
Discretion to Declaration: Shifting Shades of Love In Sarojini Naidu And Kamala Das

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Love is a universal feeling that goes beyond the limits of time place and ideology. So, it has always been a primary subject in literature as well. Poets and writers have delved deep into the depth of love in many ways in their texts. The meanings, significance, mode of expression, as well as nuances of love have been travelling from ages to ages and have taken different shapes over time. The archetypal love between Radha and Krishna is also not an exception. As the divine duo makes an icon of unconditional love not limited by worldly rituals like oaths of marriage or societal recognition, appeal of such concept of love seems to be even more irresistible. Such concept of unconditioned and uncontrolled love is appealing to a wide range of thinkers and writers starting from the spiritually inclined minds dealing with the idea of mutually attracting power of Atman and Brahman to the fiercely feminist or individualist ones dealing with radical individualism and right to expression against all odds. Many Indian English writers and poets have dealt with the theme of divine love in its different shades in their works. And as it travels through time from age to age we see it taking on new colours as well. A major portion of these authors consists of women writers. The fascination of many women poets with love, specially the never-totally- fulfilled or eternally yearning love of archetypal Radha seems to point to the observation made about love as being just a part of a man's life, while it encompasses the entire existence of a woman. This is an important observation when we come to undertake an analysis of literature, especially poetry, by women. And this is where it lends a possible feminist angle to it.

The concept of female self identity and femininity has changed and developed over time and that change is reflected on women poets writings in different ages and their interpretation of this classic tale of love and adoration. In this paper I would like to take and probe into the poetry of two very important Indo-Anglian women poets – Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das and see their

respective ways of dealing with love, particularly their use of the concept of Radha Krishna love. The reason behind choosing these two poets is not only that they are separated by very different socio-political background and leaning, but also, that it makes an interesting study to see the two farthest ends of a spectrum of shades related to Radha-Krishna passion being manifested in their work.

Sarojini Naidu is widely known as a poet as well as a nationalist. She gave voice to the women of her time in many of her fiery writings. Her poems are specially known for their expression of both a holistic image of Indian culture and civilization and a wide range of romantic sensibilities, specially from the point of view of a woman. A beautiful amalgamation of both these trends is visible in her Radha poems where her search for pure love meets a spiritual yearning for the lord God and the resultant sense of overwhelming fulfillment envelops all her works in this segment. She has dedicated some of her poems to the Radha series even though those poems can be found in different other collections. Her poems “The Flute Player of Brindaban” from the collection *The Broken Wings* (1917), “Ghanshyam” and “Songs of Radha” from *The Feather of the Dawn*, (1961) “Village Songs” and “Songs of Radha, the Milkmaid”, from *The Bird of Time* (1912) are some of them. In her poems, Radha is an assertive fearless lover woman openly and totally immersed in her love for Gobinda, who reminds us of devoted veneration of Bhakti tradition.

Kamala Das, one of the most important Indian women poets is known for her different open attitude. She has expressed her innermost feelings as well as fear and insecurities, things that were taboo earlier, in an unabashed way in her writing. She has opened new dimension in the field of recent Indian English Poetry with her confessional poetry, and has dealt with Radha Krishna love in her poems too, though in a different way. Unlike Sarojini Naidu, she does not have many poems dedicated to the theme of Radha totally. But she has used this classic story profusely in many of her poems in rather different contexts. The divine couple guides her effort to explore the quest for self identity in a particularly spiritual way. The absolute mismatch between an ideal sense of love and self and the stark reality within and around her has often taken the poet towards divinity. Radha’s lovelorn situation and life-long yearning for Krishna provides Das with the right tool to describe the difficulty of being a woman in Indian society and finding love. In “The Maggots” and “A Request” from the collection, *The Descendants*(1967)

she shapes the pain of lost love with Radha's figure. Her poem "Ghanashyam" published in the Poems collection of *Tonight This Savage Rite* (1979) offers a perfect rendering of female spirit against patriarchal systems.

