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KAMALA DAS, doubtless, is the greatest Indian woman poet writing in English. Her poetry, often cast in the confessional mode, displays an unambiguous feminist ethos. This book is an enlightening reading of Das's poetry from the angle of feminist confession. The author makes a penetrating analysis of her poetry in the light of contemporary gender-theories and related aesthetics.



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Writing the Female
A Study of Kamala Das

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Bharatiya Sahitya Pratishthan
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WRITING THE FEMALE:
A STUDY OF KAMALA DAS
(Literary Theory and Criticism)

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PREFACE

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PREFACE

My little heart overflows with ineffable joy at the completion of this book on the poetry of Kamala Das. This work emanates from an increasing awareness of the wonderful ways in which a great woman poet belonging to our culture reacts to the contemporary question of the expression of female consciousness in poetry. As a representative of the female world she shares the collective experiences of women which she expresses in unique ways in her poetry. The collective nature of women's experiences finds prominence in the literary expression of female consciousness. This book is an analysis of the poetry of Kamala Das undertaken from the general theoretical position articulated in contemporary gender-theories.

Writing as an emancipating strategy has great significance for every oppressed group, be it women, the Black or the colonised. This is particularly true in the present context of the imperialism enforced through international financial institutions which are controlled by a few developed nations. The erstwhile imperialist nations reappear in the new guise of donors who determine what is good for the body and soul of the rest of the world. In the role as modern Shylocks, they demand their pound of flesh in every sphere of human activity.

Modern man is goaded by his intellect. In order to psychologically enslave nations altogether the present form of imperialism is designed to destroy native cultures and innate urges of human beings. A consumerist culture is propagated all over the world as a poor substitute for native cultures through mass media. This is a conscious strategy to subvert the identities of nations and groups, both ethnic and sexual. As long as the native culture that determines the identity is alive, the urge for freedom remains. The political liberation of the Black, for instance, can be vicariously attributed to the preservation of the Black culture. In the past patriarchy was perpetuated at the national level through customs and conventions. The current consumerist culture indirectly fortifies patriarchy by emphasizing the physical qualities of the female. Deliberate attempts have been made at the international level to underestimate the intellectual and creative talents of women. In this context, the consumerist culture is the greatest threat to women's literary creation. The artistic expression of female consciousness has great significance in the context of the importance given universally to the photogenic and advertisement value of women. Writing the female, therefore, emerges as a creative and strategic force. This enhances the global relevance of women's literature. Women's writings must counter the consumerist culture that underlines the value of woman as a sex object on the

one hand and help to preserve native culture and purge it of the evils of patriarchy on the other. Writing the female acquires a new humanistic dimension on the strength of the liberating strategy it exercises.

While writing these chapters I have put aside my personal admiration and reverence for Kamala Das and tried to maintain the clinical detachment of a diligent reader. I have persevered to ensure that my personal impressions of Das should not colour my critical responses to her poetry. It is true that the strength of her poetry mostly emanates from the vigour of her personality. Beneath the brisk personality that operates transparently at the surface level of her poetry there lies the complex ambivalence of the Indian housewife who is at once rebellious and submissive. In order to ensure that my critical inferences should not be swayed by any non-literary factors, I have deliberately avoided to interview Kamala Das or to have any correspondence with her.

This book, I think, is a comprehensive study which gives a true perspective on Kamala Das. I have preferred to concentrate on her poetry which has been my critical focus. I have made a judicious and selective use of *My Story* to clarify or to substantiate some of my arguments. But I have denied the book the status of an autobiography. This work does not consist of a detailed and meticulous interpretation of the books and anthologies of Das. Only poems relevant from the angle of feminist confession are analysed in this book. Some of the poems are repeatedly referred to in this book. The repetition is inevitable on account of the thematic and aesthetic importance of the poems. All the references are incorporated into the body of the text according to MLA stylesheets and bibliographical details are given at the end of the book. A select bibliography of Kamala Das is also provided.

The following abbreviations are used in the book for the titles noted against them:

BKD	:	The Best of Kamala Das
CP	:	Collected Poems I
D	:	The Descendents
OP	:	The Old Playhouse and Other Poems
SC	:	Summer in Calcutta
T	:	Tonight, This Savage Rite

I thank my publishers for their help and co-operation.

N. PRASANTHA KUMAR

Chapter - 1

WRITING THE FEMALE

Women's writing now constitutes a powerful articulation of the gender-specific concerns of women, whose explicit self-identification as an oppressed group qualifies this branch of writing for analysis as a separate category. The conceptual framework of women's writing uses the historical experience of women in the patriarchy wherein gender relations assume a political dimension. Everything, including the seemingly apolitical, in this conceptual framework is political. Women's writing strengthens the conviction that the personal is political. It is this view that inspires Wilhelm Reich to term gender relations "sexual politics." Women's literature is deeply inscribed with this politics.

Feminist Literature

Women's literature, which has evolved out of women's identity struggles, creates a new awareness in men and women. This has to be distinguished from feminist literature, which expresses the shared experiences of women's oppression. Feminist literature highlights and condemns the inequalities and injustices in the treatment of women, the disadvantages women have to bear on account of their gender. As it aims at improving the situation of women, feminist literature is invariably aligned with political interests. By exhorting women to political action and by helping in consciousness-raising, feminist literature seeks to influence public opinion in order to change women's situation. Feminist literature is gyno-centric: its emphasis is on the ideology rather than on the literariness of the text. Women's literature need not be overtly ideological; its stress can be on the literary merit of the text.

Feminist literature assists women's political movement for liberation. An ideal feminist work serves a five-fold function (Eagleton 169-74). Firstly, literature serves as a medium for honest self-expression for women; women find literature the most expressive form of art which is true to women's experiences. Secondly, literature emerging out of female impulses helps to achieve cultural androgyny. It attempts to create a new social order founded on humanistic values. Thirdly,

it provides role-models which instil a positive sense of feminine identity. Literature that depicts female characters involved in activities which are traditionally not feminine hastens the dissolution of rigid sex roles. Fourthly, it provides a new sense of community, a sisterhood, fostered on female-female relationships. Lastly, it helps in consciousness-raising. Literature achieves this by providing realistic insights into the female world and into the psychological and physical consequences of sexual politics. Feminist literature, which appeals to the common feelings of insignificance and alienation of women, offers solutions to women's problems.

Feminist Ideology

Literature must be evaluated within the larger framework of social reality, the distinct background out of which it emerges. Literature either reflects or distorts the structure of social reality. Ideology is the most important element in any sociological approach to literature. Ideology as a collective representation of ideas and experiences can be contrasted with material reality on which the experiences are based. As ideology is different from objective knowledge, an ideological view of society is broken through a dialectical analysis of literature. Ideology and reality are constituent elements of a literary text which are transformed by the imagination of the writer. Literature produces ideology by its textual representation and transforms it by the art of writing. In spite of the conflict between the text and its ideology within the text, the two are inseparable. A feminist writer confronts a challenge to her ideology while she is engaged in literary creation. She encounters the danger of subordinating the feminist ideology to the literariness of the text or vice versa. A successful literary text expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions within the text. The contradiction between the ideal of sexual equality and the reality of sexual inequality gets manifested in the text. A feminist writer attempts to present a unified picture of humanity by harmonising the ideal and practice of sexual equality. The greatness of a feminist writer rests with her mastery to represent the ideology truthfully without sacrificing the literariness of the text.

Patriarchy is a sexist ideology, the ideology of male dominance. As a dominant ideology, patriarchy is a living system with a set of meanings and values that are rigidly engraved on the social psyche. It constitutes a sense of experienced reality for most people in a society. No sociological criticism is ever innocuous of prejudices. Criticism in a patriarchal society, therefore, is guiltily andro-centric. Men think and write as representatives of the dominant male sex. Male writers create images of women which serve to reinforce and naturalize patriarchy. The traditional images of women etched in the social fabric is too

rigid to be erased. Feminism is an oppositional practice based on resistance to dominant sexist ideology. Feminism or feminist criticism is designed as a contrast to other forms of ideology or criticism and is gyno-centric. Women writers and critics strive to convince that men's thoughts and writings are never gender-free. Though acclaimed as universal, asexual and apolitical, literature and criticism present a distorted view of women. Feminist writing is an honest and sincere attempt towards a truthful representation of women in a patriarchal society. It is the outcome of the collective thinking and collective experiences of generations of women. It reflects women's oppression and marginalisation which lead to women's identity crisis.

Writing the Female

The phrase "writing the female" subsumes these and related ideas pertinent to the expression of female consciousness in literature. The stamp of femaleness is conspicuous both in the content and form of women's literature. The literary text created by a female writer has a distinct tension: the conflict between an unconventional content and the persistent need for the rigour and control of form. This tension is the externalization of the conflict the protagonist undergoes: the conflict between psychic disintegration and the desperate need for psychic wholeness. This, then, is a tension that is latent in the writer's psyche. The atmosphere or locale, the imagery, the rhythm or rhyme, the mode of narration and characterisation, all have a peculiarly female touch. A woman writer is unique both in the selection of theme and in its formal rendering. This uniqueness is the outcome of the conflicting processes to which she is subjected; the processes of *being* and *becoming* a woman.

The Critique of Paternity Theory of Art

Women's literature is expressively different from general literature. Early feminists like Margaret Homans refused to see this difference, as is indicated by her remark that sexual identity alone does not determine the nature of a literary work (3). Virginia Woolf too made this mistake when she endorsed Coleridge's theory that a great mind is androgynous (Woolf 157). She thought that the conjugation of the male and female attitudes created a literary text, which also gave a sense of fulfilment to the writer irrespective of the gender. These indeed are examples of critical attempts to underestimate women's literature. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe, literature is conditioned by a paternity theory of art which even women writers and critics endorse (6-7). As an author of an enduring text, the male writer demands the attention of the posterity. But this is seldom the case with a woman writer. She is often ignored and her creative

talents are never recognised. The invidious gender-differentiated patterns that exist in society keeps her painfully conscious of the fact that literature is circumscribed for women.

It is customary for the male-centered aesthetic to consider artistic creation an act analogous to biological creation. An artwork in this view is the product of the interaction between the male artist and the external world which is regarded as feminine. A literary text, therefore, is the outcome of a generative act involving the phallic pen and the virgin blank page. Norman O. Brown has even engendered the self and the text in order to endorse this view (134). The glorification of the author as the father figure is only an extension of this view. Literary history itself has been viewed as made up largely of male writers. Harold Bloom underlines this idea when he represents poetic influence as a filial relationship of sonship (11). Literary influence percolates down from generation to generation as represented in a family tree in a patriarchy. Bloom observes that literary history is punctuated with battles between "father and son as mighty opposites" (26). Woman as a historical being has been denied any role in this.

If artistic creativity is compared to biological creativity, "the terror of inspiration for women," as Susan Gubar observes, "is experienced quite literally as the terror of being ravished" (256). Woman feels artistic creation as a form of violation, resulting in the destruction of the female body. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out that "these phenomena of interiorization mark the woman writer's struggle for artistic self-definition" (50). It would seem that the female body is the real force behind women's writing. Women's writing constantly reminds us of the sacrificial nature of female body beautified as art. Christina Rossetti offers her song as "a virginal blood sacrifice" (Gubar 253). In the poem "The Loud Posters," Kamala Das represents her poetry as a "two dimensional/nudity" which is a kind of "sad sacrifice" (BKD 39). In her vision of the woman poet as a suffering victim, Rossetti identifies bleeding with story-telling, and marriage with martyrdom (Gubar 253-54). Gubar considers Scheherazade's art of story-telling a surrogate female body that saves herself and other girls from death (254). May Swenson's "Cut" and Merge Piercy's "I Still Feel You" portray the desecrated female body that, like the wounded self of the poet, bleeds into print (Segnitz and Rainey 187-88). The writer is frightened by her sense of victimization. Writers like Sylvia Plath entertain the anxiety that poetry comes out of the state of being possessed and wounded (Gubar 256). Plath escapes the dread that she has been created as an object by self-inflicted violence. A sense of helplessness pervades her voice. Her poetry is created with "jolting words snapped out by ...electric discharges" (Gubar 257). The shock of

her art is self-destructive. She accepts her role as a heroine in a tragedy that is her art as well as her life.

Tillie Olsen's *Silences*, like Anne Sexton's "The Silence," emphasizes the significance of silence in the feminine culture. Women's voices go unheard in the literary world. Women writers are symbolically represented in a patriarchy by a blank page and by silence, by absence and by negation. The feminine has been constructed as absence, silence, incoherence, even madness. The female vision, as Mary Eagleton also observes, is evident in the unconscious (5). As feminine experience is overlooked and feminine voice is marginalised, paradigmatic elements assume greater significance in the analysis of a literary text by a woman than syntagmatic elements do. The links of a holistic vision rest with the silent and the incoherent.

In women's writing sexuality is identified with textuality. The quest for identity is the motive of women's writing. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe that "the woman's quest for self-definition" is the motive of women's literature (76). Elaine Showalter regards "the search for identity" as the theme of women's writing (13). Susanne Juhasz remarks that a feminist poet equates "consciousness of oppression" with "consciousness of identity" in her poetry (Brown and Olson 161). Women's trouble with the concept of self is reflected in women's literature. Women writers express their identity through the paradoxes of similarities and differences with Others: parents, lovers, children. They also reflect their identity through their alienation from the prescribed standards of ethics and aesthetics. Women's sense of gender, sexuality and body has a great significance in the concept of her self. As a woman judges her self through her body, the female self is always identified with the female body in women's literature.

The Feminist Text

A literary text emphasizes its pragmatic, political value. A feminist text, in this context, is characterised by the explicit feminist ideology it displays. It follows, therefore, that aesthetics and politics are not oppositional and that they are synthesized in a literary text. Toril Moi points out that "politics is a matter of the right content being represented in the correct realist form" (7). A literary text becomes synonymous with the ideology it pictures. As ideology manifests itself in the personal as well as the impersonal, it requires great skill to endow them equally with ideology and grace. Rita Felski remarks that the "literary construct" of a text is "endowed with political significance as a subversive ... force" (4). The complexities of the structure and form of literary language

question the fixed meanings of ideology. The political conviction of the writer can be located precisely in her textual practice (Moi 6). The subversive power of the language structures is related to social struggle and change in a society (Felski 6). Literary language has the capacity to defamiliarize any ideology. The dialectical nature of literature or politics does not affect the defamiliarizing capacity of literary language. The dialectical nature of feminist ideology does not create any serious problem for the woman writer. This is because feminism does not address any immediate political issues; its chief concern is with changes to be effected in the cultural and political spheres of life. Literature is a medium that can influence individual and cultural self-understanding in everyday life. This "social function of literature," as Rita Felski remarks, is crucial to an "emanicipatory feminist politics" (7). The social function of literature gives cultural prominence to the depiction of women's experiences.

As a woman is defined by her gender, a female writer has a sense of marginality. A woman writer finds it difficult to exert any meaningful impact on the world, a situation which is emblematic of all women. She is, as Deborah Pope remarks, plagued by the problems of language and style, questions of power and survival, and the task of contact with her self (2-3). Women writers do not find any models among women to follow on the questions of language and style. Early women writers blindly followed male writers on this. One can hardly distinguish between their language and style from that of the male writers of the period. This is because writers, irrespective of their gender, employ the male-centered language for literary creation. This can prove fatal for women writers. Women writers' choice of the phallogocentric language finds a parallel in the colonial situation where the colonised uses the language of the coloniser. The expression the "fourth world" used with reference to women points to this reality of sexual colonialism. Terms like "visceral colonialism," "phallic imperialism" and "penile tyranny" also point to the same situation (Ruthven 30). Women's silent approval of the male-oriented language is construed as a sign of their meek submission to the dominant sex, as a mark of their subordination and marginalisation. Feminist writers are, therefore, confronted by the immediate necessity of evolving a language that is different from the male-centered language and which can truly represent their thoughts and emotions.

The construction of such a language is related to the question of the writer's quest for identity. Women's quest for identity is complicated by her sense of loneliness and isolation. A woman writer remains anxious to reveal the truth about her womanly experiences and writes about her deepest responses. What women writers share in general is the female sensibility. Patricia Meyer Spacks stresses this identity when she observes that "the experience of women

has long been the same, that female likenesses are more fundamental than female differences" (5). The female writers think and feel alike the world over. They depict and offer solutions to the problems of life from a female point of view. There is, as Mary Eagleton observes, an "imaginative continuum" in women's literature like "the recurrence of certain patterns, themes, problems and images" (12). The belief that woman's life is different, separate and divided unifies the styles and concerns of women's literature.

The Maternal Mystique

There is a calculated myth in circulation that women's literary and biological creativities are in conflict with each other. This view, misleading as well as corrupting, is untrue. Maternal instincts sustain the spirit of a woman, endow it with subtlety, sympathy and passion which are fundamentally conducive to literary expression. The birth of a child and the creation of a text are analogous symbols of life and growth, which send signals of subjectivity to the mother-writer's bosom. Kamala Das's "Jaisurya," Sylvia Plath's "Morning Song" and Anne Sexton's "Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward" are poems linking and unifying the experiences of Nature, motherhood and writing. A woman writer, like an acrobat, is involved in a complex, precarious act of balancing. She has to strike a poise between an apparent conformity to certain patriarchal, literary standards and a trenchant critique of the same. If she is unassertive and uncertain, she loses her identity and recognition. If, on the other hand, she is dogmatic, she may be isolated. A woman writer faces the challenge whichever way she opts. The incongruity leads her to isolation, emotional breakdown, alcoholism, neurosis and even suicide. Writing proves to be a fatal infirmity to many. The Bronte Sisters, Emily Dickinson, Amy Lowell and Christina Rossetti withdrew to cloistered life. Virginia Woolf found that a talented woman would be tortured and pulled asunder by her contrary instincts (86). Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton committed suicide as they could not withstand the schizophrenic split of the self. Many female writers, who are victims of neurosis and psychosis, save themselves from madness and suicide through literary accomplishments.

The mystique of feminine fulfilment emanating from wifehood and womanhood remains a threat to the female writer who strives to express her true self. A woman writer has to fulfil the cultural expectations of womanhood as well as her own aspirations to become a writer (Pope 3). The dominant conflict in the writer's psyche is between the domestic woman and the creative artist. This conflict is the most productive source of disturbance which inspires her writing. The value system created by the patriarchal culture recognizes male

sovereignty on the basis of physical strength. Kate Millet observes: "Male supremacy, like other political creeds, does not finally reside in physical strength but in the acceptance of a value system which is not biological" (27). Talents cannot be determined on the basis of sex or gender. No man is totally masculine and no woman fully feminine. This awareness prompts Simone de Beauvoir to remark that every female human being need not necessarily be a woman. This is also relevant to literary creation. John Fowles voices his concern about the ambiguity of an author's gender in a literary text. He asserts that the feminine elements in the personality of a male writer contribute to his greatness as a writer: "There is Adam-women and Eve-men; singularly few of the world's great progressive artists and thinkers have not belonged to the latter category (Qtd. in Eagleton 83). However, he is silent about the influence of the masculine aspects of a female writer on her literary creation.

The Historical Significance of Women's Literature

The historical significance of women's literature is great. At the microcosmic level, as many feminists have pointed out, "history" is a disguised version of "his story." This is due to the influence of patriarchy in all fields of learning including history and literature. Women's literature, which is mostly autobiographical and confessional, is an alternate history. Women writers rewrite "history" into "her story." This is necessitated by woman's contradictory position *vis-a-vis* history. She is symbolically significant, yet materially invisible in history. Her predicament is best expressed by Virginia Woolf:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover. She is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of anybody whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell, and was the property of her husband (45-46).

Patriarchy stifles woman's voice and censors her words. And woman, in turn, creates a fantasy to subvert patriarchy.

Mystification of Literary Process

The art of a woman writer arises from romance, real or imaginary. She becomes her own heroine. She acts the diabolical role of a witch and risks a figurative death. Her personality undergoes a metaphoric extinction in her construction of an artful mask. She is conscious of herself as a subject, a speaker,

assertive and authoritative, and radiant with powerful feelings. In women's literature there is an identification of the writer as the protagonist and as the oppressed female. In the case of many women writers their writings have the status of an autobiography in which the female speaker is the authoritative subject and usually the author in disguise. This rules out the possibility of much displacement of emotions. The woman writer compensates for the lack of displacement by mystifying the poetic process.

The mystification can be achieved through the construction of a persona or other categories of speakers on the one hand and through revisionist myth-making on the other. Women writers explore myth-making as a means for female self-projection and self-exploration. It is an ingenious device to literally assimilate the materials dangerous to the history and culture of the female gender. As Alicia Ostriker observes, myths are changed by the "female knowledge of the female experience" (Showalter 14). The revisionist myth-making is a method of correcting the myths which have long been the source of collective male fantasy. The revised myths, according to Ostriker, represent the "retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered" (Showalter 14). As representative of the divine and the demonic in the female, they often function as a mechanism of women's survival. A woman writer often exploits a mystical framework as a deceptive cover or a disguise to portray emotional alliances. The various processes of mystification indicate how the meanings of a text are constructed, altered or even manipulated to suit the needs of the female artist. Writers like Kamala Das, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton successfully explore all the processes of mystification. The female writer portrays specific problems inherent in the history of women as writers. There is, as Mary Eagleton observes, a "celebration of retrieved sexuality" in women's literature (127). The woman writer underlines the rejection of woman as an object of desire and her transformation into a subject of sexuality.

Isolation in Women's Literature

A woman's gender-specific experiences account for her existence as a woman. Her experiences only reinforce her sense of isolation and freakishness. Female writers are distinguished by the uniqueness of their relation to the Self and the Others. Woman's isolation is a condition determined by her sex. A woman writer's diffidence to record her experiences creates an isolation from language as well. Where language is an index of power, silence is a way of perpetuating violence. Women are, as Deborah Pope points out, often forced to express their personal truths in an alien language (7). This is particularly true of bilingual writers like Kamala Das who writes surreal stories in Malayalam

under the pseudonym, Madhavikutty, and autobiographical and confessional poems in English. The tendency to distribute the creative energy between two genres in two different languages reveals the writer's schizophrenic split of the self. In the case of writers with a colonial legacy like Kamala Das or Judith Wright, the distribution of creative faculty also reflects the decolonising aspects of the self. Even a writer who works out her literary creation in one language experiments in various forms of her genre. The tendency to explore and experiment in different forms of writing shows the psychic mutation the writer undergoes.

Most existing myths tend to disregard the female experience. Women writers reimagine the female characters of folktales, legends and myths to envision prototypes rather than to revitalize archetypes and stereotypes. They try to rewrite and reinterpret these figures. The narrative of women's literature revolves round the protagonist's experience of isolation in life. Women's literature, as imaginative writing, is far from conscious, coherent and controllable. Its independent female characters provide role-models; individual women find their identity in them. Women's literature, vital and experimentative, is bristling with optimism for the potential and fulfilment of human life. Roy Harvey Pearce observes:

A poet is ours to the degree that he is gifted with that kind of sensibility which will let him push to their farthest implications such possibilities (and impossibilities) for the life of the spirit as are latent in the culture of his—and our—community, past and present (10).

In their new visions of human experiences and new meanings for humanity, women writers exemplify a commitment to the ideal Pearce proposes. Women's literature marches toward new ways of understanding and realizing human dignity. Women's literature heralds a new sense of community.

Female identity is a submerged identity in a patriarchal culture. Female identity is a "specific instability, an eccentric relation to the construction of sexual difference" (Eagleton 180). Women's literature is fragmented, intimate, confessional, personal and autobiographical. This is because female subjectivity is structured, divided and denigrated through the matrices of sexual difference. Victimised as women are by male cruelty and indifference, the identity of a woman is formed out of pain and suffering. Celebration of femininity is a collective identity of the female world. The collective identity is constructed on their collective oppression which is a shared experience. Women's literature is a blend of autobiography and ideology. The reading of a text as autobiography requires an authoritative narrator's voice.

Multiple Voices

In women's literature the narrator's voice assumes different personae leading to the presence of multiple voices in the text. The narrator's voice represents at once the writer, the protagonist and the woman. This is skilfully exploited as a poetic technique by women poets and novelists. Kamala Das, for example, masterly knits multiple voices into the structural fabric of poems like "An Introduction" and "Composition." Multiple voices are the results of the psychic fission of the writer or the protagonist. This is manifested through the intrapsychic conflict of the narrator or the protagonist. The split-selves of the author or character, including the diabolic ones, create potential personae for the text (Rogers 3). The personae in the text are the external representations of an internal conflict within the author or character. The multiple voices represent complementary, distinguishable and autonomous characters (Rogers 4-5). The psychic disintegration may be subjective like conflicting attitudes or objective like the splitting of the self.

The splitting of the self into the Double and the Other is a literary device used to identify or transfer the writer's sympathies. The Double is generally, the author's representative. The manifestation of the Double is a pathological attempt to replace the Other with one's own self. This process of projection is especially evident in the writings of the authors with a colonial background like Kamala Das. As a character undergoes mutation and development, the Double enhances the ideology of individualism (Coats 1-2). The pre-occupation with the Double is also the characteristic of bilingual writers. The alien culture and the foreign language provide them with an acquired identity, a refuge from the surveillance of the centralised society. A psychoanalytical study of the Double helps to unravel the crisis in the sexuality or identity of woman. The most alarming problem which a woman writer encounters is the crisis of identity. All her literary endeavors are directed to establish a recognizable identity.

The Female Imagination

It is the female imagination which makes the inevitable difference between the male and the female ways of perception. There is always an intrinsic element in the female experience, an element that stands in contrast with the experience of man. Certain symbols, metaphors, images, styles or tones may recur in women's literature. This repetition of distinctive elements is a standard by which the social and historical position of women can be judged. There is a marked sexual difference in writing, which operates at the levels of stylistic unity, thematic selection and construction of plots and events. A tremendous unity exists in women's literature among different styles, periods and concerns.

