Chapter II
A Singer of Feminine Sensibility

Here the term ‘Feminine Sensibility’ needs its interpretation. In this connection, the term ‘Feminism’ is useful to trace out ‘Feminine Sensibility’.

M. H. Abrams observers: Feminism has its origin in the struggle for women’s right which began late in the 18th c. more particularly with Mary Wollstonecraft's, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Later came John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and the American Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). The Suffera gette movement of the beginning of the Twentieth C. carried on the campaign. In the 1920s, there were clear sign of new and different approaches in relation to women writers and literature. This was noticeable in the critical work of, for example, Rebecca West and in Virginia Woolf’s essays on women authors who suffered from economic and cultural disadvantages in what she termed a ‘patriarchal’ society.

Her book *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) was becomes a classic ‘document’ (q.v.) of the feminist critical movement. She addressed herself to the issue of why there were so few women writers and why it is frequently difficult or impossible for a woman to write. There was also Dorothy Richardson’s very important twelve – volume stream of consciousness (q.v.) novel Pilgrimage, the first volume of which appeared in 1915 (and the last posthumously, in 1967).¹

In the post war period, a seminal work Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) tells about the role of women in society as a critique of women’s cultural identification. J. A. Cuddon also recommended the same verve.
Women are different from men in their expression; it has become the curious subject of criticism.

Since 1969, there has been an explosion of feminist writings without parallel in previous critical innovations, in a movement that, as Elaine Showalter has remarked, displays the urgency and excitement of a religious awakening. This current criticism, in America, England, France, and other countries, is not a unitary theory or procedure. It manifests, among those who practice it, a great variety of critical vantage points and procedures, including adaptations of psychoanalytic, Marxist and diverse poststructuralist theories, and its vitality is signalized by the vigor of the debates within the ranks of professed feminists themselves.

The various feminisms, however, share certain assumptions and concepts that underlie the diverse ways that individual critics explore the factor of sexual difference and privilege in the production, the form and content, the reception and the critical analysis and evaluation of works of literature: (1) The basic view is that Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal (ruled by the father)-that is, it is male-centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. From the Hebrew Bible and Greek philosophic writings to the present, the female tends to be defined by negative reference to the male as the human norm. Hence as another, or kind of non-man, by her lack of the identifying male organ, of male powers, and of the male character traits that are presumed, in the patriarchal view, to have achieved the most important scientific and technical inventions and the major works of civilization and culture. Women themselves are taught, in the process of being socialized, to internalize the reigning patriarchal ideology (that is, the conscious and unconscious presuppositions about male superiority) and so are conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination.
(2) It is widely held that while one’s sex is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concept of gender – of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in identify and behavior – are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization. As Simone de-Beauvoir puts it, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman… it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature . . . which is described as feminine”. By this cultural process, the masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational creative; the feminine, by systematic opposition to such traits, has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional.

(3) The further claim is that this patriarchal (or "masculinity" or “androcentric”) ideology pervades those writings, which have been traditionally considered mainly men for men recently have written great literature and which until. Typically, the more highly regarded literary works focus on male protagonists – Oedipus, Ulysses, Hamlet, Tom Jones, Faust, the Three Musketeers, Captain Ahab, Huck Finn, Leopold Bloom-who embody masculine traits and ways of feeling and pursue masculine interests in masculine fields of action. To these males, the female characters, when they play a role are marginal and subordinate and are represented either as complementary to or in opposition to masculine desires and enterprises. Such works lacking autonomous female role models, and implicitly addressed to male readers, either leave to woman reader an alien outsider or else solicit her to identify against herself by taking up the position of the male subject and so assuming male values and ways of perceiving, feeling and acting. It is often held, in addition that the traditional aesthetic categories and criteria for analyzing and appraising literary work. Although represented in standard critical theory as objective, disinterested and universal, are in fact infused with masculine assumptions,
interests and ways of reasoning, so that the standard selection and rankings and the critical treatments of literary works have in fact been tacitly but thoroughly gender–biased.

A major interest of feminist critics in English–speaking countries has been to reconstitute the ways we deal with literature in order to do justice to female points of view, concerns and values.

In this regard, Elaine Showalter is worth mentioning. She gives a name gynocriticism. In this criticism, women’s works are judged in their perspective writing. Women’s writing differs from that of men.

One concern of gynocritics is to identify what are taken to be distinctively feminine subject matters in literature written by women – the world of domesticity, for example, or the special experiences gestation, giving birth and nurturing or mother daughter and woman – woman relations – in which personal and affection issues and not external activism, are the primary interest. Another concern is to uncover in literary history a female tradition, incorporated in sub communities of women writers who were aware of, emulated and found support in earlier women writers, who in turn provide models and emotional support to their own readers and successors. A third undertaking is to show that there is a distinctive feminine mode of experience, or “subjectivity” in thinking, feeling, valuing and perceiving oneself and the outer world. Related to this is the attempt to specify the traits of a “woman’s language", or distinctively feminine style of speech and writing, in sentence structure, types of relations between the element of a discourse and characteristic figures and imagery. Some feminists have turned their critical attention to the great number of women’s domestic and ‘sentimental’ novels, which are noted perfunctorily and in derogatory fashion in standard literary histories, yet which dominated the market for fiction in the nineteenth century and produced most of the best sellers of the time.3
As above-mentioned development explores the radical salient feature of women’s writing. Really, it is “Feminism” where we may seek the “Feminine Sensibility”. Now I draw some basic facts to point out “Feminine Sensibility”.

**General Assumptions and Methods**

The feminist critics are informed by certain assumptions and follow certain modes of analysis. The analysis varies according to the ideological / philosophical position espoused by the thinker, yet certain common features are discernible.

(1) They assume that literary text operate on the lines of power struggle: that between men and women. The text naturalises the oppression of women through its stereotypical representation of women as weak / vulnerable, seductress, obstacle, sexual object of the male’s desire, a procreating divine and so on.

(2) They argue that literary text reproduce social biases that see the woman as only the “Other” of the male. Religion, social conditions and cultural traditions perceive the woman as an adjunct to the male. This means that the woman’s identity is never separate but is subsumed under that of the male.

(3) The woman is typecast as “Mother Nature”, thus reducing her to the perpetually giving, all-forgiving nature that never demands anything, is willing to suffer anything for her Son. Religious doctrines aid these representations. Language makes it appear permanent and “natural” with patriarchal terms like Mother Earth, Mother Nature.

(4) Sex is biological while gender is socially constructed. There is no necessary link between gender and biological sex. Masculinity and feminine are essentially coercive categories that straitjacket men and women.

In Simone de Beauvoir’s famous statement, a woman is not born: she becomes, is made a woman. This is to say that the socialisation of woman
renders her a woman with certain apparently “inherent” qualities- weakness, feeble-mindedness, patience and so on. All these help patriarchal males to argue that women need to be confined to the home (they are not strong to “go out” into the world), be protected and controlled. Her sexuality and desires are made and treated as subservient to that of the males. Thus, the feminists suggest that inequality of sexes does not have a biological basis or origin; it originates in the cultural constructions of gender difference. Gendering is a practice of power, where masculinity is always associated with authority.

(5) There is a relationship between gender dualism, sexuality and sexual orientation. Sexuality is the product of cultural processes and forces: we are not born gay, lesbian or heterosexual. The discourse of sexuality, which privileges / enforces a “compulsory heterosexuality”, creates conditions of legitimacy and illegitimacy where heterosexuality alone is legitimate. This becomes the social norm and reinforces the division between the genders by positing that sexual desire may “prevail” only between men and women.

(6) Disciplines such as psychoanalysis or philosophy helps retain the hierarchy of male and female. These disciplines must be studied to expose their ideological biases.

(7) There is the need for a canon of women’s writing.

(a) Since literature, criticism and department / syllabi have relied upon male texts for understanding and “revealing” the condition of women, all they have actually done is reinforce patriarchal ideology. They have also helped subtly disseminate this ideology through their self – created status as “representative” or “authoritarian” texts.

(b) A woman’s text will suggest an alternative picture of the conditions, desires, psychology of the woman.
In terms of language and epistemology, the feminists seek to formulate either a gender-neutral language that will reject patriarchal terms like *history* and *mankind*, or a specifically female language which will help and create an alternative epistemology itself – one based on female subjectivity, identity and experience. This would also suggest a new historiography itself, where the voice of the silenced sub-alters- woman will provide an alternative history.

Feminist criticism is political in its scope. It demonstrates the link between the economic conditions, work-place conditions and political hegemony that influence, inform and create gender oppression, inequalities and exploitative mechanisms against the women.

Feminists in the 1980s and 90s also move beyond the essentialising tendencies of early feminism by delineating local, racial and region specific gender oppression. While the early feminists sought a common platform for all women irrespective of racial or regional differences, the latter feminist argued for different approaches to suit these specific conditions.

As I have given the outlines of ‘Feminism’ to introduce Feminine Sensibilities of women poets. Kamala Das is most remarkable poetess of modern age. Her Feminine Sensibilities may be observed in the themes of her poetry. It is worth noting that the themes of Kamala Das’s Poetry focus the background of feminine sensibilities. In this connection, we examine ‘The Main Themes of Das’s Poetry’.

Kamala Das moves in a narrow range in her poetry. Like Jane Austen in English fiction, her range of themes is limited. Very often, there is witnessed repetition and consequent monotony, in the body of her poetical works. However, she moves in her circle with grace and skill. She does not try to transgress herself imposed limitations and this accounts for her success in poetical endeavours. In fact, broad political, Financial and social issues were
beyond her reach, but whatever she wrote was born of her own experiences which immediately make her an integral poet, a poet of felt thought.5

Kamala is primarily a poet of feminine longings. Her poetry and prose reflect her restlessness as a sensitive woman moving in the male-dominated society and in them she appears as a champion of woman’s cause. She raises her forceful voice against the male tyrannies in such poems as A Relationship, Summer in Calcutta, An Introduction and Marine Drive.

