

Poetry of Kamala Das: Romance or Vulgar

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Sai Sukhadev Patil

22P0110045

Under the Supervision of

Ms RUNA MENEZES

**Shenoi Goembab School of Languages and Literature
Discipline of English**



Goa University

Date: April 2024

Examined by

seal of the school

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that the data presented in this Dissertation report entitled, "Poetry of Kamala Das : Romantic or Vulgar?" is based on the results of investigations carried out by me in the Discipline of English at the Shenoai Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University under the Supervision of Ms. Runa Menezes and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree or diploma by me. Further, I understand that Goa University or its authorities will not be responsible for the correctness of observations given in the dissertation. I hereby authorise the University to upload this dissertation on the dissertation repository or anywhere else as the UGC regulations demand and make it available to any one as needed.



Sai Sukhadev Patil

Seat no: 22P0110045

Date: 16 April 2024

Place: Goa University

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RUNA MENEZES

Signature and Name of Supervising Teacher



School/Dept Stamp

Date:



Signature of Dean of the School/HoD of Dept School/Dept Stamp

Date:

Place: Goa University

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Abstract

This particular study titled, ‘ **poetry of Kamala Das : Romance or vulgarity**’ aims to shed light upon the debated question, on whether poetries of Kamala Das are truly vulgar or are they also romantic in depth. Critics very commonly have regarded Kamala Das as vulgar and have denied the status of romantic to her poems. This study explores the deeper meaning of the selected poems and has attempted to understand Kamla Das with a different perspective. The study will deeply address the question of whether poems of Kamala Das are about vulgarity or does it also reflect romance into it. The study will conduct a detailed research of the few selected poems and try to understand the intention of the poet behind writing these poems and bring to light the deeper analysis. Few poems of Kamala Das make use of strong and bold words. Thus, her poems are very often criticised without understanding the motive and Idea behind those words. This particular study will try to understand Kamala Das as an individual and how her personality reflects into her poems.

Keywords : Romance, vulgar, male-dominance, patriarchy, love, confessional

Chapter I : Introduction of Kamala Das

1.1 Introduction:

Kamala Das, born in Thrissur, Kerala, on March 31, 1934, was an Indian writer known for her candid exploration of female sexuality and the nuanced portrayal of the Indian woman's experience. She was part of a cohort of Indian authors whose focus lay on personal narratives rather than colonial themes. Das garnered widespread acclaim for her diverse body of work, encompassing short stories, poetry, memoirs, and essays. Writing in both English and Malayalam, she exhibited a remarkable versatility. Notably, her poetry and forthright autobiography earned her recognition. Additionally, Das was a prolific columnist, delving into topics ranging from women's issues to politics. Her unapologetic depiction of female sexuality positioned her as a dissenting voice in the prevailing cultural milieu.

Das hailed from a privileged background, with her mother, Nalapat Balamani Amma, being a renowned poet and her father, V.M. Nair, holding positions in both the automobile industry and journalism. Raised in Kerala and Calcutta (now Kolkata), where her father was stationed,

Das began expressing herself through writing from a young age. At fifteen, she married Madhava Das, a senior banking executive, and relocated to Bombay (now Mumbai), an experience that significantly shaped her views on love and relationships. Juggling the responsibilities of motherhood, she often found solace in writing during the late hours.

Kamala Das amassed a substantial body of work throughout her career. Her poetry collections, including "Summer in Calcutta" (1965), "The Descendants" (1967), and "The Old Playhouse and Other Poems" (1973), showcased her mastery of the English language. Noteworthy among her English works are the novel "Alphabet of Lust" (1976) and the short stories "A Doll for the Child Prostitute" (1977) and "Padmavati the Harlot" (1992). In Malayalam literature, she left a lasting impact with works like the short-story collection "Thanuppu" (1967) and the memoir "Balyakala Smaranakal" (1987). However, it was her autobiography, initially serialized in Malayalam as "Ente Katha" (1973) before being published in English as "My Story" (1976), that garnered widespread acclaim despite its controversially intimate portrayal of her life.

In a surprising move in 1999, Das converted to Islam, adopting the name Kamala Surayya. Despite the controversies surrounding her personal life, she received numerous literary honours, including the Asian World Prize for Literature in 1985.

Acknowledging the profound emotional depth of her poetry, Das once remarked on the presence of "lot of love" in her verses. She emphasised the beauty of love as a transcendent experience, while also critiquing the degradation of marital relationships into mere expressions of male dominance and lust. Her poems serve as poignant reflections on the complexities of love and desire, devoid of the sexual repression found in the works of poets like Emily Dickinson and Emily Bronte. Instead, Das's poetry emanates from a place of existential anguish, rooted in her experiences of feeling marginalised and trapped within societal constraints.

Driven by a sense of disillusionment yet tempered with resilience, Das's poetry emerges as a testament to her unwavering spirit. It serves as both a rebellious outcry against societal norms and a celebration of feminine identity, capturing the silent yearnings inherent in womanhood. Through her verses, she confronts the stark realities of love and marriage, advocating for the freedom to seek one's true self amidst the constraints of societal expectations.

1.2 Research Question:

Is Kamala Das's poetry a reflection of romance or vulgarity?

1.3 Objectives:

1. To delve into the deeper meanings embedded in Kamala Das's poetry.
2. To comprehend the notion of 'Romance' through the perspective of Kamala Das.
3. To address the inquiry: Are Kamala Das's poems indicative of romance or vulgarity?

1.4 Feminist Perspective :

Kamala Das's poetry epitomises the articulation of feminine sensibility within a male-dominated society. While inherently confessional and self-revealing, her poetry also transcends the personal to touch upon universal themes. Rejecting archaic and restrictive perceptions of femininity, Das advocated for the liberation of both mind and body throughout her work. Encountering pervasive male dominance and the suppression of her own bodily autonomy, Das channelled her frustrations into her writing, offering a critique of patriarchal norms. Poems like 'Introduction' broach the topics of sexual frustration and the societal constraints on women's

choices. This research seeks to analyse select poems to discern whether Das's poetry embodies love or lust.

1.5 What is Feminist Theory? :

Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical perspective, fictional, or philosophical discourse. It majorly aims at understanding the nature of gender inequality in the society.

Feminist theory shines a light on social problems, trends, and issues that are otherwise overlooked or misidentified by the historically dominant male perspective within social theory.

That said, since the experiences and perspectives of women and girls were historically excluded for years from social theory and social science, much feminist theory has focused on their interactions and experiences within society to ensure that half the world's population is not left out of how we see and understand social forces, relations, and problems.

It also examines women's and men's social roles, experiences, interests, chores as well as feminist politics in a variety of fields which include, anthropology and sociology, communication, media studies, psychoanalysis political theory, home economics, literature, education, and philosophy

It mainly refers to the idea they both genders are equal and neither of them is superior to another. Thus, feminist theory implies the importance of gender equality among individuals.

Many people incorrectly believe that feminist theory focuses exclusively on girls and women and that it has an inherent goal of promoting the superiority of women over men.

Feminist theories first emerged as early as 1794 in publications such as A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft, "The Changing Woman", Ain't I a Woman Speech after Arrest for Illegal Voting and so on.

"The Changing Woman" is a Navajo Myth that gave credit to a woman who, in the end, populated the world. In 1851, Sojourner Truth addressed women's rights issues through her publication, "Ain't I a Woman?". Sojourner Truth addressed the issue of women having limited rights due to men's flawed perception of women. Truth argued that if a woman of colour can perform tasks that were supposedly limited to men, then any woman of any colour could perform those same tasks.

After her arrest for illegally voting, Susan B. Anthony gave a speech within court in which she addressed the issues of language within the constitution documented in her publication, Speech after Arrest for Illegal voting in 1872. Anthony questioned the authoritative principles of the constitution and its male-gendered language. She raised the question of why women are accountable to be punished under law but they cannot use the law for their own protection (women could not vote, own property, nor maintain custody of themselves in marriage).

She also critiqued the constitution for its male-gendered language and questioned why women should have to abide by laws that do not specify women.

Thus, Part of what makes feminist theory creative and inclusive is that it often considers how systems of power and oppression interact, which is to say it does not just focus on gendered power and oppression, but on how this might intersect with systemic racism, a hierarchical class system, sexuality, nationality, and disability, among other things.

Feminist theories that focus on gender inequality recognize that women's location in and experience of social situations are not only different but also unequal to men's.

Liberal feminists argue that women have the same capacity as men for moral reasoning and agency, but that patriarchy, particularly the sexist division of labour, has historically denied women the opportunity to express and practise this reasoning.

These dynamics serve to shove women into the private sphere of the household and to exclude them from full participation in public life. Liberal feminists point out that gender inequality exists for women in a heterosexual marriage and that women do not benefit from being married.

