

# The Journey From Sensuality To Spirituality In Kamala Das's Poems And Its Upanishadic Justification

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## Abstract:

The Upanishadic philosophy covers the spectrum of life from lower truth to higher truth, from gross thinking to subtlety, and from physicality to spirituality. According to the Upanishadic philosophy, human life is encircled by four Purusharthas<sup>1</sup> (Desires). These are 'Artha'<sup>2</sup> (Money), 'Kama'<sup>3</sup> (Desire to copulate), 'Dharma'<sup>4</sup> (Religion), and ultimately 'Moksha'<sup>5</sup> (Salvation). The present article shows that she is at the physical and gross level; her sensuality drives her. This paper highlights that the physical desire felt in the poems of Kamala Das follows the concept of the Upanishadic 'Kama'. Sexual gratification is a natural urge of her body sense. Especially Brihadaranyaka Upanishad gives a transparent view of the natural attachment to sensuousness and marriage. Kamala Das's view on sensual gratification and marriage is immensely invigorated by the Upanishadic ideas of the physical plane. The article shows that the poet, being in the physical plane, naturally perceives physical and sensuous desire. Simultaneously the poet beautifully overcomes the limitation of physical gratification. The present paper displays her clinging to the body and ultimately dispassion for sensuousness showing the significant transformation from temporal titillation to spiritual permanency. This paper highlights that the body is essential for sexuality and spirituality. The desire for the body is sensuality, but the triumph over the body with the power of the Supermind is spirituality.

**Key Words:** Physical Plane, Sensuousness, four Purusharthas (Desires), Krishna Conscience

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## I. Introduction:

The poet Kamala Das is a great name in modern English poetry. Her sensibility in her poems is coloured with multi-aspects of Indian life and even universality. Her poems cater to the tastes of different aspects of life. She paints all themes of life. Physical allurements, love, frustration, the transformation from momentary pleasure to permanent peace, and the ultimate Soul adorn her poetic gallery with tremendous vivacity. The present paper shows that her physical enticement simply maintains the natural desire for copulation with her husband. The paper tries to find out the cause of her passion for physical union with her husband from the Upanishadic light. The physical plane inspires her to sustain the chain of generation. Simultaneously her transformation is shown from the ground of sensuality to spiritual salvation.

### Physical Temptation:

The poem "The Looking Glass" clarifies that the natural attachment between male and female is natural. In this poem, the poet accepts the need for physical love in human life. In the physical plane, the poet glorifies the significance of copulation. At this level, she realizes she is a body, so she hears all the hungry tones of her body.

Getting a man to love you is easy  
Only be honest about your wants as  
Woman.  
(The Looking Glass)

The poet is excessively passionate about love-making with her husband. She is frank in her expression for getting the pleasure of sexuality. Her preparation for satisfying male sexual hunger is exotic. Her honesty is exhibited in the display of her art for love-making in this poem.

Gift him all,  
Gift him what makes you a woman, 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)

The above lines transgress the limit of all reservations and hesitation. From the ground of physicality, she does not find any injustice in her love-making with her husband. Here she is an advisor for a female on how to take part in the coitus. She is ready to give all her feminine loveliness.

The Upanishadic philosophy of natural tenacity between man and woman is very pertinent, discussing her attraction for copulation. From the dawn of civilization, the existence of males and females are tied together in the shape of gram and pea. This togetherness is separated. Though man and woman are separated, their fascination is unbreakable. Coherence to each other lies in their relationship. So they feel for each other. This enchantment can be found in the mantra of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

He was not at all happy. Therefore, a person (even today) is not happy when alone. He desired a mate. He became the size of a man and wife in close embrace. He divided this body into two. From that division arise husband and wife.

(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Chapter- I, Part- IV, Mantra- 03, pp. 115)

From the light of the Upanishads, the human being is a manifestation of divinity and Atman. In the physical plane, body sense plays a great role, so this sense cannot consider the subtlety of Atman and completeness. Thus, everyone thinks that they are an incomplete entity. They feel desolation and alienation from their completeness (Atman). From this incompleteness, a sense of companionship is badly needed. When they (male and female) get together, they feel the joy of completeness.

She does not avoid exposing the intensity of sexual pleasure. Without hesitation, she explains the art of sexuality that occurred with her husband in the poem "The Invitation".

All through that summer's afternoon

We lay

On beds, our limbs inert, cells expanding

Into throbbing suns.

(The Invitation)

Her description of love-making with her partner follows the traditional process of coitus. In Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, it is described that Prajapati created his partner and performed the sexual act with a definite process. The process of love-making of her husband with the poet and Prajapati's performance with his partner follows the same skill.

Having created her, He placed her below and worshipped her. Therefore one should worship a woman, placing her below. He extended His organ that projects and with it impregnated her.

