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## LOVE POETRY OF KAMALA DAS

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**Abstract:** Kamala Das is one of the foremost Indian poets writing in English. She has published three volumes of poetry viz. *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967) and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973). Her poetry is marked by extreme sincerity and honesty of expression. Of her prose-works, *My Story* (1974), her autobiography is most important as it throws considerable light on her poetry. Her poems have an unmistakable confessional note characterized by an intimacy of tone and expansive human sympathies.

**Key words:** Love Poetry , foremost Indian poets , Kamala Das .

### INTRODUCTION:

“Kamala Das’s progress and process as a poet may be visualized through several stages – struggle for love and security in the face of neglect, agony and frustration; emotional refuge in others and return to her past; search for ideal lover; realization of the futility of such a search in the world of sense perceptions; discovery of the possibility of spiritual peace in Lord Krishna; philosophical detachment and love for all; meditation on death readiness to face it”(Nair). Kamala Das’s quest for genuine love is the major theme in her poetry and her greatness as a love poet can be seen in the fact that her love poetry is based on her personal experiences. The present paper highlights the major aspects of her love poetry as reflected in her poems.

### Major Aspects of Kamala Das’s Love Poetry

Kamala Das is one of those pioneers in Indian poetry in English along with Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan who freed Indian poetry from old-fashioned diction and sentiment and from derivative thematic representations. Kamala Das introduced a strong personal voice in Indian English poetry as no other woman poet had done earlier. Her poetry is not just Indian like that of Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt. Kamala Das’s poetry is a passionate expression of the universal experience of love, despair, anguish and failure comprehended through a feminine Indian sensibility. In her poetry Kamala Das speaks out of her love-longings, frustrations and disenchantments with a disarming frankness. “Her concern has been the existential anguish of humanity as revealed mainly through woman’s relationship with man and the male-dominated society” (Nair).

Most of Kamala Das’s poems deal with the theme of unfulfilled love and yearning for love. ‘The Dance of the Eunuchs’ is a fine example dealing with the theme of unfulfilled love. In this poem we see that the dance of the eunuchs is a dance of sterile and, therefore, the unfulfilled

and unquenchable love of the woman in the poet. In ‘The Testing of the Sirens’ we come across the poet’s sense of loneliness. The siren’s sound in the poem represents a symbol of the inner agony of the poet. The siren’s loyalty to both the lovers is only a momentary excitement.

*What can I do for you? I smiled  
A smile is such a detached thing, I wear  
It is like a flower*

The poem is a quest for an eternal and ideal lover and the same is one of the major themes of Kamala Das’s love poetry. Kamala Das’s life-long quest was for love, for emotional involvement, but her quest always ended in disasters of lust, which brought frustrations for the poet. The same can be seen in the concluding lines of the poem ‘The Testing of the Sirens’

*“Just arrange my limbs and tell  
Me when to smile. I  
Shut my eyes, but inside eye-lids, there was  
No more night, no more love, or peace, only  
The white, white sun burning, burning, burning .....  
Ah, why does love come to me like pain  
Again and again and again ?”*

In ‘The Fear of the Year’ Kamala Das speaks out the cruelty of Time that does not yield to the fascinations of love:

*“For no smile, however fond, can  
Settle time like a paper weight”.*

Sometimes Kamala Das connects innocence and love to her grandmother and herself as the mother. ‘Captive’ is a confession of the poet’s crazy run in search of security and love:

*"My love is an empty gift, a gilded  
Empty container, good for show, nothing else".*

Her portrayal of the grandmother appears as a symbol of love. The poet feels that love in her life is merely "the womb's blinded hunger" and no more than consummation of the sex act. She thinks that she is a docile slave of her own passion:

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

In some of her poems she speaks of love outside marriage. But she does not propagate adultery and infidelity through her poems. She merely searches a relationship which can give her both love and security. That is the reason why she sometimes gives a mythical framework to her search for genuine love, and identifies it with the Radha-Krishna myth or with Mira Bai's relinquishing of the ties of marriage in search of Lord Krishna, the true lover. In order to provide a mythic framework to extra-marital sex she has made frequent use of the Radha-Krishna and Mirabai legends. Whereas Krishna is the mythical lover, Radha and Mirabai are the eternal seekers for their object of love, Krishna. 'Radha' is an expression of the muted desire for love after a long waiting. The ecstasy of love-fulfillment is Radha's total surrender to Krishna:

*"O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting  
Nothing remains but  
You ....."*

'Sunset Blue Bird' shows Radha's loneliness as a result of Krishna's abandonment to humble her pride is similar to the poet's acute sense of desolation caused by her husband's indifference.

Kamala Das's love poetry is unconventional and shocking to the orthodox because her treatment of sexual love and the human body is free, frank and uninhibited. "She is not a poet of free love. On the contrary, she upholds the sanctity of domestic love and marital relationship. But she is disheartened when marital love degenerates into lust, when marital relationship turns into one of domination by the male over the female" (Nair).

The intensity in her love poetry is twofold of her existence. She has been most conventional in her instincts and she has been in need of love and security. Her feminine sensibility is manifested not in her vehement protest against the male world but in her rapture and excitement in receiving pure love and in her disillusionment when the gates of paradise are bolted by male hands.

The theme of love-lust-frustration can be seen in the poems of Kamala Das. Her frank, bold and revelatory handling of the variations of the theme is significant. "While her sensibility seems to be obsessively preoccupied with love and lust, it finds love invariably petering out into lust, and lust merely eating itself to the point of nausea" (Iyengar). Without emotional involvement, sex is barren and sterile for her. Her quest is for spiritual gratification. "A strain of

sexuality runs like forest fire in Kamala Das's poetry. However, it is the disappointment and disgust with sexual union without love and concern that mark most of her poems. Thus, love and hate, excitement and depression appear side by side. In her life-long search for true lover, the poet has stumbled on the painful discovery that man succumbs only to the snare of lust" (Naik).

Her diction in her love poetry is marked by simplicity and clarity. Her imagery is functional and not decorative. She has often used images with regard to human body. The body appears in her poems often as a symbol of lust and consequent emotional corruption. In the ecstasy of lust male and female differences vanish and the lovers become one. In 'The Sea Shore' the body asserts:

*"Not knowing  
What else to do, I kiss your eyes, dear one,  
Your lips, like  
Petals drying at the edges, the burnt cheeks and  
The dry grass of your hair".*

Images used by Kamala Das adequately express her inner turbulence and her tormenting experiences of lust and despair. "The confessional mode she has adopted makes her expression urgent and loaded with several directions of meaning." (Nair). Indeed, the unconventionality of her themes and the fervour of her conceptual imagination are matched by her utter sincerity of expression.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, love preoccupies as the central theme in Kamala Das's poetry. Here it is necessary to point out that she does not advocate promiscuity. Her love poetry merely states her life-long yearning for fulfillment through love. As love has many features, Kamala Das studies it from various angles and therein lies her greatness as love poet.

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