The belief that woman's life is distinctively unique unifies women's literature. The anxiety that woman's creative potential is underdeveloped and her necessary fulfilment is unrealized pervades women's literature. This frustration itself acts as a creative impulse in women's literature.

Feminists point out that language has been formed to suit the needs of men which include the necessity to dominate women. They observe that it is a disservice for women to use the male-oriented language for feminist discourse. The cognitive experiences differ between the sexes and this is reflected in literature. Discourse of men, which is linear, always ends with a definite conclusion while feminine discourse, wide-ranging as it is, ends on a diffused note. Julia Kristeva believes that there are many oppositions between masculine and feminine writings. Male writing is based on reasons, logic, linearity and chronology while female writing is based on associative, antilogical, non-chronological and non-linear forms. The masculine style is bold, forceful, clear, vigorous, objective, universal and accurate while the feminine style is vague, weak, tremulous, pasted, personal, confessional, narcissistic and neurotic (Eagleton 75). A woman writer is often segregated with the implicit anticipation that she has to find a definition or an identity against the wider context of man.

The Seminal Thinkers

There are three thinkers of great historic significance whose writings have influenced women's literature and feminist criticism. They are Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Kate Millet. These seminal thinkers refute and disprove the theories of Freud and throw fresh light on the question of woman's sexuality. The subservient position of woman is best reflected in Simone de Beauvoir's words:

She [Woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—She is the Other (16).

The classic conception of bisexuality, the fantasy of a total being, is designed to allay the male fear of the Other. Beauvoir views Otherness as a fundamental human thought originating from the primordial duality of the Self and the Other (16). The Self and the Other make a pair in which the Other is always subordinated. Beauvoir starts from the assumption that man is the Self and woman is the Other; the Self treats the Other as a supplement. Beauvoir's binary analysis provides an excellent basis for the view that woman is constituted negatively in a patriarchy. This fact is abundantly expressed in the writings of men of diversified talents and views. Women writers have to erase the negative

images the male writers have etched in the social psyche. They have to be innovative in their craftsmanships to reimagine themselves anew. In this context women's literature is a re-vision and a re-thinking. The mission and responsibility of women writers rest with their eagerness to create a new literature that suits the new world they have envisioned.

Friedan's notions of the feminine mystique calls attention to the maddening confusion inherent in women who limit themselves ultimately to the role-models imposed on them by the patriarchal society. Women forsake career ambitions and intellectual achievements to become mere wives and mothers. The word "mystique" in this context connotes the mysterious dilemma or the anomalous condition of modern women who, in spite of their potentials, gravitate towards age-old sexual myths and the perverted patriarchal traditions. The feminine mystique is a retarding element in the growth of a woman who drains her of her talents in the barren atmosphere of domesticity. The mystique considers the fulfilment of femininity the only commitment for women and this can be achieved through sexual passivity, male domination and maternal love (*Mystique* 37-38). The mystique sees woman only in her sexual role and degrades woman to the twin roles of her husband's wife and children's mother (*Mystique* 54). The feminine mystique encourages woman to ignore the question of her identity and misinterprets women's problem as a "role crisis." Friedan underlines that the crisis central to woman is not sexual; it is the crisis of identity. Woman finds it difficult to fulfil her potential as this need is not defined by her sexual role (*Mystique* 68). The identity crisis in a woman's life is the crisis of growing up; a woman progresses from immaturity, which is euphemistically phrased as femininity, to full human identity (*Mystique* 70). Women continue to suffer this crisis of identity in their perennial struggle to become fully human.

The expression of female consciousness has undergone a seachange in the West since the 60's. This transformation has later spread to other parts of the world. The perception of the female now progresses from the feminine mystique, and reaches what Friedan calls a "second stage." Equality becomes a reality and personhood an experience. Extremist feminist rhetoric denies the profound human reality of relationships between men and women and shakes the basic structure of family. Denial of woman's sexuality leads to a conflict over motherhood which is dubbed as a hangover from the past. But the conflict is partly real as motherhood is still dear to women; the choice of motherhood is fundamental to the identity of woman. Personal choices and political strategies are often twisted in the case of women. Women's needs for power, identity and security through work are denied by the advocates of the feminine mystique, while their needs for love, identity and security through marriage are discouraged

by the supporters of the feminist mystique (Friedan, *The Second Stage* 27-95). A new image of woman emerges: the image of woman as a person, as a heroine. The traditional image of woman, woman as wife and mother, woman as a dependent, sexual object, must merge with the new image of woman. The need of the hour is to harmonize the traditional roles of marriage, motherhood and home-making with the emerging roles of professional women with individuality and decision-making power. It will make woman fully free and confident and help her to move forward to break the mystique in the minds of her less adventurous neighbours (Friedan, *It Changed My Life* 63). This will enable women to achieve identity as fully human in order to create a new image of woman. Women writers must prevent ordinary women from being carried away by the deceptive fascinations of the feminine mystique. They must also protect family and familial values from the onslaught of extremist feminism. The ideal woman writer has to accomplish the task of achieving the golden mean between the feminine mystique and the feminist mystique. Contemporary women's literature, therefore, portrays the intricate and arduous task of attaining this harmony in the art and literature of a society which is threatened by the conflicting forces of patriarchy and feminism.

Woman does not display a virile myth and project herself as Subject. Having no literature of her own she, as Beauvoir remarks, dreams through the fantasy created by men (174). Her personality is evolved along the stereotyped lines of sex categories constructed to suit the needs of men. This is due to socialization of the sexes in a patriarchy. The limited sex roles of woman degrades her life to the animal level. All activities distinctly human are, as Kate Millet observes, labelled as masculine (26). The categorization of gender is first made manifest in the sexual myth unilaterally imposed on the social psyche. To be a woman is a unique and strange experience which can be fully expressed only by a woman. The interiorization of patriarchal ideology continually places woman under surveillance. This leads to infantilization of women even in intellectual matters. Man takes pride in his sexuality which he employs as a means to appropriate woman, the Other. Woman's image created by man suits his needs springing from the fear of her Otherness. So, the artistic image of woman is always distorted and manipulated.

Freudian psychoanalytic theory has been an obstacle to an honest understanding of the representation of woman in literature. The reactionary forces against the emancipation of women have perpetuated the notions of "penis-envy" and "castration-complex" to denigrate woman. Freud argues that a woman has the feeling of being an *homme manqué*, a man with something missing. Her feeling that she is a "mutilated man" lowers her image in her own

eyes and leads her to wish for the male organ (Beauvoir 71-73). This wish is psychologically expressed through her eagerness to be like a man. As it is physically impossible to attain the status of a man, she strives to achieve his intellectual status. She is, thus, led to seek an intellectual career which can be recognised as a sublimated modification of her repressed wish. Freud's theories are based on the assumption that woman is inferior to man. Freud saw woman exclusively in terms of sexuality, though the sexual is only one dimension of human potential (Friedan, *Mystique* 105). Helen Deutsch equates femininity with passivity and masculinity with activity. Women's fascination for action-oriented life called "masculinity-complex" stems from female "castration-complex." Deficient female anatomy and the society work together to create femininity (Friedan, *Mystique* 108). Beauvoir condemns the theory of "penis-envy" as an anomaly which fails to distinguish emotion from sexuality (304-07). Ashley Montagu refutes Freud's charge and holds that it is men who feel jealous of women's ability to menstruate and procreate (33). Kate Millet observes that to be born a female in a male-dominated culture is a tragic experience (179-80). New literary standards and norms have to be evolved on the basis of the new psychology framed on the equality of women and perception of woman as an autonomous human being capable of versatile activities. Only a new aesthetic and a modified ethic can pave the way for honest representation of the female in literature.

The new aesthetic or the new ethic cannot evolve by itself. The mystique perpetuated by patriarchy is indelible in the social psyche. Every mystique depends on sophisticated means to propagate its hold. The new aesthetic or the new ethic will not find easy acceptance in society not only because they are opposed by the patriarchal forces but also because they are viewed with suspicion. It is, therefore, the responsibility of women to postulate and popularise new critical theories and new psychology on the one hand and to represent women on the basis of the new psychology and new critical theories on the other. For the unhindered development of women's literature women have to create a congenial atmosphere in every branch of learning so that it will not smother the progress of women's literature as a distinct genre. Women must create a space for themselves in criticism, psychoanalysis, philosophy, literature and sociology. In order to write the female in her and to make it acceptable by the society, woman has to be a versatile genius in the contemporary situation. It requires a miraculous sixth sense to write the female in the contemporary world. And a seventh sense is required to appreciate and evaluate this writing. □

Chapter - 2

PATRIARCHY

Feminism has assumed an aggressive dimension in the West. But India has only begun to witness the emergence of self-assertiveness by women. In spite of the emerging female power in the West, Indian women wear an interior mask, a kind of purdah for the self. Patriarchy with all its attendant vices has strengthened its grip. Nuclear families, consumerism and foreign mass media have fortified bourgeois values. Society stands by man and censures woman. Women's limited experiences in the world outside family prevent them from developing a properly socialized self. They easily become susceptible to victimization and are vulnerable to domestic abuse. Being apprehensive of social censure, they approach the problem of the equality of gender not directly but obliquely; they are always ready to strike a compromise.

Indian Scene

Feminism being a predominantly Western concept, all its major theories are Western. But some of the ideas on which these theories are framed are also inherent in Indian perceptions about women. Indian society has been continually patriarchal, though historians like Ram Gopal think differently (440-44). The patriarchal structure of ancient Hindu society has led to the differential treatment of children and the preference of a son to a daughter. Sudhir Kakar analyses the spiritual, economic and social aspects of this discrimination (Ghadially 66). Conceived on mythic models, the Hindu woman is often regarded as the preserver of family and the protector of culture. The patriarchal family consolidates the position of man but relegates woman to marginal areas. Man demonstrates his superiority by controlling woman's life, action and behaviour. A woman is indoctrinated to be a dignified person, a pure and simple wife, a selfless and thoughtful mother. Indian attitude to women has been ambivalent; it varies between awe and contempt, respect and scorn. Woman is glorified as the divine mother on the one hand and branded as potentially dangerous on the other. This dichotomous perception explains the acceptance of a few women in positions of power even when institutionalised practices of oppression of women

continue. Men control, as Vanaja Dhruvarajan points out, not only the means of production but also the means of reproduction. Domestication also means control of the reproductive function of women (116). This all-pervasive patriarchy is also reflected in Indian literature, including the literature written in English.

Western influence of Indian society made patriarchal oppression the order of a disciplined community. Women are treated as inferior to men and made to work in subservience to them. A woman is admired not for her wisdom but for her elegance. Acumen and intelligence seldom count as qualities of recognition for a woman. Patriarchal ideology curtails woman's autonomy and deforms her personality. According to Adrienne Rich the urge for self-knowledge in a woman is "more than a search for identity, it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society" (90). Man makes woman's life miserable, renders her powerless and helpless and forces her to seek his compassion and to accept subordination as her fate. A woman establishes herself through sex which circumscribes her self and her aspirations. Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millet establish with diverse illustrations that patriarchy, which is sexual politics, operates in life and literature throughout the world. Patriarchy being a social reality, women's reactions to patriarchal oppression or exploitation remain almost identical everywhere.

Victim of Patriarchal Prejudices

Kamala Das is a victim of patriarchal prejudices. The author-narrator of *My Story* gives the account of her home as "a house of cards" (81). Her "father was an autocrat" (91) and her mother "vague and indifferent" (20). The "ill-assorted" parents put on a mask of domestic happiness (5). They considered Kamala "a burden and a responsibility" and married her off when she was still a school girl (82). She was, thus, forced to become a premature wife and mother. She recalls this tragedy in her poem "Of Calcutta" where the speaker complains (C P 56-60):

I was sent away, to protect a family's
Honour, to save a few cowards, to defend some
Abstractions, sent to another city to be
A relative's wife.

As the narrator of *My Story* does, the speaker of the poem also confines herself to domestic routine. Das condemns the gender discriminations practised by her society and refuses to reconcile with the system in which man is the "Absolute" and woman the "Other." As it is impossible for a housewife to liberate herself from male control in a family, Das gives in to her miserable fate. She feels a

sense of incompleteness about her personality. She turns to writing in order to find a new direction and meaning for her life, becoming a non-conformist in the process.

The Seamy Side of Domestic Life

Many poems of Kamala Das reflect the seamy side of domestic life and the miserable state of women in contemporary society. A woman's humiliation begins in her childhood, moves to a peak in her youth, and ends only in death. The patriarchal society ignores a woman's aspirations and discourages her in her efforts to advance herself in society. The roles Indian women play and the images they create are drawn from myths and legends rather than from social situations and personal experiences. Rehana Ghadially locates its cause in the ancient educational system in India. Men controlled knowledge and interpreted classical texts to the disadvantage of women (21). The patriarchal culture gives masculinist definitions to matters pertaining to women. This is also evident in the practice of prescribing instrumental functions for men and expressive functions for women.

A woman's struggle for identity begins in her girlhood and is confounded by her marriage which is simultaneously an uprooting and a re-rooting. This critical shift in a woman's life, as Indira Parikh points out, is romanticised and the reality of its anxiety and apprehension remains concealed. Woman craves for a life-space where she can experience a fulfilling companionship, existential equality and creativity (35). The hope of this romantic encounter creates a sense of importance in woman. Kate Millet observes that marriage and romantic love obscure the realities of female life in a patriarchy (36-37). She considers romantic love "a means of emotional manipulation" of the female by the male (37). A woman's struggle with marriage revolves round the fantasy of becoming a partner in life's struggles. Trouble crops up when woman attempts to translate this romance and fantasy into living reality.

Kamala Das is conscious of the imbalance of power in sexual relationships as is evident from *My Story* (70-90). She refuses to reconcile herself with woman's position as an object and wants for herself the status of a partner in the game. The menial domestic duties are nauseating and repulsive to Das. She always describes domestic routine with a tinge of irony or in plain understatement. The poem "Gino" expresses the housewife's feeling of shame (B K D 56-57):

I shall be the fat-kneed hag in the long bus queue
the one from whose shopping-bag the mean potato must
roll across the street.

The cumulative burden of domesticity and routine are expressed in the lines. She states with repulsion in *My Story*: "I would be a middle-class housewife, and would walk along the vegetable shop carrying a string bag and wearing faded chappals on my feet" (85). The monotonous and demanding routine deprives woman of any self-worth. Robbed of dignity and individuality woman sees herself as a slave doomed to obedience and conformity. Das expresses her will to leave the magic line of patriarchal control and create an autonomous and fulfilling existence for herself. This resolution is courageously stated in the poem "I Shall Some Day" which is an amalgam of defiant hope and freakish desire (O P 48):

I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea,
Love-words flung from doorways and of course
Your tired lust.

The repetition of the title stresses the urge for freedom. The unresolvable ambivalence in the speaker's urge to flee and then return and again to go out for freedom illustrates the Hindu wife's at once rebellious-and-submissive personality.

Woman as Doll

Patriarchal tradition imposes inhibitions upon a woman's life and activities and deprives her of free movement. A woman, in a patriarchal culture, is reduced to the despicable position of dolls. Kamala Das presents the image of a doll to delineate a woman's wretched condition. Her speakers remind us of the character Nora of Henry Ibsen's *The Doll's House*. In the poem "Of Calcutta," Das describes the predicament of the speaker-housewife (C P 56-60): "Yet another nodding / Doll for his parlour, a walkie-talkie one to / Warm his bed at night." The poem describes the speaker's transformation from a girl into a frustrated housewife. She graces the man's drawing-room as a doll and imparts a womanly voice and warmth to his bed. The loss of the soul due to the stifling domestic routine is a matter of great concern for the poet. In poem after poem Das ridicules the male ego which enslaves woman and keeps her in nets of domesticity. The poem "The Stone Age," for example, presents the indifference of man to woman's miseries (B K D 97-98):

You turn me into a bird of stone,
a granite dove,
You build round me a shabby drawing room
and stroke my face absentmindedly while you read.

The speaker addresses her man who builds around her a stony wall of comfort and turns her into an inanimate object. The man creates a domestic stone age and the mystique of femininity that goes with it.

Domestication of Woman

Patriarchal customs and conventions bury a housewife in domestic drudge. The frustration and discontent of a woman in a patriarchal family is portrayed in Das's poem "The Old Playhouse" (B K D 100-01).

You called me wife,
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
to offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering
beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
became a dwarf

If the word "wife" is subtracted from the poem, this ode to the male protector can be applied to all women—daughter, wife, mother, mistress, maid, lover. The protest poem addressed presumably to her husband enumerates the constraints of married life which Das finds abominable. The poem, according to Devindra Kohli, describes "the fever of domesticity, the routine of lust, artificial comfort and male domination" (117). In a fairly convincing argument Vrinda Nabar asserts that but for the half-line "You called me wife," the poem is addressed to a lover (63-65). Irrespective of the speaker's relationship to the addressee, the poem underscores the unpleasant aspect of the relationship. The narrator protests against the aberrations of married life as well as the casual display of male ego with all its horrid manifestations. Man's indifference reduces woman to a dwarf and the family to a little room. The male ego transforms the woman into a grotesque creature with diminished personality.

The beginning of the same poem is a thesis in the domestication of woman:

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
in the long summer of your love so that she would forget
not the raw seasons alone and the homes left behind, but
also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless
pathways of the sky.

The man wants to tame the woman, metaphorically presented as a swallow. In the long process of domestication, she is deprived of her "urge to fly." The verbs "tame" and "fly" point to the conflicting urges in man and woman. Part of the poem "Of Calcutta" also portrays the picture of the domestication of woman

(C P 56-60). The husband transforms the speaker into the contemptible canine status of a housewife: "Here in my husband's home, I am a trained circus dog / Jumping my routine hoops each day." Interestingly, the same image of domestic dog is attributed to the moon in another poem, "The Moon" (C P 21): "It is a trained circus dog / That shall never miss its hoop." That the unprotesting housewife finds a companion in the moon can also be read as a woman writer's implicit attack on a male-oriented aesthetic for which the moon for a long time was the ideal metaphor for womanhood.

Resentment Towards Traditional Sex Roles

Kamala Das resents traditional sex roles assigned to women by the patriarchy and refuses to find total fulfilment in submissive domesticity. "An Introduction" is a powerful expression of this resentment and refusal (B K D 12-13):

. . . Then I wore a shirt
and a black sarong, cut my hair short and ignored all of
this womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl or be wife,
they cried. Be embroiderer, cook or a quarreller
with servants.

The speaker defies the patriarchal definitions of femininity and refuses to fit into any schemes or to play the role of an ensnared housewife. The narrator transforms her specific alienation from "the categorizers" into an alienation of universal dimension. The second part of the poem provides an account of the process of growing up. The hermaphroditic instincts of adolescence which begin with the search for identity is presented as a defiance of womanliness. Ultimately the woman transcends her individuality and becomes a symbol of universal power. The poem, as Ramachandran Nair remarks, asserts the speaker's individuality and feminine identity against patriarchal conformity (18). Das's ability to create poems out of ordinary events is evident in this poem. As the female body oppresses the speaker with its unwanted femaleness, she wants to ignore her sexual identity.

Das's indignation arises primarily from man's reluctance to recognise woman as a rational companion, a partner who can make his life complete and meaningful. She, however, is aware that the genderless world is unattainable and that there is no escaping the gender. Kamala Das speaks of a genderless world attained not through dream but through love-making. In "Convicts," the lovers lose their gender through the heat and passion of love (B K D 38): "When he and / I were one we were neither / male nor female."

Archetypes, Stereotypes and Prototypes

Mary Ann Fergusson observes that images of women are conditioned by the reinforcement of social stereotypes by archetypes. All images of women are, therefore, defined in relationship to man (4-5). Women of classical texts become archetypes. But they are not living realities in any social context. In traditional literature classical prototypes are abundant. But, they are also abstract. In literary practice social stereotypes follow the model of and strengthen archetypes. Patriarchal society demands that women must follow the abstract models provided by classical and traditional literary texts. This demand is a heavy burden on women. They are forced to follow prescriptive role models. In Das's poem "Suicide" the speaker complains (B K D 27-31):

I Must pose.
I must pretend,
I must act the role
Of happy woman,
Happy wife.

Growing up is a painful experience for woman. The poem "Composition" is an expression of the complexities of the experience (B K D 76-85): "The tragedy of life/is not death but growth, / the child growing into adult." The speaker experiences the pleasures and pains associated with each phase of her life. She is painfully conscious of her sexual incompetence:

I asked my husband,
am I hetero
am I lesbian
or am I just plain frigid?

The narrator desires tenderness more than love. In her search for emotional security she skips from one sexual escapade to another. As "friendship / cannot endure" and "blood-ties do not satisfy," she cultivates abnormal relationships. Das's growth from girlhood to adulthood seems to be the most painful experience of her life, if we are to believe the sequence of events narrated in *My Story*. She was married when she was still a girl to a person whose sexual behaviour produced ineradicable scars on her psyche. She became a premature wife whose pathos of the experience of being uprooted are expressed in her fictional autobiography. Her marriage abruptly cut off all her adolescent relationships, especially her relationships with her parents and grandmother. The strong bond of love that existed between Das and her grandmother to which she returns repeatedly in her writings is emblematic of her desire to recover her lost

childhood. She often strategically brings in a granddame or an old lover in her stories to emphasize the childhood of the heroine who can be treated as her Double. The hideous changes that followed the narrator's marriage are described graphically in *My Story*:

At the end of the month, experiencing rejection, jealousy and bitterness I grew old suddenly, my face changed from a child's to a woman's and my limbs were sore and fatigued (90).

Patriarchal ideology prescribes roles for women which results in a stifling of their individualities. Women seldom transcend the roles; they give up their personal aspirations for the sake of the family. They can create new roles for themselves if they resolve the inner conflict caused by guilt and anxiety of being inadequate mothers and negligent housewives. But this is seldom achieved, as contemporary culture makes of women consumers of patriarchal ideology. The role of mothers is crucial in this matter. Mothers prevent daughters from fleeing the dark caverns of patriarchy. Kamala Das believes that a woman has to wage a double battle; she should resist the external coercion exerted by the patriarchal structures of society on the one hand and the internal dissension produced by members of her own gender on the other. Only her success in this battle can ensure her liberation from the torturous spell of patriarchal culture.

The Fate of Talented Woman

The society built on patriarchal values may find the unconventional ideas expressed by women foolish or mad. Barbara Segnitz and Carol Rainey remark: "Through Art the individual can express ideas the culture might designate mad and has freedom to speak the truth" (23). The society may disagree with women giving expression to their unconventional thoughts and emotions in art and literature.

Kamala Das is conscious of the bane of the creatively inclined woman whose search for equality always ends in frustration. Women with creative potential are compelled to lead an isolated and lonely existence. Even when married, talented women are alienated. The narrator complains in *My story*:

My mother-in-law sulked, for she felt that I was spending too much time away from my child and my domestic responsibilities. Whenever she said disgruntled things my husband grew angry, and his anger was directed against me and the baby (97-98).

The narrator's husband could not tolerate her self-assertiveness. Once he prevented her from taking part in a play rehearsal at the terrace of their flat,

with the words: "You must remember you are a wife and a mother" (*My Story* 98). She silently yields to this rebuke. The narrator continues: "I kept myself busy with dreary housework while my spirit protested and cried, get out of this trap, escape" (98). Das protests against the senseless restrictions which force a sensitive and intelligent woman to lead a vapid kind of existence.

Male Tyranny

Male tyranny is the outcome of man's incapacity to love and respect woman. The poem "Nani" vicariously suggests the callousness and cruelty of the male world (B K D 19-20):

Nani, the pregnant maid hanged herself,
in the privy one day. For three long hours
until the police came, she was hanging there
a clumsy puppet, and when the wind blew
turning her gently on the rope, it seemed
to us who were children then that Nani
was doing, to delight us, a comic
dance.

The unmarried maid was obviously seduced and betrayed by her master(s) or lover. Her suicide acquires a grotesque flavour due to the children's mistaken sense of enjoyment at the extraordinary sight of Nani hanging from the ceiling of the privy. The macabre images suggest total lack of sympathy for the dead maid.

The poem "Honour" also deals with male tyranny, but on a different level (B K D 138-39):

. . . At night their
serfs
Let them take to bed little nieces, and pregnancy,
A puzzle to the young toys, later thrown into wells and ponds
From which they rose like lotuses and water-lilies, each with
A bruise on her throat and a soft bulge below her navel,

This poem, as Ramachandran Nair suggests, is a "powerful expression of unmuzzled wrath and righteous indignation at the cruelties" unleashed on "the depressed class people" (57). In fact the poem can be said to portray patriarchy operating through multiple hierarchies in Indian society. The feudal lord's "honour" comprises not only of the exploitation of the male folk but also of the seduction and ultimate murder or enforced suicide of their women. This poem

is an ironic exposition of the suffering and dishonour a community is subjected to: "the poor / Were ravished, strangled, drowned, buried at midnight behind/ snake - shrines." Das describes the brutal games of the feudal lords. She concludes the poem with a cryptic reference to the death of a Moplah bride: "even dead and rotting / The wench was alluring." The ironic conclusion of the poem evokes a derisive laughter which at once mocks the pseudo-honour of the feudal lords and shocks the conscience of the readers. In a recent article Leela Menon quotes Das to illustrate the point that Indian women are not yet emancipated. The poet ridicules Indian women's consuming desire for getting married:

Why do they want to give dowry and marry? . . . Present marriages are just rape with family consent . . . I felt cheated when I was forced to marry. It was traumatic (9).

