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## Reflection of Feminine Plight in Transgender Literature-A Critical Study of Kamala Das's *Dance Of The Eunuchs*

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**Abstract:**Kamala Das was a part of that generation of Indian writers whose work centred on personal rather than colonial experiences, and her short stories, poetry, memoirs, and essays brought her respect and notoriety in equal measures. Das wrote both in English (mostly poetry) and Malayalam language . The present research paper –*Reflection of feminine plight in transgender literature* reflects the agony of transgender who have the qualities of women in them but mother Nature did not give them the responsibility of creation. The Poem “The Dance of the Eunuchs” deals with the theme of unfulfilled love. Kamala Das is one of the most distinctive and original Indian poets writing in English. In this poem, she finds an objective correlative in the dance of the eunuchs to represent the suppressed desire within. In fact, the Dance of the Eunuchs is a dance of the sterile, and therefore, the unfulfilled and unquenchable love of the woman in the poetess.

**Keywords:** Transgender literature,eunuchs ,unfulfilled love,sterile.

Kamala Das (1934 – 2009) started her career as a poet. She was known in her home town Kerala for her short stories and her autobiography. She was an Indian author who wrote openly and frankly about female sexual desire and the experience of being an Indian woman. Kamala Das was a part of that generation of Indian writers whose work centred on personal rather than colonial experiences, and her short stories, poetry, memoirs, and essays brought her respect and notoriety in equal measures. Das wrote both in English (mostly poetry) and Malayalam language.

Das's poetry collections included *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), and *The Old Playhouse, and Other Poems* (1973). Subsequent English-language works included the novel *Alphabet of Lust* (1976) and the short stories “A Doll for the Child Prostitute” (1977) and “Padmavati the Harlot” (1992). Notable among her many Malayalam works were the short-story collection *Thanuppu* (1967; “Cold”) and the memoir *Balyakalasmarnakal* (1987; “Memories of Childhood”). Perhaps her best-known work was her autobiography, which first appeared as a series of columns in the weekly *Malayalanadu*, then in Malayalam as *Ente Katha* (1973), and finally in English as *My*

*Story* (1976). A shockingly intimate work, it came to be regarded as a classic. Later Kamala Das said that most parts of the book were fictional.

The present research paper –*Reflection of feminine plight in transgender literature* reflects the agony of transgender who have the qualities of women in them but mother Nature did not give them the responsibility of CREATION . The Poem “The Dance of the Eunuchs” deals with the theme of unfulfilled love. Kamala Das is one of the most distinctive and original Indian poets writing in English. In this poem, she finds an objective correlative in the dance of the eunuchs to represent the suppressed desire within. In fact, the Dance of the Eunuchs is a dance of the sterile, and therefore, the unfulfilled and unquenchable love of the woman in the poetess.

"The Dance of the Eunuchs" is one of the most remarkable poems of Kamala Das. It is the opening poem in her first anthology, "Summer in Calcutta", published in 1965. This poem sets the tone of the first volume as well as of the two other volumes. The poetess vividly conjures up the atmosphere of a hot, tortured, corrupt, sterile and barren world through vivid symbols and images. The dance of the eunuchs whose joyless life reflects the poetess' fractured personality is a noticeable piece of autobiographical poetry. Words, images and symbols theme - oriented. They reveal the theme of sterility and rottenness.

Dancing eunuchs is a familiar sight in India but in this poem, they are used symbolically. The poetess sympathises with the dancing eunuchs who belong to neither sex and, thus, suffer a peculiar irony of fate. They dance ecstatically. They seem to be completely merged with their dance which actually reveals their inner rottenness and void. How graphically and sensuously the poetess pictures the dancing eunuchs' summer heat!

***"It was hot, so hot, before the eunuchs came  
To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals  
Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling,  
Jingling.... "***

The weather is very hot. The repetition of "hot" and the addition of prefix "so" before the second repetition heightens the effect of heat in weather. In such awfully hot weather the eunuchs dance in great excitement. The repetition of certain words- "wide skirts going round and round" and "anklets jingling, jingling" emphasise their excitement and passion for dancing . "Fiery gulmohur" conveys the effect of heat. With their eyes flashing they dance with great excitement and passion, and ultimately they bleed. The repetition of the word "jingling" creates an auditory sensation of the music they produce while they dance. There are green tattoos on their cheeks. They wear jasmines in their hair. Some are dark and some are almost fair. It is evident by their make - up that they have female appearances.

The voices of eunuchs are harsh like men. They sing melancholy songs "of lovers dying and of children left unborn." Thus, there is an undercurrent of pathos in their songs. Some beat their drums and others beat their "sorry breasts". There is no joy in their hearts. Their sad predicament fills their hearts with unending sorrow and melancholy which are reflected in the theme of their songs. They wail and writhe "in vacant ecstasy". Their passionate movements in dance are more convulsions which clearly express the joyless state of their hearts. How can they be happy with their incomplete, fractured individuality! The

physical condition of the dancing eunuchs is very pathetic and pitiable. They are emaciated, pale, lean and thin. What a pitiable sight they create!

The quest for love, or rather the failure to find emotional fulfillment through love, is the central theme of Kamala Das' poetry. Her greatness lies in the fact that her love poetry is rooted in her own personal experiences. The Dance of the Eunuchs is a symbolic poem of Kamala's inner feelings. It is said that the poem was written against the background of her sudden contact with a man who had hurt her when she was fourteen years old. This poem is very remarkable as it strikes the keynote of Kamala's poetry as a whole. She is eminently successful in creating the atmosphere of summer heat.

