

THE LOVE OF THE LOVED: ECHOES FROM 'MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE' BY KAMALA DAS

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ABSTRACT: *Love is a choice and it springs from appreciating goodness. It need not happen but can make it happen. Love is active and strong. Love sees good in others rather than the bad. Love is universal and love can also be unconditional. An unconditional love is selfless, non-egoistic and relenting. It expects nothing, expresses everything, bears and holds even the worst of anything, accepts hurts and stripes and bears bruises, suffers long and kind. All the above stated ingredients of unconditional love were found in the life of kamala Das' Grandmother and in the poem 'My grandmother's House' she yearns for it. In common the love of Grandparents towards Grandchildren is unconditional and incomparable.*

This paper is written based on Kamala Das' My Grandmother's House which envisages the qualities of the ancestral home and the love depicted by Kamala Das.

Keywords: *Love, Unconditional love, Loved, appreciating goodness.*

*One carries the memory of a 'home' to which heart retreats in times of anguish.
One feels nostalgic at the thought of happy moments in the past.*

Kamala Das is a famous Contemporary Indian writer who is called Kamala Suraiyya who wrote in English and Malayalam her native language. She is called by the name A.K.A. Madhavikutty. Kamala Das was born in Punnayurkulam, Thrissur District in Kerala, on March 31, 1934, to V. M. Nair, a former managing editor of the widely-circulated Malayalam daily *Mathrubhumi*, and Nalappatt Balamani Amma, a renowned Malayali poetess. She spent her childhood between Calcutta, where her father was employed as a senior officer in the Walford Transport Company that sold Bentley and Rolls Royce automobiles, and the Nalappatt ancestral home in Punnayurkulam. Like her mother, Kamala Das also excelled in writing. Her love of poetry began at an early age through the influence of her great uncle, Nalappatt Narayana Menon, a prominent writer. However, she did not start writing professionally until she got married and became a mother. Her popularity in Kerala is based chiefly on her short stories and autobiography.

My Grandmother's House

*There is a house now far away where once
I received love..... That woman died,
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved*

*Among books, I was then too young
 To read, and my blood turned cold like the moon
 How often I think of going
 There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or
 Just listen to the frozen air,
 Or in wild despair, pick an armful of
 Darkness to bring it here to lie
 Behind my bedroom door like a brooding
 Dog...you cannot believe, darling,
 Can you, that I lived in such a house and
 Was proud, and loved.... I who have lost
 My way and beg now at strangers' doors to
 Receive love, at least in small change?*

Kamala Das, the Indian poetess recalls her ancestral home and her dead grandmother in the poem "My Grandmother's House". Kamala Das' poems as well her imagery is extremely personal and drawn from life. This poem takes the form of a confession comparing her present broken state with that of being unconditionally loved by her grandmother. Published in 1965 in summer in Calcutta the poem is a reminiscence of the poetess' grandmother and their ancestral home in Punnayurkulam in Kerala. Her memory of love she received from her grandmother is associated with the image of her ancestral home.

*'There is a house now far away....
 I received love.....'*

The poem begins like a story introducing a house which was visited long back and it's too far from the place where the poetess lived at the same time it indicates the farness of the embracement that Kamala Das once received. But one thing is clear, the house is still there physically standing without any live activity in it. The poetess expresses very clearly that love was received, which throws light on the fact that now she is bereft of love and that's why she craves for that which is lost. The poet now lives in another city, a long distance away from her grandmother's house. But the memories of her ancestral house make her sad. She is almost heart-broken. The intensity of her emotions is shown by the ellipses in the form of a few dots. Now, in another city, living another life, she longs to go back. With the death of the Grandmother, the house ceased being inhabited. It now became an isolated and remote entity, echoed by the phrase 'far away'. The poetess asserts that with the death of her grandmother, silence began to sink in the house.

*'.....That woman died,
 The house withdrew into silence,.....'*

The poem is a reminiscence of the poetess' grandmother and their ancestral home at Malabar in Kerala. Her remembrance of love she received from her grandmother is associated with the

image of her ancestral home, where she had spent some of the happiest days of her life, and where her old grandmother had showered her love and affection. With the death of her grandmother the house withdrew into silence. When her grandmother died, even the house seemed to share her grief, which is poignantly expressed in the phrase “the House withdrew”. The house soon became desolate and snakes crawled among books. Her blood became cold like the moon because there was none to love her the way she wanted.

She understands that she cannot reclaim the past but she wants to go back home, look once again through its windows and bring back a handful of darkness – sad and painful memories, which she would have made her constant companion, to keep as a reminder of her past happiness. The poet is unable to proceed with her thoughts for sometime as is indicated by the ellipses (dots). The poet is now garroted with the intensity of grief. She hankers for love like a beggar going from one door to another asking for love in small change. Her need for love and approval is not satisfied in marriage and she goes after strangers for love at least in small quantity. But she does not get it even in small change or coins. Her love-hunger remains unsatisfied, and there is a big void, a blank within her, she seeks to fill up with love but to no avail. The image of the window is a link between the past and the present. It signifies the desire of the poet for a nostalgic peep into her past and resurrects her dreams and desires.

