CHAPTER III
LOVE THAT LIBERATES

A writer always craves for freedom, but the term does not connot social and political freedom alone. It means intellectual, conceptual and creative freedom too. But most often, enmeshed in the pangs of existence, of right and wrong, of good and evil, of limitations as a writer, of challenge posed by the language in which he/she writes, of the ever-changing concepts, ideas and moods, freedom becomes a mirage for a creative writer. Thus begins the eternal conflict in his/her mind, which will be both beneficial and harmful to the writer's creativity, at the same time. The concept of conflict as experienced by the writer is much more than his/her language can convey. Searching for an exit, the writer realises that his/her creativity is the only end and means he/she can rely upon. But for each writer, creativity, a term too general and too broad to be contained within the nutshell of his/her vision, is to be identified with something less general and more personal. Thus wherever the writer is more concerned with the struggle within, than those without and is more haunted by the self than by the society, creative writing becomes the manifestation of the inner life.
As very sensitive creative writers, both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari are seekers of intellectual and emotional freedom. In their poetry, the idea of freedom is closely related to that of love. They seem to think that true freedom is attainable through love alone. Both of them regard love as the only panacea for all human ills and as "the universal solvent" of all problems. Love is the only light that brightens the world of these two poets and that which enables them to write. Their women personae have a desperate need to love and be loved. All the different levels of love have significant roles in their world, but it is man-woman love that is mainly discussed by them both. In fact, the concept of man-woman love becomes an obsession for them, as they believe it to be the route to liberation.

Critics seem to be more or less unanimous in describing Kamala Das as a poet of love. K.R.S.Iyengar observes that "her sensibility seems to be obsessively preoccupied with love and lust".1 Vrinda Nabar proclaims that there is "indeed a lot of love" in her poems2. Eunice de Souza states that Das writes about "love, or rather, the failure of love or the absence of love with the obsessiveness of a woman who can realize her being fully only through love".3 Sreenivasan asserts that Das is preoccupied with "love in its undistinguished, purely physical form in a way reminiscent of D.H Lawrence".4 A.N. Dwivedi believes that Das
is "primarily a poet of love" and that she is preoccupied with "an intense search for love." Raveendran maintains that it is "the quest for intimacy" that is ‘pervasive’ in Das’s poetry. Sunanda P. Chavan asserts that the experience of love is a multi-dimensional phenomenon in Das, involving tensions of different kinds.

Philip Lindsay, writing about Judith Wright observes "Other women have sung of love, but apart from Sappho... none have written honestly and without shame of their desires." The compliment Lindsay pays Wright applies to Das as well. Her explicit treatment of love, sex, extra marital affairs and unconventional relationships brought great 'notoriety' to her. It is noticeable that Nalapat Narayana Menon, her mother’s uncle, has written, among other great works including lyrical poetry, Rati Samrajya, “an academic study based on the writings of Havelock Ellis and Indian sexologists." Das might be inspired to treat this aspect of life with such candour under the influence of this maternal uncle of hers.

Kamala Das has written profusely about love, expressing the richness of her emotions. But she has never received love in the true sense of the word; the only person who loved her without a purpose was her grand mother. She feels that as a child, love was denied to her. She writes in My Story about her father,
"He was not of an affectionate nature. So we grew up more or less neglected...." 

And when at the age of fifteen, she was married to an insensitive and unsympathetic man, she felt more disappointed. Her husband was devoted to his office-work alone and he had no time for his young bride. She remembers it like this,

"My husband was immersed in his office-work, and after work there was the dinner, followed by sex".

Thus the theme of frustration in love becomes the most pronounced aspect of Kamala Das’s poetry. Ayyappa Paniker observes:

"In poem after poem, there emerges the dark sinewy figure of femininity complaining of the failure of love: a wild shriek of despair fills every room until the walls visibly wobble." 

What her woman persona wants is love, pure and real love, but most often what she receives is lust alone and the tone of despair and bitterness becomes an obsession for her. Parthasarathy notices that few of her poems have escaped the note of despair. In many poems, anguish and disguise for male insensitivity is revealed. She who is a seeker
after true love, comes to realize that no man, whether husband or lover can give her anything beyond “the skin-communicated thing”. And, fed up with the arid experience of sex without love, within and outside marriage, the speakers of Kamala Das long for spiritual satisfaction.

Her compulsive quest for the ideal lover leads her to the mythological lover, Krishna. She identifies herself with Radha and waits for the immortal lover. After experimenting with love, with many worldly lovers, her woman persona experiences the futility of such relationships. As Niranjan Mohanty has put it, she comes to the realization that it is “not through exhibition or assertion but through sublimation that one can approximate truth.... and comprehend the meaning of life.”¹⁴ Das’s woman undergoes such a sublimation as she comes closer to Krishna, the eternal lover.

For Sugatha Kumari also, love is the most dominant theme. She believes that only love can redeem this valueless modern Wasteland. With great urgency of feeling, she has written about the soothing power of love, time and again. Even when love is thwarted, she goes on loving, because she regards existence as loving without limits. But the modern world, running after material gains, does not regard love as anything essential. Like Kamala Das, she too finds love being replaced by
mechanical and business-like relationships. The tone of disillusionment becomes seminal in her poetry too.

Sugatha Kumari recognises Krishna as a synonym for love. For her too, he is "the poem to end all poems" and the Ultimate Truth. The terms, love, liberation and Krishna mean the same to her. Like Kamala Das, she too is an eternal Radha awaiting hopefully the coming of her mythical lover, in spite of the painful experience of living in a heartless world.

Through ages, the myth of Krishna has occupied a central position in the Indian psyche. In fact, it is one of the crucial factors that have preserved the Indianness of the subcontinent, maintaining its unity amidst diversities. These dissemblances are so great that we have to exert ourselves in order to discover what is uniform about the different parts and people of India. Thus, we reach the conclusion that it is the common stream of culture which runs through the veins of the nation, that keeps it one. The epics and puranas with their myriad stories, the tradition of spectacular art forms based on the "Natya Sastra" of Bharathamuni, the heritage of Indian music which includes Hindustani and Karnatic systems, both having much in common and the great philosophic wisdom of ancient India are the major tributaries that have
contributed to the growth of this culture. Having inherited a common legacy of Vedic and Upanishadic literature, the great Epics and Puranas, the age old vision of here and here after and the aesthetics of sculpture and music, the people of India have stood united weathering all crises.

If we examine the cultural heritage of any people, we can see that there are certain myths and archetypes exerting an undeniable, indefinable and intense impact upon them. The Krishna concept is one such archetype deep-rooted in the Indian mind. When the primitive paganism of Europe gave way to Christianity, Christ became an archetype in the European thought. In sculpture, painting, music and literature, the impact of this archetype can very well be distinguished. Once such an archetype or myth becomes established in the psyche of the masses, it remains there through ages to come. That is why the legend of Krishna remains as a source of inspiration to our writers and artists, though faith has suffered at the hands of science and communism, and old values have deteriorated.

The Krishna concept came into being during the age of the Puranas. The great Epics like The Mahabharatha and The Ramayana and also The Bhagavatha Purana have succeeded in influencing the masses through the legends of Rama and Krishna. Consequently, these
mythical heroes have become the reforming forces of Indian thought and culture, irrespective of regional and geographical divisions and linguistic and racial differences.

