CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

Born in the early 1930s both Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath belonged to the same period. They had begun writing as established authors since 1960s though the former was an Indian and the latter an American. Sylvia Plath’s writing career encompassed only quite a few years due to her suicide but Kamala Das had been writing till her death on May 31, 2009. Their works show some similar reactions to their personal experiences as women in life and a similar response to feminist views which deserve a comparative study. Both of them not only wrote in the same confessional style but also they wrote on the similar themes of exposing the brutalities of male-dominance. Their works also reveal the personal experiences of their shattered married life. By writing against male-dominance, they protested against using the female body as objects in their poetry and other prose works. It is through their works that they found a medium to express their pent-up feelings. They expressed their feelings and emotion without inhibition in their works. Meanwhile, it is to be noted that the Indian poetry of the 1950s and early 1960s met an influence from the American
poetry of the period in its confessional or argumentative mode of expression. Many Indian authors of the period were familiar with American poetry. Kamala Das was also influenced by American poetry.

Both the poets started writing about their personal voice and their ordinary experiences in recognizable locations. Both the poets started writing about their personal voice and their ordinary experiences in recognizable locations. Authenticity, candour, boldness, ebullient frankness, vehement assertion, sadness etc. are the same qualities found in their works. They explored man-woman relationship in their works. Such confessional mode of writing began in America during the early 1950s and this style of writing was practiced internally during the 1960s. Indian poets like Nisim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Parthasarathy, Daruwalla, Mahapatra, Kamala Das, Vikram Seth and De Souza wrote in this mode.

Though Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath belong to different nations and different cultural backgrounds, their response to feminist consciousness profusely expressed in their poetry attracts a comparative study. The study will incorporate the historical, political and cultural factors as an attempt to understand their response to the new consciousness.

The thesis is a comparative study of the poetry of Kamala Das with that of Sylvia Plath in relation to their feminist consciousness. Comparison and contrast will be made in the analysis of their feminist consciousness expressed
in their poetry. Based on humanitarian perspective, comparative study brings out the common experience of the universe as human beings. The comparatists may study the political, social and intellectual contexts of literature so long as the comparative and literary emphasis is maintained. In other words, the main aim of this study of comparative literature in relation to the poetry of Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath is an attempt to produce a more genuine and more truthful appreciation of their works.

Kamala Das, one of the prominent Indian writers of the 1960s writing in English, is a woman author who has attained worldwide recognition. She draws her main inspiration of writing from her hatred of the chauvinistic attitude of men toward women in the traditional Indian Society. She shows the reality which is happening in day-to-day man-woman relationship of Indian society. She craves for love, companionship and understanding. She expresses these feelings without any inhibitions. Her poems are the image of her life. She is a serious woman writer who has deep concerns in the description of Indian women in literature. Her poetry is strong reactions to patriarchal value-system and justifications for the needs of women to be living beings. She reveals rebellious dimensions in her poetry. In other words, her poems are ponderings upon the unfortunate state of women in a male dominated society. Among the Indian English poets of her generation, male or female, she has maintained the shortest interval between emotion and expression. Her tone is always exact and
rhythm of her lines is strictly under her control although it does not follow any given convention.

Sylvia Plath is also an American woman writer of the 1960’s who tries to declare herself as a writer of professional dedication. Although she is at no time a conscious feminist, her life and work have become paradigmatic of the ideas that the feminists later came to struggle for. Her works forcefully depict the strong feelings of her own independence and rebellion against male-domination, resentment and protest against women who are passively following the traditional values of mindless domesticity. In a male-dominated society, she seeks to establish her identity as a woman as well as an outstanding writer. Her quest for identity becomes the main theme in her short novel, The Bell Jar (1963) and in almost all her poems. Her writings obviously show that Sylvia Plath is extremely ambitious and has a competitive spirit. She has revealed her struggle to be a woman writer through the imagery of clothes. C. Vimala Rao writes about her:

A woman gives attention to her clothes with the prerogative of an artist. Her sense of beauty, form and aesthetic values are indicated in this attention. Plath the artist was quite aware of this. Just as her characters and personae play out their roles in different garments, Plath plays out her moods through the medium of words, stitching them into poems or stories. She tries to make and remake and fix her identity as completely as she can by clothing her thoughts, or unclothing them, in the succession of poems, and in her, novel, The Bell
Jar. An over dependence on the matter of clothes, the attention given to it, indicates a vulnerability, a suggestion of a woman’s wish to please the other sex. This vulnerability shows itself at its worst in the spirit of competitiveness that is set up for such a woman in a man’s world. Esthers’s several confrontations with men in The Bell Jar come to mind in this context. Her relationships with Marco, Constantin, Irwin and above all, Buddy Willard are all abrasive and they end in a disastrous way.¹

Kamala Das was born in Southern Malabar on the March 31, 1934. Her maiden name was Madhavikutty. Her mother Balamani Amma was a renowned poet in Malayalam. She spent her childhood and early stage of adolescence in the city of Calcutta where her father occupied a managerial post in a British Company. Her autobiography, My Story, contained descriptions of some of these cities and the kind of life she lived there. She lived where her grandmother, father and mother used to live peacefully beside the sea. She received her education also from there. She attended a European school in Calcutta at first then the Elementary School at Purnnayerkulam and then a boarding school run by the Roman Catholic nuns. But in each school, she stayed for a short while. At the Catholic boarding school, she got ill and was removed to Calcutta where private tutors were engaged to teach her fine arts.

Sylvia Plath was born on October 27, 1932 at Boston, Massachusetts in the U.S. Her parents were Otto Emile Plath, entomologist (1885-1940) and Aurelia Schober Plath (1906-1995). She was the only child for two and a half
years before her brother Warren was born on April 27, 1935. Her first home was at 24 Prince Street in Jamaica Plain, a suburb of Boston. After Warren’s birth, the family moved to 92 Johnson Avenue in Winthrop, Massachusetts, just East of Boston. This is where Sylvia became familiar and intimate with the sea. From an early age, she had been enjoying the sea and could recognize its beauty and power. In 1942, Aurelia Schober Plath moved the family to 26 Elmwood Road, in Wellesley. Sylvia lived in the house until she attended to a college. She got grade-A the whole way through high-school and she excelled in English, particularly in creative writing. Her first poem appeared when she was eight in the Boston Herald. She won a scholarship to attend Smith College, an all girl school in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Sylvia Plath began writing poems and drawing at an early age. At seventeen, she became an experienced writer. In 1950, Christian Science Monitor published a poem called “Bitter Strawberries”. That year Plath entered Smith College on a scholarship endowed by Olive Higgins Prouty, the novelist and author of Stella Dollas. In the next year she won Mademoiselle Magazine’s fiction contest with a short story, “Sunday at the Minton” and was awarded two smith poetry prizes and elected to Phi-Beta Kappa.

