CHAPTER—III

FEMININE SENSIBILITY IN THE POEMS OF KAMALA DAS AND SYLVIA PLATH

The word “Sensibility”, according American Heritage Dictionary, means sharp intellectual receptiveness to impression and refined awareness and appreciation in matters of feeling.¹ To trace its history, it is an eighteen century term which designates a kind of sensitivity and responsiveness that is both aesthetic and moral, showing a capacity to feel both for others’ sorrows and for beauty and which gives rise to romanticism in the nineteenth century European countries and colonies. In modern literary criticism, the term is used in the analysis of an author and his or her works. By the sensibility of an author, it denotes his or her characteristic way of responding intellectually and emotionally to experience. At the root of its etymology, the term originates from the moral belief that human beings have an innate benevolence or sympathy for others. The culture of sensibility in its self-indulgent and extreme form is often criticized as sentimentalism.

The phrase, feminine sensibility, originally refers to a derogatory meaning in the coterie of masculine literary world. Men writers who possess a
high level of sensibility are even charged of effeminacy; they are vulnerable because they share much with women. The debate over the proportions of reason, the force for intellectual responsiveness, and feeling, the stimuli for emotional responsiveness has been operating for generations in the history of sensibility. The feminine sensibility means “the other” of masculine sensibility which is objective and rational. In other words, feminine sensibility is underestimated as emotional responsiveness lacking in the rational perceptiveness.

In the hegemonistic traditions of patriarchy, levelling and generalizing tenets of an objective perception is held high whereas the qualities of feelings, sentiments and emotions are treated as base and feminine. In this structural patriarchy, women are treated as being unable to respond rationally to impressions, experiences and the surrounding. The characteristic responses of women are thus generalized as emotional and sentimental. The phrase in question has the connotation of emotional responsiveness that by virtue of their roles, women relate themselves with the surrounding emotionally.

Women’s world is a limited world under the system of patriarchy. In addition to this, women’s body and experiences are different from that of men. The difference resists against the levelling of patriarchal perspective and the resistance is reflected in the women’s sensibility. With the emergence of feminist ideas after the publication of Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex in
1949, the concept of feminine sensibility has been redefined. Further, the emergence of women writing questioning the masculine doxas of writing by emphasizing what woman is and what writing about woman is and foregrounding the importance of women’s body and feminine mode of responsiveness to the senses, experiences and the surrounding in a subversive manner has increased the momentum of feminine sensibility in a new paradigm. In history, feminine sensibility in literature begins with women writers writing about their own stories by adopting the tradition of men authors but confining their stories to the world of women—the world of domestic life as mothers, wives, sisters, beloveds and widows. However, the concepts of feminine sensibility has expanded into other areas such as exposing the woes and worries of women in the confinement of domestic life, the anxieties and depression they undergo, the suppression, exploitation, discrimination and marginalization they meet in the structural manipulation of colonial repressive apparatuses of patriarchy. Women of the 1960s in the European continent, the New World and other Post colonial countries such as India and Canada have started exhibiting the expanded concept of feminine sensibility in the manner of redefining it. The word “sensibility” has an evolutionary history in the world of literature.

Sylvia Plath of the U.S. and Kamala Das of India have begun writing with the new feminine sensibility from their early period of writing career. The poems of Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath which manifest their feminist consciousness expressed with strong feelings in a note of feminine sensibility
which is the beginning phase of feminist consciousness are published nearly in the same period. The early poems of Sylvia Plath were later published in *The Collected Poems* edited by Ted Hughes in 1981. It comprises her early poems written from 1956 to 1959. Her poems, “Two Sisters of Persephone”, “The Disquieting Muses”, “Perseus: The Triumph of Wit Over Suffering” “Virgin in a Tree”, The Ghost’s Leavetaking”, “Electra on Azalea Path”, “Family Reunion”, “The Colossus” and “Mushrooms” are selected to study her feminine sensibility. All her books are published after her death. *The Colossus* was published in 1960 and *Ariel* in 1965. Kamala Das’s volumes of poetry, *Summer in Calcutta* was published in 1965 and *The Descendants* in 1967. In the early poetry of Sylvia Plath, she was not intensely feminist though she showed feminine sensibility by writing about woman in many of her poems of this period. She was more conscious about the form of her poems during this period. However, there are some poems like “The Colossus” and “Mushrooms” which were composed in 1959, the concluding part of early period and marked a difference by showing a note of feminist consciousness. The major poems of Kamala Das selected from her early volumes which show feminist consciousness are “Summer in Calcutta”, “The Descendants”, “The Dance of Eunuch”, “The Freaks”, “My Grandmother’s House”, “An Introduction”, “The Suicide”, “The Sunshine Cat”, “Requiem For My Father”, and “I Shall Some Day”.

During the early years of her writing poetry, Sylvia Plath was very careful about the crafting of form and material that characterized so much of her
works. Her early poems show a very clear sense of structure where rhyme, stanza, line-length and imagery are all carefully patterned in making a consistent whole. In the early years of her writing, Sylvia Plath felt an ambiguity in the fact of being both a woman and a poet, as if writing of poetry was not strictly a woman’s activity. Her early poems such as “Firesong”, “Sonnet: To Time”, and “Winter Landscape, with Rooks” reveal, however, an essential feature of her poetic technique—the intricate interweaving of a range of meanings making it impossible to paraphrase the poem to say what it is about. She conceives of poetry as word-craft from this experiment with form during her early period. During this period she writes on nature with self-reflection, that is, she reflects on herself and life more than she describes the natural scene.

Her poem, “Family Reunion”, one of her early poems written before 1956 also gives the picture of a woman distanced from aunts and uncles who gather together. The woman portrayed in the poem falsifies herself in order to participate in the family union. Sylvia Plath says in the person of this woman:

**I cast of my identity**
**And make the fatal plunges.¹**

This shows the conflict that Sylvia Plath encounters between her true self and the institution of family. She was conscious of the blow inflicted upon her by the traditional codes of society which forced her to develop double personality. She presents this ironical situation in the poem which was composed very early.

Sylvia Plath wrote many poems on the theme of her relationship with her father in her early days of writing. In her father poem there is frightening and terrible conflict—the ghost of the father haunting her for thirty years and dead of her father being compared with the dead of Agamemnon killed by his wife, Clytemenestra, in the poem, “Electra on Azalea Path” which was written in March 1959. This is a poem in which Sylvia Plath’s existential problem arising out of the Electra complex is depicted. The poem was inspired by her own visit to her father’s grave. The figure of Electra, presented in this poem of fifth stanza, is an ambiguous one. Electra is a victim and hag, an adventurer and moral coward having multiplicity of her identity in the story. It is this
multiplicity which seems to dominate Sylvia Plath’s poem also as expressed in the words of the last stanza, “Your hound-bitch, daughter, and friend”. Sylvia Plath is attracted by Electra with whom she identifies herself. Like Electra, Sylvia Plath is also torn between royalty—her royalty to her dead father and her royalty to her mother. ‘The Electra figure is an unhappy, marginalized, outsider, doomed neither to share the confidence of her mother not to enjoy the fruits of her royalty to her father’. ²

Sylvia Plath, like Electra, suffers from this existential crisis of split identity. She, like many educated and talented women of her time of the fifties, was a victim of the ideology of the family of the period. She struggled to pursue the ideal of being a writer and she met hardship and pressure from the compulsion of the society. Though she was not very vocal about this conflict in her early poems, she was consciously and consistently writing about the existence of this conflict.