It was the oncoming of Vaishnavism which marked the popularity of the deity of Vishnu. In the latter half of the first millennium after Christ, there lived in North India, great sages and poets like Jai Dev, Sur Das, Nam Dev, Thulsi Das etc. who played a major role in arousing the conscience of the masses through the Krishna cult.

The Old Vedic religion later underwent a kind of decay and what had begun as outdoor worship of the personified forces of Nature, later soared to the heights of true mysticism, with the Sanyasins meditating and searching for the link between being and nonbeing. But finally due to the inhuman caste system, the untouchability of the lower classes and Brahminical orthodoxy, the Vedic religion degenerated into a soulless formalism in which the meticulous performance of the rituals was regarded more important than faith. The onset of Budhism and Jainism was a result of this degeneration and great teachers like Gauthama Budha and Mahavira, criticising the sacrificial rituals etc. of the Vedic religion, spread the message of love, compassion and right living.
During the course of the first millennium A.D., many great sages and visionaries rose up in the darkened horizon of Hinduism, sworn to bring about a revival of its power and glory. Adi Sankara (Circa 700 A.D.) can be regarded as the first among them. Later, a new form of worship of Krishna gradually developed, not found in the older texts and mysterious in origin. Krishna, the warrior and counsellor began to fall more and more into the background and Krishna, a boy of wondrous beauty living in the village of cowherds, giving delight to everybody with his fabulous music and unending love, began to occupy the minds of people.

Vaishnavism was gaining foothold at that time and devotion to Krishna began to prevail. For the first time, the creative impulse in devotion passed to South India too. The twelve devotees of Vishnu in Tamil Nadu, known as the Alvars, who apparently lived in the second half of the first millennium A.D. composed devotional hymns in the vernacular, celebrating Vishnu both in his form as the child or adolescent Krishna and also according to the earlier traditional concepts. Through the writings of the Alvars, the devotion to Krishna spread all over South India. They sang about the 'leela of Hari' and then all who worshipped him formed a great brotherhood independent of caste, and have set the example of instructing unlettered folk about remembrance of the name of God.
At this time, South India produced another phenomenon that was an even more potent aid to the development of Krishna Bhakthi. It was the composition of the Bhagavatha Purana (circa 800 A.D.) This magnificent work appears to have remained for several centuries after its composition in comparative obscurity. It gives, what, in fact, might be called the standard or classical account, both of the sports of Krishna as a child and an adolescent and of the devotional tenets of the Vaishnava faith.

Another great poet who sang exclusively about Krishna is Mira Bai, who lived in the fifteenth century A.D. Mira followed the 'Madhura Bhakthi' tradition, believing Krishna to be her companion, lover and husband. All through her life she was seeking Krishna, awaiting his arrival to redeem her from the mundane.

Head over heels in love with him, her 'bhajans' reflect a life long devotee's heart rending entreaties to her Lord. In her quest for Ghanasyam she becomes a 'gopika', defying worldly convention by the intensity of her devotion. Adoration of the beautiful Shyam is the most dominant theme in her poetry, but when she says that her lover is like the "Indestructible Principle"15 we are reminded of the Upanishadic concept of Brahman. Mira is conscious of her identity with and
separation from her Lord at the same time. Her songs express her longings for a reunion with him, echoing, again, the Upanishadic wisdom that tells us about the absolute merging of the individual soul with the Supreme Spirit.

Mira dreams of the day she would be accepted by the Lord of the Braj and these lines are a fine example of the Madhura Bhakti cult which she followed.

"Sister, the Lord of the Poor
Came to wed me in a dream
Fifty six crores of deities formed the bridal procession
And the bridegroom was the Lord of Braj
In my dream,
I saw the wedding-arch constructed
And the Lord took my hand."16.

Other great poets like Jai Dev, Chandidas and Vidyapathi developed the theme of a personal love-affair between Krishnan and Radha. The poetry of Jai Dev, showing a tendency to luxuriate in devotional feelings tinged with eroticism, is intended as an illustration to show how ordinary human sex-love can be transfigured and
raised to the plane of the love of God, according to the tenets of Vaishnavism. Radha in Jai Dev’s Gita Govinda is the perfection of womanly love longing for her lover.

Not only in literature, but in art forms like dance, music etc. also the impact of the archetype Krishna is visible. These fine arts, crossing the boundaries, permeated the different states of India and became established everywhere more or less equally. The Manipuri dance of Assam and Bengal, the Odissi of Orissa, the Kathak of U.P., the Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh, the Bharatha Natya of Tamil Nadu and the Krishnanattam and Mohiniyattam of Kerala are all the different types of expression of the theme of the life of Krishna. In music, most composers of both Hindustani and Karnatic systems were great worshippers of Krishna.

Writers all over India are influenced by the Krishna concept even in the Modern Age and he seems to be an evergreen hero in Indian Literature. In Malayalam, poets like Ezhuthchan, Poonthanam, Melpathoor, Cherusseri etc. have written exclusively about Krishna alone and theirs was a mission, and that was to propagate the 'Bhakthi' tradition, to save the society from moral deterioration. They were all great devotees too, and their writings popularised the Krishna
cult in all the different strata of the society. This objective and purposeful approach of the writers of the past is lacking in the case of the modern poets.

Among the modern poets, it is Vallathol who wrote most effectively and most picturesquely about Krishna. In his writings, a political or social connotation is given to the legends of Krishna. In those days, the nationalist movement was gaining strength in Kerala too, and Vallathol promoted patriotic feelings in his readers through his inspiring poems. He depicted Krishna as the symbol of justice, as the saviour of the oppressed and more particularly as representing Mahatma Gandhi in his heroic struggle against the British rulers. His poems like ('A Portrait'), "Oru Chitram" "Karma Bhoomiude Pinchukal" (The Little Feet of the Karma Bhoomi) "Ambadiyilethiya Akruran" (Akrura At Ambady) present portraits of Krishna with unequalled charm and beauty.

Another modern poet of Malayalam, Edasseri Govindan Nair, who was not very much disposed towards legendary ideals, was also influenced by the image of Krishna. He recognised the presence of Krishna in everything that he saw around; his yellow robe in the evening clouds, his darkness in the blue flowers and so on. Moreover, he was led to the conclusion that all of us are a part of the Lord's form.
Among the Indian English poets there are not many who have come under the impact of Krishna cult. Tagore, in his masterpiece Gitanjali has written about God, and the whole poem is the description of the eager waiting of the individual soul for a reunion with the Universal Soul. But the poet does not specifically refer to any personal God.

Sarojini Naidu, another Indian English poet was conscious of the all-embracing impact of the Krishna concept in Indian literature. Her attitude towards Krishna was one of the ‘madhura-bhakthi’ tradition, herself being disguised as Radha. In poems like “Summer Woods”, “Song of Radha the Milk maid” etc the poet’s personal love is envisaged through the Rahda-Krishna myth.

In early Malayalm poetry, Kadathanattu Madhavi Amma’s “Gopika Geetham” (Song of Gopika) and Balamony Amma’s ‘Radha’ depict the Radhakrishna myth. All these poets have given their own different versions of the legendary hero, Krishna. They have all, more or less equally, discovered Krishna as a symbol of beauty, nobility and freedom. The dynamism of the human spirit, the divinity of love and above all the diversity of a free-thinking man, are all united in the
character of Krishna. Thus Krishna becomes a favourite theme for all
great writers who are seekers of truth and freedom.

