CHAPTER - II

THEMES

Comparative Literature as a discipline implies transcending the frontiers of single languages and national literatures. For a comparatist, any literature is basically a literature which has to be studied with reference to other literatures, generally on a bi- or multi-lingual basis. The only Indian literature which impressed a number of Western ideologists and orientalists as a cultural force to reckon with was Sanskrit. The multi-lingual consciousness, which has often been distinguished from a polyglot situation is characterised by the paradoxical desire to be one and yet remain many. The business of conducting a comparative study of various literatures in the West and doing the same with regard to various literatures in India is not quite the same. The fact that literature in India is a multi-racial and multi-cultural melange cannot be overlooked. Also the fact that the impacts and influences on the Indian psyche have been more or less similar in various regions cannot be disregarded. There might have been some difference of degree and variation in chronology. The case of 'bhakti'
in the medieval period and that of the Renaissance in the modern age can be cited as examples. The approach of a comparatist dealing with the national psychology of the Third World countries has to be basically different from that of a French scholar, for instance, whose favourite item is the reflection-like image or mirage of a nation or a national character in the mirror of another nation, whose context is mainly European. Political domination by a foreign nation may gradually and probably unconsciously nurture an inclination towards foreign elements. This phenomenon is peculiar to those literatures that grow under political domination. The literary history in their case becomes an integral part of their political history.

The Indian situation is still more complex. The Indian author has a rich heritage of ancient literature preserved against many odds. He is not only emotionally committed to this heritage, but it has also become an obsession with him, guarding him consciously or unconsciously from western influence. His psychology has to be seen in the light of an East-West tension. The whole question is somewhere linked with the crisis of identity. Hence while defining the nature of the
influence, it has to be borne in mind that the refractions and the metamorphosis which the influences undergo before they are reflected in another literature will be fundamentally different in this case from those in a one-to-one relationship between two or more literatures. The very essence of comparative literature is a cosmopolitan point of view. The study of parallels and that of simultaneities do not necessarily lead to tracking down influences. For anybody wanting to trace the unique characteristics of a work unconsciously starts comparing it almost automatically with similar works. But an identification of similarities does not necessarily mean discovering influences. It would in fact be difficult to claim that literary influence has already been unequivocally defined.

For comparative literature in Indian universities the challenge is twofold - to study the elements of the native literary tradition with reference to foreign influence, and to study the various national literatures in the context of reciprocal influences. It is needless to add that the reciprocal relationship can only be appreciated on the basis of a perfect understanding of the common historical bond that plays the key role in the multi-
lingual situation. No unit can be appreciated singularly to the absolute exclusion of all others, and the neighbouring units mutually determine their characteristics and role. The bigger pattern, an amalgam of smaller units, assumes in itself the status of a single unit, which as Indian Literature is distinguishable from other literatures of the world.

A broad knowledge of several literatures is an accepted requirement for the comparatist. In multilingual India, plurality is not limited to language alone; it extends to other areas of existence - social, religious, ethnic etc. It is a matter of common knowledge that a number of problems typical to the Indian society like the caste system, untouchability, religious superstition, exploitation of women, middle class morality, rural poverty and urban unemployment are connected with the transition from an agrarian society to the urban - industrial situation. These are all thematic areas that can provide valuable material for intranational comparison not to mention the other spheres like author psychology, modes of expression, style, genres, etc.
The comparative study of themes and motifs enables us to see what type of writer chooses what type of material and how the material is dealt with at various times. Thematic studies enable us in fact to examine and contrast the spirit of different societies and epochs as well as those of individual talents. Nor is it an unimportant or time wasting exercise to examine the popularity of different themes at different times and speculate on the social, political and cultural reasons for their ups and downs. Thematic studies must not be divorced from study of literary style. Different motifs may have different stylistic casts.

Hence we shall here make a tentative attempt to bring together, and thereby compare and contrast, a few fundamental aspects of theme and literary style with regard to both Balamani Amma and Kamala Das. Towards the conclusion of the above process, we shall try to bring forth and analyze some elements of intertextuality, prefiguration etc. which act as subliminal links between the two literati.

As S.S. Prawer says, comparative thematology enables us to examine and contrast the spirit of different
societies and epochs as well as those of individual talents: for the same reason, literary studies cannot be divorced from study of literary style. 'Influence' studies have acquired a quite justifiable disreputation in the present times since they have been generally pursued in a mechanical, unimaginative way. Though influence cannot be totally separated from questions of analogy, affinity and tradition, it implies "impulsion" rather than "imitation" and it is precisely the lack of mutual influence which makes the comparison interesting and meaningful. We have to remember the fact that influence is not confined to individual details, images, borrowings or even sources - it has to be considered as something organically involved in the production of artistic works, and that there are comparable manifestations in form or in content, in different authors, at different times with no apparent direct relationship to each other. As J.T. Shaw says, juxtaposition of comparable works may have great interest in value in the criticism of each of them. We must also be aware that the study of influence can lead us to questions of intertextuality, though the manifestation of intertextuality does not by itself presuppose influence.
What will be attempted here, consequently, will not be direct analogies or affinities between Kamala Das and Balamani Amma, but instances of "impulsion", inter-textuality and pre-figuration.

The thematic and structural complexity of Kamala Das's poetry is a quite natural outcome of the more complex nature of the modern world, when compared to that of her predecessors. However, it can be seen that her basic themes boil down to a few distinctive types as demonstrated below, with the help of some representative poems:

1. Against communal violence
2. Obsession with death
3. Fears and phobias
4. Frustration and disillusionment
5. Against false culture and snobbery
6. Infidelity and extramarital relations
7. Adoration of manliness
8. Emptiness of human relations
9. Pain
10. Feminism
11. War and violence
12. Hatred
13. Sympathy for the mentally ill.
14. Poetic aphasia
15. Anxiety
16. Conservation of nature
17. Love for parents
18. Belief in God and heaven
19. Lack of imagination
20. Independence and individuality
21. Nostalgia
22. Self-revelation
23. Pride about self
24. Concern for the poor
25. Tensions and worries
26. Supremacy of love (of different kinds like physical, conjugal, idyllic, motherly, fraternal)
27. Desire to escape or for freedom
28. Against boredom
29. Lust vs. love
30. Devotion
31. Herself as a universal symbol of unfulfilment
32. Pride about her children
33. About her complex personality
34. Strong desire to be loved
35. Ferocity of summer season
36. Sterility
37. Krishna possession

To select a few prominent ones we have:

POEMS ON COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Though the criticism that Kamala Das is subjective and does not bother for the world around her is levelled against her, we can easily refute it by citing a few poems she has written against communal violence. She had experienced the monstrous tyranny of communal violence while she was in Sri Lanka. She was grieved in spirit to see the plight of the innocent people brutally murdered not for their mistakes. "The Inheritance", 'Delhi-1984", "Fear", "The Sea at Galle Face Green", "Smoke in Colombo", "A Certain Defect in the Blood?" and "Shopper at the Cornells, Colombo" speak volumes about her mental agony when troubled by the violence and bloodshed around her.

