Most of the writings of women is touched by grief, male domination. Her disturbing awareness about her uncertainty about her identity as social being, her nervousness to her existence of shadow image in relation to the male is responsible for her feeling of unhappiness and loneliness. She writes about her struggle to social constrains. Language is the powerful media to express their anger and pathos. Catherine Belsey writes:

The 'I' of these poems is kind of super subject, experiencing life at a higher level of intensity than ordinary people and absorbed in a world of selfhood which the phenomenal world, perceived as external and antithetical, either nourishes or constrains.¹

Men and women are human beings but they are assigned roles in the society. Gender is one of the main features to identify the difference between men and women. It is the major reason behind their centralization. The social norms and rules are made up taking into account the biological difference. A child never knows the gender and the rules made for him. Personality of the child is designed by their parents and society. Gaylee, Greene and Coppelia Khan in their
That men have penises and women do not, that women bear children and men do not, are biological facts which have no determinate meaning in themselves but are invested with various symbolic meaning by different cultures. Whatever power or status may be accorded to woman in a given culture, they are still, in comparison to men, devalued as 'the second sex'.

The difference between boys and girls becomes exposed with the onset of menstruation in the girl’s body. She realizes the nature of this accordance with the social codes of the circle in which she moves about. They learn their earliest and deepest lessons about the sameness and as well as difference of the sexes. Gender is the basis of social system and its logic. The concept of difference and equality leads to the question whether to prioritize that which defines the category 'women' today. Two conceptions of difference exist in the feminist debates. The first in the essentialist model, which draws on the differences between men and women the second is the deconstructive model, which points to the difference within woman as a category and women as a group.

In "The Critical Difference", Barbara Johnson Says:
If human beings were not divided into two biological sexes, there would be probably no need for literature. And if literature could truly say what the relations between the sexes are, we would doubtless not need much of it then, either.

Different treatment to boys and girls teach them the rules of life. Their parents guide them how to live in the society and follow its rules. Kamala Das has similar experiences in her life. Everybody wanted to advice to her. Her advisers attend her growth into adulthood and urge to do some cooking, embroidery and so many other things. They keep watching every action and behaviour of the part. They try to protect her from passionate things so they pointed her not to be a nymphomaniac. She writes in a poem entitled ‘An Introduction’:

I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair (OP, 26)

She is too innocent to understand the physical changes and their implications. She never enjoys her life as per her wishes. Her parents command her and teach the lessons of life to her. She is compelled to
obey the rules and regulations of her parents. She tells that she was asked to dress in sarees as she had grown up. She writes in the same poem:

Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don’t sit
On walls or peep in through our lacedraped windows
Be amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
Choose, a name, a role. (OP, 27)

The parents had asked the woman to wear the sarees, be cook, be wife. She was restricted to sit on walls or peep in through the windows. She was required to play the gender defined roles. The girl's life is planned by their parents. Kamala Das writes in 'My Story':

When I put her out of my mind I put aside my self-pity too. It would not do to dream of a different kind of life. My life had been planned and its course charted by my parents and relatives.  

4
They never give her a chance to take any decision regarding her life. They asked her to be wife, because parents in those days believed that a girl has to be married soon after menstruation. One can't find fault with the parents of the older generation because most of them were uneducated. If a girl, with her teenage passion gets involved in a sexual affair and becomes pregnant, there will be very serious problems, to her as well as her parents. Due to this kind of thinking the parents get the girl married at a very early age. Because of that they are responsible for her unhappy early married life. Kamala Das tells us:

It was customary for the Nair girl to marry when she was hardly out of her childhood and it was also customary for the much older husband to give her a rude shock by his sexual haste on the wedding night.

Marriage places before a woman a set of gender-defined roles prescribed by the society. Transgressing these roles is tantamount to a defiance of social norms and invites the wrath of the power-holders in this case of men. Reality, for the society is only what it chooses to see, and it chooses to find a woman in certain fixed roles. She is married early at the age of sixteen. In which age an innocent girl never knows the meaning of marriage and man-woman relationship. Her body is
not ready to give company to her husband in bed. Rude and shocking sex experience makes a girl restless. Before understanding the growth and needs of her body she has been tied up with her husband. She says

in' An Introduction':

When

I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask

For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the

Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me

But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.

The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank pitifully. (OP, 26-27)

She was married when she was a youth of sixteen and that too with a much older man. He drew her in a bedroom and made a painful sex. She never imagined the like of the brutal first night. Her husband did not beat her but she thought that she had been beaten because of his brutal sex. She disliked him. She asked for love and what she got was shocking. The husband’s way of performing sex made her feel miserable, conventionally the man is expected to make love to the woman for his own satisfaction. He thought that his wife of a "youth
of sixteen” is a sexual object for him and a nurse of his children. The word "drew" is very thoughtfully used by Kamala Das to show the inhuman treatment of her husband. When he draws his wife into his bedroom he expects his wife to be unquestioning in her submission. As she tell us in ‘My Story’:

Until my wedding night I did not have slightest knowledge of what went on between men and women in the process of procreation.

The wife is not mature enough, as a sixteen year girl can not be physically and mentally mature and she "asked for love, not knowing what else to ask----" However, she would expect love from her husband. After the ugly, painful sex it raises the question, how does the "woman’s body" of sixteen feel? Her innocent body feels "beaten". The woman wants love not lust. But her husband treats her as a private property.

Exploitation of her body in the rude arms of her husband is her routine life that she never rejects. In ‘Larger Than Life was He’ she writes:
We were such a mismated pair,
yet there were advantages, I admit
he was free to exploit and I was free
to be exploited
we were quits at every game we played
(OSKHS, 112)

It is not the condition of the poet alone but it is the general story
of womanhood. In the words of Germaine Greer:

They were the product of the feudal situation in which a noble wife was a wife only when her warrior husband was at home (which with any luck was seldom), otherwise she ruled a community of men, many of them young and lusty, with the result that they entertained fantasies about the unobtainable to whom they could not even address their advances. She exploited their servility, which was the original of chivalry, and may or may not have served her own lusts by them. To her husband she was submissive and offered him her body as his fief.  

In ‘The Word Is Sin’ she depicts that for every woman her home is a safe place but many times it is a safe place for male to hurt her as his wish.

home is where the dream awaits us
and the knife sharpened for the kill.
home is where the god who failed us stands awaiting
and his name is sin
nothing better, nothing worse (OSKHS, 106)
The Indian woman is a victimised creature of this world. She never utters any word about her humiliation by her husband, parents and the society. Kamala Das draws the pathetic picture of an Indian woman. Parents decide the life partner of their daughter. She says that her parents are responsible for her unsuccessful married life. There is no understanding between the husband and the wife, because he has not offered her love which she needs in her teenage. She feels herself isolated because her partner is interested in sex alone.

The fact that she is able to make the discrimination between love and lust in a male dominated society makes her realize that she is a freak. Actually she has an experience of lust but not love. Her loneliness at home leads her to extra-marital relationship. She is in search of love. Neglecting the social restrictions she submits her body to her lovers. Her husband and his rude nature is responsible for her seeking love outside the marital bond. He is a man of lust careless of the emotions of his wife. Her body is shrunken in his arms, tears come in her eyes but he never attends to her poor condition.

She became an adulteress. She decides:

I made up my mind to be unfaithful to him, at least physically.
Kamala Das revolted against the male dominated society and its cruel treatment. She writes in 'An Introduction:

Don't play pretending games.
Don’t play at schizophrenia or be a Nympho. Don’t cry embarrassingly loud when Jilted 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. (OP, 27)

After a few days of married life she meets a man who has a concern for her as opposed to her husband. She loves him. She never pretends to be an honest wife. She admits her adultery before her husband and the world. She feels that every man is the same in nature and he needs a woman for his own lust. She compares herself to a common woman who expects love from her husband. This expectation is quite natural and normal. Devendra Kohlli remarks about "An Introduction":

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It is a part of the strength of Kamala Das's exploration of love theme that it also follows her compulsions to articulate and understanding the working of the feminine consciousness. Her best known poem in this category 'An Introduction' is concerned with the question of human identity and is perhaps at the heart of any attempt at self-exploration and self integration.9

Her marriage is against her will, basically she has no interest in the sexual contact with her husband. What is most shocking for her is the prolonged apathy of her husband to her. She realizes that she has failed in love with him. In this frustrated and agonized state of mind her condition seems to be pathetic.