1.6 Feminist and confessional approach to the poems of Kamala Das :

In Kamala Das' poetry, we discover the finest articulation of feminine sensibility, its existence within a male-dominated society. So, her poetry is confessional and self-revealing, all things considered; however, occasionally, she also generalises what is personal. She rejected age-old and somewhat sterile perceptions of life, advocating for the freedom of mind and body.

Throughout her life, Kamala Das confronted strong male dominance and the suppression of her own bodily needs. Thus, this led her to mental and sexual frustration due to her unfulfilled desires. She opted for her writings as a means to express her frustrating thoughts and also to criticise the ever-dominating patriarchy.

Many of her poems echo her unmet desires and have also endeavoured to criticise patriarchy. Poems like 'Introduction' address the issue of sexual frustration and also delve into questions of women's agency in society.

Most of Kamala Das's poetry traverses the border between the fulfilment and lack thereof of love. This particular study aims to analyse a few selected poems and evaluate whether Das's poetry reflects love or lust.

Kamala Das, through her poetry, has sought to present her strong views on the male-dominated society. In her poetry, she condemns patriarchal norms. Her confessional writings mirror her audacious nature. In her poems, she openly discusses sexuality and the role of women in society. In the poem 'The Looking Glass,' she indirectly criticises the position of women in comparison to men. She states,

"A man to love is easy, but living Without him afterwards may have to be Faced."

These lines suggest that Das critiques the fact that a woman's survival in society often depends on a man. Das employs potent ideas to convey her intended message. She is recognized as a modern feminist writer in India. She is also renowned for challenging certain religious traditions in her poetry.

In the poem 'An Introduction,' Kamala Das endeavours to portray how a woman's body is exploited in patriarchal society. A woman's consent is disregarded, and male dominance prevails over her will. This is evident in the following lines.

"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."

Thus, this depicts the plight of women who fall prey to patriarchy. In another poem, "The Freaks," Das presents the idea that a woman has no say of her own and is compelled to accept love devoid of emotional connection. She remarks,

"The heart, An empty cistern, waiting Through long hours, fills itself With coiling snakes of silence."

In another poem titled 'A Losing Battle,' Das portrays lustful love and criticises men for their patriarchal nature. She expresses,

"How can my love hold him when the other Flaunts a gaudy lust and is lioness to his beast"

This indicates that Kamala Das' robust feminine sensibility prompted her to write such words. She vehemently critiques male dominance. Therefore, her feminine perspective is clearly evident in her poems.

In another poem titled 'Relationship,' she presents the concept of love with her beloved and the beautiful journey they embark on. Describing her experience, she says,

“Yes, he can, but never physically Only with words that curl their limbs at Touch of air and die with metallic sighs.”

Thus, it is apparent that Kamala Das's poems extensively reflect femininity and challenge patriarchal societal norms. They also strongly denounce the meaningless religious traditions prevalent in our country. Hence, Kamala Das is hailed as the feminist writer of India.

Kamala Das is an Indian feminist. Her poetry advocates the view that both man and woman complement each other. She does not despise men per se, but she loathes the man-made system and the exploitation and subjugation in the name of social harmony. Her poetry could be categorised as protest poetry.

Her poetry is filled with anguish and protest. Her protest against the way she is treated by her husband and other sexual partners forms strong arguments in support of women's rights. Her feminine sensibility is the guiding and driving force in her poetry.

Another remarkable work by Kamala Das is 'The Dance of Eunuchs.' 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' derives its extraordinary impact from the series of contrasts woven by the poet into its structure. The eunuchs celebrating the birth of a child are likened to 'half-burned logs from funeral pyres,' instantly drawing a sinister birth-death contrast. The frenzied dance of the eunuchs with their wide skirts spinning round and round, accompanied by cymbals and jingling anklets, is juxtaposed with the sultriness of an otherwise passive afternoon. The silent crows on the trees and the calm children are set against the violent convulsions of the dancing creatures.

The poet's restrained sympathy with the eunuchs and her emotional involvement in their agony are skillfully controlled through imagery and paradox. The decrepit figures of the eunuchs dancing wildly until they bleed assume a kind of reluctant femininity.

This redemption of feeling is depicted by attributing some of the eunuchs with male characteristics and others with female traits. Some beat their drums; others beat their sorrowful breasts And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy.

The poet also feminises some of the eunuchs, and as they bleed through dancing and enter the realm of femininity through bleeding, even the sky crackles like the hymenal skin celebrating the occasion with 'thunder,' 'lightning,' and 'rain.'

Kamala Das suggests that in a disillusioned and empty heart, love becomes poison; lust masquerades as love. So one must flaunt a grand, flamboyant lust to save face. The poem exposes the gap between desire and its fulfilment. It consists of fragmented lines separated by punctuation, suggesting the woman's reluctant participation in the act of lust.

Kamala Das has employed the confessional mode in most of her significant poems. They articulate the various pains and pressures modern Indian women encounter in their journey from restraint to freedom and from tradition to modernity. An unperceptive reader might be offended by her unorthodox flashes and dismiss her poetry as virulent.

The strength of Kamala Das's poetry lies in its haunting ability to awaken our dormant human sympathies and our repressed passion for genuine man-woman relationships. Her ideal man-woman relationship is based on love without lust, passion without the desire for possession, and sympathy without condescension.

Kamala Das's autobiographical work *My Story* has startled both the respectable reader and the discerning critic because many readers and critics have overlooked its poetic structure and its prevailing tone of fantasy. Indeed, *My Story* is not a typical autobiography; it is an imaginative

and fanciful portrayal of certain autobiographical experiences that influenced the poet's journey from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to its forfeiture.

The poet is remarkably forthright in her revelations, but most of the strange and startling experiences and incidents in the 'story are more wish-fulfillment of a repressed soul than actual indulgences. The truth in *My Story* is only partly factual, with the majority of the book devoted to the truth of emotion and imagination.

Kamala Das's preoccupation with death is an extension of her fixation on the themes of love-lust-frustration. In many poems, frustration leads to protest, and protest culminates in the release of tensions and a sense of contentment with life.

At this point of maturity, both life and death reveal themselves to her as two sides of the same coin of existence. Death is depicted as a mysterious counterpart to life. Kamala Das has harboured a mystic longing for death in poems like 'Words and Birds', 'A Holiday for Me', and 'The Ancient Mango Tree'. The dread of death is downplayed, but its inevitability is emphasised. The poet's yearning for death is also intertwined with her belief in immortality. Death is seen as a temporary phase through which the human soul transitions from life to immortality.

Kamala Das writes, "I have been for years 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" (*My Story* - p.218)

Kamala Das believes that honesty of expression and sincerity to one's own feelings and emotions are more fundamental to poetry than the language employed. English could voice her joys, longings, and hopes, and it comes naturally to her 'as cawing is to crows or roaring to the lions'.

"The language one employs is not important. What is important is the thought contained by the words." Thus, her strong feminine sensibility is evident in her poems.

1.7 The confessional approach :

Kamala Das's poetry is characterised by a startling frankness and a probing exploration of the self. The unconventional nature of her themes and the intensity of her imaginative vision are matched by her complete sincerity of expression. There is no hiding behind obscure phrases and images or seeking refuge in mysteries. Kamala Das's fundamental theme is the exploration of the true nature of love, the rationale of relationships based on love, and the pains and pleasures of their realisation. Every poem is a repeated experiment in this search for the meaning of love and the significance of the self. Honesty and courage are, inevitably, the hallmarks of such an endeavour. The poet says, "There is..... a lot of love in my poems. I feel forced to be honest in my poetry. I have read very little poetry. I do not think I have been influenced by any poet..... When I compose poetry, whispering the words to myself, my ear helps to discipline the verse. Afterwards I count the syllables. I like poetry to be tidy and disciplined"¹. This is a simple formula for any poet, but the essential ingredient of the formula is honesty.

The uncompromising honesty of emotions and boldness of expression lend most of Kamala Das's poems meanings larger than her conscious purpose and significance deeper than their intense introvertedness.

The central experience in Kamala Das's poetry is an encounter with pain in relation to love, sex, and family. This obsessive theme manifests in various forms, and everywhere 'woman' is the focal point.

The locus of anguish is centred on womanhood, as a lover, as a wife, as a mother, as a flirt, as an ageing matron, and as a seeker of love and security. The poet imaginatively identifies with the 'woman,' but Kamala Das is not necessarily that woman in all respects—an eagerness on the part of critics to equate Kamala Das entirely with the woman of her poems has resulted in certain erroneous critical evaluations of her poetry and in uncomplimentary assessments of her personality and character.

