Chapter III

Love and Sex: Her Major Themes

The Love and The Sex has been the subject of many poets but the most striking point of Kamala Das is her 'openness' and 'honesty'. It would be pertinent to quote some lines from *Kamala Das and Her Poetry* by A.N. Dwivedi:

*Kamala Das is a delightful poet of love and sex, unraveling and mysteries of the finer sex in this matter. The 'openness' and the 'honesty' that we find in her is rarely witnessed in other Indo-English women poets, with the possible exception of Gauri Deshpandey in a lesser degree. In fact, many others contemporary Indian poets have sung songs in honour of Love - such poets as Shiv K. Kumar, Pritish Nandy, Nissim Ezekiel, R. Parthasarathy, Jayanta Mahapatra and A. K. Ramanujan - but in her emotional sweep and lyrical rapture Kamala Das surpasses them all.*

He further says: 'Kamala Das is unquestionably a poet of love and Sex'.

Theme of Love and Sex is the matrix of Kamala Das's writings. Primarily, Love and Sex are the part of everyone, who lives in society but in the case of woman, it is more important because they are nearer to the nature. Once Thomas Hardy wrote, 'Women are nearer to nature'. It is worth noting that women have different meaning of love and sex. Her love is everything for her. Her sex is the devotion of soul but in running society male - class uses her sex and love as the source of pleasure. A writer says: 'Love is everything for a woman but it is only pleasure for man'. This is the factor which strikes the heart of the poetess hence, in her writing whether it is poetry or prose; we find a conflict of her thoughts. In this regard, she finds dishonesty in the behaviour of
male-class. The tears of a woman are taken as the drops of water; therefore, the anguish of a woman is genuine against these feelings.

Having cleared the position of Kamala Das as a poet of love and sex, this is hardly ever conventional or conservative. It is pertinent to have a look at the vast corpus of her love poetry. Beyond a shadow of doubt, love and sex occupies a prominent place in her poetry and emerges as one of its dominant themes.

Kamala Das's *Summer in Calcutta* has a good number of poems on love and sex. Such poems are: *The Freaks, In Love, My grandmother’s House, A Relationship, Loud Posters, Love, The Bangles, The Sea Shore, Summer in Calcutta, The Sun Shine Cat, Forest Fire, Afterwards* and *The Testing of the Sirens*. Of these poems, some are about the poetess’s pure love for a near and dear one, while many others are about disillusionment in love and only a few about lust. The poems *My Grandmother’s House, Love, Afterwards* etc. are of the first category, while *The Freaks, A Relationship, Loud Posters, The Bangles, The Sea Shore* etc. are of the second and *In Love, Summer in Calcutta* and *Forest Fire* are of the third. There are different shades of love in Kamala’s poetry and the very first volume bears ample evidence of it. In *Love*, she expresses her happiness and contentment in love:

> Until I found you,

> I wrote verse, drew pictures,

> And, went out with friends

> For walks...

> Now that I love you,

> Curled like an old monger

> My life lies, content,
The poem is, clearly without any pricks, without any tensions.

There is no craving for the lips meant for others, no instinct of challenge, no steak of complaint, as one usually finds in love poetry. But this kind of mood in only short-lived for Kamala Das and she soon swings back to her usual grudge and grouse against men (who might have harmed or teased her).

The love poems occurs in all three volumes of the poetess as:

1- Summer in Calcutta.
2- The Descendants
3- The Old Playhouse and Other poems.

First we take Summer in Calcutta:

*Summer in Calcutta* was published in 1965. It had fifty poems mainly written in the heat of Kamala Das’s Calcutta experiences. The poems in *Summer in Calcutta* are not about Calcutta but they arise from poet’s agonised response to the external world of traumatic experiences of her childhood and early-married life. They suggest the poet’s conscientious involvement in the panorama of life around her and a larger vision than what the immediate sensory perception could provide. They are a response to the intense summer heat of experiences (of her childhood and early) presented to the poet by the medley of life that throbbed under the Calcutta sky. The rude summer of her life crept into every line she wrote. She writes about the origin of her poems, which she wrote in Calcutta.

It was from Calcutta that I lost my faith in the essential goodness of human beings.”

Further, we may observe few lines from *My Story*:
Yet Calcutta gifted me with beautiful sights which built for me the sad poems that I used to write in my diary in those days. It was at Calcutta that I saw for the first time the eunuchs’ dance. It was at Calcutta that I first saw a prostitute, gaudily painted like a cheap bazaar toy. It was at Calcutta that I saw the ox-carts moving along the Strand road early in the morning with proud heavy-turbaned men, their tattooed wives with fat babies dozing at their breasts like old drunkards in clubs at lonely hours.5

In the close observation of Summer in Calcutta, we find the spectrum of Love and Sex in various ways. Now we have to examine some poems of Summer in Calcutta in which we find Kamala Das's main themes Love and Sex.

The Freaks is probably the first in a series of poems dealing with the theme of disillusionment in love. The freaks are the lovers identified as the poet and her husband. A series of metaphors like ‘sun-stained cheek’, ‘mouth like a dark cavern and stalactites of uneven teeth’ suggest the impossibility of love-fulfillment and the possibility of love turning into lust. The lover stagnates at the level of lust stagnates ‘while our minds / Are willed to race towards love’.

