INTRODUCTION

Love is one of the most recognised themes of poetry. Poets, down the ages, have so often concerned themselves with it that it is difficult to imagine poetry of any place and period which does not deal with the theme of love. This is because the experience of love is common to all mankind. This is however, not to suggest that all love poetry can be generalised on common patterns and factors. A survey of the corpus of love poetry throughout the world reveals that it comprehends a variety within itself —— the themes consist in love of nature, love of mankind, love of country, sensuous love, spiritual love and other forms of love. Poets from time to time have dealt variously with love themes, depending upon their individual attitudes influenced and shaped in varying degrees by the political, aesthetic and social climate of their times and places. This could account for the fact that "there are as many definitions of love as there are
poets....

Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti and Kamala Das, with whom this study is concerned, have frequently written about love. The range of their poetry is vast, but the present study confines itself to their treatment of sacred and profane love. For this purpose, the present chapter in its first section will briefly survey the British, American and Indian traditions of love poetry to place the three poets in their respective traditions and see how far they write in conformity with their native traditions of profane and sacred love poetry. The second section will discuss briefly the blending of sacred and profane love in the three poets; all the three believe that divine love both complements and substitutes human love. For a fuller assessment of their work the third section will survey briefly the existing critical views on these poets.

I

Love Tradition in British, American and Indian Poetry

The origin of English love poetry goes back to the fourteenth

century when Chaucer wrote his great love poem *Triolus and Cryseide* depicting the elaborate sentiments of courtly love. Based on the belief in infinite superiority of the beloved, the love poems of the period invariably described the beloved as a perfect embodiment of womanhood. *Cryseide* in *Triolus and Cryseide* is thus described:

She has not with the leste of hire stature,  
But alle hire lynes so wel answerynge  
Weren to womanhode that creature  
Was nevere lasse mannyshe in semynge. 2

The courtly lover's vision of the beloved was in vogue in the sixteenth century too. The poets did not exalt love outside marriage in their poems but "true" love that ended in fruitful marriage. Sir Philip Sydney's "The countesse of Pembroke's Arcadia" is an expression of such love.

My True love hath my heart, and I have his,  
By just exchange, one for the other given:  
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss;  
There never was a better bargain driven,  
His heart in me keeps me and him in one,  
My heart in him his thoughts and senses guide;  
He loves my heart, for once it was his own;  
I cherish his because in me it bides. 3

Edmund Spenser's "Epithalamion," "Amorretti" and "Farie Queen"


too celebrate this love, ending in blissful union of marriage. In "Four Hymnes" Spenser goes a step further and reconciles sensuous love with the love of God. For him Heavenly love and Earthly love are complementary and not eternal antagonists. In one of the sonnets he writes:

Men call you fayre, and you doe credit it....
But only that is permanent and free
From frayle corruption, that doth flesh ensow.
That is true beautie; that doth argue you
To be divine and borne of heavenly seed:
Derived from that fayre spirit, from whom all true
And perfect beauty did at first proceed. 4

In the Seventeenth century John Donne gave a new turn to English love poetry. He despised the conventional chivalric love and the idealized view of sexual love deriving the tradition of Elizabethan love poetry. Most of his poems work upon complex thoughts and emotions which effectively convey the passionate energy of love. Donne was realistic, and sometimes cynical, in his treatment of sexual relations and made an ingenious use of paradox, pun, and startling parallels and distinctions. Majority of his love poems are organized in the dramatic and rhetorical form of an urgent or heated argument with a reluctant mistress. For instance, his poem "The Good-Morrow":

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be;
If ever any beauty I did see,
which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

Donne’s celebration of love was not restricted to the profane
only; he also probed with fierce anxiety his relationship
with the Divine, combining passion and argument as in his
profane love poems. "Holy sonnets" depict his passions
directed towards God.

Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fame
But am betroth'd unto your enemy:
Divorce mee, "Untie, or breake that knot againe;
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you ' enthral me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chast, except you ravish me.

Following Donne’s footsteps poets like Herbert,
Crashaw and Vaughan wrote about love of God, often employing
his poetic manner and imagery. Their poems are expressions
of passionate devotion towards God. Take, for example, an
excerpt from Herbert’s "Love":

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sinne
But quick-ey'd love, observing me grow slack
From my finest entrance in
Drew nearer to me, Sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything....

