IV. NATURE IMAGERY

The relationship between man and nature has been an intimate one ever since the beginning of life. He is the child of nature. He grows in it and develops his personality. The evolution of man starts with nature thus nature has become a part of his consciousness as well the influence of nature on man has been immense and he has been moulded by nature inside and out.

The writer is also the part of society and nature. He cannot keep himself away from nature. The subject “Nature” is continuously interpreted in the writings by different writers. Nature plays varied role to express the modes of writer's feeling. Nature is a favourite theme of writers. He chooses different elements from nature to express his psyche and feelings. The different seasons, flowers, birds, river, stars, sky, moon and sun etc. generate new life. He uses these elements in a figurative or metaphorical way to convey the thoughts and emotions.

The romantic writers and the writers of Vedas and Sanskrit classics have interpreted the beauty of Nature. Indian writers show their love for nature through the narration of beauty, mysticism and
power of nature. The theme of love in literature is decorated by the nature elements. They cannot separate the role of nature from the love theme. Nature is an integral part of writer’s consciousness.

The poets like Shri Aurbindo, Tagore have presented God, Man and Nature in integral relationship with emphasis on cosmic destiny. At the same time Toru Dutta, Sarojani Naidu’s nature element prominently deals with personal emotions and feelings. Women writers of modern age have revealed themselves to be romantic – moderns in their treatment of nature. They aren’t interested in nature as a thematic concern. They have chosen the problems of life, which are the main concerns to highlight. Their skill of using symbols and images from nature are derived from the Romantic predecessors. They are interested in practical life of man and the problems rather than focusing the beauty of nature. Nature is the storehouse of symbols and imagery to describe the human feelings. It portrays various moods of the writer. The hidden feelings are expressed through the media of nature. The writer cannot separate the nature from his literature. It helps him to draw his inexpressible emotions in a proper way.
Kamala Das is one of the creative writers who has used nature images to draw her personal life in various angles. Her feelings of lust, love, frustration and pathos are interpreted through these images very effectively. While focusing the love theme of her poetry a reader cannot neglect the impressive nature elements. These images covered every corner of her life. Her sensational poetry of love, sex, agony and rebellion is picturised through it. Nature is not the theme of her poetry but the nature element in her poetry, which she has chosen specially to express the real story of her life is. Nature elements like water; sea, air, sun, rain and earth are very impressive and have a deep meaning. She hasn’t written about nature and its beauty but she has used it as a medium of expression.

She has often been labeled as a confessional poet and the tone of her poetry is obviously ‘autobiographical’. At the same time her choice of grotesque and strange metaphors from nature is helpful to draw her own life in her writings. Nature elements like water, sun, earth and sea especially have been focused on her dual psyche, her sensational emotions and desires.
Sun Imagery:

Kamala Das’s many poems express her deep hunger for love and deal with the boundaries of her life, which are built by her husband, relatives, parents and society. There is an ever-growing awareness in her that the act of lovemaking is like being in a prison. She is trapped in it. She realizes that the marriage is a spider web and her husband is an “old fat spider” who built the wall around her, indifferent to her emotional needs, having controlled her desires, he transforms her personality into “a bird of stone, a granite dove” (The Stone Age). He was merely interested in the enjoyment her body.

All her dreams about her husband are ended when she has experienced his lustful, intensely inhuman treatment on the bed. She cannot forget her painful honeymoon. Every dream is shattered. In ‘My Story’ she describes:

I was at that time deeply in love with him and would have undergone any torture to be able to please him, but my body was immature and not ready for lovemaking. For him such a body was an embarrassment, veteran that he was in the rowdy ways of sex, which he had practiced with the maids who worked for his family.¹
She shows her exploration into the nature of lust. Her hopes are shattered into despair. Her feminine sensibility is crushed in her husband’s sexual hunger. The poem entitled ‘The Freaks’ describes her nervousness and dislike of her husband’s disgusting act of sex.

He talks, turnings a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam ..... (OP, 11)

Her husband enjoys her body as a sexual object. He crushed her body without understanding her emotions. He has hot, passionate feelings of sex in which her feminity burns. He turns his “sun-tained cheek” and makes love unbearable for her. His mouth is compared with “a dark cavern” in which the teeth are glittering due to the saliva sticking to them, uneven and look somewhat repulsive on account of the drops of saliva sticking to them. It is a very bitter experience for Kamala Das. Their lovemaking is nothing but “skin’s lazy hungers”. (OP, 11)

Further she writes in ‘Convicts:
That was only the kind of love
This hacking at 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. (OP, 25)

It is the narration of the violent sexual involvement. The flame of lust burns their body. They are interested in physical union rather than any emotional attachment. Images like “convicts hacking”, “breaking clods” and “hot sun” show the intensity of lust.

A. N. Dwivedi rightly asserts:

This richly suggestive poetic passage tells us immediately about his lustful nature and the violent sexual involvement of both 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 by, the image in ‘breaking clods At noon’ The phrase ‘breaking clods’ suggests that there was a kind of grating sound while they copulating. The word ‘earth’ indicates their ‘earthness’ as well as their ‘reception of the heat of the burning sun’.

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While explaining the sensuous experience of lust with her husband she never hides her own feelings of sexual hunger. In a poem entitled ‘Forest Fire’ she says:

Of late I have begun to feel a hunger
To take in with greed like a forest fire that
Consumes, and with each killing gains a wilder,
Brighter charm, all that comes my way. (OP,39)

Kamala Das is a woman of strong sexual desires who never hides her powerful hunger of sex. She compares her aggressive sexuality with “forest-fire” which is deep rooted and difficult to control. Which destroys her life. The body and its revolt start from lust.

