Chapter - IV

A CRITIQUE OF FEMINISM IN
KAMLA DAS’S POETRY
A Critique of Feminism in Kamala Das's Poetry

Many critics have commented on the poetic calibre of Kamala Das. From many critics I have chosen Bruce king, Sharad Rajimwale, Anisur Rahaman and Bijay Kumar Das. Bruce King finds in Kamala Das a woman who "... alongside ... unfulfilled love, another prominent subject of her poems is the need to assert, to conquer, to dominate". In the same book Bruce King has this to say on the thematic nexus in her poetry:

The interest of Das’s poetry is not the story of sex out of marriage but the instability of her feelings, the way they rapidly shift and assume new postures, new attitudes of defence, attack, explanation, or celebration. Her poems are situated neither in the act of sex nor in feelings of love; they are instead involved with the self and its varied often conflicting emotions, ranging from desires for security and intimacy to the assertion of the ego, self-dramatization of feeling of shame and depression.
Sharad Rajimwale views Kamala Das’s poetry thus:

... It is essentially poetry of protest, of defiance and of emphatic assertion, all other Modes ranging from weak feminine sense of helplessness and submission, to a restless search for happiness and shelter.. the basic Promethean Spirit which is eager to break the rusted shackles and have its voice heard.3

Anisur Rahaman also joins the above critic with his pertinent remarks on Kamala Das:

I would include following remarks on Kamala Das’s poetry by Bijay Kumar Das: " The variety of modes, the change of tone, the emphatic employment of new diction, and the subtle touch make her poetry moving and loveable. " 5
One can naturally react to Bruce King’s remarks that Kamala Das’s intention through her poems is to assert, conquer and dominate. Such a strong stand cannot be justified in her poems. My intention, therefore, is to study her feminine sensibility through the remarks of Bruce King that her poems contain instability of feelings. This can be studied through the image pattern. Her new postures, new attitudes of defence, attack, celebration fall into a definite angle. This has been seen through image after image recurring in poem after poem.

I have compared Kamala Das as a poet with Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Parthasarathy and Kolatkar. While making such a comparison, I have discovered a few common features in these poets. Moreover, I have shown where Kamala Das differs from these poets.
I have also discussed post modern poets, vis-à-vis, Kamala Das’s poetry. Many critics have accepted these poets as descendents of Kamala Das. From among these poets I have compared Mamta Kalia, Melanie Silgado, Eunice De Souza, Gauri Deshpande, Sulekha Samantaray. I have also compared and contrasted confessional poets like Sylvia Plath and Ann Sexton with Kamala Das.

Kamala Das’s values are positive values of life, such as, ideal love in husband and wife relationship leading to the eternal love of God himself. It is a journey from the finite to the infinite, from body to soul, from ordinary human lover to the eternal lover. She rebels against masks of hypocrisy, male tyranny, existing moral codes. It is her struggle against a rotting and decaying society. In this process, Kamala Das as a woman projects several faces of her feminine self: “Woman as a sweet heart, flirt, wife, woman of the world, mother, middle-aged matron. Above all, woman as an untiring seeker of the nature of the psychological process behind both femininity and masculinity”6
When she goes in search of ideal love flirting out of wed-lock, she finds the lovers as selfish, coward, ruthless watchers and a band of cynics. Her feminine fate is one of despair and unfulfilment. This leads to her death consciousness.

C.C. Varkey in his article "Treatment of Nature in Kamala Das's Poetry" sees feminine nature of the poet through the images of Nature. Many critics have seen the grandmother and her house as an image of unravished majesty and magnificence. 'The blind eyes of windows', 'the somber weird, discarded house,' the air-conditioner as against the natural fresh air, the artificial light opposed to the sunlight. With singing, dancing gone, her mind is now 'an old play house' with all its lights put out. Thus the swallow forgets to fly. The companion poem to this is 'My grandmother's House,'. The death of her grandmother is the death of her happiness, security and freedom. The destruction that sets in her life is echoed through 'snakes moved / Among books.'
entire house hold is of people gifted with creative mind. Her mind is poisoned. Her creative energy is killed. Her energy has disappeared like the moon 'turned cold.' 'The frozen air' 'the somber, weird and discarded house is her feminine psyche fallen apart. Similarly, in 'A hot Noon in Malabar' the hot noon, the beggars whining voices, fortune tellers with parrots and fortune cards, brown kurava girls with old eyes, dissolves her former identity of a happy girl of the old house into a bride with unspeakable disintegration of the mind, with no where to rest her head. While her life in the old house with her grandmother stood for light, song; with her husband it is bound up with shadow, noise, dust and grating. 'Wild men, wild thoughts, wild love' express her miserable life with her husband.

In the 'Freaks' the grotesque and bizarre images, such as 'sun-stained cheek' 'his mouth, a' dark cavern, where stalactites of uneven teeth' 'coiling snakes of silence' stands for lust. 'The sunshine Cat' presents antithetical mind set of Kamala das's protagonist. The image of 'she was cold and half dead' images her life with the husband's callous attitude, while the desire of her mind is represented by 'The sunshine cat ' which is life-sustaining ethos. The sun image recurs in Kamala Das’s
poetry as already commented by Anisur Rahaman in his book
Expressive Form in the Poetry of Kamala Das. His comment
on the image is not comprehensive: "The sun equally
oppressive in "The pigeons" is also a destroyer of dreams,
" 9
This observation of Rahaman misses various aspects on the
image. The pigeons stand for innocent and harmless women.
The pigeons "sit" strangely silent. It indicates their
passive tolerance of life. The 'sun peeled beaks' stands
for the drudgery of house-wife slogging in the heat of the
day. They cannot rest during the afternoon.

Even though their bodies are feverish, they
are deadly tired of the physical labour. The evocation of
death is suggested through: "The sun swells." Their
bodies are equated with the swelling of the sun. This, in
turn, images the women as dead, and their corpses swelling
into the heat of the sun. Thus the image grows from
pigeons to the sun, from sun to the corpses. Its link with
the fruit swelling appears to be not appropriate.

In"Sepia" the image of the sun evokes the
plight of women. They cannot vent their anger on others.
At best they can imagine that they are scorching men to the
very marrow, who are referred to here as "This sad-mouthed
human race In the "Drama" the poet’s agony is imaged through the sun. The stage with its gloomy setting is a befitting background to the tragic life of a woman. Appropriately, the sun looks like "an angry sun" it is because a red, red lamp gives that impression to the sun. The sun and the lamp together image the tragic life of a woman’s existence. The woman, as a tragedian, evokes her tragic life but with less confidence - "like confidence, slowly dying"... What commonly is the lot of women is expressed by the 'Tragedienne'- 'And wail, and beat my breast / And speak of unrequited love, I am wronged... ' This entire agony is enacted against the sun who is the source of revelation. Since it is a tragic revelation - it is connected with "take vague steps/black gowned,

Black veiled

And wail, and beat my breast
And speak of unrequited love.