"The Inheritance" (B.K.D*, p.67)

This poem is about Hindu-Muslim-Christian hatred for each other and our false belief about the superiority of

* The Best of Kamala Das - Anthology of Poems
our own religion. We had the inheritance of peaceful co-
existence, but now everything is upset. She says 'when at
sundown, the muezzin's high wail sounded from/The mosque,
the chapel bells announced the angelus, and/From the
temple rose the brahmins' assonant chant". But now lunacy
speaks like, 'slay them who do not/Believe, or better
still, disembowel their young ones/And scatter on the
streets their meagre innards'.

"The Sea at Galle Face Green" (B.K.D., p. 130)

It is about the unmoving sea which does its duty
(patrolling the empty shore) without fear, shock or pain.
She refers to some ethic violence which caused havoc in
Tamil Nadu. There were dead bodies everywhere and the
city was in the grip of fear:

Like a half burnt corpse was
That once splendent city...

"A certain Defect in the Blood ?" (B.K.D, p.135)

She states the bitter memories of having to suffer
discrimination because of her non-Aryan blood. They were
in the grip of fear and were trying to crouch like spiders
into tight balls, trying to escape by sleep. She refers to July 1983, probably ethnic violence owing to racial disparity:

It was a defect
In our blood that made us the land's inferiors,
A certain muddiness in the usual red
Revealing our non Aryan descent

ON DEATH

Death has always been Kamala Das's pet topic, and it was almost like an obsession. She was for many a time in deathbed due to cardiac problems and had seen death face to face. She grew up in a strained family atmosphere where her mother belonged to royal heritage and her father to peasant folk. They were 'terribly mismated'. She often says—she nourished a flair for death the leveller which could level the shame of her swarthy skin, ordinary features and Dravidian blood.

"The Cart-Horse" (B.K.D., p. 68)

It is about the sorrow of the young and old cart horses. Lucky is the decrepit horse who falls on the way and dies spurting pink foam from its mouth. But the old people who see the young horses being shot purse their
mouth and tremble for no reason. They think of the inevitability of death and realise that they also will have to die like this.

"Cerebral Thrombosis" (B.K.D, p. 68)

A man of eighty is in his sick bed and the relatives are sleeping ("weary, three nights in a row and not even a pillow for their heads). Though he was past eighty, he had an adolescent dream in his head. (The rattle ground like oxcart wheels the gravel of his throat, In the fluted heart of shells doze the ballads of the sea). The last line is like this: "Only the oxcart stumbling on and on...". The images of the deathbed, delirium, death etc are brought forth to make us aware of the inevitability of death.

"Death is so Mediocre" (B.K.D., p. 111)

Death is so mediocre that any fool can achieve it effortlessly. But she is more worried about the unwrapping of the carcass which would reveal her flabby thighs, sagging breasts, surgery scar etc. Perhaps she is referring to the Nair practice of exposing the dead body after death. After death she is not at all worried about
the misunderstandings that people had about her.

"My Father's Death" (B.K.D., p.124)

This is a depiction of her sincere expression of feelings on her father's death. It is actually a verbal picture of what had happened: how odd she felt, how undeserving she felt to be called the daughter of such a big man, the most important man to die in Calicut since Vasco trod the sands at Kappad. She states that she was happy to have her father dead rather than prolong his life time - he was in coma for twelve days. Only those who lost their monthly allowance mourned his death, as he was generous with his money (as generous as she was with her love).

Some people said she brought him shame. With each visit he had brought banana chips and money for her children. She admits that she had been a bad daughter, bad wife and bad mother (but in the task of loving, the bad ones were the ablest). She bewails that he should have hugged her at least once. ("You should have used kind words at least once a year/Your wallet could not hold abstract currency). She ends her poem by stating her
father's needless endeavour (talking of family bonds will not grow them). All her pent-up feelings about denial of love from her father are expressed here in a touching manner.

Among the ten "Anamalai Poems", three are about death. In Poem III (B.K.D. p. 154) she realises that it is good that she knows how to write away her loneliness and grief:

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

Poem IV (B.K.D., p. 154)

In the end we realise that there is only one claimant for us i.e. death. Only the wise people recognise death as the providence of God.

Poem VII (B.K.D., p. 156)

She wants to prolong her sleep and wishes for someone to remove the sun from her way and prevent her from
facing another sorrowful day ("lie, then in kind nights' embrace, soothed by its / blinded compassion while its groping fingers / would anesthetize my private terrors...")

She does not want to wake with fearfilled eyes again to look down the chasm of another sad day to perceive only the debris of the past night's genial dreams.

FRUSTRATION AND DISILLUSIONMENT

She has time and again brought in the issue of frustration due to various reasons. Her short stories in Malayalam also harp on the issue of frustration at various levels of a woman's life.

"The Testing of the Sirens" (B.K.D. p. 58)

This poem is about her experiences with another man other than her husband. He makes love to her and takes her outside for sightseeing. But in the end, she realises that there is no more night, no more love or peace, but only the white sun burning. Finally she asks, "Why does love come to me, like pain again and again and again"?
"Daughter of the Century" (B.K.D., p. 140)

Towards the last part of this poem she writes about how she promises to control her lust although she was enamoured by the white man who had whiter limbs. Before that there is the description of the beautiful forest on the Kerala - Karnataka border.

Also there are some philosophic thoughts about death and life - (The maggots live on the rotten dead body - who can say that we are superior to the maggots?). She expresses her belief in some superior force controlling the world. (The sea does not spill over / Although there are no walls between it and the earth). She is fully aware of the futility and meaninglessness of life. Disillusionment is well expressed in lines like

No God seems too keen to preserve us.
We mated like Gods but begot only our killers
Each mother suckles her own enemy
And hate is first nurtured at her gentle breast...

"Toys" (B.K.D., p. 136)

Inability to bear life is stated here. All is futile, sterile; images of doom and damnation are used.
Doomed are the new race of men who with their patriotic slogans sow dead seeds. The womb bleeds. It is better to bury the growth inside than to let it grow into the body of a tyr.

FEARS AND PHOBIAS

She had many a fear about ageing, children leaving her when they grow up, friends disowning her, words failing her etc.

"The Fear of the Year" (B.K.D., p. 11)

This poem can be contrasted with the poem "The Siesta" (B.K.D., p. 9). In the poem "The Siesta" she seems to be enjoying the calmness of mind during sleep. But here she says that 'fear' captivates and troubles even her sleep and dream (virgin whiteness) with its paws to make it incarnadine.

"Tomorrow" (B.K.D., p. 96)

She is fearful of the onset of tomorrow. She refers to her love and devotion for her child who called her 'Amma', and to her dreams unfulfilled before being persecuted by the cruel world.
"Women's Shuttles" (B.K.D., p. 107)

She appears to be very sad about ageing. She can no longer enjoy the privileges that she had enjoyed during her younger days:

At my age there are no longer
Any homecomings. Nothing can
Bring back a twinkle in those eyes
That took root in memory
During those innumerable
Trips behind a dear one's hearse.

AGAINST FALSE CULTURE AND SNOBBERY

"The Snobs" (B.K.D., p. 41)

The first part of the poem is about her house in Calcutta. The second part registers her strong protest against snobbery and false pretensions, against the cruelty of children who disowned their mothers because their hands were work-worn. She realises that we too, someday, by our children may be disowned.