Kamala Das who is popularly known as a poet is a prolific writer. In the beginning of her career, Mrs. Das used to write short stories in Malayalam for Mathribhumi, a magazine, which paid her rupees twelve per story. She wrote very popular short stories also in Malayalam. Notable prose works of

Kamala Das’ poetic horizon hailed from the south, precisely from the Southern Malabar in Kerala where her grandmother, Nayer father and Nalapat mother lived peacefully beside the fathomless sea. She settled in Trivandrum, Kerala. She wrote in both Malayalam and English. Kamala Das published eleven books in her mother tongue and three books of poems in English. She had collaborated with Pritish Nandy in *Tonight, This Savage Rite* (1979) which is a book of love poems. Her autobiographical work, *My Story*, was first serialized in *The Current Weekly* of Bombay from January to December in 1974. This work had come out as an independent work in 1976. She also published a novel in English entitled *Alphabet of Lust*. She received many notable awards including the Kerala Sahitya Akamed Prize.

Kamala Das’ family was not financially well-off. Her father had been employed in an automobile farm in Calcutta where he was always busy with his work. Kamala Das knew that her parents were dissimilar and horribly mismatched. In a traditional society, women are bound to the domestic duties in
the family against her soft feelings and desires for emotional involvement. Her father did not care for his wife and children because of his business.

At the age of 15, Kamala Das was married to Mr. Madhava Das who was an official in the Reserve Bank of India, Bombay. After marriage her life was miserable in the company of her husband who was nonchalant and lustful. Mr. Das, who had sex with his maid, was boastful of having known ‘Sluts and nymphomaniacs’. He was usually cruel and brutal to Kamala Das who was compelled to live hectic life. She became revengeful towards him and reacted in a non-traditional fashion in love-making, offering herself to any handsome or resourceful men who came across her and forgiving even her rapists. Her husband had no soothing words for her, no time to spare for her and was ever busy sorting out his files and affixing his signature on them. As a traditional wife in a conventional society, Kamala was expected to discharge her domestic duties well and to look after the needs and comforts of her husband. All the responsibilities were assigned to women in a male dominated society. She laments over this:

… … … Dress in Sarees, be girl,
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants

She seems to lose her will and reason. To all his questions, she mumbles incoherent replies. This reveals her strong protest against a hollow marital bond
which she cannot untie. Her tender feelings and yearning for emotional involvement were ignored. Her life in her husband’s home became miserable and an instance of prey and predatory image.

Sylvia Plath’s first major publication was *The Colossus*, a collection of poems written from 1956 to 1960. It was followed by her only novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963), which first appeared under the psynonym of Victoria Lucas. Drawn from her own experiences, the book described the mental breakdown, attempted suicide and eventual recovery of a young college girl. Works published posthumously include *Ariel* (1965) and *Crossing the Water* (1971); both are poetry collections and *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* (1977) is a book of short stories and prose. *The Collected Poems* which included many previously unpublished poems appeared in 1981 and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

Her taut melodic and highly imagistic works explore the nature of womanhood and her fixation with death. *Ariel*, which was published after her suicide, won her international acclaim as a major, U.S. confessional poet. Her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, has revealed a young woman’s emotional break down. The character, Esther who is a portrayal of Sylvia herself, has accused herself of being useless in a society. In every part of the novel, Esther thought of suicide.
In her poem, “Daddy”, she represents the idea of repressed existence. She says that she begins to talk like a Jew as she thinks she may be a Jew. A powerful expression of the female creative identity is also expressed in one of her last poems, “Lady Lazarus”, in which she says:

**Out of the ash**
**I rise with red hair**
**And I eat men like air**

Plath expresses a complex intricate failing of her feelings as a woman and a mother in her long poem, “Three Women”. Some major poems of Sylvia Plath which are related with feminist consciousness are “Daddy”, “Ariel” “Mushroom”, “Two Sisters of Persephone” and “The Beekeeper’s Daughter” “Lady Lazarus” and “Fever 103 Deg”. Sylvia Plath carries down the tradition of this consciousness that has taken place earlier in the consciousness of the past women writers.

One important movement that has brought a perceptible change in thinking in the twentieth century world is the feminist movement and literature has been the principal means of heralding this shift in perspective. Feminism becomes incontrovertibly a way of protest against the blinkered, smug and complacent, gender determined perception of life. Woman writers of the period are conscious of this trend also while they have their own cause of self-rediscovery. Virginia Woolf who is a novelist, critic and essayist is a pioneer of both ‘modernism’ and ‘feminism’ in creative writing. According to her, the
syntax and address of a work is determined by the gender of the author. Virginia Woolf’s contribution to the feminist theory is her idea that men as well as women are misrepresented in literature, and that gender positions in society, and differences between men and women in society are constructed and not essential. She is an intellectual who makes such sensible modern argument that writing is a product of historical circumstances.

Her feminism is positive, constructive, vast and interesting. She possesses always an ideal of womanhood and motherhood, and besides that, the ideal of an androgynous and harmonious mind. She is desirous of the evolution of woman as an individual and an artist. Whenever she makes an effort to play the role of an active feminist, she tries to establish the relationship of the advocated matters with the spiritual life of women and interpreted those laws of mind and spirit which have never been written on paper. Her art fulfils a golden aim as she has presented the ideal of a harmonious mind. Her novels are bright and lustrous with the light of universal ideas. She feels that women can renew a sense of life in men and thus protect them from their lust for war and death. She seems to be yearning for the freedom of living her own feminine life fully. She wants to remove those obstacles such as the lack of appropriate environment, economic independence, interferences and disturbances faced by women writers. Mrs. Woolf agrees with the suffrage movement but she does not have a direct link with that since she is too sensitive about ridicules.
Her feminism is much more interesting and deep. She discovers the basic characteristic of feminine experience and expresses it different from masculine experience. She says that purely masculine and purely feminine mind is dangerous. She has considered that feminine and masculine, intuitive and rational realities are to be blended and synthesized together in order to create harmony and make the personality complete and balanced.

Her message is for the indivisible humanity. She is a guest for truth, is a messenger of peace and universal love, of liberty, equality, fraternity and non-violence and a rescuer of essential human values. Because of this vision, she has attained a prophetic grandeur. She emphasizes the psychological, moral and spiritual aspects of time and space. She yearns for a world having been made beautiful by the realization of her dreams and ideals. All these may be called feminism or Androgyism, Humanism, Pantheism or Intuitionism. According to her only feminism is capable of saving the world from annihilation and re-enlivening the modern man who has lost his soul and is searching for it.