Body is the media of her quest for self-identity. She is in search of satisfaction and security. She celebrates the sensual world, which she has enjoyed with many of her lovers. While enjoying the physical love a question raises in her mind about this temporary satisfaction. She cannot decide whether it is sheer lust or love, she soon realizes
that this is a temporary satisfaction, which never provides her security and remains a desperate longing. In ‘In Love’ she says:

Of what does the burning mouth
Of sun, burning in today’s
Sky remind me …… oh, yes, his
Mouth, and …….. his limbs like pale and
Carnivorous plants reaching
Out for me, and the sad lie
Of my unending lust. (OP, 15)

She has a complete involvement in physical union. But the question about love and lust leads her towards the divided self. The warmth of the physical union is like “the burning mouth of sun”. It is intense, complete enjoyable for them. He holds her strongly in his arms. His limbs reached towards her like “carnivorous plants”.

Both are too passionate at the sexual moment. When Kamala Das comes out from the intense feelings of sex, she recognizes that love is nothing but an unending lust. Her lover is very skillful in
making love but not capable to give love. In his strong arms, in his passionate lust she forgets her ambition of getting love.

Das Bijay Kumar writes:

Kamala Das exposes her ‘unending lust’ as a sad lie. The sun with its heat is suggestive of the glow of passion and lust. The challenge comes from love not from lust. Lust is complete in each act of sexual intercourse.

It is the picture of passionate nature of her lover and the intensity of lovemaking. But she never rejects her own willing participation in sex. In ‘The Conflagration’ Kamala Das says:

We came together like two suns meeting and each
Raging to burn the other out. He said you are
A forest conflagration and I, poor forest
Must burn …..(TD, 20)

Like her lover she is eager to make love. Both are energetic and have strong sexual desires. She compares their hot meeting with “two suns meeting”. They are crazy to burn in the sensuous feelings of lust. He calls her “a forest conflagration” and he is “a
poor forest” who burns in her fire of lust. Sex removes her loneliness temporarily but it is futile. In the same poem she says:

….. I, poor forest

Must burn, but lay on me, light and white as embers

Over inert fires. Burn on, elemental

Fire warm the coal streams of his eternal flesh till

At last, they boiling flow, so turbulent with life. (TD, 20)

She is conscious that their life destroys in the heat of passion. It is not providing her security and peace. The words like “boiling” and “burning” signify the hot emotions of lover’s and herself too.

Fire and sun images in her poems draw the intense, passionate feelings of lust. In a poem entitled ‘The flag’ she represents the fire as a destroyer.

The orange stands for fire, for fire that eats

Us all in the end ……..(SC. 21)

She has a clear idea that lust is a temporary place to take rest and to get mental peace. Kamala Das is well aware of this but for
forgetting the unhappy married life and in search of love gets involved and trapped in it. Whenever she is nervous in her life, she meets her friend, Carlo. She forgets the miseries of life. He is her close friend with whom she has spent much time in Calcutta. All the sweet memories are haunting now. She cannot forget him. In a poem entitled ‘The Westerlies’ she describes her troublesome memories of her friend and her emotions at parting from him.

….. I ought not to have walked towards the sea and
Against the whiplash of the westerlies.
I should have travelled
Eastwards towards the morning sun, I should have worshiped
The gold not the silver of the moon
But there was none to guide
Me in this game, only the word love spoken in dark doorways
Or over crumpled beds but never mind. I still have
A chance, a last chance, for inside this ageing body, inside
This ashen fatigue my blood is a bouncing fountain, ageless.
Red and warm, I shall yet go meet the young sun, forget
The deeply moaning sea, the bitter westerlies
The desert in my soul. (TTSR, 24)
Kamala Das admits that search of love outside the marital life is not everlasting. She is aware that she is seduced by her lovers and deceived by them. She has an idea that she cannot get love through lust. She travels towards it but no one is guiding her. They play the ‘game’ of sex in darkness and utter the word “love” but she never gains it. All these experiences are painful and torturing for her. But her passionate mind never loses the confidence and is always eager to meet “the young sun”. To forget the memories of her friend, she involves in the passionate moments. But this is temporary and her mind she feels to be an “empty container” (Captive. CP, 81) Her mind is isolated which she describes as “the desert in my soul”.

Unhappy married life and unsuccessful love affairs torture her continuously. It is unbearable for her. In her autobiography ‘My Story’ she has commented about her broken marriage.

A broken marriage was as distasteful, as horrifying as an attack of leprosy.4

Married life is horrifying for Kamala Das from the very first wedding night. All her dreams about husband and peaceful life are broken. So in many of her poems she highlights the pathos of life.
Sun imagery has been used by her to show the hot and sensuous feelings and at the same time it is used for suggesting destruction of life. In ‘Pigeons’ she writes:

The hot dust rises,
falls on sun-peeled beaks;
On the city of fevered
lanes
The sun swells; then
Swollen like a fruit
It runs harsh silver threads
Lengthwise, my afternoon
Dream! (SC, 12)

The sun is a destroyer of her dreams. The heat of lust as like the heat of sun, burns her life. Her ambitions are like the day – dreams, incomplete and momentary.

In a poem entitled ‘Sepia’ she says:
It is a time to hold anger
Like a living sun
And scorch,
Scorch to the very marrow
This sad – mouthed human race (SC, 24)

She says that the sun burns man’s exterior and interior. It is furnace at noontime. Devastating heat does not let down her longing for a sweet – sleep. It does not give her chance for her dreams to be fulfilled. The sun is hot and dries up the very marrow bones.

In the words of A. R. Rahaman the sun is,

…. an agent of scorching heat generated by sex and corruption and lust.5

Sun imagery in her poems highlights the intense, powerful feelings of lust in which the life of man is destroyed. But she is never able to control her sensual feelings. She drinks it again and again. She writes about the sensuality of feelings in a poem entitled ‘Summer in Calcutta’:
What is this drink but
the April sun, squeezed
Like an orange in
My glass? I sip the
Fire, I drink and drink
Again, I am drunk,
Yes, but on the gold
of suns. (SC, 48)

The April sun brings the warm, sensuous and exciting feelings. She drinks “the juice of the April sun”. Her feelings of sex are hot and beyond self-control. The repetition of the words “drink” and “drunk” suggest the repeated emergence of sensual desires.

