I secret we met:
In silence I grieve
That Thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive.
If I should meet thee? -
With silence and tears.

- Lord Byron
Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, and Pritish Nandy represent the coming of age of Indo-Anglian love poetry. In the preceding chapters we have seen how they approach all-encompassing phenomenon of love in their singular ways, accentuating different dimensions of it and bestowing to it their own distinctive meaning. Coming to a comparative appraisal in this context, what can just not be lost sight of is the remarkable consistency with which these poets, otherwise widely differing in perceptions and poetic sensibilities, come to the mysterious realm of love, fully cognizant of the basic corporeal, bodily edifice without which no airy, abstract notion of love, can take shape. Despite their attempts to scale spiritual heights in significant sections of their poetry, both Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das honour the primacy of the physical. Pritish Nandy has incontrovertibly been the poet par excellence of the concrete, the real, the tangible and the physical.

Witness the unabashed confession of his priorities by Ezekiel in 'Motives':

My motives are sexual,
Aesthetic and friendly
In that order, adding upto bed with you.1
In the same poem Nissim Ezekiel focusses his male self's attention on the anatomy of the partner, her eyes, breasts, thighs, the colour of the skin, the way she dresses and the postures and preferences she has in the act of sex. They hold the attention of the poet. In one poem after the other, Nissim Ezekiel is seen immersed in the female body and the pleasures that become consequent because of the contact with these bodies therein. Adopting a typical male stance Nissim Ezekiel scrutinises daringly, analyses with care and comments on the female body in a brutally frank, yet apparently dispassionate manner:

Ethereal beauties, may you always be
Dedicate to love and reckless shopping,
Your midriffs moist and your thighs unruly,
Breasts beneath the fabric slyly plopping.  

Like John Donne who declares "Love's mysteries in souls do grow/but yet, the body is his book." Nissim Ezekiel is also possessed by passion and declares:

The sexual form may serve to calm.
The senses and keep the darkness pure.

He continues:
Darkness, disturbed and turbulent,
Is also dear: possession is necessary,
Certain vases and women, however, expensive,
Fill the animal heart with wonder and warmth,
And deprivation is desolation
I have stood in the empty room
And gazed at crowds in the street,
Longing to be absorbed-
No moral law can fill void,
Deaf and blind to all is appetite.  

In the concrete irreducible experience of the senses Nissim Ezekiel finds the substance of life itself. In the life of the senses seems to lie his bliss and salvation. The naked body absorbs his attention and he openly declares:

I am given up to nakedness
A pleasure in itself, doubled
Now by the nakedness of the other.  

He takes cognizance of not merely the body but the actual act of physical union as he finds it a natural corollary to the visual and the tactile. Look at this poem for instance:

This one announces every act
Of pleasure as she does it.
I love undressing, she has to say,
As she undresses, the verbal
'Is this a part of you?' she asks, as she holds it, stares at it. Then she laughs. 'Put your finger there,' she pleads, as if I need instructions, it's only impatience, though becoming frenzy as I penetrate. 'Now', she claims, You are within me, aren't you within me? And she makes me say, 'I am.'

Thus for Nissim Ezekiel engrossed with the physical

The true business of living is seeing,
      touching, kissing,
The epic of walking in the street and loving on
      the bed.

Not only on the physical level but on the philosophical level as well Ezekiel has explicitly accepted the primacy of the human and the real over-intellectualisation.

The mundane language of the senses sings
Its own interpretations, common things
Become, by virtue of their commonness,
An argument against the nakedness
That dies of cold to find the truth it brings.

In this context Linda Hess has made a very perceptive comment:

Every mature poet finds his art demanding again and again that he synthesises certain powerful and
apparently opposite forces within himself. In Nissim Ezekiel the synthesis which has continually had to be made is that between the ever-abstracting intellect and the concrete irreducible experiences of the senses in which, if there is not the comfort of symmetry and system, there is a substance of life itself. If the life of the senses confronts us with the constant spectre of incompleteness, it also opens to us the doors of endless discovery, balancing the climax of consummation against the abyss of what lies beyond.¹⁰

With his priorities laid bare, Ezekiel can afford to give his modus operandi:

As lover, love, you know that I am lost
In continents of thoughts, and every urge
To see, know, hear, touch and praise the earth
Is concentrated on your lips and thighs—
The strange mysterious way of earthly love.
Yet we to keep our love as fresh as earth
Must charge our earthly love with love of earth.¹¹

Fascination for the female body, sex and love obsess Ezekiel's mind as the feeling that having seen the world and having a taste of its temptations, he would like to change his life and "start again". "The female animal' and the 'night of love' are to haunt Ezekiel's imagination along with the wish for a more settled way of life that
will include interest, renewal, controlled desires and poetry."^{12}

In perfect agreement with Ezekiel is Kamala Das who just cannot imagine either a body sans soul or a soul sans body:

\begin{verbatim}
Bereft of soul
My body shall be bare
Bereft of body
My soul shall be bare.^{13}
\end{verbatim}