Her essays also reflect her feeling of sensitivity. For example, Why Not More Than One Husband? And What Women Expect out of Marriage on What They Get? Kamala Das expresses the secret hopes and fears of womankind as seen in the poem Afterwards:

Son of my womb,

Ugly in loneliness.

You walk the world’s bleary eye

Like a grit. Your cleverness

Shall not be your doom

As ours was.6

The above – quoted lines highlight a mother’s concerns for her son. And the following poetic passage reveals the monotony and tiresomeness of a hollow married life:

I shall someday leave, leave the cocoon

You built around me with morning tea,

Love – words flung from doorways and of course

Your tried lust. I shall someday take /

Wings fly around...7
Evidently, Kamala Das speaks here as a ‘liberated' woman, who resents 'the cocoon' built around her and desires to flit about without any restrictions. The fairer sex receives a better deal from this sensitive poetess, who airs out its grievances and sufferings in a striking fashion.

Unquestionably, Kamala Das is a poetess of love and sex. As such, she is not so much preoccupied with the metaphysical quest of a restless soul, nor with the formulation of any theory of poetry. She writes almost invariably about the power of love and the appeal of the body. She confesses that she “…wrote the poems in the book *Summer in Calcutta* to make a man love me, to break down his resistance”.8 As an honest poet of love, she looks very frank and naive, without the ‘intellectual pride’ and the domestic air of the well known Australian poetess, Judith Wright. It should, however, be remembered that Kamala Das wrote her poetry against a more conservative and tabooed society than that of Judith Wright. She has, therefore, more to say about the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role to the point of discovering and asserting her individual liberty and identity.

More often than not she concentrates on sexual love and her woman – persona rises as though in a mood of revolt. The love poems of Kamala Das usually breathe an air of unconventionality and urgency. Mark the following extract in this connection:

*Of late I have begun to feel a hunger.*

*To take it with greed, like a forest-fire that*

*Consumes, and, with each killing gains a wilder,*

*Brighter charm, all that comes my way.*

*..............................*

*... My eyes lick at you like flames, my nerves*
Consume; and, when I finish with you, in the
Pram, near the tree and, on the park bench, I spit
Out small heaps of ash, nothing else.⁹

Again:
A man is a season,
You are eternity.
To teach me this, you let me toss my youth like coins
Into various hands, you let me mate with shadows,
You let me sing in my empty shrines, you let your wife
Seek ecstasy in others' arms . . .

. . . Perhaps I lost my way, perhaps
I went astray. How would a blind wife trace her lost

Husband, how would a deaf wife hear her husband call? ¹⁰

Here love expression may be marked as sensibility. A. N. Dwivedi remarks, “It would be, in truth, no exaggeration to say that love is the leitmotif of Kamala Das's poetry through and through” ¹¹

Related to the theme of love is the theme of the body in Mrs. Das’s verse. Sometimes she likes her body, while at others she dislikes it. Physically, she is ‘dark’ with ordinary features and her loathing for the body is mainly due to this factor as well as to her protracted illness. In liking the body, she resembles Nissim Ezekiel, who is also a ‘poet of the body’. Both these poets, like American ‘Confessional’ poets, accept whole-heartedly the demands of the body. As for Kamala Das, the tensions of the body issue forth in her poetry
from a pressure of her complex family background-she were not properly cared for during her childhood not well attended to in her married life.

And as she says in her essay *I Have Lived Beautifully*, her marriage was doomed to fail right from the beginning: “My husband was immersed in his office-work, and after work there was the dimmer, followed by sex. Where was there any time left for him to want to see the sea or the dark buffaloes of the slopes?” Possibly, the failure of love is linked with the birth of poetry and its fulfillment in case of Kamala Das. The following is a fine piece of poetry written with the sole purpose of celebrating the body, reminding us of Walt Whitman in modern American poetry:

Yes,

*It was my desire that made him male*

*And beautiful, so that when at last we met*

*To believe that once I knew not his*

*From, his quiet touch, or the blind kindness*

*Of his lips was hard indeed. Betray me?*

*Yes, he can, but never physically*

*.................................*

*My body’s wisdom tells and tells again*

*That I shall find my rest, my sleep, my place*

*And even death nowhere else but here in*

*My betrayer's, arms. . . . 12*

And here is the poem *A Request* depicting the hatred of the poetess for the body:

*When I die*
Do not throw
The meat and bones away
But pile them up
And let them tell
By their smell
What life was worth
On this earth
What love was worth
In the end.\textsuperscript{13}

The latter piece shows that she is fed up with the present way of her life and that she is pricked deep down within without a ray of hope for redemption.

Kamala Das’s poetry contains an acute concern for decay and death. Her autobiography, bordering on fiction occasionally, was actually written during one of her serious illnesses. It is not that she is afraid of death, and the last portions of My Story tell us that she was sometimes even ready to welcome it, but physical decay and destruction definitely haunt her inescapably. The poem Lines to a Husband has two parallel strands in it – obsession with decay and death and obsession with love (which could not be had at the legitimate source).\textsuperscript{14} The simultaneous pull of these obsessions renders the poetess hopeless and helpless and in deep anguish she cries out:

\textit{From the debris of house wrecks}

\textit{Pick up my broken face,}

\textit{Your bride’s face,}

\textit{Changed a little with the years.}

\textit{I shall not remember}
The betrayed honeymoon;

We are both such cynics,

You and I.

In her My Story Kamala Das tells us that she, at the age of 19, suffered a nervous breakdown as a ‘neglected wife’ and that she was commanded to live all alone in a closed room with sunshine peeping through a window. She fell seriously ill and was removed to Malabar, where her grandmother’s affectionate care could be cure her. Of all persons, Kamala Das liked her grandmother best whose house was ‘a paradise on earth for me’. In the poem My Grandmother’s House, She remembers this house as a source of great comfort abounding in love for her:

There is a house now for away where once

I received love . . . that woman died,

The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved

Among books, I was then too young

To read, and, my blood turned cold like the moon.

How often I think of going

There... 15

No doubt, one of the loved central characters in Kamala’s work is her great grandmother who is usually associated with her memory of the parental home in Malabar now more than three hundred years old but tinged with regality. The poem Blood is actually an apotheosis of this home- ‘this old house beside the sea’, and the poetess’s fascination with the images of the house beside the sea can clearly be traced back to her childhood associations with it.

Kamala Das is a poet not so much of the countryside as of the city. In this context, she is utterly contracted to such poets as K. N. Daruwalla who is so
alive to the sights and sounds and colours of idyllic countryside. In fact, Kamala deplores her moving away from a beautiful atmosphere beside the seashore surrounding her parental house to the ‘dusty cities’ with their hustle – bustle. Another noted poetess, Gauri Deshpande, rightly points out a general lacuna in contemporary Indo – English verse – the absence of the countryside details events – in her Foreword to An Anthology of Indo – English Poetry and Kamala Das is no exception to this. And if we look for her strength as a poet, we must detect in her poetry the dust, the heat, the crowds, the poverty of India combined with the misery and endurance of woman kind.

She has actually seen too much of the city, its commotion and horrors and dens of vices, to be 'idyllic' about anything else. The 'city', is an integral part of her existence and she cannot shake of its impressions and memories easily. She rather tries to strike a sort of synthesis between the changing reality of a private passion and the apparently unchanging reality of the shining sun on Indian horizon. In this connection, the overtones of the poem Summer in Calcutta in the first volume must be taken into account. It is a synthesis, which is almost spontaneous and unconscious in its compulsive drive. Kamala Das uses neither the biting social irony of Nissim Ezekiel, nor the larger philosophical theme of Sri Aurobindo or even of Tagore, but she is not very alienated from the Indian landscape or its social milieu like our well–known expatriates Dom Moraes and Tilottama Ranjan.

Kamala Das’s being a typical poetess of the city is quite evident from her persistent use of the metaphor of the city for life, such as in the poem A New City.

I have come only a picnic bag

To this new city,

To seek a blind date, to shed as snakes do,
In coils, and coils my
Weariness.\textsuperscript{16}

Nissim Ezekiel also is with Kamala Das in expressing his sense of annoy and boredom toward the city of Bombay – 'the city wakes, where fame is cheap, / And he belongs an actire fool', ("A Morning Walk"). But in Ezekiel the sense of loss is of a different nature; it is ‘depersonalized; so to say. On the contrary, Kamala Das feels acutely for the loss of her parental home and pure love by making the city as her new home.

Coupled with this anguished awareness of her loss is her eloquent expression of the pleasures and charms to be found in a big city. She discovered “all the Delhi streets . . . fragrant murky” and here she became once more ‘young, very lovely and delightfully carefree’ Elsewhere she contrasts the impressive tranquility of the Delhi landscape with the disturbed state of her mind. The one city, which told heavily on her nerves, is Bombay, and yet she bids a touching farewell to it in one of her moving poems:

\begin{quote}
\textit{I talk leave of you, fair city, while tears}
\textit{Hide somewhere in my adult eyes}
\textit{And sadness is silent as a stone}
\textit{In the river’s unmoving}
\textit{Core....}
\textit{It’s goodbye, goodbye, goodbye'.}
\textit{To slender shapes behind windowpanes}
\textit{Shut against indiscriminate desire}
\textit{And rain....} \textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}
A separation from anything is ever painful and the intellectual oneness that Kamala Das might have experienced in this grand city makes her say a tearful goodbye to it.