K. R. Ramchandran writes:

The April sun becomes the ‘noble venom’ that flows through the poet’s veins providing a temporary triumph over life’s despairs. Just as the sun is transformed into a juice, transformed into laughter, despair is transformed into hopeful desire.
Her endless desires of making love are going to be ended now. She is tired to find ideal love through physical desires. She has no hopes of getting it. In ‘Drama’ she says:

There is no such stage today, no
Footlights, no veil, no lamp shining
Like a crimson sun …. (OP, 49)

Her life is full of darkness due to her futile search of self–identity and love. Now she is feeling helpless and alone. There is no other way, which will help her to console herself. Her passionate feelings, her hunger of love are destroyed. Her condition is like “a crimson sun”.

Sun imagery in her poems plays a vital role. It’s the imagery of hot desires or passionate emotions of the poet and her lovers. It is a destroyer of her personal identity and her dreams. Fire imagery deals with her sensuous feelings like the sun imagery. It deals with her inner feelings and her hunger for getting love.

K. R. Ramchandran writes:
The poet celebrates herself with hunger to take in all that comes her way. She projects herself as a forest fire enveloping everything.

These images suggested her joy and suffering. It is also the celebration of regenerate mood of sensuality and passion through the absorption of sensuousness.

**Tree Imagery:**

A woman’s greatest expectation from marriage is that it should provide her security. But many times she is forcefully subjected to man’s desire and neglected as well. In the reality of marriage, the hope of romantic encounter remains unfulfilled, creating the feeling of restlessness in her mind. Kamala Das is one of the victimized women. In spite of all the anguish and misery the society doesn’t provide her legitimacy and space.

Kamala Das’s husband and her dreams shatter her, like a fragile glass, and turn her into splinters. She has a lot of expectations from her husband but each one of them is shattered. She is a mere plaything, like a doll without feelings and emotions. In ‘The Stone Age’ Kamala Das shows that she is a mere showpiece decorating the
house of her husband and accompanying him as her wish. Hence, the neighbours, appear to be asking her:

…. Ask me why like

A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breasts,

And sleeps. Ask me why life is short and love is

Shorter still, ask me what is the bliss and what its price.

(OP, 51)

She feels that her body is crushed under him. As a wife she must endure and she must suffer the pain and humiliation. Even during the sex she is played with by her husband as a sexual object. He falls on her body like “a great tree”. It is his sudden action which she never imagines. Naturally his cruelty during the sex is unbearable for her. He sleeps after the act without asking her about her emotions. He is a man of lust and cruelty. Kamala Das is feeling herself a poor creature so the life for her is “short” and love is “shorter”.

She is trapped in the passionate treatment of her husband. Her feelings are always suppressed by him. She is imprisoned in her cage
which is ruled by him. She has a feeling of helplessness. In a poem entitled ‘The Old Playhouse’ she says:

…. you called me wife,

.................. cowering

Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and

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

Questions I mumbled incoherent replies. The summer

Begins to pall. I remember the ruder breezes

Of the pall and the smoke from burning leaves. (OP, 1)

Kamala Das is unsatisfied with the disappointing conjugal life. She never enjoys her life, as she wants. He overpowers her at her every moment. She has lost her ‘self’ in the arrogant and egoistic nature of her husband. His “monstrous ego” suppresses her emotions. His nature of self – importance has reduced her stature and made her feel “a dwarf” she has no capacity to think about herself. She has lost her will. The haunting memories make her restless. She is conscious about the future calamity. She knows that she has a dark
future, she cannot live happily with her husband “the smoke from burning leaves” suggests her awareness of self destruction.

In search of true love she makes herself available as a sexual object for men. Her feelings of failure as a wife or as a mistress never allow her to live peaceful life. In a poem entitled ‘In Love’ she writes:

                        At noon
I watch the sleek crows flying
Like poison on wings and at
Night, from behind the Burdwan
Road, the corpse – bearers cry ‘Bol
Hari Bol’, a strange lacing
For moonless nights ..... (OP, 15)

Although all her sensual desires are fulfilled by her lovers in this journey and she forgets love. The imagery of “poison on wings” represents her negative attitude towards life. The sound of “Bol Hari Bol” from the men carrying the dead – body to the cremation ground awakens from her from the illusionary and temporary world of lust.
The use of the symbol “moonless nights” suggests the darkness of her mind with no hopes of getting ideal love. She thinks that the real love is difficult to find anywhere.

Whenever Kamala Das is trapped in a painful situation she remembers memories of Malabar and her lovable grandmother whom she never forgets in whole life. In ‘The Swamp’ she says:

i am tainted bush the poisonous snakes retreat at three a m while the others sleep i have no name of my own and my past is the desolate terrain where memory like tall trees grow to my Malabar home…. (OP, 53)

Due to the physical mental harassment by many she compares herself to a “tainted bush” which will be destroyed soon. She is seduced by her lovers and left alone in a pathetic situation.

While explaining the painful experiences she never forgets to describe the delivery pains. She remembers her experience of motherhood. She glorifies her sexual love by the childbirth. She celebrates her painful motherhood experience of giving birth to a child in ‘Jaisurya’.
It was again the time of rain and on

Every weeping tree the lush moss spread like

Eczema, and from beneath the swashy

Earth the fat worms surface to explode

Under rain ….. (TD, 33)

Nature elements in her poems are very suggestive. She has described her labour pains using the imagery of “weeping tree”, “the time of rain”. The lush moss covers the whole tree and hides its identity just like Kamala Das has lost her own identity. Every tree is weeping and through it asserts the intensity of painful situation. The foetus has grown up in her womb like “the fat worm” and rushed out forcefully from her womb. Further she writes in the same poem:

….for a while I too was earth.

In me the seed was silent, waiting as

A baby does for the womb’s quiet

Expulsion. This then was my destiny. (TD, 33)
A foetus is like a seed which takes rest in the womb of the mother as like the seed beneath the earth. Giving birth to a child is very risky for a mother therefore Kamala Das consoles herself believing in destiny.

