her whole life. Her autobiography gives all the details about her disturbed psychology in childhood. In

the horrible atmosphere of the Nair family Kamala Das felt restless.

Her nervousness with her parents is shown in her following statement:

My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched. But my mother's timidity helped to create an illusion of domestic harmony which satisfied the relatives and friends. Out of such an arid union were born the first two children, my brother and I⁴¹

Kamala Das was grown up lonely in her strict family atmosphere. She underwent strange hostel, school experiences but she was unable to communicate with her mother. Once she was insulted by her teacher's son regarding her poor knowledge of music. But she could tell this to her mother. She was far away from love, security and happiness in her childhood. In *My Story* she writes:

When I returned home I did not tell my mother what had happened. She never asked any questions. My father too was entirely without curiosity. They took us for granted and considered us mere puppets, moving our limbs according to the tugs they gave us. They did not stop for a moment to think that we had personalities that were developing independently, like sturdy shoots of the banyan growing out of crevices in the walls of ancient fortresses.⁴²

In a poem entitled 'A Requiem for my father' she says:

From childhood to middle years I have had a raw deal
Illness, and loneliness, loves that faded like mist,
And the elders' irrational hate
You loved life. (CP, 40)

Her problem of isolation is continued even after the marriage. She and Mr. Das are yet another mismatched pair like her parents. Lack of emotional rapport with either the parents or her husband makes her a woman of rebellious nature.

At the early age of fifteen she has experienced disgusting, cruel and painful sex. After that it becomes the unavoidable part of her life. She describes in a poem entitled 'The Stone Age':

Fond husband ancient settler in the mind
Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment,
Be kind. You turn me into a bird of stone, a granite
Dove, you build around me a shabby drawing room,
And stroke my pitted face absent mindedly while
You read. (CP, 96)

Due to this indifferent treatment she has revolted against all social constraints made for women. Das Bijay Kumar writes:

As she deals with the conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male-oriented universe, her tussle with love, sex, lust, womanhood, has most usually centred itself upon her relations with her husband or with the other men in her life.⁴³

Kamala Das wants to be free from the tiresome routine of a hollow married life. In 'I Shall Some Day' she writes:

I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea,
Love-words flung from doorways and of course
Your tired lust. I shall some day take
Wings, fly around (OP, 48)

She wants to be away from all the human bondages built around her by her husband and the society. it is her inner urge to fly away and live as a human being. As Jaykrishnan Nair says:

Thematic concerns in Das's poetry range from the sad plight of woman in society, and the harrowing situations of feminine experiences to a longing for the freedom of the inner self through experiencing consummate love in the interpersonal relationships.⁴⁴

She becomes depressed due to the savage lust of her husband and his negligence towards her. One of her friends, Carlo brings happiness in her life. She says:

When Carlo came into my life all the
flowers of the university garden had fallen.⁴⁵

Throughout her life she has enjoyed many friends in search of love. She wants to be loved, it is the necessity of her life. She never draws the curtain on each of her sensuous experiences. She never feels ashamed to describe the sex-act that makes her controversial and bold among the other Indian women writers. Some of her poems are very hot in narration.

In 'Convicts' she describes:

This hacking at each other's parts
Like convicts hacking, breaking clods
At noon. We were earth under hot
Sun we were neither
Male nor female. (OP, 25)

Further in one of her poems entitled 'The Looking Glass' she describes:

Getting a man to love you is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Woman. Stand nude before the glass with him
..... admit your
Admiration. Notice the perfection
Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,
Dropping towels, and the jerkey way he
Urinate

Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your
Endless female Hungers. (DS, 27).

She doesn't feel any guilt to describe the sensuous man-woman relations and the secrets of women they were not allowed to describe. A woman from a traditional Nair family crosses all the boundaries of

hesitation and boldly uses the words like ‘the Jerky way’, ‘The musk of sweat between the breasts’, “menstrual blood” etc. All the hidden and inexpressible feelings, demands of men and women are clearly drawn by her. It makes her a very controversial figure.

But sometimes Kamala Das hates the body and its temporary pleasure. She feels that it is “the bloody use” (Convicts, OP. 25). She knows that it is a ‘trap of lust’ which provides her “a temporary home” (Glass, OP, 21). King Bruce writes:

In her poetry love and hate are often
neighbours, just as an assertion of sexual
freedom sits near feelings of self-disgust
expressed through depression.⁴⁶

Her poetry and her autobiography show continuous ups and downs of her psychology. It continuously moves from love to lust and from lust to love. Every word of Kamala Das’s writing depends upon her mood and her condition in which she is. Every situation, every experience of life promotes her to write. So sometimes we cannot separate her verse from her autobiography. Because many chapters of *My Story* have started with the poems which highlight the

condition of the poet's persona. In an interview with Iqbal Kaur she replies:

I can't forgive people who caused me to write poetry. If they hadn't hurt me, I wouldn't have been a poet at all and probably the only thing that really matters to me is my poetry, my writing and right to live as a poet. So far as my husband is concerned, I am grateful to him for the sufferings inflicted on me in my youth, for without them I would not have written poetry at all.⁴⁷

Whenever she feels suffered by the nature of her husband she thinks of committing suicide. The servants who came from Malabar to take care of her and her kids, could not bear her pathetic condition. Mr. Das was angry to his wife when his mother told him disgruntled things about her. It was torturous for her. She admits that she tried to commit suicide.

One day, being able it no longer, I sent the cook to chemist's shop for a dozen tablets of barbiturates. No chemist would give them without doctor's prescription. The cook, on his return, empty-handed, told me with tears in his eyes, that he too would take tablets if I decided to kill myself.⁴⁸

Sufferings in life, repeated sicknesses, feeling of insecurity threatened her life. Life for Kamala Das is a horrifying experience. Many times she thinks about suicide. In *My Story* she focuses on her nervous breakdown.

I was losing patience. I could not understand the purpose of my return from the hospital or of the resurrection of my health. On some days, seated before the mirror, and painting my pale lips, I felt all of a sudden uneasy. I saw the lonely eyes reflected in the mirror, clouding over as though a mist had enveloped them. I was looking into the depths of my loneliness. Then I felt that I was applying paint on the lips of a corpse. Death leans against my hedge. If death touched me, the fragrance will leave my body and in its place will be an unbearable stench.⁴⁹

When Kamala Das looks around, and discovers the real world of her dreams, she becomes nervous and loses her confidence. So she turns to the Indian myth to console herself and to find the ways of salvation. Images like Radha, Meera support her to set her mind. Her devotion to Lord Krishna has made her happy and secure. A poem entitled 'Ghanshyam' highlights her intense love for Krishna which helps her to come out from her depression.

Ghanshyam,
You have like a koel built you
Nest in the arbour of my heart.
My life, until now a sleeping jungle
Is at last astir with music. (TTSR, 18)

Through out her life Kamala Das battled with society to live as a human being. But she finds that there is no change in male psychology and the condition of woman. A woman has always been the object of male entertainment.

She becomes conscious that her verse and her autobiography have limitations to explain the story of her painful journey with many ups and downs. She is aware that her writing is less useful to change the male psychology In 'The Summing Up' she says:

In ten minutes how can I sum up
This life, this voyage on uncharted
seas, this flight over radarless ports
this endless worship at plundered shrines
this love transformed into mere pain and

this emptiness that hangs from brackets
of withered arms, the strangers who have
come to wipe my tears, the oyster's ache
.....
..... change the world with
Rhetoric? Never: Cynicism
Takes the driver's seat for time perhaps
personified as stillness, all its
fury jelled, tamed.

And then she requests to readers:

..... Life spreads its moulting
Wings to sicken me but do not judge
Me harshly, I am your kith and kin
I gathered your laments into a song. (OSKHS, 127)

She believes that her dear readers like her honesty and judge her in a tender way.

Whatever she feels, she observes and experiences she expressed through writing and in interviews without hiding anything. Her writing is her sincere approach to life. In her autobiography she writes:

I wrote about the subjects the editors asked me to write on, fully aware that I was uneducated by the usual standards and that I had no business meddling in grave matters. But now happily I meddled to satisfy that particular brand of reader who liked me and liked my honest approach. I was useless as a housewife anyway. I could not pick up a teapot without gasping for breath. But writing was possible. And it certainly brought me happiness.⁵⁰

A confessional poet Kamala Das becomes very frank and honest, close and intimate, in her details. She often writes about her personal failures, mental as well as physical illnesses, death and destruction, extremely private experiences in the matters of love and sex. Kamala Das operates her poetry from the level of the personal and the particular rather than the general. A. N. Dwivedi rightly asserts:

....Kamala Das is a typical 'Confessional' poet who pours her very heart into her poetry. She is largely subjective and autobiographical, anguished and tortured, letting us peep into her sufferings and tortured psyche.⁵¹

As a poet, Kamala Das makes ample use of images and symbols to heighten her emotions. Hence her poems leave a lasting impression on the mind of readers. A. N. Dwivedi writes:

The poetess returns to the theme of love and sex repeatedly with all urgency and sincerity. Many of the poems are suffused with warmth and passion with heat of an unrequited love and an unfulfilled desire. The frequency of the love theme may evoke repudiation from nuns and spinsters and breed boredom in the minds of general readers, but like Sappho in Greek literature, like Elizabeth Barret Browning in English letters, and like Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath in Modern American poetry, Mrs. Das offers us a feast of vivid images of love couched in felicitous language. No doubt, love is her forte in poetry.⁵²

The dissertation attempts a study of the images used by Kamala Das in her poetry. Broadly the images can be classified into various types as follow:

- i) Body as an Image
- ii) Nature Imagery
- iii) Animal Imagery
- iv) Mythological Images

Analysis of all these types of images is attempted in the following chapters.

Chapter II of this dissertation deals with the images related to her body. It also focuses on her sensuous sex experiences and its keen descriptions. Sometimes her husband's brutality comes out through these images. The celebration of the body and the body pains are carried out by the poet through these body images.

Chapter III focuses on the images that Kamala Das borrows from the world of nature. It is attempted to suggest that the nature images are close to the body images.

Chapter IV is an analysis of the animal imagery which is used by the poet to highlight the brutality in the men that she encounters.

Chapter V attempts an analysis of the images that the poetess borrows from the mythology. These images are used by the poetess in order to highlight the cyclical as well as the spiritual aspects of her own experiences.

Chapter VI is the conclusion.

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II. BODY AS AN IMAGE

Most of the writings of women is touched by grief, male domination. Her disturbing awareness about her uncertainty about her identity as social being, her nervousness to her existence of shadow image in relation to the male is responsible for her feeling of unhappiness and loneliness. she writes about her struggle to social constrains. Language is the powerful media to express their anger and pathos. Catherine Belsey writes:

The 'I' of these poems is kind of super subject, experiencing life at a higher level of intensity than ordinary people and absorbed in a world of selfhood which the phenomenal world, perceived as external and antithetical, either nourishes or constrains.¹

Men and women are human beings but they are assigned roles in the society. Gender is one of the main features to identify the difference between men and women. It is the major reason behind their centralization. The social norms and rules are made up taking into account the biological difference. A child never knows the gender and the rules made for him. Personality of the child is designed by their parents and society. Gaylee, Greene and Coppelia Khan in their

essay, "Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman"

write:

That men have penises and women do not, that women bear children and men do not, are biological facts which have no determinate meaning in themselves but are invested with various symbolic meaning by different cultures---- Whatever power or status may be accorded to woman in a given culture, they are still, in comparison to men, devalued as 'the second sex'²

The difference between boys and girls becomes exposed with the onset of menstruation in the girl's body. She realizes the nature of this accordance with the social codes of the circle in which she moves about. They learn their earliest and deepest lessons about the sameness and as well as difference of the sexes. Gender is the basis of social system and its logic. The concept of difference and equality leads to the question whether to prioritize that which defines the category 'women' today. Two conceptions of difference exist in the feminist debates. The first in the essentialist model, which draws on the differences between men and women the second is the deconstructive model, which points to the difference within woman as a category and women as a group.

In "The Critical Difference", Barbara Johnson Says:

If human beings were not divided into two biological sexes, there would be probably no need for literature. And if literature could truly say what the relations between the sexes are, we would doubtless not need much of it then, either ³

Different treatment to boys and girls teach them the rules of life. Their parents guide them how to live in the society and follow its rules. Kamala Das has similar experiences in her life. Everybody wanted to advice to her. Her advisers attend her growth into adulthood and urge to do some cooking, embroidery and so many other things. They keep watching every action and behaviour of the part. They try to protect her from passionate things so they pointed her not to be a nymphomaniac. She writes in a poem entitled 'An Introduction':

I was child, and later they

Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs

Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair (OP, 26)

She is too innocent to understand the physical changes and their implications. She never enjoys her life as per her wishes. Her parents command her and teach the lessons of life to her. She is compelled to

obey the rules and regulations of her parents. She tells that she was asked to dress in sarees as she had grown up. She writes in the same poem:

Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep in through our lacedraped windows
Be amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
Choose, a name, a role. (OP, 27)

The parents had asked the woman to wear the sarees, be cook, be wife. She was restricted to sit on walls or peep in through the windows. She was required to play the gender defined roles. The girl's life is planned by their parents. Kamala Das writes in '*My Story*':

When I put her out of my mind I put aside my self-pity too. It would not do to dream of a different kind of life. My life had been planned and its course charted by my parents and relatives .⁴

They never give her a chance to take any decision regarding her life. They asked her to be wife, because parents in those days believed that a girl has to be married soon after menstruation. One can't find fault with the parents of the older generation because most of them were uneducated. If a girl, with her teenage passion gets involved in a sexual affair and becomes pregnant, there will be very serious problems, to her as well as her parents. Due to this kind of thinking the parents get the girl married at a very early age. Because of that they are responsible for her unhappy early married life. Kamala Das tells us:

It was customary for the Nair girl to marry when she was hardly out of her childhood and it was also customary for the much older husband to give her a rude shock by his sexual haste on the wedding night ⁵

Marriage places before a woman a set of gender-defined roles prescribed by the society. Transgressing these roles is tantamount to a defiance of social norms and invites the wrath of the power-holders in this case of men. Reality, for the society is only what it chooses to see, and it chooses to find a woman in certain fixed roles. she is married early at the age of sixteen. In which age an innocent girl never knows the meaning of marriage and man-woman relationship. Her body is

not ready to give company to her husband in bed. Rude and shocking sex experience makes a girl restless. Before understanding the growth and needs of her body she has been tied up with her husband. She says in 'An Introduction':

When

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-body felt so beaten.

The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank pitifully. (OP, 26-27)

She was married when she was a youth of sixteen and that too with a much older man. He drew her in a bedroom and made a painful sex. She never imagined the like of the brutal first night. Her husband did not beat her but she thought that she had been beaten because of his brutal sex. She disliked him. She asked for love and what she got was shocking. The husband's way of performing sex made her feel miserable, conventionally the man is expected to make love to the woman for his own satisfaction. He thought that his wife of a "youth

of sixteen" is a sexual object for him and a nurse of his children. The word "drew" is very thoughtfully used by Kamala Das to show the inhuman treatment of her husband. When he draws his wife into his bedroom he expects his wife to be unquestioning in her submission. As she tell us in '*My Story*':

Until my wedding night I did not have slightest knowledge of what went on between men and women in the process of procreation⁶

The wife is not mature enough, as a sixteen year girl can not be physically and mentally mature and she "asked for love, not knowing what else to ask----" However, she would expect love from her husband. After the ugly, painful sex it raises the question, how does the "woman's body" of sixteen feel? Her innocent body feels "beaten". The woman wants love not lust. But her husband treats her as a private property.

Exploitation of her body in the rude arms of her husband is her routine life that she never rejects. In '*Larger Than Life was He*' she writes:

We were such a mismated pair,
yet there were advantages, I admit
he was free to exploit and I was free
to be exploited
we were quits at every game we played
(OSKHS, 112)

It is not the condition of the poet alone but it is the general story
of womanhood. In the words of Germaine Greer:

They were the product of the feudal
situation in which a noble wife was a
wife only when her warrior husband
was at home (which with any luck was
seldom), otherwise she ruled a community
of men, many of them young and lusty, with
the result that they entertained fantasies
about the unobtainable to whom they could
not even address their advances. She
exploited their servility, which was the
original of chivalry, and may or may
not have served her own lusts by them. To
her husband she was submissive and offered
him her body as his fief.⁷

In 'The Word Is Sin' she depicts that for every woman her
home is a safe place but many times it is a safe place for male to hurt
her as his wish.

home is where the dream awaits us
and the knife sharpened for the kill.
home is where the god who failed us stands
awaiting
and his name is sin
nothing better, nothing worse (OSKHS, 106)

The Indian woman is a victimised creature of this world. She never utters any word about her humiliation by her husband, parents and the society. Kamala Das draws the pathetic picture of an Indian woman. Parents decide the life partner of their daughter. She says that her parents are responsible for her unsuccessful married life. There is no understanding between the husband and the wife, because he has not offered her love which she needs in her teenage. She feels herself isolated because her partner is interested in sex alone.

The fact that she is able to make the discrimination between love and lust in a male dominated society makes her realize that she is a freak. Actually she has an experience of lust but not love. Her loneliness at home leads her to extra-marital relationship. She is in search of love. Neglecting the social restrictions she submits her body to her lovers. Her husband and his rude nature is responsible for her seeking love outside the marital bond. He is a man of lust careless of the emotions of his wife. Her body is shrunken in his arms, tears come in her eyes but he never attends to her poor condition.

She became an adulteress. She decides:

I made up my mind to be unfaithful to him,
at least physically.⁸

Kamala Das revolted against the male dominated society and its cruel treatment. She writes in 'An Introduction:

Don't play pretending games.

Don't play at schizophrenia or be a

Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when

Jilted in love----- I met a man, loved him. Call

Him not by any name, he is every man

Who wants a woman, just as I am every

Woman who seeks love. (OP, 27)

After a few days of married life she meets a man who has a concern for her as opposed to her husband. She loves him. She never pretends to be an honest wife. She admits her adultery before her husband and the world. She feels that every man is the same in nature and he needs a woman for his own lust. She compares herself to a common woman who expects love from her husband. This expectation is quite natural and normal. Devendra Kohlli remarks about "An Introduction":

It is a part of the strength of Kamala Das's exploration of love theme that it also follows her compulsions to articulate and understand the working of the feminine consciousness. Her best known poem in this category 'An Introduction' is concerned with the question of human identity and is perhaps at the heart of any attempt at self-exploration and self integration.⁹

Her marriage is against her will, basically she has no interest in the sexual contact with her husband. What is most shocking for her is the prolonged apathy of her husband to her. She realizes that she has failed in love with him. In this frustrated and agonized state of mind her condition seems to be pathetic.

She remained a virgin for a fortnight even after marriage while he was after some other lady. It means that even after the marriage Mr. Das had extra marital relationships with the maid servants. He was interested in other women and seduced them and told this to his wife without hesitation. Hence it may be the cause of her frustration in marriage. She can't expose this to her father and mother. They think that she is happy with their son-in-law. Her confused mind, suppressed feelings lead her to commit adultery. Her search for love leads her nowhere.

She becomes sad because of the unquenching lust of her husband this sexual experience with him created a kind of dilemma for her. Her husband made love to her with much passion, but till the end she could not decide whether it was sheer lust which motivated him or whether it was love for her as well. Actually it is the haunting memory of her sexual experiences that she writes about in a poem entitled 'In Love':

----- 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, while pleasure
With deliberate gaiety
Trumpets harshly into the
Silence of the room---At noon. (OP, 15)

She delineates a sexual union devoid of any satisfaction and the ecstasy of love. He plays with her body in a lustful manner. She describes her pathetic condition during sex. She draws herself in his embraces which are like " a finished jigsaw". There is a vacant ecstasy of love. She ignores her " poor moody mind" and tries to enjoy the sex deliberately. Her mind hears the sobs of the " gaiety trumpets". In the silence of the room, she listens nothing except sensual completeness. There is a physical union only. Anisur Rahaman remarks:

The man is presented with scorn and poet's sexual union with him affords no satisfaction; rather it gives pain.¹⁰

She has no pleasure in her life. Her body is in the captivity of her husband. Her mind is burdened with the disillusionment in life. Her body is like a toy in the hands of her husband and her lovers, the poor body of Kamala Das battling with her husband's impersonal lust. At every moment the poet feels insecure in the arms of her husband. In a poem entitled 'Gino' she writes:

This body that I wear without joy, this body
Burdened with lenience, slender toy, owned
By man of substance, shall perhaps wither, battling with
My darling's impersonal lust. Or, it shall grow gross
And reach large proportions before its end. (OP, 14)

Her body is useless for her. She doesn't enjoy her life. While thinking about her physical relationship with her husband and lover, she becomes nervous and thinks about her death and decay. In her nervousness she recollects the experience of the treatment given by her husband. She doesn't like the behavior of her husband, who doesn't love her. Kamala Das tries to locate herself in her physical existence. Physical attractiveness is a prime concern in sex to which she is battling in her whole life.

She becomes confused because of her obsession for an ideal love and inability to find it. Again and again she repeats the same words "this body". According to Barche G.D.:

The pain and anger is evident in the repetition of the phrase 'this body' and the use of the phrases 'burdened with lenience, 'men of substance, 'battling with.'¹¹

Kamala Das is struggling with her darling's impersonal lust and hunger. Her body pains are endless. She never understands the complexity of human life. She thinks about the husband-wife relationship again and again. Millions of questions arise in her mind regarding love and sex. Is it love which she needs? she suspects that her husband does not love her. It tortures her. Answering to it, she says in 'In Love':

Million questions awake in
Me, and all about him, and
This skin-communicated
Thing that I dare not yet in.
His presence call our love. (OP, 15)

The wife undergoes sleepless nights as her husband does not have patience to understand her feelings and thoughts. Therefore, she walks around the Verandah and asks herself a million questions. Questions about whom? The answer to these questions is that real love is quite elusive and therefore hard to find anywhere. What she had felt in the course of the sexual act with that lover was only " a

skin communicated thing" or purely a physical desire, the "unending lust" leading to physical annihilation.

Memories of unhappy married life are very torturous. She never forgets them. Her relation, with her husband is a physical union. As she writes in her autobiography:

I was to be the victim of young man's carnal hunger and perhaps, out of our union, there would be born a few children.¹²

Mr. Das was an officer in Reserve Bank of India, Bombay, where her life became miserable in the company of her lustful husband. His contact with his wife was usually cruel and brutal. She remembers the experience with her husband just after her engagement. He pressed amorously her fingers. She writes:

Whenever he found me alone in a room he began to plead with me to bare my breasts and if I did not, he turned brutal and crude. His hands bruised my body and left blue and red marks on the skin.¹³

His way of love-making compels her to leave the bondages of tradition. She reacts in a non-conventional manner in love-making.

Offering herself to a handsome lover, who comes across her and makes violent love to her. She enters in others' life and changes her lovers endlessly. No one gives her love and sympathy. Feeling alone in her own home she waits for the smooth words of her husband. But he has no spare time for her . He is always busy sorting out his office files and affixing his signature on them.

In the poem entitled 'Larger Than Life Was He' she writes:

He peered into his office files
till the supper turned cold
and the children got up to sleep
I cannot recollect a film
a play or a concert he took us to
or joke which together we shared
He was like a bank locker
steely cold and shut
or a filing cabinet that
only its owner could unlock
Not for a moment did I own him.
Only a few bedbound chores
executed well, tethered him to me
Emotion was never a topic
brought up in our home...(OSKHS, 112 - 113)

As a traditional wife she does her duties and warm his bed but there is no emotional contentment. They made love for a few

moments and produced the children and except that nothing appears to happen between them. Her husband expected her to do her domestic duties well and to look after the needs and comforts of her husband.

Beverly Jones points out:

The husband after all, is trying to protect and bolster his frail ego, not drive his wife insane or force her suicide. He wants in the home to be able to hide from his own inner doubts, his own sense of shame, failure, and meaninglessness. He wants to shed the endless humiliation of endless days parading as a man in the male world, pretending a power, control, and understanding he does not have.

