Emily Dickinson's love poems give enough evidence of her originality in making a creative use of language: she modulates the language norms to achieve desired effects. To do so, she does not restrict herself to the conventional use of vocabulary, syntax and grammar, but coins and uses words in violation of grammatical rules, collapsing syntax, varying syntactic order or repeating similar syntactic structures in an effort to pack the intensity of feelings of a "flaming lover." This helps her to give exact form to the thoughts and emotions of a lover.

Dickinson's poetic practice conforms to the principle that the poetic art involves conscious craftsmanship. Though she did not explicitly formulate this principle, there are scattered utterances in her poems which clearly set forth her idea of the poet and his task. In one of her poems, she states that a poet is a "Discloser," who can distil the "amazing" and the "immense" from the "Ordinary" and the "familiar":
This was a poet - It is that
Distills amazing sense
From ordinary Meanings -
And Attar so immense

From the familiar species
That perished by the Door -
We wonder it was not Ourselves
Arrested it - before -

Of Pictures, the Discloser -
The Poet - it is He -
Entitles Us - by Contrast -
To ceaseless Poverty -

Of Portion - so unconscious
The Robbing - could not harm -
Himself - to Him - a Fortune
Exterior - to time -

Here we get to know that a poet communicates an individual experience primarily because he is capable of discovering something surprising in the commonplace. The communicative act is a process, by which the life of the created work remains "Exterior to Time": that is it transcends time and acquires a universal significance. The poem further clarifies that the creative process is a self-conscious one and, as such, it is distinct from mere inspiration. Another poem of hers expresses the same idea pointedly through a more compact analogy:

Essential Oils - are wrung -
The Attar from the Rose
Be not expressed by Suns - alone -
It is the gift of screws -

The General Rose - decay
But this - in Lady's Drawer -
Make Summer- when the Lady Lie
In Ceaseless Rosemary -

(J. 335)

Just as "Attar" of roses is an essence extracted from the petals of the rose, in the same manner poetry is the essence extracted from experience. Perfume and poetry are not just natural products but the products of a deliberate effort as the word "wrung" suggests. They are not "expressed by suns alone" but "wrung" with skill and effort..." a gift of screws." The poetic principle implicit here emphasizes the poet's craftsmanship; language serves as the instrument through which "the essential oils of poetry are seized upon." The emphasis on craftsmanship can be found in another poem where Dickinson stresses the poet's reliance upon "Philology":

Shall I take thee, the Poet said
To the propounded word
Be stationed with the Candidates
Till I have finer tried

The Poet searched Philology
And when about to ring
For the suspended Candidate -
There came unsummoned in -

That portion of the Vision
The World applied to fill
Not unto nomination
The Cherubim reveal -

(J. 505-6)

Dickinson here lays emphasis on the conscious effort
a poet has to make for choosing the right word. However, in the creation of his work, the poet's intuition also plays its part, as is suggested by the following lines:

And when about to ring
For the suspended candidate
There came unsummoned in -

That portion of the vision
The word applied to fill

It has to be borne in mind that the help received by the poet from his intuitive faculty may not come at all, if he does not deliberately pose to himself the question with which the poem opens: "Shall I take thee." The last two lines of the poem suggest that the hint received through intuition has not to be mistaken for a revelation. The emphasis here is on the poet's task to search for the appropriate words, and it is only natural that as the inevitable outcome of a continuous effort by the poet, the words would find their proper place. When the words chosen find their place in the poetic pattern, they acquire a life and power from the contexts in which they are placed. That is how the poet consciously exploits the potential power of a word. In another poem craftsmanship is further stressed when Dickinson compares herself (as a poet) to a carpenter:

Myself was formed - a carpenter
An unpretending time
My plane—and I, together wrought
Before a Builder came —

(J. 234)

Here her attitude approximates to the view of the artist as a craftsman prevalent in the 18th century. Although she stresses conscious craftsmanship of the poet, she does not think in terms of the classical restraints and decorum emphasized in that century. She gives due importance to the poet's own individual talent and does not advocate absolute conformity to tradition at the expense of artistic freedom.

