CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

It is nearly one hundred and fifty years since Indian poets gathered under the comprehensive parasol of the English language. In examining the phenomenon of Indian verse in English, one comes up, first of all, against the paradox that it did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of the British from India. An important characteristic of Indian verse in English in the mid-twentieth century has been its emergence from the mainstream of English literature and its appearance as part of Indian literature. It has been said that it is Indian in sensibility and content and English in language. It is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment, and reflects its mores, often ironically.

Modern Indian English poetry is a genre in itself which emerged after the Second World War as a sign of the end of colonialism. It is different in many ways from the other literatures since it is closely akin to cultural movements that India witnessed after her independence. Since it reflects the life situations and social
conditions of Indian people it differs greatly from contemporary British and American literatures. Moreover, the Indian English writers felt a continuing conflict within them, that is the conflict between traditional culture and modern consumer society, which gets reflected in their writing. Their traditional bondage to culture is widely recognized. Eminent writers like A.K. Ramanujam, Gieve Patel, Nissim Ezekiel and R. Parthasarathy who come under this group wrote maintaining a close link with the cultures of India and the West. And thus it can be said that the most important trait of Indian English poetry is its capacity to sustain its cultural tradition.

Many other Indian English poets of the early period took their example from the British and European models. As a result there occurred a proper mixing of the world literature with the traditional works in the regional languages of India. Indian English poetry during the 1950s and the 60s showed divergent developments, and the major trend was towards the lyrical and the confessional. The poetry of the period exhibited a surprising predominance of certain topics such as guilt, sexuality, love affairs, freedom etc, as a kind of experimentation. Poets felt the necessity of long poems instead of the
short lyric and this helped them to remain close to modern Indian culture. Indian English poetry established its firm grip on world poetry, keeping up a literary tradition of its own.

Women's poetry in India has a distinct tradition of its own that seems to begin with the tribal songs of her early inhabitants - the Pali songs of the Buddhist nuns of the 6th C B.C., the sangam poets of Tamil like Andal and Auvaivar, the devotional poems of the poets like Mirabai, Ratnabai, Mahlaq Bai - and reaches upto Balamani Amma. Indian women poets writing in English, to whose ever growing tribe Kamala Das belongs, form a little tradition of their own, related in various ways to this great tradition. She is the inheritor of many traditions, the regional-cultural traditions of Kerala and the pan-Indian tradition; and within the regional tradition she has a specifically matrilineal background provided by her caste and a specific provincial background offered by Malabar where she spent her childhood. She is also heir to two poetic traditions, that of Malayalam whose roots go back into the ancient Tamil Sangam poetry and medieval folklore, and that of Indian English poetry beginning with
Henri Derozio or Toru Dutt. She also justifies her choice of English as she believes, she is using it with her own angularities and eccentricities, her human joys and longings.

If we look at the works of the major women writers from the 1920s to the present times, the most compelling imaginative task they address seems to be the creation of a new resistant self, one that is not easily understood or explained, but is, all the same, a power to be reckoned with. Other trends such as those found in the women's journals and in the critiques of the reform movement, made by writers who did not use the images and the idiom of national movement, run parallel, but the concerns of the writers influenced by mainstream nationalism are quite distinct. The pattern of everyday life is rarely broken by the spectacular or the grotesque. History, politics, antagonisms of gender or class do not intrude in immediately recognizable forms. Yet this seems to chart women's slow but unmistakable and moving struggles for dignity and personhood outside the double edged promises of Enlightenment and the social reform movement.
The real significance of Kamala Das's poetic output lies in that she opened up a new world of human relationship. She also shared her interest in social reality, with poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Eunice De Souza and A.K. Ramanujam, with a difference.

