Chapter 5

Poetic Craft
Poetic craft : Poetry of Kamala Das and Adrienne Rich

Kamala Das and Adrienne Rich both are modern feminist poets. Their style is confessional and free and frank expression of their emotion is the unique quality of their poems. Modern poets especially feminist poets are well
known for the intensity of their emotion and their poetry is a prime example of how anger and anxiety can be converted into text with par excellence aesthetic dimensions both in form and spirit. Their poetry had also opened up altogether a new way of looking at basic essences of human relations from the point of view of a pleasurable operation of the human intellect.

Poetry is considered to produce ‘Rasa’ i.e. aesthetic emotions. A production of ‘Rasa’ is the ultimate purpose of poetry. There are nine rasa (aesthetic emotions) i.e. Srinagar (erotic), Veer (the heroic), Roudra (the furious), Karuna (the piteous), Hasya (the comic), Bhayanak (the fearful), Bheebatsa (the repulsive), Adbhut (the marvellous) and Shant (the peaceful). Earlier it was believed that a poet is mastered to produce in one rasa but modern feminist writers has broken this myth. Most of the rasa or emotions are prominently attended by them with effectiveness. Their poetry has the capability to arise the emotion in the heart of the readers with the same intensity as experienced by the poet. The most effective rasa or emotion or one can say the best tool in the hands of feminist writers is the Karuna (the piteous) which is the outcome of long suffering and incurable pain of bleeding heart which directly connects with the readers. Truly said by Keats in
his ode, ‘Our sweetest songs are those which tells the saddest thoughts.’ When Kamal Das and Adrienne Rich presented their experiences in an intense style with appropriate diction in their poetry, it worked in the same manner and widely appreciated by the reader.

In English literature poetry is categorized in two 1) subjective poetry which is personal in tone and ‘I’ is dominating factor. 2) objective poetry where poet is not involved personally. He/she talks about others life, their experience and emotions. At first glance poetry of Kamala Das and Adrienne Rich seems subjective as they talk about their own emotion of anguish, anger, failure in love etc. But deep study of their poetry tells us that their poetry is a journey from subjective to objective from personalisation to depersonalisation. Their suffering and experience are not poetic fallacy but truth realized in its bare form and the poetic process reveals the constant striving of an artist to arrive at harmony of the human particulars and widely acceptable symbol. Highly subjective experience, if not properly assimilated is liable to slip below the level of personal memories. But these poets balance the pains of living and the suffering of creation. This is finally the feat of these poets that gives coherent poetic mould to the highly intensely subjective experience of the
poet. In the poem ‘Composition’ Kamala Das shares her experiences and her anguish with her reader when she says

When I got married

My husband said,

You may have freedom,

As much as you want.

My soul balked at this diet of ash

Freedom became dancing shoe,

How will I danced

And danced without rest,

Until the shoe turned grimy on my feet

And I began to have doubts.(1)

She tells that in the beginning on the name of freedom she was very happy and excited but soon she realized that she this freedom is just an illusion in the name of marriage and she denied to enjoy this freedom. Later she discovered that
The ultimate discovery will be that

We are immortal

The only things mortal being

Systems and arrangements

Even our pains continuing

In the devours who constitute

The world,

Even.

Oft-repeated moves

Of every scattered cell

Will give no power

To escape

From

Cages of involvement. (2)

Here ‘we’ and ‘our’ represent the community of women of whole world where pain is similar and they all are captive of this marriage institution. In the poem
‘An Introduction’ her sufferings get mixed with others and gives the universal expression to her thought when she says

I have no jouys which are not yours, no

Aches which are not yours, I too cal myself I.(3)

In ‘Anamalai Poems II’ she herself is the subject matter. She writes:

There were nights when I heard

My own voice call me out

Of dreams, gifting such rude

Awaking and then me

Expelling me from warm

Human love, unacces love

Fare for one such as

A misfit when awake

Later in anamalie poem iv she

Realised a truth for all

Women and writes for the
Ultimately we come to know

That for us there is only one.

Claimant when by mistake we call

Death obsessed as we are by our

Physically, restrained

By the eyes inadequate power

To perceive beyond the farthest

Precincts of truth.(4)

Unlike Kamla Das, Adrienne Rich only wear a mask of ‘I’ and represent the women class and instructs then in snapshots of a daughter in law, she writes

Sigh no more ladies

Time is male

And in his cups drinks to the fair

Be mused by gallantry, we hear

Our mediocritees over praised

Indolence read as obnegation

Shaltern thought styled intuition
Every lapse forgiven, our crime

Only to cast too bold a shadow

On smash the mould straight off. (5)

Her poems are a kind of encouragement for other women. She wants to make them aware about themselves. In her poem ‘Diving into the Wreck’, she fuses her female persona with all the female and tells.