Feminism in America also in the 1960s laid a particular emphasis on the personal experience and consciousness of women as an oppressed category to constitute its ideology and methods of propaganda. This is so because women’s consciousness of themselves as the other marginalized from the mainstream patriarchal culture formed the crux of feminist awakening. Feminism has tried to develop its theory and practice starting from a personal experience of gender and gender discrimination extending this experience from
a personal to a political level of power struggle between the two sexes. The slogan, ‘personal is political’, used by the feminists in the early stages of the movement is the main foundation of American feminism as it expressed itself through literature and literary criticism. This emphasis on the personal and the political factors in feminist approach has wide ranging implications on the growth of the movement and has given rise to particular problems and paradoxes in feminist thought.

The books, The Second Sex (1949) of Simone-de-Beauvoir and The Feminine Mystique (1963) of Betty Friedan influenced feminist movement in America in the early 1960s. These books raised questions with regard to the genuine women’s image sketched by male texts and social institutions. They highlighted in general the condition in which women have so far been aware through the ages and portrayed by men to fall into two categories of idealization and disparagement. Both of these make an effort to deny women an equal status with men and relegated them to an inferior and powerless role. When the social order is created and ordered by dominant males, women have had to lose their sense of genuine freedom. They lead their lives in subordination in order to conform to the myths and stereotypes formulated by patriarchy. The foremost aim of a feminist awareness is to question and protest against these images of woman created by patriarchy and in doing this, women should dispense with both the feminine mystique and inferior role attributed to them.
In speaking of an exclusive feminine point of view, the American feminists promoted the idea of a universal womanhood cutting across all the barriers of age, income, class, race and other divisive factors. Female protagonists depicted in women’s novels are portrayed to represent a universal female condition and this leads to much reappearance and uniformity in the personal experiences shown by women. Such personal experiences consisting mostly of oppression and injustice at the hands of a male-dominated society emphasized feelings of anger, frustration and revolt on the part of the woman. Commitment to the women’s emancipation is the sole driving force in such feminist books and sexual politics becomes an overriding concern.

American women novelists write inspired by feminist ideology as they portray a female protagonist in her search for an authentic self as she moves across the oppressive tracts of experience. The female characters in women’s novel are struggling against their conditioning, the psychology of oppression, and teaching themselves how to play the game of sexual politics on their term. A significant idea depicted in the works of feminist writers of America is their considering it as treason for a woman to admit that there can be goals other than depolarization of the two sexes, other than the sexual wounds, other politics than sexual politics and the other antihuman nature than misogynist ones.

The women characters in the American feminist novels are portrayed to be undergoing a process of educations in finding out a consciousness of their true self through rebellion. The plots centre on the evolution of consciousness
and they use the infinite detailing of existence to illustrate the fluctuations of the self. The protagonists seek to solve the problem of gender consciousness through the process of narration yet the novels remain an expression of personality and a turning loose of emotion. The aim of the protagonist is to draw the sympathy of the reader and evoke them to join the protagonist in her struggles against general sexual oppression.

Many novels written by women deal with women as victims who labour under received notions of masculinity and are unable to interrogate themselves to the desired sense of freedom and personhood. Notable such women writers are Sylvia Plath, Alix Kates Schulman and Joyce Carol Oates. In her novel, *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath shows the protagonist, Esther who is coming up against the inevitable odds of female life, hating everyone including her mother who acts as an agent of oppression, and retreating finally to a state of nervous breakdown and unreality. The feminine viewpoint in Plath is smothered under a bell Jar as it represents the self as engaged in a fertile exploration of its own psychic trauma. In the poetry written by American women authors, such as Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Anne Waldman and Muriel Rukeyser, women’s personal experiences under the repressive shadow of patriarchy had been explored with a new feminist consciousness.

Adrienne Rich (1929) is a representative poet of American women’s poetry. She is a poet, an essayist, a feminist and one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the twentieth century. A much more
personal work entitled “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law”, one of her feminist poems, is an examinations of her female identity. The subject of female identity is a dominant theme of American feminist poetry and Adrienne Rich plays the leading role in search of this identity which is a personal issue of American feminist author. Adrienne Rich has gone too far in this issue when her feminist position is crystallized in her self-declaration as a lesbian in 1976. Her poems published in *Dream of a Common Language* (1978) marked the first direct treatment of lesbian desire and sexuality in her work. Many of her poems in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (1981) and the some of her late poems in *The Fact of a Doorframe* (2001) represent the capstone of this philosophical and political position. Through her poetry she champions the cause of lesbian feminism, an aspect of American feminism. American capitalist system has marginalized women at an extreme level and women are compelled to take extreme steps. Adrienne Rich is also a member of the New Left which she joined in 1964. Rich is also very active in women’s liberation movement of her time.

Anne Sexton (1928-1974) was one of the most resonant poets that America produced in the 1960s. She was the people’s poet who wrote in the confessional mode. The events of her own life were the only material of her poetry. Her own self was at the centre of her poetry. She was one of the most self-conscious women poets. Some of her poems are “Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward”, “Her Kind”, “The Double Image”, and “The Division of
Parts”. Anne Sexton believed that a poem should hurt a person into a new awareness. Through her poetry, she was pointing a figure at the circumstances of woman in a male-dominated American society. For American women, American dream turned out to be a nightmare. This is what Anne Sexton often depicts in her stories of young women. She realized that women in this society had to play predetermined roles as wife, mother and housewife and leave her little rooms for the exercise of her creative energy. Her life itself is a feminist’s dream. She herself once remarked to Elaine Showalter that she and her friend began women’s movement. At times, however, feminism appeared to her a one-sided view and she was a many-sided person. She wrote poems for the most marginalized. Among them were the ones who had lost their minds.

Hence, the very character and nature of literature of the present century are realistic representation specifically. Sociologist, psychologist, political scientists, philosophers, and creative writers are engaged in a serious study of the modern literature and they assume the increasing importance of literature in English in the twentieth century. From a technical perspective, modernism involves the rejection of traditional forms as well as the aesthetic perceptions associated with these form. Modernism involves a highly self-conscious manipulation of form.

Dr. Sharada Iyer says that women are genetically and constitutionally given to isolation are often facing the problem of identity crisis. Such works of literature provides a moment of self-assertion for the female writers. Sharada
works this art of self-assertion in a paradigm of repression and resolution with reference to the poetry of Kamala Das. Sharada is inclined to the view that Kamala Das’s poetry is not really confessional but addresses to a split self. So, kamala Das is a modern poet who possesses the modernist tendency of asserting the self and identity.