(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Chapter- VI, Part- IV, Mantra- 02, pp. 370)

The Upanishad directs the art of love-making to sustain the chain of generation. The Upanishad delivers the right process of sexuality in which woman is worshipped, but if one performs sexuality without knowing religious practice lying in sexuality, one would debase a woman's mind and commits sin. The poet's husband performs love-making for his sexual pleasure, so there is no emotional cum spiritual bonding. Thus, this purely body-centric sensuality makes her dispassionate to her husband and his love-making at the end.

### **The Significance of Copulation and Marriage:**

The concept of marriage of Kamala Das is like the philosophy of the Upanishads. Kamala Das wants a happy married life in which emotional cum spiritual love leads her life. She thinks that marriage creates a beautiful relationship between her husband and herself in which she can start her journey of divine love, so she deems her husband as Krishna, the Lord, and herself as Radha. This expectation proves that she covets the process of marriage as the means of spiritual transformation. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad percolates that marriage plays a vital role in the transformation from physical sensation to spiritual liberation. Marriage makes a man disciplined and self-controlled. It does not give a life of consumption; rather than it provides a lesson of sacrifice and renunciation. Thus, marriage opens an opportunity to be spiritually a sound character. Like the Upanishadic values, she believes that marriage brings the opportunity for mental equity, ecstatic, purification, and meditation.

Celibacy suits me. I like to be physically free and clean.

(Kamala Das: Critical Perspectives, Conversation with Eunice de Souza, pp. 26)

She desires a married life in which chastity and self-control refine her physical limitation. After gaining the experience of disenchantment with sexuality, she perceives the relevance of physical coitus. She exposes her realization of sensuality in the conversation with Eunice de Souza.

Sex is a messy job, but if you have to produce children, you have to go through it.

(Kamala Das: Critical Perspectives, Conversation with Eunice de Souza, pp. 26)

The significance of physical union is for sustaining the human race, not for the satisfaction of sexual desire. The poet's womanly sensibility gets full-fledged pleasure and ecstatic joy when she gives the birth of a child in the poem 'Jaisurya'.

When once my heart was vacant, fill the  
Emptiness, stranger, fill it with a child.

(Jaisurya)

To her, the child is the image of her vitality due to the union of her husband (Heaven) and the poet herself (Earth). Her child brings a vivacious mood to her. The child's jocund company carries a joy of generosity and a bountiful deity. Her son is the embodiment of God. She feels the joy of the creation of a new life. The Upanishad asserts the physical union as the process of sustaining the human race.

Yajnavalkya said, the body is one half of oneself, like the half of a split pea. Therefore, this space is indeed filled by the wife. He was united with her. From that union, human beings were born.

(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Chapter- I, Part- IV, Mantra- 03, pp. 115)

### **Dispassion for Body:**

The sexual activities do not give her peace. The sensuous activities are simply limited to the body. Her passion for the body loses its significance in love-making. Dispassion for sensuality grows continuously. She realizes that the body is not an instrument of satisfying lust; instead, she becomes more conscious of its relevance. The body is the home of the Soul, so it needs a special care of self-control for spiritual deliverance. This tone becomes clear in the poem "The Prisoner".

I study the trappings of your body  
For I must someday find  
An escape from its snare.

(The Prisoner)

All the importance of sensuality is lost. She is adamant about escaping from the bondage of the body, and she becomes a part of the unlimited entity. The body seems to her a burden in the poem "Too Early the Autumn Sights".

Too early the autumn sights  
Have come, too soon my lips  
Have lost their hunger, too soon  
The singing birds have  
Left.

(Too Early the Autumn Sights)

The body becomes the cause of pain and suffering. Pain is too much heart penetrating that she loses all hope and happiness about her life. She wants to leave life prematurely. She does not find the relevance of life. Her life is wrapped in avoiding emotional cum spiritual love because her husband is not interested in her heart's desire. Thus, she is isolated from her husband. Her body and exploitation of the body inspire her to discover the real game of life. After that, she realizes that Soul lies in the body. The body is not constructed to satisfy physical hunger; instead, it is crafted to make a journey for the realization of the state of non-physical existence. Every human carries seven planes- Physical, Astral<sup>7</sup>, Mental<sup>8</sup>, Intuition<sup>9</sup>, Atmic, Monadic<sup>10</sup>, and Divine. But the 'I-Consciousness' works in every plane. Due to the excessive desire for sensuality in the physical desire, the 'I-Consciousness' becomes dormant. Peace is the feeling of divinity. It depends on the peaceful mind. The mind has no physical entity. It is simply non-physical. So, sensuous activities cannot give the mind peace. The mind desires unlimited and divine pleasure. At first, the poet wants peace through the limited activities of the body in the physical plane, but the underlying 'I-Consciousness' propagates its verdict that the limited body is not suitable for ultimate peace. Though the body sense temporarily quenches her sensuous hunger, ultimate peace is beyond reach.

Whichever object is giving you pleasure, the same object will give you misery! The same thing will give you misery and pain.

