



# Women's Quest for True Love: A Study on Selected Poems by Kamala Das and Rabindranath Tagore's "The Broken Nest"

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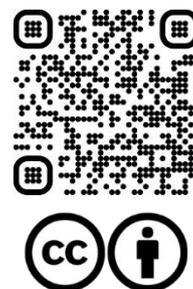
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**Abstract**— Many women across the world are still now treated as an object for sexual purposes by the patriarchal society. These women want true love from their beloveds, but often they are deprived of achieving the essence of true love due to male dominance. This paper showcases women's quest for true love in Kamala Das' poems named "The Old Playhouse", "The Sunshine Cat", "The Descendants" and Rabindranath Tagore's novella "The Broken Nest". Kamala Das has represented the consistent psychological damage of women due to fake and mechanical love-making with their husbands or beloveds. The female individuals in Kamala Das' poems desire emotional and spiritual satisfaction, but they are only physically used for the carnal gratification of male individuals. In "The Broken Nest", Rabindranath Tagore writes the story of a lonely woman named Charulata. She is neglected by her husband as Bhupati, Charu's husband was a workaholic person. This negligence makes Charu fall in love with Amal and a new illusionary world is created by Charu. In this world of imagination, only she and Amal inhabit. In the end, with Amal's leaving the house, Charulata understands that she again becomes lonely in both the illusionary and real world. The present paper reflects the deep desire and hunger for true love of the speakers of Kamala Das' poems and Charulata, the main character of Tagore's novella.



**Keywords**— True love, Quest, Lonely, and Desire

## I. INTRODUCTION

Love, an emotion moulded by affinity, commitment, and passion, is the predominant theme of many literary works written by different writers across the world. Some writers showcase the thirst for love between several characters and some of them also draw their own experiences related to love through different characters. Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest writers of all time, portrays the hunger for the love of Charulata in his remarkable creation "The Broken Nest". Apart from Tagore, an eminent Indian poet in English, Kamala Das presents the quest for the love of women in her different poems like "The Old Playhouse", "The Sunshine Cat" and "The Descendants".

Love is a very common need in human life; this emotion adds some extra colours to the life of people.

However, the men-women relationship becomes a superior-subordinate relationship in a male-dominated society. Female figures are psychologically and physically dominated by male individuals in so-called traditional romantic bonding. This patriarchal dominance has been faced by Kamala Das who is also familiar with her pen name Madhavikutty. Kamala Das confesses her own quest for love in her several creations. Das' agonies, exasperation, and experiences are mirrored in her poems. She raises her voice against the patriarchal oppression in love through different creations of hers. Kamala Das was in search of true love throughout her life, but the tragic barriers created by male-dominated society have demolished her desires. For instance, in Das' remarkable poem, "The Old Playhouse", the speaker's voice of protest against her egocentric husband is portrayed. The voice of the speaker of the poems

by Kamala Das is a voice of her own. She always desires a male soul who can listen to her heart; but every time Kamala Das becomes the victim of the satisfaction of a robust sensual desire of her husband. "The Sunshine Cat" and "The Descendants" also represent Das' loneliness and her hunger for love.

Rabindranath Tagore in his novella "The Broken Nest" or "Nastanirh" mirrors the loneliness of Charulata, the central character of this literary work. It is quite normal for Charulata to desire her husband's company. However, Bhupati, Charulata's husband, is a workaholic person who is an editor of a progressive newspaper. Bhupati has no time to give company to her lonely wife. But, in this novella, it can be seen that Amal, Bhupati's younger brother sprinkles water droplets of love in the dry soil of Charu's heart. Charulata who was confined to the dark cave of loneliness gets the light of contentment with the entry of Amal in her life. Her quest for love is temporarily stopped by the presence of Amal; she gradually falls in love with Amal.

