Symbols of Love and Lust in the poetry of Kamala Das

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ABSTRACT
Kamala Das is undoubtedly the greatest woman poet in the contemporary literature. Her poetry is all about herself, about her intensely felt desire for love, and for emotional involvement. Unlike other poets of India, she is frank and open to her readers. She openly expresses her longings for love. She is always charged with overpowering emotions and a sense of urgency. She is truly a celebrant of the human body and her poetry is glutted with images and symbols of love and lust. The paper thus explores the various facet of love in her poetry.

KEY WORDS: plight, kamala Das, exploitation, dejection and relationship

INTRODUCTION
Kamala Das is an important figure whose bold and honest voice has re-energized Indian writing in English. Das has attempted to touch and feel life in a meaningful way and there lies a dualism in her writing in English, in which soul is contrasted to body. Kamala Das writes in her usual, frank open-mindedness, about married life or man-woman relationship in many of her poems. She frequently complains about man’s callousness and wantonness and woman’s suffering on that count. These confessional poems are intensely personal, highly subjective. There’s no ‘persona’ in her poems. The themes are nakedly embarrassing and focus exclusively upon the pain, anguish and ugliness of life at the expense of pleasure and beauty.

She craves for union with man for the fulfillment of love but she is disillusioned and frustrated when it degenerates into sheer lustfulness and bodily pleasure. Her poetry deals with unfulfilled love and celebration of sex. Kamala Das confesses about her failure in love. She asserts:

“I have failed
I feel my age and my uselessness”

In the opinion of Kamala Das Physical love is of no value only the peace of soul is eternal and everlasting but mainly men are after the bodily beauty of women and they satisfy only their sexual hunger. In her view spiritual love between wife and husband is weightier than carnal love. Kamala Das states in “In Love” –

“…………….. While I walk
The verandah sleepless, a
Million questions awake in
Me, and all about him and
This skin communicated
Things that I dare not yet in
His presences call our love.”

In her autobiography “My Life” she asserts:

“Love has a beginning and an end but
Lust has no such faults. I needed security,
I needed permanence, I needed two strong arms
Thrown around my shoulders and a soft voice in my ear”
In ‘The Looking Glass’, the poetess has presented utter sense of despair and dejection caused by man’s dominance and exploitation. In the very beginning of the poem the poetess presents the comparison of man and woman in physical terms. The poetess uses the image of mirror and writes:

“Getting a man to love you is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Women 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...

In her poem “The suicide” she gives us a glimpse of her psyche. She clearly says:

“I want to be loved and if love is not to be had, I want to be dead”

Similarly, the absurdities of a male’s body and ‘Skins lazy hungers’ are depicted nicely in the following lines of Freaks,

“He talks, turning a sun – stained
Check 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.”

Kamala Das with her characteristic honesty makes no bones about relating her need for love. Her passionate yearning is manifested in the voice of her woman protagonist who says:

I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is every man
Who wants woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love.
Her pursuit of love has driven her to the doors of strangers to receive love at least in the form of ‘a tip’. Previously
She was ‘proud’, as she did not have to compromise on her self-respect. Now she has to move in the maze of chauvinistic. Her open and frank treatment of female sexuality is without any sense of guilt and imparts special power to her writings. Love and sex in her poetry symbolize the fractured realities that she encounters in her actual life. She speaks for a woman who is in search of love. Kamala Das feels that a woman’s role as a daughter, a wife or a lover echoes the victimization in relationships. Therefore, she rebels against a deliberately formed concept of relationship. According to her, women are not at all promiscuous. The prevalent notion of male supremacy is brutally shaken by her who challenges the usual ideological discourse of sexism and love. She reveals her own victimization to the carnal desires of a young man. Union and beg for love in the form of change. The main feature of all Kamala Das’s writing seems to be her desperate obsession with love. Das establishes herself firmly as a desiring female subject searching for love in a world that rarely understands her. To her, womanhood involves certain collective experiences. A marriage of convenience which is still a thriving system in our society was a bitter experience for kamala Das.

Her fictional autobiography My Story reveals that her poems are indeed an intense study of their personal traumas and tribulations that she faced in her married life bereft of her emotional bonding. However, her poems are not just confessions but the vigorous voicing of her female identity.
It appears obvious that she is least concerned about the man’s wants. Even after knowing full well that the man desires only a female form she nevertheless expresses her wish to be loved infinitely and assumes that every woman wants unstinting love from her man. One of the most renowned Indian poet kamala Bhasin asserts on the plight of women: “A Girl is like a young plant, half fed and half heartedly educated, she gets only half paid for her wages, the country got its freedom but she continued to be bonded”

According to William Walsh “Her poetry is self centered and unabashedly sexual”

According to Bruce King “Marriage and Love life is the predominant theme of kamala’s poetry”

Conclusion

Kamala Das is an important figure whose bold and honest voice has re-energized Indian writing in English. Das has attempted to touch and feel life in a meaningful way and there lies a dualism in her writing in English, in which soul is contrasted to body. Her poems are filled with yearning for death which symbolizes calmness in contrast to the conscious mind and the body of the anxious individual. Her realization of the supremacy of spirit over matter, soul over body, timeless over the temporal is suggestive of a maturity in her creative art. In Das’s poetry, I find the best expression of feminine sensibility, its suppression in a male dominated society.

REFERENCES

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