One area of experiences in common is the widening new awareness and awakening amongst the women. It has been portrayed very effectively through the female protagonists in the fictional world of the female writers. The emerging new woman becomes restless as she wants to acquire and establish a distinct identity in the traditionally male-dominated society. Moreover, the poetry written by women authors in commonwealth literature also has the same feature.

Margaret Lawrence and Anita Desai are outstanding women novelists. They are basically novelists of feminine sensibility. In their works, the readers can notice a remarkably perceptive and sensitive nature and female psyche. They share another important characteristic which distinguishes them quite significant by from the majority of their fellow writers in their respective countries. They turn away in a prominent manner from the traditional themes of nationalism and socio-cultural questions and turn inward in an attempt to come to terms with their own individual selves. Consequently, their novels tend towards the subjective and the poetic moreover instead of depicting socio-political realism and are mainly characterized by personal and subjective
impression. In poetry also, there are poets such as Gauri Deshpande and Kamala Das who go deeper into the inner world of human psyche rather than dwelling on the surface reality.

Contemporary American literature presents enormous scope for deliberation. The Eurocentric studies and literary notions have disintegrated with the disintegration of the British Empire. After the Second World War, America has emerged not only a political super power, but also as a centre for construction and deconstruction. The cold war between the two superpowers had deeply affected the intellectual climate of the nation and it suffered from acute internal conflict. The picture of the world divided between ‘free and democratic’ and ‘totalitarian and godless’ influenced profoundly the thinking of the most Americans. At the same time, dissecting voices seemed to threaten the internal agreement. This internal conflict resulted in new movement and ideologies.

In 1960s and 1970s, America was stirred socially and intellectually in the same manner in which it was stirred in the later half of the nineteenth Century. Women’s Liberation Movement and several other uprisings like Black movement and Civil Rights Movement affected the culture and intellectual climate of the time. In addition to these movements, protest movements and a number of other events took place. The assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, of Malcom X in 1965, of Martin Luther King in 1967 and of Robert Kennedy in 1968 made the society suffer. The society which suffered in this
way has always created something new and original. The old cultural notions were subverted and attempts were made to create new notions of class and society, of race and gender, and of international politics. This is more obvious in literature than anywhere else. Every literary genre is rich with new notions and new ideologies. Nina Baym writes about the new consciousness:

The new confidence and technical sophistication of American Poetry in the 1940s fostered the more exploratory styles of the 1950s and 1960s. Some changes were more noticeable and notorious than others. For one thing, poetry extended its subject matter to more explicit and extreme areas of autobiography: insanity, sex, divorce, and alcoholism. The convenient but not very precise label *confessional* came to be attached to certain books: Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies*, which explored the disorders of several generations of his New England family; Anne Sexton’s *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960) and *All My Pretty Ones* (1962), which dealt openly with abortion, women’s sexuality, the poet’s own life in mental hospitals; W.D. Snodgrass’s *Heart’s Needle* (1969), whose central lyric sequence chronicled the stages of divorce from the point of view of a husband separated from his wife and child; John Berryman’s *Dream Song*, which exposed his alcoholism and struggle with insanity. Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* celebrated his homosexuality. Sylvia Plath’s *Ariel* explored the heightened energies of a woman on the edge.4

Women’s writings in American, African-American literature, literature of the Immigrants experience, and other ethnic groups make the contemporary
American literary scenario highly appealing. It has appeared with new ideas and ideologies. There has been a shift from the past and accordingly, the term ‘Postmodernism’ suits the American society today, perhaps, more than any other society in the world.

After the end of World War II, transforming shocks were administered to American poetry. Allen Ginsberg’s Howl (1956) and Robert Lowell’s Life Studies (1959) are popular poetry in America after the World War II. The setting in which the poem, “Howl”, appeared is significant like the Renaissance poem. It challenged the conventions of a literary tradition dominated by the East Coast. With its open experimental form and strong oral emphases, “Howl” sounded a departure from the well-shaped lyric. Lowell was rooted in the literary culture of Boston. In his work, Life Studies, he challenged the literary status and began a new directness and autobiographical intensity with American poetry as he exposed the psychological turbulence suffered by an inbred New Englander.

Their poems anticipated and explored the strains in American social relationship that were the cause for the open conflicts of the 1960s and 1980s; the strains were the public interest about the uses of government and industrial power, the institutions of marriage and the family, the rights and power of racial minorities, women and homosexuals, the use of drugs and alternative states of consciousness. American poetry would arise from diverse regions of the country
but with its common form having a more vital relation with contemporary life. American poets such as Lowell and Ginsberg felt ready to claim new authority and new areas of experience in their writing. However, their change in the style and content of American poetry in the 1950s and 1960s was rooted in subtle, far-reaching developments of the decade before. American poetry flourished in the late 1940s because of a new confidence in native literary traditions derived in part from the achievements of the early modernists in the first half of the century. The two most prominent figures were T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Both were expatriates but whose works continued to dominate the literary scene in the 1940s.

Many poets in 1960s identified themselves with specific reform and protest movements. Denise Leverton, Adrienne Rich and Robert Lowell directed poems against American participation in the Vietnam War and their government’s support of the corrupt South Vietnam regime. The important freedom movements of the 1960s advocating black power, women’s liberation, and gay rights had supporters among committed poets. Some poetry of the late 1960s had the insistence, urgency and single mindedness of political tracts. But the enduring effect of political protest on poetry was to make a broader and more insistent range of voices available to verse. Poems dramatized individual predicaments stressing the underlying angers and desire that also issued in political action. In response to the pressure, inner and outer of the 1950s and 1960s, new kinds of poems emerged. Traditional forms and ideas have been
changed and history has provided meaning and continuity to human life in the contemporary literary imagination throughout many parts of the world including the United States.

The style of American poetry is varied. Some are regional and some are associated with famous schools of poets. For the opportunity, the American poetry can be arranged along a spectrum, producing three categories like the traditional, the idiosyncratic and the experimental. Traditional poets used poetic tradition; idiosyncratic poets have maintained both the traditional and the innovative techniques in creating unique voices whereas experimental poets have used new cultural styles.