Dowry is an extension of patriarchy that works through the general notion of male sovereignty.

The Maternal Mystique

Man does not offer woman companionship in marriage. So she turns to her children for companionship and emotional fulfilment. In her yearning for recognition and prominence in the family hierarchy the woman longs for a son, the symbol of her power. As a mother she earns the respect of society which she fails to acquire as a wife. Thus, being a mother becomes synonymous with being a woman. So, a woman considers her role of mother more important than that of a wife. Betty Friedan observes that modern woman lives through her body; she considers child-bearing "the pinnacle of human achievement" (*Mystique* 125). Modern woman considers child-bearing a substitute, though a poor substitute, for male achievement. This "glorification of the female sexual function" is one of the ways by which the feminine mystique is propagated (Friedan, *Mystique* 126). Confined to the home, a woman remains passive with no phase of her existence under her own control. Wholly dependent on man in the world of his making, woman craves to have a child for self-affirmation and self-expression.

Kamala Das's "Jaisurya" portrays the feelings of a woman associated with the birth of a son (B K D 62-63). This poem glorifies creation and childbirth as fulfilment of love. It is the finest example of her vision of organic unity in a poem. The speaker is involved in the loving act of creation. She feels like and becomes the earth and finds meaning and fulfilment in love. The man who helped her conceive is only a shadow figure:

Only that matters which forms
 as toadstools do
 under lightning and rain,
 the soft stir in womb,
 the foetus growing,

Proud Jaisurya,
 my son, separated from a darkness
 that was mine
 and in me.

This poem, as Devindra Kohli observes, weaves "a pattern of feeling which holds itself with the joy of creation" (97). The birth of the child is the break of day under "virgin whiteness." The poem exemplifies feminine sentiments. The childbirth is a psychological function with a cathartic effect. The growth of the foetus and its expulsion are, as Ramachandran Nair remarks, linked to "the creative process of nature" (34). This creative process of nature and the biological process of childbirth can again be linked to the pleasure and pain latent in the creation of a poem. There is a strange similarity between the birth of a child and the birth of a poem. This analogy is explored by Sylvia Plath in "Morning Song" and Anne Sexton in her "daughter poems." Das weaves into her experience the universal feminine hunger for a child. The companion poem "The White Flowers" expresses a mother's anxiety and anguish at the war which destroys love and life (D 24). The speaker's concern for her baby-son assumes a universal dimension. The mother is determined to protect her son: "Today I shall kiss the crown of my baby-son's head / And wish him a long life before putting him to bed." The speaker wishes her son long life in face of the threat of violence and death. The poem "Afterwards" stresses the sense of belonging a son offers to a mother (B K D 5-8): "A man who let me take his name / To make me feel I belonged."

Sex Without Self Within Marriage

Sexual exploitation and betrayal are not the only forms of male cruelty in a patriarchal society. Lack of love in man-woman relationships is an improvised form of male oppression. Remember Byron's remarks: Man's love is of man's life, a thing apart; it is woman's whole existence." Loveless relationships are unbearable for women. Relationships wanting in love corrupt their minds and degrade their positions in society. Kamala Das conceives of the male as a beast wallowing in lust with a monstrous ego under which the woman loses her identity. The strong desire for freedom, including the freedom to rebel,

forms the central strain in many of her poems. She enumerates the male felonies in her poems and builds up a structure of protest and rebellion in her poetry. Das assimilates the strength of love and the fervour of sexual attraction into her poetry. But she rejects the general contention that sex and love can sustain a marriage and make a woman's life complete and meaningful. Alladi Uma rightly observes that sex in India is a woman's duty and a man's pleasure (40). Several poems of Das convey the tedium and monotony of sex both within and outside marriage. The husband and lovers are alike in the matter of love. Their love is disguised lust, a poor substitute for real love. The life of Das's persona may be considered a tale of her experiments with love and the repeated failures of her experiments force her ego to be resentful and defiant. She looks upon each encounter as a substitute for the real experience of true love. Several of her poems, including "Honour" and "The Old Playhouse," illustrate this aspect of her attitude to love.

Kamala Das believes that not only actions but also words and gestures can make or break relationships. The poem "Of Calcutta" narrates how the routine sex of the speaker's partner is degraded by his endless tales of the sexual pleasures he derived outside the orbit of marriage (C P 56-60):

. . . he folded
 Me each night in his arms and told me of greater
 Pleasures that had come his way, richer harvests of
 Lust, gleaned from other fields, not mine; the embers died
 Within me then.

Wittingly or not, the husband contributes almost everything that will mar a sexual union. In "A Man is a Season," the speaker blames her husband for sending her to other men (C P 80):

. . . you let me toss my youth like coins
 Into various hands,
 . . . you let your wife
 Seek ecstasy in others' arms.

The husband stoops to savage depths to teach her the distinction between a man and a husband: man is a "season," but husband is "eternity." The aftermath of his action is irreparable and irreversible. "A Faded Epaulet on His Shoulder" portrays marital disharmony which results from the destruction of woman's personality (C P 103-04). The speaker tells us of the unfeeling, unloving, bureaucratic husband in sarcastic terms. He has greater interest in the problems of the co-operative movement than in the *parijat* on her hair or in the aroma

of her sandalwood-smeared breasts. The husband is lustful and lascivious: "even a fair-skinned maid servant could / take him away from me for hours." The partners are doomed to be estranged with rapid disappearance of love between them. Though the male partner hardly evokes any true passion in her, he is lively with his lust which he performs routinely.

The poem "The Sunshine Cat" reveals the extreme form of domestic cruelty perpetuated on woman (T 22). Selfishness and cowardice of the husband deprive the woman of familial protection: "being selfish / And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor / Used her, but was a ruthless watcher." Das's speakers bear the burden of sex without self which their ethically and psychologically inferior husbands perform ritually. Her women feel a sense of revulsion which ultimately lead them to protest and to rebel. The poem "The Freaks" presents the speaker and her partner as freakish (B K D 42). The woman's impatience and frustration with an emotionally passive man who commutes his love into sheer lust find ironic expression in the poem. With his inability to love he short-changes love for lust and mocks at her feminine integrity. With a view to asserting herself she flaunts "a grand, flamboyant lust." This poem reflects the widening chasm between woman's passion and its fulfilment. The poem "Cat in the Gutter" also presents the image of a woman disgusted with loveless sex (C P 99). The speaker cannot convince her husband that his robust lust "without any "soul to overpower" her is only a physical pleasure. With his lust he reduces the woman to "a high bred kitten / Rolling for fun in the gutter." In the poem "The Swamp," Das portrays the speaker's dissatisfaction with her sexual partner (B K D 89-91). The soul-less sex which the man engages in is only a physical exercise which produces a sort of addiction in the partners.

Sex Without Self Outside Marriage

Patriarchy is sexual colonialism in which gender relationships are in terms of domination and subordination. This ingenious form of internal colonization results in the inhuman and undignified treatment of women. Men develop a utilitarian attitude to women and expect total and unconditional servility from them. Love and marriage are means of emotional manipulation which men exploit to their advantage. Man not only underestimates woman's aspirations but also refuses to create a context for her growth. This can lead to the construction of a world of fantasy in which a woman may flit from man to man in relentless pursuit of a fruitful and abiding relationship. Kamala Das is keenly aware of the complexity of the problem, which she has articulated with involvement in her poems.

Kamala Das's "Substitute" is an overview of her various relationships with men which she considers substitutes for her marriage (D 6-7):

. . . love became a swivel-door
When one went out, another came in.
Then I lost count, for always in my arms
Was a substitute for a substitute.

The speaker plunges into a series of affairs as satisfactory substitutes for her disharmonious marriage. Devindra Kohli finds in her article "I Studied All Men" an elaboration of this view (95). Love is compared to "a swivel-door": as one lover leaves her, another enters. The refrain "It will be alright" is an ambiguous statement. The speaker means the opposite of what it literally conveys. Her unconventional state, as Vrinda Nabar points out, is an aberration (44). But it is an aberration only from the angle of patriarchy. There is complete lack of harmony between the man and the woman:

Our bodies after love-making
Turned away, rejecting.
Our words began to sound
Like clatter of swords in fight.

This poem is an exploration of the frustrated female psyche. There is hardly any emotional involvement in this love. The warmth and loveliness of the affair is shortlived.

The poem "Gino" can be read as Das's experience with one such "substitute for substitute" (B K D 56-57). It opens on a note of warning. Das compares the kiss of a lover to the bite of a krait that "fills / the bloodstream with its accursed essence." As Vrinda Nabar observes, there is an element of betrayal in the kiss of the Indian lover (65). The speaker is caught between a frustrated love life and the prospects of a glorious love which, it is suggested, is unlikely to be realized. Caught between the misery of one and the uncertainty of the other, the speaker becomes lonely and helpless. Another poem "Sunset, Blue Bird" presents the desertion of the lover after he has found out that the woman has conceived from him (B K D 86). The woman continues to be absorbed in the lover long after the event.

In the poem "Conflagration" the speaker reminds the poet that the world extends beyond the body of her lover (D 20). The sexual act is compared to "lying buried / Beneath a man." The Lawrentian sense of passion as a self-centred and destructive elemental fire is evident in the poem. The sexual act as burial is a recurring theme in Das's poetry. The poem "Descendants" portrays

Patriarchy

lovers indulging in insubstantial love (B K D 43): "nailed, no, not / to crosses but to soft beds." The identification of the cross with the bed indicates, as Ramachandran Nair points out, the agony and torture of the kind of love the lovers practise (24). The lust which the lovers actively engage in ends in damnation and punishment. The speaker is one of the descendants who awaits damnation for the unconventional love to which she yields easily. The poem "Captive" describes love as "an empty gift" and the speaker as a captive of "womb's blinded hunger" (C P 81). The image of "muted whisper / at the core" suggests the act of consummation without contentment. This poem stresses the speaker's dissatisfaction with lust which is the only kind of love she experiences in her life. In "The Doubt," Das pictures love as a shameful act and sex as a murder where the murderer, the male, destroys the evidence of the crime (D 16):

. . . I can see him
After a murder, conscientiously
Tidy up the scene, wash
The bloodstains under
Faucet, bury the knife.

The lover's thrust is compared to a stab. The poem ends with an exposure of the poet's sexual identity: "what am I in sex who shuttles / Obsessively from his / Stabs." The speaker doubts whether the sexual experience she has as a female is something else. The theme of sexual act as murder is a recurrent theme in Das's poetry. In "Ferns" the relationship of the lovers is conveyed through the images such as "dismembered heads," "night-streets grinning in static mirth" and "quiet places eat its own hotted flesh" and is confirmed by the pictorial lines "our / Bodies stalked on beds will mimic the slow / Gestures of the mind" (B K D 32). The sexual hunger is self-consuming and horrible as expressed by the grotesque imagery of the poem.

In the poem "The Looking Glass," the speaker flatters the male ego in ironic expressions (D 25). The woman yields to the man's strange demands and gives in to his supremacy. The irony of the situation lies in the woman's difficulty to keep the man despite her sacrifices:

. . . getting
A man to love is easy, but living
Without him afterward may have to be
Faced

The basic needs of women are universal rather than personal. The speaker reveals what the male wants to believe: his strength compared to her softness

before the looking glass. The explicit sexuality of the first half of the poem is rather startling. The poem "Glass" speaks about the fragility of love and female body (B K D 103). The hasty arms of the lover reduces the woman to "an armful of splinters," a "broken glass." As Ramachandran Nair points out, the sad awareness that nothing endures in man-woman relationship is the underlying feeling of the poem (42). The speaker renders a service to her many lovers, gives "a wrapping to their dreams," a "woman-voice" and a "woman-smell." The second half of "The Stone Age" portrays the poisonous and sinful nature of the speaker's relationship with her lover (B K D 97-98): "ask me / why his hand sways like a hooded snake / before it clasps my pubis." The erotic imagery has the advantage of erasing the question of infidelity of the speaker. "The Old Playhouse" portrays a lover who ensnares the speaker (B K D 100-01). His lust coils the woman like a snake; she depends on him for more love: "The strong man's technique / is always the same. He serves his love in lethal doses." He kills her individuality through slow-poisoning by his lust. In her sexual encounters Das's speaker can never find fulfilment as a person or satisfaction as a woman. The woman's experiments with love end in a catastrophe. Das knows that in sexual relationships woman is always the inferior partner yielding to the egotistic cruelty of man.

Conclusion

Feminism has assumed an aggressive and militant dimension in the West while India still holds an ambivalent attitude to the movement. The emergence of women as an organised group is a new phenomenon in the Indian situation. Indians have a sceptical approach to feminism. A woman writes consciously out of her gender as a representative of the internally colonized and marginalized half of the human race. As a member of the second sex, Kamala Das shares the collective experiences and collective oppression of women which she represents uniquely in her poetry. An unconscious feminist ideology remains latent in her poetry which portrays women's untiring battle against the forces of male domination and tyranny.

Female sensibility and literary creations are positive elements that disprove the theories of feminine fulfilment currently in circulation in all societies. Though torn between domestic duties and artistic aspirations, Kamala Das emerges successfully from the confusion and contradiction that confront a woman's life. It is natural for women writers to expose themselves consciously to their female-predecessors in their anxiety of poetic influence. But Das appears not to be influenced by any female poet in her repudiation of the mystique of

feminine fulfilment. The drive for self-knowledge which her speakers express is a search for identity.

Kamala Das is of the view that the phallogentric organisation of society exerts its vicious influence on women. Patriarchy is an all-pervasive phenomenon in the present-day world. The most dominant spheres of its influence are the family and the domestic life and the institutions of love and marriage. Male cruelty and female subordination are direct consequences of patriarchy. The consideration of motherhood as a redeeming transition from womanhood is a significant aspect of patriarchal thought. Das highlights the miserable predicament of woman who struggles to reconcile herself between the society's expectations of womanhood and her own expectation of feminine fulfilment.

Domestication of women is one of the strategies adopted by the patriarchal culture to perpetuate the interests of the dominant male sex. Man seldom reaches sophistication beyond the level of Browning's duke in "My Last Duchess" who regards taming the shrew as his serious vocation. Kamala Das is conscious of the perpetual domestication of women in contemporary society and has written about this in several of her poems.

Marriage is a social construct which comes handy for men to exploit women. Once the sexual exploitation is over, man spurns woman. She protests against the inferior and insignificant social role assigned to her. Marriage turns out to be a fleeting bondage, a dream that vanishes as naturally as darkness at dawn. Living in a swamp of sexual and marital commitments emaciates woman's individuality. A man, who fails to sustain a woman by genuine love and marital happiness, attempts to make up for his failure with adulation and flattery. Often man passes off as an unbeaten romantic hero who lifts woman into a world of make-believe. Kamala Das portrays wonderfully the failure of love and marriage in sustaining man-woman relationship. Man and woman cannot keep any abiding companionship by sex without self in marriage or outside its legal orbit. Many poems of Das point to the disintegration of the social institutions of love and marriage. Love, in her view, is a deceptive passion that shackles a woman into an unsure and uncertain conjugal connection. She believes that women have the potential for the collective effort to overcome their limitations and accomplish and enjoy a just and impartial society. In unambiguous terms Das mocks at women who express tender feelings and suggest that a literary woman should rise spontaneously above the rigours of beauty and courtesy if she is to satisfy her inner urge of self-expression.

The family is a socially entrenched institution that keeps a woman as a domestic drudge. Tradition imposes unnatural restrictions on a woman's life and

deprives her of free movement and choice. What family and domestic life offer a woman is an uncertain and unsure existence. Kamala Das portrays the manifold aspects of domestic violence in many of her poems. She gives expression to her feminine fury and feminine anguish with equal emphasis. Physical assault that she expresses in her poetry is often a symbolic outrage. She underlines the psychological aspect of domestic violence and its impact on woman's life. The history of womanhood has only the scenario of nunnery, nursery, hospital, graveyard and death to offer woman. It is a record of women's elusive moments of self-sacrifice and resultant doom. What Das conveys is that a woman's virtue doesn't lie in burying her self to satisfy others.

For generations, women consider motherhood the be-all and end-all of womanhood. Though woman is defined by her sexuality, she is restrained from enjoying her sexuality. This irony of fate that haunts woman is one of the cruelties which a patriarchal society inflicts on woman. Even woman's maternal instincts are conditioned by patriarchal ideology. Woman looks upon the birth of a child as a necessary fulfilment which earns her recognition in society. Kamala Das celebrates the birth of a son as an event of redemption in woman's life. A son, for her, is a deliverer who makes a woman's life meaningful. The tender feelings of maternal duty and maternal bond are manipulated by patriarchal ideology. Kamala Das draws attention to the enormous proportion to which patriarchal ideology vitiates maternal instincts.

The maternal mystique handed down by tradition is the strongest impediment to women's battle for equality and dignity in life. Little wonder that rational women of today want to be purged of the enslaving bondage of motherhood. The mother in a woman is a symbol of the victim in her that transforms her into a martyr whose submission is in perpetual conflict with her urge for autonomy. This conflict is also evident in the clash between generations of women: mothers as supporters and consumers of patriarchy and the daughters as the protagonists of feminist awakening. The psychic dimension of domestic violence denigrates a woman in the public and downgrades her in matters of literary creation. Patriarchy as an obstructive ideology attempts to foil woman's creative efforts. However, the speakers of Kamala Das do not allow patriarchy to stifle their voices. They declare themselves to be revolutionaries for the establishment of woman's equality and respect.

□

Chapter - 3

THE SELF AND OTHERS

In most societies woman defines herself through inter-personal relationships. Sudhir Kakar states that woman's dependence is a marked tendency in the Indian context (Ghadially 45). The dominant psycho-social realities which determine a woman's identity find expression in literature as role-models. A woman transforms her cultural devaluation into feelings of unworthiness and inferiority. Inter-personal relationships are structured to maintain hierarchical relationships between the sexes. In India the structures are so rigidly set that accomplished women find it difficult to create complimentary roles for themselves.

A woman's life is a dehumanising and humiliating experience in a patriarchal society. The struggle to become a human being is the necessary fate that awaits a woman. This struggle is manifested in women's literature in manifold forms. In women's poetry the persona assumes different forms corresponding to the various roles a woman is forced to assume. The different guises the persona assumes lead to multiple voices. Besides the multiple roles of daughter, wife and mother, a woman poet plays out the roles of unhappy woman, unsated mistress, selfless lover, reluctant nymphomaniac, innocuous doll, vicious seductress and ferocious witch. In autobiographical writings, the narrator's voice is the poet's Double or the Other (Coates 1-2). Writing constitutes a continuous process of self-discovery through the medium of creative art. The verbal symbols enable the writer to attain self-knowledge. The most alarming problem which the modern woman writer, especially of autobiographical writings, encounters is the crisis of identity. All her creative endeavours are directed to establish a firm, distinct identity.

Kamala Das emphasizes the point that in the case of women there is nothing which can be called isolated individual experience. Her insights into woman's sexuality enable her to sympathetically portray the sufferings and actions of all kinds of women in her poetry. Her experiences incorporate

personal as well as mythical memories. The adventures of each of her personae constitute a commentary on woman's plight the world over. The poems of Das repeatedly emphasize the futility of investment in personal relationships, the growing attention to inner self, women's potential for self-awareness and their alienation from society. There is a deceptive calmness with which her personae narrate the disintegration and chaos of the self in repulsive epithets. Das adopts this technique, which may be condemned as a structural discrepancy, to shock and enlighten her readers. She weaves highly personal poems out of her sexual, emotional and even spiritual experiences with integrity and mastery. Both thematically and stylistically her poetry should be read in the context of her unique experiences of gender.

Poetry as Self Discovery

Kamala Das relies on her life and experiences for the themes of her poems. The recurring themes of her poetry are childhood memories of ancestral home, love, marriage, man-woman relationship, the Radha-Krishna legends and maternal instincts. She transmutes the psycho-pathological elements of her life into something universal in her poetry. Das remarks in the course of an interview:

A writer derives inspiration from his life, what else? A writer is like a mirror that has learnt to retain the image reflected in it. Indelible reflection. Those who do not write, retain nothing of life, ultimately. Life runs through their fingers like fine sand (Remedios 57).

Das creates a personal mythology in some of her poems and peoples them with her relations, husband, lovers, children and friends. She believes that her personality is the raw material for her poetry. She writes in *My Story*:

Poets . . . are different from other people . . . A poet's raw material is not stone or clay; it is her personality (157).

This statement, which may be applied to every creative writer, reflects the essential component of her poetry and indicates a direction to the understanding of her poetry. Das observes in the article "Only Those Above 55, Obsessed with Sex": "Although I write with a lot of detachment, I do figure in my writings . . ." (*The Current Weekly* 22). Devindra Kohli describes her poetry as a sort of "compulsion-neurosis" which offers a kind of release, a safety-valve, for her emotions (20). She views poetry as a continuous torment. Her poems carry the violent energy associated with "unpremeditated and unreflected emotions" (Kohli 20). Writing is a means of self-discovery for her. She says: "When I write I get closer and closer to my true self . . . It is an activity that

cannot be shared, so akin to dying" (Remedios 59). She looks upon writing as a full-time vocation and complains that she, a "part-time house-wife," finds it difficult to set aside a time-table for writing (Remedios 59). Das comments:

If I had not excellent servants to do the work around the house, I would not have become a poet. A poet cannot write when there are momentary worries filling his head. Poetry is a full-time job.

(Qtd in Nabar 13)

She finds poetry a demanding art. She uses, according to Bruce King, a "personal voice," and "self-revelation" in an effort to evolve her personality in a self-assertive mood (152). Anisur Rahman observes that her personae are her own "mutilated self," tormented by temperal consciousness (20). There is an abiding sense of crisis which pervades her poetry as she relentlessly tries to build an identity in a patriarchal society. The existential framework of her poems underlines the dynamics of self-evolution. Her poetry is marked by a feminist consciousness as well as a feminist sense of resistance to male oppression. She evolves a female identity as a person in her poems. Devindra Kohli observes that "Kamala Das has more to say about the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role to the point of discovering and asserting her individual freedom and identity" (29). K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar also expresses the same idea: "Kamala Das's is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in largely insensitive man-made world" (680). The central burden of her poetry springs from the conflict between a woman's loss of freedom and identity in a patriarchal society and her ruthless fight to attain the same values. Das's vision, as Suresh Kohli points out, is "vitally particularised by woman's point of view" (17). She startles the conformist society by her attempts to redefine herself in personal relationships even by breaking the traditional concept of womanhood.

Identity Through Others

Kamala Das's personae are contemporary women beset by an identity crisis which works at two levels. In the first, she tries to mend an identity for herself by her nostalgic yearning for her ancestral past represented by her grandmother and ancestral home, a place of childhood innocence where she feels at home with her self. The ancestral memories are the vital "symbols of undefiled purity which she left once and lost for ever" (Rahman 31). In the second level the crisis assumes the form of a psychic conflict in which the alluring past is at war with the bleak present. The poet's self frequents the past and the present in a commendable effort to redefine her identity. Her rebellious

posture against the patriarchal world extricates her self from the crisis of identity. Das's poetry is a contemporary Indian woman's relentless quest to evolve a personal identity distinct from her identity as a sexual object that traditional society has constructed for her.

Kamala Das uses her vision of personal relationships to evolve an identity for herself. This is an existential problem which involves a personal demand for self-definition against a personal impulse to have none. Her poetic utterances betray an aggressive personality. Like a "forest fire" she wants to grab and swallow everyone and everything that comes her way. Her appetite for life is a consuming passion. The force with which Das takes possession of the different human beings is concretised in "Forest Fire" (O P 39). Unlike the all-destructive forest fire, the poetic frenzy consumes human beings to prevent destruction. Hunger of the forest fire, as Vrinda Nabar also points out, is the essential part of Das's life (21). The yearning for satisfying human relationships is at the bottom of her heart. The poem "Substitute" indicates the direction in which Das pursues the relationships (D 6-7): "for always in my arms / Was a substitute for a substitute." For the poet the relationships form an endless series of substitutes. The frustrated female psyche continues to deal with the substitutes in a tireless attempt to build a new identity. The distinction of the identity unmistakably conveys the idea of the woman she wants herself to be. Her difference from the forest fire is not without significance. Das hints that she wants to be different from the traditional woman who has no substitute to rely on.

Grandmother

Kamala Das undergoes an identity crisis due to her inability to establish meaningful and abiding relationships with the world. She attempts to resolve this crisis either through love or by poetry, wherein the urge to return to the past becomes, in essence, an occasion for the celebration of the body. In "My Grandmother's House" the past is the phase of the narrator's life when true love existed (B K D 21). After her grandmother's death, "the house withdrew into silence." She recalls her childhood days when "snakes moved / among books I was then too young / to read, and my blood turned cold like the moon." She compares her past with the present and cries out in wild despair:

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

Love in the past was a spontaneous emotion. The speaker desires to

... pick an armful of
darkness to bring it here to lie
behind my bedroom door like a brooding
dog

Darkness is a symbol of nostalgic passion which convinces her that the past is preferable to the present. The speaker's present condition of emotional insecurity forces her to find comfort by an imaginative sojourn to her grandmother's house which binds her to an enviable past. Das is conscious that an amiable past exists only in memories. The poem stresses the sad awareness that the shared emotional comfort and togetherness are over. The poem begins with this awareness, leads us through childhood experiences and takes us back to the same awareness in a realistic portrayal of the grandmother's house. The speaker's fascination for the house provides her with a feeling of vicarious comfort and a sense of belonging.