All he asks of his wife, aside from hours of mental work, is that she not see him as he sees himself. That she not challenge him, but admire and desire him soothe and distract him.¹⁴

Kamala Das eroded her own distinct personality and dwarfed herself for ever as she states in 'The Old Playhouse':

---- you called me wife,

I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
Question I mumbled incoherent replies. (Op, 1)

Having destroyed every channel of self-realization as a woman and as an individual, she feels alone. Sharda Iyer points out the inner confusion of the poet as a woman:

The term split-self was first given significance for women's poetry in Florence Howel's introduction to 'No More Masks'. It describes an opposition women feel between essential aspects of the self, between what is socially prescribed on the basis of gender and what is defined on the basis of the self, between what a woman feels she should be what she feels she is¹⁵

Kamala Das protests against the restrictions of married life. It is a hollow marital bond which she cannot untie. It is most unfortunate that such a sensitive woman as Kamala Das is tied to stake. She needs her natural freedom. His male ego suppresses her feelings. She has found the way of freedom. She decides to be unfaithful to her husband. Mr. Das is responsible for her frigid nature. He has permitted her to be free as per her wish. Her heart dances with joy but some questions make her disturbed. She reveals it in a poem entitled 'Composition':

When I got married
my husband said,
You may have freedom,
as much as you want,
My soul balked at this diet of ash.
Freedom became my dancing shoe,
how well I danced,
and danced without rest,
until the shoes turned grimy on my feet
and I began to have doubts.
I asked my husband,
am I hetero
am I lesbian
or am I just plain frigid?
He only laughed.
For such questions
probably there are no answers
or else
the answers must emerge

from within. (Op, 4-5)

She talks of her early married days again in order to reveal her husband's relationship with her. The husband assures her as the word "said" indicates, that she has as much freedom as she wants. Her heart dances at this moment due to the freedom. she uses very appropriate phrase for her happy satisfied soul. She says her soul "balked at this diet of ash" and freedom for her is a "dancing shoe" But her satisfaction is momentary. Her feminine consciousness creates many questions regarding her feminity and rules for it. She asks her husband " am I hetro", "am I lesbian" and continues "am I just plain frigid?" He never replies and laughs. Why does he laugh? Why does he never answer? All these questions are unanswerable to him as a husband probably his laugh suggests that her questions are foolishly asked. She should find the answer within herself.

At the same time the poem shows how the social consciousness renders her unable to enjoy the freedom. But this freedom confused the female sensibility that is accustomed to follow the commands of the male. She cannot come out easily from the Dravidian culture which is taught to her by her grandmother and her parents. Her conscious mind reminds her grandmother's lessons. She thinks about

it and finds herself incapable of answering it. The passive sexual role assigned to woman is itself a denial of female sexuality.

Kamala Das thinks that freedom has no use at all for her. Even she becomes free to search the real love outside her married life. Her husband has given her full freedom to enjoy. He too gets the same enjoyment. There is no emotional bond between them. Her life is full of regrets. In her poem entitled 'Composition' she says,

The tragedy of life
is not death but growth,
the child growing into adult
and, growing out of needs. (OP.4)

She visualized her growth as an evil one. The child grows into adult and his needs are growing. He needs many things which he cannot explain. The presentation of her growth is full of problems. Her childhood in Malabar was glorious and she lived happily with her grandmother. Her grandmother is an ideal person for Kamala Das. When a girl is a child she has no restraints but when she grows, everyone teaches her every lesson of life as a woman. So for her the

tragedy of life is not the end of it but the growing age is painful. Nair

Jayakrishnan writes:

The relative manner in which she presents the various facets of growth in life ultimately contributes to one simple summation, that is life in its overall presentation of growth and development offers no relative comfort or ease.¹⁶

Every girl or a woman has similar experiences like Kamala Das. But they have no courage to express their needs of life. The woman plays different roles in life but no role gives her security and status. Suma Chitnis writes in her article, ' A Design for Sociological Study On Images of woman':

-----Women are almost universally relegated to an inferior status, exploited and confined to homemaking and to child-rearing. But they deny that this is a 'natural' order rooted in biological needs. They use the concept of culture to demonstrate how statuses, positions and roles are derived, from the manner in which a particular people construct their society and view their reality. Through comparative studies of culture they also pave the way for a recognition of the ethnocentricity of specific sex role definitions. Sex statuses and concepts regarding the importance of the

male and female principles in life. They agree that women are at a disadvantage physically particularly during their child-bearing years, and that they are therefore vulnerable to oppression and exploitation, but, by exposing how the form and extent of this exploitation and domination differs from society to society, and within the same from time to time they explode notions regarding the "Inevitability" of woman's inferior situation and status.¹⁷

Playing the role as a wife, beloved, mother, streetwalker, goddess etc. has no importance in the attitude of man. She generalizes in 'Composition',

We are all alike,
We women,
In our wrappings of hairless skin.
All skeletons are alike
Only the souls vary
That hide somewhere between the flesh
And the bone (OP, 6)

This is the voice of womanhood which is exposed and put before the world by Kamala Das. The woman is subordinate from the

male point of view. Every woman has the same experience in her life. But she hides her inner feelings and only a few women have the courage to express them. The body of the woman is a skeleton for which Kamala Das uses the line " All skeletons are alike."

In 'Terror' she depicts the physical and mental degradation of the woman in a very ironic manner.

We wear service masks night and
day, between their metal and our skin
the sweat stinks of rot and pus. The brave
are in; we need no bars, no locks, no warrant.
Cowardice wardens us night and day.
For a brief forgetting we search for
old familiars for beauty of trees
and the sky. Terror hides behind
thickets of pubic hair, all men are
impotent, all women barren, the sky
is taut like the face of drum (OSKHS, 41)

But the Indian woman is not conscious of about her inferiority because she is born and brought up in a patriarchal society which is fit for it. According to poet all women are hypnotized who never think and act against their male.

We

go round and round singing the national
nursery rhymes, we are kids with souls
tied into tight hypnotic knots.

We are happy, we are free, we are padmashree.

(OSKHS, 41)

The irony of these lines presents the universal picture of tragedy of womanhood. But the poet is different from the other women because she revolts boldly against the cruel rules of society. She leaves the conventional things and asserts herself, her own problems and her natural needs very frankly. She is a poet of love and sex. It is pertinent to have a look at the vast corpus of her love poetry. Beyond a shadow of doubt, love and sex occupies a prominent place in her poems and emerges as one of its dominant themes. A girl of Dravidian culture forgets her cultural bondages. Exposition of the word "sex" is

an immoral thing in Nair family. But Kamala Das frankly puts her own sex experiences to the world. It is a revolutionary change of her personality. Her bold image is shaped by the treatment of parents husband and lovers.

Her body images show that her quest for self-identity is sex oriented. She has delineated her feminist voice through her sex imagery. Her discourse is that of woman's corporal language from the woman's point of view. Man is always happy in sex relations but the woman suffers. Body and sex images in her poems are highly controversial in the Indian context. She gives descriptions of her bodily experiences, her joys and failures in love and sex. She has revolted against the traditional restrictions frankly and unabashedly Her bedroom secrets are open to the reader. Which is not permitted by the Indian society. But she expresses them without hiding anything. In her poem 'The Old Playhouse' she writes,

I came to you but to learn

What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every

Lesson you gave was about yourself, 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 (OP, 1)

Kamala Das tells her husband that he has called her his wife and that she has fully gratified his lust for her without getting love in return. He feels happy with her body's convulsions as she lays beneath him. He pours his saliva into her mouth during the sexual act and has poured himself into every nook and cranny of her body. But he ignores her plans, her feelings and her desires. She has almost paralyzed her thinking faculty so that her mind is now like an old playhouse. She expresses her disgust through sex with whomsoever she slept. She complains her incapacity to receive love from her husband and lovers. her "poor mind" is never able to react during the sex act. It is her weakness as a woman and as a wife. Germaine Greer writes:

Love was a blight, a curse, a wound, death, the plague. Sex itself was outlawed except in desire of issue. The chastity belt and its attendant horrors are reminders of the intense pressure built up in such a situation. The body-soul dichotomy which characterizes medieval thought operated to protect the status quo.¹⁸

She is in dilemma because of her husband's inability. She speaks about her wants of affection in her sexual relationship. she misses not only love and affection but even the intensity of the passion which is associated with lust. She awaits the commencement of the sexual act as eagerly as her husband does, yet she experiences a certain degree of disgust as well. Her husband is not passionate enough to satisfy her. She realizes that their marriage is failure even though they lived together for a long time, they have not really been able to achieve any conjugal happiness. It is her bitter realization of the reality that makes her ask in 'The freaks',

Can't this man with
Nimble fingertips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skin's lazy hungers? (OP, 10)

Her husbands fingers move over Kamala Das's body so passionlessly that they can arouse only her skin's "lazy hungers." She describes her heart as an empty cistern. His heart is more empty than

her, he is not able to love her. In the desperate mood she calls herself.

" a freak," adding that she flaunts at times, a grand, flamboyant lust.

Nair K.R. Ramchandran quotes:

The poet wonders whether the lover is capable of anything more than ' Skin's lazy Hungers'. when soul-love is frustrated lust becomes a subterfuge for man of sexual passivity.¹⁹

Kamala Das delineates that they have a sex without love which makes her live a sterile life. She writes in her poem 'The Invitation',

I have a man's fist in my head today

Clenching, unclenching-----

I have got all the Sunday evening pains. (DS. 20)

She feels that she is the man's fist as tightening and loosening her body in his arms. She feels tortured by her experience of love making with her husband. She has some other bitter memories of lovers, who seduced her and never returned. Torturous feelings lead her to think about suicide. She knows the reality that the company of the lovers is momentary but her mind is always involved in the

memories of sex. Every Sunday evening is painful due to the brutal sex.

Both her husband as well as her lovers are too cruel and lustful. She finds similar psychology in the male regarding sex. The male may be a lover or a husband but he is a seducer of woman's body and not interested in her feelings. Her poem 'My November' highlights the sensuous nature of man.

I die so very slow. This is all
That they think. Looking at me, huddled
In bed. Like a sickle embedded
In flesh or crescent of the moon
Is this pain beneath my left breast.
which ruthless lover clasps its opulence
In this brutal, so brutal way? (TTSR,17)

Her lover's brutal acts make her desire death. They know her secrets in her bed and crush her body rudely. Her breasts are painful which "ruthless lover" clasps in a very brutal way. The repetition of

the word "brutal" suggests her unbearable pains during sex. It is the exploitation of the female by the male. As Mohan Lal Sharma asserts:

She revolts against this exploitation and reviles against the marital obligations, the course animalistic rutting devoid of warmth of love and human understanding wherein the spirit of woman is made to bleed at the bloody alter of male supremacy.²⁰

Kamala Das's poems are dealing with the subject of sex. She doesn't hesitate to describe each movement of their sex game. She admits the warmth and powerful sex feeling of her lover and herself too. She tells that their strong sexual experience leads them towards intense love. She writes in 'The freaks':

He talks, turning a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam, his right
Hand on my knee, while our minds
Are willed to race towards love. (OP,11)

Use of different body images shows the disgusting sex act with the husband and the lover. The lover's mouth is described in a contemptuous manner. His mouth is like a dark hollow in which the teeth are uneven and look somewhat repulsive on account of the drops of saliva sticking to them. She compares his mouth to "a dark cavern". He is a man of "a sun stained cheek" never capable of giving her good company. She never comes out of the memories of joyful nights with him their minds are united in the act of intense love-making.

Kamala Das offers a few suggestions, to the woman about how to get maximum possible pleasures out of her sexual requirements when she is going to have sexual intercourse with a man. A woman feels shy to explain her bodily demands. But the poet says that a woman should not feel shame to admire the man's strong body and his limbs when she sees him nude. She prefers to allow each part of her body to lover. Her poem 'The Looking Glass' is the best example of bold narration.

Getting a man to love you easy

Only be honest about your wants as

Woman. 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
Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor
Dropping towels, and the jerky way he
Urinate. All the details that make
Him male and your only man Gift him all
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts
The warm shock of menstrual blood and all your
Endless female Hungers. (TD, 27)

She notices the perfection of his body and the details which makes him male. She suggests to the woman that she should make it possible and even convenient for a lover to smell "the musk of sweat" between the breasts. She should stand naked by this side so that they can both see their reflections in the mirror and let him enjoy his feeling of superiority over her by virtue of his bodily strength. Her

body is softer than him. Kamala Das never minds to come into contact with him during her menstrual period. It is "warm shock" of monthly days.

She advises the woman to observe his reddened eyes after bath and "the jerky way" and enjoy. These details of male body please the woman and make her think that this man is the only one who will satisfy her body in every way. She writes that the woman enjoys his body and gives him everything that she is capable of giving in bed. She should make him conscious of all her sexual cravings which she wants him to satisfy. The woman doesn't hide her "endless female hungers". In the words of Sharma Mohan Lal:

Kamala Das is a poet both of the body and the soul and she is not merely a poet of the 'squalor, shame and freakishness', of love or lust, she also celebrates the splendour, glory and self-sufficiency of these emotions.²¹

Kamala Das sheds her timidity, shyness and behaves boldly. Secrets of a woman's body are delineated by her very clearly. Her desire of enjoyable sex promotes her to take lead in sex. Further she writes in a poem 'A Relationship':

This love older than I by myriad
Saddened, centuries was once a prayer
In his bones that made them grow in years of
Adolenscence to this flevoured height. Yes
It was my desire that made him male
And beautiful. (OP, 41)

Again and again she raised her voice against the brutality of her
lover and husband. But never forgets the labour and heat. At the same
time she depicts it as a deeply sensuous experience in 'Convicts':

That was the only kind of love,
This hacking each other's parts
Like convicts hacking, breaking clods
At noon. We were earth under hot
Sun. There was a burning in our
Veins and the cool mountain nights did
Nothing to lessen heat. When he
And I were one we were neither
Male nor female. (OP, 25)

This is a suggestive poem in which she narrates the lustful nature of man and the violent sexual involvement of both of them in the summer season. On the part of the poetess there is a sense of guilt over such an involvement conveyed by the metaphor " Convicts". The proper sexual act involving energy and speed is marvellously carried through the image in "breaking clods/At noon." The phrase " breaking clods" suggests that there is kind of grating sound while they are copulating. The word "earth" indicates their "earthness" as well as their "reception of the heat of the burning sun." There can be no better image to express the energy and violence in the sexual intercourse than that of "hot sun." It emphasizes their oneness in love. Nair K. R. Ramchandran writes:

The theme of lust is apotheosized in 'Convicts,' a poem in which sensual love is portrayed in terms of physical labour and heat. The convicts are the lovers and their lust is universal.²²

Kamala Das recognized the futility of physical love and feels alone. She tries to fill her soul with ideal love but it becomes miserable. She learns that physical love is not the final aim of life. Sex

is a body communicated thing which would never provide security and love. Feeling of insecurity in sex makes the relations horrible. Woman is terrified at the thought sex due to the male behavior. Some of her poems focus on an alienated life. 'The Swamp' has the same theme in which she writes,

my beloved is armed with cunning and violent hates and
mistrust but he comes to my arms unarmed and when the
last of strength in drops is shed I call him my baby I hold
him to my breast but often after taking leave I open his door
again and see him at his desk signing letters with the glasses
change is so complete that I am silent and in silence must
move away. (OP, 53)

Her beloved's love is violent and unfaithful to her. His powerful body loses its strength after sex and lies like a baby in her arms. Lust is temporary. He never satisfies her. Chavan Sunanda says:

She believes love to be a fulfillment of soul realized though body-an experience of sex, beyond sex. Unfortunately, in each love relationship, she finds her body accepted at

the cost of her soul ---- In 'The Swamp', the consciousness explores her relationship with one of the lovers who takes her body but leaves her soul unfulfilled in the act of sex.²³

She describes the momentary pleasure of sex in 'Convicts':

We lay

On bed, glassy eyed, fatigued, just

The toys deal children leave behind,

And we asked each other, what is

The use, what is the bloody use? (OP. 25)

The husband and wife have slept after a mechanical sex act. They are like "the toys" lying on bed compared to the body without soul. Then they ask to each other whether there is any "use" rather "bloody use" in a disgusting manner. It is materialistic, momentary attraction in which their minds lead to achieve the highest peak point of sex. After the sensual activity the bitter reality of life and love raises many questions of uselessness of physical need of sex and dryness in their emotions. Germaine Greer writes in "sex";

Sex for many has become a sorry business, a mechanical release involving neither discovery nor triumph, stressing human isolation more dishearteningly than ever before.²⁴

Kamala Das is controversial due to some of the illustration in her poetry. She conveys her pleasures in the company of her lover. In 'Winter' she frankly admits,

And, I loved his body without shame,
On winter evening as cold winds
chuckled against the white window panes. (SC, 17)

Winter being a cold season, she turns to her man without masks or pretensions to derive warmth and vitality in his living contact. A mother of three children seeking restlessly the sources of "true love". she enjoyed his body without any shame. She was able to satisfy her body's need to some extent but her soul is always empty.

Futility of physical love and her repentance is depicted in her poems. She confesses in 'The Prisoner':

As the convict studies
His prison's geography
I study the trappings
Of your body, my dear love,
For I must some day find
An escape from its snare. (Op, 29)

The poetess regards herself as a woman held as a prisoner by her own lust for the man who loves her. The word "trapping" suggests the lust from which she must free herself to experience the true love. Her soul cries for getting ideal love. She tries to escape from the business of love but she feels that there can be no real escape from the imprisonment of the world of lust.

Despite the husband's lust and its uselessness, she tries to find the reality. Both realize it is futile. The Poem ' Substitute' depicts the feeling of emptiness resulting from the need to conform to the conventions of a hypocritical society.

Yet, I was thinking, lying beside him
That I loved, and was much loved

It is physical thing, he said suddenly,

End it, I cried, end it, and let us be free. (DS, 7)

She loved him much and was involved emotionally but he says it is a "physical thing". There is no mental contact between them. She is disappointed due to the mechanical love and cries "end it". She wants to be free from this unbearable mechanical act.

Her husband has failed to provide love to her, she declares her state in 'Captive':

My love is an empty gift, gilded

Container, good for show, nothing

else. (Cp, 81)

Her own effort has proved to be an "empty gift", "an empty container." It seems to be only a show of her love for outsiders to get an impression that the husband and the wife have a good relationship.

Her agonized and frustrated mind becomes diminished. She surrenders to him and thinks that there is no other way to it. She is no

different from other human beings. She sometimes feels sinful and sometimes pious. There is a failure disappointment and reconciliation.

She would like to escape from the bonds of marriage, family and society hence in the poem ' I shall Some Day' she says,:

-----and I shall some day see

My world, de-fleshed, de-veined, de-blooded.

Just a skeletal thing, then shut my

Eyes and take refuge, if nowhere else,

Here in your nest of familiar scorn... (OP, 48)

She is tired of her sorrowful life because of sexual humiliation. It is just " a skeletal thing". She would like to be away from the troublesome life so she expresses her desire of escaping from it. This desire stimulates her to involve in illicit relations with other men. In 'An Apology to Gautama' she writes:

When other eyes haunt my thought, I kiss your

Eyes and shut them, so that I need no longer

see them brood, or their naked, naked fear.

Another voice haunts my ears, another face
My dreams, but in your arms I must today,
Lie and find an oasis where memories,
Sad winds do not so much blow, and I must
hear you say, I love, I love, I love. It was
Another who made me lonely, not you
Your hands with bitten nails, never pain, never
Reject, another's name bring tears. your's
A claim, and smile, and yet Goutama
The other owns me, while your arms hold
My woman form, his hurting arms
Hold my very soul. (SC, 19)

She tells Goutama that she kisses his eyes and shuts them despite the "other eyes", meaning her husband's eyes, haunting her thought. However, her husband's "voice" and "face" torture her. To get away from being obsessed she must find an "oasis". One can imagine that the lack of love from her husband is very painful. Moreover she wants to hear from Goutama that he loves her. The repetition of the word "love" intensifies and heightens her "endless

hunger" for love. She also confesses to Goutama, who is an outsider, that "another" is responsible for her loneliness. Instead of the pain in her husband's hands, she experiences calm and comfort in Goutama's arms. Nevertheless, she tells Goutama that she is owned by her husband. The woman can never ignore the roots of Indian culture and tradition. She says that only the "woman form", that is the body of wife is in Goutama's hands but her mind is in her husband's hurting arms. Sing, Amar Kumar writes:

----- there is a complete lack of rapport----
between the husband and the woman. They
have lived together like islands unto
themselves. The husband is nothing but his
beastly hungers, shallowness, lip love. He
can never go beyond the body.²⁵

Again in the poem ' The Joss-sticks at Cadell Road' she shows dissatisfaction with her husband.

My husband said, I think I shall
Have a beer, it's hot,
Very hot today.
And I thought, I must

Drive fast to town and

Lie near my friend for an hour. I

Badly need some rest. (DS, 29)

She is honest to express her personal emotions aroused in her married life. She reveals that there is the other source to get relieved from the boredom in life, and the source is outing on holidays. She never likes her husband's habit of drinking liquor. So she would like to go to the town and lie near her friend for an hour to take rest. Germaine Greer writes about the male arrogance and his command over woman's body:

The universal sway of the feminine stereotype is the single most important factor in male and female woman hatred. Until woman as she is can drive this plastic spectre out of her own and her man's imagination she will continue to apologize and disguise herself, while accepting her males pot-belly, wattles, bad breath, farting, stabble, baldness and other ugliness without complaint. Man demands in his arrogance to be loved as he is, and refuses even to prevent the development of the sadder distortions of the human body which might offend the aesthetic sensibilities of his woman.²⁶

Kamala Das is unable to explain the real happiness of woman. What she likes she can not deserve. Because her happiness lies under the rude nature of man. 'In Conflagration' she says:

Woman, is this happiness this lying buried
Beneath of man? It's time again to come alive
The world extends a lot beyond his six feet frame.
Thoughts that lurk shadows deep inside, be still. (DS, 26)

She thinks that sex is the burial of the woman under the man. It is painful to her. She says that it is a time that the woman thinks about her own happiness. She surrenders her body and life to the man and never thinks about her own dignity. Her image is dignified as Goddess, mother, wife but never praised. Kamala Das is never ready to live like an ideal wife and fit herself in the norms of society. But a woman is compelled to play the role of a happy wife. Molvi Z.F. asserts:

The love is the essence of her life but in real life she has to wear the mask of a happy woman and wife in the male-dominated, urbanized Indian society.²⁷

Men make women as a subject of harassment and object of enjoyment. They are like the toys which are played by male as their own wish. For getting the freedom and love Kamala Das changes different partners but every relation is unsatisfactory. She writes in 'The Latest toy':

It was indeed awkward for him when the latest toy
Began to speak after the day's best games were over.
A toy at best must only squeak, even his costliest
Ones did only that, all those plump walkie talkie dolls
But this little thing spoke unfamiliar words in
A voice softened as though with tears. He said then, his
Dark brow wrinkling. oh please dont become emotional,
Emotion is the only true enemy of joy.(TTS R, 25)

Kamala Das stressed on a word " toy " "a latest toy " which shows the mechanical approach of man towards the woman. He never permits his wife to utter any word when they are playing the game of sex. He never likes to leave the initiative with his wife. Whenever she speaks to him, she softens her voice. Every woman is a "plump walkie

talkie doll". It symbolizes that the woman is an object of sex mechanism. A sensitive woman never understands her own position. she is weeping silently and trying to express her emotions to her husband. Her tears have no meaning in his attitude, he neglects them. He suggests her in a dry voice that she should not be emotional because "emotion is the true enemy of joy". He doesn't console her but instructs while playing in bed not to disturb him by using the weapon of tears. The irony of the woman's life is that she is neither permitted to speak and nor to weep. She should live like a doll and play according to his wish.

The path decided by Kamala Das is not the right path. She changes her partners like clothes. She becomes tense in situations. The 'right' man which she wanted has never met her. This is at the core of her tragedy. In a poem 'The Invitation' She writes:

For long I've waited for the right one
To come, the bright one, the right one to live
In the blue. No I am still young
And I need that man for construction and
Destruction----- (TD, 14)

further she writes in 'Captive':

What have
we had, after all, between us but the
Womb's blinded hunger, the muted whisper
at the core----- For years I have run from one
gossammer lane to another, I am
now my own captive. (CP, 81)

The men in her life are responsible for her tragedy. Her husband is the first man who destroys all her dreams of life and marriage. The couple will go two different ways for the sake of removing boredom and dissatisfaction of life. Her path passes through love and that of him through lust. She realizes that it is just "womb's blinded hunger" and nothing more. In fact, man is "eternal flesh", always bewildered by lust. It is his nature. He never changes it.

The poet's failure in love is displayed in her poems. The poem, "The Bats" brings out her sense of sorrow and exhaustion in a striking manner,

From stranger to guest, from guest to

Lover, my beloved, when you take,

When you at least win, ignore the stain.

Beneath dead eyes, the fatigue in my smile. (SC, 46)

Her unsuccessful love affairs and failure of married life disturb her. She loses her faith in love. Men have no courage to look in her eyes before doing the wrong things but Kamala Das has a true desire of looking at her man unashamedly before making love. She is honestly keeping her relations with them. What she is doing is not a wrong thing in her attitude. She never hides her emotions. In ' The Music Party ' she says:

I wish my eyes

Eyes were similarly

Brave and had looked at you

At least once before the

Singing stopped and you left

Quickly, without goodbye----- (SC, 34)

She is depressed by these tortuous memories and experiences. Her utter loneliness, disappointment and her forceful complaint against men as a whole and hollow marital relationship. She does not like physical love although she is repeatedly forced to do it. It is very hot and undesirable for her. 'The Testing of the Sirens' explores the deep sense of agony and despair.