She remained a virgin for a fortnight even after marriage while he was after some other lady. It means that even after the marriage Mr. Das had extra marital relationships with the maid servants. He was interested in other women and seduced them and told this to his wife without hesitation. Hence it may be the cause of her frustration in marriage. She can't expose this to her father and mother. They think that she is happy with their son-in-law. Her confused mind, suppressed feelings lead her to commit adultery. Her search for love leads her nowhere.
She becomes sad because of the unquenching lust of her husband; this sexual experience with him created a kind of dilemma for her. Her husband made love to her with much passion, but till the end she could not decide whether it was sheer lust which motivated him or whether it was love for her as well. Actually it is the haunting memory of her sexual experiences that she writes about in a poem entitled ‘In Love’:

------- Where

Is room, excuse or even

Need for love, for, isn't each

Embrace a complete thing, a

Finished Jigsaw, when mouth on

Mouth, I lie, ignoring my poor

Moody mind, while pleasure

With deliberate gaiety

Trumpets harshly into the

Silence of the room---At noon. (OP, 15)
She delineates a sexual union devoid of any satisfaction and the ecstasy of love. He plays with her body in a lustful manner. She describes her pathetic condition during sex. She draws herself in his embraces which are like "a finished jigsaw". There is a vacant ecstasy of love. She ignores her "poor moody mind" and tries to enjoy the sex deliberately. Her mind hears the sobs of the "gaiety trumpets". In the silence of the room, she listens nothing except sensual completeness. There is a physical union only. Anisur Rahaman remarks:

> The man is presented with scorn and poet’s sexual union with him affords no satisfaction; rather it gives pain.  

She has no pleasure in her life. Her body is in the captivity of her husband. Her mind is burdened with the disillusionment in life. Her body is like a toy in the hands of her husband and her lovers, the poor body of Kamala Das battling with her husband’s impersonal lust. At every moment the poet feels insecure in the arms of her husband. In a poem entitled 'Gino' she writes:
This body that I wear without joy, this body
Burdened with lenience, slender toy, owned
By man of substance, shall perhaps wither, battling with
My darling's impersonal lust. Or, it shall grow gross
And reach large proportions before its end. (OP, 14)

Her body is useless for her. She doesn't enjoy her life. While thinking about her physical relationship with her husband and lover, she becomes nervous and thinks about her death and decay. In her nervousness she recollects the experience of the treatment given by her husband. She doesn't like the behavior of her husband, who doesn’t love her. Kamala Das tries to locate herself in her physical existence. Physical attractiveness is a prime concern in sex to which she is battling in her whole life.

She becomes confused because of her obsession for an ideal love and inability to find it. Again and again she repeats the same words "this body". According to Barche G.D.:

The pain and anger is evident in the repetition of the phrase 'this body' and the use of the phrases 'burdened with lenience, 'men of substance, 'battling with.' 11
Kamala Das is struggling with her darling's impersonal lust and hunger. Her body pains are endless. She never understands the complexity of human life. She thinks about the husband-wife relationship again and again. Millions of questions arise in her mind regarding love and sex. Is it love which she needs? she suspects that her husband does not love her. It tortures her. Answering to it, she says in ‘In Love’:

Million questions awake in
Me, and all about him, and
This skin-communicated
Thing that I dare not yet in.

His presence call our love. (OP, 15)

The wife undergoes sleepless nights as her husband does not have patience to understand her feelings and thoughts. Therefore, she walks around the Verandah and asks herself a million questions. Questions about whom? The answer to these questions is that real love is quite elusive and therefore hard to find anywhere. What she had felt in the course of the sexual act with that lover was only " a
skin communicated thing" or purely a physical desire, the "unending lust" leading to physical annihilation.

Memories of unhappy married life are very torturous. She never forgets them. Her relation, with her husband is a physical union. As she writes in her autobiography:

I was to be the victim of young man's carnal hunger and perhaps, out of our union, there would be born a few children.  

Mr. Das was an officer in Reserve Bank of India, Bombay, where her life became miserable in the company of her lustful husband. His contact with his wife was usually cruel and brutal. She remembers the experience with her husband just after her engagement. He pressed amorously her fingers. She writes:

Whenever he found me alone in a room he began to plead with me to bare my breasts and if I did not, he turned brutal and crude. His hands bruised my body and left blue and red marks on the skin.  

His way of love-making compels her to leave the bondages of tradition. She reacts in a non-conventional manner in love-making.
Offering herself to a handsome lover, who comes across her and makes violent love to her. She enters in others’ life and changes her lovers endlessly. No one gives her love and sympathy. Feeling alone in her own home she waits for the smooth words of her husband. But he has no spare time for her. He is always busy sorting out his office files and affixing his signature on them.

In the poem entitled ‘Larger Than Life Was He’ she writes:

He peered into his office files
till the supper turned cold
and the children got up to sleep
I cannot recollect a film
a play or a concert he took us to
or joke which together we shared
He was like a bank locker
steely cold and shut
or a filing cabinet that
only its owner could unlock
Not for a moment did I own him.
Only a few bedbound chores
executed well, tethered him to me
Emotion was never a topic
brought up in our home…(OSKHS, 112 - 113)

As a traditional wife she does her duties and warm his bed but there is no emotional contentment. They made love for a few
moments and produced the children and except that nothing appears to happen between them. Her husband expected her to do her domestic duties well and to look after the needs and comforts of her husband.

Beverly Jones points out:

The husband after all, is trying to protect and bolster his frail ego, not drive his wife insane or force her suicide. He wants in the home to be able to hide from his own inner doubts, his own sense of shame, failure, and meaninglessness. He wants to shed the endless humiliation of endless days parading as a man in the male world, pretending a power, control, and understanding he does not have.

All he asks of his wife, aside from hours of mental work, is that she not see him as he sees himself. That she not challenge him, but admire and desire him soothe and distract him.  

Kamala Das eroded her own distinct personality and dwarfed herself for ever as she states in ‘The Old Playhouse’:

---- you called me wife,

I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and

To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering

Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and

Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your

Question I mumbled incoherent replies. (Op, 1)
Having destroyed every channel of self-realization as a woman and as an individual, she feels alone. Sharda Iyer points out the inner confusion of the poet as a woman:

The term split-self was first given significance for women's poetry in Florence Howel's introduction to 'No More Masks'. It describes an opposition women feel between essential aspects of the self, between what is socially prescribed on the basis of gender and what is defined on the basis of the self, between what a woman feels she should be and what she feels she is.

Kamala Das protests against the restrictions of married life. It is a hollow marital bond which she cannot untie. It is most unfortunate that such a sensitive woman as Kamala Das is tied to stake. She needs her natural freedom. His male ego suppresses her feelings. She has found the way of freedom. She decides to be unfaithful to her husband. Mr. Das is responsible for her frigid nature. He has permitted her to be free as per her wish. Her heart dances with joy but some questions make her disturbed. She reveals it in a poem entitled 'Composition':
When I got married
my husband said,
You may have freedom,
as much as you want,
My soul balked at this diet of ash.
Freedom became my dancing shoe,
how well I danced,
and danced without rest,
until the shoes turned grimy on my feet
and I began to have doubts.
I asked my husband,
am I hetero
am I lesbian
or am I just plain frigid?
He only laughed.
For such questions
probably there are no answers
or else
the answers must emerge
from within. (Op, 4-5)

She talks of her early married days again in order to reveal her husband’s relationship with her. The husband assures her as the word "said" indicates, that she has as much freedom as she wants. Her heart dances at this moment due to the freedom. she uses very appropriate phrase for her happy satisfied soul. She says her soul "balked at this diet of ash" and freedom for her is a "dancing shoe" But her satisfaction is momentary. Her feminine consciousness creates many questions regarding her feminity and rules for it. She asks her husband " am I hetro", "am I lesbian" and continues "am I just plain frigid?" He never replies and laughs. Why does he laugh? Why does he never answer? All these questions are unanswerable to him as a husband probably his laugh suggests that her questions are foolishly asked. She should find the answer within herself.

At the same time the poem shows how the social consciousness renders her unable to enjoy the freedom. But this freedom confused the female sensibility that is accustomed to follow the commands of the male. She cannot come out easily from the Dravidian culture which is taught to her by her grandmother and her parents. Her conscious mind reminds her grandmother's lessons. She thinks about
it and finds herself incapable of answering it. The passive sexual role assigned to woman is itself a denial of female sexuality.

