CELEBRATING THE BODY: A STUDY OF KAMALA DAS
As a powerful interrogative mode, feminist critical theory holds suspect the universalistic assumptions of the dominating patriarchal discourse. Underlining the fact that aesthetic value is not universal and confined to the text only, it is historically and culturally determined, feminist theory considers patriarchy's essentializing assumptions as relative not absolute or axiomatic. Although the Anglo-American and the French feminist theorists differ significantly in their approaches to women's literary productions, women's representation in literature and women as readers, they unanimously emphasize women's subjectivity and autonomy of selfhood. What started as a social agenda soon emerged as a literary polemic. While the American approach addresses real readers and situations, the French polarize feminist issues into body and language.

Irigary and Cixous are the ardent advocates of a feminist poetics that takes note of women's body as the object while pleading for different
nqistic register for creative expression by women. Although there are resistances to such a position it is true that women's body is an important aspect of her identity and self-expression. It is a text on which are inscribed the visible/invisible traces of centuries of domination and oppression.

In her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Helen Cixous, writing on women’s creative writing, maintains that “Women must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies or the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text as into the world and into history - by her own movement (1996: 320).” To Irigaray and Cixous, the female body is no more a despicable object, but can articulate its own subjecthood. Therefore semiotically, the body becomes the very text that rewrites femininity’s difference in culture, history and literature. This is where both French theorists see the possibility of a feminist poetics in formation that opposes sexism and endorses feminism’s agenda for raising consciousness in the socio-cultural and artistic domain.

In India there is a long tradition of women’s writing. The Vedas bear testimony to this proud initiative. Women in ancient India demonstrated their creative gift by composing hymns and songs
which were no less gifted in point of music and poetic quality than those composed by men. However, their writing did not vindicate their social position under a Brahmanic social system. Manu's dictum perpetuated not only social marginalization of women but inflicted an epistemic violence as well. Women's body was considered impure and held against her. The songs of Bahinabai, a Buddhist nun, make a telling expression of woman's position. She writes:

The Vedas cry aloud, the Puranas shout
"No good may come to woman"
I was born with a woman's body
How am I to attain truth?
"They are foolish, seductive, deceptive
Any connection with woman is disastrous."
Bahina says, "if a woman's body is so harmful,
How in this world will I reach truth?"

From Bahinabai to Kamala Das one may underline a tradition of feminist resistance and self actualization. Without debating over whether the female body should/should not be considered as the subject of literary composition, there may be unanimity on the fact that the female body is in essence the only possession woman has and the civilizational wounds have been inscribed on it. It thus makes sense that the female body needs to be contextualized in literary composition, for it is the fountain head of women's creative impulse. Kamala Das's poetic endeavour is sharpened with her intimate and deeper understanding.
of the socio-cultural and historical location of her body in a dominating patriarchal society. It is through this understanding that she articulates her identity and selfhood. She maintains:

I am sinner,
I am saint, I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

("An Introduction": 1965: 57-60).

From an acute awareness of selfhood and identity issues a poetics of otherness. Such a poetics while in opposition to the dominant poetics is foregrounded in the metaphorical exploration of the body. The body is the central metaphor in Kamala Das's poetic canon. As Stephen Heath maintains:

The woman is close to the body, the source of writing - it is obvious that a woman does not write like a man, because she speaks with the body. Writing resembles the body and the sexual division of male and female is expressed in the difference of women's writing: 'a feminine textual body can be recognised by the fact that it is always without end, has no finish, which more over is what makes the feminine text very often difficult to read (1996:313).

Although Kamala Das's poetry is not difficult to read for she shows a competent craftsmanship in creating, poetically, a 'textual body', acceptance of the body and its physical limitations is not easy. It is bound up with Kamala Das's exploration of the love theme. Writing about pornography in 'Obscenity and Literature', she describes
herself as "too emotional to be pornographic" and expresses a justified
impatience with the Indian morality. To her, moral position mystifies
sex and gives the body 'too many secrets to hold'. Her various illnesses
which forced her to visit hospitals have brought to her an enriched
awareness of the naked body:

I have spent a lot of time at hospitals both as an
inmate and as a visitor. When I was convalescing,
my private nurses had to wheel me past the
general words where the nurses sponged the
patients or helped them into the clothes. I
have seen corpulent men, pregnant women and
the green hued cancer patients all naked. I have
seen wrinkled bellies and thin backs broken with
red bed-sores. Not once have I felt sick looking
at any of them. The human body in all conditions
fills me with awe and tenderness. I am humble
when I look at it.