----- with the crows came the morning, and my limbs
warm from love, were once again so lonely (SC, 63)

and in the same poem she continues,

----- why does love come to me like pain
Again and again and again (SC, 64)

The repetition of the word "again" reinforces the idea that there is no escape for her from the painful existence. She is trapped in it, and that her "pain" mainly springs from the unrequited love. Her body is misused by many including her own husband. All her dreams about her husband are washed out.

In her autobiography she says:

My cousin asked me why I was cold and frigid. I did not know what sexual desire meant, not having experienced it even once--- it was a disappointing week for him and for me --- I wanted conversation, companionship and warmth. Sex was far from my thoughts. I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms the loneliness of my life-----²⁸

Her poem ' Ethics ' shows her lover's concern with physical lust rather than love.

This night
he smiles at me, on my verandah
Under a rash of winter-stars, he smiles
the busy man must always smile at love,
his eyes window shop, idly they caress
my brow, my lips, my breast, ethically
he cant afford more. (OSKHS, 121)

Kamala Das observes the sensuous gestures of her husband. His eyes are interested in gazing every part of her body. His

passionate movements are hungry for her body response. Every part of her softened body is crushed cruelly by him.

She describes the selfish nature of man in ' Glass '.

I went to him for half an hour

as pure woman, pure misery

Fragile glass, breaking

Crumbling-----

The house was silent in the heat

Only the old rafters creaking

He drew me to him

Rudely

With a lover's haste, an armful

Of splinters, designed to hurt, and,

Pregnant with pain-----

With a cheap toy's indifference

I enter other's

Lives, and

Make of every trap of lust

A temporary home. (OP, 21)

She depicts the miserable life of woman who is hurt every time. It focuses attention on the fragility of love- experience and also of the body. The husband's aim is nothing but to become a father. Therefore, he draws her into his room in order to make his wife pregnant. Kamala Das portrays the unchangeable psychology of the husband in all of her poems. She experiences hurt rather than ecstasy with her husband and lovers. The adverb "rudely" shows how rude he is with his wife in the sexual act. He is not concerned with his wife's happiness. She or every woman is a cheap toy for the male and she is broken like a "fragile glass". Through the images like "doll", "toy" and very ironically, "cheapest toy" the poet expresses the degradation of the woman. She is aware of her own weaknesses of the body and her subordination in the life of man. She is searching a protective life in the arms of her husband and her lovers, but everyone plays with her in an indifferent manner. She moves from man to man in search of true love but there is a sense of wasted effort in the prolonged search. Everyone traps her in his lust and leaves her alone. The words like a "pure woman" and "Pure misery" ironically state the suffocation of the woman. A.N. Dwivedi thinks that :

When she speaks of love outside marriage,
She does not necessarily propagate the
insinuation of adultery or infidelity, but
seems to be merely searching for a
relationship which gives both genuine love
and impenetrable security. ²⁸

'Ghanshyam' depicts the suffering of her life when she is
tortured by the indifference of her husband.

We played once husk game, my lover and I
His body needing mine,
His ageing body in its pride needing the need for mine
And each time his lust was quietened
And he turned his back on me
In panic I asked Dont you want me any longer
Dont you want me
Dont you don't you. (TTSR, 18)

After the husband's lust is "quietened". He turns his back to
her. It brings total dissatisfaction to her. His body needs the body of
Kamala Das to play "husk game". His "ageing body" proudly needs

her femininity. His age is not an obstacle in his intense sex feelings. After the game he turns his back and sleeps. Therefore she panics and asks, "Dont you want me / Dont you dont you". The repetition of the word "Don't you" symbolizes her deep agony and her awareness of nothingness in the attitude of her husband.

She has given expression to her disappointment with her husband and her lovers. who never offered her love she lies in her bed and weeps. No one is consoling her. 'The Millionaires at Marine Drive' is a poem in which she comments on the selfish nature of man:

----- there was no
More of it for me, for, no longer was
There someone to put an arm around my
Shoulders without a purpose, all the hands
The great brown thieving hands groped beneath my
Clothes, their fire was that of an arsonist's,
Warmth was not their arm, they burnt my cities
Down, it was not blood but acid that flowed
Through my arteries..... (CP, 97)

Her lovers including her husband give her no real love, no real emotions in their relationship. The bed, in which she used to sleep with them is a paradise only to some extent of her sexual pleasure, but their mechanical manner of performing the sexual act leads her to think negatively about life. Those hands thief beneath her "clothes" and invade her body. They have fixed their attitude and fire very hot like an "arsonist's" and not providing to the warmth of love. Their fire of lust burns her body. She compares her blood with life corroding acid that flows in her arteries. She thinks of the brutal treatment which destroys her life.

Disgusting lust, male psychology, their brutal nature and her pathos teach her the lesson of futility of sex. 'A Relationship' depicts her desire of committing suicide.

To believe that once I knew not his
Form, his quiet touch, or the blind kindness
Of his lips was hard indeed. Betray me?
Yes, he can, but never physically
Only with words that curl limbs at
Touch of air and die with metallic sighs

-----while

My body's wisdom tells and tells again

That I shall find my rest, my sleep, my peace

And even death nowhere else but here in

My betrayer's arms----- (OP, 41)

Her thoughts again turn to her lover, and she realizes that she wants no other lover because her lover comes to meet her in the intervals of his office work only to refresh himself. She has a foolish dream that he will be back. These bitter experiences make her wise and awaken her from the temporary world of passions. The words "tells and tells again" suggest realization of life. The words "rest" "sleep" "peace" and "death" highlight her negative attitude towards life. She wants to commit suicide and be free from lust. This is her feeling of insecurity. In the opinion of Germaine Greer:

For women, there is an aspect which is common in both situations: demands are made upon them to contour their bodies in order to please the eyes of others. Women are so insecure that they constantly take measures to capitulate to this demand, whether it is rational or not.³⁰

Attraction of the body and lust is not permanent. Her illness leads her mind to accept the limitations of the body, strong sensuous body loses its capacity of making love. 'After the Illness' suggests the passiveness of the body and its need of rest.

----- There was

Not much flesh left for the flesh to hunger, the blood had
Weakened too much too lust, and the skin, without health's
Anointments, was numb and unyearning. What lusted then
For him, was it perhaps the deeply hidden soul ? (OP, 50)

Now her sick body is incapable to enjoy sex. It is a time to love
" the deeply hidden soul" which he never understands in his life.
Kamala Das admits the limitations of body but never forgets the
memories of sex with her lover Carlo. In 'White Man with Whiter
Legs', she says,

I shall retire from youth without murmur, Fold up
My lust neatly like a wedding gown, put it always for good,
And keep my dreams' gate always that although by God, he was so

Beautiful, white man with whiter legs

So luminous against the blue..... (CP, 86)

She remembers the sweet moments that she had spent with him. Her hungry body and soul stimulate her to change the partners. Mr. Das is never interested in her sexual relations with other men. But at last her husband shows concern for her. She writes about it in a poem entitled 'Vrindavan':

-----husband

Who later asks her of the long scratch

On her brown aureola of her breast

and she shyly replies

hiding flushed cheeks, it was so dark

outside, I tripped over the brambles in woods---(OSKHS, 101)

She comes from her meeting with her lover. Her husband sees the scratches on the brown aureola of her breast. First time he expresses concern about the marks on her body. But it is too late. She

has crossed the line of marital relationship. When asked about the
scratch she shyly replies in 'The Last Act':

----- To the newcomers, age
Was loathsome skin disease, worse, it was
Also imbecility. He heard such
Harsh talk, but did not believe that he too
Was old. In bed, he still had the bison's thrust,
The only fatigue he knew was the one
After love. (CP, 67)

But he never neglects the truth of life and admits:

----- after all
He was the king, the lion, the eternal
lover-----
----- Back home,
He stumbled into the woman's arms, that
Little one who used to talk of love and
Bore him. I was waiting for you, she said,

I thought you would need me today, He clung
To her, he buried his arrogant face
Between her breasts, but a little later, sobbing
Like a hurt child, he said, I am old.
I am finished,
I cannot even make love----- (CP, 67)

Mrs Das is highly strung with the nature of her husband. In such a solitary circumstances. She requires the support by him. But he makes her nervous at every moment whenever she is asking for something he is careless to her. Her anger comes out and reflects in her poems. She writes in ' Woman without her shadow':

----- raising
Herself from her pillow she cried, you have
changed, I would not have recognized you, had
I met you outside my home, you are dark,
toasted black, as though some hell-fire had clasped
You to its bosom for a while. It replied
Smiling, I was busy. I had no time
To breathe. (C P, 35)

Unpleasurable events of her life with her husband indicate her exploitation and unhappiness. She ironically uses the word "toasted black" for his dark colour. The sense of self of man overpowers the woman and devaluates her. But the age has a limitation for everyone. Each one should accept the power of time. It destroys the strength of body but the egoistic nature of the male is never ready to welcome.

Kamala Das is aware of her victimization. Her femininity is destroyed by the male in the corrupt cities. She tries to locate her identity, her disturbed mind beneath skin, beneath flesh and bone. In 'Loud Posters' she writes:

I am today a creature turned inside

Out-----

----- I've

Spent long years trying to locate my mind

Beneath skin, beneath flesh and underneath

The bone. I have stretched my two dimensional

Nudity on sheets of weeklies, monthlies,

Quarterlies, a sad sacrifice. I've put

my private voice away adopted the
Typewriter's click as my only speech; I
Click-Click, Click-Click tiresomely---- (OP, 47)

The woman is in search of self-identity in a patriarchal culture. The male culture flourishes through the female support. Unfortunately women don't get the support by men. On the contrary they are mentally and physically harassed in a male dominated world. Kamala Das is one of them and feeling alone in the world and decides to clear the pathetic picture to people. Her life is mechanical. what she is trying to gain from lovers is " a sad sacrifice " she is a poor creature of the world. She has no place in a patriarchal culture. She finds that she is caught in a complicated situation. In ' Of Calcutta' she says:

In that fourth dimension which husbands and masters
Never seem to know, not the warmth of young desire,
But cold stalactites, growing as in cave, the heart
Where a woman, once humbled, sharpens herself
To a sword ----- (CP, 59)

She never gets what she is looking for in her search for self-identity. The whole world is a chaos for her in which she is unable to find a secure place. Her quest for self-love and security is failed.

Disgusting human life creates a negative attitude in the mind of poet. Due to it she loses her faith in life. In 'Death is so Medicore' she describes the bloody use of human body.

The many paltry, human details that must disgust
The esthete, the flabby thigh, the breasts that sag,
The surgery scar, yes, it would indeed be
Of no bloody use believing in my soul's
Poise----- (CP, 55)

Her dissatisfaction in life sharpened her consciousness of her victimization and humiliation. The poem 'Too Early the autumn Sights' brings out her misery and sorrow.

Too early the autumn sights
Have come, too soon my lips
Have lost their hunger, too soon
The singing birds have
Left. (SC, 26)

Her sense of sorrow and exhaustion is drawn in her poem. 'The Bats'.

From stranger to guest, from guest to
Lover, my beloved, when you take,
When you at least win, ignore the stain
Beneath dead eyes, the fatigue in my smile.(SC, 46)

Her condition is like a beggar. She goes from one door to another and waits for getting love just like the beggar waiting for food. She changes her lovers to gain love but it is 'purely physical' under such circumstances, love degenerates into lust and savagery with which she is fed up in her life. 'Love' is a meaningless word for the male.

In 'Mortal Love' she says:

Fidelity in love
is only for the immortals,
the wanton Gods who sport in their

secret heavens and feel
no fatigue. For you
and me, life is too short
for absolute bliss and much long
alas, for constancy (OSKHS, 132)

Being victimized by her lovers she loses her faith in love and also suspicious about the love of immortal God.

In a poem entitled 'A Request' depicts the hatred of Kamala Das for the body:

When I die
Do not throw
The meat and bones away
But pile them up
And let them tell
By their smell
What life was worth
On this earth
What love was worth
In the end. (CP, 63)

She is fed up with the present way of her life and that she is pricked deep down within without a ray of hope for redemption. It contains an acute concern for decay and death.

Every man has the habit of dreaming of marriage with a beautiful bride. A leper is too weak to make love but the dreams of honeymoon always give him satisfaction. Sex is a natural need of human body, no one can move away from these hidden feelings. In 'The Moon' She describes:

The leper

Dreams of his own wedding day, with
Unflawed arms and legs he sports on
His bridal bed, and his girl is
So beautiful, her head thrown back
In laughter. (C P, 21)

Kamala Das has a similar dream of sensual nights. Her life seems to be similar to the life of the leper. She locates herself as a

poor creature of the world. She has sweet dreams, about her husband and marriage. But she is never able to fulfil them.

Her body's need is fulfilled by her lovers. She has many sweet memories of bed time. Young body needs a sexual partner. Therefore, she has changed them. But after the unbearable treatment by the male she realizes the real meaning of love, the significance of the relations between soul and body. In ' Suicide ' she writes:

Bereft of soul

My body shall be bare

Bereft of body

My soul shall be bare. (C P, 71)

Marriage, Love, Sex, body and soul are important subjects of Kamala Das's poems. It gives a clear picture of her life experiences.

Hari-Mohan Prasad and Chandra Prasad point clearly:

Her poetry has often been considered as humorick in sex or striptease in words, and over exposer of body of 'snippets of trivia'. But the truth is that her poetry is an autobiography, an articulate voice of her ethnic identity, her Dravidian culture.³¹

She never forgets the unending pains of the woman's body during the sex as well as and in the child-birth. 'Jaisurya' the poem concerns with her first-born son.

It rained on the day my son
Was born, a slanting rain that began with
The first labour pain and kept me
Company, sighing, wailing and roaring
When I groaned so that I smiled and stopped my
Plaints to hear its grief. I felt then that
Out of the mire of a moonless night was
He born, Jaisurya , my son, as out
The wrong is born the night and out of night
The sun-drenched golden day. (TD, 33-34)

She delineates the actual feeling just before delivery and immediately after giving birth to a child. It is the time of the labour pains. She is groaning. These are unbearable pains for her. At that time she neither thought of lust nor of love but was only crazy and anxious to become a mother. She has "groaned" and "moaned" during

the sex and in delivery. Although these pains are unforgettable as a wife mother she celebrates them as a matter. She forgets the pains for a child.

In her autobiography Kamala Das says:

At the hospital I was put on the table in the delivery room where, to distract my mind from the spasms of pain, I recited the Gayatri Mantra, and while the sun grew in my eyes, filling my veins with its warmth I felt the baby slide along my thigh and heard its loud cry. "It is a beautiful son", cried vimala.³²

She has intense pains in her womb before the delivery but a sensitive woman doesn't think about her sexual humiliation and unfulfilled love at that time. The birth of the child sublimates her feeling of lust. It is an illuminating experience of her life.

Sometimes her suspicious mind is not expecting gratitude from her son. Her search for love is a part of the larger quest for motherhood and home. Further she says in ' White Man with Whiter Legs,'

We mated like Gods, but begot
Only our slayers. Each mother suckles her own enemy.
And hate is first nurtured at her gentle breast and each man's seed
Is pregnant with his death. (CP, 86)

Her tortured mind suspects her own male baby. she says that
each mother suckles her own enemy to make the baby strong.
Innocent mind of the mother takes care of the children in a blind
belief that he will provide her secured life in the old age. But the man
takes interest in the woman's body alone.

She expresses secret hopes and fears of womankind as see in '
Afterwards'. Being a mother she expects love by him but is not
assured of getting it. It's the bitter truth of woman's agony.

Son of my womb
ugly in loneliness
you walk the world's bearily eye
Like a grit
Your cleverness
Shall not be your doom
As ours was (SC, 55)

She imagines that her son must have sprung from the dark womb. She compares the "womb" with a dark place where her son lives alone. She has a dream to bring her son in the bright world. He will succeed after that. Because he is a male child.

Whenever Kamala Das becomes nervous in her life, she visits Malabar. When she sees her old school-house, after many years, she finds a brothel there. In 'Composition' she draws the tragic picture of night girls and the bitter social attitude towards them.

My first schoolhouse
is now a brothel,
and
the ladies sun themselves on the lawn
in the afternoon
with their greying hair,
newly washed,
left undyed.
Who can say, looking at them,
that they are toys
fit for the roaring nights ? (OP, 8)

Woman is insecure in the world. Men look at her in a very disgusting way. They gaze every part of her body with passionate eyes. Looking to women they say "they are toys" and fit for the "roaring nights". They need the body of woman only for seduction. It is a very humiliating predicament for a woman. So Kamala Das's anger is expressed in her poems. Barrett Michale writes:

-----thin image of woman as, on the one hand, the sexual property of men and, on the other, the chaste mother of their childrenthe means whereby men ensure both the sanctity and inheritance of their families and their extra-familial sexual pleasure.³³

Further in another poem she highlights the unfair treatment of men to women.

-----Celibate by choice, she entered
The party, found all men dark and sleek like drones, women
Parakeets, offered her chilled hand of severed veins and
Saw from the corner of an eye, again a male glance
And again a smile blazing rudely like alphabates

And going down the lift saw in its cold mirror
with apathetic eyes the fullness of a body,
Tamed by will and practice taught never to make demands.

(After the party CP, 8)

Everywhere the woman is captured by the lustful glances of the men. She never protects herself from the passionate eyes of man. Kamala Das has used the word "again" in her poems many times, it suggests the intensity of the woman's pains and the repetition of her physical and mental harassment by man. How the women are brutally captured in "a male glance", "And again--- lustful smiling". Their condition is like a "parakeets" who play as the wish of masters. They haven't their own existence and own demands. Because of the indifferent treatment to women in society, Kamala Das criticises bitterly the patriarchal social structure.

Elaine Showalter feels that the existence of a separate literary tradition of women is not a biological factor but it is due to different manner of socialization. She says:

I am intentionally looking, not at an innate sexual attitude, but at the ways in which the self-awareness of woman writer has translated itself into a literary form in a specific place and time span.³⁴

Women are unsafe everywhere. They feel themselves to be subordinate due to the social constraints. They are society ladies who have dark future and never think about their bright life. In 'The snobs' she writes:

We

Are paltry creatures, utter snobs,

Who disowned our mothers only

Because their hands, we noticed, were

Work worn, and, so to seek richer

Mothers and better addresses.

We must move on and on, until

We too, some day, by our children

May be disowned. (OP, 44)

It picturises the social picture of womanhood. Woman is eternally same everywhere. It masks contradictions and offers partial

truths in the interest of coherence. They obscure the actual conditions of existence. People are made to behave in a way that contradicts their material interests. These women are "paltry creatures" and "utter snobs," they have no respect in society. They are hard workers but they have no status. They also have some awareness like Kamala Das's rebellion is against such an ideology. She agrees that the oppression of women is a psychological condition and a material reality. She proves that gender is constructed in patriarchy to serve the interests of the male supremacy. Everywhere men humiliate women. In the opinion of K.V. Surendran:

She believes that the society is hostile to women that they are humiliated in all possible ways.³⁵

Her social consciousness represents the picture of India. She recalls some of her experiences of her home in Malabar. She thinks of hot noon when all sorts of persons used to pass her home and to pause there in order to sell the wares which they carried from place to place. She depicts the man who comes with parrots and fortune cards, the kurva girls and the bangle sellers in a poem entitled 'A Hot Noon in Malabar':

This is a noon for beggars with whining
Voices, a noon for men who come from hills
With parrots in a cage and fortune cards,
All stained with time, for brown kurva girls.
With old eyes, who read palms in light sing song
Voices, for bangle-sellers who spread
On the cool black floor those red and green and blue
Bangles, all covered with dust of roads.

(R. Parthsarthy. 1976-24)

Men with the parrots and the fortune cards sitting on the roadside is a very common sight in India. Indians have blind belief in these irrational things. Kurva girls wander from one place to other place. They have brown coloured old eyes. Old eyes suggest that they are experienced and have no capacity to see dreams. It is the real picture of poor girls.

She always memorizes the typical harsh sound of bangle sellers and their body which proves their hard work. In the same poem she describes:

Whose feet, devouring rough

Miles, grow cracks on the heels-----

(R. Parthasarthy. 24)

The bangle sellers have walked miles and mile, town to town. In the course of their journey their feet get covered thickly with dust, and their heels became cracked on account of the toil labour of the journey. The phrases "devouring rough miles" is noteworthy. The bangle sellers walk covering miles and miles of the dusty roads at noon. It is a very tortuous journey but they have no other option. They must work hard for survival. Then she focused on their psychology. She says,

yes this is

A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love

(R. Parthasarthy. 24)

When they speak their voices resembled wild like "jungle voices." She says that the noon in Malabar is not only for the visit of

wild men but also for the wild thoughts and for wild desire for love making. Whenever she is feeling unsatisfactory, her childhood memories relax her mind. According to K.V. Surendran:

The poet in such an atmosphere yearns for the spontaneity, which was present in that early life as a childhood in Malabar. She is sick of the routine when everything is mechanical. She believes that the only way out of the suffering is to travel down memory lane that is to her life as a child in Malabar.³⁶

Whenever the torturous memories make her restless she is on a long walk in Calcutta at night. She sees the vulgar picture of night girls who stand beside the road to sell their body. 'The Wild Bougainvillaea' draws the pathetic picture of these prostitutes.

I walked on streets where the night-girls with sham
Obtrusive breasts sauntered
And under yellow lamps, up and down wandered
Beaming their sickly smiles
At men.----- (OP, 30)

Night girls are wandering on the road in search of their customers. They are showing their breasts deliberately, and smiling. It is a very disgusting scene on the road at night. But their smile is “sickly smile” it symbolises their unwillingness to business. Now they are trapped in it and never rescue themselves, it is their source of economy and the need of life. They make their body a media of business.

The poem 'The Dance of the Eunuch', highlights the tone of frustration and the feeling of the futility of love. The eunuchs represent the incapacity of performing the sexual act and of producing a child. It is used for meaningless of love.

It was not, so hot, before the eunuchs came
To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals
Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling,
Jingling. Beneath the fiery gulmohour, with
Long braids flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced and
They danced, oh, they danced till they bled ---- There were green
Tattoos on their cheeks, jasmines in their hair, some
Were dark and some were almost fair. Their voices

Were harsh, their songs melancholy, they sang of
Lovers dying and of children left unborn
Some beat their drums, others beat their sorry breasts
And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy. They
Were thin in limbs and dry, like half-burnt logs from
Funeral pyres, a drought and a rottenness
Were in each of them. (CP, 106)

It is a hot time when eunuchs come to dance, wearing wide skirts, going round and round, their cymbals produced rich clashing sounds, their anklets jingling. They have dark eyes. The tatoos symbolise their belief in religion. Some are fair and some dark. They danced till they bled. Some beat their drums, and others beat their " sorry breasts" they " writhed in vacant ecstasy". It appears to be a very significant image of the bareness of poets own life.

Woman in the poem of Kamala Das is the subject of destruction at every place, in home and outside too. No one understands and pays attention to her emotions. The poems of Kamala Das are autobiographical in nature but they also stand for the life story of womanhood.

The poetry of Kamala Das has an abundant imagery of different types. Many of her poems articulate the body images. Through these she elaborates every moment of her life to readers. It is actually a woman's body which is speaking and expressing her desire for sexual gratification and at the same time its need for love and affection. A woman's body in her poems express its sensual desire, its pain and motherly affection. At the same time it reflects disgusting sex relation, cruelty of men and humiliation of the sensitive woman's body. She offers vivid body images spontaneously and frankly.

Body imagery deeply influences the self image. A woman's general body proportions are very much related to her feeling of self-worth and the development of certain parts of body in a girl, in comparison to other girls of her age, is linked to her self image. In a poem 'An Introduction' Kamala Das draws the growth of her body using very effective phrase like "sprouted hair ", "tall limbs" Her innocent "woman body" felt beaten and her husband crushed her. Use of the words like "womb crushing", "weight of breasts" is very sensuous.

As for the imagery in her poems, most striking and most predominant is the imagery of sex and love. These images are based

on Kamala Das's actual experiences in life. Sex appeal of the woman's body is very significant because of the appropriate use of body imagery. In the poem entitled 'The freaks' she picturises her husband's mouth with "dark carven" and describes his fingers moving her body but doing more than arousing her "skin's lazy hungers" and his disgusting sex act when he "dribbled spittle" into her mouth. (The Old playhouse)

Every secret of woman's body is highlighted through the bold words and phrases. In a few of her poems she has used such words like "pubis" "pubic hair," "the musk of sweat between breasts," "the jerky way" which are very bold and sensual in nature. Use of these lively and sensuous body images, attracts her readers to her poems. The sensitive picturization of the sexual intercourse is unforgettable for reader. Images are not imaginative but realistic and autobiographical.