These lines adequately communicate, through the colour contrast, and the wailing voice of the miserable situation of women in the world. This links up with Kamala Das’s general grievance against the 'unrequited love'. The agony of woman’s situation and hatred towards women is evoked
through 'Cavernous mouths' and the callous and unreasonable attitude of men is brought out through 'reason died

A hundred deaths, the laughter rose
Like locust hunger...

Evaluating the sun image in Kamala Das's poems, Anisur Rahman has this to say, "... the sun is sometimes a vigorous element of nature, at others a source of pain and still at others, a symbol of lazy sexual indulgence and lust." As opposed to this Sunanda P. Chavan says that the sun is an image of "love-experience". According to me the sun image becomes a background against which the pain of lust, craving for love, despair at the selfish nature of man's relationship with woman, and the nostalgic memory of the happy days spent by the poet with the grandmother, and the indifferent attitude of the parents for the poet are evoked. Emotions, such as, desire for security, intimacy, the assertion of the ego, self-dramatization and feeling of shame and depression are expressed mostly against the background where sun related surroundings are evoked. In the "Testing of the Sirens" - the poet meets her pock-marked lover, who is better than the other, who is a filthy snob." He takes her to see the
lake. But both are after her body. It is through the crow she shows that they are interested, in the 'lust and satisfaction of the bodily appetite which is brought out as "the morning came with the crows" and the crows only bickered over a piece of lizard-meat and the white sun was there.

And everywhere" while the sun is a witness, the agony of her soul is described: I

Shut my eyes, but inside
Eye-lids, there was
No more light, no more love, or peace, only The white, white sun burning, burning burning

Probably, this burning indicates her burning desire for real love - which is hardly to be had in this world. And "the lust of the male" than any passion of the poet, as indicated by Anisur Rahman

The poet's unwilling participation in
The sexual act recurs in "Conflagration".

We came together like two suns meeting, and
Each Raging to burn the other out. He said
You are A forest - Conflagration and I, poor
Forest, Must burn. ("The Descendants," P. 20).

The two suns image is like the image of Donne—the two legs of the compass. It is a natural process of sexual act. The act itself comes to its natural fulfillment when one's urge is put out by the other. The poet proves to be the weaker of the two. It indicates her feminine cooliness about the lustful arousal, and her desire for real love, and not for the lust.

As opposed to the reality expressed above, in "The convicts" the sun image bares the reality of sexual urge aroused in the couple. Here it is not one overcoming the heat of the other, but the heat does not cool only by the earthly "cool mountain nights". By indulging in brisk sexual activity, the satisfaction be achieved. But this is not what the poet evokes. It is the futility of their physical urge. It is a meaningless waste of labour extracted by the convicts just to punish them, and to keep them occupied in the futile labour: "...like convicts hacking, breaking clods. At noon." The poet refers not to the satisfaction of sexual urge when she says "... There was a burning in our veins". It refers to their lust which
does not lead to love. Therefore, their music and song rises "out of earth and out of each sad night like our ache." It is because they do not achieve love, after all the struggle.

The poem suffers from ambiguity of content. "When he and I were one, we were neither Male nor female." It refers to their past union. Nothing of what happens in the present is referred to.

In the "Invitation" the sun image is again used as a background to the theme of the poem. The couple is bored to death: "All through the summer’s afternoon/ On beds, our limbs inert, cells expanding/ Into throbbing suns" ("The Descendants", P.14) "Throbbing suns" indicates sexual act. During copulation, the heavily beating heart and throbbing pulse are meant. This in no way leads to fruitful union based on love and friendship.

Eunice De Souza has rightly highlighted a parallel between the image sequence in Kamala Das poetry and the thematic nexus: Kamala Das’s world... In *Summer in Calcutta* is a harsh, sun-scorched tropical world heavy with
the smell of rotting garbage and death, where even the men have "limbs like carnivorous plants?" the lanes are 'fevered', the trees dusty and leafless, cheeks sun-stained. Only the hardy marigold and bougainvillea survive, and courtesan with 'tinsel and Jasmine, in their hair' The poet herself feels' a hunger to take in with greed, like a forest fire that / Consumes .."'

Against a background of this fraught landscape... of her inner sense of dirt and sexual disgust play out her roles of unhappy woman, unhappy wife, mistress to young men, mother, reluctant nymphomaniac, pining for the joys of innocence and childhood which have been lost "

The hallmark of her agony is that her emotions and feelings are not her own. They are playacted for her husband, yet the paradox of it all is: I have no joys which are not yours, no

Aches which are not yours, I too call myself I
The image of the rotting garbage and death is evoked in 'The Old Playhouse': The poet is fed up of "the cut flowers / In the vases have begun to smell of human sweat." In 'Composition' we have the poet talking about her freedom: "the freedom to discompose."

The image used in the 'flag' are personal and universal, whereas, those in 'The Dance...' are personal. These indicate the agony of the poet's loss of real love.

The autumn has set in is what the poet grieves about in her prime of youth. This is expressed through the rot that is her life. The hopes of her life have withered away like the fallen leaves: The fallen leaves do not rest, but raise themselves like ghosts to perform a blind and ugly dance.
These lines echo Shelley's tendency to compare concrete things with abstract things like ghosts. It shows that the poet has faded herself into a ghost of her self. A hopeless existence is what the poet expresses in 'My Morning tree' when she says:

No leaves, no buds, no flowers, just your Branches

Like dry roots, stretching towards the Unfertile Sky. An old hag's fleshless limbs, a Hand thrown up In despair, no hope .... At all....

The image explores the rotten Garbage life of the poet:

I .. where the barges Float, their undersides rotting and the garbage Rot, and the dead fish rot

And, I smelt the smell of dying things and the Heavy smell of rotting Dead
The barges image the life of the poet as also the fish. The underlying truth of her existence is tellingly evoked through these despicable images. The entire poem is about death and roaming:

A few summer days
That passed slowly, and
Moodily, like mourners behind a bier.

And:
... On streets near old cemeteries
Where the dead are so dead
That even their tombstones have lost
Their names in
The rains...

The poet’s concept of love is totally ruined. There is no trace of it as it is evoked through the tombstones bereft of the names on them.