The poem "A Hot Noon in Malabar" contrasts the irresistible past with the miserable present (B K D 18). The natural and spontaneous life of Malabar is a contrast to the speaker's suppressed, lonely life in the city. Malabar comes to symbolize her childhood days and she recaptures it to regain her lost self. In "The Suicide," the narrator recollects how she used to swim in the pale green pond when her grandmother warned her (B K D 27-31): "you must stop this bathing now. / You are much too big to play / Naked in the pond." Poems like "No Noon at My Village Home" and "Evening at the Old Nalapat House" present the picture of the ancestral home in surreal images (C P 31,38).

Ambivalence is the hallmark of Das's "grandmother poems." Her protagonist at once craves for grandmother's love and intimacy and struggles to free herself from the sense of loss and pain associated with the relationship. It is this ambivalence that initiates the central conflict of the "grandmother poems." The grandmother is a magic cure for the neurotic disturbance of Das personae. The conflict arises out of the Double and the Other associated with the poetic self. While the Double takes on the sense of loss and pain, the Other finds life marvellous. For the Das speaker, her pain and pleasure come from the same or identical sources. Though the grandmother is a source of sense of loss and pain, she provides a constructive help and delightful comfort in the development of Kamala Das as a person and as a poet. The situation of Das speaker is the general predicament of abandoned women in a patriarchal society. The grandmother is emblematic of the feminist sisterhood which is at once a matter of help and an emotional burden.

Mother

Kamala Das's poetry is dominated by an impulse of rejection. The need for intimacy in life which her speakers express is counterbalanced by a strong sense of self in her poetry. The sexual and emotional demands of her personae are rejected on account of her loss of power, freedom and selfhood in a patriarchal culture. As a force of assimilation, grandmother was a source of relief and comfort for her. Strangely enough, Das's affection for her mother is hardly transmuted into poetry. The narrator of *My Story* describes her home as "a house of cards" with one parent in Malabar and the other in Calcutta (81). She recalls that her mother was not intimate to the children. "My mother, vague and indifferent, spent her time lying on her belly . . . composing poems in Malayalam" (*My Story* 2). The children are, therefore, forced to seek the company of servants. She portrays her parents as an ill-assorted couple who put on a facade of happiness in the family (*My Story* 4-5). The narrator disapproves of her mother's "timidity" which creates "an illusion of domestic harmony" (*My Story* 5). The unsatisfactory mother-daughter relationship drives Das speakers to find a surrogate mother in the grandmother. However, Kamala Das has not written many poems about her mother. "My Mother at Sixty Six," one of the few of her "mother poems," conveys the speaker's anxiety over her mother's getting old like "a late winter's moon" (B K D 148). The poem also reveals the speaker's anxiety about ageing. In the poem "Home to Mother," the housewife-speaker visualizes herself as a girl running to her mother "with two pigtales and a satchel" (Nandy, ed., *Indian Poetry in English Today* 90). The stress, again, is on the childhood of the speaker irretrievably lost rather than on her love for the mother. In her "mother poems" Das follows the general feminist technique in which the persona identifies herself with a woman relative through her identification with the female body. It is through body, through motherhood that the identities of various generations are evolved. At best, as the narrator of *My Story* reveals, her mother is a source of inspiration for her poems on Krishna legends. As a representative of the Indian woman who seeks independence within domestic security, Das finds her mother's subservient role in the family a hazardous model to follow. The poetic reticence which Das consistently keeps about her relationship with her mother is a fit case for psychological probing.

Father

It is Kamala Das's relationship with her father, and not her feeling for her mother, that finds artistic expression in her poetry. The concluding statement of "Glass" is quite significant in this respect (B K D 103):

. . . I have misplaced a father
somewhere
and look for him now everywhere.

This can be interpreted as the Freudian search for a lost father figure. Devindra Kohli correctly observes that the speaker "moves from man to man in search of her true home" and her father (112). She has given a mythical dimension to the same attempt in her "Krishna poems," where the father figure merges with Krishna, the eternal lover. The speaker-lover of Das flits from one man to another in an act of inexplicable revenge against the male order.

The narrator of *My Story* pictures her father as an autocrat who insisted that his wife should not "wear anything but Khaddar" (4). He forced her to wear no ornaments except the "mangalasutra." His treatment of children was nightmarish and humiliating. He took the children for granted, and never thought that children too have independently developing personalities (74). Kamala Das was never in sympathy with the ways of her father. No wonder the speaker of the poem "Of Calcutta" complains (C P 56-60):

I was sent away, to protect a family's
Honour, to save a few cowards, to defend some
Abstractions, . . .

This does not mean that Das had no regard for her father. She was fond of him and has deep respect for his moral strength, as is indicated by many poems. The poem "A Requiem for My Father" is a monument of filial affection (C P 39-41). The poet conceives of her father as a hero, a strong man with an undying zest for life. He resisted death and withstood medical torture for nine days:

For nine days and nights you were on the rack
While your secret foes came to watch you die

Her father's popularity was so great, his personality was so irresistible, that even his "foes came to watch" him die. The image of "rack" gives a halo to the dying father and invokes the image of Christ on the cross. The sense of desolation of the bereaved family, the awareness of the futility of human achievement and the senseless prayer of the living for the dead are poignantly expressed in the poem. The poem closes with the statement: "I loved you father, I loved you all my life." This is a very sincere and honest statement in simple and unambiguous terms.

In another poem entitled "My Father's Death," the speaker expresses her repentance and anguish at being "a bad daughter, bad wife and bad mother"

(B K D 124-25). A sense of guilt pervades the poem. Her father evokes a sense of awe and reverence. Das brought him ill-reputation with her publication of *My Story* and a few unconventional prose pieces.

. . . Some say that I brought him shame. He brought with each visit
banana chips and words of reproach. I feared my father.
Only in that last coma did he seem close to me, and
I whispered into his ears that I loved him, although bad..

The speaker longs for a hug, a kind word from her father. Though she is "bad," she claims she is the most loving. Her love, she states, is priceless: "but my price was too high for you, / your wallet could not hold abstract currency." This poem is also a vivid expression of love of a repentant and guilt-conscious daughter for her father. In another poem, "I Shall Not Forget" the speaker recalls the way she watched her father die (C P 30). This incident gives her courage to defy death. "I have seen death / And I shall not forget." Das's attitude to her father alternates between love and hatred. She expresses her anger and hatred for her autocratic father in her prose writings. But her unqualified love for him finds poignant expression in her poems. As poetic expression her love for her father carries the weight of emotion. Her unsated desire for his company had an abrupt end when she was prematurely married off. Ever since her marriage she has been seeking the "misplaced father" in all her relationships with men. In a patriarchal culture every girl has to leave the security and love of her family for an uprooted life in a stranger's home, where she hopes "to receive love, at least in small change (B K D 21). This uprooting and re-rooting of life is certainly emotionally disturbing for a woman.

The father-daughter relationship is a poignant motif in Das's poetry. Das looks upon the nuclear family as a microcosmic analogue of the social and psychic structure of patriarchal culture. A few of her poems represent the psycho-social pattern of father-daughter relationship. Phyllis Chesler remarks:

Most of women are glossed into infancy . . . by an unmet need for maternal nurturance. Thus, female children turn to their fathers for physical affection, nurturance, or pleasurable emotional intensity—a turning that is experienced as "sexual" by the adult male, precisely because it is predicated on the female's (his daughter's) innocence, helplessness, youthfulness, and monogamous idolatry. This essentially satyric and incestuous model of sexuality is almost universal (18-19).

Daughters turn away from mothers' intimacy as they are phobic of lesbian tendencies, jealous of daughters' youth, averse to harsh training into femininity

and resentful of the dislike of other women and female body (Chesler 19). The unconscious incest that may be attributed to Das's "father poems" is not a source of neurotic disturbance. Patriarchal marriage and romantic love are "psychologically predicated on sexual union between Daughter and Father figures" (Chesler 20). Das's father is a male principle who is not sufficiently accommodative to the female world. He is the patriarchal father-God whose shortcomings are definitive failures of humanity.

Husband

With characteristic frankness Kamala Das describes the discords of her married life in many of her poems. She frequently complains of her husband's callousness and her boring domestic routine. She hoped that her husband would be a man of compassion and considerateness. The narrator of *My Story* recalls: "I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms, the loneliness of my life" (84). Her search for the father figure in her husband failed miserably. His love was only skin-deep. She was reduced to the status of a "hausfrau for his home," a "mother for his sons," a "nodding / Doll for his parlour" and a "walkie talkie one to / Warm his bed at night" (C P 59). She became a domesticated woman and a sex object. She soon found herself degenerated to the position of "a trained circus dog" which jumps its "routine hoops each day" (C P 59). She felt soulless; her desires became mute on her tongue. Her husband had a history of indiscretion. He was alleged to have homosexual relationship with other men. Any fair-skinned maid could take him away from her for hours, as she mentions in "A Faded Epaulet on His Shoulder" (C P 103-04).

"The Freaks" portrays the speaker and her partner, her husband of course, as freakish (B K D 42). Her impatience and frustration with a sexually passive man who commutes his love into sheer lust find ironic expression in the poem. Because of his inability to love he short-changes love for lust and mocks at her feminine integrity. And in order to assert herself she flaunts "a grand, flamboyant lust." "The Freaks" suggests the widening gulf between a woman's desire and her sense of fulfilment. The poem "The Stone Age" testifies to the misery of the wife-speaker due to the indifference of her husband (B K D 97-98). Her husband, the "old fat spider" weaves "webs of bewilderment" out of his venom to turn her "into a bird of stone." He stonewalls her in a "shabby drawing room" and caresses her while reading. He spoils her "pre-morning" dreams and creates a domestic stone age to annihilate her personality. "The Old Playhouse" is another poem that deals similarly with the theme of the domestication of women (B K D 100-01). The male partner in this poem

"planned to tame a swallow" and "to hold her / in the long summer" of his love. He wanted her to forsake her "urge to fly" and "the endless / pathways of the sky." He wanted to domesticate the woman symbolised as a swallow. She "ate the magic loaf and / became a dwarf." The man overwhelmed her and reduced her to a chattel. Confined at home, helpless and discontent, she became a pigmy. The man was only pleased with her "body's response, . . . its usual shallow / convulsions." He wanted her for the simple purpose of sexual gratification. He could hardly quell her passion for love. He fed her with love "in lethal doses."

The poem "Heron" states that it is the duty of the wife to satisfy the lust of her husband (B K D 52). The speaker's husband thinks that she is more lovable when put on sedatives. He believes that her "ragdoll limbs adjust better / to his versatile lust" when she is semiconscious. In another poem "The Swamp," Kamala Das emphasizes the point that unsatisfied sexual banter brings anguish and weariness (B K D 89-91). Sex without love becomes a "tragic sport" and becomes an addiction. The poem "Sunshine Cat" reveals the extreme version of domestic cruelty (T 22). The husband, here, is "a coward" who "neither loved nor / Used her, but was a ruthless watcher" (T 22). The husband watches his wife as if she were a prisoner convicted for some grave crime. He shuts her up "with a streak of sunshine" and keeps her as a pet. His cruel ways drive her to the point of insanity. The poem "Of Calcutta" narrates the manner in which the speaker's husband makes sour the routine sexual act by his tales "of greater / Pleasures," the "richer harvests of / Lust, gleaned from other fields" which causes "the embers died" in her (C P 56-60). The poem "Cat in the Gutter" also presents the image of a woman disgusted with sex without love (C P 99).

Kamala Das's *My Story* contains many passages which narrate the emotional tension in her relationship with her husband. Lack of love in marital relationship can assume the form of male cruelty. The male partner in *My Story* is a savage gloating over his versatile and robust lust. Several passages of the book convey the tedium and monotony of routine sex. The husband recklessly exploits the wife's body and lacerates her psyche. He is not the father-figure Das is in pursuit of. The husband who replaces the father is not only domineering but also inconsiderate. Her search for the "misplaced father" fails.

Lovers

The poem "Substitute" illustrates the insatiable appetite which Kamala Das's speakers express for affairs (D 6-7):

... love became a swivel door
When one went out, another came in.
Then I lost count, for always in my arms
Was a substitute for a substitute.

The article "I Studied All Men" prompts Devindra Kohli to conclude that the author plunges into a series of love affairs as a satisfactory substitute for her discordant married life (95). Love is compared to "a swivel-door" with a simultaneous "in" and "out." This comparison finds its echo in the article: "Each night, after stripping myself, I put aside my soul and entered the arena with a body as efficient as a clock work toy" (Singh 14). The refrain "It will be alright" of "Substitute" suggests that she is ready to play the roles assigned to her. Her unconventional state is, as Vrinda Nabar remarks, an aberration which invites attention to her individuality (44):

Our bodies after love-making
Turned away, rejecting.
Our words began to sound
Like clatter of swords in fight.

This statement suggests the lack of harmony between the partners. The speaker attempts a self-discovery in the poem. The ironic repetition of the refrain, as Ramachandran Nair observes, means the opposite of what it says (30). The love described in the poem is a "physical thing." The lovers kissed and loved "all in a fury." The rapid and mechanical nature of love suggests lack of emotional involvement.

The poem "A Relationship" identifies love with physical desire (O P 41): "It was my desire that made him male / And beautiful" The relationship is archetypal, older than "myriad / Saddened centuries." It is an irony of fate that the speaker finds rest and peace in her lover who has betrayed her. In "The Testing of the Sirens," Das speaks of a dual adultery, of the speaker's intimacy with two lovers (B K D 58-59). One of them, as Vrinda Nabar phrases it, is "merely a poor substitute for the other" (27). The speaker awakens from a night of love and lust to a day of physical loneliness, goes for a drive with the young man with "a pock-marked face" and "a friendly smile." While he photographs her against the rusty guns standing like mute phalluses, a sensation of love arises in her which is doomed to remain unfulfilled. She juxtaposes her intimacy with the young man with the "one-sided love" of the "filthy snob." She responds to the first lover with her "limbs" and to the second with a "smile." The relationships expose the futility of words which hardly convey anything despite the tenderness and abundance of language (Kohli 79). The melancholy wailing

of the sirens symbolising the agony of the speaker resonates with the mirthless laughter of the new lover. The speaker's loyalty to both the lovers, as Ramachandran Nair observes, is a passing fancy which is part of her endless search for a perfect lover (14). The hideousness of such images as the "pregnant girl" baring her "dusky breasts" and the "crows" bickering over "a piece of lizard meat" suggests the futility of real love and the cruelty of lust posing as love. Real love remains elusive and unfulfilled while lust reigns.

The dialectical opposition between the ascetic and the sensual is the theme of "An Apology to Goutama" (S C 19). Goutama is a substitute lover who satisfies the speaker's need for a man's arms and a man's voice. The poem expresses her anguish at the failure of her frenetic attempt to keep away the thought of another man. The dichotomy between physical comfort and mental anguish runs through the poem. It is ironic that while Goutama, the gentle lover, brings calmness and physical comfort to the speaker, the other man who hurts her with his love holds her spiritually. The poem reduces "Goutama to the level of a possible lover for the poet" and then dismisses him "as an inferior lover" (Kohli 68). Her amorous approach to Goutama reduces her relationship to a mere physical one while the torment she undergoes in loving the other man transcends to a spiritual plane.

The poem "The Descendants" pictures lovers indulging in insubstantial love which is a sin beyond redemption (B K D 43):

We have lain in every weather, nailed, no, not
to crosses but to soft beds and against
softer forms . . .

The identification of the cross with the bed indicates the agony and torture of the kind of love the lovers practise. The lovers' savage pleasure is a sin which ends in damnation and punishment. The speaker is one of the descendants who awaits damnation by the public for the unconventional love to which she yields easily. A similar idea is expressed in "Convicts" (B K D 38). Here physical love is described in terms of physical labour. The convicts are the lovers engaged in lust who are like "the toys dead children leave behind." In the heat and heaviness of their fatal lust they have lost their gender: "When he and / I were one we were neither / male nor female." This is a recurring theme in Kamala Das. A tragic absence of feeling is emblematic of the kind of love that Das's speakers are after.

The poem "The Doubt" which is built on an irrefutable logic about death, pictures love as a shameful act, and sex as a form of murder where the murderer, the male, destroys the evidence of the crime (D 16):

. . . I can see him
 After a murder, conscientiously
 Tidy up the scene, wash
 The bloodstains under
 Faucet, bury the knife . . .

The poet begins with a simple doubt as to why the corpse is referred to in the neuter and wonders whether it is the soul that imparts gender to a body. The sexual act is portrayed as a murder and the lover's thrusts as jabs of a murderer's knife. The poem ends with an exposure of the speaker's sexual identity:

. . . What am I in sex who shuttles
 Obsessively from his
 Stabs

She doubts whether the sexual experience she had as a female was something else. This uncertainty is enhanced by the torturing stabs of her lover. In "Ferns," Das expresses the theme of physical love and its painful end (B K D 32). The fern is a symbol of disenchantment which she desperately wants to hide in the darkness. The images of darkness, lonely streets, craggy shores and mountains evoke a sense of horror. The grotesque nature of the imagery suggests the artificiality and stagnancy of love. The idea of lack of spontaneity in love is conveyed through the conception of the sexual hunger of the lovers which is self-consuming and horrible.

The poem "In Love" is an ironic portrayal of carnal physical desire, the never-ending lust, which links the speaker to her lover in a short-lived bond (B K D 36-37). The peace attained through lust fades on encounter with death. The impossibility of the speaker's escape from her partner's lust is conveyed through the image of "his limbs like pale and / carnivorous plants reaching / out" for her. This poem as well as "The Looking Glass" deals with essentially the physicality of sexual ecstasy (D 25). The latter poem is about love and lust. The speaker flatters the male ego in ironic expressions. The woman yields to the man's strange demands and gives in to his supremacy. The irony of the situation lies in the woman's difficulty to keep the man in spite of her sacrifice which leads to a painful contradiction in their relationship:

. . . getting
 A man to love is easy, but living
 Without him afterward may have to be
 Faced.

The phrases in the poem suggest the offensiveness of the male behaviour. The poem emphasizes the needs of the body. The basic needs of woman are universal rather than personal. The poem underlines the essential oneness and universality of sex as a ritual which each male-female unit performs uniquely. The poet reveals what the male wants to believe—his strength compared to her softness — before the looking glass. The frankness of the poem is disarming. The lovers share everything in an intimate personal bond.

The poem "Glass" speaks about the fragility of love and of the female body (B K D 103). The speaker wants to assert herself in spite of the pathos of the opening lines:

I went to him for half an hour as pure woman,
 pure misery, fragile glass, breaking, crumbling

The speaker attempts a ritual manipulation of her lover in a Cleopatra - like indifference. But in the hasty arms of her lover she is reduced to "an armful of splinters," a "broken glass." With abominable unconcern she enters and ruins the lives of others without involvement and satiety. She makes "every trap of lust a temporary home." The underlying feeling of the poem is the sad awareness that nothing endures in man-woman relationship. The fact that love experience does not reconcile with genuine pleasure is expressed through the juxtaposition of "trap" with "home." The fragile woman hurts deliberately and declares that it has become her habit.

In "Ode to a Lynx," Kamala Das gives lyrical expression to the falsehood and stink of lust (C P 88). The poem expresses a strikingly original idea. The poet addresses a lover with leonine grace but refuses to succumb to his charms. Lynx, here, is a symbol of lust and cunning. The man pretended for three years that he loved not her but her poetry. She forsakes the lover with contempt:

. . . every busy man seeks a womb,
 A womb to hibernate in.
 You thought you deserved a singing one.
 With each pelvic thrust you hoped to hear,
 In skilful verse, the range of my response

The poet stresses the lack of conscience on the part of man in relationships. Man uses every means, however base, to subjugate and ensnare woman. Woman's search for true love remains an elusive dream.

The Quest for the Ideal Lover

Kamala Das makes a myth out of her pursuit for the ideal lover. In a rare poetic conception she transcends the affairs of her speakers by giving her

poems the mythic framework of Radha-Krishna love. This deviation in the treatment of physical love is not spontaneous. It is an ingenious but unwilling poetic device necessitated by the compulsions of circumstances. This mythopoeic motif helps her to evade direct public attacks of her love poems. Das herself has confirmed this fact in one of her interviews:

I think I decided then to wear a disguise. That was why I shifted to poems that seemed metaphysical. Because many people used to advise me that I should write about the love between Radha and Krishna and escape criticism from people rather than write about my own affairs, if there were any. I would consider those poems to be the first steps I took towards the safest area. Cowardice.

(Raveendran, Interview 148-49)

This statement confirms that there is hardly any mysticism in Das's poetry. The mystical guise is misleading. It is a poetic strategy rather than a poetic reality. To attribute a mythical dimension to her poetry is a misrepresentation of facts. Mysticism in Kamala Das's poetry is a deceptive framework.

In "Radha," Das speaks about Radha's long waiting for Krishna (B K D 25). In "his first true embrace" she became a "girl / And virgin" and felt that she was melting to the core. Radha's physical experience is similar to the narrator's sensation in *My Story*: "At the first touch of his body, all my past infatuations were obliterated. It was as if his dark body was the only body left alive" (184). The "true embrace" of Krishna is to be read in the context of the treacherous kiss of the Indian lover in "Gino." In the poem "Krishna," the poet says that Krishna's body is her prison and that her world ends there (B K D 54). She cannot see beyond his dark body which blinds her. His whispers of love keeps her away from the wisdom of the world. The narrator of *My Story* passionately speaks of her last lover in almost the same words (183).

In "The Blind Walk," Kamala Das synthesizes love, fear of separation and longing for re-union in a masterly way (B K D 73). Her lover has gone away. He "was the only landmark" she "could/recognise" in the city. His name, "the only name" she remembers, "lies cradled" in her breath. She wants to "hold him," to sow her "soul in the fertile soil of his body." The fertility image of the last lines suggest a possible reunion of the lovers and the physical fulfilment of their love. The poem "Ghanashyam" is addressed to Krishna who, like a koel, has built his nest "in the arbour of" her heart (C P 93-95). Her life, which was a jungle, is now "astir with music." Whenever she approaches him he vanishes "like a spectral flame" and she is left in the cold. When she is confronted by death she remembers the "husk-game":

His body needing mine,
His ageing body in its pride meeting the need for mine
And each time his lust was quietened
And he turned his back on me
In panic I asked don't you want me any longer, don't you want me

The physicality of the love experience is also stated in *My Story* where the narrator describes her encounter with her last lover (181-84). The speaker in "Ghanashyam" may be recalling the end of an affair. Her lover casts his "net in the narrows" of her mind and her thoughts race towards him "like enchanted fish." Though the affair is over the speaker has been living in the fertile memory of the experience even while making love or washing plates. The poem's stress on ageing is only marginal and its main thrust is on her desire to be possessed by love (Rahman 30). In "Lines Addressed to a Devadasi" the poet says that "Ultimately there comes a time / When all faces look alike / All voices sound similar" (C P 101). None of her poems categorically emphasizes the exclusively spiritual nature of love. The mystical framework of the poems is a pretext. Whether Kamala Das seeks the "misplaced father" or the "beauteous Krishna," it has no sufficient cause. Her love poems are only poor imitations of Meera's hymns. She always celebrates her body as Whitman does. But unlike Whitman, she sings of its weariness and limitations.

Children

The Indian wife turns to her children for companionship and emotional fulfilment. She achieves freedom and power only among her children. She, therefore, considers the role of the mother as more significant than that of the wife. The worship of mother, as Alladi Uma points out, has been an integral part of Hindu civilization (5-6). The son is a medium of self-expression for the Indian mother. A woman evokes respect as a mother which she fails to evoke as a wife. The self-worth and self-respect of a woman are protected through her son. Motherhood is a compensatory mechanism. Society can control and manipulate a woman by forcing her to take the motherly identity. Patriarchy exploits the symbolic paradigm of motherhood. Indian society inculcates in man an ambivalent attitude toward woman.

Every Indian woman celebrates the birth of a son. The Sanskrit equivalent of son is *putra* which means deliverer from hell. Though the meaning has a bearing on the deliverance of the soul, this is a significant pointer to the Indian reality. Kamala Das expresses maternal instincts and the joy of fulfilment in the birth of a son in her poem "Jaisurya." (B K D 62-63). The feelings that precede and follow childbirth assume a generic dimension in the poem which

glorifies childbirth as a fulfilment of love. The persona involved in the loving act of creation finds meaning and fulfilment in her new role. Childbirth is also a psychological event with a cathartic effect. What matters to the mother is "the soft stir in womb, / the foetus growing." The creative process of motherhood finds a parallel in the creative process of nature, and both again find an analogy in the creation of a poem. In the poem "Afterwards," Das stresses the sense of belonging that she obtains from her son: "A man who let me take his name/ To make me feel I belonged" (B K D 8).

Conclusion

Life to Kamala Das means life as a woman. She writes consciously as a woman, as a housewife and as a mother. The poet defines herself in terms of her relationships with Others - as daughter, wife, mother or lover. Her poetry celebrates womanhood in uniquely beautiful phrases. The euphoria related to the glorification of femininity is not a consistent emotion in her poetry. What she expresses often is the limitations of the body and the demands of the soul. She expresses with regret and scorn her unsatisfactory relationships with Others. The destiny of a woman is to play simultaneously several roles. Each role contributes to the overall experience of woman in a patriarchy. Kamala Das indicates that a woman's identity is centered round her self which is ignored by the lopsided tradition of patriarchy.

As a woman poet, Kamala Das refracts her experiences through Others who are related to her in her primary role as a woman. Das's grandmother is a mother-substitute or mother's Double. The elderly relative is an antithetical Double of the mother and is a source of emotional security. In the case of Das, with the death of the old woman, nervous breakdown and emotional insecurity begin to threaten the speaker. For the Das speaker the past is a tranquil period of love to which she nostalgically longs to return. The sense of loss and grief at the death of the grandmother is a cause of neurotic disturbance for the adult speaker in Das.