The woman in Kamala Das's poetry is 'every woman who seeks love. It is, probably, the first-person narrative style she employs in her most subjective poems that fortifies the critics against any possibility of separateness between the private personality of the poet and the tormented woman persona of her poems. But, then, this style is an essential part of the confessional mode the poet adopts.

Confessional poetry is concerned with the disrupted self of the poet and its reaction to the impact of a world in the process of disintegration. For the confessional poet, the entire world is a manifestation of his own disturbed consciousness. For him, the reality is evident in his tense relationship with the fluctuating world and his disrupted relationship with his own self.

The primary endeavor in confessional poetry is to preserve the vitality of life and experience by articulating the sufferings of the self with acute awareness. Though the roots of confessional poetry can be traced to various sources like Shakespearean soliloquies, Wordsworth's autobiographical reflections in *The Prelude*, and Browning's dramatic monologues, it was Robert Lowell and later Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton who paved the way for its more effective practice in modern times.

The confessional mode has emerged as a potent technique in modern times because it allows the poet to release the psychological pressure that overwhelms their sensibility.

Thus, confessional poetry now is 'an attempt to present the poet's own naked self and rationalised, uncensored actual feelings and behaviour. The poet is absorbed in an urge to peel off the layers of themselves to reveal the terror, pain, miseries, vexations, and frustrations that engulf them. Sometimes reticence and social propriety are disregarded in the attempt to be startlingly frank. Both Anne Sexton and Kamala Das confess to drug habits and extramarital affairs.

The confessional mode is often associated with rendering in the first person. Such a technique imparts a sense of immediacy and authenticity to the sentiments expressed. However, confessional poetry cannot thrive unless it transcends the simple autobiographical mode. To achieve the goal of surpassing what is explicitly stated, the confessional poet employs a language that evokes rather than signifies. Innocuous but abrupt beginnings, use of imagery and symbols that operate simultaneously at more than one level, arrangement of lines in appropriate lengths to convey nuances of passion and emotion, disregard for syntax and metre, and a deliberate adherence to rhythm and movement are some of the devices confessional poets use to overcome the limitations of the first-person rendering. In the process, the 'symbol I' becomes something else through the medium that absorbs its associations.

Kamala Das has been a bilingual writer. She has penned numerous short stories in Malayalam, her mother tongue, and one of her collections of short stories received a Kerala Sahitya Academy Prize. She has also written scores of short essays in periodical publications in Malayalam.

She adopts a highly personalised and evocative style in her prose writings in Malayalam. However, Kamala Das has opted to write poetry in English. Most Indian writers in English who gained prominence after the fifties were university-educated intellectuals who chose writing only as a secondary profession. Kamala Das never attended a university, and the English she

acquired was the result of her diligent self-study. Thus, writing in a highly expressive form in a foreign language that she learned without much external aid is in itself a significant achievement.

Her language and style stand in stark contrast to the flatness, inelegance, and coarseness of some later women poets. "Often her vocabulary, idioms, choice of words, and some syntactical constructions are part of what has been termed the Indianization of English."

Kamala Das's choice of English as the medium for poetic communication does not seem to be deliberate. Commenting on why Indian writers use English for creative expression, Kamala Das says "Why in English is a silly question. It is like asking us why we do not write in Swahili or Serbo-Croatian. English being the most familiar, we use it. That is all." In 'An Introduction,' the poet touches upon this question and replies to those who advise her not to write in English.

"I am an Indian, very brown, born in Malabar, I speak three languages, write in Two."

Kamala Das believes that honesty of expression and sincerity to one's own feelings and emotions are more fundamental to poetry than the language employed. English could voice her joys, longings, and hopes, and it comes naturally to her 'as cawing is to crows or roaring to the lions'. "The language one employs is not important. What is important is the thought contained in the words."

Poetry is but the thought and words in which emotion spontaneously embodies itself. It is an organisation of the best words in the best possible order. Shelley's definition of poetry as the expression of the imagination is inadequate today. There is something more than mere expression of imagination in great poetry, and it is futile to separate thoughts, emotion, and expression in poetry as if they are irreconcilable entities. In great poetry, the poet is concerned with the revelations of the self, the joys, sufferings, longings, and anguish of the self, caught in the welter of existence. It celebrates man's ability to observe and apprehend experience as well

as to manipulate language expressively. It is the communication of abstract feeling, the direct presentation of individual experience.

The expression of the self in poetic terms in a tangible manner requires the assistance of language and words. Thus form and content in poetry are interdependent and constitute the indivisible core of the poet's art. T.S. Eliot observes, "The notion of appreciation of form without content, or of content ignoring form, is an illusion; if we ignore the content of a poem, we fail to appreciate the form; if we ignore the form, we have not grasped the content for the meaning of a poem exists in the words of the poem and in those words only.

In the poetry of Kamala Das, the distinction between form and content disappears because it works synergically on the several planes of our sensibility and consciousness. She chooses words by their tone of voice and uses them with unmistakable instinct to convey the perpetual burning within her. She is unaware of the morphology or even the grammatical nuances of words, but she recognizes their vital power and emotive effects. Her poetry is an exploration with words and their countless combinations, unlocking a world where experiences scramble to be expressed. Poetry, for her, is a method of unloading her tortured self, unfolding the mishaps and despairs of her life to attain a state of tranquility. The confessional mode she has embraced renders her expression urgent and loaded with various directions of meaning. This mode aims at recreating intense feeling through a structure of words that expresses the turmoil of the self and evokes a responsive emotional disturbance in the reader.

In Kamala Das, the emergence of an idea, a feeling, or a sensation is immediately followed by its expression in words. The waning of inspiration is practically nonexistent.

Thus, even while giving an impression of writing without premeditation, Kamala Das displays great power and virtuosity in the use of language. "While giving the impression of writing in haste, she reveals a mastery of phrase and control over rhythm, the words often pointed and

envenomed too, and the rhythm so nervously, almost feverishly, alive." The spontaneity of expression, which is the main feature of Kamala Das's diction, largely reduces the unpleasant possibility of the tyranny of words that marks most of the writings of Sri Aurobindo and his school.

There is a complete fusion of thought, expression, rhythm, and meaning in her verses, and the words create a symbiosis of several sensations, visual, auditory, and emotive. 'The Freaks' opens with a visual image that slaps the reader's consciousness with sudden impact.

The abrupt and spontaneous beginning of 'Summer in Calcutta' is striking, and the words form into a quick, evocative image.

“What is this drink but The April sun, squeezed Like an orange in My glass?”

The word 'squeezed' pervades the meaning of the poem. In 'The Music Party,' the first four lines composed of associative words at once convey the cold attitude of the lover.

Music in front. A pale Girl in pink, beside the Harmonium. Behind Me, your stillness.

"Harmonium interposes between stillness and music. For Kamala Das, words are birds that take to wings with a bang as soon as an emotion or feeling takes shape out of the cauldron of experience.

Kamala Das's poetry is not emotion recollected in the coolness of tranquility but an uninhibited expression of emotions and feelings in the white heat of experience. In the momentum of experience, words curl their limbs and flow out of her like a torrent at the slightest provocation. Kamala Das has remarked that every good writer is a sculptor with words. She has outlined her philosophy of writing and the methodology in the use of words in 'Without Pause' (Summer in Calcutta).

All around me are words, and words and words, they grow on me like leaves, they never seem to stop their slow growing from within. But I tell myself, words are a nuisance, beware of them, they can be so many things, a chasm where running feet must pause to look, a sea with paralyzing waves, a flash of burning air, or a knife most willing to cut your best friend's throat. Words are a nuisance, but they grow on me like leaves on a tree, they never seem to stop their coming from a silence, somewhere deep within.

Kamala Das's language is natural, colloquial, and moulded by a confessional urgency. In most poems, she employs the common speech of an English-educated Indian; she does not create or borrow poetic words; she does not burden the words with philosophical or spiritual implications; she does not charge them with exotic nuances hard to comprehend. Often her language is a sophisticated form of everyday speech lifted to the point where the facile distinction between poetry and prose is obliterated. There is poetry and simplicity in lines such as

**"I know the rats are running now Across the darkened halls. They do not fear the dead.
I know the white ants have reached my home And have raised on walls Strange totems of
burial."**

Kamala Das's poetry reveals an acutely private universe disturbed by the impact of conflicting and corrosive experiences. It objectifies the passions and frustrations of her personal relationships through a multitude of analogs drawn from several sources.

Imagery, symbols, and metaphors constitute the most discernible and powerful devices the poet employs to mold her poetic art. In poetry, the evocation of feelings and states of being is of primary importance, and this is achieved through structures of words that express the inner world of the poet and the reader. Structure and style are principal devices poetry employs for the communication of experience, and the language is more intensified than in other forms of

literary art. Only these intensified moulds of language can truthfully bring out the nuances of the inner world of the poet. While the impact of dramatic and narrative poetry depends on incidents, plot, and character, in lyric poetry, which is most personal, the poet achieves the effect through the employment of the figures of speech and figurative language.

