I. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation attempts to analyze the images in Kamala Das’s poetry. She is a well-known Indo-Anglian woman poet for her confessional and autobiographical modes of writing. She is a poet of love and pain arising out of it. She writes mostly from her experiences of sexual humiliation, failure of love affairs, frustration and anger. Her sensuous writing about man-woman relationship makes her a controversial figure. Her poetry has different themes relating to her feminine consciousness. She revolts against the male-dominated society, unhappy married life, and the traditional role of a woman as a wife, as well as artificial urban life. She expresses her sense of alienation and the consequent quest for identity through the medium of her writing. She has been continuously in search of spiritual gratification.

In search of true love and self-identity she gives up all the rules made for women. She never wears the mask of a chaste and moral woman. As a bold writer she never hesitates to depict her adultery and all womanly secrets. Her writing may be autobiographical in
manner of writing but it seems to be universal because it deals with the inner personality of every woman.

*My Story* articulates the writer’s personal experiences as well as the incidents in her life which force her to think about the condition of woman in the society. Woman is humiliated and neglected everywhere. She discovers through her life that the woman is a thing of attraction and seduction. In her autobiography she describes all the details of each and every situation which impacts on her mind.

(I)

She writes about the suicide of her maidservant Nani, which was unbearable and unforgettable for her. Who was seduced and become pregnant. But the society and her family members criticized her. They never understood her condition and never think of finding out the person who abused her. She was an immoral woman in the attitude of the society and not so the man who was responsible for her pathetic condition. The woman was helpless. She never found any solution. Therefore, the poor creature hanged herself and ended her life. There is no punishment for the person who impregnates but on the contrary the victimized lady is punished without any mistake. It creates an impact on the sensitive mind of Kamala Das. She never
forgets the death of Nani and never understands the reason behind it. She discovers to her dismay that the woman has no place, value in the attitude of male.

There are many more experiences like this. The chaparasi of her father’s office had sent hundred rupees money order to his family by borrowing from Kamala Das’s mother for the funeral his sick old wife who was said to be dying. Later on when he learnt that she had recovered, he started shouting that she had cheated him for hundred rupees. He asks Kamala Das:

If she decides to die after few months how will I be able to raise another hundred for the funeral? ........ why didn’t she die at the proper time ..... he nodded his head and muttered, it is god’s will ....

For him, hundred rupees are more valuable than the life of the woman. Her existence is nothing. It happens because of her dependent life. Women are never to be counted as a human being. They have to live per as their husband’s wish.

One of the chapters from her autobiography depicts the bitter irony of woman’s life. In the chapter ‘Caluctta’s Cocktail Season’ she focuses on the condition of wives of middle class govt. servants. Who
used them for their progress in job. They bring their wives in the parties to give company to their officers, industrialists and the wives cannot react in any situation. She writes:

The Government servants drag their foolish wives to such parties, hoping that their comeliness and charm might impress the rich. The rich enjoy being introduced to the Government – wives, and to those who are still young and fresh, they hand glasses of sherry or vermouth with crushed ice and plead in sweet tones, please drink, please drink, let me see the drink put sparkle in those lovely eyes of yours …

At that time that the woman looked towards her husband with hopes but he was engaged in discussion with other girls and he deliberately neglected her. It means that the women are used to please someone. As Germaine Greer says:

For women, there is one aspect which is common to both situations: demands are made upon them to contour their bodies in order to please the eyes of others. Women are so insecure that they constantly take measures to capitulate to this demand, whether it is rational or not.
That women are helpless, they cannot save themselves from the sensual eyes and touchings. In Hindu religion the husbands are the protectors of their wives life but they smoothly forget it for their own business. Kamala Das’s anger comes out through these words:

Such are the kind of games that are being played in Calcutta during its winter. The players are practised liars.

These incidents which she has been observed in the society and experienced throughout her own life strengthen her resolve to struggle against the male domination. She challenged all the concepts that are made for women to suppress their feelings.

Kamala Das was born on 31st March, 1934 in Malabar, Kerala. As her autobiography tells that her maiden name was Madhavikutty. She first attended a European school in Calcutta, then the elementary school at Punnayurkulam and then a boarding school run by the Roman catholic nuns, but in each of them she stayed for a short while.

Kamala Das was proud of her ancestral home in Malabar which was called the Nalapat House. She had never forgotten her glorious childhood which she had spent in Nalapat House with the lovely family members, aunt Ammini, grand uncle Narayan Menon who was
a “poet philosopher”, her great grandmother and her two sisters. The members of Nalapat family were steeped in Indian epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana and had a belief in Lord Siva and Lord Krishna, whose stories are naturally impressed on the innocent mind of Kamala Das in her childhood. Her grandmother always told her about the purity of their ancestral blood.