(Weekly Round Table : 23rd April, 1972 :32).

Kamala Das's sensibility is not limited to her frank
confessions of her sexual life or in her detailed description of private
parts of the body, it is expressly manifested in her attitude to love.
In the ecstasy of love she experiences both pleasure and agony. The
feeling of being jilted is most painful to the poet. She offers an
aggressively independent assessment of man-woman relationship that
makes most of the poems speak for themselves with distinct voices.
With an unusual spontaneity of expression and intensity of feeling, the
poet articulates her most intimate responses and uninhibitedness in her
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poems, in a sense presenting a novel poetic mode that verges upon
the self confessional

"An Introduction" best sums up Kamala Das's predicament.

It is wholly female as well as wholly Indian, and also part of the
general Indo-English dilemma. The run-on lines, the casual
juxtaposition of her own responses with suggestions made by others,
the defiant assertion of her right to use a language, which become
hers alone, her account of her husband's rejection of her love-
described more fully in her autobiography - all these lead up to the

fact of her loneliness, for she would not fit in with the "Categorizers".

In her poems, her persona is always present, playing its varied role
which define her as woman, sexual partner or lust object.

The human body to Kamala Das, is of deep interest and
fascination. It is through the contours, shapes and dimensions of the
fascination It is through the contours, shapes and dimensions of the body that
Kamala Das explores the theme of love and lust. Her obsessive search
for true love has often ended in despair because the flow of true love
is always as it seems could not take off beyond the body. Das situates the

concepts of love and lust in the dialectical interplay of the soul and
body However, the body is important because it is the source of
excitation and thrill. The body is the gateway to the spiritual, for the
spiritual cannot be conceived without its material origin. It is for this
that Das is an admirer of physical beauty free from vulgarity. She has
been conscious of her own dark skin and poor features and always
liked to appear dressed in silk and jewellery.

I hated to see myself as I really was in
mirrors which threw back at me the pathetic
contours of my thin body and the plain face
with the protruding teeth. (1976. 50).

The poet is aware of the beauty and ugliness of the human
body and treats it as a symbol of disgust when lust fills it. The body
is subjected to lust, disease, pain and death. The body appears in
Kanala Das’s poetry often as a symbol of lust and consequent
emotional corruption. In the ecstasy of love male and female differences
vanish and the lovers become one. However, her concern with the
theme of the body may seem ambiguous. If at one level she loves it
intensely, at another level, she loathes it as an unwelcome burden.
This loathing is not so much of a feeling of its inadequacy as of her
own prolonged illness. Moreover, one may locate the articulation of an
interrogative stance that has been often traditional and radical. If we
accept Das as a feminist, her treatment of body as a burden is to
focus more of its relevance to the woman’s creative consciousness.

In “The Freaks” the poet’s disgust with the lustful
body is expressed in phrases such as 'sun-stained cheek and mouth, a
dark cavern'. Decay and disease of the body kill both love and lust.

This body that I wear without joy, this body
Burdened with lenience, slender joy, owned
By a man of substance, shall perhaps wither...

The male body's several attractions fascinate the poet even when they
are linked with lust - the leonine grace, hemlock smile, 'the deep
armpits and the shadowed groin'. However, it is contemptible and
abhorrent when the body pulsates with mere lust:

...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 ...(The Looking Glass ; 1967 : 7-11)

This male vulgarity of lust is counterbalanced by the female's stinking seductions:
.... the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your
Endless female hungers...
(The Looking Glass' : 1967 : 13 - 16)

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

...Oh yes getting
A man to love is easy, but living
Without him afterward may have to be
Faced... (1967; 16-19)

