CHAPTER V
EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING

Inscrutable are the ways, not only of God, but also of the human mind, and man has, from time immemorial, been puzzled by the enigma of the mind. Even modern science could not unravel the mysterious working of the mind completely. It is popularly believed and later scientifically proved that the mind has wonderful powers, though the majority of humanity has not succeeded in tapping it. The invisible psyche and its functioning have always fascinated man much more than the visible physique. Besides, he came to realize that while the body undergoes changes and is prone to degeneration and decay, the soul is immortal. Its immortality, and its all-pervasiveness, are all regarded as indicative of the soul’s supremacy over physicality, or the external nature of objects.

Man has been able to conquer the universe, thanks to his mental faculties, and even those tasks that involve muscle power require mental
powers too. It is his superior intelligence, power of memory, high degree of concentration and accuracy that have helped him in his conquest of the world. It is the mind that decides the well being of a man, and a person of mental strength and determination cannot be defeated by any adverse circumstances. But the inner world of man that helps him to master the outer world is often afflicted by negative emotions that weaken his capabilities. These black holes in the inscape, like pain, despair, anger, hatred, fear and jealousy swallow up all the brighter aspects. While anger, hatred, fear or jealousy are mental reactions to physical circumstances, pain or suffering can be physical as well as mental experiences.

Most sensitive people are haunted by the problem of pain or suffering in the worldly life, and from the dawn of history itself many theologians, philosophers and creative writers have been baffled by the question of suffering and its impact upon human endeavours. The presence of suffering in its innumerable manifestations is regarded as a retarding force set against the human will in its quest for perfection. All great religions of the world have invariably stressed the value of suffering or pain as a means of redemption. Hinduism considers both pleasure and pain as momentary, dismissing them as insignificant, and suffering is interpreted as life or existence itself. The Bhagvad Gita
exhorts us to follow the path of Karma Yoga, not caring about the material rewards it may bring, and to regard the sufferings and sacrifices in our life as something essential, if we are to achieve realization. It teaches us that sense perceptions and the pleasures derived from them are all transient and that only through non-attachment to the objects of the material world, we can experience eternal bliss.

Buddhism holds the view that the world is full of sorrow, that life is suffering and the very existence is pain. Christianity also considers the trials and tribulations of worldly life as ordained by God; sorrows and hardships are regarded as part of the struggle we have to make in order to attain union with God. The Bible promises heavenly reward for those who undergo suffering in this world. The New Testament asserts:

"Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh."

The Islamic teachings too emphasize the idea of divine reward to those who bear the yoke of suffering and pain with patience.

Great philosophers like Schopenhauer and Hegel also maintain that suffering is the essence of life. Schopenhauer believed that the higher
the organism is in the biological scale, the greater is it destined to suffer, and as consciousness ascends, pain also increases and reaches the highest degree in those human beings endowed with the highest intelligence. Hegel thought that a man comes to exercise his full potential only through “compulsion, responsibilities and suffering.” Existentialism, which is essentially a philosophy of disillusionment and despair, maintains that the whole of human existence is permeated by a tragic anxiety or anguish.

Many great poets all over the world are worried about the question of suffering in this world. It is believed that Valmiki, the first poet of the world composed the first lines of his great epic The Ramayana as he witnessed a hunter shooting down a bird, and its spouse left heartbroken. This legend reminds us that poetry took its origin from grief. Though any corresponding legend about the origin of poetry is lacking in the Western World, many prominent poets of the west, have also discussed the meaning of sorrow in human life. William Shakespeare, the incomparable genius, has explored the different aspects of pain or suffering through his famous tragedies. In "King Lear" he speaks about the helplessness of human situations in most powerful words:
"As flies to wanton boys
Are we to the Gods
They kill us for their sport"  

The Romantic poets of the eighteenth century have given vent to their personal despairs as well as the universal forlornness of man. They have identified the inscrutability of sorrow in human life. P.B. Shelley was the greatest exponent of the concept of an undercurrent of pain in all human experiences. In "Ode to the Westwind“ he writes:

“Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!”

And in “To A Skylark,”

“We look before and after,
And pine for what is not
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught:
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts.”

Another prominent Romantic poet, Keats, also had a gloomy outlook on life as is expressed in his “Ode to Nightingale”. He describes the world as a place,
"Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin, and dies:
Where, but to think is to be full of sorrow"
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where beauty cannot her lustrous eyes,
Or new love pine at them beyond tomorrow.  

Great Indian poets like Sri. Aurobindo and Tagore have considered the problem of suffering in a positive way, as leading to nobler experiences. Aurobindo, who was convinced of the ultimacy of the spirit over the living body, did not overlook the importance of earthly life, but regarded it as a part of the divine plan. To him, pleasures and pains were to be treated alike, as they were both the results of one's action. Tagore considers pain or suffering as tests to be survived by human beings in order "to march forward with triumph" in his journey toward God.

The central experience in Kamala Das's poetry can be said to be an encounter with pain. The experience of pain becomes an obsessive theme for her, and its several manifestations are visible in all her writings. The focus of anguish is invariably centred on the woman persona, in her different roles. Kamala Das successfully portrays pain, both physical and mental, in relation to love, sex, family, quest for
identity, worldly life, illness, old age and death. Pain is depicted as a close companion of the human being, just like one’s shadow. She recognises worldly life as a pattern of the “brute regimentals of sane routine” and even strong men are hurt by its ways. But, always it is the woman, in search of her identity in culturally dichotomised societies, who suffers most.

At the same time, her vision of life is not darkened by the realization that pain is central to earthly life. With the strength of mind of a seeker after truth, she recognises the predominant role of sorrow in the human drama; one after another, she turns the pages of human experiences and discovers that nowhere is pain missing. Yet, she is brave enough to face the challenge of life and to experiment with novel experiences. She accepts pain as the only treasure we carry across being and death; but this eternal burden of pain does not in any way lessen our love for life. Even the pessimistic idea of all-pervasive pain is dealt with in an optimistic mood in Kamala Das’s poetic vision.

As a most sensitive writer, Kamala Das is aware of the fundamental nature of pain or suffering in human life. Whether she writes about her nostalgic past which symbolises security, love and freedom or the barren present which invokes a sense of insecurity,
pretensions and bondage of society, it is always an excavation of "deep, deep, pain" that we find in her poetry. As a young girl, she wrote "sad poems about dolls who lost their heads and had to remain headless for eternity". Without being sentimental and sensational, she reveals her feminine experiences of longing, despair and frustration, thereby creating a feeling of genuine pain which moves the readers. She identifies herself with all that suffers and she feels their suffering selves popping up from within her soul. Her poems, fraught with images of maggots nipping the corpse, terror and fleet of foot rampaging the sedate suburbs, all languages paralysed on the tongue, living without life after having lost love, and nightmares crouching under beds, reflect the poet's anguish. Then, terribly disgusted with the stifling social set up of injustice, inequality and sexual politics, she writes poems of painful protest.