(Yogasara Upanishad, Mantra- 09, pp. 304)

**Spiritual Awakening:**

The Upanishads determine the destiny of life. The poet's life is not exceptional. Her desires come naturally. But she does not confine herself to the snare of body pleasure. Her conflict of the mind is the result of her dispassion for body enticement. Spiritual awakening means the study of Self-enquiry beyond the entity of the body. Spirituality is the finest aspect of life. It gives her a great chance to heal her wounds caused for the male-dominated society, her husband's uncontrolled sensuality, and his devoid of knowledge of true love. Spirituality opens a gate of unending happiness. Thus, she proclaims the true significance of divine love in the poem 'Krishna' adopted from "Collected Poems".

Your body is my prison, Krishna,  
I cannot see beyond it.  
Your kindness blinds me.  
Your love words shut out the wise world's din.  
(Krishna)

The poet is fully aware of the true significance of the body. The body is the home of Atman. But here, "your body" does not convey the physical structure of the Lord, Krishna. The Lord, Krishna, is her 'I-Consciousness' or "Krishna Conscience", which is non-physical and purely egoless. The "Krishna Conscience" supplies the immeasurable vitality to defeat the crafty tricks of worldly grossness. Her inward journey discovers the unending flow of divine love which she has longed for so far. After getting the touch of divine affection, her inner world illumines. She realizes that the dark skin of the Lord, Krishna provides her spiritual light and removes her inner darkness of inflictions. Her inner and outer world are oozed with the "Krishna Conscience", so she does not see anything different, only realizes the divine love of the Lord, Krishna. Her sense of physique is gone fully; the sense of spirituality takes place instead of it. Her Krishna-oriented world and egoless philosophy show similarity with the Upanishadic values of 'Non-Duality' in which a man realizes the existence of Atman in every aspect of nature. The poet's 'Non-dualistic' philosophy inspires her to discover the same reality behind the creation of all entities, so she finds the "Krishna Conscience" everywhere.

All this, whatever exists in this changing universe, should be covered by the Lord. Protect the Self by renunciation. Lust not after any man's wealth.

(Isa Upanishad, Mantra- 01, pp. 201)

She realizes that the renunciation of bodily pleasure makes her way to spirituality. Self-enquiry becomes possible when she goes inward. Thus, she discovers the entity of the Soul within her body in the poem "The Suicide".

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

.....  
I throw the bodies out,  
I cannot stand their smell.

(The Suicide)

A beautiful ratio of the spiritual journey is flashed out. The poet's comprehensive and finer sensibility is exposed in the above lines. This philosophy is seen in the Upanishadic values. When the bodily sense is removed, the Soul will be bare to be experienced, and when the Soul is bare, the bodily sense will be spoilt. The body creates bondage, but the Soul is the finest and all-pervasive. Self-realization removes the pain of bondage and gives the destination of the ultimate peace. The journey of her mind is Soul-centric, so she experiences her Self. Her bodily desire is dissolved due to pain and pang. Her mind is trained for Self-enquiry. Her continuous suffering and inability to escape from her husband's grip construct the soil of Self-realization.

If all desires of the heart are destroyed, then alone one attains Immortality, Supreme Peace, and the Highest Knowledge of Brahman.

(Jyotirbindu Upanishad, Mantra- 08, pp. 212)

As all her desires are annihilated, she perceives the existence of her Soul. She is prepared for the Supreme Self. She understands the brevity of the body and the infinity of the Soul. She raises her voice against the gender of the Soul in the poem "The Descendants".

Is she male who with frail human soul

Clasp me to her Breast...

... And is he female who

After love, smoothes out the

Bed-sheets with

Finicky hands and plucks

From pillows strands of hair?

(The Descendants)

In the above lines, 'he' and 'she' refer to 'Atman'. 'Atman' or 'I-Consciousness' is the reality of everybody. 'Atman' is non-physical, so sexual identity is useless to determine Atmic existence. The poet's mind achieves the liberty of the body sense. Her mind is in the divine plane. She does not find any sexual identity of Atman or the Soul. Her feeling goes beyond the body and rests in the Atmic layer. Here the Upanishadic concept of 'Atman' is pertinent to refer to.

Thou art woman, Thou art man; thou art youth and maiden too. Thou as an old man totters along on a staff; it is Thou alone who, when born, assumes diverse forms.

(Svetasvatara Upanishad, Chapter- IV, Mantra- 03, pp. 107)

The poet's mind is so refined that she experiences the commonness between males and females. Any demarcation between male and female is prohibited as their reality is constituted on the ground of Atman.

## **II. Conclusion:**

According to the Upanishadic conviction, when the poet stays in the Physical Plane, the physical desires drive her destiny and give her temporal pleasure and pain. This experience of diversity makes her mentally tormented and alienated. When her Conscience drives her, she takes the right track of Self-realization. She finds the drawbacks of the body and her husband's physical hunger. She realizes that her husband and his lust do not create a chance for ultimate happiness. So, she runs after the Lord, Krishna, who is not a physical entity rather than Conscience. Her journey begins for her inner Self. Ultimately she senses the existence of the Soul that peeps through her devotion and total surrender. She discovers her Atmic existence in the Atmic Plane. Thus, her journey starts with human passion but ends with monastic cognition.

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