In spite of the fact that Kamala Das speaks of soul being an important constituent in the frame-work of the concept of love it is important to remember that without the themes of the body Kamala Das's corpus of poetry would seem like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. In poem after poem Kamala Das sings the song of the body, sometimes, full of rejoicings, many times the songs lapse into a requiem, where the body seems to her nothing but an open wound, cause of much agony and torment. Nevertheless, the theme of the human body holds an eternal fascination for Kamala Das and is taken up by her again and again. Her poetry as in her autobiography My Story is replete with the physical. She is pre-occupied with the body of his male partner and notices "the perfection of his limbs, his eyes reddening under shower". She notices his "shy walk across the bathroom floor, dropping towels
and the jerky way he urinates." For her these fond details are significant because they make him 'male' and her "only man". She is ready to gift him her body, all of it, without inhibition or bashfulness. She is ready to

Gift him all,
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,
The warm shock of menstrual blood.¹⁴

Her "endless female hungers" are projected when she dwells on "our wrappings of hairless skin;"¹⁵ she savours the flavour of his mouth which brings blood carousing in her veins, and the smell of human sweat laced with lust arouses her body to a crescendo as she studies the "trappings of your body".¹⁶

Undisputably there is no one who can speak better about the fullness of a body with raw letters of 'lust' emblazoned upon it, there is, perhaps, no one who can comment upon the 'bouncing fountain' of her blood. With artless ease she can celebrate the forest fire of her body:

Of late I have begun to feel a hunger
To take in with greed, like a forest fire that Consumes and, with each killing gains a wilder, Brighter charm.¹⁷
In the same poem Kamala Das reflects her open interest in the male body when she gushes:

My eyes lick at you like flames, my nerves
Consume; and when I finish with you, in the
Pram, near the tree and, on the park bench.  

Anisur Rehman beautifully and aptly describes Kamala Das's engrossment with the body when he comments:

Love in its real form is extremely heart-warming and the bodily organs namely 'mouth', 'eyes', 'ears' and 'hands' become entirely precious and lovable. The poet is treated with the solitary food of love through a willing participation in the sexual drama with her partner. Her approval to the matters of sex is purely instinctive. She seeks to sanctify the flesh in a bid to establish an emotional liaison with her partner. She is questing for eternal peace through her total surrender to a human form which, in essence, gives a symbolic entity to the persona in her poems, as also to her imagery.

It is, however, to be noted that Kamala Das is fixated on the human body not only in the celebratory, joyous and exultant mood. If she sings about the triumph of the body in her poetry, the sad strains of the defeat of the body, reflecting her despair and her sulk, are also sung. The body becomes the source of a dismal disdain for
her as she comes to realize that it is merely a medium of satisfying human lust. The body is seen with a sense of growing disenchantment and disillusion. Like Anne Sexton who says:

I was tired of being a woman
tired of the spoons and the pots,
tired of my mouth and my breasts,
tired of the cosmetics and silks.\textsuperscript{20}

Kamala Das also wants to "throw the bodies out / I cannot stand their smell."\textsuperscript{21}

The sunny pleasures of the body notwithstanding, Kamala Das understands that the human body is subject to decay. In 'Composition' she whimpers:

To be frank
I have failed
I feel my age and my
Uselessness.\textsuperscript{22}

The poet is not only frustrated with her own body, she seems to be equally repulsed by the male form. Nailed under his "six-foot frame"\textsuperscript{23} she understands the true nature of a man's body and his lust:

...ask me the flavour of his
Mouth, ask me why his hand sways like a hooded
\textit{snake}

Before it clasps my pubis. Ask me why like
A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breasts.\textsuperscript{24}
In another poem 'Freaks' she once again describes with sulphuric disgust the male physiology:

He talks, turning a sun stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam.25

Almost with the same sense of repugnance and loathing she gives expression to her complaint:

You dribbled spittal into my mouth, you poured yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed my Poor lust with your bitter sweet juices.26

Anisur Rehman very perceptively remarks, "Images detailing the anatomy of the male with various shades of distaste, scorn and negation occur in Kamala Das with such frequency that they acquire a symbolic dimension."27

Thus we find a commonness of interest in the human body in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das. It may not be irrelevant here to comment that in Nissim Ezekiel, it is the female body which holds his attention, while in the case of Kamala Das the body of the male as well as the female hold jointly the place of pride. To both the poets not only the mere depiction of the human body is important, equally significant for them is the
poetry we find repeated reverberations of body. Repeatedly do we come, across the expressions like 'mouth', 'hands', 'breasts', 'thighs' and the ritual which is manifested through these organs:

This ritual mouth to mouth
This hand between your thighs.  

again:

leg upon leg upon leg
face upon face upon face
my gentle member hardens
in your swamp.  