The woman persona, in most of her poems, leads a life of misery and hopelessness and most often, it is because of unrequited love or failure in love. The woman is an eternal seeker of true and pure love; she is a real Radha. The endless waiting, the selfless dedication and the wholehearted sacrifice from her part naturally anticipate similar feelings from the man. But the woman does not receive any love of this kind which she believes is the foretaste of paradise, and "the only pastime
that involves the soul”. When male insensitivity and self-centredness turn love into lust, the woman is deprived of the rapture and excitement that love alone can bring. What the man needs, most often, is satisfaction of his carnal hungers. He does not wait to understand what his partner needs, and is not bothered about the injuries he makes in her soul. These frustrations of the woman, at love being replaced by lust, and its painful reverberations appeared even in the poems in her first volume, Summer in Calcutta itself. Here, a tropical sun scorched world of emaciated emotions, with the terrible heat and dust reflecting the disgust of the poet, is presented. “The Freaks” is one such poem, in which the emptiness of the human soul when real love is wanting is pictured, evolving painful helplessness. The lover in the poem can excite only physical passion, nothing more than “the skin’s lazy hungers”. He is introduced as a man with “sunstained cheek”, a mouth like “a dark cavern” and uneven teeth that look like “stalactites”, suggesting the hot, dark and sharp lustfulness of male love. What the woman needs is the consolation of love, which her lover is unable to give. With all the pain of despair she says that their minds “are willed to race towards love/But they only wander, tripping idly over puddles of desire....” For her there is no rescue from this helpless situation and thus she confesses:
"...Who can
Help us who have lived so long
And have failed in love?"}

In “The Testing of the Sirens”, one of the early poems in which the search for an eternal lover begins, we find another shallow love-drama enacted. Here, the lover, with pockmarked face, takes the woman for an outing, and what greets them in the street is the sound of the sirens, which resembles the wailing of an unhappy soul. She tries to weave the sound with that of the lover’s mirthless laughter. The eternal tragedy of love turning into lust at every encounter between the lovers, which is suggested by the phallic symbol of the “rusty nineteen thirty four guns”, happens here also. Time and again disappointed in love, the woman becomes totally indifferent towards life, and she learns to smile in her disappointment. For, now she can wear a smile like a flower, as it is such a detached thing for her. But, this smile is only superfluous, as there is “no more light, no more love, or peace” within her soul. Still again, love comes to her like pain, burning down her very existence. This coordination of love and pain is a decisive factor in the poetry of Kamala Das; pain becomes a synonym for love, and its irresistibility is emphasized. Even when the woman persona knows that she will not get any happiness or peace of mind out of love,
she can only witness it entering her world and subjugating her. Thus, when she writes,

"Ah, why does love come to me like pain again, and again and again?" 12

it is the concept of identifying love with pain that is presented. But in spite of her identification with pain and love, she cannot accept love being transformed into fear. That is why she asks, in "The End of Spring",

"............. what is the use of love, all this love, if all it gives is Fears, the fear of storms asleep in you, And me the fear of hurting you?" 13

She who regards love as liberation, as freedom from all fear, cannot accept love that causes fear. The pain of love may be sweet, but love being transformed into fear is agonizing.

Bertrand Russell has recognized love as having a unique place in human life. In *Marriage and Morals* he comments:

"Love is the principal means of escape from the loneliness which afflicts most men and women throughout the greater part of their lives."
There is a deep-seated fear, in most people, of the cold world, and the possible cruelty of the herd: "Passionate mutual love puts an end to this feeling."  

But when the poet finds love generating fear, though of another kind, she is disillusioned.

Kamala Das’s obsession with the idea of pain is closely associated with her preoccupation with the theme of love, loneliness and frustration. Adil Jusswala has remarked that she writes almost exclusively of “love, sex and loneliness.” The sense of loneliness is so basic in her poetry that it can be, to some extent, traced back to her childhood days, when she thought that she was a neglected child—a child born “of an arid union of parents who were dissimilar and mismated.” She believed that the parents often took the children for granted and considered them as “mere puppets.” Moreover, as a child she was haunted by a sense of physical inferiority because of her dark complexion. This has its psychological impact on her as her own words seem to indicate: “I was born fair, but within weeks, like the rolled gold bangles on the poor ladies’ arms my skin grew tarnished I was the first dark girl in the family there was something tainted in me of this I was aware.” She believed that she was never properly loved as a child. Most of the time she was lonely, longing for the company of her parents. As her mother left Calcutta,
following a severe attack of typhoid, with the younger children, and her elder brother went to Madras to study medicine, she alone stayed in Calcutta. Those were very unhappy and lonely days for her. In *My Story* she writes: "Whenever all of us got together and began to feel secure, some cruel illogical destiny always rudely brought the edifice down like a house of cards". 

When she got married at the age of sixteen, she hoped that she would find love in the new relationship. What she expected from her husband was "Conversation, companionship and warmth". But it was again, the pain of despair and terrible disillusionment that she derived out of marriage, instead of a sense of fulfilment. This sense of disillusionment in her personal life must have had its impact on her poetic vision and thus have enkindled her preoccupation with the theme of pain and love.

"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" writes Paniker. This wild shriek of despair is heard every time when love is replaced by lust. In "Summer 1980" she speaks about the destruction of all that was beautiful and dear and "the malevolent/Alchemy of the city air/
Aided in, turning gold to Lead". The gold of love is transformed into the lead of lust by the alchemy of modern life and familiar, caressing hands themselves bring about death and destruction. Here we are reminded of the terrible summer that dries up all the wetness of life and generates "fear in a handful of dust" as in "The Waste Land".

In "The Suicide", we find the woman persona being fed up with a life of pretentious role-acting. What she expects from life is the warmth of love, and if she cannot have it, she prefers to die.

Her sense of loneliness becomes a symbol of her preoccupation with the theme of pain. Her woman persona experiences isolation even in the midst of people, she feels an inner silence even when voices fill the air. Nobody recognises her inner aloofness and reads the meaning of her deep silence. In "The Anamala Hills" she identifies her woman persona with the mist covered lonely mountains, and she hears the mountain whispering.

"I was alone, I am alone, I will be alone............."  

In "Ghanasnyam", again the woman persona feels that she is alone, lying beside her husband. She knows that sex is only a
“husk game” for them, since it does not involve their souls. This soulless game naturally ends in bitterness and isolation. She writes,

“At three in the morning
I wake trembling from dreams of a stark white loneliness
Like bleached bones cracking in the desert sun is my loneliness,”

Thus, it is the absence of “soulful” or spiritual love that throws the woman persona to desperate loneliness and it is the sense of inner loneliness that makes the poet write frequently about pain or grief. This love-loneliness-pain triangle forms the basic structure of Kamala Das’s poetry.

The poem “The Bats” also expresses her deep-rooted anguish at not having received true love. She recognises the frightened flight of her soul as the one initiated by a loveless, hostile world. Like a bat that finds itself wandering in an alien zone of bright light, her soul lost its way in the hypocritical world. To experience true love was only a dream she always had, but often she was awakened from that dream rudely, and expelled from “warm human love.”

The concept that all experiences and activities are ultimately fraught with some degree of painful feeling, and that worldly existence
is essentially sorrowful is maintained in many of her poems. Instances of human predicament strike the poet, as she discovers that we live in a world, where "laughter is crazed with pain", where "we are not going to be/ever redeemed", where "those who do not believe" are slain, where even the name of God is "purified in the unbeliever's blood" and where "the heaviest luggage/they tote is pain". Being surrounded by an unfriendly world, she is eager to escape to somewhere else.

The poet is disillusioned when she is confronted by the hostility of the world. She recognises the insincerity of people, the shallow and superfluous nature of human relationship as the outcome of the crisis in modern civilisation. In "Ode to a Lynx" she gives vent to her desire to flee from such a civilisation.