Kamala Das’s frequent bouts of illness and nervous breakdown have made her the recipient of her husband’s protection, and during such periods ‘there developed’, as she tells us, ‘between myself and my husband an intimacy that was purely physical’. And ‘I accepted with gratitude his tenderness which was but lust, loud and savage, for it seemed like a good substitute for love’. But more than this, it was her own body in its nakedness that she began to accept totally:

Whenever he tried to strip me of my clothes, my Shyness clung to me like a second skin and made my movements graceless. Each pore of my skin became at that moment a seeing eye, an eye that viewed my body with distaste. But during my illness, I shed my shyness and for the first time in my life learned to surrender totally in bed with my pride intact and blazing (1976; 100)

One of the ways in which Kamala Das’s conflict between her physical and spiritual aspects of love can be understood and appreciated
is by understanding her attitude to the place of words in the love-experience. The intensity of passions makes words irrelevant in the poems of Kamala Das Silence, and not words, are the strength of her love-experience. Either love is identified with physical relationship or it exists as an unfulfilled longing. While a complete physical gratification benumbs the body and buries momentarily all longing, it troubles the poet for she is not sure whether she was really loved or not.

Kamala Das is concerned with love as the innermost reality, the naked self as distinct from the mask of social convention and mere physicality. Her conflict between the coarse physicality of life and the informing and harmonising principle of love and the desire for freedom from all material trappings is achieved in some of her poems that exudes in a life flowing rhythm and cadence. It is difficult to say whether Kamala Das succeeds in resolving the conflict between the physical and the spiritual aspects of love, however, there is no doubt that the poems in which she articulates this conflict are authentic and moving:

Love is not important, that makes the blood
carouse, nor the man who brands you with his
mark, but is shed as slough at the end of each
Embrace (‘Jaisurya’; 1967; 21-24)
‘A Relationship’ identifies love with physical desire. The ‘sting of rejection and deception is juxtaposed with ‘body’s wisdom’ which tells that the poet would find rest and peace in her lover’s arms though he might betray her. Here love is older than the lover by ‘myriad saddened centuries’. Her desire makes the male beautiful. It originates in the primordial instincts of the lovers. The betrayal with words does not matter so long as the body whispers wisdom and so long as the lovers ‘communicate’ this wisdom to one another. She knows that neither verbal harshness nor verbal disloyalty can destroy their bonds:

...Betray me?
Yes. he can. but never physically
Only with words that curl their limbs at
Touch of air and die with metallic sighs.
Why care I for their quick sterile sting while
My body’s wisdom tells and tells again
That I shall find, my rest, my sleep, my peace
And even death nowhere else but in
My betrayer’s arms...
(1965 ; 9 - 17)

‘In Love’ is a poem of a mild variation of the same theme and focusses on the carnal nature of physical love. The poem brings the poet face to face with her unpleasant memory of haunting sexual experience. She is hesitant to call it love at all for its sensual completeness is forced without caring for ‘the moody mind’:

...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...
(1965;7-16)

The concentrated warmth of the movement of physical union, like that of ‘the burning mouth of sun’, is too complete, self-contained and intense in itself to be identified with love, perhaps even to be named.
The sun with its heat is suggestive of the glow of passion and lust.
The ‘unending lust; which binds the lovers together momentarily is suggested by the imagery of ‘male limbs as carnivorous plants’:

...his limbs like pale and Carnivorous plants reaching out for me...
(1965;4-6).

The tranquillity attained in lust slowly fades into a death reverie provoked by the sight of the ‘corpse-bearers’. ‘The sleek crows flying like poison on wings’ resurrect the noxious memory of love-making. In ‘The Suicide’, like Walt Whitman, Kamala Das underlines the fact that the body and the soul are inseparable. Therefore, she cannot choose between a physical and spiritual death.
But the sea in the poem expresses a preference for her soul because

I throw the bodies out
I cannot stand their smell.
Only the souls may enter
The vortex of the sea.
(1967;9-12)