In another poem Pritish Nandy speaks of this savage night of desire when/primal fire breaks through your loins. In poem after poem he speaks of dark breasts and their contours, the "immortal fire in cunt". In another poem Pritish Nandy shows his enchantment with the female form and the sex act when he writes:

Tonight I draw your body to my lips:
your hand, your mouth, your breasts, the small of your back. I draw blood to every secret nerve and gently kiss their tips, as you move under me, anchored to a rough sea, I cling to you, your music and your knees. I touch the secret vibes of your body. I fill my hands with the darkness of your hair.
In *Tonight, This Savage Rite* Pritish Nandy once again speaks of the bodies in love. The magnetic pull that the female body has for the poet is well demonstrated when he describes the delirium of passion which engulfs him:

My tongue travels to
your navel, and downwards: I cling onto your body, my mouth breathes in the shadow of your breath.\(^{36}\)

Pritish Nandy rejoices in the female body, sings the song of ecstasy. When he joins the female body in a slow and sensuous movement a new alchemy of love is created. The poet celebrates a beautiful ceremony where one body joins with another:

You move under me,
my body celebrates this beautiful ceremony.
Within my hands, your small breasts move into the twilight: yes, we have loved like the wind that swirls into the seasons: your breasts contend against my proud absence, shipwrecked into expectancy as your tongue turns hunter tonight.\(^{37}\)

It can thus be observed that Pritish Nandy is as much a celebrator of the body as Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das are. But these seem to be not only the points of commonality among them, there are aspects of their poetry dealing with this particular aspect of love where their
singularity of voice can be observed. Nissim Ezekiel and Pritish Nandy, the two male poets, seem to be more frank and forth-right in the depiction of the female anatomy. There is abundant use of words like 'breasts' and 'thighs' in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel. Pritish Nandy goes a step further and in his poetry the expressions like 'cunt', 'member', 'semen' are used as an integral part of the expression of emotions. These two male poets without any inhibition describe not only the female body in minute detail, they celebrate the actual act of sex with almost no reservation. In Nissim Ezekiel, particularly, we are to note that the poet, in a typically male stance, stands off and comments upon not only the body of the female partner but the actual sex act also. He analyses and examines the female body and the sexual act and gives a sort of running commentary using irony and objectivity as his tools.

Pritish Nandy also, donning the male superior stance, comments on various parts of the female body and the sex act. But while Nissim Ezekiel uses traditional images to describe the body of the female and the sexual union with a pinch of irony, Pritish nandy seems to glide with "guiltless lyricism" as he discerns and comments on the female body. Kamala Das, on the other hand, exhibits a truly female sensibility operating under the constraints of a tradition-bound society where, in spite of all her rebellious stance, she merely suggests but never describes.
Her insatiable yearning for love forces her into the description of love wherein the physical aspect of love is indeed unavoidably taken up. She nevertheless describes such situations in love generally with the help of highly evocative, yet suggestive words:

... these men who call me
Beautiful, not seeing
Me with eyes but with hands
And, even ... even... love.38

The aroma of her feminism wafts through her attitude in the description of the human body - male or female - and only when it is contrasted with the description of the same kind in Nissim Ezekiel or Pritish Nandy do we realise the essential difference marking their respective poetry.

There is one more essential difference in the stances adopted by the three poets under consideration. Nissim Ezekiel seems to be interested in life in general, and through his love poems he not only tries to define his experience in love merely as an individual but also as a part of the social milieu in which he moves. Pritish Nandy, on the other hand, partakes love not merely as an individual; his social, political consciousness and commitments are fully manifest with violence and blood spattered, enveloping the body of the beloved and the experience of love in strange crimson colours:
Your sweat I shall watch your blood spattered on the footpaths of the city I shall smell the semen in the dust and find you spreadeagle dead.39

It may also be noted that though these three poets do not shy away from the corporeal and the bodily edifice, their main pre-occupation is not the body. The body for them all is a mere halting place where they sojourn gathering energy for the next phase of this flight in the quest of their real selfs. Nissim Ezekiel endeavours to achieve "the gentle art of leaving things alone" where he can "dream of love unconfined to threshing thighs and breasts", where "crude acceptance of the need for one another" transcends the environ of the mere physical, where "the female animal no longer haunts the bed in flesh or dream" and a plateau where love of life can always be renewed and a human balance is achieved:

I do not want the yogi's concentration,  
I do not want the perfect charity  
Of saints nor the tyrant's endless power.  
I want a human balance humanly  
Acquired, fruitful in the common hour.40

Kamala Das also goes beyond the confines of the flesh and wants to attain a state of true liberty through love which does not "make the blood carouse." The body, a mine of pleasure for the poet, does not serve the poet
beyond a limit. All her "endless female hungers" bewilder her only for a time and she moves towards a divine non-corporeal lover in Ghanshyam in order to bring about a happy union of the body and the soul. In case she fails to achieve this end, then she is ready to toss the body back and retain only the soul:

Bereft of body
My soul shall be free
Take in my naked soul
That he knew how to hurt.
Only the soul knows how to sing
At the vortex of sea.4