Kamala Das thinks that freedom has no use at all for her. Even she becomes free to search the real love outside her married life. Her husband has given her full freedom to enjoy. He too gets the same enjoyment. There is no emotional bond between them. Her life is full of regrets. In her poem entitled 'Composition' she says,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The tragedy of life} \\
\text{is not death but growth,} \\
\text{the child growing into adult} \\
\text{and, growing out of needs. (OP.4)}
\end{align*}
\]

She visualized her growth as an evil one. The child grows into adult and his needs are growing. He needs many things which he cannot explain. The presentation of her growth is full of problems. Her childhood in Malabar was glorious and she lived happily with her grandmother. Her grandmother is an ideal person for Kamala Das. When a girl is a child she has no restraints but when she grows, everyone teaches her every lesson of life as a woman. So for her the
tragedy of life is not the end of it but the growing age is painful. Nair Jayakrishnan writes:

The relative manner in which she presents the various facets of growth in life ultimately contributes to one simple summation, that is life in its overall presentation of growth and development offers no relative comfort or ease.\textsuperscript{16}

Every girl or a woman has similar experiences like Kamala Das. But they have no courage to express their needs of life. The woman plays different roles in life but no role gives her security and status. Suma Chitnis writes in her article, 'A Design for Sociological Study On Images of woman':

-----Women are almost universally relegated to an inferior status, exploited and confined to homemaking and to child-rearing. But they deny that this is a 'natural' order rooted in biological needs. They use the concept of culture to demonstrate how statuses, positions and roles are derived, from the manner in which a particular people construct their society and view their reality. Through comparative studies of culture they also pave the way for a recognition of the ethnocentricity of specific sex role definitions. Sex statuses and concepts regarding the importance of the
male and female principles in life. They agree that women are at a disadvantage physically particularly during their child-bearing years, and that they are therefore vulnerable to oppression and exploitation, but, by exposing how the form and extent of this exploitation and domination differs from society to society, and within the same from time to time they explode notions regarding the "Inevitability" of woman's inferior situation and status. 

Playing the role as a wife, beloved, mother, streetwalker, goddess etc. has no importance in the attitude of man. She generalizes in 'Composition',

We are all alike,
We women,
In our wrappings of hairless skin.
All skeletons are alike
Only the souls vary
That hide somewhere between the flesh
And the bone (OP, 6)

This is the voice of womanhood which is exposed and put before the world by Kamala Das. The woman is subordinate from the
male point of view. Every woman has the same experience in her life. But she hides her inner feelings and only a few women have the courage to express them. The body of the woman is a skeleton for which Kamala Das uses the line "All skeletons are alike."

In ‘Terror’ she depicts the physical and mental degradation of the woman in a very ironic manner.

We wear service masks night and day, between their metal and our skin
the sweat stinks of rot and pus. The brave are in; we need no bars, no locks, no warrant. Cowardice wardens us night and day.
For a brief forgetting we search for old familiars for beauty of trees
and the sky. Terror hides behind thickets of pubic hair, all men are impotent, all women barren, the sky is taut like the face of drum (OSKHS, 41)
But the Indian woman is not conscious of about her inferiority because she is born and brought up in a patriarchal society which is fit for it. According to poet all women are hypnotized who never think and act against their male.

We go round and round singing the national nursery rhymes, we are kids with souls tied into tight hypnotic knots.

We are happy, we are free, we are padmashree.

(OSKHS, 41)

The irony of these lines presents the universal picture of tragedy of womanhood. But the poet is different from the other women because she revolts boldly against the cruel rules of society. She leaves the conventional things and asserts herself, her own problems and her natural needs very frankly. She is a poet of love and sex. 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 poems and emerges as one of its dominant themes. A girl of Dravidian culture forgets her cultural bondages. Exposition of the word "sex" is
an immoral thing in Nair family. But Kamala Das frankly puts her own sex experiences to the world. It is a revolutionary change of her personality. Her bold image is shaped by the treatment of parents husband and lovers.

Her body images show that her quest for self-identity is sex oriented. She has delineated her feminist voice through her sex imagery. Her discourse is that of woman's corporal language from the woman's point of view. Man is always happy in sex relations but the woman suffers. Body and sex images in her poems are highly controversial in the Indian context. She gives descriptions of her bodily experiences, her joys and failures in love and sex. She has revolted against the traditional restrictions frankly and unabashedly. Her bedroom secrets are open to the reader. Which is not permitted by the Indian society. But she expresses them without hiding anything. In her poem 'The Old Playhouse' she writes,

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, you were pleased With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow
Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured
Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed.
My poor lust with your bitter sweet juices (OP, 1)

Kamala Das tells her husband that he has called her his wife
and that she has fully gratified his lust for her without getting love in
return. He feels happy with her body's convulsions as she lays beneath
him. He pours his saliva into her mouth during the sexual act and has
poured himself into every nook and cranny of her body. But he
ignores her plans, her feelings and her desires. She has almost
paralyzed her thinking faculty so that her mind is now like an old
playhouse. She expresses her disgust through sex with whomsoever
she slept. She complains her incapacity to receive love from her
husband and lovers. her "poor mind" is never able to react during the
sex act. It is her weakness as a woman and as a wife. Germaine Greer
writes:

Love was a blight, a curse, a wound, death, the plague. Sex itself was outlawed except
in desire of issue. The chastity belt and its attendant horrors are reminders of the
intense pressure built up in such a situation. The body-soul dichotomy which
characterizes medieval thought operated to protect the status quo.
She is in dilemma because of her husband’s inability. She speaks about her wants of affection in her sexual relationship. She misses not only love and affection but even the intensity of the passion which is associated with lust. She awaits the commencement of the sexual act as eagerly as her husband does, yet she experiences a certain degree of disgust as well. Her husband is not passionate enough to satisfy her. She realizes that their marriage is failure even though they lived together for a long time, they have not really been able to achieve any conjugal happiness. It is her bitter realization of the reality that makes her ask in 'The freaks',

Can't this man with
Nimble fingertips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skin's lazy hungers? (OP, 10)

Her husbands fingers move over Kamala Das's body so passionlessly that they can arouse only her skin's "lazy hungers." She describes her heart as an empty cistern. His heart is more empty than
her, he is not able to love her. In the desperate mood she calls herself. "a freak," adding that she flaunts at times, a grand, flamboyant lust.

Nair K.R. Ramchandran quotes:

The poet wonders whether the lover is capable of anything more than 'Skin's lazy Hungers'. When soul-love is frustratedlust becomes a subterfuge for man of sexual passivity. 19

Kamala Das delineates that they have a sex without love which makes her live a sterile life. She writes in her poem 'The Invitation',

I have a man's fist in my head today

Clenching, unclenching--------

I have got all the Sunday evening pains. (DS. 20)

She feels that she is the man's fist as tightening and looseningher body in his arms. She feels tortured by her experience of love making with her husband. She has some other bitter memories of lovers, who seduced her and never returned. Torturous feelings lead her to think about suicide. She knows the reality that the company of the lovers is momentary but her mind is always involved in the
memories of sex. Every Sunday evening is painful due to the brutal sex.

Both her husband as well as her lovers are too cruel and lustful. She finds similar psychology in the male regarding sex. The male may be a lover or a husband but he is a seducer of woman's body and not interested in her feelings. Her poem 'My November' highlights the sensuous nature of man.

I die so very slow. This is all
That they think. Looking at me, huddled
In bed. Like a sickle embedded
In flesh or crescent of the moon
Is this pain beneath my left breast.
which ruthless lover clasps its opulence
In this brutal, so brutal way? (TTSR,17)

Her lover's brutal acts make her desire death. They know her secrets in her bed and crush her body rudely. Her breasts are painful which "ruthless lover" clasps in a very brutal way. The repetition of
the word "brutal" suggests her unbearable pains during sex. It is the exploitation of the female by the male. As Mohan Lal Sharma asserts:

She revolts against this exploitation and reviles against the marital obligations, the course animalistic rutting devoid of warmth of love and human understanding wherein the spirit of woman is made to bleed at the bloody alter of male supremacy. 20

Kamala Das's poems are dealing with the subject of sex. She doesn't hesitate to describe each movement of their sex game. She admits the warmth and powerful sex feeling of her lover and herself too. She tells that their strong sexual experience leads them towards intense love. She writes in 'The freaks':

He talks, turning a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam, his right
Hand on my knee, while our minds
Are willed to race towards love. (OP,11)
Use of different body images shows the disgusting sex act with the husband and the lover. The lover's mouth is described in a contemptuous manner. His mouth is like a dark hollow in which the teeth are uneven and look somewhat repulsive on account of the drops of saliva sticking to them. She compares his mouth to "a dark cavern". He is a man of "a sun stained cheek" never capable of giving her good company. She never comes out of the memories of joyful nights with him their minds are united in the act of intense love-making.