Imagery in poetry is the manner in which sensory responses are evoked through the presentation of ideas in a collocation of words, conventional or unconventional. An imagery brings to the focus of our consciousness a sensory picture of experience, a recognizable image, a perceptible idea, or notion by the deft combination of connotative words. In "The Stone Age," Kamala Das evokes two striking images of lust in the following lines:

"Ask me why his hand sways like a hooded snake Before it clasps my pubis. Ask me why, like A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breasts. And sleep."

Kamala Das eschews exotic imagery or symbols, opting instead for those drawn from everyday circumstances, imbued with a purely Indian flavour. In her poetry, imagery reinforces sentiment, and many of her images express her inner turbulence. The imagery of the 'trained circus dog' recurs in multiple poems.

Her poetry unveils a deeply private universe disturbed by conflicting and corrosive experiences. It externalises the passions and frustrations of her personal relationships through a plethora of analogs drawn from various sources. Imagery, symbols, and metaphors constitute the most discernible and powerful devices she employs to shape her poetic art.

In poetry, the evocation of feelings and states of being is paramount, achieved through word structures expressing the inner worlds of poet and reader alike. Structure and style are pivotal in communicating experience through poetry, intensifying language more than other literary forms.

While imagery bolsters the structure of feeling Kamala Das constructs in her poetry, symbols, metaphors, and similar figurative devices underpin the emotional universe it encompasses. Emotionally conceived, symbols and metaphors help transform disordered pains and frustrations into well-defined experiences.

A symbol is an objective image chosen to represent an abstraction due to an implied association of qualities or traits between them. Some symbols have fixed meanings within a culture, like 'rose' for love or 'serpent' for evil, while others, like 'sea,' remain open-ended, representing a cluster of ideas and radiating diverse meanings.

Kamala Das derives her symbols from the earth, air, water, fire, animal life, and plant life. The sweep of her imagination animates every word used in a symbolic context, lending even ordinary expressions remarkable mobility and beauty. In 'A Certain Defect in the Blood,' the paralysing effect of fear is vividly symbolised, as seen in the following lines:

"Like spiders exposed

To a water jet we curled ourselves into

Tight balls....."

Thus the feminine perspective and the confessional approach is clearly evident in the works of Kamala Das.

1.8 Literature Review:

A) Poetry of Kamala Das: A Critique of Patriarchy

Subrata Chandra Mozumder

Subrata Mozumder's paper, 'The Poetry of Kamala Das: A Critique of Patriarchy,' examines the harsh realities of Kamala Das's life and her bold defiance of prevailing patriarchal norms.

Mozumder asserts that Kamala Das vehemently rejected traditional gender roles, often eschewing feminine attire in favour of more masculine clothing. This assertion is supported by excerpts from Das's poem 'An Introduction.' Additionally, Mozumder portrays Das's longing for emotional intimacy, which she found lacking in her marriage, where physical pleasure overshadowed emotional connection. Das's yearning for emotional fulfilment is echoed in lines from her poem 'The Freaks.'

Mozumder further elaborates on Das's marital woes, describing her husband's dominance in their sexual relationship, reducing Das to a mere object of his desires. This portrayal highlights the profound influence of Das's personal struggles on her confessional poetry.

According to Mozumder, Das's experiences epitomise the plight of women in society, where love often becomes a mechanized union devoid of emotional depth. Das's poetry, Mozumder argues, reflects her rebellion against patriarchal structures and the systemic oppression of women.

In painting a grim picture of Das's life and the societal constraints she faced, Mozumder portrays Das as a fighter who resisted patriarchal norms despite contemplating suicide. Despite her suffering, Das's poetry stands as a testament to her resilience and rebellion against entrenched patriarchy.

Through an examination of Das's familial background, her experiences with love and sexuality, and the societal pressures she endured, Mozumder concludes that Das's poetry serves as a scathing critique of patriarchy.

B) Exploring the Feminist Perspective in Kamala Das's Poetry

Varsha Verma

Assistant Professor

JVC Group of Institutions

In her paper titled 'Exploring the Feminist Perspective in the Poems of Kamala Das,' Varsha Verma contends that Kamala Das authentically expresses her innermost feelings in her poetry, drawing from her lived experiences. Verma supports this assertion by citing a statement made by Kamala Das:

"For the first time, I learned to be miserable with my energy, spending it only on my writing, which I enjoyed more than anything else in the world. I typed sitting propped against a pillow on my wide bed... I wanted my readers to know of it. I had realized by then that the writer has none to love her but the readers. She would have proved herself to be a mere embarrassment to the members of the family, for she is like a Goldfish in a well-lit bowl whose movements are never kept concealed" (My Story 201).

Verma observes that Kamala Das exhibits remarkable boldness in openly discussing 'Sex' and women's hunger for bodily pleasures in her poetry. This openness is evident in lines such as:

"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 hunters" (Only the Soul Knows How to Sing 68).

Describing Das's work as a blend of past and present, Verma notes that it grapples with unfulfilled love while also celebrating sexuality. Verma asserts that Das's poems vividly depict her suffering and sexual exploitation. According to Verma, Kamala Das views language as a means of expressing her thoughts.

Verma contends that Kamala Das has successfully carved out a space for herself as an Indian woman writer and employs writing as a means to alleviate mental stress. Verma further suggests that Das has established a tradition in Indian Poetry.

Additionally, Verma states that Das's poetry reflects a longing for emotional stability, as evidenced by lines such as:

"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; but, they only wander, tripping Idly over puddles of Desire" (Summer in Calcutta 8).

Verma asserts that Das's poetry resonates with readers due to its strong feminine sensibility, addressing themes of both love and lust. Verma concludes that Kamala Das is truly a preeminent feminine poet of India.

C) Poetry of Protest and Confession: A Study of Kamala Das

Purnima Bali

Research Scholar

Himachal Pradesh University

Shimla, India

In her paper, Purnima Bali asserts that Kamala Das is unabashedly open and direct about her feelings, particularly her passion. Bali contends that Das's poems represent her quest for identity within a traditional society. According to Bali, confessional poetry necessitates the writer's honesty, a trait which Kamala Das embodies in her poetic works.

By analysing select poems, Bali suggests that Kamala Das grappled with the conflict between passion and tradition, desiring to break free from societal constraints. Bali argues that Das, through her poetry, not only articulates her innermost feelings but also asserts herself as a feminist poetic voice demanding dignified recognition.

Bali posits that Das's poetry resonates most strongly with readers who seek to empathise with the poet's inner turmoil and view the world through the lens of a haunted woman. According to Bali, Das's poetry revolves around themes of self-searching, self-analysis, introspection, and profound self-examination.

1.9 Necessity of the Proposed Research:

The proposed research is pertinent as it seeks to address the contentious query regarding whether Kamala Das's poetry is solely romantic or also reflects elements of vulgarity. It is crucial to offer readers fresh insights into this debate. While Kamala Das has been labelled as vulgar due to the explicit portrayal of sexuality and the use of bold language in her poetry, existing studies have overlooked the question of whether her poems should be deemed vulgar and inappropriate or retain their status as expressions of love and romance.

1.10 Methodology :

The research endeavours to resolve the debate surrounding Kamala Das's poetry, focusing on whether it primarily explores themes of lust/vulgarity or encompasses elements of love and romance as well. The methodology entails:

- Thoroughly analysing selected poems by Kamala Das to discern the underlying ideas and messages conveyed.
- Undertaking qualitative analysis through close textual examinations.

1.11 Scope and Limitations :

Scope: This study aims to investigate whether Kamala Das's poems are exclusively romantic or also contain elements of vulgarity. Specifically, the paper will analyse seven poems by Kamala Das, namely:

'My Grandmother's House'

'The Freaks'

'An Introduction'

'In Love'

'The Looking Glass'

'Relationship'

'A Losing Battle'

Kamala Das's poetry is often criticized as vulgar, with critics questioning its status as love poetry. Therefore, there is a growing need to explore and research this topic.

Limitations : Due to time constraints and a specified word limit, the study will focus only on a few selected poems. It will not delve extensively into the background of the poems but rather analyze their themes and language choices. The study is limited to exploring the ideas conveyed in the poems and does not delve into the poet's intentions.

Chapter II: ‘An Introduction’ and ‘My Grandmother’s House’

This particular chapter explores the idea of love in depth and also attempts to understand Kamala Das as an individual by analysing these poems.

2.1 summary of the poem ‘An Introduction’

The poem An Introduction is an autobiographical work by Kamala Das that sheds light on the life of a woman in the patriarchal society.