"Nani" (B.K.D., p. 19)

This is mainly about the pregnant maid who hanged herself in the privy one day. They mistook the dead body
for an expression of comic dance. When once she asked her grandmother about Nani she asked 'Who is she?' It is also an expression of her philosophic thoughts about life, death and truth. She just cannot tolerate the indifference of the rich towards the poor. She says in a mocking manner that "each truth ends with a query. Lucky are those who are indifferent and deaf towards what they see around. This world is not for the touchy, sensitive and sentimental".

INFIDELITY AND EXTRA MARITAL RELATIONS

"Mortal Love" (B.K.D., p. 64)

At the outset, she says that fidelity in love is only for the immortals, for the life of a human is too short for absolute bliss and much too long, alas, for constancy. She seems to be justifying her wanton love thus.

"Gino" (B.K.D., p. 56)

This poem is about her intimate relationship with a foreigner - Gino. The first four lines are about the warning given by others against loving him. It is a fairly long poem describing her life with him "He - great white steed,
trampler of hoary laws" - with whom she shares her bed. Then in bed she dreams of obscene hands, morgues, sepulchral x-ray rooms, clatter of the trolleys, half-caste children lovelier than gods - children born of him are described as lovely and half-caste dream children:

I should be dreaming his peerless dreams
his dreams of sunlit villas and of fat half-caste children lovelier than Gods and of drinking wine in balconies, he and I...

"Vrindavan" (B.K.D., p. 48)

She here hints at a soothing extra-marital relationship. She generalises it by saying that "Vrindavan lives on in every woman's mind and the flute is luring her; regarding the long scratch on her brown aureola and flushed cheeks she lies to her husband that she tripped over the brambles in the woods.

ADORATION OF MANLINESS

"Love" (B.K.D., p. 35)

She expresses her admiration for the man who has satisfied her desires about love:
Until I found you
I wrote verse, drew pictures
and went out with friends
for walks.
Now that I love you,
curled like an old mongrel
my life lies, content
in you...

"Autumn Leaves" (B.K.D., p. 75)

This ten-lined short poem also expresses her infatuation for men and their manliness and it also expresses her excessive desire to be loved:

This is a secret
Once through his shirt
I saw his chest
and all that hair
and, on that very night in my dream
the autumn-winds blew down
from the trees
all their leaves
and I lay on them
I lay on those smoke-scented leaves.
EMPTINESS OF HUMAN RELATIONS

"Summer in Calcutta" (B.K.D., p. 49)

She drinks in the April sun like orange squeezed into her glass. She is intoxicated and wants him only for a moment. She realises how brief is the duration of her devotion and how brief is his reign inside her mind when she drinks the juice of April suns:

...Dear, forgive this moment's lull in wanting you, the blur in memory. How brief the term of my devotion how brief your reign...

PAIN

"Ischaemia in August" (B.K.D., p. 95)

There is no constancy in human relationship and love. People change their ways very often resulting in pain for each other's mind. Pain seems to be the only lasting thing:

Ultimately

The blood took its own
Bitter decision
And hung the writhing carcass
From a peg of pain
Wisely
Most wisely
For, nothing holds like pain...

"Old Cattle" (B.K.D., p. 121)

This poem was written three weeks after the heart attack, with ECG's and sedatives all around. She envisages herself as the old cattle driven to the slaughter yard. This poem is written in prose style. "I saw near the mountain passes some aged cattle being driven to the slaughter yard. I saw their thin haunches and the vermillion brand on their shoulders. Some of them paused to chew at the shrubs and to gaze around. I wanted to, for one short moment, get down, from the car and join them. Human beings are never branded with a hot iron. They are just sent home with their electrocardiographs and sedatives".
"The Proud One" (B.K.D., p. 74)

The young man's hurt feelings when rejected by his sweetheart whom he loved most dearly are expressed in a poignant manner. He accepted the country as his bride and rode her for thirty years. He felt hurt again when she became a whore. He nailed himself to his bed like Christ, out of hurt feelings. The poet finds it difficult even to sympathize with him.

FEMINISM

Though Kamala Das is chiefly called a feminist poet by her detractors, it seems that she broke herself away from the common kind of feminism. Her feminine sensibility does not argue for gender equality, reservation etc, but for tender care and consideration from the male counterpart.

"The Old Playhouse" (B.K.D., p. 100)

It is a fairly long poem touching upon almost all aspects of wifely duties. She expresses her intolerance in having to live as a submissive, subservient wife, under the monstrous ego of her husband. The tone is mainly ironic. Feminism at its best can be seen here:
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. You were
pleased
with my body's response, its weather, its usual
shallow
convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth,
you poured
yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed
my poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices,
you called me wife, ...

"Herons" (B.K.D., p. 52)

This poem is against male dominance and selfishness
and the disregard of her husband for her feelings. Her
husband tells her that on sedatives she is more lovable-
'her ragdoll limbs adjust better to his versatile lust-He
would, if he could, sing lullabies to his wife's sleeping
soul..." It seems that she regards men as mere
exploiters.
SYMPATHY FOR THE MENTALLY ILL

"The Lunatic Asylum" (B.K.D., p. 127)

This is a twenty two lined poem expressing sympathy for the mentally deranged. They lie with open eyes in their beds since they have no fear about anything. This poem can be considered a verbal picture of the pathetic plight of the inmates in a lunatic asylum. In the first part me can see an insomniac lantern which burns always. The second part is about the mentally crippled who had bravery enough to step out of the "cruel regimentals of sane routine" :

No, do not pity them, they were brave enough to escape, yes, to step out of the brute regimentals of sane routine, ignoring the bugles, the wail of sirens and the robots' stern bark, ...

ANXIETY

"The First Meeting" (B.K.D., p. 143)

The poet wanted to start a fresh relationship, but was worried about its commitments, and wants God to
protect her. He was a very eminent man and she becomes aware of her inability and unworthiness:

... I never knew any
Politics, wielded no religion or
caste to empower my claims; yes never
Feared calumny, poverty, pain or death
But the fatigue in your eyes unnerved me. In sudden
unease I wondered who would
Protect me, which obscure God with wise and
lenient ways, from this new love and its vast
commitments...

LOVE FOR PARENTS

"My Mother at Sixty Six" (B.K.D., p.148)

This is a touching poem in which she depicts her sad feelings when watching her mother age. Her tender love and concern for her mother are well expressed here:

I saw my mother beside me
doze, open mouthed, her face ashen like that of a corpse and realized with pain
that she was as old as she looked...
BELIEF IN GOD AND HEAVEN

"Poem No X" (B.K.D., p. 158)

Hope in heaven, faith in God and her optimistic feelings find expression in this poem. It is actually a very rare phenomenon in her poems:

"There is a love greater than all you know that awaits you where the red road finally ends".

AGAINST LACK OF IMAGINATION

"Sepia" (B.K.D., p. 3)

This is a fairly long poem in which she blames mankind for not going deep into the essence of things. We should use the "scorching rays of the sun" (anger) to destroy mankind who are not imaginative even in dreams. She seems to be dead against those who have no purpose in life:

In noonday queues they dream of limbs and limousines they do not go up the trees to reach with fingertips a fringe of summer clouds they do not go down the sea
to count the mermaids' eggs
that lie beneath the anemones'.