The poetess wonders whether the lover is capable of anything more than ‘skin’s lazy hungers’. When soul-love is frustrated, lust becomes a subterfuge for the man of sexual passivity. The poet brings in silence as an influence that transforms loneliness into obsession with sex.6

........The heart,

An empty cistern, waiting

Through long hours, fills itself

With coiling snakes of silence.
In a disillusioned and empty heart, love becomes poison; lust asserts posing as love. So one has to flaunt a grand flamboyant lust to save one’s face. The poem unravels the charm between desire and its fulfillment. However, in *The Freaks*, the poetess is ready to bear the cross for the sake of the lover who is unaware of his weakness. She is ready to declare ‘I am a freak’ whereas, in fact, it is the lover who is a freak.

*In Love* is a mild variation of the same theme and focuses on the carnal nature of physical love. The ‘sun' in the second line is the glow of passion. Here love is merely a 'skin – communicated thing'. The ‘unending lust’ which binds the lovers together momentarily is suggested by the imagery.7

\[\ldots\ldots.\text{his limbs like pale and}\]
\[\text{carnivorous plants reaching}\]
\[\text{Out for me...}\]

The tranquility attained in lust slowly fades into a death reverie provoked by the sight of the ‘corpse–bearers’. ‘The sleek crows flying like poison on wings’ resurrect the noxious memory of love-making. The poem’s title is ironic.

In *Winter*, the sense of physical warmth and well – being is placed against the bitter cold of winter winds. *A Relationship* identifies with physical desire. The ‘sterile sting of rejection and deception' which tells that the poet would find rest and peace in her lover’s arms though he might betray her. Here love is older than the lover by ‘myriad saddened conturies. Her desire makes the lover beautiful. It originates in the primordial instincts of the lovers.

Love here is an ennobling power as in William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in spite of its occasional vacillations. *Spoiling the Name* mocks at the importance we give to names and abstractions. Names are gifts given by somebody else and the poet disdains the logic of binding a person
with the shackle of a name. The poem is a rhetorical argument interspersed with questions and doubts presenting and insight. But poetry should be more than closed logical arguments.

In *The Testing of the Sirens*, the poet wakes from a night of love and lust into a morning heavy with a sense of loneliness. A man with a ‘pock-marked face’ and friendly smile arrives and takes her for a drive. Last night it was the love of a ‘filthy snob’ and now that of a pock-marked monster with a smile and a camera.

. . . . *out in the street, we heard*

*the sirens go, and I paused in talk to*

*Weave their wail with the sound of his mirthless Laughter*... 8

The melancholy wailing of the sirens concedes with the mirthless laughter of the new lover. The siren’s sound becomes a symbol for the inner agony of the poet. It is the doleful cry of disillusioned love. Her loyalty to both the lovers is only a momentary excitement. She is not involved.9

...*What can I do for you? I smiled.*

*A smile is such a detached thing, I wear*

*It like a flower...*

The poem is a part of that endless search for an eternal and perfect lover, which is one of the central themes in all Kamala Das’s poetry. Here love becomes an endless and painful experiment for possession. The evasiveness of real love and the cruelty of lust posing as love are brought out in the two images of the pregnant girl baring her dusky breasts and the crows bickering over a piece of lizard meat.
Under the summer sun when passions run high and desire becomes a pain the lover simply wants to have her photographs ‘lying down’ while the ‘rusty nineteen – thirty four guns’, precisely as old as the poet, stand mute like phalluses. While the sun is still burning, disillusionment seems to have no end.10

Ah, why does love come to me like pain
Again and again and again?

Eunice de Souza calls these lines ‘weak and self-indulgent’.11

A poem more popular than any other in Summer in Calcutta is An Introduction variously interpreted and applauded as intensely autobiographical and as the poet’s aesthetic manifesto. It may serve as an introduction to her poetry. Though the confessional technique is adopted, the early part of the poem slides over its own technique and only towards the end the confessional note is clearly visible. It has an amazingly prosaic beginning with a reference to politics to which the poet is indifferent. Then it moves on to Kamala Das’s credo about the poetic language and finally it forays into some autobiographical references and experiences. The poetess writes in English inspite of protest from others. She adopts English because it is natural language for emotional expression. It is human speech, the speech of the mind. No profound aesthetic theory of language is propounded and no challenging attitude is adopted by the poet in this prefatory section of the poem. It is notable that poetess has given the growth of youth, the centre of Love and Sex.

The last thirty seven lines constitute a more important part of the poem where the poet presents a picture of her growing up into a woman. The agonies of growing up, both physical and emotional, are expressed through a chain of metaphors –
...I wore a shirt and my
Brother’s trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness.

The self-puzzlement caused by three languages at the beginning of the poem is here paralleled by the mystery of three names. The unsuccessful experiment in love mentioned earlier is here matched by a positive gain in love.

I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is every man
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love...12

As it has been introduced in the beginning about the volumes of Kamala Das's poetry namely Summer in Calcutta, The Descendants, The Old Playhouse and Other poems. I have already interpreted the love and sex, in Summer in Calcutta. Now I take the volume The Descendants and try to interpret 'Love and Sex in it. It would be better to introduce the outline of the volume before the illustration of 'Love and Sex'.

