

Depiction of Love in 'Summer in Calcutta' by Kamala Das'

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Abstract:

Kamala Das's "Summer in Calcutta" is a poignant exploration of love, loss, and the complexities of female desire. While the poem doesn't explicitly use the term "depreciation of love," it certainly portrays a disillusionment with romantic ideals and a confrontation with the transient nature of love and relationships. It would be, in truth, no exaggeration to say that love is the main motive of Kamala's poetry through and through. Kamala Das herself accepted that the theme of love is subject in her poetry; so there is 'lot of love' in her poems. She upholds the sacredness of family love and matrimonial relationship. But she is discouraged when matrimonial love collapses into lust, when matrimonial relationship turns into one of the controls by the male above the female. Her poems are the brutal appearance of the emotionalism caused by dissatisfaction when love turns into its contrary only because of male selfishness and egoism. She is indisputably a poet of love and sex. The poem Summer in Calcutta deals with the theme of love and lust.

Key Words: Love, Lust, Sex, Female, Dissatisfaction

In Kamala's poem Summer in Calcutta, there are a lot of poems that depict the theme of love, lust and sexuality. But these should not lead one to believe that she has been demanding all along for infidelity. They rather clear her strong desire to get freedom from the control of a maledominated society and pass a happy, and equal counterpart with man.

Here are some key themes and ideas from the poem that relate to the concept of "depreciation of love":

The fleeting nature of love: The poem contrasts the intense passion of love with the harsh realities of life, suggesting that love, like the summer season, is temporary and subject to change. The speaker's experiences with love have left her feeling disillusioned and questioning its true meaning.

The pain of betrayal and abandonment: The speaker hints at past relationships where she experienced betrayal and abandonment, leaving her with emotional scars. These experiences have contributed to her cynicism about love and her fear of vulnerability.

The search for identity and self-expression: The poem explores the speaker's struggle to define herself beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother. She seeks love and fulfillment on her own terms, challenging societal expectations and embracing her sensuality.

The conflict between desire and societal norms: The poem reflects the tension between the speaker's desires and the constraints of societal norms. She grapples with the conflict between her longing for love and acceptance and her need to break free from societal expectations.

The theme of disillusionment: Overall, "Summer in Calcutta" conveys a sense of disillusionment with the romanticized notions of love. The speaker's experiences have led her to question the idealized image of love and to confront its complexities and contradictions.

The female in her asserts a strong will and the strength of revenge, and wants to activate the idealistic female and makes her to rise in rebellion against all kinds of oppression and domination being carried out on her by nobody else but by her co-partner i.e man. Kamala as a poet is never exhausted of talking clearly for female as a whole, and numerous of her

poems in *Summer in Calcutta* should be read in this light. Having cleared the position of Kamala Das as a poet of love and sex — which is hardly

ever traditional, it is relevant to have a look at the vast quantity of her love poetry. There is no doubt, love and sex have a major place in her poetry and appear as one of its leading themes but *Summer in Calcutta* has a quite good number of poems which are wholly on love and sex. Such poems are : *The Freaks*, *In Love*, *My Grandmother's House*, *A Relationship*, *Loud Posters*, *Love*, *the Bangles*, *The Sea Shore*, *Summer In Calcutta*, *The Sun Shine Cat*, *Forest Fire*, *Afterwards*, and *The Testing of the Sirens*. Of these poems, some are about the poetess's pure love for a near and dear one, while others are about her lack of expectation in love, and only a few about lust. She confesses that she "...wrote the poems in the book *Summer in Calcutta* to make a man love me, to

break down his resistance." 1

As a truthful poet of love, Kamala Das looks very truthful and naive, without the 'intellectual pride' and the family air. It should, however, be remembered that Kamala Das wrote her poetry against a more traditional and prohibited society than that of other contemporary poets. She has full experience about the suffering of a woman who suffer due to a submissive nature. She wants to show way for her individual freedom and independence. More often than not she focuses on sexual love, and her woman-persona rises as though in a mood of revolt. The love poems of Kamala frequently depicts the real picture of a suffering woman. Mark the following extract in this connection:

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,

Theme of Love in Kamala Das.....

Brighter charm, all that comes my way.

.....My eyes lick at you like flames, my nerves

Consume; and, when I finish with you. In the

Pram, near the tree and, on the park bench, I spit

Out small heaps of ash, nothing else.

(Summer in Calcutta: Forest Fire)

There are different kinds of love in Kamala's poetry, and the very first volume shows an ample evidence of it. In Love, she expresses her pleasure and satisfaction in love:

Until I found you,

I wrote verse, drew pictures,

And, went out with friends

For stalks....

