CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

When comparing these two poets par excellence we have to reiterate the questions which were framed by Prawer some time ago: What is there in the earlier work which made it 'possible' for the later to be produced? In what way did the later work build on (and modify) grounds prepared by the earlier one? What expectations aroused by the earlier work did the later disappoint or satisfy?

The answer to these questions lie partly in theme and partly in style. It would not be illogical to posit that, contrary to popular convictions, the mother and the daughter are conjoined with a remarkable chain of intertextuality and influence, though the latter term must be used with caution. 'Influence' does not here refer to that kind which can be explicitly shown as concretely expressed in the form of images, characters or style. Here influence is at once subliminal and reciprocal. We do not intend to go all the way with Harold Bloom who maintains, while pursuing his pet theory of 'the anxiety of influence', that every poem is a deliberately distorted
derivative of older ones, although there might be some logic in the argument that much of the aggressive 'originality' that marks the poetry of Kamala Das might be conscious or unconscious outworkings of an innate defence mechanism, a vital pre-requisite for survival amongst an orthodox and hereditary literary creed.

Whatever it might be, our thematological analysis of data exposes the folly behind some familiar platitudes regarding the individuality of these two poets. For example, there has been a tendency to pigeon-hole Balamani Amma's poems as prototypes of motherly love, and to deny such feelings in Kamala Das. What is forgotten is that the latter has, beneath the deceptive apparel of almost jingoistic feminism, a core of intense emotionality converging on domesticity and motherhood, amply reflected in such exquisite creations as "Jaisurya", "Afterwards", "Requiem for a Son" etc. As already mentioned, this is only a question of difference in treatment: While Balamani Amma carries motherly affection to the realm of transcendent spirituality, Kamala Das lets a bit of stringent realism seep in.

Another discrepancy we have noted is the tendency
among critics to underplay Balamani Amma's objective correlatives for physical love and to overplay the same in Kamala Das. We have seen, with the help of illustrations, how we need to ply beneath the veil of truisms to isolate the former's passionately felt emotions regarding husband-wife relationship and gender justice. The telling effect of zeitgeist upon her poetry has already been mentioned elsewhere, which has blunted the force of her attack. She has had to project her feelings by means of an artificial context and by using the appropriate personae, so as to circumvent the delicate problem of involving persons from real life. Her poems "kalyaanaveedimeel" is an apt example. Balamani Amma's philosophy is as mentioned earlier, one which embraces earthly life in all its fullness, and gives due recognition to the psychological truth that asceticism has its martyrs.

We have seen that there are significant strands of intertextuality in conceptualizing the divine in the poems of the mother and the daughter. While Balamani Amma holds self-sacrifice, loyalty and devotion to be the means to attain 'moksha', the vision of Kamala Das concerning the same is free from conventional religious insinuations. For
her, religion is an escape from the stranglehold of the present, and the ability to view life as originating from the infinite and proceeding towards the infinite, exemplified in such works as Anamalai poems No.10 and No.4. She displays through various instances her deep rooted faith in a supreme controlling Force which dominates the cosmos, albeit whether this coincides with the traditional God-image is a matter of debate. In the matter of social commitment also mother and daughter share common elements, the main difference being in that while the former prefers to linger on the plane of refined idealism, the latter thrusts the point further home by personalising sensitive issues in her typical fashion, amply exemplified in her poems dealing with social inequality, communal violence etc.

With regard to style, we saw how Kamala Das effectively employs the technique of dislocation to impart the vividity and dynamism of live speech to her poetry. By fixing the prepositional phrase in places other than after the head and by placing the adverbial phrase before the verb phrase (which in fact, are her favourite methods of dislocation) she expresses certain nuances which would
otherwise have remained inarticulate. Her unique skill in the art of dislocation is the basis of the colloquial nature of her poetry, because dislocation brings poetry close to ordinary speech with its extemporaneity, its ellipses and its repetitions. It can even be said that as an operative tool dislocation is a nonpareil when it comes to capturing language at the pre-speech levels, before thought is conventionally structured into sentences, clauses or phrases. Dislocation enables the poet to lead the reader directly into the nooks and corners of the human psyche from where the poet conveys the flux of life to the enterprising reader. As we have seen there were 131 instances of dislocation in Kamala Das, compared to 75 in Balamani Amma, which in itself speaks volumes about the stylistic (and also thematic) contradistinctions which mark the individuality of each. The comparatively lesser number of dislocations in Balamani Amma reinforces her position among the traditional poets who cared much for that obsolescent entity termed as 'poetic felicity' which in itself pre-empts the dominance of dislocation.