Every human passion is skillfully narrated by Kamala Das while keeping the central idea of lust and love, a reader cannot neglect the impressive images that are used by her.

**Air Imagery:**

Kamala Das hates the relationship with her husband, which is only for sex so she doesn’t get the real satisfaction of love. She thinks that this unsatisfactory relationship leads to pain and unhappy life. Her sex without love creates frustration in her mind. In this respect Devindra Kohli feels that:

> It is the woman’s impatience and frustration with the man as well as the moment, with the man because of his sexual passivity and slackness and with the moment because it mocks her feminine integrity.  

She has a complaint against her husband because there is no love between them. He rules over her body without understanding her
emotions. He tries to control her feelings as his whims and fancies. Due to his inhuman treatment Kamala Das has a wish to fly away and make herself free from his bondages. In a poem entitled ‘The Old Playhouse’ she says:

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget
Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless
Pathways of the sky (OP, 1)

Her husband is happy with her bodily response. He holds her in the summer season of lust which is full of heat and passion. She is imprisoned in his strong feelings of lust. He overpowers her so that she must forget all the lovely seasons of her life. He plans to control her like “a swallow”. The resting place that a swallow has left behind before finding a different location. As Kamala Das has left her Nalapat House and her loving grandmother behind but her mind never forgets these lovely memories.
A caged bird never likes the bounded life. It is his nature which he cannot separate from himself. Kamala Das also has a similar feeling to fly away and get freedom from this forced life. She wants to reach towards “the endless pathways of the sky.”

A. N. Dwivedi rightly asserts:

…. the husband stands all for suppression and cruelty, while she wishes ‘to fly’, to attain freedom. As a proud husband conscious of his glittering gem called ‘wife’, he has totally annihilated her identity and individuality.9

She is a captive in her own home. As she writes in ‘The conflagration’:

Fetter that aminous wail.

Let only silence move there humming a slow

And languid air. (TD, 20)

Her mind is hammered by bitter movements of life. She is not secure anywhere. It is a bad omen. There is a silent weeping of her mind.
She would like to escape from the bonds of marriage, family, society and the troublesome life. In ‘I shall some Day’ she says:

…. I shall some day take

Wings, fly around, as often petals,

Do when free in air …. (OP, 48)

Wherever she goes in search of love she can’t get it. She finds lust only. So that she desires to escape from all these temporary passions taking wings of freedom she wants to fly freely in the air.

**Imagery of Darkness / Night:**

Kamala Das enjoys her adultery with many persons. She never thinks about the Hindu culture and social constraints. She is a woman of bold nature who never hides her enjoyments nor her pains. She says that her lover comes to meet her at night. It is the proper time for them to make love. It is conveyed in ‘The Testing of the Sirens’:

The night, dark – cloaked like a procuress, brought

Him to me, willing, light as a shadow
Speaking words of love

In some tender language I do not know. (SC, 63)

In some of her poems she has used the image of night and darkness to represent her adultery and her painful existence. He comes to meet her full of passionate feelings. She doesn’t like it. The dark night stimulates them to enjoy the bodily pleasures. At the same time she has a need of tender treatment and love.

The image of darkness and night that she has used to present her inner darkness and frustration. It symbolizes the darker side of her life. In ‘Jaisurya’ she has repeated the word darkness that focuses the misery of her life.

…. proud Jaisurya, my son,

Separated from the darkness that was mine

And in me. The darkness of rooms where the old

Sit, sharpening words for future use,

The darkness of sterile wombs and that of

The miser’s pot, with the mildew on his coins.

Out of the mire of moonless night was
He born Jaisurya, my son, as out of
The wrong is born the right and out of night
The sun-drenched golden day …. (The Descendants, 34)

Her son is separated from the darkness of her womb and that the darkness is within her. She played with by many lovers and that actually makes her a poor creature. She feels herself to be a helpless woman. But at the time of childbirth she forgets the haunting memories of her sexual humiliation. She is proud of her child who enters in the world. The day of her son’s birth is a golden day which makes her happy.

Kohli Devindra writes:

…. “Jaisurya” brings both the elements – fire and water and the opposing images of light and darkness together; not to weave a dissolving pattern but one which holds itself with the joy of creativity.³⁰

The opposing images in her poetry have focused her dual psychology. She is unhappy and happy at the same moment. The loss of her life in search of true love is a darker side but the birth of child is a ray of hope. She has mixed emotions. These are described in her poetry.
Water Imagery:

i) Imagery of rain:

She feels herself to be a woman who was always neglected by her husband. She feels herself as an object of sex to satisfy her husband. She is a doll to fulfil his desires, a woman to look after his house and a nurse for his children. Victor ‘D’ souza rightly asserts about the subordination of woman in a patriarchal society.

One may therefore, say that unity and integrity of the joint family are maintained through the subordination of woman by man. In fact, according to the traditional Hindu code, woman is always deemed to be subordinate to man, first to her father, then to her husband, and finally to her son.11

Every woman is suppressed by her husband even after that she maintains silence. But the poetic persona never accepts it as her destiny. She goes out of the house to find out her own satisfaction. Having been dissatisfied with him she takes the step of adultery. In a poem entitled ‘The Stone Age’ she says:
When you leave, I drive my blue battered car
Along the bluer sea I run up the forty
Noisy steps to knock at another door.
Through peep-holes, the neighbours watch,
They watch me come
And go like rain. (OP, 51)

There is endless misery in her life. Only sexual humiliation is there which disturbs her mentality. She doesn’t get the heart to heart correspondence. She is always treated cruelly and given a subordinate place.

Whenever she becomes nervous and feels alone, she knocks at another’s door to receive love. It is for her the only way of escaping from loneliness and disillusionment. Her neighbours and relatives are aware of her adultery. They keep watching her meetings with her lovers and her sudden returning home like “rain”.

She has enjoyed the lust with her lovers to forget her inner dilemma. But sometimes the company of lovers is unbearable and torturous for her.

