



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Ethnic Sublimity Behind Erotic Sensuality in the Poetry of Kamala Das

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## ABSTRACT

*Kamala Das is a well known poet of Indian English writings, and in her life time, she was ardently admired for her open and frank expressions about the real woman in erotic sensations on the one hand and on the other hand she was also criticized for shamelessness in lascivious details. In this research article an attempt has been made to find out the greater vision of this daring poetess in her sensual and sexual images. Really, Kamala Das has recorded her ethnic grandeur in her erotic details. She considers female hungers for male touches as a part of the scheme of nature and there is nothing shameful in recording them. On the other hand, hiding such feelings due to certain fears of the society is to ignore the scheme of nature pervading althrough the universe. It provides a great psychic health in the scheme of nature, if a female gets perfect male touch and enjoys it uninhibitedly. Even the great myths of Radha and Krishna are based on these female hungers in erotic life, but the imperfect understanding of the society has led to modify and articulate the myths in their narrow visions. Thus, Kamala Das has forcefully brought out the hidden truth of female persona around nucleus of erotic life.*

**Key words:** Ethnic sublimity, Erotic sensuality, Kamla Das

## FROM REPRESSION TO SWINGS

Kamala Das was born in a Keralite family in 1934. She was a very sensitive child from the very beginning of her life and started composing poems at the age of twelve. She was in clash with the traditional environment of her family where the whole vocation of a woman was limited to domestic works and household chores – “Dress in Saris, be girl, be wife.” However, she got education in a boarding school run by Roman Catholic nuns as a part of her father’s ambition to make his children learn and speak English language. Initially, she felt a kind of humiliation due to her brown colour among the white skinned European girls. All her hopes of higher education were thwarted when her tradition and custom ridden parents decided to marry her off at the age of fifteen. She was married to Mr. Madhav Das, an employee in the Reserve Bank of India, but much older in age than her. A young woman’s blooming hopes were completely ignored and she was thrown in unwanted sexual relations without having charms of love from her side. She frankly confesses thus:

*...kissed me sloppily near my mouth. He crushed my breasts with his thick fingers. Don't you love me, he asked me, don't you like my touching you... I felt hurt and humiliated. All I said was "good bye". (My Story, p. 99)*

She gave birth to children, but she suffered a lot and her mental agony later on flowed in her writings. Her artistic talents were struggling to come out and a real woman’s voice found expression in her poems leaving aside all inhibitions. She admits thus, “I myself had no control over my writing which emerged like a rush of prickly heat in certain seasons.” (My Story: 211) Her imagination about what a real woman feels within herself about sensuality in male female touches and what can lead to its grandeur flowed fast into her poetic lines. Entire body of her poetry containing sensual images of erotic touches hides behind it the grandeur of feminine virtues in the life of sex with a great thought of the physical and the sublime in the scheme of the universe. Many a time she was charged with

indecent and vulgarity and shamelessness in the crowd of the traditional writers and masked moralists, but she never knew “go back”. Finally, her strong voice was recognized in the literary world and her frank expressions became proverbial in the female world. At one time she sang songs of Radha and Krishna with her view to realizing the perfection of sensuality and sensuousness in male female unions. In the later years of her life, she converted herself into an Islamic woman and married to an Islamic young man, much younger than her age. She died in 2009 at the age of seventy five.

### GRAND EROTIC IMAGES IN THE POETRY OF THE WORLD

Kamala Das, a great poetic genius of the 20<sup>th</sup> century world has made an attempt to bring to light those innermost feelings of female kind which arise in her innerself in the common acts and sometimes rare acts of erotic life. The grand feelings of love and sex based on erotic touches did not find their full poetic expression from the female point of view. Male point of view in erotic grandeur frequently occurred in poetic expressions and people at large got much aesthetic pleasure in them. Spenser’s poetry has frequent details of female charms with all sensuous details. We may quote a few lines which present before us a beautiful picture of a lady with boiling breasts.