Richard Eberhart and Richard Wilbur, the older Fugitive poets, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, the younger poets such as John Hollander, Richard Howard and Robert Lowell are examples of traditional writers. Traditional poets are generally precise, realistic and witty like Richard Wilbur. They have been influenced by fifteenth and sixteenth century British metaphysical poets. Robert Lowell was the most influential recent poet. He began writing traditionally but was influenced by experimental currents. His life and work span the period between the older modernist masters like Ezra Pound and the contemporary writers. But his career was mostly inclined to the later experimentalists in a larger context. Robert Lowell was well-educated and linked with the political and social establishment.
In his work, *Life Studies*, Robert Lowell initiated confessional poetry, a new mode in which the poet bared his most tormenting personal problems with great honesty and intensity. He discovered his individuality and celebrated it in its most difficult private manifestations. Lowell continued his autobiographical explorations and technical innovations, drawing upon his experience of psycho-analysis. Lowell’s confessional poetry has been particularly influential upon poets like John Berryman, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath who used to write by imitating the style of Lowell. Plath, Sexton, John Berryman, Theodore Roathke, Richard Hugo, Phillip Levine, James Dicky, Elizabeth Bishop and Adrienne Rich are idiosyncratic poets who have developed unique styles drawing it into a new realness with a distinctively contemporary flavour.

Anne Sexton was a passionate woman who attempted to be wife, mother and poet on the eve of the women’s movement in the United States. Like Sylvia Plath, she suffered from mental illness and ultimately committed suicide. Anne Sexton’s confessional poetry is more autobiographical than Plath’s. Her poems appeal powerfully to the emotion. They thrust taboo subjects such as sex, guilt and suicide into close focus. Often they daringly introduce female topics such as childbearing, the female body, or marriage seen from a woman’s point of view. In her poem, “Her Kind” (1960), Sexton identifies with a witch burned at the stake. The title of her work indicates their concern with madness and death. These are contained in *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960), *Live or Die* (1966) and the posthumous book, *The Awful Rowing Toward God* (1975).
Sylvia Plath has also occupied a significant room in the landscape of American poetry by writing confessional poetry. She was the most emphatic voice of the twentieth century who introduced new dimensions and trends making the deep relationships between destruction and creation. She is labeled as a feminist because of her revealing the suppressed self of woman in poetry. She contributed a fascinating new voice in the 1960s of America. She was one of the talented poets of the twentieth century and her works were popular among the American poets. Her novel, *The Bell Jar*, remains a classic of American literature. Her collections of poem, *The Colossus* (1960), *Ariel* (1965), *Crossing the Water* (1981) place Sylvia Plath among the twentieth century significant American poets.

Kamala Das occupies an important place among the poets who constitute the modern tradition of Indian poetry in English. The modern trend of Indian poetry emerged in the early fifties and has continued in form and the content. Many young poets feel a strong urge to write in the modern trend and to turn away from the transcendental mystical stream of poetry represented by Sri Aurobindo Ghosh. These young poets want to deal with the concrete experiences of men living in the modern world of their own time. These poets distrust not only what is vague and metaphysical but also have a tendency to reject anything that looks too general and conventional. They try to write about their private experience of life and to capture a moment of intensely personal experience in all its uniqueness and immediacy. In her works, Mrs. Das
expresses her personal experiences. In her poem, “An Introduction”, she portrays her personal experiences like a modern poet as given below:

... ... ... the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware

The modern poets express strongly their dislike of the conventional style of writing. The poetry of the post independence era successfully meets the basic requirements of all good literature like clarity of thought, intensity of feelings, refinement and subtlety of expression. It claims that an individual who has come to know his authentic self is not guilty of any sloppiness in thought and feeling. Their acute self-awareness and the restraints imposed on them by the hostile environment are revealed by producing a sufficient amount of tension and complexity in the poetry of the modern writers. Kamala Das is one of the gifted writers of this group.

In the post independent era, some educated sections of Indian society felt hindered both by the old traditions and the new social and political changes taking place around them. The feelings of an individual in a hostile world are expressed through modern poetry which is related to the predicament of the westernized section of the Indian upper middle class. Through western education many individual express their liberal ideals which tend to strengthen their sense of individuality and make them conscious of the coercive pressure of Indian conformist traditional culture. Western education makes them see
rational outlook and many of the conventions governing their social life which become rigid and petrified. On account of their western education, they acquire their self-conscious individualism and the special status. They can identify themselves with the larger democratic upsurge that can effectively challenge and overthrow the old hierarchies and conventions. There are authenticity and force in modernist poetry which is derived from the sorrow and anger felt by the Indian middle class.

The human significance of the restlessness and bewilderment or disappointment and gloom experienced by the women of the educated class would be much greater since the contradictory pressures were present in their life in heightened form. The conscious identity won by women through education could not find any expression in the roles thrust upon them by the society while men could cultivate the realm of personal relationships as a reserve area because their liberal ideals. The women were denied of this privilege. There was hardly any opportunity that asserted her freedom and individuality even in the field of man-woman relationships.

Kamala Das is the only woman poet of Indian writing in English who has achieved universal recognition because of her assertion of the freedom of expression in her poetry without any inhibitions. She exposes the man-woman relationship affected by a discordant or incompatible marriage. Her self-assertive and bold expression made her win many awards such as PEN Asian Poetry Prize in 1963 and Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1969.
Writers like Virgina Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Anita Desai, Shobha de, Gauri Despande, Simone de Beauvoir, and Kate Millets wrote in this new medium of expression. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* is a theoretical work on feminism in which she wrote about the physical suppression of women. In Virginia Woolf’s, *A Room of one’s own*, and Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*, there were strong expressions of self-assertion. In Shashi Deshpande’s latest novel, *That Long Silence*, she portrayed the dilemma of a woman writer who was also a housewife. Women liberation draws from the ideas of pioneering theoretical accounts of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970). Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath belong to this trend of thinking. In their creative works, they have forcefully expressed the repressive system against the female body and soul.

In India where the institute of marriage is bound by orthodoxy, it is most unfortunate that such a sensitive woman as Kamala Das is tied to a stake. Such occurrences are common in India. Many women turn tragic and gloomy in their attitude towards life due to this condition. She expresses repeatedly her protests against this sort of situation in her poetry. She continues to live with her husband and look after her three sons. She merely searches for a kind of man-woman relationship which should guarantee both love and security to a woman. It is important to note that she gives a mythical framework to her search for
genuine love and identifies it with the Radha-Krishna myth or with the Mira-Krishna relationship. There are several poems on Lord Krishna in her volumes.

