CHAPTER-VI
CONCLUSION

The study of the poetry of Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari reveals the reformative, revolutionary and romantic spirit of these two poets. It is evident that in spite of the apparent differences between them, there is an underlying vision that binds their poetry together. The shared context of ideology binding them together is the spark of optimism that enables them to visualise the creation of a better world. This ideology of optimism helps them weather all crises and keep up their faith in man. It is not only a woman’s inborn capacity of resilience to stress which helps her bring up another generation with undeterred hope, but a well-thought out vision of life also.

Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari have succeeded in presenting the disillusionment, loneliness and rejection experienced by men and women living in the modern world. When all moral and ethical values are lost and man forgets to care for others, life dries up. By projecting
the drought of modern life, the two poets under discussion are expressing the dream of a better world where love is "all-pervasive like ether" and where "love creates its own climate, a balming climate"¹ as Kamala Das puts it. Sugatha Kumari also believes that life is not as hard as it seems to be, if there is the shade of love and the refreshment of friendship to soothe us in our journey through the dust and heat of life. This dream of a better world soothened by love is expressed in both their writings.

Adrienne Rich has defined poetry as a concentration of the power of language, which is the power of our ultimate relation to everything in the universe"². But poetry has long been considered an exclusively male realm and the place of women in poetry was just as objects for it. The awareness that the poet or the 'maker' becomes powerful when he/she produces a chunk of the world, prompted women to enter the world of poetry. Women poets are engaged in an effort to project the world of reality as is known to them and experienced by them, since poetry is, as Rich believes,

"primarily the stuff of experience rendered into speech and that a woman's poems are the authentic speech of her life and being". When Kamala Das declares that it is "someone else's world" where her
husband and sons formed the axis and she was insignificant as a fly, and Sugatha Kumari says that she is writing about the discontent and sorrow of woman of all times and places, they are clearly articulating the feeling of alienation experienced by all women who feel wounded in their sensibility. But these discontents and alienation do not defeat their spirits, and "faith grows in silence" within them. When Kamala Das claims that "I symbolize something for women. I symbolize courage" there is the revival of hope; Sugatha Kumari shares the same view by asserting that she did something significant as the Chairperson of the Women's Commission and that the organization "has succeeded in helping women to defend herself when she is rejected by man" - here again, the same revival of hope and strength can be noticed.

Although she was born and brought up in the conservative Indian society, Kamala Das has an assertive personality that refuses to be subjugated. As a poet, she considers it her duty to place herself in the position of the oppressed and confront the hypocrisy of the society in her own person, disregarding the hazards that are involved in such a feat. She does not take any precautionary measure to protect her reputation or shelter herself from the adverse criticism which would be levelled against her. While she challenges the hypocrisy and malice that reign in the society under the veil of respectability, she does
not forget to expose her own self also. It seems that her poetic genius finds the confessional mode suitable as it necessitates her to project her inner world. She derives her inspiration to write from her own life and experiences.

"I can only write about my personal experiences, and being versatile, I see poetry in an experience, and then see good prose coming out of the same experience".

Consequently, a shocking self-exposure which incorporates sexual candour, frank confession of private humiliations, quest for true love, feelings of guilt, minute details of family relationship, death-wish and longing to restore childhood happiness and so on characterize her poetry.

Like Kamala Das, Sugatha Kumari too is keenly aware of the power of poetry in projecting the issue of human predicament. She considers it her duty to report the injuries received by people around her faithfully. She recognizes the cruelty and corruption of the society, and she too situates herself among the oppressed. She challenges the hypocritical society that exploits women mentally and physically and consequently ruins her. She questions the utter disregard for the suffering of fellow beings in an obsessed manner and goes on to
defend them practically as far as possible. She is a social activist, fighting for the rights of all those who are marginalized. But her protests do not cross the borderlines of propriety, nor does she disturb the social codes through a portrayal of extramarital relationships or sexual exploitations. The patriarchal tendency of the society that denies woman an identity of her own is criticised, but the criticism is far from being offensive.

Both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari identify themselves with their fellow beings and confront the different situations in life through their perspectives. Irrespective of caste and creed, they are able to experience what others feel and the universality of human predicament is portrayed in their writings. Kamala Das observes,

"............Anywhere and

Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself

I; ........ it is I who drink lonely

Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,

It is I who laugh; it is I who make love

And then feel shame, it is I dying

With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,

I am saint. I am the beloved and the

Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no

Aches which are not yours............"
expressing the intensity with which she identifies herself with the hunted Tamilians in Sri Lanka, or the Telugu-speaking house-builders, or the dancing eunuchs with limbs thin and dry like “half-burnt logs from funeral pyres” or the “aged cattle driven to slaughter-houses” or the cart-horses whose burdens are always too heavy for them. The voices of all those who are oppressed or humiliated find a place in her poetry. She believes that poets “cannot close their shops in their minds as long as they carry it with them they feel the pressures and the torments. She is vexed by the suffering and humiliation of people around her and many of her poems like “Nani” raise a sharp criticism of this kind of inhuman societal attitude.