Das explores the relationship between her mother and herself in a few of her poems. But Das's relationship with her mother is not poetically very productive. She disapproves of her mother's role as a meek and obedient housewife, a silent approver of patriarchal discriminations and an easy prey to male domination. Her poems never dwell upon the strength or complexity of the mother-daughter relationship. Something is, however, missing in this vital relationship. They rather deal with her anxiety over the advancing age of the mother and her own yearning to return to childhood which was lost with her

premature marriage. The psychological dimension is totally absent in Das's "mother poems."

Das's relationship with her father is poetically fruitful and emotionally disturbing. But it is not very complex and poignant. Das's "father poems" are characterised by the speaker's yearning to reconcile herself with her father. Stirred by her sense of being a bad daughter, the speaker seeks the father's forgiveness. Either in theme or in technique the "father poems" are seldom complex.

The love poems of Kamala Das underline the physicality of the experience of love. The love affairs the speakers of Das involved in are poor substitutes for her disharmonious marriage. Her speakers are alienated even in marriage: they are relegated to the position of the "Other" in matrimony. In love they are further alienated by the presence of the lover's wife whose position is relatively solid. The lovers portrayed by Das are men without integrity and conscience. They reject the women after sexual exploitation. Das masterly pictures the pathetic and miserable state of the abandoned women who still hold on to the fond memories of the old lovers. What Das consistently wants to convey is that the male behaviour is fundamentally the same both within matrimony and outside it: man considers woman an object of sexual enjoyment, whether she is wife or lover. Her speakers engage in sex without self within and outside marriage; their experience remains fundamentally the same. The lack of any spiritual attachment makes the union arid and tiresome. However, the female protagonists of Das are rather thrilled by the very physical aspect of the experience. The unbridled physical energy associated with the experience is faithfully embodied by the vigorous movement of the lines.

Kamala Das's "son poems" are magniloquent expressions of the anxiety and fulfilment associated with womanhood. They link biological creation with the creative process of nature and both again with literary creation. The poet sees some similarity between the growth of a foetus into a baby and the evolution of a poem. These identical processes of creation, in her view, find some parallels in the spontaneous creativity of Nature. Das looks upon the birth of a son as the fulfilment of womanhood. In a few poems the speaker expresses the maternal anxiety about her son's safety.

A woman is defined by her personal relationships or roles. Das gives an aesthetic meaning to her personal relationships through her poetry. She does not acknowledge herself as a feminist poet. Her indignation at the suppression and oppression of women may be qualitatively different from that of her avowed

feminist contemporaries. But her poetry demands the feminist attention in a special way: many of her experiences and sentiments are the product of a patriarchal society. She seems to have lost part of her aggressive feminist ethos due to her uniquely feminine trap of at once celebrating herself and apologizing for herself, exploiting herself and letting herself be exploited. Her poetry, therefore, is the product of a society that oppresses women, not a critique of it. Das establishes that a woman's life is reduced to a wretched existence when she mutely follows the social roles assigned to her, exhausting her talents, energy and power in the process. She has the visionary insight by which she rewrites the history of the female. She narrates the story of a woman poet in such a manner that changes her life as well as those of others.



Chapter - 4

AESTHETICS OF CONFESSION

Confessional literature emerges from a tradition associated with Christianity. Robert Lowell remarks that his poetry stems from a tradition rather than an innovation (Phillips 2). Confessional literature is often identified with autobiography. Roy Pascal observes that autobiography, "a creation of European civilization" indeed "begins with Augustine's *Confessions*" (21). Though the "confessional mode" is a comparatively recent phenomenon, some of its salient features can be seen in ancient literature. Some Old Testament Psalms, Song of Songs and many books of the Apocrypha are confessional in tone. Sappho and Catallus in the pre-Christian era wrote poems which are explicitly confessional. Rousseau's *Confessions*, Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Byron's *Don Juan*, Lamb's *Essays of Elia* and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* are strikingly confessional. Confessional literature has thus been in circulation ever since man began to give expression to his subjective feelings, though Confessional poetry as it is understood today partakes of other important qualities too.

Elements of Confessional Poetry

Confessional poetry is highly subjective. It is a poetic technique adopted to reveal and even dramatize the poet's life. The autobiographical impulses and elements in poetry are the result of a selective accommodation of poetic materials. Northrop Frye considers confession a form of autobiographical fiction or fictional autobiography (365). Poetry takes over the traditional functions and tones of fiction. The term "confessional" overstresses the notion of the poem as instant communication. The poem itself is an act, a part of the life it describes. It creates an environment where the poet leads a life of struggle, improvisation and resistance. Personal experience includes the fantasies of the poet's inner life. Poetry absorbs the data of private events, fears and desires as well as materials of intimate confession and historical imagination. Confessional poetry thus translates autobiographical facts into epic narratives. Kamala Das, for example, concludes "Of Calcutta" with a sense of anguish and despair (C P 56-60):

When you sat before me my book between your hands
 I thought your hands the tamest seen, like a father's,
 When handling his first born, and when you raised your eyes,
 Your surma-stained eyes, I thought I saw my future within,
 Yes, I thought I saw my future within your eyes.

Confessional poetry is an expression of personality and never an escape from it. In this regard these poets follow the Romantics and break with the Eliotic aesthetic on the impersonal nature of poetry. The poets do not obliterate their personalities in their poems; their lives seldom remain invisible in their works. They break the Eliotic reticence about the poet's biography and deliberately parade the details of their life in poetry. They reveal to the readers what a Christian reserves for the Father Confessor or a patient reserves for the analyst. In this process the aesthetic distance between the man who suffers and the mind that creates vanishes and the poet becomes the victim. Ultimately, poetry evolves out of victimization. That is the reason why Confessional poetry is often called "the poetry of suffering" (Rosenthal 130). Psychological conditions like breakdown and paranoia make the suffering unbearable. A heightened sensitivity to the human predicament leads to a sharper sense of the pain of existence. A "sense of eternal torture" is a motive behind Confessional poetry (Phillips 53). Kamala Das, for instance, expresses a woman's yearning for unadulterated love in "Morning at Appollo Pier" (B K D 50-51):

. . . But, hold me, hold me once again,
 kiss the words to death in my mouth, plunder
 memories. I hide my defeat in your
 wearying blood, and all my fears and shame.
 You are the poem to end all poems
 a poem, absolute as the tomb.
 Your flawed beauty is my only refuge

Her moods alternate between frenzy and pain, the need for love and the thought of death. In a state of subjective reality the poet equates love with death, compares a lover to a poem and finds in poetry an alternative to lovemaking.

Confessional poetry has a therapeutic value. In the preface to *My Story*, Kamala Das describes how she began writing the book as a reprieve from the thought of imminent death. She finds fiction an alternative to reality and story an equivalent to life. Like Sheherzade of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the narrator of *My Story* gets an extension of life through story-telling. This means that the analysis of a Confessional poem will yield the same result as the analysis of a dream in the treatment of a patient.

Lowell's *Life Studies* was written as self-therapy, and its influence on other Confessional poets is profound. Das's "The Anamalai Poems" and most poems in Sexton's *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* are examples of self-therapy exercises. They take to poetry to destroy dragonish dreams and experiences. Das describes one of her experiences (B K D 153):

There were nights when I heard
 my own voice call me out
 of dreams, gifting such rude
 awakenings, and then
 expelling me from warm
 human love, unaccustomed
 fare for one such as I,
 a misfit when awake.

Confessional poetry is woven round the poetic self as the chief symbol. The personal mythology which the poet creates has the poet as the focal point. The truth expressed by the poem is not literal but poetic. Kamala Das speaks of imaginary lovers like Gino and Carlo in her poems and *My Story*. The mystified truth, nevertheless, has some significance for the poet's life. Each poem declares guilt, anguish and suffering. Each poem, as Robert Phillips observes, is "egocentred," though not "egocentric" and is aimed at "self-therapy" and "purgation" (8). Das declares in one of her "Anamalai Poems" (B K D 154):

If I had not learnt to write how would
 I have written away my loneliness
 or grief? Garnering them within my heart
 would have grown heavy as a vault, one that
 only death might open, a release then
 I would not be able to feel or sense

The poetic self is at the centre stage of the events that find expression in poetry. A Confessional poet finds no hurdles between his self and the direct expression of that self despite the pain, anguish and difficulty involved in that kind of expression. The adoption of a persona is not necessary for a Confessional poet to express his emotion. Even when there is a persona, the poetic self explicitly identifies itself with the persona. The Confessional poets do not accept any symbol or formula for an emotion and give direct, personal expression to emotions. As Confessional poetry is an expression of personality, one finds only subjective correlatives corresponding to subjective confessions.

The impulse behind Confessional poetry is the urge to see and know the truth about oneself, however painful and embarrassing it may be. The poet plunges into the unconscious, dives beneath the level of rational discourse, ransacks the darker side of the self with subliminal imagery and the logic of association. The poet dramatizes the personal, explores the discovery of the external truth by the self, portrays the self's reaction to this discovery and incorporates personal history into poems. The poet's frequent attention to the objective narration disguises an obsessive inwardness which is realised as a ferocious preoccupation with the subjective. Even poems that are apparently not about the poet turn out to be subjective. Kamala Das's "Ghanashyam," for example, though apparently about Radha and Krishna, is actually about herself and her lover. When the narrative mask is dropped, the tone can be painfully raw and open. Das's "A Requiem for My Father" is addressed to the poet's father. The contrast between the passion and intimacy of the address and the rigidity of the measure exacerbates the situation and intensifies the feeling of the poem. The half-yielding, half-rebellious mood of the poet symbolizes her paternal inheritance as well as her love-hate relationship with her father. She is confronted with the pain of being a daughter, wife, mother and lover. Long before it became fashionable, Das wrote in praise of her distinctive identity as an Indian *female* poet.

Confessional poetry is pre-occupied with the evolution and identity of the self. It is concerned with the frontiers of existence, and the ultimate, and inchoate sources of being. The need to confess springs from a strong belief that her story must be told. The poet encounters a painful awareness of the self: her anxiety springs from a world corrupted by egotism. The poet's story of life becomes a true tale for humanity at large. The poet fabricates larger, historical meanings and imaginary myths out of the personal horror. The banal horrors of personal and general history are rendered in terms of fairy tales or folk songs. Kamala Das's "Krishna poems" for instance, describe personal horrors in terms of folk songs. Das's "Ghanashyam," to take an example, speaks of the love between the poet and an aged lover in terms of the Radha-Krishna myth (C P 93-95).

We played once a husk-game, my lover and I
His body needing mine,
His ageing body in its pride meeting the need for mine
And each time his lust was quietened
And he turned his back on me
In panic I asked don't you want me any longer, don't you want me

Private and taboo subjects are often explored in confessional poetry. The self discovers itself partly through the energy it acquires by its insights into reality and partly through the sensuous excitement created by the reality of experience. Confessional poetry revolves round the individual as victim who fights relentlessly for true self-realization. The poet accepts the implicit role of an artist and liberates herself from the domination of the literal. Poetry is often a political and cultural criticism, a symbolic embodiment of national and cultural crisis. The private life of the poet under the stress of psychological crisis, sex, family life, private humiliations, self-doubt and confusion is an expression exposing the vulnerability characteristic of the poetic statement. The Confessional poet is involved in a more radical act than to speak of things that have been considered taboo. The self participates in a world of flux from which it can no longer separate itself. The confessional self appears psychotic and flirts with a dangerously dark, unrecognised encounter with experience. So, the relationship between the psychological state of the poet and her poetry is a major critical concern in this kind of poetry. The expansion of the boundaries of self involves the risk of sanity, if not the risk of life itself. Sylvia Plath and John Berryman committed suicide. Robert Lowell and Theodore Roethke spent a period of their lives in mental hospitals. Bedlam was a second home for Anne Sexton, who finally committed suicide. Kamala Das suffered mental breakdown several times as *My Story* and some poems reveal. Confessional poetry is a combination of the art of reconciliation and the art of resistance. While some Confessionals find a therapeutic release in poetry, others find poetry pushing them towards the edge.

The Poetry of Breakdown

The unconscious exercises some force on the conscious self. As inaccessible to voluntary investigation, the unconscious is often perceived as an alien power. Motivation by the unconscious comes to mean motivation by an external power. The interpenetration between the conscious and the unconscious makes their boundaries flexible. Confessional poetry erases the boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious. It is built on the relation between objective experience and the materials previously repressed. This leads to a rethinking of the merit of the poetry of madness. The tradition of the poet as madman goes back to the ancient Greeks. Shakespeare places the poet, the lover and the lunatic on the same plane of imagination. Romanticism introduces madness as a source of inspiration. Symbolism and surrealism significantly reduce the distance between the voice of the poet and that of the madman. But madness does not find acceptance as the means and subject matter of poetry until

the advent of the Confessional school, which secularizes as well as deromanticizes madness. Confessional poetry evolves a new theory of the poetry of madness to justify its insights and to support its distinguishability.

What is found in Confessional poetry, then, is madness stripped of nobility, though Theodore Roethke claims otherwise in "In a Dark Time": "What's madness but nobility of soul / at odds with circumstance?" (Roethke 239). The mad poet has a special insight into the human condition. His knowledge has painfully human origins. In spite of the distortions or aberrations implicit in his situation, he can see things more clearly than a normal man can. Sanity becomes a screen that separates the individual from his self and its relation to the rest of the being. The act of repression reduces the range of experiences that should be available to consciousness and calls for a new definition of consciousness. Poetry is a means to cope with madness or to purge it. Poetic process is an act of ridding the psyche of garbage; confession of ugliness is a way of cleansing.

Madness as a theme and point of view shaping poetic technique is the hallmark of Confessional poetry. The adaptation of madness as poetic material which reveals a wide range of experiences and responses is felt in the individual voices of the poet and his personae who are at once familiar and strange to the poet. Confessional poetry reflects contemporary cultural attitude towards the unconscious mind. Madness is not merely a destructive product of the corrupt values and heartlessness of society but is also a defence against these evils and a means to combat them. Madness is a means of self-realisation. Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* begins with a shocking utterance: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness." Madness is not only the voice of poetry but also a reduction of the poet to silence. Madness is also manifested in poetry through fantasies and memories of attempted suicide that enacts the persona's most intense experiences of being and creating. A narrative mask or a persona helps to filter the intimate experiences peculiar to madness through a consciousness detached from its emotional immediacy. The persona externalizes dreams, fantasies and memories as conscious acts of daily existence.

Breakdown as a Metaphor

Susan Sontag observes that madness symbolizes the predicament of a modern writer: "In the twentieth century, the repellent, harrowing disease that is made the index of a superior sensitivity, the vehicle of 'spiritual' feelings and 'critical' discontent, is insanity" (35). Just as Romantic temperament can be represented by the metaphor of tuberculosis, the confessional temperament is best

represented by the metaphor of madness. Tuberculosis and madness reduce patients to exiles. The metaphor of the psychic voyage, an extension of the romantic notion of travel associated with tuberculosis, can be applied to insanity also. The romantic view that illness embitters consciousness holds equally good for the Confessionals. The notion of the poet-victim as a reckless creature extremely sensitive to the horrors of vulgar everyday life is a significant feature of Confessional poetry. The Confessional poet has neither any serious religious faith nor any substantial sense of the self. Analysis in this context provides the poet with a "way of sublimating his suffering" (Ramakrishnan 18). The disorientation of the poet's mind finds acceptability in a society which values irrational experience for its own sake. Each individual has an element of uniqueness in his personality which must be realized irrespective of his mental condition.

The desire to seek fulfilment through self-expression is a confessional urge. An obsession with the self has a liberating influence on the sensibility of the Confessional poet. The new concept of the self as a field of possibilities, according to E.V.Ramakrishnan, underlines the quest for authenticity and fidelity in literature (19). Authenticity, like psychoanalysis, is closely linked to "the irrational and the unconscious" (Ramakrishnan 19). The Confessional poet's treatment of madness as an essential element in contemporary culture is significant. He has an absurdist vision of the world. Confessional poetry demands a subtle change of reality by incorporating into its world the neurosis and psychosis of contemporary history. The Confessional poet depersonalizes the contemporary society which has lost its sensitivity. The poet's sense of herself as a victim, as E.V.Ramakrishnan observes, may be traced to the artist's over-exposure to a society which has internalized psychological violence in the system (20). The Confessional poet explores the domain of experience where the self is confronted in a destructive landscape of passion and paranoia. Madness is only a metaphor with wide possibilities for that which is felt to be socially or morally wrong.

The increasing sense of aloneness in an indifferent society is symbolically transformed into visions of assault on the notion of an autonomous self in Confessional poetry. The conception of madness as a revelation of mind or an expansion of consciousness is a poetic technique for the Confessionals. Confessional poetry marks a continuous interest in the psychic experiences of the poet as part of the flux that is history. R.D.Laing considers madness as a struggle for liberation from false attitudes and values, an encounter with primary feelings and impulses which help to evolve a true self. He believes that "authentic

aspects of the self can be conveyed in madness" (Feder 281). The Freudian concept of madness as a malign and malevolent psychic disorder no longer holds true. The psychic disorder of the author gets reflected in the narrative pattern or symbols or metaphors in the poem. Casimierz Dabrowski, a Polish psychiatrist, makes some daring exploration on the creative potential of madness. He argues that some neuroses and psychoses are benign and that they help to develop personality through a serial process of alternate disintegration and reintegration of psychic structure. Mental disorientation is not only artistically productive but is also a movement towards health. This theory called positive disintegration is critically established in the case of writers like Theodore Roethke, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton.

Poems on Breakdown

Neurosis, however, is something that artists share with other members of the society. A poet's genius lies not in the intensity of his neurosis but in his skill to successfully objectify it. The nervous breakdowns Kamala Das claims she suffered might be just ordinary events by western standards. The narrator of *My Story* describes two instances of severe nervous bouts she suffered. Disillusioned by the homosexuality of her husband, the narrator went to the terrace of her home on a moon-lit night. She was tempted to fling herself down. She saw a mad beggar dancing under a street-lamp. The rhythm of his grotesque dance fascinated her. She felt like the last human being dancing on the most desolate pinnacle. Somehow she managed to return to her room. She transmuted her experience into a poem (104-05). She suffered a second breakdown after the birth of her second son. She was put on bromide and was advised to take rest and sleep. The narrator claims that her breakdown was a blessing in disguise as there developed an intimacy between herself and her husband (111).

In the poem "Bromides," one of the tragic signs of madness is that the speaker's words become "disembodied" (S C 37). As "fatted on bromides / They ought to bounce." But they become burdensome and what they do is simply to "flail their limbs / And fly." The poem "Herons" portrays the ephemeral gaiety obtained through sedatives (B K D 52). The speaker now becomes more lovable to her husband. There is a tinge of sadness about this remark. Her speech is pleasantly relaxed, free from the oppression of domestic routine and conscious thought. By transferring the impressions to the memory of the speaker's husband, she transforms the precariousness of her swooning into a state of reality. In "Peripeurperal Insanity" the speaker describes a similar state of mind (C P 10). "Madness is a Country" is a poem about madness. The

poet compares madness to a country where "their only rule is freedom" (Nandy, ed., *Indian Poetry in English Today* 88). Some of Das's "hospital poems" like "The Intensive Cardiac Care Unit," "Cerebral Thrombosis" and "The Lunatic Asylum" can also be remembered in this context. Breakdown provides a structure and pattern for these poems.

The Poetry of Suicide

Confessional poetry is a classic illustration of the fact that poetry balances the unconscious and the conscious. The source of poetry is the unconscious; the control is provided by the conscious. On the strength of the poetic ego the poet visualises a point at which the two meet. The Confessional poets express an urge to court the disasters, to plumb for the dark mysteries of life and death. They long to feel the thrill and chill of death in their pulses in an irresistible temptation by death. Confessional art is a direct outcome of the disintegration of the poetic psyche. A desire for psychic wholeness and integration counters the disintegration and strives for psychic stability. The poet takes the extreme step of self-sacrifice to find psychic reintegration and stability. In the very process of self-extinction the poet finds a new identity.

Self-destructiveness is a way to normalize oneself in certain cases. It helps one endure threatening crises and neutralize overwhelming forces. It is achieved through the twin processes of transposition of opposites and transmutation of objectives. Destruction promises both relief and fulfilment. The Confessional poets discover their affinity with death; they are driven by a desire to create their own versions of death. They eroticize pain, anxiety or guilt and look to suicide as a form of resolution of the conflict. This is effected by changing an intolerable reality into an idealized state expected in life or anticipated in death. Death and life are so ambiguous for these poets that they libidinize reality and turn death into an idealized existence (Shneidman 281-93). Alvarez says that the "act of formal expression" of the poetic self makes the "dredged up" self more "readily available" to the poet (38). Thus poetry becomes an expression of a retrieved self.

The hypothesis that extremist poetry produces the side effects of madness or suicide seems reasonable. A Confessional poet's life is tormented by his psychic disturbance. Poetic creation is destructive or curative; a poem proposes a new model of the self, not as a distortion, but as a complete and honest confrontation with reality. The reader's response to Confessional poetry is based on the willingness to see the individual not as an isolated being, but as part of the universe and his isolation as a temporary situation.

Poems on Suicide

As a Confessional poet, Kamala Das is haunted by suicide. Das's "Nani" is a popular poem about suicide (B K D 19-20). Like Berryman, who was haunted by the suicide of his father, Das is haunted by the suicide of the pregnant maid who hanged herself in the privy while the poet was a child. The children who saw the hanging body thought "that Nani/was doing to delight us, a comic/dance" like a "clumsy puppet." Time passes and the abandoned privy becomes an alter: "a lonely shrine/for a goddess who was dead." Though her grandmother makes light of the incident, the poet is still haunted by the macabre death.

The form of self-destruction that seems to appeal to Das most is by drowning in the sea. The narrator confesses in *My Story*: "Often I have toyed with the idea of drowning myself to be rid of my loneliness . . . I have wanted to find rest in the sea . . ." (215). The contemplated suicide does not take place due to her inability to choose between physical death and spiritual death. This is a serious problem which artists confront in their life and art. Kafka committed artistic suicide when tuberculosis failed to provide him natural death. Beckett's characters survive suicide and lead posthumous, immobile lives. Das seems to be unsure and uncertain as she says in "The Suicide" (B K D 27-31):

I have enough courage to die,
But not enough.
Not enough to disobey hi
Who said, do not die

The thought of suicide takes her to life and the necessity of having to play happy roles. The vortex of the sea which refuses the body and accepts only the soul reflects the poet's tortured psyche. The poet contemplates alternatives:

I want to be loved
And
If love is not to be had,
I want to be dead, just dead.

What distinguishes life and death is love; bereft of love, life is death. The poet transforms her urge for drowning to a desire for swimming. She nostalgically returns to her grandmother and her white lover in an assertion of life.

Kamala Das's fascination for drowning reappears in "Composition" (B K D 76-85). The poem expresses very diverse moods as passionate attachment, agonising guilt, repulsive disgust and inhuman bitterness. She describes her

sufferings and tries to provide a social context to some of her experiences. The poem begins with the poet's encounter with the sea: "Ultimately, / I have come face to face with the sea." After talking about her sufferings, the poet expresses her urgent need to confess: "I also know that by confessing, / by peeling off my layers / I reach closer to the soul." She confesses her failures and uselessness and finally desires to find rest at the depth of the sea:

All I want now
Is to take a long walk
into the sea
and lie there, resting,
completely uninvolved.

But she fails to carry out the plan and miserably hangs on to her existence:

I must linger on,
trapped in immortality,
my only freedom being
the freedom to
discompose.

The poem "The Invitation" is conceived as a form of dialogue between the speaker and the sea (D 14-15). The conflicting desires for life and death constitute the tension of the poem, casting its torturous spell on the speaker's self. The speaker is torn between the haunting pains of despair and disillusionment and the fondling memories of the occasional visits of the lover:

. . . You are diseased
With remembering,
The man is gone for good. It would indeed
Be silly to wait for his returning.

The sea serves as a kind of tempter, inviting the speaker to end her troubles by submerging herself in the sea. The sea offers a kind of empathetic companionship to the self:

. . . Think of yourself
Lying on a funeral pyre
With a burning head.

The "funeral pyre" and the "burning head" are contrasted with the comfortable death offered by the sea:

... Bathe cool,
Stretch your limbs on cool
Secret sands, . . .

In his analysis of the poem Devindra Kohli observes that "while the sea offers one kind of death, a complete negation, her lover whom she cannot disobey offers another, metaphorical death" (90). Though the image of heat describes the intensity and passion of the speaker's sexual encounter, there is, as Vrinda Nabar remarks, nothing that suggests that the "funeral pyre" is metaphoric death (49). The two kinds of death the poet conceives are total; one, physical offered by the sea and the other, death-in-life offered by the lover. The sexual ecstasy and subsequent agony caused by the desertion of the lover is a death-in-life situation. Das's preference for the latter, as Kohli also observes, is emblematic of an "unconscious" desire (90). But it is also, as Nabar remarks, a "modification of a perfectly normal perception" (49). The speaker rejects all temptation in the fond memories of the moments of sexual love:

All through that summer's afternoons we lay
On beds, our limbs inert, cells expanding
Into throbbing suns. The heat had
Blotted our thoughts

This is an acceptance of life and love indicated especially through the presence of organic images:

... I am still young
And I need that man for construction and
Destruction.

The consummated joy of existence gives way to temptation. "[H]ow long can one resist" the temptation of the sea, the temptation to commit suicide? Das's "suicide poems" are often loose in structure and form. Most of them are conceived as a dialogue between the persona and the sea.