Kamala Das's images are sex oriented. She represents her woman's voice through the use of sex imagery she has used the body imagery from the woman's point of view. her passion, willingness, pathos, passion and revolt is delineated through these images. The intensity of feeling in the poem conveys the image of a hurt woman,

her own self, trying to locate herself through physical intimacy with men other than her husband. There is too much anguish and suffering in her verse. These symbols take birth from the experience of own life. Woman in her poetry is always compared with "a doll" which for her means a plaything as well as a decorative dumb female. She always stresses on the passionate nature of man and her own self too in the words "skin's lazy hungers" One of her poems ' convict' is very bold where she has used disgusting sex imagery. The line in the poem "We were nor male nor female" appeal in narration.

Kamala Das, in her effort to discover, her own self, unknowingly shakes the norms of a male dominated society, which continued its existence through hundreds of years. With very little changes she has crossed all limits permitted for a society lady. I.K. Sharma has worked out the set of words from her poems to find the meaning of them. The set of the words reveals the whole world of woman along with their cultural paraphernalia:

Marriage, wedding, drums, bedrooms, bride bouquet, double-bed, pillow, mirrors, bangles, bells, gems, sandalcent, musk, dolls, lipstick, perfumes, oils, breast, flesh, mouth, lick, lipkiss, embrace, love, lust,

honeymoon, hair pigtails, legs, hearts,
womb, spittle, pubis.³⁷

Many words in this group prominently stand for womanhood and its body language. These images are the weapons of the poet to struggle with the Indian society, particularly the crude boundaries for women made by men. Her honest, courageous sound roars against it.

There is too much anguish and suffering in her verse. It colours her poetic body though adverse circumstances have rendered her vision tragic and melancholy, her upbringing by careless parents, her marriage with an egoistic and vainglorious man, her disappointment in love, her illicit love affairs with other men in order to remove her boredom and anxiety. Added to this, she is a very sensitive and unconventional woman not prepared to be dictated terms to. Love is the central theme of her poem. The reader cannot separate the theme from her verse. Related to this theme, is the celebration of the 'body' in her poetry. It is her approach is perfectly personal, adding a touch a delicacy and charm to it. Her 'self images' are powerfully stands for every feeling of the person.

Suma Chitnis writes about self-image in "A Design for a sociological Study on Images of Woman":

----- the most important aspect of the study of the images of women is the study of their self image, of how they see themselves, their self worth, their own sense of their personal standing, status, power and efficacy, their concept of their own roles and obligations in life and their notions of what is due to them from others, their joys, satisfactions and frustrations. Their feelings about being accepted and rejected.³⁸

Images in her poetry are appropriate to female sensibility. Self-exploitation, self-pleasure, pathos and bitter experiences of Kamala Das are drawn through the channel of body images. In the matter of body imagery she resembles Nissim Ezekiel, who is also a "poet of the body". Through her sensitive, body poems she defines and redefines herself. Her shifting moods, her anatomy, her humiliation in the world. Her body poems have become the honest vernacular of her heart.

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III. ANIMAL IMAGERY

The poetry of Kamala Das is written on the subject of her childhood, her marriage, her dissatisfaction with her husband, her sexual relationship with other men which for her is a consolation for her suffering in love through frustration and disillusionment etc. Her poetry is a kind of psychological striptease. She discloses that the theme of most of her poems is man-woman relationship and the frankness about her own sex life. She appears to be a sex – hungry rebel. Being a poet of love and pain, she writes about the experiences of anger, humiliation, sexual torture, sickness, loneliness, and frustration. Actually her poetry seems to be a rebellion against the male-dominated society. According to Vrinda Nabar :

She began seriously writing verse because of her intense unhappiness in her marriage. She has even claimed that her “love life” was a result of that frustration.¹

She would like to express her personal life, which is full of unhappiness. Her frustrated and unhappy life resulted in the writing of the poems. She confesses what she has done in her life. She never hides the secrets of her life. Devindra Kohli asserts:

All the new poems continue Kamala Das's central theme, the exploration of the true nature of love and the extent to which the intensity of love, when achieved, is self-sufficient. There is a frequent reference to illness, and the concern with the decay of body and with all sensuous pleasure that is bound up with its physical limitation is more pervasive than before.²

There is more sophisticated organization of the experiences related to her frustrated life. That is why she thinks about the decay of her life. Her experiences are the real motivation for her poetry. She is a conscientious artist who is mainly guided by her impulse and instinct for precise and harmonious words. She is fully aware of the value of words and their finer shades of meaning. Her poems are similar in theme but different in images. Her skill of using images, phrases, words appears to be very effective. She can make subtle distinction in picking up or turning down her words and phrases.

In order to delineate her own sex life she often uses animal imagery which appears to be highly suggestive and impressive. These images interpret the inner meaning of her sex life. Through these images she achieves the goal, which she wants to present before the world. The images can be distinguished into those of the pet animals and those of the wild animals. Her keen observation of the nature of

animal as compared to men and women gives birth to the sameness in their nature. The wild animal imagery stands for the rude, cruel nature of her lovers, especially her husband. The pet animals broadly symbolize the bound, subordinated, dependant and pathetic life of women in general and poetess in particular. Some of the specific pet animals like 'a sparrow', 'a cat', 'a dog', 'a horse', 'a dove' and 'a puppet' are generally used by Kamala Das. These animals are weak creatures, which are overpowered by their masters. They have no choice to decide their way of life. On the contrary 'a lion' stands for kingly command, the strength of body and cruelty equated with her husband and therefore she questions her husbands comprise with the lion. These powerful images strengthen her poems and thoughts. Her idea about life is very clear to the reader due to the appropriate use of different images. She deserves high praise for her choice of words and images for the writing of her poems.

According to Kamala Das women are like these pet animals in the houses of their husbands. They are over-ruled by their husbands. Women don't have any freedom to ask any question. This is the experience of Kamala Das in her married life. She is like a doll in the hands of her lovers and husband. For her husband she is only an

object of sex. He never cared for her feelings. His manner of making love to her is disgusting like “a libertine” who crushed her innocent body without understanding her emotions. She is surprised by his strong attack. She tried unsuccessfully to come out of his embrace. He made sex with extreme brutality. His hand sways like “hooded snake”. She becomes fearful. The entire brutal behaviour makes her bold. She hates her husband and his inhuman ways of sex. She never hides her own sex experiences and those of her husband. She expresses her anguish with harsh sounds. She asks herself why she behaves like this? Why does she use bitter words for her husband. She writes about it in her poem “The Stone Age”:

Ask me, everybody ask me

What he sees in me, ask me why he is called a lion,

A libertine, ask me the flavour of his

Mouth, ask me why his hand sways like hooded snake.

.... Why life is short and love is shorter still.(Op,51)

The torture of her husband that she experiences during the act of sex is very painful for her. Her condition is very pathetic. She has a feeling of frustration in the arms of her husband. For him such a

body is an embarrassment. She loves him but her body is not ready for lovemaking in the manner that he likes. Love comes out of fear and pains. In the opinion of Kaur :

Kamala Das did display tremendous courage in revolting against the sexual colonialism and providing hope and confidence to young women that they can refuse and reject the victim positions, that they can frustrate sexist culture's effort to exploit, passivise and marginalize women.³

Her husband neglects her emotions. What would a wife do when the husband is "indifferent" to her emotional needs. The husband is a perpetual irritant an unwelcome intruder into the privacy of the wife's mind and body which is also haunted by other men.

Her agony is that every man seduced her but no one loved her. She accompanies many men whom she likes. She identifies the difference between the male psyche and the female psyche dealing with love and sex. She concludes that the woman loves and the man seduces. 'Love' has no meaning in the life of man. Every bed-partner uses her for his physical satisfaction. They are selfish and lack emotions. They leave her for silent weeping. No one has taken time out to ask about her pains and emotions. They are merciless. They never know the importance of love. Kamala Das suggests it in her

poem 'The Losing Battle', that men are 'worthless' and a woman should use the cheapest bait to trap them:

How can my love hold him when the other
Flaunts a gaudy lust and is lioness
To his Beast? Men are worthless, to trap them.
Use cheapest bait at all, but never
Love. Which in a woman must means tears.
And a silence in the blood (TTSR, 12)

As a wife, she feels nervous against the enormous ego and brutality of her husband. She becomes fearful whenever she is in the arms of her husband. The central theme of her poems is her painful experience of being a woman. What has stirred her sensitive psyche is the dehumanization of the woman as a being. She is an object of her husband's game of sex. Sex for him is nothing but a game for his personal enjoyment. He has used her to satisfy his sexual hunger. She has had a painful experience during the sex. Her marriage floundered right from the start due to her husband who according to her devoted all his time to the official files and no leisure to spare for his sensitive wife who used to hanker for a fulfillment in love, for an emotional attachment. Lack of this emotional connectivity in sex is

unbearable for her. Her own bed has not given her solace either. The pangs of her body during the sex and after are inexpressible. The wife in Barche's words,

“groaned” and “moaned” and constantly
“yearned for a man's loving and healing
touch”.⁴

Her invisible grief is mute for others. The sound of her heart refers to her expectation of love, which never materialized. In 'Cat in the gutter' she writes that in the act of love-making her private part is wounded. The body was crushed by him and he slept. He never thought about her wounds. She was just like “a high bred kitten” in his strong arms. He fully enjoyed her body. She regards herself as a weak pet animal:

Cowardice was his favourite diet

So who would tell him that when he made love,

Grunting, groaning, sighing, with no soul to overpower me,

Only his limbs and his robust lust

I was just a high bred kitten

Rolling for fun in the gutter. (Cp,99)

There is too much anguish and suffering in her life. The poem is remarkable in that it rises above the considerations of physical decay and frustration in the mind of Kamala Das. Since she is now loved for her body alone, and not for her spirit, she is in search of love outside her married life. Dwivedi, A. N. aptly says:

She moves from man to man in search of
her true home, but there is a sense of wasted
effort in the prolonged search.⁵

She has failed to get love outside her home. She had studied the behavior of her husband and his lust. Then she had studied the other men as well. The result of all is that there is no freedom from the imprisonment of the world of lust. Only sexual humiliation and frustration are present in the world. There is the inevitable pain and defeat in her life. She had really loved her husband in the hope that he would love her too. But she no longer loves him because he proved to be a selfish man. He showed himself to be a keen and relentless observer when in sheer desperation, she acquired other lovers and went to bed with them. She calls her husband “a ruthless watcher”. Being fed up with her husband because of his lack of love for her, she turned to other men. He never uttered any word after watching her

with other men. She never hesitates to confess her illicit relations and even offers a close description of her lovers' sprouted hair on chest. She compares it with "great winged moths" in which she hides her face as like small animals digging into the earth in order to hide themselves in it. She is conscious that what she is doing is shameful.

On Kamala Das's search for ideal love and lover, Sunanda Chavan rightly observes:

Kamala Das's search for ideal love and the resultant disappointment seem to involve the psychological phenomenon of "the animus" struggling to project the masculine imprint as interpreted by Jung. The attempt to seek in every lover the perfection of masculine being is destined to end in failure because of the impossibility of realizing the ideal human form.⁶

In "The Sunshine Cat" she speaks of the injustice meted out to women where again the dominant motif is suffering. She believes that the society is hostile to women and that they are humiliated in all possible ways. Her own husband whom she loved, did not love her in return.

.....the man

She loved, who loved her not enough being selfish
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor
Used her, but was ruthless watcher, and the band
Of cynics she turned to clinging to their chests where
New hair sprouted like great – winged moths, burrowing
her Face into their smells and their young lusts to forget
To forget, oh to forget ... and, they said, each of
Them. I do not love, I cannot love, it is not
In my nature to love, but I can be kind to you

They let her slide from pegs of sanity into
A bed made soft with tears (TTSR. 22)

The same poem again contains some vivid imagery of her sexual experience. After a description of the hairy chest of young lovers who had allowed her to slide from “Pegs of Sanity” into the bed made soft with tears, the poem then follows the vivid picture of her husband’s cruel nature. Locking her inside a room of books every morning before going to office and unlocking the room only in the evening. She recalls herself “a yellow cat”. A ray of sunshine fell at

the door of that room, and the ray of sunshine was the only company she had. Time passed, winter came and then she lost her “sunshine”.

This appears to be symbolic:

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, he

Noticed that the cat of sunshine was only a

Lone, a hair-thin line, and in the evening when

He turned to take her out, she was a cold and

Half-dead woman, now of no use at all to men. (TTSR, 22)

After repeated encounters like this and also as a result of her husband’s continued ill treatment to her, she lost her capacity for enjoying the sexual act. Her condition is described as that of a “half-dead woman” who is of “no use at all to men”. She becomes useless for the men with whom she might have slept for sexual pleasure. There is a predominant feeling that she has been used as a sex object by every man with whom she was on intimate terms. Her emotions

form a cage with herself as the caged animal. She is not ashamed to call herself 'a bitch' in the world of lust. Her husband is responsible for this condition.

In her loneliness and frustration no one is interested in consoling her. In this pathetic and unbearable situation she needs emotional support by her husband but it doesn't happen in her life. Dwivedi writes:

At this moment, when she needed love and consolation of her husband, he treated her with cruelty. He used to lock her up before he went out for his official duty.⁷

Kamala Das is always waiting for the love of her husband as well as that of others. Unfortunately she has bitter experiences in the world. Her husband treats her cruelly which she never forgets in her whole life. Sex for her is an unavoidable phenomenon leading to her infidelity. Her husband is responsible for it. A critic, Dhar T. N., writes it in appropriate words:

The husband is not merely a cowardly and selfish person, but a jealous and ruthless watcher. When she goes out in search of love to young people. She is frankly told by them that they cannot give love to her, but only lust. The husband punishes her brutally till she returns into a “cold and half-dead woman”. Whether she is in a house or on a corridor, acutely conscious of her need for love.⁸

Kamala Das experiences exploitation of woman as a wife. Regarding this subject she calls herself “a swallo” in the poem “The Old Playhouse”. Her husband had planned to tame her. The image of swallo and flight is appropriately used to express her feminine experience particularly as a wife. She is bound by the rules of her husband and that of the society. She is trapped in a cage of her husband like a bird. Her urge to fly and her pre-occupation with self, both are reduced gradually for she becomes the victim of male lust.

You planned to tame a swallo, to hold her

In the long summer of your love so that she would forget

Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but

Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless

Pathways of the sky. (Op, 1)

In an unhappy marriage, wife may quarrel with the husband and suffer it till death, Kamala Das, a dominant woman, chooses the commanding nature. It is her personality. At the same time her husband is also responsible for it. Vrinda Nabar states:

It doesn't seem likely that Kamala's extra-marital love life had its roots only in spite! It is more plausible that the rationale for it may have been helped by her husband's conduct. Kamala was probably able to enter into relationships with other men without any overt feelings of guilt because her husband had done nothing to sustain either her loyalty or her respect.⁹

Kamala Das's failure in married life, her extra-marital relationship, her revolt and pathos is depicted in the poems through varied images. Her sex experience with each one of them is unsatisfactory. She realizes that all men are the same by nature. They like the body of woman rather than her feelings. In one of her poems, 'Gino', she refers to her western friend whom she has gifted her womanliness. She loves him, feels secure in his arms but afterwards she knows the reality. He likes to seduce her not for love but for bodily pleasures. He is a moody person, uses bitter words to her. She obeys his demands without uttering the word. He enjoys the sex. He

never heard the silent weeping of Kamala Das. Her search of love outside the home is unsuccessful. Everyone plays the game of sex with her. Accompanied by the white English lover, Carlo, she feels herself to be a pathetic creature of the world. Her unsound weeping is like “a homeless cat’s wail”.

I shall polish the panes of his moody eyes,
And jealous moods, after bitter words and rage,
I shall wail in his nerves, as homeless cat’s wail
From the rubble of a storm. But one only gets
The life one deserves and dreams only such dreams as
The old soul can comprehend. (CP, 23)

Kamala Das’s past memories of her grandmother and her childhood memories can never be separated from her poems. Whenever the persona feels alone, her past days console her. Her grandmother was an ideal woman for her. She recalls the house where she once used to live with her grandmother who was quite fond of her and from whom she received a lot of love. The poem “My Grandmother’s House” offers a striking contrast between her

childhood days with grandmother and her present life as a grown up woman. As a little girl, too young to read, she enjoyed her grandmother's love, while now she gets no love from anybody and therefore feels as if she had lost her way in life. Her sense of loss is intense. So she has a feeling of deprivation.

Once she had visited the deserted house of her dead grandmother, all that the poetess remembered of the visit are her past sweet memories. She felt that she would gather a heap of darkness and silence and to take it to her city residence where she would only lie down in her bedroom in a contemplative mood, looking like "a brooding dog" which seems to be lost in contemplation.

There is a house now far away where once
I received love That woman died,
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved
..... pick an armful of
Darkness to bring it here to lie
Behind my bedroom door like a brooding
Dogyou cannot believe, darling,
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved (OP, 32)

The house boasted of a great personal library and her incapacity to read the books as a child brought only regrets to her mind. This is certainly an agonising thought to her as far as the poet is concerned. The comparison with a brooding dog is not a happy one. This is a descent from the sublime into the pathetic. She deliberately used this imagery with full consciousness of what it implies.

Marriage is an institution, which is based on the mutual understanding between the husband and the wife. But in the Indian context it is ruled by the husband. Both, men and women are socialized to the basic patriarchal policies with regard to the status, role and temperament. Women cannot get equal status and dignity from the men. They are not ready to change their attitude. It must be changed when they have concrete relationship in any condition and respect one another as a man or woman and also as a human being. Kamala Das is also a victim of this patriarchal society. She faces many problems like other women. She recognizes that love is a very weak instrument to keep the marriage alive. The woman's body is a powerful weapon to hold her husband strongly. Her faith in marriage and husband is lost.

In the absence of any pleasure whatsoever, the poet is reminded of the old grandmother in whom she identifies all the lost love in her life. She pleads to all women to kneel down before the male ego since it is implicit in the institution of marriage. In her opinion the house of lust is nothing but “a merry dog house”. She writes in her poem entitled ‘Composition’,

Husband and wives,
here is my advice to you.
Obey each other’s crazy commands,
ignore the sane.
Turn your home into a merry
dog house,
marriage is meant to be all this
being arranged in
most humorous heaven. (OP, 8)

The ‘Composition’, ironically, throws light on one’s existence which one suffers endlessly without any hope. The Indian believes marriage is being arranged in heaven. But for Kamala it is arranged in

'humorous heaven'. It symbolizes the humour of her married life. It is one's growth and consciousness that causes the tragic catastrophe. This concept of Kamala Das appears to be closer to Hindu belief in Karmik cycle according to which one suffers one's prescribed share as a result at the wrongs done and sins committed during myriad cycles of births and deaths. The poem finds extension of meaning, acquiring, new dimensions of thought and feeling.

Loveless marriage of Kamala Das is very painful for her. Her desire of sex is not fulfilled by her husband. Sex with love seems to be the need of her heart. Germane Greer discusses about love and marriage:

Loveless marriage is anathema to our culture, and a life without love is unthinkable it is axiomatic that all married couples are in love with each other.¹⁰

She thinks that she has been living with her husband for a long time but he has failed to give her love. Other persons with whom she was linked did not love her. So she becomes fed up with her husband, lovers and her life as well. A. N. Dwivedi rightly asserts:

Kamala Das in her poem expresses her ideas against arranged marriages, which are usually inspired by the parent's conveniences more than those of the couples. The poetess therefore, paints an abhorrent picture of her man, with whom she has to enter into sexual intercourse willy-nilly for his satisfaction Except for physical contact, it offers no emotional contact between the man and woman.¹¹

Her poems focus on the double standards of social morality, on power politics and power imbalance in sexual relationships and on a number of related social issues. It attempts to highlight the problems women face in a sexist culture. In a man's world a woman is little more than an object that plays a marginalized role. Marriage, thus, came to Kamala Das as a punishment. She is well aware of the subordination of a woman in the world of men. She changes her love partners to bring change in her life but it doesn't work. To show her pathos in this bitter world, she uses the imagery of dog in her poems like 'Composition', 'My Grandmother's House', 'In Calcutta' and others.

Kamala Das becomes upset due to the social set up which brings no value to women in the family and the society. She is not treated as a human being. She says that every woman is trained by her family members as well as her husband to follow up their rules.

Kamala Das is one of them who had trained herself to carry out the duties of a wife in a subservient manner. She has no freedom to express her inner feelings that she wants. She is compelled to live under the control of her husband like the pet animals do as per their master's wish. This appears to her to be the condition of each and every woman. Therefore Kamala Das compares a woman with "a trained circus dog" in "The Moon":

It is a trained circus dog

That shall never miss its hoop.

Endlessly healing, it waits for

The new day's wounds (CP,21)

She depicts her husband as a brute seeking, the gratification of his lust and of course, satisfying her sexual desire also in the process and yet leaving her sorely dissatisfied and frustrated because of the complete absence of emotion from his manner of performing the sexual act. Now there is a large gap between them. They haven't any attachment. Their husband – wife relation is nominal. For the society Kamala Das and her husband are a couple like any other married

couple. She is far away from him and involved in other men. Now she doesn't need his company for sexual satisfaction. She ironically says in 'My Dog':

The poodle, a solitary fruit
On the top branch of our bed,
Just a pearly glow against the pillow.
I told him, my husband for thirty years,
Father, the children are all grown up
And gone. Only the dog sleeps between us now.(CP,20)

For Kamala Das, the lover is an acme of accomplishment and perfection. Love brings an endless contentment in "Love". It is an all fulfilling experience, which seems to end all quests of the poet:

Until I found you,
I wrote verse, drew pictures,
And, went out with friends
for walk

Now that I love you,

Curled like an old mongrel

My life lies, content,

In you (OP, 23)

Now her life is meaningful because of her lover. She is involved in him. She has had mixed experiences with lovers and husband. Few of her poems expose her anger and hatred about male partners. But sometimes she is satisfied with her lover. Her mind is unstable.

One of her poems 'Grey Hound' expresses the confusion in her mind. Her mind is not constant. She thinks about life in different types. Her mind is like a racing dog. She says:

Mind

Lean greyhound,

Awaking

And leaping up (CP, 19)

Most of the animal images in her poetry are connected with her dissatisfied life, agony, disillusionment and her anger towards men

specially her husband. She portrays the realistic picture of her life. She has the pressures on her mind, which are generally found in a woman. Every married woman has a depressed psychology. But she doesn't have the courage to open it to society. She hides her suffering because of the traditional impact on her mind.

Kamala Das, the poetess, has to face all the feminine problems without any hesitation and fear. Sex relations, consequent quarrels, and likes and dislikes are secret issues, making them a public issue is immoral and unconventional in the Indian context. But in the opinion of the poet, it is the universal problem of every woman.

Her husband fulfils his desire at his will, and she must surrender to him every time. She is like a bird in the cage of marriage she has an urge to fly in the sky of freedom. But she turns into "a bird of stone", "a granite dove". Her husband builds the net of rules around her. Her mind weeps for freedom. Her wounded mind becomes tired and soulless. Her body is a body without soul. Her husband does not create any hurdle regarding free love-sex. Das boldly and honestly states in 'The Stone Age':

Fond husband, ancient settler in the mind,
Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment,
Be kind, you turn me into a bird of stone, a granite
Dove, (TTSR, 51)

Kamala Das's failure to establish an eternal bond and realize the meaning of existence is at the root of her existential despair. Her painful and emotional life is torn between dual loyalties to the self and non-self.

The epithets "ancient settler" and "old fat spider" are too much pregnant with scorn to shake the web off which a spider, by implication weaves around itself. This is ironically preceded by a better sounding address "fond husband" which heightens the irony through the device of contrast. Indeed her own identity is expressed as a "bird of stone" and a "granite dove" which gain in effect through the collocation of opposites, innocence and tenderness in contrast to hardness and granite. This is a juxtaposition of the symbol of peace with that of death.

Her internal urge to fly cannot be fulfilled. It is an endless torture which she experiences in her life with her many lovers. She

has to accept it. She can't escape herself from this world which is formed by men in a manner suitable for them. This experience generates the realization of the real life, in a poem entitled 'Composition':

.....Even
oft - repeated moves
of every scattered cell
will give no power
to escape
from cages of involvement. (OP, 10)

Once a woman married, she has no choice regarding her likes and dislikes. It is unavoidable for her. The definition of marriage in social context is the way of physical satisfaction. Love comes after sex. Kamala Das has a bitter experience about it. She ironically advises women in a poem entitled 'Composition':

fall in love
fall in love with an unsuitable
person,
Fling yourself on him
like a moth on a flame.
Let there be despair in every move.
Excavate
Deep, deep pain. (OP, 9)

These lines appear to indicate the reality of life and husband-wife relationship. It is the duty of a woman to devote herself completely to her husband. She advises women to switch of their personal feelings and love him even though he is unsuitable to them, destroy the life like “a moth”, which knows the death before it and burns. A woman is in a similar condition, knowing the reality she accepts it.