The Descendants:

Kamala Das’s second collection of poems, The Descendants was published in 1967. It contained twenty-three poems. Nine of these are extremely short two are among the longest poems ever written by her. The themes of love, lust and disillusionment constitute the leading motif in these poems. They are presented with a greater maturity of thinking and better control over expression then in the previous collection, Summer in Calcutta. Most poems in The Descendants show a metaphysical concern with time, death and decay. Some of the poems express a profound disgust with the intrusion of lust into the luminous blues of life’s several surfaces. A preoccupation with loneliness and a
corroding sense of futility mark some of the poems. The incongruity between man's guiding desires and the insubstantiality of his achievements strikes the poet lending her vision of human destiny a tragic dimension.¹³

*The Descendants* reveals the thematic and symbolic structure of a poetic consciousness moulded by meditation over death and physical decay, ugliness of the body and the mind and the fallibility of human emotions

Devindra Kohli has perceptively pointed out that in *The Descendants*, ‘there is a shift from the sun – image of *Summer in Calcutta* to the sea-image, from noon to night from fire to water".¹⁴

The poems in the first collection are toddling experiments where as in *The Descendants* they are bolder in conception and stabler in expression.

The title-piece *The descendants* begins in sinning and ends in the impossibility of redemption. The lover’s indulgence in insubstantial love is sin because there is no authenticity of emotions. The agony of such love is its punishment, which is suggested by a negative equation between the cross and the bed.

*We have lain in every weather, nailed, no, not*

*To crosses, but to soft beds and against*

*Softer forms…….*

The identification of the cross with the bed, though negative, indicates the torture of insubstantial love, the sin of temptation. The juxtaposing with spiritual (crosses) with the sensual (beds) suggests the venality of the lover’s engagement. The lovers, in the ecstasy of their lust, are ready to yield to everything; is birth curious to them nor is death frightening.

*….We were the yielders,*

*yielding ourselves to everything. It is*
Not for us to scrape the walls of wombs for

Memories, not for us ever to

Question death...

They are ready to surrender to the ‘cold lovelines’ of death. The impossibility of redemption is made obvious in the second use of the cross symbol.

.... None will step off his cross.

Or show his wounds to us.....

The Biblical concept of sin and punishment should have led to repentance and redemption. But here there is not repentance and so no redemption. No god lost in silence shall speak. It is certain

....we are not going to be

Even redeemed, or made new

In The Descendants, punishment descends from sin and damnation descends from punishment. The syndrome of lust, torture, and loss of lone is paralleled by that of sin, punishment and lack of redemption.

Through imagery, the poetess presents their love process. The central imagery in The Descendants is that of the lovers nailed to the bed, which is like a cross. The same image is repeated in The Proud One to suggest the agony of a jilted lover and betrayed husband. Love and power are juxtaposed and the pain of disillusionment is brought home by the imagery.

... I saw him that day

Lying nailed to his bed, in imitation

Of the great crucifixion...
In *Ferns* the theme in *The Descendants* is followed with a self-mocking intensity. There is ironic glorification of physical love even when the poetess is painfully aware of its sad end. *Ferns are* a metaphor for disenchantment, for the poetess wants to hide in its darkness. The putrescent sensuality that haunts the relationship of the lovers is conveyed through such metaphors as 'dismembered heads', ‘night streets grinning in static mirth' and ‘eat its own hotted flesh’ and confirmed by the pictorial lines:

. . . . . and our

*Bodies stacked on beds will mimic the slow

*Gestures of the mind and take on the blame

* I silent sin........

The theme of lust is apotheosized in *Convicts* a poem in which sensual love is portrayed in terms of physical labour and heat. The convicts are the lovers and their lust is universal. The comparison of the lovers with ‘toys dead children leave behind’ implies the fatal nature of lust. The lovers have lost their separate genders in the heat and heaviness of lust.

. . . . . when he

*And I were one, we were neither

*Male nor female . . . . . .

*The effacement of individual personalities in the clout of lust
takes the perceptibly hard shape of a metaphysical conceit.

*That was the only kind of love,

*This hacking at each other’s parts

*Like convicts hacking, breaking clods

*At noon...
The Looking Glass is about man-woman relationship, love and lust. There is an ironic suggestion about the need to flatter the male ego. The woman has to yield to his strange and abnormal demands and ‘gift him all’. She has to allow him to feel his superiority; ‘admit your admiration’, for him. There is unrelieved sense of despair in the thought that in spite of the sacrifices and self-effacement of the woman, it is difficult to keep the man with her. He slips away insulting the woman’s pleasure of possession. The painful contradiction in the man-woman relationship is brought out:

. . . . . . . .Oh, yes getting
A man to love is easy, but living
Without him afterward may have to be
Faced...

Severe criticism has been leveled against Kamala Das for the use of some apparently immodest phrases in the poem like, 'the jerky way he urinates', ‘the musk of sweat between the breast’ and 'menstrual blood'.

The tenor of the poem suggests that the vulgar pungency of these phrases is deliberate device used by the poetess to project the vulgarity of the male’s love demands. The offensiveness of the language reflects the offensiveness of the male behaviour. The Looking Glass, this poem is a looking glass for male lust and its several malodorous manifestations.

The Conflagration is a poem of sexual love. Here love is the elemental fire and sex is the vital principle. The poem is divided into three sections of three, five and seven lines each. There is thematic and formal balance in the poem.

The progression in the number of lines indicates the growth of passion culminating in the imagery of boiling fire ‘so turbulent with life'. The first section implies the posture of sexual intercourse conceived as burial of the
woman under the man. The burial, inevitably, is followed by resurrection. The second part is an attempt to channelise despair that threatens the erotic fulfillment. The third section reaffirms the value of sexual love as an all-embracing conflagration, an elemental fire in which the lovers boil themselves into the final glory of fulfillment and emerge ‘turbulent with life’.