In ‘Afterwards’ she describes her pains.
The earth we nearly killed is yours

Now, The flowers bloom again,

But a savage red, it takes

Time to forget blood or the quick gasps

Of the dying. And the sudden pain,

But the sun came again, and rain.      (SC, 56)

She is calm and quiet like “earth”. The feeling of passion rises in her mind like the flowers blooming but it is “a savage red’. It significantly stands for the savage lovemaking. To forget it she needs time. While remembering the joyous and painful moments there is a sudden labour pain and the “son” takes birth. The rain welcomes the new born baby. It has a unique phenomenon, pleasure, pain and again pleasure.

The same elements of nature have been used in the poem entitled ‘An Introduction’:

…. the speech of the mind that is

Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent muttering of the blazing
Funeral pyre. (OP, 26)

A human mind has a capacity to hear and see everything that is happening around the man. It is not deaf and blind like the trees, which are stable and silent in storm and rain or at the time of funeral pyre.

Kamala Das tries to explore her search of self – location through these images, which are focused on her personal life.

ii) **Imagery of river, sea**

Kamala Das thinks that, there is no spiritual love between herself and her husband, hence she wanders in search of real love but she never gets it. She says that all men are the same, wherever she goes the man uses her only to gratify his lust but he doesn’t give her love for which she is really longing. She finds a hasty aggressiveness in the male during the sex. In ‘An Introduction’ she rightly describes
the intense, passionate movements of man which are very opposite to that of a woman.

…. he is every man

Who wants a woman, just as I am every \n
Woman who seeks love. In him … he hungry haste

Of rivers, in me ….the oceans’ tireless

Waiting. (OP, 27)

Kamala Das has an observation that every man has hasty and passionate approach to woman during the sex which creates the feeling of frustration and disgust in the woman. The man forgets that the woman needs tenderness and respect for her emotions. His male ego overpowers her feelings. He is very quick, sudden and passionate as like “the hungry haste of rivers”. Due to this quickness in sex he creates a terror in her mind.

Kamala Das compares her feeling of sex like the “ocean’s fireless waiting” that every woman’s waiting for love is unending. Women are sensitive persons who primarily want love rather than sex.

Anais Nin has pointed out the different attitudes of the man and the woman towards sex from the psychological point of view:
There is common agreement about only one thing, that woman’s erogenous zones are spread all over her body, that she is more sensitive to caresses and that her sensuality is rarely as direct, as immediate as man’s.  

Although women’s needs are not immediate as men’s, they also have sensuous feelings and need of love. Kamala Das admits that sometimes her body is hungry for sex. In the poem entitled ‘The Old Playhouse’ she explores the hidden emotions of a woman about her sexuality.

It’s only the wind knocking at the door, the sea
Is wild this morning, there is perhaps a high tide on.

(OP, 43)

Here in the poem the sea imagery describes the rising passion of her mind. When “the wind” means her lover knocking at the door “the wild sea” is eager to meet him. She compares herself to sea and the “high tide” symbolically stands for the increasingly passionate feelings of the poet.
She has spent a lot of time of her life with her best friend Carlo. Who has consoled as well as supported. She always remembers him. The poem ‘The Wild Bougainvillae’ depicts her solace and her destruction.

…. a few summer days
That passed slowly, and
Moodily, like mourners behind a bier. Days
When even my bed gave
No rest, but like a troubled sea, tossed me on
Its waves, and how I groaned
And moaned, and constantly yearned for a man from
Another town …. Then, by
And by, my love wilted, for I look long walks,
Walked roads I had never
Seen before, …. (OP, 30)

Boring days with Mr. Das passed slowly like summer days. These unpleasant days never bring peace in her life. She has used the suggestive imagery to highlight the tragic movements of her life.
days of Kamala Das with her husband are like “mourners behind a bier”. Instead of giving rest, her bed tosses her like “a troubled sea”. She has tossed on “waves” that is to be with lovers she is constantly humiliated by her husband and lovers. She has “groaned” and “moaned” and searched for lovers throughout her life.

She has always been humiliated by them. Even her lovers cannot prove themselves to be ideal lovers. In ‘Gino’ she addresses her lover as ‘a krait’ through whom her life is full of darkness in which she has lost her way:

It was July, a July, full of rain, and darkness

Trapped like smoke, in the hollows of the sky, and

That lewd, steamy smell of rot, rising out of earth.

(OP, 13)

Her conscious mind never rejects her helplessness, the darker side of life. She understands that she is leading towards the decay of life. She is aware that he likes her body not love. It appears to be the same as the experience she has shared with her husband.

In ‘Convict’ she says:
there were no more
Words left, all words lay imprisoned
In the ageing arms of night. in
Darkness we grew as in silence
We sang, each note rising out of
Sea, out of wind, out of earth and
Out of each sad night like an ache …. (OP, 25)

Their physical union is completely disgusting Kamala Das
never expected this. It is a deep pain of her life for which she never
finds the solution.

In ‘The Seashore’ she writes about the passiveness of her
husband from whom she never expects love.

Shall I forgive the days ……

...................... ............................ or
forgive the crowds who come to you to talk, to plead
To argue, and gay brittle ones who flash such
Fake smiles at you and ask you for drinks or are asked
For drinks …… All those destroying ones who leave you by
Night, to lie so ravaged, so spent, like a sea shore
In empty hours under moon …….? Not knowing what Else to do I kiss you eyes ……………..

………………

……. I see you go away from me And feel the loss of love I never once received.

(OSKHS, 43) Whenever she tries to get love from her lovers she is unsuccessful. Her Humiliation in search of ideal love is endless.

S. Murali writes:

…. it is one long, unending, stream of misery and sexual humiliation – an endless tale of a woman too much wronged by the obsessively male world around her.13

She constantly yearned for a lover from town to town. But it is not easy to find an ideal love. She takes a long walk. When Kamala Das seeks the lover for her, she forgets her husband.

While in search of an ideal lover she has a sexual relationship with a man. She writes about it in a poem entitled ‘An Apology to Goutama’:
When other eyes haunt my thoughts ….