In the case of Prithish Nandy the body helps him to realise how, by passing through the tempestuous storms of passion, he can endeavour to conquer the fleshless through the flesh; it serves as the medium of transporting him to a splendid land where body with all its fragrance decays and withers down, and yet where love remains fresh as ever in spite of ageing limbs and death knocking at the lovers' doors:

but we are all concerned for we are near to death
and we love each other in the acceptance of light and
day we know and recognise the winter
in our limbs and we share the intense passion of
waves.42
Pritis.h Nandy thus carries on his metaphoric journey into the realm of love though the citadels of body and in the process finds the faithlessness of the body to realise that all love-making is a ritual to salvage dead passion. The poet's intensity of understanding and immediacy of experience make him realise the significance of loveliness in man's life: "Everywhere I have gone I have found / only solitude".43

The mysterious alchemy of love affects the poets under study in differing ways as each brings to bear his or her own distinctive perception to it. What strikes even a casual reader at once is the pre-dominantly poised posture of Ezekiel, as contrasted with the spontaneous and impulsive outburst of Kamala Das and the staccato overflow of frenzied words in a seemingly endless torrent in Pritish Nandy. The poet, rightly compared to an ardent but devoted lover and a keen bird-watcher by Ezekiel in 'Poet, Lover, Bird watcher', is prepared to wait endlessly for the right experience, the appropriate sensation or the proper expression to incapsulate, to embody what seizes his mind in a haze. Even his admonitions to himself revolve round this:

Perhaps there is another way
And I will find it: concentrate,
Concentrate, make the mind a fist.44
Mark the intense yearning in the poet to make his poetry the embodiment of sentiments which go beyond the circumscribed, stagnant self so that even the supposedly private sensibility is rendered in a manner which behoves his commitment to larger realities without:

Restore my waking time
To vital present tense,
And dreams of love and crime
To primal quiescence
...
...
...
Whatever the enigma,
The passion of the blood,
Grant me the metaphor
To make it human good.45

To create this human good Nissim Ezekiel is hard at work in search of perfect word. For him the spirit and substance of experience constitute the raw material. He changes and recreates language in order to achieve the authenticity and purity of style. He is able to create rhythm with the help of singing lines which are compatible with the tone of the poem. Nissim Ezekiel himself says, "In rhythm I aim at the flowing, the direct and the informal or conversational."46 David McCutchion rightly observes, "Ezekiel's technique is immaculate: rhythms, are carefully varied yet regular rhythms, lines that run
over with a poised deliberateness. But behind the casual assurance one senses the clenched fist, the wounded tenderness." 47 He maintains a restrained conversational, nevertheless, an objective style, where the emotions are kept under control with the help of gentle colloquial idiom thus bring about what Chetan Karnani calls "a fine combination of remarkable clarity of expression with congruency of argument." 48

Such objectivity of manner and poised tone, mindful of the larger varieties seems conspicuous by their absence in Kamala Das and in Pritish nandy, in general, notwithstanding the comparatively consciously evolved medium in the later poetry of Pritish Nandy. What strikes one in the poem entitled 'A Request', reproduced here below, is such characteristic overflow of words highly charged with emotive current creating intense eddies in whirlpool of the Kamala Das's psyche:

When I die
Do not throw
The meat and the bones away
But pile them up
And let them tell
By their smell
What life was worth
On this earth
What love was worth
In the end. 49
'Lines To A Husband' contains the agonised outpourings coming from the inner-most recesses of the poet's heart, full of all poignancy in their pristine immediacy:

... love me one day
For a lark
Love the sixty seven
Kilograms of ageing flesh
Love the damaged liver
The heart and its ischemia
Yes love me one day
Just for a lark
Show me what life would have been
If only you had loved.

As against the objective form of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry, kamala Das's poetry exhibits the subjective outpourings of a tortued soul. The poems like 'The Suicide', 'A Request', 'Luminol', 'The Invitation', 'The Looking Glass', 'Convicts' and 'The Composition', to pick examples from The Descendants, are highly confessional in tone where the poet is in dialogue with her own self trying to explore the questions relating to fulfilment and unfulfilment in the frame-work of her own tangible experiences in love and life. Nevertheless there are poems like 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' which objectify through an external familiar situation the poet's
strangled desires within. Pritish Nandy, on the other hand, though confessedly confessional, still is able to maintain a seeming poise. He also has to undergo a struggle to identify and acquire a personal diction capable of describing the passions within life around. Pritish Nandy would change his voice according to the need of the poem and from the sweet languid melody evoking the delicate ecstasies of physical love to the proclamations of rebellion, he could write in passionate idiom.

Ezekiel's cool, dispassionate, desentimentalised objectivity manifests itself in another way too: it makes the obviously and explicitly autobiographical in him transcend the barriers of time and clime to stand for the general experience, making his confessional outbursts, which have always been the prerogative of a creative artist, have a distinctively "public hue" about them. The grammatical "I" in Ezekiel's poems, then, expands and comes to embody the creative tension between the poet's philosophical pre-occupation and the external empirical reality in all its harsh contours. 'On Bellasis Road' captures delicately this dichotomy in all its artistry:

I see her image now
As through a telescope
Without a single
Desperate moral
To keep it in focus
Remote and closeup
Of what use then to see and think?
I can not even say I can or do not
Perhaps it is a kind of despair. 51

Ezekiel, the cerebral observer of the external world, finds that he cannot afford the luxury of succumbing to the "final formula of light", so much does he feel committed to the widest commonality of life.