When we were children
My brother and I
And always playing on the sands
Drawing birds and animals
Our great grandmother said one day,
You see this house of ours
Now three hundred years old,

………………..
She told us
That we had the oldest blood
My brother and she and I
The oldest blood in the world
A blood thin and clear and fine. (OP, 17)
In her childhood Kamala Das was very fond of her great grandmother. She was the only daughter of a wealthy chieftain, the Raja of Punnathore Kotta. She was married to Raja of Chiralayman, came to Nalapat House and became a good wife, good mother and good grandmother. While writing about her grandmother she says:

She was really simple.
Fed on God for years
All her feasts were monotonous
And the rest mere condiments.
She told us how she rode her elephant
When she was ten or eleven
Every Monday without fail
To the Siva shrine
And back to home again.
And told us of the jewel box
……………..
And her marriage to a prince
Who loved her deeply for a lovely short year
and died of fever, in her arms. (OP, 17)
Her grandmother was good care-taker, psychologist and adviser who guided Kamala Das and took care of her personality. She taught her the manners of their oldest blood. She was the dearest person of the poetic persona who understood the psyche of Kamala Das and helped her to make it stable. All the secrets which she had, were shared with her great grandmother. The repetition of the adjective “great” regarding her grandmother suggests Kamala Das’s feeling of gratitude and the place of the grandmother in her life. When her grandmother died, she felt a vaccum in her life and felt alone in the world. The Nalapat House, its memories and of her grandmother continuously mentioned by Kamala Das many time. It symbolizes her attachment of Nalpat family and her past glory.

While speaking about her parents Kamala Das was not so happy. They are not ideal for her because they were a mismatched pair. Her mother Balamani Amma, a renowned poet in Malayalam was always lying on bed and busy in writing. Her father belonged to a traditional Nair family who never loved Balamani Amma. It has the negative effect on her.

Kamala Das was married at the early age of fifteen to Mr. Madhava Das, an Executive Director of the Reserve Bank of India,
Bombay. Her married life was unhappy. He was experienced in sex with his maidservants. It compelled her to enter into extra-marital relationship in search of true love. But it was unsuccessful and fruitless. The result was that she became frustrated. It stimulated her to write her own story and coloured her poetry. It was filled with different shades of her life.

Kamala Das has lived in many metropolitan cities as Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi and written about them. She has contributed to Malayam Literature and Indian English Literature.

Kamala Das has been awarded the prestigious awards like P.E.N. prize in 1964, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for her insightful Malayalam short stories in 1969, she got Chaman Lal Award for Journalism in 1971 and Asian World prize for Literature in 1985. She was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the World Academy of Arts and Culture, Taiwan, 1984 and the Indira Priyadarshani Vrikshamitra Award in 1988. She has published a full length autobiography *My Story* in 1976 which was first serialized in *The Current Weekly* of Bombay from January to December, 1974.
Her poetical collections in English are:

i) Summer In Calcutta (1965)

ii) The Descendants (1967)

iii) The Old Playhouse and other poems (1973)

iv) Tonight, This Savage Rite : The love poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy. (1979)

She has also published two novels in English under the title, *Alphabet of Lust*, 1976 and *A Doll for the Child Prostitute*, 1977.

She has also written some prose which is almost autobiographical. Her prose writings are controversial; her essays have a bitter comment on male dominated society. Her essays like “I Studied All Men”, “What Women Expect Out of Marriage and What They Get”, “Why Not More Than One Husband?” and “I Have Lived Beautifully” are unconventional in manner.

Besides her poetical and prose works, she has written for various popular magazines and periodicals, such as The Illustrated Weekly of India, Poetry East and West, Opinion, Debonair, Eve’s Weekly, Femina, Imprint, Weekly Round Table and Love and Friendship.
According to Kamala Das any language doesn’t any matter. She has also said that the caste, religion, language and geography to which the writer belongs is not important. While replying to P. Lal she says:

I do not like to classify writers as Indians, English or Indo-Anglians. The language one employs is not important. What is important is the thought contained by the words.⁵

Kamala Das’s writing is considered as autobiographical and confessional. Her work is not to be separated from the moments of her life. Whatever she felt and experienced, is put before the world. It is her sincere attempt to describe everything that happened with her.

A Pre-Marital Life

In an interview with Atma Ram, she explains the sources of her writing.

I am very honest with myself when I write poetry. Life has influenced my poetry.⁶
Her poetry is an honest appeal. It is her revolt against the social norms and her assertion of right to exist as an individual with a distinctive identity. Dr. Sharada Iyer rightly asserts:

The poetry of Kamala Das must be viewed in the light of her feminine consciousness. She acquired this consciousness under hostile circumstances dependent upon the society of her childhood days. Repressive attributes caused fragmentation to her/self. As a poet, she is conscious of her creative faculties and tries to break chains and restraints. She indulges in self-awareness, self-exposure and self-introspection in order to define herself poetically. The aim of the poet is not self-exposure; but self-discovery and self-examination. She structures self-exploration in order to search her lost identity as a woman and as a poet.

She has designed her humiliated and neglected personality through the media of writing. Her writing is the weapon to struggle with society. She brings the vivid picture and focuses on her own self as a woman. She is rebellious in nature which is highlighted in her poetry. She has a tremendous courage to demand all the feminine needs.
Kamala Das is certainly the most considerable Indian woman poet writing in English today. She has created a permanent place for herself in the contemporary Indo English poetry through her bold writing. Poets like A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarthy, Arun Kolatkar, K. N. Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, Shiv K. Kumar, Nissim Ezekiel have written about the subject of childhood, alienation, love, sex, sensuality, as well as on political, social, mythic issues. But among them she has her own range, popularity and feminine sensitivity. The thematic concern may be same in their writing but Kamala Das’s autobiographical and confessional touch in her writing makes her different. Her writing is based on the realistic approach to her own life. It is her honest description about her own life dealing with her lesbian relationships, homosexuality, extra-marital relations and her husband’s brutality and his indifferent nature.

i) Initial Hetrosexual Attractions:

Kamala Das has had a sensuous personality from her childhood. In her autobiography, *My Story*, she writes explicitly about her sensuous experiences. When Kamala Das was the student of the
elementary school, she fell in love with Govinda Kurup, a student of
eighth standard. While speaking about him she says:

He was handsome and had dimple on his right cheek which appeared only when he smiled. I could hardly take my eyes off his face. I was so infatuated with his charm.  