Mrs. Das’s poetry shows a special force that in her poetry she asserts her right to exist as an individual with a distinctive identity. She wants to show her authentic self in breaking the moulds of traditional ethics and propriety. In her poems, she reveals her vehement protest against the senseless restrictions which compel a sensitive and intelligent woman. In the poem, “An Introduction”, she describes the role of a woman in a traditional society. She expresses:

… … … …Be embroiderer, be cook,
    Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in, oh,
    Belong, cried the categorizers. 6

She reveals her dislike to fit into the schemes devised by the categorizers. Through her frankness and confessional style of writing, she expresses her flamboyant lust in order to retrieve her undermined dignity. In most of her poems, she presents the bitter irony and anguish of a woman who finds herself tied down to a meaningless routine of household activities. In the poem, “The Siesta”, the poet reveals the desperate situations as a rebellious act of self definition and she does not want to be a cut-flower in the lines:

To pick herself an average
Identity, to age
Through years of earthy din
Gently like a cut flower until
It’s time to be removed; or, will she
Wander ⁷

Through her defiant self-assertion, she shows the outward values which
can block the emotional and intellectual growth of an individual. Her painful,
frenzied and self-consuming life of an ill-adjusted sensitive individual living the
rotting and decaying society is portrayed in her poem. Kamala Das’s desire for
freedom, her wish to free herself from the dull routine of domesticity and lust is
shown in the lines of her poem, “I Shall Some Days”:

I shall some day leave, leave the cacoon
You built around me with morning tea,
Love-words flung from doorways and of course
Your tried lust. I shall some day take
Wings, fly around, as often petals
Do when free in air, and you dear one,
Just the sad remnant of a roof, must
Lie behind, sans pride, on double-beds
And grieve. ⁸

Among the Indian poets writing in English, Kamala Das is the one who
makes complete and open statements of the evolution of her ‘self’, both in her
poetry and in her autobiography. This quest for identity is noticeable in her
novels, Alphabet of Lust and A Doll for the Child Prostitute.

Kamala Das has created a permanent place for herself in contemporary
Indo-English poetry. She has been one of the most popular poets of India who
has gained ground even in the West. Indian poets can be easily counted like A.K. Ramanujan, Dom Moreas, Nissim Ezekiel, Pritish Nandy, K.N. Daruwalla, Shiv. K. Kumar and Kamala Das. Mrs. Das never tries to transgress her self-imposed restrictions. She is a woman with a narrow range of experience in life, but she makes the best of the crippling situations around. Like Jane Austin, she also moves within her limited range with grace and skill. The advantage of this range is that it offers to the reader only what the writer has personally felt and realized and nothing borrowed from another source.

As a poet of feminine sensibility, Kamala Das provides vent to the hopes, fears and desire of womankind. She has been the champion of woman’s cause in all her writings. Her poems like, “An Introduction”, “A Relationship”, “Summer in Calcutta”, “The Freaks”, “The Old Playhouse”, “The Dance of Eunuchs” and several others poems have indicated her boldness and freedom in speaking aloud the secret longings and aspirations of womankind. In her poem, “Summer in Calcutta”, she portrays a woman’s hectic search for the desire of true love under the scorching sun. She says:

… … … … My worries
Doze, Wee bubbles ring
My glass, like a bride’s
Nervous smile, and meet
My lips. Dear, forgive
This moment’s lull in
Wanting you, the blur
In memory.⁹
Not only in her poetry but also in her essays, she comes out as an unofficial spokesman of the Indian counterpart of the women’s liberation movement in the West and her essays like “Why Not More Than One Husband?”, “Why Women Expect Out Of Marriage And What They Get” and “The She-Mouse Returns Home” are testimony to this. In Kamala Das, we find much that is conventional and feminine and she speaks aloud of the needs and fears of a common woman and pleads for authentic love and sense of security of her out of her own knowledge.

Mrs. Das has expressed her own duality from the combination in herself of a need for domestic security and the inborn desire to be liberated. Marriage and love form the dominant themes of Mrs. Das’s poetry. When she speaks of love outside marriage, she seems to be merely searching for a relationship which gives both genuine love and impenetrable security. She gives a mythical framework to her search for true love and identifies it with that of Mira-Bai relinquishing the ties of marriage in pursuit of Lord Krishna, the true divine lover. In the poem “Vrindavan”, she speaks about this search:

Vrindavan lives on in every woman’s mind
and the flute luring her
from home and her husband
who later asks her of the long scratch
on the brown aureola of her breast
and she shyly replies
hiding flushed cheeks, it was so dark
outside, I tripped over the brambles in the woods

In the poem, “Ghanashyam”, Kamala Das ventilates her mystical longings and mythical leanings. She is primarily a poet of love. She is not so much preoccupied with a metaphysical quest or with a formulation of poetic theory with an intense search for love. As a poet of love, she looks most naive, honest and frank. She does not posses the intellectual pride and the open-hearted case of Judith Wright. It must be mentioned that her poetry is against a conservative and tabooed society, and not against a free and uninhibited society of the Australian poetess. As compared to some other women poets of the confessional mode, she may lack intellectual vigour but she indicates lyrical outburst of unpremeditated thoughts and feelings in emotional intensity.

In reality, Kamala is more aware of the pathos in the life of a common woman playing a very passive role in the tradition-bound society than some of these women poets are highlighting a different cultural and moral ethos. Related to the theme of love is the celebration of the body in Mrs. Das’s poetry. Her approach is perfectly personal, adding a touch of delicacy of an old charm to it. Her poems indicate that she both likes and dislikes her body. Physically she is dark-complexioned with ordinary features and her loathing for body is partly due to this and partly due to her protected illness. In liking the body, she is led by the pleasure it affords to her and to her companion. In this matter, she resembles another distinguished Indo-English poet, Nissim Ezekiel, who is a
poet of the body. Her tensions issue forth from the pressures of her complex family background. She is neither cared for by her parents nor by her office-going husband after her marriage. She has conveyed her feelings for her husband’s home in her autobiographical novel, *My Story*. She says about her husband:

**My husband left for his office every morning before nine and returns at ten in the night after our son had fallen asleep in his room, on the babycot beneath which the old ayah spread out her own mattress. There was no opportunity for the father to get to know the child, or to learn to regard him as a distinct personality.*

This has indicated that the failure of love becomes the birth of her poetry. Her poems like “The Suicide”, “The Prisoner”, “Captive” and “Advice to Fellow Swimmers” are the best examples of it. She finds no true-love from her legitimate source and she tells us that her intimacy with her husband is purely physical. Under such circumstances, love degenerates into lust, loud and savage with which she is fed up in her life and makes a fervent appeal to readers in expressing it in her poems. The naked body becomes more acceptable to her during her illness and she has spoken of this in her best selling autobiography, *My Story*. She writes:

**Whenever he tried to strip me of my clothes, my shyness clung to me like a second skin and made my movements graceless. Each pore of my skin became at that movement a**
Seeing Eye, an eye that viewed my body with distaste. But during my illness, I shed my shyness and for the first time in my life learned to surrender totally in bed with my pride intact and blazing.  