_We came together like two suns meeting, and each_

_Raging to burn the other out. He said you are_

_A forest conflagration and I, poor forest,_

_Must burn..._

The 'sun' is symbol of passionate participation in love. The lover rage to burn each other out in a conflagration of sexual union. The critic who says that sun is a symbol of ‘unwilling sexual indulgence’ and the same note of unwilling participation in sex recurs in *The Conflagration* has sadly missed the intensity of the poem and the significance of the sun symbol in Kamala Das’s Poetry.

*The Invitation* is in the form of a dialogue between the poet and sea. In Kamala Das’s poetry, the sea is a recurring symbol. The sea lurks in her memory and has been a place of retreat from the agonised world of everyday existence.

The roaring of the Arabian Sea, which is not for away from her ancestral home Nalapat, has been always fresh in her consciousness. In *The Invitation*, the poet is prodded towards suicide by the haunting pains of disillusionment. The memories of the lover (husband) who visits her occasionally (a fish coming up to water) warm her up. The conflicting desires for death and living constitute the torture of the self in the poem.

_......... you are diseased_

_With remembering._
The man is gone for good. It would indeed
Be silly to wait for his returining.

The eternal attraction of the sea, its mystery and cold solace invite the poet. Death by the sea offers a kind of comfort; the lover’s company offers another kind of death.

. . . . . . Think of yourself
Lying on a funeral pyre
With a burning head.

The burning death imagery of the funeral pyre is contrasted with Bathe cool/
Stretch your limbs on cool / Secret sands. The poem is a meditation on death, life and suicide proceeding from the feeling of torture that accompanies sexual love. There is ultimate rejection of the sea’s invitation and the fascination of suicide,

. . . . . . I am still young
And I need that man for construction and
Destruction…

This is a positive posture of acceptance of life and love in spite of their inadequacies. She is 'the bright one, the right one to live in the blue', by all accounts, but the poetess protests, ‘no, I am still young’. There is sudden resurgence of life-force, a consummated joy of existence, a strong desire to desire. But the sea continues to beat against the walls of her life’s fortress. Who can satisfy its rage? How long can one resist? At the end, the temptation of suicide looms large.

In The Suicide, again, the dominating metaphore is the sea. The poem moves on a pattern of dialogue but the poetess and the sea interspersed with
reflections of the poetess. The sea, here, represents a temptation to return to simplicity and innocence through death. In *My Story* the poet writes,

> Often I have toyed with the idea of drowning myself to be rid of my loneliness which is not unique in any way but is natural to all. I have wanted to find rest in the sea and an escape from involvements.\(^{16}\)

The contemplated suicide does not take place because of the poetess's inability to choose between physical and spiritual death. For her like Walt Whitman, the body and the soul are inseparable. The sea expresses a preference for her soul because,

> I throw the bodies out,
> I cannot stand their smell
> Only the souls may enter
> The vortex of the sea.

But a momentary warm thought of her lover, (husband) who has asked her to die rescues her from the impulsive desire for death. The idea of suicide takes her to the thought of life, the necessity of pretending to be happy as a woman and wife.

The vortex of the sea, which refuses to accept anything less than the soul, reflects the poet’s tortured psyche. The poet meditates on the alternatives:

> I want to be loved
> And
> If love is not to be had
> I want to be dead

Bereft of love, life is death. But death is held at bay by the continual assertion of life. The propensity for drowning is mercifully channelised into the
activity of swimming which comes naturally to the poetess. She takes a respite from thoughts of death; goes back nostalgically to her grandmother’s house and to her white lover, both associated with her swimming memories. This nostalgia is life giving and a bracing sensation of love posses through her. The poem ends in an assertion of life, in an intensified craving for life and love. The resurgence of life has been already suggested in the paradoxical lines.

*There must be a sun slumbering*

*At the vortex of the sea.*

Swimming takes the metaphorical meaning of indulgence in love and every lover becomes a 'pale-green pond'. The thought about the Whiteman who remains alien in the vortex of the poetess’s memory, finally settles the choice between life and suicide.

*The white man who offers*

*To help me forget,*

*The white man who offers*

*Himself a stiff drink,*

*Is for me,*

*To tell the truth,*

*Only water,*

*Only a pale – green pond*

*Glimmering in the sun.*

The Whiteman must be Carlo, the poetess’s fancy lover, about whom she writes in *My Story* in a language reminiscent of the poem:
.... he offered himself as a stiff drink, he offered to help me forget and in the afternoon I lay in his white arms, drowsily aware that he was only water, only a pale-green pond glimmering in the sun.17

Substitute opens with vague images of the sea and death. The poem is an attempt to escape from memories of frustration. Love is now blackmail and sorrow. The momentary ecstasies result in frustration because love is only a physical thing. It does not make a contact.

_Our bodies after love-making_

_Turned away, rejecting._

_Our words began to sound_

_Like clatter of sounds in fight._

The lack of mental contact between the lovers is suggested by the imagery of 'the poor crows with raucous cries'. The awareness that love is a 'physical thing' makes the lovers free from mutual obligations and involvement and a sense of false freedom descends on them. But it is a freedom with pain.

_This freedom was our last strange toy_

_Like the hangman’s robe, even while new_

_It could give no pride._

The reference to ‘hangman’ stirs up the picture of the gallows, a mechanical device to cause death. Love, for the poet, becomes a mechanical affair and lovers become a series of substitutes.

