

Colours of Love in Kamala Das: A Critical Study of Her Poems

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Abstract:

Kamala Das or Madhavikutty is one of the most prominent woman poets in Indian English literature of the twentieth century. Her poetry mainly talks about women's conception of love, marriage and life in totality. This research paper will try to explain various dimensions of love presented in the poems of Kamala Das. Moreover, this paper will try to analyse the status of women and their mental condition in the then society. Her conception about love, marriage and human life is something far away from the reality of life. She has realised by her own experiences that women are in crux. She presents the unequal treatment of women in the field of love, marriage and in other social events. She is an inborn fighter against the rules and regulations of the then family and society and she boldly exposed her mind what she thought about true love in her poems crossing all types of barriers of social rules. Kamala Das has realised that what she thought about love and marriage is not what she experienced in real life. And she has boldly presented her unique vision in her poems and prose.

Keywords: Marriage, Love, Experience, Reality, Victim.

Introduction:

Any analysis on the poetic works of Indian writers who have written in English cannot be complete one without discussion on the literary works of the famous 20th century Indian English poet, Kamala Das. Poetry as a literary genre normally talks about the eternal theme of love. Kamala Das has spoken of that eternal feeling but closely connected with her own real experiences of life. It is observed that the poet has tried to explain love as she has realised out of her own experiences. The essence of love which is dreamt of by the poet is found in contradiction with the actual love what she has enjoyed. The bitter experiences in her own life have aroused a sense of revolt against the conventional concept of love. A sense of unsatiety

and a keen desire to come out of crisis has given birth to a spirit of so-called feminism in Kamala Das. Her relationship with her husband gradually turned into a bitter one as both of them were not in a position to enjoy their love in their conjugal life due to maladjustment of mind and body. As a result, the matter of love in Kamala Das is closely attached with her personal life, socio-cultural atmosphere of the time and her own identity. Her poems invariably speak of her anxieties, grieves, and a demand for free life breaking all conventions of the society. In 20th century Indian English poetry Kamala Das appears to be an exceptional poetic talent who composes poetry mixing with her own personal life and the desire of women in the Indian context. Naturally a deeper analysis of the poetic works of Kamala Das is very much necessary in the present context.

Literary review:

Generally, it is observed that Kamala Das as a writer has presented the status of women in the Indian context and she has presented her own bitter experiences related to love. Moreover, very openly she has confessed all the events of her life in her writing and has boldly revolted against the male dominated society. As a result, Kamala Das appears to be a feminist voice in the 20th century Indian English Literature.

Suman Singh remarks in his paper entitled “Woman Perspective in Kamala Das’s Poetry” that Kamala Das’s poetry deals with women’s mentality against the supremacy of the male dominated society even in case of expression of love. Moreover, the poet expressed her radical voices against the conventional love and the exercise of lust. She has also shown a keen desire to free herself from the bondages.

Hemanta Sarma commented in his research paper “Feminist Assertions in Kamala Das: A Study of An Introduction & The Sunshine Cat” that the prevalent maladies paralysed women and their wish to overcome the unjustified sufferings as exposed in Kamala Das’s poems – ‘An Introduction’ and ‘The Sunshine Cat’. These poems also present that the real bitter personal life are experiences of love and sex and her constant fight against all hurdles.

Swati Vandana expressed her concern in her research paper named “Feminism and Indian Response to Kamala Das’s My Story” that Kamala Das was bound to bear the unbearable pains for the discriminations against women in the Indian society. ‘My Story’, Kamala Das’s autobiographical work presents her agony and her struggle. She wishes to become a free lady who would be able enjoy life according to her own wish but at every moment she has been challenged by the chains of social conventions. Further the scholar has commented that women fail to enjoy their own life or to think about themselves as they are forced to play their conventional role as a daughter, as a wife and as a mother.

In the research paper “Feminism: An Overview” Javed Ahmed Raina discloses his views that from the very beginning of human civilization women have been playing a secondary role in the male dominated society. They have been cornered in such a way that they have been living a subordinate life. But the scholar has pointed out that women have to redefine her own identity disconnecting themselves from all sides of ideals and beliefs framed by the dominating male personality.

In the research paper named “Pain and Pleasure in Kamala Das’ My Story” the author Jay Prakash reveals that apparently women in the Indian society are given prestigious names like ‘angel’, ‘nari’ and ‘devi’ but in the practical field they have been put in a humiliated position in the family and society. It has also been observed by the scholar that it is a herculean task on the part of women to ‘kill the angel’ and ‘tell the truth’. In fact, women are exploited in the name of some sweet names.