She never had any clear idea of love but had physical attraction towards the male friends. She told her grandmother about her attraction towards Govinda and her ambition of marriage to him. She was not able to control her feelings of attachment towards the opposite sex. She never kept aside any secrets of her life regarding her love affairs and her physical attraction.

A Syrian Christian Spinster was one of her tutors who was a short and aggressive lady. One day when she was at Kamala Das’s home to take her tuition, she stood at the window and watching behind that curtain and she suddenly felt restless. The reason behind it is that she had a sight of that man who had ruined her life and that of many other girls. Kamala Das looked at him and felt him attractive. She told her tutor that, “I like his looks”. Her lady tutor warned her that the person had ruined the lives of several girls. Even
after the knowledge about his wicked personality Kamala Das thought that,

……… I ought to meet him when I grew up, and perhaps become his mistress.  

This incident clearly indicates the irresistible temptation that sex was for her throughout her youth. Further she describes about her another male attraction at the age of thirteen when she went to Malabar for the summer vacation. She fell in love with a student leader who had been jailed for his revolutionary activities. He was interested in politics. He never had any attention towards Kamala Das. But she was interested in him. Her grand-aunt tried to keep her away from these affairs. As she describes,

She must have deduced from my behaviour that I had become infatuated with his charm. I tried to spend as much time as I could get in his company, but he did not once touch my hand or show any particular fondness to me.  

It was the nature of Kamala Das that she could not control her craze for opposite sex. At the early age of her life she was interested
in physical satisfaction before knowing the meaning of love. In her hunger of physical attraction / satisfaction she had forgotten the age limits. At the age of fourteen she fell in love with the art-tutor and never thought about the age difference and the relationship between the teacher and the student.

The art-tutor came to teach her every Wednesday. She was crazy for him. She watched his face with intense feelings of physical attraction. Every Wednesday she had a good make-up and became busy to make herself attractive. Her parents noticed the changes in her personality and the tuition was discontinued. She had never forgotten the last rainy day of her life when she went to the art tutor’s home to express her emotions to him. She was totally drenched due to sudden rain. He raised his eyes and invited her in. He says:

You are wet, you must change your clothes, he mumbled. He pulled my tunic over my head and wrung the water out through the window. His fingers were warm on my skin. Then with a handtowel he dried my hair and put the tunic on my body again. And without another word he took me by taxi to my house and shook my hand at the gate.
….. that was the last time I saw him.
But off and on I remembered the tenderness
with which he pulled aside my dress and
dried my body.\(^\text{12}\)

However, she continues to crave for the physical satisfaction through encounters like this:

Why did he not kiss me? Why didn’t
he make love to me? I asked my friend in
school why my first adult meeting with him
gave me only disappointment.\(^\text{13}\)

ii) Her Initial Lesbian Attractions:

Her immature physic and psyche is continuously searching for physical satisfaction. She has also had some of the experiences of lesbian relationships when she was a teenage girl of twelve years. She was living at a hostel where she had friendship with Sharada Menon, Raji, Meenakshi and Annie. Sharada Menon was the prettiest among them. One of the lesbian admirers from Goa fell in love with her and kept watching the beauty of Sharada Menon. But Sharada Menon was not interested in all these things. She lost her temper and shouted at her. One day Kamala Das had observed the behaviour of that admirer. She writes:
The lesbian admirer came into our room once when Sharada was away taking a bath and kissed her pillowcase and her undies hanging out to dry in the dressing room. I lay on my bed watching this performance but she was half-crazed with love, and hardly noticed me.\textsuperscript{14}

Kamala Das took an interest in these things and also had a habit to read the love letters of other girls and their love stories. She had always accompanied Annie who had a boyfriend. She had enjoyed the gossips with Annie. Once Sharada Menon warned her to keep her away from these gossips. But Kamala Das’s sensitive mind was not ready for it. It was her nature that she was attracted towards these things easily.

Once Annie showed Kamala Das the letters of her lover who wrote about her attractive figure and desired to touch her breasts. Kamala Das was shocked when she read it. Annie too became angry with him and shouted:

\ldots... Didn’t I tell you he was a worthless lecher? He does not love me. He only wants my body \ldots.\textsuperscript{15}
and then next morning she showed Kamala Das a bruise on her upper lip and whispered:

… he climbed over the wall and came to my bed at last night when all of you were asleep.¹⁶

But during the third term Annie was ejected from the boarding school. Later on Sharada Iyer told Kamala Das that all the letters were written by Annie herself. It was the nature of Annie that she liked to live in the world of fantasy. It proves that all the hidden desires of the girl are to be fulfilled through the imagination. It underlines the fact that girls can’t open express their sexual needs and have to suppress them. They caught in dual psychology, the desire of enjoy the sex and hide them smoothly from the world.