5 John Donne, "Good-Morrow," H.J.C Grierson, ed., The
Metaphysical Lyrics and the Poems of Seventeenth Century


The seventeenth century saw another group of poets who devoted themselves to the theme of secular love alone. They were Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling and Richard Lovelace. All were connected with the court, of which the head, Charles I, was a man of culture and a connoisseur of the arts. He believed in the divine right of kings. Like him, the courtly poets also believed in their rights as poets and gave expression to voluptuous love through their polished lyrics of gallantry. This period is called the Golden Age of the love lyric, and the poem "A Rapture" by Thomas Carew is considered a classic of erotic poetry:

... there I'll behold
Thy bared snow and thy unbraided gold;
There my enfranchised hand on every side
Shall O'er thy naked polished ivory slide
No curtain there, though of transparent lawn
Shall be before, thy virgin-treasure drawn;
But the rich mine, to the enquiring eye
Exposed, shall ready still for mintase life
And we will coin young cupids...

The age came to a violent end with the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the triumph of the Puritans. During the period of Commonwealth, the only two poets of consequence who had official recognition were Milton and Marvell. Milton's single love lyric "On his Deceased Wife" is a touching tribute to his dead wife:

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Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind;
Her face was veiled, yet to my fancied sight,
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined
So clear, as in no face with more delight.
But Oh as to embrace me she inclined
I waked, She fled, and day brought back my night. 9

The Restoration period saw a revival of love poetry in the works of Sir Charles Sedley, Charles Sackville and Lord Buchurst, who frequently wrote about sensuous love as a sharp reaction to Puritanism. The poet contemporaneous with them who deserves a special mention here is John Dryden. Though known for his didacticism, his poems "Secret Love," "The Royal Matyr," "An Evening's Love," "The Double Discovery" and "Cleomenes" convey the feelings of a wooing lover.

I feed a flame with in, which so torments me
That it both pains my heart, and yet contents me
'Tis such a pleasing smart, and I so love it
That I had rather die than once remove it... 10

In the eighteenth century the form of the lyric was made subservient to the exercise of wit. The worth of love lyrics was measured less by the depth of feeling than by their surface smoothness and wit. The art of love was essentially regarded an exercise in pleasure — the pleasure


of persuasion, anticipation and gratification. That explains why almost all the Georgian love songs have a certain gloss and smoothness about them. Robert Burns' "Ae Fond kiss, and Then we Sever" is illustrative of these qualities:

Fare thee weel, thou first and fairest!  
Fare thee weel, thou best and dearest!  
Thine be ilka joy and treasure,  
Peace, Enjoyment, Love, and Pleasure.  

With the advent of the cult of nature in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Romantic poets "trained their gaze on higher nobler and less personal objects than woman." Yet love does find expression in their poems. John Keats' "The Eve of St. Agnes", "Isabella, or the pot of Basil" "Lamia" and "La Belle Sans Merci" are narratives about love, the last two poems involving the supernatural. They are all expressions of physical passion of an earthly lover for an earthly beloved. For instance, the following lines of "The Eve of St. Agnes."

My Madeline! Sweet dreamer! lovely bride!  
Say, may I be for ay thy Vassal blest?  
Thy beauty's shield heart-shaped and vermeil dyed?  
Ah, Silver Shrine, here will I take my rest...
Shelley's poems "Epipsychidion," "Rosalind and Helen," "One Word is too often Profaned" and "An Invitation" are all celebrations of love. But they are unlike Keats' poems in not depicting physical beauty of the beloved nor the physical desires of the lover but something of spirit rather than body. Shelley's concept of love was an abstract ideal that lovers sought to attain. The concept, in fact, was platonic.

We lay, till new emotions came,
Which seemed to make each mortal frame
One Soul of interwoven flame,
A life in life, a second birth
In worlds diviner far than earth,
Which, like two strains of harmony
That mingle in the silent sky.... 14

Lord Byron too wrote about love and his lyrics are expressions of real sentiments. "All for Love," "She Walks in Beauty," "To a Lady," "There be none of Beauty's Daughters" depict love of the profane kind.