Connected with the processes of urbanization and Westernization, the over-domination of man motivated woman to form a sense of her own identity in India. This sense of a distinct identity that emerged in women is one of the reasons why women came forward in the field of writing. Some of the noteworthy women writers of Indo-Anglian literature are Kamala Markandeya, Eunice De'Souza, Gouri Deshpande, Anita Desai, Monica Varma, Meena Alexander, Kamala Das and Shailaja Ganguli. But Kamala Das can be singled out from them as she possesses a poetic sensibility which encompasses in itself the existential anguish of human beings. She attained maturity as a writer in the backdrop of a robust tradition. Since traditional patterns of emotional obligations always evoked a sense of incompleteness and dissatisfaction in her mind, she consciously evolved her own themes and techniques with rare ingenuity.
Kamala Das's images emerge from the cultural sources of the typical Indian background which define her identity, and they are pointers to her native sensibility. Instead of appearing extraneous, her images impress us with a sense of organic, inherent pattern.

Indian poetic tradition can be considered only with reference to the changing position of women in India. Women poets keep up the feminine poetic tradition inspite of totally unfavourable conditions. In a way Indian poetry in English by women can be described as the boldest assertion of the modern Indian woman. For instance, in the case of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, the first among them to write during the second half of the 19th century, the exposure to the West was intense and direct. But in spite of it they remained traditional in their poetic sensibility because they belonged to the early stage of the process of modernisation. The variety of new tensions encountered by contemporary women stimulated the Indian feminine poetic psyche's progress from tradition to modernity.

It is rare to find a person writing with mastery in two languages and still rarer to find a mother and a
daughter as exponents of literature. In both of them there is feminist strategy and female assertion. Both of them have reached the zenith of celebrating childhood and motherhood albeit through different pathways. The mother is covert, hiding the roaring seas within her, as the daughter is overt, blurting out in powerful language.

Kamala Das writes with ease, not bothering about the readers or what indictment they would form about her. She was obsessed with a passion for self explanation. She unveiled herself, her mind and body via her writings. She is the sole protagonist of all her literary output. She cries, laughs and sympathizes before the readers. Without least realizing, we fall in love with her, simply coronating her as the goddess of love. Her language is the language of love and purity. As leaves are to trees, words come naturally to her. Like a master craftsman, she constructs an artefact with ease. She is the spokesperson of an ultimate social revolution.

She was obsessed with the tradition of Indian love and fully alive to the tradition of Indian love poetry, but she would have nothing to do with sentimental poetry. Even while speaking of fantasies, lovers and disappoint-
ments in love, she was free from the current imitation of Victorian sentimentality by her own use of Indian English with a direct expression of feelings with its own cadences, phrases and symbols. Even in the confessional mode Das is unique, though she shares some features with Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath. Her confessional poetry is the poetry of a Hindu woman and not nourished and nurtured by a Catholic School. Rooted in Indian life, the poems of Kamala Das express ample signs of depression, distortion and self consciousness.

Kamala Das's poetry is a cultural avant-garde in Indian English poetry. We find the trace of Western culture in many modern Indian English poets even though they are bred in the modern Indian culture. The case of Kamala Das is not of this kind. She is basically concerned with defining the essential human situation, especially the situation of a Hindu wife. Most of the moderns try to construct a framework of ideas in order to modify their sensibility of contemporary life. It is in this context that we have to examine the craftsmanship of Kamala Das. Even though critics identify specific ideas, the framework of her poetry is the very life blood of her cultural lineage, and themes such as love, sex, and
freedom form part of the genetic equipment of Kamala Das's poetry. Her treatment of love, the basic human passion, speaks how she struggles hard for it in the face of neglect, agony and frustration. We can say that her poetry is an urgent response to the need of the psyche to come to terms with itself, which would otherwise give in under the pressure of complex tensions.

Wherever she lives, Kamala Das has a nostalgia for Punnayurkulam. A new house 'Samudra' has been erected at Punnayurkulam in the place of the 400 year old family house close to 'Sarvodaya', the house built a few years ago by her parents. The village is beautiful and inspiring, with coconut palms, mango trees and paddy fields. There are three ponds in the Nalapat compound and a serpent shrine, and behind the shrine is the place where many members of the family have been cremated. A few yards away from Kamala's house is situated the house of Madhava Das. She had strong nostalgic feelings about her house at Nalapat wherever she went. "If there is a paradise on earth for me, It is this, this old house beside the sea," she once remarked.
In her early years she avoided reading many poets as she did not want to be influenced by any one. However a few writers like Hanbert, Tolstoy, Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, Kalidasa and Bhasa have left a deep impression on her. She has put herself and her relations into many of her poems and some of her best poems are those which deal with her family house set amidst rural surroundings. The Nalapat house at Punnayurkulam, her grand mother and her great grandmother appear frequently in her poems and occasionally she writes about her elder brother and her sons.