Finally, Kamala Das is a poet of moods and freaks. Hence she writes about so many other things that momentarily arrest her attention; e.g., about pigeons, seasons, children, bangles the sea-shore and the morning tree, bats, phone calls, artificial alarums, airports, the ferns and the maggots, the joss-sticks and the looking glasses, convicts, problems of composition, the high tides and the loud posters, the swamp and the blue bird. These various things have been catalogued here in order to show that Kamala Das does emerge from her well-chosen themes now and then, and thereby create an impression of diversity and variety.

She is as felicitous in their handling as in that of her familiar themes. And together, they create the impression on the reader’s mind that her poetry is “as honest, it is as human, as she is.”

The narrowness of her range is thus widened and the monotony caused by frequent reversions to the same subject and mood partly removed.

Thus in the light of above-mentioned themes we examine the central Sensibility of Love and Sex. Though Love and Sex are the central points of Kamala Das’s Poetry, yet we find in different forms these seminal factors. Feminine Sensibility derives the nature, habit and response of woman. In wide sense, it comprises women nature and character. When we consider it as a subject for contemplation, we find it mingle with society. Our consideration itself denotes that there is something wrong with descriptive subject. In this regard, we do not talk only about the nature and habit of woman but we also present her revolt. As for as, Kamala Das is concerned she has touched the poignant and striking feelings of women. Kamala Das is herself a woman and she has experienced the conflict of social flow.
She has presented in her poems and autobiography the Feminine Sensibility and male octopus of domination. Her Feminine Sensibility may be observed in following poems:

- The Freaks
- My Grandmother’s House
- A Hot Noon in Malabar
- The Sunshine Cat
- The Invitation
- The Looking Glass
- The Old Playhouse
- An Introduction

(a) The Freaks:

The Feminine Sensibility may be observed in the corpus of poetry. Sensibility alone cannot be separated from poetry it may be only marked in the spirit of the poetry. Therefore, it will be my effort to trace out the Feminine Sensibility from the culture of poetry. This remarkable lyric is extracted from *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), and is to be marked for its abnormally psychological situation in lovemaking and its unredeemed helplessness and deep despair. The title itself suggests these things. The ‘freak’ is one who capricious and whimsical in behaviour, one who does not behave in accordance with the accepted norm. The title suggests that the lovers – the woman and her man-do not behave properly with each other and hence are abnormal and whimsical in their approach to love.

‘He’ in the poem is the man persona and ‘Me’ is the woman persona. They are together in a room. The lover talks and turns his reddened face towards her. But he is not like the lover in fairy tale; he is rather repulsive to
her. His cheeks are ‘sustained’ and brownish in colour; his mouth is ugly and looks like a ‘dark cavern’; his teeth are 'uneven' and calciferous. Evidently, these details are given here to show the woman’s disgust with the man. She seems to be tied to him socially, though personally she does not like him. Thomas Gray in his famous elegy, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* was deeply moved by the loss of so many precious lives in village whose talents were not properly utilized. Kamala Das in her poem expresses her ideas against arranged marriages, which are usually inspired by the parents’ conveniences more than those of the couples are. The poetess, therefore, paints an abhorrent picture of her man, with whom she has to enter into sexual intercourse willy-nilly for his satisfaction. In such a situation, no partner feels happy and jovial. Except for physical contact, it offers no emotional contact between the man and the woman. Hence, her deep sense of personal agony and despair. Her situation becomes all the more pathetic because there is no escape from it. She is utterly helpless and hopeless.

The man puts his hand on her knee in apparent gesture of lovemaking. Though they are inclined to make love to each other, they simply cannot do so, because their minds or at least the woman’s wander away. The phrase ‘puddles of desire’ denotes that the arrows of love smite lovers, but that their love is full of dirt and filth, and not pure and emotional. Where there is no meeting-point for the two hearts, the minds will definitely go astray. This is precisely Kamala’s own situation, -a situation that Devinder Kohli characterizes as “a rather helpless situation”. The woman persona is filled with utter disgust at the failing of her lover, who can touch her with nimble finger-tips to fondle and soothe her, but who can offer her nothing more than ‘skin’s lazy hungers’. Possibly her sexual hunger remains unfulfilled, nothing to speak of the yearnings of the heart for truer love and closer understanding.
The fullness of life through “the sexual titillation and fulfillment” have completely evaded her, so in great despair, she asks the question:

Who can

Help us who have lived so long
And have failed in love?

The heart remains ‘an empty cistern’, and like a dry well devoid of the waters of life, it harbours only ‘coiling snakes of silence’. As a result, her impatience touches a new height. The man remains largely passive and slack, mocking at her ‘feminine integrity’. She has, therefore, to don the masculine role and flaunt ‘a grand, flamboyant lust’ at times in order to save her femininity.

It may be observed that Feminine Sensibility of poetess in above mentioned line is worth noting. It is notable though her lust is grand and flamboyant; it is not real and genuine. When she says I am a freak, this indicates that she alone is abnormal in the given circumstances, but the truth is she plays the male part of activity in sex-participation due to the laziness and the passivity of her man. It is sexual feeling in the eyes of a woman.

(b) My Grandmother’s House:

This is one of the nostalgic poems first published in Summer in Calcutta. It is ‘nostalgic’ because it portrays the happy, carefree days of the poetess when she was a child (before her marriage). She yearns for the return of those days. In Malabar, she used to live in the aristocratic parental home, which was affectionately supervised by her grandmother. The tone and the attitude of the poetess is the same here as those of Charles Lamb in his famous essay, Old Familiar Faces.

The poem also recalls Lord Tennyson’s Tears Idle Tears to our minds in ‘thinking of the days that are no more’. The permanent departure of the dear and
near ones marks all these literary pieces, whose dominant mood is one of melancholy and pathos and nostalgia.

In this poem, we see the Feminine Sensibility when poetess reminds the affection of Grandmother. There is flow of feminine spirit in this poem. Though this poem resembles to Lamb’s *Old Familiar Faces* and Tennyson’s *Tears Idle Tears*, but feminine spirit varies in passion.

Like the poem *A Hot Noon in Malabar*, this one attempts to recapture and sustain the poetess's childhood memories. Kamala Das provides us detailed information regarding the genesis of this poem. In chapter 33 of *My Story*, she writes:

After the sudden death of my grand – uncle and then that of my dear grandmother the old Nalapat House was locked up and its servants disbanded. The windows were shut, gently as the eyes of the dead are shut. My parents took my great grandmother to the house called Sarvodaya where she occupied noiselessly the eastern bedroom on the ground floor, shaded by the tall mango trees through the leaves of which was visible the old beloved house. The rats ran across its darkened halls and the white ants raised on its outer walls strange totems of burial.²¹

The grandmother has been a source of affection and inspiration to the poetess, but her death has rendered her sorrow-stricken and desolate. The house looks totally deserted, now inhabited by snakes and rats. Kamala feels lonely and depressed.

During one of her serious illnesses—during her nervous breakdown in the noisy city of Bombay—she had taken shelter in Malabar and was nursed back to perfect health by her anxious grandmother, but, alas, she is now no more alive.

The grandmother’s house is associated with an impenetrable sense of security and protection, which is now missing in her married life. Even the
‘darkness’ of this house kept security for her instead of terror or violence, Kamala rather wants that darkness to be lifted bodily and shifted to her new married home flooded with light (but with no security). She expresses this feeling of her through an evocative image:

\[
\text{pick an armful of} \\
\text{Darkness to bring it here to lie} \\
\text{Behind my bedroom door like brooding} \\
\text{Dog...} \quad 22
\]

A ‘dog’ is a trusted companion keeping an unerring eye on the door to scare away the strangers and the enemies and to safeguard the inmates with all main and might.

The last few lines are addressed to the ‘darling’ to her husband. Kamala tells him that:

\[
I \text{ lived in such a house and} \\
\text{Was proud, and loved . . . .}
\]

How nostalgic and pathetic these lines are! The sense of pride and love she once had in the house of her grandmother is now no more her property, since she has become a beggar for love who knocks helplessly at strangers’ doors to receive it at least in a small measure. She has lost her way in quest of true love. This situation is in utter contrast to her previous life lived in the soothing company of her grandmother. Kamala Das tells us that she has often remembered her “Sweet frail great grandmother”\textsuperscript{23} and has remembered her with a sense of nostalgia and beggarliness.

In above-mentioned lines we may experience, there can possibly be no worse pathetic situation for a married woman than this.

(c) A Hot Noon in Malabar:
This poem, like “My Grandmother’s House” is reminiscent of Kamala Das’s childhood spent in her happy home in Malabar. It is picked up from Summer in Calcutta (1965). Tinged with pathos the poem moves between nostalgia and estrangement. It is certainly full of moving pathos and tenderness. Apparently, the woman-poet is now living in a big city, far removed from her ancestral home. At noon, she is inside her house, but outside the world is none-too-happy. The beggars come and knock at the door raising unpleasant voices. The men from the hills pour in with parrots in cages and with dirty and stained clothes to tell fortunes of others; the dark-skinned Kurawa girls catch hold of the palms of their customers and please them with their singsong voices; the bangle-sellers sell their bangles of varied colours. All of them have come from a long distance and have developed cracks on their heels, so that when they ascended the porch of her city house, a grating noise arose.