Both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari envisage love as the route
to liberation, and love for them is what Krishna alone can give. Each in
her own way seeks Krishna, and hopes to be relieved of all pains at
his hands.

The poetry of Kamala Das, which is actually a quest for love and
identity, reflects her craving for selfless love. But she discovers that
such a love is never to be found in the modern world of loosening humani
ties, degenerating values, ever-changing concepts and hypocritical attitudes.

She recognises life in the modern age as one of lovelessness and
the countless miseries resulting from it. She believes that no rules and
laws can improve the lot of the suffering humanity. Remedial measures
are to come from within, for, it is the soul that suffers, and not the body.
The soul should be freed from the imprisonment of misleading ideas
and concepts, and to achieve this, the glorious agony of love should be
experienced. Kamala Das identifies Krishna as another name for Love,
and that is how she is drawn towards him. Born and brought up at the
Nalapatt house, she was very well acquainted with the legends of Krishna. She knew him through her grand mother's stories, as the one who had conquered the world through his all-embracing love. The young girl Kamala had heard about the delightful escapades of Krishna and had him inscribed on her conscience.

Puranas describe Krishna as the tenth 'avatar' or incarnation of Lord Vishnu, preceded by the less perfect nine incarnations. The myth of the avatar is in itself a version of the Theory of Evolution beginning with the fish and proceeding to the amphibians next, and later to advanced forms of life on land. Of all the avatars, Krishna is the perfection of human values and is the best illustration of broadmindedness. As opposed to the war-like, empire building, statesman-like and strictly monogamous Rama, Krishna is wanton, artistic, diplomatic, philanthropic and liberal. He wins the heart of the village of cowherds through his celestial music, dance and his love for them. He invariably satisfies all those who seek him with his endless lenience and pleasing manners. This disarmingly handsome Prophet of Love fascinated Kamala Das even when she was quite young. For, she recognised love as the vital force of life, and the theme of love, whether Platonic or sensual, was proper stuff for poetry. In many of her poems, the absence of, or failure in love is treated with exceptional
candour and intensity. Even when she writes about her vocation, she associates it with her obsession with love.

"...................like music in a Koel’s egg there was poetry in my veins although clotted for want of words to express it. I grew up watching my mother write her poems, lying on her stomach on an old poster bed. I knew that, the time would come for me to begin writing too. I groped in the darkness at night for words to convey my emotions. I was in love with a husband who did not want my love, and it was sweet torment to lie with my face against his feet while he slept. Mine was a crushed love, a beautiful and futile emotion........"\(^1\).

Thus, an obsessive concern with ideal love, like the one that existed between Krishna and his beloved Radha, becomes a major theme of Kamala Das’s poetry. The poet, it seems, is longing for a love that will not impede her impulse to self-pride and freedom in the cob-webs of marriage and her sensitive self struggles with it. As said in the Puranas, Krishna’s love affairs with Gopis, including Radha, were illicit. The torpor of conformity with worldly values was unknown to them. These illicit relationships surpassed all man-made institutions, and their charm was deathless. Kamala Das prefers the depth, intensity and even the tension of an illicit relationship that defied convention to the soulless
domesticity of married life. In many of her poems, she expresses this idea most vividly, and "I Shall Some Day" is one such poem. Here, the woman persona dreams of a day, when she will be able to tear off the conventional attitudes, to reveal the quintessential woman inside her. Hoping against hope, she believes that one day she will be a liberated woman, with no shackles on her feet.

"I shall someday leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea
Love-words flung from doorways and of course,
Your tired lust; I shall someday take.
Wings, fly around, as often petals do
Do when free in air and you dear one,
Just the sad remnant of a root, must
Lie behind, sans pride, on double beds
And grieve" 18

The concept of total freedom, of absolute merging with each other makes the poet write about the ideal world of Radha and Krishna repeatedly. To her, Krishna is the ideal lover, the one who satisfied both the body and the mind of his beloved through his genuine love, the one who does not disappoint her with the discovery that "men are
worthless, to trap them use the cheapest bait of all, but never Love” as in “A Losing Battle”.

She seeks in him a love that does not fail and regards him as an inextricable part of her, without whom she cannot exist at all. She writes about her craving for Krishna thus.

“...........But illogical that I am, from birth onwards, I have always thought of Krishna as my mate. When I was a child, I used to regard him as my only friend. When I became an adult, I thought of him as my lover. It was only my imagining that he was with me that I could lie beneath my husband to give him pleasure. Often I have thought of Radha as the luckiest of all women, for did she not have his incomparably beautiful body in her arms........... We do not have him physically to love us; we have to worship a bodiless one. How are we to get close to him without the secret entrances of the body which may have helped us in establishing a true contact? ........ Now in middle age, having no more desire unfulfilled, I think of Krishna as my friend, like me grown wiser with the years, a householder and a patriarch. And illogically again I believe that in death I might come face to face with him. Then the shehnai can begin, the birds can sing, the river can start its lullaby, for another of his brides would have come home........”.
Her realization that true love can never be expected from the men of this world, led her to seek Krishna. But even before this realization came, Krishna was in her mind as the central force. She has always recognized him as the very embodiment of true love that never fails. Even in her girlhood days she knew that the only woman “whose sex-life seemed comparatively untumultuous was Radha, who waited on the banks of Jamuna for her blue-skinned lover” 21. In her inspired moments, she became his Radha, achieving her force from her symbolic retreats and cravings. Poetry to Kamala Das is expressly redemptive. Her search for Krishna and her act of remembering the past are basically united in her overall poetic process. These are the gestures of her relief and both perform a curative function. The present with its drab realities cannot soothe her. So she remembers the glorious past and craves for Krishna, the symbol of her eternal bond, at one and the same time. Through these deliberate attempts, she attains some measure of equipoise and transcends the aches of the present. The Krishna myth has clung to her consciousness always. Writing of an early childhood experience, she records:

“In one of the Sanskrit plays written on palm leaf by an unknown writer I came upon a fascinating passage. Radha, abandoned for some years, and lovelorn, entreats a traveller to go to Mathura and give a
message to Krishna. When asked to describe her lover, she says with tears in her eyes; I do not remember his colour or his height, or even his face, all I remember is the bliss I felt when he was inside me, like a seed in the earth.”

Again, seeking to realise her dream and her union with Krishna, she writes:

“I was entirely without lust. I hoped that someday as I lay with a man, somewhere beneath the bone, at a deadened spot, a contact would be made, and that afterwards each movement of my life became meaningful. I looked for the beauteous Krishna in every man. Every Hindu girl in reality is wedded to Lord Krishna.”

Kamala Das maintains the notion of the parallel existence of two worlds and two types of love-experience. One of myth, and the other of reality, one is archetypal and perfect and the other is unromantic and imperfect. In the latter, the poetic persona is constantly disillusioned by the men she encounters, by the endless struggles and losing battles and by her lover’s and her own inability to cross the boundaries of their egos, to escape from the watertight compartments. But in the mythical world of Krishna’s love, it is liberty and ecstasy that both lovers are
achieving through their relationship. While it is imprisonment within
the boundaries of their egos that the worldly lovers gain, the legendary
couple attain a pure and total freedom through their love. Real love
too, can result in a sort of imprisonment, but it is totally different from
the egoistic worldly lovers' experience. Hence, love in its perfection
becomes a prison, demanding the absolute surrender of the beloved,
blinding her sight, deafening her ears. But, it is not convention or routine
which demands such a surrender. It is the overflowing torrents of real
love that swallow the entire personality of the loved. Kamala Das speaks
about such love in "Krishna".