As already noted above in a different context, the image of rotten things are most insistent in ‘The Dance of the Eunuchs’. The futility of her love and the waste land existence of her life are brought out through:
... like half burnt logs from
Funeral pyres, a drought and rottenness
Were in each of them.
The images mentioned above are linked with those that are
used in 'The Flag':
Your shame beneath this blood - drenched
Indian soil
And lie their and rot
As those poor babies who die of hunger
And are buried, rot.... (Desendants?)

Similarly, in the poem 'The Invitation' the sea and the
lover inviting her stands for death. The sea offers her
complete negation of life, whereas, the lover invites her
for metaphorical death. The sea with its widening horizon
gives her 'abiding asylum.' It is an invitation to escape
from the tortures of married life. It gives her spirits
the therapeutic treatment. Her tortured life gets two
options - one in the poem - 'The Invitation' - where the
sea, with its destructive force is similar to the offer of
the sea as a redemptive force in 'Advice to Fellow swimmers.'

'Punishment in Kindergarten' evokes the protagonist's distressed existence when her teacher "throwing words at me like pots and pans", - indicates violence in her life as opposed to her past life of a girl which was" That honey-coloured day of peace." The sun's solitude is the protagonist's solitude during her married life. 'Room of One's Own' images the protagonist's nationality. It is not the narrow, selfish, narcissistic room of the male where she does not have her own voice. She has to bear when 'you dribbled spittle into my mouth'... 'you embalmed / My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices' as in' The old playhouse' In'room of one's own' she searches for her poetic identity and conflict between self and society.

Women are kept under their thumb by men or by elderly women. This attitude is brushed aside by Kamala Das’s protagonist in "Introduction', her first collection of poems,' in Summer In Calcutta. She asserts her being as an individual with a wish and choice of her own. Nature
has endowed each living being with the language of its own. 'While cawing/ Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it/Is human speech... a mind that sees and hears and Is aware.' She has her own language: ' The language I speak becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness, All mine, mine alone.' All this indicates the outburst of a feminine rebellious spirit which was suppressed by male dominance. Her human nature and the demands of the body are evoked against the childhood innocence: During childhood the freedom she desired was of a limited nature, but along with her bodily growth, she developed the instinctive demands of the body:

But 'that was long ago
Before the skin
Intent on survival
Learnt lessons of self-betrayal

When her grandmother was alive, she took care of her desires, but after her death, when she was married, she had to fend for herself. Thus, the sea images her anxiety for fulfilling the demands of her body: 'I had then / no time for the sea' ('Composition', The Descendants). In this context, The sea symbolizes the magnificent 'other' as
against the self... engrossed in its own properties of growth and development.

As our first parents ate death while desiring for eternal life, woman in the Indian context desires to have love in life, but ironically she is dished with violence and a life of humility:

When I asked for love,...
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the Bedroom and closed the door.
He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed Me

( 'An Introduction')

The bodily features of the protagonist such as breasts and womb, which are the treasures of her body become a curse to her. Z.F.Molvi echoes my views when he says, "Her womanhood becomes a curse and illness is a way of escape" Further he adds: "the world of the hospital is a metaphor for the modern world which is sick and sickening". Man’s indifference to her bodily wealth becomes Kamala Das’s poetic thematic nexus. Her dismal existence is evoked thus: 'It is I who drink
Lonely/Drinks at twelve midnight,
...I have no joys which are not
Yours, I too call myself I'
('Introduction')

Her joys and aches are his and not hers. This is the height of the feminine predicament in Kamala Das's poetry.

In My Story she describes her plight in falling ill. It images her sick and sickening modern world. We are reminded of Solzhenitsyn's Cancer Ward.

In Kamala Das's poetry there is a contrast between two modes: Life before marriage and life after marriage. The first mode of life gathers around it images of "warm yellow rooms." (The Corridors) welcoming loud voices and rich friendly laughter and upturned faces. The second mode is of lover's absence, empty rooms, naked walls. The former mode evokes body and its men lusting after ('The corridor'). Around it are the clusters of materialistic culture. This is contrasted with a spiritual void which the protagonist wants to fill. Around the second mode there are clusters of the physical aspects of the city. These turn a blind eye to the metaphysical urges.
of the artist. The after marriage mode of the life of the artist evokes the 'city values'. The life values of this mode are only for appearances and spectacles as opposed to this is her life before marriage. It was life given to delicate feelings and finer sentiments. These are concerned with metaphysical dimension of ideal love. And the protagonist of Kamala Das is yearning for these, though they appear to her the yearning of the moth for the stars.

Calcutta as a city has shown her two faces: The childhood city and the state of married life in the city with unfulfilled desires and nostalgia. The same city has fragmented and disintegrated herself:

Here in my husband’s
Home, I am a trained circus dog
Jumping my routine hoops
Each day, where is my soul,
My spirit, where the muted tongues
Of my desire?
Our Childhood city is distant now
Kamala Das's experience with the workers engaged in house building is that they build houses for the alien rich and they are themselves houseless. This experience is internalized. She identifies with the workers. She feels that she is a houseless creature and is working for people like her husband and the other men who do not give her soul to be at home with her ideal love and spiritual soul.

Kamala Das finds the city very repressive. Predatory creatures dominate its dealings. 'After the party' and 'White plan with white legs' illustrate her psychic state:

Our city crushes / its inhabitants one by one with urban finesse eats / them, and afterwards sits facing the moon picking its teeth.

Thus, the city for Kamala Das images exploitation, dehumanization, corruption, brutalization and homelessness. In 'After the party' men appear to her 'as dark and sleek as drones.' The city is the centre of masculine authority. In the urban climate, the woman is exposed to many risks.
The greatest risk of all is the parties thrown by the rich. During the get together the husband is made to drink excessively and the wife drinks beyond her control. She goes to the wash basin and omits. In the meantime, some hawk jumps to help the woman. He paws all over her tempting spots. This ritual helps him to come into physical contact with the lady. This is the way of the urban life. It is a jungle where a predator pawns upon his prey. Kamala Das sees the millionaires of Bombay scattering grain to the doves. The dove images herself. She becomes a beggar in search of real love. In 'Fern' Kamala Das sees her femininity as a sterile bondage:

"Shores and mountains where
Darkness grows like ferns."

(Ferns' CP Vol. P.43)

For Fern is a green plant with feathery shaped leaves without any flowers. Similarly, 'The old house' evokes the lover's kiss as a Krait's bite. Thus the lover is compared to a reptile sucking the blood of the female body. Consequently, the line between life and death and love and
lust is of paper thinness. The poet evokes her death wish and her physical disintegration through the image of the crumbling house.