"Civilisation irks me with its cunning ways
I connect only with candour."27

But nowhere is candour respected, or openness welcomed. People have learned to accept artificiality, and nobody is prepared to seek truth, if it involves any risk. Their life style is dull and commonplace, beginning with morning tea and ending with satisfying their lust. The poet is shocked by this kind of frozen life, and she is unwilling to
call such people, the members of the distinguished human race. She feels she can no more tolerate them. Thus she writes,

"Let anger grow like a living sun
And scorch
Scorch to the very marrow
this sad mouthed human race".28

In these poems where the poet expresses her dissatisfaction at the ways of the world, fear, disgust and pain become one. When, neither the civilized society nor individuals do give any value to unselfish relationships, the poet who expects better understanding, deeper relationships and compassion is disappointed. If civilization simply means categorizing people and asking them to perform certain roles, she wonders why there should be a civilization at all. If love is confined to enacting the role assigned to one or satisfying the lust of one's partner in life, such love is meaningless.

Her quest for love and its real meaning consequently leads her to the fundamental question of the meaning or reality of life. For her, the act of writing is the only means of affirming reality, and thus, turning inwards she writes her poems with a quest for her real identify. She also addresses herself to basic questions as the cause of failure and
the nature of freedom. She is aware that these questions do not have any definite answers and that there is no way out of her tormented inner world. The endless questions that haunt a person who seeks his or her identity or real place in the fast moving, inconsiderate world never find an answer. In the poem "Nani" she writes:

"...\ldots.\ldots... Each Truth

Ends thus with a query. It is this designed

Deafness that turns mortality into

Immortality, the definite into

The soft indefinite. They are lucky

Who ask questions and move on before

The answers come, those wise ones who reside

In a blue silent zone, unscathed by doubts."\textsuperscript{29}

Her hunger for identifying her place in the world leads to the discovery that as a woman she is not free to choose her roles, but is asked to

"Dress in Sarees, be girl

Be wife ................." \textsuperscript{30}
And such humiliating experiences make her react strangely. Thus she “wore a shirt, cut (my) hair short and ignored all / the womanliness”.

This spirit of nonconformity leads to anguish and her “sad woman body felt so beaten” and finally she “shrank pitifully”.

The pivotal experience in Sugatha Kumari’s poetic vision also is that of pain and she believes pain to be the sum and substance of worldly existence. She has dealt with a multitude of themes in her poems, like Nature, nationalism, people and places she has known, the universal brotherhood of man etc, but the essence of her urge to write seems to be an awareness of an all-pervading pain or sorrow. The Malayalam word for ‘pain’ or its synonyms appears at least once in almost all her poems. Even in such poems that discuss cheerful themes, we find the idea of pain entering unexpectedly. And, this obsession with the theme of pain is, to some extent, based upon the strong foundation of the ancient wisdom of India, and she writes about it, in the preface to Irulchirakukal.

“All the doctrines of Hinduism, that we are fed upon, along with our mothers’ breast milk, are those of hopefulness and faith. Still all of them invariably brand this earthly life as sorrowful, as mere pain. Each human relationship is only a different shade of the Eternal Pain”.

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Sugatha Kumari believes that the entire universe with its living and non-living constituents, is designed as the pattern of a painful search for something indefinitely remote. Whether it is the life of a human being, commencing in the helplessness of infancy and ending up with the devastation of old age, or the endeavours of love to achieve its goal, or the flameward flight of moths, or the rotation of the earth on its axis, Sugatha Kumari believes it to be the repetition of the eternal quest for something beyond the physical world. This quest is always one of agony and suffering but it is a means and route to a great goal, the attainment of which will relieve us of all pain. So the poet is willing to wear the crown of thorns and sing songs in praise of sorrow.

Sugatha Kumari has portrayed pain in all its dimensions, and in all its different shades. The theme of pain, whether personal or universal, is the fulcrum of her poetic perspective. In many of her poems, the outpourings of her personal woes form the content, disclosing the pulse beats of the poet’s psyche. Her poems give us the impression that creativity springs from an overwhelming unhappiness or discontent with the external environment that compels the writer to seek fulfilment of his/her instinctive images through creative writing. She even identifies this innate vexation of the writer with creativity that results in the birth of classics. She has written profusely about the bitter
experiences in her life, and the aching soul within. Also she has written about the grief-stricken world, the hardships of the downtrodden and atrocities towards women, children and Nature. Thus, Sugatha Kumari is exposing the miscellaneous faces of misery that prey upon the living world, through her poetry.

The portrayal of grief in her poems has a wide range, spread across all her ten collections. Sometimes she sings about the inextinguishable heartache that inspires creativity, and sometimes it is the riddle of human suffering that bothers her or it may be the tragedy of growth, old age or the painful enigma of death.

Her preoccupation with the theme of pain is inseparably linked with her treatment of love. She considers love to be the basic principle that guides the universe, the driving force behind all creativity and the essence of human life. Love in all its different forms, is celebrated in her poems, but it is man-woman love that is recognized as the crux of life, as the only thing that does not become uninteresting and insipid due to repetition. At the same time, she does not visualize love as joyous or cheerful, but as an inner ache, a wound that never heals, and this wound of love always gives sorrow. It seems that Sugatha Kumari finds love and pain identical, as both represent the different phases of
the same inner urge. This urge of the spirit to explore the unknown and to experience real solace, results in great inner torment for the seeker. But the poet seems to prefer the agony of love, to the aridity of the soul caused by the absence of love.

Sugatha Kumari is a major poet who has written so much love poetry and she has, like a visionary, realized the true greatness of love. Man-woman love is given a special place in her poetry, as she considers it to be the path leading to spiritual realization. For her, both love and pain are interrelated and one is inseparable from the other. Often both are identified with each other, as both ennoble the human soul equally well. In “Padangal” (The Feet), it is the experience of walking in the rain in summer which is depicted. Here the protagonist is a young man, sauntering along the busy street in a hot burning afternoon. All of a sudden, the sky darkens and a torrential downpour begins. Then the girl whom he was awaiting arrives, her pretty little feet washed and caressed by rainwater. He watches her from a distance as she walks away, longing for her touch, desiring to become a drop of water that soaks her feet. He expresses his wish as,
"To be a droplet of water,
To be shattered on your
Lotus like little feet
I feel the terrible pain of longing..."\textsuperscript{33}

Here, pain disguised as longing emerges from the depth of the lover’s heart and he merges with pain.

Again, in "Anuragam" (Love) the woman persona identifies herself as the personification of pain; intensely in love with her man; her devotion is described as the rhythmic movement of the waves or “the sad-joy of a feeble, little flower”\textsuperscript{34}. She contrasts the momentary nature of life, the forlornness and uncertainty that confront her, with the eternity of love which gives her a sad pleasure.

In "Ivalkku Mathramay" (For Her Alone) the portrait of woman as daughter, sweetheart, wife, mother and friend, is depicted. She brings solace to all around her, brings up her children and cares for the family up to the last moment of her life. But hers is an unrewarded work and her life is fraught with painful experiences. All her personal joys are sacrificed for the sake of her family, which does not acknowledge her unselfish services. Here we are reminded of Kamala Das’s "Goat"
in which the woman persona faces a similar predicament. Still, she does not regret or feel disillusioned, as she believes that, selfless love is the greatest goal, and that it is superior, even to God. She expects to be consoled by none other than Time, the great leveller. Sugatha Kumari wishes to dedicate a poem for this woman, who is actually every woman who suffers, serves and sacrifices. But, she adds, even that wish may not come to fruition, since despair is the natural outcome of all wishes. 