In the later part of 1959, she began writing poems like “The Colossus” and “Mushrooms” with intense feminist consciousness. As she grows older as a poet, she becomes more self conscious and her feminist sensibility is perceptible in its budding condition in “The Disquieting Muses” in which she complains about the restraint of prescribed social values imposed upon women. Similarly in the poem, “The Colossus”, her consciousness about the condition of woman flowers in full-bloom in which she exposes colossus-like image of her father and
her husband. The later years of the 1950s is the grooming years of the feminist in Sylvia Plath as an author who admitted ‘that there were multiple roles for women during the 1960s besides mothering or not mothering’.

As a sensitive woman who had intended to be a bit of a perfectionist, she was considered to be a model daughter and student by many people. She was a popular straight student who had always won the best prizes. The poems included in the volume *The Colossus* clearly revealed the dedication with which she pursued her apprenticeship. The poem, “The Colossus”, is Plath’s admission of defeat and analysis of her own importance. She transferred elements from the myth and rituals of the dying God to the Colossus figure and elaborated them with references to Greek tragedy to make her poem a complicated, enigmatic study of her own failure. She selected the ancient role of the female who mourned the dying god or the heroine who tended the idol and brought it into her poem as a felt experience.

In fact, it is a classical or a mythical being; he is a revived idol, pithy and historical as the Roman Forum and at the same time, a figure whose great lips utter “Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles” which show an echo of Ted Hughes’ language. The Colossus himself is both a stone idol with immense “skull-plates” and “fluted bones” and “acanthine hair” and at the same time a natural wilderness covered with weedy acres and “a hell of black cypress” which appear confusing. Sylvia Plath introduces her volume of poems, *The
Colossus, on a peaceful yet assuring comment building up through confession of her illness — physical and mental. It is the poetry of suffering and agonizing assessment which finds expression in naked confession.

In order to study the beginning phase of feminist consciousness of these two great poets, their response to the social code of the institute of family and relationship—father-daughter relationship, mother-daughter relationship, their relationship with the members of their society, their relationship with husband/men and also their response to the general prescribed codes of womanhood in their respective societies will be explored as they expressed in their poetry. Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das had written many poems on these themes since the beginning of their early days of writing poetry. Their poems may be classified into two groups written on— their relationship with their father, mother and grandmother and their response to the societal codes of womanhood as a daughter, as a wife and as a woman. The poem written on the first theme by Kamala Das during her early days is “Requiem for my father”. She does not write much on this theme in poetry but she writes about this in her prose, her autobiography, My Story. However, she writes a much acclaimed poem on the theme of her relationship with her grandmother entitled “My Grandmother’s House”.

In the poem, Mrs. Das shows in confessional tone a lot about the pathetic condition she is in and about the difference when she becomes a beggar
for a small amount of love at her husband’s house. In an unusual manner of expression, Mrs. Das, in a personal tone, writes with frankness and openness to express the real experiences. Sylvia Plath also wrote quite a few poems based on her relationship with her mother though she wrote on this theme mainly in her prose—her Journals and Letters Home. The poems written by Sylvia Plath on the first theme during this period are “The Disquieting Muses”, “Perseus: The Triumph of Wit Over Suffering”, “The Beekeeper’s Daughter”, “Electra on Azalea Path” etc. Both the poets wrote many poems on the second theme which showed their response to the societal prescription of womanhood such as their response to marriage, their relationship with husband, motherhood, and pregnancy which are important aspects of their life in the domestic arenas.

In the poem, “Two Sisters of Persephone”, written in 1956, Sylvia Plath portrays the split identity of a woman. She reveals the split between woman’s own identity and the identity made by the convention in the patriarchal society. She shows the subject of her divided female selves. She draws a portrait of two sisters different as dark and light. The first sister is a logical, mathematical, and intellectual in her aptitude. It shows that "the first sister seems hardly a woman at all, not in the feminine sense of womanhood. She draws:

As she calculates each sum.  
At this barren enterprise  
Rat-shrewd go her squint eyes,  
Root-pale her meager frame. ⁴
The first sister goes to her grave as a virgin “with flesh laid waste and worm-husband”. But, she is no more a woman. The second sister is a vibrant woman in nature and complete woman whose setting clearly makes her a symbol of fertile womanhood. She longs luxuriantly in the yard, bronzed as earth, taking in the vivid red silk flare of petalled blood of a nearby bed of poppies. She writes:

**Bronzed as earth, the second lies,**

**Hearing ticks blown gold**

**Like pollen on bright air. Lulled**

**Near a bed of poppies,**

The poem is quite obviously a self-portrait wherein Sylvia Plath sees into herself the potential for a dry spinsterish life of intellect with little else alongside the conflicting looming vision of herself as a vital and sparking woman that made complete in motherhood, the most natural lavish gift. Mrs. Plath has revealed her opposing desires by delineating the two sisters. She has shown her conflicting mind which is originated from the 1950s society. As she is an intellectual, artist, educated and highly ambitious woman, she wants to keep her self identity as a woman in the society. But she is bound to the convention of the society. Therefore, she is not able to fulfill her desires in the male-dominated society. She shows her dual mind through the two women and her ambition to be an intellectual and a writer which makes her perplexed.
She has exhibited the difference between the two sisters as darkness and light. The first sister is portrayed as an analytical intellectual working on mathematical calculation. She is also squint-eyed, pale and unhealthy, turned bitter and absorbed in the barren enterprise. She is a virgin until her death. She wastes her womanly flesh and peruses the activity done by men instead of marrying. Thus, she expresses her desires to be of equal status with men. The second sister exhibits her love and closeness to nature. She is drawn as vibrant, bronzed as earth being always exposed to the sun and always mixed with nature and enjoying the redness of poppies which are like “petalled blood”. Sylvia Plath’s sensibility bears the mark of the feminine in the poem in the traditional sense of the term. Her sensibility cannot raise a voice which comes out of the crisis of the identity.

On the other hand, Mrs. Das’s first volume of poems, Summer in Calcutta also appeared in 1965. The poems included in this volume have originated from her experiences of childhood and early married life in Calcutta. The poems reveal her agonized response to the external world of traumatic experiences of her childhood and the early married life. She has shown her scrupulous involvement in the complete views of life around her and extensive vision rather than what the immediate sensory perceptions could provide. They are a response to the intense summer heat of experiences presented to the poet by the mingled life that beat strongly under the Calcutta sky. She has presented
the rude summer of her life. Her childhood experiences in Calcutta are drawn in her poems. She lives in Calcutta with her husband, a worker for the Reserve Bank of India who is posted in Calcutta for three years after marriage. Therefore, her experiences are very much close with Calcutta but she desires to run away from Calcutta because of the corrupting atmosphere of Calcutta. Although she dislikes the city, her inspiration of writing poems has been drawn from that city.