ADVISING INDEPENDENCE AND INDIVIDUALITY

"Afterwards" (B.K.D., p. 5)

She advises her new born baby to be bold enough and not bother for the laws of the world. She says that times have changed. The older generation had learnt kindness but were not able to practise it. "I have seen my brother blind a beetle". Her child has nothing to worry, since "From us to you was a gigantic leap". She says that her baby can have happy days ahead, though she had experienced only sadness during her childhood.

NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia seems to be a recurrent theme in Kamala Das's poems. She longs for the happy days of the past which were spent happily with her grandmother. One thing that appears to be very noticeable is that she longs for the past only to be with her grandmother.

"The Millionaires at Marine Drive" (B.K.D., p. 71)

This is a fairly long poem in which she gives
expression to her very strong nostalgic feelings about her grandmother and the warmth of love she took away when she died. No man was able to give her love thereafter. They simply groped beneath her clothes making her old, frigid and grey haired. But "somewhere lovers still cling with wet limbs, wet eyes, near doorways at parting hour".

"Composition" (B.K.D., p. 76)

This poem was considered to be her masterpiece for some time. It is a very long poem which begins with an expression of the sense of security which she experienced when her grandmother was around. The second part of the poem is about her sad feelings at the death of her grandmother. At first she grew up turning a deaf ear to the love and care that her family offered her; especially the love that her grandmother offered. Then she became badly in need of the tenderness of love. She made love to everyone on the way because she felt terribly lonely without her grandmother. This long poem expresses her own true self very effectively. She even has an advice to be given to husbands and wives:

Obey each offer's crazy commands,
ignore the sane
Turn your home into a merry
dog-house,
Marriage is meant to be all this
anyway.

By writing in an incoherent manner she unveils her
philosophy and summarises her psychology of life as a
whole.

SELF REVELATION

"An Introduction" (B.K.D., p. 12)

This again is a fairly long poem in which she
introduces herself as an Indian belonging to Malabar,
speaking three languages and writing in two. In this poem
she complain of her sad and beaten first experience of
love also. She says that the language that she uses to
write poetry is "half English, half-Indian, funny perhaps
but it's honest, it is as human as I am human..." She
confesses that

I don't know politics but I know the names of
those in power and can repeat them like days of
week or names of months, beginning with Nehru.

She complains that "when I asked for love, not
knowing what else to ask for, he drew a youth of sixteen into his bedroom and shut the door. He did not beat me but my sad woman-body felt so beaten”.

PRIDE ABOUT SELF

"Blood" (B.K.D., p. 14)

Her grandmother makes herself and her brother feel proud of their three hundred year old family house and its tradition. She says that she is sad to watch it die. Then she determines to rebuild it when she grows old and rich. This poem is an illustration of how her grandmother had captivated her mind with her a godly nature and innumerable stories. She says that through their veins flowed the oldest, finest, thinnest, and clearest blood. Her grandmother died at the age of eighty six. She realises that, to grow rich is a difficult feat. She pleads that even if anybody calls her callous and selfish, they should not blame her blood. She is very proud of her tradition:

But do not blame my blood
So thin, so clear so fine
The oldest blood in the world
That remembers as it flows
All the gems and all the gold
And all the perfumes and the oils
And the stately
Elephant ride..."

CONCERN FOR THE POOR

"The House-Builders" (B.K.D., p. 146)

She pities the plight of the house-builders who toil hard to shelter even the unbelievers when they themselves are exposed to the harsh sun and rain. They are being compared to cicadas:

Puny, these toy men of dust, fathers of light
dust-children, but their hands like the withered boughs
of some mythic hoodoo tree cast only
cool shadows and with native grace bestow
even on unbelievers vast shelters...

TENSIONS AND WORRIES

"The Sensuous Woman Ill" (B.K.D., p. 144)

The poet is finding it difficult to adjust herself to the new reality, that is, she is ill. Later, she learns to adjust herself to the reality that she should feel
happy about being alive:

And, as day and night as one tide after
Another roll away, an ocean's vast
Languor seizes her blood, the fences between
The state of life and death fade, and nailed
To the pleasant cross of being she straddles
The handless clockface of eternity.

**SENSUOUS LOVE**

"Morning at Apollo Pier" (B.K.D., p. 50)

Everybody discouraged her saying that she was
finished and that she could write no more, that the goose
which laid the golden eggs could lay no more. But she hid
all her defeat in his wearying blood, all her fears and
shame - and submits herself to his love till death:

You are the poem to end all poems
a poem, absolute as the tomb
your flawed beauty is my only refuge
Oh love me, love me, love me till I die...

**MOTHERLY LOVE**

"Jaisurya" (B.K.D., p. 62)

This poem tells us how proud she felt at the birth of
her child and how dedicated she was to her new born baby. She wants to disregard the man who branded her with his lust - what matters is only the "soft-stir in womb, the foetus growing..."

They raised him
to me then,
proud Jaisurya,
my son, separated from a darkness
that was mine ...

IDYLLIC LOVE

"Radha" (B.K.D., p. 25)

This is about the self-sacrifice of the beloved Radha for her lover Krishna. The eternal waiting had made their bond very chaste and the love described is Platonic:

O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting
Nothing remains but
you...

DESIRE TO ESCAPE/FOR FREEDOM

"Ferns" (B.K.D., p. 32)

In this poem she hopes for a chance to escape. She is hopeful of an escape to shores and mountains where
darkness grows like ferns to hide herself from what remains of pride:

Escape now from such bonds
And from the precious staleness that we drag
From one century to another...

AGAINST BOREDOM

"The Maggots" (B.K.D., p. 46)

One feels corpse-like when bored with the routine relationship with one's husband - in her husband's hands she is like a corpse not bothering about the nip of the maggots - but she is excited over the intimate relationship with Krishna.

LUST vs. LOVE

"In Love" (B.K.D., p. 36)

Here she complains of lust without love. She appears to be bored with the skin-communicated love. The burning sun reminds her of his mouth and pale limbs which are like carnivorous plants. She says that:

this skin-communicated thing
... I dare not yet in his presence call our love".
UNFULFILMENT

"Loud Posters" (B.K.D., p. 39)

This poem tells us of her devotion towards her lover though he neglects her. To him she is only a stranger now:

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

"Someone Else's Song" (B.K.D., p. 40)

In this poem, she calls herself a symbol of a million voices, million deaths, million births and million silences strung like crystal beads into someone else's song:

I am a million, million deaths pox-clustered, each a drying seed someday to be shed, to grow for someone else a memory.
PRIDE ABOUT HER CHILDREN

"My Sons" (B.K.D., p. 119)

She felt proud to bring up children, and to recite the poems that she had written using her blood as ink. But when they grew up, they roam around on the lookout for women of their tribe. But she is only proud and happy to realise that yet another generation awaits

At the closed doors behind their faded jeans...

STRONG DESIRE TO BE LOVED

It is on this theme that she has written the majority of her poems.