"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." 21.

The woman persona in this poem is satisfied with accepting such
a blinding darkness in her eyes and such a deafening voice in her ears,
for it all emanates from an ideal love. Krishna, the ideal lover conquers
his woman, not through the conventional and stubborn rules of wedlock,
but through his endless love. There is freedom within the prison of his
love; there is light and sound within the realm of his darkness and
deafening love words. There is life for her in his body, because there is love for her. The poet seems to be believing that such love means freedom, happiness and truth.

The total dissolution of the individual self and the complete identification of the lovers with each other is the moment of realization in any love-relationship. Such an ecstatic moment comes true in the Radha-Krishna relationship. Just as Radha’s long waiting had made her the beloved of her Krishna, the poetic persona experiences a rebirth, a reawakening into life in his first true embrace. What she had experienced till now was only ‘skin’—communicated’ hungers and not love. But the first touch of real love, the first experience of warmth made her a girl, a woman, a virgin. Her womanliness is celebrated and consecrated by her lover’s contact. This magic of love that can melt even the hardest shell or outer covering of the individual soul is the theme of the poem “Radha”. Like an arrow of fire, her Krishna’s love pierces her soul, melting everything, even the hard core of her heart.

“O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting
Nothing remains, but
You”
The mythical heroine experiences such a unique moment of celestial bliss in the arms of her lover. But what an ordinary woman receives is the disappointment and shame of unrequited love. While Radha considers her corporal form insignificant, and is no more interested in the "skin communicated thing", in the joy of physical union alone, the ordinary woman is caught in the traps of soulless love. Radha, has been maddened by her love for Krishna, for all that is beyond the transitoriness of flesh. But a woman of the modern world is time and again disappointed in love. To melt in the arms of her lover, to dissolve the existence of two different individuals and to become one, is only an impossible dream. Thus, it is the unbridgeable gulf separating these two worlds that has made her write Krishna poems.

In "Ghanasyam" she depicts the transformation she is undergoing by her endless quest for love. She is led along routes she has never known before and the silent jungle of her existence is awakened into melodious rapture. With no regret, she confesses that her married life has never been so happy, as her husband could never establish a rapport with her soul, because it was only a 'husk-game' that they played together. But if her Krishna were in the place of her legal partner, it could be very different, and the poet sings,
"Who is loving who
Who is the husk who the kernel
Where is the body where is the soul", 26

What the woman persona of the poem wants is an absolute merging with her love, which is not feasible in this world of realities. She desires to dissolve the self, to cross the boundaries of her identity and become one with her lover. This dream, she realizes, can be true only if Ghanasyam were her lover.

In this poem a higher level of understanding of the personality of Krishna is achieved. The poet realizes that all frustrations and despairs ensue from our failure in attaining Krishna; a self-forgetful devotee enjoys such moments of realization when that person feels that every lover and his beloved, the husk and the kernel and the husband and the wife were different manifestations of the image of Krishna, there will be no place for disappointment. Hence the lines, "But if he is you, and I am you" and,

"You come in strange forms
And your names are many ..."27
remind us of the Upanishadic wisdom contained in the lines from *The Bhagavad Gita*.

"Brahmarppanam Brahma havir
Brahmangou Brahmanahutham
Brahmaiva thena ganthavyam
Brahma karma samadhina" 28

(The oblations in a yanjna are Brahma, and the offerings are Brahma. Brahma is the sacred fire, Brahma is the one who does the yanjna. Brahma is the yajna itself, and Brahma is the goal to be reached).

This poem “Ghanasyam”, pulsating with the feeling of love, ardour and self-surrender makes use of the beautiful images of the koel, the fisherman etc. to bring out her devotion to Krishna. The koel building a nest in the arbour of her heart and her sleeping life, dark and jungle-like, being caressed and awakened by music are powerful analogues stressing the sense of suffering and redemption through the tradition-bound images. The same poetic outlook is noticeable in the image of the fisherman’s net in the following lines,
“Shyam, O Ghanasyam
You have like a fisherman cast your net in the marrows
Of my mind
And towards you my thoughts today
Must race like enchanted fish .....”29

The imagery of “the fisherman” and the “enchanted fish” completes a full circle which begins with the intimate address in the first line. Her sense of total surrender is well-expressed in these images.

Finally, the guests leave, the room is vacated and the lights are put out. Then, in the silence, darkness and stillness, Ghanasyam comes to her like a fisherman with his net. This net catches hold of her very existence, with a death-like grip. In fact, Ghanasyam is her last guest, the final solace, when all others depart and everything else is lost. In this poem, Krishna is in a way identified with death, thereby hinting the idea of the unification of the Individual Soul with the Universal Soul through death. Thus her merging with Krishna in the end is the ultimate God-realization which every seeker of truth desires. And the poem is an expression of mystic dreams.

The concept of Krishna as the formless one is expressed in the poem “A Phantom Lotus” also. Here the poet speaks about her love for
him as another way to know him, to reach him. It is the 'Bhakthi Yoga' path that she is following in order to attain God-realization. She knows that her faith is the only thing that counts; everything else is transient. Any stone can be worshipped as an idol, but to experience God, either faith or knowledge of him is inevitable; the woman persona in the poem chooses faith and love as her path leading to the ultimate truth. And the poem is an expression of the metamorphosis undergone by the woman persona through the alchemy of her love for Krishna.

If it is her craving for the kind of love which she has never experienced makes her write Krishna poems, the same craving and the subsequent failure in achieving it are pitiabley pictured in many of her love poems. The poem "Maggots" throws light on the darker sides of Radha’s love life. Her relationship with her ideal lover, though not everlasting, is mere bliss, the very acme of happiness. But at night, in her husband's arms Radha feels dead, as she is contemptuous of him, who only wants the warmth of her body, but not the sparks of her soul. But she does not snap her marital ties in spite of her love for Krishna, as she considers her body insignificant, and the marital bond irrelevant. At the same time, this meaningless relationship, which puts fetters on her feet makes her feel like a corpse.
"At the sunset, on the river bank, Krishna
Loved her for the last time, and left ……
That night in her husband’s arm, Radha felt
So dead that he asked, what is wrong
Do you mind my kisses, love? and she said,
No, not at all, but thought, what is
It to the corpse if the maggots nip?” 30

The malignant impact of wedlock upon individuals is etched in these lines. A marriage that functions only on the physical level does nothing less than killing the individual dream of love, of freedom, converting the body that inhabits the longing soul into a corpse. This lifeless existence devoid of love is matched against the perfection of love in the arms of Krishna. Hence, it is evident that Kamala Das makes use of the myth of Krishna in order to express her deep concern for ideal love which does not find a place in the hearts of selfish earthly lovers. This awareness of her inability to attain pure love at the hands of her man, renders the woman persona disillusioned and exhausted. Such signs of exhaustion are visible in the poem “Lines Addressed to a Devadasi” also.
"Ultimately there comes a time
When all faces look alike
All voices sound similar ...