Once Kamala Das got a love letter from her schoolmate Devaki. She had an intention to read that letter but her grandmother found the letter in her bag read it and became upset. She was angry with Kamala Das. But there was no change in her personality. Again she fell in love with her Austrian teacher. As she describes:
Her voice was strange, fractured in the middle and I thought it beautiful. It was easy for me to fall in love with her, for I had at that time a need to squander, but there were no takers. I wrote a poem addressed to my teacher in which I likened her to a rose.\textsuperscript{17}

She had an interest to discuss physical secrets with the elders. Mr. and Mrs. Kunhappa was one of the couples who always visited her house when she was at Calcutta. One day Mrs. Kunhappa came there and she had a very frank discussion with Kamala Das. Kamala Das writes:

She was frank with me and to my frank questions she gave frank answers although at that time I did not even believe all that I heard. I could not for a moment believe that all the dignified couples coming to my house to discuss politics and literature with my parents, could in the dark perform sexual acrobatics to get what my dear friend called the great orgasm. She made me laugh in disbelief. Was every married adult a clown in bed, a circusperformer?\textsuperscript{18}

Once Kamala Das had enjoyed lesbian attraction towards a young girl who lived in the college hostel. Kamala Das’s mother had professor friends of that college. One of a family friend warned Kamala Das against accompanying that hostel girl who was different
from others. Kamala Das wished to meet her but she did not wish to displease her mother’s friends.

One day her mother went to Malabar so that after some days Kamala Das’s father decided to send Kamala Das home for vacation with the batch of professor friends and students. Kamala Das described the sensuous lesbian encounter which she had enjoyed with that college girl. She describes:

She looked around first to see if any one was awake. Then she lay near me holding my body close to hers. Her fingers traced the outlines of my mouth with a gentleness that I had never dreamt of finding. She kissed my lips then, and whispered, you are so sweet, so very sweet, I have never met anyone so sweet, my darling, my little darling…….  

In the same journey this college batch and the professors visited to Major Menon’s house, who was the family friend of Kamala Das’s parents. Again the poet and her girl-friend enjoyed a bath together. She said, “Both of us felt rather giddy with joy like honeymooners.” The affair left a deep impression on her mind. As a result even after her unwilling engagement she had phoned the same girl and invited her at home and had wished to give her company.
The description throws light on the intense feelings of love and sex that she has. In her discussion with her relative Mr. Das before the marriage, she mentions that Oscar Wilde is her favourite writer. When she speaks about him she says:

My favourite author at that time was Oscar Wilde and my favourite poem the ‘Ballad of Reading Goal.’ He talked about homosexuality with frankness.  

Regarding her interest in Oscar Wilde as well as the lesbian and homosexual relations, Mr. Das says: “Many of us pass through that stage.”

Kamala Das was afraid that her grandmother might hear her frank discussion which was not suitable for the girl of a Nair family. Where the women of Nair family never mentioned the word sex. On the contrary Kamala Das was very opposite to that situation. After the frank discussion with Mr. Das they were on a walk to the hedge and she had a shocking experience.

At the hedge, beside the Damson tree, he embraced me, and puzzled by his conduct I ran back to my house.
Later on her marriage was fixed with Mr. Das. Before he went to Calcutta he pushed her into a dark corner and tried to crush her body. It was a sudden shock for her which she never imagined about her future husband. While telling the truth about her husband’s nature, she also had accepted the another truth that she could not control her lustful nature even after the engagement and the marriage.

One of her family friend arrived in Malabar with her daughter and an 18 year-old son with whom Kamala Das enjoyed same sensuous moments. She liked to give him a company.

I felt beautiful when he was with me, arranging my limbs shyly with a blush pinking his cheeks. He was stocky and fair-skinned.²⁴

He was unhappy when he heard that she was going to marry in the month of February. She would like to give him company but she was not ready to marry him because he had no job. He came to attend her marriage, expressed his feelings through eyes and went out.
B: Maratial Life: Adultery As Rebellion.

The married life of Kamala Das was totally different from what she had earlier thought about it. When she understood that she was merely an object of sex for her husband she was totally collapsed. He openly told her about his relations with maid-servants. The wedding night was an unforgettable painful night for Kamala Das which she has never forgotten. Her humiliation was continued. He neither cared for his wife nor for the children.

When Kamala Das was in Malabar at the time of delivery she invited him for some days. She had a lovely son, Monoo. He came to Malabar on leave for some days but he could not bear when the baby was crying at night. He shouted to Kamala Das and told her to take him away. In those days he was very aloof from his wife. He was indifferent to her emotions and enjoyed sex with other women.

During his stay in Malabar, he spent most of his time with his cousins and his sister-in-law, paying me little attention and never bothering to converse with me. At night he was like chieftain who collected the taxes due to him from his vassal, simply and without exhilaration. All the Parijata that I wove in my curly hair was wasted. The taking was brutal and brief. The only topic of conversation that delighted him was sex and I was ignorant in the study of it. I did
not have any sex-appeal either. I was thin and my swollen breasts resembled a papaya tree. How much more voluptuous were my maidservants who took for my husband his bath-water and his change of clothes while he waited impatiently in the dark bathroom at Nalapat! 