The hot noon draws strangers to her porch who peeps into her room through the window—drapes. Since they have the sun—stained eyes, they cannot see properly what is there inside. Getting disappointed there, they turn to the brick—legend well to quench their thirst and feel some respite from the scorching sun. These strangers are usually doubtful at everything they look at; they are dark, silent, and recalcitrant. When they speak, their voices sound unfamiliar and wild. In the unusual heat, wild men, wild thoughts, wild love consummate. Suddenly, the poetess is reminded of her parental home in Malabar, where things were quite different, though the people stirred about in the hot noon’s there as elsewhere.

There is only one sentence in the whole poem which marks a transition in the thought—sequence of Kamala Das; it is ‘to / be here, far away, is torture’. This sentence is pregnant with meaning and significance, for her ‘torture’ is linked up with the dusty and noisy city, whereas in her previous home of childhood she was all happy and content, with nothing to bother about. The 'hot
noon’s’ were essentially different in Malabar. In one piece, she rightly remarks, ‘From every city I have lived, I have remembered the noon in Malabar with an ache growing inside me, homesickness’.

The poem is conspicuous for its autobiographical element. The details of locale, of persons and places, have been recorded literally in Kamala Das’s autobiography. The ‘cool black floor’, for instance, mentioned in it tallies exactly with the one mentioned in My Story.\textsuperscript{24} Even the details of her various love affairs can easily be corroborated from the records of her life. Similarly, her observations regarding her grandmother, her parental house in Malabar, the frigidity of Nalapat women in sexual matters in general, and the great stress under which she somehow carried on her life: all are fine flashes of her autobiography.

For one thing, Kamala Das expresses her deep distrust and despair at the city – bred life, which cramps the elemental life force. As contrasted to the city-snobs, those born and bred in the open lap of Nature or even in the midst of jungles – such as the ‘strangers’ she speaks of in the poem–are much more favourably inclined towards his life force. \textit{In My Story}, she writes: "I should never have taken to wearing the coloured clothes of the city – I belonged to the serenity of Nalapat".\textsuperscript{25}

Poetess’s Sensibility is Feminine Sensibility. If we sift the sensibility from above descriptions, we may observe as follows:

\textit{Poetess has expressed her choice. In her choice, we find her homesickness. Kamala Das has no deep trust in city-life. There is light on sexual matter. She does not like city-life because she finds anarchy in life mostly in the field of sex. The escape and reflection are the parts of her poetry. Feminine Sensibility may be witnessed in the light of above\textsuperscript{26}...}
Thoughts and feelings are the part of creative work. They constitute the Sensibility.

(d) The Sunshine Cat;

This poem, too, like the previous ones, finds a berth in Summer in Calcutta (1965). It is sans warmth, sans love. Sexual humiliation, which forms the main theme of Kamala Das’s autobiography, My Story is the central experience herein. It recounts the tale of a woman too much wronged by the male world around her.

The poem directly highlights the miseries of a forlorn woman. The men treated her very badly— the man she loved did not reciprocate her feelings and he was basically ‘selfish’ and ‘coward’, the husband, who neither ‘loved’ her nor ‘used’ her, but who was ‘a ruthless watcher’, who also made of the same grain; the ‘band of cynics’. She ultimately turned to for her emotional gratification was all selfish and egotistic. These cynics with monkey-like hair on their chests subjected her to all kinds of humiliation and torture, including physical and odorous; their smells were sickening and they were mostly driven to her for quenching their raging lusts. All of them assured her to be ‘kind’ towards her, but they also pointed out to her that she was not meant for love, suggesting thereby that she was probably frigid and cold and ill-suited for love-making. When she got out of their clutches, she retired to her room, to her soft bed and started sobbing and weeping.

She now realized that ‘tears’ were her trusted companions and that she would have to pass the rest of her life in a sad, hopeless manner. At this moment, when she needed the love and consolation of her husband, he treated her with cruelty. He used to lock her up, every morning, in a room of books with streak of sunlight lying near the door, before he went out for his official duty. Soon winter came and while locking her one day he realized that his woman was a mere Skelton, a hair – thin line, and no human creature of flesh
and blood. By the time he returned to her in the evening, she was ‘cold’ and ‘half dead’ quite unfit for the touch of men. The disease hinted here is that of serious nervous breakdown, to recover from which Kamala Das had to go to her grandmother. The story of the genesis of the poem may be observed in chapter 41 of My Story.

This chapter is titled “I withdrew into the cave I had made for myself.” In it the writer first complains of the unsympathetic attitude of non – writers towards a writer and then of her own aching loneliness. Speaking of the non – cooperative attitude of the non– writer, Kamala Das writes:

"The essence of the writer eludes the non-writer. All that the writer reveals to such people are her oddities of dress and her emotional excess"

She writes again:

"As I wrote more and more, in the circles, I was compelled to move in, I became lonelier and lonelier. I left that my loneliness was like a red brand on my face. In company when there were dinners at any friend's house, it sat still as a statue, feeling the cruel vibrations all around me. Then my husband realised my plight and stopped talking me out anywhere. I withdrew into the cave. I had made for myself where I wrote stories and poems and became safe and anonymous".26

In above-mentioned lines, we see the Feminine Sensibility. How she experiences her feeling towards her partner is the reflection of Feminine Sensibility.

This situation has been beautifully portrayed in the present poem. She has not received love from her licit or illicit orbits; she is totally lonely and frustrated. Those who claimed to be kind towards her had only subjected her to humiliation and injury. If we study referred poem closely, we experiences that
she is no better than ‘The Sunshine Cat’, all pale and diseased. That is why, the title of the poem is suitably chosen to be *The Sunshine Cat*. Taken in this light, the poetess’s life over brimming with sexuality finds no true source for fulfillment and it, therefore, becomes all the more miserable and deplorable. The last lines in particular and the tenor and temper of the whole poem in general verify this fact –‘know of no use at all to men’.

Then, the poem is pervaded with the air of lust and passion. It has no place for pure and true love. The poetess might feel a hunger for the ideal lover, but she cannot be freed of the sin of committing adultery with other men and she seems to cry over the loss of her ‘use’ for men in general. The modern woman’s predicament is energetically voiced in this poem, but her challenge of the socio–moral laws, nay her flaunting of them is unpardonable.\(^{27}\) In this way Feminine Sensibility reflects in this poem.

(e) **The Invitation:**

This poem was included in *The Descendants* (1917). It is in the form of an interior monologue. It is a dialogue between the poetess and the sea, but the solo voice is that of the former. The 'tides' are nothing but the emotions welling up in the poetess. The dominant mood in it is one of death by drowning. The sea image is insistent here. The poetic persona is in great despair due to failure in love and married life and she receives an invitation from the see to commit suicide in order to escape the trials and tribulations of existence. The invitation for death or suicide is so urgent and strong but she resists it by holding out promises of better life in the future.

The poem opens with a very touching image of meaningless sexual encounters of the poetic persona. The image shows a male fist ‘clenching and unclenching' in her head. The intensity of her ‘Sunday evening pains' in her head is remarkably suggested by it. On Sundays when her husband is at home,
her headache becomes intense and throbs in the same any as the frequent closing and opening of an ugly male fist.

In the meantime, the sea extends its invitation to her by becoming ‘garrulous’ that she should come down and drown herself into it. Moreover, her life has been empty and deserted, and so her ‘dying’ won’t make much difference. And if she dies, the sea will become richer to contain her.

But the woman-persona turns down the suicidal suggestions of the sea. She asks it to go its way, while she will go her own. She prays to the sea to leave her alone. Suddenly she remembers the lover who came to her for a brief rest and refreshment after a busy schedule, as a fish comes out of the water for a puff of breeze. He was warm in her arms for a while and did not talk much to produce a jarring sound. The sea however, reminds her that she was thinking of the past, which is sort of a disease, and that the man has gone away forever. It would be, therefore, foolish to wait for him; instead, she should accept its invitation and be free of all worldly botherations. Again, she refuses to oblige it, for she still remembers her lover and his warm embraces. While he was with her on the bed, which had become a shrunken paradise for them, they derived utmost pleasure. Walking out together, they made the whole city look a blessed paradise on earth. The sea is still insistent with her and invites her again. It urges her to have herself drowned into it. This will be a cool, carefree death for her much different from the death by burning on a funeral pyre.

As contrasted to this, the cool, sandy bed of the sea will provide her great relief like the soft pillows for a reclining head. But she again remembers her lover and his pleasant company. She expresses her sexual pleasures. The heat of the summer had rendered their bodies inert and indolent, but the sexual contact expanded their private cells. Getting a little dejected, the sea once again cries out for her and asks her to stop thinking of bygone days. It tells her that it has
waited for long for ‘the right one’ to come, ‘the bright one’ to live in its blue waters. The woman persona says ‘no’ to the call of the sea, telling it that:

\[
I \text{ am still young}
\]

\[
And I need that was for construction and
\]

\[
Destruction. Leave me. . . . 28
\]

The poem highlights the staggering situation of a middle class wife in the clutches of male domination. It externalizes the poetess’s hopeless condition in a loveless family. That her life is empty and sterile without her lover, who is not likely to come back to her, becomes so clear in it. There is no solution to her personal dilemma arousing suicidal thoughts in her. The lover whose company erstwhile enabled her to derive the utmost joy is lost for ever for her, while the licit source is sluggish and unsympathetic. It is a hellish life for a domestic woman, to which the opening Lines of the poem point out Very often in her poetry Kamala Das identifies the ‘sea’ with the source of solace and comfort and redemption, whereas the ‘heat’ or the ‘sun’ connotes the opposite force of oppression and exploitation.29

Here also the poetess looks to the sea as usual and eventually accepts its invitation of self-drawing-

(f) The Looking Glass:

To study the ‘Feminine Sensibility’ we may take example from The Looking Glass. This poem is culled from the Descendants (1967). Like Ferns and Convicts in this volume, it is about physical love between a man and a woman. It is “both patronizing and indulgent in tone.” The woman in it is every woman that seeks love and the man is every man that wants a woman to satisfy this sex hunger. The poem faithfully reflects the mutual need of man and women for physical enjoyment and a woman must be truthful to the need of hers. According to the poetess, a woman should be honest about her wants and
requirements and then it would be easy for her to get a man to love her. For physical gratification, she should draw close to him. She should not hesitate to stand naked before the looking glass with him so that he sees it clearly that he is stronger and she is weaker, younger and lovelier. This will satisfy his male ego and excite his passion for the weaker sex. She should also accept his praise of her beauty and youth. In order to satisfy his male ego, she should point out to him that he is bodily perfect and notice that his eyes are getting red in passionate excitement. She should also mark his shy walk across the bathroom floor, covering himself in a towel and his jerky way of urination. She should, in short, admire him for all his good points and let him feel that he is her ‘only man’ for sexual satisfaction.