Objectives:

Generally, Kamala Das is famous for her standpoint as a woman against the prevalent conventional rules and regulations which oppress the women. But here in the paper emphasis has been given on the dimensions of love as assumed and experienced by the poet herself. In the Indian context her open-minded confession about love is a challenge to the existing norms. A concrete shape of Kamala Das’s idea about various aspects of love has been tried to be presented in the paper. It is expected that the well thought explanation of the concept of love in comparison with lust presented by Kamala Das in her poetic works will usher in a new scope to realise the so-called feminist poet. It is also expected that the realization of love connected with a feministic outlook will give birth to new critical thoughts in understanding twentieth century Indian English poetry. This study may also disclose the feminine psyche related to love, lust and marriage which will give ray to new knowledge of human life in modern times. Keeping in mind all these objectives some of her poems and the autobiographical writing “My Story” have been critically analysed in the study.

Discussion:

An Introduction: In the poem ‘An Introduction’ Kamala Das has also disclosed her opinions related to love, marriage, women’s liberty and her own identity as a human being. At the very beginning of the poem she has, in fact, pointed out two other matters related to the involvement of women in politics and the use of any other language except the mother tongue. Kamala das herself believed that the involvement of women in politics in India is shallow and very merge. As an outspoken lady she has revealed the truth to others. Again, she opines that a writer can write in any language in which he or she feels comfort. She denies the commonly accepted stand point that the writer should write only in mother tongue.

As it is very much natural to express what she thinks or feels about any matter, here in the poem the poet discloses her own feelings related to love and marriage. She presents that whenever she was a mere child, she was bound to marry a young boy but naturally she had a rosy idea about love and marriage but her dreams were shattered being confronted by the real experiences. Very categorically she has mentioned here that she wanted to enjoy life but she was on the other hand bound to bear the unaccepted physical intimacy. She did not accept it even in dream; the actual marriage life shattered all her ideas related to love and marriage. Here it is seen Kamala Das for the first time has been introduced with the hard reality of life which is far away from her own fairy ideas. Then in the poem Kamala Das has disclosed the lack of liberty in case of the married woman. She wanted to enjoy the dress and haircut of the male people in order to expose her revolt against the social rules. The so-called guardians of the male dominated society have given instruction to wear saree, to behave like girl and to act

as a wife. They always instruct the women in the society to 'keep in' and to 'belong'. They always remind the women that they cannot be beyond the conventional social thinking. The women should always act as a better daughter to a father, loyal wife to her husband and ultimately to be a mother. But Kamala Das as an aware lady has revolted against these conventional thinking. She wants to create a new role for the women.

“It is time to chose
A name, a role.” (P.27)

She has suggested to all women of the world not to be the victim of schizophrenia nor to become too much cool to accept everything in life. Even she has remarked that there is no need of being embarrassed even if rejected in love.

Kamala Das again has mentioned that she wanted to enjoy love marrying a man but, she confessed that what she wanted to get she did not get it. To her marriage is a kind of dominance on the part of a male person on women. She wants to enjoy the liberty what the male person is to enjoy but at every stage she is denied to. She has realised that she is considered to be the cause of sins to the male counterpart and again at the same time she is worshipped as a saint. For this the poet comments:

“I am the beloved and the
Betrayed.” (P.27)

As a result, at the end of the poem the poet searches for the identity of herself. Kamala Das intends to search for her own identity and wishes to lead her life as instructed by her own identity.

The Glass:

In the poem 'The Glass' the poet Kamala Das uses the word 'glass' in order disclose women's fragile or damaged condition in the male dominated society. As we know glass is fragile and can easily be broken; in the same way a woman also can be fragmented with her emotional disturbances. Kamala Das in her poem gives an idea of her own disappointing experiences during her sexual relations with her lovers. It appears that the poem is a confessional one as we find Kamala Das here appears with a confessional note on her own feelings which are common and natural experiences of other women of society. Also, the poet herself confesses that she is obsessed with enjoying love but the treatment she got from her lover is really heart breaking for her. Because she wanted a caring love from him which she did not get. Normally the children enjoy a kind of affectionate love from their parents and they crave for the same love from their partners. But in this poem, she speaks of a man who only wants to enjoy sexual acts on her. He pulled her close to him roughly treating her like a pile of broken pieces. His actions hurt her and caused her a lot of pain which compelled her to feel like a broken glass. The poet Kamala Das fails to have the love she imagined initially whenever she bore physical intimacy with her husband for the first time. The poet also pointed out that she has been performing the role as a cheap toy and has been bearing lust indifferently.