The poetry of Kamala Das must be viewed in the light of feminine consciousness. She is almost exclusively concerned with the personal experiences of love. She is aware of her husband’s deceptive

nature. She can't believe in his words when he flatters her. She asserts in a poem entitled 'Herons':

On sedatives

I am more lovable

Says my husband

My speech becomes mistladen terrain

The words emerge tintured with sleep

They rise from the still coves of dreams

In unhurried flight like herons.... (CP, 105)

It appears that Kamala Das was already informed by her husband about his variegated sex life that is why she delineates in a newspaper article:

..... he had other women before and could talk with rest about their sexual skills. He spoke admiringly of several sluts and nymphomaniacs. At times he talked himself into frenzy and when I lay near him, I was merely one or other of those attractive women. This was the first unpleasant discovery I made about men. It changed my life.¹²

Her thoughts arise from the darkness of her heart. He never heard her nor praised her but when he called her 'loveable' she could not react. Her words are very poor to come out and take the wings. Her feelings, thoughts and the words are like the condition of "herons". It suggests the incapacity of the poet and her tragedy.

Terror of sex, its attraction and revulsion are powerfully expressed in a poem entitled 'Gino' using the imagery of krait for her lover.

You will perish from his kiss, he said as one must
Surely die, when bitten by krait who fills
The bloodstream with its accursed essence, I was quiet,
For once, my tongue had fainted in my mouth.(OP, 13)

She expresses a sense of disgust of the male habits and treatment. The lover's kiss is compared with a krait's bite in order to express the horror of sex. The lover is like a reptile who keeps on sucking female body. Love as it is manifested in her life generates a sense of death thus one feels that it is very difficult to draw a demarcation line between life and death as well as love and lust.

There is a desire to experience love but it turns poisonous even outside marriage. A line “I was quiet” symbolizes her defeat in love.

Her insecure life and disgusting love show her a way of infidelity. She wandered from one place to another but her journey of searching love is unsuccessful. O. J. Thomas writes:

Thus, one can see that there is a search for security, understanding, shelter and happy home. Love always meant something more than physical to her. What she actually wanted from her husband was sympathy, understanding and companionship. She lived all her life in search of illusive love and company.¹³

Description of these experiences indicates her isolation, turbulence and depression. She is trying to discover, her own self and ideal love. Love is a tragic game for her even though she changes her partners like a bird migrating from one place to another. It is her nature. She rightly asserts in a poem ‘Ghanshyam’:

In love when the snow slowly began to fall

Like a bird I migrated to warmer climes

That was my only method of survival

In this tragic game (CP, 94)

The sexual companionship gives a temporary sense of security and shelter because it saves her from loneliness. She feels that the kind of solitude she suffers from turns her house into a desert. Her lovers are like “seasonable insects”. Once her heart was dancing in the company of lovers. Her adulterous sex experiences are sweet but deadly. But sometimes she feels it to be concrete and sometimes as an unpleasurable thing. This one makes her a poor creature of the world. Regarding this the following lines from ‘The Survivor’ are highly significant:

Her friends were romantics, they watched her survive
A certain love and became her secret foes
Like seasonal insects her kind were required
To die when the singing was its best, and
The dance was sweetest frenzy. Kill, if you must
But in a tender way this moth that escaped
The legitimate holocaust. (CP, 61)

It highlights the miseries of a forlorn woman. The men treated her badly. She has not received love from her illicit orbits; she is

totally alone and frustrated. Those who claimed to be kind towards her had only subjected her to humiliation and injury. Act of love with them is a meaningless sexual encounter.

According to her a woman should be honest about her wants and requirements and then it would be easy for her to get a man to love her. But it is very torturous for her. She began to feel a great emotional vacuum. She is disappointed with these bitter experiences of life. This short-lived love harmed her. She loses her mental balance. It is her anguish of life. She has violated these social norms due to her husband.

Indian women are placed on a pedestal for worship on the one hand and treated badly and enslaved on the other. They are happy to live in the four walls of the house, looking after the kitchen and the children. But Kamala Das is not a woman of this category. She throws out these traditional norms. She chooses the way of freedom. She has a firm desire to move towards liberation. She seeks her own place. It is a captivity in the domestic set up that the poet finds dissatisfying. Her mind moves to freedom from those bondages. In 'I Shall Some Day' she says:

I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea,
Love words flung from doorways and of course,
Your tired lust. I shall some day take
Wings, fly around as often petals
Do when free in air. (OP, 48)

She says that she is the victim of the patriarchal society and her husband. She aggressively tells her husband that one day she will leave the bonds that trap her.

In her autobiography '*My Story*' she writes about her serious illness when she was admitted in the Willingdon Hospital. She was looking thin and pale. Later she was discharged. She sincerely writes about the thought that came to her mind at that time:

Like the phoenix, I rose from the ashes of my past. I forgot the promises that I had made to God and became once more intoxicated with life. My lips had without rest uttered the sweet name of Lord Krishna while I lay ill, but when I recovered my health I painted them with pink lipstick. On moonlit nights once again I thought wistfully of human love¹⁴

The path which she has chosen is not admired by the society. She never cares about it. She forgets these things in her sickness but again her mind is on the way of love. Her Nair family is a bundle paradoxes. Sex, in that community was not mentionable or a matter of discussion. But Kamala Das never hides any page of her life. Her writing is an album of her personal life. She confesses her deeds without hiding her real issues.

She feels unhappy and angry due to the deceptive nature of the persons of society. She bitterly comments in her poem 'Composition':

Reader

You may say,

now here is a girl with vast

sexual hungers,

a bitch after my own heart.

But,

I am not yours for the asking.

Grovel at my feet,

remove you monkey – suits and dance

sing Erato, Erato Erato,

yet I shall be indifferent.

Not because of morality

but because

I do not feel the need.... (OP, 6)

A close reading of her poetry reveals the fact that most of her poems are full of anger and scorn. Her poetry oozes from every word and every line. She admits her adultery but her anger against the society is expressed in the line 'remove your monkey – suits'. She never finds honesty in the nature of man. She does not call herself immoral because her search for love is carried out on a different kind of morality like that of Lord Krishna.

Kamala Das never finds love and sympathy in the society. But people are selfish. She revolts against these norms of the society.

Kurup P. K. J. says:

It is in this perspective that the rebellion Das's poetry voices against the masks of hypocrisy, male tyranny, and the existing moral codes and even the human predicament and the human destiny has to be viewed. In fact her poetry is the sum total of her quarrels with the human destiny of all kinds.¹⁵

She further, feels unhappy about her marriage, as she appeared to be a puppet, which is being held firmly by her parents. She had no freedom to select an ideal lover for her. Others did all the planning for her marriage and she was not even consulted on the subject. In her own words, “My life had been planned and its course charted by my parents and relatives.”¹⁶ what hurt her most was this indifference to her individuality from her relations. As a modern woman she never liked the way in which they moved about and fixed her marriage without, even trying to know her ideas and aspirations. This attitude of her relations actually hurt her and she considered herself a helpless victim:

I was a victim of a young man’s carnal
hunger and perhaps out of our union, there
would be born a few children.¹⁷

This sense of helplessness and alienation promotes her to become a rebel and creates a feeling of loneliness. She would not mix with that mismatched husband. Her life is a burden of agony and isolation. There is a horrible silence in the bedroom, which is unbearable for her. Her heart is like “an empty cistern”. She writes in ‘The Freaks’:

Who can
Help us who have lived so long
And have failed in love? The heart,
An empty cistern, waiting
Through long hours, fills itself
With coiling snakes of silence (OP, 11)

The heart which has been waiting to be filled with “flamboyant lust” is forced to reconcile itself to merely ‘coiling snakes of silence’. It expresses the woman’s impatience and frustration with the man as well as the moment with the man because of his sexual incapacity and slackness. And thus if she has done the masculine role, if she flaunts “a grand flamboyant lust” (The Freaks, 11) it is to save her face, to redeem her feminine face.

She discovers that, after all, the pleasures, her body offers are of cloying and ephemeral nature. A love, which flourishes and thrives on body is bound to wither with it and the search for true love in a world of philanderers is a futile exercise. So she turns to the mythical world of Krishna and Vrindavan to seek lasting love and fulfillment.

She imagines herself as Radha and finds comfort in the arms of imaginary Krishna.

She addresses Ghanshyam and tells him that he has built a nest in the garden of her heart and that her life, which was till now a silent and sleeping jungle, is now stirring with the sounds of music. Ghanshyam, she says, has been leading her along a route which she had never known before. In 'Ghanshyam' she recalls him:

Ghanshyam,

You have like a koel built your nest in the arbour of my heart.

My life, until now a sleeping jungle is at last astir with music.

(CP, 93)

The detachment from the world of reality and venturing in the world of imagination, the eternal longing for true love is the main concern of her poem. The persona waits along for Krishna, the 'eternal lover' like the mythical 'Chataka' bird that waits for ever for the celestial water to quench thirst. The 'koel' building nest in the arbour of heart and her sleeping life being caressed with music are beautiful analogues stressing the sense of suffering and redemption through the tradition bound images. The same poetic behaviour is

discernible in the image of fisherman's net in the following movement of the poem:

Shayam O Ghanshyam

You have like a fisherman cast your net in the narrows

Of my mind

And towards you my thoughts today

Must race like enchanted fish (CP, 95)

The imagery of the "fisherman" and "enchanted fish" comes full circle. She prays to Lord Krishna to control her thoughts and feelings. She wants to live in his net of pure love. According to her God is a permanent lover of the woman. He is universal. He is the great fisherman, who cast his net in the depths of her mind and her thoughts are rushing towards him like a fish, which briskly enters the fisherman's net under some mysterious urge. Thus this poem reveals Kamala Das's spiritual longings which have been dormant in her and which have come to the surface as a consequence of her sexual frustrations.

Many of her poems highlight on the theme of death. When her life is unbearable for her she thinks about her death. Understanding of life includes understanding of death and in any attempt to understand and solve the mystery of human existence comprehension of death is highly imperative. She understands that the body is troublesome in so far as it is matterbound and hence subject to many limitations. It is a destructive thing. She admits the limitations of the body. She also wants to underscore purposelessness of life, which leads to suffering, and thought of death.

Now the poet has no capacity to continue the tragic game. She is depressed. Her age does not help her to proceed her affairs. Search of ideal love in a materialistic world is impossible. All the ways are closed. Her mind desires to take rest. Her condition resembles “an old horse”. She has a negative attitude about her life.

Of late my words have worn

Thin, my speech resembles

The tagged gallop of

A cart horse that needs to

Be reshod and perhaps

Given rest, for, poor thing
Its roads were arduous
And its burden always
Too heavy. An old horse,
If lucky, dies on road....(The Cart Horse. CP, 62)

At the same time Kamala Das compares her words with birds:

Words are birds.
Where have they gone to roost,
Wings, tired,
Hiding from the dusk?
.....
When I lie down to sleep
I am not sure
That I shall see
The blessed dawn again. (Words are Birds CP, 25)

Her poems are her personal topics of life in general but some of her poems focused on social set up. She is also conscious of the

social problems. The hierarchical power structure of the city is masculine in its authoritarian disregard for human sentiments. She speaks about the brutalising aspects of the urban experience. She highlights the social, political and patriotic issues in the poems like 'The House Builders', 'Nani', 'Flag', 'Visitors to the City' and 'Pigeon' etc.

In her poem 'The House Builders' the masculine authority of the city manifests itself in its corrupting influence which turns its inhabitants into victims. The poet sympathizes with these workers. These workers are the victims of the rude society. They have no shelter, nor sufficient clothes and food. There is nothing in their life. They are exploited by the higher class of the society. Her poem 'Pigeon's is the best example of it. She writes:

Pigeons on the ledge
Of an afternoon dream
Sit strangely silent,
The hot dust rises
Falls on sun-pealed beaks(Cp, 107)

She compares these poor people with 'the pigeon', which sit on the edge silently. They have no shelter to protect them from the heat of sun. No one cares for them. When she has seen this poverty in India, she had commented on Indian Government and their policies. She has depicted a very pathetic condition of poor women. They have no security of their life. The poor woman is always raped by the people of upper society and never gets justice.

One of the important poems where Kamala Das draws the reader's attention to the suffering and humiliation which women are made to experience is 'Nani'. The focus of the poem is a pregnant housemaid hanging herself, due to the shame and moral austerity of the society in which she lived. The spectacle of Nani hanging from a rope is heart-rending which raises unanswerable questions:

Nani the pregnant maid hanged herself
In the privy one day. For three long hours
Until the police came, she was hanging there
A clumsy puppet, and when the wind blew
Turning her gently on the rope,.....(OP, 40)

The image of clumsy puppet performing a comic dance is noted for its vividness and also its suggestiveness. Nani, as is made evident by the poet, has been a puppet in the hands of fate and the real culprit who has subjected her to such humiliation is of course the society and also its moral codes. She hangs from a rope as a helpless victim to the designs of an “unknown citizen” and the effect produced in the eyes of children is comic.

K. V. Surendran writes about it:

Maids become pregnant before they get a chance to get married and the choice left before them is to hang themselves or consume poison and thereby end their lives.¹⁸

These poor women have only the way of suicide. Many questions are raised in the mind of Kamala Das regarding this poor creature. After passing some years the poetess asks unpleasant question to her grandmother about Nani. She asks her whether she remembers Nani or not. Her grandmother replies she never knows Nani. It is very inexplicable to Kamala Das. The Grandmother avoids to speak about Nani. Why does she neglect this pathetic creature? Death of Nani is meaningless for the society. So Kamala

Das has a readymade answer to explain this reaction. In 'Nani' she writes:

Each truth

Ends thus with a query. It is this designed

Deafness that turns mortality into

Immortality, the definite into

The soft indefinite. (Op, 40)

This bitter experience appears to have been one of initiation. She moves from a world of innocence to a narrow, conservative way of life which prefers to suppress what is unpleasant and "inexplicable". The tragedy of Nani is not that of an individual but it appears to be universal one. The woman is one of the victimized groups of society. Nani, a woman of lower caste, and the poetess, from rich Nair family, are similar in the eyes of the society. She writes that Nani is the comic subject for them because she is the clumsy puppet for the society. It is a major problem of womanhood.

To put it briefly, suffering and humiliation are undoubtedly the dominating themes in her poetry. Women's exploitation in a male

dominant society is the major part of her poetry. She airs her views with a boldness unparalleled. Dependent life of woman is a cause of her tragedy. Her parents and husband are the makers of her life. Her awakening about this reality makes her weak. Due to this she is ridiculed by a hostile world. This condition of woman is described through the image of pet animals in the poetry.

Kamala Das has a good skill of using appropriate images in proper places. She is fond of nature so she discovers similarities between varied animals, and woman. In the Indian context once a woman married she is a guest for parents. Whatever the problems she has, she will not be back to her parents home. She has no right to live in parent's house even if she likes. The same thing happens in her life when she lives with her husband and bears unhappy moments. She cannot express it to her parents and lives with them. In the social context the husband is the master so she has to follow the rules under his guidance otherwise she has no place. She cannot express her sufferings to her parents. To her live with him till death is a compulsion for her. So the poet compares this with "a brooding dog", "a homeless cat", "a sparrow" to highlight its intensity. Her images have deep meaning. Using the images of beast, poisonous snake for

lovers and husband the poet draws the brutal selfish and merciless nature of the male. Her husband and lovers are as cruel as the lion and the poisonous snake. The husband is the master of his wife. He has treated her as per his own wish. He imprisoned her in his cage of lust. Her powerful images show it.

Kamala Das has emotions arrested in glowing words, phrases, expressions and she has a skill to turn out brilliant images and similes. Her images are expressive and spontaneous. Phrases like “hooded snake”, “a ruthless weather” are suggestive and remarkable. Some of the negative images showing her frustration and helplessness are more authentic in comparison to the images of freedom that she tries to draw. These images highlight the fact that a woman has no location. Bird images convey the image of hurt woman and her urge of freedom from the cage of her husband, a brutal animal. No doubt the animal images in her poetry are dominant and impress the reader.

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- 18) Surendran, K. V. “Suffering and Humiliation in Kamala Das’s Poetry”. Indian English Poetry : Critical perspective (ed) Jaydipsinh K. Dodiya. Sarup and Sons, New Delhi, p.153.

IV. NATURE IMAGERY

The relationship between man and nature has been an intimate one ever since the beginning of life. He is the child of nature. He grows in it and develops his personality. The evolution of man starts with nature thus nature has become a part of his consciousness as well the influence of nature on man has been immense and he has been moulded by nature inside and out.

The writer is also the part of society and nature. He cannot keep himself away from nature. The subject “Nature” is continuously interpreted in the writings by different writers. Nature plays varied role to express the modes of writer’s feeling. Nature is a favourite theme of writers. He chooses different elements from nature to express his psyche and feelings. The different seasons, flowers, birds, river, stars, sky, moon and sun etc. generate new life. He uses these elements in a figurative or metaphorical way to convey the thoughts and emotions.

The romantic writers and the writers of Vedas and Sanskrit classics have interpreted the beauty of Nature. Indian writers show their love for nature through the narration of beauty, mysticism and

power of nature. The theme of love in literature is decorated by the nature elements. They cannot separate the role of nature from the love theme. Nature is an integral part of writer's consciousness.

The poets like Shri Aurbindo, Tagore have presented God, Man and Nature in integral relationship with emphasis on cosmic destiny. At the same time Toru Dutta, Sarojani Naidu's nature element prominently deals with personal emotions and feelings. Women writers of modern age have revealed themselves to be romantic – moderns in their treatment of nature. They aren't interested in nature as a thematic concern. They have chosen the problems of life, which are the main concerns to highlight. Their skill of using symbols and images from nature are derived from the Romantic predecessors. They are interested in practical life of man and the problems rather than focusing the beauty of nature. Nature is the storehouse of symbols and imagery to describe the human feelings. It portrays various moods of the writer. The hidden feelings are expressed through the media of nature. The writer cannot separate the nature from his literature. It helps him to draw his inexpressible emotions in a proper way.

Kamala Das is one of the creative writers who has used nature images to draw her personal life in various angles. Her feelings of lust, love, frustration and pathos are interpreted through these images very effectively. While focusing the love theme of her poetry a reader cannot neglect the impressive nature elements. These images covered every corner of her life. Her sensational poetry of love, sex, agony and rebellion is picturised through it. Nature is not the theme of her poetry but the nature element in her poetry, which she has chosen specially to express the real story of her life is. Nature elements like water; sea, air, sun, rain and earth are very impressive and have a deep meaning. She hasn't written about nature and its beauty but she has used it as a medium of expression.

She has often been labeled as a confessional poet and the tone of her poetry is obviously 'autobiographical'. At the same time her choice of grotesque and strange metaphors from nature is helpful to draw her own life in her writings. Nature elements like water, sun, earth and sea especially have been focused on her dual psyche, her sensational emotions and desires.

Sun Imagery :

Kamala Das's many poems express her deep hunger for love and deal with the boundaries of her life, which are built by her husband, relatives, parents and society. There is an ever-growing awareness in her that the act of lovemaking is like being in a prison. She is trapped in it. She realizes that the marriage is a spider web and her husband is an "old fat spider" who built the wall around her, indifferent to her emotional needs, having controlled her desires, he transforms her personality into "a bird of stone, a granite dove" (The Stone Age). He was merely interested in the enjoyment her body.

All her dreams about her husband are ended when she has experienced his lustful, intensely inhuman treatment on the bed. She cannot forget her painful honeymoon. Every dream is shattered. In 'My Story' she describes:

I was at that time deeply in love with him and would have undergone any torture to be able to please him, but my body was immature and not ready for lovemaking. For him such a body was an embarrassment, veteran that he was in the rowdy ways of sex, which he had practiced with the maids who worked for his family.¹

She shows her exploration into the nature of lust. Her hopes are shattered into despair. Her feminine sensibility is crushed in her husband's sexual hunger. The poem entitled 'The Freaks' describes her nervousness and dislike of her husband's disgusting act of sex.

He talks, turnings a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam (OP, 11)

Her husband enjoys her body as a sexual object. He crushed her body without understanding her emotions. He has hot, passionate feelings of sex in which her femininity burns. He turns his "sun-tained cheek" and makes love unbearable for her. His mouth is compared with "a dark cavern" in which the teeth are glittering due to the saliva sticking to them, uneven and look somewhat repulsive on account of the drops of saliva sticking to them. It is a very bitter experience for Kamala Das. Their lovemaking is nothing but "skin's lazy hungers". (OP, 11)

Further she writes in 'Convicts:

That was only the kind of love

This hacking at each other's parts

Like convicts hacking, breaking clods

At noon, we were earth under hot sun, there was a burning in our

Veins and the cool mountain nights did

Nothing to lessen heat. (OP, 25)

It is the narration of the violent sexual involvement. The flame of lust burns their body. They are interested in physical union rather than any emotional attachment. Images like “convicts hacking”, “breaking clods” and “hot sun” show the intensity of lust.

A. N. Dwivedi rightly asserts:

This richly suggestive poetic passage tells us immediately about his lustful nature and the violent sexual involvement of both in the summer season. On the part of the poetess there is a sense of guilt over such an involvement conveyed by the metaphor ‘convicts’. The proper sexual act involving energy and speed is marvellously carried through by, the image in ‘breaking clods At noon’ The phrase ‘breaking clods’ suggests that there was a kind of grating sound while they copulating. The word ‘earth’ indicates their ‘earthness’ as well as their ‘reception of the heat of the burning sun’.²

While explaining the sensuous experience of lust with her husband she never hides her own feelings of sexual hunger. In a poem entitled 'Forest Fire' she says:

Of late I have begun to feel a hunger
To take in with greed like a forest fire that
Consumes, and with each killing gains a wilder,
Brighter charm, all that comes my way. (OP,39)

Kamala Das is a woman of strong sexual desires who never hides her powerful hunger of sex. She compares her aggressive sexuality with "forest-fire" which is deep rooted and difficult to control. Which destroys her life. The body and its revolt start from lust.

Body is the media of her quest for self-identity. She is in search of satisfaction and security. She celebrates the sensual world, which she has enjoyed with many of her lovers. While enjoying the physical love a question raises in her mind about this temporary satisfaction. She cannot decide whether it is sheer lust or love, she soon realizes

that this is a temporary satisfaction, which never provides her security and remains a desperate longing. In 'In Love' she says:

Of 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. (OP, 15)

She has a complete involvement in physical union. But the question about love and lust leads her towards the divided self. The warmth of the physical union is like "the burning mouth of sun". It is intense, complete enjoyable for them. He holds her strongly in his arms. His limbs reached towards her like "carnivorous plants".

Both are too passionate at the sexual moment. When Kamala Das comes out from the intense feelings of sex, she recognizes that love is nothing but an unending lust. Her lover is very skillful in

making love but not capable to give love. In his strong arms, in his passionate lust she forgets her ambition of getting love.

Das Bijay Kumar writes:

Kamala Das exposes her 'unending lust' as a sad lie. The sun with its heat is suggestive of the glow of passion and lust. The challenge comes from love not from lust. Lust is complete in each act of sexual intercourse.³

It is the picture of passionate nature of her lover and the intensity of lovemaking. But she never rejects her own willing participation in sex. In 'The Conflagration' Kamala Das says:

We came together like two suns meeting and each
Raging to burn the other out. He said you are
A forest conflagration and I, poor forest
Must burn(TD, 20)

Like her lover she is eager to make love. Both are energetic and have strong sexual desires. She compares their hot meeting with "two suns meeting". They are crazy to burn in the sensuous feelings of lust. He calls her "a forest conflagration" and he is "a

poor forest” who burns in her fire of lust. Sex removes her loneliness temporarily but it is futile. In the same poem she says:

..... I, poor forest
Must burn, but lay on me, light and white as embers
Over inert fires. Burn on, elemental
Fire warm the coal streams of his eternal flesh till
At last, they boiling flow, so turbulent with life. (TD, 20)

She is conscious that their life destroys in the heat of passion. It is not providing her security and peace. The words like “boiling” and “burning” signify the hot emotions of lover’s and herself too.

Fire and sun images in her poems draw the intense, passionate feelings of lust. In a poem entitled ‘The flag’ she represents the fire as a destroyer.