As a woman true to her nature, she should give herself over to him totally. She should offer to him the scent of her long hair, the musk of her breasts and the warm shock of her menstrual blood. She should allow him to have his fill of sexual pleasure and indulge in it with all her ‘endless female hungers’. He would then feel that she is not only satisfying his lust but also hers.

Again, the poetess returns to the initial impulse in the poem and asserts that it is easy to get a man to love a woman but that it is very difficult so carry on her life after he has gone away forever. For him, it is simply a sexual encounter with a lustful woman but for her it entails all difficulties and tensions. On his desertion, she feels totally stranded in life, suffering humiliations and miseries of a forlorn woman. She was once in quest of emotional fulfillment but she received only tears and sobs, incoming into contact with ‘strangers’.

Her body, which once gleamed under his touch like burnished brass, becomes now ‘drab and destitute’. She is no more than a melancholy woman having on slaughters of disease and decay and deformity.

If we consider the reflection of poem, we find:
The poem does not merely celebrate the passions of love; it simultaneously views the climax and the anti-climax through a bifocal vision which renders the complexity, ambivalence and the irony of the total situation in a much greater depth than is normally available to the Newtonian ‘Single Vision’; to adopt a Blakean phrase.30

The poem is simple and straightforward in its diction. It is highly charged with pulse and power. Passion seems to leap out of every line. A sharp feminine sensibility is at work here. As a full-blooded woman, Kamala Das makes an honest confession of her wants for her sexual gratification. The poem is decidedly a psychic striptease. It powerfully evokes the image of a lustful relationship between the two sexes. Nothing is, in truth, concealed from the reader, not even the ugly and the forbidden. There is a subtle psychological analysis of the male mentality in the first part of the poem, just as the second part is totally pervaded by a feminine consciousness. The cumulative effect of the poem is one of sterility and futility of sexual love.

(g) The Old Play House:

This is the title-piece of Kamala Das’s third volume of verse, The Old Playhouse & Other Poems (1973). It is addressed to 'you' to the husband, who wanted to curtail her freedom of movement and action through his subtle maneuverings. The poetic persona does not like this, just as she does not like him or his ways. His ‘monstrous ego’ comes under fire herein, since it has totally reduced her and disappointed her. As a result, her mind becomes ‘an old playhouse with all lights put out’.

The poem, which was first published in The Illustrated Weekly of India, is a strong indictment against injurious male behaviour. It protests against the manner of treatment meted out to her by her own man. In My Story, she writes, "I too tried adultery for a short while".31 obliviously, it is an attempts to shatter
all conventional and imposed bonds, including that of wedlock, upon a woman who craves for emotional fulfillment and sense of security.

Kamala Das writes in her autobiography:

Like the majority of city-dwelling women, I too tried adultery for a short while, but I found it distasteful. My lover had entered the decline of his career and aroused in me, more than love, a strong sense of pity.

and again as under:

Years after all of it had ended, I asked myself why I took him on as my lover fully aware of his incapacity to love and I groped in my mind for the right answers. Love has a beginning and an end, but lust has no such faults. I needed security, I needed permanence, I needed two strong arms thrown around my shoulders and a soft voice in my ear. Physical integrity must carry with it a certain pride that is burden to the soul. Perhaps it was necessary for my body to defile itself in many ways, so that the soul turned humble for a change.32

These autobiographical extracts demonstrate clearly that the poetess needed love and tenderness, security and permanence, from her strong man but he could not satisfy her on these scores. Hence her unredeemed damnation and suffering in his company.

The possessive instinct of the man is stressed in the opening of the poem. The man tried to tame a free bird that she was and subject her to sexual torture so that she should forget her happy seasons, old homes and her intrinsic value as a woman. But she had come to him not to learn of him but of herself and thereby ‘grow’ in a carefree atmosphere. He was pleased with her body’s response and its fragile convulsions.

He made hectic love to her and overwhelmed her by his forceful physical contact. He rather over flooded the organs of her body by an energetic mating and dribbled his spittle into her mouth. He called her ‘wife’, who was taught to
attend to her domestic duties ungrudgingly and look after him properly by supplying him tea, food and vitamins at the needed moments. She tried to adjust herself in accordance with his wishes but she lost her individuality in the process and became a mere dwarf under his disastrous male ego. She was totally reduced and annihilated in due course:

_Cowering_

_Beaneth your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and_

_Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your_

_Questions I mumbled in coherent replies._

The days of happiness came to a grinding halt in her case, – ‘The summer / Begins to pall’; she began to feel the arrival of the autumn for her and the suffocating atmosphere of the burning leaves and the rising smoke. The man she loved adopts artificial measures to satisfy himself – ‘artificial lights’ – and grows indifferent and insolent towards her by keeping his windows shut. But the artificial measures have not helped him in any way to override his dominating male impulse. Even his ‘breath’ is strongly masculine. The overall impact of all this on her is dejection and cheerlessness, with no hope of regeneration. Her singing is gone, her dance is forsaken and her mind becomes ‘an old playhouse with all its lights put out’. As contrasted to this, the man adopts a hard line towards her and serves his love in deadly doses, whereas for her love is self-obsessed and unenjoyable and yet it seeks its fulfillment in freedom rather than in bondage. Love for its healthy growth wants to be pure and emotional and not lustful and muddy. The expressions like ‘the water’s edge’ and ‘to erase the water’ signify sexual consummation between the man and the woman, which the woman persona does not like.

In this poem, the poetess’s personal predicament is aired out. She who was as free as a swallow has now been domesticated with all her wings severed.
She desired to discover a meaning, a perfect fulfillment through love but her man broke her completely by thrusting household responsibilities on her shoulders and by creating barricades for her in life. He asserted marital prerogatives, curtailed her freedom totally, showed his masculine power to her. Consequently, she became a dwarf under the heavy weight of his lustful masculinity and monstrous ego. All her hopes were dashed into pieces; all her cheerful spirits disappeared for good. She began to feel a great emotional vacuum and could not enjoy sexual encounters with him. She got possessed with an abnormal psychology and sought love at strangers’ doors. The lustful advance of her man grew distasteful to her and she took revenge upon him by craving for freedom from his snares and by seeking shelter in others’ arms (to use her own expression).

In its tone and temper, the poem is gloomy and pessimistic. In its language, it is fiery and charged. At places it gives the impression of being verbose and long-winded. The metaphorical expression –‘my mind is an old / Playhouse with all its light put out.’

Her ‘feminism’ may be marked here. She casts her eyes on woman’s freedom. In the light of above exploration we, conclude her feminism. She presents her feeling towards male. She does not excuse her husband. She desires perfect fulfillment through love.

(h) An Introduction:

It is one of the best poems ever written by Kamala Das. It is highly revealing of the poetess-of her political knowledge, of her linguistic acquirements, of her physical growth and marriage, of her love to another man and of her eventual frustration and loneliness. It is definitely cast in a ‘confessional’ mode.
Introducing herself to her readers, the poetess tells them that she does not know politics but she knows the names of influential, powerful persons. Beginning with Nehru; that she is an Indian, very dark, born in Malabar that she speaks three languages, writes in two and dreams in one, that she write in English despite objections from certain people quarters and that she has a strong claim to it; that English comes to her as naturally as cawing to the crows or roaring to the lions and that it is competent to convey her emotions and thought; that she was married to a youth of sixteen when she grew up a little; that her husband did not beat her but left her woman-persona crushed and broken; that she disliked him since then; that she started moving about in society in a male dress, ignoring her womanliness; that people again objected to it and wanted her to 'fit in' or 'belong' and not play pretending games or roles; that she, thereafter, fell in love with a man who also loved her; and that ultimately she drank deep at the well of pessimism and dispiritedness. This is all that she reveals about herself. The tone of the poem is intimate and convincing; the language is simple yet sweeping. The swift movement of the lines is evident in its use of monosyllabism; for example as in the following:

*Dress in sarees, be girl,*

*Be wife, they said, Be embroiderer, be cook,*

*Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,*

*Belong... Don’t sit*

*On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.*

*Be Amy, or be Kamala: - - Or, better*

*Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to*

*Choose a name, a role.*
In it the poetess identifies herself with ‘every woman’ who seeks love. Prof. K. R. S. Iyengar characterizes this piece as "confessional".37

Thus, we see keen ‘Feminine Sensibility’ in An Introduction. She presents her view towards male-society. She expresses her ideas about the social status of women in society. Her inner feeling finds expression in this poem. Her feeling of revolt may also be observed in this poem. This is all that she reveals about herself.

There is short survey of Feminine Sensibility of Kamala Das and it is not enough to establish the Feminine Sensibility of Kamala Das.