“... with a cheap toy's indifference

I enter other's
Lives, and
Make of every trace of lust
A temporary home". (P.21)

The Dance of the Eunuchs:

The title of the poem used by Kamala Das is very symbolic. The term 'Eunuchs' means the transgenders who are always victimised by the social humiliation, humorous and harsh realities of society mainly for their physical deformity. In a sense they are separated from normal social norms and they have to fight daily against the rough treatment of normal people. For their livelihood they are bound to come in contact with other normal human beings and try to please them by expressing their womanly beautiful physics which are artificially decorated by them. They are bound to do that only for their livelihood going against their will. Even after that they face many derogatory comments. Still, they never give up their activities in their lives.

In the same way the poet feels that like Eunuchs she is also unable to perform sexual act devoid of any sense of love in it as eunuchs are incapable of having child. Moreover, they are also not in a position to enjoy that pleasure as the normal human beings do. Here in the poem the poet Kamala Das herself has found a similarity with the eunuchs in case of enjoying love. She has confessed that she is not fit to enjoy the normal bodily pleasures. The frustration of the eunuchs has also been lurking in the heart of the poet herself.

Kamala Das again points out in this poem that in this patriarchal society females are constantly humiliated by the of male members. It means the male people always look down upon women, as they do in case of the eunuchs. Thus, in this poem Kamala Das tries to present her own replica comparing to Eunuchs.

In Love:

In this poem the poet Kamala Das discloses her own confusing feelings regarding lust and love. The poet here talks about her own observations after sexual enjoyment with one of her lovers that after having physical passionate love, she was puzzled whether her lover really loved her or it was just a lustful action. The poetess finds that lustful love gives only frustrating dilemma and disillusionments to the women. She always longs for pure love but her search of love ends in sex and lust. Thus, it reveals the inner female psyche. It is observed that she always wishes to enjoy platonic love devoid of any sense of sex or lust she is totally deprived of that soul connected true love from her lovers who on the other hand involves her in skin communicated love which ultimately results in despair, depression and anxiety.

“... while I walk
The verandah sleepless, a
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.”(PP.15)

Jaisurya :

Like other poems this poem is also a poetic outcome of her own personal experiences. In this poem she reveals her feelings towards her first son Jaisurya after his birth. Being a new mother, she gathers a new type of experience and also feels an attraction towards the child as a symptom of unbreakable bonding. As the mother of the child, she bears intolerable pain at the time of the birth of the child but she enjoys an inseparable connection or bonding with the child. In fact, the poet Kamala Das indicates that she does not feel that type of bonding with her husband or lovers even after their long stay in a room together. She wishes to enjoy that type of unbreakable pure love but in reality, she has not found it in her all love relationships. For this she always repents. It is also true that the poet depicts her unbearable labour pain during her child's birth but when she listens to her child's cry at that time, she feels no interest in her lovers and their lust but a kind of affection for the new born baby. This poem elevates the concept of childbirth as fulfilment of womanliness.

Ghanashyam:

Kamala Das in this poem reveals a new type of love associated with Ghanashyam, i.e., Lord Krishna. After being deprived of true love in real life she has devoted herself to the worship of Lord Krishna. As the poet fails to enjoy the taste of true love in real life, she wants to enjoy the love as enjoyed by Radha and Krishna. She has thought in the love of Radha and Krishna the separate identities of lovers are united into one. Being motivated by that concept of love she surrendered herself to her husband or lover but gradually she has understood whatever love she has enjoyed with her husband or lover mainly based on physical desire and lust. It is far away from the divine love which she wanted to have in her life. After wasting her emotions on some mechanical minded lovers in quest of true passionate, caring love, she perpetuates with an observation that the only true lover is Krishna who loved Radha with that kind of emotional, respectful attachment, which kamala Das asks for but never gets.

The poet explicitly says that Ghanashyam is dwelling all over her mind and heart. She has been trying to imagine that Ghanashyam is making love to her whenever she indulges in physical love with her so-called lovers. Many times, she tries to realise the supreme, aesthetic, divine love in sexual enterprise with her lovers imagining them as the incarnations of Krishna. But at the end she realises that all the lustful affairs can never be compared to the spiritual love of Krishna. On the other hand, in fact, Kamala Das herself tries to get the taste of the pure Radha- Krishna love in her own relationships with her husband or lovers. But she is deprived of that type of love.

“We played once a husk game, my lover and I
His body needing mine, his aging 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 don't you want me any longer don't you want me
Don't you don't you

In love when the snow slowly began to fall

Like a bird I migrated to warmer climes

That was my only method of survival

n this tragic game...".(PP.18)

The Old Playhouse:

In this particular poem the poet Kamala Das presents the deplorable condition of a married woman in the hands of her husband who takes his wife as a dumb doll, and who never complains of its suppression. The poet reflects the idea of the patriarchal society where in front of male ego, females must be the submissive doll and fulfil all the demands of the husband as a mere doll. It is also found that as human being women have their own high ambitions, elevated and independent wishes but it seems that they always have to sacrifice their dreams to fly in the sky like a bird due to the dominating nature of male counterpart. Thus, in the process of sacrifice women forget all their power to achieve any success and they start to subdue their own mental elevated thinking and follow the narrow path showed by their husband; as a result gradually, their mind turns into a playhouse.