Kamala Das, on the other hand, despite a few poems like 'An Introduction', where she comes down to depersonalise her private voice, seems inclined to trudge precariously the narrow predictable grooves of her own psyche, seemingly unmindful of the larger philosophic or sociological issues involved. In 'An Introduction' she can proclaim

... I met a man, loved him. Call Him not by any name, he is every man who wants a woman, just as I am every Woman who seeks love. 52

She transcends from the personal to the universal. But Das "is at her best when she portrays ... within the framework of her personal theme and not when she attempts to project a larger theme." 53 Devindra Kohli again insists that "to transcend the private voice and reach an intense but sustained universality through empathy is not, however, Kamala Das's achievement, though she adumbrates
it within the limits of her lyric sensibility.\textsuperscript{54}

In her love-poems, Kamala Das while revealing the
guintessential woman within, does bring out the triviality
and shallowness of the life she is condemned to live in a
patriarchal, feudal society which does not recognise her
emotional, physiological and physical hungers, not to say
of facilitating their fulfilment. Nevertheless the
implicit expose\textsuperscript{6} of society is limited to small, isolated
facets of the complex entity, and the endeavour lays bare
only her naive\textsuperscript{6} if not intellectual laziness, backed as
it is only, by an inadequate awareness of the larger
social issues in their intricacies. In "Lines Addressed
to a Devdasi" one comes across, what can very well be
termed the concentric circle of the self in relation to
itself, rather than the self in relation to the society
without:

Ultimately there comes a time
When all the faces look alike
All voices sound similar
And trees and lakes and mountains
Appear to bear a common signature.
It is then that you walk past your friends
And not recognise
And hear their questions but pick
No meaning out of words
It is then that your desires cease
And a home sickness begins
And you sit on the temple steps  
A silent Devdasi, love lorn  
And aware of her destiny.  

However, at this juncture, it would be relevant to draw attention to a few "uncharacteristic" poems by Kamala Das where the poet's persona, far from indulging in what Kurup terms as "her wailings, breast beatings and talk of unrequited love", reduces itself to but an observer of a situation pregnant with disturbing meaning of great sociological import. 'Death of the Goat' well-exemplifies such distinctive poems by the poet:

The only woman of the house was ill  
The one who used to run about at home  
Like a mad dervish, busy with her chores.  
The one whose hollow cheeks and spindly legs  
Made the children say, oh mother, you look  
So much like a goat!  
When they wheeled her into the hospital  
She opened wide her delirious eyes and said:  
please let me go  
I smell the Tur Dal burning ...

In a few other poems like 'The Flag', 'Someone Else's Song' and 'The Bougainvillea' the poet tries to put "her private voice away" and portray a larger penorama of experience transcending her personal moods and feelings.
In contrast to Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das, Pritish Nandy finds it easy and convenient to transcend beyond the mysterious and highly complex vistas of self and joins himself with those who cannot read what I write. I use a language they do not know." Keenly aware of the social and political happenings surrounding him in the post-Independence period of the country, Pritish Nandy is able to empathise with the suffering masses by including them in the framework of his love experience:

We shall share the passion of the black moon and
midnight with your thighs
Anamika when the season for violence is over I
shall claim the
Krishnachura which burns in your loins.

'1000 Rounds A Minute' also voices Pritish Nandy's concern where the violent conditions force a young lover to forget his beloved and kiss a gun:

In a fierce denial of your absence
street lights burn on
and a young man
touches his first rifle
with a hand that touched your cunt.

In a way blood, violence and social exploitation go hand in hand with the themes of love in Pritish Nandy's poetry:
Your hands are tied my arms are week
all passion maimed
a mouth that cannot speak.\textsuperscript{60}

In 'The Syllables of Stone' the poet once again crosses the barriers put forth by the self and goes beyond the personal theme of love to join himself with the tired whores of the city:

it is no longer different
:I have endured this city
for long and I have known
what you have known
we have loved
this ritual mouth to mouth
this hand between your thighs
I have known
the syllables
of stone
tired whores
in forlorn lanes
remain
as we had known them
the city is like my childhood
: forgotten.\textsuperscript{61}

In all his poems, in general, and in his love-poems, in particular, Ezekiel's tormented self seems to recoil at the agonising dilemma of bicultural existence which saps all certitude and imparts a seemingly fruitless hankering after something to cling to. Coming from a background
which seems tailor-made for such rootlessness—Jewish origin, urban English speaking elitism, ivory-lower academic pursuits—Ezekiel seems predestined to flit from one smug conviction to the other, more often than not betraying rank scepticism, nay, cynicism, even resignation. 'Marriage' reveals such a frame of mind where the persona watches bemusedly the fond faith of the spouses smashing to predictable smithereens at the alter of reality:

Lovers when they marry face
Eternity with touching grace
Complacent at being fated
Never to be separated

Why should I ruin the mystery
By harping on the suffering rest,
Myself a frequent wedding guest?