"A New City" (B.K.D., p. 87)

She has come to a new city to seek a blind date and to shed off her weariness as snakes do in coils. Her excessive desire to be loved is well painted with words:

"To awake anew at the touch of a strong young mouth..."

PORTIC APHASIA

Fear of losing verbal capacity has haunted many a poet from Shakespeare up to the very modern
poet. Kamala Das had very much dreaded the day when the words would fail her.

"Words Are Birds" (B.K.D., p.137)

The poet appears to be pessimistic, depressed and dejected in this poem. She thinks that poetic aphasia would affect even her hair and skin:

Words are birds
Where have they gone to roost,
Wings, tired,
Hiding from the dusk?

THE FEROCITY OF SUMMER

"Summer 1980" (B.K.D., p.109)

This poem is about the ferocity of summer that comes always to destroy. Summer forms the deathbed of all the dear and beautiful things:

Summer's catch word was always,
always destruction; and this
year's wrapping us like some
Prickly mantle cried kill, kill
all that was...
STERILITY

"The Dance of the Eunuchs" (B.K.D., p.60)

There was a popular belief that the dance of the eunuchs would bring rain. It was very hot before the eunuchs came to dance. All fiery images are being used: hot, clashing, jingling, braids flying, eyes flashing, danced till they bled, voices harsh, wailed, writhed in ecstasy, drought, rottenness, sky crackled, thunder and lightning... Sterility is implied through

"And rain, a meagre rain that smelt of dust in Attics and the urine of lizards and mice..."

KRISHNA OBSESSION

She seems to be very much obsessed with the thought of Krishna. She makes love to each person thinking that he would turn out to be the real Krishna. She imagined herself to be Radha - the faithful beloved. She grew up in an atmosphere of chanting praises of Krishna.

"Krishna" (B.K.D., p.64)

Though this is a short poem, she pours her heart into it. She cannot escape from the prison of his body:
Your body is my prison, Krishna,
I cannot see beyond it
Your darkness blinds me,
Your love words shut out the wise world's din.

Balamani Amma's poems, on the other hand, fall into thirty broad heads:
1. Motherly love
2. Childhood innocence—value and significance
3. Motherly love as worship
4. Sanctity of role as wife or mother
5. Love for children, leading to universal love
6. Relationship between man and God
7. Marital bliss
8. Dreams/Imagination
9. Supremacy of love
10. Childhood and development
11. Optimism or hopefulness
12. Attachment to native place
13. Attachment to home
14. Complacency in present existence
15. Value of emotion, love, respect
16. Plea for unity
17. Ideology of non-violence
18. Reverence for past masters
19. Love for nature
20. Protest against social inequality and cruelty
21. Patriotism
22. Festivals
23. Concern for the poor
24. Nostalgia
25. Insignificance or limitations of man
26. Transience of life
27. Religious ideals
28. Altruism
29. Fraternal love
30. Legends/Mythology.

MOTHERLY LOVE

Poems depicting motherly love constitute the major chunk of Balamani Amma's poetry. It is often remarked that Balamani Amma is the poetess of motherhood. Even in this collection (soopaangam) twenty three poems directly represent motherly love and there are many more poems which represent motherly love indirectly also.
"maatrācumbānam" (p.3) (Kiss of the mother)

Balamani Amma is proud of being the mother of a human being. She kisses her child on the mouth, forehead, locks, head etc. The child is compared to a bud. The spring has come to add to the beauty of the bud fondled by the father and mother. She blesses her child to be able to face the harsh realities of life. She also was kissed by her mother before, when she was also a child.

"kaavyaamratam" (p.6) (Elixir of Poetry)

The sweet smile of the child on her lap inspires her to write a poem. The whole world becomes meaningful to her only through his smile. At first she fails in her attempt to describe the beauty of the earth when the beautiful moon dawns. She realises her foolishness in roaming around for inspiration. This tender love would invoke many more poems if encouraged.

"ammayum makanum" (p.8) (Mother and Son)

This is the story of the beginning of a spiritual transformation. She is overjoyed when she first touches her baby boy. Thereafter, there is no place for selfishness in her mind. She pledges to live for her son.
Tears of joy rush down her cheeks. She decides to refine her ways. No philosopher except the mother could ever interpret the babble of the small child.

"aaSiiirvaadam" (p.11) (Benediction)

The course of love takes a new turn when a child is born to a couple. Marriage becomes meaningful and complete only at this stage. The wife embraces her first-born and goes near her husband. Then the husband sees in her not his mate, but a saintly woman. They see in each other's eyes a special gleam that they have not seen before. Only the child can tighten the marriage knot. Nature also blesses the blessed mother.

CHILDHOOD INNOCENCE: VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE

It seems that Balamani Amma had identified herself with small children and their mental condition at one phase during her life. She asserts that it is the child's innocence that make him angelic.

"valutaavanam" (p.30) (Want to grow up)

Children are eager to grow up and face the realities of life. Man always wants progress but realises that he
is still in square one. Life is an endless quest. We often find that by going in for progress, we are merely going round in circles. When her son wants to grow up and be like his mother, she wants to be a child once again.

**MOTHERLY LOVE AS WORSHIP**

Worshipping children was Balamani Amma's kind of religion. She considered her husband as the supreme power and children as deities.

"veenugoopaalan" (p.36) (Lord Krishna)

In this poem, the child is compared to Lord Krishna himself. At the height of devotion, even the objects of worship turn out to be God. For gods who do not have ageing or death, the transient childhood might appear attractive. That might have been the reason why they were that much interested in the music of young Lord Krishna. Any mother who vows to serve the son can see God himself in her son. Only foolish people search for God in sacred texts. Only the mother is privileged to envision God in her son.

"diipaappanam" (p.50) (Dedication of the Lamp)

A mother's primary duty is to serve and nurture her
children. A child is a guest not only to her but to the whole world. When the mother gets ready to serve the child, a light is being kept ready in her soul for the worship of God. That light is ten times stronger than the candle she lights in the dark room. Affairs of the world bow before this mother's sacrificial fire.

"ambalattileekkā" (p.64) (To the Temple)

When the poet identifies herself with all the creatures, she finds God in nature itself. She understands that God dwells not in luxurious temples, but in the houses where He assumes His real shape. She takes a bath in the morning and takes flowers in a dish to go to the temple. Then her husband asks for those flowers. But she thinks that as they are meant for God they cannot be given to him. Her daughter wants to make a garland for her doll with those flowers. But she tells her daughter that she will do it after she comes back from the temple. When she stands before the idol of God in the temple, God seems to tell her that he is not in the temple, but is in her house itself.
SANCTITY OF ROLE AS WIFE OR MOTHER

"kavipreeyasi" (p. 74) (Wife of a Poet)

This poem explains how the wife of a poet controls her feelings before him who spends his time involving himself in noble things. Half way through cooking and not even combing the hair she climbs the steps to see her husband. There he was sitting, writing poetry, addressing the universe. Her earthly desires are about to rouse him from the state of concentration. She is remorseful about wasting her youthful years. But her husband's words that their youthful days are not meant for enjoyment and merry making stop her from going near him. But she sees her husband kissing the ring she gave him and hears him praising her. Then she understands the depth of the love he has for her. She is very much moved by this act of her husband. That is why she is ready to go back silently.