Kamala Das contrasts the dream world of desire with the real world of sickness and old age. In ‘Gino’ Kamala Das foresees her bleak future in waiting in the long bus queue as a fat kneed hag from whose “shopping bag the mean potato” must roll across the road. The word ‘mean’ suggests the miserable life of the old woman and her fear of being reduced to an object of ridicule. Such a ridiculous life is imaged in imagining herself as a patient on the hospital bed ‘lying in drugged slumber and dreaming of home’ ‘Gino’ ends with her death without rebirth;

Perhaps some womb in that
Darker world shall convulse, when
I finally enter,
A legitimate entrant, marked by discontent

( CP, Vol.1, P.85)
This discontent of hers finally leads to "Suicide"

Bereft of soul
My body shall be bare
Bereft of body
My soul shall be bare

('The suicide')
The Descendants, P.1)

For her the sea is both a companion and a killer. It is a generous cow offering her shelter. Her possessive nature is defeated. She fails to posses her husband:

It required drinks
To hold him down
To make him love

Her childhood world of innocence images her swimming in the sea. The sea image changes into the body of her husband when she reaches her adulthood.

In 'Smoke in Colombo' the sea image is transferred from companion and killer to innocence of the
child to eternity. In the poem she evokes the devastation of the city in the riots. Smoke images grief. Therefore, the poet says that smoke lingered in the city like smoke as ‘grief lingers’ on within women rocking emptied cradles. “The dove’ and ‘the bird of stone’ image the wife. This image sequence indicates the wife’s feminine personality destroyed by the husband. The image of the ‘blue battered ear’ indicates the arousal of lust in the wife’s body from enforced passivity on her by the husband to her lusty activity:

.... I run up the forty

Noisy steps to knock at another’s door

‘The stairs’ image lust. Here it is relevant to note Bruce king’s 14 remark that another prominent subject of her poems is the need to assert, to conquer; to dominate. She asserts her bodily need by kicking her heels into the air and throwing to the dogs all the moral and social norms of life.

The image of rot is in ‘Gino’.... darkness /
Trapped like smoke ... and that lewed, steamy smell of rot “
This image evokes her disgust for lustful interest shown by her lover for her body. For the poet there is no such thing as love. It is dead. The night and the black crows and the dead body being carried for cremation express the agony of the heart in the poem, 'In love'.

... At noon
I watch the sleek crows flying
Like poison on wings - and at
Night, from behind the Burdwans Road, the corpse-bearers, cry 'Bol
Hari Bol, a strange lacing
For Moonless nights..

Similarly, in "blood", the poet's rotten life and death of her loveless existence is depicted through the rotten condition of her grandmother's old house:

The walls are cracked and torn
And moistened by the rains,
The tiles have fallen here and there
The windows whine and groan
And every night
The rats come out of holes
And scamper past our doors
The snake-shrine is dark with weeds
And all the snake-gods in the shrine
Have lichen on their hoods.

The image of rotting garbage is insistent in the wild
'Bougainvilleae' as nowhere else in" the old playhouse and
others Poems".

In'Gino' the imagery of 'the white horse' also
confirms the remarks of Bruce king stated above. 'The
white horse' stands for her unquenchable energy and wild
elegance of lust which tramples over all conventional
restrictions as stated by K.R.Ramachandran Nair.15 Here
the wife takes vicarious pleasure in remarking that her
lover has conquered 'another ' country. It implies her
own success in jilting her husband and giving legitimacy of
passion to her extra-marital adventure and romance.
The imagery of 'homeless cats' also stands for the wife. The cats wail from the rubble of a storm. It stands for the wife's forlornness.

In the poem 'glass' its brittleness

images woman's bodily fragile existence. In the arms of the lover she is broken into splinters.

For Kamala Das her grandmother's house stands for her ancestral great tradition. It is broken down and is wiped out of existence. But its memory lingers on into her mind:

From every town I live in
I hear the rattle of its death
The nose of rafters creaking
And the windows' whine

Her poems present her as a depressed woman, tormented wife and reluctant nymphomaniac. In My Story she talks of a depressing atmosphere where her parents considered her as a
non-entity and a doll to be operated by their tugs: "They did not stop for a moment to think that we had personality too that were developing independently, like sturdy shoots of the banyan growing out of crevices in the wall of ancient fortress."

Later on, she realizes that she "was a burden and responsibility neither my parents nor my grandmother could put up with for long." Her marriage compounded complexity to her already hopeless existence. In her poem 'Composition' this is what she says:

I asked my husband am I hetero
Am I lesbian
Or am I just plain frigid?
He only laughed.
For such a question
Probably there are no answers
Or else.
The answers must emerge from within.

The poet knows that there are no answers for such existential questions: In 'Nani' she comes to this awareness:
The definite into
The soft indefinite. They are lucky
Who ask the questions and move on before
The answers come

Thus, the poet remains in the tortured world, and her search remains incomplete.

In 'An Introduction' she laments how people wanted her to fall into the traditional pattern of being a woman.

Dress in sarees, be girl,
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer,
Be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants,
Belong, cried the categorizers.

'The Old Playhouse' ironically presents a feminine role and holds the society guilty for this:

You called me wife.
I was taught to break saccharine into
Your tea and
To offer at the moment the vitamins
Cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego,
Became a dwarf,

The gymnastics of couple are mostly compared in the 'The Descendants': with: "Turn your home into a merry dog-house." For Kamala Das this gymnastics is lust, at best, it gives only pleasure but not happiness. While love is a spiritual discipline for women, it is animal satisfaction for men. It is an appetite demanding variety as a spice of life:

"This skin communicating thing/
that I dare not yet in his/ presence call our love." ('substitute')

The different attitude of the husband turns the wife into "a bird of stone". The sad thing about the husband is that he has changed himself into a stone. His touch and strokes are as lifeless and dead as a stone. Therefore,
Knows how to sing, (48).

Kamala Das's stance against male dominance is even more aggressive and terrorist. Her clarion call for women is that they must come out of their angelic role by kicking their heels in the air, and gate crash into all the shackles of suppression, and by opposing end them. This is what she says in the 'Conflagration':

Woman, is the happiness, this lying

Buried

Beneath, a man? it's time

Again to come alive

The world extends a lot more

Beyond this six foot frame

( The Descendants, 20)

Thus, Kamala Das invites women to throw to the winds the image of woman as an 'Angel in the house,' a passive, docile and self-annihilating, self-humiliating being.
Her request is not to store poison in his heart as an 'old fat spider' but "be kind". The last two words, fall on the male reader like the steal balls breaking his heart into smithereens. (‘The stone Age’).