Her second collection of poems, *The Descendants*, was published in 1967. The poems included in this volume are written on the themes of love, lust and disillusionment and have suggested a speculative concern with time, death and decay. Some of the poems have exhibited a deep disgust with the intrusion of lust into the growing blues of life’s several seascapes. Thoughts of loneliness and a corroding sense of fertility mark some of these poems. The disharmony between men’s guiding desires and the nothingness of his accomplishments strike the poet’s tending her vision of human destiny with a tragic dimension. This volume of poems has presented the thematic and symbolic structure of a poetic consciousness moulded by meditation over death and physical decay, ugliness of the body and the mind and the fallibility of human emotions.

In their early poems, both the authors have shown their intense feelings of bitterness, loneliness, hatred, towards death and decay. It is very obvious that their feelings arose from the depth of their consciousness of being a woman.
They have encountered the harsh realities of the life of a woman in their own lives. And these two authors are very sensitive to the cruelties that they have encountered in their early age as women.

As a poet of feminist consciousness, Mrs. Das reacts against the restriction imposed upon women and different roles played by women in the patriarchal society. In her poem, “An Introduction”, she portrays her individuality and feminine identity by breaking the social and cultural norms. She has shown her abrupt and annoyed reaction to the annihilation of the female self in a hierarchical society in which man is the ruler. She says:

… … I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair.  

The mentioned lines have shown the traditional views of being a woman imposed on a growing up girl. When she was a child, there was no difference between her and her brother and they were treated as the same. She has expressed the agony of the growth of a girl in a male-dominated society. Ironically, the poet has presented the negative response of the society to the physical growth of a girl restricting her freedom. It is only an introductory part of the set of social and cultural complexities of adjustments. This change in growth is typically un-adjustable because of its chaotic conditions by the pathetic reflection imposed by her fellowmen and family members. Such change makes Kamala Das remain under constant threat for loss of her self. She is
living in a state of dilemma. She remembers her childhood experience of eating sweetmeat without knowing the gendered indifference of her surroundings.

She has revealed various themes related to the feminist concern sensitively and obliquely in her poems. She has exposed an average female child in the process of her growth and development and also displays the difficult situation of woman in society and the very sad situation of feminine experiences. She has been exhibiting a longing for the freedom of the inner self in which there is a perfect love in the interpersonal relationship. In the beginning of the poem, Mrs. Das speaks about politics. She describes her experiences in political field. She says that she does not know about politics but she expresses that she knows the power of politics. She has expressed her continual resentment against the politics of sex in which women suffer the situation of suffocative silence. She says that a woman can repeat only the name of those in power after their male-counterparts:

I don’t know politics but I know the names of those in power, and can repeat them like Days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru. 7

These lines are revealing her starting with politics but moves on to her outburst of hurt and humiliation which she feels as a woman. She has comprised the most significant stage of the development of Indian feminine poetic
sensibility not yet attained by her younger generation. Indian women writing in English have evolved the full identity of the modern woman only in the post independence period. Kamala Das in the beginning stage of her writing is found going farther than Sylvia Plath in depicting a sharp feminine sensibility in its expanded feminist reinterpretation of feminity.

Mrs. Das, who was married at age of sixteen as a custom in a conventional Hindu society, experienced a monotonous married life in a bedroom and closed door. She could not get the true love from her husband. Therefore, she disliked her husband since the very beginning of her marriage. She started moving about in society in male-dress by ignoring her womanliness. Consequently, other people objected her new life-style, but she disliked fitting in her womanly role that she wished to be free like her brother. She says:

... ... ... I wore a shirt and my  
Brother’s trousers, cut my hair short and ignored  
My womanliness.  

She has expressed her emotions painfully that she is not able to tolerate the women’s restriction made by the traditional society:

... ... ... Dress in Sarees, be girl,  
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,  
Be a quarreler with servants. ... ... ...  
Be Amy, or be Kamala, or, better  
Still, be Madhavikutty.
Sylvia Plath was very critical of the 1950s Western attitude towards woman leaving only three roles of women—the role of barren spinsters, seductresses or prostitutes or wives and mothers. In “Perseus: The Triumph of Wit Over Suffering”, she expresses her dissatisfaction with her mother’s powerlessness and influence which make her suffer. She praises the courage of Perseus whose wit outsmarts the Gorgon. At the earlier stage of her consciousness, Sylvia Plath is simply critical of the influence of her mother who always tries to force upon her daughter what she wishes her to be. Over and above, Aurelia Plath, though she herself was a career woman, inherits many old values of womanhood. This poem, which was written in as early as 1958, suggested her consciousness which she would express in her later poems such as “Medusa” and “Daddy”. Though she was not conscious about the patriarchal manipulation to make woman to be in conflict with each other, she was conscious that there was a rupture or gap between her and her mother. Her mother was a wife, a mother and a successful career woman.

In another poem, “The Ghost’s Leavetaking”, Plath blames her father for haunting her even after his death. In a way, the poem may be looked upon as a turning point of her consciousness and prelude to her later feminist consciousness as expressed in her later poems, “Lady Lazarus”, “Daddy” and “Ariel”. This poem was composed after Sylvia Plath had seen Paul Klee’s painting. Her dislike of the influence of her parents is expressed in the lines:
Go, Ghost of our mother and father, ghost of us
And ghost of our dreams’ children, … … … ¹⁰

Sylvia Plath, in some of her early poems attacks the patriarchal conceptualization about the virginity of woman as Kamala Das is also very offensive against the patriarchal notion of womanhood in the Hindu cultural folds which fix woman to the role of daughter, wife and mother. In these early poems, they portrayed themselves as victims only describing their suffering. Both the poets cannot come out of their conditions of suffering and build a self or identity of their own at this state of feminine sensibility. According to the moral codes, chastity is a virtue that a woman has to preserve. Sylvia Plath consciously looks at this question of virginity in woman with a little more serious reflection. Radical feminists from the very beginning of its history have had reservation about the virginity or chastity of woman. Sylvia Plath is found to be conscious of this debate. Plath shows in the poem “Virginity in a Tree” that women who maintain their chastity spent their youth in neglect and yearning gradually becoming embittered in their old age. Sylvia Plath looks at this idea of woman as virgin as a distortion of life and dehumanization. In her sensibility a virgin is more like a tree than a living woman. Ironically, using “Puns” (“chased” for “chaste”) Sylvia Plath writes:

How this tart fable instruct
And mocks! Here is the parody of that moral mousetrap.¹¹
In the poem, “The Disquieting Muses”, Plath was annoyed by her mother’s and society’s expectations that a girl should be musical and graceful. She demonstrated the suffering experienced by the girl or woman who tried desperately hard to satisfy her mother’s ambitions but was guilt-ridden in her adulthood by her failures. Plath placed the blame for her own suffering on her mother because she could not free herself from her mother’s influence. She also blamed her father for her suffering as he abandoned her by dying when she was ten. She expressed her longing for reunion with her father even if it made her want to die. At the last stanza, she writes:

And this is the kingdom you bore me to,
Mother, mother. But no frown of mine
Will betray the company I keep.12

Sylvia Plath wrote often about the suffering of women. In the early 1940s, everyone knew that girls rarely went to college. Women were trained to marry well and to be literal helpmates and could accept whatever ambitions that their husbands wanted from them. Even primary school education made children aware of gender difference. What she writes in a poem reveals her sensibility to the woes of women:

When on tiptoe the schoolgirls danced,
Blinking flashlights like fireflies
And singing the glowworm song, I could
Not lift a foot in the twinkle-dress
But, heavy-footed, stood aside
In the shadow cast by my dismal headed
Godmothers, and you cried and cried.\textsuperscript{13}

The Poem, written in 1957, was discussed on a BBC programme. Sylvia Plath commented about the poem:

\textit{It borrows its title from a painting by Giorgio de Chirico---\textit{The Disquieting Muses}, All through the poem I have in mind the enigmatic figures in this painting-three terrible faceless dressmaker’s dummies in classical gowns, seated and standing in a weird, clear light that casts the long strong shadows characteristic of de Chirico’s early work. The dummies suggest a twentieth-century version of other sinister trios of women--The three Fates, the witches in \textit{Macbeth}, De Quincy’s sisters of madness.}\textsuperscript{14}

The poem delineates three strange women who are the antithesis of the mother figure. The first stanza is structured as a question to the mother and suggests that the recurring visitations by the three women are the mother’s fault. The poet reveals the story of sleeping beauty whose parents unwisely did not invite the one female relative who caused the spell to be put upon the child. The second stanza also addresses to the mother describing the way in which evil and ugly things that had always been diluted by her: “Mother, whose witches always, always /Got baked into gingerbread”. She asks the question whether the mother could see and speak to the three women gathered round the child’s bed. The next three stanzas have developed the theme of the mother’s refusal to
accept ugliness and unhappiness. She attempted to hide herself and her daughter from the ugly things. In the third stanza, the mother offered cookies, an ovaltine and a comforting song to sing during a hurricane. In the fourth stanza, mother cried for her daughter who stood heavy footed unable to lift a foot in the twinkledress whereas the other school girls danced and sang. In the fifth stanza, mother insisted on piano lessons for her child and ignored the reports of every teacher that she was “tone-deaf and yes, unteachable”. Thus, the poem ends by showing the distance between the mother’s vision of the world and her daughter’s responses: ‘I learned, I learned, I learned elsewhere/ from muses un hired by you, dear mother’. The last two stanzas show the distance between the mother and the child’s responses.

Sylvia Plath, as a feminist poet, was aware of feminist trends of thought of her time and of times to come. Her poems particularly the ones which have been selected for study remind the reflections of great feminist thinkers of both the past and the present. Regarding the patriarchal conceptualization of women’s beauty and faulty education, Mary Woolstonecraft as early as the eighteenth century observed in the same way as Sylvia Plath felt about the same topic:

I have turned over various books written on the subject of education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; ... ... ... the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of misery I deplore, and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion. The conduct and
manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength, usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity.\textsuperscript{15}

Sylvia Plath also expressed the same idea from her own personal experiences in her poems discussed. At present feminist thinker like Germaine Greer who represents the contemporary generation declared in her book, \textit{The Whole Woman}:

\begin{quote}
No sooner had I caught sight of the whole woman then western marketing came flaring down upon her with its vast panoply of spectacular effects, strutting and trumpeting the highly seductive gospel of salvations according to hipless, wombless, hard-tilted Barbie.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

There is no difference between what is meant by Germaine Greer in her phrase “hipless, wombless, hard-tilted Barbie” and what is meant by Sylvia Plath in her poems, such as, “The Disquieting Muses”, “The Munich Mannequins” etc. Sylvia Plath holds a radical view of feminism which totally rejects the breeding of femininesss that restricts a woman to the role of a beautiful woman as wife, as mother and a daughter only. She redefines what is to be feminine. She expresses her personal strains caused by the tension and anxiety in her confrontation with social norms. In her vision, a woman should not be caught by the false aura of the ‘feminine mystique’ just to be a mere
‘mannequin’ or a ‘Barbie-doll’ though she has not yet claimed for separate identity of woman at this stage of her feminine sensibility.

Kamala Das as a leading woman poet of India has written a number of poems expressing such kind of feminist revolt in the Indian context. In the poem, “The Dance of Eunuch”, Mrs. Das has presented the sense of aridity and sterility which become the theme and tone of the poem. The poem is an expression of the poet’s feeling over the loss of identity of women through the Eunuch’s dance. It is one of the most remarkable Indian poems in English in which she has expressed her real experience of watching eunuchs dance. She recognizes their pain and sterility through their dance in the hot weather. Their dance is a continuous convulsion; their voices are harsh; their appalling aridity in their life is shown by the weather in which they dance. Through these imageries, Mrs. Das has shown the loss of identity of a woman after marriage in a male-dominated society. The Eunuchs dance till they bleed and they have green tattoos on their checks and jasmines in their hair. They are thin in limb and dry like half-burnt logs from funeral pyres. Even the meager rain has no cooling effect. On the contrary, it has sinister smell of urine of lizards and mice. Even the crows are so silent on trees and the children are watching these poor creature’s convulsions. Mrs. Das has considered that the eunuchs are some mysterious creatures and their celebrating the birth of a child is compared to half-burned log from funeral pyres, drawing at once a sinister birth-death contrast. She writes:
They sang of
Lovers dying and of children left unborn. …
Some beat their drums; other beat their sorry breasts
And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy.17

Through the sorrow and painful imageries of the eunuchs, the suffering of a married woman in a conventional society is shown. Under the vicious ego of man, a woman cannot express her desire and woman’s mind is always confined under the male-governed society. Kamala Das suggests the loss of identity and the anguish of women in her description of the eunuchs and their dance. She has exposed the outward extravagance of the eunuchs as a sad commentary on their inner poverty and emptiness caused by sterility. The behaviour of the eunuchs is so unnatural and artificial. Because of their natural barrenness, the eunuchs have become image of death and rottenness. Their songs are melancholic due to the dismal reality that surrounds them. She writes:

… … … … Their voices.
Were harsh, their songs melancholy, … … 18

Kamala Das, like other leading feminist writers, touches upon the problems of female marginality, psychic despair, broken marital relation, suppressed sexuality or the crises of suppressed identity in her poetry. Her poems such as the “An Introduction”, “I Shall Some Day”, “The Suicide”, “The Invitation” and “The Dance of Eunuch” are a critique of the sexual colonization of patriarchy. Kamala Das ‘Condemns the gender divisions created by the
male dominated society and pities the lot of women because they have been losers in the war of the sexes. The male desire to relegate women to margins suffocates her.¹⁹

Based on every experience, the poetry of Sylvia Plath is intensely personal, the knowledge of which often proves beneficial in revealing obscure references or cryptic images to fuller clarity and meaning for the reader. She has expressed her experiences as a victim of male oppression and a victim of the fifties and its institution of the family. She lived in a decade when women were encouraged not to entertain the idea of independence and to see their goals in life as being good house-keepers, wives and mother. In a patriarchal society, women could not express their desire. Plath resisted and took hold of the power of language and literature to rebel against the prescriptions of the social codes.