Some of the major themes dealt with in her poems are childhood memories of her life in the family home at Punnayurkulam, her experiences during the periods of her stay in Calcutta before and after her marriage, in Bombay, in Delhi and in Colombo; the man-woman relationship, the Radha-Krishna legend, her maternal instincts and her love for her father and mother. Her poems also deal with hospitals and ailments, death, suicide and life after death, the sea, the identification of the poet with all persons and objects, politics and religion. They contain social satires and her views on writing also.
In her childhood she had to suffer much humiliation as a brown child in a European School. In Calcutta, she says, her father ate with a fork and knife, but she and her elder brother ate early and unsupervised the Western meals served with their little brown fingers, licking their hands while the cook stood by frowning. He regarded them to be savages.

At the age of six, she wrote sad poems about dolls who lost their heads, who had to remain headless for eternity. Each poem of hers made her cry - she had two tutors, Mabel, an anglo-Indian and Nambiar, the Malayalam tutor. As a child she loved nature - In the afternoons she slipped out of the gate while the watchman slept soundly, to the old cemetery. The tombstones were like yellowed teeth and even the writing had faded with the rains of half a century. But it was thrilling for her to read the words that had not faded. Except for monkeys she was the only living creature there. She was then too young to know about ghosts - It was possible for her to love the dead as deeply as she loved the living.

When the Second World War threatened to grow into an interminable horror, her father decided to send her to the
ancestral home in Malabar. Will Mahatmajji approve, whispered the old ladies of the house to one another at the beginning of any activity. It was as if Mahatma Gandhi was the head of the Nalapat house. His photographs hung in every room. Even the servants felt his presence in the house and began wearing khaddar. Her grandmother spun Khadi yarn on a thakli and she told her of the trip the ladies of the family once made to Guruvayoor to donate their jewellery to the Harijan fund.

Her grand uncle Nalapat Narayana Menon was a famous poet-philosopher. He looked every inch a king, although he did not have enough money even to buy the books that he wished to read. To the south of the portico of the house was the grilled library ruled by an ill assorted group of books consisting of Blavasky, Gurdjieff, Havelock Ellis and Varahamihira. The Nalapat house had the finest library of palm leaf manuscripts, most of which were written in the 'vattezhuthu' that probably came to Malabar from the Phoenicians. At her grand uncle's evening durbar there were occasionally brilliant grammarians - and writers who came from long distances to stay with him, but they were tongue tied and awed by his presence. He had written the first book on sex in Malayalam, 'Rati
Samrajya' which was an academic study based on the writings of Havelock Ellis and the Indian sexologists.

Until her wedding night she did not have the slightest knowledge of what went on between men and women in the process of procreation. Sex was not a fashionable word then as it is now. Women of the best Nair families never mentioned sex, which was their principal phobia. They associated it with violence and bloodshed. They had been fed on the stories of Ravana who perished due to his desire for Sita, and of Kichaka, who was torn to death by Draupadi's legal husband Bhima only because he coveted her. It was customary for the Nair girl to marry when she was hardly out of her childhood and it was also customary for the much older husband to give her a rude shock by his sexual haste on the wedding night.  

As small children Kamala Das and her brother, with the help and co-operation of their friends, began a theatre movement calling their group the Vannery Children's Dramatic Society and staged each of their productions on the multi-levelled patio of the Nalapat House, hiring gaudy curtains, costumes and stage hands from the nearest town. The village had no electricity in
those days. The street lights were hurricane lamps covered, according to changing moods, with coloured cellophane. The first play they staged was a Malayalam adaptation of a chapter from Victor Hugo's classic 'Les Miserables', the one that described Jean Valjean's visit to the house of Temardierre to meet the little orphan Cossette. Their team succeeded in wringing out tears from the stony hearts of the chieftains who sat in the front row. Her best performance was in the role of the Moghul queen Noor Jehan. If ever she had a personal hero in her childhood, it was her brother who stood first in every class.