............................

And you sit down on the temple steps
A silent Devadasi, Lovelorn
And aware of her destiny .........." 31

The Devadasi, a Radha of the modern age, who has been worshipping her Lord through her dance and music all through her life is now spent up and exhausted, for, she was handed over from one man to another, and used roughly by them all; all of them wanted her flesh alone; none did think of anything beneath the flesh. The bitter experiences have made her indifferent to worldly relationships and the image of the "silent Devadasi" acquires a sharp focus in the light of her gesture of withdrawal. The rejected, frustrated Devadasi of the poem, a Radha of the modern world, is presented in her novel "A Doll for the Child Prostitute" also. The innocent girls of the brothel house, in the novel, who are named after Hindu Goddesses, trafficking in flesh are anxiously awaiting the arrival of Krishna who will redeem their sufferings. But never do they meet their Krishna, their redeemer. Life goes on tediously for them, and the dream to be saved by Krishna fades
as years pass by; but its last rays are still there, unaffected by bitter realities.

The poet dismisses sexual pleasure as nothing better than bodily contact resulting in a few seconds’ forgetfulness. The realisation of the futility of bodily pleasures and the need for higher planes of happiness is the first step in achieving spiritual realization. The poet goes in search of attaining that higher plane of happiness, which she recognises as soul-love, or Divine Love. Thus to earn Krishna’s love, she sets out. Says she:

"Like alms looking for a begging bowl, was my love which only sought for a receptacle. At the hour of worship even a stone becomes an idol. I was perhaps seeking a familiar face that blossomed like a blue lotus in the water of my dream. It was to get closer to that bodyless one that I approached other forms and lost my way. I may have gone astray but not once did I forget my destination"  

The serenity of her tone when she yearns for a union with Krishna, whether formless or with a form, reveals the fact that it is a higher level of love that she is seeking. To achieve this kind of love, one should be able to overcome the limitation of a body. Kamala Das feels that when
the body is only a twig for the soul to perch, it does not obstruct the progress of love. Extending the Radha - Krishna imagery to include the eternal love of the two for each other, or the deeper level of love of the Atmas for the Brahman, the river of life and the tree of the human body form the frame work to concretise this relationship in human terms.

The eternity of their love leads the poet to the realisation that truth is love, a more profound thought than the Keatsian identification of truth with beauty. While everything else is perishable, her love, her faith will stand the test of time.

Beginning with the disillusionment resulting from her relationship with her man and supported by her deep knowledge of the stories of Krishna, Kamala Das develops an affinity for him. Recognising him as a dominant image in her poetry and her soul’s mate, she evolves as a writer of Krishna poems. She does not distinguish between Krishna and love. The perfection in love is identified with the myth of Krishna in her poetry. Wherever the woman persona of her poems is denied love and is used as a plaything, she remembers Krishna, the ideal lover. For, he was the only one who could satisfy his women and never let them fall into pits of despair. Hence, even after his departure, they
lived on the sweet memories of their togetherness. Awaiting his return unfailingly, they became his greatest devotees. According to the Puranas, even great sages and yogis desired the status of these unlettered country girls. While the learned yogis had to seek him through ages and births, the maids of Vrindaban had him as their playmate, lover and even a humble admirer. Such was the power of love they had for him; and such was his response to their ardent dedication that Kamala Das praises that lover repeatedly in her poems, because like him, she too believes in the religion of love. Like him, she too believes that conflicts and strifes occur when the springs of human kindness and love dry up. Kamala Das's obsession with the theme of love can thus be understood as a philanthrope's dream of an ideal world.

But her Krishna is not confined to the limits of an ordinary lover endowed with a serene state of sublime fulfilment and luxuriating in the divine adultery he is committing. On the other hand, he is the hope of the hopeless, the only way out for the trapped. He represents the soul love, which can be experienced only by those who plunge deeper into the soul. He is the spiritual love, attainable by means of selfless surrender alone. In her poems on Radha-Krishna myth, Radha stands for the spirit of surrender, that is the very first step towards spiritual evolution. This spiritual evolution is something which is frequently
mentioned in the poetry of Kamala Das. In her poems dealing with the
myth of Krishna, Kamala Das draws a parallel between the physical
evolution of man propounded by the Darwinian philosophy and his
spiritual evolution. The gradual and steady spiritual evolution of man
is suggested in many of her Krishna poems.

Like enchanted fish, the soul races towards the Divine. The
individual soul crosses all boundaries to become one with the Universal
Soul. For this consummation of spiritual love, Kamala Das mingles her
complete self with the self of Krishna, and thus achieves a flawless
evolution of spiritual love.

Her poems which are centred around the Radha-Krishna myth
give us the same impression of Krishna as the all-pervading reality. At
the same time, Krishna is the blinding darkness and the cell of the
deathless sun, he is the one in whom Radha melts like a lump of butter
and becomes an inseparable part of his body and mind. Also he is the
one who leaves his beloved to rest like a corpse in the arms of another
man. His qualities are infinite and everything and everybody is in reality
Krishna or the Universal Soul.

Kamala Das's description of the concept of Krishna is in
concordance with the ancient wisdom of India, as expressed in the
Upanishads or The Bhagavad Gita. Both of them speak of the permanence of the soul and its longing to merge in the Universal soul or 'Brahma'. They describe Krishna as the lord of the souls and advise us to be free from the notion of 'I' and 'mine' from which alone all ideas of narrow-mindedness arise. The aspirant is asked to give up "self" and find solace in the Lord alone. Once the seeker is liberated from the illusionary attachments and ties, he/she knows the Lord, the Supreme Being. The seeker melts to become one with God. He/she sees nothing but the Lord's presence, hears nothing but the Lord's voice. Here the sublimation of ego resulting in communion with God or the Ultimate Reality which is the message of Yoga, occurs.

The same experience is expressed in the Krishna poems of Kamala Das. Radha waits for her Krishna undeterred by the passage of time and when Krishna comes to her, an absolute merging of personalities happens; no Radha exists afterwards. Only Krishna, the one who contains everything and everybody in him, is there. It is towards this final goal that her ideal woman persona is looking. Thus the Krishna poems of Kamala Das are not mere expressions of the love-life of the legendary hero and his sweethearts, but the reflections of the seeker of the Ultimate Truth. They portray an evolution of character, the growth of earthly love into the divine, the elevation of the commonplace into the supreme.
In Sugathakumari the Krishna concept is pivotal as in Kamala Das. It is the central theme of her poetic genius. The image of Krishna occurs as the crux of many of her poems and as an indirect reference in some others. In fact, the literary life of Sugatha Kumari itself is inspired by the Krishna myth. Whatever is the theme of her poetry, it is invariably about Krishna that she sings really; whether she speaks about love or death, or the glimpses of joy or the flashes of pain, her song spins around the centre, Krishna. To her, Krishna is an eternal theme, an eternal relevance and an eternal inspiration. Yet Sugatha Kumari has a wide range of topics, ranging from Nature poems to those that deal with social problems, from feminist writing to unsophisticated love poems. But in all of them, the unseen presence of Krishna can be felt alike. She realises that, like birth, life and death, poetry is also a sure path that leads to him. She has written some thirty poems on the theme of Krishna myth which express the different attitudes of a devotee, intoxicated by love for him.

