SHADES OF LOVE IN THE POEMS OF KAMALA DAS

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A woman has always been a topic of discussion since time immemorial. A woman lives in a world which is very different from that of a man. Her thoughts and actions follow a different trail from that of a man. Since ages people have tried various ways and methods to find out what exactly goes into the making of a woman. The strange part is that yet so far no one has come up with any clues on what exactly constitutes a woman! For a woman her world cannot revolve without love. It may be love for her parents, her spouse, her siblings, her kids, friends or relatives. In all these relationships love plays a pivotal part in her life.

It was so true for the love queen of Kerala, Madhavi Kutty alias Kamala Das alias Kamala Suraiyya. She had traversed dangerous boundaries of the mind and the soul to seek the quintessential piece of the magical iota called love. She tossed her dice of love several terms in several ways but unfortunately was unable to attain it. It at all she did it was in fragments and pieces like alms thrown into a beggar’s bowl. Till her very end she was short of the quota that she had sought of love.

When she at first was able to discern some potion of love she seemed to be so content with it. The lines from her poem entitled, ‘Love’ very vividly portrays it.

.....Now that I love you,
Curled like an old mongrel
My life lies content, In you.....

Though she seems to be avidly in love with her husband knowing very well that he has betrayed her, strangely she still feels at peace lyng next to him. This feeling is evident in her poem entitled, ’A Relationship’.

.....My body’s wisdom tells and tells again
That I shall find my nest, my sleep, my peace
And even death nowhere else but here in
My betrayer’s arms’.

The physicality of love is very much evident in her poem entitled, ’Looking Glass’.

.....There was a burning in our
Veins and the cool mountain nights did
Nothing to lessen heat’.

When she is unable to get the love that she so desperately seeks, he is prepared to face death calmly. The lines from her famous poem entitled, ’Suicide’ aptly show this.

.....I want to be loved
And
If love is not to be had
I want to be dead.’
Her unquestionable urge to think beyond death as part of love is portrayed in the poem entitled, ‘A Request’ where she says:

‘When I die
Do not throw
The meat and bones away
But pile them up
And let them tell
By their smell
What life was worth
On this earth
What love was worth
In the end’.

She is desperate that there is nowhere that she can get the depth of love that she anticipates. Everything seems to be artificial on this front. Her lin from her poem entitled, ‘Captive’ demonstrates this.

My love is an empty gift, a gilded
Empty container, good for show, nothing else’.

In another beautiful poem, ‘The Stone Age’, she feels depressed that her husband happens to be dumb and not understand her trauma of wanting to be deeply loved by him. The mechanical act of daily doses of sex from her husband frustrates her so much that much against her wishers, that uncannily sex with other men rather than her own lawfully wedded husband is a fancy that enters her mind and she seeks it through her body. The following lines show her helplessness in this regard.

…..And
Yet on daydreams strong men cast their shadows, they sink
Like white suns in the swell of my Dravidian blood;.....

The same frustration can be seen in her poem, ‘Glass’ where hse is unable to take it for granted that after all she is only a toy for her husband.

…..With a cheap toy’s indifference
I enter others’
Lives, and
Make even trap of lust
A temporary home.....

Even love which should be undeniably inherent in a mother and son relationship seem to evade her. Therefore it is not uncommon that she does not get it from her own sons as well. The following lines from ‘A Widow’s Lament’ show this.

…..My man, my sons, forming the axis
While, I, wife and mother,
Insignificant as a fly
Climbed the glasspanes of their eyes.....

Sex is repulsive to her when it is performed as an act similar to that by animals, casting against sentiments like geniality, sensitivity or even divinity. It horrifies her to no end. In the poem, ‘Freaks’ this feeling it brought out vividly.

‘He talks to me turning a sun stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam.....

She craves for love but unfortunately she never gets it in any form. She is unable to find love in its genuine form. Everywhere she finds it in coated forms which says ‘I want it then give in something in return’. In other words men are prepared to offer her love coated in sex, The poem, ‘The Millionaires at Marine Drive’ is explicit of this feeling.

.....All the hands
The great brown thieving hands groped beneath my
Clothes, their fire was that of an arsonist’s.
Warmth was not their aim, they burn my cities
Down.....

It is also true that unlike most Indian women she is unconventional in her approach to marriage, love and sex and unmindful of the impact that it may have on the society. She is unmindful in her resolve to show her sexual feelings openly. This can be observed in the lines of her poem, ‘Forest Fire’.

‘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.....

She is aware at the same time that men will be men and it is difficult to expect faithfulness from them. In the poem, ‘A Losing Battle’ she holds the reader’s interest very evincingly in the following lines.

‘How can my love hold him when the other
Flaunts a gaudy lust and is lioness
To his Beast?.....

However much she tries to hold on to the man she loves and from whom she expects everything unquestioningly, she is despaired to note that it is difficult to hold on to either the man or his love. In her poem,’The Sunshine Cat’ this sentiment is vivid.

‘They did this to her, the men who knew her, the man
She loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor
Used her, but was a ruthless watcher.....

She hates the fact that a society accepts the fact that a man needs sex but completely disregards this where females are concerned. The society is unmindful of how it treats women in matters regarding sex or matters of sex that imply to women as well. The first few lines from the poem ’The Old Playhouse’ bring vivid recollections of this sorry state of affairs.

.....It was not to gather knowledge
Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn
What I was and by learning, to learn to grow, but every
Lesson you gave wa about yourself. You were pleased
With my body’s response.....

When she realises much to her desperation that Destiny has no plans for her to enjoy love in any form or in any parameter, she turns to find it in its divine form. In the poem, ’Radha’ she says the wait for her lover Krishna was finally over. The wait though long and tedious brings with it the air of chastity and the bondage between the two of them grows stronger.

‘The long waiting
Had made their bond o chaste, and all the doubting
And the reasoning
So that in his first true embrace she was girl
And virgin crying
Everything in me
Is melting.....

The feeling of wanting divine love rather than just physical is brought out in her poem,’The Maggots’ where she realises serenely than divine love is any day better than temporal love, where sex in reality is as good as making love to a corpse. The following lines from the above poem avidly express this sentiment.

‘At sunset on the river bank, Krishna
Loved her for the last time and left.
That night in her husband’s arms Radha felt
So dead that he asked what is wrong
Do you mind my kisses love and she aid
No, not at all, but thought, what is
It to the corpse if the maggots nip?

From the analysis of the few of her poems analysed above, it can be concluded that love was a mirage for Kamala Das. It was that streak of horizon which can only be seen but never touched. So was it in her life. Only a little spiritual succour was all she was able to get inspite of all the trouble she took to get it.

Works Cited
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The Stone Age: Pg.82
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A Widow’s Lament: Pg. 157
Freaks: Pg. 59
A Losing Battle: Pg. 59
The Sunshine Cat: Pg. 67
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Radha: Pg. 77
The Maggots: Pg. 52
The Millionaires At Marine Drive: Pg. 83
Forest Fire: Pg. 170