We are, I am, you are

By cowardice or courage

The one who find our way

Back to this scene

Carrying a knife, a camera

A book of myths

In which

Our names do not appear. (6)

Rich gets her existence acknowledged and at the same time she wants that every woman must stand for herself and search for the answer who she is. In her poem ‘To a poet’ she expresses it beautifully.

How do I exist?
This was the silence I wanted to breaking.

I had questions but you would not answer.

I had answers but you could not them.

This is unless to you and perhaps to clothes.

Dream of common language. (7)

Both Kamla Das and Adrien Rich expressed their intense and personal experience as a general truth. Their poetry in the fine example of depersonalization.

To handle a storm of emotion and present in with the same straight to leave permanent impression on the mind of the reader free verse is the appropriate medium of poetry. Which was adapted by our both female poet. Free verse is a poetry that is based on irregular rhyming, cadence recurring with variation of phrases, images and syntactical pattern rather than the conventional use of metre. In other words free verse has no rhythm scheme on pattern.

However emotions are at high pitch and very effectively presented. Powerfully emotion can not be found in rhythmic pattern it needs to flow existently and free verse serves then best medium for these poets who does
not believe to be chained. Poem ‘Composition’ by Kamala Das in free verse, There no rhyming scheme length of each line varies, neither there is no proper stranzaic pattern. Every stanza has different number of lines.

Reader,

You may say

Now here is a girl with vas

Sexual hungres

A bitch after my own heart

But

I am not yours for the asking

Grovel at my feet

Remove your monkey suits and dance,

Sing eratee, eratee, eratee

Yet I shall be in different

Vat because of morality,

But because

I do not feel the need.
But why worry?

What I am able to give

Is only what your wife in qualified

To give

We are all alike,

We women

In our wrapping of hairless skin.(8)

Every ling has different length. In some line there is only one word, in some two and some have many world. Same way a stanza has five lines, next has six lines, next only three. There is no uniform pattern of stanza, no metre but the link of thought never found to be broken. Continuation of thought process and its connectivity remain the same. It binds the reader, it appeals to there heart. First she talks about herself, her sexual desire, her way to live the life. Later she becomes the representation of woman and tells that in this man dominated world status woman is limited to physical body who is there to satisfy the hunger.
Poem ‘Too late for making up’ consists of 29 lines divided in three stanzas. In first stanza there are four lines, in last stanza there are five lines and in second stanza is of twenty lines. But the feeling expressed on the loss of his father in first stanza has ability to bring tears in our eyes. Same effects can be brought by second stanza of twenty lines but effectiveness remains the same. Here she describe the rituals done try after the death of her father like geeta path and the about the comments passed at her by the visitor who came to pay ‘Shrandanjali’.

*I heard someone whisper*

*The one who caused him the greatest pain*

*And look at her now, acting solemn.* (9)

But she expresses her feelings for her father what she has, though the world thinks in other way. In the same poem she writes

*Should I have loved you, father*

*More than I did*

*That wasn’t so easy to do*

*If I have loved others, father*
I swear I have loved you the most.

Though she had many complaint with his father but still her heart was filled with love for him. Small, big lines of her poem beautifully expresses these emotions.

Adrienne Rich also used free verse technique in her poem to express her intense feelings. Poem ‘Storm warning’ is written in free verse. It is a poem about powerless- about a force that is much greater and can bring revolutionary changes in the society. The poem is written when America was at verge of world war: the war which could to destroy human civilization. This was compared as storm whose warning was given and people were in terror. In first stanza the scene is explained effectively in unrhythmic lines.

The glass has been falling all the afternoon,

And knowing better than the instrument

What winds are walking overhead, what zone

Of gray unrest is moving across the land,

I leave the book upon a pillowed chair

And walk from window to closed window, watching
Boughs strain against the sky.(11)

Speaker of the poem is a traditional woman who is passively playing her role as a housewife and she is powerless but there is a storm in her mind that is noway lesser than the storm outside. The way storm outside is going to write a story of destruction and change the same way inner turmoil will bring change in society.

Both the storms are compared in second stanza and wordy depiction of this thought gives lyrical effect to the poem.