Emily Dickinson's love poetry shows that she has made full use of her craft in exploiting to the utmost limit the potentialities of language, in order to fashion words into her own idiom for recording her experiences. In regard to this, Anderson writes: "Emily Dickinson approached language like an explorer of the new lands. It offered her the excitement of adventure .... She used words as if she was the first to do so with the joy and an awe largely lost to English poetry since Renaissance."²

The syntax of Dickinson's love poems calls for a special attention; by and large, it is not simple. She compresses language into fragments and does not present smoothness of movement or delicacy of texture. Her syntax becomes fragmentary and elliptical, serving to convey the mood of urgency associated with the emotion of passionate love. The following poem would exemplify this:

Wild Nights - Wild Nights!
Were I with thee
Wild Nights should be
Our Luxury!

Pitile - the winds
To a Heart in Port -
Done with the Compass
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden
Ah, the Sea!
Might I but moor-Tonight
In thee!

(J. 114)

The poem expresses the beloved's passionate desire to be in the company of her lover. At the level of graphology the exclamatory marks impart to the poem the form of a spontaneous utterance, which accords well with the urgency of the message conveyed. The poem does not have syntactical coherence/logic. The syntax has been cut through to achieve conciseness in order to convey the excitement of passionate thinking, having a logic of its own.

The diction of the poem is simple, but it is not
straightforward. "Wild Nights" is an unusual collocation. "Wild" is suggestive of something that is violent, disorderly, that cannot be controlled and thus can be associated with passion. "Nights" are associated with calmness or a quiescent state. Through this unusual collocation the poet reinforces the theme of passion and at the same time derives from it a sort of comfort that makes her to exclaim the very first line: "Wild Nights — Wild Nights!" The theme of passion is further suggested through the use of the word "Luxury." It includes the meaning of lust as well as lavishness of sensuous enjoyment, if one goes to its Latin origin — "Luxuria." The words "Port," "Compass," "Chart" showing lexical cohesion in being all connected with voyage are used to suggest concretely the law to be strictly followed in a voyage to the paradise; the poet renders vivid the lawlessness of sexual passion that defies any discipline. This is further reinforced by parallel syntax: lines 3 & 4 of the second stanza have a similar syntactic structure (Verb ♦ prepositional phrase):

Done with the Compass
Done with the Chart!

Thus we notice an interplay of elements at syntactic and semantic levels. In the last stanza the image of the "moor" conveys the beloved's yearning for sexual fulfilment, which
is limited for a mortal in its duration - just "To night."

Dickinson's syntax is often elliptical; within it she uses parallelism to convey the intensity of the emotion of love. The poem "Mine - by the Right of the White Election" is reproduced below as an illustration:

Mine - by the Right of the White Election!
Mine - by the Royal Seal!
Mine - by the Sign in the Scarlet Prison -
Bars - cannot conceal!

Mine - here - in vision - and in veto!
Mine - by the Grave's Repeal -
Titled - confirmed -
Delirious Charter!
Mine - long as Ages Steal!

(J. 258)

The central theme of the poem is that of heavenly marriage. The beloved sure of her future bliss thinks of her heavenly betrothal as a certainty and her entry into the "aristocracy of grace" as a release from the bondage of time: "Mine-long as Ages Steal!" At the level of syntax, we find similar/identical syntactic structures in lines 1, 2, 3 and 6. (Possessive + Prep Phase). The Syntactic equivalence corresponds to their semantic equivalence; the two reinforce each other. This serves to focus attention on the underlying emotion of dedicated love towards the heavenly lover, thereby conveying its intensity and depth. Throughout the poem we come across unusual collocations: "White Election,"
"Scarlet Prison," and "Delirious Charter." "White" is associated with purity and suggests the divine, by using it with "Election" the poet conveys the idea of God's electing His favourites. In "The Scarlet prison" the word "Prison," suggests the human heart, the seat of the emotions of love that bind us to one another as human beings. It gets weightage from the line "Bars—cannot conceal," implying that worldly splendours cannot distract a dedicated beloved from her Election to future bliss.

