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## Treatment of Love and Sex in Kamala Das's Poetry

Manju, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

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Kamala Das (1934-2009)

Courtesy: <http://www.bookchums.com/blog-detail/guest-blogs/guest-blog-remembering-amma-kamala-das/NDEx.html>

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## Abstract

In the history of Indian English poetry, Kamala Das is a well known, interesting and controversial poet in post-colonial era. The best thing about her poetry is the openness and the frankness which is unusual in Indian context. Her style of writing best expresses the feminine sensibility and its suppression in the male dominated society.

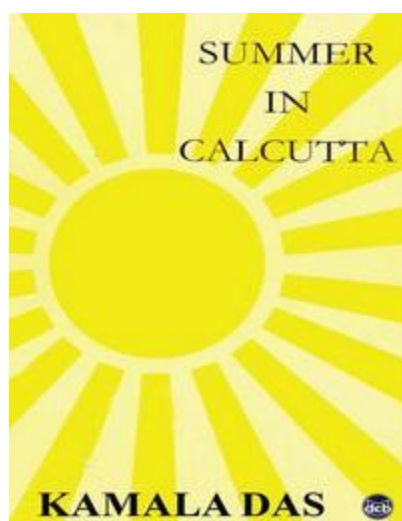
Our country is having a patriarchal system in society. Man is considered as the head of the family as well as owner of its members. Female is the main sufferer in patriarchal system. Man assumes himself as the owner of female's mind as well as body. Husband-wife relationship is also not an exception.

This paper focuses on husband-wife relationship as depicted in the poems of Kamala Das.

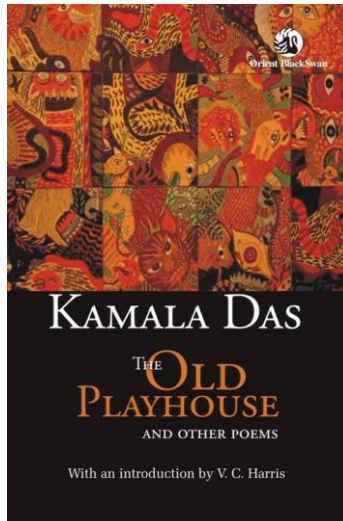
**Keywords:** Frustration, Unsuccessful

## Kamala Das' Love Poems

Kamala Das holds a prominent place in post-colonial era. Poetry was in her blood as there were two poets in her family: her mother and maternal uncle. Kamala Das being a bilingual writer writes in two languages, English and Malayalam. Her poetic output in English is thin. It consists of three slender volumes: *Summer in Calcutta* 1965, *The Descendants* 1967 and *The Old Playhouse and other poems*. Most of the poems from her two volumes *The Descendants* and *The Old Playhouse and other poems* are love poems.



It's not easy to describe each and every love poem of Kamala Das. But with the help of a few well known creations of Kamala Das, namely, "An Introduction", "Glass", "The Suicide", "The Old playhouse", and "Composition", an attempt is made to show the treatment of love and sex in her poetry.



### **Kamala's Woman**

Kamala's woman in "An Introduction" is only sixteen when she gets married. Traditionally, a married man thinks that his wife is a sexual object and wants to make love with her, irrespective of her age as shown in the following lines:

When I asked for love when 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.

(Das.12)

### **Love and Lust Faced by Kamala's Woman**

In "Composition" the woman talks about her relationship with her husband during early days of marriage:

When I got married  
my husband said  
you may have freedom  
as much as you want.

(Das.77, 78)

Husband gives the woman freedom but what kind of freedom, he has not stated. Though he gives freedom to his wife, this does not apply to the sexual context as he is rude with his wife during sex. The woman reveals this through the poem entitled "Glass":

He drew me to him rudely with a lover's haste,

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an armful of splinters, designed to hurt and pregnant  
with pain

(Das.103)

### **Woman's Questions**

In "Composition" the woman asks her husband

I asked my husband,  
am I hetero  
am I lesbian  
or am I just plain frigid

(Das.78)

These types of questions may arise naturally in a woman's mind when her husband neither loves her nor has any concern regarding her desires. Although a husband remains unconcerned about his wife's feelings, he expects her to be happy all the time.