In both Tagore's and Das' works, women's search for love is expressed very explicitly. The above-mentioned poems and novella continuously make readers think of the void that is created in the lives of the speakers of Kamala Das' poems and Tagore's heroine Charulata just because of the lack of love. Though Charu's solitude is temporality mitigated by Amal's presence, Kamala Das' isolation becomes the constant in her life and creations.

## II. DISCUSSION

### *Reflection of the quest for love in selected poems by Kamala Das*

"*The Old Playhouse*" by Kamala Das reflects the speaker's pain caused by patriarchal supremacy in her married life. A male-dominated society portrays that a husband always has the license to touch his wife's body without her consent. Here, the male figure often does not care about what the female body wants. In the present poem, similar catastrophic moments have been experienced by the speaker of the poem. Like a swallow, she is tamed by her husband to gratify his carnal desires. The female figure of the poem who desires romantic and true love from her husband is deprived of love and liberty. Her pain is penned down in the line -

"You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her

In the long summer of your love so that she would forget  
...her nature, the urge to fly" (Das 22).

Love does not destruct the independence of an individual; rather a person can find another meaning of independence in love. However, the woman's independence

is demolished by her husband to satisfy his bodily pleasures. The speaker wants to fly, but she is compelled to be confined in a room to accomplish her responsibilities constructed by the patriarchal society. After coming into the husband's house, the female individual forgets all the homely comforts enjoyed by her before marriage. She becomes imprisoned in her married life. She expected that she will get a chance of self-growth and the love of the man with whom she was going to start her another journey, but this man is busy giving lessons to her about himself.

The husband is pleased by the response of the body of his wife, but he does not care about the inner peace and love desired by the woman. She is converted into an object of physical satisfaction of her husband. He has no time to think of his wife's desires; the woman discovers that her husband is extremely self-centred. This married life is transformed into a life of suffocation to the speaker. She does all the duties that a male-centred society expects from a wife; however, in this unusual procedure of conciliation, she loses her own identity. The "monstrous ego" of her husband makes her understand that desiring love from him is just out of the question. Therefore, a hunger and quest for love are always there in the speaker of Das' poems. She wants some respect and love from the male figure, but she is ignored ceaselessly.

The woman also loses all her will to think independently and her ability to participate in a conversation with her husband. When she starts to comprehend that she is used just as a product for the bodily satisfaction of her husband, the caged existence caused by her husband's dominance makes her feel depressed and frustrated. "Artificial lights" and shut windows in a room reflect how much that room is suffocating for one who resides in it. The woman lives in that room day by day and tries to preserve her stifling married life by losing all of her identity. Only the "male scent" of her husband's breath smelt by her in this room becomes exactly synonymous with her married life which is suffocating, annoying, and depressing. Even the odour of her husband's ego and bodily pleasure is fused with the smell of a flower. The innocence of flower's smell is concealed by the dominance of the husband; like that flower, the woman's innocence is crushed under the uncontested ego of the male figure. Kamala Das has written -

"...There is

No more singing, no more dance, my mind is an old  
Playhouse with all its light put out" (Das 22).

The word "playhouse" mirrors a sense of joy, innocence, charms, and positivity. But in the present poem, the entire meaning is changed by Kamala Das by adding a single word "old" before the playhouse. Das here desires to

mean that the speaker of the poem has lost all the sense of joy and creation within herself. Like the suffocating room, her mind has become an "old playhouse" where only darkness inhabits. Like the speaker of the poem, Das' life is made meaningless by the stereotyped way of love-making of the husband. She just breathes but does not live this confined life. Hence, it is too much natural for Das to search for true love where she does not need to lose her identity and freedom, where her mind again desires for creating something new, and where she not only breathes but also lives in her way.