"diipaaraadana" (p. 39) (Worship of the Lamp)

The poet shuts the door against all worldly things and tries to concentrate on worship. But duties towards her husband and children drag her out. She achieves supreme satisfaction by serving them. To her, this itself is the way to heaven. However hard she tries to go on
with the worship of God in seclusion, the words of her husband change the ascetic into a wife. Seclusion becomes insignificant after that.

"vaduvinoôd" (p. 70) (To the Bride)

A marriage is celebrated with wonderful music, perfumes and expensive dress. But to some it becomes a nuisance. They curse the marriage ceremony itself. But if they understand the essence of such ceremonies they will not have to regret later on. True love, selflessness and keeping moral principles are the secrets of the success of married life.

"grâhiñi" (p. 72) (Housewife)

This poem is about the mental satisfaction of a devoted housewife. She is brighter than the lamp she lighted in the evening, more humble than the grasslings she wore on her hair, more active than the smoke column rising from the chimney of the kitchen. A housewife has her own limitations in serving the universe. But this lady is supposed to be sympathetic towards humanity and she is humanitarian within her limitations. She serves her family, makes dress for her children, inspires them,
gives love to her husband and is sympathetic towards the suffering and the bereaved. This type of a lady is a real saint. Though she is timid in a sense, her goodness would take her to the heaven. She has a contented feeling that she is the empress of that divine place - her home.

LOVE FOR CHILDREN, LEADING TO UNIVERSAL LOVE

"maatr̥hr̥dayam" (p.57) (Heart of the Mother)

The poet's daughter expresses protest when the mother kisses only her, and not her pet kitten. The mother was forcefully made to kiss the kitten. The rays of the morning sun seemed to ridicule her loving only her daughter. The daughter was delighted at the act of the mother anyway. Giving birth to children is only one way to bring out love in the heart. Even if she loves her children wholeheartedly, she is supposed to love all the living things in the world as she loves her own children. More than that, she must be able to show sympathy to them from the depth of her heart. Only then will her soul be worthy of real motherhood.

"kuttikalkkiṭayil" (p.60) (Among the Children)

This appears as a continuation of the above poem. As
she starts conceiving every living being as her own child, an unconscious feeling of affection starts flowing towards everybody from her. She seems to be excited over such a feeling and tears of joy rush down her cheeks. The dawn, the grass, the beetles, and the lambs are compared to small children calling her 'mother', coming towards her to drain the love of her heart. The tides, the moss, the ducklings, the small fish, all seem to her like her children. The young one of a pigeon and a kitten ask her for food. When she sits near her child in the afternoon and when she sleeps she says in her own mind that she has become the mother of the world.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND GOD

"paniniirppuuv" (p.77) (The Rose Flower)

This explains where man's unquenchable thirst for hardwork takes him. In the end he will keep everything at the feet of God. This is true sacrifice and this itself is God-realization. The mother sees this in her son's childhood games. The son struggles to escape from the mother to take unsteady steps. He goes slowly to the yard to pick flowers. Then he comes and gives the fruit of his effort to his mother. That special kind of flowers have
no thorns, nor do they wither. But the child has only contempt for those flowers and he tramples them. Nature is all-powerful. She hurts those who disturb her. But the mother has no other option than to succumb to her child. If anyone tries to own for himself the beautiful things of the earth, they would wither soon. But the smile on the child's face indicates the happiness one gets out of owning such things. Finally when man goes to God, he understands that everything he earned are already in heaven.

"maṇṇambalam" (p.130) (Temple of Sand)

The poet says that man makes his own life according to his will. His life is his place of worship also. It is transient. But he does not care about it. He repairs it again and again and his success lies in that process of repeated repairing. A boy makes a sand castle-cum-temple near the banyan tree and worships God there, by offering flowers and lighting lamps, when his mother tells him that his sand temple would be destroyed in one day. He replies that he would make a better one the next day.
"vandaṇaṁ" (p.162) (Greeting)

When sickness stopped the poet from mixing with the people around, she drew herself closer to God. When she was healthy and busy she did not get time to pray to God. But now whenever she closes her eyes, she sees the God-image before her eyes. She drinks the medicines as an elixir from heaven given by the gods. Injections of medicine remind her of the glory of God. She says that nothing can tire her when God comforts her. She is afraid whether God would leave her when she becomes healthy.

MARITAL BLISS

"mangalyaraatri" (p.99) (Marriage Night)

If a bride forgets her past and clings to her husband, it is because all her thoughts are centered on him. The soul which has achieved God-realization is afraid if it would lose this faculty if it gives importance to worldly things. She is attracted to the beauty of the earth. The poet says that one can ultimately reach God only by learning to appreciate the beauty of the earth. Her husband becomes her whole universe.
"kalyaṇaṇaveediyinmeel" (p.81) (On the Marriage Stage)

This poem and the next describe how the modern man views marriage. A scientist fears marriage though his fears prove to be unfounded. Though marriage is like a candle in this dark world, he thinks of some ancient foreboding stories. However hard he tries he is unable to find out what his bride can do to help him in the search for truth. He decided to marry because of his father's persuasion. He considers it his weakness to have decided to marry her, yet, during the ceremony, he is overcome by the tender feelings and dreams of a happy life after marriage. He was afraid whether he would tumble down into the depths of debasement, even though his fear was baseless.

"kavanaṇāitiṇṭattil" (p.84) (On the Stage of Poetry)

This person also estimates marriage as insignificant like the above said scientist. But he does not fear married life as much as the scientist and hopes that some good would come out of marriage. He looks at the roof thoughtfully, when his wife comes and stands at the door. She appears very beautiful and his concentration is lost when he sees her. Her voice makes the house a heaven and
according to him, he has got a world of pleasure for himself through marriage. But she pretends as if she does not know what is in his mind. The artist knows that whatever be there, a heart eager for his presence is essential for his perfection in the field. And finally he understands that the beating of a tender heart is sufficient to melt any heart of stone.

ON DREAMS/IMAGINATION

"svapnam" (p.92) (Dream)

It is the habit of young people to dream of beautiful things in life. Girls are more imaginative than boys in that sense. Scientists have discovered that the dreams of girls include those of love and marriage. But this poem deals with how the dreams of a servant maid are shattered. Her hair is uncombed, and her clothes are torn. But she has beautiful eyes. She does not have a mirror to see for herself her beauty. However hard she tries to stop them, so many feelings come to her mind. When she was two or three years of age, her mother was the servant in a rich man's house. Then the boy of that house whom her mother cared for, three or years elder to her, kicked her. Her mother did not scold him. Later when he comes back
from abroad after many years, he punishes her little
brother for plucking flowers from his garden. Her mother
who used to do the work of hundred people fell ill and
started lamenting that she was not good for anything.
Then she dreams of becoming rich by getting the treasure
of a King Cobra. But the coming of her Prince Charming
appears more easy to her. She would blush with shame and
he would marry her and they would live happily
thereafter, and would come back when spring visited that
place. They would provide treatment for her mother and
she would regain her health in one year. She would
purchase good food and clothes for her brother. But her
mother's call to light the oven to prepare supper brings
her back to reality. Thus she finds that she has no right
to prolong even her dreams.

THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE

"preemoopahaaram" (p.139) (An Offering of Love)

A girl stitches a handkerchief for her lover, and
wants to make it perfect. She stitches it, re-stitches it;
her eyes are tired and the work is not completed. She
admires it herself but doubts whether her fingerprints
would make it untidy. She feels that though her handwork
is not perfect, her love will make good the flaws. She wonders whether this would be enough.

"gurupadeesam" (p.147) (Advice of the Master)

The master advises his follower to learn to free himself of the sorrow of the world. The master spent his years learning to love. His words brought peace to the follower's mind. Even if one's husband loves some one else, if she would love him as ever, it is selfless love. The master's advice was like an ever-shining light in his follower's mind. When hatred, sorrow and desire to commit sin grow in his heart, he would remember his master's advice to learn to love even his enemies.

CHILDHOOD AND DEVELOPMENT

"vikaasam" (p.124) (Progress)

This poem explains how a child finds happiness in the company of his friends. Small sparrows also leave their nests to fly as they like. A stage may come in the life of a child when he or she can no longer be completely satisfied with the presence of their mother. He will go with his friends to play in the playground and it will appear to be a heaven to him. Later he will leave the
playground also as he once left his mother's breast.

"randu kuṭṭikāl" (p.157) (Two Children)

This poem is the compromise between two playmates who resume their games after a truce. One says to the other to stop fighting and start rolling over the meadow. It is useless to argue and counter argue, inflicting pain upon one another. One can philosophise that they also are like animals with all their instincts, though they are dressed in good silken cloth.

OPTIMISM AND HOPEFULNESS

"roogini" (p.159) (Sick Woman)

The woman was in her sickbed and the medicines on the table seemed to warn her that she would not talk. She is tired of seeing only the pale walls in the place of bright nature. It becomes difficult for her to tolerate the dragging hours. Old happy memories rush to her mind when her body becomes frail. Sad thoughts about the present seem to drown the thoughts about the future. Nightmares bring memories of death to her mind. She is very much worried about the future of her small children. She hears from the other room the noise her children make
while playing. Suddenly the cry of her little child is heard from a distance. She tries to get up from the bed but she cannot. Her mind goes near the child to embrace it and nothing in the world could ever stop her from that.

ATTACHMENT TO NATIVE PLACE

"tiriccupoovumbool" (p.164) (When I Go Back)

This is the poet's farewell to the dear city where she was living. It is the city that goes away from her. She hopes that she will reach her birth place after this long journey leaving behind dried rivers, hot deserts and hill tops. She says that when she reaches home, she will think of the old city which was full of bright light, huge buildings, wide streets and delightful cinemas. She thinks that death may take her away before fulfilling her ambitions.

ATTACHMENT TO HOME

"suheuttukkal" (p.171) (Friends)

The poet opines that the houses we live in are not mere constructions of clay and stone, but that they are our friends. The house is a perfect place for rest, daydreaming, sleep and a place to entertain guests. A house
is our friend in birth and death alike. Our children celebrate their honey-moon in this house sharing love and friendship. In every way our house is our silent companion and a witness to all our activities.

COMPLACENCE IN PRESENT EXISTENCE

"aaŋandam" (p.168) (Happiness)

The poet says that when she enjoys the sunshine leisurely, she understands the joy of retired life. In the moonlight, she understands the happiness one gets out of peace of mind. When her child comes home from abroad, she enjoys the happiness she derives out of busying herself with the chores.

VALUE OF EMOTIONS LIKE LOVE, RESPECT

"avayeppatiti" (p.175) (About That)

This is the poet's imaginary picture about herself after death. She visualises people of the family crying about her death and the people of her native place praising her good deeds, selflessness etc. But she says that they do not see the dark side of her mind and her hidden sorrows. When she was alive, people did not realise her worth. But now they euologise her. They
try to touch her dead body and start singing about her.

"naalatte naadō" (p.177) (The World of Tomorrow)

When she sees the ashes at the cremation ground the poet is reminded of her departed dear ones and feels sad about them. She knows that it is useless to think about dead people. But the feeling that they belong to her add to their value. She lights lamps for them at the temple of the snakes near her house. But the dead people do not bother even to touch them. But the world is for them also, said her mind.

"kannuniir kaanumbool" (p.178) (When I see the Tears)

When the poet said something harsh, a tear fell from her child's eye. The poet asks whether that tear would become a pearl. Only the people of the earth are able to cry when there is intense love and sorrow. Even cruel hearts can be melted by tears. The poet opines that the ability to cry is a blessing for man. But when she sees the tears of her child, her heart grieves and she wishes to wipe away all tears from the world for ever.
PLEA FOR UNITY

"baagam kaṭiṇṇittō" (p.180) (After Partition)

The poet narrates how division of property affects the relationship between brothers and sisters of one family. She wonders how man can become cruel and selfish because of wealth. Long arguments over fields, estates and bank balance make us unhappy. The poet preferred not to see frowning faces greedy for money. She liked to see them smiling and playing together as children in the affectionate atmosphere of the house. During vacations they all joined together to prove that they were all one. Then her thoughts fly to their youthful days when they started to lean towards selfishness. They all worshipped the same God, but never tried to make a heaven of their house. Each of them made his own luxurious house but they missed the old gaiety and love they shared in childhood. Even when they say that they are brothers and sisters their heads bow in shame. The poet hopes that they may be able to hand over the good faith that joy doubles when shared.
IDEOLOGY OF NON-VIOLENCE

"prabaatam" (p.189) (Dawn)

This is the poet's asking her soul to wake up in the morning to worship God and to bow her head in mutual love. The life based on rites and rituals makes it difficult for one to reach the shore safely. Unless there is the strong oar of friendship, the ship is likely to be shattered against the walls of hatred. Life was wasted in search of vain things and is now suffering from misfortunes. If we want to make our life enjoyable, we must believe in the principle of non-violence. Those who desire to hear the voice of God must not like the sound of mutual fights. When we leave all ill-feelings and aspire for Godliness, fraternity and equality, we reach God-realization.

REVERENCE FOR PAST MASTERS

"mangalam" (p.191) (Homage)

This is a poem written to honour the great Malayalam poet Vallathol. South Indians are blessed by the great poems written by Vallathol. The poet asks us to worship the great literary genius who showed us the path of truth with his pen. She says that her poems are rough and crude whereas his poems are beautiful. He sowed the seeds of
righteousness, new ideas and wisdom while protesting against selfishness. Streams of love flow through his classics. He was a staunch advocate of Gandhian principles. She admires the poet who created the feeling of unity in the people by his noble poetry. The precious lines of the poet make even the forest look like a playground. She looks forward to getting more and more great poets like Vallathol to bless Kerala.