In some of her Krishna poems he is presented as a lovely, lovable child and in others as an outstandingly charming youth. Sometimes she is a Yashoda, the mother of Krishna, craving for his presence. Sometimes, she is a Radha, love-lorn and longing for her lover. In whatever way she disguises herself, her search for Krishna is ceaseless.
In all forms, in all moods, and at all times she seeks him. To reach his
abode, she will become a Radha, Yashoda, or Meera or anybody else.
The only thing that matters for her is Krishna.

Sugatha Kumari recognises Krishna as a solution to all the modern
world's problems. The spiritual degeneration, the cultural decline, the
deterioration of values, violence towards nature, pollution of air, water
and forests, inhuman treatment of animals, atrocities towards women—all
such problems can be solved through Krishna. Because, to her,
Krishna is the all-embracing principle of love. He is both the
mythological hero of the Vrindaban wearing a yellow silk dhoti, a
peacock's feather stuck upon his plaited hair and blowing his favourite
flute, and a symbol of eternal love, peace and justice. In her poetic
world, Vrindaban is not merely a legendary garden, but it exists verily.
The ever-flowing Jamuna is there, on the banks of which the cowherds
let their cattle graze. The blue-flowered Kadamba tree is there, upon
which Krishna squats, singing melodious songs .... Everything related
to Krishna is still there. She does not leave out any detail about him, as
each of them is so dear to her. In her Krishna poems, we find her
journeying unendingly, untiredly, after births and rebirths, in search of
Krishna. It is an eternal journey for her, as it is an eternal bond that
binds them together. This "kind, yet hard-hearted" lover does not reveal
himself to her when she awaits him. He is invisible, but when she is
disappointed he smiles at her. This “leela” or prank is played upon the
seeker, time and again. But she is not discouraged by this game of hide
and seek which her lord plays upon her.

The Krishna poems of Sugatha Kumari, written at different
periods in her career are so remarkable that she has compiled them into
a separate volume. The twenty nine poems in this anthology are all
portraits of Krishna the child, Krishna the lover, Krishna the protector of
the weak and they are all skilfully pictured in these poems. But they
are not simply colourful portrayals, but the heart-beats of a real devotee.
These poems vary among themselves in their themes and treatment,
though the Krishna image is central to them all. The variations are only
skin-deep, and beneath them, we find the love-lorn Gopika waiting for
her lover, or the affectionate and tender-hearted mother expecting her
highly adored son or the earthly seeker travelling along unknown paths
to get a glimpse of the light that shone in the Vrindaban. Whoever is
the protagonist in these poems, we recognize the poet feeling with them
the thirst for Krishna.

The woman persona of the poem “Krishna Neeyenne Ariyilla”
(Krishna You Do Not Know Me) is not Radha, but another Gopika, living
in and loving her Krishna in silence. Her love, like herself is unnoticed. She does not dance with him, nor does she try to attract his attention. Behind the closed doors of her little cottage, she sits on the floor, listening to the musical notes of his flute. She imagines that Krishna who is always surrounded by crowds of beautiful women in the Vrindaban, does not know her. But on the day of his departure, his chariot stops in front of her cottage, and he glances at her with love, mercy and above all, recognition. For the first time, she realises that he has loved her, loved her too deeply to express it. Thus the poem is an enquiry into the higher levels of the meaning of love. The woman persona of the poem offers Krishna her wholehearted devotion, and such devotion cannot go unrequited. Though not near, Krishna understands her feelings for him. At the right moment he returns it. Here Sugatha Kumari is presenting the deep and complex aspects of the human mind and the unseen facets of love here. Krishna emerges as the omniscient, omnipresent legendary hero, who is won by love.

“Oh Krishna, though you don’t know me,
Your chariot stops before my cottage
For a moment, your tearful eyes
Are cast upon me, and your benign smile
Is gifted to me, Krishna
Do you know me, Do you know me?”
But in "Kannanethedi", (In Search of Kanna) the woman persona is dejected, as her endless search for him is not rewarded by his appearance. Crossing the boundaries of births and deaths, she goes in search of him. But he does not come before her, though the jingle of his ornaments and the celestial music of his flute are heard. She longs for a meeting with him, but in vain.

"I have seen you, Krishna
In dreams alone
This agony of separation
Burns like wildfire in me
Oh come, come I am
Seeking you every where
A thousand lives have passed
Since this search is begun ..."  

Thus the poem becomes a comment upon the futility of waiting for Krishna, the eternal lover. In this darkened world, his devotee, groping helplessly, is left unnoticed. The wheel of births has revolved many a time, but her dream is not yet fulfilled. The recognition that True love is unattainable is hinted at in this poem.
The same mood of hopeful exploration and the final dejection echo in some other poems also. "Pathirappookkal" (Midnight Flowers) is a fine example. Here the protagonist is a lonely traveller walking along unknown paths, with his single-stringed musical instrument, singing songs about the Lord. The garland of flowers which he makes for Krishna may wither before the latter comes to him. But nothing deters him from pursuing his goal. Thus the poem is an assertion of the uninterrupted pursuit of Krishna, the ultimate goal.

In 'Shyama Radha' (The Dark Radha) Nature is identified with Radha who looks for her lover eagerly. Towards the conclusion, this Radha or Love is realized as sorrow and the poet hails her. Her philosophy that love and sorrow are one and are inseparable from each other is expressed here. In other words, it is the same vein of retirement, the painful truth of the inaccessibility of Krishna that we find here also.

In poems like "Mattoru Radha", (Another Radha) the woman persona, who calls herself Radha, might be identified with the poet's own personality. Time and again, she tells us that the only gift she has for her Lord is her songs of love, which she would sing continually like a flute in the hands of wind. Here again references to his dark - blue complexion, the bunch of peacock feathers which he wears on his head,
are in plenty. Here again, the tone of intense seeking is kept up; here again, the plaintive request to have mercy upon her is repeated. In short, Sugatha Kumari's woman persona is prepared to wait endlessly for her Krishna, and despite his cold silence, her patience does not ebb away.

The sweetness of love as experienced by Radha, finds expression in her poems like "Oru Nimisham", (One Moment), "Mazhathulli" (A Drop of Rain) which convey the intensity of her experiences. She has known love, the love of her Krishna. The blossomed Kadamba tree of the Vrindaban and the nights spent underneath its green canopy still obsess her. She is intoxicated by love, but at the same time she fears that her lover would go away from her at any moment, she confesses frankly that love confuses as well as consoles, as is said in the poem Mazhathulli (A Drop of Rain)

"These tricks are played upon us
From time immemorial, to confuse."

in the poem "Mazhathulli" (A Drop of Rain). The protagonist in all these poems, pendulating between the extremes of hope and dejection in love, symbolizes the plight of modern man who is unable to find a foothold in one thing or other.
A poem like "Oru Vrindavanarangam" (A Scene From Vrindavana) is the poetic expression of her understanding of the women of India. The poem pictures a scene of romance at the Vrindaban, when Radha is decorated by her lover. From the personal to the general is the evolution of thought in the poem as the poet proclaims that every woman of India is a Radha – a Radha who seeks perfect love at the hands of her man; a Radha who gives everything, including her life to him. He is the centre of her life, and without him she has no life at all. The unselfish love of Radha, her self-forgetful devotion and endless patience have been regarded as the ideals of womanhood in India. Radha who loves eternally, Radha who lives and dies for Krishna is the role model for the women of India. And they have imbibed this Radha into their souls and have thus become the living messages of unselfish and sacrificing love. Moreover, for the women of India, life becomes an endless search for perfection in love, since the heroine of the Vrindaban is alive in them.......