"*The Sunshine Cat*" written by Kamala Das represents the need for true love in a person's life for spiritual and mental satisfaction; the poem mirrors that the absence of this pure love can demolish an individual's life. A despondent woman's desolation is drawn in the present poem; the lady becomes a failure in gaining true love in her life. This woman falls in love with different men, but she is physically used by them. Real love may bring both emotional and physical satisfaction, but only a man's craving for a woman's body reflects the mechanical hunger of masculinity. Kamala Das portrays the melancholy of the forlorn woman through her writing –

"They did this to her, the men who knew her, the man  
She loved, who loved her not enough" (Das 29).

The husband of this woman was also busy gratifying his sexual cravings and the emotional requirements of the lady is simultaneously denied by her husband. Being cowardly and selfish, her husband was just a "ruthless watcher" of the utilization of his wife's body by other men. Smell of lust of other men who use the woman for physical satisfaction intensifies the void of true love in her life. These male figures make the lady understand that she cannot be loved. This is so much painful for a woman who seeks true love throughout her life. This work by Das is confessional and it portrays a woman's endless suffering in a loveless and forced marriage. The massive pain of this woman can be felt through Kamala Das' lines –

"...I shall build walls with tears.  
She said, walls to shut me in" (Das 29).

Above lines express the unfathomable pain got by the woman; the expectation of real love and the absence of it makes the woman sink into her tears. Cynical and lustful attitude of her lovers including her husband brings doubts related to the existence of true love within the woman. She was locked by her husband in a "room of books" and there "a streak of sunshine" looking like a yellow cat was only her companion and last hope in her life which is full of pathos. But soon, this cat of sunshine turns into a thin line that signifies her consistent and never-ending sadness. The

husband of this woman who locked his wife in that room suddenly discovered that she became a "half-dead woman" and useless for sexual purposes. A void of true love, and independence; and persistent expectations from her lovers who have used her just because of fake love-making kills the inner soul of this woman. "The Sunshine Cat" portrays the quest for the love of the woman who becomes attached to many extra-marital relationships but again and again fails to achieve real love from both extra-marital and marital relationships.

Another poem named "*The Descendants*" is also the reflection of the quest for true love of this poem's speaker. Slowly deterioration of life for the absence of true love is portrayed in this poem and the meaninglessness of life in the presence of a lustful relationship is showcased by Kamala Das. The female persona of this poem gradually understands that her relationship with her partner is just based on a physical and lustful bonding in which there is no spiritual and emotional contentment. In the first section of this poetry, the speaker says that she spent her youth with her partner in the absence of any interruption from the external world. But they create their world of "insubstantial love" and this love-making is fully sexual-based. The speaker with her growth comprehends that her search for true love will be endless. Her loveless life is moulded by dissipation, demolition, and death. In this poem, the woman says –

"We shall give ourselves to the fire or to  
The hungry earth to be slowly eaten,  
Devoured" (Das).

A nihilism because of the emptiness of actual love is portrayed in the above lines; a nothingness covers the speaker's life. She understands that there is no possibility of redemption from the darkness of physical relationship established between she and her beloved. Kamala Das in this work has explicitly drawn the importance of true love in one's life. A tone of pessimism is created in "The Descendants" and the devoid of true love makes the female figure of the poem understand that only decadence and destruction can be brought by mechanical and lascivious love.

*Studying the search for the love of Charulata in Rabindranath Tagore's "The Broken Nest"*

"*The Broken Nest*" or "*Nastanirh*" highlights the mingling of the love and friendship that is built between Charulata, the central character of the novella, and Amal. Bhupati, Charulata's husband loves his work; it is better to say that Bhupati's work is his world. On the other hand, in spite of getting all the homely comforts, Charulata is very lonely as she does not get his husband's company. The love

between Charulata and her husband remains unexplored with the increase of their age. But one's company slowly becomes immensely close to Charulata; Amal, the younger male cousin of Bhupati wins the heart of Charu by repeatedly demanding little things from her. Charu happily fulfills all demands of Amal as she thinks that Amal is the only person in this world who demands something from her. From giving him some pocket money to weaving his shoes all these works are done by Charu with great contentment.