_After that love became a swivel-door,_

_When one went out, another came in._
The poem is an attempt to discover the male and an exploration into the psyche of the frustrated female. It has an ironic structure made explicit through the repeated meditative strain ‘It will be all right’. The irony is directed against society as well as the poet herself. In Kamala Das’s poetry, such repletion’s are deliberate devices to communicate the sense of agony. In the poem, ‘It will be all right’ is repeated thirteen times. Each repetition is a substitute for each aspect of the poignant emotional stance the poetess assumes – sense of loss, contempt for society, anger, self-pity, defiance, disdain and so on. The repetition ‘has a telling effect’\(^{18}\) according to Prof. K. R. S. Iyengar.

They are not merely a 'quick solution to the problem of filling up a line'\(^{19}\) as Linda Hess has facilely observed.

They help to create an ironic effect essential to the structure of the poem. Similar repetitions that internalise the emotional and intellectual dilemma of the speaker are used by T. S. Eliot in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.\(^{20}\) The dilemma is expressed by T. S. Eliot in the line ‘It is impossible to say just what I mean’. So Prufrock’s repetition of the lines ‘That is not at all / That is not what I meant, at all’ acquires an inscrutable significance.

*Composition* is one of the longer poems of Kamala Das in which the thematic intensity sometimes flags because of its sheer length. It is a confessional narrative beginning with the image of the sea. The kaleidoscope of imagery changes with rapidity. The poem is intense with several autobiographical insights and progresses from the composite state of innocence and childhood to the state of self-consciousness and age. The progress is from ‘composition’ to ‘decompositions’.

*Composition* may be divided into seven sections, each coalescing into the other thematically and symbolically. The first section (1.1-43) is a fond
recollection of the poet’s childhood and is inhabited by the images of the sea and the grandmother’s red house.

The sea was only two miles away

But Time has erased these fond memories and growth replaced love with guilt. Growth is visualised as evil.21

The tragedy of life

is not death but growth.

The second section (1.44-53) recalls the poet’s loss of touch with the sea. She has 'no time at all for the sea' but the seascape survives in her dreams.

Life in the shadow of marriage fills the third section (1.54-73). The ‘dance’ imagery conjures up the freedom the husband has granted her.

You may have freedom

as much as you want.

However, the satiety of freedom oppresses her and awareness comes that the craze for freedom was only an escape from the consciousness of sexual incompetence and suspected heterosexuality, lesbianism and frigidity. The fourth part (1:74-135) presents a mature woman who desires tenderness more than love. In search of emotional security she skips from one sexual escapade to another. Normal relationships do not endure, so she whips up a forth of desire and resorts to the abnormal.

I must let my mind striptease

I must extrude

autobiography.
A similar associative use of the word ‘striptease’ is found in Sylvia Plath’s poem *Lady Lazarus*. Here it refers to the physical and the persona retains her identity as a woman.

*The peanut-munching crowd*

*Shoves into see*

*Them unwrap me hand and foot-

*The big striptease.* 22 *(Sylvia Plath-Lady Lazarus)*

In Kamala Das ‘striptease’ is related to the mind and still she has to retain her identity as woman. In loneliness, she becomes a ‘girl with vast sexual hungers’ The concern with bodies’ hunger leads to a meditation on the body and the soul, a meditation not free from superficiality. Any resemblance to Hindu thought is fortuitous. The fifth section (7.136-200) is anecdotal recalling a domestic event that happened ‘thirteen years ago’. However, it is a part of the general scheme of confession.

..............by confessing

*by peeling off my layers.*

*I reach closer to the soul.*

In the sixth section (1-201-213) there is a stoic acceptance of life’s trials. The final section (1.214-268) is a confession of the poet’s failure.

*I feel my age and my*

*Uselessness.*

Only the basic hunger ‘to crumble, to dissolve’ is left in her. Free from all involvement, she desires to reach the tranquil stage of detachment. What sustains her is the thought of immortality of the soul.

*The ultimate discovery will be*
**that we are immortal**

**the only things mortal being**

**systems and arrangement.**

In spite of its expressive thematic presentation and expansive imagery, Composition suffers from a drag of prolixity.

We may observe the poem Composition. It is ‘a totally formless stream of unhappy consciousness.” There are two other poems in which we find some verves of ‘sex and love’. These poems are The White Flowers and Jaisurya.

In The White Flowers, there is thoughtfully expressed anxiety and anguish. War destroys both love and life. The poet’s concern for her baby-son born in an age of bloodshed and despair grows into a universal concern for mankind. The white flowers are contrasted with the red cherry wine suggesting the contrast between peace and bloodshed. The ghastly sense of death created by the images like the 'dead man's palm’ and the 'weeping of old mother' is counterbalance by the poet’s determination to protect the baby-son.

**Today some of us will rise and sing of love**

**In voices never as sweet before, for love like life**

**is sweetest just before its end.**

Jaisurya is one of the most acutely personal poems of Kamala Das. It is a narrative meditation on childbirth. It was again the time of rain when the son was born. The birth pangs are identified with the wailings of the rain outside linking man’s destiny with nature.

. . . . . . . .It rained on the day my son

Was born, a slanting rain that began with

The first labour pain and kept me
Company, singing, wailing, and roaring

When I groaned...

The birth of the son coincides with the stoppage of the rain and the arrival of afternoon light. In the last ten lines of the poem, there are repeated references to ‘darkness' and 'night’ probably suggesting something unpleasant in conjugal relationship. The last four lines are haunted by this disturbed consciousness.

Out of the mire of a moonless night was

He born, Jaisurya, my son, as out of

The wrong is born the right and out of night.

The sun-drenched golden day.

Thus the ambit of love may be observed here.

In the connection of love Kamala Das's another poem The Doubt is worth mentioning.