*Her gracious words their rancour did appall  
And sunk so deep into their boiling breasts  
That down they left their cruel weapons fall  
And lowly did abase their loftie crests.*

(Fairly Queen II)

And John Keats takes pleasure in the ripening breasts:

*Pillowd upon my fair love’s ripening breasts  
And feel for ever their soft fall and swell.*

(Sleep And Poetry)

Even in Sanskrit literature we find grand descriptions of eroticism about female nude figures. Kalidas in “Kumarsambhav” marks the flow of rain drops from eyelid hair towards lips and then to the frontal tip of the rising breasts and then deciding the further course towards the naval region.

*Stitha kshanampkshmasu tadita dhara  
payodharotsedhanipat churnita  
Nalishu tasya skhalita prpadire chirone  
Nabhim prathmod bhindavah.*

(Kumar Sambhava)

In the present lines, the slow movement of the poet’s poetic imagination along with the motion of rain drops creates pictorial effect and aesthetic beauty in a language that is primarily erotic and sensual. But, whatever great poetic expressions dwelling around the perfect sensuous beauty in female organs, female touches and male female unions are found, all of them have grandeur of male point of view. Major poetic expression in the entire history of poetry is related to the higher sensuous contemplation of man about feminine beauty. The age-long traditions of aesthetic writings have also gone in favour of male point of view. There is considerable gap in achieving perfect knowledge of all those sensibilities of female figures who are engaged as co-partners in the sensuous acts of body language. It is irony that most of the feminine sensibilities are depicted by the male poets. It is true that such poets have employed their superior talent and sublime imagination in recording and picturing the innermost feelings of female partners in their sensuous acts and erotic expressions. But the completeness of female point of view is still wanting.

### FEMALE HUNGERS IN EROTIC LIFE

Kamala Das as a female being has engaged herself in recording all those grand swells of erotic life which become a part of female hunger in such an act of love. She leaves all inhibitions and indulges in unchecked expression. It is definitely to her credit that she has started a new chapter of erotic writings in which female point of view dominates. Kamala Das has no shyness in expressing the romantic glory in looking and touching the complete

maleness of the male. She engages herself in uninhibited expressions of love and sex which make the height of glory in erotic language. She prefers to enjoy physical excitement in the blooms of body language. She speaks from the close quarters of feminine sensibility and wants to have the taste of male body. Her eroticism from female point of view is best discernible in her poem "The Looking Glass". Earlier the male poets sang high songs of female beauty and roamed in the realms of imagination and expressed their excitement on looking at the different parts of female organs. Generally, the beauty of the female organs, genitals and pudenda remained the centre of attention in erotic poetry. But Kamala Das has changed the story. She records feminine sensibility while looking at the thickness and alacrity of the male sexual organs. Let us mark the cleverness of an erotic lady in handling the male psychology in erotic life in the following lines:

*Stand nude before the glass with him  
So that he sees himself the stranger one  
And believes it so, and you so much more  
Softer, younger, lovelier...*

(“The Looking Glass”)

She watches with subtlety the jerky urinating ways of the male organ. In fact Kamala Das tries to bring to light those things of feminine psyche in the life of eroticism which were never thought by the people in the conservative society.

*Notice the perfection  
Of his limbs, his eyes redening under  
Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor  
Dropping towels, and the jerky way he  
urinates. All the fond details that make  
Him Male and your only man. Gift him all  
Gift what makes you woman, the scent of  
Long hair, the mask of sweat between the breasts  
The warm shock of menstrual blood and your  
Endless female hungers.*

(The Looking Glass)

Feminine glory in her sublime erotic gesture, actions and realizations, which was lying hidden and unexpressed is openly expressed and sublime poetry has been made out of that. Thanks to the changing attitude of Kamala Das and several other women writers who dared to breathe what they felt within. The submerged female point of view of erotic life has been brought before the world. Great pleasures resulting out of the union of male female copulation in the heightened concept of erotic life are openly expressed. She captures those rare moments of female ecstasy in the rhythm of her poetry. Kamala Das contemplates higher erotic experiences and calls them the gifts of body and rewards of living. She takes her emotional refuge in her retreat in her real love.