There is a confessional note in the poetry of Kamala Das. She lets her mind striptease and she is the seeker after truth. She is of the opinion that a poet's raw material is not stone or clay, but it is her personality. The poems of Kamala Das are not innumerable, and we cannot find any conscious experimentation with poetic diction or technique; she is honest to the core and that makes her stand out from the usual crowd of poets.
She had published several short stories in Malayalam before she brought out 'Summer in Calcutta', her first volume of poems in English in 1965. She was immediately and widely noticed and soon recognized as a poet of promise, for her poems were and still continue to be characterised by a striking vitality of metaphor and an originality of voice which cannot be missed; the authenticity of both demonstrated to the Indian poet in English that one could write well without parading Eliot and Auden in one's pocket and that one could be a distinctly Indian poet without striving to be one and without leaning on the crutch of transcendental philosophy. At the conscious level, her favourite theme has always been the shadowy borderline between fulfilment and unfulfilment in love.

It is part of the strength of her exploration of the love theme that it also follows her compulsions to articulate and understand the workings of the feminine consciousness. Her best known poem in this category, 'An Introduction' is concerned with the question of human identity, but it effectively uses the confessional mode in order to focus pertinent questions relating to an Indian poet's identity in English.
Kamala Das's tone of voice as well as the nature of her experience - its spontaneity and an uninhibited treatment of a woman's experience belong centrally to the history of the recent years in which there has been a heightening of interest in the work and achievement of women and women writers in particular. Not surprisingly, more anthologies of women poets have been brought out by women writers in the last few years in America than ever before. The important issue is the way in which a woman writer can redefine herself and her world without breaking away completely and violently from the traditional roles of women. Kamala Das is essentially a poet of the modern Indian woman's ambivalence giving expression to it more nakedly and as a thing in itself than any other Indian woman poet. The reason for this is that Kamala Das seems to have a good deal of the conventional woman in her make-up, so that not only can she speak of the common woman and her basic need for love and security with inside knowledge, but cannot help, in addition, expressing an ambivalence proceeding from her own duality resultant from the combination in herself of a need for domestic security and the desire for an independence, an independence
consistent with a non-domestic mode of living.\textsuperscript{5}

Married at the age of fifteen and finding herself tied as she tells us time and again to a hollow relationship which she could not untie, Kamala Das's artistic output despite its sensationalism which is sometimes heightened by the directness of her manner, makes poignant reading and in essence strikes one as representative of a not so uncommon social phenomenon in India. When she speaks of love outside marriage, she is not really recommending adultery, but merely searching for a relationship which gives both love and security which should have been hers right at the start.\textsuperscript{6}

Kamala Das writes with the avowed aim of unraveling woman's ambivalent sensibility. Love poetry has found a niche in the heart of Kamala Das and it is an expression of her own feelings. Critics have time and again emphasized that a literary work of art is not entirely an objective product but a personal expression which represents the whole man behind it. As Albert Mordell puts it, "A work of imagination opens up to the reader hidden vistas in man's inner life, just as dreams do".\textsuperscript{7} It is a fact that the dreams of Kamala Das are the dreams of
her own real life and she resorted to reveal the problems of husband-wife relationship through her poems perceptively.

In her autobiography 'My Story' she reflects her temperamental restlessness regarding her erotic tie:

"I was looking for an ideal lover... The one who loved me did not understand why I was restive. You are like a civet cat in a cage, said a friend of mine".  

Kamala Das like the distinguished Australian poet Judith Wright perceives the experience of love ennobled rather than belittled by its being found in marriage and in family. Therefore as primarily a poet of love, Kamala Das grapples with the problems of love in real life. She puts before us her innermost feelings spontaneously and without any hesitation. She makes a sort of invocation to her fellow poets to follow the path of love:

Write without a pause, don't search for pretty words which dilute the truth, but write in haste of everything perceived, and known and loved...
Kamala Das has more to say about the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role to the point of discovering and emphasizing her individual freedom and identity. She concentrates primarily on sexual love and her woman persona speaks with a sense of confessional urgency like the noted poet of America, Sylvia Plath. Her talent probes into the psyche of man-woman relationship to present the life around her. But her love life is open to everyone where one can see her motherly affection and lover's love walking hand in hand. In her articles, she has increasingly defied the traditional image of woman in a bourgeois society, and though she craves for 'that particular humility that true love brings out in a woman,' her views on marriage, love, friendship, sex are rendered with such a gusto as to assume an air of unconventionality.