Now that I love you,

Curled like an old mongrel

My life lies, content,

In you..

(Summer in Calcutta: Love,).

It is clearer that, she does not like ‘physical’ love that her strong husband showers on her; she in the search of emotional identity which he is not able to afford to her. The poem An Introduction has a dual theme; it deals with the language of identity and the identity of a woman as a woman. Like most poems of Kamala Das, An Introduction begins with a statement:

I don't know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with
Nehru. I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
Theme of Love in Kamala Das.....
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queer nesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,

It is as human as I am human, don't

You see?

(Summer in Calcutta: An Introduction,)

A mild sort of angst and an anxiety to assert one's hold over the medium of expression are combined to create a powerful need to admit and to communicate. The success of the confessional poems seems to depend on the honesty of the self and the inquiring minds integrity in thought, feeling, and creation and Kamala Das impresses by being very much herself in her poems. English Language, as the speaker of the poem unemphatically and without any sort of irony, says:

Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is

Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears an

(Summer in Calcutta: An Introduction,)

What the speaker tells us is that she has a mind that sees, hears, and is aware. The task of a poet is to find a linguistic structure and a frame of reference to communicate what he or she sees, hears, and is aware of. This creative urge leads to a confession of the speaker's experience as a married woman, not exactly knowing what marriage is, and what it demands of her as a woman:

I was child, and later they

Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs

Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When

I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask

Theme of Love in Kamala Das.....

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.

(Summer in Calcutta: An Introduction)

The lines reveal the fact that the poet's early marriage seems to have given a vulgar jerk to her awareness as a woman. The 'he' of the poem did not beat her, but her 'sad woman-body felt so beaten.' The speaker seems to consider her "sad woman-body" as the source of trouble. It appears to be a very shameful experience. For a woman, her body seems to stand in the way of establishing her identity. To refresh the self from the shameful experience, the speaker changes her dress, wears a shirt and trousers, cuts her hair short, and ignores her womanliness. The categorizers think that her behaviour smacks of a rebellion against male authority. They advise her:

Dress in Sarees, be girl

Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,

Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in, oh,

Belong (Summer in Calcutta: An Introduction,).

In most Indian homes a young house-wife is expected to be an

embroiderer, a cook, and a supervisor of the family business. She is not

expected to ‘sit on walls or peep through lace draped windows.’ She has

to be recognized with a name:

Be Amy or be Kamala or, better

Still, be Madhavikutty

(Summer in Calcutta: An Introduction,).

Suppose a house-wife is not at calm with herself or with her husband society would tell her to play “pretending games” like, a schizo or a nympho. Till this point, the poem is a mild satire on the male attitudes and the conventional gender role assigned to a wife in terms of the dos and don’ts. From this the rest of the poem follows as the mild protest of a woman who very much wishes to have an identity of her own and earnestly seeks it:

...I met a man, loved him. Call

Theme of Love in Kamala Das.....

Him not by any name, he is everyman

Who wants a woman, just as I am every

Woman who seeks love. In him. ..the hungry haste

Of rivers, in me...the oceans’ tireless

Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,

The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and,

Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself

If in this world, he is tightly packed like the
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. 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.
(Summer in Calcutta: An Introduction,)

The concluding section of the poem brings to the surface the difficult of a woman's identity, the male identity is everywhere taken for approved as suggested by the image "the sword in its sheath." The poem ends with the theme of details of unusual roles a woman is not expected to play by categorizers. But notwithstanding moral-socio-political categorization, every woman has a self and the subjective need to call herself "I." In Kamala Das's poems, the quest for identity of a woman as a woman goes a long way in making the self out of various disjunctive psychosomatic pressures which make her sometimes a victim and sometimes a crazy woman in whom we find an evaluating reason. In short, it is clear from above that Kamala Das' poem "Summer in Calcutta" is full of love theme. The poem shows in particular the poetess's own love and suffering through her life but in general it depicts the love and suffering of the whole women in this world.

In short, "Summer in Calcutta" doesn't explicitly mention "depreciation of love," it explores the themes of disillusionment, loss, and the fleeting nature of love, which are all related to the concept of love losing its value or appeal. The poem reflects the speaker's journey of self-discovery as she navigates the complexities of love and relationships in a patriarchal society. If you'd like to delve deeper into this topic, you can explore critical essays and analyses of "Summer in Calcutta" that focus on themes of love, desire, and feminism in Kamala Das's poetry. Additionally, you can research the social and cultural context in which the poem was written to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by women in India during that time.

References

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