Though the technique of dislocation as such is not freely used by Balamani Amma, in the matter of elaboration she is a consummate artist. We have seen how she weaves
magic out of the apposition of adjectives one after the other, a delight to the eye and the ear alike. On the other hand, Kamala Das prefers to use clauses rather than adjectives in apposition, which is very significant. In Table - 3 we analysed the main types of coordination by apposition and said that while there are 38 instances of adjectival apposition in Balamani Amma there are only 5 in Kamala Das. In Table - 4 which analyses instances of coordination by conjoining (which is another technique involved in elaboration) we can see that while there are only four instances of conjoining adjectives in Kamala Das, we have eighteen in Balamani Amma. While there are 14 instances of clausal conjoining and 23 instances of verb-phrase conjoining in Kamala Das, the corresponding figures are only 11 and 8 in Balamani Amma. The statistics are not much different in the case of subordination, the other form of elaboration, as evidenced by Table - 5. Only one subordinated adjectival clause (noun generated) is recorded in K.D, while we have twelve in B.A. The 'adjectival' style of Balamani Amma is elaborate, reflective and slow moving, while the 'clausal' style of Kamala Das is direct, simple and dynamic. Consequently, while the poetry of the former leads the
reader into quiet introspection and possible enlightenment, that of the latter achieves more or less the same end by manhandling the reader dramatically into the midst of action; without exposition or ceremony the reader is left there to make sense out the complex jigsaw of frustrated ambitions, unfulfilled dreams and thwarted love.

The use of fragmentation, which means the deliberate omission of significant parts of an utterance is of special significance in understanding the poetry of Kamala Das. As remarked earlier, fragmentation is more palpable in Kamala Das than Balamani Amma, who is comparatively restricted in its use. As seen in Table - 6, there are 19 cases of noun phrase fragmentation in Kamala Das compared to 4 in Balamani Amma. As for the omission of auxiliary, the figures are 13 and 0, the total adding up to 55 and 36 respectively. The poet who can speak of

\[
\text{Nothing but nothing inside or outside the nothing that resides as an ache within...}
\]

obviously expects us to understand the significance of
such meaningful stretches of 'nothingness'. Here we can profitably employ relevant concepts from Reader Response theory, especially the concept of 'gaps' or 'indeterminate elements' advanced by Wolfgang Iser, which can help us to arrive at sensible interpretations.

Apart from examining structural devices like dislocation and fragmentation, another rewarding area of comparative study is that of lexis. It is a basic assumption of quantitative stylistics that there is always a perceptible relationship between an author's psyche and the kind of vocabulary he uses. From our analysis of data, we have found that while Kamala Das has a more or less 'verbal' style, Balamani Amma has a more or less 'nominalizing' style. Our earlier comment regarding the use of elaboration by the two poets can be repeated here in a different form: A verbal style is more taut and fast-moving when compared to the nominalizing style which is deliberate, refined and reflective. The ratio of abstract and concrete terms in the poetry of the mother and the daughter also pertinent here. While the mother is given to using more abstract terms, the daughter displays an involuntary desire to impart concreteness even to
abstract entities. Thus while Balamani Amma can confidently speak of "soul" and "vision", Kamala Das would like sleep to "make holes in memory". The predilection to nominalization on the part of Balamani Amma can be partly ascribed to the formative influence of Sanskrit on her poetic career, but explaining verbalization in Kamala Das much more unsure business. The influence of time which results in modifications in the poetic idiom is the main factor, though we can happily throw in a reference to the earlier-mentioned 'defence mechanism' which is a tangible force countering all possible ramifications of 'influence'.

The next significant issue is the question of how cohesion is achieved by the two poets, answering which we are led to further insights. We saw that Balamani Amma achieves a supreme degree of reiterative cohesion, mainly by semantic elaboration involving synonym formation. As a matter of fact, this further aspect is in total conformity with our earlier findings regarding her poetry. A poet who habitually employs reiterative cohesion is a conscious craftsman, almost a perfectionist, one who prefers to make everything shipshape and substantial, leaving nothing to conjecture. The only drawback (if we can use such a term) of such a poet is that there will be
a certain delimitation regarding the semantic range of his or her poetry, which is true with regard to Balamani Amma. On the other hand, reiterative cohesion is almost nil in the case of Kamala Das who prefers to work by collocation. As remarked earlier, the collocational balancing of words in her poems allows an almost unprecedented resilience of both theme and style, leading the reader along unexplored byways of literary perception.

J.T. Shaw has stated that the really 'original' author is not necessarily the most inventive, but rather the one who succeeds in making all his own, in subordinating what he takes from others to the new aesthetics of his creativity. This is literally true in the case of both of these supreme artists. What the daughter received as literary heritage from the mother is transformed, with newly evolved tools for dissecting modern life-situations, into remarkably convincing pictures of human life, which with their strange penchant for shuttling back and forth through time, act as links connecting different worlds - different worlds of thought, feeling and art. Balamani Amma in the poem "To my Daughter" composed in 1965 wrote:
But about you I hold no fear
Your power of turning worms into butterflies
Comforts me.
With a little of subversion thrown in for flavour, we can comment that it is lucky that her daughter had access to worms; otherwise there would not have been butterflies.