Like Sylvia Plath, Mrs. Das also expresses her desire to commit suicide when she is unable to get true love after marriage. She considers her life meaningless, barren and waste. She cries out in her poem, “The Suicide” expressing this feeling:

O Sea, I am fed up
I want to be simple
I want to be loved
And
If love is not to be had
I want to be dead. …²⁰
She could find happiness and security in her childhood under the loving guidance of her grandmother. She got the warmth of her childhood under the loving care of her grandmother that made her feel happy and inspired. Her quest for love as an adult is very seriously brought out in the same poem:

I had a house in Malabar
And a pale green pond.
I did all my growing there
In the bright summer months.
I swam about and floated
I lay speckled green and gold
In all the hours of the sun,
Until
My grandmother cried,
Darling, you must stop this bathing now,
You are much too big to play
Naked in the pond.  

It has shown the contrast between the happy secure life when she was with her grandmother and her quest for love in the house of her husband. The loss of her grandmother’s love continues to torture her inner spirit. She has discovered male-dominance from the inner core of her feminine consciousness. In a way, Mrs. Das has presented a feminist notion through her poetry. She could not find true-love and her discontent reached its climax that she turned to the thought of committing suicide. She expresses her painful thought:

Bereft of body
My soul shall be free.\textsuperscript{22}

Mrs. Das uses the image of the sea to revive her happy childhood which she gets through harmony between the soul and the body when she used to swim in a pale-green pond near her house in Malabar. The harmony breaks away with the intervention of her adulthood; her physical maturity becomes destructive. And the suppression or the fulfillment of her physical maturity cannot give her mystical experience. She feels a conflict between the world as it is and her personal experience. She is unable to synthesize the inner being and the outer like the soul and the body. She longs for love as an essence in her life, but in real life she has to wear the mask of a happy woman and wife in the male-dominated society. The loss of her grandmother’s affection has been continuing to torture her inner spirit. As the confessional poets do interest in death and suicide, both Sylvia and Anne Sexton commit suicide. Their fascination for suicide is not a pretence. In Mrs. Das, the suicide wish has always been strong though she does not commit it because of her essentially spiritual psyche and deep sensitivity.

Robert Lowell describes Sylvia Plath’s confessional poems as the autobiography of a fever. This is true of Kamala Das’s poems also. Her fever can be frigidity, the complex about her dark skin and ordinary features, the suspected unconcern of her husband and her neurotic loneliness. Her obsessive
pre-occupation with her favourite theme of love, lust and frustration began with the poems in the first volume, *Summer in Calcutta*.  

Because of her desire to die, she writes a few poems of decay, disease and death. The poem, “The Fear of Year”, exhibits the approach of old age and after which she knows well that there will be ‘dead, dead, dead’. Her poems, “Winter” and “The End of Spring” are also written on the same theme. “A Relationship”, one of her poems, presents her inability to escape from her pitiless husband in the hope that she will find her rest, her sleep, her peace after her death only in her husband’s arms. The poem, “Palam”, also reveals her thought of decay and death:

... ... Walk away from me into lonely night  
With my finger-prints on you, my darling, go, while like,  
  blood  
  Running out  
  And death beginning, this day of ours is helplessly ending

Her poem, “Composition”, exhibits that the tragedy of life is not death yet growth and this growth is equivalent to death in life. Her failure of finding true-love is revealed in the poem, “The Descendants”. It presents the lover’s indulgence in nothingness, love-like sin since there is no true emotion in their physical relation. The poet says that they are committing sin and they have no possibility of redemption. She says:
We have spent our youth in gentle sinning
Exchanging some insubstantial love … … … 24

They have lain on every weathers and the lovers are nailed to the bed:

We have lain in every weather, nailed, no, not
To crosses, but to soft beds and against
Softer forms… … … 25

The identification of the cross with the bed brings in negative sense but it tries to reveal the torture of insubstantial love and the sin of temptation. The lovers are in their ecstasy of lust and they are ready to produce everything that is neither curious in birth nor frightening in death. It shows the failure of finding genuine love in the male-dominated society. The syndrome of lust produces torture and loss of love is paralleled with that of sin, punishment and redemption. Mrs. Das reveals the agony of a lover who is unable to gain true love from the betrayal by her husband.

The theme of disillusionment in love is exhibited in her poem, “The Freaks”. She expresses the feeling of women’s secret longing for true-love. She has drawn the impossibility of fulfillment of love and the possibility of love turning into lust. She shows that the lover stagnates at the level of lust by using the metaphors like “sun-stained cheek”, mouth like “a dark cavern” and “stalactics of uneven teeth”. But her mind is towards love. She shows that a lover finds nothing but only “Skin’s lazy hungers”:
Nimble finger- tips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skin’s lazy hungers? 26

In the male-governed society, soul-love is frustrated, lust becomes domineering. She has shown the transformation of loneliness into obsession with sex. One of the prominent features of her poetry is a desperate obsession with love. How she feels about love is expressed:

… … …The heart
An empty cistern, waiting
Through long hours, fills itself
With coiling snakes of silence … … …. 
I am a freak. … … …. 27

Her sadness after marriage, as a puppet is shown obviously. She remains as a virgin for a fortnight after marriage. Her husband had extra-marital affairs with another lady, leaving her alone in her home. Therefore, all her softer emotions are completely switched off toward her husband. She was intolerable seeing the behaviour of her husband. She deplored:

… … … … his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactics of
Uneven teeth gleam, his right
Hand on my knee, while our minds
Are willed to race towards love;
But they only wander, tripping
Idly over puddles of
Desire. …

Therefore, she feels unhappy in the absence of true-love in her life. She remains all through her life searching for love and understandings which could not be found in her life even in a little amount. She writes:

… … … … who can
Help us who have lived so long
And have failed in love? The heart,
An empty cistern waiting
Through long hours, fills itself
With coiling snakes of silence… …. 
I am a freak.  

Mrs. Das admits that she is a freak. She needs a companionship to unburden her agony and her complaints. But she could never find the true love from her husband. Man’s indifference to woman’s pursuit of perfect being becomes a major preoccupation in her poetry. The incompatibility is the source of frustration in the poet and she asks the question in the poem:

Can’t this man with
Nimble finger tips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skin’s lazy hungers? 