Obsession with the Self

Kamala Das's search for Ghanashyam in the poem of that title symbolises her eagerness to discover the self (C P 93-95). The "I" here refers not only to the individual experiences of the speaker but to the general lack of courage to plumb beneath the surface level of reality. Das's experiences only reinforce her sense of isolation and freakishness. In "The Freaks," the self assumes the mask of a freak, flaunting "a grand, flamboyant lust" (B K D 42). "Composition" is another poem that expresses the poet's concern for the self (B K D 76-85). The

poem is a confessional narrative which is built on the central metaphors of the sea and the house. Saturated with autobiographical material, the poem progresses from "the composite state of innocence and childhood to the state of self-consciousness and age" (Nair 30). The poem may appear as unstructured and formless. It can be divided into seven sections. The first section is a recollection of the speaker's childhood. The childhood memories are erased by growth which replaces love with guilt. The images of femaleness are predominant in this section which expresses the conflict between the child self and the woman self. The child's growth into a woman is visualised as evil: "The tragedy of life / is not death but growth." The second section deals with the speaker's loss of intimacy with the sea, though seascape survives in her dreams. The third section pictures the shadow of marriage that brings tragedy to the adult speaker's life. The dance imagery conjures up freedom whereas the imagery of sexuality reveals the uncertainty and the sense of crisis that threatens her identity. The fourth section presents a mature woman who desires tenderness more than love. In order to find emotional security she passes from one sexual contest into another. As normal relationships do not endure, she wants to be abnormal:

I must let my mind striptease
I must extrude
autobiography

The lines underline the confessional urge of the speaker. Her concern with the body's hunger leads to a meditation on the body and the soul. The fifth section brings the reader back to the speaker's grandmother. It recalls an event in the speaker's life that happened thirteen years ago. She could not spend a night with her grandmother, though the old lady waited for her all night. The burden of guilt and loss makes her confess and

... by confessing
by peeling off layers
I reach closer to the soul

The need to confess her guilt leads the speaker closer to her soul. The sixth section is a stoic acceptance of the trials of the speaker's life. In the final section she confesses her failure: "I feel my age and my / uselessness." The speaker wishes to attain the tranquil state of detachment. What sustains her life is the thought of the immortality of the soul.

The poet loses her grip over the materials. This makes the lines transparent. Das, as Devindra Kohli points out, is concerned with "the discrepancy between what one wishes to have and what one has" (87). Her sense

of discrepancy is personal and is not supported by any clear vision of human destiny. The title of the poem is deceptive: it evokes the structured pattern of a musical composition. There is no organised development of the poetic materials in the poem. The poem begins with the dominant image of the sea which, however, is subordinated at the end when the speaker wishes to meet her final rest at the sea. Though the tone of the poem is largely confessional, its substance is a persistent theme in her poetry. Her inability to laugh at herself makes her confession weary:

I asked my husband,
am I hetero
am I lesbian
Or am I just plain frigid?
He only laughed.

The reader's response is also the same. The confession without the metaphoric or imagistic sharpness often deteriorates into self-pity. The poem is a kind of self-criticism, though Eunice de Souza considers it a "totally formless stream of unhappy consciousness" (Shahane and Sivaramakrishna 46). The speaker's ultimate discovery is that the only freedom available to her is the freedom to "discompose." This last word, as Vrinda Nabar also remarks, is an "intensely evocative word" that hints at the "sources of her disquiet" (53). The poem begins with the central burden and leads to a plunge into the essential crisis the poet faces.

"The Fear of the Year" is yet another poem that presents the anxiety of modern man under the shadow of a nuclear holocaust (B K D 11). Modern man lives from moment to moment under the urgency of this anxiety. He has, therefore, no time for "slow desires" and "fond smiles." Fear deprives man even of the freedom to dream. This anxiety about an all-destructive holocaust is a common characteristic of all Confessional poets. "Too Early the Autumn Sights" describes the fear of ageing (S C 26). The speaker's aloneness makes the confrontation with the terror inevitable. She cannot escape the panic created by the dance of dead leaves:

. . . the fallen
Leaves do not rest, but raise themselves
Like ghosts to perform
A blind and ugly dance.

The ghostly dance of the fallen autumn leaves would remind one of the "vacant ecstasy" of the eunuch's dance (B K D 60). The conflict in the poem is between

the youthful physical self and the ageing, intellectual self. A related poem is "The End of Spring" which describes the speaker's "fear of change" (B K D 26). It is a dialogue between the physical self that responds emotionally to the external world and the intellectual self that evaluates situations rationally. The conversation centres round "you," identified as the speaker's lover and "me," the speaker herself. She spurns the love that induces fear in the lovers:

. . . What is the use
Of love, all this love, if all it gives is
Fear, you the fear of storms asleep in you,
And me the fear of hurting you?

Forms of Isolation

The division of the self symbolizes the psychic fragmentation of the cultural and religious heritage of the poet. The fragmentation of the self and the quest for a self which is a psychic whole is a recurrent phenomenon in women's poetry. Woman experiences isolation as an existential condition and further isolation that is unique to the female gender which Beauvoir calls "Otherness" (16). Besides the split between the Self and the Other due to alienation and marginality, woman poet experiences splitting of the self due to her personal predicament. Isolation in women's poetry, according to Deborah Pope, manifests itself in four forms: victimisation, personalisation, split-self and validation (10-12). They are in the progressive order towards the healing of the selves into a unified whole.

Victimisation is a mode of manifestation of comprehensive isolation in women's poetry, especially feminist Confessional poetry. The speaker perceives her femaleness as a flaw and her existence as an unchangeable condition. As physical self is the most viable aspect of gender, the poems express the speaker's feeling of alienation from the sexual body. The speakers of "victimisation poems" are women who passively accept social role-models. Their inner lives appear too weak to change the course with confidence or purpose. They, therefore, express the most negative sense of isolation. The embattled female inner self constantly struggles against the physical self. This aspect is, sometimes, aesthetically embodied as alienation from nature or from vital human emotions. The poems represent a hopeless world cut off from nature, time, others and the self.

Kamala Das's poems like "The Stone Age," "The Old Playhouse" and "Of Calcutta" present the speakers as victims of alienation and marginalization. She describes the victimised speaker and her hopeless world through barren

images. Her "victimisation poems" are peopled by selfless mothers, submissive wives/lovers or dutiful daughters. In "The Stone Age," the speaker is "a bird of stone, / a granite dove" (B K D 97-98). In "The Old Playhouse" the speaker is a tamed "swallow" who "ate the magic loaf and / became a dwarf" (B K D 100-01). Her "mind is an old / playhouse with all the lights put out" and she is fed on "love in lethal doses." In "Of Calcutta" the speaker stoops to canine status, becoming "a trained circus dog / Jumping . . . routine hoops each day" (C P 56-60). She lives like a "nodding / Doll," a "walkie talkie one to / Warm bed." The speaker places herself as a victim in the social and historical context of her gender.

The alienation and trauma associated with the role-models and the inability to form a satisfactory relationship with male sexuality are the sources of isolation for "personalization poems." The isolation in this case is localized. The speakers turn to nature as a solatum for broken human ties. They adopt the roles of muted survivors whose situations form a logically tested personal history. The female self shapes the contextual and personal aspects of gender. The poems are concerned with threatening forces of disintegration and omnipresence of death. The common heritage and the shared context of gender offer a sense of sisterhood. The disorder and pain of human existence punctuate the poems. The poems express a consciousness of human helplessness. Action becomes irrelevant in a world of fixed co-ordinates. The quest for identity need not necessarily lead to any meaningful impact on the speaker's life or her world.

Kamala Das's poems like "My Grandmother's House," "A Man is a Season," "Cat in the Gutter," "Gino," "The Testing of the Sirens" are examples of "personalization poems." The poem "My Grandmother's House" exemplifies the speaker's nostalgia for love and security (B K D 21). Her grandmother is a symbol of unalloyed love and uninhibited security. But the speaker has lost her grandmother and all the attendant support to her life. She has lost her way and "beg now at stranger's doors / to receive love, at least in small change." The speaker sings her lonely solo in "A Man is a Season" (C P 80). Her husband lets her toss her youth "like coins / Into various hands" and "Seek ecstasy in other's arms." In "Cat in the Gutter" the speaker feels like "a high bred kitten / Rolling for fun in the gutter (C P 99). In "The Sunshine Cat," the speaker slides "from the pegs of sanity into / A bed made soft with her tears" (T 22). In "Gino" the speaker fears that she will perish from the kiss of her Indian lover (B K D 56-57). She compares the lover's kiss to a krait-bite "that fills / the blood stream with its accursed essence." In the poem "Testing of the Sirens," love comes to the speaker "like pain"

repeatedly (B K D 58-59). Love as a stab and the act of love as a murder are recurring images in Das.

In feminist poetry, especially of the confessional variety, isolation is also manifested in the split between the socially acceptable woman and the marginal female artist. Isolation emerges as a symptom of, and as a means to, the mystery and power associated with the artist's realm. The persona has the awareness of the duality between the external, socially acceptable, integrated, feminine, woman and the internal, socially unacceptable, rebellious, unfeminine, isolated artist. The two selves are in varying degrees of tension with each other. The woman and the artist seem to be necessarily estranged. It was Florence Howe who established the significance of the term *split-self* in women's poetry (27-33). The term denotes the opposition between essential aspects of the self, between the social concepts of gender, between the definitions of self and between being and becoming a woman. The speaker of the "split-self poems" identifies the two selves with the domestic gender role(s) and the role of the artist. The domestic self occupies a safe position, gets acceptance and approval of society in general and of males in particular. The artistic self occupies an unsafe world of independence and power at once stimulating and threatening. The artist makes uncertain choices and confronts unfamiliar experiences and environments. The masculine patriarchal world firmly supports the persuasive cultural power of gender roles enacted by the self. The dilemma of the two selves involves a conflict. The domestic self's eagerness for cultural acceptance silences the powerful voice of the artistic self. The central division of the self makes the choice limited: be true either to the self or to others; to be true to the self is to be potentially dangerous for others. A woman poet becomes a social outcast as her behaviour does not confirm to that of domestic woman. A woman poet is a single woman divided against herself. When the self is split into opposing factions, fragmentation begins leading to the creation of a set of dichotomies which ultimately result in the destruction of the self. The poet moves from split-selves to a healed self through acceptance and integration. The success of the woman poet rests with her power to heal the diverging selves into a concept of wholeness that accepts a woman poet as both woman and poet with no unnatural polarization between them.

Kamala Das's poem "The Loud Posters" is built on the central division between the domestic self and the artistic self (B K D 39):

. . . I have stretched my two dimensional
nudity on sheets of weeklies, monthlies,
quarterlies, a sad sacrifice. I have put

my private voice away, adopted
the typewriter's click as my one speech,

The display of nudity, which figuratively stands for the confession of intimate privacies, is a kind of sacrifice. Das indirectly suggests that poetry for a woman is a kind of ritual and a form of sacrifice. The speaker forsakes her private domestic voice and adopts the voice of the typewriter which metaphorically represents the artistic voice. "Morning at Apollo Pier" develops the conflict between the physical self and the spiritual self, life and death, domestic routine and poetic art. The flawed beauty and the diminishing love of the lover are the impulses of her poetry. Her lover is her masterpiece (B K D 51):

You are the poem to end all poems
a poem, absolute as the tomb.

The poem "An Introduction" introduces the speaker as an Indian poet and an Indian woman (B K D 12-13). She chooses her own ways as a poet and as a woman. Das's Indian English honestly "voices my longings, my hopes;" it is "human speech." She spurns the advice of the critics, friends and relatives. The speaker shocks her orthodox relatives and the conventional society in unfeminine ways: She "wore a shirt / and a black sarong;" she cut her "hair short and ignored all of / this womanliness." In this case also she rejects the counsel of the categorizers. In this poem the artistic self asserts itself over the domestic one. In "Composition" the speaker expresses her desire to compose her autobiography, to confess and to reach close to the soul (B K D 76-85). But she finds that her power rests with her "freedom to / discompose." The domestic self is kept in check by the artistic self. All these poems express the conflict between domestic duties and creative endeavours, between the limitations of the body and the demands of the mind.

Women's traditional isolation has a positive, liberating potential. A true feminist poet builds an affirmative vision of validation by her political and sexual synthesis. The victory of woman in every conventional and unconventional way leads to a healing of selves. *Validation* is a psychic state where the speaker triumphs both as a woman and as an artist. The creative potential of validation is two-fold: it is an unexhaustive source of inspiration for the artist as well as a curative source that makes the selves coherent. Woman can change her isolation and marginality into the foundation of a new world. The isolation from the male-centred culture itself is a means of freedom. Poetry bestows the personal benefit of release and recognition to the poet. Validation is the fully emergent aspect of isolation. The significance of validation as a form of isolation

lies in its choice as a basis for an alternative world. The separateness of female gender brings forth a hope and a vision. Isolation is a choice that explores the possibilities of change. A woman poet transmutes isolation, which is an enforced condition for other women, into poetry charged with possibilities of change and power. The speaker of the "validation poems" tries to be successful in every conventional and unconventional role. The conflict is between successful femininity and successful artistry. The speaker is haunted by the feeling that she cannot be a successful woman and a successful poet at the same time. A woman poet's personal struggles for identity and her anger against the limitations of creativity merge as guilts associated with her artistic self. She has to find a synthesis between the two aspects of the self—the artistic and the feminine, not necessarily the domestic—to express isolation in her poems. She confronts the need to confess the painful truth of her everyday experience as woman. She turns away from the despair engendered by the traditional isolation enforced by andro-centric culture to the prophesy and power associated with the isolation chosen by woman. Isolation is neither a marginality of self nor a separation from strength; isolation is a willed rejection of a destructive heritage. Woman's isolation from patriarchal culture sustains a poetry of new vision.

Kamala Das concludes her poem "Flotsam" with added emphasis on her loneliness (C P 91):

... I wondered if
I should have fought at all to save this dubious
Asset, my aloneness, my terrible aloneness.

The speaker feels this terrible loneliness immediately after the departure of her lover, a kindred soul. Together they create an oasis of lust which proves to be a "mirage." This intense loneliness of the female persona is a recurring theme in Das's poetry. Loneliness is an emotional crisis evolved out of the speaker's inability to establish meaningful and abiding relations with the world. Das resolves this crisis either through poetry or through lust. The persona's lust is as much related to her loneliness as the poetry is to the loneliness of the poet.

The persona's urge to withdraw from the world of experiences, the essentially male-centred world, is central to Das's poetry. As the female persona engages herself in vigorous sexual conquests to make amends for her isolation, Das creates poems out of her isolation. The persona's urge to escape from the trivialities of everyday experiences is best expressed in Das's "love poems." The poet gives an unromantic or ironic twist to her "love poems," though they are cast in a mystical disguise or a deceptively mythical framework. In "Krishna,"

for instance, the speaker seems to be trapped in Krishna's "body" which is her "prison" and her world; his darkness "blinds" her and his "love words" prevent her from growing worldly-wise (B K D 54). In "The Prisoner," the speaker studies the trappings of her lover's body to "escape from its snare" (B K D 55). In "Love," the speaker, "curled like an old mongrel," lies content in her lover (B K D 35). In "The Blind Walk," the speaker expresses her "passion for symbols" (B K D 73). In "A New City," the speaker seeks a "blind date" (B K D 87). She comes "with hunger, with faith and a secret language" to "awake anew at the touch of a strange young" lover. In "Morning at Appollo Pier," the poet compares a lover to a "poem, absolute as the tomb" (B K D 50-51). Das says in one of her "Anamalai Poems" that with poetry she writes away her "loneliness" (B K D 154).

Poetry, for Kamala Das, is an alternative to love. Isolation is the motive behind the two experiences. The split between the feminine and the artistic selves in Das enhances the power of isolation. The conflict between the two selves increases the range and intensity of her poetry, which, as P.P.Raveendran observes, is "an extension of the body" (B K D xv). The celebration of the body is the expression of a "deep-seated urge to socialize" (B K D xv). Das expresses her anxiety about the decline of poetic faculties through images of old age and death. In "Words," the poet compares words to "a sea with paralysing waves" (S C 11). In "Without a Pause," the poet describes "darkened rooms" where "the old sit thinking, filled with vaporous fear" (S C 10). The speaker is tired of a plethora of words harassing her. In "Words are Birds," the poet compares words to birds "gone to roost, / Wings, tired" (B K D 137). The dusk which hides the wings of words plays upon the speaker's skin and hair revealing her old age. In "The Cart Horse," Das acknowledges the inadequacy of words to carry the burden of her nightmarish experiences (B K D 68). The central image of the poem, the tired horse, suggests not only physical weakness, but poetic failure also.

It may be that the monotonous experiences of love in all its intensity make the personae of Das's "love poems" inarticulate. In "Ferns," the poet expresses the fear that "a time will come / When words, while uttered, will fall thudding down / Like dismembered heads" (B K D 32). In "The Blind Walk," the poet visualises a tragic future when "the sea is full of writers' carcasses" and the poets "lose their way inside their own minds" (B K D 73). That Das's poetry bears an objective correlative to the physical body is evident from the organic nature of the imagery she frequently employs in her poetry. Because poetry is an extension of the body and verse-writing an alternative to love-making, there

seems to be no conflict between the feminine and artistic selves. The feminine self stands for the conventional feminine qualities. The conventionally successful feminine self is always at war with the unconventionally successful artistic self. The persona's anxiety that she cannot at once be a successful, conventional woman and an equally successful, unconventional poet is not misplaced. In "Ghanashyam," poetry alternates with love in the psyche of the persona (C P 93-95):

With words I weave a raiment for you
With songs a sky
With such music I liberate in the oceans their fervid dances.

Poetry that the persona creates through her imagination is followed by the game of love she indulges in with her lover:

His body needing mine,
His ageing body in its pride meeting the need for mine
And each time his lust was quietened
And he turned his back on me
In panic I asked don't you want me any longer,

The memory of the love that she enacted in the company of her lover brings with it feelings of intense loneliness, "like bleached bones cracking in the desert sun." The persona is awakened to the reality of domestic chores and the lack of love in her relation with her husband. The persona is the mutilated self of the poet which manifests itself in poetry. The poem "Vrindavan" establishes the song of flute that lures woman to Vrindavan, which symbolises the world of poetry (B K D 48). The frolic at Vrindavan leaves a "brown aureola" at the speaker's breast. Though she tries to conceal it, she derives intense pleasure from the memories it brings.

Kamala Das's "love poems" anticipates the "catalyst" ideology of feminist literary criticism that helps, as Annette Kolodny observes, to "bridge the gap between the world as we [women] found it and the world we [women] wanted it to be" (Showalter 144). What characterises these poems is an urge to reduce the aesthetic distance between *being* a woman and *becoming* a woman. The poet's socialized self urges her to suppress her innate impulses and behave in a stereotypically feminine way. But her artistic self inspires her to write powerfully and flamboyantly. Das's "love poems" reveal the dilemma of a woman writer who is forced by male-centred culture to express her truth in slanted forms. The conflict, as Alicia Ostriker remarks, is between the true *writer* and the true *woman*: "The true *writer* signifies assertion while the true *woman* signifies

submission" (Showalter 15). These poems symbolize Das's effort to harmonize the true writer and the true woman.

Confessional Rhetoric and Penitential Attitudes

The sacramental aesthetics of the confessional mode is crucial to a specific rhetorical process of self-disclosure. It establishes a universal and aesthetically appealing framework of meaning in the poetry of Kamala Das. The structural patterns of her poetry concretize a well-defined process of repentance and reconciliation experienced by her personae. Her poetry is a rhetoric of rebirth and regeneration that celebrates the human cycle of guilt-purification-redemption. The basic tension in her poetry is manifested in the conflict between the potential of self-awareness for regeneration and the normal impossibility of escaping physical and emotional bonds for its achievement. Her poetic process uncovers the perversities that operate at different levels — psychic, familial and artistic. Family life is the primary source of inspiration for regeneration that is specifically noted as religious redemption. The tentative achievement of regeneration and redemption dissolves the memories of pain, guilt and loss, the very traumas explored in her poetry.

A detailed analysis of the poetry of Kamala Das helps to identify at least five penitential attitudes. They are mortification, "victimage" or scape-goating, contrition or *apologia*, mock-lyric or self-parody, and edification. Kay Ellen Merriman Capo classifies the attitudes in the case of Anne Sexton (4589). The same categories are also identifiable in the case of Kamala Das. Das's poems maintain a rhetorical distance from emotionally charged experiences that get regular treatment in her poetry. The experiences include intimate family relations, romantic love, identity crisis, creativity, death and spiritual quest. The potentially guilty acts evolve as forms of *mortification*. The guilt-conscious personae work to find out a means to re-establish their innocence. The misery and suffering the personae undergo due to surgery, insomnia, madness, grief, suicide attempts, breakdowns and fear of death can alienate them from the loved ones, from motherhood and even from womanhood. The personae's attempts to strike a reconciliation bridge the estranged relations. A successful attempt at reconciliation brings forth the possibilities of redemption. Das's "Luminol," for instance, expresses the speaker's attempt to reconcile herself to a surrender to her husband (B K D 44). "The Tom-Tom" reveals the speaker's preparation to reconcile herself to continue physical relations with her partner (C P 77).

The framework of *victimage* or *scape-goating* is explored to alleviate the natural guilt feelings associated with sexual development and to assimilate

personal tensions. The scape-goat figure need not necessarily be a family member always, though this is the usual case in the early poems. The object of victimisation becomes abstract or mythical especially in the later poems. This tendency shows the rhetorical and psychological development of the speakers. In Kamala Das's "A Man is a Season," "The Sunshine Cat," "Of Calcutta" and "Cat in the Gutter" the rude husband of the premature wife is the scape-goat figure. In "An Apology for Gautama," the Gautama, who could win the speaker's body and not her soul, is the scape-goat figure. *My Story* and "Of Calcutta" accuse the speaker's father for her personal misery. The mythical Krishna or an unidentified "you" is the scape-goat figure in Das's "love poems."

The term *contrition* or *apologia* refers to a rhetorical strategy that appeals to the compassionate forgiveness or rational approval which other persons can offer. The guilt-ridden or wrongly accused persona gets a redemptive chance to assert her innocence at the end. This poetic technique helps to remove the divisive ramparts that separate the persona from her parents, lovers and other relations. Ultimately, the persona tries to establish meaningful and abiding relationships with authorities of God and Death. Kamala Das's "My Father's Death" and "A Requiem for My Father" describe the persona's belated attempts to seek forgiveness from her dying father. "Composition" describes the speaker's unfulfilled promise to spend a night with her grandmother at the ancestral home (B K D 76-85). This incident makes her replace love with guilt. The guilt-conscious speaker regrets her inability. In "The Testing of the Sirens," the persona regrets her inability to continue her affair with the gentle lover (B K D 58-59). She is afflicted by the unfulfilled love with its burden of pain. In "Gino" the speaker portrays her Indian and foreign lovers and expresses her pain about the varying quality of the two (B K D 56-57). She is troubled at the prospective disaster of her love with Gino, the foreign lover. She regrets the non-fulfilment of this noble love.

Mock-lyric or *self-parody* is another poetic device which helps to gain rhetorical distance from autobiographical material. This gives rise to a balanced tension between the positive and negative aspects of the persona. The poet treats the otherwise distasteful topics like suicide and madness with an air of comic diminution to emphasize their universal aspects. Das's "The Suicide" and "The Invitation," though expressing the speaker's contemplations on suicide, lift the thoughts to universal dimensions. The poems "Bromide" and "Luminol" reveal the impersonal side of mental breakdowns along with the speaker's personal experiences.

The phrase *edification* suggests an overall perspective on the autobiographical approach pursued by Kamala Das. Instead of providing a

format to stimulate the condition of psychoanalysis, Confessional poetry illuminates the universal quest for a favourable resolution of human guilt. Connecting her individual problems with general experiences, her personae gain aesthetic distance over their private anxieties and attain redemptive insights about the general character of all human experiences. The confessional label blurs the distinction between the biographical details and personal truth. Her poetry represents not a revelation of the external or factual, but of the internal and imaginative. The personal mythology she creates chocks the readers into psychic order. Das concentrates on the complexities of womanhood to depict woman as a passive victim and martyr. A schizophrenic polarisation permeates the personal myth and makes the poetic consciousness out of a series of fluctuations. In this context biography becomes subservient to archetypal imagery and form is subordinated to content.

Kamala Das breaks superficial identities to experience a larger identity as an extension of other selves, both real and archetypal. Her quest for self-understanding involves exploration of multiple selves. The exploration of the self ranges from a delineation of the thwarting of her native spontaneity and affections to an imaginative and expansive merger with the sea, which symbolizes archetypal womanhood. The woman self is potentially redemptive when she experiences the vitality of woman's body and escapes the limitations of gender to arrive at a distinctive and complete self. Her poetic self, the most promising and expansive self, is achieved through poetic language which helps to find the truth underlying the roles and to celebrate many selves which are connected with her identities. Imagination transforms the selves to recognisable transcendent dimension.

The Conflict between Life and Death

Many poems of Kamala Das express a central conflict between life and death. Her treatment of death is qualitatively different from that of the popular singers of death like Tagore or Whitman, Dickinson or Plath. The quest for love of Das's speakers ends in frustration. What they find is an octopus-like life of lust. The lustful life her speakers lead is a death-in-life. In poems like "The Conflagration," Das equates a woman's life of torment with death and she conceives of sexual act as a burial (D 20). For the Das speaker lust is an inevitable destiny like death. The conflict between life and death in her poetry is an extended version of another conflict: the conflict between love and lust. The two conflicts may be thematically different, but structurally identical. Her poems become the verbal equivalent of this conflict; they are a means to provide a structure and form to her tortured self.