Coming to Kamala Das from Nissim Ezekiel, one is simply struck by the realisation that not withstanding her constantly donned rebellious posture, Kamala Das is devoid of the peculiar rootlessness that seems to characterise Nissim Ezekiel's poetry. Omprakash Grewal in his examen of this aspect of her poetry voices the same impression when he comments, "And despite her maladjustment and rebelliousness, Kamala Das does not give the impression of being an alien who draws her emotional
sustenance from cultural sources outside India. In fact, she represents a variety of the emotional and intellectual disturbance which forms a necessary component of the process of 'modernisation' that Indian society has been undergoing for a long time." While the poetic self in Nissim Ezekiel seems to hang "trishanku-like" in its quest for love as a means for fulfilment with no single frame-work of cultural, mythical or religious beliefs to sustain him, the steadfast adherence to the Hindu ethos and its perception of life as a continuum with death only as a temporary aberration imparts to Kamala Das's poetry a distinctive edge of its own. Notice the philosophic postulates overtly reminiscent of the Bhagwad Gita in the following excerpt from "An Introduction":

I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.  

Pritish Nandy stands on an altogether different ground when compared to the bicultural, elegantly elite Nissim Ezekiel, and maladjusted, rebellious yet still "belonging" Kamala Das. One one hand, he seems to resemble Nissim Ezekiel in his cosmopolitan outlook where the cultural roots do not seemingly bind him, on the other hand, he can write a long poem like Dhritrashtra Downtown:Zero
where he very effectively uses a myth from *The Mahabharata* to project the dilemma of the modern man. Nandy in this long poem creates a relationship between a blind seeker doomed to futility and a scarred surrounding from which he can find no escape. Nandy is able to create the conflict with the help of images related to the negatives of existence and show the failure of love:

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I raise my hands
I cannot touch you
Your eyes remember ...
Your eyes remember ...
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In spite of the cultural rootedness discernible occasionally in the poetry of Pritish Nandy, we are to note that Nandy does not seem much akin to Kamala Das. He, on the other hand, maintains a seemingly equidistant relationship with Nissim Ezekiel as we do not find him as much steeped in irony, metaphor and paradox born of the three-pronged alienational experience Nissim Ezekiel is subject to.

Perhaps, another dimension of this difference in the attitudes the three poets bring to bear in their approach to love-poetry is the tough, cerebral, ironic, witty and comparatively dispassionate and objective tone underlying Ezekiel's capturing of the love experience as
contrasted with the romantic lyrical and passionate poetry of Pritish Nandy, and a penetratingly psychological tone celebrating and deriding the love experience almost in the same breath, bestowing a remarkable autonomy to Kamala Das's emotional experience. The predominantly intellectual versus emotional dichotomy in the relative perceptions of Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das can perhaps very well be illustrated by referring to the treatment meted out to the experience of death as an integral and, at times, not merely incidental part of the quest for life through love in the two poets.

Whereas the secularised self in Ezekiel is open-ended, if not ambivalent, in the sociological, cultural and mythical context, and seems predisposed to a spiritual rather than a religious stance to the mysteries of death and the realm unknown lying beyond that, in Kamala Das it is the narrowly circumscribed but a sure and tangible Hindu conviction that death is but a stepping stone to another life where the self's quest can commence from precisely the same juncture where it had got temporarily terminated earlier. It is in this mood of certitude that Kamala Das yearns for death when love has eluded her, for wiping the slate can but be a prelude to your starting again with a clean slate:
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 ... 66

Kamala Das continues:

While I enter deeper,
With joy discover
The sea's hostile cold
Is afterall skin-deep
The sea's inner chambers
Are all very warm.
There must be a sun slumbering
At the vortex of the sea. 67

The same religious stance inculcated from the Hindu philosophy of life is reflected in 'Composition' where Kamala Das declares:

The ultimate discovery will be
That we are immortal
The only things mortal being
Systems and arrangements. 68

Contrast this certitude with the low-keyed, unflamboyant, desentimentalised and demythicized view in its characteristic terseness in Ezekiel:
... Wisdom
is of little use to tired men.
Metaphor and symbol fake
Original attack when orders
no sooner given work carried out. 69

Ezekiel continues:

Perhaps there is another way
and I will find it: concentrate
Concentrate, make the mind a fist. 70

Ezekiel explicitly explained in a letter how he views death in plain unsentimentalised and unromanticised manner:

I have no philosophy about death except to the extent that it is one of life's realities, when one thinks about it in relation to life, it can add to the identity of living, to the meaning of struggle for self-projection and self-understanding. I deal with death superficially because I do not claim to have discovered anything about it through my confrontation with the prospect of disappearing from time, space and eternity. 71

Obviously, in such a frame of mind the poet cannot but exclaim:

I often think of death
But cannot think the thought out to the end,
For that would be the end of thought,
Death or perfect peace,
And life is imperfection. 72
Nissim Ezekiel says:

Life is only partly lived,
Desires are half desires,
Love is partly going to sleep
I often think of death.