Kamala Das has a sense of physical inferiority because of her feeling that she was born bearing the burden of a swarthy skin and ordinary features. Her dark skin always reminds her of physical ugliness leading to an inferiority complex. However, her best poems deal with the theme of love and sex and are characterised by emotional intensity. Her poems when focused on love treat it within a broader range of themes, more realized
settings and with deeper feeling bringing into it intensity of emotion and speech and a rich complexity of life.

Her descriptions of man-woman relationship include anatomical details of body functions and are delivered undisguised by metaphor. In her autobiography, she writes about her own unhappy marriage: "As a marriage in the conventional sense mine was a flop". In the poem, 'The Old Playhouse' she points out how her husband belittled her personality:

"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 play, and endless pathways of the sky. It was not to gather knowledge of yet another man that I came to you but to learn what I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every lesson you gave was about yourself..."\(^{10}\)

She lays emphasis on the consummation of love and does not fight shy of eulogizing extra-marital
Enjoyment of sex seems to be a predominant motif in her love poems. Like the metaphysical poets Kamala Das confesses to her husband that while he may own her body, the other one, her lover holds her soul. Her husband does not know anything else except his own sexual satisfaction and therefore spiritual love has become insignificant for him. Externally, she is with her husband and inwardly, she is united by her soul with her lover. According to Kamala Das, it is her husband who is responsible for making her whorish and stray into the path of sin.

The life of Kamala Das has become the very epitome of love because she wants to sacrifice all her feminine desires to achieve the dignity and perfection of love—she even contemplates that her life which she has got in this earth would be useful if it is worthy of love at the end of this. She becomes philosophical while discussing the serious issues of life and as a poetess, she is the only one in contemporary Indian English literature who even in an old age facing the challenges of life is trying to sustain the Indian ethos by her own creativity.
Suresh Kohli, emphasizing her essentially feminine sensibility, says that "her vision is vitally particularized by the woman's point of view". He also says that in her typical poems the male desire is quickly apprehended and described:

... these men who call me

Beautiful, not seeing

Me with eyes but with hands ...

But in such poems the emphasis is largely on sexual love while feminine sensibility in the real sense of the term implies stress on emotional bond and an attitude which the women-poets alone can achieve. Kamala Das's feminine sensibility is not to be found in her frank confession of her sexual life or in a detailed description of female organs. It is expressly manifested in her attitude to love, in the ecstasy she experiences in receiving love and the agony which she feels when jilted in it.

It has been said that women bear cultural scripts in their bodies and that women writers are like the mythic woman warrior who went into battle scarred by the thin blades which her parents literally used to write fine lines of script on her body. Here woman herself becomes
the text and this may explain the woman writer's preference for confessional modes of writing. Every deviation from the norm is looked upon as perversion or mental illness. Her hurt, humiliated soul goes on begging for love; the images of the hasty river and the waiting ocean re-emphasize the element of instinct that drives the woman in her. She finds her identity to be a moment of deferment before a final dissolution in others as she finds that her joys and aches are the same as those of her readers. The discovery has a social as well as a metaphysical dimension, both of which in different ways have grown along with her poetry to constitute a spiritual politics of the body and beyond.

The universalising theories of Western feminism alone cannot explain Kamala Das's concept of love and transcendence. She is typically Indian in her identification of the lover with Krishna in her compassion for all those who suffer and in her battles with the body to go beyond it to an unfettered world of humane spirituality. Her poetry shows a gradual widening of concerns over the years as she liberates herself from her initial obsession with her gender identity and extends her
sympathies to entire sections of suffering humanity, the marginalised, the poor, the minorities, the fighters for justice, women, children, abandoned youth, victims of war and oppression. Double commitment - to the self and to others is what defines Kamala Das's poetics of complementarity and lends to her creative universe a comprehensiveness seldom encountered in the stereotypical feminist poetry. She stubbornly resists the temptation to divide the world on the basis of simple binary male-female opposition since that excludes not only other equally real divisions of class, caste, nation or race, but even the possibility of authentic love. In this awareness, she is closer to her mother who by sheer power of experience and intuition unsupported by any concrete theory recognized intensely the pains of being a woman while refusing to surrender to hatred and violence. They would not share the man-made myth of the female being the male's creation reiterated again and again.