Perhaps in the moments of her recuperation, she needs her husband’s tenderness and reassuring love which she accepts most heartily. Her book, My Story, has presented a tension between colonialism and anti-colonial Gandhism, between patriarchy and matriarchy. As an employee of the British Automobile company, her father has adopted British way of life even in his food-habits and choice of clothes. He prefers to eat with a knife and fork, signifying assimilated British culture. But the children and the ladies of the house ate typically Keralian food in the Indian fashion with their hands. At the theoretical level, the father remains as commanding figure to his timid wife. The powerful image of a tyrannical patriarchy is shown in her autobiography. She describes:

After the wedding he made her remove all the gold ornaments from her person, all except the mangalsutra? To her it must have seemed like taking to widow’s weeds, but she did not protest. She was mortally afraid of the dark stranger who had come forward to take her out of the village and its security. She was afraid of her father and afraid of his uncle.  

These given lines have revealed a powerful image of a tyrannical patriarchy. The irony lies in the fact that an alien life-style is being ruthlessly
inflicted upon an aristocratic Nair wife with a strong matriarchal and matrilineal tradition. The accomplishment of the poet is her revelation about the subordinated condition of the matriarch. On the one hand, the father’s personality exhibits an embedded conflict between two cultures. He is seen as representing a synthesis of colonialism and patriarchy. By imposing his personal stances and point of view he becomes a colonizer at home. Kamala Das treats patriarchy as an equivalent of colonialism. Feminists hold the same notion. The colonization of the women’s mind by patriarchy has been presented in the poem “The Stone Age”. She develops this idea in the opening line of the poem:

Fond husband, ancient settler in the mind  
Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment,  
Be kind. 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. 14

It has indicated the colonization of the woman’s need by patriarchy. It is certainly not a recent phenomenon. Colonization has been there since time immemorial that is why the colonizer-husband is referred to as an ‘ancient settler in the mind’, while in “Gino” he is addressed as ‘fair-conqueror of another’s country. The husband’s imperialist authority over the female is legitimimized through the age-old social sanctions and hegemonic structures of power particularly the institution of marriage.
The poem, “The Stone Age”, has brought out the retrograde value systems and obscurantism underlying familial colonialism. Indeed, colonization of the female needs at home far predates British colonization. It has proved to be far more damaging and unjust than political imperialism from which there is always a scope for liberation. This is not the ‘Stone Age’, of the noble savage benign and simple, but of the ‘Old fat spider’, the ‘carnivorous plant’, the ‘hooded snake’, an ‘untamed lion’ and libertine. The animal imagery is functional and suggestive of the predatory character of the deceiving male, who always waits like a python to trap and strangulate the gentle female reducing her to a plaything and soulless being. The symbol of dove and granite signifies the colonized woman and the colonizer who is man. The line, ‘with loud talk you bruise my pre-morning sleep’ reveals an auditory representation of the brutal unconcern of the barbarous male.

Kamala Das says gender is at the level of behavioural traits and the male and the female aspects in the human personality become inseparable. With regard to artistic creation, she says reliance about gender difference. She wants to reject the male and the female binaries. To Mrs. Das, gender becomes a matter of individual voice and style. She rejects unequivocal terms, the binary male-female opposition placed by the Western radical feminists. This kind of disjunctiveness, the sense of mutual exclusion makes the Western feminist consciousness appear negative in character to Das and hence arouses her
resentment. Despite some very keen remarks made by her poetic personae and characters, the overall stance of Mrs. Das is in no way anti-male. She says her sense of feminism within herself is different from the feminism in the West. Western feminism is an anti-male stance. She never hates the male because she loves her husband and she still loves her children. She can derive a lot of happiness from masculine company. So, she is never able to hate them. It indicates that Mrs. Das is equating Western feminism with radical feminism. By refusing the male-female divide, she gives a more certain implication to feminism which emerges to be essentially of a humanistic kind.

Belonging to the same generation, Sylvia Plath like Kamala Das also led a life dominated by man in her own society. In 1950, Sylvia Plath entered Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. She continued to build her writing career as she wrote and published in both the college newspaper and in large-circulation magazines like Seventeen and Haper’s and The Christian Science Monitor. In 1952, she won Mademoiselle’s college fiction contest with her story, Sunday At the Mintons. Throughout college, she also dated many boys and the most serious relationship was with Dick Norton, a Wellesley neighbour. However, she has also developed periodic bouts of depression, insomnia and also thoughts of suicide, as evidenced in her journals.

When Sylvia was informed of her father’s death, she proclaimed that she would never speak to God again. Sylvia was still confused and angry about her
father’s death. Sometimes, she felt to commit suicide. Her strong and conflicting emotions of love, hate, anger and grief at the loss of her father were to affect Sylvia for the rest of her life. She developed a pattern where stress would often lead to bouts of illness, which would cause depression and more stress. Slowly she would seem to recover her successes and achievement helping to buoy her spirit. After the death of her father, her mother Aurelia struggled hard to support her two children’s literary ambitions. After graduating from Wellesly High School, Sylvia went to Smith College on a scholarship and graduated summa cum laude. Plath’s early life was dominated by a drive to excel at writing. She entered and won many literary contests and received a scholarship to Smith College. On a Fulbright grant, she studied in England at Cambridge University. There she met Ted Hughes. On June 16, 1956 Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes were married in the Church of Saint George the Martyr in London.

The newly weds had spent time that Summer in Paris, Madrid and Benindorm, Spain on the coast where every evening at dusk the lights of the Sardine boats plunge and shine out at sea like drifting stars. They had spent their days writing, studying, swimming and enjoying the quiet town. During her newly wed summer, she had written some poems like “Fiesta Melons”, “The Goring”, “The Beggars”, “Spider”, “Rhyme”, “Dream with Clam Diggers”, “Epitaph For Fire And Flower” and “Alicante Lullaby”. On April 1, 1960, Sylvia gave birth to her first baby girl, Frieda and Nicholas was born on January 17, 1962. Sylvia knew that her husband and Assia Wevill who was a wife of his
friend, David Wevill seemed to flirt with each other openly. So, there was a tension between Sylvia and Ted Hughes. Ted Hughes had been continuing to see Assia. In September Sylvia and Ted Hughes went to Ireland in an attempt to reconcile the marriage, but it ended disastrously when Ted suddenly packed up and left three days before the end of the trip. Their marriage seemed to be successful outwardly but Sylvia suffered from psychological problem.