“Ninne Njanetu Cheyyatte?” (What Shall I Do With You?) in Ambalamani is a poem, celebrating the nobility and dignity of love; the woman persona, in spite of the benevolent nature of love, realizes its futility and innate desolation. Recollecting the kaleidoscopic patterns of love scattered all through the years of her life, she discovers that all its grandeur was in vain. Addressing Death or Time, she says,

“Oh, lord, what else to do,
Other than submitting
To your deep blue embrace
My love, this shy and dignified
Sorrow of mine.........”

Thus, love, the bosom companion of the woman persona, is identified as a “Great Sorrow” and once again she proclaims that pain or sorrow is only a synonym for love.
Sugatha Kumari's concept of love is mainly based on the legend of Krishna, the ideal lover, or the perfection in man-woman relationship and the ultimate bliss any woman may yearn for. In adoring Krishna, she becomes his Radha, searching for him through ages, through her songs. Most of her Radha Krishna poems have an undercurrent of melancholy, echoing Radha's endless, futile search for her lover. Her Radha represents, both the long awaiting, love-lorn woman and the willing spirit of surrender which is the very first step towards spiritual evolution. The woman persona in the love-poetry of Sugatha Kumari realises that her Krishna's love is the last resort for her, even though it may crush her personality and being. In fact, the crux of her poetry is the quest for a reunion with Krishna, the ideal, transcendental lover. The urge for this quest, like an open wound, causes her immense pain, and she bears up the pain, hoping to achieve her aim only through suffering. Such a willing acceptance of suffering in order to attain union with the Ultimate Reality is certainly the result of the impact of the Oriental vision of transcendentalism and mysticism.

The concept of the willing acceptance of pain or suffering associated with love is beautifully portrayed in "Krishna, Neeyennenariyilla" (Krishna, You Do Not Know Me). The woman persona, a resident of Vrindaban, worships Krishna with all her heart,
but she does not feel like expressing it. When the music of his flute fills the night air, when the other 'gopikas' sing, dance and enjoy themselves with him, when the whole of Vrindaban pulsates with the charm of their love-drama, she alone sits in her little hut, shedding tears of joy, feeling content in her abnegation, in denying herself all the physical pleasures. By subjugating the physical element of love to the spiritual and thereby experiencing an acute pain within, she is satisfied in her own way. The picture of love generating pain and, subsequently pain bringing about contentment is beautifully presented in this poem.

"I placed you in my mind, and
Worshipped you, submitted even my soul."[37]

This total surrender, with no hope of gaining anything, is the ultimate reality of true devotion; the pain of losing everything and the pain of being unrecognised become the culmination of devotion, as it leads to the devotee's attaining realization.

Another poem in which the glorification of the love-pain theme is successfully employed is "Vazhiyambalathile Pattu" (The Song At The Inn). It is a dark and rainy night threatened by fierce lightning and heavy storms, and the woman persona is all alone in an inn, singing devotional songs. The terrible atmosphere does not frighten her,
as she believes that all these are part of Krishna's "leela". Throwing herself at his feet, and surrendering her life of sorrows, she is sure that this pain of love which has made her immortal, is the most valuable thing in her life. She is also confident that nothing, even death could touch her, when the dark music of love throbs within her soul.\(^{38}\).

Krishna, the perfect lover, is not the one who gives everything, but the one who takes everything away. He makes his devotees virtual have-nots, taking away all their wealth - not only material, but intellectual and spiritual also. Only when his devotee has nothing and nobody other than him, only when his/her body and mind are laid at his feet, with absolute humility, he will accept him/her. The renunciation of all worldly possessions and all the signs of the ego, leading to fulfilment is the theme of the poem "Yamuna Theere" (On The Banks of the Yamuna).

"If you want to see Him
Go to Vrindaban, with silent steps
Surrender yourself at His feet
Offer Him everything you have, and
His mischievous lovely eyes will be
Full of tears of mercy ..."\(^{39}\)
In “Syama Radha” (Dark Radha) also, the identification of pain with love is the central theme. Following the Indian tradition of regarding love as self-negating, if it is to be ideal love, Sugatha Kumari considers it as another facet of pain. Here, this pain alias love is celebrated, for the poet believes that blessed are those who can love and suffer. In an ascetic manner, she welcomes pain, refuting the glitter and gloss of earthly pleasures. In “Ente Manassinte Ponnambalahtilum” (In The Golden Temple of My Mind Also) Krishna is pictured as the beloved one who gives love and pain to those who worship him. The fire of terrors burns all around, the woman persona is panic-stricken, but her lord is indifferent to all these. She cries out,

“It's only a child's play,
This terrible pain, for you,
But, my lord, it is
Deadly fire for me!”

The long narrative poem “Radhayevide?” (Where is Radha?) presents the most profound analysis of the love-pain theme, among the writings of Sugatha Kumari. Radha, after being deserted by her lover, wanders aimlessly, stops by the Himalayas for a while, and climbs down to the plains, where she falls down dead
and her soul, broken into a million bits, is reborn in age after age. In each and every birth, Radha’s new incarnations are engaged in an endless quest for a reunion with Krishna. Each time, the love-pain struggle becomes a temptation, a challenge and an end for the seeker. Radha’s love-life is one of intense joy and immense suffering; even in the most cheerful moments she doesn’t feel free from her preoccupation with grief. While on a swing, with her lover, Radha remembers,

"Our bodies are one, our hearts one
The sparkle of our eyes one, our souls one
It is true we are one; but your
Joyous smile and my burning grief will never be one..." 

When reborn as Mira, her suffering becomes more acute, as she cannot even meet her lover physically. Her frenzied singing and dancing make people brand her as insane, but Mira, unaffected by rumours, rejoices in that “Krishna has enkindled an ever burning fire within her”. Even her lord is aware of the love pain struggle within the seeker, that he tells here that,

"Nothing equals this wonderfully
Sweet and sorrowful love..."
Then, the poet, intent upon finding out what happened to the grief-stricken Radha, comes to the conclusion that every woman of India, who suffers from male insensitivity, insincerity or neglect, and dreams of the ideal lover, is none other than Radha. The female psyche of India is, thus, engaged in a strenuous search to discover the perfect lover; the search may not be fruitful, yet Sugatha Kumari, on behalf of the women of India asserts,

"The pain is the ultimate truth, but
It is sweet, it is the greatest blessing."^{43}

By accepting pain soulfully as the weapon to fight disillusionment, Sugatha Kumari reaches a philosophical height as advised by The Bhagavad Gita in the following lines.

"Sukh-dukhe same kritva
Labhalabhau jayajayau
Tato yudhaya yujyasva
Naivam papam avapsyasi."^{44}

(Pleasure and pain are to be treated alike, like gain and loss, or victory or defeat. What matters is the willingness to fight. If that is done, you incur no sin)
Not only worldly involvements like love, but devotion to God also is recognised as identical to pain. The more the devotee is attached to God, the greater become the trials he/she has to face. In “Gajendra Moksham” (Salvation of the Elephant-King) the agony of suffering which lasts for a very long time becomes an intense prayer, and devotion is interpreted as facing the worst. In “Kaliya Mardanam” (The Taming of Kaliya) it is a tug of war between the ego of man and the awareness of the need for God realisation that is pictured. What Kaliya, the venomous serpent requests Krishna is to defeat him by stamping on his hood and crumbling it. The hood does not fall, the ego does not accept defeat easily, and it tries to rise up, time and again, but to achieve God, all concern for one’s ego is to be done away with, and this wiping off incurs great pain. The pain of subjugation, of total surrender and of absolute self-denial is sought after here.