*When other eyes haunt my thought, I kiss your  
Eyes and shut them, so that I need no longer  
See them brood or their naked, naked fear.  
Another voice haunts my ears, another face  
My dreams, but in your arms I must today.  
Die and find an oasis where memories  
Sad winds do not so much blow and I must  
Hear you say, I love, I love, I love.*

(An Apology of Gautama)

A man and a woman come together as opposite poles on the common ground of sexual desires and fuse into each other to capture the sublime language of universal creation. In her poem "Substitute" she writes under this grand contemplation:

*We kissed and we loved, all in a fury  
For another short hour or two  
We went all warm and wild and lovely.*

(Substitute)

In her poem "Conflagration" she makes her view point clear about the final glory of fulfillment in erotic life.

*We come together like two Suns and each  
Raging to burn the other out. he said you are  
A forest conflagration and I, poor forest  
Must burn...*

(Conflagration)

In her poem "The Stone Age" she conceives of a perfect male female union in which responses of a female figure are skillfully, artistically and eloquently described:

*Ask me, everybody ask me  
What he sees in me, ask me why he is called a lion.  
A libertine, ask me the flavour of his  
Mouth, 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 sleeps, ask me why life is short and love is  
Shorter still, ask me what is bliss and what its price.*

(The Stone Age)

In her poem "The Invitation" she is warmed by the memory of her love experience with her lover. She cannot forget the intensity of the moment of love:

*All through that summer's afternoon we lay  
On big beds, our limbs inert, cells expanding  
Into - throbbing suns. The heat had  
Blotted our thoughts...*

(Invitation)

Thus, Kamala Das repeatedly makes her attempts to focus light on feminist point of view in contemplating the life of sex as the necessity of the two individuals in the scheme of Nature. What she violently pleads for is the possible understanding between a man and a woman coming together with their grand gifts of body and having equanimously independent personalities in the atmosphere of higher sensations in erotic life.

Kamal's repeated expressions of erotic, sensual and even sexual details are not playfulness of a voluptuous mind. They are, of course, an attempt to seek the ways of Nature in the manifestation of the male female bodily pleasures. A greater view of life emerging from the most common exercise of sexual deeds has been highlighted and humanity has been made to understand grandeur in the autonomy of male female individuals in sexual deeds. She develops ethnic element and grand religiosity in conceiving the life of sex. A real man possessing the gifts of sensuality and vitality of sex as gifted to him by Nature is God in her eyes. Let us mark the following lines of her poem "A Weather to Winter In":

*I prefer the scent of human sweat  
To that myrrh or frank incense  
I shall turn him into my only God  
And Coradle him in my arms.*

(A Weather to Winter In)

Her erotic love does not mean lust as it is understood in the common human mundane. From sensation to sublimation is the complete journey of Kamala Das' erotic love. It is just irony that the people in the society hate the idea of sex under faulty conception. Kamala Das wants to remove this falsehood and irony of her male friends. Why can't a woman aspire for a perfect male touch which could produce vibration to the level of enhanced music of sex. A male can also not have the real bliss of the sexual pleasures if he fails to awaken the body language of his female partner.

#### **RELIGIOSITY BEHIND SENSUALITY**

Kamala has purity of vision in conceiving the life's glory in sexual touches. She applies the Indian myth of Radha and Krishna in conceiving the height of glory in male female touches. She makes Lord Krishna a symbol of perfect love and conceives of perfect male

touch in his company. Though the sources are spiritual in the use of this myth, her idea of great love is based on the use of perfect body language by conceiving perfection of maleness and manhood in the figure of Lord Krishna. It is very much clear from her expression in an article published in *Femina* (June 6, 1975).