Kamala Das puts a special emphasis on marriage. She contrasts the roles of men and women in society and explains for the reader how her life is miserable and the rules she's unwillingly bound to obey, infringe on her freedom. Readers should be able to ask themselves while moving through the poem how, if at all, the things Das is mentioning apply to their own life.

She further says, if nothing matches up, they might ask themselves why and if some kind of unaddressed or unacknowledged privilege is making their lives better.

Thus, it is a clear depiction of how the males have been ruling the country encroaching on the rights of the women. Moreover, the rulers are fewer in numbers because democracy exists only in words. In reality, the rule of the country remains in the hands of some people only who have assumed themselves to be the sole rulers.

In the first section of the poem the speaker begins by comparing her knowledge of politicians to the days of the week and months of the year. Although she does not have a firm understanding of politics itself, those who hold power have remained in her mind. This shows their power to be much greater than their role should allow them to be.

The first of these she is able to recall is Nehru, who served as India's first prime minister after the end of the British rule. After these opening lines that set the scene, the speaker moves on to describe her own being. She is Indian and she is very brown. Lastly, she is from Malabar in southwest India. These are the basics of her life, but not everything.

She continues to describe language and the role it plays in her life by saying that she is judged for writing in English. It is not her "mother-tongue." Whenever she is criticised for how she speaks and writes she feels as if she is alone. There is no one, not her friends or cousins, who support her. They all are critics, she says.

Being well familiar with English she uses this language in her writings. However, this habit of hers is not liked by her friends, relatives, and critics. They all condemn her for writing in English as according to them, English is the language of the colonists. She asks them why they criticise her. Why she is not given liberty to write in whatever language she desires

She directs the next line at this group, asking them why it bothers them what she speaks. She feels a strong connection to the words she uses and how, through “deformation” her language can only be defined as her own. She says that her grieves and sorrows are the grieves and sorrows of every woman of her country.

She directs the next line at this group, asking them why they care what she speaks. She feels a deep connection to the words she uses and how, through distortions, her language can only be defined as her own.

As the poem progresses the speaker goes on to describe herself as half English, half Indian. She sees the humour in this combination and acknowledges that fact as it is “honest.” This appears to be one of the most important parts of her, a desire for honesty. Her identity, as seen through her voice, is human just as she is human. It should be held under the single defining category and no other.

The speaker defines her freedom through making use of her voice. She explains to the reader that there are other circumstances in her life that breach that freedom. They are out of her control. When she was young she asked for love, because she didn’t know what else to ask for.

This ended with her marriage at the age of sixteen and putting her behind a closed bedroom door. The pressure placed on her by her husband and by her family led her to an emotional and mental breakdown. It was a Pitiful process according to her.

The speaker is ridding herself of the female image that has extremely harmed her. Now that she is rebuilding her identity she is able to deny the traditions of womanhood. These include fitting in and dressing in sarees. She chose to move her life beyond the traditional norms and therefore expand her presence in the world.

She goes on to describe a time in which she met and loved a man. This person is referred to as “man,” he has no name. Additionally, the name is of little importance as he is meant to represent every man in the world who uses women as he pleases.

The young girls in her country are forced to marry old men without having their consent. They are so young at the time of their marriage that they cannot accept that they have grown up. However as their body parts including the genitals grow up, they have to accept that they are mature now and thus have bound into the nuptial alliance.

The girl after being married desires that her husband should show compassion to her and love her. But instead, she is drawn to the bed and made to endure the pains of sex that she is not willing to do.

Hence, in conclusion, the speaker acknowledges the constant presence of “I” around her. In the world, she’s a part of there are “I” men everywhere she looks. A person of this nature is able to go and drink at twelve and stay in hotels of strange towns. As the lines proceed the division between the speaker and the “I” gets blurred.

This ‘I’ or the ‘male-ego’ gives him the liberty to do whatever he likes. He can drink at midnight, laugh, and satisfy his lust. However, he feels ashamed after losing a woman due to his own shortcomings and also this ego of ‘I’ dies when the person dies and thus his end is no different than the end of the woman.

Eventually, we understand that she is trying to come to terms with her own independence and identity as both saint and sinner.

2.2 Lens of romance to the poem :

At the beginning the poet provides a brief introduction to the readers mentioning that she was born in Malabar and also that she speaks in three languages, write in two and dream in one. As we read further we encounter the fact that Kamla Das was criticised by many for writing in English. Defending her choice Kamla Das presents the following lines.

“It is half English, half Indian, funny parts perhaps, but to be honest, it is as human as I am human, don't you see? It voices my joys, my longings, my hopes,”

As the poem progresses we encounter the fact that the poet is a child. Soon she also mentions to her readers that she now grew up, she couldn't think of asking anything else, hence she asked for love.

Since she had asked for love, she was sent behind closed doors along with a youth of sixteen. The boy could provide her only lust and not pure love. After getting married, she desires that her husband should show compassion to her and love her. But instead, she is drawn to the bed and forced to endure the pains of sex that she is not willing to bear.

Furthermore, she was also asked to hide her real self. Her in-laws even commanded her to remain silent and endure her unattained love.

This is clearly reflected in the following lines.

“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.”

These lines tell us that Kamla Das wished to experience a pure form of love, rather she experienced only lust.

Her plight as she mentions in the poem, gives its readers an idea that Das had a strong desire for pure romance over meaningless lust. Her life was incomplete and lacked pure love.

‘My Grandmother’s House

2.3 Summary of the poem ‘My Grandmother’s House’ :

My Grandmother’s House by Kamala Das is an auto-biographical poem in which the poet memorised her past childhood days at her grandmother’s house and how the love and affection she got from her had been lost since her death.

The house had become lonely after the demise of her grandmother. It became a place of silence over the death of the old woman because her grandmother was the very soul of that house. The poet now lives in a big city after her marriage, an isolated place from her grandmother’s house. The poet’s feminine sensibility finds its clearest loveless relationships in it.

A note of pessimism runs throughout the action of the poem. It reveals the poet’s painful unfulfilled desire to visit her grandmother’s house to which she is deeply and emotionally attached. The poet is shocked to learn that the house is all in ruin after the death of her grandmother. She suffers in silence due to the wear and tear it has undergone in her absence. A death-like silence reigns in her grandmother’s house.

She is reminded of her grandmother's house where she spent her pleasant childhood. Ironically, it is the only place where she received love from her grandmother. The death of her loving grandmother is even mourned by the house to which she was emotionally attached. A death-like silence resided in the house after her departure from this world. It seems that the grandmother was the very soul of this house. After her grandmother's death the snakes were moving on the books. The poet was too young then, she couldn't read anyway and she didn't really understand what was going on.

All these things made the house quite horrible and the poet's blood turned cold like the moon. But still, the poet expressed her desire to go back to the house because she was emotionally attached to that house since her childhood. She wanted to look through and observe closely through the windows, which might be blind eyes as no one was staying in the house. The air of the house was frozen, because no fresh air had circulated through the house since the death of her grandmother, as it remained locked.

The poet also wished to pick up an armful of darkness which was a reminder of the past and wanted to take it back to her distressed, troubled and hopeless life so that even a pinch of darkness from her beloved grandmother's house might provide her with love and warmth.

This shows that her present life is worse than the darkness of the empty house of her grandmother. The poet was really desperate for her grandmother's love. In that house, she was very much loved and felt proud.

She was emotionally weakened after the death of her grandmother and felt heart-broken. It was her disenchantment with her loveless marriage that reminded her of her grandmother's pure and selfless love. Her marriage no longer assures her affection and love. She knew well that she wouldn't be able to get that much love but she still hoped for at least a part of it.

Hence the poem ends with hope but at the same time reflects a certain level of despair. The poet is in a mood of recollections and recreates the plight of her grandmother's house after her departure from this world. She gives us the very feel of the house in its state of neglect and isolation.

Further, the post appears to tell her husband that he can never believe the intensity of love that she received from her grandmother. He can never understand that she was extremely proud of her grandmother's house where she was deeply loved by her grandmother.

It is only after her separation from her grandmother's house that has ruined her life forever. It is loveless and hopeless married life that has crippled her sense of pride and love which she used to have in her grandmother's house. She has become a beggar for love who now knocks helplessly at strangers' doors to receive love at least in a small measure. She has completely lost her way in search of genuine and selfless love.

The poet often longs to visit her grandmother's house to which she was emotionally attached since her childhood. It has been a place of security and protection which is sadly missing in her new house in the city. She would like to peep through the dust-ridden or coloured panes of windows that were shut after the death of the grandmother. She would like to listen and feel the still atmosphere prevailing in the house. It is this longing to revisit her grandmother's house that adds to her sense of frustration and hopelessness. The darkness of her grandmother's house can have no terrifying impact on her. She would like to gather some darkness, some memories of the grandmother's house and bring them to her present city residence. The very memories of her grandmother's house will have a soothing impact on her loveless and hopeless married life.