In Sugatha Kumari, the identity crisis is of another kind as it discusses the purposelessness of the speaker’s existence. Here we don’t find the society or its individual members interfering with and staking claim of the poetic persona’s ideas and actions. No attempt to categorise is made, nor is the persona prevented from doing what she likes. But the crisis arises from the fact that the society does not realize the purpose and meaning of the poetic persona’s ideas, and deeds.
The world is too busy to listen to the feeble voice of righteousness that comes from the poet. It is the pageantry of power, the pomp of wealth and the gimmicks of insincere relationships that receive admiration now a days. The poet's unassuming voice that tries to arouse, encourage and admonish is often neglected; thus she feels that her identity is unrecognised. The woman persona in Sugatha Kumari's poetry is mostly a lonely traveller, upholding the ideas of love, compassion and reverence for Nature; her solitary speech often falls flat on the ears that are deafened by the world's din. But it is not totally unheeded, as she is aware of the presence of somebody who recognizes her voice as akin to his. The long waiting for recognition and the disappointment resulting from the lack of it are there, but a streak of light flashes across the darkness, and hence the question of identity in the poems of Sugatha Kumari is not so menacing as in Kamala Das. In "Akale Ninnoru Sugantham" (A Fragrance From Afar) she feels that the so-called gentlemen may call her creativity, which is as natural as a breeze, the night and the fragrance of flowers, sheer madness; but as this madness brings her solace, she says,

"I who can sing, I who is a poet
Is fortunate, and content, and let me laugh"
Here we are reminded of Kamala Das’s Justification of her poetry as expressed in the poem “An Introduction”. The so called “critics, friends and visiting cousins” warn her not to write in English; but she is ready with her reply that the language she speaks becomes hers. She retorts,

“It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest. It is as human as I am human”.

Again, in “Pazhmaram” (The Useless Tree) the poet confesses that the lush green of youthfulness and the blossoms of dreams are no more in her writings. The devastating draught has dried her twigs rendering her lifeless. Still, she retains a tinge of spring in her heart, and despite her deprivities she can play host to the winged singers. Though the world considers the tree to be useless, it enjoys sharing the tears and laughter of life around it.

The Devadasi poems of Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari show a striking similarity in their analyses of the subdued voices of “devadasi” or the handmaids of God. In both their poems, the women personae are in their old age, reminiscing their lives of unfulfilled dreams and passions. The hopeful, tumultuous days are over, replaced by silent
resignment. The devadasi in Kamala Das’s poem, “Lines Addressed to a Devadasi” finds that all faces, people, trees and lakes look alike, and desires die out giving way to a growing urge of homesickness. The love-lorn old woman in Kamala Das’s poem is sitting on the temple steps, waiting for the final release, while in Sugatha Kumari’s poem, “Devadasi”, the woman persona, squatting on the steps leading to the temple, longs to sing before her Lord, before she falls down dead. Hers had been a tale of long waiting, and a tedious quest for happiness, but her waiting was never rewarded, nor was her quest fulfilled and she had to return empty-handed. In “Devadasi” Sugatha Kumari also portrays the elderly “devadasi”, squatting on the temple steps brooding over her losses.47

It is the problem of identity crisis of woman and the anguish emanating from it, that find expression in the Devadasi poems of both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari. In an institutionalised and mechanical society, selfless love or devotion is often unacknowledged, and nobody, not even the person worshipped, realises its value. Being aware of the meaninglessness of their existence, these women recede from the world’s bustle. The Devadasi poems of both these writers haunt us through their sense of utter helplessness, resulting from unrequited love.
But it is not always about the pain resulting from love or failure in love that Kamala Das writes. Pain or fear caused by factors other than love, is also there. Old age is something that bothers her very much, and the withering away of youthfulness seems to frighten her. She seems to fear that love in her soul will also dry up and wither away with the ageing process. It is not because she is relating love to the body or confining it to the physical level, but because she considers love as a synonym for beauty. The soulless lover in "Freaks" is described as ugly and his insincerity and lustfulness are represented by dark, cavernous mouth and uneven teeth. The passage of time, as she calls it, seems to disturb her; wrinkling skin and eyes blinded by cataract—indicating the irrevocable loss of beauty which threatens her with the loss of love too. In "Gino" she pictures herself as an old, "fat kneed hag in the long bus queue/The one from whose shopping bag the mean potato must/Roll across the road". Also she observes that her body shall wither "battling with/My darling’s impersonal lust". The chillness of her partner’s lust which she has to satisfy regularly, makes her body dull and ageing; it is a process of ugliness generating ugliness again. In "The Cart-Horse" the loneliness and despair of old age is expressed. The woman persona is being taken home, after spending some three weeks in hospital, and on her way home, she finds old cattle driven to slaughterhouses. At once, she
realizes that the vermillion brands on their shoulder are not different from the electro cardiograph and sedatives which patients carry home often in illness.

Kamals Das discusses the problem of the painful experiences of the aged in her short stories also. Women in their old age, neglected by their children are pictured in her stories. In "Koladu" (The Goat) the woman is so worn out by her household work that she resembles a goat or "koladu", as she is contemptuously called by her husband and sons. She does not receive an affectionate word or a soothing touch in her hardship. Even on her deathbed, she is not free, but bound inseparably to the endless household chores; she is worried about the food that is getting burnt in the kitchen. Throughout her life, she has been considered not as a human being, but as a household utensil that is worn away with time; the greatest pity of all is that she too can evaluate herself only like that.

The painful predicament of being a woman is portrayed in different colours in all her writings, and the double predicament of a woman in her old age is expressed here. Having lived a life of not her own, she is destined to die a lonely death. Neglect has been her lot all through her life, and now in old age also, the situation does not change.
At the same time, she is unable to free herself from her “supposed duties” and die a peaceful death. In “The Word is Sin” Kamala Das writes about women in cancer wards who resemble “branded cattle” on their last long walk as

“remembering more than all
their new kitchen sinks” \[51\]

Kamala Das does not offer any panacea to cure the malady of neglect and marginalization faced by women. She believes that love alone can be a solution, and that men—“fair conquerors of another’s country”—should be broadminded enough to recognize the female of the species as human beings just like them. By harping on the theme of man’s neglect of woman, and the dwarfing of her personality as a result, Das is suggesting that a little care and understanding can enhance her growth as an individual.

For Kamala Das, both life and poetry are only two forms of the search for something eternal, something imperishable. But most often, that ‘something’ is elusive, and the search becomes fruitless, reaching nowhere. If that goal is not achieved, life is meaningless and when the time comes for one to leave this world, his or her hands will be empty.
In a “A Cask of Nothing” the woman persona comes to realize that her love, an empty gift, a gilded empty container' will have nothing to hold; the only content that the cask can contain is

"the nothing that resides
as an ache within” 51

Here she is very close to the Vedanta philosophy of India which preaches that the earthly life is unreal or ‘Maya’ and all emotions make a person addicted to this ‘Maya’. The only gift this ‘Maya’ can give one is sorrow, and the more one gets involved in earthly life, the greater becomes his/her sorrows. A person who wastes away his/her life, running after pleasures, like children tracing their shadows, will find at the end that his/her hands, and soul are empty. “An ache within” will be what remains at the end. Her obsession with the theme of pain attains a new dimension, and hence her quest for that “something everlasting” has deeper meanings.