…. 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 …. (SC, 19)

When her husband’s haunting memories make her restless she puts her body in the arms of Goutama. She finds an “Oasis” in the arms of her lover where the “sad winds”, painful experiences, haven’t touched her and she enjoys her life.

In many of her poems the sea imagery represents the different psychological moods of the poet. Whenever she is in a painful situation she looks towards the sea as her companion. The sea imagery is prominently used by her to present her troublesome life. In ‘A half – day’s be-witchment’ she compares herself to sea to declare her destruction.

I am also sea that roars behind the house, roars out

Its passion at the high tide hour; but, later the ebb arrives

To tell different tale. I have, like the sea, some silt

At the core, some junk, the leavings of ships floundered in the night.

(CP, 46)
She is also like the sea, which roars behind the house and outside. Her passions are intense in which she has forgotten love. But later she understands that this way of searching love leads her to decay and degeneration.

Kamala Das says that her condition is the same as the sea, which is made dirty by a lot of useless material. Miserable, unbearable and unforgettable experiences spoiled her life in the same manner. Due to this she feels herself to be alone and misfit anywhere.

Kamala Das says that while playing the role of wife she was not happy with her life. But she pretended becoming “a happy woman” and a “happy wife”. In a poem entitled ‘The Suicide’ she represents her tiresome life full of the unwilling roles. She also describes her disturbed life, which leads her to think about suicide.

But,
I must pose.
I must pretend,
I must act the role
Of happy woman,
Happy wife.
I must keep the right distance
Between me and the low.
And I must keep the right distance,
Between me and the high.
    O sea, I am fed up
    I want to be simple
    I want to be loved
    And
    If love is not to be had,
    I want to be dead, just dead. (OP, 35)

Thus love is the essence of her life but she has acted the role of a happy woman and a happy wife. It is not the truth. It is a mask which she has worn to hide the pathos of her life. She has a compulsion to maintain the distance between lower class and high-class people. She dislikes playing the pretentious roles. She wants to enjoy the life being a simple woman.

Kamala Das complaints about her losing patience, playing the deceptive roles in her tiresome life. She is unsuccessful to get love which is the dream of her life. She desires that she should be loved by
the lover or the husband. She has a desire that love should not be a skin-communicated thing. When the poet identifies that it is not possible here she wants “to be dead, just dead”. To urge the bitter utterance of her life she makes the sea her close companion.

Ramkrishnan E. V. says:

Since the poet cannot disinherit either the body or the soul and live with one of them, the whole climax of the poem saturates into the idea of suicide where the agency which can take away one of them is the sea, an old symbol of timelessness.\[15\]

The imagery of sea shows the overwhelming sense of frustration and unfulfillment leading to the final desire of death. In utter disgust, she says in ‘The Invitation’:

> Oh sea, let me shrink or grow slosh up,
> Slide down, go your way,
> I will go mine (DS, 14)

Kamala das fears life which tossed her in different ways. She becomes helpless and upset to live. Her tossing is now very different
and unbearable than the waves of the sea. Her feelings are suppressed by many in different ways that makes her conscious negatively.

In ‘Death Is So Mediocre’ she writes:

Death is

So mediocre, any fool can achieve

It effortlessly. (OSKHS, 52)

She thinks that the death is never painful before her disgusting life. To live a life is a very hard to Kamala Das so far she feels that death easy than life.

As Kurup P.K. J. asserts:

The self devouring and the self mocking nature of experience of sexual love makes her death conscious because the self is rendered lonely, empty, lifeless and sterile by the sex without love.\(^{15}\)

Whenever frustration overpowers her, whenever the life appears meaningless, she seeks life in death by considering the possibility of walking into the waves of sea ‘In Composition’ she writes:
All I want now
is to take a long walk
into the sea
and lie there, resting,
completely uninvolved. (OP, 9)

Kamala Das indulges herself in a dialogue not only with sea, but also with her absent lover. She would like to commit suicide.

The image of the sea is used as a companion and a killer. In search of ideal love, she becomes confused. She cannot separate the needs of body from the soul. In ‘Suicide’ she sublimates the soul which helps her to decide the supreme power of soul and the temperory existence of the body and its lust.

I throw the bodies out,
I cannot stand their smell.
Only the souls may enter
The vortex of the sea.
Only the souls know how to sing
At the vortex of the sea. (OP, 34)
The soul is never tempted by the outer things and never shaken in any condition. It proves the supremacy of the soul. Life is like a sea and the calamities; material temptations are like the “Vortex” of the sea. The soul has a power to enter in it and knows how to face the calamities of life and overcome them. But the sensual temptations attract the poetic persona and again she is caught in the past memories, thinking about her lover and his passionate movements in which she was involved. In the same poem she writes about her enjoyment with him.

The white man who offers
To help me forget,
The white man who offers
Himself as a stiff drink,
Is for me,
To tell the truth,
Only water.
Only pale-green pond
Glimmering in the sun.
In him I swim. (OP, 36)
The past memories of Kamala Das shook her again and again. It is possible for her to forget the memories of childhood and her great grandmother. While thinking about her lover she remembers that while taking a naked bath in a green pond, she was admonished by her grandmother who reminded her that she was an adult then and therefore she should not take a naked bath in the pond.

Kamala Das would like to swim in the love pond of her white friend who helps her to forget the haunting memories. In her autobiography ‘My Story’ she delineates her experience of enjoyment in the arms of Carlo:

…. he offered himself as a stiff drink, he offered to help me forget and in the afternoon I lay in his white arms, drowsily glimmering in the sun. In him I swam, all broken with longing in his robust blood I floated, drying on my tears.\(^\text{16}\)

Kamala Das’s awareness of self is a reason behind her dual psychology. Her failure in life is often the reason of her double consciousness. Her swimming in childhood is joyous at the same time swimming in the lust of her lovers in adulthood is very torturous.
Kurup P. K. J. asserts about the imagery of swimming:

The images of swimming and drowning in this poem hint at the possibility of liberation, while swimming affords a kind of illusory freedom, drowning releases the soul to enter the vortex of the sea. ¹⁷

Kamala Das visualizes this kind of escape in physical love. So far she prefers the soul which knows how to sing in a vortex of the sea.