Mrs. Das reveals her mental suffering due to the cruelty of her husband in another poem, “The Sunshine Cat” also. Women seem to have lost their
identity in the hands of their husbands. She indicates the hurtful manner of her husband and her misery of being a forlorn woman who has been treated very badly by her husband. She loves her husband and wishes that she would like to get true love, companionship and understanding from her husband. She has received love only through lust. It exhibits the nature of male-sadism which is the ultimate shape that lust has become love. She reveals ‘Selfish’ and despicable cowardly nature of her husband in the following lines:

They did this to her, the men who knew her, the man she loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor used her but was a ruthless watcher … … …

Mrs. Das reveals her mental illness in the company of a cruel husband. In a confessional tone, the poem exhibits the agony of a forlorn woman who has been treated very badly by her husband. Mrs. Das expresses that her husband neither loves nor uses her but he is a ruthless watcher. She has turned to the band of cynics for her emotional satisfaction but the band of cynics was all selfish and egoistic. She becomes the victim of all kinds of embarrassment and great pain—physical and of foul smell. She has been sickened by their smell and they have driven her to their lagging lust. She weeps when she gets out of their clutches. She has realized that tears are her twisted companions and has to go for the rest of her life in sad and hopeless manner. She is treated with cruelty. Her husband used to lock her up in a room of books with a streak of sunshine cat lying near the door before he goes out to his office. In winter season, her
husband has realized that her woman is a mere skeleton with a hair-thin line. She becomes no human creature of flesh and blood like a sunshine cat which is reduced to a hair thin line and the woman is cold and half-dead. She describes it in the revealing words:

… … … Her husband shut her
In, every morning; locked her in a room of books
With a streak of sunshine lying near the door, like
‘A yellow cat, … … …’

Her husband thinks that she is unfit for the touch of men. Therefore, she suffers from serious nervous breakdown. Thus, Mrs. Das reveals her experience of being a wife in the traditional society. As a traditional wife, she has to attend to the needs and comforts of her husband. Women have been facing such a terrifying situation and have been subjected to all kinds of pains. She expresses on it in the poem:

He returned to take her out, he was a cold and
Half-dead woman, now of no use at all to men.

Her husband’s ill treatment of her showing total indifference to her in their relationship is rendered. Here, ‘Cat’ is a symbol of Mrs. Das herself who is an object of mistrust and embarrassed at the hands of her own man. She has revealed a great tragedy of personal human relationship by exposing that she is treated by her husband as a non-existent, unexciting being; the phrase, “a hair-thin line” signifies this annihilation of Kamala Das by her husband. Thus, a
voice of despair fills the poetry of Kamala Das. Like Sylvia Plath, Mrs. Das also writes about her father in the poem, “A Requiem For My Father”, in which she expresses her admiration for her father. In her early poem such as “Perseus: The Triumph of Wit Over Suffering”, Sylvia Plath also expresses the same thought. In her later poems, she has changed her attitude toward her father. Kamala Das also shows her distaste for her father in her autobiography, My Story. It may be concluded that both the poets have similar attitude towards their fathers in protesting against the colonization of patriarchy and subsequent subordination of their own selves. Both of them have a mixed feeling toward their fathers. Kamala Das portrays her father as a strong man with a never fading zest for life. Her father withstanding death for nine days makes a stand against the medical tortures and the various cruelties that came ahead of death. She writes:

They bled you to test your blood
When you lay insensate and stiff
They did the lumbar puncture
Folding you like a canvas chair
Yet you did not once protest.34

It suggests the greatness of the father that he can face his ‘secret foes’ that come before death. The death of the father is praised as a sacrifice or martyrdom. The hero figure of the father is shown through the secret foes:

For nine days and nights you were on the rack
while you secret foes came to watch you die.35
Mrs. Das remembers how she watches her father die. She delineates her father as a hero—bold, popular and affectionate. She adores the overpowering personality of her father. The impact of the father image upon her mind is the manifestation of a patriarchal society.

Sylvia Plath also thought her father as a God. The influence of her father cannot be removed from her mind. She has delineated the father figure as a despot whereas Mrs. Das considers her father as omnipotent. Mrs. Plath adores her father as a fascist, as another German Fuehrer in her poem, “Daddy”, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter as one of her later poems. She does not have emotional communication with her father. She says:

I never could talk to you  
The tongue stuck in my jaw  
It stuck in a barb wire snare.36

When she is thirty she wants to recover her father. She confesses about it in the following lines:

I have always been scared of you,  
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo  
And your neat moustache,  
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.37

Mrs. Das reveals her adoration for her father in the closing lines of her poem in a simple innocent statement; ‘I loved you father, I loved you all my
life’. The poem is very evocative suggesting the image of the father as a popular and bold leader of men, full of affection for his children, and Mrs. Das’s relation with her father as one of extreme regards and overflowing close affection. In the conventional society, daughter seems to be more attached to her father. In the patriarchal society of the East and the West, a daughter is a non-living being. Vrinda Nabar observes:

*Neither Islam nor Judaeo-Christian tradition have distinguished themselves by any manifestation of concern with equal rights and privileges for the two sexes ... ... ... According to Manu, no female—whether girl, young woman or old woman—was to be allowed independence of action. A woman was to be under her father’s control in childhood, her husband’s once married, and her son’s when widowed.*

In the context of this observation of the leading Indian feminist theoretician, the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das may be analysed. Their poems depict the reality of women’s existence—their intense suffering, loneliness and their voice of resistance against this societal pre-condition. “Perseus: The Triumph of Wit Over Suffering”, “The Ghost’s Leavetaking”, “The Beekeepers Daughter”, “The Colossus”, “Daddy” and “Lady Lazarus” of Sylvia Plath, and “Next to Indira Gandhi” and “A Requiem for my father” of Kamala Das report about their relationship with their fathers. They have portrayed their fathers as domineering demigods. Both of them adore and love their fathers and also they express their hatred towards their fathers. The two women poets possess a unique feminine sensibility unlike women writers of the
past century protesting against the dominant father image in their works. For thirty years, Sylvia Plath suffers from the syndrome of father-fixation; she realizes the damages caused to her by this fixations. That is why she calls him a Nazi and herself a victim. In this new sensibility, the meaning of the words, ‘feminine’ and ‘feminity’ have undergone changes. To be ‘feminine’ is not to bear the silencing force which has been muffling women for generations.