Closely associated with the theme of pain is the concept of death in her poetry. She concretises the vague, mysterious fears that lurk in the human psyche on the abstract concept of death. She brings out the plain reality of death through the images of preying birds and wailing carnivores. Death, in all its dimensions, is presented in her poetry. She
speaks about the built-in terrors of her mind which swoop down on her from the tree tops at dusk and about large birds of prey which perch with rustling claws and an all-knowing gaze in the kitchen’s unlit corners. The carnivores wail louder and louder till “and the oft, repeated baby-cry fades out of life/quick like a vast pain swallowing a minor one”. She visualizes death as a close companion of the living, existing in every moment, in every part. Like one’s shadow, it never parts, and strikes at some unexpected moment, as a “sudden drought” that dries up the “estuaries of blood”. She does not think that death has any grandeur, she refuses to admit that death is awe-inspiring, she feels that

“Death is/So mediocre, any fool can achieve
It effortlessly”^52

Here she resembles John Donne who expressed his opinion of death as “Death Be Not Proud” in his “Ode to Death”. Though death itself is not ugly, the vulgarities of the final rites are enough to disgust the aesthetic minded- “the slow unwrapping of the carcass, the flabby thighs, the sagging breasts or the surgery scars”.

Kamala Das resembles Sugutha Kumari in that she does not look upon death as the tragedy of life; it is growth which is the real tragedy,
according to her. Growth is an awakening, an awareness about life and its limitations and drawbacks. As one grows, he grows out of the need for love, the need for every thing tender and comes to discover “that the old have black-rimmed nails/and scalps from which emanate/a sweet mouldy smell”53. The poet realizes that death brings about no great change to the human being, as the human being is not his body. The skeleton, the flesh, or the hair may all be alike, but it is the soul that is different from person to person. The exterior or the covering of the soul will decompose, but the soul escapes death, unscathed. And the soul carries with it, all the pain that has long been there, in its after-death journey. She advises her readers to fall in love with the most unsuitable person and experience utter despair in every move and in every moment. By doing so, they will be excavating “deep, deep pain” which is actually an inseparable part of the human soul. Here, she seems to suggest that pain has got a purgatory or redeeming effect upon human life. Like fire that burns down everything, devouring all impurities, pain also purifies the human soul, burning down the darker aspects of it. In a way, she is echoing the concept of asceticism that self-imposed punishment or suffering can lead to salvation. In other words, she is recognising pain as an essential part of the human soul, which is immortal.
“The ultimate discovery will be
that we are immortal
the only things mortal being
systems and arrangements,
even our pains continuing
in the devourers who constitute
the world”  

Her belief in the immortality of soul and the continuity and permanence of life is evident in these lines. In many of her poems, death envisaged as a journey, a long crossing, the only one claimant for all mortals, can be seen and she considers death to be a great healer, a great leveller. (At the same time, we find her losing heart at the death of her husband, in poems like “Stock Taking”, “A Widow’s Lament”, “A Feminist’s Lament” etc.) She even goes to the extent of recognising death as God, looking beyond the momentariness of ‘the chilling flesh, the funeral pyre’s rapid report and the mourners’ vanquished stance’. She who believes love to be the greatest blessing and the noblest goal, realizes that “there is a love greater than all you know that awaits you where the red road finally ends” and that once again the soul finds some womb ready to welcome it. Thus love and death become synonyms for God, the noblest and the most soothing experience mortals
can dream of. It is the pain that ends all other, lesser pains—the rivulets of pain uniting to form the final, indefinite ocean of pain. When she says that “its embrace is truth”, she is actually echoing the Vedantic concept of worldly life as unreal.

In Muthuchippi, Sugatha Kumari’s first collection, there are poems which deal with the theme of the sorrowful nature of worldly life. Discussing the impermanence of joy and the silliness of human endeavours, she feels that it is mere waste of time and energy to seek gratification of desires, during the short life span. In “Pazhayoru Katha” (An Old Story) she portrays a traveller being hunted by dangers trying to grasp the little pleasures he can have, greedily. He has fallen into a deep pit which houses venomous snakes; a ferocious tiger is about to jump on him. He is clinging desperately to a small herb, the roots of which are gnawed by two rats. It is a paradox that even when besieged by such deadly terrors, he is craving for the tiny drops of honey that trickle down from a tree. He whispers,

“Into my mouth then drizzled
Drops of honey, I cried
‘Oh what a pleasure! and God
Hearing my words would have laughed!”

55
Certainly, Sugatha Kumari was influenced by the vision of Ezhuthachan, the father of Malayalam language, who sang,

"Like a frog that is caught in the mouth
Of a snake, begging for a meal" 56

are we human beings, crazy about worldly, pleasures, forgetting the momentary nature of life and the imminence of death

In "Indrajalam" (Magic), one of her early poems, she realizes that the background music of worldly life is sorrow. It does not mean that the poet is overlooking the brighter sides of life—which projects itself through the opening of a flower, or the dawning of a new day. But all such promises subsequently lead to the inevitable end—flowers withering away and days fading into night. Still, the poet does not disdain this world of sorrows, since it is the will of God that has designed it like that. In "Sukham" (Pleasure) she emphasizes her doctrine of interpreting earthly life as a handful of sorrows. All through their lives, men rush after pleasures, not realizing that they may vanish before them, like a mirage. The longing for pleasures burns their souls and finally they are left crippled so that they cannot strive for any greater goal. In "Athraykku Thamassil Njan" (I Am In That Much Darkness) again, she gives vent to similar feelings about worldly life. Here also, she
recollects the transitory nature of human life and asserts her faith in life after death. She is sure that all mundane affairs are unreal or ‘Maya’, the pleasure and pains of earthly life irrelevant, and the Ultimate Reality is beyond human knowledge. Like the great yogis, she requests God Almighty to free her from the fallacy that earthly life is real. And her prayer that,

"The chain that binds my body
shouldn’t be thought of as binding my soul,
this iron-cage be not misread as
my real home, and the sheer pain, my true self”  

reveals her desire to rise above all worldly bondages. Also, she is positively expressing her faith in the purposefulness of human life, as it has a great goal to achieve, and not to perish through illusionary bondages.

The influence of the Hindu philosophical concept of earthly life as unreal, the transcendence of soul and the existence of a superior soul or “Paramatma”, is obvious in these lines. The poet believes that the soul is something that cannot be bound by chains or defeated. Her words echo the concept of soul as expressed by The Bhagavad Gita.
“Nainom Chindandi Sastrani,
Nainom Dahathi Pavaka,
Na Chainam Cledayantia po
Na Shoshayati Marutha”58

(The soul cannot be cut by arrows, nor be burnt by fire; it cannot be dissolved by water, nor be dispersed by wind)

Sugatha Kumari believes that creativity springs from a painful restlessness that disturbs the writer eternally. The indefinable anguish which is another name for creativity has become the central idea in many of her poems. In the poems “Dhanyatha” (Contentment) the poet recognises the spark of creativity in her soul as an innate pain and endeavours to celebrate it.

“Oh tell me, in which moment
My song rose up
I don’t know how to praise
That moment, that pain, that
Sweet agony, that excitement
That intoxicating sad joy, that
Infinity; oh, how shall I praise it!” 59
She realises that her poetic art is a divine gift she is entrusted with, in order to articulate the woes of the world. Thus, according to Sugatha Kumari, her poetry is inspired by her inborn melancholy; and she believes that had there been no such anguish within, she would not have been a creative writer.

In the “Puthiya Pathalam” (The New Hell) also she refers to the melancholic nature of creative writing and refers to poets as “visionaries doleful” who sing with shivering voices. In “Anuragam” (Love) she describes poetic disposition as one of intense gloom and brands herself as sorrow itself.