The Victorian poets did not hesitate in giving poignant expressions to youthful passions in their poems. Tennyson's poems like "The Princess," "Fatima," "The Gardner's Daughter," "The Lady of Shallot," "Maud" treat

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of passionate love. Physical passions remain subdued in these poems because Tennyson, as Victorian moralist, cared most for married love. Unlike Tennyson, Robert Browning wrote about love in all its forms, from the wilderness of passion to the tenderness of married bliss. His poems are marked by frankness and boldness of manner, giving expression to fierce animal passions and rapturous love. "By the Fireside," "Love among Ruins," "A Woman's Last Word," "The Last Ride Together" and "Evelyn Hope" are among his best lyrics.

Another important Victorian poet who deserves mention here is Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Every sonnet of his is "the monument of a moment of emotion or passion," right from the birth of love to the rapture of supreme surrender and wedded bliss:

This hour be her sweet body all my song,
Now the same heart-beat blends her gaze with mine,
One parted fire, Love's silent countersign
Her arms lie open, throbbing with their throng
Of confluent pulses, bare and fair and strong;
And her deep-freighted lips expect me now,
Amid the clustering hair that shrines her brow
Five kisses broad, her neck ten kisses long... 15

The foregoing brief survey shows that love has

15 Hadfield, p. 312.
continued to be an important theme of British poetry. The theme has been presented in different forms, depending on the individual attitudes of the poets as also the spirit of the age concerned, contributing to what may be termed as the tradition of British Love Poetry. If we look for a similar tradition in American poetry, we notice that there has not been any major poetry devoted to the theme of love until the nineteenth century, when Poe and Whitman wrote about love. Whitman’s “Song of Myself” reveals a remarkable range and variety in the treatment of the theme of love. Till this poem was published, there appeared only occasional pieces of love poetry like Anne Bradstreet’s celebration of domestic love for her husband:

If ever two were one, then surely we
If ever men were lov’d by wife, then thee
If ever wife was happy in a man
Compare with me ye women if you can
To prize thy love more than whole mines of gold. 16

Edward Taylor preoccupied himself with love, but it was totally divine. His poems are often lyrical outbursts of his love for God. For instance his poem “Meditation.”

Whitman writes of universal brotherhood in a

mystical vein:

And I know that the hand of God is the elder hand of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest brother of my own,
And all men ever born are also my brothers ... and the women my sisters and lovers,
And that a Kelson of the creation is love. 17

In "Song of Myself" he looks back through the epochs of history to the first, Infinite Nothing, where his wanderings begin and to the conclusion of all these wanderings, the transformation and vision of Great Camarado that reminds us of a mystic's vision and union with God.

See Over so far, there is limitless space outside of that,
Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that,
My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
That Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms. 18

Edgar Allen Poe consistently wrote of love, but his love is not earthly, it is supernal. In "Philosophy of Composition" he wrote "Beauty is the sole legitimate


province of the poem" and this beauty was to be experienced in "an elevating excitement of the soul." In the "Poetic Principle" he writes, "Love - the true, the divine Eros, - the Uranian, as distinguished from the Dionian Venus - is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetical themes," and the poem "Lenore" deals with such a theme:

Let no bell toll then!-lest her Soul, amid
its hallowed mirth
Should catch the note as it doth float up from
the damned Earth. 19

Unlike America, India has a long native tradition of love poetry. In early India, when Sanskrit Court poetry known as Kavaya was produced to reflect the courtly tradition, devoted to the life of nobility for delightful and instructive purposes, the attitude towards pleasure of love was not absent in the literary tradition.20 It was in idealized love that the spiritual meaning of earthly love was sought, and profane love as an experience in itself, was not thought to be worth poetic exploration. In fact Kavaya essentially dealt with the earthly activities of

Gods, and the poets often drew upon mythology in this regard. For instance, the characterization of the highest Lord incarnated as the cowherd-lover, the love-play with the cowherdresses, the *Rasa* dances, the motifs of sorrowful love-in-separation from Krishna and joyous love-in-union with him depicted in the famous *Gita-Govinda*, are based on the Vishnu and Bhagvata Puranas. In these Puranas, passionate love had become sacramental as an expression of *bhakti*; the loving-woman's longing became devotion and love-making became worship. Moreover, the attitude and training of the Indian poet was such that the idea of using poetry to express his private, personal feelings hardly ever occurred to him.\(^2\)

The Indian tradition of love poetry was confined mostly to love poems devoted to God only - the *Bhakti* poems. Falling in line with this tradition, Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* is a collection of devotional songs, where the relationship between God and Man has been looked at from different angles - Master and servant, Lover and Beloved, Boatman and Traveller, Musician and Lister, Father and son. The lover's dedication to the beloved finds likewise notable expression in Sri Aurobindo's poem:

\(^{21}\) S.K. De, p. 19.
I am held no more by Life's alluring cry,
Her joy and grief, her charm, her laughter's lute,
Hushed are the magic moments of the flute,
And form and colour and brief ecstasy.
I would hear, in my spirit's wideness solitary
The Voice that speaks when mortal lips are mute.  