In 1950s society attitude toward women was different. It was believed that women should not show anger and not ambitiously pursue a career instead of giving fulfillment in tending their husbands and children. Successful women like Sylvia Plath lived in a contradiction. When Plath was separated from Ted Hughes, she cared for the young children in a London apartment during a winter of extreme cold in isolation and in despair. Plath worked against the clock to produce a series of stunning poems before she committed suicide by gassing herself in the kitchen. These poems were collected in the volume *Ariel* two years after her death. Her early poetry is well crafted and traditional but her late poems show pro-feminist cry of anguish. In her poem, “The Applicant”, Plath exposes the emptiness of the role of a wife. She says:

*A living doll, everywhere you look,*
*It can sew, it can cook*
*It can talk, talk, talk*  

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She indicates her feminist consciousness in her poems like, “Mirror”, “Lady Lazarus”, “Tulips”, “Daddy”, “Fever 103 Deg”, “Morning Song”. “The Moon and The Yew Tree”. In the poem, “Lady Lazarus”, Sylvia Plath reveals her desire for suicide, self loathing and her hatred for men with a dagger-like cadence. She writes about her suicide attempt:

It’s easy enough to do it in a cell
It’s easy enough to do it and stay put
It’s the theatrical
Comeback in broad -day
To the same place, the same face, the same brute. 

Sylvia Plath’s committing suicide is quite interesting as a historical note but the temptation of cheapening her life must be avoided by making her suicide a legacy as opposed to appreciating her excellent writing. Her private diaries offered the readers a vivid, wide open look into the life of the twentieth century’s best mind. Her Journals are full of honest thoughts. She wrote a letter to her mother on August 27, 1962. The letter reveals the state of her mind struck by anguish and turmoil:

Thanks very much for your letter and the cheque. I am slowly pulling out of the flu, but the weakness and tiredness following it makes me cross. I had a day nurse for a week when I was worst and the children had high fevers (little Frieda got a ghostly rash, which turned out to be an allergy to penicillin, which she can’t have), but then the nurse got a cold and went home, Just as well, for she used up that $50
Sylvia Plath wrote a letter to her mother on January 16, 1963, one month before she died revealing her anguish. Her life has been indeed a tragic one. She is a complete woman but it is the people around her who do not understand her true-self. She yells to be heard but all her pleads go unheard and she finds a way-out in suicide. Her poems, journals and letters are a mirror of the sad and brutal life of her. She is mistakenly portrayed as a fragile, brilliant immigrant’s daughter scarred by overreaching ambition. She writes in another letter:

I fear I wrote two worrying letters to mother this week when I was desperate … Do try to convince mother I am cured. I am only in danger physically, mentally I am sound, fine and writing the best ever, free from 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. each day. I did not tell Mother that I almost died from influenza that is why I begged to see Magic. I thought a loving … Sister-in-law whom I already love dearly would protect me from further assaults while I got back my weight, my health. But now I am better and if this local many comes through and covers my trip to Ireland, I should be safe for a while. … I am a writer and this is all I want to do. Over here I can ear quite a bit from the radio, live on little, get free medical care, and have had my first novel accepted (this is a secret; it is a pot-boiler and no one must read it!) and am ready to finish a second the minute I get a line-in-many … …
Just as Sylvia Plath produces an autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, and her autobiographical writings such as *Letter Home* and her *Journals*, Kamala Das has also written her own autobiography, *My Story*. Mrs. Das reveals the truth and the reality which are happening in day-to-day life of Indian society in her works. Her sincerity, honesty and her craving for love, companionship and understanding are obviously depicted. She is a female writer who has shown earnest concern for the description of women in literature.

Her poetry is the strong revulsion and justification for the needs of women as a living being. She has shown rebellious areas in her poetry. Her poems are pondering upon the unfortunate state of woman in male-dominated society. The popularity of the autobiography, *My Story*, has perhaps deemed her image as a poet in the public mind, but she has the depth and genuineness of the artist in her English poetry also. In her poem, “An Introduction”, Mrs. Das has highlighted the status of a woman in the society governed by men. And Sylvia Plath, a famous American poet of 1960s, has the same experiences like that of Kamala Das. In her works, she has also exposed the life of a young woman growing up in the male-dominated society. Her works are not only the reflection of her life but also the lives of many young women all over the world. Some critics portrayed her as a fragile overambitious woman struggling for a career of writing as well as taking the responsibility of husband, children and reign of prescribed domesticity. Critics looked at her as an unreasonable perfectionist whose outrageous demands alienated everyone who crossed her path, an
unbalanced artist who would sacrifice everything including her own life to serve her art.

Like Kamala Das, Sylvia Plath has also expressed her intense desire to be loved and a loving wife, and to become a mother from her deeper self through her writing. The death of her father when she was eight gave a lasting impact on her life as she thought her father as a God. Her experiences of life have been expressed in her works. In many of her poems, she has depicted the status of woman in the society ruled by men. After her marriage with Ted Hughes, she went through terrible experiences of a married woman betrayed by her husband. Significantly her novel, The Bell Jar, shows the life of a young woman who grows up in a male-dominated society. In her poem, “The Applicant”, Sylvia shows the role of a woman in a male-dominated society as in Mrs. Das’ poem, “An Introduction”. Sylvia Plath became frustrated when Ted Hughes started an affair with Assia Wevill and splitted from Mrs. Plath. She committed suicide in her London flat in 1963.

Both the authors have remarkable similarity in their basic perception of the experience as women and as poets. Both of them have attempted to explain the feminist voice through their works. They have projected a new device to liberate women from the bondage of slavery in the male-dominated society. Both the poets have expressed their distaste for the submissive and insubstantial role of a woman in the male governed society. Their intense desire to be loved and loving wife and their desire to become mothers are the common themes of
their works. Both the authors have hinted at the need for feminist movements through their works and they have discovered the male-hegemony from the inner core of their feminine consciousness.

For my critical analysis of feminist consciousness of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das, I have consulted and reviewed the views of a number of their critics. To name some of the critics of Kamala Das are Usha V.T, Ramesh Kumar Gupta, Sharad Rajimwale, Jaya Krishnan Nayer, Sharada Iyer, K.V.Surendran, N. Ramadevi, Irshad Gulam Ahmad, Dr. Beena Agarwal etc. Among the critics of Sylvia Plath mention may be made of Suman Agarwal, Suman Bala, Susan Bassnett, Lucy Collins, Linda Wagner Martin, C. Vimila Rao, M. L. Rosenthal, and Mina Surjit Singh. Most of these critics have expressed positive views in their critical analysis of the feminist consciousness as reflected in the poetry of the two women poets. The purpose of my investigation is to explore new elements in their feminist consciousness from a close reading of their poetry using comparative perspectives. The following chapter will make an attempt to study the feminist consciousness of the two authors in general as shown in their works.

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Notes:


6. Ibid.,p. 60.

7. Ibid.,p. 54.


12. Ibid., p. 112.

13. Ibid., p. 4.


18. Ibid., p. 472.