All the dreams which she had seen were washed out. He could not prove himself to be a good husband. Her expectations were belied. While describing about the expectations of any girl about her future husband Germaine Greer says:

Any girl who was personable, healthy and good-natured, was likely to be heartily wooed, but love was always subject to firm considerations of suitability and advantageousness. Her husband must not be old or disfigured or cruel or whoremaster. She was not married away vilely for money, for the heroes of ballads and their admirers strongly condemned the practice of the nobility in disposing of their children like stud cattle; on the other hand a girl could not be married out of her father’s house until a suitable groom presented himself in a proper manner. She agreed to treat him well, respect him and joyfully to do his will in bed, but there is no indication that she expected her life to be transfigured by love. She considered herself to be, as others thought her, a sexual creature ready for mating and her husband was chosen as likely in this fashion too.
Kamala Das was nervous due to her husband. She thought that

he married her,

…..only because of my social status and the possibility of financial gain. A coldness took hold of my heart then. I knew then that if love was what I had looked for in marriage I would have to look it outside its legal orbit.27

Further she decides, “I made up my mind to be unfaithful to him, at least physically.”28 She turns herself to become an adulteress. During her stay in Malabar she was attracted towards a young bricklayer who came to build the new house for the Nair family. When the work was nearly over Kamala Das sent her maid-servant to the place where he was staying. She had invited him to meet her near the shrine of the Bhagwati in the evening. She had given a gold coin to her maid-servant for giving the message to him. But unfortunately he had left for his village. It made the poet nervous. But her search of new friends for physical satisfaction was continued. She had many friends during her life. Carlo was one of them. He was an Italian and very close to Kamala Das. He understood her feelings. He knew that
the memory of her grey-eyed friend were painful for her. She could not forget him. At that time he advised her:

You can forget your grey-eyed friend, leave your indifferent husband and come with me to my country.²⁹

She was not ready to leave her children and divorce her husband. But her affair with Carlo was continued and yet she never got satisfaction in it. She was continuously tossed from one lover to another by the restless moments. She had many friends but none of them gave her a permanent company. Due to that bitter experience and her husband’s indifferent nature she became a suspicious woman. She lost her faith in love and marriage. She was not able to involve herself with her husband. Due to her past experiences of her husband’s affairs with the maid-servants and his cruel nature, she had many questions about his personality. She could not bear his male company. Once his old friend came home and the poet became restless. Again her moody mind kept moving from normal to abnormal thoughts. As she describes:
At this time my husband turned to his old friend for comfort. They behaved like lovers in my presence. To celebrate my birthday, they shoved me out of the bedroom and locked themselves in. I stood for a while, wondering what two men could possibly do together to get some time, my pride made me move away. I went to my son and lay near him. I felt then a revulsion for my breasts seemed to be crushing me. My private part was only a wound showing through. Why are you weeping, Amma, asked my little son and I shook my head, saying nothing, nothing ....

Her mind was not stable that she could not believe in love and husband. She became very emotional and sensitive. She was feeling herself alone and searching for love. She enjoyed physical relations with many but no one made her life secure and provided her love for which she had been searching throughout her life. But one of her lovers whom she loved very much appeared to be significant. While describing him she writes:

What was happening to me, I wondered. Was it no longer possible to lure a charming male into a complicated and satisfying love affair with the right words, the right glances, the right gestures? Was I finished as a charmer? Then with the force of a typhoon he conquered me, the last of may lovers, the most notorious of all, the king of all kings, the bison among animal, the handsome dark one with a tattoo between his eyes.
He was one of her attractive lovers with whom she enjoyed many nights. Her physical desire was fulfilled by him. She again met him after her sickness and re-lived the sweet moments which she had shared with him in the room of eighteen mirrors. At last she felt that it was not her physical attraction but she had really fallen in love with him. She writes,

There were eighteen mirrors in his room, eighteen ponds into which I dipped my hot brown body. Beyond that room was enclosed verandah where we stood together to look at the sea. The sea was our only witness. How many times I turned to it and whispered oh, sea, I am at last in love; I have found my Krishna….

She had very deep feelings about him. But she thought that she met him too late. She writes:

…. he and I met too late, we could get no child of our own, my love for him was just the writing of the sea, just a song borne by the wind …. 

But her last love was not successful because he was not sensitive like her. He liked her body but did not love her. Whenever
she wrote him sentimental letters and expressed her emotions he never took it seriously. Because all these sentimental things were foolish things for him.

It is her first and last love but her journey of physical satisfaction is endless. She never changes her sensual mind. It is attracted easily towards any one who comes in her contact.

Repeated illness was the part of her life. Once again she lost her weight and fell sick. She soon became the patient of room no 565 of Bombay hospital which was familiar to her. There she had an affection towards one of the doctors. She says,

“I liked the smell his thick fingers left on my hands.”