Sugatha Kumari is, in a way, a more ardent critic of all sorts of oppression prevalent in the society. Tribals betrayed, or a stray dog hunted, or Nature dastardly exploited or teenaged girls harassed become recurrent themes in her poetry; and, poems that deal with such burning themes are no more words, but question marks as sharp as arrows. When the disheartened mother in ‘Kollendathengane’ (How to Kill) questions God, Fate or society as to do what with her mentally retarded daughter, as M.T. Vasudevan Nair observes,
"...There is no answer to this question. Even God is shocked, and keeps mum...". It is the poet’s earnestness and craving to rectify all the wrongs, that makes the question this much sharp.

Quest for love is the principal preoccupation of the poetry of Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari. It is through love that they endeavour to discover themselves. The poetic creed of Das seems to be that loving is growth and development of the soul, from a lower level of consciousness to a higher level, and culminating in self-realisation. In “The Old Playhouse” she says:

"............... It was not to gather knowledge of yet another man that I came to you but to learn what I was and by learning, to learn to grow...". She believes that love means understanding, growth and finally liberation from all bondages. In the poem ‘The Seashore’ she writes that love can take the man and his beloved to “worlds where life is / Evergreen”. In “Advice To Fellow-Swimmers” she writes that the ultimate aim should be to overcome one’s own self. She writes,

"go swim in the great blue sea
where the first tide you meet is your body
that familiar pest;
but if you learn to cross it
you are safe, yes, beyond it you are safe........"
But what she gets always is lust, as love is a spiritual discipline to woman, while it is only mere animal passion to man. Woman is tired of soulless sex, and the pretence of respectability, while man is satisfied with sexual fulfilment alone and he wants to keep up pretences that give him social status. It is her protest against such soulless love that has led her to seek Krishna. He is the only lover who can give spiritual fulfilment. Just as physical love is a biological necessity of man, emotional love is a psychological and basic necessity of life for woman, and Krishna alone gives her this emotional love which supports her all through her life. As Sunanda P. Chavan puts it, it is "the experience beyond sex through sex".\(^1\) His love is "a poem that ends all other poems" and the woman finds herself melting in it, thus the "familiar pest" of self is overcome, and she achieves self realization.

Love is the motivation of life for Sugatha Kumari also. Her poetry revolves round the central theme of love, and she regards Krishna as a synonym for love. There is no other lover she can think of, and no other love that is true. She identifies herself with Radha who is willing to go through any crisis in order to attain her Krishna. Krishna or love gives her both pain and pleasure, both darkness and light. She realises that love is the only thing that does not become monotonous, even through repetitions. Sugatha Kumari even goes to the extent of identifying
Krishna with death, as it is a means of achieving him. According to her, there is a Radha in the mind of each and every woman of India, for whom life is an eternal search for love.

Love or Krishna is the blissful experience that liberates the seekers, in Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari. Both of them have a positive vision of love as a dynamic force that promises liberation from all petty obligations.

Both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari raise their voice in support of individual autonomy for woman. They want woman to be treated as full-fledged individuals in their own right, instead of being considered as someone's daughter, wife or mother. Though their immediate interest is to restore women's rights, their ultimate concern is about ending all forms of oppression. Kamala Das is mostly concerned about the role of woman in man's world, and her quest for identity. P.K. J. Kurup opines that:

"The predominant theme of My Story is the difficulty of being a woman in Indian society and finding love, instead of male lust and indifference in the institution of marriage"
The same difficulty of finding love which is related to her quest for identity, leads her to recognize man's insincerity and insensitivity. Her women personae yearn for love, understanding and compassion from their partners, but what they actually receive is only lust. Hence, she is forced to disagree with man and his inconsiderate ways. Like a true feminist, she brings out, woman's loss of identity and deprivation of will and reason as the pernicious effects of marriage on her. Woman's body is a prime source of imagery in feminist writing, and Kamala Das is, like a true feminist, a "poet of the body" and is so without inhibitions. She celebrates the female body.