On the other hand, as has already been outlined here above, the romantic and the believer in the Hindu ethos in Kamala Das would make her impart special significance - philosophic, mythic and religious - to the phenomena of death. In her autobiography *My Story* Kamala Das has this to say on the subject:

The ideas of our world round and our life being a cycle has tripped us up. If we were to forget the world's past, present and future and were to see life as a collage, a vast assembly of things and people and emotions, we shall stop grieving for the dead, stop paining for the living and stop accumulating visible wealth... I have no end, all that we suffer is a discomposition.

"Composition" also indicates the same idea:

I must linger on,
trapped in immortality,
my only freedom being
the freedom to
discompose.
Pritish Nandy, too, unlike Kamala Das, looks at death as a part of human experience. Instead of taking death as a part of the large pattern of continuum as professed by Hindu philosophy, Pritish Nandy treats death in the context of love as a part of social experience where it acquires a violent shade:

She is the blood on the wall after the shooting is over the red stain on the bedsheets after rape

She is the whisper of passion in the eyes of rain the thirst of the travelling sea outside your door

She is the voice of death softly repeating the name of a river that flows inside.\(^7\)

In 'do not search for beauty in the savage wilderness' also Pritish Nandy speaks of death stalking the realms of love and beauty underlining the social context where it is difficult for love to exist in uncongenial circumstances of the society:

do not search for beauty in the savage wilderness of the heart where strange beasts prey on the last remains of faith

do not ask for the bitter taste of the sea when the waves recede from the last dark evenings in your tresses

for murder stalks the land and solemn pledges pillage the intellect.\(^7\)
Not merely is the subject-matter of their love-poetry predictably different, with the love-experience given their own individual pitch and flavour, even in the manner wherein they choose to couch their disparate nuances, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy reveal remarkable differences of approach which underline the few areas where they seem to agree. We have already taken note of the dispassionate, objective and cerebral tone in Ezekiel as contrasted from the emotional outburst in Kamala Das and the early poetry of Pritish Nandy. What can be added to this observation at this juncture is the tantalisingly poised ironic stance in Ezekiel which places his poetry apart from the rather unidimensional, even subjective posture in Kamala Das as most of Pritish Nandy.

The palpable polarities in Ezekiel's poetry emanate from his Janus-faced approach to life-inclusive of its varied experiences, of which love obviously takes place of pride. Whereas on one hand Ezekiel swears by his commitments to making life out of mere existence, on the other hand, the man in him feels the ties of community sacred and any instinct to find a final formula of light sacriligious. "Philosophy", perhaps, is an apt illustration of this creative tension underlying most of his poetry. An ironic stance whereby the persona is both an active participant within and a bemused observer
without is Ezekiel's defence-mechanism in such excruciatingly agonising situation. The same dilemma is captured beautifully in the following lives:

This body has a name
or the name has a body.
It is not the subject of my love
but a form, an art
in which I am absorbed
For her I am the same,
possessed and possessing. 

This non-chalance carries the poet away from the cauldron of experience to a strategically placed vantage point wherefrom he can observe his own male self in sexual proximity with the female participant as a bemused observer, who can afford to pass coolly detached wry comments. Such consciously worked out ironical stance one notices again in the ending of 'Marriage' too where in a puckish manner, Ezekiel after outlining the palatable and the unpalatable dimensions of the union of two spouses shrugs his shoulders, so to say, and mutters:

Why should I ruin the mystery
By harping on the suffering rest
Myself a frequent wedding guest? 

Kamala Das presents a study in contrast in so far as the recourse to irony as an authorial strategy to counter-balance mutually-exclusive but equally-
legitimate stance is concerned. Unlike Nissim Ezekiel, in Kamala Das there is no discernible endeavour to develop neutrality of medium, or even vision committed to pursuits other than the myopic pre-occupation with self. What the poet in Kamala Das seems absorbed in accomplishing is the portrayal of her alienation as a woman from the dominant tenets of the male-dominated ethos, and no other competing perspective distracts the poet's unidimensional perception:

... you were pleased
With my body's responses, its weather, its usual
shallow
Convulsions, You dribbled spittal into my mouth,
you poured
Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed
My poor lust with bitter-sweet juices. You called
me wife.80

That the lines cited above are devoid of any intricate complexity or multiple nuances is obvious enough, even though it is not to suggest by any means that such poetry is consequently inferior. There is an unmistakable elemental force in Kamala Das's poetry and the phrase "Virgin Whiteness" used first by poet herself in 'The Fear of the year' and later by critics like Devindra Kohli assumes significance. What one comes across in her poetry is raw, unsophisticated concentration of impulses and
reaction to situations. Anisur Rehman's comments here can 
be quoted with benefit, "With the limitations of her theme, 
Kamala as is not much imaginative, but it is also true 
that her imaginative use of words makes all the difference. 
Her experience as well as the poetic medium thrive with 
vigour and become concrete to the core. The words and 
metaphors emerge effortlessly and coalesce with 
emotions." This is reflected in the poem given 
hereunder:

Days
When my bed gave
No rest, but like a troubled sea, tossed me on
Its waves, and how I groaned
And moaned, and constantly yearned for a man from
Another town