The emotional restlessness of the poet in the volume 'The Descendants' is more complex and more accentuated partly because of the positivity of the 'body's wisdom' which is qualified by the new recognition that the body itself is subject to decay and that this brings physical ugliness into view. This is in sharp contrast to the poet's volume 'Summer in Calcutta' where the devouring vastness of the forest fire is used to focus the poet's all absorbing white-hot sensibility. In 'Ferns' there is ironic glorification of physical love even when the poet is painfully aware of its sad end. The poem arrests sexual love in an image of self-devouring and self-mocking intensity which suggests that perhaps there is a sense which her glorification of physical love carries with it an element of disenchantment. The putrescent sensuality that haunts the relationship of the lovers is conveyed through such metaphors as 'dismembered heads', 'night streets grinning in static mirth' and 'eat its own hotted flesh' and confirmed by the pictorial lines:

...and our
Bodies stacked on beds will mimic the slow
Gestures of the mind and take on the blan\nIn silent mimic...

(1967; 16 - 19)

Desire is identified with the flesh. In its various
forms it fascinates as well as troubles. Kamala Das identifies desire
with sexuality. The idea of sexuality runs like forest fire in Kamala
Das's poetry. However, it is the disappointment and disgust with
sexual union without love that mark most of her poems. In her poems
love and hate, excitement and depression appear side by side. In her
life-long search for true love and true lover, the poet has stumbled
on the painful discovery that man succumbs only to the snare of lust.
Thus the woman is nothing more than a passive participant in the
ritual of sensuality planned by man. Graces of love are unknown to
him:

Men are worthless, to trap them
Use the cheapest bait of all, but never
Love...

('A Losing Battle': 1965: 3 - 5)

And the cheapest bait is lust. The poet's repeated forays into the
intricacies of sexuality, lust and depression are laced with a longing
for an ideal man to fill her dreams with the hues of love. In spite
of her obsession with the hectic love life that never get fully realized,
the poet has never been a nymphomaniac, reluctant or otherwise. These
alignments form the basic design in the general pattern of Kamala Das's explorations into the meaning of love, lust and sexuality. For her ideal love is a fulfilled experience attained through sex but beyond its constructive dimensions. It is a tension that envelops the body, the mind and the soul. When love stops with the intimacies of the body, it becomes lust and the lovers are deprived of the ultimate bliss which is part of an ideal man-woman relationship. In Kamala Das's poetry, there is an untiring search for the perfect masculine male and each encounter with the male either as husband or the lover, is an experiment in discovering the meaning of true love. The repeated failures of such experiments make her resentful and defiant turning each encounter for her merely as a substitute for the real experience. Her preoccupation with the intensity of sexual love, or with the tensions of a love which she herself cannot fully resolve, does not bring her to the brink of inarticulation. Words are an abstraction and being the product of conscious formulation, are therefore opposed to the elemental darkness of passion. This is one of the strands which runs through her poetry, and time, and again she shows us the inadequacy of language to cope with the weight and depth of her emotional experiences. As Kadiatu Kanneh puts it:

The tremor which seizes the woman from the depths of her lungs, the irresistible
use of the body to complement the
unmanageable ripple of her voice, is an
accurate account not of an inherent feminine
essence but of the direct results of social
marginalization and intolerable sexual
visibility. Not conditioned to wear mastery
in a public scene or to forget the role of
her body in a voyeuristic male society
the female public speaker acts, in this prototypical
case with a shivering uncertainty,
 handling the language of politico-theoretical
discourse with stumbling skill. (1996 , 332 )

In Kamala Das’s case, however, it is not merely a question of the
palpableness of sensuous experience seeking a visible vehicle in
intellectual form and notation, but also a question of the sheer quantity
of energy, the density of passions.

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

That was the only kind of love,
This hacking at each other 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
It is tragic that ‘love’ should manifest itself through such acts of destruction. The reader’s response is further complicated by the presence of a wistfulness in the poetic persona, especially towards the end of the poem. It is implied here that there might have been greater sexual harmony under more congenial circumstances.