"Delirious Charter" is again an unusual collocation. The word "Delirious" is used in combination with the word "Charter," the certificate of marriage with the divine lover makes the beloved wildly excited since she achieves something far better than the "Swoon" of an ordinary wife. The legal terms: "Right," "Seal," "Bars," "Repeal," "Titled," "Confirmed," and "Charter" all point to the beloved's elevated status: she comes to think of her marriage to the Divine as a legal one which she cannot refuse.

In poems where Dickinson is not seeking an effect of the kind achieved through parallel syntax, she resorts to sub-ordination and other forms of syntactic elaboration (such as modification, co-ordination etc.,) in order to achieve complexity of meaning; the syntax in the following poem assumes an analytical form:
Of all the Souls that stand create -
I have elected - One -
When Sense from Spirit - flies away -
And subterfuge - is done
When that which is - and that which was
Apart-intrinsic-stand
And this brief tragedy of Flesh -
Is shifted-like a Sand -
When figures show their royal Front -
And Mists-are carved away,
Behold the Atom-I preferred-
To all the lists of clay!

(J. 330)

The elaborate and analytical syntax here accords well with
the essential complexity of the argument presented; it
consists in the twists and turns of thought underlying the
decision of the beloved to pledge herself to eternal
fidelity. In the first two lines, one notices alteration
in the usual pattern through "Hyperbation" in back-shifting
"I have elected-One" to a non-initial position for emphasis
and thematic prominence. The item "One" also gets additional
emphasis through rhyme. Such modulations through syntactic
manipulations help to convey the nuances of meaning. Here
the poet wants to highlight that the beloved's choice of
the Divine is ultimate and cannot be changed.

The diction of the poem is not simple and straightforward. The antithetical items "Sense" and "Spirit" are
used for the mortal body and the soul. The body-soul
dichotomy is emphasized here. The souls have to depart
from the mortal sphere due to "tragedy of Flesh" and
show their "royal Front" when face to face with Divinity. Their mortal remains degenerate into dust and clay; the beloved in the poem thinks that Eternity is a certainty, hereafter. She chooses One - God for her love and dedication. This is conveyed in the last two lines:

Behold the Atom - I preferred
To all the lists of Clay

Here one notices the shift from one level of discourse to another to give rhetorical shock to the reader and at the same time convey the beloved's conviction quite forcefully. The item "Atom" signifying God exemplifies Dickinson's strategy to use a scientific term to concretize faith as opposed to doubt.

Using elaborate and analytical syntax Dickinson at times skillfully blends abstract and concrete words. This helps her to lend force and complexity to her argument and concretize the abstract for vivid immediacy. For an illustration we may look at this poem:

I see thee better - in the Dark -
I do not need a Light -
The Love of Thee - a Prism be -
Excelling Violet -

I see thee better for the years -
That hunch themselves between -
The Miner's Lamp - Sufficient be -
To nullify the Mine -

And in the Grave - I see Thee best -
Its little Panels be
A glow - All ruddy - with the Light
I held - So high, for Three -
What need of Day -
To Those whose Dark - hath so - surpassing Sun
It deem it be - Continually -
At the Meridian?

(J. 301)

In the first stanza "Love" of God is compared to a "Prism." The analogy is a subtle one: the Prism is a term drawn from science, functioning as an image in the poem. The poet tries to expound the nature of "His Love" with the detachment of a scientist. Since the prism projects different colours, it is qualitatively superior to many flowers which have only a single colour. Love is also a unifying principle; it leads to the soul's fulfilment in union with God. The very first line of the poem is a paradox. The poet does not need light to see God; instead she can see Him in the dark. The Transcendent does not present itself to the sense-perception, but can be apprehended through inward contemplation; the quest for spirituality does not depend upon sensory experience. The opening line, in fact, introduces the concept of 'Divine Dark' that we come across frequently in Christian mystical writings.