Women's marginalised position in the male dominated world while enfeebling and silencing them also gives the survivors a peculiar advantage; women writers are most unlikely to produce a fixed, authoritarian subject within their discourse. Woman's experiences force her to be a
yet unformed subject, ever evolving and experimenting with self.

Women's function in the patriarchal society is primarily one of negation. She tends by the very fact of her positioning in the social hierarchy to negate whatever is considered complete, ultimate, well made and established in her society. Her very act of writing almost inevitably breaks the set rules and norms of the status quo. Kamala Das even while not being consciously political and declaring "I don't know politics," is no exception. The undeniable political dimension of her poetry is an unconscious expression of her longing for a different order of things where no one will be deprived. Her stance against state-sponsored or patriotic violence and war is an extension of her obligatory battle against feudal and patriarchal violence.

Woman's language, like woman's sexuality is decentred and in a sense amorphous. She longs to shape a being from within as much as she longs to carry and mould a child in her body. She is many: her language speaks with a hundred tongues. She finds consistency where man finds only contradiction. She does not want to master anyone
including herself. She realises that matriarchy also like patriarchy reinforces gender inequality. She cannot imagine a world without men.

Woman's instinctive fascination for man, her sad longing for a sacred and perfect love that goes beyond the joy of sex, the disillusionment that follows the realisation that men only lust after her body: the man-woman relationship in Kamala Das's poetry operates within this emotional triangle. She would like to get out of the logic of phallocentrism and isolate the myth called 'woman' from the class called 'women'; the solitary struggles for which she presents in 'An Introduction'.

She rejects the patriarchal value system that is based on egoism, greed for power, expansionism, hero-cult, violence, war, mindless exploitation of man and nature, the misuse of intelligence and the supremacy of reason and theory over sensitiveness and experience. At the same time she has to express her rejection in a language that still carries a male-bias. This creates an inevitable ambivalence in her poetry. She begins to distrust language or feels uneasy about it.
Qld age, death and nothingness are a recurring presence in her more recent poems. The continuous encounter with physical decay also forces the poet to look beyond death into a state of spirituality that has little to do with conventional religion. She believes that by confessing, by peeling off her layers, she reaches closer to the soul. Her whole artistic corpus becomes a declaration of the greatness of love that even while being expressed through the body also transcends the body.]

Mao said "If you want to know the taste of a pear, you have to eat it". Indeed only as one embarks on the task of retrieving women's writings and creating a critical ambience within which such work may be read today, does one realize how radical an intervention in literary study it is. The problem would have remained relatively simple had the effort been only to retrieve and lay alongside an existing canon another set of writings, this time by women. But new concerns especially when they emerge in relation to social and political changes that are taking place can rarely be restrained in this way. They will bring new questions into focus. One asks what this means for the woman writer; what happens to the reader, female or male bred on such an unbalanced diet.
It is not difficult to locate the structural similarity between the repression of women or women's writing and the marginalization of literatures (Indian Literature for example) that do not belong to the dominant critical tradition. For a woman who writes, each step is treacherous and there are many casualties. But it is also true that in the face of such negativity women have devised incredibly subtle strategies to survive and be heard. If a woman was to take her vocation as a writer seriously, it required the transcendence of her female identity. In fact, artists themselves will always speak intensely of their desire to avoid special treatment and achieve excellence. On the contrary, Susy Tharu suggests that this excellence itself is tainted, that the value of the work, its meaning for readers and for other writers trying to understand their experience trying to develop a tradition in brief its worth for them, is never the same as its price in an alien culture.\textsuperscript{15} Not surprisingly, Erica Jong would say, considering how she went through a literary education, where she learnt about being a 'woman' unfortunately believing a lot of male definitions: "... I had learned what an orgasm was from D. H. Lawrence, disguised as Lady Chatterly .... For years I measured my
orgasm against Lady Chatterly's and wondered what was wrong with me.... I learned from Dostoevsky that women have no religious feeling; I learned from Swift and Pope that they have too much religious feeling (and therefore can never be quite rational) I learned from Faulkner that they are earth mothers and at one with the moon and the tide and the crops. I learned from Freud that they have deficient superegos and are forever incomplete...