At the end of the poem entitled ‘The Suicide’ she requests the sea:

Bereft of body
My soul shall be free.
Take in my naked soul
That he knew how to hurt.
Only the soul knows how to sing
At the vortex of the sea. (OP, 37)

She urges the sea to take her naked soul which is more vital than her body. The body’s pleasure is temporary and destructive. The
joy of the soul is unshaken and permanent. The soul knows the eternal truth and true enjoyment of life.

Meena Surjit Singh says:

The “Vortex of the sea”, thus becomes a multivalent symbol defining a situation, a way of life, a pursuit that engulfs irresistibly and remorselessly, enervating and self-consuming. The sea itself of creation, destruction, hope, despair, passion, inertia, comes to symbolize the poet’s desire to discover “the bones supreme indifferent”.18

She compares her failure in life with sea. She writes in ‘Suicide’

O sea,

You generous cow,

You and I are big flops.

We are too sentimental. (OP, 37)

She becomes conscious of her life as a big flop. Her sentimental nature is responsible for her unsuccessful life.
The use of sea imagery in her poetry is focused by Brewster. He says that Kamala Das,

…. opens with a reference to the sea, whose melancholy movement rolls throughout the poem and sweeps it on to its conclusion.19

Her heart is filled with sad emotions. In ‘Maturity’ she has drawn her own understanding of eternal truth.

The river of unhappiness to flow in
Towards the hearts restive ocean, the eyes
The ears, so that the breath, inhaled yields its
True meaning, each exhalation then becomes
A sacrifice to honour what is, or
What may well be, worthier than life itself. (CP, 48)

Misery of her life is like a river which flows towards the “hearts restive ocean”. Her heart weeps and then gets relaxation.

Due to the maturity of the eternal truth of life Kamala Das advises to newcomers regarding the problems of life and their solutions in ‘Advice to fellow swimmers’ Kamala Das advises:
When you learn to swim
Do not enter a river that has no ocean
To flow into, one ignorant of destinations
And knowing only the flowing as its destiny,
Like the weavy rivers of the blood
That bear the scum of ancient memories. (CP, 100)

Her suggestion to youngsters is important. Swimming as the involvement in physical lust is not the permanent truth. It has no firm, fixed and secured root. Lust is temporary. She has experienced it. Again she says:

but go swim in the sea,
go swim in the great blue sea
where the first tide you meet is your body,
that familiar pest,
but if you learn to cross it
you are safe, yes, beyond it you are safe,
for, even sinking would make no difference then (CP, 100)
‘Sea’ imagery in the poems of Kamala Das plays a very specific role to express her various thoughts of pleasure, pain and suicide and the experiences which she has enjoyed in childhood and in adulthood. In ‘suicide’ Kamala Das writes about the freedom of swimming in the pond of innocence. She looks at swimming as sexuality in the arms of her lover Carlo. It is the way of resolution from her personal crisis.

According to Kamala Das sea is the bedroom where everyone wants to swim to get physical and emotional contentment. Once a person crosses the stage of temptation then he becomes safe in life. But Kamala herself cannot desist from this temporary physical attraction. Her mind leads towards it again and again. In ‘suicide’ she admits her happiness in the game of lust.

O sea, I am happy swimming
Happy, happy, happy…..
The only movement I know well
Is certainly the swim.

.................
In him I swim

All broken with longing
In his robust blood I float

Drying off my tears. (OP, 36-37)

She cannot hide her desire of fulfilling the physical lust. Her sensitive mind is attracted towards it. But she also has a need or mental stability and an ideal love. Her sensitive mind is bitterly humiliated by her husband and lovers. Whenever she has the negative and painful memories she thinks about death. In ‘My Story’ she says:

Often I have toyed with the idea of drowning myself to be rid of my loneliness, which is not unique in any way but is natural to all, I have wanted to find rest in the sea an escape from involvements.\(^{21}\)

She cannot hold her husband and his egoistic nature. He is not a loving husband that she dreams of in her life.

In ‘Suicide’ she writes:

Holding you is easy

Clutching at moving water,

I tell you, sea,

This is easy,
But to hold him for half a day
Was a difficult task.
It required drinks
To hold him down.
To make him love.
But, when he did love,
Believe me,
All I could do was sob like a fool.  (OP, 37)

He has a habit of enjoying her body but he never loves her, which is what she really needs. A. N. Dwivedi rightly asserts:

…. she herself is the holder of ‘water’ as she, too is a mother yearning for peace, happiness and security. But her ‘water’ is not sufficient for a drunkard like him, so he needs ‘drinks’ to make himself warm and jubilant.²²

While describing the nature imagery many of her poems have focused on her attachment with different cities and her bitter experiences in them. Cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Colombo and the loveable place Malabor have been described by her from
different points of view. Her happiness, miseries, revolt are all related to these cities.

In ‘Farewell to Bombay’ she exposes her intense feelings towards the city of Bombay.

I take leave of you, fair city, while tears
Hide somewhere in my adult eyes
And sadness is silent as a stone
In the rivers unmoving
Core …..

It’s goodbye, goodbye, goodbye,
To slender shapes behind windowpanes
Shut against indiscriminate desires
And rain. (SC, 39)

Leaving Bombay is an unhappy moment for her. Her sadness is silent as like “a stone” in the river emotions. The repetition of the word ‘goodbye’ represents her attachment with the city and painful departure. The city forms an integral part of the emotional make up of the poet. Regarding this K. Radha comments:
In ‘Farewell to Bombay’ she is grieved at the prospect of leaving ‘The fair city’. The city where slender shapes peer behind closed windowpanes, where flesh-hungry birds circle in the sky with shrill and hostile cries, and where crowds gather near the sea, talking endlessly. 