Now, we should study some pages of My Story where we may explore some points of Feminine Sensibility of the poetess.

Marriage happens to be an important turning point in the life of women. Especially in Indian context, it is regarded as the summum bonum of woman’s life. For professional artists and careerist women, marriage has been no less than an imprisonment. For such women, it has been a persistent myth of dependence and projection, joy and conflicts, gaps and communions.38

In autobiographies, most women portray their marriage as the central cause of transition in their lives. For the writers who introspect, marriage happens to be an ambivalent theme of their life-stories. On the one hand it awakens the happy memories of shyness, innocence and hesitation of youth, while on the other, it arouses the questions with 'ifs' and 'buts', relating the logic of 'cause and effect' between the past and the present. The relationship of husband and wife not simply affects the lives of writing woman but pervades their attitudes and expressions. A single woman, conscious of her singularity, writes with a different stance and a married woman equally aware of her wedded womanhood, writes with that pressure on her mind. One can state, in other words, that marriage colours the self-expression of woman, as writers or
autobiographers. In fact, the social impact of marriage teaches the art of deception. The sexual politics, as the feminist critics argue, moves beyond the borders of private suffering of women.

Women autobiography is the matrix of Feminine Sensibilities. In this connection, it is notable that the role and attitude of the husband, actually determines their perceptions about male mind and patriarchal culture. In majority of the writings on women’s lives, the husbands seem to represent exploiting agencies of gender–based norms. Such women lament, in their writings, the lack of fulfillment, freedom or identity resulting finally in their isolation. The suffering of married but isolated women writers is mainly caused by their disillusionments in domestic life; it is not surprising that such woman writers broke away from their socially expected norms of womanhood.

Kamala Das is blatantly frank about her personal and private relation within and without marriage. The writers like Kamala Das do believe that not all relations are necessarily sexual. Her account of marriage in My Story is crucial for many reasons. First, it is this theme in her story that become a central ground to hold the resultant ironic conditions, paradoxical codes, and phases that change her selfhood.

Secondly, it is the marriage of Kamala Das that made her youth not simply sad and isolated but helpless and doomed to the loss of warmth, as if she had to pay the price of her spontaneity and innocence to the negative attitudes of husband, the related and not-so-related people around her.

Thirdly, it is through marriage that Kamala Das’s emotional conflicts were fused with her physical struggle and intensified her creativity. Next, it is only because of marriage that sincerity and sensibility of her delicate mind was bruised. Her integrity was cracked due to her suffering in the marital life. Finally, it is on account her disillusionments through marriage that her intense thirst for love remained unquenched, to prompt her, every now and then, to
write poems; in her marital frustrations, she was activated by the 'endless female hungers' that survived all suffering. In her article *The Shame of Marriage*, she writes: “I am thoroughly disappointed with my marriage and everybody else marriage…the ideal marriage, continued according to the desire of our society, is a bond in which both become mental cripples and cling on to each other until death.”

Kamala Das’s marriage was fixed by the elders of her family in a peculiarly orthodox manner. She was an adolescent of fifteen and was not prepared mentally for marriage. It was only the entry of her mind into the dreams of love that unexpectedly got shattered by the fixing of her marriage with a much older person, who was a relative of hers. Before she could know and react about the match, she was informed that she ought to marry this man. He had been a regular visitor to their house and was employed in the Reserve Bank of India. This most important event of her life was made to happen without her consent and choice, due to the typically conservative climate of her South-Indian family. No member of the family considered it necessary to know Kamala Das’s opinion and choice. It was taken for granted that she was incapable of knowing her own choice. In those queer conditions, she had to accept the family authorities, who had only seen that this man enough to discuss her readings with him impressed her.

This is the most critical sentiment of Indian parents when their daughter is but in teens. The parents worried about the public-responses of their growing daughter at home; wish to discharge their responsibility without bothering much for the girl’s desires. In this regard her voice may be heard: “It had been clear to me that my home was broken for incomprehensible reasons. My mother was living in Malabar while my father stayed on in Calcutta. It was not a complete family like everybody else’s…I was a burden and a responsibility neither my parents nor my grandmother could put with for long.”
In this regard, feminism is mentionable. Feminism is widely spread term for vital movement of women class in modern time. This word is not equally applied in ‘Eastern and Western’ countries. Women differs accepted truth from men in the different territories of world countries.

"Women of every race are the only discriminated group with no territory, no country of their own, not even a neighbourhood. In a patriarchy a poor man’s house may be his castle but even a rich woman’s body is not her own. Somewhere in our lives, each of us needs a free place, a little psychic territory."41

There are the words of ‘Gloria Steinem’ about the feminism. The gender difference gets innocuously reflected in the writings of a woman writer. It is precisely because the male writer is conscious that he is a writer; whereas, a female writer is fully conscious that she is essentially a woman trying to come to terms with herself through a phallocentric language. The gender difference, therefore, gets intensified eschewing a startling tension in the language a woman writer chooses to write in. The feminist perspective or the question of feminism gets perpetrated into the psyche of a woman writer, for she makes an honest attempt to define her identity saying “I am a woman”. This precisely is what Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex (1949) intended to assert. The woman writer creates a space within her and around her to assert what she feels in terms of her dreams, fantasies, hopes and frustrations. As a result, she does not allow the non-womanly, non-female farces to interact with her own oneiric, apparently liberated sphere of identity.

This cult of female individualism is likely to create a vacuum in the woman writer. In this connection, Mary Jo Salter remarks: "The time is overdue to admit that there is something of vacuum in women’s poetry and that we abhor it. For a woman to concede this is not disloyal to her sex; it is the first
step in the creation of an environment in which women artist of the future will
flourish".42

Whether women writers will flourish in future, if they admit with
humility the possibility of a vacuum in their poetry, is altogether a matter of
time. But this much is certain that the gender difference gets celebrated
sometimes with motivated malignity against men and sometimes with innocent
exhibitionistic tendencies.

It is noticeable that feminism in America is not appreciated, in this
regard, following lines may be quoted: Throughout history, any time women
tried to loosen their corsets and breathe more freely, they met with a suffocating
counterattack. Initially the feminist revolution of the 1970s was understood as
an effort to secure the economic, political and social rights and protections that
men have always enjoyed. But in the 1980s that understanding of the term
seemed to disappear. First the fundamental right, then the White House and ultimately Hollywood, television and many journalist held feminism responsible
force every woe besetting women, from mental depression to meager savings
accounts, from teenage suicides to eating disorders to bad complexions. The
collective message to women went something like this: Feminism is your worst
dynasty all that freedom is making you miserable unmarriageable, infertile, and
unstable. Go home, back a cake, quit pounding on the doors of public life, and
all your troubles will go away.43

Worthnoting is superior to that of India in many aspect of life. Among many
factors contributing to the high divorce rate and instability in the American
families, the achieved freedom of the American women and their insistence on
the right to equality with men can be termed central. Woman is the fulcrum of
stability in a family. When her relationship with the male counterpart gets
ruptured or distorted, the family as a whole is likely to sediment instability.
In the Indian context, the woman in general, still retains the required patience and courage to avoid any disequilibrium in the family relationship. The family in India is still more stable and the family relationship more gratifying and encouraging.

The position or status of woman in the nucleus family is almost similar to that of the joint family in so far as she enjoys a central or pivotal position. There is something miraculous in this phenomenon of a woman’s subordination or subjugation to family’s male-dominance.

But now, today the condition is changing. In the changing pattern of society, because of the impact of rapid industrialization, new scientific invention, rapid spread of education, a woman-particularly the educated one-in India, or for that matter, a woman creative writer in India, is likely to feel the uneasy burden of suppression or subjugation.

She is likely to be influenced by the changing attitude of the civilization as a whole. So she becomes vocal in defining her identity. She thinks in terms of her rights and responsibilities. In an interview, Kamala Das reveals the startling purpose of her My story:

*I needed to disturb society out of its complacence. I found the complacence a very ugly state. I wanted to make women of my generation feel that if men could do something wrong; they could do it themselves too. I wanted them to realise that they were equal. I wanted to remove the gender difference. I wanted to see that something happened to society, which had strong inhibitions and which they only told lies in the public.*

But it is remarkable to say that ‘Feminism’ in India is in a low key. Really, it has been a very quiet revolt in India. It has not been as noisy as in Europe.
Like Kamala Das, there are others namely Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia, Tara Patel who write with a view to defining their feminine identity reflecting typically on the plight of women in India. Tara Patel in her *Single Women* examines and portrays a woman’s life, which is one of loneliness and suffering.

But Patel’s sensibility is punctuated by the forces of a living paradox. As a woman, the persona in the poems seeks after love, dreams of being touched by a man and dreams of touching a man to achieve consummation in love. She exposes the genuine feelings of a woman:

*Touch me, touch, touch me somewhere,*

*give me permission to touch you,*

*Take me and strip me and return the*

*Compliments of nakedness.*

*I’ve lived for so many years thinking you*

*will reach out and calm me.*

*Women chase men’s balls, saying,*

*If you catch a man by his balls*

*His heart and mind will follow.*

But when she is impelled by the question of feminine egotism and identity, she rejects the male – dominance with a view to achieving freedom and equality with man. She ruefully advises a woman: “You need a new reason every day to be alive.” The persona at once becomes conscious of the sexual difference and attempts to define her identity in a new way:

*It is easy to dismiss all men as bastards,*

*perhaps I need to do a course in a male psychology,*
with extensive practicals,
to understand your need to perform
even with shores.

You married at the right time
if not to the right man.

Or

His invitation to go swimming naked
was turned down.