The orange stands for fire, for fire that eats
Us all in the end(SC. 21)

She has a clear idea that lust is a temporary place to take rest and to get mental peace. Kamala Das is well aware of this but for

forgetting the unhappy married life and in search of love gets involved and trapped in it. Whenever she is nervous in her life, she meets her friend, Carlo. She forgets the miseries of life. He is her close friend with whom she has spent much time in Calcutta. All the sweet memories are haunting now. She cannot forget him. In a poem entitled 'The Westerlies' she describes her troublesome memories of her friend and her emotions at parting from him.

..... I ought not to have walked towards the sea and
Against the whiplash of the westerlies.
I should have travelled
Eastwards towards the morning sun, I should have worshiped
The gold not the silver of the moon
But there was none to guide
Me in this game, only the word love spoken in dark doorways
Or over crumpled beds but never mind. I still have
A chance, a last chance, for inside this ageing body, inside
This ashen fatigue my blood is a bouncing fountain, ageless.
Red and warm, I shall yet go meet the young sun, forget
The deeply moaning sea, the bitter westerlies
The desert in my soul. (TTSR, 24)

Kamala Das admits that search of love outside the marital life is not everlasting. She is aware that she is seduced by her lovers and deceived by them. She has an idea that she cannot get love through lust. She travels towards it but no one is guiding her. They play the 'game' of sex in darkness and utter the word "love" but she never gains it. All these experiences are painful and torturing for her. But her passionate mind never loses the confidence and is always eager to meet "the young sun". To forget the memories of her friend, she involves in the passionate moments. But this is temporary and her mind she feels to be an "empty container" (Captive. CP, 81) Her mind is isolated which she describes as "the desert in my soul".

Unhappy married life and unsuccessful love affairs torture her continuously. It is unbearable for her. In her autobiography '*My Story*' she has commented about her broken marriage.

A broken marriage was as distasteful, as
horrifying as an attack of leprosy.⁴

Married life is horrifying for Kamala Das from the very first wedding night. All her dreams about husband and peaceful life are broken. So in many of her poems she highlights the pathos of life.

Sun imagery has been used by her to show the hot and sensuous feelings and at the same time it is used for suggesting destruction of life. In 'Pigeons' she writes:

The hot dust rises,
falls on sun-peeled beaks;
On the city of fevered
lanes
The sun swells; then
Swollen like a fruit
It runs harsh silver threads
Lengthwise, my afternoon
Dream! (SC, 12)

The sun is a destroyer of her dreams. The heat of lust as like the heat of sun, burns her life. Her ambitions are like the day – dreams, incomplete and momentary.

In a poem entitled 'Sepia' she says:

It is a time to hold anger

Like a living sun

And scorch,

Scorch to the very marrow

This sad – mouthed human race (SC, 24)

She says that the sun burns man's exterior and interior. It is furnace at noontime. Devastating heat does not let down her longing for a sweet – sleep. It does not give her chance for her dreams to be fulfilled. The sun is hot and dries up the very marrow bones.

In the words of A. R. Rahaman the sun is,

.... an agent of scorching heat generated by sex and corruption and lust.⁵

Sun imagery in her poems highlights the intense, powerful feelings of lust in which the life of man is destroyed. But she is never able to control her sensual feelings. She drinks it again and again. She writes about the sensuality of feelings in a poem entitled 'Summer in Calcutta':

What is this drink but
the April sun, squeezed
Like an orange in
My glass? I sip the
Fire, I drink and drink
Again, I am drunk,
Yes, but on the gold
of suns. (SC, 48)

The April sun brings the warm, sensuous and exciting feelings. She drinks “the juice of the April sun”. Her feelings of sex are hot and beyond self-control. The repetition of the words “drink” and “drunk” suggest the repeated emergence of sensual desires.

K. R. Ramchandran writes:

The April sun becomes the ‘noble venom’ that flows through the poet’s veins providing a temporary triumph over life’s despairs. Just as the sun is transformed into a juice, transformed into laughter, despair is transformed into hopeful desire.⁶

Her endless desires of making love are going to be ended now. She is tired to find ideal love through physical desires. She has no hopes of getting it. In 'Drama' she says:

There is no such stage today, no
Footlights, no veil, no lamp shining
Like a crimson sun (OP, 49)

Her life is full of darkness due to her futile search of self – identity and love. Now she is feeling helpless and alone. There is no other way, which will help her to console herself. Her passionate feelings, her hunger of love are destroyed. Her condition is like “a crimson sun”.

Sun imagery in her poems plays a vital role. It's the imagery of hot desires or passionate emotions of the poet and her lovers. It is a destroyer of her personal identity and her dreams. Fire imagery deals with her sensuous feelings like the sun imagery. It deals with her inner feelings and her hunger for getting love.

K. R. Ramchandran writes:

The poet celebrates herself with hunger to take in all that comes her way. She projects herself as a forest fire enveloping everything.⁷

These images suggested her joy and suffering. It is also the celebration of regenerate mood of sensuality and passion through the absorption of sensuousness.

Tree Imagery:

A woman's greatest expectation from marriage is that it should provide her security. But many times she is forcefully subjected to man's desire and neglected as well. In the reality of marriage, the hope of romantic encounter remains unfulfilled, creating the feeling of restlessness in her mind. Kamala Das is one of the victimized women. In spite of all the anguish and misery the society doesn't provide her legitimacy and space.

Kamala Das's husband and her dreams shatter her, like a fragile glass, and turn her into splinters. She has a lot of expectations from her husband but each one of them is shattered. She is a mere plaything, like a doll without feelings and emotions. In 'The Stone Age' Kamala Das shows that she is a mere showpiece decorating the

house of her husband and accompanying him as her wish. Hence, the neighbours, appear to be asking her:

.... Ask me why like

A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breasts,

And sleeps. Ask me why life is short and love is

Shorter still, ask me what is the bliss and what its price.

(OP, 51)

She feels that her body is crushed under him. As a wife she must endure and she must suffer the pain and humiliation. Even during the sex she is played with by her husband as a sexual object. He falls on her body like “a great tree”. It is his sudden action which she never imagines. Naturally his cruelty during the sex is unbearable for her. He sleeps after the act without asking her about her emotions. He is a man of lust and cruelty. Kamala Das is feeling herself a poor creature so the life for her is “short” and love is “shorter”.

She is trapped in the passionate treatment of her husband. Her feelings are always suppressed by him. She is imprisoned in her cage

which is ruled by him. She has a feeling of helplessness. In a poem entitled 'The Old Playhouse' she says:

.... you called me wife,

..... cowering

Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and

Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your

Questions I mumbled incoherent replies. The summer

Begins to pall. I remember the ruder breezes

Of the pall and the smoke from burning leaves. (OP, 1)

Kamala Das is unsatisfied with the disappointing conjugal life. She never enjoys her life, as she wants. He overpowers her at her every moment. She has lost her 'self' in the arrogant and egoistic nature of her husband. His "monstrous ego" suppresses her emotions. His nature of self – importance has reduced her stature and made her feel "a dwarf" she has no capacity to think about herself. She has lost her will. The haunting memories make her restless. She is conscious about the future calamity. She knows that she has a dark

future, she cannot live happily with her husband “the smoke from burning leaves” suggests her awareness of self destruction.

In search of true love she makes herself available as a sexual object for men. Her feelings of failure as a wife or as a mistress never allow her to live peaceful life. In a poem entitled ‘In Love’ she writes:

.....At noon
I watch the sleek crows flying
Like poison on wings and at
Night, from behind the Burdwan
Road, the corpse – bearers cry ‘Bol
Hari Bol’, a strange lacing
For moonless nights (OP, 15)

Although all her sensual desires are fulfilled by her lovers in this journey and she forgets love. The imagery of “poison on wings” represents her negative attitude towards life. The sound of “Bol Hari Bol” from the men carrying the dead – body to the cremation ground awakens from her from the illusionary and temporary world of lust.

The use of the symbol “moonless nights” suggests the darkness of her mind with no hopes of getting ideal love. She thinks that the real love is difficult to find anywhere.

Whenever Kamala Das is trapped in a painful situation she remembers memories of Malabar and her lovable grandmother whom she never forgets in whole life. In ‘The Swamp’ she says:

i am tainted bush the poisonous snakes retreat at three a m
while the others sleep i have no name of my own
and my past is the desolate terrain where memory like tall
trees grow to my Malabar home.... (OP, 53)

Due to the physical mental harassment by many she compares herself to a “tainted bush” which will be destroyed soon. She is seduced by her lovers and left alone in a pathetic situation.

While explaining the painful experiences she never forgets to describe the delivery pains. She remembers her experience of motherhood. She glorifies her sexual love by the childbirth. She celebrates her painful motherhood experience of giving birth to a child in ‘Jaisurya’.

It was again the time of rain and on
Every weeping tree the lush moss spread like
Eczema, and from beneath the swashy
Earth the fat worms surface to explode
Under rain (TD, 33)

Nature elements in her poems are very suggestive. She has described her labour pains using the imagery of “weeping tree”, “the time of rain”. The lush moss covers the whole tree and hides its identity just like Kamala Das has lost her own identity. Every tree is weeping and through it asserts the intensity of painful situation. The foetus has grown up in her womb like “the fat worm” and rushed out forcefully from her womb. Further she writes in the same poem:

....for a while I too was earth.
In me the seed was silent, waiting as
A baby does for the womb’s quiet
Expulsion. This then was my destiny. (TD, 33)

A foetus is like a seed which takes rest in the womb of the mother as like the seed beneath the earth. Giving birth to a child is very risky for a mother therefore Kamala Das consoles herself believing in destiny.

Every human passion is skillfully narrated by Kamala Das while keeping the central idea of lust and love, a reader cannot neglect the impressive images that are used by her.

Air Imagery:

Kamala Das hates the relationship with her husband, which is only for sex so she doesn't get the real satisfaction of love. She thinks that this unsatisfactory relationship leads to pain and unhappy life. Her sex without love creates frustration in her mind. In this respect Devindra Kohli feels that:

It is the woman's impatience and frustration with the man as well as the moment, with the man because of his sexual passivity and slackness and with the moment because it mocks her feminine integrity.⁸

She has a complaint against her husband because there is no love between them. He rules over her body without understanding her

emotions. He tries to control her feelings as his whims and fancies. Due to his inhuman treatment Kamala Das has a wish to fly away and make herself free from his bondages. In a poem entitled 'The Old Playhouse' she says:

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget
Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless
Pathways of the sky (OP, 1)

Her husband is happy with her bodily response. He holds her in the summer season of lust which is full of heat and passion. She is imprisoned in his strong feelings of lust. He overpowers her so that she must forget all the lovely seasons of her life. He plans to control her like "a swallow". The resting place that a swallow has left behind before finding a different location. As Kamala Das has left her Nalapat House and her loving grandmother behind but her mind never forgets these lovely memories.

A caged bird never likes the bounded life. It is his nature which he cannot separate from himself. Kamala Das also has a similar feeling to fly away and get freedom from this forced life. She wants to reach towards “the endless pathways of the sky.”

A. N. Dwivedi rightly asserts:

.... the husband stands all for suppression and cruelty, while she wishes ‘to fly’, to attain freedom. As a proud husband conscious of his glittering gem called ‘wife’, he has totally annihilated her identity and individuality.⁹

She is a captive in her own home. As she writes in ‘The conflagration’:

Fetter that ainous wail.

Let only silence move there humming a slow

And languid air. (TD, 20)

Her mind is hammered by bitter movements of life. She is not secure anywhere. It is a bad omen. There is a silent weeping of her mind.

She would like to escape from the bonds of marriage, family, society and the troublesome life. In 'I shall some Day' she says:

.... I shall some day take
Wings, fly around, as often petals,
Do when free in air (OP, 48)

Wherever she goes in search of love she can't get it. She finds lust only. So that she desires to escape from all these temporary passions taking wings of freedom she wants to fly freely in the air.

Imagery of Darkness / Night:

Kamala Das enjoys her adultery with many persons. She never thinks about the Hindu culture and social constraints. She is a woman of bold nature who never hides her enjoyments nor her pains. She says that her lover comes to meet her at night. It is the proper time for them to make love. It is conveyed in 'The Testing of the Sirens':

The night, dark – cloaked like a procuress, brought
Him to me, willing, light as a shadow

Speaking words of love

In some tender language I do not know. (SC, 63)

In some of her poems she has used the image of night and darkness to represent her adultery and her painful existence. He comes to meet her full of passionate feelings. She doesn't like it. The dark night stimulates them to enjoy the bodily pleasures. At the same time she has a need of tender treatment and love.

The image of darkness and night that she has used to present her inner darkness and frustration. It symbolizes the darker side of her life. In 'Jaisurya' she has repeated the word darkness that focuses the misery of her life.

.... proud Jaisurya, my son,

Separated from the darkness that was mine

And in me. The darkness of rooms where the old

Sit, sharpening words for future use,

The darkness of sterile wombs and that of

The miser's pot, with the mildew on his coins.

Out of the mire of moonless night was

He born Jaisurya, my son, as out of

The wrong is born the right and out of night

The sun-drenched golden day (The Descendants, 34)

Her son is separated from the darkness of her womb and that the darkness is within her. She played with by many lovers and that actually makes her a poor creature. She feels herself to be a helpless woman. But at the time of childbirth she forgets the haunting memories of her sexual humiliation. She is proud of her child who enters in the world. The day of her son's birth is a golden day which makes her happy.

Kohli Devindra writes:

.... "Jaisurya" brings both the elements – fire and water and the opposing images of light and darkness together; not to weave a dissolving pattern but one which holds itself with the joy of creativity.¹⁰

The opposing images in her poetry have focused her dual psychology. She is unhappy and happy at the same moment. The loss of her life in search of true love is a darker side but the birth of child is a ray of hope. She has mixed emotions. These are described in her poetry.

Water Imagery:

i) **Imagery of rain:**

She feels herself to be a woman who was always neglected by her husband. She feels herself as an object of sex to satisfy her husband. She is a doll to fulfil his desires, a woman to look after his house and a nurse for his children. Victor 'D' souza rightly asserts about the subordination of woman in a patriarchal society.

One may therefore, say that unity and integrity of the joint family are maintained through the subordination of woman by man. In fact, according to the traditional Hindu code, woman is always deemed to be subordinate to man, first to her father, then to her husband, and finally to her son.¹¹

Every woman is suppressed by her husband even after that she maintains silence. But the poetic persona never accepts it as her destiny. She goes out of the house to find out her own satisfaction. Having been dissatisfied with him she takes the step of adultery. In a poem entitled 'The Stone Age' she says:

When you leave, I drive my blue battered car
Along the bluer sea I run up the forty
Noisy steps to knock at another door.
Through peep - holes, the neighbours watch,
They watch me come
And go like rain. (OP, 51)

There is endless misery in her life. Only sexual humiliation is there which disturbs her mentality. She doesn't get the heart to heart correspondence. She is always treated cruelly and given a subordinate place.

Whenever she becomes nervous and feels alone, she knocks at another's door to receive love. It is for her the only way of escaping from loneliness and disillusionment. Her neighbours and relatives are aware of her adultery. They keep watching her meetings with her lovers and her sudden returning home like "rain".

She has enjoyed the lust with her lovers to forget her inner dilemma. But sometimes the company of lovers is unbearable and torturous for her.

In 'Afterwards' she describes her pains.

The earth we nearly killed is yours
Now, The flowers bloom again,
But a savage red, it takes
Time to forget blood or the quick gasps
Of the dying. And the sudden pain,
But the sun came again, and rain. (SC, 56)

She is calm and quiet like “earth”. The feeling of passion rises in her mind like the flowers blooming but it is “a savage red”. It significantly stands for the savage lovemaking. To forget it she needs time. While remembering the joyous and painful moments there is a sudden labour pain and the “son” takes birth. The rain welcomes the new born baby. It has a unique phenomenon, pleasure, pain and again pleasure.

The same elements of nature have been used in the poem entitled ‘An Introduction’:

.... the speech of the mind that is

Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and

Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent muttering of the blazing
Funeral pyre. (OP, 26)

A human mind has a capacity to hear and see everything that is happening around the man. It is not deaf and blind like the trees, which are stable and silent in storm and rain or at the time of funeral pyre.

Kamala Das tries to explore her search of self – location through these images, which are focused on her personal life.

ii) **Imagery of river, sea :**

Kamala Das thinks that, there is no spiritual love between herself and her husband, hence she wanders in search of real love but she never gets it. She says that all men are the same, wherever she goes the man uses her only to gratify his lust but he doesn't give her love for which she is really longing. She finds a hasty aggressiveness in the male during the sex. In 'An Introduction' she rightly describes

the intense, passionate movements of man which are very opposite to that of a woman.

.... he is every man

Who wants a woman, just as I am every \

Woman who seeks love. In him ... he hungry haste

Of rivers, in methe oceans' tireless

Waiting. (OP, 27)

Kamala Das has an observation that every man has hasty and passionate approach to woman during the sex which creates the feeling of frustration and disgust in the woman. The man forgets that the woman needs tenderness and respect for her emotions. His male ego overpowers her feelings. He is very quick, sudden and passionate as like "the hungry haste of rivers". Due to this quickness in sex he creates a terror in her mind.

Kamala Das compares her feeling of sex like the "ocean's fireless waiting" that every woman's waiting for love is unending. Women are sensitive persons who primarily want love rather than sex.

Anais Nin has pointed out the different attitudes of the man and the woman towards sex from the psychological point of view:

There is common agreement about only one thing, that woman's erogenous zones are spread all over her body, that she is more sensitive to caresses and that her sensuality is rarely as direct, as immediate as man's.¹²

Although women's needs are not immediate as men's, they also have sensuous feelings and need of love. Kamala Das admits that sometimes her body is hungry for sex. In the poem entitled 'The Old Playhouse' she explores the hidden emotions of a woman about her sexuality.

It's only the wind knocking at the door, the sea
Is wild this morning, there is perhaps a high tide on.

(OP, 43)

Here in the poem the sea imagery describes the rising passion of her mind. When "the wind" means her lover knocking at the door "the wild sea" is eager to meet him. She compares herself to sea and the "high tide" symbolically stands for the increasingly passionate feelings of the poet.

She has spent a lot of time of her life with her best friend Carlo. Who has consoled as well as supported. She always remembers him. The poem 'The Wild Bougainvillae' depicts her solace and her destruction.

.... a few summer days
That passed slowly, and
Moodily, like mourners behind a bier. Days
When even my bed gave
No rest, but like a troubled sea, tossed me on
Its waves, and how I groaned
And moaned, and constantly yearned for a man from
Another town Then, by
And by, my love wilted, for I look long walks,
Walked roads I had never
Seen before, (OP, 30)

Boring days with Mr. Das passed slowly like summer days. These unpleasant days never bring peace in her life. She has used the suggestive imagery to highlight the tragic movements of her life. The

days of Kamala Das with her husband are like “mourners behind a bier”. Instead of giving rest, her bed tosses her like “a troubled sea”. She has tossed on “waves” that is to be with lovers she is constantly humiliated by her husband and lovers. She has “groaned” and “moaned” and searched for lovers throughout her life.

She has always been humiliated by them. Even her lovers cannot prove themselves to be ideal lovers. In ‘Gino’ she addresses her lover as ‘a krait’ through whom her life is full of darkness in which she has lost her way:

It was July, a July, full of rain, and darkness
Trapped like smoke, in the hollows of the sky, and
That lewd, steamy smell of rot, rising out of earth.

(OP, 13)

Her conscious mind never rejects her helplessness, the darker side of life. She understands that she is leading towards the decay of life. She is aware that he likes her body not love. It appears to be the same as the experience she has shared with her husband.

In ‘Convict’ she says:

there were no more
Words left, all words lay imprisoned
In the ageing arms of night. in
Darkness we grew as in silence
We sang, each note rising out of
Sea, out of wind, out of earth and
Out of each sad night like an ache (OP, 25)

Their physical union is completely disgusting Kamala Das never expected this. It is a deep pain of her life for which she never finds the solution.

In 'The Seashore' she writes about the passiveness of her husband from whom she never expects love.

Shall I forgive the days

..... or

forgive the crowds who come to you to talk, to plead
To argue, and gay brittle ones who flash such
Fake smiles at you and ask you for drinks or are asked
For drinks All those destroying ones who leave you by
Night, to lie so ravaged, so spent, like a sea shore

In empty hours under moon? Not knowing what

Else to do I kiss you eyes

.....

..... I see you go away from me

And feel the loss of love I never once received.

(OSKHS, 43)

Whenever she tries to get love from her lovers she is unsuccessful. Her Humiliation in search of ideal love is endless.

S. Murali writes:

.... it is one long, unending, stream of misery and sexual humiliation – an endless tale of a woman too much wronged by the obsessively male world around her.¹³

She constantly yearned for a lover from town to town. But it is not easy to find an ideal love. She takes a long walk. When Kamala Das seeks the lover for her, she forgets her husband.

While in search of an ideal lover she has a sexual relationship with a man. She writes about it in a poem entitled ‘An Apology to Goutama’:

When other eyes haunt my thoughts
.... haunts my ears, another face
My dreams, but in your arms I must today,
Lie and find an oasis where memories,
Sad winds do not so much blow (SC, 19)

When her husband's haunting memories make her restless she puts her body in the arms of Goutama. She finds an "Oasis" in the arms of her lover where the "sad winds", painful experiences, haven't touched her and she enjoys her life.

In many of her poems the sea imagery represents the different psychological moods of the poet. Whenever she is in a painful situation she looks towards the sea as her companion. The sea imagery is prominently used by her to present her troublesome life. In 'A half – day's be-witchment' she compares herself to sea to declare her destruction.

I am also sea that roars behind the house, roars out
Its passion at the high tide hour; but, later the ebb arrives
To tell different tale. I have, like the sea, some silt
At the core, some junk, the leavings of ships floundered in the night.

(CP, 46)

She is also like the sea, which roars behind the house and outside. Her passions are intense in which she has forgotten love. But later she understands that this way of searching love leads her to decay and degeneration.

Kamala Das says that her condition is the same as the sea, which is made dirty by a lot of useless material. Miserable, unbearable and unforgettable experiences spoiled her life in the same manner. Due to this she feels herself to be alone and misfit anywhere.

Kamala Das says that while playing the role of wife she was not happy with her life. But she pretended becoming “a happy woman” and a “happy wife”. In a poem entitled ‘The Suicide’ she represents her tiresome life full of the unwilling roles. She also describes her disturbed life, which leads her to think about suicide.

But,
I must pose.
I must pretend,
I must act the role
Of happy woman,
Happy wife.

I must keep the right distance
Between me and the low.
And I must keep the right distance,
Between me and the high.

O sea, I am fed up

I want to be simple

I want to be loved

And

If love is not to be had,

I want to be dead, just dead. (OP, 35)

Thus love is the essence of her life but she has acted the role of a happy woman and a happy wife. It is not the truth. It is a mask which she has worn to hide the pathos of her life. She has a compulsion to maintain the distance between lower class and high-class people. She dislikes playing the pretentious roles. She wants to enjoy the life being a simple woman.

Kamala Das complains about her losing patience, playing the deceptive roles in her tiresome life. She is unsuccessful to get love which is the dream of her life. She desires that she should be loved by

the lover or the husband. She has a desire that love should not be a skin-communicated thing. When the poet identifies that it is not possible here she wants “to be dead, just dead”. To urge the bitter utterance of her life she makes the sea her close companion.

Ramkrishnan E. V. says:

Since the poet cannot disinherit either the body or the soul and live with one of them, the whole climax of the poem saturates into the idea of suicide where the agency which can take away one of them is the sea, an old symbol of timelessness.¹⁵

The imagery of sea shows the overwhelming sense of frustration and unfulfillment leading to the final desire of death. In utter disgust, she says in ‘The Invitation’:

Oh sea, let me shrink or grow slosh up,

Slide down, go your way,

I will go mine (DS, 14)

Kamala das fears life which tossed her in different ways. She becomes helpless and upset to live. Her tossing is now very different

and unbearable than the waves of the sea. Her feelings are suppressed by many in different ways that makes her conscious negatively.

In 'Death Is So Mediocre' she writes:

Death is

So mediocre, any fool can achieve

It effortlessly. (OSKHS, 52)

She thinks that the death is never painful before her disgusting life. To live a life is a very hard to Kamala Das so far she feels that death easy than life.

As Kurup P.K. J. asserts:

The self devouring and the self mocking nature of experience of sexual love makes her death conscious because the self is rendered lonely, empty, lifeless and sterile by the sex without love.¹⁵

Whenever frustration overpowers her, whenever the life appears meaningless, she seeks life in death by considering the possibility of walking into the waves of sea 'In Composition' she writes:

All I want now
is to take a long walk
into the sea
and lie there, resting,
completely uninvolved. (OP, 9)

Kamala Das indulges herself in a dialogue not only with sea, but also with her absent lover. She would like to commit suicide.

The image of the sea is used as a companion and a killer. In search of ideal love, she becomes confused. She cannot separate the needs of body from the soul. In 'Suicide' she sublimates the soul which helps her to decide the supreme power of soul and the temporary existence of the body and its lust.