It is a search that continues through ages, and the seeker comes in different forms in different ages. At one time she is Radha, and at another she is Mira. In whatever guise she may come, her ambition is to merge into her Krishna. She is not only his beloved, but his mother and his companion also. With all the tenderness of motherhood she
calls out for him. Though he is nowhere to be seen, she is sure that one day he would come to her. It is this hope that renders life liveable to her. As a mother waiting hopefully for her son, she has a twofold personality. One is that of Devaki, the real mother of Krishna, and the other is that of Yashoda, his foster mother and the queen of cowherds in Gokulam. It was the latter who brought up him until he reached adolescence. Then came Akrura, the messenger of Kansa, who was the wicked and totalitarian monarch of Mathura, to take Krishna to the palace. Krishna leaves Gokulam forever and all the people in his village are thrown to abysmal depths of despair. But Yashoda, his foster mother awaits his return hopefully.

In the poem 'Krishnante Amma' (The Mother of Krishna) it is this anxiety of Yashoda that finds expression. The whole world shrinks into the village of cowherds, where Yashoda, vexed by her neighbours who complain about her son, wanders. Overcome by grief and defeat, she is exhausted, when, all on a sudden, the melodious notes of the flute surprise her. Unable to be displeased with him, she enjoys the music. The disarming sweetness of his love cannot be ignored and like Yashoda, all are won by his music.

"Amma" (Mother) is a poem in which Devaki is seen analysing the agony of a hopeless mother is portrayed, through the character of
Devaki. Though she is presented as Devaki, she can be any mother, who is forced to witness her children being tormented, values reversed and life robbed of its purpose. Devaki, who could never experience the joy of motherhood, though she had mothered eight children, seems to be living in the hope that her youngest son, Krishna would come to her. It is her burning love for him that enables her to weather all trials and tribulations. Then one day, quite unexpectedly, her Krishna comes to her; in her world of blighted hopes, the dark cloud that is Krishna, showers his love; it seems that the mother knew about his coming as she whispers the words,

"My child, your mother knew
That you would come, you would".

Though she has long been tormented by humiliating imprisonment, and the sight of her newly born babies butchered, Devaki has not yet lost hope. And certainly it is her fathomless love for her son that preserves her hopefulness. Here we find, love spontaneously evolving into optimism. Such an evolution happens in the mind of the poet also; her faith in love enables her to have faith in life, and to be an unfailing optimist.
The same note of optimism, the long awaiting, the misery and agony, and the final moment of salvation are portrayed in the poem, "Gajendramoksham" also. The elephant king, roaming the jungles is attacked by a huge crocodile when he was playing in the forest lake. The tusker could not outsmart the monster and in the tussle that followed, he is weakened. One after another, his companions take leave of him, and he beseeches Krishna to save his life. Time passes by and the waters of the lake turn red; crest fallen, the elephant king is about to surrender when the smell of "Harichandana"-Sandalwood paste which is a favourite of Vishnu—fills the air.

To Sugatha Kumari, Krishna is the ultimate solace and the final truth. Nobody is turned away from this Ultimate Truth and all those who seek him, are safe in his hands. Be it a wild animal or an emperor, Krishna soothes him alike through his love. To achieve this love and to absorb it wholly, one should be free of the burden of his ego. Where the ego is strong, there the soul will be subdued by it. It is one’s false notions about himself that create imaginary problems for him. It is one’s ego that makes life difficult and decisions impossible to be taken.
As The Bhagvad Gita says,

“Dhayatho vishayam pumsa, sangastheshu prajayathe
Sangath samjayathe kama: kamath krodhabhijayathe
Krodhath bhavathi sammoha sammohath smrithivibhrama
Smrithibhramsath budhinaso, budhinasath pranashyathi”

(One who dreams about worldly pleasures becomes attached to them, Attachment brings desire, and desire fury. Fury begets indiscretion, which in turn begets forgetfulness. That leads one to stupidity which destroys everything).

Sugatha Kumari is so much aware of this fact that she proclaims in her poem “Kaliyamardanam” (The Taming of Kaliya) that only by overcoming the challenges posed by the ‘self’ at all hazards, one can attain the Ultimate Truth, i.e., God. In this poem, the speaker is Kaliya, the killer snake, who has been living in the pure waters of the Jamuna for long, poisoning the entire river. Those who quench their thirst by its water would die. To put an end to this adulteration of the river, Krishna punishes Kaliya. His little feet dance upon the fierce hoods of the snake. Turbulent waves rise and fall, the shores shake, the dancer’s feet are hurt, but the hoods of the snake do not droop, and his pride does not
fail. He requests Krishna to tread on his crest until all the barriers are overcome, all the doors are broken open. He wants to be crushed under Krishna’s feet so that the divine touch would awaken his soul. Thus the punitive dancing goes on and Kaliya forgets himself in its frenzy.

“Let all my evil deeds dissolve
In the rhythmic jingling of your anklets
Let my pains vanish, as I kiss
And kiss your sweet, sweet feet”³⁸

is his humble but vehement prayer to Krishna as the frenzied dancing goes on. The poetic persona hopes to achieve God realization by overcoming the bondage of one’s ego. Such a purgation is achieved through the cathartic effect of Krishna’s punitive dance. In this poem, the tone is that of total surrender, of self-abnegation as is congenial to a real devotee. Kaliya stands for one’s unbridled ego and thus conquering Kaliya means conquering the self. The poet craves for such an absolute subjugation of the self and the subsequent peace of mind, echoing the wisdom of The Bhagavad Gita.
“The Vihaya kaman ya! isarvan
Pumanscharathi nispruha
Nirmamo nirahamkara
Sa santhimadhigachathi.”39.

When the pursuit of something becomes so intense, every object of Nature looks like its symbol, and everywhere its presence is felt. The woman persona in the poem “Thirichariyal” (Recognition) experiences this truth when she encounters, quite unexpectedly, a flute player, with plumes on his headwear, a variant Krishna. She was touring in a strange land, in a far-off country among strangers, feeling uneasy and homesick. But when the shepherd boy smiles at her acknowledgingly, the strangeness and remoteness vanish. Her loneliness is replaced by an assurance of familiarity and friendliness. Taken aback by this meeting and recognition, the poet realises that nowhere is she alone; and that no land is strange to her. To her, it is a moment of recognition, the recognition of the oneness of man all over the world. She feels an unseen bond of unity binding all human beings together. Whether we call it love or Krishna or faith in God or faith in man or merely faith in faith, it is there. The realization that
"Nowhere am I alone

When these strange lands are mine"\textsuperscript{40} is a great relief to the woman persona.

Her Krishna poems vary among themselves as much as those dealing with the furtive flight of lovesick women towards him, to those which speak of the total submission of the seeker before the Soul Supreme. In all these poems she achieves perfection as the feeling is created genuinely in them. The gopikas of Vrindaban loved and adored Krishna as their beloved, or husband, but they were not legally married to him. Most of them had husbands and children, and hence their relationship with Krishna is often described as happiness which they cannot experience in other relationships. Their love for Krishna is unselfish, since they do not want to profit out of it. They do not even seek liberation or Moksha. What they do is to offer themselves to Krishna, to place themselves at his feet. This sublime love is the noblest of all human passions. At its climax, the sublimity of their devotion erases their separateness and makes them one with Krishna.