"ṆaṆṆāṆuṭe neetaavā" (p.193) (Our Leader)

This is a poem written in homage to Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji came to save the nation from the clutches of foreigners and also to save the people from foolishly aping them. The land of philosophy lost its tradition gradually. The learned who chose to be content with India's own tradition and culture fought with the new generation who wanted to be modern. Highly educated people fought against the scum of the society, rich against the poor, and religious people against those believed only in rites and rituals. People did not know the right path and nor had the courage to discriminate between good and evil. Then Gandhiji appeared on the scene like the sun appearing on the zenith to guide the
people with his light. No longer did the people need to
grope in darkness. Even the wicked people were attracted
towards his struggle for freedom. Some people tried to
find fault with him for his principles. But he stood
firm. After some time, everybody started understanding
him and even foreigners admired him for his principles.

LOVE FOR NATURE

"sandyaaagiiitam" (p.335) (Song of the Evening)

She has written many nature poems blending
philosophical views with love for nature. She used to
find delight in the phenomena of nature. This poem is
written in the form of a soliloquy uttered by the Earth.
The sun descends and nocturnal birds wake up. But she
doubts whether some devilish dance is going to be
performed then, since the huge shadows of the trees appear
as devils. Blood seem to spill around. But she stands
between past deeds and future aspirations, holding a
candle in her hand. She calls upon all godly powers to
bring back clouds of hopefulness in the sky.

"oru maram" (p.333) (A Tree)

This poem is also a mixture of her philosophical
perspective and love for nature. The poet says that when she bows to the perfecting spirit, she is quite aware of the imperfections in her life. Even when she praises God, her feet are still in the mire. Her mind is in the tangles of depression and dejection even when she races towards the light. Poisonous snakes spit deadly venom even when she is delighted in the beauty of flying birds. She feels that she is quite unable to spread the fragrance of godliness. But she ends her poem on an optimistic note.

PROTEST AGAINST SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND CRUELTY
"kṣeetraviidiyil" (p.206) (On the Threshold of the Temple)

This poem was written to celebrate the Guruwayur Temple Entry Proclamation. The poet seems to be fully conversant with the social and political issues of her time. Till 1107, backward communities were not allowed to enter the temple to worship God. But several freedom fighters and social activists fought for years together to eke out this privilege. The poet praises all those who made that feat possible. She ends her poem by declaring that the revolution which can wipe the tears of the downtrodden is the only true kind of revolution.
The poet bewails the plight of Calcutta city which has become a miserable place for the poor people though it is a paradise to the rich. The children of the beggars appear like mere skeletons and they have no house of their own except some place on the pavement. There is dirt and squalor everywhere. There is extravagance of wealth on the one side and disease, poverty and ignorance on the other. She hopes that some day, the gap between the rich and the poor will be eliminated to bring forth a happy state of living.

Patriotism

"jañma nakṣatram" (p. 237) (Birth Star)

She calls upon the poor and the rich alike to bow to the leader who is fighting for the noble cause of bringing freedom for the mother country. Though their lives are drowned in darkness, with the help of the charka and the dignity of labour they can produce a 'rama rajya', a happy land for everybody.
FESTIVALS

"oonam" (p.229) (Onam Festival)

We often consider Onam as an occasion for celebration but it should remind us of a supreme sacrifice. Onam is the harvest festival and there is abundance everywhere. People invite and entertain guests. Since we are steeped in happiness and merrymaking, we forget that Onam is the monument of King Mahabali's sacrifice of his kingdom and his own body for the protection of truth.

CONCERN FOR THE POOR

"tentikal" (p.251) (The Downtrodden)

This poem gives a picturesque account of the plight of the beggars. They wander all day from house to house for something to eat. They get up in the morning and wander around for basic necessities. When they are fatigued, they sleep even on the pavement. But in their dreams they see themselves as rich people living in palatial buildings. When they get up because of thirst, they have to repeat the begging even for a drop of water.
NOSTALGIA
"tiruvatira" (p.265) (Thiruvathira Dance)

The poet says that youthfulness fades away like a smile. When she was young, she used to dance and sing during celebrations. But she looks forward to happy days even when she has become old. But the footsteps of passing youthfulness are heard.

INSIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF MAN
"atima" (p.316) (Slave)

Even when man thinks himself as superior, he realises that he is nothing in the hands of fate. He is often scared of the fact that his insignificance and savagery will be reflected in his behaviour. The slave described in the poem seems to tell the poet that there is dirt in the house and that the slave is willing to clear them up. But the poet turns an indifferent eye to the slave, not acknowledging the good that she has been enjoying so far. Man is so selfish in nature that he has not even a trace of gratitude and sincerity to other people. Man wants to be idealistic and gentle. But he is full of perversions. Man thinks that he has overcome all the savage instincts,
but unknowingly he is being overcome by them.

**TRANSIENCE OF LIFE**

"vimaanattil" (p.299) (In an Aeroplane)

This is a fairly long poem telling us of the transience of life. The poet while travelling in an aeroplane thinks that she has got detached from all the earthly ties. But she is pained to notice that she is away from all her dear ones. All the fascinating things of the earth cease to delight her anymore. She overcomes the attraction for worldly things by and by and realises that she does not belong to the world, ultimately, and that man is constituted of the five elements of nature.

**HUMAN FRAILTIES**

"valarcca" (p.368) (Growth)

When the poet started learning experimenting with this and that, sobbing and smiling, her attitude changed. She realised that man is mere puppet in the hands of fate and that he is unable to do anything for himself.

"gaṅgayil" (p.323) (In the River Ganges)

Man goes back to the bosom of mother nature when he
realises for himself that even though he tries to grow rich, he is just a small child. When he goes back to nature, he experiences richness and freshness. Man tries to dominate and control. But in the end he realises that he is a mere toy in this universe which is controlled by a supreme force. Nature purifies us in a slow and steady manner. Each death and each birth is a device to purify human souls. Life originated in water, and likewise a dead body is thrown into the waters of the Ganges in the hope to purify it. At the same time the soul flies away to a different world.

FRATERNAL LOVE

"pratiikśa" (Expectation)

The poet is waiting for her friend to come back from her husband's house. On her marriage day, the house adorned itself with happiness. After some days, the mirth disappeared. The crowd receded and she went to her husband's house. The house she left became empty like an oyster without its pearl. But her belongings are still on the table. When she sees her marriage garland hanging from the ceiling she asks herself whether she is happy or sad. When sandal dhoop-sticks are lighted fragrance of
her sweet personality lingers there. The walls, the cot, the window, the mirror and everything she used remind the poet of her friend and kindle her love for her.

LEGENDS AND MYTHOLOGY

"vasantootsavam" (The Festival of Spring)

Every year 'holi' festival is celebrated to remember the lovemaking of Radha and Krishna during the onset of spring season. People celebrate the occasion happily by spraying coloured water at each other, singing songs and by dancing merrily. People forget about their sadness and worries of the past year and fill their hearts with new vigour and vitality. Even if the people are uneducated, the culture is deep down in their hearts. The world has progressed much after the time of Radha and Krishna. Radha and Krishna are pictured as symbols of love and the poet congratulates the people for becoming one with them.
Notes


2 Jain, 84.


5 S.S.Prawer, "Influence, Analogy and Tradition", op.cit., 52.


7 Poems of Kamala Das taken from The Best of Kamala Das (Kozhikode: Bodhi Publishing House, 1991), abbreviated as BKD.