Kamala Das offers a few suggestions, to the woman about how to get maximum possible pleasures out of her sexual requirements when she is going to have sexual intercourse with a man. A woman feels shy to explain her bodily demands. But the poet says that a woman should not feel shame to admire the man's strong body and his limbs when she sees him nude. She prefers to allow each part of her body to lover. Her poem 'The Looking Glass' is the best example of bold narration.

Getting a man to love you easy

Only be honest about your wants as

Woman. Stand nude before the glass with him
So that he sees himself the stronger one
And believes it so, and you so much more
Softer, younger, lovelier----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 jerky way he
Urinates. All the details that make
Him male and your only man Gift him all
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. (TD, 27)

She notices the perfection of his body and the details which makes him male. She suggests to the woman that she should make it possible and even convenient for a lover to smell "the musk of sweat" between the breasts. She should stand naked by this side so that they can both see their reflections in the mirror and let him enjoy his feeling of superiority over her by virtue of his bodily strength. Her
body is softer than him. Kamala Das never minds to come into contact with him during her menstrual period. It is "warm shock" of monthly days.

She advises the woman to observe his reddened eyes after bath and "the jerky way" and enjoy. These details of male body please the woman and make her think that this man is the only one who will satisfy her body in every way. She writes that the woman enjoys his body and gives him everything that she is capable of giving in bed. She should make him conscious of all her sexual cravings which she wants him to satisfy. The woman doesn't hide her "endless female hungers". In the words of Sharma Mohan Lal:

Kamala Das is a poet both of the body and the soul and she is not merely a poet of the ‘squalor, shame and freakishness’, of love or lust, she also celebrates the splendour, glory and self-sufficiency of these emotions. 21

Kamala Das sheds her timidity, shyness and behaves boldly. Secrets of a woman’s body are delineated by her very clearly. Her desire of enjoyable sex promotes her to take lead in sex. Further she writes in a poem 'A Relationship':
This love older than I by myriad
Saddened, centuries was once a prayer
In his bones that made them grow in years of
Adolenscence to this flevoured height. Yes
It was my desire that made him male
And beautiful. (OP, 41)

Again and again she raised her voice against the brutality of her lover and husband. But never forgets the labour and heat. At the same time she depicts it as a deeply sensuous experience in 'Convicts'.:

That was the only kind of love,
This hacking each other's parts
Like convicts hacking, breaking clods
At noon. We were earth under hot Sun. There was a burning in our Veins and the cool mountain nights did Nothing to lessen heat. When he And I were one we were neither Male nor female. (OP, 25)
This is a suggestive poem in which she narrates the lustful nature of man and the violent sexual involvement of both of them in the summer season. On the part of the poetess there is a sense of guilt over such an involvement conveyed by the metaphor "Convicts". The proper sexual act involving energy and speed is marvellously carried through the image in "breaking clods/At noon." The phrase "breaking clods" suggests that there is kind of grating sound while they are copulating. The word "earth" indicates their "earthness" as well as their "reception of the heat of the burning sun." There can be no better image to express the energy and violence in the sexual intercourse than that of "hot sun." It emphasizes their oneness in love. Nair K. R. Ramchandran writes:

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.  

Kamala Das recognized the futility of physical love and feels alone. She tries to fill her soul with ideal love but it becomes miserable. She learns that physical love is not the final aim of life. Sex
is a body communicated thing which would never provide security and love. Feeling of insecurity in sex makes the relations horrible. Woman is terrified at the thought sex due to the male behavior. Some of her poems focus on an alienated life. 'The Swamp' has the same theme in which she writes,

my beloved is armed with cunning and violent hates and mistrust but he comes to my arms unarmed and when the last of strength in drops is shed I call him my baby I hold him to my breast but often after taking leave I open his door again and see him at his desk signing letters with the glasses change is so complete that I am silent and in silence must move away.  (OP, 53)

Her beloved’s love is violent and unfaithful to her. His powerful body loses its strength after sex and lies like a baby in her arms. Lust is temporary. He never satisfies her. Chavan Sunanda says:

She believes love to be a fulfillment of soul realized though body-an experience of sex, beyond sex. Unfortunately, in each love relationship, she finds her body accepted at
the cost of her soul ---- In 'The Swamp', the consciousness explores her relationship with one of the lovers who takes her body but leaves her soul unfulfilled in the act of sex.²³

She describes the momentary pleasure of sex in 'Convicts':

We lay

On bed, glassy eyed, fatigued, just

The toys deal children leave behind,

And we asked each other, what is

The use, what is the bloody use? ( OP. 25 )

The husband and wife have slept after a mechanical sex act. They are like "the toys" lying on bed compared to the body without soul. Then they ask to each other whether there is any "use" rather "bloody use" in a disgusting manner. It is materialistic, momentary attraction in which their minds lead to achieve the highest peak point of sex. After the sensual activity the bitter reality of life and love raises many questions of uselessness of physical need of sex and dryness in their emotions. Germaine Greer writes in "sex";
Sex for many has become a sorry business, a mechanical release involving neither discovery nor triumph, stressing human isolation more dishearteningly than ever before.  

Kamala Das is controversial due to some of the illustration in her poetry. She conveys her pleasures in the company of her lover. In 'Winter' she frankly admits,

And, I loved his body without shame,

On winter evening as cold winds chuckled against the white window panes. (SC, 17)

Winter being a cold season, she turns to her man without masks or pretensions to derive warmth and vitality in his living contact. A mother of three children seeking restlessly the sources of “true love”. she enjoyed his body without any shame. She was able to satisfy her body’s need to some extent but her soul is always empty.

Futility of physical love and her repentance is depicted in her poems. She confesses in ‘The Prisoner’:
As the convict studies
His prison's geography
I study the trappings
Of your body, my dear love,
For I must some day find
An escape from its snare. (Op, 29)

The poetess regards herself as a woman held as a prisoner by her own lust for the man who loves her. The word "trapping" suggests the lust from which she must free herself to experience the true love. Her soul cries for getting ideal love. She tries to escape from the business of love but she feels that there can be no real escape from the imprisonment of the world of lust.

Despite the husband's lust and its uselessness, she tries to find the reality. Both realize it is futile. The Poem 'Substitute' depicts the feeling of emptiness resulting from the need to conform to the conventions of a hypocritical society.

Yet, I was thinking, lying beside him
That I loved, and was much loved
It is physical thing, he said suddenly,

End it, I cried, end it, and let us be free. (DS, 7)

She loved him much and was involved emotionally but he says it is a "physical thing". There is no mental contact between them. She is disappointed due to the mechanical love and cries "end it". She wants to be free from this unbearable mechanical act.

Her husband has failed to provide love to her, she declares her state in 'Captive':

My love is an empty gift, gilded
Container, good for show, nothing else. (Cp, 81)

Her own effort has proved to be an "empty gift", "an empty container." It seems to be only a show of her love for outsiders to get an impression that the husband and the wife have a good relationship.

Her agonized and frustrated mind becomes diminished. She surrenders to him and thinks that there is no other way to it. She is no
different from other human beings. She sometimes feels sinful and sometimes pious. There is a failure disappointment and reconciliation.

She would like to escape from the bonds of marriage, family and society hence in the poem 'I shall Some Day' she says:

-----and I shall some day see
My world, de-fleshed, de-veined, de-blooded.
Just a skeletal thing, then shut my
Eyes and take refuge, if nowhere else,
Here in your nest of familiar scorn… (OP, 48)

She is tired of her sorrowful life because of sexual humiliation. It is just "a skeletal thing". She would like to be away from the troublesome life so she expresses her desire of escaping from it. This desire stimulates her to involve in illicit relations with other men. In 'An Apology to Gautama' she writes:

When other eyes haunt my thought, I kiss your
Eyes and shut them, so that I need no longer
see them brood, or their naked, naked fear.
Another voice haunts my ears, another face
My dreams, but in your arms I must today,
Lie and find an oasis where memories,
Sad winds do not so much blow, and I must
hear you say, I love, I love, I love. It was
Another who made me lonely, not you
Your hands with bitten nails, never pain, never
Reject, another's name bring tears. your's
A claim, and smile, and yet Goutama
The other owns me, while your arms hold
My woman form, his hurting arms
Hold my very soul. (SC, 19)

She tells Goutama that she kisses his eyes and shuts them despite the "other eyes", meaning her husband's eyes, haunting her thought. However, her husband's "voice" and "face" torture her. To get away from being obsessed she must find an "oasis". One can imagine that the lack of love from her husband is very painful. Moreover she wants to hear from Goutama that he loves her. The repetition of the word "love" intensifies and heightens her "endless
hunger" for love. She also confesses to Goutama, who is an outsider, that "another" is responsible for her loneliness. Instead of the pain in her husband's hands, she experiences calm and comfort in Goutama's arms. Nevertheless, she tells Goutama that she is owned by her husband. The woman can never ignore the roots of Indian culture and tradition. She says that only the "woman form", that is the body of wife is in Goutams's hands but her mind is in her husband's hurting arms. Sing, Amar Kumar writes:

----- there is a complete lack of rapport----

between the husband and the woman. They have lived together like islands unto themselves. The husband is nothing but his beastly hungers, shallowness, lip love. He can never go beyond the body. 25

Again in the poem 'The Joss-sticks at Cadell Road' she shows dissatisfaction with her husband.

