

# Themes in The Poetry of Kamala Das

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Volume : 6

Issue : 3

Month : June

Year: 2018

ISSN: 2320-2645

### Abstract

*Kamala Das was an Indian English Poet as well as a Leading Malayalam author from Kerala, India. She was a widely read Columnist and wrote on diverse topics including women's issues, Childcare, Politics etc. Her open and honest treatment of female sexuality, free from any sense of guilt, infused her writing with power and marked her as an iconoclast in her generation. The aim of this research article is to explain in detail the themes of Kamala Das's poetical works. Her themes which seem to be different from one another, are the difference offshoots of one theme-love and Sex Apart from that there are some other themes, Death consciousness, Nostalgic Recollections and Male Body Repulsion.*

**Words used:** traumas, quest, vacuity, hanker.

Received:  
09.06.2018

Accepted:  
14.06.2018

Published:  
26.06.2018

Citation:  
Suganya lakshmi, "Themes in The Poetry of Kamala Das." Shanlax International Journal of English, vol. 6, no. 3, 2018, pp. 46–48.

DOI:  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2557453>

### Introduction

Kamala Das's greatness as a Poet arises from the fact that her love Poetry is rooted in her own Personal experience. She has indeed written extensively on love and passion. Most of her poems deal with the theme of unfulfilled love and yearning for love. She writes of the pains and wounds of love of the final disillusionment and seldom of fulfilment in love. Her Poems are revolt and the revolt is the outcome of all her dissatisfaction and Psychological traumas. The major theme of most of her Poems are the quest for love and her failure to find fulfilment of love in life. The main themes in the poetry of Kamala Das are love, marriage, sex, nostalgic recollections,. Death-consciousness and body repulsion. All these aspects do not run out from but run into one whole. This implies that there is a harmonious blending in the poetry of Kamala Das. Let us throw light on these various aspects of Kamala's poems and then see how these various aspects run into one another.

### Love, Sex and Marriage

Love and sex are nuclei round which the other themes are collected. Love, especially the failure in love, leads to sadness and loneliness. Sex leads to extra marital relation and copulation. It will be in the fitness of thing to deal with them separately and then see them as one whole.

The leitmotif of Kamala's poetry is love, Kamala Das can realize her being only through love. She aspires to, and longs for, love. Her poetry is an external quest for love. As love, like the horizon, recedes further and further away from her, her aspiration and longing for it remain unfulfilled. She is therefore the poetess of unfulfilled love and emotional vacuity. She expresses the failure in love in her poems. She writes in The Sea Shore:

I see you go away from me  
And feel the loss of love  
She writes in *The Freaks*  
Who can help us who have lived so long  
And have failed to love ?  
The failure in love leads to sadness and loneliness.  
It is the sadness that makes the poet feel lonely, and loneliness causes sadness.

The poetess expresses sadness caused by the failure in love in *The Suicide* :

O sea.....

I want to be loved,

And

If love is not to be had

I want to be dead

She writes in *The Testing of the sirens* :

Ah, why do you come to me like pain

Again and again and again?

Almost all her poems express the failure in love and the consequent sadness. The woman persona in “*The Sunshine Cat*” sheds tears because no man loves her. The lover of the woman in *Luminal* is ruthless and clumsy. Therefore the woman wants to sleep for ever by taking sleeping pills. The woman persona, really speaking the poetess herself, in *My Grandmother’s House* seeks love at the strangers’ doors because her grandmother, who alone loved her, is dead. The eunuchs in *The Dance of the Eunuchs* sing melancholy songs because the lovers are dead.

### Loneliness

The sun, which in *Punishment in Kindergarten* stands lonely in the sky, suggests the loneliness of the woman persona. The miserable lonely life of the eunuchs in *The Dance of the Eunuchs* becomes the objective cor-relative of the loneliness of the poetess. Like the mortal millions of Mathew Arnold’s poem “*To Marguerite*” the women of Kamala Das live alone. Their lovers, after using them sexually, desert them. Their husbands make them captives in the domestic household.

Whereas the women personae long for love, the men personae hanker after lust. K.R.S. Iyenger has said that love is crucified in sex and sex defiles itself. Love and sex sing and swing together. We find in the poems of Kamala Das the women personae aspiring to love and the men personae hankering

after sex. The woman persona in *The Sunshine Cat* wants love and sex but she finds only sex. In *Love* is an ironical poem because there is in the poem no love. The mingling of love and sex is found in *An Introduction*. The poetess says that every man seeks a woman for sex but every woman seeks a man for love. Here is the crux of what she says :

In him.... The hungry haste

Of rivers, in me.... The oceans’ tireless

Waiting

### Adultery

Sex leads to adultery. Kamala Das uses Krishna – Radha – Meera myth as objective co-relative for adultery. She writes in *Vrindaban* that Vrindaban lies in the heart of every woman. Lured by the flute a woman goes away from home. When she returns late, her husband inquires about the long scratch on the aureole of her breasts. She, hiding blushes on her cheeks, shyly makes an excuse that she tripped over the brambles in the darkness. The woman persona of *The Sunshine Cat* mates with a band of cynics. The woman persona in *The Stone Age* knocks at the door of the other man when her husband is away. The man persona says to the woman persona in *The Testing of the Sirens*:

I am happy just being with you, but you love another.

### Copulation

Sex ultimately leads to copulation. The poetess presents the bed scenes in her poems, which can be seen only in the blue films. Such poems cannot be read out and explained in the class – rooms. The woman in *The Looking Glass* stands naked with her naked lover before the looking – glass and offers him all those private organs of her body from where sex oozes out. There is in *The Invitation* the scene of copulation :

... the boundaries

Of paradise had shrunk to a mere

Six by two

Kamala Das, as she claims, can realize her inner being in love. But love is a far cry from being realized. One fails to understand why, if she longs for pure tender love, she dwells on sex, adultery and copulation. Her claim that the men-folk hanker

after sex and the women – folk aspire to love, cannot be accepted. There are men and men and women and women. If there are men who are lustful, there are women who are almost nymphomaniacs. The elders in An Introduction ask Kamala Das not to be a nymphomaniac. We find many adulteresses in Kamala's poems.

### **Conclusion**

These various themes of Kamala Das meet and

minge in one harmonious whole. What the poetess aspires to is love but what she receives is lust. As the loss of love causes loneliness and sadness, lust leads to adultery and copulation.

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