

Exploration of “Self” in the Study of Kamla Das’ *the Decedents*

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Abstract – This paper is an attempt of to understand the vision of Kamala Das' poem named *The Decedents* from the feministic point of view. In a number of Das' poetry, there is an intense voice of self and sufferings. The poems are not only a mirror of her own world but also a kind confronts with society which is primarily a patriarchal in nature. The sensitivity and emotions flowed in the present poem is enough to understand the ceaseless boundaries of emotive senses.

Key Words: Self, the Decedents, Patriarchal

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The second volume by Kamala Das, namely *The Descendants* has 23 poems in all. In this collection, there are many poems which are *Death Conscious, Death Obsessed, the Descendants, the Invitation* and *The Composition*. These are some of the finest poems in this collection. *The Composition* includes total seven units and all units vary in length. In the first section, Kamala Das very beautifully explains that how she faces the sea and how she lay beside her grandmother when she notices the breaking surf at nights. Loss of innocence, the discovery of horror, the tragedy of growth is all what second unit speaks about. In the third unit tells of, sexual interactions and marriage with both men and women. This unit ends with the saying that poetess misses her granny. The fourth unit describes about the similarity of all sexual encounters and external world to the soul. The fifth unit is about love between a grandmother and a grand-daughter. This unit recalls the time when narrator's grandmother invited her for a night to spend with her in the old house. The sixth unit makes us aware of dangerous world of marriage, friendship, prostitution and enmity. The final unit explains that crumbling of the self brings no rest and also that pains continue and immortality of consciousness is a certainty. "The freedom to decompose" is the only freedom.

The poems of the speaker go through early memory and also through pain of growing:

"The tragedy of life is not death but growth; the
child growing into adult/and growing out of
needs/ discovering/that the old have black
rimmed nails and scalps that emanate/a sweet,

mouldy smell./In the years that followed/ I was

busy growing/I had then/no time at all for the

sea./But, there was off and on a seascape in

my dreams/in the water/sloshing up/and sliding
down." (31)

Tone of Hardian pessimism was found in "Shut Out that Moon" and "Neutral Tones." "The Descendants" revolves around nihilism. The poem, "The Suicide" explains that constant distraction can be found in the sea:

"The sea is garrulous today. Come in,

Come in what do you lose by dying and

Besides, yours losses are my gains." (25)

Sea offers one kind of death, and the strains of death explicit in "A Request" and in "The Invitation." Another poem, namely "Convicts" shows a physical experience that belongs to no intellectual language and also shows physical love in the elemental terms. "Substitute" is another poem of both truculent and poignant. "Glass" has a theme of conventions of a hypocritical society which makes one's feeling of emptiness more painful. Another poem, "Captive" explains the love of Kamala Das as "an empty gift" and "A glided empty container." This poem also describes Kamala Das as the prisoner of "the womb's blinded hunger, the muted whisper at the Core." Combination of the meditative and the narrative details of whole gamut can be found in "Jaisurya."

Kamala Das is no doubt a love poet. We can find her poems themes of unfulfilled love and pining for love. This theme sets very well for "The Dance of the Eunuchs." In this poem speaker describes an objective correlation in the dance of the eunuchs. Passion, sexual drought and rottenness was stimulated by the action of shirts going round and round. The contrast remains sustained all through the poem. The unfulfilled and unquenchable love of the women can be related with the dance of the eunuchs which was a dance of the sterile. "The Freaks" also has the same theme. Kamala Das was totally transformed after eating his husband's magical loaf like one happened in *Alice in the Wonderful*. This helps her husband to embalm her with lust. But it's not only lust what she is pinning for. She also wants sympathy and understanding with a mature person to have an identity with him and above all.

Kamala Das greatness as love poet comes from the fact that her love is rooted from her personal experience. She was married at the early age of 16 and soon after her marriage she discovered that she was tied to a hollow relationship which can't be untied. Love and marriage need not to be mutually exclusive, but in the vision of Kamala Das, it has to be proved. Account of her love experiences may not be true but it surely will be truly emotional.

No doubt, her love poetry, her treatment of the sexual love and the human body was shocking and against the society and orthodoxy. From this, we can conclude that Kamala Das was a very frank and open minded women and poet. Now, this was very obvious that she refused to follow the traditional role of a woman which a wife was expected to play.

In the poems like "Love", "In Love", "The Prisoner" relationship of man-women is shown as the pleasant escape from the stress and trivialities of day to day life. Although the concept of "Happy Prison" is a Romantic literature but then also Kamala Das was able to give this poem an un-Romantic twist:

"Your body is my prison, Krishna.

I cannot see beyond it

Your darkness blinds me

Your love words shut out the wise world's din." (54)

And again,

"As the convict studies his prison's geography

I study theappings

of your body, dear love

for, I must someday find

an escape from its snare" (56)

Kamala Das is serious about love and a realist when dealing with her own lover and she understands, "What is love":

"While I wait for your phone call, I do not

know who to believe, You, who say who love,

Or the voice that tells me no, no, no ...

... What is the use

of love, all this love, if all it gives is

Fear, you the fear of hurting you?" (145)

"Until I found you

I wrote verse, drew pictures

and went out with friends for walks.

Now that I love you,

curled like an old mongrel

my life lies content

in you..." (66)

The present state of mind of Kamala Das is such an unclear memory that she is unable to distinguish between her lovers of youth and now she can't declare anyone superior or inferior:

"At my age there are no longer Any

homecomings. Nothing can bring

back a twinkle in these eyes that

took root in memory

During those innumerable

Trips behind a dear one's hoarse. No,

I cannot recollect the face

Of the man who told me he loved

My poetry, just yesterday,

At someone's party, or his name

I see only those faces that.

Have returned of dust, or my childs

As it looked fifteen years ago.

My mind sleeps, I watch the road lights

Of vehicles love on the dark

Looks of night like women's shuttles..."(71)

The definition of love for Kamala Das is different from other poets as she thinks that experience of love is beyond sex:

"We played once a husband me, my lover and I,

His body needing mim

dis ageing body in its pride needing the need for mine
And

each time his lust was quietened." (107)

Das' unusually alert antennae were turned towards authenticity in life and she subjected each being too sensitive radar. Human beings are not mere abstractions to her. Her dominated being over society's norm can easily be seen in her works. This kind of boldness reflects her a wide range of intellectualism. That was actually tragedy of her life.

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