Kamala Das’s bold suggestion is that women should give tit for tat. If men shows selfishness in trapping women in their net, so should women catch men in their grip. For women falling in love with men is like getting ready for self sacrifice and devoting themselves to the love-lock, stock and barrel. They are ready to die for each other. But for men it is only lust - the cheapest and easily available thing with them.

How can my love hold him when the other
Flaunts a gaudy lust and is lioness
To be beast, Men are worthless,
To trap them
Use the cheapest bait of all, but
Love, which in a woman never must mean fears
And a silence in the blood
("A losing Battle," Only the soul)
There is also a reverse view to this side of the problem. For Kamala Das, women should cherish to love the real lover. They must share with warmth the pleasures of human ecstasy, born out of the sweet pains, arising out of sexual union, though rarely experienced.

When other eyes haunt my thought,

I kiss your

Eyes and shut them, so that I need no longer
See them broad, or their naked, naked fear.
Another voice, haunts my ears, another face. My dreams, but in your arms I must today lie, and find an Oasis where memories, sad winds do not so much blow, and must hear you say, I love, I love, I love.

("The Sea shore" Summer in Calcutta, 40)

One could give an assent to the remarks made by Anisur Rahaman that Kamala Das is occupied with... "the male body as an agent of corruption,... as a symbol of corrosion, the destroyer of feminine chastity," yet she wants women to admire the male body, and thus derive the pleasures of living.
Notice the perfection
Of limbs, his eyes reddening under shower,
the shy walk across the bathroom floor,
Dropping towels and the jerky way he
urinates. All the found details that make
him male and your only man.

Not only that, but women should gift him:
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
long hair, the musk of sweat between the
breasts, the warm shock of menstrual blood,
and all your endless female hungers.

(Descendants P.25)

II
Kamala Das has identical themes with those of Nissim
Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Parthasarthy and Kolhatkar. From the
post modern poets, Kamala Das has affinity in writing
consciously as woman. Poets such as Monika Varma, Sujatha
Modayil, Lila Ray, Gauri Deshpande, Funic De'Souza, Mamta
Kalia. Even Kamala Das's concerns resemble those of
Dickinson and of confessional poets—Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton.

A comparison between Kamala das's poetry and Nissim Ezekiel is drawn by Lakshmi Raghunandan:

Her poetry like that of Nissim Ezekiel describes the entanglements of life's complex situations that ensnare the unwary and those deluded by the sensory gratification of the most corporeal desires, but her stress is not so much on detachment, brought about by a conscious severance of the self from emotional involvements as on the search and identification of the self, and its association with the Divine.

In “Contacts” Kamala Das tells us what she means by “I” when I
Sleep, the outside world crumbles, all contacts
Broken. So, in that longer sleep
only
The world
Shall die, and I
Remain, just being
Also being a remaining

("descendants' P.19)"

"I" and the world are connected through the consciousness that distinguishes between the manifest, and the un-manifest, is the self or the "I".

This concept is viewed by Ezekiel differently. In "Fisherman" for Ezekiel during sleep a mystical experience can be had. He does not talk about experience of the individual in after life. For Ramanujan unpleasant dreams come to him in sleep as in "Routine Day Sonnet". He contrasts between the daily routine and the pleasant and sad experiences of dreams. For him waking state is better. Here again, no experience of after death existence is mentioned. To Parthasarathy sleep is death of each day's life. Kellehatkar thinks that sleep is a means to reach God as in "The Renunciation of the dog". 
For Kamala Das, the problem of "I" is bound up with philosophical angle. It is linked with feminine sensibility, that is, with one's identity. She has pantheistic concept of the "I" - One in all and all in one:

I am a million, million people
Talking all at once, with voices
Raised in clamour.

('Summer in calcutta' Someone Else's song)

It springs from the Bhagawad Gita, Chapter 7, verse 7 which states that the Lord holds all forms of the universe as the chord holds the pearls in a necklace. In Parthasarathy the "I" means that it changes from minute to minute. The concept is the same as the concept of T.S. Eliot in the 'Four Quartets' taken from the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus that you can't dip in the same river twice. This is what Kamala Das also means when she says, "Silences / strung like crystal beads " and this is connected with death to pox - clusters.
In Ramanujan the self is divided from the "I". Kohatkar, sees in "The Bus" his divided self in a "Pair of glasses". What these four poets mean by love is:

1) For Kamala Das it is yearning of the soul for the Eternal. In the poem - 'Introduction' she refers to the man she met and loved should not be confined to a name for he is every man and she is every woman.

2) Parthasarathy in "Trial" uses the key phrase for it- "the night of the Capricorn," This is connected with cold months of December and January. During this month for parents the symbolic old age of the soul has arrived - with it the security of belonging. They equate love with mutual need and desire.

3) For Ramanujan love in youth is lost among nettles while love that grows has gold to reap as he describes it in "Two styles in love." The absence of the loved one creates intense agony as expressed in his poem "Still Life"
4) Ezekiel exalts love to a Divine experience in “Poet, Lover, Bird watcher”,

5) Kohatkar speaks about platonic love personified as Yeshwant Rao. Speaking about, ‘The doubt’ by Kamala Das, as to what she means by - ‘she and he’.

According to her, gender distinction is only possible when the soul animates the body. Without it the corpse can only be referred to as “It”.

The tree image is used by these poets:

1) Kamala Das uses Kadamba tree to mean human body, in which homeless souls are reborn. It is the main possession of the lovers from which birth of love is born.

2) For Ramanujan the tree is a symbol of enlightenment, where as,

3) Ezekiel uses it to mean the Samsar vriksha.

4) For Kohatkar it is a symbol of
enlightenment. For Kamala Das bats hanging from Kadamba tree are reincarnating souls that transmigrate from one body to another. In "RadhaKrishna", she says: "Kadamba, Tree, our alone, for our homeless Souls to return someday To hang like bats from its pure physicality...
And the concept of the bats as souls transmigrating comes out in "The Bats".

From stranger to guest, from guest to Lover, my beloved, when you take....

("Summer in Calcutta", PP 37.46)

Similarly sex is seen by these poets in different light. Kamala Das sees it in "Composition" Frigidity, lesbianism, or homo sexuality are perversions of a bewildered mind. The real "I" that resides in the mind is observer. It remains uncorrupted by physical actions. The answer that she gets from the mind terminates all doubts: I have lost my best friend

To a middle aged queer
The lesbians hiss their love at me

Love...

What Kamala Das means through these lines is that the mind is one’s best friend. If it goes along the false desires, it will be the worst enemy. Thus the poet regrets for having lost her best friend. It aspires for her husband’s love. Her husband himself is a middle aged queer “The word “hiss” conveys lesbian love as much dangerous as other false show of love. Therefore, she gives up all types of love and submits herself to tenderness.

