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THE QUEST FOR LOVE IN KAMALA DAS' POETRY

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ABSTRACT

Quest for love is the central thematic concern of Kamala Das' poetry. She is a poetess of feminine desires fears and hopes. The failure to find emotional strength through love is one of the main ideas of her poems. Her love poetry is rooted in her own personal experiences which makes her great Indian love poetess. Her attitude towards love is quite liberal and provoking. Her concept of love is not confined to the narrow limits determined by traditional taboos and social barriers. It yearns for gratification. Her poetry is revolutionary in nature because of her frank and open account of sexual experiences. This paper concerns with the treatment of the concept of love and sex by the Indian poetess Kamala Das.

Keywords: Love, Gratification, Sexual Experiences, Self-discovery.

Introduction

Kamala Das' is one of the Anglo-Indian poets who write with her most intimate thoughts, feelings and experiences in a unique way of expression. The emotions of a south Indian girl in her varied roles and relations are intensely explored in her poems. Her poetry is a conflict between what she wanted to get and what she really gets. She was longing for true love but she gets pain only as she writes in '*Summer in Calcutta*':

"Ah, why does love come to me like Pain

Again and again and again?"

Her volume of verse '*Summer in Calcutta*' has many poems on the concept of love. In her poem '*Love*', she shows her happiness and contentment in love. But in a number of other love poems she expresses her quest for love. In the poem '*A Relationship*', she says that she does not like the physical love that her husband provides. It is suffocating and does not give her spiritual satisfaction with sexual gratification. The poetess ridicules the hollowness of the futile marital relationship in this poem. In the poem '*The Freaks*' Kamala Das criticizes the lustful relationship which makes her heart 'an empty cistern' filled with coiling snakes of silence'. There is no love between the two. It brings out only her emotional emptiness:

"Can't this man with

Nimble finger-tips unleash

Nothing more alive than the

Skin's lazy hunger?"

The Poem '*The Invitation*' stresses the boredom and meaningless sexual encounters. It expresses her distaste for the kind of life she has been leading as well as her frustration and disillusionment. She fails to find that emotional strength for which her soul is hungry. In the poem, it seems that the sea is inviting her to drown herself in its waters:

"The sea is garrulous to day. Come in,
Come in. what do you lose by dying, and
Besides, your losses are my gains."

But the poetess rejects the repeated invitation of the sea. She has faith in her lover and cannot bear any separation from him.

Her poetry is largely an expression of her unfulfilled love. Her marriage was a failure. As a result, Kamala Das often goes in for extramarital relationships for her emotional and spiritual satisfaction and frankly admits it. She never hesitates to question the very basis of the socially accepted norms of marital relationship. Her female persona in her poems goes in for extramarital relationship in search of true love for regaining the sense of freedom. In '*My grandmother's House*' the poetess tries to seek alternative sources of love to overcome her frustrations in marital life:

"I who have lost
My way and beg now at stranger's doors to
Receive love, at least in small change."

But she never got real love even from other people. They looked open her only as a source of satisfying their lust. Her search for real love ends in frustration because she has been treated like an object of lust by her husband as well as by other men. They are not concerned about fulfilling her emotional desires. The denial of true love intensified her sense of loneliness, desolation and hopelessness. In the poem '*The Sunshine Cat*' she writes:

"They are her slide from pegs of sanity into
A bed made soft with tears and she lay there weeping
For sleep had lost its use. I shall build walls with tears'
She said, walls to shut me in."

Kamala Das offers us a vivid image of love. She points out that the right kind of man she wanted has never met her. She longs for the life of freedom from male's captivity to regain her lost identity and freedom which she expresses in her so many poems. In '*The Old Playhouse*' the woman criticizes her husband for shattering her dreams. She has realized that she is merely an object for him which is meant for satisfying his lustful desires. The wife is treated no better than a hireling. She therefore, loses her identity and personality. She expresses the sickening state of her mind in this poem. She compares her mind with an old playhouse with all its lights put out'. In this poem, her husband stands for suppression and cruelty while she wishes to attain freedom:

"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
Path ways of the sky."

The same idea is also presented in the poem '*Captive*'. Her husband knows only the physical kind of love without trying to make any emotional contact with her. This poem shows her complete disillusionment. The poem describes Kamala Das' love as 'an empty gift', 'a gilded empty container' and herself as the prisoner of 'the

womb's blinded hunger.....' She has finally realized that she has become her own captive in this futile search of true love:

"For years I have run from one
Gosammer lane to another. I am
Now my own captive."

Kamala Das' poetry mingles the physical love with emotional or spiritual love in an aesthetic manner. Physical love is an integral part of love. But it is not the sole thing. It involves emotional attachment and a spiritual union. In the poem '*The looking Glass*', she explains the art of love making. It is a psycho-spiritual dramatization of the feminine sensibility. The poem shows how her pure love degenerates into lust and her emotional needs remain unfulfilled. Apart from all the frustrations, her poetry also deals with pure love addressed to her loved ones. '*The Grandmother house*' shows Kamala Das' deep love for her grandmother. The death of her grandmother has created a vacuum in her life. She feels insecure and helpless because she is suffocated in the company of her lustful husband. She is totally disenchanted by the sensual love which fails to satisfy her emotionally. In the poem '*The Suicide*' poet welcomes death to get rid of the 'life of humiliations and frustrations. According to Kamala Das, life without love can be compared to death:

"I want to be simple
I want to be loved
And
If love is not to be had
I want to be dead.."

Another aspect of her poetry is the mythical framework given to her quest for love. She tries to rise above mere physical love and wants to attain spiritual love like Radha-Krishna. Kamala Das depicts '*Radha-Krishna*' as the symbol of ideal love who stands for purity, innocence and spirituality. She compares her search for true love with the myth of Radha- Krishna. She identifies herself, with Radha and Mira Bai in the poems, '*Radha Krishna*' and '*Vrindavan*'. In these poems, the poet aspires for eternal love and for this she would like to melt like burning candle only for the true love of Krishna. In her poem '*Rahdha-Krishna*' she writes:

"This become from this hour
Our river and this old kadamba
Trees, ours alone, for our homeless
Souls to return someday."

Her love poetry is unconventional and shocking. Her treatment of love and human-body is quite liberal, frank and honest. She treats physical and spiritual love as an instrument of self-discovery. Her frankness and honesty gives a quality of uniqueness to her poetry. According to her love involves emotional attachment and spiritual union. She does not advocate promiscuity. Her love poetry merely voices her life- long yearning for fulfillment through true love.

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