Besides her lustful nature and her love affairs, she has had some of the bitter life experiences. Which she has expressed in her autobiography. One of her cousins held her in his arms and kissed her in a disgusting manner. It was unbelievable for her. She writes:

He panted with his emotion when he kissed me on my mouth I disliked the smell of his stale mouth.
She feels that people look at her as the object of sex and a woman of vast sexual hunger. In chapter 26 Kamala Das describes the very dark night of her life when she was trapped in an unsuccessful rape. One night her ayah had invited a stranger in their house in the absence of Mr. Das who was away in Assam on an official tour. That stranger entered the room with the ayah. After a few minutes the ayah had closed the door leaving that man in the poet’s room. She writes:

The man threw himself down on my body with two strange groans. He smelt of stale liquor and under his weight my limbs became rigid and I wished to raise myself to vomit. Soon enough, after an incomplete rape, he rolled off my body and lay inert at the foot of the bed, hugging my cold feet. He kissed my toes.  

C: Death and Suicide moving from the physical to the spiritual.

Kamala Das had all these bitter experiences which taught her that every man thought that a woman was the object of sex. Even her neighbours have looked at her as a sensuous woman. One of her
neighbours to whom she called uncle had once brought the
pornographic book for her. It was shocking for her.

Her flopped marriage, unsuccessful love affairs, bitter
experiences of life lead her to think of committing suicide. Her search
of love outside marriage is fruitless. In addition to that the reputed
illness brings nervousness in her life. Her mind turns physical to
spiritual she tries to find out the truth of life and sometimes she wants
to end all these momentary things which don’t provide any security to
life.

This seems to have shaped her personality. Her autobiography
and her poems are the reflection of her inner personality. She has
tried to clear all the ideas and reasons which develop her personality
as a sensuous girl, a betrayed wife and an adulterous woman.

Kamala Das becomes conscious that her writing becomes
controversial and it will be harmful for her well-known family but it
provides her pleasure. In the preface to My Story she writes:

I had disgraced my well-known family by
telling my readers that I had fallen in love
with a man other than my lawfully wedded
husband. Why, I had even confessed that I
was chronically falling in love with persons
of flamboyant nature. ---- This book has cost
me many things that I held dear, but I do not for a moment regret having written it. I have written several books in my life time, but none of them provided the pleasure the writing of *My Story* has given me.\(^{37}\)

Kamala Das is different from the other poets of her time. She has always been a controversial figure in literary circle for her uninhibited portrayal of female sexuality. Jaikrishnana Nair says:

The modern English poetry with all its aggressiveness and boldness begins and culminates in Kamala Das. No other feminist poets in India could achieve the absolute rebellious dimensions of Kamala Das in her poetry. In fact, Kamala Das makes a poetic revolt by way of introspectively pondering upon the unfortunate state of existence in which Indian women conduct themselves. Like a seasonal artist she penetrates her imaginative potential to sympathetically understand the possible average grievances of Indian women as extremely exploited agent in the social, domestic circumstances.\(^{38}\)

Kamala Das is never ready to admit the submissive and sympathetic framework of woman. She doesn’t fit herself in it. Her opinion about it in The Sunday Review is obviously remarkable:
People think that the ideal woman is like a Hindi film heroine, with a drought in her genitalia and over-moist eyes. But real women are different. We are courageous. The creator’s confidence is within us. It’s the womb that gives that inner courage. 39

She deals with her failed marriage and frustrating love affairs. Her poetry is the open chart of her painful life and her hidden passions. She always feels that she is alone. Her feeling of loneliness and nothingness plays a prominent role in her life. Her hunger for love is endless which she cannot get throughout her life. That is the reason behind her adultery. In composition she writes:

Love

I no longer need,

with tenderness I am most content,

I have learnt that friendship
cannot endure,

that blood-ties do not satisfy.

and so

with every interesting man I meet,

be it
a curious editor,
Or a poet with a skin yellowed
like antique paper,
a skin older than Jesus Christ,
I must
most deliberately
whip up a froth of desire,
a passion to suit the occasion.
I must let my mind striptease
I must extrude
autobiography.
The only secrets I always
withhold
are that I am so alone
and that I miss my grandmother (OP, 5)

Adultery is a kind of her revolt against her husband and the male dominated society. It also helps her to get free from her feeling of isolation. She is aware that it is a temporary escape. Sometimes she hates all these things. In the same poem she says:
It may be
that in my heart
I have replaced love with guilt
and discovered
that both love and hate are
involvements. (OP, 4)

Love is the essence of life. So she admits that it comes in
different shapes. As she replies:

I used to think love was only like a boil –
intensely concentrated on one spot, but now
I feel it’s also like a rain, spreading out,
touching many people. Love is politics,
love is food, love is everything.40

She was nervous in her childhood due to the strict nature of her
father and lack of attachment with her own mother. From those days
she was in search of love which was fulfilled only by her grandmother
whom she would never forget in her whole life. Her autobiography
gives all the details about her disturbed psychology in childhood. In
the horrible atmosphere of the Nair family Kamala Das felt restless. Her nervousness with her parents is shown in her following statement:

My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched. But my mother’s timidity helped to create an illusion of domestic harmony which satisfied the relatives and friends. Out of such an arid union were born the first two children, my brother and I.⁴¹

Kamala Das was grown up lonely in her strict family atmosphere. She underwent strange hostel, school experiences but she was unable to communicate with her mother. Once she was insulted by her teacher’s son regarding her poor knowledge of music. But she could tell this to her mother. She was far away from love, security and happiness in her childhood. In My Story she writes:

When I returned home I did not tell my mother what had happened. She never asked any questions. My father too was entirely without curiosity. They took us for granted and considered us mere puppets, moving our limbs according to the tugs they gave us. They did not stop for a moment to think that we had personalities that were developing independently, like sturdy shoots of the banyan growing out of crevices in the walls of ancient fortresses.⁴²
In a poem entitled ‘A Requiem for my father’ she says:

From childhood to middle years I have had a raw deal
Illness, and loneliness, loves that faded like mist,
And the elders’ irrational hate
You loved life.  (CP, 40)

Her problem of isolation is continued even after the marriage. She and Mr. Das are yet another mismatched pair like her parents. Lack of emotional rapport with either the parents or her husband makes her a woman of rebellious nature.