For Ramanujan sex is a normal man-woman relationship as conveyed in the poem “Looking for a cousin on a swing” – and “Love Poem for a wife 1 & 2.” Perversions of the kind revealed in Kamala Das’s poems do not find a place in his poetry. Ezekiel has more than forty poems on love and sex. Only one poem of these deals with libido. That is “The old Abyss.” Parthasarthy’s poems on prostitute do not deal with perversions in love as Kamala Das does in the poems mentioned above. Mr. Takar talks about sex with tongue in cheek in the poem “A Son for a Murli.”
In "Composition" Kamala Das evokes blood relationship and permanence of friendship as an illusion. Similarly Ramanujan finds dissatisfaction in such familial relationship. For Parthasarathy family relationships depends upon reunions. The effect of the father's death on the poet's nuclear family and its sadness spreading to joint family is what concerns the poet.

In "The Night of the Scorpion", Ezekiel shows how villagers and mother in the family are concerned about the sting of the scorpion suffered by a son in the family. While the father has scientific attitude towards the happening, the mother and the villagers attribute it to the sins committed by the son, and the intense love of the mother for the son in saying that the scorpion should have picked on her rather than him. Kirtikar's attitude to family relationship is about the exploitation of authority of the father over the son. It is brought through the station master and the booking clerk:

While the booking clerk
Takes his tongue
Hands it to you across the counter
and directs you to a superior intelligence

That superior intelligence is the station master: He is a superior authority over the clerk:
He is a "two headed station master" and
Rejects every time table
Not published in the year the track was laid...
Finally he nods like a stroke
Between a yes and a no. "

In Ezekiel's poems the city is a permanent presence. It deals with his themes and style where as, Kamala Das views the city as a hostile place. She could never survive and settle down in the city as her identity is with her rural childhood. If for Ezekiel Bombay is a backward place, yet he intends to come back to it:

I have made my commitments now.

This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place,.
My backward place is where I am

(Background, Casually')

Nevertheless, for Kamala Das the city is a male dominated place. Therefore, without wearing masks she cannot survive. However, she has to confirm to the social snobbishness. Consequently, her life is reflected in the existence of the eunuchs. Because their life is empty and meaningless, even so is hers. Thus, she is a displaced victim. Following this vision in her life, the city is associated with morbid and gloomy sides of her own experience.

III

From among post-modern poets Kamala Das has her descendants. They are Mamta Kalia, Eunice de Souza, Gauri Deshpande and Sujata Bhatt. Besides these she can be compared with the confessional poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton and Dickinson.
Let me begin with Mamta Kalia and Kamala Das's influence on her in their feminine perspective. A woman is married and stays with her husband after that. She comes home to her parents after a few months. Parents are anxious to know about her stay with her husband. In "Marital Bliss" Mamta Kalia comes back to her parents almost after eight years:

Eight years after marriage
When I first came back home
Mom and daddy asked
'Are you happy? ' Tell the truth;
I wanted to tell them
I was happy on Tuesday
Sad on Wednesday. That
One day I'd be laughing at 8 O'clock
And crying at quarter past.
That in a family of fourteen
It's is struggle to stay happy,
I swallowed everything
And smiled like a contented woman.
The protagonist of Mamta Kalia is articulating the agony of the woman in a joint family system. The woman puts on a smile “like a contented woman.” This predicament of the woman is no different from Kamala Das’s woman, who holds on to marriage despite her depressing existence with the husband. Both the women keep alive the Hindu culture and tradition in the face of their pitiable plight.

The credit goes to Mamta Kalia for exploring registers of speech, voice, attitudes and themes, which are so dear to Kamala Das: This task of keeping alive the torch of modernism is notably taken forward by Silgardo and de souza and Gauri Deshpande. Mamta Kalia is most impatient as not to wait for her as does Deshpande.

She bemoans how her individuality is eroded by reducing her to the status of a slave in her house.

I no longer feel I’am Mamta Kalia
I’m Kamala
Or Vimla
Or Kanta or Shanta
I cook, I wash,
I bear, I rear,
I nag, I wag
I sulk, I sag ('Anonymous')

Mamta Kalia’s iconoclastic stance is most evident in her poem 'Tribute to papa' which is feministic in its ironical dig at the patriarchal dominance over women:

Who cares for you Papa?
Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean
Words, clean teeth?
Who wants to be angel like you?
Who wants it?
These days I am seriously thinking of disowning
You, everything about you clashes with nearly
Everything about me.
You suspect I am having a love affair these days
But you are too shy to have it confirmed.
What if my tummy starts showing gradually
And I refuse to have it curetted?

Mamta Kalia’s theme is all about woman’s power and her independence as it is of Kamala Das.
The younger generation feels and acts according to the examples set by their elders. The age of honest people has gone. That of the 'Goddess' of getting on has succeeded. Melanie Silgardo uses her childhood and relation to her parents as does Kamala Das about her childhood and her grandmother's influence in her poem 'An Introduction' and 'The Old Playhouse.' This is what Melanie says about her immaturity and adolescent pride:

Grown fifteen and above I thought that wisdom lay
In startling words
In saying cad and bastard...

The unauthentic self of a woman is imaged through the making up of a face like Pope's Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*, of course, opposed to Belinda is our modern society woman who is smiling, cheerful, passive and not ambitious:

Daily faces crumple,
Die in front of mirrors
Scraping to uncover
Ratted faces,
To uncover endless faces.
Black as the sun snuffed out  
Darkness and shadow  
Leap and hit the face.  
A tear shocked inside an eye  
A mouth a gaping cave.

There is a parallel picture of the woman of society created by Kamala Das in her poem “Substitute”:  

It will be all right if I join clubs  
And flirt a little over telephone  
It will be all right between the world  
And me.

Earlier Women’s problems were solved by falling in love, but now-a-days there are no love poems. This is what is shown by Silgado’s love poem – ‘A memory’. She rejects heart’s satisfaction after meeting the man of her choice. For her it is woman’s equality with man that matters. The man is as much eager to meet the woman as the woman is. Therefore she says, “If I must meet you / it must be halfway”. For her there is no waiting for the lover or beloved – it is not the yearning of the moth for the star, or the intense desire which says if rivers mingle with the ocean, ‘why not I with thine? but instead, it is: ‘No
there is no togetherness for us/I cannot merge’. Similarly for Kamala Das, it is only ‘skin communicated thing.’ There is no merging and mingling with the other.