And think again, as often when the air

Moves inward toward a silent core of waiting,

How with a single purpose time has traveled

By secret currents of the undiscerned

Into this polar realm. Weather abroad and weather in the heart alike come on

Regardless of prediction.(12)

Poem ‘Planetarium’ from ‘The Will to Change’ has fragmented verse passage of short four, three, two or single lines. This pattern is deliberately
chosen by Rich to show fragmented personality of a women who could not
distinguish who she is in real sense. Starting line states the same idea:

\[ \text{A woman in the shape of a monster} \]
\[ \text{A monster in the shape of a woman} \]
\[ \text{The skies are full of them.} \]

Poet describes the journey of a woman’s discovery of her search. She is
afraid that her whole life has gone in vain. Stanza eight to eleven are of two
lines but they vividly expreses the woman ‘s search process

Tycho whispering at last

\[ \text{“ let me not seem to have lived in vain} \]
\[ \text{What we see, we see} \]
\[ \text{And seeing is changing.} \]

Closing lines of the poem are into more compact form:
years to travel through me And has
taken. I am an instrument in the shape
of a woman trying to translate pulsations
into images for the relief of the body
and the reconstruction of the mind.(15)

Although these twelve lines are more compact than earlier parts of the poem, and at a distance- could almost be mistaken for not quite finished sonnet. Rich intentionally writes for her poetry has a role of a breaker of silence, especially silence around the oppressed, the invisible, the unheard.

The method they adopted to express their feminist thought is free verse and they fully justified it. To reach to the state ob sublimity as it’s the basic function of poetry, we found abundant use of imagery and symbolism in their poetry. They serve two purposes in the poetry: one they are ornamental to beautify the poetry and another is to arouse aesthetic pleasure in the readers. An image enables a poet to convey hi abstract thought or mystical longings in a concrete form. It evokes picture, a concrete idea or shape, about the writer’s feelings. As a poet kamala Das and Adrienne Rich uses imagery and
symbol to produce desired effect in the mind of readers. Rich is mastered and trained in all poetic devices but Kamala Das is a raw material in this field. She did not receive any proper education, neither she was trained but she had grown up reading poem of her mother and her uncle who were renowned poets. She used imagery and symbols at many places and the use of some images is so frequent that they become symbols in her poetry. But if you look into it we will not find many rather few are there which are used frequently with one or other meaning and use of these imagery is relevant and rewarding. Few images that are used repeatedly are sea, sun and human body.

The image of sea is used in Das poetry at many places describing her mental state in a word. The sea dwells into Kamala Das’ memory since her childhood when she left the red-tilted home where the Arabian sea roared quite close to her ears. Sleeping beside her grandmother she could feel the movement of waves coming and going into sea. When this sea took hold on her consciousness and her thought process linked with it she could not get any idea about it. In the poem ‘composition’ the sea reminds her childhood memories and provides her with rest and comfort and a life of uninvolvement:
All I want now

Is to take along walk

Into the sea

And live there, resting

Completely uninvolved.(16)

‘The Suicide is another poem where sea is present from beginning to the end. This poem is addressed to the sea and image of sea turned into a symbol. The sea appears soul mate of Kamala Das:

I throw the bodies out,

I can not stand their smell

Only the souls may enter

The vortex of the sea

Only soul know how to sing

At the vortex of the sea.(17)
The sea imagery also occurs in so many other poems of kamala Das in such poems as ‘The Invitation’, ‘Convicts’, ‘The Jass sticks at Cadell Road’ and ‘The High Tide’. Sometimes image of sea symbolizes inner turmoil of poet, and at any place it symbolizes the deep rooted sorrow. Another image which is used frequently in her poems is the sun. It is used with the meaning of scorching heat, corruption, burning desires and lust. It is often associated with the sexual desire and dryness of life. It affects the skin and makes it tamed and stained, as we find in ‘The Freaks’:

He talks, turning a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites 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.....(18)
The poem ‘In Love’ equates the burning sun with the burning mouth of the man in love:

   Of what does the burning mouth
   Of sun, burning in today’s
   Sky remind me...oh ,yes , his
   Mouth..(19)

In ‘Sepia’ the sun is presented as a source of scorching heat that dries up the very narrow of the bones. It is conceived as a destroyer of the real charms of life:

   It’s time to hold anger
   Like a living sun
   And scorch
   Scorch to the very marrow. (20)

Apart from these images Kamala Das has written some symbolic poem like ‘The sunshine cat’ where cat is a symbol of a female who is captive in this male dominated society and dying every day. Poem ‘The wild Bougainvillea’
signifies the unending lust and passion. The wild passion which keeps on growing like a plant of bougainvillea.