My husband said, I think I shall

Have a beer, it's hot,

Very hot today.

And I thought, I must
Drive fast to town and
Lie near my friend for an hour. I
Badly need some rest. (DS, 29)

She is honest to express her personal emotions aroused in her married life. She reveals that there is the other source to get relieved from the boredom in life, and the source is outing on holidays. She never likes her husband's habit of drinking liquor. So she would like to go to the town and lie near her friend for an hour to take rest. Germaine Greer writes about the male arrogance and his command over woman’s body:

The universal sway of the feminine stereotype is the single most important factor in male and female woman hatred. Until woman as she is can drive this plastic spectre out of her own and her man's imagination she will continue to apologize and disguise herself, while accepting her males pot-belly, wattles, bad breath, farting, stabble, baldness and other ugliness without complaint. Man demands in his arrogance to be loved as he is, and refuses even to prevent the development of the sadder distortions of the human body which might offend the aesthetic sensibilities of his woman.26
Kamala Das is unable to explain the real happiness of woman. What she likes she can not deserve. Because her happiness lies under the rude nature of man. 'In Conflagration' she says:

Woman, is this happiness this lying buried
Beneath of man? It's time again to come alive
The world extends a lot beyond his six feet frame.
Thoughts that lurk shadows deep inside, be still. (DS, 26)

She thinks that sex is the burial of the woman under the man. It is painful to her. She says that it is a time that the woman thinks about her own happiness. She surrenders her body and life to the man and never thinks about her own dignity. Her image is dignified as Goddess, mother, wife but never praised. Kamala Das is never ready to live like an ideal wife and fit herself in the norms of society. But a woman is compelled to play the role of a happy wife. Molvi Z.F. asserts:

The love is the essence of her life but in real life she has to wear the mask of a happy woman and wife in the male-dominated, urbanized Indian society.
Men make women as a subject of harassment and object of enjoyment. They are like the toys which are played by male as their own wish. For getting the freedom and love Kamala Das changes different partners but every relation is unsatisfactory. She writes in 'The Latest toy':

It was indeed awkward for him when the latest toy
Began to speak after the day's best games were over.
A toy at best must only squeak, even his costliest
Ones did only that, all those plump walkie talkie dolls
But this little thing spoke unfamiliar words in
A voice softened as though with tears. He said then, his
Dark brow wrinkling. oh please dont become emotional,
Emotion is the only true enemy of joy.( TTS R, 25)

Kamala Das stressed on a word "toy" "a latest toy" which shows the mechanical approach of man towards the woman. He never permits his wife to utter any word when they are playing the game of sex. He never likes to leave the initiative with his wife. Whenever she speaks to him, she softens her voice. Every woman is a "plump walkie
talkie doll". It symbolizes that the woman is an object of sex mechanism. A sensitive woman never understands her own position. she is weeping silently and trying to express her emotions to her husband. Her tears have no meaning in his attitude, he neglects them. He suggests her in a dry voice that she should not be emotional because "emotion is the true enemy of joy". He doesn't console her but instructs while playing in bed not to disturb him by using the weapon of tears. The irony of the woman’s life is that she is neither permitted to speak and nor to weep. She should live like a doll and play according to his wish.

The path decided by Kamala Das is not the right path. She changes her partners like clothes. She becomes tense in situations. The 'right' man which she wanted has never met her. This is at the core of her tragedy. In a poem 'The Invitation' She writes:

For long I've waited for the right one
To come, the bright one, the right one to live
In the blue. No I am still young
And I need that man for construction and
Destruction-------- (TD, 14)
further she writes in ‘Captive’:

What have
we had, after all, between us but the
Womb’s blinded hunger, the muted whisper
at the core----- For years I have run from one
gossamer lane to another, I am
now my own captive. (CP, 81)

The men in her life are responsible for her tragedy. Her husband is the first man who destroys all her dreams of life and marriage. The couple will go two different ways for the sake of removing boredom and dissatisfaction of life. Her path passes through love and that of him through lust. She realizes that it is just "womb's blinded hunger" and nothing more. In fact, man is "eternal flesh", always bewildered by lust. It is his nature. He never changes it.

The poet's failure in love is displayed in her poems. The poem, "The Bats" brings out her sense of sorrow and exhaustion in a striking manner,
From stranger to guest, from guest to
Lover, my beloved, when you take,
When you at least win, ignore the stain.
Beneath dead eyes, the fatigue in my smile. (SC, 46)

Her unsuccessful love affairs and failure of married life disturb her. She loses her faith in love. Men have no courage to look in her eyes before doing the wrong things but Kamala Das has a true desire of looking at her man unashamedly before making love. She is honestly keeping her relations with them. What she is doing is not a wrong thing in her attitude. She never hides her emotions. In 'The Music Party' she says:

I wish my eyes
Eyes were similarly
Brave and had looked at you
At least once before the
Singing stopped and you left
Quickly, without goodbye----- (SC, 34)
She is depressed by these tortuous memories and experiences. Her utter loneliness, disappointment and her forceful complaint against men as a whole and hollow marital relationship. She does not like physical love although she is repeatedly forced to do it. It is very hot and undesirable for her. 'The Testing of the Sirens' explores the deep sense of agony and despair.

------- with the crows came the morning, and my limbs warm from love, were once again so lonely (SC, 63)

and in the same poem she continues,

----- why does love come to me like pain
Again and again and again (SC, 64)

The repetition of the word "again" reinforces the idea that there is no escape for her from the painful existence. She is trapped in it, and that her "pain" mainly springs from the unrequited love. Her body is misused by many including her own husband. All her dreams about her husband are washed out.
In her autobiography she says:

My cousin asked me why I was cold and frigid. I did not know what sexual desire meant, not having experienced it even once---it was a disappointing week for him and for me --- I wanted conversation, companionship and warmth. Sex was far from my thoughts. I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms the loneliness of my life

Her poem 'Ethics' shows her lover’s concern with physical lust rather than love.

This night
he smiles at me, on my verandah
Under a rash of winter-stars, he smiles
the busy man must always smile at love,
his eyes window shop, idly they caress
my brow, my lips, my breast, ethically
he can't afford more. (OSKHS, 121)

Kamala Das observes the sensuous gestures of her husband. His eyes are interested in gazing every part of her body. His
passionate movements are hungry for her body response. Every part of her softened body is crushed cruelly by him.

She describes the selfish nature of man in 'Glass'.

I went to him for half an hour
as pure woman, pure misery
Fragile glass, breaking
Crumbling--------
The house was silent in the heat
Only the old rafters creaking
He drew me to him
Rudely
With a lover's haste, an armful
Of splinters, designed to hurt, and,
Pregnant with pain-------
--------------------------
With a cheap toy's indifference
I enter other's
Lives, and
Make of every trap of lust
A temporary home. (OP, 21)
She depicts the miserable life of woman who is hurt every time. It focuses attention on the fragility of love-experience and also of the body. The husband's aim is nothing but to become a father. Therefore, he draws her into his room in order to make his wife pregnant. Kamala Das portrays the unchangeable psychology of the husband in all of her poems. She experiences hurt rather than ecstasy with her husband and lovers. The adverb "rudely" shows how rude he is with his wife in the sexual act. He is not concerned with his wife's happiness. She or every woman is a cheap toy for the male and she is broken like a "fragile glass". Through the images like "doll", "toy" and very ironically, "cheapest toy" the poet expresses the degradation of the woman. She is aware of her own weaknesses of the body and her subordination in the life of man. She is searching a protective life in the arms of her husband and her lovers, but everyone plays with her in an indifferent manner. She moves from man to man in search of true love but there is a sense of wasted effort in the prolonged search. Everyone traps her in his lust and leaves her alone. The words like a "pure woman" and "Pure misery" ironically state the suffocation of the woman. A.N. Dwivedi thinks that:
When she speaks of love outside marriage, She does not necessarily propogate the insinuation of adultery or infidelity, but seems to be merely searching for a relationship which gives both genuine love and impenetrable security. 