In the second stanza the "Years" symbolize time. Being entrapped in time points to human mortality. Though imprisoned in the realm of the temporal, the beloved can
see Him even with a little glow of his light, which is suggested and concretized in the phrase "Miner's Lamp." The "Grave" is the place where He is perceived "best" by the beloved. This is established at the syntactic level - the adverbial "in the Grave" has been thematized by means of topicalization. God's love is visualised as a prism, a concrete object making every panel of the grave to glow with light. The item "Grave" is further suggestive of the beloved's release from the encumbrance of mortal conditioning. In the last stanza, unusual collocation "Dark... Surpassing Sun" has been aptly used. The Sun is the source of all light and Life. The word "Surpassing" hints at the Light that produces the illumination of the soul. This is reinforced in the poem by the use of the item "meridian." It signifies the highest point reached by the Sun as viewed from a point on the earth's surface. It is through "Dark contemplation" that the transcendent is made tangible and therefore the poet shuns the light of sense perceptions and writes, "I see thee better in the Dark" - a paradox as pointed out earlier. It is relevant to refer to Ian T. Ramsey's perceptive view of religious language as one "in search of a situation which as such will either "be logically odd" or may "contain significant tautologies." Winifred Nowotny while affirming Ramsey's view in the essentials, makes a significant observation.

When one attaches the language to the right sort of situation, or construct the situation such language demands as its explanation, the language will ring true. The peculiarity and violence of the language forces us to look for or imagine a situation capable of calling such language into being. 4

The textual analysis attempted above makes it clear that in order to communicate her thoughts and experiences with passionate conviction, Dickinson exercises considerable skill in fashioning her poetic idiom. This helps her to achieve a close correspondence between the formal features of a poem and the experience it embodies. Her subtle exploitations at different levels of language often give rise to ambiguity and obscurity, but generally they are meant to enhance the richness of meaning in the poem. Her distinctive use of compressed language, enables her to verbalize the intensity and excitement of her experiences in novel forms, thus making her a stylist in her own unique way.

Christine Rossetti's love poems are marked by a linguistic precision and clarify which distinguish her

from Emily Dickinson. Rossetti’s language is free from ornateness and vagueness. Some of her poems serve as examples of how a complex pattern of meaning can be spun out of simple materials. Vocabulary too is very simple. There is a continuity in the linguistic pattern of all her poems, which persuades one to think that she observed a poetic principle shaping and writing the poems. But there is hardly any evidence that she really formulated any poetic principle. There is also no evidence in her poems to show that she is a self-conscious poet as Emily Dickinson. Nowhere do we find any mention of what a poet is like and what his task is. However, one can infer from her poetic practice that she did not trust romantic excess and considered decorum in the use of language desirable.

As far as the syntactic structure of her poems is concerned, it is not elaborate but simple, though not uniformly so. We do not come across intricacy or involvedness of any sort in the syntax of her poems. For an illustration we may look at the following poem:

Beyond this shadow and this turbulent Sea,
Shadow of death and turbulent Sea of death,
Lies all we long to have or long to be.
Take heart, tired man, toil on with lessening breaths
Lay violent hands on heaven’s high treasury,
Be what you long to be through life-long scathe.
A little while Hope leans on Charity,
A little while charity heartens Faith;
A little while; and then what Further while?
One while that ends not and that wearies not,
For ever new whilst evermore the same.
All things made new bear each a sweet new name;
Man's lot of death has turned to life his lot,
And tearful Charity to Love's own Smile.

The periods occur at regular intervals, which give smoothness to the texture and, at the same time, elevation to the language, to a level which is appropriate to the theme of sacred love. Within this uniformity we also notice parallel syntax and repetitive structures in lines 7, 8 & 9; this provides an impetus which is transferred to the subject matter. The diction is simple and not elaborate. Words like "Heaven," "Charity," "Hope," and "faith" are appropriate to the theme.

In several of her devotional poems Rossetti uses words biblical in association/reference. For instance, in the following poem:

Thou who didst hang upon a barren tree,
My God, for me;
Though I till now be barren, now at length,
Lord, give me strength
To bring forth fruit to thee.