“Always the same , he serves his love in lethal doses,
For, 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.”(P.1)

A relationship:

The title of the poem generally is not hinting at the common relationship among human beings , rather it points out the relationship between the husband and wife or the lover and beloved. At the very beginning of the poem the poet Kamala Das talks about the importance of love in human life. To her it is the spirit which drives human beings towards the maturity of human life. Then she also remarks that it is that desire in woman which pursues to be attracted by male persons. But that uncontrollable attraction towards man has not been materialised at the time of real experience. The poet has understood that her idea about love and attraction for husband or lover is not exactly so, whenever she has enjoyed physically coming in contact with her husband or lover. In that case she feels she is betrayed by her husband or lover. Again, she remarks that she is in fact not betrayed from physical pleasures rather she is betrayed in case of that change of feelings of love. It appears to her that the expression of love by her lover or husband is highly artificial devoid of real feelings. At the end of the poem with a painful heart the poet exposes another position of woman in case of enjoying love in real life. The women are interested to free themselves from the bondage of artificial love in reality. But they are in such a critical situation that they have to enjoy rest , peace or comfort in life and even death being in the folds of her counterpart’s arms.

“ Why care I for their quick sterile sting 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...." (P.41)

My Story:

The famous book 'My story' written by Kamala Das is out and out an autobiographical writing where she has disclosed mainly her inner self besides her major events in life. In this book her attitude to love, lust , conjugal relationship and the status of women in family and society and so on is visibly reflected. Whatever she has assumed and experienced in her life is presented in this writing. It has become very much clear that not only as a human being but also as a poet she does not like to hide anything from her readers. She has confessed everything in this book, what she has felt and experienced in her life. Kamala Das herself is fond of love but against brutal sex and lust. She does not get any pleasure from a kind of love of the same sex. In the conventional conjugal love, she has not found the essence of true love what she desired or wanted from her husband. She has confessed that her husband was only interested in bodily love making, not in any other affection. During her pregnancy the poet was not in a condition to satisfy her husband's lustful demands. She was bound to go to her grandmother's house to have mental peace. Even she has confessed that she tried her level best to give pleasure to her husband as he wants whenever he was in fatigue due to official work load. Just before her marriage she had a keen emotional attachment with a young boy and she wanted to materialise this affair but it was not possible for social and family pressure. Normally as the wife Kamala Das demands care from her husband but she has not been given rather she was bound to bear marital rape going against her mind. From the book 'My Story' it has also become clear that as Kamala Das herself is impoverished of love, she came in contact with many male persons in her life. It appears to Kamala Das that marriage to her is not a source of pleasure rather it is a trap from which she always tries to escape. The husband of the poet always treats her as a machine and also, he behaves in a mechanical way without any human touch and his words are also very much harsh to her. As a result, the poet fails to get any charm in him. Though Kamala Das was a girl of independent thought but being humiliated by the male counterpart she began to behave like a male person. All these things are presented by the writer in various chapters of the book which was published in 1977. The most interesting thing is that all the experiences and feelings time to time have been artistically presented in her poems also. It may be said that 'My Story' is nothing but the presentation of her poems in prose form. It also can be presented in a manner that the autobiographical events which are described by the poet in 'My Story' are poetically presented in her poems.

Conclusion:

A clear conception of love with various features which is framed by the 20th century Indian English poet, Kamala Das is very much visible to the readers. To her love which she

dreams of is not the same what she has experienced in her real life. Kamala Das has explained that love is not an emotional bonding or not a mental and a physical togetherness, but a lustful physical dominance of the male partner over the female one. Love or marriage in the Indian society is a mechanical bonding where the freedom of wife or beloved is brutally crushed by the iron rule of the husband or the lover. Kamala Das is introduced with the new meaning of love in the actual world. She has failed to find out that spirit of bonding between the husband and wife as there is an unbreakable emotional attachment between the mother and the child. The poet compares women with the eunuchs as they are inhumanly treated in the society. She wants to enjoy the spiritual union as Radha and Krishna had but in vain. But love appears to her as a mere external presentation of lust and male dominance. As a result, she revolts and fights for the freedom of women from that bondage. In that way her treatment of love is invariably connected with the feminist attitude to life.

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