The Doubt is built upon an apparently irrefutable logic about death. The poetess is convinced that only souls have sex because a body, when it is dead, is referred to as 'it’. Love is shame, sex act is murder and male is the murderer who destroys all evidence of the crime.

...........How well I can see him

After a murder, conscientiously

tidy up the scene.       .       .

Captive is a confession of the poetess’s crazy run in search of security and love.

My love is an empty gift, a gilded

empty container, good for show, nothing else.
The picture of the grandmother rises above the cloud of despair as a symbol of love. What passes today as love in poetess’s life is merely ‘the womb’s blinded hunger’ (lust) and ’the muted whisper at the core’ (consummation of the sex act). She is a docile slave of her own passion.

. . . . . . . . . For years I have run from one

gossamer lane to another, I am

now my own captive.

Among the shorter poems in The Descendants, A Request stands out because of its implied meditation on the decay of the human body and its accent on the futility of life without love.

Radha is an expression of the muted desire for love after a long waiting. The ecstasy of love – fulfillment is Radha’s total surrender to Krishna.

O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting.

Nothing remains but

You...

The repetition of the word ‘melting' heightens Radha’s suffering of love. In 'The Maggots' which is also related to the Radha – Krishna myth, the poet muses over the futility of sexual union. In the heat of lovemaking the woman is a corpse and the male is a nibble at the body like maggots.

. . . . . . . . what is

It to the corpse if the maggots nib?

Palam is a farewell poem that combines the sadness caused by the lover’s departure with the poetess’s regret at the sudden ending of an afternoon of joy.

The close study of the poems reflects the love feeling of the poetess. Love is a eminent component of one’s personality. No one can reject its importance in life. As for as Kamala Das is concerned she has expressed the idea of love in
many facets of life; it is true that she has been deprived of genuine love and become the patient of shattered love. She analyses it in different aspect of life, a patient has become a doctor and gives the observations of love’s anatomy.

**The Old Playhouse and Other Poems:**

These volume containing thirty-three poems was published in 1973. There are only thirteen new poems in this collection, the rest being reprints of poems, which have already appeared in the earlier collections. Most of the new poems are concerned with themes and sentiments already found expression in the several poems of the previous volumes. Kamala Das’s concern continues to be the exploration of the nature of love, lust and frustration.

The title poem, *The Old Playhouse*, shows that Kamala Das’s exploration into the nature of lust and disillusionment is not merely confined to the exposure of the male personality but also is an exploration into her own anguished self. The poem is addressed to the husband and the theme is suggested in the first four and a half lines.

*Swallow* stands for the feminine psyche’s desire for freedom. The conflicting meanings established by the use of the wards ‘tame’ and ‘fly’ sets the tone of the poem. The nature of marital love is explored through a harsh reminiscence of the early-married life. The first seventeen lines are in the past tense and the rest of the poem is in the present tense.

The first part deals with the daily routine of the domesticity and the second part with the disastrous effect of this relentless routine on the psyche of the wife. Love is a way of learning about oneself; in love one seeks a completion of personality. She came to her husband not merely to cower beneath his ’monstrous ego’,

. . . . . . . *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 was about yourself...

This is the despair of every married woman whose urges one aimed at excitements beyond the circumscribed limit of a nuclear family. In this anguish and anger there hides a tacit confession that the woman needs the male’s solicitude to realize herself fully. Instead of lending a helping hand to the wife to raise herself to the pedestal of self – realization, the husband exploits her body and destroys her mind.

.... You embalmed

My poor lust with; your bitter-sweet juices, your called me wife.

The wife is reduced to the status of a slavish dwarf and life has shrunk into the dimension of a little room. The little room itself is heated with; disgust. Even the air conditioner does not help. The cut flowers smell of human sweat.

...There is

No more singing, no more a dance, my mind is an old

Playhouse with all its lights put out.

The love, rather lust, the husband has been administering to her in ‘lethal doses’ rendered her life joyless, dark and passive.

Old Playhouse symbolises that life, Kamala Das’s protest, here, is not merely against the superficial aberrations of married life but against the essential nature of Hindu domestic life, which 'tames the swallow' and permits free exhibition of the male ego in all its horrid manifestations.

Sylvia Plath gives a similar ironic caricature of the role of a wife in The Applicant. The loss of personality and mechanised routine of the woman is
suggested by the pronoun ‘it’, instead of ‘she’. Sylvia Plath’s woman is like Kamala Das’s wife.28

..... Here is a hand
To fill it and willing
To bring teacups and roll away headaches
And do whatever you tell it.

A defiant mood of protest against man’s inhumanity to woman is a common trait in both the poems.

The Stone Age is, thematically, a continuation of The old Playhouse. The condemnation of male insensitivity is in more fierce terms and the glorification of an extra-marital affair imparts it a strange significance as one of the crucial poems in Kamala Das’s contrived system of male-abhorrence. Like The Old Playhouse, the poem opens with an ironic address to the ‘fond husband’. He is the ‘old fat spider’ weaving webs of bewilderment around her. He has created a domestic stone age for her. In a hundred ways, he had destroyed her feminine personality.

. . . . . . . . .You turn me into a bird of stone, a granite

Done, you build round me a shabby drawing room,
And stoke my pitted face absent mindedly while.

You read. With loud talk you bruise my premorning sleep,

You stick a finger into my dreamy eye.29

These charges would not appear adequate justification for the subsequent event in the poem unless they are taken as mildly expressed symbols of protest against the wildly provocative and felonious behaviour of the husband. He is certainly a source of irritation. The poet’s daydreams are filled with other men.
'I drive my blue battered car’ symbolises the quick awaking
of the badly from enforced passivity to lusty activity.