In Sarojini Naidu the Radha-Krishna relationship is a metaphor for that between *Atman and Brahman*; in Kamala Das the relationship, though one of ideal lovers, is realized in human terms, and as such it does not rise to the divine level. Sarojini Naidu's Radha is not anti-sexual, yet sex is not the primary concern in the Radha poems. But in Kamala Das body and bodily reactions imply a "deep and intense relationship" which is not devotional; it is very much human in its concern. Fritz Blackwell rightly observes that a poet's concern is almost always literary and existential, and not religious. Poets often use a religious concept for a literary motif and metaphor. Both Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das have done the same thing in their works, though in their own ways. In her poem "Ghanshyam" Sarojini Naidu depicts Krishna not as her lover but as God who is omniscient and omnipotent and is the central principle of this universe.

Thou givest to the shadows on the mountains
The colours of thy glory, Ghanshyam
Thy laughter to high secret snow-fed mountains.
To forest pines thy healing breath of balm.
Thou lendest to the storm's unbridled tresses
The beauty and blackness of thy hair... (Naidu, 1961,39)

This poem is written in the form of *Stotra*, a hymn in praise of God. The tone of the poem suggests the high seriousness of a devotee. She offers the lord not her body like Kamala Das but her "yearning soul": "O take my yearning soul for thine oblation". Kamala Das, on the other hand, considers Krishna as her "mate" who comes to her in "myriad forms" and to whom "In many shapes shall I surrender...I shall be fondled by Him". This is illustrated by the poem "Radha," where she somewhat sentimentally depicts the ecstasy Radha experiences in Krishna's embrace. These two women poets also demonstrate their love for the deeply personal mode of writing. The difference between a sublime spirituality of Naidu and a candid human reality of Das draws our attention. It is not that Naidu refrains from going into human details for the persona of Radha. In her "Songs of Radha", Sarojini Naidu describes the restlessness, anxiety

and pain Radha experiences in waiting for her lover, Krishna. But her songs are rhythmic and have a musical appeal, while Kamala Das poems are short and highly personal. The following examples make it clear.

O take my yearning soul for thine oblation

. . . Let me be lost, a lamp of adoration

In thine unfathomed waves of ecstasy.

(Naidu, 1961,39)

And

. . . love became a swivel-door

When one went out, another came in.(Das 1967,7)

While spontaneity characterises Sarojini's poems, brooding and meditation permeate Kamala Das's poems. "Ghanshyam" depicts vividly the transformation that was wrought in Radha and by extension Das herself by her relentless search for love. She realizes that her husband can never establish a rapport with her soul, because "each time his lust was quietened, And he turned his back on me ..." What she seeks is a total merger in her lover. But since it is not feasible in the actual world, she searches for Ghanshyam, the ideal lover. In this point we may say the two poets have converging points. Dissolution of the individual self and the total identification is shown to be possible only with her mythical lover in both of their poems. But das goes on to give us more vivid descriptions as she says that Radha does not snap her marital ties in spite of her love for Krishna as she considers her corporeal form insignificant. She is contemptuous of her husband who only wants the warmth of her body. The poem entitled "Maggots" embodies Radha's experience with her husband which is analogous to the predicament of the poet. Radha does not experience rapture in the arms of her husband, but remains as a corpse, indifferent. The poem Maggot moves far beyond the spiritual yearning of a lady for her lord God. Krishna is here like any other man leaving his lady for greater aim in life and Radha's love for Krishna is expressed more in her contempt for her husband than in a spiritual thirst for God's love.

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
On you mind my kisses, love? And she said,
No, not at all but thought, what is
It to the corpse if the maggots nip?

(Das 1967, 42)

In conclusion I would like to say these love poems also stand apart as they fruitfully combine the indigenous traditions such as *Abhisarika* and *Sahaja* illustrated mainly though not solely in Sarojini Naidu's poems and the Western confessional tradition which is illustrated with a new vigor in Kamala das's poems. With their similarities and differences these two poets have opened a new dimension in the field of Indian English poetry. They have shown that centuries old mythical love story can be read and re-read again and again and every time it can bring something new. Great as their contribution to Indian literary and cultural narratives is, it cannot, however, be denied that the never ending reservoir of love and fulfillment in the archetypal love of Radha and Krishna has made similar contribution in shaping the great minds as well. Interface of great minds and great narratives has resulted in great poetic creations of all times.

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