When we study the poetry of Adrienne Rich and compare it with Kamala Das we find that unlike Kamala Das, Rich’s use of symbol and imagery is wide. In spite of using imagery she has written many significant symbolic poems. In the poem, ‘Roofwalker’ she projects her female persona into alternative male figure. She writes:

    *I’m naked, ignorant,*  
    *A naked man fleeing*  
    *Across the roofs*  
    *Who could with a shade of difference*  
    *Be sitting in the lamplight*  
    *Against the cream wallpaper*  
    *Reading- not with indifference-*  
    *About a naked man*  
    *Fleeing across the roofs.* (21)
This poem talks about a gender free society and nakedness represents that her female persona no longer is going to wear old fashioned role of a woman imposed on her by society. ‘Aunt Jennifer’s Tigress’ is another remarkable poem of Rich where Image of tigress is used to symbolize strength of a woman who remains quiet outwardly but she is very strong internally.

*Aunt Jennifer’s tiger prance across a screen

*Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.

*They do not fear the men beneath the tree;

*They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

*Aunt Jennifer’s fingers fluttering through her wool

*Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.

*The massive weight of Uncle’s wedding band

*Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer’s hand.(22)

Here aunt represents all woman who are marginalized and her tiger represents inner strength of woman who has the ability to free herself from undesired life.
‘Diving into the wreck’ is another remarkable symbolic poem where image of wreck is used of fragmented society that is losing its utility. In the same poem another imagery of mermaid is used, when poet writes:

This is the place,
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
Streams black, the merman in his armored body
We circle silently
About the wreck
We dive into the hold
I m she: I am he(23)

She just talks about the duality of personality and finally realized that she is not dependant for anything on the man. She has both man and woman in herself. In the poetry of Rich there is a wide range of imagery from natural objects like sun, river, desert, ocean, tree etc. to man made things like chair, cattle, bomb, ship, cake all are used with effectiveness. In the poem ‘Trying to talk to a man’ Rich has used a wide variety of imagery. In the first stanza image of bomb, river, cliff and sun is used.
Out in this desert we are testing bombs,
That’s why we came her.

Sometimes I feel an underground river
Forcing its way between deformed cliffs
An acute angle of understanding

Moving itself like a locus of the sun

Into this condemned scenery. (24)

Rich’s autobiographical poem ‘Blood-sister’ which is written for her sister Cynthia is full of imagery. She remembers her childhood days which they spent playing beside ocean, collecting shells. She presents the picture:

Shoring up the ocean. A railroad tract

Ran close to the coast for miles

Through the potato-fields, bringing us

To summer. Weed blur the ties

Sludge clots the beaches.(25)
Rich’s use of imagery is so apt that reader could correlate hiself/herself with the same emotion what poet feels. In the poem ‘Integrity’ we see the wonderful use of imagery:

_A wild patience has taken me this for_

_A boat with a spasmodic outboard motor_

_Old swaters, nets, spray- matted books_

_Tossed in the frow_

_Some kind of sun burning my shoulder blads_

_Splashing the oarlocks._

(26)

As a skilled artist Rich paints with words and creates word scenery that provides aesthetic pleasure to her readers. ‘Turning the Wheel’ proves this artistic quality of her:

_No room for nostalgia here. What would it look like?_

_The imitation of a ghost mining town_,

_The movie-set façade of a false Spanish Arcade, the faceless pueblo_
With the usual faceless old woman grinding corn?

It’s all been done. Acre on Acre

Of film location disguised as Sears,

Safeway, the desert National Bank,

Fashion Mall, Sun Valley Waterbeds.

Old people, rich, pass on in cloistered stucco

Tilted and with fountains;(27)

Poetry of Adrienne Rich is primarily visual rather than aural, and she is mastered at imprinting images so indelibly that they convey the meaning without comment or conclusion. Her poetry functions as the vehicle for seeing and for fixing what one comes to see. It is the camera with lens and focus, and poems are snapshots.

One more remarkable feature that can be seen in the poetry of Rich is plenty use of reference that is from history, myth or from politics. Reference of Marie Curie, a famous scientist and noble prize winner appears in her poem ‘Incipience’
A man in asleep in the next room

A neurosurgeon enters his dream

And begins to dissect his brain

She does not look like nurse

She is absorbed in her work

She has a stern, delicate face like Marie curie

She is not/might be either of us.(28)

In her poem ‘Nightbreak’, reference of an ancient country is given which existed between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers:

Time is quite doesn’t break things

Or even wound Things are in danger

From people The frail clay lamps

Of Mesopotamia.(29)

Even the titles of her poems have some or the other reference. Either they are extract of some poem or the title of some play. For instance, Poem entitled ‘I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus’, here Orpheus is a legendary Tharcian poet who descended to the underworld to recover his dead wife, Eurydice. Jean
Coetean wrote and directed a motion picture Orphee, modernizing the story. Scenes and images from the movie are used in the poem. Another poem titled ‘When We Dead Awaken’ is also the title of the last play of Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906). Poem ‘The Demon Lover’ is also taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem ‘Kubla Khan’. It is used as a phrase in this poem. Poetry of Adrienne Rich is not only a poetry of emotion or of artistic outcome but at the same time it is an intellectual piece of literature.