Aurobindo idealized love in his famous poem Savitri using mythological story of Savitri and Satyavan. In this poem Savitri while claiming Satyavan from Death makes a strong plea for love on earth:

Love must not cease to live upon the earth;
For Love is the bright ink twixt earth and heaven,
Love is the far Transcendent's angle here;
Love is man's lien on the Absolute.  


union and separation, excluding the sensuous animal passion. Some poems have even a deep mystic fervour in them. For instance, "The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love":

All pain is compassed by your frown.
All joy is centred in your kiss.
You are the substance of my breath
And you the mystic pang of Death. 24

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's love poems are mostly devoted to God. They display a personal relationship between the devotee and the Lord. The poems "Loyalty," "Embarking Time" provide fine examples of fervent devotion. "The Collected Plays and Poems" include forty-four sonnets which are celebrations of variety in mystical experience. Harindranath's several poems are devoted to an earthly beloved, whose temporary separation causes grief, but this grief is rather sentimental than deep and poignant. "The Garden of Isolation" is occupied with such love.

Out of my life the coloured lights are gone,
Deep dark surrounds me and I cannot see.
Night, sorrowful, immense, without a dawn
Descends on me 25


Some poets like Manmohan Ghose have given free expression to earthly love. Gosha's poems are remarkable for the refinement with which they are written. Earthly love in them is so idealized that it is hardly distinguishable from divine love. For instance, in "Immortal Eve," the poet exalts the earthly beloved to the level of a perfect spiritual being.

I think a soul shape grows behind
Your body's screening view
'Tis what the deathless sculptor, Life
Craves out of what is you.
Your essence, spiritual stuff,
Laughter, thought, effort, will
Joy, suffering, all you feel, think, do
Like Pāṇijn marble still
Life Chisels, the ulte-tip you... 26

The foregoing brief survey of the traditions of love poetry has given us a fair and precise idea of the background of Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson and Kamala Das. Each of them was, no doubt, influenced by her respective tradition. But what the actual analysis of their poems attempted herein after will show is that all the three are distinctively individual in their attitudes, and their treatment of profane and sacred love. For instance, in the Indian tradition profane, sensuous love has been approached with restraint,

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in fact not without inhibitions. In sharp contrast to this tradition Kamala Das has devoted majority of her love poems to the theme of physical love, although in a few of her poems (devoted to Krishna) she writes in conformity with the Indian Tradition. Likewise, there has been a long tradition of erotic poetry in British Poetry, ranging from fierce animal passions to the sublime one. But Christina Rossetti's treatment of this theme shows that she avoids excessive physical passions in her poems. Unlike most of the English poets, she does not philosophise or intellectualize the concept of love. Her love lyrics are marked by simplicity of manner and pure feeling. As far as Emily Dickinson is concerned, she is unlike her American predecessors and contemporaries though there are occasional glimpses in her of the fervent devotion that marked Edward Taylor's poetry.

In spite of belongings to three different cultures and literary traditions, the three poets write on common themes, showing, no doubt, variations in their poetic styles. Dickinson's approach seems markedly analytic and intellectual. Her lyrics analyze emotions through analogies. That is where she shows affinities with the Metaphysicals of England. Rossetti's poems, on the other hand, are noted for their simplicity of manner and language. There is no intellectual intricacy or philosophising in them.
Kamala Das expresses her emotions at times through analogies and at times directly, but the analogies are not used the way Dickinson uses them. They are simple and direct, lacking the Dickinsonian complexity.

II

Dickinson, Rossetti and Das write on profane and sacred love, making their profane love poems centre round the theme of unfulfilled love and seeking fulfilment in their sacred love poems through a concentration of the full power of their love upon God. In the latter poems, the sexual instinct, the need to overcome isolation, the craving for union reminding one of human love in all its phases, are directed to God. Taken together, in their love poetry divine love is often seen as a complement of human love or as a substitute for unfulfilled earthly passion.