At the early age of fifteen she has experienced disgusting, cruel and painful sex. After that it becomes the unavoidable part of her life. She describes in a poem entitled ‘The Stone Age’:

Fond husband ancient settler in the mind
Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment,
Be kind. You turn me into a bird of stone, a granite
Dove, you build around me a shabby drawing room,
And stroke my pitted face absent mindedly while
You read.  (CP, 96)
Due to this indifferent treatment she has revolted against all social constraints made for women. Das Bijay Kumar writes:

As she deals with the conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male-oriented universe, her tussle with love, sex, lust, womanhood, has most usually centred itself upon her relations with her husband or with the other men in her life.⁴³

Kamala Das wants to be free from the tiresome routine of a hollow married life. In ‘I Shall Some Day’ she writes:

I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea,
Love-words flung from doorways and of course
Your tired lust. I shall some day take
Wings, fly around ….. (OP, 48)

She wants to be away from all the human bondages built around her by her husband and the society. it is her inner urge to fly away and live as a human being. As Jaykrishnan Nair says:
Thematic concerns in Das’s poetry range from the sad plight of woman in society, and the harrowing situations of feminine experiences to a longing for the freedom of the inner self through experiencing consummate love in the interpersonal relationships.\textsuperscript{44}

She becomes depressed due to the savage lust of her husband and his negligence towards her. One of her friends, Carlo brings happiness in her life. She says:

When Carlo came into my life all the flowers of the university garden had fallen.\textsuperscript{45}

Throughout her life she has enjoyed many friends in search of love. She wants to be loved, it is the necessity of her life. She never draws the curtain on each of her sensuous experiences. She never feels ashamed to describe the sex-act that makes her controversial and bold among the other Indian women writers. Some of her poems are very hot in narration.

In ‘Convicts’ she describes:

This hacking at each other’s parts  
Like convicts hacking, breaking clods  
At noon. We were earth under hot  
Sun ………. we were neither  
Male nor female.  (OP, 25)
Further in one of her poems entitled ‘The Looking Glass’ she describes:

Getting a man to love you is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Woman. Stand nude before the glass with him
……. admit your
Admiration. Notice the perfection
Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,
Dropping towels, and the jerkey way he
Urinates ………
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 Hungers. (DS, 27).

She doesn’t feel any guilt to describe the sensuous man-woman relations and the secrets of women they were not allowed to describe. A woman from a traditional Nair family crosses all the boundaries of
hesitation and boldly uses the words like ‘the Jerky way’, ‘The musk of sweat between the breasts’, “menstrual blood” etc. All the hidden and inexpressible feelings, demands of men and women are clearly drawn by her. It makes her a very controversial figure.

But sometimes Kamala Das hates the body and its temporary pleasure. She feels that it is “the bloody use” (Convicts, OP. 25). She knows that it is a ‘trap of lust’ which provides her “a temporary home” (Glass, OP, 21). King Bruce writes:

In her poetry love and hate are often neighbours, just as an assertion of sexual freedom sits near feelings of self-disgust expressed through depression.46

Her poetry and her autobiography show continuous ups and downs of her psychology. It continuously moves from love to lust and from lust to love. Every word of Kamala Das’s writing depends upon her mood and her condition in which she is. Every situation, every experience of life promotes her to write. So sometimes we cannot separate her verse from her autobiography. Because many chapters of My Story have started with the poems which highlight the
condition of the poet’s persona. In an interview with Iqbal Kaur she replies:

I can’t forgive people who caused me to write poetry. If they hadn’t hurt me, I wouldn’t have been a poet at all and probably the only thing that really matters to me is my poetry, my writing and right to live as a poet. So far as my husband is concerned, I am grateful to him for the sufferings inflicted on me in my youth, for without them I would not have written poetry at all.\footnote{47}

Whenever she feels suffered by the nature of her husband she thinks of committing suicide. The servants who came from Malabar to take care of her and her kids, could not bear her pathetic condition. Mr. Das was angry to his wife when his mother told him disgruntled things about her. It was torturous for her. She admits that she tried to commit suicide.

One day, being able it no longer, I sent the cook to chemist’s shop for a dozen tablets of barbiturates. No chemist would give them without doctor’s prescription. The cook, on his return, empty-handed, told me with tears in his eyes, that he too would take tablets if I decided to kill myself.\footnote{48}
Sufferings in life, repeated sicknesses, feeling of insecurity threatened her life. Life for Kamala Das is a horrifying experience. Many times she thinks about suicide. In *My Story* she focuses on her nervous breakdown.