More than man's insensitivity in love or his substituting emotional love by physical satisfaction it is the male-oriented society's selfishness that bothers Sugatha Kumari. The atrocities against women which crop up everyday, provoke her and she condemns such moves in the most vehement manner. Dowry deaths, rape, unwanted pregnancy, abortion or abandoning female infants—all of which are caused by man's greed and insensitivity enrage her. She demands a positive change in the societal attitude to the female question. While Das wants man as an individual to change his approach to woman, it is the male-dominated society which should change, according to Sugatha Kumari.
Unlike the western feminists both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari do not show any sign of negating the role of men in the lives of women. Though their poems give expression to the urge of emancipation from bondage, from loveless marriages, from domestic duties, from the feeling of otherness experienced by the feminine psyche, they do not attempt to create a world devoid of men. There is a willingness to transcend the spirit of revolt and seek solace under the shadow of man’s love.

Both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari support women’s liberation in a positive way. They believe that woman should be able to stand on her own feet, and to prove her identity as an individual. She must be recognized as man’s partner and equal, instead of being downgraded as a commodity. She should be able to express her opinions and be her own master. Her unselfishness in love, her “melting, melting and melting” in man, should be acknowledged; her self-sacrificial devotion as mother should be appreciated. There is a rebellious voice which aims at bringing about liberation not from man, but from his insensitivity and egoism. They are not man-haters, they do not refute man’s seminal role in the life of woman. A positively feminist approach that aims at creating a new world, where better man-woman relationship
is possible, is their policy. In a way, it is akin to Gandhi’s policy of “Don’t hate the sinner, but the sin”.

Both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari regard pain as fundamental to worldly life. The image of the suffering woman is identifiable in the writings of both these poets. They might have imbibed this spirit from Hindu philosophy, which considers wilful acceptance of pain and self-sacrificing dedication as ennobling the human soul and leading it to salvation. The seekers of realization with God undergoing most hazardous meditations or ‘tapas’, the deliberate choice of ascetism by many ‘sadhus’, the uncomplaining acceptance of oppression and humiliation by Sheelavathi, the self-immolation of Jeemothavahana and Kunthi’s prayer for more suffering intended to invoke love for God in her mind, etc. establish the sanctity of pain. In the poems of the two writers under discussion, the latent presence of a person who welcomes suffering can be experienced. When Kamala Das advises her readers to fall in love with the most unsuitable person and fling themselves on their lovers like a moth on a flame, so that they would feel despair in every move, in every split second, she seems to think that by excavating deep pain, by experiencing the pangs of unrequited love, the mind would be cleansed of all its impurities. Besides, she identifies love with pain, realizing that both lead to a nobler
state of mind. Sugatha Kumari also equates love with pain and believes that the total surrender of one's self steeped in painful love is the route to salvation. She considers creativity as another expression of this burning pain, the seeds of which sprout to become a tree which gives shade to others. Both the poets do not shun death, though both of them are in love with life, nor do they invoke death, as Edappalli Raghavan Pillai or Emily Dickinson did. They feel that death is not tragic, as it cannot destroy the human soul.

They accept pain as all pervasive, and recognize sorrow as basic to life. But this does not render their vision pessimistic or cynical. On the other hand, they have a very positive view of pain as purifying the human mind.

The spirit of optimism that brightens the poetic perspectives of Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari is not shared by many of their major contemporaries. Most of them are disheartened by the ever-widening boundaries of the modern Wasteland. Values degenerating, ideals discarded and human relationships forgotten, disillusion them. Looking all around they don't find any ray of hope, and their world view is often clouded by utter loss of faith.
Indian English poets like Keki N. Daruwalla, Arun Kolatkar, A.K. Ramanujan etc. picture the bitter aspects of human existence in their poems. Unlike the Romantics, they recognize the harsh realities that encompass the realms of Nature and are unable to sing the glory of Nature and human life. Keki N. Daruwalla writes about the devastation of life and property brought about by the river Ghaghra in spate. Houses, trees and cornfields are swept away and people are rendered utterly helpless. The poet observes that,

"No one sends prayers to a wasted sky
For prayers are parabolic:
they will come down with a plop anyway."\(^{12}\)

A.K. Ramanujan also writes about the damages done to human life and property by a river in spate, in his poem "A River". He depicts the waters rising at places and "the way it carried off those village houses" and more shockingly the death of "one pregnant woman/And a couple of cows. Named Gopi and Brinda, as usual". Apart from presenting the grim realities that are associated with the flood, Ramanujan hints at the sterility of the new Tamil poets who "still quoted/the old poets"\(^{13}\) and remain indifferent to the plight of fellow beings. He has written about aged mothers shrinking into
themselves, couples who always fail to share each other’s childhood memories, and Hindu joint families where individual identities are lost, with a tinge of painful irony at their futility.