....... I run up the forty

Noisy steps to knock at another’s door.

This is running up the stairs of lust. Once the defiance takes place, it finds
its own justification through a series of daring questions. The questions are a
bulwark against accusations.

The pace and rhythm of the lines trot with the suspicious questions of the
neighbours and reflect the merry defiance of the poet. The imagery of the
'hooded snake' hints at the poisonous nature of her relationship with the other
man. The lover who 'slumps against my breasts and sleeps' like a 'great tree
felled’ is a contrast to the husband who with his loud talk bruises her, 'pre
morning sleep'. The combined impact of the erotic imagery, the lively
movement of the last few lines and the image of repulsiveness of the husband
presented by the first few lines erase the question of the woman’s infidelity
from our mind.

In the concern of Love and Sex we may take the example of Gino. In
Gino the initial impulse is the unfulfilled love for another man. The poet accepts
it as poisonous lust and the metaphor ‘kraits bite’ in the second line sets the tone
for the emotional structure of the poem. The poet’s frustration arises from the
conflict between the desire for another man and her inability to liberate herself
from the clutches of a conventional society, which looks upon her as a wife.
This inability to ‘dislodge the inherited memory of a touch’ deprives her of the
pleasures of a free life. The vision of such a life is presented through the
imagery of the white horse.

........... We shall ride happiness

Great white steed, trampler of unsacred laws.30
The ‘white steed’ with its mythical associations embodies the unquenchable energy and wild elegance of lust which tramples over all conventional restrictions. The lover is termed as ‘fair conqueror of another’s country’ imparting the extrametrical affair the glory of a conquest, legitimacy of passion and a halo of adventure and romance. Caught between the stormy frustration of an unfulfilled married life and an unrealised liaison, the woman is utterly lonely and helpless. The imagery of ‘homeless cats’ wailing from the rubble of a storm’ points to this forlornness. The stink of lust reeks through the lines:

... I dream of obscene hands

Striding up my limbs.

The metaphor of lust dissolves into another of death.

...of morgues where the night-rights.

Glow on faces shuttered by the soul’s exit.31

Juxtaposition of lust and death is a common device in Kamala Das and it projects the consciousness of futility that wraps all lust activity. The hospital imagery that follows reinforces this contrast.

The imagery of death reappears in the second section of the poem. The futility and incompleteness of lust-experience give rise to a realisation about the insignificance, cheapness and uncouthness of the body. It become a torture and so unwanted like a mutilated toy or worn-out clothes.

This body that I wear without joy, this body

Burdened with lenience, slender toy’s owned.

By man of substance, shall perhaps wither.

In the next section, the poet visualises the stages of her woman – body is gradual decay, first as ‘fat kneed hag’ then a patient on the hospital bed and
finally a grandmother with one foot in the grave. In the last three lines as a contrast to the first three lines where lust is invoked, the poetess invokes the religious myth of rebirth echoing Sri Sankaracharya’s delineation of the progress of the human soul through the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

...Perhaps some womb in that

Darker world shall convulse, when I finally enter,

A legitimate entrant, marked by discontent.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{Gino} is one of those great poems of Kamala Das in which multifarious meanings emerge from the single central concept. It encompasses the terrestrial delusion of love and lust as well as the ethereal visions of life, death and rebirth.

In several poems of Kamala Das, lust causes devastation and disintegration of the self. The fragility of love – experience is the theme that dominates ‘Glass’. The poem describes in a tone of mock indifferences the woman’s ritual manipulations of various lovers. Fragility of ‘Glass’ is analogous to the fragility of love.

\textit{I went to him for half an hour}

A pure woman, pure misery

\textit{Fragile glass...}\textsuperscript{33}

In the arms of the lover she is reduced to 'an armful of splinters', broken glass.

She enters into love-experience with a sort of unconcern bordering on the abominable. The absence of involvement and the sand satiety haunt her.

\textit{With a cheap toy’s indifference}

\textit{I enter others}

\textit{Lives, and}
Make of every trap of lust

A temporary home ...³⁴

The juxtaposing of ‘trap’ and ‘home’ instantly illustrates the irreconcilability of her love-experience with genuine pleasure.

A feeling that nothing endures in man-woman relationship fills the poem. After every encounter, the woman body feels so beaten. There is a search for the ‘misplaced father' at the end of the poem. The father figure merges with the lover in a Freudian manner and the picture that emerges is that of ‘every woman who seeks love’, flitting from one man to another as if in unmentioned revenge against the male order.

In the early poems, Kamala Das is mainly obsessed with her own restlessness and agony in the face of male truculence. However, the growing diversity of her poetic vision and maturity of response to the milieu are seen in some of the poems dealing with social and interpersonal themes. ‘The Inheritance’ is such a poem inspired by the poet’s disgust with everyday religion. In has an ironic structure and focuses on the ‘ancient viruses of religion which is our only inheritance. The early poems are background of ‘Love and Sex’. Love has many facets that may be observed in the poem Nani. It is inspired by the memory of a tragic incident that happened in the poet’s household years ago.

Nani the pregnant maid hanged herself

In the privy one day.

This childhood experience got deeply embedded in the poet’s memory. The dead body was hanging there like a ‘clumsy puppet’:

...and when the wind blew

Turning her gently on the rope, it seemed
To us who were children then, that Nani was doing, to delight us, a comic Dance...\(^{35}\)

The macabre imagery of ‘a comic dance, suggests the total absence of sympathy for the dead maid on the part of the household. In fact, within another year or two the grandmother forgets the event and is even annoyed when the poetess asks about Nani’s death. Her queries remain unanswered. Each truth ends with a query.