*... I have always thought of Krishna as my male. When I was a child, I used to regard him as my only friend; when I became an adult, I thought of him as my lover. It was only imagining that he was with me that I could lie beneath my husband to give pleasure. Often I have thought of Radha as the luckiest of all women, for did she not have his incomparably beautiful body in her arms? We do not have him physically to love us; we have to worship a bodiless one.*

When Kamala Das makes a search for the perfect male partner as true lover, her search comes round the mythical figure of Lord Krishna as an ideal partner in love. She knows it for certain that the legend of Lord Krishna is a unique concept of ideal manhood in the feminine world. That is why, she writes in her poem "Vrindavan" thus:

*Vrindavan lives on in every woman's mind  
and the flute, luring her  
From home and her husband  
who later asks her of the long scratch  
on the brown aureala of her breast  
And she shyly replies  
Hiding flushed cheeks, it was so dark  
Outside, I tripped over brambles in the wood.*

(Vrindavan)

Her longing for an idealized phallus is manifested in the personality of Lord Krishna. She glorifies Radha's everlasting waiting for Lord Krishna and assumes herself a Radha like personality. She surrenders herself completely before the perfect male touches of Lord Krishna as devised by her imagination.

*The long waiting  
Had made their bond so chaste and all the doubling  
And the reasoning  
So that in his first true embrace she was girl  
And virgin crying  
Everything in me  
Is melting, even the hardness at the core  
O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting  
Nothing remains but You...*

(Radha)

Kamala Das does not separate her ideal concept of love from its purely sensuous aspect. In her opinion, fineness of embraces and melting of a woman in her sensuousness and erotic touches are integral part of the further heights in the realm of love. In fact eroticism is the source of realizing the grand and unique pleasure of sexuality with the help of physical touches. From perfect body contacts and vibrant sexual appetite, she rises higher to spiritual realization in love and Lord Krishna becomes perfect symbol of ideal male part in female longing. In her poem, "Ghanshyam" she vividly depicts the transformation that has been brought in her by relentless search for love. Let us mark the following lines:

*Ghanshyam  
You have like a koel built your nest in the ardour of my heart  
My life until now a sleeping jungle is at last stir with music  
You lead me along a route I have never known before.*

(Ghanshyam)

In the journey of perfect male-female union leading to bliss and ultimate truth of life, "My Chastity is my only gift to you, O Krishna."

In 1999, Kamala Das embraced Islam and named herself Kamala Surayya. Her conversion was rather controversial among social and literary circles with the *The Hindu Daily* calling

it a part of her "Histrionics". She said she liked being behind the protective veil, the Purda of Burka. Later, she felt it was not worth to change one's religion and said:

*I fell in love with a Muslim after my husband's death. He was kind and generous in the beginning. But now I feel one shouldn't change one's religion, it is not worth it.*

(Kamala Surayya Wikipedia)

Courting and wooing with plentiful endearments having been uttered into her ears by Sadique Ali tempted her to find beauty of male female touches. She herself described her visit to Sadique Ali's home thus:

*I was almost asleep when Sadique Ali climbed in beside me, breathing softly, whispering endearments, kissing my fair breasts... and when he entered me, it was the first time I had ever experienced what it was like to feel a man from inside.*

## CONCLUSION

Earlier, Lord Krishna was the symbol of perfect maleness and Kamala Das wanted to have those fruits of maleness in her imagination. Later on Sadique Ali's connection with her made her change her religion and she wanted to know more about Islam and Mohammad. She did not leave the myth of Lord Krishna and said in her own manner that she had converted her Krishna to Islam and called her Mohammad. The identification of Lord Krishna and Mohammad Sahib was not acceptable either to Hindus or to Muslim. Kamala Das has thought about her Krishna, Allah and Mohammad in the private chamber of her mind and imagination. It seems to be a part of her greater designs of life, not conceivable in the practice of people in the society. It is very difficult to understand what went into her mind for such a change at the age of sixty five. One thing is, however, certain that she had higher notions of life which lie beyond the narrow considerations of the practice of religions upon this tiny planet. She wants to achieve higher thoughts not only about global love but about universal glistening of love in perfect womanhood and perfect maleness.

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