Kamala Das's own disgust and failures led her to a frantic search for the mythic Krishna, the ideal lover, with whom she could establish an eternal bond. The use of mythic dimensions is an important characteristic of Kamala Das's poetry and creates a conventional atmosphere in some of her poems. She is very competent in the handling of myth and imparting it into her poetry, and she gives a mythical framework to her search for true love and identifies it with the Radha - Krishna myth.

Balamani Amma her mother was born in 1909 at Nalapat House, Punnayurkulam, Malabar, as the eldest daughter of the Raja of Chittanjore and Kochukutty Amma. It was her nature to get up early in the morning to sing praises of Sri Krishna. She was a very devoted Gandhian, besides
being very religious. She got married at the age of 20 to Vadakkekkara Madhavan Nair.

She had the great fortune to be brought up under the constant care of her great uncle Nalapat Narayana Menon who is one of the father figures of modern Malayalam literature. Great writers of yesteryears like Vallathol Narayana Menon and Kutti Krishna Marar were frequent visitors of Nalappattu family. Constant association with the elite of Malayalam literature made the dormant genius in her flower forth all the more magnificently. In the peace of domestic atmosphere devoid of its awful drudgery, she was free to associate herself with the best of literature of both the East and the West - Her own uncle's library was a vast treasure house for her - The influence of Gandhi, Annie Besant, Krishna Moorthy, to name a few, was responsible for a spiritual turn in her writings. Some people would prefer her to be the homely poet of domestic values and motherly love, though such an estimate has serious limitations.

Dr. M. Leelavathy considers her as a romantic poet of the introverted type.18 But according to Dr. P. Rama-chandran, such Jungian categories cannot fully explain the
deep Rishi-like quality in her Balamani Amma, who has won her insight through a deep spiritual struggle.  

Balamani Amma's growth from her role as her children's mother to the mother of the universe was a momentous one. In her poem 'The Grandmother', Looking at the toddler in her lap she says, "As you awake in me once again the unworldly joys of motherliness, and the small rubble before your feet pains me, I understand that nothing is destroyed in this world. Even in this old heart there are many treasures for your hands to throw about". At home she is the centre of all love and affection. But the world of her domestic affection is like an icicle reflecting a whole forest. She attains the heights of Advaita where nothing is there, except divine motherhood.

She appears to be at peace with herself, quite content with what she has and what is around. She is really proud to be born in the ancient Nalapat family and she considers her husband as her God and master and her children as deities to be worshipped. She considers it her rare privilege to be the mother of four children. She is simple in everything. Her approach to life around her
reflects this simplicity. She has a simple style of writing and her imagery is natural, not contrived. She looks on nature for impetus and encouragement. She has a Gandhian attitude towards life or the 'trusteeship' attitude, i.e. the view that we are trustees of the gifts we have and that we are to share our prospects with other less fortunate people.

Simplicity and clarity are the first things that strike the reader as the most notable qualities of her poetry. These are not merely the attributes of the formal aspects of her poetry like diction, structure of sentences, choice of images etc; but also of the content. Her simplicity is the result of her clarity of vision. Are not the greatest things the simplest? This is what makes her poetry fresh, pure and elevated. As her vision unfolds itself it makes its demands, no doubt, but this is different from the demands made by the so-called obscure poetry of the surrealistic kind. The growth of her sensibility as a poet and seer requires of the reader a similar growth.
Notes

1 R. Parthasarathy (ed.), *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets* (Delhi: OUP, 1976), 3.


6 ibid.


11 Rahman, 4.
12 K. Satchitanandan, in Forward to Only the Soul Knows how to Sing (Kottayam : DC Books, 1996), 16.


14 Partha Chatterjee, 9.