I was losing patience. I could not understand the purpose of my return from the hospital or of the resurrection of my health. On some days, seated before the mirror, and painting my pale lips, I felt all of a sudden uneasy. I saw the lonely eyes reflected in the mirror, clouding over as though a mist had enveloped them. I was looking into the depths of my loneliness. Then I felt that I was applying paint on the lips of a corpse. Death leans against my hedge. If death touched me, the fragrance will leave my body and in its place will be an unbearable stench.49

When Kamala Das looks around, and discovers the real world of her dreams, she becomes nervous and loses her confidence. So she turns to the Indian myth to console herself and to find the ways of salvation. Images like Radha, Meera support her to set her mind. Her devotion to Lord Krishna has made her happy and secure. A poem entitled ‘Ghanshyam’ highlights her intense love for Krishna which helps her to come out from her depression.
Ghanshyam,

You have like a koel built you
Nest in the arbour of my heart.
My life, until now a sleeping jungle
Is at last astir with music. (TTSR, 18)

Throughout her life Kamala Das battled with society to live as a human being. But she finds that there is no change in male psychology and the condition of woman. A woman has always been the object of male entertainment.

She becomes conscious that her verse and her autobiography have limitations to explain the story of her painful journey with many ups and downs. She is aware that her writing is less useful to change the male psychology. In ‘The Summing Up’ she says:

In ten minutes how can I sum up
This life, this voyage on uncharted seas, this flight over radarless ports
this endless worship at plundered shrines
this love transformed into mere pain and
this emptiness that hangs from brackets
of withered arms, the strangers who have
come to wipe my tears, the oyster’s ache

…………………………………………

……………. change the world with
Rhetoric? Never: Cynicism
Takes the driver’s seat for time perhaps
personified as stillness, all its
fury jelled, tamed.

And then she requests to readers:

………. Life spreads its moulting
Wings to sicken me but do not judge
Me harshly, I am your kith and kin
I gathered your laments into a song. (OSKHS, 127)

She believes that her dear readers like her honesty and judge
her in a tender way.

Whatever she feels, she observes and experiences she expressed
through writing and in interviews without hiding anything. Her
writing is her sincere approach to life. In her autobiography she
writes:
I wrote about the subjects the editors asked me to write on, fully aware that I was uneducated by the usual standards and that I had no business meddling in grave matters. But now happily I meddled to satisfy that particular brand of reader who liked me and liked my honest approach. I was useless as a housewife anyway. I could not pick up a teapot without gasping for breadth. But writing was possible. And it certainly brought me happiness.  

A confessional poet Kamala Das becomes very frank and honest, close and intimate, in her details. She often writes about her personal failures, mental as well as physical illnesses, death and destruction, extremely private experiences in the matters of love and sex. Kamala Das operates her poetry from the level of the personal and the particular rather than the general A. N. Dwivedi rightly asserts:

....Kamala Das is a typical ‘Confessional’ poet who pours her very heart into her poetry. She is largely subjective and autobiographical, anguished and tortured, letting us peep into her sufferings and tortured psyche.
As a poet, Kamala Das makes ample use of images and symbols to heighten her emotions. Hence her poems leave a lasting impression on the mind of readers. A. N. Dwivedi writes:

The poetess returns to the theme of love and sex repeatedly with all urgency and sincerity. Many of the poems are suffused with warmth and passion with heat of an unrequited love and an unfulfilled desire. The frequency of the love theme may evoke repudiation from nuns and spinsters and breed boredom in the minds of general readers, but like Sappho in Greek literature, like Elizabeth Barret Browning in English letters, and like Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath in Modern American poetry, Mrs. Das offers us a feast of vivid images of love couched in felicitous language. No doubt, love is her forte in poetry.\textsuperscript{52}

The dissertation attempts a study of the images used by Kamala Das in her poetry. Broadly the images can be classified into various types as follow:

i) Body as an Image

ii) Nature Imagery

iii) Animal Imagery

iv) Mythological Images
Analysis of all these types of images is attempted in the following chapters.

Chapter II of this dissertation deals with the images related to her body. It also focuses on her sensuous sex experiences and its keen descriptions. Sometimes her husband’s brutality comes out through these images. The celebration of the body and the body pains are carried out by the poet through these body images.

Chapter III focuses on the images that Kamala Das borrows from the world of nature. It is attempted to suggest that the nature images are close to the body images.

Chapter IV is an analysis of the animal imagery which is used by the poet to highlight the brutality in the men that she encounters.

Chapter V attempts an analysis of the images that the poetess borrows from the mythology. These images are used by the poetess in order to highlight the cyclical as well as the spiritual aspects of her own experiences.

Chapter VI is the conclusion.
References

2) Ibid p.156.
10) Ibid, p. 61
11) Ibid, p. 65
12) Ibid, p. 74
13) Ibid, p. 75
14) Ibid, p. 40
15) Ibid, p. 46
16) Ibid, p. 47
17) Ibid, p. 77
18) Ibid, p. 72
19) Ibid, p. 82
20) Ibid, p. 83
21) Ibid, p. 84
22) Ibid, p. 84
23) Ibid, p. 84
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34) Ibid, p. 196
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36) Ibid, p. 113
40) Ibid, 2001, p. 1
42) Ibid, p. 77


46) Bruce, King. Modern Indian Poetry in English. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 1987, p. 150.


48) Das, Kamala, **My Story**, p.103.


52) Ibid, p.32.

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