Such a culmination of the self-negating love of a Gopika for her Krishna, is the theme of the poem "Abhisarika". The word Abhisarika has damaging connotations, but the poet chooses to call herself so, since
she is actually an Abhisarika or a woman who goes to her lover, instead of waiting for him at her home passively. Moreover it is not to make love to him, nor to dance according to his tunes that she is stealing towards Krishna at the dead of night, but to see him, just to see him. She leaves behind her husband and child, the unfinished household duties, the endless responsibilities and burdens. As the celestial flute calls out to her, she forgets everything else. Tearful, excited and frantic she flees to him and finally falls into his arms. At that moment of liberation, of self-immolation, she recognizes that Death is only a synonym of Krishna. For, having attained perfection in her love and devotion, by securing a place for her in his sandal-perfumed bosom, she feels that she has lived enough. Life and Death are the same to her now. Once the acme of love that offers absolute liberation is reached, nothing matters. The woman persona of the poem, or the poet’s alter self comments,

"When I throw my sorrows and fear
On your sandal smelling bosom dear
I recognise at once, Oh Shyamsundar
That death is only another name of yours."

This identification of Krishna with death opens up a new chapter in her attitude towards life and death. Death is not sought
after in Sugatha Kumari's poems, nor does she deify it. She is unmistakably in love with life and she expresses it in her poem "Enkiluminnum" (But Still)

“Still I love you, life
O, still I love you life
Though my fading eyesight
Fail to reflect the sun’s light

Becoming a rock, my benumbed heart
Fail to stir, fail to beat
Still I love you, life
Oh, Still I love you, life ....”

Adoring life and enthusiastic to drink it to the last drop, Sugatha Kumari has a positive view of life. At the same time, death does not embarrass her, since it is only another way of attaining Krishna, attaining perfect love which leads to salvation. She regards it as a door leading to Krishna and thus welcomes it. This 'advaita' i.e. the philosophy of recognising the Divine in everything we see around, is the gist of Sugatha Kumari's poetic attitude. Life and death are equally desirable to her, as both of them lead to the ultimate goal or krishna. Through her poems
she can worship him while alive, and through abandoning her body and liberating her love-lorn soul she can reach him in death. Sugathakumari’s ‘Abhisarika’ is a seeker of Krishna, who is the Soul Supreme. The distant call of the flute lures her and she sets off in search of it. Nothing prevents her from seeking this goal, not even the family ties. The fierce obstacles on her path do not frighten her, nor do the comforts of worldly life tempt her. She will not take rest until her goal is reached and through the maze of life she proceeds. At last when she unites with her Shyamsundar waiting for her at the end of the path, the seeker experiences the bliss of realization. For, in a way, it is the reunion of the ‘Jeevatma’ or Individual Soul with the ‘Paramatma’ or the Universal Soul. Thus the Oriental vision of mysticism and transcendentalism proves its strong impact upon the poetry of Sugatha Kumari.

The sublimity of Radhakrishna love and the subsequent salvation achieved through it are best portrayed in the poem “Radhayevide?” (Where Is Radha?) It can be considered as the peak of the poet’s identification with Radha, the legendary heroine, in her dedication to her lover. It is the story of an age-old search, the search for Krishna who is an integral and inseparable part of Radha’s being. Through ages and generations Radha continues her journey and finally
gets dissolved in the burning souls of all those women who long for perfection in love. Here, the paradoxes of the mundane and the ideal, the real and the mystical, the physical and the immortal, the worldly and the divine help in shaping the vision of the poet.

The poet traces Radha as wandering along the hillsides and planes in a dreamlike, mesmerized state of mind. She knows that her lover is gone and that a reunion with him is not possible. But she is not ready to accept this desperate truth. Instead she endeavours to join him, if not in this life, later, i.e. after so many births and deaths. That is why Radha is reborn as Mira, Chaithanya or Kurooramma and even as any woman of India. She who toils in the fields, she who burns like firewood in the kitchen, she who is dejected, jilted and neglected, is Radha reborn. In a multitude of dialects, voices and tones they sing about Krishna, the most beloved. In other words, it is Eternal Love which we call Krishna, says the poet. But it is a terrible love which reminds us of the Blakian image of "terrible beauty". It attracts the woman, making her forget everything else and drawing her fatally towards him. Having kissed the blue flames of his irresistible charm, they fall down, burnt and broken hearted like moths that are drawn towards fire. Thus, refused time and again, Radha becomes used to her unending predicament and is no more going to beg for his love. She is proud about her love, which no
one can steal from her. She tells Krishna stubbornly that the only thing she wants is love and that

"If you won't give me your love dear,
I won't have your mercy either...."43

This highly emotional poem concludes with the recognition that the only truth is sorrow, but it is made sweet by the relentless search which Radha launches. Time passes by, every thing changes but not Radha's love. Like the earth that revolves round the sun, the feminine conscience of India is centred around Krishna, till eternity. To attain deathless love, of which Krishna is just a synonym, the women of India are striving. Thus the poet's enquiry about Radha, reaches the conclusion that she is reborn as each and every woman of India, and the question that has been haunting Sugathakumari for long, is answered thus. Radha is discovered as living in the heart of every woman in India, waiting to receive her Krishna's love, returning it in greater quantities; she is self-forgetful in love but proud and stubborn if neglected. This concept of the Indian woman as Radha, is true about Sugatha Kumari as a poet also. She has dedicated herself to her great love, i.e. poetry. She awaits its coming ardently, forgets everything else, when the muse blesses her. If rejected, she wanders aimlessly through the maze of life, like a hunted
animal. Hence, Krishna becomes an equivalent for love and poetry alike. Through this dramatic narrative “Radhayevide?” the poet attains the ultimate wisdom that Radha is not any particular woman, but the Eternal Woman seeking perfect love.

The unending pursuit of Krishna or Ideal Love is the life-blood of the women of India, according to the poet. Cherishing the dream that one day he will come to them, these women are ready to endure all the miseries of life uncomplainingly. Even the mis-demeaning features of subordination and subjugation by male dominance do not weaken them. On the other hand, this eternal waiting instils in them an invisible strength and unending patience. This patience is what a seeker of the Ultimate Truth needs most, and Sugatha Kumari’s Radha becomes a symbol of the seeker of the Ultimate Truth.

Thus, love becomes a driving force, a power that leads the woman persona to attain nobler states of mind and greater levels of freedom. In other words, love becomes a synonym for liberation. What she hopes to achieve through love is an escape from all bondages, all dualities and all inhibitions. Love is not a simple passion that binds man and woman, but it is the door to freedom which means salvation. Both
fulfilment in love and dejection in love alike, lead to detachment to "the wise world". Even the abandoned woman lover attains satisfaction by becoming one with her self-forgetful devotion to her man. Even the darkest moment of facing neglect, opens the way to a brighter world. Both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari agree in that.
NOTES


10. ..., 10
11. ..., 15
15. Kamala Das, Only The Soul, 32.
25. ..., 63
26. ..., 95
27. ..., 95
30. ..., 42