

## SHADES OF LOVE IN THE POEMS OF KAMALA DAS

**Mrs. Kshama Shahidhar**

Ph.D. Research Scholar

JJT University

Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan

A woman has always been a topic of discussion since time immemorial. A woman lives in a world which is very different from that of a man. Her thoughts and actions follow a different trail from that of a man. Since ages people have tried various ways and methods to find out what exactly goes into the making of a woman. The strange part is that yet so far no one has come up with any clues on what exactly constitutes a woman! For a woman her world cannot revolve without love. It may be love for her parents, her spouse, her siblings, her kids, friends or relatives. In all these relationships love plays a pivotal part in her life.

It was so true for the love queen of Kerala, Madhavi Kutty alias Kamala Das alias Kamala Suraiyya. She had traversed dangerous boundaries of the mind and the soul to seek the quintessential piece of the magical iota called love. She tossed her dice of love several times in several ways but unfortunately was unable to attain it. It at all she did it was in fragments and pieces like alms thrown into a beggar's bowl. Till her very end she was short of the quota that she had sought of love.

When she at first was able to discern some portion of love she seemed to be so content with it. The lines from her poem entitled, 'Love' very vividly portrays it.

.....Now that I love you,  
Curled like an old mongrel  
My life lies content, In you.....

Though she seems to be avidly in love with her husband knowing very well that he has betrayed her, strangely she still feels at peace lying next to him. This feeling is evident in her poem entitled, 'A Relationship'.

.....My body's wisdom tells and tells again  
That I shall find my nest, my sleep, my peace  
And even death nowhere else but here in  
My betrayer's arms'.

The physicality of love is very much evident in her poem entitled, 'Looking Glass'.

.....There was a burning in our  
Veins and the cool mountain nights did  
Nothing to lessen heat'.

When she is unable to get the love that she so desperately seeks, she is prepared to face death calmly. The lines from her famous poem entitled, 'Suicide' aptly show this.

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

I want to be dead.’

Her unquestionable urge to think beyond death as part of love is portrayed in the poem entitled,

’A Request’ where she says:

‘When I die  
Do not throw  
The meat and bones away  
But pile them up  
And let them tell  
By their smell  
What life was worth  
On this earth  
What love was worth  
In the end’.

She is desperate that there is nowhere that she can get the depth of love that she anticipates. Everything seems to be artificial on this front. Her line from her poem entitled,

’Captive’ demonstrates this.

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

In another beautiful poem, ’The Stone Age’, she feels depressed that her husband happens to be dumb and not understand her trauma of wanting to be deeply loved by him. The mechanical act of daily doses of sex from her husband frustrates her so much that much against her wishers, that uncannily sex with other men rather than her own lawfully wedded husband is a fancy that enters her mind and she seeks it through her body. The following lines show her helplessness in this regard.

.....And

Yet on daydreams strong men cast their shadows, they sink  
Like white suns in the swell of my Dravidian blood;.....

The same frustration can be seen in her poem, ’Glass’ where she is unable to take it for granted that after all she is only a toy for her husband.

.....With a cheap toy’s indifference  
I enter others’  
Lives, and  
Make even trap of lust  
A temporary home.....

Even love which should be undeniably inherent in a mother and son relationship seem to evade her. Therefore it is not uncommon that she does not get it from her own sons as well. The following lines from ’A Widow’s Lament’ show this.

.....My man, my sons, forming the axis  
While, I, wife and mother,  
Insignificant as a fly  
Climbed the glasspanes of their eyes.....

Sex is repulsive to her when it is performed as an act similar to that by animals, casting against sentiments like geniality, sensitivity or even divinity. It horrifies her to no end. In the poem, ’Freaks’ this feeling it brought out vividly.

‘He talks to me turning a sun stained  
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark

Cavern, where stalactites of  
 Uneven teeth gleam.....

She craves for love but unfortunately she never gets it in any form. She is unable to find love in its genuine form. Everywhere she finds it in coated forms which says i you 'want it then give in something in return'. In other words men are prepared to offer her love coated in sex, The poem, 'The Millionaires at Marine Drive' is explicit of this feeling.

.....All the hands  
 The great brown thieving hands groped beneath my  
 Clothes, their fire was that of an arsonist's.  
 Warmth was not their aim, they burn my cities  
 Down.....

It is also true that unlike most Indian women she is unconventional in her approach to marriage, love and sex and unmindful of the impact that it may have on the society. She is unmindful in her resolve to show her sexual feelings openly. This can be observed in the lines of her poem, 'Forest Fire'.

'Of late, I have begun to feel a hunger  
 To take in with greed, like a forest fire that  
 Consumes, and, with each killing gains a wilder,  
 Brighter charm, all that comes my way.....

She is aware at the same time that men will be men and it is difficult to expect faithfulness from them. In the poem, 'A Losing Battle' she holds the reader's interest very evincingly in the following lines.

'How can my love hold him when the other  
 Flaunts a gaudy lust and is lioness  
 To his Beast?.....

However much she tries to hold on to the man she loves and from whom she expects everything unquestioningly, she is despaired to note that it is difficult to hold on to either the man or his love. In her poem, 'The Sunshine Cat' this sentiment is vivid.

'They did this to her, the men who knew her, the man  
 She loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish  
 And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor  
 Used her, but was a ruthless watcher.....

She hates the fact that a society accepts the fact that a man needs sex but completely disregards this where females are concerned. The society is unmindful of how it treats women in matters regarding sex or matters of sex that imply to women as well. The first few lines from the poem 'The Old Playhouse' bring vivid recollections of this sorry state of affairs.

.....It was not to gather knowledge  
 Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn  
 What I was and by learning, to learn to grow, but every  
 Lesson you gave wa about yourself. You were pleased  
 With my body's response.....

When she realises much to her desperation that Destiny has no plans for her to enjoy love in any form or in any parameter, she turns to find it in it divine form. In the poem, 'Radha' she says the wait for her lover Krishna was finally over. The wait though long and tedious brings with it the air of chastity and the bondage between the two of them grows stronger.

'The long waiting

Had made their bond o chaste, and all the doubting  
And the reasoning  
So that in his first true embrace she was girl  
And virgin crying  
Everything in me  
Is melting.....

The feeling of wanting divine love rather than just physical is brought out in her poem, 'The Maggots' where she realises serenely that divine love is any day better than temporal love, where sex in reality is as good as making love to a corpse. The following lines from the above poem avidly express this sentiment.

'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 aid  
No, not at all, but thought, what is  
It to the corpse if the maggots nip?

From the analysis of the few of her poems analysed above, it can be concluded that love was a mirage for Kamala Das. It was that streak of horizon which can only be seen but never touched. So was it in her life. Only a little spiritual succour was all she was able to get in spite of all the trouble she took to get it.

## Works Cited

Das, Kamala, 'Only the Soul Knows How to Sing'. All cited works are from this book (DC Books: Kottayam, 2007)

Love: Pg. 127

A Relationship: Pg. 123

The Looking Glass: Pg. 68

Suicide: Pg. 107

A Request: Pg. 104

Captive: Pg. 113

The Stone Age: Pg.82

Glass: Pg.131

A Widow's Lament: Pg. 157

Freaks: Pg. 59

A Losing Battle: Pg. 59

The Sunshine Cat: Pg. 67

The Old Playhouse: Pg.38

Radha: Pg. 77

The Maggots: Pg. 52

The Millionaires At Marine Drive: Pg. 83

Forest Fire: Pg. 170