While Kamala Das is depressed and dejected to experience sex without love, Silgado and de Souza go beyond what Kamala Das experiences. For Kamala Das it is sincerity and fidelity that matters; while for the post-modern poets ‘if they make a mess of their lives’ it is their mess and not the fault of a husband or lover. This attitude is because of their modern view of love and man-woman relationship. Moreover, this attitude has its origin in existential philosophy. In de Souza’s Fix, she does not have her complaints, attacks, demands for freedom and sexual encounters that we come across in Kamala Das’s poetry. Her poems are ironic. Much wit has gone into the creation of her poetry. For her Goan community of Pune appears to be half-in contrast to Kamala Das’s grandmothers’ house,. For Das her grandmother’s house is a paradise lost. No such emotions are conveyed in de Souza’s poems. She satirizes catholic motherhood, the church, marriage Indian colour prejudice, sexual prudery
and hypocrisy, Goan vulgarity, and the alienation felt by many Goan Catholics towards Hindu India. Her poems grow out of situations as Kamala Das’s poems do. For instance, in ‘Marriages are made’ the girl and the family are examined. They try to find out signs of insanity in the family, as they know that Goans hook the gullible people and attempt to marry off a woman who is insane in the hope that it will cure her: My cousin Elena

Is to be married
Her family history examined
For T.B. and madness
Her father declared solvent
Her eyes examined for squints
Her teeth for cavities
Her stool for the possible Non-Brahmin.

Her poems, such as ‘de Souza Prabhu’, ‘Forgive Me, Mother’ and ‘Autobiographical’ reveal herself as a feminist with a female vision. In the ‘Autobiographical’ she says, “I’ve learned almost nothing from experience.”

I head for the abyss with
Monotonous regularity.

She shifts to the problem of what others think of herself. Ultimately, she realizes that, she was cruel to the world hence the world was like that to her: 'cut me down go through me/ with a razor blade' and that was what she was doing to the world:" wanted to do to the world." This is how she learns through self exposure. Kamala Das hardly does this. De Souza has a pessimistic outlook as for herself and towards the world. She has hatred for her parents as Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das have. In the poem 'Forgive Me, Mother':

It was kill or die
And you got me any way:
The blood congeals at lovers touch
The guts dissolve in shit.
In dreams / I kick you.

Gauri Deshpande’s obsession with death is evoked in her poem "Death", and the poet fulfils her love for death in a dream experience as Kamala Das expresses her intention to lie at the bottom of the sea and be one with it:
Go Swim in the great blue sea. Where the first tide you meet is your body, That familiar pest, But you learn to cross it You are safe, yes, beyond it you Are safe For even sinking would make no Difference then..

Her intention is to go beyond body consciousness not by the path of negation but through the process of expansion. After the body is discarded, that is the muddy form, it changes into shining soul.

For Gauri Deshpande path to death is self chosen. Whatever is born is bound to die. But for Deshpande, she wishes to console the child sleeping with ‘tear on its cheek’, but death cannot give her this chance. She has feminist approach to death – in comparing the path to death with her friend or brother who held her hand at every bend in her life. She finds mystic quality in death as Kamala Das finds in death a chance to unite with her Creator.
In Kamala Das the depth of understanding about real love and lust is missing in Gauri Deshpande. Her beloved is contented with the lover's glances that strayed so often in her poem "Marks". It shows how shallow and "time-pass" is the modern mode of love as contrasted with the search for real love in Kamala Das. She is not contented with the search for real love as in Kamala Das. She is not contented with the gesture of "Atikya Khandala" type of love; but Gauri Deshpande is contented with this jejune gesture of her lover:

They call it my blooming late
But can no one see that this bloom
Which shines on my eyes and hair
Is bestowed by your glance
That strayed so often there?

There is a vast difference between Kamala Das and Gauri Deshpande. She is a romantic poet writing on the trees, flowers, and fruits. Mango and its different stages of formation please her thus:

He in supreme in flower, supreme too
In fruit is this tree the mango.
Snow flaked shaped flowers make us drunk
    in youth.
The firm and sour flavour of pleasures
    In his early fruit..
And his ripe maturity fills our mouths
And runs in saffron rivers down
One summer-soaked trunks
He drinks and blossoms and yields the Indian
    Sun.

This poem—'Indian Treescape' celebrates the
beauty and bounty of the king of fruits—such poems are rare
to come by in Kamala Das.
Sylvia Plath’s Ariel and Anne Sexton’s Live and Die and
'Looking for God' deals with the hatred they bear for their
parents.
Sylvia Plath in 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus' wants to commit suicide to exorcise her father's betrayal. She expresses her rage and grief at it.

Her novel, *The Bell Jar* also deals with it. For Kamala Das the bases of disturbance arises out of her husband, her lovers and her parents:

Beneath your monstrous ego I ate
The magic
Loaf and
Became a dwarf (The old Playhouse)

About her parents she says:

I've misplaced a father/ somewhere, and I look /for
Him now everywhere;

As already referred to above, she expresses her sense of dirt and disgust against lust.

If we compare and contrast Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and Dickinson with Kamala Das, the first two poets grow towards a new awareness and deepening strength of their identity as women and artists they handle this material and progress from one creative effort to another.
Kamala Das lacks this strength. In order to cover her defect, she refers to her sexual acts without real love. This appears to be repetitive. Where eroticism ends and the artists begins is very difficult to determine.

In the prose-poems 'The swamp' and 'Sunset, Blue Bird', the blue bird stands for immortal nature of love, and locus of anguish represents husband. Women generally are plagued by husband menace, and they wish to die. This wish syndrome is identical in Emily Dickinson and Kamala Das. In Dickinson’s poem 'Because I could not stop for death' the protagonist is prepared to walk into death:

> We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
> And I had put away
> My labour, and leisure too,
> For his civility.

Later - Dickinson knows about her inadequate preparation to meet death. It has to be mitigated by her efforts to cruise her to the secure territory of eternity:

> I first surmised the horse’s heads were towards eternity.
For Kamala Das death is seen and met in every
town and every house:

For every town I live in I hear the
rattle of its death the noise of
rafters creaking and the windows’
whine.

This common awareness of death makes her accept it. The
cycle of day and night are emblems of life and death:

Each night when darkness turns
Me blind, I think, of death

(Death brings No loss)

In these two poets Dickinson opts for death and yet looks
for an escape; Kamala Das transcends the fear of death, and
looks at it as natural aspect of daily life. For her it is
like a beloved yielding to the lover.