“Why I love you, with my eyes
With my heart, with my
Weeping life, with my soul
Why I who am sorrow, love you?”

In the “Naivedyam” (Offering) she names the poetic spirit, “a wound of sorrow” inflicted by Krishna, and confesses that her poetry is that of bitterness, which she offers with all her heart at his feet. The poem “Veyil Vazhi” (The Sunlit Path) discusses the philosophical problem how to recover from the maladies of despair, fear and pain
whereupon the poet is reminded of the solution suggested by the great teachers, as to love, to sing and to pray. With the wisdom of a seer, she asserts that these three mean the same, i.e., to seek and achieve God through love and prayer. Here again, she refers to her poetry as “salty with tears”, indicating the bleeding heart and the craving soul behind it, as also universalising her themes. In “Nattu Maranna Vithu” (A Seed Planted and Forgotten) the poet speaks about the genesis of her poems explicitly; the seeds of grief that the poet has sown in the fertile soil of her mind, sprout as new life. It is a resurrection of the spirit of grief, as poetry, which aims at delighting or at least bringing solace to the world. She sings,

“My decaying sorrows have become
Flowers and music that swing in the air
And the air sprinkles coolness around
And those flowers spread honey and fragrance”...

Here we find the poet feeling relaxed in that her personal woes that are buried deep in her soul emerge as melodious music which offers consolation to the suffering humanity. Her favourite concept of wilful suffering for the welfare of mankind, as expressed through the image of Lord Siva who swallowed poison to save the world, is voiced here
also. Plants' benign way of swapping carbon dioxide for oxygen during photosynthesis aimed at keeping the planet healthy and providing sustenance to the animal world is another instance of self-forgetful service.

It seems that Sugatha Kumari is basically melancholic in her attitude towards life, and this spirit of melancholy may be an individual peculiarity. Also, her close acquaintance with Hindu philosophy and the Vedantic perception of worldly life as sorrowful, acquired in the early years of her life, would have contributed to the development of a mirthless outlook on life. She perceives everything around her as disturbed by some unknown restlessness which renders earthly life dismal. She believes that the whole universe is driven by a longing to attain a greater goal, or that which is the Ultimate Truth, and the longing naturally leads to disappointment. Also, it could be the disillusionment at the turn of the events that causes misery. In "Ha Rama!" (Ha Ram) she recalls the noble martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi and imagines that now his soul will be craving to know about the present state of affairs in India. To his great distress, he will come to know that the India of his dreams is no more; it is an embattled nation besieged by poverty, ignorance, corruption, violence, exploitation and communalism. The Mahatma will be broken hearted to find out that his beloved country
has fallen into a very despicable state. Here we find, the present situation of the country represented by the word ‘pain’; the poet pictures the river Yamuna as an emaciated woman or as,

"exhausted, unbalanced pain itself"\textsuperscript{65}

She renames the heartbeats of the poor as "pain beats" and concludes that the essence of their lives is pain.

"Neerkkili" (Water bird) is a light-hearted poem which narrates a cheerful stroll the poet and her companion had, on the banks of the river Kaveri. They happened to see a water bird, cheerfully gliding across the waves and diving into the depths. It was an unforgettable experience for the poet, and even now, after so many years, she remembers the scene, pleasant and gleeful, contrasting it with the disheartening circumstances of the present; she calls her life,

"a meaningless, dark gloom that flows feebly"\textsuperscript{66}

She seems to think that the heyday of life is over and "the good old days", whether of the nation, or of the society, or of the individual, are gone forever, and what remains is only the fag end of the great past. To presume that the present is painful, is to accept a pessimistic view of life. But Sugatha Kumari’s vision is not totally pessimistic, as she does
not regard pain as despicable, though, sometimes, she feels discouraged. She accepts pain as preparatory for a greater challenge, thereby facing life with determination.

Sugatha Kumari never feels tired of writing about pain and its impact upon the human psyche. She is always innovative to bring forth novel images of suffering and she apprehends each and every object around her as shadowed by gloom. In "Ambalamoni" (The Temple Bell) she presents a string of images to describe the dilapidated condition of an old temple. The temple-tower is in its ruins, the old banyan tree does not have a single leaf, the water in the pond is contaminated. An ominous silence fills the air, broken only by the fluttering of bats' wings. Even the night is described as sorrowful. All of a sudden, the old, broken temple-bell starts to sing, though nobody wants to hear its song. In the dismal silence of the night, its singing becomes a strange experience to the poet, and she feels that the glorious old days are reawakened and the promise of a bright future is revived. The feeble, yet determined ringing of the bell transforms the dilapidated temple into a grand, crowded pilgrim centre. Caparisoned elephants, the temple orchestra or 'Panchavadya', the long array of lamps, the fragrance of flowers and incenses-everything is there. The poet comes to the surprising
discovery that even in the midst of great adversities creativity that originates in the depth of one's heart can work wonders. The painful song that emerges from the broken heart of the bell converts the dismal atmosphere of the abandoned temple into one of faith and hope, reminding us of the magical effect of real poetry that springs from the abysmal depths of pain, in transforming the miserable world into a better place.

Besides love or other abstract concepts, hard realities of life like old age and death also find expression in association with the theme of pain in her writings. Although Sugatha Kumari is not concerned about the body or its charm, old age seems to disturb her, just as it does Kamala Das. In many of her poems, the woman persona laments the passage of years, the loss of youth and the coming of old age. Sugatha Kumari never relates man-woman love with mere physicality, but she feels that, with the advent of old age, love undergoes some transformation and it gradually ends up. Like Kamala Das, she also, must be viewing love as related to beauty, and thinking that when and where beauty fades, love also would be fading. It can be a new interpretation of the Upanishadic motto, “Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram” which means “Truth, Goodness
and Beauty" as Truth, Love and Beauty which forms the undercurrent of her vision.

In many of her poems, we find the images of "sorrowful old age", "grief-stricken evening", "greying mind" etc. which express her attitude to old age. She does not seem to think of ageing as the time to retire into peaceful, leisurely living; for her, it is the sad, darkening of a day, when everything beloved is lost. We find many of her characters lamenting the passage of years and the wastefulness of life. They think that, life has been aimless, taking them nowhere; the protagonist in the poem 'Devadasi' is an example. In her old age, she feels dejected and abandoned, since she has never consummated her love for the Lord, nor has she ever known real happiness. All her life, she has been waiting for her Lord to summon her to his presence, all her life she has been dreaming of singing and dancing before him. But never did her dreams come true, and she was not even once able to climb up the steps and see her Lord. Now she is old and weak, with greying hair, dull, lack-lustre eyes and tired limbs, now she has only one goal, that is death, before her. She sings her swan song.
“Even in the last
I don’t hope that you’ll come,
To open the door of darkness and
To stand by me……..
You’re late, oh my Lord,
You are very very late
Now I am preparing to go back
Silently, but before that
I have to throw this last
Bit of sweetness and crush it
Before you, my Lord………..”

Her words, replete with dejection and painful longing act as a reminder of the helplessness of old age. A touching image of wastefulness, neglect and senility is sympathetically presented here.

The woman persona in the poem “Pahtukke” (Slowly) in her old age, is willing to accept her loneliness and desolation when nobody, not even her partner in life, is there to console her. “Rathrimazha” (Rain at Night) discusses the painful experience of recurring physical illnesses and the greater maladies that afflict the mind. She is worried that,
"The affected organ can be mutilated, but,
What can be done, if the mind is affected?"  