'Ghanshyam' depicts the suffering of her life when she is tortured by the indifference of her husband.

We played once husk game, my lover and I

His body needing mine,

His ageing body in its pride needing the need for mine

And each time his lust was quietened

And he turned his back on me

In panic I asked Dont you want me any longer

Dont you want me

Dont you don’t you. (TTSR, 18)

After the husband's lust is "quietened". He turns his back to her. It brings total dissatisfaction to her. His body needs the body of Kamala Das to play "husk game". His "ageing body" proudly needs
her feminity. His age is not an obstacle in his intense sex feelings. After the game he turns his back and sleeps. Therefore she panics and asks, "Dont you want me / Dont you dont you". The repetition of the word "Don't you" symbolizes her deep agony and her awareness of nothingness in the attitude of her husband.

She has given expression to her disappointment with her husband and her lovers. who never offered her love she lies in her bed and weeps. No one is consoling her. 'The Millionaires at Marine Drive' is a poem in which she comments on the selfish nature of man:

------ there was no
More of it for me, for, no longer was
There someone to put an arm around my
Shoulders without a purpose, all the hands
The great brown thieving hands groped beneath my
Clothes, their fire was that of an arsonist’s,
Warmth was not their arm, they burnt my cities
Down, it was not blood but acid that flowed
Through my arteries......... (CP, 97)
Her lovers including her husband give her no real love, no real emotions in their relationship. The bed, in which she used to sleep with them is a paradise only to some extent of her sexual pleasure, but their mechanical manner of performing the sexual act leads her to think negatively about life. Those hands thieve beneath her "clothes" and invade her body. They have fixed their attitude and fire very hot like an "arsonist’s" and not providing to the warmth of love. Their fire of lust burns her body. She compares her blood with life corroding acid that flows in her arteries. She thinks of the brutal treatment which destroys her life.

Disgusting lust, male psychology, their brutal nature and her pathos teach her the lesson of futility of sex. 'A Relationship' depicts her desire of committing suicide.

To believe that once I knew not his
Form, his quiet touch, or the blind kindness
Of his lips was hard indeed. Betray me?
Yes, he can, but never physically
Only with words that curl limbs at
Touch of air and die with metallic sighs
My body’s wisdom tells and tells again
That I shall find my rest, my sleep, my peace
And even death nowhere else but here in
My betrayer’s arms-------- (OP, 41 )

Her thoughts again turn to her lover, and she realizes that she wants no other lover because her lover comes to meet her in the intervals of his office work only to refresh himself. She has a foolish dream that he will be back. These bitter experiences make her wise and awaken her from the temporary world of passions. The words "tells and tells again" suggest realization of life. The words "rest" "sleep" "peace" and "death" highlight her negative attitude towards life. She wants to commit suicide and be free from lust. This is her feeling of insecurity. In the opinion of Germaine Greer:

For women, there is an aspect which is common in 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. 30
Attraction of the body and lust is not permanent. Her illness leads her mind to accept the limitations of the body, strong sensuous body loses its capacity of making love. 'After the Illness' suggests the passiveness of the body and its need of rest.

There was

Not much flesh left for the flesh to hunger, the blood had
Weakened too much too lust, and the skin, without health’s
Anointments, was numb and unyearning. What lusted then
For him, was it perhaps the deeply hidden soul? (OP, 50)

Now her sick body is incapable to enjoy sex. It is a time to love "the deeply hidden soul" which he never understands in his life. Kamala Das admits the limitations of body but never forgets the memories of sex with her lover Carlo. In 'White Man with Whiter Legs', she says,

I shall retire from youth without murmer, Fold up
My lust neatly like a wedding gown, put it always for good,
And keep my dreams’ gate always that although by God, he was so
Beautiful, white man with whiter legs

So luminous against the blue…… (CP, 86)

She remembers the sweet moments that she had spent with him. Her hungry body and soul stimulate her to change the partners. Mr. Das is never interested in her sexual relations with other men. But at last her husband shows concern for her. She writes about it in a poem entitled 'Vrindavan':

----------husband

Who later asks her of the long scratch

On her brown aureola of her breast

and she shyly replies

hiding flushed cheeks, it was so dark

outside, I tripped over the brambles in woods--(OSKHS, 101)

She comes from her meeting with her lover. Her husband sees the scratches on the brown aureola of her breast. First time he expresses concern about the marks on her body. But it is too late. She
has crossed the line of marital relationship. When asked about the scratch she shyly replies in ‘The Last Act’:

------- To the newcomers, age

Was loathsome skin disease, worse, it was

Also imbecility. He heard such

Harsh talk, but did not believe that he too

Was old. In bed, he still had the bison's thrust,

The only fatigue he knew was the one

After love. (CP, 67)

But he never neglects the truth of life and admits:

-------- after all

He was the king, the lion, the eternal

lover--------

----- Back home,

He stumbled into the woman's arms, that

Little one who used to talk of love and

Bore him. I was waiting for you, she said,
I thought you would need me today, He clung
To her, he buried his arrogant face
Between her breasts, but a little later, sobbing
Like a hurt child, he said, I am old.
I am finished,
I cannot even make love------ ( CP, 67 )

Mrs Das is highly strung with the nature of her husband. In such a solitary circumstances. She requires the support by him. But he makes her nervous at every moment whenever she is asking for something he is careless to her. Her anger comes out and reflects in her poems. She writes in ' Woman without her shadow':

---------- raising
Herself from her pillow she cried, you have changed, I would not have recognized you, had I met you outside my home, you are dark, toasted black, as though some hell-fire had clasped You to its bosom for a while. It replied Smiling, I was busy. I had no time To breathe. ( C P, 35 )
Unpleasureable events of her life with her husband indicate her exploitation and unhappiness. She ironically uses the word "toasted black" for his dark colour. The sense of self of man overpowers the woman and devalues her. But the age has a limitation for everyone. Each one should accept the power of time. It destroys the strength of body but. the egoistic nature of the male is never ready to welcome.

Kamala Das is aware of her victimization. Her femininity is destroyed by the male in the corrupt cities. She tries to locate her identity, her disturbed mind beneath skin, beneath flesh and bone. In 'Loud Posters' she writes:

I am today a creature turned inside
Out--------
---------------------- I've
Spent long years trying to locate my mind
Beneath skin, beneath flesh and underneath
The bone. I have stretched my two dimensional
Nudity on sheets of weeklies, monthlies,
Quarterlies, a sad sacrifice. I've put
my private voice away adopted the

Typewriter's click as my only speech; I

Click-Click, Click-Click tiresomely---- ( OP, 47)

The woman is in search of self-identity in a patriarchal culture. The male culture flourishes through the female support. Unfortunately women don't get the support by men. On the contrary they are mentally and physically harassed in a male dominated world. Kamala Das is one of them and feeling alone in the world and decides to clear the pathetic picture to people. Her life is mechanical. what she is trying to gain from lovers is " a sad sacrifice " she is a poor creature of the world. She has no place in a patriarchal culture. She finds that she is caught in a complicated situation. In ' Of Calcutta' she says:

In that fourth dimension which husbands and masters
Never seem to know, not the warmth of young desire,
But cold stalactites, growing as in cave, the heart
Where a woman, once humbled, sharpens herself
To a sword ------ ( CP, 59 )
She never gets what she is looking for in her search for self-identity. The whole world is a chaos for her in which she is unable to find a secure place. Her quest for self-love and security is failed.

Disgusting human life creates a negative attitude in the mind of poet. Due to it she loses her faith in life. In ‘Death is so Medicore’ she describes the bloody use of human body.

The many paltry, human details that must disgust
The esthete, the flabby thigh, the breasts that sag,
The surgery scar, yes, it would indeed be
Of no bloody use believing in my soul's
Poise---------- ( CP, 55 )

Her dissatisfaction in life sharpened her consciousness of her victimization and humiliation. The poem 'Too Early the autumn Sights' brings out her misery and sorrow.

Too early the autumn sights
Have come, too soon my lips
Have lost their hunger, too soon
The singing birds have
Left. ( SC, 26 )
Her sense of sorrow and exhaustion is drawn in her poem, 'The Bats'.