A long brown look accentuated
the loneliness of my inhibitions.46

Mamta Kalia in her *Tribute to Papa* exposes the difference between the
two worlds-her own world and that of her father-one hackneyed, corrupt, the
other idealistic, sacred. She blames her papa for being so clean in “thoughts”,
“words” and “teeth”.

You are an unsuccessful man, papa
couldn’t wangle a cozy place in the world.

. . . . . .

I wish you had guts papa,
To smuggle eighty thousand watches at a stroke,
And I’d proudly say, “My father’s in
import-export business, you know
I’d be proud of you then.”47

Gauri Deshpande deftly depicts the plight of a woman in *Men and
Women*:
Then certainly my friend, after this insidious
adulation amounting to obscenity
you could turn her essential contempt
for this great gowk of a creature, her man,
inwards, that she could with such ease.
be enslaved by your skillful Hands,
beggar’s heart, and from himalayan heights
condescend to warm your bed
stiffen your manhood
and bear your spawn.48

Apart from Kamala Das, there are other poetesses like Imtiaz Dharker, Charmayne D’ Sauza, Menka Shivdasni, and Adarsh Mishra who write poetry from a female perspective. All though all of them try to gather strength from the springboard of female perspective already prepared by Das, they try to be different from Das in terms of handling English language and in terms of patterning their poetry with startling metaphors and metonyms. Rajlukshmee Debee Bhattacharya intelligently surfaces the difference between the two generations of poets:

These new women poets stand poles apart from their predecessor, Kamala Das. At the same time, they are rooted in her and liked with her, sharing the same ambience and the same concerns. These poets and perhaps women poets anywhere inhabit the same woman’s world. It is impossible to get out of one’s skin. They possess distinctly feminine sensibilities. At times, moving from one poet of the new generation to another gives a feeling of dejavu; the same wine seems to be poured from so many bottles.49
It is eminently evident that Indian poetry in English has already initiated a feminist perspective but it is still in a low key. Moreover, feminism in India has not assumed the kind of complexity it has acquired in the U.S.A. because of the ethnic and racial problems. White-black complexes or differences do not tear India apart. Perhaps none except Kamala Das articulates her female-experience and female – ego with such startling frankness and honesty. Because of such frankness and liberty, her language assumes distinction. As a creative writer, she feels the inadequacy of language to express all her experiences and feelings:

Yes I feel that inadequacy every day, every moment, when

I feel I should express myself freely.50

The poetry of Kamala Das makes a discovery of the many levels of paradoxes through which the self passes in order to define, authenticate and validate its total involvement in the affairs of life. These paradoxes – such as female male, physical or sensual – immortal, worldly-divine, real – mystical, subjective – objective, gynocentric – phallocentric, mundane ideal, fettered-liberated – help in shaping the vision of Kamala Das. When we come to Das’s later poetry, we discover that her vision comprehends such paradoxes and attempt to transcend them. Although early poetry of Kamala Das advocates for a feminist perspective it dissolves in the later poetry. Such dissolution is the result of the maturing vision of Kamala Das as an artist, not necessarily as a woman writer.

In an early interview, Das once said, “a poet’s raw material is not stone or clay: it is her personality”. (Nabar 163). Kamala Das tries to reveal her personality – genuinely feminine – through her poetry. But the personality is likely to be influenced and shaped by the forces of culture and society it springs from. The deposits of culture sedimented in her personality and hence she tries to rise to a height of mystical union with the invisible lover Lord Krishna. Such a willing acceptance of the ideal transcendental lover Lord Krishna is no doubt
the result of the impact of the oriental vision of transcendentalism and mysticism. This is perhaps, one of the many avenues of life, which help overcome the problems of life. A group of French Feminists (including Chantal Chawal, Xaviere Gauthier, and Luce Irigary) strongly believe and argue that female sexuality is mysterious, unknown and subterranean. Helen Cixous in her essay *The Laugh the Medusa* advocates that women must put their bodies into their writing. The further believe that there exists an inviolable linkage between female sexuality and female writing: "Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of unconscious spring forth."51

A truly liberated woman writer must be prompted to uncover herself, uncensored her writing; for these processes she touches the supinely secret unconscious of the female ego. She must be against all forms of repression. Caroline G. Burk argues, “Women’s writing proceeds from the body” and that "our sexual differentiation is also our source"52 Adrienne Rich registers a similar view but with difference. Kamala Das’s poetry is very close to what Rich advocate for achieving in *Of Woman Born*: Female biology…has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specification. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology. For these reasons, it will I believe, come to view our physicality as resource rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully human life, we require not only to conquer our bodies…we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, the corporeal ground of our intelligence.53

Here, in this comment we closely touch the tangent of biology and physicality that is the base of the corporeal ground of intelligence. Women are influenced by patriarchal thought. Feminism develops from here. Among these components, body is eminent. Body becomes the source or origin of a woman writer’s pattern of imagery, which reflects her awareness of the reality around. Body serves as a spring – board of imagery that governs the text.
So women poets use a language that is more frank, an image pattern, more pervasive so as to give it a distinctive identity, quite different from the male writers. Poetry of Kamala Das is rich with such pervasive anatomical imagery. Perhaps this is one way of articulating the desire for liberty whose seeds lie deep in the unconscious of female psyche. She celebrates the body in an ecstatic matter:

\[
\text{isn’t each} \\
\text{Embrace a complete thing, a} \\
\text{Finished jigsaw, when mouth on} \\
\text{Mouth, I lie, ignoring my poor} \\
\text{Moody mind, while pleasure} \\
\text{With deliberate gaiety} \\
\text{Trumpets harshly into the} \\
\text{Silence of the room. . . .54}
\]

In an act of love, a woman has to abandon her shyness. She has to be free and frank with a view to celebrating her sense of liberty and to achieving consummation.

\[
\text{Stand nude before the glass with him} \\
\text{So that he sees himself the stronger one} \\
\text{And believes it so, and you so much more} \\
\text{Softer, younger, lovelier . . . .Admit your} \\
\text{Admiration. Notice the perfection} \\
\text{Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under} \\
\text{Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor.}
\]
Dropping towels, and the jerky way he
Urinates. All the fond details that make
Him male and your only man. Gift him all,
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your
Endless female hungers. 55

Parthasarthy rightly observes:

"With a frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context, Kamala Das expresses her need for love. What is overpowering about her poems is their sense of urgency. They literally boil over. 56

While trying to explore the possibilities of "endless female hungers," Kamala Das narrates the experiences of a woman who in love merges the border between life and death:

And, as day and night as one tide after
Another roll away, an ocean's vast
Longour seizes her blood, the fences between.
The state of life and death fade, and nailed
To the pleasant cross of being, she straddles
The handless clockface of eternity. 57

No Indian woman writer before Kamala Das could bring to the forefront the ubiquitous female psyche in an inhibited manner. Her language has been modelled with such oneself – consciousness that at once it becomes the proof of her authentic experiences, Joyce Carol Oates believes that "Writing is a far
more conscious form of dreaming and no one dreams that are of no interest to him, however, trivial and absurd they may appear to someone else.”58 Not merely in Kamala Das’ verse narratives, but in her prose writings, too she is frank enough to mould language to her own basic need of articulation.

Kamala Das writes:

_I was born in a family of frigid women. They were all so inhibited that I was not told what would happen when a girl entered puberty. Then one day while the blood flowed between my thighs I wept out of fear, assuming that some internal organ had ruptured and I was going to die. Nobody had ever told me of a woman’s menstrual cycle and of her magical secretions, to prepare me for womanhood. And at fifteen as a bride, wearing braces on my teeth, I saw a man’s nudity for the first time and was shocked. It was so horribly men aching like a snake about a strike. I envied then the nuns, their security, and the privacy of their genitalia. Of course, I had no courage then to talk of the exercise in bed. Or of the soreness between the legs which burned when I bathed the morning after._59

Thus, from her writings one gets ample proof of the poet’s dependence on the female body involving its manifest mysteries and miracles – for the sake of imagery, which help express the female psyche.

There are a good number of poems wherein Kamala Das registers her sense of suffocation issuing from her loss of liberty after marriage. She is iconoclastic in her approach to marriage. She treats “marriage” as “a game of cruelty.”60 Her female ego comes to the surface when she ruefully depicts her loss of liberty. In _Of Calcutta_ Kamala Das exposes the intricacies of her inner pangs in stemming from marriage:

_I was sent away, to protect a family’s_.
Honour, to save a few cowards, to defend some
Abstractions, sent to another city to be.

A relative’s wife, a hausfrau from his home, and
A mother for his sons, yet another nodding

Doll for his parlour, a walkie talkie one to warm his bed at night.  

She feels that she has been reduced to a “trained circus dog.” Her spirit—essentially feminine—is being forced to accept chastisement. She laments:

where is my soul,

My spirit, where the muted tongue of my desire?  

She frankly admits in her Diary:

Perhaps my marriage was meant to be a chastisement, a punishment to remove kinks from my personality. My husband was to be the scourger. He was in that role very competent, very effective during the first years of marriage; I wonder if I do not equal him or even surpass him in the game of cruelty.

Once again in The Stone Age Kamala Das laments over her loss of identity. She lodges her complaint to herself:

You turn me into a bird of stone, a granite

Dove, you build round me a shabby drawing room

And stroke my pitted face absent-mindedly while

You read. With loud talk you bruise my pre-morning sleep

You stick a finger into my dreaming eye.