In "Njan Asooyalu" (I am Jealous) also, we find the poet, bothered about the fading of youthfulness and the advent of old age, illness, and poverty, feeling jealous of a flower, the dove—orchid. The flower looks like a dove, but it is luckier than a dove, as it does not have to fear for its young ones, or worry about want of food, old age and disease. Here, the poet seems to think that the limitations imposed upon all living thing by Time, as the greatest handicap.

Even though old age is considered disgusting and unwelcome, she does not consider death as a tragedy, just like Kamala Das. She views death as the natural closure of earthly life, and a door that leads to another world. Her strong faith in the Hindu vision of the permanence of the soul might be one of the reasons for her fearless, and often friendly attitude towards death. For, the Hindu philosophy does not regard death as 'the wages of sin' acquired by a human being during his lifetime. The Chandokya Upanishad proclaims: "This body certainly, dies; but the living soul does not die." While the Semitic religions consider human life as a closed entity and with predestined patterns of birth and death and the existentialists regard of death as the ultimate fate of human
beings, Hinduism, by ascribing immortality to the soul and asserting the possibility of rebirth or re-incarnation, assures the continuity of life, which fortifies men against fear of death. Well-nourished on the Hindu eschatology, Sugatha Kumari views death as liberation, as an answer to all the problems of earthly life.

In “Thalappizha” (Broken Rhythm) she describes her experience in the Intensive Cardiac Care Unit when she came face to face with death. Here she discovers that Death is not fearful, but kind and benevolent; and that the sound of the footsteps of Death are identical to the throbbing of her painful heart. Death and life are identified as one, and if we accept one of them, the other is also to be welcomed. Again, in “Mrithive Kannal Kandeen” (I Have Seen Death With My Eyes), “Moodha Swapnam” (A Stupid Dream), “Amrutham Gamaya” (Let’s be Led to Immortality) etc., death is represented as inevitable, impassioned, sublime and wonderful.

Death is presented as a synonym for Krishna, the perfect lover in the poem “Abhisarika” (The Woman who Goes To Her Lover) The woman persona, enticed by the music of his flute, leaves her child, husband and everything behind, and goes in search of him. She has to weather innumerable crises on her way, but she is not discouraged.
She knows that the call of the flute is agonizing, the path towards him is painful, but she believes that there will be a moment in her life, when all pains will come to an end. She realizes that Krishna, her eternal lover and Death are one and the same, giving her the promise of, salvation

“Oh, my dark, handsome one, now I know that Death is only another name for you” 70

Thus we find, Sugatha Kumari completing her concept of pain and devotion for Krishna, by identifying them with each other. For her, Krishna is the ultimate pain that melts away all other pains, and evokes joy. Kamala Das is expressing a similar view when she sings that everything in Radha melts, and nothing remains, other than Krishna, at the end, in her poem “Radha”. Prof. S. Guptan Nair, in the preface to Pathirappookkal (Midnight Flowers) writes:

“Sugatha Kumari’s skill lies in transforming personal grievances into universal sorrows”71, and K Ramachandran Nair, in the foreword to the Thulavarshappacha (The Green of the Monsoon) records that Sugatha Kumari has always been the singer of human miseries. He adds: “though it is alleged that she writes about individual angst, she
is, in fact, a poet with a universal vision."² Besides, such dualities as personal sorrows and universal sorrows are irrelevant to a real genius, as what he/she gives expression to is the all-pervading density of absolute grief. Whether the poem is about Devaki lamenting the death of her children or about the female infant abandoned by its mother, it is the tragedy of human life that is pictured Sugatha Kumari has a unique capacity for sharing the heartaches of all who suffer and many of her poems articulate the agonies of her fellow beings—not only human beings but birds, animals and even trees.

The outpourings of a tormented soul, disturbed by the sufferings of others find expression in many of her poems. Neglected children of the street, the mentally retarded, teenaged girls forced into prostitution, molested innocents, the homeless, shelterless millions—all those who suffer torture either at the hands of fate or of man are sympathetically presented here. "Penkunju-90" (Female Infant-90), "Jessey", "Sare Jaham Se Acha", "Kollendathengane"? (How to kill?) "Kanathayavar" (Those Who Are Missing), "Ammayundu" (Mother Is There), "Entu Pattee Namukku?" (What Happened To Us?), "Vanitha Commission" (Women's Commission) etc. are some of the poems where she voices her concern about the trials and tribulations of the hapless.
Sugatha Kumari is well known as a Nature poet, and she has written many a poem celebrating the splendour of Nature, but greater in number and more vehement in tone are the poems expressing her protest against the way man has been treating Nature. Poems like "Marangal" (Trees), "Aana" (The Elephant), "Silent Valley", "Ningalen Lokathe Entu Cheythu?" (What did You Do To My World?) etc voice her deep rooted agony at the atrocities of man towards Nature.

Her obsession with melancholy is so fundamental that even in poems that are based on legends or stories from ancient mythologies, she makes use of tragic scenes and distressful events as her themes, and "Oru Ramayanarangam" (A Scene From The Ramayana), "Phaeton" etc. are examples.

But her obsession with the theme of melancholy does not darken her poetic vision; on the other hand, she regards sorrows as having a purgatory effect, cleansing the human soul of all its foibles and leading it to a nobler state. She considers suffering not as any particular feature of life, but as the essence of life as existence itself, just as the Hindu vision of life lays down it. As all experiences are sorrowful, nothing can give us unmixed joy; involvement in worldly pleasures can only strengthen the poignancy of sorrows. As a seeker of the Ultimate Truth,
Sugatha Kumari is convinced that all is sorrow, and that all the pleasures are temporary and what she aims at is the final deliverance from sorrows, leading to the attainment of true happiness. Even when she confesses that life is wasteful in "Ellam Veruthe" (All Is In Vain) she does not forget to add that "this sorrow is eternally sweet and great". 73

While considering pain as the pivotal experience and the sum and substance of life, both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari do not find the situation sombre and disappointing; nor does the realization evoke any negative feelings in them. They discover it as the only truth about life and the only reality which is eternal; growth and old age may be tragic, but death is not. The spirit of creativity is sheer pain, but its fruits give pleasure to all. Hence, it is impossible to achieve pleasure without accepting pain.

Here we are reminded of the words of Kunthi, as she requests Krishna, to grant her sorrows, so that she would desire to see him more and more

"Vipadassanthauna sasswal
Thatra thatra Jagad guro
Bhavando Darshanam yat Swad
Apunarbhava Darsanam” 74
(Let there be sorrows in abundance so that, oh, my Lord, we would desire to see you with our eyes; and seeing you would free us from further births)

Like Kunthi, they too aim at the purification of the soul through the wilful acceptance of suffering. Writing is the true expression of the self for both of them, and through their writing they are glorifying pain; but unlike Emily Dickinson or Changampuzha or Edappally, it is not in a tone of disappointment that they are acknowledging the inevitability of sorrow in earthly life. On the other hand, sharing the wisdom of the great masters of the past, they accept pain as the core of life with philosophical detachment. Moreover, even so dark a topic as the permanence of pain in worldly life is brightened by their concept of its being redemptive-a real silver lining of the dark, gloomy cloud.
NOTES

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69 *Chandokya Upanishad* 6:11:3


71 Prof. S. Guptan Nair, Foreword, *Pathirappookkal* 4.


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74 *Srimad Bhagavatham* (Guruvayoor: Guruvayoor Devaswom, 1995) Canto I, Chapter 8, 68.