Thus, It reflects the agony and humiliation of a married woman who is forced to seek extramarital relationships to find love for her emotional satisfaction. It is a nostalgia that dominates the closing phase of the poem.

There is a possibility that her poems probably suggest extramarital affairs to fill up the void of love. The poet is reminded of her grandmother's house where she received love and secure feelings in her childhood. She has lost all her identity and freedom in her loveless relationship.

2.4 Poem with the lens of romance :

Here Kamala Das is presenting before the readers the urge of love that she is craving for. This poem is symbolic of the selfless love that her grandmother had for her. The whole poem speaks of nostalgia for Kamala Das. She escapes into past memories and gets emotionally lost thinking of her childhood memories.

In the first few lines Kamala Das speaks about the love from grandmother that she received in her house. The following lines,

‘you cannot believe, darling, can you, that I lived in such a house and was proud, and loved....’

These lines imply that she craved for the love of her grandmother, but also it partially reflects her wanting of romantic love. Though it's not directly mentioned in the poem, the urge could be felt as we read the poem.

As the poem proceeds readers are confirmed with the idea that Kamala Das is not only referring to the idea of love of her grandmother, but she expresses her urge to experience romantic love from a man. This could be witnessed in the following lines,

“I who have lost My way and beg now at strangers’ doors to Receive love, at least in small change?”

Thus, it is evident that Kamala Das portrays not only the love for her grandmother but also for the romantic love of man. Her desperation is clearly represented in her poem ‘My Grandmother's House’.

[Kamala Das](#) exposes the futility of loveless and hopeless marital relationships in these five concluding lines of the poem. It shows the agony and humiliation of a married woman who is forced to seek extramarital relationships to seek love for her emotional satisfaction. It is the mood of nostalgia that dominates the closing phase of the poem. The poet is reminded of her grandmother's house where she received love and safety in her childhood. She has lost all her identity and freedom in her loveless relationship.

Chapter 3 : 'In Love,' 'The Freaks', 'The looking Glass'

This particular chapter attempts to understand the idea of love conveyed through these poems and also has attempted to understand the motive behind writing these poems and the choice of words made in these particular poems.

In Love

3.1 Summary of the poem In Love :

The poetess was extremely hungry for true love. She had wandered from place to place in search of true love, but her strivings for love proved to be futile. In order to fulfil her yearnings for love, she developed physical relationships with many people, but every person with whom

she came across simply exploited her physically. None of them expressed true feelings of love for her.

In fact, she had a bitter experience of life. She was so much involved in barren and sterile intimacy that she could not forget her bitter experience of life. When she saw the burning sun in the sky, she, at once, recalled the company of one of her lovers. She had been the sex partner of one of her lovers for a long time. The burning sun reminded her of her lover's repulsive mouth.

The lover had sun stained cheeks which symbolised the heat generated by sheer lustfulness and sexuality. She was full of hatred to remember his ugly face. When he lay on the bed with her to satisfy his physical hunger, his cheeks turned brown with extreme lustfulness. Under sheer lustfulness, he showed his great eagerness to embrace her body in his arms. So he stretched his mouth and weak limbs to her like carnivorous plants. He wanted to devour her body lustfully.

After taking the poetess in his tight grip, the lover remained busy in his sexual acts. She had to unwillingly surrendered before his sexual acts. Her partner never tried to know the state of her mind. In such a way her unending craving for love forced her to lie on bed with him. Thus, She often thought about true and spiritual love.

The female persona is totally disgusted with the non-stop sexual demands of the male persona. She is critical of his purely lifeless and uninspiring love. She is treated like a playful object only. The fingers of the man move very swiftly over her body for the gratification of his lustful desires. He cannot think beyond 'skin's lazy hungers', only physical passion in which there is no place for the realisation of spiritual or emotional satisfaction. She has realised the futility of this relationship which is based on sex and not love in any way.

They have lived together for so long without the realisation of pure love which can ensure them emotional security, “Who can help such an unfortunate couple? Nobody, really”! She asks. Their hearts are like empty, dry cisterns devoid of the life-giving water of true love which can lead to spiritual and emotional fulfilment. Their hearts are like empty cisterns filled with snakes of silence waiting to be filled with love, not sex. A lustful relationship pollutes but an emotional-cum-spiritual bond purifies the hearts of the persons involved in the sexual act.

She heard about true love, but she found it nowhere. No man cared about her tender feelings. Every time she was crushed under the lustfulness of her lovers. In this male dominated world, physical bond was given much more importance than the inner feelings of love.

She remembered when her lover, under great intoxication of love, put his mouth on her tender cheeks, but she, in spite of her disliking for him, could not resist him and allowed him to proceed. She lay in the bed without opposing him. He ignored her gloominess. When the poetess and the lover remained busy in the lustful act there pervaded silence in the room. No words were exchanged. Only there was skin-communication.

3.2 Lens of mance to the poem :

In love is a poem written by Kamala Das. This poem majorly speaks of the idea of love. As we read the poem, in the first stanza Kamla Das presents the idea that she is confessing her sorrow to her readers. The sorrow of not getting the true love. This could be seen in the following lines.

“oh, yes, his Mouth, and....his limbs like pale and Carnivorous plants reaching out for me, and the sad lie of my unending lust.”

Kamla Das makes it clear that what she experienced from her lover was only lust, whereas her expectations were that of pure love. Thus, it is evident that that was very romantic by nature and not lusty. This poem is a reflection of a craving for pure form of love and not the vulgar. Furthermore, Das also describes that while there is silence in the room, only pleasure makes its noise. This reflects her agony. Kamala Das year is very confessional about her thoughts and feelings towards pure love.

As the poem progresses we see that Das completely despises the vulgar form of love and terms it as only skin- communicated relation. Despising it more strongly she says that she will dare not call it love. This is evident in the following lines.

“This skin-communicated Thing that I dare not yet in His presence call our love.”

Thus, it is very clearly reflected that she craves for pure love and she is very confessional of her feelings.

The Freaks

3.3 Summary of the poem ‘The Freaks’:

The poem, ‘The Freaks’, presents an abnormal situation of love-making which exposes the vanity of loveless relationships. It also brings to light the agony of the female persona who remains a non-participant in the act of love-making because it denies her the emotional and intellectual thrills of life which she desires to have. The speaker in the poem presents the idea of love in a very dark light. His way of talking is highly selfish and has no fascination for her. She knows that he cannot go beyond the satisfaction of his lustful bodily desires.

In the poem, Kamala describes how in a male-dominated society, a woman must submit to her husband though he may be ugly, older, lustful etc. She is supposed to satisfy him in all ways without considering herself, her sexual needs and desires.

The poet calls herself and her husband “freaks”. Describing the act in detail Das says, His way of talking is highly selfish and has no fascination for her. She knows that he cannot go beyond the satisfaction of his lustful bodily desires. She finds him not only ugly but also extremely repulsive. His cheeks appear to be sun-burnt and brownish in appearance, his mouth looks very horrible like a dark cavern and his shining teeth are very uneven and calciferous. The man places his right hand on the knee of the female with a gesture of love-making. They are intending to make love, their minds wandering to avoid any sign of emotional involvement in it.

The word freak means abnormal or strange. Her husband is a freak because of his old and ugly appearance while she herself is a freak because she has been in a loveless relationship with such a person since long, satisfying him in all the ways.

She is all disenchanted with the purely sensual relationship which leads to the deprivation of her intellectual and emotional thrills of life. She feels almost suffocated but has to bear this torture because of societal norms.

She is not against physical love but it must also pave the way for spiritual and emotional love. Further the poet says that the woman finds herself totally isolated and ignored in the ongoing sexual act. She is all fed up with the lustful desires of her partner in love. She feels emotionally and spiritually hollow in such a type of sensual relationship. She also feels very uneasy and disillusioned in this unwilling marital relationship. She is critical and strongly despises his purely lifeless and uninspiring love. She is treated like a playful object only. The fingers of the man move very swiftly over her body for the fulfilment of his lustful desires. He cannot think beyond skin's lazy hunger, the poet says in this physical passion in which there is no place for the realisation of spiritual or emotional satisfaction. She has realised the futility of this relationship which is based on sex and not love in any way.

According to Kamala Das a lustful relationship pollutes an emotional and spiritual bond which could purify the hearts of the persons involved in the sexual act. Poet says that It has to be borne because of its social compulsions to honour marital commitments.

As the poem progresses, she wants to prove that she is not frigid in any way, but is sufficiently fit for participating in the lustful act. But this pretended presentation of lust cannot be termed as genuine and true. It is undoubtedly an abnormal behaviour and laziness of the male partner. This shows that she is also a freak who poses to be an equal and willing partner in the sexual act.