Sylvia Plath indicates her domineering father whom she has worshipped for thirty years but whose image is deteriorating despite her effort to revive his memory and to mend the decay in her poem, “The Colossus”. She explores a very private, very personal experience and her relationship with her dead father. She adores and hates her father at the same time. Her dead father has been still influencing on her remaining life. She expresses her feelings towards her father who died thirty years ago and whose image remains as a colossus in her life. She writes:

*I shall never get you put together entirely,
Pieced, glued and properly jointed.*

She knows the decay of her father’s image in her is due to an internal conflict in her and not due to an external force. Her loss of hope which she visualizes under the influence of the colossus or the image of her father is shown obviously in her poems. The colossus image embodies both the poet’s fear of the stone-like, resistant force of the patriarch and her admiration for the colossal power that her father once possessed. The broken statue indicates that the dead
man cannot be recovered through piecing him. Although the poet has memories of him, she continues to gaze in fear and love at him. It is a symbolical poem in which she successfully uses the statue as a symbol for the father’s vanished power. She addresses her father:

I shall never get you put together entirely,
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.
Mulebray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles
Proceed from your great lips.
It’s worse than a barnyard.40

She praises and shows contempt for her father at the same time. The poem is still split between the two objectives—the expression of a vitriolic contempt for the abandoning father and a rigid pride in his all powerful, paternal authority. The poem presents her hours which are married to shadow—to the soul of the inanimate and oppressive father-husband who lives only in her remembrance. She writes:

My hours are married to shadow.
No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel
On the blank stones of the landing.41

Indeed, she looks like the shadow only as the colossus stands in the sun making the shade in which she lives in. Therefore, she complains against living in the ‘shadow’ of the powerful men. She feels both sides to be intimidated. The ‘I’ does not possess her own shadow, her own artistic identity, but it is
possessed by that of another. The poem exhibits the poet’s defiant attitude toward the stone ruins addressed as the father. The poet explores a very private, very personal experience, her relationship with her dead father who she both adores and hates. The father is drawn as a great person but he cannot be revived. Her mind always sticks to her dead father that she is unable to be free herself from his power:

Scaling little ladders with gluepots and pails of Lysol
I crawl like an ant in mourning
Over the weedy acres of your brow
To mend the immense skull-plates and clear
The bald, while tumuli of your eyes.\(^{42}\)

She is yoked and dedicated to death. The giant statue is mythic and larger than life but in being so it is also the past. It is irrevocably dead and cannot be reconstructed. But it has become her only home. She lives in its shadows and views the living world from its perspective. Her psychological and emotional vocabulary is expressed:

Nights, I squat in the cornucopia
Of your left ear, out of the wind,
Counting the red stars and those of plum-color.
The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue.\(^{43}\)

Thus, Plath has expressed her pains, despair and the nothingness of existence after she has lost her female identity under the impact of male-dominance. When she writes “The Colossus”, her former admiration for her
father has turned into the tone of indignation at him for dwarfing her by his imposing image. The poem is a psychological reaction to male-dominance. Sylvia Plath retreats from her former stance of Electra complex and comes to realize that it is a false imposition to direct her desire “towards a sovereign being”, the father or the husband. It is at this level that feminine sensibility has undergone a revolutionary change – shifting from the former patriarchal paradigm of leveling women as passive, silent provider of service all behind the image of men to the realization of repression that she has been forced upon. Simone de Beauvoir also stated being critical of Freud’s opinion:

The sovereignty of the father is a fact of social origin, which Freud fails to account for; in fact, he states that it is impossible to say what authority decided, at a certain moment in history, that the father should take precedence over the mother—a decision that, according to Freud, was progressive, but due to causes unknown.44

Both Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das express their feeling about freedom in their poems. Mrs. Das presents her desire to be free from the restrictions set up by the traditional society in her short poem, “I Shall Some Day”. The poem reveals the feelings of frustration and desire to escape from the bondage. Her hopes being broken, she is frustrated after marriage. She is just like a prisoner in a prison of her husband’s body. The poet would like to transcend in the body of her lover. She is ready to striptease to escape from the snare of lust. She portrays
the intense desire of the woman to break loose from the cocoon of lust. She says:

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.45

She shows her defiant hope and freakish desire. It highlights the strong desire for freedom that is to leave, to take wings, to return and to take refuge. Women become submissive but sometimes become rebellious. The dual personality of the Hindu wife is a woman’s need to leave her husband and to return again. Mrs. Das indicates the tiresomeness of a hollow married life. She would like to be a liberated woman who resents at the cocoon which is built around her. She desires to move quickly from her status without any restrictions. As a poet of feminine longings, she reveals her restlessness as a sensitive woman moving in the male-dominated society. She expresses her secret hopes and fear of womankind. She hopes for a world which is de-fleshed, de-veined and de-blooded. She declares:

Of freedom, and I shall someday see
My world, de-fleshed, de-veined, de-blooded
Just a skeletal thing, that shut my
Eyes and take refuge, if nowhere else.
Here in your nest of familiar scorn.46
She exposes her secret desire to be liberated from the restriction one day or the other. Sylvia Plath also expresses her deep desire to gain control and power in the society one day in her poem, “Mushrooms”. The poem is evocative of her depression. Everybody knows about her depression but nobody ever talks about it; women get many sufferings and they get depressed often, but nobody sees it. She says:

Nobody sees us,
Stops us, betrays us;
The small grains make room.\(^{47}\)

She seems to have written it while she is in a more stable state of mind. She seems to feel as if she is just one object amongst the mushrooms that she is indistinguishable from all the other mushrooms. The mushrooms inherit the earth just like the meek inherit the earth. The underlying motive of the poem is that the poet has a deep desire to gain control and power one day. She strongly believes that one day the meek shall inherit the earth and finally regain some of the power which they have desired. She says:

We shall by morning
Inherit the earth.
Our foot’s in the door.\(^{48}\)

Mushroom is a soft plant but it struggles to inherit the earth. Like Mushrooms, Mrs. Plath struggles to inherit the earth. The poem is about the feminist movement as it has a meaning about the inevitability of women’s rise
to power. Mushrooms grow weak and numerous. Their growth is also very short-lived and they are only sustainable in a very specific condition. She expresses the struggle of the weak in their achievement. She indicates about women and their empowerment. Women cannot be discriminated because of their gender and of any reason. She becomes a strong character and a role model for women. It is an inspirational poem that it inspires women. As a whole, it shows a picture of the small soft mushroom pushing out through the layers of dirt. In some lines of the poem, she shows her offensiveness at manhood:

Nudgers and shovers
In spite of ourselves.
Our kind multiplies:49

Although Plath is pertaining to her restraint from the idea of pain and misery, she holds a largely optimistic view in mushrooms. She expresses her triumph in playing silently the dominant role in society. The poem ends by showing the point that feminists stand about to make a social change. The poet articulates her emotions simply. She expresses that her pain and misery will grow in the male-dominated society. Like mushrooms, women are soft and meek but the emotions of women are strong. Although mushrooms are soft, they grow through the strong cracks of the earth. Although she is a woman, Sylvia Plath wants to step into the society which is governed by men. She also shows her protest against the male-centred society. Using the imagery and symbol of the mushrooms, Sylvia Plath speaks about the depression of women remaining unseen and growing in the dark in the misogynist society.
Sylvia Plath reveals the agonies of women at the loss of their true-self in her poems. The agonizing confessional voice at the loss of the female identity in the crisis of male-dominated world became the poetic medium of her poems. Some of the representative poems written on the theme are “Family Reunion”, “The Colossus”, “The Mushrooms”, “Elm”, “Mirror”, “Lady Lazarus”, “Daddy” , “Tulip”, “Fever 103 Deg”, and “The Stone”. The innermost recesses of the poet’s soul are laid bare in these poems. She perceives that the secret of her turbulent heart, the complexity of living a divided self, is due to her state of father-fixation; the realization against this condition gains momentum in the later poems, “The Colossus”, “Daddy” and “Lady Lazarus”. Her expression like that of Kamala Das and other women authors are replete with highly personal tones and experience. A woman’s bewilderment at the lost of her sense of belongingness causes an ultimate problem of loss of her identity—her true-self. Therefore, she expresses this feeling in the mirror- imagery as reflecting her true-self, the reality and also the other—the stranger in her which lies unseen.