### **Pretend to be Happy**

In "The Suicide" following lines represent this:

I must pose,  
I must pretend,  
I must act the role,  
Of happy woman,  
Happy wife.

(Das.28)

To look happy, a wife has to pose and pretend only to make her husband happy. She has to act in order to get the look of a happy wife. She has to wear a mask of happiness. For an Indian wife, her husband is her whole life, but for man she is only a part of his life.

### **The Shrewd Nature of a Husband**

A husband's shrewd nature is depicted in the poem "The Suicide". The woman tells that it is easier to hold sea than her husband:

Holding you is easy  
Clutching at moving water,

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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

(Das. 30)

In this picture, we see that the woman's husband is so harsh natured that the woman has to use alcoholic drinks to make him available for making love. Wife toils for mutual understanding but she remains unsuccessful.

### **Problems and Failures**

Woman reveals her problems and failures in the poem entitled "The Oldplayhouse":

I come to you but to learn  
What I was and by learning....  
.....all its light put out

(Das.100)

### **Unable to Establish Self-identity**

The wife's longing to realize about self remain unfulfilled. She only comes to know about man's lust. The monstrous ego of husband wouldn't allow him to treat the woman in any other fashion than as a wife. The only duty of wife is to look after his needs and obey him. She loses her will and reasoning ability. She becomes a dwarf and just mumbles incoherently. She says she can no more sing or dance. She compares her mind with an old playhouse with "lights put out" as she also has no new ideas.

As K.R.S. Iyenger points out, the subject of her poetry is, "Love is crucified in sex; the sex defiles itself again and again." (K.R.S.Iyenger, 1983:677)

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## **Wants to Be Dead**

In a poem titled “The Suicide”, the wife is so frustrated that she wants to be dead on not getting true love from her husband.

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.

(Das.28)

The wife is fed up with her husband’s unemotional love-making. She only wants to be loved and she said that if she will not get true love for which she hungered for, she wants to become dead, i.e., to take her life out.

## **Unending Concern and Love for Husband**

Though the woman shows courage to die, she is also afraid to disobey her husband because she doesn’t want to hurt him due to her concern for him as shown in these lines:

I have enough courage to die,  
But not enough.  
Not enough to disobey him,  
Who said not to die  
And hurt that certain way.

(Das.28)

The husband is not concerned with the woman emotionally but he has asked her not to die because he has realised that living without a wife is terrible and he is still young. So he asks the woman to leave the thought of dying.

## **Love and Comfort in Extra-marital Love**

Later in her married life the woman meets a man who shows concern for her which she doesn’t receive from her husband. She starts seeking love and comfort in an extra-marital relationship as shown in these lines from “An Introduction”:

Later, I met a man. Loved him. Call him.

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not by any name, he is every man who wants his  
woman, just as I am every woman who seeks love.

(Das.13)

According to Devindra Kohli (1975), “[W]hen Kamala Das speaks for love outside marriage she is not really propagating adultery and infidelity, but merely searching for a relationship which gives both love and security” (27).

### **Mutual Adjustment**

When the woman remains unsuccessful in extra-marital relationship she changes her mind from the search for love to a search for mutual adjustment, as in “Composition”.

It may be  
that in my heart  
I have replaced love with guilt  
and discovered  
that both love and hate are  
involvements.

(Das.77)

Both love and hate are involved in the discovery of love in extra- marital relationship, “love” because the woman is in search of it, and “hate” because her search fails. The woman feels guilty of her extra- marital relationship.

### **To Conclude**

Kamala Das’s approach to the theme of love is original which defines the complexity of man-woman relationship. Her depiction of love experience does not revolve around the traditional frame of womanhood but it revolves around the agony of a woman who remains unsuccessful in getting love from her husband through physical relationship. The woman as portrayed seeks sexual-spiritual fulfilment in extra marital relationship also but remains unsuccessful.

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