Death has been a consistent stream of thought in Das's poetry. It continues to mature with her poetic career. In her later poetry the portrayal of death is mellow and serene. She seems to believe in the immortality of the soul. The speaker declares in "Composition" (B K D 76-85): "The ultimate discovery will be / that we are immortal." Das considers death a temporary cessation of life. In "Death Brings No Loss," the speaker regards death as a "night-fall," a "Temporary phase, which / Brings no loss" to anyone (S C 17). In "Death is so Mediocre," the speaker remarks (B K D 111-12):

. . . Death is
So mediocre, any fool can achieve
It effortlessly

Death renders the demands of life ineffective. In spite of the "awful/vulgarities" of the post-death rituals, the speaker finds death a serene consummation and a contentment.

The poem "Woman Without Her Shadow" is a painful recollection of a dying woman (C P 35-36). She recalls her love without the involvement of her self. The woman's shadow is a stand-in for her self and is the speaker of the poem. The shadow returns to narrate the experiences at this critical moment when the hard and fast line between life and death begins to vanish for the woman: "She lay still, her open eyes two cartwheels / Stunned to a sudden halt." In "The Sensuous Woman III," Das presents the ironic picture of a sensuous woman who chooses to die in style (B K D 144). The irony arises from the contrast between the inexorable nature of death and the woman's desire to die in a classy style. Her final state is similar to that of the woman described in "Woman Without Her Shadow." As "languor seizes her blood," the boundaries that separate "the state of life and death fade" for her. In the poem "Tomorrow," death is portrayed as a "homing bird" that quickly finishes a "story half told" (B K D 96). "A Holiday for Me" expresses the speaker's somewhat detached desire for death (C P 27). Das expresses a similar view in "Words are Birds" (B K D 137):

When I lie down to sleep
I am not sure
That I shall see
The blessed dawn again

The poem "Life's Obscure Parallel" defines death in terms of life (B K D 110): "Life's obscure parallel is death." According to the poet every gesture of mind or body reflects a trace each of living and dying. The speaker remarks that death lurks behind the manifestations of life:

. . . The built-in terrors of my mind
Swoop down on me from the tree tops at dusk and in
The kitchen's unlit corners large birds of prey
Perch with rustling claws and an all-knowing gaze.

Motherly love is the only panacea she prescribes for the terror of death. Das's suicide poems and hospital poems also express this conflict between life and death. But they are structurally different from her poems on death. Das's poems on death are more objective and impersonal; they only rarely incorporate autobiographical details. Her poems on suicide and hospital experiences are more subjective and autobiographical; she parades as much autobiography in them as possible.

Das's speakers seem to have an irresistible fascination for elements of Egyptology like funeral, cremation, corpse, morgue, pyre, bones, post-death rituals, the smoke from the pyre, corpse-bearers cry and sandal or perfumes used to scent the corpse or pyre. Several poems like "The Invitation," "In Love," "The Seashore," "A Souvenir of Bone," "The Joss-Stocks at Cadell Road," "Death is so Mediocre" and "The Dance of Eunuchs" present grotesque images of Egyptology. Das weaves these images with emotional fervour and zest for life. She always expresses death in terms of life. Her poems are emotionally loaded in favour of life. They are excellent illustrations of the skilful use of the language of paradox that Cleanth Brooks speaks of.

Feminist Confession

Literary confession is concerned with the affirmation and exploration of free subjectivity. This attempted emancipation of the self exposes a self-defeating dialectic in which the history of confession returns to new forms. The self is a social product. Any attempt to assert its privileged autonomy underlines its dependence on the cultural and ideological systems through which it is constructed. The act of confession exacerbates rather than alleviates problems of identity, engendering a dialectic in which writing as a means to define a centre of meaning serves to underscore the alienation of the subject which it seeks to overcome. In feminist confession, the interpretation of the subjective within the social and ideological framework can be done at a number of levels. The social constitution of the self manifests itself in the self-image of women writers. This reveals the psychological system by which gender ideologies are internalized.

Autobiographical writing by women as the oppressed gender is prone to conflicts and tensions. The depiction of the life and experiences of women, on the one hand, is a liberating process in so far as it expresses a public self-

acceptance and a celebration of difference. On the other hand, the internalised cultural values which define specific identities as marginal come to the surface in the feelings of anxiety and guilt. This strongly negative self-image is a problem for women whose socialization endows them with feelings of inadequacy. The negative pattern in which attempted self-affirmation reverts to anxiety and self-castigation is a recurring example in feminist confession. In this context, feminism, as Rita Felski observes, ironically accentuates the guilt rather than resolves it "by providing an ideal of autonomy which the author is unable to emulate" (105). If the insights gained through the act of confession are not translated into action, they generate increased feelings of guilt in the author at the extent of her own failings. The very objective of feminist confession is to confront unpalatable aspects of female experience as general problems and not to present idealized images of women as positive models. A feminist confessional writer is engaged in a tight-rope walking between critical insight and obsessive self-castigation. The act of confession can expose a female subjectivity only within the symbolic order. The female self is marked by contradictions and tensions related to a problematic subjectivity and conditions of marginalization and powerlessness.

Feminist confession caters to the specific needs arising from its social functions in the context of women's cultural and political struggles and articulates the specific problems experienced by women in the process of identity formation and cultural critique. The tension between a focus on objectivity and the construction of an identity that is communal rather than individualistic is a feature of feminist confession. The production and reception of feminist literature has acquired a political dimension recently. Feminism links the personal and psychological dimensions of experiences to the institutionalised nature of sexual oppression. The basic principle of feminist confession, as Rita Felski remarks, is "the recognition that women's problems are not private but communal" (115). The politicization of feminist confession is a significant issue. Confession is less concerned with any explicit political questions than with the cathartic release associated with self-disclosure. The strength of confession as a genre lies in the ability to communicate the conflicting and contradictory aspects of subjectivity and the tensions between personal feelings and ideological convictions.

The existence of a feminist readership provides a context for a politicized interpretation of feminist confession. Contemporary responses to feminist confession indicate the existence of a significant readership which contextualizes its social meanings. The political value of self-disclosure is explicitly asserted by feminist writers. Feminist confession indicates that the process of self-

examination is a necessary, politically significant act in relation to the community of female readers. The division between a repressive stereotype and a symbolic cultural identity is a narrow one. The creation and affirmation of symbolic identities constitute a recurring need for the female sex. This fulfils a desire for self-validation in the face of the hostility of the dominant patriarchal culture. The focus on sexuality as a determinant of cultural identity is a recent historical phenomenon. Feminism denotes a range of cultural and political affiliations rather than a preference for a form of sexuality. It relies on a critique of patriarchal culture for its construction of an oppositional female identity, which is not a destiny but a choice. This oppositional identity articulates experiences of alienation, exclusion and suffering of women. The socially constructed identity does not undermine its political functions.

Feminist confession is not a self-generating discourse to be judged in its abstraction from prevailing social conditions. On the contrary, it exemplifies a "simultaneous interrogation and affirmation of gendered subjectivity," in the context of the communal identity of the female created by social movements (Felski 121). Feminist literature creates an oppositional identity in terms of gender to unite all human beings. Confessional literature depicts the struggle to discover a female self, a struggle that is a necessary moment in the self-definition of an oppositional identity of the female as a community. New parameters of aesthetics have to be defined to express this struggle and new coordinates of ethics have to be determined to evaluate it.

Conclusion

Besides the dominant characteristics of feminism, the poems of Das reveal the prominent traits of Confessional poetry. It follows, therefore, that Das is a feminist Confessional as defined by modern critical standards. The "poetry of breakdown" which she often practises can be traced back to her neurosis. Neurosis as the unmistakable source of some of her poems is a critically established fact. Das also takes to the "poetry of suicide." Das's poems on suicide are often loose in structure and form. Almost all of them are conceived as a dialogue between the persona and the sea, a structure that recalls the "sear-drift poems" of Whitman.

The quest for the self and the fragmentation of the self are central to the poetry of Kamala Das. Her speakers often reveal a psycho-pathological obsession with the self. Most of her personae undergo disintegration of the self: each self splits into the child, the woman and the artist. The conflict between split-selves is a common motif in her poetry. The speakers of Das experience isolation at

two different levels. They experience isolation as a general, existential condition which they share with the male order of society. In addition to this general isolation, her speakers experience further isolation that is unique to the female gender. Das depicts the isolation of her speakers in four different forms: victimization, personalization, split-self and validation. Das pictures her hospital experiences in her poems. She also portrays her sexual conquests with economy and artistry. Poems on sexual escapades cast the shadow of a Cleopatra-like image to Das. Her poems can be classified on the basis of five penitential attitudes: mortification, "victimage" or scape-goating, contrition or apologia, self-parody or mock-lyric and edification.

Das is more impulsive and confessional but less assertive and optimistic. At times her poetry nauseates when it verges on the extremes of confession, giving the minutest details of her private lives. The unflinching courage she evinces in condemning the feminine delusion and the absorbing metaphors she employs in her poetry give her significant place among the confessional poets. Like the "con man" of Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*, Das makes a living not only out of her deathwish, but out of her grief, guilt, neurosis and womanhood. The traumas that she experiences and her obsessive fascination for death are transmuted into excellent poetry that speaks out the strange truths from the angle of a victimized woman in a patriarchy. These aspects of her poetry testify to the fact that Das is a Confessional who is also conscious of her gender and the limitations and perils associated with it.

Chapter - 5

CRAFTS(WO)MANSHIP

Confession, especially of the feminist variety, can be a source of strength—both ideological and poetic. But it can prove to be a burden for the poet if it remains uncontrolled. The poetry of Kamala Das is characterised not merely by a fidelity to experience but by the absolute control that the poet exercises over her material. The language of her poetry generally is colloquial, and the verse is blank or free, rhymed or unrhymed. At times she even employs unpunctuated prose. The openness of language leads to an uninterrupted flow of emotions. What redeems her poetry from wild, unchecked emotional outbursts is the control of form she keeps in her poetry. The tension between the control and organisation of poetry and the wild surges of the heart is the focal point of critical interest.

As a writer of feminist confession, Kamala Das undergoes a sort of psychic fission. The poet is under the perpetual threat of a psychic quake. There is a perpetual movement between the disintegration of the self and its reintegration to the normal state. It is precisely out of this conflict between the movement toward psychic stability and a yearning for disintegration that the basic tension of her poetry originates. This conflict is the holocaust within the poetic mind. It is a conflict between the tendency toward structure and form and the urge for unconventional content. The craftsmanship of Das is ultimately related to this conflict. The poet has a centripetal urge for complete freedom in the choice of subjects, especially in her craving for unconventional content. This is opposed by a centrifugal necessity to have control and form in poetry. The success of the poet's technique depends on her skill to poetically transmute the psychic conflict through harmonization of the matter and manner of poetry.

Theories of art make much of the dichotomy between content and form. But there is an organic inseparability of form and content. As form is an extension of content, the nature of content determines the form of poetry. The "shaping motivation" of a work of art is "objective artistry" (Rosenthal 140). A Confessional like Lowell, as Rosenthal observes, seeks "self-transcendence" as a

means to objective artistry. This objective artistry is the "impersonal motivation" of a work of art. This means that even when the content is intimately private or subjective, an objective form can make a poetic work impersonal. Confessional poetry is the best example of impersonal poetry on intimately personal subject matter. It exemplifies the second type of impersonality that Eliot speaks of which allows the poet with intense personal experiences to express "a general truth retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol" (255). The poetic self voices the concern of modern man. An emphasis on form helps to manage the material of Confessional poetry which is the bare psyche of a suffering man in a hostile world. The sequence of images, symbols and metaphors effects the externalization of the speaking psyche through selective distortion of language. The true objective of poetry thus becomes the discovery of an external equivalent of the speaking self which is its own victim.

Split-Self Motive

The recurrence of certain images, symbols, metaphors, styles or forms in women's poetry indicates not only the personal history of the poet as a woman but also the social and historical position of women in general. In feminist confession the narrator's voice assumes different masks or personae leading to "multiple voices." In Kamala Das the poetic self splits into three recognizable entities: the child, the woman and the poet. Tension between these different selves is an important aspect of her poetry.

In some of her poems the personae undergo an infantile regression to a turbulent past. These personae seem to be torn between the desire to remain a child and the fear of growing into an adult. Kamala Das expresses the agonizing experience of growing up in the long poem, "Composition" (B K D 76-85). The onset of adulthood marks the inevitable tragedy of a woman: "The tragedy of life / is . . . / the child growing into adult." Das's speakers seem to have an irresistible desire to remain a child throughout their lives. This is a recurring feature of her short stories most of which she published in Malayalam under the pseudonym Madhavikutty. She strategically brings in a grandmother or an old woman relative or an old lover to underline the childhood of the protagonists in her stories. Her retreat to her ancestral home and grandmother is, as Anisur Rahman also remarks, a "symbolic retreat to the realms of innocence, simplicity and purity" of the childhood (31). In "My Grandmother's House," the speaker identifies the house with her grandmother who binds her to the past (B K D 21). Das's fascination with the images of the house beside the sea can also be interpreted in terms of certain childhood associations. Her ancestral home is a symbol of the spontaneity of love. In Das

house and woman are closely related; a house is easily identified with a woman and vice versa. In Das's poetry intensity of passion is synonymous with silence. "The woman died, / the house withdrew into silence," says the poet. With her grandmother's death the intensity of her love for her grandmother increases.

Images of femaleness like blood, moon, snake, house and sea recur in "Blood" (B K D 14-17). The speaker's love for the grandmother and the ancestral home is expressed through references to the purity of the ancient blood she shares with her grandmother. The agony of the speaker's identification with the house is brought out perceptively in the poem. A wistful longing for the past characterises the poem. "The Suicide" is another poem which deploys images of femaleness in order to evoke the past (B K D 27-31). It contrasts the final rest offered by the sea with the speaker's present death-in-life, the miserable predicament of her life. The sea brings to mind the pond where she used to swim as a child. The childhood memory of swimming has a new significance in the context of the adult's love affair and the adult-poet's verse-writing. Swimming, which was natural to the child self of the speaker, readily recalls to her vision the woman self's death-in-life caused by her unfulfilled love of "the white man." The speaker returns to her grandmother and her ancestral house as an alternative to the "sea's hostile cold" which is "skin-deep." This sojourn to the childhood experience brings her back to the woman self's tragic experience with the white man:

The only movement I know well
Is certainly the swim.
It comes naturally to me.

As swimming comes naturally to the child, love comes naturally to the woman:

The white man who offers
Himself as a stiff drink,
Is for me,
To tell the truth,
Only water.
Only a pale green pond

This passage also shows the difference in the perceptions of the lovers and the consequent collapse of love. The image of love as drink or food recurs in Kamala Das. The world of love is the world to eat or to be eaten. The speaker's lover hurts her with his love. The traditional association between love and pain is pursued with a new meaning in the poem.

The images of Nature and femaleness recur in "Composition" (B K D 76-85). As the child self grows into adult, love is replaced with guilt. The speaker returns to the grandmother and the ancestral house in an apparent bid to circumvent her arid domestic life. She feels that her growing into adulthood is a tragic turning point in her life. She juxtaposes her childhood days with the barren life of a modern family. The contrast magnifies the alienation of the woman self from the child self. Surreal images like "the wind's / ceaseless whisper in a shell," "the surf breaking on the shore," "thieving ants," "a skin yellowed / like antique paper," and "a skin older than Jesus Christ" blend with Eliotic images like "dancing shoe," "lesbians hiss their love," "ladies sun . . . on the lawn," "toys / fit for the roaring nights," "merry / dog-house," "humorous heaven" and "cages of involvement" to produce new meanings. The child self is engrossed with the memory of the grandmother's house. The split-self characteristics of her poems become dominant when the woman self is alienated from childhood memories and experiences.

The conflict between different aspects of the woman self is an extension of the conflict between the child self and the woman self and Das provides many examples of this second kind of conflict. The poems "An Introduction" and "An Apology to Goutama" are examples of poems that bring this conflict between contending woman selves forcefully into play. Some poems also reveal a split between the woman self/selves and the poetic self. These several conflicts in the poetry of Kamala Das work in conjunction with the pattern of multiple voices in her poetry. The narrator's voice in her poetry assumes the roles of the child, the woman and the poet. It is this pattern that contributes to the basic tension in her poetry.

Das's "Loud Posters" is designed on the central tension between the housewife and the poet (B K D 39). The body imagery is contrasted with inorganic imagery to poetically embody the conflict. Images like "eyes," "skin," "flesh," and "bone" describe the housewife-speaker. Her creativity is represented by a second set of images like "loud poster," "typewriter," "weeklies" and "monthlies." Literary creativity of the female attracts the attention of the "stranger" as do the charms of the female body. The artist asserts herself and defies her domestic ties as is evident from the conspicuous nature of the inorganic imagery in the poem. The body images and the inorganic images are well arranged in the texture of the poem which is finely balanced. The image of "nudity" in conjunction with other images evokes a series of responses including the confession of intimate privacies. The image of "sacrifice" in combination with the rest of imagistic structure indicates the sacramental nature of confessional literature. Das offers her poetry as a "sad sacrifice."

Das's Speakers

Kamala Das demonstrates the case of a woman poet whose first person narratives reveal the identity or continuity of the speaker. Her adept use of traditional persona in autobiographical poems is characterised by the persona's closeness to interior events which leads some critics to identify the speaker with the poet. Even the most autobiographical poetry requires a structuring process which is fictional in sense. The tight, metrical, vigorous stanza form itself is a formal fiction. Das's "Composition" constitutes at once an elaborate fiction and an artful truth with tight formalities which involve complex rhythmic structures, intricate constellations, juxtaposition of imagery and ideas, and irony, both gentle and sharp. As fiction is an alternative to truth, the voices that the woman poet wants to speak include, among others, her own. In "The Suicide," the poet recreates herself as a character. The "I" of this poem, at once self-reflective and self-reflexive, is like the formally constructed persona of "The Invitation." These poems are deliberate recreations of the states of mind of the speakers. They are half truth and half artifice.

Maxine Kumin identifies four kinds of "I" in the first-person poems: the persona, the autobiographical or confessional "I," the lyric "I" and the ideational "I" (147-56). The categories are only reference points; they may not be comprehensive or mutually exclusive.

The *persona* "I" is a first person narrator, distinct from the poet. The self-revelation the persona makes is understood better by the readers than by the persona herself. This ironic gap between self-knowledge and other's perceptions is a salient feature of the persona poems. The creation of a persona as a conscious strategy or an unconscious accident constitutes an element of fiction to the first person poetry. Das's "Gino" and the "The Suicide" are examples of the persona poems. The "I" of both the poems is a constructed character who tells her story in a rhythmic but ironic narrative. This device keeps considerable formal distance between the poet and the speaker. The character Gino, the foreign lover, himself is a figment of fiction. The white lover referred to in "The Suicide" is also a fictional character. Das presents him as Carlo in *My Story* where the narrator fancies that she was Carlo's Sita. In the poem "Daughter of the Century," the speaker wonders whether the white lover is only a symbol (B K D 140-42):

White man with a whiter limb
Luminous in the blue,
Have I met you in real life too,
Or are you just a symbol?

The *autobiographical* "I" dissolves the distinction between the speaker and the poet. The best autobiographical poem requires the best artistry especially in its form and control to transcend the personal. The confessional poems arouse the reader's sympathy and identification as they embody a crisis or a psychological dilemma shared by a significant number of the people. Das's "My Grandmother's House" and "Of Calcutta" are highly autobiographical poems in which the narrator's mask is so transparent that it can be easily identified with the poet's. Das manages to achieve impersonality in her best autobiographical poems through the merit of her poetic craft. The tone and imagery of the poems help her to transcend the personal.

The use of the *lyric* "I" belongs to a venerable and ancient poetic tradition. It communicates personal emotion in a voice, rhythmic and melodious. Das's "Ode to a Lynx" and "Ghanashyam" are lyrical expressions of disgust and pure love respectively. The poem "Ode to a Lynx" eulogizes the animal grace of the male and condemns his deceitful love whereas "Ghanashyam" expresses the speaker's unalloyed love for Krishna who has built a "nest in the arbour" of her heart. Both the poems illustrate skilful use of the lyric "I."

The *ideational* "I" is a first person voice which is subordinated to establish the intent of the poem, which consists of making a statement. The statement made by the speaker is more important than the identity of the speaker. The introduction of the "I" is crucial to the thematic statement of the poem. Das's "The Millionaires at Marine Drive" uses the ideational "I" effectively (B K D 71-72). The autobiographical "I" of the beginning is subordinated at the end of the poem.

. . . I have turned old, frigid, grey-haired, but
Surely somewhere lovers still cling with wet
Limbs, wet eyes, near doorways at parting hour?

The final statement of the poem makes the identity of the speaker irrelevant. The poem "Glass" is another instance where Das uses the ideational "I" masterly (B K D 103). The concluding statement of the poem subordinates the speaker. It matters little whether the speaker is Das or her persona. "The First Meeting" also explores the transforming power of ideational "I" (C P 78). The final statement of the poem is remarkable:

In sudden unease I wondered who would
Protect me which obscure God with wise and
Lenient ways, from this new love and its vast commitments.

The speaker can be Das or her persona or any constructed character. The "I" of these poems may have the characteristics of her guilt or anxiety or disgust. But the poems are essentially ideational as the speaker can be replaced with a persona or a constructed character.

Kamala Das wrote a number of poems with the persona as constructed poetic self who may be differentiated from the poet. Das's "Sunset, Blue Bird" has as the speaker a girl seduced and abandoned by her lover (B K D 86). In "An Introduction," the speaker is a non-conformist Indian woman poet (B K D 12-13). In "Nani," the girl who witnessed the macabre sight of Nani hanging from the privy of the outhouse is the speaker (B K D 19-20). An anxious mother expressing her agony and anguish at the war is the speaker in "Afterwards" (B K D 5-8).

In the case of Anne Sexton, Diana Hume George identifies a fifth kind of "I," frequently used by Blake and Americanized by Whitman. She calls it the "prophetic I" and it denotes the poet's voice which "transcends the personal by becoming mythic or collective or archetypal" (103). This voice can also be heard in the poems where Das explores the Krishna legends. In such poems the poet uses inappropriate style and off-the wall imagery because of her insistence on a vocabulary that includes terms appropriate to the kitchen.

Das's "The Descendants" makes an attempt toward a mythic and collective voice (B K D 43):

. . . None will step off his cross
or show his wounds to us, no God lost in
silence shall begin to speak, no lost love
claim us, no, we are not going to be
ever redeemed or made new.

The prophetic voice is usually hedonistic; it reverses normative values. "The Snobs" is another poem which speaks in a prophetic "we" (B K D 41):

. . . We are
paltry creatures, utter snobs
who disowned our mothers only because
their hands, we noticed, were
workworn and so to seek richer
mothers and better addresses
we must move on and on until
we too, someday, by our children
may be disowned.

In "Death Is So Mediocre" the speaker's statement acquires a prophetic dimension (B K D 111-12):

I shall go too in silence leaving not
Even a finger print on this crowded earth,
Carrying away my bird - in - flight voice and
The hundred misunderstandings that destroyed
My alliances with you and you and you.

In "Ghanashyam," Das tries out a mythic and intra-cultural female voice (C P 93-95).

The ones in saffron robes told me of you
And when they left
I thought only of what they left unsaid
Wisdom must come in silence
when the guests have gone
The plates are washed
And the lights put out
Wisdom must steal in like a breeze
From beneath the shuttered door

The prophetic voice emancipates the poet from all restrictions, including the restrictions of the craft of poetic composition.

The "prophetic I," which Kamala Das employs in her poetry, also resorts to a sort of Whitmanesque celebration of the Self. Das's "Someone Else's Song," for example, presents the speaker, who is a constructed persona, as a universalized self (B K D 40): "I am a million, million people / talking all at once." She is also a "million, million deaths / pox-clustered" or a "million, million births / flushed with triumphant blood" or a "million million silences / strung like crystal beads." The narrator's voice changes from an Indian woman poet to "every woman who seeks love" in "An Introduction" (B K D 12-13). The speaking voice is a constructed persona who dissolves all dichotomies on behalf of the female gender: "I am the sinner, I am the saint. I am both the lover / and the beloved." She partakes of the same joys and pains as that of the community and shares "the same fate" and "the same crumbled dreams." The unidentified "you" stands for the female gender and by extension for humanity. The last lines echo Whitman's "Song of Myself" (C W 203):

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others
Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man

The Self and the Craft

The poetry of Kamala Das combines a concern for identity and for authentic being within a literary pattern. The concern with the self is a means to reach beyond personal life and to achieve a mythic dimension: it places the self in a paradoxical situation with potential for regeneration. The poetic output of her concern with the self follows a graphic development. Her early poetry begins with a limited self manifested through tight structures and subdued images. These poems concentrate on familial themes. The concern for the self changes to a conflict between the desire for and fear of selfhood. The themes change to love and death. The concern with self gradually gives in to religious questions. The themes move to materials beyond family. The forms of narration become looser and more associative, the rhythms become increasingly vernacular. At the centre of her poetic evolution she confronts themes of identity in the context of individual psyche. The quest for identity is symbolically and structurally expressed in myths and dreams. The poems develop a tension between the potential of self-awareness for regeneration and the near impossibility of escaping physical and emotional bonds to achieve the same. The poems are classic self-exposures of family life and artistic achievement. The tension continues to develop further but, soon subsides. Religion overwhelms family as the prime impulse behind poetry. The poems are structurally loose, meditative narratives abundant in surreal imagery and punctuated with drearily monotonous repetition of rhythms. The potential regeneration is a specifically religious redemption, though its usefulness is often doubtful. During the last phase of her poetic development the tentative regeneration and achievable redemption dissolve in the memory of loss and pain. The traumas lead her to the same themes explored in her early poetry. From the angle of themes or structures or obsession with self, Kamala Das undergoes a cyclic poetic evolution: the poetic craft develops to a peak and then disintegrates and merges with the poetic art at the beginning.