From stranger to guest, from guest to Lover, my beloved, when you take, When you at least win, ignore the stain Beneath dead eyes, the fatigue in my smile. (SC, 46)

Her condition is like a beggar. She goes from one door to another and waits for getting love just like the beggar waiting for food. She changes her lovers to gain love but it is 'purely physical' under such circumstances, love degenerates into lust and savagery with which she is fed up in her life. ‘Love’ is a meaningless word for the male.

In ‘Mortal Love’ she says:

Fidelity in love is only for the immortals, the wanton Gods who sport in their
secret heavens and feel
no fatigue. For you
and me, life is too short
for absolute bliss and much long
alas, for constancy  (OSKHS, 132)

Being victimized by her lovers she loses her faith in love and
also suspicious about the love of immortal God.

In a poem entitled ‘A Request’ depicts the hatred of Kamala
Das for the body:

When I die
Do not throw
The meat and bones away
But pile them up
And let them tell
By their smell
What life was worth
On this earth
What love was worth
In the end.     (CP, 63)
She is fed up with the present way of her life and that she is pricked deep down within without a ray of hope for redemption. It contains an acute concern for decay and death.

Every man has the habit of dreaming of marriage with a beautiful bride. A leper is too weak to make love but the dreams of honeymoon always give him satisfaction. Sex is a natural need of human body, no one can move away from these hidden feelings. In 'The Moon' She describes:

The leper

Dreams of his own wedding day, with
Unflawed arms and legs he sports on
His bridal bed, and his girl is
So beautiful, her head thrown back
In laughter. (C P, 21)

Kamala Das has a similar dream of sensual nights. Her life seems to be similar to the life of the leper. She locates herself as a
poor creature of the world. She has sweet dreams, about her husband and marriage. But she is never able to fulfil them.

Her body's need is fulfilled by her lovers. She has many sweet memories of bedtime. Young body needs a sexual partner. Therefore, she has changed them. But after the unbearable treatment by the male she realizes the real meaning of love, the significance of the relations between soul and body. In 'Suicide' she writes:

Bereft of soul
My body shall be bare
Bereft of body
My soul shall be bare. (C P, 71)

Marriage, Love, Sex, body and soul are important subjects of Kamala Das's poems. It gives a clear picture of her life experiences. Hari-Mohan Prasad and Chandra Prasad point clearly:

Her poetry has often been considered as gumorick in sex or striptease in words, and over exposer of body of 'snippets of trivia'. But the truth is that her poetry is an autobiography, an articulate voice of her ethnic identity, her Dravidian culture.
She never forgets the unending pains of the woman's body during the sex as well as and in the child-birth. 'Jaisurya' the poem concerns with her first-born son.

It rained on the day my son

Was born, a slanting rain that began with

The first labour pain and kept me

Company, sighing, wailing and roaring

When I groaned so that I smiled and stopped my

Plaints to hear its grief. I felt then that

Out of the mire of a moonless night was

He born, Jaisurya, my son, as out

The wrong is born the night and out of night

The sun-drenched golden day. (TD, 33-34)

She delineates the actual feeling just before delivery and immediately after giving birth to a child. It is the time of the labour pains. She is groaning. These are unbearable pains for her. At that time she neither thought of lust nor of love but was only crazy and anxious to become a mother. She has "groaned" and "moaned" during
the sex and in delivery. Although these pains are unforgettable as a wife mother she celebrates them as a matter. She forgets the pains for a child.

In her autobiography Kamala Das says:

At the hospital I was put on the table in the delivery room where, to distract my mind from the spasms of pain, I recited the Gayatri Mantra, and while the sun grew in my eyes, filling my veins with its warmth I felt the baby slide along my thigh and heard its loud cry. “It is a beautiful son”, cried vimala. 32

She has intense pains in her womb before the delivery but a sensitive woman doesn't think about her sexual humiliation and unfulfilled love at that time. The birth of the child sublimates her feeling of lust. It is an illuminating experience of her life.

Sometimes her suspicious mind is not expecting gratitude from her son. Her search for love is a part of the larger quest for motherhood and home. Further she says in ' White Man with Whiter Legs,'
We mated like Gods, but begot

Only our slayers. Each mother suckles her own enemy.

And hate is first nurtured at her gentle breast and each man's seed

Is pregnant with his death. (CP, 86)

Her tortured mind suspects her own male baby. she says that each mother suckles her own enemy to make the baby strong. Innocent mind of the mother takes care of the children in a blind belief that he will provide her secured life in the old age. But the man takes interest in the woman’s body alone.

She expresses secret hopes and fears of womankind as see in 'Afterwards'. Being a mother she expects love by him but is not assured of getting it. It’s the bitter truth of woman’s agony.

Son of my womb

ugly in loneliness

you walk the world's bearly eye

Like a grit

Your cleverness

Shall not be your doom

As ours was (SC, 55)
She imagines that her son must have sprung from the dark womb. She compares the "womb" with a dark place where her son lives alone. She has a dream to bring her son in the bright world. He will succeed after that. Because he is a male child.

Whenever Kamala Das becomes nervous in her life, she visits Malabar. When she sees her old school-house, after many years, she finds a brothel there. In 'Composition' she draws the tragic picture of night girls and the bitter social attitude towards them.

My first schoolhouse
is now a brothel,
and
the ladies sun themselves on the lawn
in the afternoon
with their greying hair,
newly washed,
left undyed.
Who can say, looking at them,
that they are toys
fit for the roaring nights? (OP, 8)
Woman is insecure in the world. Men look at her in a very disgusting way. They gaze every part of her body with passionate eyes. Looking to women they say "they are toys" and fit for the "roaring nights". They need the body of woman only for seduction. It is a very humiliating predicament for a woman. So Kamala Das's anger is expressed in her poems. Barrett Michale writes:

------thin image of woman as, on the one hand, the sexual property of men and, on the other, the chaste mother of their children .....the means whereby men ensure both the sanctity and inheritance of their families and their extra-familial sexual pleasure.  

Further in another poem she highlights the unfair treatment of men to women.

------Celibate by choice, she entered

The party, found all men dark and sleek like drones, women Parakeets, offered her chilled hand of severed veins and

Saw from the corner of an eye, again a male glance

And again a smile blazing rudely like alphabates
And going down the lift saw in its cold mirror
with apathetic eyes the fullness of a body,
Tamed by will and practice taught never to make demands.

(After the party CP, 8)

Everywhere the woman is captured by the lustful glances of the men. She never protects herself from the passionate eyes of man. Kamala Das has used the word "again" in her poems many times, it suggests the intensity of the woman’s pains and the repetition of her physical and mental harassment by man. How the women are brutally captured in “a male glance”, “And again--- lustful smiling”. Their condition is like a "parakeets" who play as the wish of masters. They haven't their own existence and own demands. Because of the indifferent treatment to women in society, Kamala Das criticises bitterly the patriarchal social structure.

Elaine Showalter feels that the existence of a separate literary tradition of women is not a biological factor but it is due to different manner of socialization. She says:
I am intentionally looking, not at an innate sexual attitude, but at the ways in which the self-awareness of woman writer has translated itself into a literary form in a specific place and time span. 34

Women are unsafe everywhere. They feel themselves to be subordinate due to the social constraints. They are society ladies who have dark future and never think about their bright life. In 'The snobs' she writes:

We
Are paltry creatures, utter snobs,
Who disowned our mothers only
Because their hands, we noticed, were
Work worn, and, so to seek richer
Mothers and better addresses.
We must move on and on, until
We too, some day, by our children
May be disowned. (OP, 44)

It picturises the social picture of womanhood. Woman is eternally same everywhere. It masks contradictions and offers partial
truths in the interest of coherence. They obscure the actual conditions of existence. People are made to behave in a way that contradicts their material interests. These women are "paltry creatures" and "utter snobs," they have no respect in society. They are hard workers but they have no status. They also have some awareness like Kamala Das's rebellion is against such an ideology. She agrees that the oppression of women is a psychological condition and a material reality. She proves that gender is constructed in patriarchy to serve the interests of the male supremacy. Everywhere men humiliate women. In the opinion of K.V. Surendran:

She believes that the society is hostile to women that they are humiliated in all possible ways.\textsuperscript{35}

Her social consciousness represents the picture of India. She recalls some of her experiences of her home in Malabar. She thinks of hot noon when all sorts of persons used to pass her home and to pause there in order to sell the wares which they carried from place to place. She depicts the man who comes with parrots and fortune cards, the kurva girls and the bangle sellers in a poem entitled 'A Hot Noon in Malabar':
This is a noon for beggars with whining
Voices, a noon for men who come from hills
With parrots in a cage and fortune cards,
All stained with time, for brown kurva girls.
With old eyes, who read palms in light sing song
Voices, for bangle-sellers who spread
On the cool black floor those red and green and blue
Bangles, all covered with dust of roads.