Pritish nandy, hailed by Mulk Raj Anand as one "who 
plunges into the deeper layers of his sensibility", does 
not depend on inner tensions and irony or merely the raw 
material of his life and experiences to give projection 
into his poetry. Instead, Nandy uses his private voice to 
bring about the rejection of exterior melody altogether 
and comes to rely more in the inner music that had to be 
wrung out from new and contradictory combination of words 
and sounds. In his inimitable style Nandy, with the help 
of the language he has fashioned for himself, is able to 
give concreteness to the abstract and non-tangible 
experience of love.
As artistic artifacts the poems of these poets under study throw significant lights on the artistic strategies and predilections of their creators. In Ezekiel, as has already been suggested, the language is poised on the surface, and it is only within that a creative tension can be felt. "Philosophy" has perfect rhyme and rhythm even though the dichotomy between the instinct to rationalise and the raw experience which defies all rationalisation is palpable enough in the poem. 'Situation' presents another such complex situation, dexterously rhymed:

We took our coffee seated in the shade,
She had no axe to grind but knew her trade,
And turned the conversation when I sighed,
To what I loved in secret but denied.
And then the chips are down—I recognise
The haze of self-deception in our eyes. 83

Coming to Kamala Das, one is struck by the defiance of linguistic decorum in her poetry which she uses as an act of resistance: "The poet acts accordingly, reacts, constructs the poetic subject differently from our expectations. Where we expect progressive argument, she gives us rough transition: where we expect full-stops, commas. Where we expect irony, crude contrasts." What Linda Hess perceives as just carelessness or want of wit
on the part of the poet is really a consciously worked out posture of a discernible eccentricity to project the poet's rebellion against the norms expected of her calling. Unlike Sylvia Plath, who resembles Kamala Das in her pre-occupations, Kamala Das, perhaps in order to deride and assail the ideals of male culture subverts the norms of decorum of poetry, splitting her poems internally to correspond to her varying reactions and moods. Language to Kamala Das is obviously a mere means to her avowed aim and one who comes to her poetry has necessarily to resort to "a negation of aesthetic categories of judgement". In order to get to the heart of the matter. 'Composition' is an excellent illustration of her propensity for rapidly twisting and turning postures to activate what can perhaps be turned as a "dialogue of self", explaining in the process her own self to herself. This makes the poem have a seemingly bizarre form of rapidly succeeding scenes in the theatre of the self.

Pritish Nandy, like Kamala Das and unlike Nissim Ezekiel, uses the language with greater variation and penetration to cover in his poetry a wider frame of experiences and in the process brings in the element of queerness and distortion which have earned him the various titles of being a poet of "pointless visual effects", "word jugglery" and "irrelevant references". This is
specially the case with his early experimental poetry a glimpse of which the reader can have in *The Poetry of Pritish Nandy* and *Riding The Midnight River*. An innovator in the true sense, Pritish Nandy roams far and wide, allusions from the Old and New Testaments, Hindu Mythology, The Greek Pantheon, Henry Miller, The psychologists' note books. Nandy in his earlier experimental phase used a diction which was essentially picturesque, built on a series of striking original images. Often perplexing, he would use the common images in remarkably new combinations.

always the silence
between your knees
the shadow
on the eastern
side  *tragic*
presence
allergic to fear
phallic syllable
and
indefinite image
hostaged to rage
; the first king
hung
symbolic fate

Pritish Nandy also makes use of staccato sounds and techniques to show his defiance against the social mores of the society. The troubled theme of love torments him
and out of the innermost recesses of his psyche brings out a poem like this:

nothing touches you
in this convocation of holocausts
nothing but lighting
& an ochre feud
it is terrible
this loneliness
when your unknown hair
covers the abyss of my pillow
murder trembled in your eyes
when we drank the violent wine of earth
& it rained
the first stars of night

In his later collections, Pritish Nandy presents an altogether new facet of his craft where he is trying to be "more clear, direct and simple than ever. The poems are short, musical, evoking the unified emotion and ingenuity of the same imaginative mind ... the directness and lucidity of the language, concreteness of the images' music coming out of the splendid orchestration of words give these poems certain depth."  

Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy, all in their own singular ways, treat with the theme of love and like different devotees praying to the same God through the incantation of the different 'mantras' try to achieve their salvation, adopting different strategies of theme and
language. Ezekiel explores the mysteries of love by adopting the stance of a voyager, dispassionate, critical, neutral and objective and comes to realise his self through the root of love in the "ordinariness" of things and events around him. Kamala Das taking a subjective stance tries to decipher the mysteries of love and lust by adopting a highly rebellious and individualistic posture and comes to realise the fact that her salvation lies in the arms of a non-corporeal divine lover. Pritish Nandy scrutinizes love not only from the personal romantic angle but from the sociological angle as well, and in the process experiments with the language and diction, roams with his "gypsy satchel" from one nowhere place to another and wearied, comes to realise the significance of "silence" and loneliness as he perceives the bitter fact that "loving and unloving are the same" in the ultimate analysis.
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