The poet admires the ‘clotted peace’ at the end. But this is ironic admiration. This is peace acquired by not asking inconvenient questions or by moving away from the blast of shocking answers. The ‘clotted peace’ is for those wise ones ‘unscratched by doubts’. The poet seems to be disturbed by the death of the maid and more disturbed by the awful silence others maintain over the death. There is great humanism in the poem. It reveals that muffling truth is more painful than even the most shocking truth.

Here we see love and sympathy for maid. There is a poem After the Illness in which we find the threat of love. The poem is concerned with the question of survival in spite of illness. The poem must have been written after the poet’s illness, which she describes in My Story,

The right side of my abdomen ached dully and constantly. I coughed throughout the night. I could not retain even the blandest food.\(^{36}\)

She was admitted in the Wellington hospital, Delhi. The love of the husband survived her illness. As a result, there is a slow change from the brink of death to the ‘accustomed grooves’ of life.
I knew you would survive, my darling. I willed it so. The yellowed eyes and fetid breath have vanished. There is a change from the imagery of lust and flesh in the later suggesting the recovery and will to live on the part of the poet.

...There was

Not much flesh left for the flesh to hunder, the blood had

Weakened too much to lust...³⁷

In spite of the body’s unattractiveness and the skin’s numbness, what makes her husband lust for her? It is the deeply hidden soul’s that lusk? Are the body and the soul separate? Is not the soul deeply hidden in the body? These reflections impart a halo of inscrutability to the poem.

In the light of above examples, we notice the various forms of love. It is well-known fact to everyone that ‘Love and Sex’ is the centre of man’s activity. No one can deny the fact of vital force. The love and the sex cannot be separated from each other. But we can take them exclusively while we are doing the analysis of one’s personality. In the case of Kamala Das, we mostly find paucity of love in dis-satisfied form.

In the light of above-mentioned poems, we observe the projection of ‘Love and Sex’. It is notable that Kamala Das has opened her heart in these poems. What she has experienced in her life she presented in her writings. She thinks for complete love i.e. loves with body and spirit. She finds male-class only pacified his physical hunger of sex at the cost of love. It is travesty of human society that people want animal satisfaction in the name of love. Spirit animates love as vital factor of our life. In all three volumes of the reflections of poems are mainly loves oriented. But higher we see the observation of poet that indicates deprivation of love. In Summer in Calcutta she presents the unsatisfied love.

I met a man, loved him.
Call him not by name,
he is every man, who wants
a woman, just as I am every
woman who seeks love….

It may be observed easily that she universalise the need of love.

In him, all the erotic forces of love and lust are combined. Here the poem takes wings and the woman who seeks love transcends her in dividuality and becomes a symbol of that universal power in which everything, good and evil merges.

It is to be noted that the love and lust are the part of love expression. Love and Lust run together. In this concern, one cannot separate the love from lust. As Psychology interprets the instinct as a part of human nature, but is remarkable to note that socialisation of man makes differences. This difference is the demand of the poetess. One cannot deny the fact that man cannot go beyond the nature. Yes, it is true we follow the nature but with reformation. Man has developed culture and civilization, there are the distinctive points of man, which occupy him on the zenith of all creatures. Kamala Das has to say about the distinction of man from another animal. In society we learn to respect mankind. Woman is an eminent part of our society and this class should not be suppressed. In this way Kamala Das is the leader of woman-poets who are awakened from the sleep of slavery. She proclaims the genuine need of woman-class. She desires for society, friendship and love.

The idea of Love and Sex is examined by A. N. Divedi as follow:

In Kamala’s three volumes of verse, there are a number of poems that breath an air of love, amorousness, and sexuality. But these should not lead one to believe that she has been pleading all a long for promiscuity and adultery. They rather articulate her strong desire to get
liberated from the clutches of a male-dominated society and pass a happy, healthy life of peace and rest. The woman-persona in her asserts an `indomitable will' and 'the spirit of revenge' and gives a clarion-call to the weaker sex to rise in revolt against all kinds of repression and tyranny being perpetrated on it.

Kamala Das does not like ‘physical’ love that her strong husband showers on her; she rather craves for emotional identity, which he fails to afford for her. 38

Kamala Das is a thinker. She thinks over Hindu set-up of marriage. The whole Hindu social set-up is the subject of sharp criticism. In this rotten set-up, marriages are made without taking into account the suitability of partners from various angles their family background, age, education, financial status and social connections. Kamala Das raises her voice of resentment against this hollow set-up.

Kamala Das needs spiritual love and she rejects physical love devoid of spiritual love. The kisses of her husband on her cheeks are the ‘maggots’ rolling over ‘the corpse’. He knows only the ‘physical’ kind of love without trying to make any emotional or spiritual contact with her. This idea is neatly expressed in the poem Convicts.

Kamala Das has expressed her protest against in genuine love. This sort of ‘openness and frankness’ is hardly to be found in any other Indo English woman poet. The resultant emerging picture is a man or a woman of flesh and blood, a living biological reality, with not distortions’ or twists. Naturally, Kamala Das is at her best here as a poet of love and sex.

Love and Sex are central emotions of the poetess. It is striking point of her poetry. One cannot deny the fact that Kamala Das has expressed her ideas in
the matrix of Love and Sex. Her presentation needs deep observation for critic to evaluate the Love and Sex at right level.

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