Charulata and Amal create their imaginary world where Amal starts to share his writings with Charu. She eagerly waits for Amal's creations and listens to all created words said by Amal with huge concentration. Charu constructs the meaning of Amal's writings in her own way and she starts to think that Amal's creation is just her possessions. But, one day Charu discovers that Amal provides his writing for the publication and this incident gives birth to an immense pain in Charu's heart. Here Tagore efficiently portrays the concealed possessiveness of his heroine. Charu who was isolated and neglected in her married finds the meaning of life after spending quality time with Amal. She is also inspired by Amal to create her writings and gradually they decide that they would create some writing together. In this particular matter, Charu has a condition that their writings would never be published. Amal would be the only reader of Charu's writing and Amal's writing would only be read by Charu.

Unknowingly, Charulata falls in love with Amal and slowly she also becomes possessive. Charu starts to feel jealous when Manda, who was the elder sister of Charu interferes in Amal and Charu's conversations. In the meantime, Bhupati is cheated by Umapada, Manda's husband in business and consequently, he sinks into a depression and seeks emotional support from his wife. However, it was difficult for Charu to suddenly feel for her husband who is persistently neglected by Bhupati during the last twelve years of their married life. Later, Bhupati brings a marriage proposal for Amal which is quickly accepted by him and after the marriage, Amal starts a new journey of continuing study in Britain. Amal's sudden acceptance of the marriage proposal extremely hurts Charu. Her quest for love and company is temporarily ended by Amal's friendship and hidden love. But Amal's sudden adieu creates an eternal pain in Charu's heart. In Amal and Charu's world, human creativity is prioritized over all mechanical things and Charu builds her own imaginary nest with Amal and their creations. At the end of the novella, the nest created by Charu with care and love is broken with the farewell of Amal.

### ***Amalgamation of the desires of the speakers of Kamala Das' poems and Charulata***

Feelings of created character Charulata and the speakers of Kamala Das' poems have been amalgamated. Both of these individuals are in search of true love; though Charulata is temporarily mesmerized by the charms of Amal, Kamala Das finds the meaning of true love throughout her life. Das in her different poems has shown the patriarchal supremacy, her continuous tussle to search for true love and her lost identity caused by mechanical and fake love. Though Charulata's story is slightly different from the female figures appearing in Das' poems, in the end, both Charu and Das wait for real love in their life; the quest for love is continued.

Das closely observes and witnesses that in this male-dominated society, a woman is physically and mentally controlled by a man; the female figure who craves real love from her beloved gets engaged only in physical love-making. In comparison with Das' speakers, achieving love from Amal becomes easier for Charu. However, Charu later realizes that she makes an illusionary world with Amal and this world has no existence in reality. In the end, it can be seen that Charu's longing for true love remains unfinished. Though at last Bhupati comprehends his mistake, it was too late for him to create a place in the heart of Charu. Kamala Das expresses her desire for true love through her creations and Charu waits for the real love throughout her life.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

True love is very much needed in everyone's life to live in this mechanical world. Those who have already achieved the essence of true love know that it makes life more positive and beautiful. But, the individuals who are trapped in illusionary, temporary, mechanical, and fake love-making know the pain caused by the absence of true love.

Kamala Das, a confessional poet, portrays her desire and search for real love in her several writings. Her life was so much pathetic as the male figures with whom she becomes attached just use her for their sexual gratification. The speakers of Kamala Das' poetry's physically and psychologically damaged by patriarchal dominance. They continuously struggle against this supremacy and a sense of nihilism moulds each of these speakers' life. Rabindranath Tagore efficaciously mirrors the desire of Charulata for love from beloved Amal. In Charu's lonely life, Amal enters like a magician who plants the seed of love in Charu's heart. But Charu and speakers of Kamala Das become lonely at the end; the love for which they desire pushes these individuals again into a world of isolation and melancholy.

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