I throw the bodies out,
I cannot stand their smell.
Only the souls may enter
The vortex of the sea.
Only the souls know how to sing
At the vortex of the sea. (OP. 34)

The soul is never tempted by the outer things and never shaken in any condition. It proves the supremacy of the soul. Life is like a sea and the calamities; material temptations are like the “Vortex” of the sea. The soul has a power to enter in it and knows how to face the calamities of life and overcome them. But the sensual temptations attract the poetic persona and again she is caught in the past memories, thinking about her lover and his passionate movements in which she was involved. In the same poem she writes about her enjoyment with him.

The white man who offers
To help me forget,
The white man who offers
Himself as a stiff drink,
Is for me,
To tell the truth,
Only water.
Only pale-green pond
Glimmering in the sun.
In him I swim. (OP, 36)

The past memories of Kamala Das shook her again and again. It is possible for her to forget the memories of childhood and her great grandmother. While thinking about her lover she remembers that while taking a naked bath in a green pond, she was admonished by her grandmother who reminded her that she was an adult then and therefore she should not take a naked bath in the pond.

Kamala Das would like to swim in the love pond of her white friend who helps her to forget the haunting memories. In her autobiography '*My Story*' she delineates her experience of enjoyment in the arms of Carlo:

.... he offered himself as a stiff drink, he offered to help me forget and in the afternoon I lay in his white arms, drowsily glimmering in the sun. In him I swam, all broken with longing in his robust blood I floated, drying on my tears.¹⁶

Kamala Das's awareness of self is a reason behind her dual psychology. Her failure in life is often the reason of her double consciousness. Her swimming in childhood is joyous at the same time swimming in the lust of her lovers in adulthood is very torturous.

Kurup P. K. J. asserts about the imagery of swimming:

The images of swimming and drowning in this poem hint at the possibility of liberation, while swimming affords a kind of illusory freedom, drowning releases the soul to enter the vortex of the sea.¹⁷

Kamala Das visualizes this kind of escape in physical love. So far she prefers the soul which knows how to sing in a vortex of the sea.

At the end of the poem entitled 'The Suicide' she requests the sea:

Bereft of body

My soul shall be free.

Take in my naked soul

That he knew how to hurt.

Only the soul knows how to sing

At the vortex of the sea. (OP, 37)

She urges the sea to take her naked soul which is more vital than her body. The body's pleasure is temporary and destructive. The

joy of the soul is unshaken and permanent. The soul knows the eternal truth and true enjoyment of life.

Meena Surjit Singh says:

The “Vortex of the sea”, thus becomes a multivalent symbol defining a situation, a way of life, a pursuit that engulfs irresistibly and remorselessly, enervating and self-consuming. The sea itself of creation, destruction, hope, despair, passion, inertia, comes to symbolize the poets desire to discover “the bones supreme indifferent”.¹⁸

She compares her failure in life with sea. She writes in ‘Suicide’

O sea,

You generous cow,

You and I are big flops.

We are too sentimental. (OP, 37)

She becomes conscious of her life as a big flop. Her sentimental nature is responsible for her unsuccessful life.

The use of sea imagery in her poetry is focused by Brewster.

He says that Kamala Das,

.... opens with a reference to the sea, whose melancholy movement rolls throughout the poem and sweeps it on to its conclusion.¹⁹

Her heart is filled with sad emotions. In 'Maturity' she has drawn her own understanding of eternal truth.

The river of unhappiness to flow in
Towards the hearts restive ocean, the eyes
The ears, so that the breath, inhaled yields its
True meaning, each exhalation then becomes
A sacrifice to honour what is, or
What may well be, worthier than life itself. (CP, 48)

Misery of her life is like a river which flows towards the "hearts restive ocean". Her heart weeps and then gets relaxation.

Due to the maturity of the eternal truth of life Kamala Das advises to newcomers regarding the problems of life and their solutions in 'Advice to fellow swimmers' Kamala Das advises:

When you learn to swim
Do not enter a river that has no ocean
To flow into, one ignorant of destinations
And knowing only the flowing as its destiny,
Like the weavy rivers of the blood
That bear the scum of ancient memories. (CP, 100)

Her suggestion to youngsters is important. Swimming as the involvement in physical lust is not the permanent truth. It has no firm, fixed and secured root. Lust is temporary. She has experienced it. Again she says:

but go swim in the sea,
go swim in the great blue sea
where the first tide you meet is your body,
that familiar pest,
but if you learn to cross it
you are safe, yes, beyond it you are safe,
for, even sinking would make no difference then (CP, 100)

'Sea' imagery in the poems of Kamala Das plays a very specific role to express her various thoughts of pleasure, pain and suicide and the experiences which she has enjoyed in childhood and in adulthood. In 'suicide' Kamala Das writes about the freedom of swimming in the pond of innocence. She looks at swimming as sexuality in the arms of her lover Carlo. It is the way of resolution from her personal crisis.

According to Kamala Das sea is the bedroom where everyone wants to swim to get physical and emotional contentment. Once a person crosses the stage of temptation then he becomes safe in life. But Kamala herself cannot desist from this temporary physical attraction. Her mind leads towards it again and again. In 'suicide' she admits her happiness in the game of lust.

O sea, I am happy swimming

Happy, happy, happy.....

The only movement I know well

Is certainly the swim.

.....

In him I swim

All broken with longing

In his robust blood I float

Drying off my tears. (OP, 36-37)

She cannot hide her desire of fulfilling the physical lust. Her sensitive mind is attracted towards it. But she also has a need or mental stability and an ideal love. Her sensitive mind is bitterly humiliated by her husband and lovers. Whenever she has the negative and painful memories she thinks about death. In '*My Story*' she says:

Often I have toyed with the idea of drowning myself to be rid of my loneliness, which is not unique in any way but is natural to all, I have wanted to find rest in the sea an escape from involvements.²¹

She cannot hold her husband and his egoistic nature. He is not a loving husband that she dreams of in her life.

In '*Suicide*' she writes:

Holding you is easy

Clutching at moving water,

I tell you, sea,

This is easy,

But to hold him for half a day
Was a difficult task.
It required drinks
To hold him down.
To make him love.
But, when he did love,
Believe me,
All I could do was sob like a fool. (OP, 37)

He has a habit of enjoying her body but he never loves her, which is what she really needs. A. N. Dwivedi rightly asserts:

.... she herself is the holder of 'water' as she, too is a mother yearning for peace, happiness and security. But her 'water' is not sufficient for a drunkard like him, so he needs 'drinks' to make himself warm and jubilant.²²

While describing the nature imagery many of her poems have focused on her attachment with different cities and her bitter experiences in them. Cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Colombo and the loveable place Malabar have been described by her from

different points of view. Her happiness, miseries, revolt are all related to these cities.

In 'Farewell to Bombay' she exposes her intense feelings towards the city of Bombay.

I take leave of you, fair city, while tears
Hide somewhere in my adult eyes
And sadness is silent as a stone
In the rivers unmoving
Core

It's goodbye, goodbye, goodbye,
To slender shapes behind windowpanes
Shut against indiscriminate desires
And rain. (SC, 39)

Leaving Bombay is an unhappy moment for her. Her sadness is silent as like "a stone" in the river emotions. The repetition of the word 'goodbye' represents her attachment with the city and painful departure. The city forms an integral part of the emotional make up of the poet. Regarding this K. Radha comments:

In 'Farewell to Bombay' she is grieved at the prospect of leaving 'The fair city'. The city where slender shapes peer behind closed windowpanes, where flesh-hungry birds circle in the sky with shrill and hostile cries, and where crowds gather near the sea, talking endlessly.²³

Kamala Das has lived in such metropolitan cities and her poems and autobiography sketches the experiences of the city life. The city life is torturous for her. She has always been hungry for humane treatment. However, the city constantly reduced her to a sexual object. it is the inseparable part of her writing.

A. N. Dwivedi remarks:

Mrs. Das is a poet not so much of the countryside as of the city ... the city is an integral part of her existence and she can't shake off its impressions and memories easily.²⁴

She cannot forget Calcutta due to her harassment. In '*My Story*' she writes about her fear of Calcutta.

There were at least a dozen men deeply infatuated with me. And, yet I feared Calcutta. I longed to escape from it.²⁵

Her whole life is a painful existence for her which tortures her continuously. She discovers herself and exposes the different layers of hypocrisy of the society the different layers of hypocrisy of the society in which the whole womanhood has been lost.

Women are humiliated by men and they never know that they are enforcing oppression on women in their family life. Women ignore it and sometimes they are unconscious about their suppression. But a poetic persona never neglects it and stands against all these inhuman treatment given to women.

Kamala Das's writing is the powerful media of focusing the issues. Images of nature in her poems are very appropriate and effective. Every corner of her life is impressively drawn by these images. When Kamala Das lies near Carlo, a white Englishman, she becomes aware of the colour difference. While explaining her dark colour she has used a very appropriate imagery, "a dark fruit on silver platter" (Gino). She enjoys sex with him but not ever be happy with life. She says that her life is like a caged life, which makes her "a dwarf". (The Old Playhouse) Her conscious mind is never ready to

accept the bounds of the husband and the society. She has a dream to get freedom and reach towards “pathways of the sky”. (The Old Playhouse)

Her struggle starts from the physical lust and may take her to eternal truth. She avoids the rules for woman made by the society. She accepts the way of adultery and “swim” in it as she likes. It gives her full of pleasure. Her lover is as like a “sun” in his hot weather of lust she melts and destroys her life too. These images sometimes focus the opposite meanings. Sun is the symbol of passionate feelings and is a destroyer too.

The images like bird, air, sun, sea, rain have different meaning for her. She draws different pictures of her husband, lovers and herself using these images.

Sunanda P. Chavan writes:

The image of ‘sun’ is an integral part of her love experience while the birds like bats, herons, swallows and crows project different shades of her subjective responses.²⁶

As a confessional poet she admits her desire of making love in as intense a manner as her lover. He is a hot sun and she becomes “a forest fire” very sensuous in love. On the contrary the lover is very

forceful like “a river” and she becomes silent like “Ocean”. Her life is tossed by different problems.

Kamala Das’s poems are very sensuous in nature but due to the different images it impacts on the mind of reader. These images give the specific mode to her writing. Her psychological ups and downs are carved by these troublesome nature elements.

She is exploited by many men and it creates trouble in her life. She compares herself to “a troubled sea” (The Wild Bougainvillae) and both are “a big flops” (Suicide. CP, 36). She feels that her existence is only to entertain men. In search of ideal love, she lost her youth and her self. But her search is futile, she never gets anything except sexual and mental harassment. The sea is her close companion to open her heart and console herself. All her feelings are shared with the sea. Sea is the image of her companion and the deep feelings of lust in which she would like to swim. At the same time it symbolizes her weakness and helplessness. Her frustration is highlighted by the imagery of sea.

Sunanda P. Chavan says:

The poet's lack of stamina to transcend the sufferings of the self corresponds with the lack of stamina to delve deep into the symbolic value of the image of sea. Of course, sea now provides a satisfying objective correlative to concretize the psyche's sufferings. 'The Invitation' is the poet's struggle to keep up her faith in life in spite of the betrayal by a particular lover although there is irresistible temptation to end life in the sea. The image of sea provides a valuable means to project the inner conflict between faith and despair. Here is the sea a physical reality; inviting her, and here is the sea of mind trying to resist the fatal invitation.²⁷

Nature elements in her poetry celebrate her divided self, her urge of getting freedom, her feminine consciousness and hollowness of her life. Her joys and pains are universalized through these images. She also celebrates her motherhood with nature. Every part of the nature becomes conscious about her painful existence. Love, lust and pain are the basic ideas of her poetry but the nature elements create the variations in her writing. Her world of imagery is very broad in area. It links her childhood to motherhood; love to lust, Joy to pain. It also relates the physical to psychic. The imagery explores her domestic stresses, sensuous feelings, labour pains and her disturbed psyche as well.

Due to this her suppressed mind thinks about her nothingness in the world, her physical torture in her journey of lust. Later on she acknowledges that it is her own mistake that she uses her body as a weapon to receive love. Later on she thinks of love beyond body. In 'Anamalai Poems X' she writes:

There is a love greater than all you know
That awaits you where the red road finally ends
its patience proverbial; not for it
the random caress or the lust
that ends in languor. (OSKHS, 111)

In this journey of searching love her body and mind both severely wounded. According to her body pains are temporary and curable but the wounds of mind are very hard and difficult to tolerate and cure. Physical pains can come to an end after death so for poetic persona committing suicide is an easy way to rescue herself from this unbearable life. Some of her poems 'Death Is So Mediocre', 'Suicide', and 'Life's obscure Parallel' highlight her inner struggle regarding her unbearable life.

Life's obscure parallel is death. Quite often
I wonder if what I seem to do is living
Or dying. A little of each is in every
Gesture, both my mind's and my body's. Inside
My throat that inward breath combats the outside.
One. And the sights, seen, reside not outside
But within. (Life's Obscure Parallel. OSKHS, 83)

Her life is worse than living. For Kamala Das her life is, life in death and death in life. She feels that her breathing and her body movements are mechanical activities. Her condition is very critical that no one understands.

Because of this neurotic condition she is incapable of finding the proper way. She wants to release herself from her disturbed emotions, frustration, feelings of guilt and suicide. She turns to mythology. It shows her a proper way to lighten the burden of her heart. Her turning to mythology represents her evolution of the self from the physical to the spiritual.

: End Notes :

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Mythology and literature have a close relationship. Writers cannot keep themselves away from the impact of myths and the mythological images from them. They go to ancient Indian cults, legends and tales and read into them a new meaning. They find new concepts in old myths. In the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojni Naidu, Toru Dutta, Shri Aurbindo, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das and others, the reader finds their attraction to God and Goddesses. They are interested in spiritual things. Using of these mythic stories and characters they develop their ideas of life.

Pre-independence Indian English poets have described the mythic images Satyawana and Savitri to sketch the pure and strong man-woman relationship. Shri Aurbindo has focused on the mythological character Urvasi, who is a courtesan in heaven. She has beauty and the mannerism that attracts any man. Lord Shiva, Krishna, figures from Mahabharata are the central figures in writing of Rabindranath Tagore. He is highly impressed by “Bhagwat Geeta” and the philosophy of life, which is narrated by Lord Krishna. For him Krishna is a transcendental significance.

In the opinion of Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das, Radha-Krishna relationship is highly ideal. But both have narrated their story in different ways. Sarojini Naidu never depicts Krishna as her lover but as her God who is omniscient and omnipotent and is the central principle of this universe. She writes in high serious tone and becomes a devotee of Lord Krishna. On the contrary Kamala Das offers Lord Krishna as a lover, yearning for love. Krishna as her “Mate” who comes to her in “Myriad forms”. She describes the restless anxiety and pain that Radha experiences in waiting for Krishna. But Das’s appeal is highly personal.

Radha-Krishna relationship is a relation between Atman and Brahman. Radha is not anti-sexual. Yet sex is not the primary concern in the poems of Sarojini Naidu. Their meeting takes place at a platonic level. She is not looking at their union from the physical point of view. These mythic images are judged by the writers as divine images and never to be compared with the nature of human being.

Kamala Das is one of the writers who uses these images in relation to the human feelings and needs. Sex and love are the basic concepts of her poetry. Her love themes are decorated through the

Radha-Krishna attachment, which was unconventional in the Indian culture. Sex in her poems is deep and intense physical union and not devotional. Radha-Krishna and their love is very much concerned with human passions. She generalizes these divine images and connects them to human being.

The theme of love emphasizes the man-woman relationship, female biological experiences, mythological allusions, feminine sensibilities and her search for identity. Uses of different images are related to her search of self in a patriarchal society. It moves from the physical to the spiritual. Having been dissatisfied with her husband and lovers she becomes crazy in search of an ideal love. In her journey of self-location she has many bitter experiences. She is unsuccessful to find it in the world. Becoming nervous due to the selfish world Kamala Das turns to the mythological images, which are attractive for her from her childhood. She attains a balanced state of mind when she discovers that her situation is similar to Radha and Meera. Her choice of these images expresses her feminine consciousness. Some of her poems and her autobiography focus on her spiritual progress the desperate involvement and defeats that

constitute her vision of the self and that of the ideal lover. As she writes in her autobiography '*My Story*':

I was wanted in those days, loved as men love their women, but I yearned for an ideal lover. I was looking for one who went to Mathura and forgot to return to his Radha. Perhaps I was seeking the cruelty that lies in the depths of a man's heart. Otherwise why did I not get my peace in the arms of my husband? Subconsciously I hoped for the death of my ego. I was looking for an executioner whose axe would cleave my head into two. The ones who loved me did not understand why I was restive. You are like a civet cat in a cage, said a friend of mine looking at me walk up and down biting my nails. Take some gin, he said. It will quiet your nerves you are always dissatisfied, cried my husband. Only I can understand you, said my Italian friend, come away with me¹

She is defeated by her husband and lovers in different ways. Whom so ever she loved they never understood her properly. She is tired in search of love. It is a futile journey of her life. Everyone aroused in her, more than love. They have a strong sense of pity for her. Her unsafe and tortured body feels the need of the warm arms of a lover. She wants to be free from this temporary and weak relationship. Her soul turns humble for change. She has invented a

means of transcendence from the real to the fictional and the fantastic, from the mortal to the immortal. She is able to discover for herself the centre of her own self where the time-ridden, flux – begotten, self attains immortality. In ‘composition’ she says:

The ultimate discovery will be
that we are immortal,
the only things mortal being
systems and arrangements,
even our pains continuing
in the devours who constitute
the world. Even
oft-repeated moves
of every scattered cell
will give no power
to escape
from cages of involvement
I must linger on,
trapped in immortality,
my only freedom being the freedom to
discompose. (OP, 10)

Her varied experiences lead Kamala Das to celebrate the physical world as well as the spiritual. She makes the body and the spirit complementary to each other and these, in turn, lead to the illuminated vision of God. After having enjoyed the sensual life she knows the ultimate truth that she has lost her way in the veil of Maya. She discovers that the outward appearance of objects is not the reality; the reality is the essential soul, the Brahma that only matters. She is influenced by the Hindu world-view and recognizes that the passion of body is temporary.

In 'Anamalai poems X' she says:

There is a love greater than all you know
that awaits you where the red road finally ends
its patience proverbial, not for it
that random caress or the lust
that ends in languor. (OSKHS, 111)

At last she comes out from the world of maya and declares that spiritual love is greater than other things which are related to the body's pleasure. She thinks of love beyond flesh.

The body is mortal and soul is immortal. Love is not only physical but also spiritual. So we cannot separate the body from the soul. She writes in her poem entitled 'Suicide':

Bereft of soul

My body shall be bare

Bereft of body

My soul shall be bare (CP, 71)

Kamala Das is influenced by the theory of Karma and Moksha. She admits that she has committed the sin of adultery. As she has no chance to purify her soul and get Moksha. 'The Descendants' brings out her sense of spiritualism and her fear of salvation:

None will step off his cross

Or show his wounds to us no god lost in

Silence shall begin to speak, no lost love

Claim us, no we are not going to be

Ever redeemed, or made new. (CP, 44)

Kamala Das explains that a man is responsible and pays for what he does not only in this life, but in the future lives as well. However to achieve Moksha one must get rid of all the Karmas. She always believes that Mukti of the soul relates to the deed done by the person. A man is responsible for all his deeds, good or bad. She is conscious that the sin of adultery closed the door of Moksha for her. A man or a woman who commits a sin in whatever form it can't be "redeemed" or "made new". Kamala Das has committed the sin and has knowledge that she does not have a chance of salvation.

Whatever happened in her life including the mistakes she made was the need of the hours. It might have been the sin in the attitude of society but for Kamala Das it is the way of searching ideal love. Meena Surjit Singh says:

She herself is priest and confessor, saint and
sinner, beloved and betrayed.²

She plays different roles in her life and confesses her illicit relations. Paradoxically she calls herself "a sinner" as well as a "a

saint”, she is betrayed by her lovers. She represents the victimized woman in the society.

The social exploitation of the female by the male is always done for his self-gratification. She is suppressed everywhere. Even the religion never provides her support. Devadasi is physically, mentally harassed by blemished religious rules. In ‘Lines Addressed to Devadasi’ Kamala Das describes the pathetic condition of a Devadasi, a courtesan dedicated to god. Men use her, defile her and discard her under the name of religion and culture. No one will give her a place in his life. She is a helpless woman played with by everyone. She knocks the door of men and God to ask about her loss. Kamala Das locates herself in the image of Devadasi.

Ultimately there comes a time

When all faces look alike

All voices sound similar

All trees and lakes and mountains

Appear to bear common signature.

It is then that you walk past your friends

And not recognize

And hear their questions but pick
No meaning out of words
It is then that your desires cease
And homesickness begins
And you sit on the temple's steps
A silent Devadasi, lovelorn
And aware of her destiny ...(CP, 101)

Being humiliated by men she loses her faith in marriage and love. Her tortured, painful mind feels that all faces look alike. Every man whom she loved is the same in nature and in treatment. Everyone treats her in an inhuman way and talks to her in an indifferent manner. After the physical union and their fulfillment of lust they depart. It is her solace after her loneliness in life. It is a very brutal time for a woman who is fondled by men and left alone afterwards. Her hidden desire for love can't be expressed. For her there is no other way but to sit on the temple's steps like "a silent Devadasi" and look towards the dark future. Devadasi is aware of her painful, insecure future but can't reject it. Because she is a woman and chained in different ways.

Religion, culture, social institutions and norms shape the different images of woman from the male point of view. Woman is 'a devi, deaf and dumb, always waiting for Bhakta's' 'a Pativrata' – a life for husband. Shaping the ideal image of women, the society builds a very strong wall of morality around her which she cannot break. Pativratas like Sita, Savitri, Uma and others are presented before, the Indian woman as the ideals to be emulated. Kamala Das was never attracted towards these images because these images are matchless in her philosophy of life.

Radha – Krishna is the ideal pair for Kamala Das. No one is as good as Krishna who lives in the heart of every Indian girl or woman. Radha is not a divine figure but a human being and has the same passions. Radha's love for Krishna after marriage is unorthodoxical but she doesn't fear and lose her faith. Radha is a supportive mythical image for Kamala Das to draw herself in different shades and colours. In her interview with Eunice De Souza she explains her choice of Radha and Krishna:

I thought nobody would be as good as Krishna. I believed that until ten years ago, until I realized Krishna too could be myth. I've moved away from temples and religions, no edifice can contain God. Religions have an expiry date. If you move

away from religion, you go closer to God. The myths are like costumes, you don't need them. Religion is not relevant. I love the character Radha I always think of her waiting for him who never came back. I don't think any love is completely reciprocated. In one of my stories, Radha smeared sandalwood paste on her breasts and fell asleep, and when she woke up, he still hadn't come and the sandalwood paste was dry. She felt such was a waste of sandalwood. I understand her. I see her as a human being.³

Her choice of mythical characters is not presenting her religious mind. Religion and spiritualism are different things. Moving away from religion a person easily goes closer to god. She loves Radha. She is not a goddesses or a divine figure but a common woman who waits for an ideal lover Lord Krishna and surrender her life to him.

In 'The Cobwebs' she writes:

Do not look into Radha's eyes O friends
For her soul lies dead inside
As cobwebs block the doorways, unused,
Grief now mars her lonely eyes
He has been gone for years, that Krishna who
Once was hers alone. Perhaps

Another holds him now, a lovelier and
More fortunate one. And yet
Poor Radha must live on, for life is long.

(OSKHS, 123)

According to Kamala Das for Radha Krishna is her's but in reality Krishna is a lover for her Gopi's but even Radha thinks only about Krishna throughout her life.

Love is a the soul of Kamala Das's poem but due to the use of mythical figures her love poetry is divided into two phases. In the first phase her obsessive concern with physical love is quite prominent, in the second we notice her drift towards ideal love. By ideal love she means the kind of relation that exists between Radha and Krishna. She yearns for a love which does not obstruct the impulse to freedom. She emphasizes the concept of ideal love in a poem entitled 'The Old Playhouse':

..... love is Narcissus at the water's edge, haunted
By its own lonely face, and yet it must seek at last
An end, a pure, total freedom, it must will the mirrors
To shatter and the kind night to erase the water(OP, 1 -2)

In ancient mythology, Narcissus is a young handsome man. Who sees his reflection in water of a pool and falls in love with himself. He has a fruitless desire for a sexual union with himself. He becomes weaker and weaker till his death.

In the poem she uses this mythology of Narcissus to show the arrogant behaviour of her husband towards her. At every moment he tells her only about himself and his need of bodily pleasure. As she writes in her poem entitled 'The Old Playhouse':

.....but every
lesson you gave was about yourself, you were pleased
with my body's response..... (OP, 1)

His selfish treatment creates loneliness in her life. Mr. Das is responsible for his own unhappy married life just as Narcissus's unnatural desire leads him to his own tragic death.