Body Imagery

The images and metaphors used by Kamala Das reveals a lot about the specific ways in which the poet articulates her experiences. Biofeminist critics stress the importance of the female body as a source of imagery. Contemporary women poets use pervasive anatomical imagery in their poetry. This body language rejects the flesh-loathing of the early feminist poets. Many women poets of today associate physical nudity with the objectified or sexually exploited female. They avoid explicit sexuality through protective images of armoured self (Showlater 189). Motherhood as a social institution and biological power is a

lived experience that unifies the body and the mind. The biological imagery in women's poetry is useful to understand women's situation in society from a female angle.

Das identifies herself with her body: she is painfully conscious of its complexities and limitations. She places the body at the centre of her quest for identity. This makes her poetic craft intricate as it creates a situation where the themes of Otherness and Body merge. Her feminine sensibility is manifested not only in the body imagery but also in her attitude to the experience of love. She often identifies herself with her grandmother or her mother through her body. The identities of female generations are evolved through female body.

Das is the flesh-loathing woman poet who finds the female body a destiny. She looks upon the body as a source of her weakness. Her speakers reject the body in an obvious attempt to circumvent subordination and marginality. The narrator of *My Story* laments:

... my broken down doll of a body was attractive . . . Impartially I scrutinised its flaws and its virtues. It was like a cloth doll that had lost a few stitches here and there. The scars of operations decorated my abdomen like a map of the world painted crudely by a child . . . I was no longer bed-worthy, no longer a charmer of lecherous men (191).

The macabre description of the maid's body hanging in the privy like a "clumsy puppet" engaging in a "comic dance" is also a rejection of the female body (B K D 19). The mutilated female body represents the mutilated self of the speaker in poems like "The Tom-Tom" (C P 77). The state of the female body after a surgical operation is graphically described thus: "They have left behind two big breasts and a hole." The speaker apprehends that man will cease to have interest in the disfigured body after the operation: "Which man would want to rest his head on these hillocks of breasts / Only to hear the dying heart's ominous tom-tom." She also fears that sexual love may not be possible to her hereafter:

Which man would dive into this hole
An emptied coffin of a hole where the last stiff lying in state
Left a stale blood smell?

The speaker even doubts whether her voice has changed: "with half your / Ovaries out, even the soft voice that you had is now / A sexless groan." The post-operative scars also produce indelible marks on her mind. In "After the Illness," the speaker wails over the disastrous effects the disease caused to her body (C P 109):

. . . There was
 Not much flesh left for the flesh to hunger, the blood had
 Weakened too much to lust, and the skin, without health's
 Anointments, was numb and unyearning.

The poem "Gino" expresses the speaker's disgust and weariness with her "burdened" body (B K D 56-57):

This body that I wear without joy, this body
 burdened with lenience, slender toy owned
 by man of substance shall wither, battling with his
 impersonal lust.

The speaker refers to herself as a "dark fruit on silver platter" served in "bedroom-mirrors." The image recalls to memory the tale of Cleopatra who was offered to Julius Ceaser wrapped in a mattress. The images of "dark fruit," "another's / country" and "toy" reveal the relatively unimportant position of woman in love. The image of the body as a burden recurs in "An Introduction" (B K D 12-13): "my sad / woman-body felt so beaten. The weight of my breasts and / womb crushed me."

The womb is the most significant of the images of the body Das uses. It represents the visual sensation of darkness. In "The Bangles," the womb is a metaphor of darkness (S C 34):

Drapes her windows darkly to make
 The lonely noons lightless like
 Wombs . . . and sobs piteously in
 Afternoon sleep.

In "Afterwards," the womb works as a neutral image (B K D 5-8):

Son of my womb,
 Ugly in loneliness,
 You walk the world's bleary eye
 Like a grit.

The poem "Jaisurya" also presents the womb as dark (B K D 62-63):

my son, separated from a darkness
 that was mine
 and in me.
 The darkness of rooms

where the old sit,
 sharpening words for future use
 the darkness of sterile wombs
 and that of the miser's pot
 with the mildew on his coins.

The womb as a store-house of memories occurs in "The Descendants" (B K D 43):

. . . It is
 not for us to scrape the walls of wombs for
 memories, not for us even to
 question death, but as child to mother's arms
 we shall give ourselves to the fire

Though Das rarely uses the womb as a sex image, in "Captive" it appears as the source of sexual love (C P 81):

. . . What have
 we had, after all, between us but the
 womb's blinded hunger, the muted whisper
 at the core.

But the womb is not a dramatic force in the thought pattern of this poem. It arouses the reader's imagination rather than sensation (Rahman 45). The image creates a visual sensation of the intended object and forms an integral part of the poetic structure.

Images from the male anatomy are used to represent the corruption of love and the corrosion of feminine virtues. The lovers Das portrays are often physically deformed. The physical deformity of the lovers symbolize the unsatisfactory nature of their emotional relationships. "The Freaks," for example, presents a lover who is ugly by any standards (B K D 42):

He talks, turning a sun-stained cheek to me,
 his mouth a dark cavern where stalactites
 of uneven teeth gleam,

The poem "Gino" likens the kiss of a lover to the bite of a krait (B K D 56-57). It produces unsavoury memories in her mind. The image conveys scorn and disgust for the male posture and habits. "The Stranger and I" portrays male gestures in metaphors of distaste (S C 44): "I've seen your bitten nails, / Your sickly smile, heard your brittle / Broken talk."

House Imagery

Kamala Das identifies woman with house in her poetry. Images of constriction like room, grave, closet, cloister, bower, tomb, cave are prolifically used to describe woman's life and growth in her poetry. The images truly represent woman's marginalisation and oppression and limit the influence of gender roles. A woman's world of retreat or action is the little space left out by the dominant masculine world. The expansion of the female world is poetically embodied by the expansion of the potentials of the female body. The poem "A Half-Day's Bewitchment" equates the house with the speaker (C P 46): "Ultimately the house and I became one." This plain statement is the characteristic of feminist poetry. The "I" stands for both the physical and feminine selves of the speaker. Das couples the images of woman and body and compares this complex image with the house. The poetic statement is developed on apparently simple theses: woman equals house and woman equals body. The speaker's "heart's door" is compared to the "wrought iron gate" of the house. The images of "rusted hinges" and "creaking" gate reveal the problems of communications she encounters. The alienation of the speaker from the world, the alienation between body and soul and the isolated nature of the house are indicated by the image of "bats with human faces" hanging in the house. The oldness of the house is expressed through the exotic image of the "African warriors / Killed and trophied by their Massai enemies." Her soul "remote controls" her poor body. A woman is acted upon as a house is used or as a body is controlled. Isolation works at three different levels in the poem: through the realms of house, woman and body. The image of the sea conveys the restlessness of the speaker. The metaphor of "compass with needles / Missing" expresses the directionless life of the speaker. The poet attributes strangeness to beauty: "The beautiful ones are reverted to stranger rank." This statement enhances the isolation of the primary images: house, woman and body which are ultimately interchangeable. Das identifies her grandmother with her ancestral home in a few poems whereas in some other poems she identifies her ancestral home with her grandmother. The oldwoman and the old house seem to be interchangeable in her perspective.

Kitchen Imagery

Another remarkable feature of the poetry of Kamala Das is the kitchen imagery she skilfully employs in her poems. The kitchen images not only show the speakers' identification with hearth and home but also expose their revulsion, nausea and repulsiveness to the drudgery of domestic duties. The narrator of *My Story* describes the predicament of every housewife with irony and distaste:

I would be a middle-class housewife, and walk along the vegetable shop carrying a string bag and wearing faded chappals on my feet. I would beat my thin children when they asked for expensive toys, and make them scream out for mercy. I would wash my husband's cheap underwear and hang it out to dry in the balcony like some kind of a national flag, with wifely pride (85).

The passage reflects the disappointment of a premature housewife in the Indian context. There are several poems such as "Gino," "The Swamp" and "The Old Playhouse" in which Das gives poetic expression to the idea contained in this passage, using, in the process, a good number of kitchen images to drive home her point. For example, the poet compares the baby-girl's skin to the "rolled gold bangles / on . . . ayahs arms." (B K D 89). In "The Old Playhouse," the poet describes her wifely duties with sarcasm (B K D 100-01):

I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
to offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering
beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
became a dwarf.

The images "saccharine," "vitamins" and "magic loaf" enhance the metaphor-status of "dwarf." In "Glass," the speaker is compared to a "fragile glass" and again to a "broken glass," an image which brings out the vulnerability of the speaker as a woman (B K D 103). In "Ghanashyam," the poet refers to the way how a woman gains insights into the ineffable experiences of life (C P 93-95):

When the guests have gone
The plates are washed
And the lights put out
Wisdom must steal in like a breeze
From beneath the shuttered door

A woman gains rays of insights only after the domestic chores are finished. When the wifely duties are taken care of, her thoughts "race like enchanted fish" to Ghanashyam, the Self beyond herself.

Hospital Imagery

Kamala Das has written a few "hospital poems" on exclusively hospital experiences. These poems are the aesthetic equivalents of the speakers' psychological traumas of manifold types. They are punctuated with clinical imagery both visual and olfactory. In "Gino," the speaker enumerates her experiences (B K D 56-57):

I dream of obscene hands
striding up my limbs and of morgues where the night-lights
glow on faces shuttered by the soul's exit.

The speaker dreams of "ward-boys, sepulchral, wheeling" her "through long corridors / to the X-ray room's interior." She is annoyed by the "Clatter of the trolleys, with the dead on them, / as loud as untimely laughter." The poem "Luminol" describes the "luminous sleep banked in / the heart of pills" which enables the speaker to keep the "ruthless one" out of her soul (B K D 44). Das's portrayal of her father's last days in "A Requiem for My Father" is a classic illustration of clinical cruelty (C P 39-41). In the hospital a "young intern" comes "in a hurry / To hack at your swollen feet and find yet another / Vein to pierce." The clinical examination has become a routine of indifference and cruelty:

They bled you to test your blood
When you lay insensate and stiff
They did the lumbar puncture
Folding you like a canvas chair

The doctors continue their diagnosis on the man who is only clinically alive.

The poem "The Intensive Cardiac Care Unit" reflects the trauma of the speaker who meets face to face with death (B K D 69). The patients lie there in the light of "the lidless fisheyes of bulbs burn on / blind to the night's thinning out into light beyond the wall." The patient's predicament is like that of "the weary travellers pause to pitch a tent, the oasis / for a night's rest before the long crossing / on camel back." They lie awaiting their execution and at midnight the doctor comes and calls them "from the depths of dreams, out of breaths, / the bulbs blurring in" their eyes. The poem is a realistic picture of hospital experience. The structure of the poem corresponds to the electrocardiograph of a heart patient. In "The Tom-Tom," Das describes the post-traumatic experience of a surgery the speaker has undergone (C P 77). The speaker thinks that the doctors have been kind enough to leave behind "two big breasts and a hole" after the operation. The surgeon's frequent examination is an agonizing experience:

How can I call this one pain, this murderer
Returning to the scene of his crime,
The surgeon's scalpel returning to take stock

The poem "The Lunatic Asylum" marks the speaker's visit to the bedlam to see her relative confined there (C P 2). Though he was not really mad at the

time of his admittance, he later became mad and died there. The light in the cell is the most striking image: the light "burning all through the night." The unshaded bulb, which is likened to a tear, represents the untold misery of the inmate. The image has attained metaphor status through the remarkable simile Das employs:

An unshaded
Bulb, shaped like a teardrop,
Hanging from the deadwhite ceiling.

The intensity of the light matches with the gravity of the inmate's mental disorder:

The lamps in their skulls, those lights that
The bromides of the electric whiplash
Of every week cannot put out,

The miserable picture of the inmate and the equally miserable cell are indelible hospital images. The poem "Old Cattle" is also remarkable for its clinical images (B K D 121). The speaker, who is a heart-patient just discharged from the nursing home, identifies herself with the old cattle branded and led to the slaughter house. The animals are ignorant of their imminent death whereas the speaker is conscious of the death that follows like a shadow. As the old cattle are sent to the slaughter house, the patient is sent home with "electrocardiographs and sedatives," the signs of inescapable fatality.

Revisionist Mythmaking

Kamala Das seriously engages in revisionist myth-making in the "Krishna poems." The poems combine popular tales with psychological revelation. The immortal love between Radha and Krishna is the central metaphor of bridal mysticism in Indian poetry. Das modernizes this theme in the light of her own experience. Mythologically Radha is only Krishna's lover: their love is adulterous by modern standards. In "Radha," Radha's experience is the opposite of what is normally expected from such an alliance (B K D 25). The "long waiting" makes their "bond so chaste" that in his "first true embrace, she was girl / And virgin." Krishna's embrace restores to her chastity and virginity. Her hardened heart melts until nothing remains except Krishna. As Krishna's love makes Radha vibrant in all respects, her husband's love reduces her to a "corpse" that the "maggots nip." "The Maggots" expresses an experience emotionally opposite to what is expressed in "Radha" (B K D 46):

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, do you mind my kisses,
 love, and, she said, no, not at all
 but thought, what is it to the corpse
 if the maggots nip?

She must wait for the return of Krishna to become alive again. "An apology to Goutama" describes an experience which is normally unexpected (S C 19). Goutama, the ascetic and gentle lover holds the speaker's "woman form" while her lover's "hurting arms" hold her "very soul." These poems based on popular legends are given new interpretations by Das in the context of woman's experience in a patriarchy. Her revisionist myth-making is subversive both in its structure and meaning. What comes out of these poems is the portrait of a woman as creator. Das desentimentalizes the tales and demolishes many social conventions.

In the "Krishna poems" Das takes the position that the legendary characters are sometimes elevated to positions as important as the speaker's own. As all characters and events are the projections of the speaker's psyche, all poetic materials point to the poet-speaker herself. The speaker's voice controls the poems by an intimacy of revelation. The characters of the poems fail to emerge whole; they are mutilated psychologically. Unrelieved monotony is the fate that awaits them. Das honestly attempts to unify the truly feminine and the truly artistic selves. She transforms what is not truly feminine in the tales and combines them with the truly poetic elements. Das transforms the mythical world of andro-centric culture through her own world of gyno-centric thoughts. Her task involves the transformation of the patriarchal world of fixed co-ordinates by the female world of varying co-ordinates represented by femininity and artistry. Das accomplishes the task through her language and diction which involve torturous phrases and violent images. Das transforms the myths into her own tales by her poetic craft. This upholds the dominance of the artistic self over the domestic self.

The Writer's Block

Kamala Das has been writing serious poetry since 1950's. A meticulous analysis of the verbs and images of her poetry reveals that her later poetry is very much different from her early poetry. This is an evidence of her sustained

power of development as a poet. In her we find an exquisite Romantic craftsmanship developing to a great poet giving profound expression to the complex realities of life. The difference between the early poetry and later poetry is so great that one gets the impression that her early and later works have almost been written by two different persons. In Das we find a continuous development to the very end in the power of expression, the range of themes and the variety of moods. Her range of mind, her fidelity to experiences, her courage in making poetry out of her inner struggles, and her mastery of style and rhetoric are all remarkable. The poetic evolution she has undergone, though slow, is steady and progressive.

Das's poetry written till 1970 may be, for the purpose of this analysis, accepted as her early poetry. The anthology edited by P.P.Raveendran, *The Best of Kamala Das*, is a reliable collection for this chronological classification of her poems. Among the various parts of speech the percentage of verbs is higher in her early poetry. Most of the verbs of her early poetry belong to two definite categories: verbs of motion and verbs of perception. These verbs of definite patterns bear testimony to the poet's agile and sensitive mind. The images of this period also fit to certain patterns. Most of the images of her early poetry are images of fertility and vitality like the sun, the sea, the river, the blood, the womb and the summer. Besides these recurring images, Das also uses landscape imagery which marks the spiritual conflicts and food imagery which represents the guilts of her speakers. Most of the body imagery that she uses during this period describes the beauty and attractiveness of the female body. Her speakers seem to revel in sensory experiences. Her early poems rarely objectify the interior events that occur in the psyche of the speaker. The themes of Das's early poetry are mostly personal and autobiographical. Her early poetry, which is remarkable for its poetic flavour, is spontaneous and rhythmic. There is an effortless ease and even flow about Das's early poetry.

Poetry written after 1970 may be considered Das's later poetry, at least, for the purpose of this analysis. In her later poetry the percentage of verbs has undergone a remarkable reduction. The nature of verbs has also changed radically in the later phase of her career. Her later poetry is abound in verbs of inertia and verbs of sensory and mental deficiencies. These verbs signify her morbid and imperceptive mind. The images of this period reflect loss of vitality and fertility. The images of oldage, disease and death have attained prominence in her later poetry. Das also explores animal imagery that symbolises the elusoriness and mystery of death and clinical imagery that reflects her hospital experiences. She produces a cumulative, morbid effect in some of her poems

through the adept use of a series of images from Egyptology. Though she continues to explore landscape imagery, the landscape is now subordinated to the seasonal changes of autumn and winter. The body imagery she uses during this period expresses the clumsiness and repulsiveness of human body. Das's speakers of this period seem to have lost their fascination for sensory experiences. Most of the experiences portrayed in her later poetry are the agony of her tortured self. The themes of this phase are of increasingly impersonal and universal nature. Das's later poetry is a classic specimen of laboured verse. Her poetry has lost its spontaneity, effortless ease and rhythm during the second half of her career. Her later poetry becomes uneven and laboured. But it is economical, colloquial and mellow.

As Das's poetry progresses to maturity, the verbs and images she uses undergo a regular transformation of certain definite pattern. The verbs of motion of her early poetry have changed to verbs of inertia in her later poetry. Likewise, the verbs of perception have transformed to verbs of deficient senses and mind. Sensory experiences of her early poetry give way to experiences of the self in her later poetry. The summer landscape of her early poems are replaced by autumn or winter landscapes in her later poems. The body imagery of her early poetry exchanges its beauty for clumsiness in her later poetry. Das substitutes the food imagery of her early period with animal imagery and clinical imagery during her later period. Her themes have changed from personal to impersonal, from autobiographical to increasingly universal. Her spontaneous, even and rhythmic early verse has transformed to limited, uneven and unrhythmic towards the second half of her career.

A subtle analysis of the patterned transition of verbs and images of Das's poetry underlines the possibility that she must have suffered a "writer's block," a temporary loss of creativity due to psychological reasons, during early 1970's. Her poem "The Cart Horse" gives ample evidence to the occurrence of this psychic inertia (B K D 68). The speaker bemoans:

Of late my words have worn
Thin, my speech resembles
The jagged gallop of
A cart horse that needs to
Be reshod and perhaps
Given rest,

This lament is metaphoric of the poet's inability to write. The poem is a prosaic narration of the inevitable destiny of old horses which are unable to pull the cart. The almost equally long lines of the poem suggest the mechanical nature

of poetic composition. The movement of each line symbolises the motion of a cartwheel grounded to a sudden halt. Words that semantically go with one line are violently pushed down to the next. These disjointed words signify one or two laborious rotation of the cartwheel which stops instantly as the horses cannot move any further. The laboured words without any sentiments suggest the difficulty of poetic composition. The grotesque images and deficient verbs enhance the picture of morbidity. The carthorse driven by old horses facing imminent death is a metaphor of declining poetic faculty. This poem reminds us of Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," in its apprehension of losing poetic genius. This poem, along with the patterned changes of verbs and images, establishes that Kamala Das probably suffered a "writer's block" in early 1970's.

Conclusion

The range and variety of the poetic techniques Das employs in her poetry are commendable. She widely uses images of femaleness in her poetry. The poetic techniques she adopts have a direct bearing on her primary position as a woman. In the light of the contemporary critical findings the dichotomy between content and form vanishes. The poetic art of Das arises out of her urge to write the female with remarkable force.

One of the dominant poetic techniques explored by Das is the split-self motive which works at three different levels in her poetry: the child versus the woman, the woman versus the woman and the woman versus the artist. The conflict between split-selves in some of these forms is evident in most of the poems. Another poetic device Das employs is the multiplicity of narrator's voice: a device the poet has clearly exploited in long poems. The "I" of her poetry only rarely refers to the poet. Das uses as speakers the persona, the confessional or autobiographical "I," the lyric "I," the ideational "I," and the prophetic "I" besides the Whitmanesque self. The existence of several speakers is the most significant aspect of her poetic craft.

The images, symbols and metaphors Das uses have the stamp of femaleness about them. The symbolic structure of her poetry revolves round three simple theses: woman equals body, woman equals house and body equals (surrogate) mother. Das constructs an identity for herself through the female body or the mother or the house. In the poetic art of Das woman, house and body are interchangeable images. Das copiously uses body imagery, house imagery, hospital imagery and kitchen imagery in her poems. The imagery she adopts is in perfect harmony with her concern with writing the female. There is, thus, absolute homogenization of the matter and manner in her poetry.

Das uses revisionist myth-making in poems based on legends and folk tales. Das's "Krishna poems" adopt reinterpretation of the myths and tales as a poetic technique. The revisionist myth-making is not an outcome of the poet's exposure to psychology. Her growing awareness of the socio-cultural reality from the point of view of a woman in a patriarchy has contributed to the reinterpretation of legends and folktales. The technique involves not only a mystification of facts but also the manipulation of the structure of the poems.

Das uses unpunctuated prose to represent the tortured psyche of the speaker. The torturous language and the violently split lines she often employs reveal the anger and violence that she experiences internally as a woman writer. The poet explores variations in rhythm in order to represent the changing moods of the speakers. The continuously alternating long and short lines she adopts for her autobiographical poems carry the restlessness of the speakers. The poet creates a sense of spontaneity and freshness in her poems on legends and folktales through short lines or measured stanzas. The difference in length of the stanzas denote the discrepancy between ambition and achievement of the female characters. The patterned transition of verbs and images of Das's poetry reveals that she possibly suffered a "writer's block" in early 1970's.

Kamala Das, like most modern women poets, is a combination of two poets—one feminist and the other Confessional. The achievement of Das lies in the fact that her feminist and confessional aspects are equally powerful and good. Das reveals the two-fold power of poetry: the reality of the self and the insistence on life. Her poetry breathes life with an ardour of the self and owes its success to the discovery and fusion of the elements that constitute great poetry. Without losing her national identity, she transcends all limits to sing the anthem of the New woman.

Kamala Das's stylistic devices reinforce the predominantly emotional quality of her poetry. Her poetry is characterised by a control of form and a disciplined expression of painful emotions. Her works would have gained considerably in strength had she been a more ruthless editor of her own work. As already pointed out, obsessive confessional writing is a source of power. It can be a burden, if it gets out of control. No amount of fidelity to experience can save the poem. Poems like "The Testing of the Sirens" is flabby, self-indulgent and maudlin. There is hardly any grit of resilience to shape and control emotions. The last lines of the poem could have been cut off without any sense of loss in structure and meaning as they express in a weaker way emotions already strongly expressed. A rigorous consciousness of form could have made a better piece of poetic art of "Loud Posters." The poem

"Composition" is a formless stream of unhappy consciousness of real and fancied experiences of life. "The Stone Age" begins with concrete, telling images, but ends with romantic cliches. The concluding lines which are over-sentimentalized to generate empathy produce the opposite results; the readers are irritated by the poet's unwillingness to escape the psychological trap. When the poet loses control, the work ceases to be poetry and becomes automatic neurotic writing. Das uses unpunctuated prose to denote the speaker's tortured psyche. The torturous language she uses in poems like "The Swamp," "Sunset," "Blue Bird," or "The Blind Walk" exposes the internal tumult the speakers undergo. The violently split lines also express the anger and violence that they experience internally as women in a patriarchal society. The continuously alternating long and short lines in some of her poems indicate the restlessness of the speaker while short measured lines convey the spontaneity of the psyche.

Das's poetry is about death, rage, hatred, blood, wounds, cuts, deformities, suicide-attempts, stings, fevers, operations—there is devil's plenty with which she hardly reconciles. Her poetry reveals a hurting, grinding, grating joy which comes from the perfection of the descriptive language that overcomes a hesitating spirit. Death, in her poetry, is a possibility, a gesture complete in itself. There is a sensual distortion about her mind; she contemplates the mutilation of the soul as well as the flesh. The expressive violence of the language comes from a mind speeding along madly, yet she commands an uncanny control of language, sound, rhythm and imagery that is the opposite of mental disorder.

Das moves from tight forms to free verse. She has a developing sense of precise imagery. Her images recreate the experience for the readers. Das tames form to her advantage. Her strengths outweigh her weaknesses as an artist. The apparent disunity of her work results from her quickness to see relationships. As a skilled artist she enhances power of her poetry through her use of literary and non-literary allusions. The accurate image *par excellence* is Das's trade mark. Whether it is kinesthetic, visual, synaesthetic, metaphorical, symbolic or literal, it clearly communicates a sensuous reality to the reader. Das's poetry is memorable for its startling images and comparisons. Her greatest achievement is her lyrical quality. Das is a sensitive poet who has experienced much pain and little joy: her recreation of both is her gift to the world.

Das's poetry is a revelation of the internal and imaginative life. She shocks the readers into the complexities of womanhood and breakdowns, psychic awareness and order. She portrays the female honestly in her poetry through diverse personae as well as through both personal and archetypal imagery. Her

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stylistic pattern reveals the emotionally surcharged quality of her poetry. Her forceful alliterations provide an emphasized closure to many poems. She strains through appropriate rhythms, off-rhymes and inner cadences to the desired end. As a manifestation of interior events, her poetry is a truthful assimilation of her primary experiences as a woman. Her poetic craft emerges out of her experiences, lived and imagined as an Indian housewife. What she narrates is the story that a million middle-class Indian housewives fail to express, though they wish to do. Her poetic art is expressively feminine; it is the skilfully varied craft of writing the female that she is.



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