Quite often the sacred and the profane intermingle in love poetry: the religious language is used by poets to describe secular love. Thus “Glory,” “Sweet martyrdom,” the ‘Crucifixion’ of love, all Christian sentiments, are infused in the secular lyrics of the medieval period.27 Conversely,

religious poets have also used the language of physical love to describe the union of the soul and God. If one overlooks the symbolic/spiritual meaning of the "Song of Songs" it can be taken to be a marriage song connected with an earthly nuptial. The analogy of earthly marriage is applied to the spiritual relation between Christ and the Church:

as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it .... For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto to wife, and they two shall be One flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speaking concerning Christ and the Church... 28

The distinction between the sacred and the profane is not noticeable so much in the expression of love or in the feeling and yearning of the lover as in the nature of the beloved. The fourteenth century mystic thus speaks to God:

Thou givest me Thy whole self to be mine whole and undivided ... Thou art in me and I am in thee, glued together as one and the selfsame thing which hence forth and forever cannot be divided 29

28 Siegel Lee, p. 5.

Similarly secular love lines are spoken by Isolde to Tristan:

We are one life and flesh .... you and I, Tristan and Isolde, shall for ever remain One and undivided!... I am yours... You are mine... One Tristan and Isolde.  

Gerelac Peterson's love is sacred because it is directed to God and Isolde's love is profane because Tristan is flesh. The chasm remains only between spirit and flesh, eternity and temporality. Otherwise the dynamics of love is alike in both the realms. Every kind of love whether profane or sacred wishes to become one with what it is loving.

According to Plato, the Neo-Platonists, Dante and St. Augustine, sexual love is a degraded form of spiritual love. But for Freud spiritual love is a perverted form of sexual love, i.e. as aim inhibited sexuality; the sexual impulse, libidinous drive, from which the need for actual sexual gratification has been removed.

Libido is an expression taken from the theory of emotions. We call by that name the energy, regarded as a quantitative magnitude ... of these instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word 'love.' The nucleus of what we mean by love naturally consists (and this is what is commonly called love, and what the poets sing of) in sexual love with sexual union as its aim. But we do not separate from this ... on the other hand, self-love, love for parents and

30 Siegel Lee, p. 2.
children, friendship and love for humanity in general, and also devotion to concrete objects and to abstract ideas (e.g. Sacred love, love of God) .... psychoanalytic approach has taught us that all these tendencies are an expression of the same instinctual impulses; in relations between the sexes these impulses force their way towards sexual union, but in other circumstances they are diverted from this aim or are prevented from reaching it, though always preserving enough of their original nature to keep their identity recognisable as in such features as the longing for proximity and self-sacrifice.

The three poets Dickinson, Rossetti and Das seek fulfilment in sacred love. In Freudian terms their repressed impulse of profane love gets sublimated into sacred love and the Divine becomes a substitute for an earthly lover. Both Rossetti and Dickinson had unsuccessful love affairs. Unlike them, Kamala Das is a married woman. Her profane poems explore love realistically in its varieties of passion. In none of these poems (as we shall see during the course of this study) is the experience of fulfilled love in evidence. The scornful attitude to physical love, reflected in many of her poems, assumes significance in the Freudian context. However, all divine poetry cannot be explained

in Freudian terms, for there have been poets and mystics who led happy wedded lives and also sang glories of the Lord.

III

Emily Dickinson's love poetry has attracted much critical attention; it has been widely discussed and variously interpreted. Some critics relate her love poems to her biography. They think, "her poems clearly have their roots in her own unhappy experiences and they are intimately related to her deepest and most private feelings." They even speculated on the identity of her lovers. It is true that biographical evidence does at times provide some useful insights into a work of art but it is not true that a work of art is necessarily rooted in biography. Thus Eunice Glenn has rightly remarked "to arrive at conclusions on the


33 Clark Griffith, p. 5.
basis of biographical data alone is not unjust to her but is very nearly fatal to her poetry."34

Some critics35 criticize her poetry maintaining that Dickinson would surely not have achieved recognition as an eminent poet if she had been solely judged on the basis of her love poems. They think that Dickinsonian love poems lack genuine erotic passion because they neither celebrate the ecstatic union of lovers nor do they express their regret over the swift passage of time. Richard Chase goes even to the extent of saying that "these poems are more concerned with the increased status love brings to the woman than with her emotional investment with the man."36 Actually Dickinson's love poems are not like conventional love poems; they do not elaborate a complement to a lover nor do they dramatize the moment of love between lovers. They are not narratives of love but expressions of a mood or a state of feeling. In fact, they are charged with so much