Suman Agarwal, a critic of Sylvia Plath has rightly pointed out:

Plath rejected traditional roles assigned to women. Marriage and motherhood were more the societal conventions of the fifties to which women were to conform. Plath’s poetry about her rejections of her father’s paternal authority is an allegory of her rejection of patriarchal authority … … …In a patriarchal society, women are not supposed to have a voice, Plath resisted and took hold of the power of language and
literature. She took the personal and made it political through her works. 50

Many feminists are of the opinion that Sylvia Plath is a ‘victim of a sexist society and her suicide is a response to the oppression of women, and her poetry, choreography of female wounds’. 51 A critic of Kamala Das also expresses a very comprehensible observation about the feminist sensibility of the poet in the following lines:

… … … Kamala Das is a contemporary Indian poetess quite conscious of her artistic design and purpose as well as of her responsibility towards her vision. Here is undoubtedly a feminist voice articulating the hopes and oppression, the concerns and tensions, of womankind … … … Her poetic voice imbued with a feminine-cum-feminist sensibility is typically her own and it cannot be confused with anyone else’s. 52

Thus, there are many similarities between the two authors regarding their feminine sensibility and feminist consciousness. Both the poets have a longing for a genuine love from their husbands and their father and both long for freedom which is expressed in many of their poems. Both of them react sharply against the sexist outlook of sadistic men and masochistic women in their poems. An observation about the similarity between the two poets may be recalled in passing. Anisur Rahman has stated:
... both suffered emotional displacement in their lives and both achieved remarkable efflorescence in art ... and here are two poets incessantly and feverishly trying to grapple with certain telling emotions and discovering their characteristic tones of voice. 53

In his comparative analysis of the two poems, “The Applicant” of Sylvia Plath and “The Old Playhouse” of Kamala Das, Anisur Rahman once again makes such a memorable remark:

At the end of both the poems there is a certain desire for disengagement from the given lot: Plath expresses it with ridicule and Das with earnest desire. Suffering in these poems is not an end unto itself; it is a cause of one’s assertion, a medium to voice a note of dissent, a way of saying a positive “No” to suffering. 54

It may be concluded that both the poets write with a committed consciousness for the cause of women from their personal stance.

Mrs. Das has suffered a nervous breakdown at the age of nineteen as a neglected wife and stayed in Malabar with her loved grandmother. For a different reason, Sylvia Plath has also suffered a similar nervous breakdown almost at the same age because of an intense, unbearable love for her adored father. But Mrs. Das could be cured whereas Sylvia could never come out the agony and depression. There was a tension between her and her husband. In September 1962 she and Ted Hughes went to Ireland in an attempt to reconcile
the marriage but Sylvia filed for divorce immediately. She seemed to be coping with the immense stresses of the breakup of her marriage by writing poems at a phenomenal pace. Plath’s mother also did not get love and care from her husband, Otto Plath. On account of Otto Plath’s illness, Aurelia Plath said, her husband never hugged and never kissed his children. He never took a walk, played with and touched them. There were no talks with them but only a pat on the head at bedtimes.

Mrs. Das, like other children in the Nair family has been completely neglected but for her grandmother. This is what she writes in her popular autobiography, My Story. Her father is not of an affectionate nature. He belongs to a traditional family having an aristocratic atmosphere around it. His family was not financially well-off. As an employee in an automobile farm, he was always busy in his work. Her mother did not have true feelings of love for him. Mrs. Das reveals about the loveless relationship between her mother and her father:

My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatch. But my mother’s timidity helped an illusion of domestic harmony which satisfied the relatives and friends. Out of such an arid union were born the first two children, my brother and, I bearing the burden of a swarthy skin and ordinary features.55
In her poems, Mrs. Das takes an imaginative flight directed to the Sun leaving her home and hearth behind. As the sun is also a source and symbol of power, confronting the sun is a challenge to the so-called divine male authority. Even when her fingers are blistered because of the scorching heat, she is not hesitant to forge forward; ‘Now pacing the blue skies / I walk steadily toward the sun’. Her fierce flight to the sun is similar to Sylvia Plath’s flight to the same destination in her famous poem “Ariel”. Toward the end of the poem, there is a suggestion that her sealing up to the sun is occasioned by a treachery of her beloved. Such type of angry protest against men has been revealed by Sylvia Plath in her poems, “Lady Lazarus”, “Daddy”, “Purdah” “The Colossus” and “Musrooms”. It is in the writings of Kamala Das that the Indian-English poetry has acquired for itself a real substance that matches equally with the creative contribution of the western confessionalists like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton of America. Of all the women poets of the present in India, Mrs. Das has projected herself as a fervent, feminist poetic voice which is always exchanging for a dignified place of honour, a respect for the naturalistic freedoms and choices. Her poetry has contributed for the strong revulsion and right for the most needful awakening of woman as a living entity in the world.

Similarly, a significance of the works of Sylvia Plath lies in its appeal to the preparation in the late sixties for the explosion of women’s movement in the nineteen seventies in the western world as a voice of anger joining in with other sisters. Susan Bassnett remarked, in the later decades:
Sylvia Plath becomes an example of someone who tried with all her strength to find a way forward in a situation of despair, to cope with pain caused by all kinds of aspects of her life and character whose death was not because she desired to die but rather because she could not momentarily cope with the anguish of living a life that fell far short of the life she wanted so much to have.\textsuperscript{56}

Indeed the poetry of Sylvia Plath has various and timeless ramifications as a muse to the movements against injustices and cruelties of mankind. In continuation of this study, the next chapter will discuss on how the two poets move from redefining feminine sensibility to raising a female voice in their consciousness expressed through their poetry.
Notes:

1. www.answers.com>Library>Literature & Language
6. Ibid., p. 32.
8. Ibid., p. 59.
9. Ibid., p. 60.
10. Ibid., p. 60.

19. Ibid., p.9.


22. Ibid., p.3.


24. Ibid., p. 10.

25. Ibid., p. 8.


28. Ibid., p. 10.

29. Ibid., p. 10.

30. Ibid., p. 10.

31. Ibid., p. 10.

32. Ibid., p.49.

33. Ibid., p. 49.

34. Ibid., p. 49.


36. Ibid., p. 39.

38. Ibid., p.55.
41. Ibid., p.20.
42. Ibid., p.21.
43. Ibid., p.20.
44. Ibid., p.21.
47. Ibid., p.52.
49. Ibid., p.35.
50. Ibid., p.35.
52. Ibid., p.88.
David, E. Harrell (Hyderabad: American Studies Research Centre, Summer 1992) 76.

55. Ibid., p.79.