Poetry of Kamala Das has a distinct quality. Her poetry is mostly poetry of emotion. It does not appeal intellect in the same way but it appealed the heart most. To serve this purpose kamala Das uses the technique of repetition of words or sentences. As we can see in the poem ‘Loud Posters’:


...........I’ve put

My private voice away, adopted the

Typewriter’s click as my only speech; I
Click-click. Click- click tiresomely into your

Ears, stranger, though you may have no need of

Me, I go on and on, not knowing why....(30)

Here repetition of word click shows the monotonous and boredom of life her life.In ‘Someone Else’s Song’ word million is repeatedly used to intensify her feeling:

I am a million, million people

Talking all at once, with voices

Raised in clamour, like maids

At village- wells.

I am million, million deaths

Pox –clustered, each a drying seed

Someday to be shed, to grow for

Someone else, a memory.(31)

Repetition and choice of word is a kind of self- introspection or self- inquiry.

In the poem, ‘The Stone Age’ she writes:
Ask me, everybody, ask me

What he sees in me, ask me why he is called a lion,

A libertine, ask me the flavor of his

Mouth, ask me why his hands sway like a hooded snake

Before it clasps my pubis. Ask me why like

A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breast,

And sleep. Ask me why life is short and love is

Shorter still, Ask me what is bliss and what its price.(32)

In this passage, the phrase ‘ask me’ has been repeatedly used to give it more prominence and emphasis. It's a feminist device desiring it to be heard by one and all. In the poem ‘Substitute’ same poetic device is used:

It will be all right when I learn
To paint my mouth like a clown’s

It will be all right if I put up my hair,

Stand near my husband to make a proud pair.

It will be all right if I join clubs

And first a little over telephone.

It will be all right, it will be all right

I am the type that endures.

It will be all right, it will be all right

It will be all right between the world and me

It will be all right if I don’t remember

The last of the days together .....(33)

“It will be all right” is used again and again to express her highly tense and restless life. Her sensitive and emotional soul yearns for peace and rest.

Both the poet has their own poetic style on same subject matter. Thorough study of the work of both the poets reveals the fact that use of vocabulary and use of imagery by Adrienne Rich is very rich and wide while Kamala Das’s vocabulary and imagery is limited. Rich is masterd in poetic style. Since childhood she was taught poetic craft. Her first collection “A Change
Of World” is a fine example of her skilled approach as a poet. Later she switched to free verse and found it suitable for her subject matter. Albert Gelpi comments on Rich’s poetic craft in his essay ‘Adrienne Rich: The Poetics of Change’

“Adrienne Rich’s earlier poems were praised for their subtlety of rhythm and tone and these unmetered lines lose none of their subtlety for being more strongly stressed and more freely paced. But in becoming more concrete, her poetry was becoming primarily visual rather than aural, and she has been increasingly successful at imprinting images so indelibly that they convey the meaning without comment or conclusion.” (34)

Kamala Das’ poetry is a sincere effort to unravel her poetic heart by her poetic diction. Her language is easy to understand, words are common in use. Her poetry is a direct talk, free from symbolism or references. Commenting on the poetic style of Kamala Das Prof. Laila Jaya Chandran has remarked very perceptively.

“The artist creates something of the infinite, but that closeness is not the infinite to itself. The infinite can be understood as permeated by
finite through art only in terms of paradox. Kamala Das achieves this and purely through a language, which on the surface looks natural and innocent. A common place experience is examined in a casual seemingly effortless manner. It is the language of honest thought, however disagreeable the thought may be. The images are shocking but the intention of the poetess is honest. In order to explore the emotions honestly the language should be penetrating and intensely bold. The reader is led to poetic experience through clarity in intent. It is this honesty that lifts Kamala Das’ poem into prominence.”(35)

Both Adrienne Rich and Kamala Das are poet of revolutionary thoughts and their poetry is the mirror of their thought process. Diction and style chosen by them is apt for them serves the true purpose of poetry that is purgation of emotions. It gives the outlet to their emotions and readers also go through the process of purification of heart while reading their poetry. They feel connected and oneness, thus they too undergo the process of catharsis.

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