36 Richard Chase, p. 140.
of emotional intensity that critics like Theodora Ward have been led to remark that "Dickinson's love poems were distilled from the ecstasy of pain." In a similar vein Thronton Wilder also remarks that "Dickinson stoically nourished an unrequited passion for love." Another eminent critic Anderson remarks about her love poetry that "in spite of some freshness of phrasing and an occasional haunting imagery these poems tend to fritter themselves away into a series of exclamations." Wells also remarks in this connection, "Emily Dickinson metamorphoses her love into something intangible." As already said, Dickinson's love poems revolve round the theme of separation. In fact an "Evanacent Vision" has been her vision of the lover and this is the source of the


40 Wells, p. 244.
perennial struggle remarkably evident in her poems. She comprehends this struggle of love in diverse shades from separation to union. Each poem is an expression of re-created and re-fabricated experience with this invisible lover. Albert Gelpi remarks in this regard that the love poems of Emily Dickinson grow out of the "missing something." ⁴¹

Several critics have dwelt on the theme of sacred love in Emily Dickinson and have recognized her mystical tendencies. ⁴² They think that, "her vision of the lover's heavenly marriage changes to an actual celestial union with God." ⁴³ She sought her lover in God and directed her earthly passions towards Him. In some poems her sensitivity to experiences touch the domain of the mystics. But we cannot call her a mystic. Dickinson did not see possibilities of any fulfilment in profane love as such and prized the fulfilment in spiritual love. Her poems provide the picture of an awakened soul


whose craving for contact with the Divine lover is intensified by the imperfections of human love. It is perhaps this reason that makes Sister Humialata to remark that "there is faith, certainty and religious conviction; but nowhere is there that complete dedication to the search for perfection which motivates the mystic." Similarly Downey remarks, "She does not lose herself in the unity of God," which is the domain of mystic poets.

Dickinson's wading through different experiences of love and tallying earthly love with spiritual love, her belief in the duality of soul and body has made some critics to link her with the Metaphysicals, mostly because in her love poems the development of thought through imagery and metaphor is used as a structural device and not merely as an ornament. Dickinson's affinities with the Metaphysicals

45 Quoted in Henry Wells, American Literature, XX (1948-49), p. 466.
can be accepted only with certain reservations, for a number of her poems defy the metaphysical mode. Perhaps it is because of this that some think Dickinson a Romantic.\(^{48}\)

The brief critical survey attempted in this section shows that Dickinson's love poetry has been approached on diverse planes. But her profane and sacred love poems have not been considered together to show that for her sacred love is a substitute or complement for profane love. The two categories of poems have been dealt with separately, thereby ignoring that separation of lovers in the profane realm foresees a reunion in the spiritual realm.

As regards Christina Rossetti, much has not been written on her profane love poems. She is considered primarily a religious poet and enjoys good reputation as a devotional poet. For instance, Rev T.A Seed writes: "Her genius for religious poetry is universally recognised, her place among the highest English poets is secure; her pious child-like spirit is alive in her reader's heart."\(^{49}\)

\(^{48}\) Rebecca Patterson, "Emily Dickinson's Palette," *The Midwest Quarterly* (Summer 1964), p. 274.

Likewise another admirer of her religious poetry writes: "More remote and unworldly, dwelling far from the tumult and the strife, as in dim religious light in the atmosphere of the aisle and cloister ... Miss Rossetti had the vision of a seer, the self-distrust of a penitent and the rapture of a saint. The subtle witchery of words, the quaint fantastic beauty, the exquisite finish, the fervent and intense passion, the sincere religious feeling in her poems, give them a peculiar hold on sympathetic minds." It is true that Rossetti's main preoccupation has been sacred love and these are marked by lyrical passion and fervent devotion, but it is also a fact that she has written about profane love, based largely on her own experience of unfulfilled love. Thus one of her biographers relates her poems of profane love to her biography, observing that "Christina might have regretted some unfulfilled possibility in her own life." Another critic remarks on the blending of the sacred and the profane in her poetry: "For Christina there was no deep division between eros and agape, love human and love divine; she saw the two as very closely akin.