‘.....snakes moved
 Among books, I was then too young
 To read, and my blood turned cold like the moon
 How often I think of going
 There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or
 Just listen to the frozen air,
 Or in wild despair, pick an armful of
 Darkness to bring it here to lie
 Behind my bedroom door like a brooding Dog...’

The moon is being an emblem of love. The worms on the books seem like snakes at that moment, in comparison to the size of the little girl; and in keeping with the eeriness of the situation. The poetess also implies that the deserted house is like a desert with reptiles crawling over. The poetess now longs to 'peer' at a house that was once her own. She has to peek through the 'blind eyes' of the windows as the windows are permanently closed. The air is frozen now, as contrasted to when the grandmother was alive-the surroundings were filled with the warmth of empathy. Kamala Das pleads with us to "listen" to the "frozen" air; that is an impossibility. Neither is the air a visual medium, nor can air cause any displacement because it is "frozen". In wild despair, she longs to bring in an "armful of darkness". Note firstly, that it is not a 'handful' but an armful. Secondly, 'darkness' that generally has negative shades to it, has positive connotations here of a protective shadow. It also reflects the 'coziness' inside the house. This armful of darkness is her essence of nostalgia.

*'.....you cannot believe, darling,
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved....'*

Kamala Das was very proud about her grandmother and the love she received. The Ellipsis after the word loved shows how much she grieves at the loss of the person who unconditionally loved her and satisfied her to the core. She was so convinced by the environment in which she lived, that the loss of it was indigestible, and uncompromisable. She feels so proud of her grandmother and the house in such a way that she wants all the others know how promising and satisfying was the atmosphere at the grandmother's house.

*'.....I who have lost
my way and beg now at strangers' doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?'*

The pronoun 'I' here is very emphatic and also melancholic. Emphatic in order to tell the world that no one would or could have come across such an admiring part of life the poetess lived and melancholic to let the readers know that she is a great loser and there can be no loser like her in the world. It also echoes her inner reverberations that when her grandmother was alive she was rich with love and after her demise she became bankrupt and started begging at stranger's door. She dint expect the equal amount of love that she received from her grandmother from the society she was in but only little. Even that little love she was deprived of. This makes it clear that Kamala Das' grandmother was an embodiment of unconditional love.

Why grandchildren are much attached to grandparents than the parents?

This is a common tendency which one witnesses in the any family for that matter. Generally most of the grandchildren get more attached and engrossed and enthralled by their grandparents' selfless and unconditional love. It is because of the fact they are pampered and petted among all odds they commit. Grandparents are more matured than the parents to handle the immatured and the innocents in turn the grandchildren get more attached to the grandparents. The reasons for grandparents being loved by grandchildren are enumerated by Jacqueline Carroll

Grandparents

- Are up for adventure as the kids do.
- Know many stories.
- Can grow things (garden) in which kids like to soil their hands.
- Are great guides.
- Are not afraid to be silly. Did a grandchild make a mask or a funny hat? grandparents will try it on.
- Let grandchildren take their own time for any task.
- Make best audience even if it is silly.

- Have coolest pets to share with the kids.
- Love to travel.
- Know tons of good songs the kids like.
- Are patient listeners always optimistic.
- Are always thrilled to hear something from the kids
- Are walking history books.
- Send kids the coolest care packages when they go away to camp, to college, or just for the fun of it.
- Sometimes pay grandchildren for household works.
- Believe whatever stories grandchildren want them to believe.
- Have skills to teach grandchildren which can't be learnt in school.
- We will snuggle up on the couch, when grandchildren aren't feeling well.
- Read favorite books to them, over and over again.
- Stay in touch and make sure grandchildren know that they're thinking about them even if they live far away.
- Let grandchildren teach us things, like how to use a cell phone and share photos online.
- Want to make every day they spend with their grandchildren special.
- Love grandchildren unconditionally.

When there are so many things that grandparents could impress grandchildren obviously the feelings of the poetess Kamala Das proves true and eternal.

The poem springs from her own disillusionment with her expectation of unconditional love from the one she loves. In the poem, the image of the ancestral home stands for the strong support and unconditional love she received from her grandmother. The imagery is personal and beautifully articulates her plight in a loveless marriage. Thus, the old house was for her a place of symbolic retreat to a world of innocence, purity and simplicity, an Edenic world where love and happiness are still possible.

"Love is a behavior." A relationship thrives when lover and the loved are committed to behaving lovingly through continual, unconditional giving — not only saying, "I love you," but showing it.

- Dr. Jill Murray

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