In the narcissistic phase, the lovers do not outgrow their ego, which stands as a hurdle preventing their merger. They are chained in self-admiration. But it is not a permanent phase as it must undergo water mutation of the mirrors and the drying of the seeking "total

freedom”. It is in the next phase of ideal love that the lovers transgress the boundaries of their ego or narrow selves to merge with each other; as such a merger ensures total freedom. The poet beholds such an exemplary relationship in the love between Radha and Krishna, the ideal lovers.

Kamala Das never finds the ideal love in her whole life. Everyone whom she loves, loves her physically. Both, her lovers as well as her husband are violent in sex. They are not lovers like Krishna but the seducers of her body. A poem ‘Convicts’ is the bitter criticism of animal sex. For them love is:

That was the only kind of love,
This hacking at each other’s parts
Like convicts hacking, breaking clods
At noon. (OP, 25)

She wants to escape from this world of lust. Due to these unbearable incidents in her life, her mind is shattered. She always lives simultaneously in two worlds, the actual world, where love is

usually lust, in her words “skin-communicated love” (In Love OP, 15) and the Mythical world of Vrindavan.

Kamala Das’s futile exercise to search an ideal love in every partner turns her to the mythical world of Krishna and Vrindavan for lasting love and fulfillment. She imagines herself to be Radha and finds comfort in the arms of an imaginary Krishna. Her relation with Krishna is purely human. Further she experiences absolute liberty from the rigid social code and the constraints of super ego in the presence of Krishna.

Krishna, in psychological terms,

----- encourages the individual to identify with an ideal primal self, released from all social and super ego, constraints. Krishna’s promise, like that of Dionysus in ancient Greece is one of utter freedom and instinctual exhilaration.⁴

Krishna promises total freedom and releases a person from confused psychology. She is very faithful to Lord Krishna. The haunting image of Krishna is inscribed in her mind. She remembers him in every moment of her life – at bridal night, in pregnancy, in delivery, in sickness and also while playing with her son.

After seeking the immortal world of love and ideal lover Lord Krishna, she escapes from the selfish world and enters the world of innocence through her firm belief and recollection. Thus identifying herself with Radha and Meera, she is subconsciously finding a justification for her quest for love outside marriage. She wants to be free from all the human bondages like Radha and Meera.

In her serious illness Kamala Das recognizes the truth of life. Thoughts of Krishna console her and encourage her to live a peaceful life. In her autobiography '*My story*' she writes:

Free from that last of human bondage, I turned to Krishna. I felt that the show had ended and the auditorium was empty. Then he came, not wearing crown, not wearing make-up, but making a quiet entry. What is the role you are going to play, I asked Him. Your face seems familiar. I am not playing any role, I am myself, he said. In the old playhouse of my mind, in its echoing hollowness, his voice was sweet. He had come to claim me, ultimately. Thereafter he dwelt in my dreams.⁵

In her serious illness her tired mind turned to Lord Krishna. Hollowness of her mind was filled with her faith in Krishna. He dwelt in her dreams.

Kamala Das glorifies Radha's eternal waiting for Lord Krishna and assumes that she has the same feelings and anxiety like Radha. Intensity of her love and that of Radha's is described in 'Radha':

The long waiting
Had made their bond so chaste, and all the doubting
And the reasoning
So that in his first true embrace, she was girl
And virgin crying
Everything in me
is melting, even the hardness at the core
O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting
Nothing remains but
you. (CP, 68)

Kamala Das praises Radha who has been long waiting for Krishna and never loses her faith. She never fears the criticism of the society, because their bond is chaste and ideal.

Every woman's "long waiting" is the waiting for the ideal husband which makes the marriage a chaste bond. She is a virgin in the embrace of her husband at first night. But she is crying due to the

painful sex act. Kamala Das never forgets her wedding night, which gives her a lot of shocking experiences. She wants to be stable in her mind so she prays to Lord Krishna.

In '*My Story*' she writes:

----- without warning he fell on me, surprising me by the extreme brutality of the attack. I tried unsuccessfully to climb out of his embrace. ----- I begged him to think of God. This is our wedding night, we should first pray to Krishna, I said.⁶

Praying to Lord Krishna Kamala Das gets comfort and strength. She recalls Lord Krishna to provide sufficient energy in order to bear the pain in the act of lovemaking. The repetition of the word "melting" heightens the sense of pain and suffering. She expects emotional communion, which she never gets throughout her life. Her husband has failed to prove himself an ideal lover. Marriage for her is "skin's lazy hungers" (*The Freaks*) which fails to satisfy the soul's lonely hungers. Her life is planned by her parents, relatives and the society which she cannot avoid. '*The Maggots*' harshly describes her helplessness in the face of reality.

Sunset, on the river bank, Krishna
Loved her for the last time and left.
That night in her husband's arms, Radha felt
so dead that he asked, what is wrong,
do you mind my kisses love, and she said
no, not at all, but thought, what is
it to the corpse if the maggots nip? (TD, 2)

The woman has a dream of warmth of relationship and a safe place for her. But his contact with her is so hot that the woman's feelings as well as her self are destroyed.

The poet identifies herself with Radha, but unlike Radha, she feels a sense of boredom and loss with another male partner. She is reduced to the condition of a corpse. The male nibbler of the soul is compared to maggot, which nips at the cold, dead body of the beloved.

Radha's revolt against the social constraints attracts the attention of the poet. Radha braves social storms to get the love of Krishna. She is never frightened to express her love for him. Kamala Das also crosses the bonds of the society and seeks love outside

marriages. She takes the support of mythological figures Radha and Krishna. She does not necessarily propagate the institution of infidelity, but seems to be merely searching for a relationship, which gives both genuine mythical framework to her search of true love, and identifies it with the Radha – Krishna syndrome or with that of Mirabai relinquishing the ties of marriage in pursuit of Lord Krishna, the true divine lover.

Human relationships are temporary and complicated. Her unsatisfactory married life, unsuccessful love affairs and repeated illnesses make her think about the meaning of life, love and God. She understands these things in unbearable situations as she writes in '*My Story*':

In actuality who is he? Who am I? Who are these three boys who call themselves my children? We are burdened with perishable bodies which are also unreal, and perishable. The only relationship that is permanent is the one, which we form with God. My mate is He. He shall come to me in myriad shapes. In many shapes shall I surrender to His desire. I shall be fondled by Him I shall be betrayed by Him. I shall pass through all the pathways of this world, condemning none, understanding all and then become part of Him. Then for me there shall be no return journey ...⁷

After considering the mortality of the body and momentary relationships finally she concludes that God is her mate and comes to her in different shapes. Once a man is involved in the spiritual world, he never turns to temporary worldly things therefore she writes that there shall be “no return journey”.

Kamala has a tremendous courage to accept her guilt in the Indian context. Changing the sex partners is an act of sin from the point of view of the society but she never hides it. In a poem entitled ‘The Descendants’ she writes:

We have spent our youth in a gentle sinning
Exchanging some insubstantial love and
Often thought we were hurt, but no pain in
Us could remain, no bruise could scar or
Even slightly mar our cold loveliness (CP, 44)

She admits that she has sinned in her youth. She has had extra-marital relations with many persons. She is conscious about this but she never tries to protect herself from the bitter comment of society.

Because whatever she has done is her spiritual quest. In 'An Introduction' she says:

I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys, which are not yours, no
Aches, which are not yours. I too call myself, I. (OP, 27)

The lines portray her personal crisis. Her preoccupation is entirely with her self-distress as well as the darker sides of her passion. She is conscious of her divided 'self'. She is "sinner" because she has had an extra marital relationship. She is a "saint" because she is in search of true love. Therefore, she seeks a happy relationship in future by accepting herself as both a sinner as well as a saint.

Having accepted her sins, unconsciously her mind turns to metaphysical issues. Her inner voice recognizes her own mistakes. Getting an ideal lover through physical relationships is wrong as she writes in 'Drama':

I am wronged, I am wronged,

I am so wronged ----- (OP, 49)

The repetition of the word “wronged” suggests her consciousness of fruitless love for which she goes door to door and makes herself “a coin” in the hands of many. And further she requests in ‘A Souvenir of Bone’:

-----if I am sinner, please

Forgive my sins. If I am innocent, forgive my

Innocence. In his wild arms where I rest today

There will once be the gross air, nothing else. They will

Burn me then on a log and pick for each grieving son

A souvenir of bone. (CP, 33)

Her adultery is a sin from the social point of view. So she requests them to forgive her sins and innocence. She is aware of the mortality of the body which is burned after the death and kept as a reminder. She is conscious that she has committed sins for the body

pleasures are momentary. Which will end with the destruction of body.

Due to the realization of unforgivable adultery, agonized failures in life, her frustrated mind leads her to think of committing suicide. But her faith in God prevents her to do that. It is the time when she needs to balance her disturbed psychology. In fact, God is the psychological necessity of every man. So, man has kept God alive and God is the part of man's consciousness. It happens with Kamala Das as well. Whenever she thinks of Krishna, Radha and Meera she feels relaxed. She tries to glorify her search of love as nothing but the spiritual quest like Radha and Meera. Meena Surjit Singh says:

-----her Krishna poems assume a greatest significance as embodying not a desperate plea for sexual communion, but for Krishna's ethics of self – reliance.⁸

She is crazy to achieve love beyond body, beyond a transitoriness of lust. Almost a transformation has taken place in her attitude of life, love and her vision. In 'Krishna' she celebrates her spiritual love:

Your body is my prison, Krishna,

I cannot see beyond it.

Your darkness blinds me,

Your love words shut out the wise world's din.(CP, 75)

Lord Krishna's body itself is her prison. She is a prisoner of him. Now her painful body and soul are never ready to think of lust, she cannot go beyond it. Krishna is everything for her. His love and support closes the world's weary things. She alerts herself from the dull things and temptations.

Lord Krishna impresses every Indian virgin. He is a protector of virgins; he saves their life from Satan, Narakasur. It is the mythology about him, which impacts on the mind of every woman. Kamala Das is in a similar condition. She is not ready to come back to her lustful world. Her imaginary world of Krishna and His love provides her permanent sense of fulfilling love and secured life. She says in 'Ghanshyam':

Ghanashyam,

You have like a koel built your nest in the arbour of my heart.

My life, until now a sleeping jungle is at last astir with music.

You led me along a route I have never known before

But at each turn when I near you

Like a spectral flame you vanish

The flame of my prayer lamp holds captive my future

I gaze into the red eye of death

The hot stare of truth unveiled. (CP. 93)

Kamala Das tells Ghanashyam that he has built a nest in the garden of her heart and that her life is now stirring with the sounds of music. Ghanashyam she says has been leading her along a route, which she had never known before. That every time, when she thinks of come close to him, he simply disappears. She goes on to say that life is bearable because of him.

Again her mind turns to the thought of death. It is the eternal truth no one can escape from. In '*My Story*' she asserts:

I have been for year's obsessed with the idea of death. I have come to believe that life is a mere dream and that death is the only reality. It is endless stretching before and beyond our human existence. To slide into it will be to pick up a new significance. Life has been, despite all emotional involvements, as I ineffectual as writing on moving water. We have been mere participants in someone else's dream.⁹

In the same poem 'Ghanshyam' at the ending lines her mind turns to Ghanshyam:

Shyam, O Ghanshyam

You have like a fisherman cast your net in the narrows

Of my mind

And towards you my thoughts today

Must race like enchanted fish (CP, 94)

Krishna is like a "fisherman" in whose net of spiritual love, her mind is trapped. She humanizes the image of Krishna as her lover. Whenever she lies with her husband and her lovers she imagines that it is Ghanshyam who is making love to her. It is this fantasy which used to console herself during the painful relations, her restless psyche

involves in the various imaginative shapes of Krishna. Niranjan Mohanty writes about her feminine sensibility and her diversion to mythic character:

Das tries to reveal her personality genuinely feminine – through her poetry. But the personality is likely to be influenced and shaped by the forces the deposits of culture lie sedimented in her personality and hence she tries to rise to a height of mystical union with the invisible lover Lord Krishna. Such a willing acceptance of the ideal transcendental lover Lord Krishna is no doubt the result of the impact of the oriental vision of transcendentalism and mysticism. This is perhaps, one of the many avenues of life which help overcome the problems of life.¹⁰

In 'A Phantom Lotus' Kamala Das writes:

----- I

seek but another way to know

Him who has no more a body

To offer, and whose blue face is

A phantom lotus on the waters of my dreams ...(CP, 92)

Her spiritual quest is indicated in her poems and her autobiography from time to time. She is a unorthodoxical woman but her inner 'I' never parts from the belief in Lord Krishna.

Meera is a married woman but emotionally she is married to Lord Krishna. Running through all scandalous and promiscuous relations with Him, she never thinks to depart and never forgets. Her unshaken soul binds herself with Him. Kamala Das weds him as Meera weds. Her passionate feeling is expressed by her in '*My Story*':

Through the smoke of the incense I saw the
beauteous smile of my Krishna. Always,
always, I shall love you. I told him, not
speaking aloud but willing him to hear me
only you will be my husband, only your
horoscope will match mine ...¹¹

Kamala Das's choice of Radha and Meera focuses on her psychology. She gets her psychological comfort when she compares herself to Radha and Meera. She never highlights the mythological ideal women like Sita, Savitri who are well known as Pativratas. Draupadi a character from Mahabharata is wedded to five pandavas but she is considered to be a pativrata like Sita and Savitri. Radha becomes a great symbol of Abhisarika. Radha is recognized for her

extraordinary devotion for Krishna. Having married the other man against her will she never lets her love for Krishna diminish.

Kamala Das has an inner urge to rise above the more earthly love and find the way of eternal love. Coming out from the physical and the carnal lust the poet finds the love of Radha and Krishna in a poem entitled 'Radha-Krishna':

This becomes from this hour

Over river and this old Kadamba

Tree, ours alone for our homeless

Souls to return someday

To hang like bats from its pure physically ...(SC, 37)

She compares her solitary mind with "a homeless soul". In the physical world the soul forgets the way. It needs purity and nobility. Physical lust traps her person and destroys her life. Kamala Das's soul is trying to get spiritual satisfaction, she fills her heart with the divine love of Lord Krishna.

Every woman has the same feelings like Kamala Das who dreams about the ideal husband like Ghanshyam. She expects her

husband to become Krishna who protects her life and makes love to her. Her poem 'Vrindavan' justifies the hidden, inexpressible emotions and the will of every woman about her husband.

Vrindavan lives on, in every woman's mind
and the flute, luring her
from home and husband ...(OSKHS, 101)

Every woman's love for her husband is more than physical but he takes interest in her body without understanding her emotional needs. Every woman is like Radha who depicts the picture of her Krishna. The ideal picture of husband like Krishna is deeply rooted in her mind. Kamala Das clarifies the dream of every virgin in her article "I Studied All Men":

I was entirely without lust. I hoped that someday as I lay with a man, somewhere beneath the bone, at a deadend spot, a contact would be made and that afterwards each moment of my life became meaningful. I looked for the beautiful Krishna in every man. Every Hindu girl is in reality wedded to Lord Krishna.¹²

Kamala Das's endless waiting for love is futile. Her desire of getting spiritual union is not fulfilled. So that she consciously selects the mythical characters Radha, Krishna and Meera.

Devindra Kohli explains the reason of selection of these images by women writers:

In searching for mythic ancestresses women poets reject images glorified by the male imagination, such as Aphrodite, Helen and Eve – those dual natured archetypes of Beauty, Virgin, Seducers and Purveyors of man's joy and destruction. Instead they find their psychological lies with such figures as Leda, Cassandra and Lot's wife – all victims of the gods or society struggling to comprehend their circumstances and to express themselves.¹³

Kamala Das's intention is to focus on her spiritual quest. But the Indian readers are interested in her body poems and neglect her spiritual development. Her nervousness is expressed in '*My Story*':

..... I turned deeply religious. I had shed carnal desire as a snake might shed its skin. I could no longer pretend either. I was no longer bed – worthy, no longer a charmer of lecherous men. But my poems had been read by several people. My articles on free love had titillated many. So I continued to

get phone calls from men who wanted to proposition me. It was obvious to me that I had painted of myself wrong image. I was never a nymphomaniac.¹⁴

Her writing on “free love” labelled her “a nympho”. They never keep in mind that her love poetry is the celebration of body as well as her spiritual quest. Regarding this Irshad Ahmed writes:

.....the notion of the parallel existence of two worlds is also structurally similar and is reminiscent of Plato’s theory of Ideas granting the poet an interesting posture of feminist – Platonist – an idea which can be illustrated by examining her treatment of two worlds of imaginatively transmuted reality, one archetypal, the other an imperfect, imitation a distorted reflection. The former represented by Radha and Krishna, luxuriating in a serene state of sublime fulfillment and the divine adultery ...¹⁶

Kamala Das’s concept of “divine adultery” is not approved by the society. Her poems ‘Radha’, ‘Krishna’, ‘Vrindavan’ and ‘Radha-Krishna’ lead towards her self – realization, feeling of love, ardour, and self-surrender. The romance of God with every soul is a unique reality.

Her Krishna poem ‘Ghanshyam’ highlights her emotional trapping. The “koel” building a nest and the image of “fisherman’s

net” stress the sense of suffering and redemption through the discernible.

Her other poem ‘Lines Addressed to a Devadasi’, shows signs of exhaustion, almost on the stage of indifference to the worldly objects, a stage of widening mental horizons and glory. The image of the “silent Devadasi” acquires a sharp focus in the light of her gesture of withdrawal. Kamala Das’s obsession with Krishna is keen enough and elsewhere, she identifies herself, rather obliquely with Radha and Meera, Sita and Sarswati of her novel ‘*A Doll for the Chief Prostitute*’. The ironic focus deepens since these innocent girls named after the Goddesses of Hindu religion traffic in flesh.

Her quest is leading her to Krishna and the extracts quoted from her poetry and autobiography confirm her progress. Through the changing circumstances, changing partners and defiled life promote her to think of the eternal truth of life. She confirms that the lure of Blue God is constant. Everything else follows and derives its value from this truth, and mere conjectures have no validity in matters of life – divine.

END NOTES

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Conclusion

The women's writing in twentieth century mainly challenges the traditional concepts of feminine roles and attacks the patriarchal structure of society. They write about themselves, their pains, desires, body and mind. These women never hesitate to draw their own body through words, their sexuality and their bodily needs. It took long time for them to realize that they need not be ashamed of being what they are, they need not be apologetic for being women and to express their needs. They make their private issues become public. It is a part of attempt to get their due place in the patriarchal society.

From this point of view Kamala Das is one of those writers who puts the mirror of her life before the society. Shedding all her inhibitions she writes frankly in an outspoken manner. She has chosen the personal, the autobiographical, and the confessional mode to express her inner personality and its journey. Her outward and inner journey is focused through effective and appropriate images, which may be classified as body images, animal imagery, nature imagery and mythological images.

Her confession belongs to her role as a wife, as a mistress to many men and as a mother. She writes boldly about her husband,

lovers, her menstruation, her uterus, sexual desires etc. These subjects are generally avoided by women. But she never hesitates to write about them. She revolts against a conservative society and its taboos which are specially designed for women. A victimized poet, Kamala Das opens the door of her life story to each and everyone to peep in and know her pains, pleasure, struggle and the reasons behind it. Her female self is continuously longing for love which is a rare quality for a man. She has always been treated as a subordinate by every man who comes in her life. It is not the problem of the poetess alone but that of the womanhood in general. According to Anne sexton women for male were considered as,

.... abnormal mysterious, alien creatures, irrational beings hard to understand. whose importance was measured by their relationships to the men who defined their roles in day-to-day life, their lovers, husbands, or fathers. Women were to be tolerated so long they remained within well-defined, uncontroversial, given roles – like that of wife or mother. If any other role they were seen as wicked or evil as bitches or whores. For the men it was simply not convenient to see women as independent entities or even as normal human beings, cohabitants of a shared world.¹

Kamala Das is one of the victims of the patriarchal society that Anne Sexton mentions. She is frustrated in her life as a result of the shock and despair that she received from her married life. She has felt suffocated in her husband's home as a consequence of her husband's selfishness, self-centeredness, egoism and his indifferent attitude towards her. For him she is merely a housewife and a partner to warm his bed. He has no soothing words for her, no time to spare with her and fulfil her emotional needs. And as a traditional wife she was expected to follow her domestic duties well, look to his needs and fulfil it as his own wish. She exposes that her innocent body is badly "beaten" (An Introduction) many times in his cruel embrace which she compares with "a finished jigsaw" (In Love). It is nothing but "skin's lazy hungers" and (The Freaks) "a skin-communicated thing" that exploits her body very rudely. Due to this her anger is expressed in bitter words and symbols. She compares his dark face with a "sun-stained cheek", his mouth with "a dark cavern" (The Freaks), his limbs spread over her body like "carnivorous plants" (In Love) and his hand sways like a "hooded snake" (The Stone Age) to destroy her femininity. She feels disappointed and calls herself "a yellow cat"

who loses her “sun-shine” and feels herself “a half-dead woman”, who becomes “no use at all to men”. (The Sunshine Cat).

In ‘The Stone Age’ she portrays her husband as “an old fat spider” who weaves “webs of bewilderment” around her, erects the dead, dull stony wall of domesticity that turns her into “a bird of stone, a granite dove”. She feels herself to be “a sparrow”, “a brooding dog” and “a homeless cat”. Such a predicament makes her a self-conscious rebel against the establishment of all sort of bonds of marriage, family and society from which she wishes to escape:

I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea,
Love-words flung from doorways and of course.
Your tired lust. I shall some day take
Wings, fly around, as often petals,
Do when free in air....(I Shall Some Day)

Due to her strong dissatisfaction with her conjugal life, she becomes rebellious. She has protested against the passivity and the timidity of the Indian woman and her subordinate position. Kamala

Das never accepts it as her destiny; she stands against it. She has decided to use her body a weapon to crush all the moral codes which are only made for a woman. Enjoyment of sexual freedom is her first step towards revenge and vicarious self-fulfilment.

As a poet of love and sex she never feels ashamed to describe the hungers of her body and its sexual desires. In 'The Looking Glass' she offers the readers all the details of womanly secrets and love making. She wishes to offer "the musk of sweat between the breasts" and "the warmth of menstrual blood" to her lover. The keen description of man-woman relationship is frankly narrated which is very rare to find in any other Indo-Anglian English woman poet. There is no element of shame and guilt in her expression of sensual experiences, it is always the celebration of the body and joy. Their sensuous feelings are to be compared with "hot sun" and "fire". She accompanied many male partners and enjoyed them. But later on the bitter universal truth comes before her that love is merely physical business for men and no more no less. The woman is the "latest toy" for man to fulfil his desires. Kamala Das goes from door to door to receive love but she was used by each and everyone as "a toy" and left alone. Due to this she becomes frustrated and feels insecure.

She has lost her belief in human relationship. So she makes “sea” her companion to share her pains and problems. “Sea” imagery in her poetry plays a very significant role to focus her psyche. Her past was glorious when she swam in the pond of innocence. Her desire of swimming in adulthood is sensuous that gives her pain. She has mixed experiences. As a result her mind is continuously tossing like “a troubled sea”. Her depressed mind drags her to think of committing suicide.

Her poems like “The Descendants” and “The Suicide” describe the picture of her awareness of feminine self, the defeat, frustration and the feeling of nothingness. Her mind thinks about the sin of adultery and becomes restless and the thought of committing suicide comes in her mind again and again.

She is afraid of the punishment after death for the sin of adultery. She realizes that the way of getting love through physical sex is a mistake that cannot be repaired now. Her awareness of nothingness, physical decay, sin and lack of salvation bothers her and draws her to think of committing suicide. It forces her to look beyond flesh. Her unstable mind thinks of spirituality. She reaches closer to soul, closer to god. She tries to lighten the burden of her soul by

turning towards the mythical figures like Radha and Krishna. She transforms her sexuality into spirituality. She has risen above her carnal desire through the articulation of her faith in love beyond flesh.

This journey shows the graph of her life, her physical as well as psychological journey which starts with lust and ends in eternal love. She has used various images in her poems to express her condition, desires and nature of the men she meets. In the first phase of her poetry her images in general deal with the pain and pleasure of the body. It articulates the sensuous needs of the writer, her unending lust and temporary desire of getting love. These images have limitations as body has. But in the second phase of her poetry the images turn to spiritual love beyond flesh towards an ideal lover Lord Krishna. The journey of her life, her poetry and her imagery turns from pathos to rebellion with the husband, the lover and the people from, lust to love, the victimized physical to the sublimated spiritual, from the body to the soul.

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