Numerous references in her autobiography and other prose works substantiate to a certain extent the kind of discoveries she has made about men on whom some poems are based. In ‘I Studied all Men’, Kamala Das writes how she was spurred by her unusual marriage:

‘...into a hectic love life with a small capital - just a pair of beautiful breasts and a faint musk-rat smell in my perspiration... Each night, after stripping myself, I put aside my soul and entered the arena with a body as efficient as a clockwork toy’. (Love and friendship ; 14)

The concept that marriage was a union of souls and mind seems to have gone astray. It had degenerated into lust bereft of the participation of the soul. And the constant struggle of the poet to free herself from the impasse yielded little result. Kamala Das identifies herself with Radha and seeks to realise union with the Lord. The Radha-Krishna
myth provides an objective correlative for her passionate yearnings and repressed desires. In the above article, she writes:

I was entirely without lust. I hoped that Someday as I lay with a man, some where beneath the bone, at a deadened spot, a contact would be made, and that afterwards each movement of my love would become meaningful. I looked for the beauteous Krishna in every man.

(Love and Friendship; 5)

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

I went him for half an hour
A pure woman, pure misery
Fragile glass ...(1973; 1 - 3)

In the arms of the lover she is reduced to 'an armful of splinters', a handful of broken glass. She enters into love experience with a sort of unconcern bordering on the abominable. The absence of involvement and the sad satiety haunt her:

With a cheap toy's indifference
I enter other's
Lives, and
Make of every trap of lust
A temporary home. (1973; 18 - 22)
The juxtaposition of 'trap' and 'home' instantly illustrates the irreconcilability of her love experience with genuine pleasure. A feeling that nothing endures in man-woman relationship fills the poem. After every encounter, the woman-body feels so badly beaten. There is a search for the 'misplaced father' at the end of the poem. The father figure merges with the lover in a Freudian manner and the picture that emerges is that of 'every woman who seeks love', flitting from one man to another as if in unmentioned revenge against the male order. However vital 'the body's wisdom' may be, it cannot satisfy the poet for long. Nor it can be the end of any search for certitude and meaning, clinical or mythical. In 'The Prisoner', the poet compares herself to the convict who 'studies his prison's geography' with suspicion and hope:

I study the trappings
Of your body, dear love
For I must some day find
An escape from its snare.

(1973; 3-6)

Trapping here has a double meaning for Kamala Das—one is that she wants to be free herself from the trapping of lust to know true love and, the other is the soul's cry against the mortal dress. Either way there is a trap since body and soul are not envisaged by Kamala Das.
as separate entities there is little qualitative difference between losing one or losing the other

Bereft of soul
my body shall be bare
Bereft of body.
My soul shall be bare.

(The Suicide': 1967 : 1 - 4 )

There is no final escape 'from cages of involvement’ and there is no freedom which does not run the danger of becoming imprisoned. Even after recovering from her ailments, Kamala Das has to reconcile herself with 'the weary body settling into accustomed grooves’. In the poem 'After the Illness', the imagery of lust and flesh suggesting her recovery, reviving the will to live:

...There was not much flesh left for the flesh to hunger, the blood had weakened too much to lust ...

(1973 : 10 - 12 )

In spite of the body's unattractiveness and skin's numbness what made her husband lust for her? Was it the 'deeply hidden soul'? In attempting to find answers to these questions, Kamala Das contradicts herself with the stance that the body and soul are one entity as in 'The Suicide'. It seems here in 'After the Illness' that the body and soul are separate. It is characteristic of the poet not to attempt to resolve the dilemma beyond the limits inherent in the very nature of her own experience. Kamala Das seems to suggest that
perhaps the body and soul are inseparable, but she finds it difficult to experience the wholeness, the sense of completeness without a shadow of doubt and uncertainty. Her exploration into the nature of lust is not merely confined to the exposure of the male personality but also, as indicated above, into her own anguished self. This is the despair that every woman goes through mostly the married ones. There is a perceptible gap between their longing and its gratification. In the anguish and anger of unfulfilled desires there hides a tacit confession that the woman needs the male’s solicitude to realise herself fully. Instead of lending a helping hand to the wife to raise herself to the pedestal of self-realisation, the husband exploits her body and destroys her mind:

...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. You called me wife.
(‘The Old Playhouse’; 1973; 8-12).