The poetess sympathizes with the eunuchs who neither contribute to the male nor the female genre and suffer a peculiar irony of fate. The details of the weather contribute to building up the atmosphere of the poem. The hot weather is emphasized by the repetition of the word "hot". The image of "Gulmohar" is qualified by the epithet "fiery" which gives additional charm to the poem. The word "Jingling", was repeated thrice. It creates an auditory sensation of the music.

*"To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals  
Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling  
Jingling... Beneath the fiery gulmohur, with  
Long braids flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced and  
They dance, oh, they danced till they bled.."*

The poet emphasizes the nasal sound since it contributes to creating a total impression of the eunuchs who are neither characterized by male power nor female delicacy. A typical feminine gesture is also noticeable both in their voice and appearance. Quite in keeping with all these are the melancholic songs of "Lover's dying" and "children left unborn".

The "funeral" imagery in this poem is symbolic of the inner vacuity and sterility of the eunuchs as well as of their decrepit bodies. This image also creates the visual impression of the eunuchs who survive and suffer endlessly like "half burnt logs from funeral pyres":

*"They Were thin in limbs and dry; like half-burnt logs from  
Funeral pyres, a drought and a rotteness  
Were in each of them. "*

*The Dance of the Eunuchs* is seen as one of Kamala Das's best poems. This poem appeared in *Summer in Calcutta*. It's the first poem in the collection, setting the tone for all the poems. The poem strongly conveys Kamala Das's feelings using well-chosen words and repeated phrases. There's a lot of vivid imagery, and the overall mood is gloomy.

The poem reflects the poet's **experiences** and **sympathy** for eunuchs. The costumes, makeup, and passionate dance suggest femininity, but underneath, there's inner sadness expressed through harsh songs about **dying lovers and unborn children**. Despite their outward appearance, the eunuchs lack joy and can't dream of happiness due to their fractured personality. The background of thunder, lightning, and meager rainfall mirrors their outward sparkle and inner emptiness. The dance of the eunuchs symbolizes Kamala Das's **unfulfilled love**.

*"They sang of Lovers dying and or children left unborn....  
Some beat their drums; others beat their sorry breasts  
And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy."*

The poem has two levels of meaning. On the surface, the poet seems to feel for the eunuchs who are compelled to dance in the scorching sun, dancing until they bleed. Their

“harsh” voices and “melancholy” songs about dying lovers and unborn children become evident. Comparing the eunuch’s “**thin and dry body**” to a half-burnt log evokes shock and pity, creating a dramatic scene without inner vitality.

On another level, written in a **confessional style**, the poem symbolically reflects the poet’s sadness in her own life. The eunuchs symbolize **unproductiveness and barrenness**. For Kamala Das, the poem becomes an objective representation of her inner suffering. The dance of the eunuchs, with skirts swirling and cymbals clashing, is contrasted with their “**vacant ecstasy**,” highlighting the gap between outward passion and inner emptiness. This contrast continues throughout the poem, portraying the eunuch’s dance as that of the sterile, compared to the unfulfilled love in the poet’s life.

The poem skillfully uses images and symbols to portray the summer season, emphasizing the hot weather with words like ‘**so hot**’ and ‘**fiery**’ before gulmohar. Colors such as green, jasmine, dark, and fair vividly depict the external beauty of the eunuchs, contrasting with the emptiness inside, described as ‘**vacant ecstasy**,’ ‘**thin and dry like half-burnt funeral pyres**,’ and ‘**drought and rotteness**.’ Words like ‘**crackled**,’ ‘**thunder**,’ ‘**lightning**,’ and ‘**rain**’ create the atmosphere of the rainy season, representing a natural shift from hot summer. The title’s meaning is not straightforward; the eunuchs’ dance, while associated with them, is a livelihood and compulsion rather than an expression of inner joy, making it an antithesis reflecting their unhappiness.

The poem, narrated in the third person, captures the dance’s atmosphere through descriptions of eunuchs’ dress and behavior. The rhythm of the dance intensifies throughout the poem, reaching a climax with thunder, lightning, and rain. However, there’s a sudden fall in rhythm in the last two lines, reflecting the poet’s **depressed state** and a **sense of futility** in her sexual experience.

They are emotionally dry. They have no feelings. They are internally rotten and sterile. Their dance and songs are unproductive and communicate their internal rotteness and sterility. Even the noisy crows are stunned to silence at their pathetic condition and children, wild - eyed with bewilderment look at their dance. The clouds thunder, lightning flashes and meagre rain falls. It too gives no relief from the awful heat. It only smells “of dust in attics and the urine of lizards and mice.” It is a beautiful and well - organised poem. The functional imagery and theme - oriented diction create the desired effect of sterility, rotteness inside the hearts of dancing eunuchs and of environmental heat.

In short, this poem is an excellent example of a poem dealing with the theme of unfulfilled love. According to Srinivas Iyenger, “Kamla Das is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts.” The use of words marks the rich sensibility of Kamla das. For her as for W.B. Yeats, “words alone are certain good”. She is fully aware of the immense potential of words. They grow on her “like leaves on a tree”. She uses varied and various kinds of words, images, and adjectives. They give the true picture of the poetess’ modes and feelings. She achieves a good harmony between, the idea and the words. All of this shows her mastery over the use of the English Language.

## References

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