Kamala Das has lived in such metropolitan cities and her poems and autobiography sketches the experiences of the city life. The city life is torturous for her. She has always been hungry for humane treatment. However, the city constantly reduced her to a sexual object. it is the inseparable part of her writing.

A. N. Dwivedi remarks:

Mrs. Das is a poet not so much of the countryside as of the city … the city is an integral part of her existence and she can’t shake off its impressions and memories easily. 

She cannot forget Calcutta due to her harassment. In ‘My Story’ she writes about her fear of Calcutta.
There were at least a dozen men deeply infatuated with me. And, yet I feared Calcutta. I longed to escape from it.25

Her whole life is a painful existence for her which tortures her continuously. She discovers herself and exposes the different layers of hypocrisy of the society the different layers of hypocrisy of the society in which the whole womanhood has been lost.

Women are humiliated by men and they never know that they are enforcing oppression on women in their family life. Women ignore it and sometimes they are unconscious about their suppression. But a poetic persona never neglects it and stands against all these inhuman treatment given to women.

Kamala Das’s writing is the powerful media of focusing the issues. Images of nature in her poems are very appropriate and effective. Every corner of her life is impressively drawn by these images. When Kamala Das lies near Carlo, a white Englishman, she becomes aware of the colour difference. While explaining her dark colour she has used a very appropriate imagery, “a dark fruit on silver platter” (Gino). She enjoys sex with him but not ever be happy with life. She says that her life is like a caged life, which makes her “a dwarf”. (The Old Playhouse) Her conscious mind is never ready to
accept the bounds of the husband and the society. She has a dream to get freedom and reach towards “pathways of the sky”. (The Old Playhouse)

Her struggle starts from the physical lust and may take her to eternal truth. She avoids the rules for woman made by the society. She accepts the way of adultery and “swim” in it as she likes. It gives her full of pleasure. Her lover is as like a “sun” in his hot weather of lust she melts and destroys her life too. These images sometimes focus the opposite meanings. Sun is the symbol of passionate feelings and is a destroyer too.

The images like bird, air, sun, sea, rain have different meaning for her. She draws different pictures of her husband, lovers and herself using these images.

Sunanda P. Chavan writes:

The image of ‘sun’ is an integral part of her love experience while the birds like bats, herons, swallows and crows project different shades of her subjective responses.26

As a confessional poet she admits her desire of making love in as intense a manner as her lover. He is a hot sun and she becomes “a forest fire” very sensuous in love. On the contrary the lover is very
forceful like “a river” and she becomes silent like “Ocean”. Her life is tossed by different problems.

Kamala Das’s poems are very sensuous in nature but due to the different images it impacts on the mind of reader. These images give the specific mode to her writing. Her psychological ups and downs are carved by these troublesome nature elements.

She is exploited by many men and it creates trouble in her life. She compares herself to “a troubled sea” (The Wild Bougainvillae) and both are “a big flops” (Suicide. CP, 36). She feels that her existence is only to entertain men. In search of ideal love, she lost her youth and her self. But her search is futile, she never gets anything except sexual and mental harassment. The sea is her close companion to open her heart and console herself. All her feelings are shared with the sea. Sea is the image of her companion and the deep feelings of lust in which she would like to swim. At the same time it symbolizes her weakness and helplessness. Her frustration is highlighted by the imagery of sea.

Sunanda P. Chavan says:
The poet’s lack of stamina to transcend the sufferings of the self corresponds with the lack of stamina to delve deep into the symbolic value of the image of sea. Of course, sea now provides a satisfying objective correlative to concretize the psyche’s sufferings. ‘The Invitation’ is the poets struggle to keep up her faith in life in spite of the betrayal by a particular lover although there is irresistible temptation to end life in the sea. The image of sea provides a valuable means to project the inner conflict between faith and despair. Here is the sea a physical reality; inviting her, and here is the sea of mind trying to resist the fatal invitation.27

Nature elements in her poetry celebrate her divided self, her urge of getting freedom, her feminine consciousness and hollowness of her life. Her joys and pains are universalized through these images. She also celebrates her motherhood with nature. Every part of the nature becomes conscious about her painful existence. Love, lust and pain are the basic ideas of her poetry but the nature elements create the variations in her writing. Her world of imagery is very broad in area. It links her childhood to motherhood; love to lust, Joy to pain. It also relates the physical to psychic. The imagery explores her domestic stresses, sensuous feelings, labour pains and her disturbed psyche as well.
Due to this her suppressed mind thinks about her nothingness in the world, her physical torture in her journey of lust. Later on she acknowledges that it is her own mistake that she uses her body as a weapon to receive love. Later on she thinks of love beyond body. In ‘Anamalai Poems X’ she writes:

There is a love greater than all you know
That awaits you where the red road finally ends
its patience proverbial; not for it
the random caress or the lust
that ends in languor. (OSKHS, 111)

In this journey of searching love her body and mind both severely wounded. According to her body pains are temporary and curable but the wounds of mind are very hard and difficult to tolerate and cure. Physical pains can come to an end after death so for poetic persona committing suicide is an easy way to rescue herself from this unbearable life. Some of her poems ‘Death Is So Mediocre’, ‘Suicide’, and ‘Life’s obscure Parallel’ highlight her inner struggle regarding her unbearable life.
Life’s obscure parallel is death. Quite often
I wonder if what I seem to do is living
Or dying. A little of each is in every
Gesture, both my mind’s and my body’s. Inside
My throat that inward breath combats the outside.
One. And the sights, seen, reside not outside
But within. (Life’s Obscure Parallel. OSKHS, 83)

Her life is worse than living. For Kamala Das her life is, life in
death and death in life. She feels that her breathing and her body
movements are mechanical activities. Her condition is very critical
that no one understands.

Because of this neurotic condition she is incapable of finding
the proper way. She wants to release herself from her disturbed
emotions, frustration, feelings of guilt and suicide. She turns to
mythology. It shows her a proper way to lighten the burden of her
heart. Her turning to mythology represents her evolution of the self
from the physical to the spiritual.


8) Ibid., p.18.