She says such relationships manage to survive because of parental pressures and social compulsions only.

Lastly, the poet says, being highly self-centred, he deliberately overlooks the demands of his partner in a sexual relationship. He considers the female as an object for fulfilment of his lustful desires only. He is least bothered about the satisfaction of the female's emotional needs. He has no faith in the purifying power of love. He is more than satisfied with arousing in his beloved the skin's lazy hungers.

3.4 Lens of romance to the poem :

In this particular poem Kamala Das is presenting the idea of love through her own experience. Through this poem Das portrays her experience of love with husband. The poem clearly reflects her sadness while she is experiencing the lustful love with her husband. The vivid description of the action fascinates the readers.

The following lines,

“his right Hand on my knee, while our minds Are willed to race towards love; But, they only wander, tripping Idly over puddles of Desire.....”

clearly define her agony for pure love that she is lacking. Thus, this poem represents the urge of pure romance. This poem is also evident in the patriarchal dominance present in our society. The word freaks refers to abnormal or strange. Kamla Das is craving for the pure kind of love, the connection of soul and not merely physical bodies. She is deep Inside lacking the pure romance that she expects from her partner. The only thing she gains is bodily lust. This is confirmed by the following lines

“The heart, An empty cistern, waiting Through long hours, fills itself With coiling snakes of silence.”

Thus, it is evident that Kamala Das is craving for pure romance over vulgar meaningless love.

The Looking Glass

3.5 Summary of the poem ‘The Looking Glass’ :

The poetess suggests that a woman should be bold when she is going to have physical contact with her man. She should give up on her shyness during the sexual act. If she wants to gain the maximum pleasure through sexual acts she should tell her partner about her requirements. She should not conceal the admiration of man's body and his limbs in her heart.

When she sees her lover in nude state, she should speak great of his body and limbs. The woman must not hesitate to stand naked with her lover in front of a mirror so that he can compare her physical weakness with his masculine strength and admire himself. It will also enable him to see that she is young, soft and beautiful, and worthy of his lust.

Her feminine beauty and delicacy would both spark his passion and please his ego of being the superior being the male of the species. The woman also needs to cater to his ego and conceit, and admire the perfection of his body.

The woman should note his eyes becoming red when the water enters his eyes while he is having a bath. The woman should note the shy manner in which he walks upon the bathroom floor, dropping his towel because of his loose grip in it.

All these details about the man's body and his movements actually please a woman and make her think that this particular man is the only one who can provide her satisfaction in bed. She should offer her lover everything which is in her capacity. She should spread her long hair over his face to smell. She should bring her breasts close to her lover so that he might smell the sweat between and under her breasts.

She further says that the woman should be free from the conventional myth that sexual intercourse is harmful during menses. She should encourage her lover to come into contact with her during menses. The woman should make her lover conscious of all her sexual yearnings.

She sheds light on the profound physical needs of the men and their masculinity. That's why she asks women to fan or boost male ego as it makes the men happy.

Overall, the poem ends on a sad note as the narrator, after experiencing love, bears separation and heartbreak. She grieves. Now she has to live on his memories.

The poem is written in free verse. The diction used by her is simple and doesn't have complex words. The woman would find it easy to do all these things if she gets rid of her shyness and adopts a bold attitude. It is very easy to get a man to love a woman, but to continue with her life after he has departed is very challenging and painful.

She finds such life dry and monotonous where she moves from place to place, meets new strangers, but her eyes are tired of searching for her lover, only her ears recall his last parting words and her name. Her body which was once revitalised by his slight touch, is now half dead and lost its vitality. Here she uses a simile of brass to compare it with her body.

The woman looks for emotional gratification, she yearns for it, all her life, but when she can't find it, she yearns for it.

The man quickly forgets the woman; he moves on and never returns. For the man, the encounter was nothing but a moment's pleasure, it had no emotional significance for him, but for the woman it is quite different, she remembers the depth of the relationship, and suffers for it all through her life.

The woman looks for emotional gratification, she yearns for it, all her life, but when she can't find it, she yearns for it. Her body that once gleamed like burnished brass grows old and frail. The ears like eyes long for his voice which once called her name and praised her body. The body of the woman which used to get pleasure with her man ultimately has to suffer in his absence.

3.6 Lens of romance to the poem :

In this poem Kamala Das is presenting the idea of love to her readers. First few lines are very simple. As we read further, the following lines put the readers in astonishment.

“ 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”

For the more the poem gets a more bold description where the poet is giving details of her beloved's physical appearance. This is witnessed in the following lines,

“Notice the perfection Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under The shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,”

As the poem makes progress, the description gets more bold and confessional. Das puts forth the idea of romance in a different lens. On simply reading this poem simply appears to be very bold and vulgar, but on close reading we understand that the poem is not vulgar rather it is a criticism of the male-dominated society.

Through this poem Kamala Das is trying to put the society expectations and the societal norms that are thrust on a woman. Through this poem Kamala Das indirectly is despising the idea that women have to submit to their men without thinking of themselves. Also that men act as overlords and don't consider it important to take a woman's consent.

Further, Indirectly Das has also referred to the plight of the women after the death of their husbands. It refers to the expectation from a woman that she is restricted from being with any other man after the death of her husband. This is evident in the following lines,

“A man to love is easy, but living Without him afterwards may have to be Faced.”

Thus, it is evident that Kamala Das's poem is not about vulgarity but about true and pure love. 'The Looking Glass' reflects the silent sorrow of kamala Das that she has for the dominating male of the society.

Here the dependence of women is reflected. It symbolises the fact that the woman needs a man in order to please her body. The poet throughout the poem is not praising the qualities of a woman but exposing their reality. The soft, young and lovely body of the woman is what makes the man believe that he is strong.

This also depicts the sad reality that how superior the woman is to a man as she possesses such great qualities which are a gift for the man. But these qualities ultimately become the tools of exploitation Hence being a woman is a camouflaged blessing according to Kamala Das.

Chapter 4 : 'Relationship' and 'A Losing Battle'

This particular chapter further explores two poems by Kamala Das, namely 'Relationship' and 'A Losing Battle'. These poems offer Kamala Das's perspective on love, playing a pivotal role in her collection of love poems.

'Relationship'

4.1 Summary of 'Relationship' poem:

At the onset of the poem, the poet conveys the timeless and ancient nature of their love, surpassing her own existence. She also suggests that it was once perceived as a form of devotion. Delving into her personal encounters, the poet expresses that her desire shaped her lover's masculinity, as evident in the line, "yes, It was my desire that made him male."

Thus, the poem resonates with the theme of love. The poet fondly reminisces about their initial encounter, yet upon reuniting, she finds the love has diminished. Consequently, she remarks, "to believe that once I knew not his Form, his quiet touch, or the blind kindness Of his lips was hard indeed. Betray me?" In the subsequent stanza, the poet labels her beloved as a 'betrayed', clarifying that it's not through physical actions but through words, depicted in the lines, "Yes, he can, but never physically only with words that curl their limbs at touch of air and die with metallic sighs."

In conclusion, she ironically expresses finding solace, sleep, peace, and even death solely in her lover's (betrayed's) embrace, as depicted in the lines, "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 betrayed's arms..."

4.2 Lens of romance to the poem :

This poem portrays Kamala Das's perception of a platonic relationship, beautifully capturing her emotional bond with her beloved. Throughout the poem, her joyful disposition is palpable. It serves as a testament to Das's romantic nature, as seen in the lines,

"This love older than I by myriad Saddened centuries was once a prayer In his bones that made them grow in years of Adolescence to this favoured height."

These lines reflect Das's romantic sensibilities rather than vulgarity. Additionally, it underscores Das's disdain for carnal desires, evident in the lines, **"Yes, he can, but never physically Only with words that curl their limbs at Touch of air and die with metallic sighs."**

These lines exemplify Das's preference for romantic love over lust, providing readers with insight into her romantic approach to love.

Moreover, the poem highlights Das's yearning for emotional connection rather than mere physical intimacy, as expressed in the lines, "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..." Thus, it becomes apparent that Kamala Das's poetry does not veer into vulgarity; rather, it delves into the depths of romance and love.

'A Losing Battle'

4.3 Summary of 'A Losing Battle' poem :

"A Losing Battle" stands as one of Kamala Das's briefest English poems, employing metaphorical imagery. It addresses the value of women in society and suggests that men, too, are morally bankrupt and insignificant. The poem contends that men can easily succumb to temptation, portraying a theme of failed love due to the dominance of lust and the triumph of inferiority over superiority. The poem begins with the poet in a melancholic state, pondering, "How can my love hold him when the other Flaunts a gaudy lust and is lioness To his beast?"