Arun Kolatkar also presents the predicament of mankind in some of his poems, and in the long narrative poem “Jejuri” he portrays the relation between dreary. Nature and humanity, in a subtle manner to link both to the spiritual wasteland of modern life. Through the character of the old woman whose eyes look like “bullet holes”¹ the poet presents the diminishing of human beings into insignificance.

Distressful images like the waters of the Ganges contaminated by cartloads of dead men’s ashes and bones, darkened rooms where one’s reflection is lost in the mirrors and misplaced watches denoting sexual union without love frequent the poems of most Indian English writers. They present the poignant realities of life with detachment. Many of these poets find it difficult to dream of a better tomorrow.

An insistent note of pessimism prevails in the poetry of many modern Malayalam writers also. A leading Malayalam poet, Balachandran Chullikkad has a very gloomy vision of life, as is expressed in many of his poems. In “Thathavakyam” (Father’s Words) he writes,
"Always I'm the punished, and
The punishment continues even after death
Who can hurt me more as
I find pleasure in being hurt and destroyed"?  

The hopeless condition of the present day world, the problem of suffering and its consequent impact on human endeavours, man's inherent urge to err and institutionalised power oppressing human will, make the poet lose all faith in life. He fears that the darkness that is devouring the world and its people cannot be done away with.

Another major poet, A. Ayyappan too thinks that mankind is facing a very negative phase. He feels that violence, cruelty, greed and selfishness have replaced love and compassion. Even Natural forces like rain or wind become malignant symbols of death and destruction in his poems. He writes,

"It was raining outside...and it smelt of gunpowder

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

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

It was fiercely raining outside, a red rain...
And it was the blood of the five people who came for the inner"  

Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, a very popular Malayalam poet, also is worried about the degeneration of values in the modern world. He is seen brooding over the good old days in many of his poems.

"I am squatting on the backbone
Of the ruined family house
I am squatting in the upstairs
Of the ruined family house" 17...

He feels that there is no hope of reviving the lost glory of the "ruined family house"; he finds only destruction and defeat all around.

Deshamangalam Ramakrishnan, another contemporary of Sugatha Kumari is also disappointed in that man has no shelter anywhere on this fast-dying earth. Man the unbeliever, man the betrayer is hunted by a merciless fate. He remembers,

"There is no shelter in the deep forests
Everywhere burning hands follow me
There is no shelter anywhere..." 18

Even the younger generation of poets shares this dark pessimism as is evident from the lines of K.R.Tony or P.N.GopiKrishnan. Tony
thinks that man is terribly alone as no relationship is meaningful; a fierce sense of loneliness is the only truth about man’s existence\(^\text{19}\). Gopikrishnan feels that even one’s house is no place for love and sharing; on the other hand, it is where one is given the preliminary lessons of hatred and cruelty\(^\text{20}\). As contrary to the pessimistic attitude of these writers, Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari still have faith in life. They are sharply aware of the darkening of horizons; but that does not extinguish their hope that there will still be a bright dawn.

This study reveals that the two poets under discussion show a very positive attitude in their handling of the different issues in life. While dealing with social themes or feminist questions, they endeavour to awaken the society, by expressing their utter discontent. Through their love poetry that focuses on the Radha Krishna myth, both Kamala Das and Sugatha Kumari try to communicate the unparalleled capacity of love to free human beings from all bondages and lead them to salvation. Their recognition of pain as basic to earthly life, and wilful acceptance of it are intended to convey the therapeutic and purgative quality of pain. They are both in love with life, and they would like to celebrate it; ‘live and let live’ is what they ask their readers to do. When they turn bitter critics of society and its institutions, when their voices
become subversive, they are endeavouring to change the unhealthy practises. When they rebel and resist, it is to create a better tomorrow.

In spite of the influence of the present day occurrences that ruin our faith in man and God and make us all negativists, the spirit of optimism still brightens their poetic world. As visionaries they may have guessed that the need of the hour is rebels who can teach the society to distinguish between right and wrong. They are humanists who can pardon all human follies even while protesting against them. They are romantics who praise the glory of love as the one force leading to liberation. They are feminists who preserve and praise femaleness and femininity, even while criticising the patriarchal set up. Accepting the essential nature of suffering, they believe that it can lead mankind to a nobler state. In their poetry, we find the successful ideal concept of a liberated woman who welcomes man’s participation in all walks of life. The dream of a more peaceful world order lurks in. Aspiring for better understanding and love from man, and striving for a braver new world, these two poets uphold the spirit of optimism to lead their readers to light.
NOTES

1. Kamala Das, "I Needed to Disturb Society....” Interview. Perspectives on Kamala Das’s Poetry by Iqbal Kaur, 163.


3. Kamala Das “I Needed...”, 163


8. Kamala Das, Only the Soul..., 30


13. ..., 98

14. ..., 50