50 The Baptist Magazine, William M. Rossetti, p. XVII.

There is a curious and touching purity in her eros feeling; there is passion in her conception of agape. This is an extreme view and cannot be accepted without some qualification or reservation. We notice that in a number of her poems, she does not approve of physical love, and she always yearns for love of the higher kind. If she had seen no division at all between the sacred and the profane and looked upon them as identical, she would not have sought fulfilment in sacred love, which is amply evident in her love poems as a whole.

Some critics have written solely on Christina Rossetti's religious poetry and have called her a mystic poet. In spite of the passionate nature of her love of God she was no mystic, for no where in her poetry do we come across any evidence of the rapture of complete union with God; of course, her poems are full of the yearning for union, which could be considered akin to the mystic's yearning. Battiscombe's comment seems quite convincing; "Nowhere in Christina's poetry is there any description of a moment of direct apprehension. The


proper sense of the word mystical signifies direct apprehension of God by the human mind.  

The critical views mentioned above show that none of them attempts to see a connection between Christina's experience of unfulfilled earthly love and her devotion to the sacred. The present study seeks to examine her love poetry in a new light inasmuch as it will focus upon the relation between the sacred and the profane in the work of the poet and also highlight the progression in her attitude to love.

Kamala Das's love poetry like Rossetti's has received scant critical attention and the subtleties of her love poems have generally been overlooked. Her preoccupation with sexual love has misled critics, pitiably enough, to associate lust with her personality and her poetry. One of the critics thus observes, "Here is the unending lust, the Ocean's tireless waiting, the woman's sexual lust...."

Further, her frank eroticism has made some critics to

54 Battiscombe, p. 182.

55 Devendra Kohli, Kamala Das (Delhi: Arnold-Hiemenmann, 1975), p. 16.

call her an exhibitionist and deny a positive quality to her poetic vision. Yet another critic thinks that since Das is uninhibited and treats man-woman relationship in blunt, bitter and concrete terms on the basis of her own personal experiences, she is the most prominent of the confessional poets.\(^5\) Das has been even equated with poets like Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Judith Wright, and Gauri Deshpande\(^6\) for having shaken characteristic feminine inhibitions. Reducing these critical demurers to their basic objection, one is faced with the conclusion that Kamala Das "mirrors love in all its nakedness..." Actually Kamala Das believes in sincere treatment of materials. By writing realistically about sexual love she does not glorify sexuality but highlights its inadequacy. In poem after poem she resents such love, since she is unable to find fulfilment in it and anticipates such gratification in sacred love, the love of Krishna. Thus Dwivedi's remark seems quite convincing: "Her search for true love and true lover in Lord Krishna is not without

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significance, as it gives her both love and security.\footnote{59}

The available criticism on the love poetry of Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti and Kamala Das shows that their love poems (both sacred and profane) have not been studied together to see that in each of these poets profane love anticipates divine love and divine love complements profane love. This is the most significant feature of their love poetry that makes them comparable to each other. The three poets write on common and similar themes, no doubt revealing variations in treatment traceable to the fact of their being historically and geographically distant from one another. The three poets belong to three different traditions and cultures. One could attribute the affinities between Rossetti and Dickinson to the fact of their being contemporaries and to the close correspondence between their lives as spinsters, apart from their common Christian background. In addition, Americans right from the Colonists often looked to British poetry for models. Since there was not much of love poetry written before Dickinson in America, she too might have looked for her models in the British poetry.

Kamala Das's insistent concern with the theme of love,

of the profane type largely, is an interesting phenomenon, something not quite in keeping with her cultural background. Though she is a non-Christian, her concerns are similar to those of Dickinson and Rossetti. Yet in several significant ways she stands apart from them: her poetry is characterized by a frank eroticism and a note of positive feminine assertion. The divergences discernible in their poetic manner also spring from the difference in their cultural upbringing and the literary traditions they inherited. This aspect will be more specifically looked into in the last chapter.

Despite these divergences, the three poets share marked similarities so far as their attitudes aspirations and modes of thinking are concerned. This is largely because of their common feminine sensibility: their writings are informed by a distinctly female consciousness. This particular consciousness is vitally linked with culture. In fact, it is determined by the prevailing culture, the social environment of the individual women poet. The next chapter, therefore, focuses on the development of this female consciousness in a male-dominated society in each of the three poets.