Her female ego is invulnerable to the male-dominance. So she raises a voice of protest, sharply defining the chasm between the two worlds one masculine, the other female:
Your room is
Always lit by artificial lights, your windows always
Shut. Even the air – conditioner helps so little
All pervasive is the male scent of your breath.65

She derides artificiality. She intends to come to terms with her own self
for this would give her the taste of liberty. She objects to making any
compromise with her husband. Ironically she portrays her own plight:
It will be alright when I learn
To paint my mouth like a clown’s.
It will be alright if I put up my hair
Stand near my husband to make a proud pair.66

The kind of self one encounters in the poetry of Kamala Das is surely to
remind one of what R. D. Laing in his The Divided Self 67 calls an
“ontologically insecure” personality. Laing argues that such a personality
encounters strange kind of experiences in which the identity and autonomy are
always in question. R.D. Laing further suggests that the reality of other people
is understood as a threat in two ways: “engulfment” and
“pertification”: “Engulfment” occurs when there persist a fear of losing one’s
identity in the other if one is loved or understood. “Petrification” occurs out of
fear of being put to use, made into an object by others. Considering the nature
of the self as revealed in the poetry of Kamala Das, one can squarely discover an
“ontologically insecure” self that is predicated by “petrification” rather than by
“engulfment”. She aspires for “engulfment” and it occurs to her only in the
height of imagination where in she surrenders herself at the altar of Lord
Krishna – The ideal, the immortal lover. Sudhir Kakar in his Intimate Relations:
Exploring Indian Sexuality rightly harps on the female psyche, when he writes:
Yet what strikes me most in the Indian woman's fantasy, as reflected in the narratives, is less a burning rage than an aching disappointment. Her imagination seems propelled by the longing for a single two person universe – which the women from the slums called a Jodi – where the affirmation of her female body and the recognition of her feminine soul take place simultaneously. The longing is for an idealized phallus which will serve as a “transitional object” in the consolidation of her feminine identity.68

Kamala Das’s poetry dramatizes an “aching disappointment”. Such dramatization ingrains within the desire to come to realize an idealized phallus,” which she discovers in Lord Krishna. Partly because of her disappointment in realizing an idealized form of love in her husband and partly because of her cognition of the fleeting nature of time that takes away the youthful vigour and passion, Kamala Das feels disenchanted with convulsions of the body, of the body’s miraculous magic. She exhorts other fellow women to free themselves from the fetters of maledominion:

Woman, is this happiness, this lying buried
Beneath a man? It’s time again to come alive

The world extends a lot beyond his six foot frame.69

She intends to escape from this prison into a new world of new love and ecstasy infinite:

As the convict studies
His prison's geography
I study the trappings
of your body, dear love.70
She aspires for the freedom of a bird. Her languages is fully under her control. She does not generate an enmity with the male as does Sylvia Plath in idealizing the recondite power of women in *Lady Lazarous*. Here her tone is outrageous:

> Out of the ash
> I rise with red hair
> And I eat men like air. 71

Kamala Das simply out of disgust intends to take leave of the world where there is the sacrifice to woman’s freedom and worship of man’s infinite might:

> I shall someday leave, leave the cocoon
> You built around me with morning tea,
> Love-words flung from doorways and of course,
> Your tired lust. I shall some day take
> Wings, fly around, as often petals
> Do when free in air. 72

But where shall she fly? She cannot like the Sylvia Plath willfully bring death to her own fold. When this body “starts withering”. Indicated in *Collected Poems* in p.84 and “breasts sagging, hair graying, and the fine lines forming / Beneath my eyes’ may be noted in *Collected Poems* in p.56 and the “age sticks a crusty finger down my throat” *Collected Pommes* in p.34 and finally when the death delays, she has to invent for herself a means of transcendence from the real to the fictional and fantastic, from the physical / mortal to the immortal, from the flux of words to the permanence of the word. She is able to discover for herself the centre of her own self where the time-ridden, flux – begotten self attains immortally:
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.  

Before the finally escapes into the immortal world of love, manifested in her longing for a union with Lord Krishna, she escapes into a world of innocence through recollection. Thus recollection becomes a mode of redemption. Kamala Das on her experiences of petrification and defacement was left with no other alternative but to fall back on the childhood experiences. She re–establishes her relationship and archetypal figures like grandmothers, father so as to eschew her feelings of “engulfment” as against the feelings of “petrification”. And finally she fictionalizes other archetypal figures of a lover – Lord Krishna– who presumably takes away her psychic tensions of being faceless and of being deprived of the female autonomy.

Caught in the currents of time and ageing, Kamala Das clutches and clings to the lost dimensions of her blood. She remembers her grandmother. She feels her absence acutely, because she discovers in her, a feminine solace and retrieving care and love. She is no longer in the need of love. All relationships, bondages seem to be meaningless:

Love

I no longer need,

with tenderness I am most content,

I have learnt that friendship
cannot endure,

that blood – ties do not satisfy.74

Kamala Das reminisces over the archetypal figure of the granny who used to wait for her with a lantern burning in her room of the four hundred year old family house:

We shall talk, she said
darling,
we shall talk all might
and,
in the evening,
she kept a lighted lantern
on the window – sill,
and sat up waiting for me.75

Her grandmother, when alive, requested Kamala Das to take care of the playhouse, but Kamala Das could pay no attention to preserve the lofty building and hence her agonies abide. She appropriates her inner anguishes when her granny died:

When they burnt my great grandmother

Over logs of the mango tree

I looked once at the house

And then again and again

For I thought I saw the windows close

Like the closing of the eyes.
I thought I heard the pillars groan

and the dark rooms heave a sigh

Grandmother, for Kamala Das becomes an archetypal ideal who gave her love unselfishly. But the male dominated society is at large selfish. In order to remain away from this selfish world she falls back on memory and fondly recollects:

There’s a house now far away where once
I received love . . . That woman died,
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved
Among books I was then too young
To read, and my blood turned cold like the moon.
How often I think of going
There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or
Just listen to the frozen air
Or in wild despair, pick an armful of
Darkness to bring it here to lie
Behind my bedroom like a brooding

Dog . . . .

Past and the memories of the dead people do not leave us. They remain as sources of solace. For Kamala Das, the grandmother still remains a source of her comfort amid mounting fevers of ageing. The grandmother’s absence has created an incurable wound in her. She exposes this wound:

Eighteen years have passed since my grandmother’s death;
I wonder why the ache still persists. Was

She buried, bones and all, in the loose red

Soil of my heart? 78

In Evening at the Old Nelapat House Kamala Das tries to revitalize her ties with past vis-a-vis the memory of the house where her grandmother lived once, but now, no more:

Only my grandmother walks there

Then, though dead for eighteen years and wispy

As a shred of mist, walks on the white sand

Of the countryard where she watched as play as

Children, a long time ago, walks through

The barred doors, all brass – knobbed and dark

Climbs the stairs scanning even the civets. 79

It is evident that the grandmother occupies a central place in the poetry of Kamala Das. She has been genuinely presented as a vital force or the source that can smoother away the poet’s uneasy anguish of petrifaction and defacement. She is also the symbolic figure who re-establishes the poet’s link with her own lost innocence or lost paradise. Moreover, from the feminist perspective, the return to the grandmother is significant. Kamala Das recollects her father too but not with equal poignancy or urgency. Her intimacy and emotional involvement with grandmother seems to outweigh her relationship with her father. She mourns the death of her father and experiences utter helplessness:

We are tongue-tied, humbled and quiet

Although within we wept for you
And more for ourselves, now without a guardian.  

The loss of father creates a vacancy within the poet. She lament:

Who would send us money to bail us out of jail?

Who would come when we land as junk at the city hospitals?

She breaks down and admits honestly:

I loved you father, I loved you all my life . . . .

Upto this particular point, the poetry of Kamala Das retains a feminist perspective seems to lose ground when one looks into her later poetry. She celebrates her longing for the “idealized phallus” manifested in the personality of Lord Krishna. She glorifies Radha’s eternal waiting for Lord Krishna and assumes a Radha-like personality and feels:

Everything in me

Is melting, even the hardness at the core.

O Krishna, I’ am melting, melting, melting.

Nothing remains but

You...

We encounter here altogether a different self of Kamala Das. She is not egoistic, radical feminist, man-hater, but a worshiper and devotee of the idealized phallus. She is no more interested in the body, in the “skin-communicated thing”, in the joy of physical union. She has become mad in her love for all that is beyond body, beyond the trasitoriness of flesh. Almost a transformation has taken place in her attitude to life, love and in her vision. In “Krishna" she celebrates her spiritual love:

Your body is my prison, Krishna,

I cannot see beyond it.
Your darkness blinds me.
Your love words shut out the wise world’s din. 83

The eternal lover “comes in strange forms”, he is the “blood of the eternal life”, “the hue of summer air”, he is bodyless, yet his pervading presence animates all things. He is deceptive too:

But at each turn when I near you

Like a spectral flame you vanish. 84

The enchanting qualities and capacity of the eternal lover have been depicted in following lines:

Shyam, O Ghanashyam
You have like a fisherman cast your nets in the narrows
Of my mind
And towards you my thoughts today
Must race like enchanted fish . . . 85

In above-mentioned lines, there is fervour of metaphor but the spirit of feminism is sublimated here.

Kamala Das is conscious of her limitations of mortality. Partly beguiled by the forces of mortality and partly prompted by an instinct to internalize the seeds of immortality, Kamala Das creates a fantasy, rather a tapestry of a dream world in her poetry with a view to transcending the burdens of reality—the burdens of the ubiquitous self. The inexplicable vehemence with which she sublimates or to a certain extent subverts, her feminine ego marks her departure from the popular feminist bias or perspective. In a recent interview she admits that her unhappiness or dismay does not stem from being a woman writer or herself, but from the larger issues beyond the corridors of self. Her concern is
not for the subjective self but for the objective world and for the humanity at large.

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