These lines portray the poet's willingness to love her beloved, yet she finds herself unable to do so as her partner is consumed by lust, transforming into a beast. This illustrates the poet's predicament of being deprived of love and offered only physical desire.

Valuing companionship, emotional attachment, and genuine love, she scorns men for seeking only carnal pleasure. The poet asserts that all men are 'worthless' and suggests that, unfortunately, women must resort to the cheapest means to ensnare them, but cautions against loving them, as seen in the lines, "Men are worthless, to trap them Use the cheapest bait of all, but never Love."

These lines depict the harsh reality faced by the poet and many other women who fall victim to patriarchal dominance. She further elaborates that loving a man will only bring tears and ultimately silence to their hearts.

Thus, the poet profoundly portrays the plight of women oppressed by patriarchal men in their lives. This poem serves as a voice for all those oppressed women.

4.4 Lens of romance to the poem :

'Losing Battle' stands as one of Kamala Das's shortest poems, reflecting her strong desire for romantic love, as evident in the opening lines:

"How can my love hold him when the other

Flaunts a gaudy lust and is lioness

To his beast?"

This indicates her longing for love with emotional connection, which unfortunately turns into mere lust. Her aspirations for romantic love remain unfulfilled, prompting her to voice her sentiments for all women facing similar circumstances.

Asserting her stance, she declares, "Men are worthless, to trap them Use the cheapest bait of all," revealing her disdain for dominating males in society and advocating for romantic love over lust.

She also warns against falling in love with such men, as it will only lead to tears, as clearly stated in the lines, "Love, which in a woman must mean tears And a silence in the blood."

Thus, it is evident that Das advocates for romance rather than mere physical intimacy. Emotional connection holds significance for Kamala Das, portraying her poetry as not vulgar but romantic.

Chapter 5 : Conclusion and Findings

5.1 Conclusion:

The comprehensive analysis demonstrates that Kamala Das's poems are not crude; rather, they are imbued with romance. Her poetry reflects a strong longing for romantic love over mere lust. In her poems, Kamala Das yearns for a profound emotional connection, a love defined by spiritual bonding rather than mere physical gratification.

The selected poems in this study vividly illustrate Kamala Das's yearning for romantic love. Through these poems, Das articulates her desire for authentic love, which she has been deprived of for so long. The opening poem of the study, "My Grandmother's House," portrays her quest for romantic love following the loss of her grandmother. The lines,

“You cannot believe, darling, Can you, that I lived in such a house and Was proud, and loved....”

underscore her longing for a form of love that transcends the physical. This highlights Das's perpetual yearning for pure love, revealing the depth of romance in her poems.

In another poem titled "The Freaks," Das denounces the lustful encounters she experiences with her partner. She anticipates emotional connection but instead receives mere physical pleasure and exploitation of her body. This sentiment is expressed in the following lines:

“Uneven teeth gleam, his right Hand on my knee, while our minds Are willed to race towards love; But, they only wander, tripping Idly over puddles of Desire.....”

It is evident that she sought romantic love but encountered a crude form of love filled with degradation.

Kamala Das does not oppose physical intimacy but desires a level of emotional connection alongside physical affection. This sentiment is evident in the poem "An Introduction":

“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.”

These lines convey Das's longing for emotional intimacy alongside physical closeness..

Kamala Das embodies a feminist ethos in her poetry, fearlessly condemning the inequalities and injustices perpetuated by society against women. Through her verse, she seeks to articulate a universal womanhood, sharing her personal experiences in her quest for female identity amidst polarities. Das portrays women demanding equal social standing and expresses their emotional needs. She critiques the rigid, conservative traditions that have harshly judged her unconventional lifestyle. Transitioning beyond the confines of a poet, she assumes the role of a profoundly honest woman, viewing it as her duty to faithfully report every detail of real-life experiences.

5.2 Findings:

The study findings indicate that Kamala Das, as a poet, is not vulgar; despite employing strong and bold language, her intention is to confide her innermost feelings to her readers. While critics may perceive her poems and other writings as vulgar, a close examination reveals that her poems silently critique the patriarchal norms of male-dominated society.

It was observed that Kamala Das was inherently romantic, as evidenced by several of her poems. Her personal experiences deeply influenced her poetry, compelling her to employ bold and strong language. While critics may interpret her language as vulgar, it is merely a reflection of her confessional approach to expressing her emotions.

Although Kamala Das began writing poetry in her adolescence, her first collection, "Summer in Calcutta," was published in 1965 when she was over thirty. Her early poems signalled the emergence of a new poet whose strength lay in meticulously delineating the soul amidst a hostile world.

Kamala Das reiterated her themes and experiences through numerous poems, focusing predominantly on the pain inflicted by a male-dominated society. While her poetry may touch upon social issues, Kamala Das generally avoids explicit social commentary. She is not bound to any particular ideology but espouses humanism and love.

Despite her observations of social injustices, Kamala Das maintains an intense faith in the value of life. Her poetry exudes vitality and a robust belief in the beauty of human existence. She confronts death with ecstasy rather than horror, as evidenced in the poem

"Death's Face on My Pillow," which testifies to her faith in immortality. Thus, Das emerges as a revolutionary writer of modern India.

Indeed, Kamala Das, with her deeply personal yet universally relatable themes, has indeed transcended the personal to articulate the broader human experience, particularly that of women. Her candid and authentic voice has been instrumental in voicing social transformations and challenging societal norms. She's rightfully considered a revolutionary writer, embodying honesty, frankness, and a profound understanding of the human condition, especially from a female perspective.

In her poem, she articulates the internal struggles sparked by marriage, conveying a profound sense of loss and confinement as she feels commodified, her soul, spirit, liberty, and essence as a woman crushed. Kamala Das is hailed as an authentic feminine voice, grappling with the tension between submission and rebellion in a male-dominated world.

Her poetry, addressed to Devendra Kohli, ultimately acknowledges and celebrates the beauty and courage inherent in womanhood.

As a poet delving into themes of love and sexuality, Kamala Das is characterised by her native, honest, and frank approach. Through her poetry, she explores her yearning for freedom and identity, navigating between utopian ideals and genuine authenticity.

In her poem, she delves into the inner turmoil triggered by marriage, expressing a deep sense of loss and confinement as she feels objectified, her essence as a woman suppressed. Kamala Das is revered as an authentic feminine voice, confronting the conflict between conformity and

resistance in a male-dominated society. Her poetry, dedicated to Devendra Kohli, ultimately celebrates the beauty and resilience inherent in womanhood.

Thus, the female voice in Kamala Das's poetry seems to hover between two realms: one of societal norms and established traditions dictating women's behaviour and conduct in society, overshadowing her sense of sanity; and the other of her psychological landscape, influenced by her emotional struggles.

In Das's poetry, moral constraints and societal pressures compel feminist voices to feel stifled, prompting them to pursue rebellious paths.

The interplay of psychological, social, and cultural constraints has inflicted immense suffering and hardships upon women. When Kamala Das chooses to adopt male attire to conceal her femininity, societal guardians insist on traditional female clothing, imposing expectations of fulfilling the prescribed roles of wife and mother, confined to domestic duties. She is warned to stay within the confines of her designated female sphere, lest she be labelled as abnormal or deviant.

The oppressive environment leads women to experience depression, frustration and a sense of alienation, prompting them to view the world through a distorted lens of coloured binoculars.

The influence of global feminist movements on postcolonial Indian literature, including Kamala Das's work, is indeed palpable. Her adoption of the confessional style adds a layer of self-awareness and empowerment reflecting a conscious awakening to one's rights and identity. Her portrayal of the woman's struggle with identity resonates deeply, especially in societies where women are boxed into predefined roles. Her shift towards confessional poetry adds a rawness and relevance that speaks to many.

In "My Grandmother's House," she nostalgically reflects on the genuine love she experienced from her grandmother, highlighting the contrast with the impersonal interactions of the present. It's a poignant reminder of the depth of connection she once had and the longing to reclaim it in a world that often feels alienating.

Kamala Das indeed weaves multiple layers of themes in her poetry, often delving into the complex terrain of a woman's desires and struggles. Her exploration of mythology, particularly the Radha-Krishna motif, she states,

“At 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?”

By using the Radha-Krishna motif in "The Maggots," she draws attention to the broader issue of women's struggles within patriarchal societies. The poem serves as a critique of societal expectations and the suffocating nature of love when it's not mutual, particularly from a woman's perspective.

Similarly, in "An Introduction," Das skillfully explores the theme of identity crisis, shedding light on the anxieties and fears imposed on women by societal norms and expectations. Both works offer profound insights into the complex realities faced by women, challenging readers to question traditional notions of love and identity.

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