The husband’s lust administered to the poet in ‘lethal doses’ rendered her life joyless, dark and passive. Kamala Das’s protest here, is not merely against the superficial aberrations of married life but also against the usual domestic credo that permits the free exhibition of the male ego in all its horrid manifestations.
Kamala Das has always been concerned with the precariousness and incompleteness of the love-relationship. The precariousness may be due to the change of feelings or to the nature of sexual love which, Kamala Das, despite her occasional glorification of it, finds inherently incomplete and brief. From the theme of the incompleteness of love, it is quite logical for the poet to turn to the very precariousness of the body on which it depends. Sometimes, such a deep immersion in this theme leads Das to reflect on the contrasting attitudes in man and woman to love. At other times, these are complimentary, even though physiologically they are opposite: 'the hungry haste of rivers' in man and 'the ocean's tireless waiting' in the woman. Woven into this is the poet's central theme: the exploration of the true nature of love and of the extent to which the intensity of love, when achieved, is self-sufficient. There is a frequent reference to illness; and the concern with the decay of body and with all the sensuous pleasure that is bound up with its physical limitations is more pervasive than before. The decaying house of the grandmother is sometimes internalised through physical symbols as in the following:

My body is like a mansion where once parties were given. Wine flowed. The dancers danced, the musicians sang. Every guest was noble. Every guest was a pleasure seeker. Then the house crumbled. And one day the slum dwellers began to arrive with their shabby luggage. Each step they took was with an apology.
We know that we ought not to have come here, they said. Like the slumdwellers the aches came creeping in a night into this body where once only pleasures lived. These are the new tenants, they know that they have come to stay.

(‘The Sparrow on the Glass - Pane’, No-5)

In ‘Gino’ multiple meanings emerge from the single central concept. It encompasses the terrestrial delusion of love and lust as well as the ethereal visions of life, death and rebirth. Juxtaposition of lust and death is a common device in Kamala Das’s poetry that projects the consciousness of futility wrapping all lust activity. In the latter part of the poem, the poet discards the idea of triumphant love instead of chasing it, she realises that they are unreal. She also feels that the sheer burden of the body growing uncomely and gross with years and its slow decay are more real:

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.

(1973 : 37-41)

The strength of Kamala Das’s poetry lies in its haunting ability to awaken our dormant human sympathies and our repressed passion for genuine man - woman relationship. Her ideal man - woman relationship is based on love without lust, passion without desire for
possession and sympathy without condescension. Kamala Das has admitted that there is ‘lot of love’ in her poems. She wrote:

Love is beautiful, whatever four-lettered names
The puritans call it by. It is the foretaste of paradise. It is the only pastime that involves the soul.

(‘Obscenity and Literature’ : April 1972).

But she is not a poet of free love as allegedly some critics opine. On the contrary, she upholds the sanctity of domestic and marital relationship. But she is disheartened when marital love degenerates into lust, and when marital relationship turns into one of domination by the male over the female. The traces of sexual repression and gloomy foreboding found in the love poems of Emily Dickinson and Emily Bronte are absent in the poems of Kamala Das of love and lust. She is perhaps, the most feminine among the women poets writing in English and her feminine sensibility is manifested not in her fulmination against the male world but in her rapture and excitement in receiving pure love and her subsequent disillusionment when the same degenerates into lust. Her repeated explorations of the same theme in poem after poem is an incantatory and ritualistic performance that secures for her emotional purgation and ultimate tranquillity and serenity. Kamala Das’s poems on the theme of love does not exist for its own sake but concerns with lust, death, decay, illness and the human
body. If lust produces frustration in the woman subjected to it, it also produces cruelty in the man who practices it.

Thus love and hate, excitement and depression appear side by side. Love expression in Kamala Das's poetry is a kaleidoscope of numerous tensions. Their several alignments form the basic design in the general pattern of her explorations into the meaning of love, lust and sexuality. For her, ideal love is a fulfilled experience attained through sex but moves beyond its physical dimensions. It is a tension that envelops the body, the mind and the soul. When love is imprisoned within the intimacies of the body, it becomes lust and the lovers are deprived of the ultimate bliss which is a part of every ideal man-woman relationship. Since, the quest in her case is a failure, sex is no more than a 'mindless surrender' or a heartless participation and not a 'humming fiesta.' K.R.S. Iyengar rightly points out that hers "is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man-made world." (1984; 680).

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