... we were the yielders,

Yielding ourselves to everything ( The
descendants) for Kamala Das it is a creative force and is
able to glorify death as a rich experience. It may be
probably, her miserable life with her husband and her
futile search for the ideal love that lands her in this
attitude.
I shall see a sudden flower, and
Know at once
That my death is just a flower..
('My Morning tree')

Therefore, we agree with what Barinder kumar Sharma says on this aspect of her poetry:
The dominant but contrasting traits characterize Kamala Das's Poetry: one, her desire to love and be loved and two, her wish for death when life becomes quite frustrating.

Kamala Das's rebellious 'Self is of great importance. she asserts:

"As a human being she has right to do as she pleases. It is her urge to conquer others and to dominate herself on others as Bruce King has commented above.

Why not leave,
Me alone, critics, friends visiting cousins, every one of you? Why not let me speak in Any language I like? (An Introduction')
When others compelled her to fall in the traditional mould of a woman by becoming a wife, a mother and a sister, she revolts against this stereotype and traditional type-set.

I wore a shirt and my brother’s trousers,
Cut my hair short and ignored My womanliness.

If we compare and contrast Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton with Kamala Das, the first two poets grow towards a new awareness and a deepening strength of their identity as women and artist as they handle this material and progress from one creative efforts to another.

Kamala Das lacks this strength In order to cover her defect, she refers to her sexual encounters, unorthodox private life.

Plath as Kamala Das remembers her grandmother with great affection. In ‘The Colossus’ she remembers her grandmother for her excellent housekeeping skills,

Such collusion of mulish elements and she wore her broom.
Kamala Das remembered her grandmother for the deep love and understanding she received:

There is a house now far away
Where once I received love
(My Grandmother's house)

Both hate their mothers Kamala Das has this to say about her mother in My story.

"My mother, vague and indifferent,
Spent her time on her belling on a
Large four-posted bed" (P.2 My story).

Plath has such views about her mother:

The moon is my mother.She is not
Sweet like Mary.
(The Moon and the Yew Tree),

For Kamala Das her father was responsible for her all her suffering. If she has lost.

My way, and beg now at stranger's doors to
Receive love, at least in small change’
(My Grandmother’s House)
It is Kamala Das’s husband who is responsible for such a mess. Plath, however, hates not only her father but also her husband.

If I’ve killed one man
I’ve killed two.

For her they are vampires who suck (Daddy) blood of women. Kamala Das is concerned with bodily and sexual experiences:

Can this man with
Nimble fingertips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skins’s lazy hungers?

(The freaks)

Sylvia Plath’s spectrum extends beyond herself and includes all the suppressed elements of the world. In 'Daddy' she indentified with jews killed and skinned in the concentration camps. In 'Lady Lazarus' she evokes physical exploitation of women in the world. As Kamala Das finds men reducing women to their toys of desire and
objects of lust. Plath talks about triumphant come back in 'Lady Lazarus':

I will come back
With my red hair
And eat me like air

Kamala Das's poems end in:

I who have lost my way
And beg now at the doors of strangers

Or

Home in Malabar, so far away,

(A Hot Noon in Malbar)

He returned to take her out, she was

Cold

Half dead woman, now of no use at all

To me

(The sunshine Cat)

The significant fact is that while Kamala Das depends on men for mental and sexual satisfaction, Plath revolts against it. She even contemplates homosexuality as an alternative to marriage. In her poem 'Lesbos' she wears
tiger pants. It reminds us of Kamala Das wearing men’s dress to show her equality of the sexes.

Plath does not have the policy of overlooking the overbearing attitude of men. She wants the right to live the way she wants. She expresses her right for that in a poem ‘The Arrival of the Bee Box’

They can die
I need feed them nothing,
I am the owner

Plath feels exposed and unprotected in a society based on customs and traditions:

In my sleeveless summery dress
Have no protection
And they are all gloved and covered,
Why does no body tell me?

(The Bee Meeting)

Kamala Das, too hates the peeping Toms:

Through peep-holes, the neighbours watch,
They watch me come and go like rain.

(The stone Age)
Kamala Das feels child is one who can be loved without limit. But Sylvia Plath considers pregnancy as a ridiculous position - a bag apples' an elephant'. For Sylvia Plath mother-hood brings fear for the safety of the child in our modern mechanical and selfish world:

It is the heart,
This holocaust I walk in
O Golden child this world will kill and eat,
(Mary's song).

Sylvia has antithetical attitude towards her husband. In the early poems, he is projected as God. In 'Sow' he is shown as one who reduces the female body to a reproductive machine.

Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath know that they are reduced to loss of freedom and frustration. Hence, Plath tells:

Every woman adores a fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you
(Daddy)
And Kamala Das has this to say about her husband:

You planned to tame a swallow, hold her
In the long summer of your love so that
She would forget
Not the raw seasons alone, and
The houses left behind but,
Also her nature, the urge to fly,
And the endless pathways of the Sky,

(The Old Playhouse).

A housewife, according to Plath means:

Measuring the flour, cutting off the surplus,
And adhering to rules.

She talks of herself by comparing herself to other women:

I stand, in a column
Of winged, unmiraculous women.

Honey drudge
Though for ears, I have eaten dust
And dried plates with my dense hair,
And seen my strangers evaporate.

( Stings)
Kamala Das accepts her fate-as it is without any hope of coming back or recovery from the lost state:

I asked for love, not knowing
What else to ask
For he drew a youth of sixteen into the Bedroom and closed the door

( Introduction)
Both these unhappy women find their happiness in their own way. Kamala Das finds it in the arms of illicit love or in motherhood. But Plath does not escape from her troubles in this way. She wants to live her life on her own terms:

What is love
The piston in motion
My soul dies before it
And the hooves of the horses,
Their merciless chum ( years)

Plath can't beg for love at the Stranger's doors as does Kamala Das:
The women is perfected
Her dead
Body wears the mile of accomplishment
Her bare feet seem to be saying
We have come so far, it is over

Plath never gives us the impression that she is battered and is reeling under the burden of being a woman. She searches a place in the world not as a woman but as an individual. Her suicide in 1963, proves the failure of society, not to allow her to live as she pleased. The society trained her to think like an individual, but live like a woman. She finds nature malevolent, men intolerable—society and other women unfriendly. Kamala Das managed to survive, while Plath succumbed to tension of trying to be a woman and individual at the same time.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid, P.151.


13. Z.F. Molvi, "Kamala Das: Homeless in the city" P.186

14. Bruce King, *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, P.150


17. Ibid, P.73.

18. Rahman, Anisur: *Expressive Form in the poetry of Kamala Das* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1984), P.38

20. Mamta Kalia, *Tribute to Papa and others poems*  
(Calcutta: Writers workshop), 1970.

21. Mamta Kalia, *Tribute to Papa and other poems*  