(R. Parthsarthy. 1976-24)

Men with the parrots and the fortune cards sitting on the roadside is a very common sight in India. Indians have blind belief in these irrational things. Kurva girls wander from one place to other place. They have brown coloured old eyes. Old eyes suggest that they are experienced and have no capacity to see dreams. It is the real picture of poor girls.

She always memorizes the typical harsh sound of bangle sellers and their body which proves their hard work. In the same poem she describes:
Whose feet, devouring rough
Miles, grow cracks on the heels------

(R. Parthasarthy. 24)

The bangle sellers have walked miles and mile, town to town. In the course of their journey their feet get covered thickly with dust, and their heels became cracked on account of the toil labour of the journey. The phrases "devouring rough miles" is noteworthy. The bangle sellers walk covering miles and miles of the dusty roads at noon. It is a very tortuous journey but they have no other option. They must work hard for survival. Then she focused on their psychology. She says,

yes this is
A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love

(R. Parthasarthy. 24)

When they speak their voices resembled wild like "jungle voices." She says that the noon in Malabar is not only for the visit of
wild men but also for the wild thoughts and for wild desire for love making. Whenever she is feeling unsatisfactory, her childhood memories relax her mind. According to K.V. Surendran:

The poet in such an atmosphere yearns for the spontaneity, which was present in that early life as a childhood in Malabar. She is sick of the routine when everything is mechanical. She believes that the only way out of the suffering is to travel down memory lane that is to her life as a child in Malabar.

Whenever the torturous memories make her restless she is on a long walk in Calcutta at night. She sees the vulgar picture of night girls who stand beside the road to sell their body. 'The Wild Bougainvillaea' draws the pathetic picture of these prostitutes.

I walked on streets where the night-girls with sham Obtrusive breasts sauntered
And under yellow lamps, up and down wandered
Beaming their sickly smiles
At men.----- ( OP, 30 )
Night girls are wandering on the road in search of their customers. They are showing their breasts deliberately and smiling. It is a very disgusting scene on the road at night. But their smile is "sickly smile" it symbolises their unwillingness to business. Now they are trapped in it and never rescue themselves, it is their source of economy and the need of life. They make their body a media of business.

The poem 'The Dance of the Eunuch', highlights the tone of frustration and the feeling of the futility of love. The eunuchs represent the incapacity of performing the sexual act and of producing a child. It is used for meaningless of love.

It was not, so hot, before the eunuchs came
To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling, Jingling. Beneath the fiery gulmohour, with Long braids flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced and They danced, oh, they danced till they bled ---- There were green Tattoos on their checks, jasmines in their hair, some Were dark and some were almost fair. Their voices
Were harsh, their songs melancholy, they sang of
Lovers dying and of children left unborn ……
Some beat their drums, others beat their sorry breasts
And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy. They
Were thin in limbs and dry, like half-burnt logs from
Funeral pyres, a drought and a rottenness
Were in each of them. (CP, 106)

It is a hot time when eunuchs come to dance, wearing wide
skirts, going round and round, their cymbals produced rich clashing
sounds, their anklets jingling. They have dark eyes. The tatoos
symbolise their belief in religion. Some are fair and some dark. They
danced till they bled. Some beat their drums, and others beat their "sorry breasts" they "wriathed in vacant ecstasy". It appears to be a very
significant image of the bareness of poets own life.

Woman in the poem of Kamala Das is the subject of destruction
at every place, in home and outside too. No one understands and pays
attention to her emotions. The poems of Kamala Das are
autobiographical in nature but they also stand for the life story of
womanhood.
The poetry of Kamala Das has an abundant imagery of different types. Many of her poems articulate the body images. Through these she elaborates every moment of her life to readers. It is actually a woman's body which is speaking and expressing her desire for sexual gratification and at the same time its need for love and affection. A woman's body in her poems express its sensual desire, its pain and motherly affection. At the same time it reflects disgusting sex relation, cruelty of men and humiliation of the sensitive woman’s body. She offers vivid body images spontaneously and frankly.

Body imagery deeply influences the self image. A woman's general body proportions are very much related to her feeling of self-worth and the development of certain parts of body in a girl, in comparison to other girls of her age, is linked to her self image. In a poem 'An Introduction' Kamala Das draws the growth of her body using very effective phrase like "sprouted hair", "tall limbs" Her innocent “woman body” felt beaten and her husband crushed her. Use of the words like "womb crushing", "weight of breasts" is very sensuous.

As for the imagery in her poems, most striking and most predominant is the imagery of sex and love. These images are based
on Kamala Das's actual experiences in life. Sex appeal of the woman’s body is very significant because of the appropriate use of body imagery. In the poem entitled 'The freaks' she picturises her husband's mouth with "dark carven" and describes his figures moving her body but doing more than arousing her "skin’s lazy hungers" and his disgusting sex act when he "dribbled spittle" into her mouth. (The Old playhouse)

Every secret of woman’s body is highlighted through the bold works and phrases. In a few of her poems she has used such words like "pubis" "pubic hair," "the musk of sweat between breasts," "the jerky way" which are very bold and sensual in nature. Use of these lively and sensuous body images, attracts her readers to her poems. The sensitive picturization of the sexual intercourse is unforgettable for reader. Images are not imaginative but realistic and autobiographical.

Kamala Das's images are sex oriented. She represents her woman’s voice through the use of sex imagery she has used the body imagery from the woman’s point of view. her passion, willingness, pathos, passion and revolt is delineated through these images. The intensity of feeling in the poem conveys the image of a hurt woman,
her own self, trying to locate herself through physical intimacy with men other than her husband. There is too much anguish and suffering in her verse. These symbols take birth from the experience of own life. Woman in her poetry is always compared with "a doll" which for her means a plaything as well as a decorative dumb female. She always stresses on the passionate nature of man and her own self too in the words "skin's lazy hungers" One of her poems 'convict' is very bold where she has used disgusting sex imagery. The line in the poem “We were nor male nor female” appeal in narration.

Kamala Das, in her effort to discover, her own self, unknowingly shakes the norms of a male dominated society, which continued its existence through hundreds of years. With very little changes she has crossed all limits permitted for a society lady. I.K. Sharma has worked out the set of words from her poems to find the meaning of them. The set of the words reveals the whole world of woman along with their cultural paraphernalia:

Marriage, wedding, drums, bedrooms, bride bouquet, double-bed, pillow, mirrors, bangles, bells, gems, sandalscent, musk, dolls, lipstick, perfumes, oils, breast, flesh, mouth, lick, lipkiss, embrace, love, lust,
Many words in this group prominently stand for womanhood and its body language. These images are the weapons of the poet to struggle with the Indian society, particularly the crude boundaries for women made by men. Her honest, courageous sound roars against it.

There is too much anguish and suffering in her verse. It colours her poetic body though adverse circumstances have rendered her vision tragic and melancholy, her upbringing by careless parents, her marriage with an egoistic and vainglorious man, her disappointment in love, her illicit love affairs with other men in order to remove her boredom and anxiety. Added to this, she is a very sensitive and unconventional woman not prepared to be dictated terms to. Love is the central theme of her poem. The reader cannot separate the theme from her verse. Related to this theme, is the celebration of the 'body' in her poetry. It is her approach is perfectly personal, adding a touch a delicacy and charm to it. Her 'self images' are powerfully stands for every feeling of the person.

Suma Chitnis writes about self-image in "A Design for a sociological Study on Images of Woman":

honeymoon, hair pigtails, legs, hearts, womb, spittle, pubis.
------ the most important aspect of the study of the images of women is the study of their self image, of how they see themselves, their self worth, their own sense of their personal standing, status, power and efficacy, their concept of their own roles and obligations in life and their notions of what is due to them from others, their joys, satisfactions and frustrations. Their feelings about being accepted and rejected.  

Images in her poetry are appropriate to female sensibility. Self-exploitation, self-pleasure, pathos and bitter experiences of Kamala Das are drawn through the channel of body images. In the matter of body imagery she resembles Nissim Ezekiel, who is also a "poet of the body". Through her sensitive, body poems she defines and redefines herself. Her shifting moods, her anatomy, her humiliation in the world. Her body poems have become the honest vernacular of her heart.

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References


13) Ibid, p.87.


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