Thou who didst bear for me the crown of thorn
Spitting and Scorn;
Though I till now have put forth thorns, yet now
Strengthen me Thou
That better fruit be borne

Thou Rose of Sharon, Cedar of broad root,
Vine of Sweet fruits,
Thou Lily of the Vale with fadless leaf
Of thousands Chief
Feed Thou my feeble shoots

(R. 92-93)

The syntax is regular and smooth, and the metre is patterned. The poem is conversational and argumentative, with a tone reminiscent of the hymns in the Bible. The biblical diction is seen in the choice of "barron tree," "My Lord," "My God," "fruit," "Crown of thorn," "Strengthen me." Through such diction Christina presents the theme in a simple and straightforward manner; the reader has no difficulty in grasping it. In the last stanza, the language of fruits and flowers has been used to describe God; this lends familiarity to the experience of love of God; the transcendent is addressed in homely terms.

Biblical diction is noticeable in "A Better Resurrection."

I Have no wit, no words, no tears;
My heart within me Like a Stone
is numbed too much for hopes or fears
Look right, look left, I dwell alone;
I lift mine eyes, but dimined with grief
No everlasting hills I see;
My life is in the falling leaf
O Jesus, quicken me.
My life is like a faded leaf,
My harvest dwindled to a husk
Truly my life is void and brief
And tedious in the barren dusk;
My life is like a frozen thing,
No bud nor greenness can I see;
Yet rise it shall - the Sap of Spring;
O Jesus, rise in me

My life is like a broken bowl,
A broken bowl that cannot hold
One drop of water for my soul
Or cordial in the searching cold;
Cast in the fire the perished thing;
Melt and remould it, till it be
A royal cup for Him, my King;
O Jesus, drink of me.

(R. 62-63)

The phrases "everlasting hills," "Sap of Spring," "broken bowl," "drop of water," "Cast in the fire," "Royal cup" have a biblical association appropriate to the theme of sacred love elaborated in the poem. The syntax is characterised by parallelism:

My Life is like a faded leaf
My Life is like a frozen thing
My Life is like a broken bowl.

The syntactic equivalence of these lines reinforces their semantic equivalence. The lexical cohesion between "faded," "frozen," and "broken" lends further weight to the intense feelings of the beloved, who considers her life worthless without the company of her divine lover. The last lines of the poem have a special significance: the plight of the beloved is conveyed in a language free from diffuseness or
vagueness:

My life is like a broken bowl,
A broken bowl that cannot hold
One drop of water for my soul
Or cordial in the searching cold.
Cast in the fire the perished thing,
Melt and remould it, till it be
A royal cup for Him, my King;
O Jesus, drink of me.

On the whole in Rossetti's love poems the language is free from any ornamentation and vagueness. Nothing is obscure or ambiguous. The descriptions are given either in simple, commonday language or in the biblical diction. At all the levels of structure we do not come across intricacy of any sort. The language of her poems is also generally simple.

Unlike Rossetti, Kamala Das does not follow any conventional metrical form in her love poetry, but writes free verse. There is also no consistency or continuity in her use of language. She shakes off all the norms of the poetical to give unabashed expression to her personal feelings. In fact, she modulates her technique to suit her purpose. The excessive liberty she takes with the poetic forms has provoked hostile criticisms too. For instance, Linda Hess has to say in this respect:

There are major weaknesses in Mrs. Das's book. These can be characterized as a general carelessness in composition, a
looseness typified by the alarming number of ellipses, three lazy dots thrown in at the end or middle of a line and seeming to say "this matter could have been elaborated much further, but I lack either the wit or the energy to do it."

There are frequent repetitions of words and phrases, another quick solution to the problem of filling up a line, but one that has disastrous effects on intensity and precision. There are patches of triteness and lapses of balance. Too often the end of a line brings an unnatural break in the diction, which seems to have no excuse except the whims of the author.

This criticism is valid up to a point, but not altogether justified. It has been a common device of Kamala Das to enact the situation through repetitions and ellipses. In fact it gave her poetry "an air of naturalness" and intensity. As we shall see her supreme artistry in the use of diction and syntax, makes her a competent poet who can forge her instrument to her needs. Linda Hess also recognises her merit by this qualifying her criticism:

"But all these difficulties cannot finally cloud the fact that a genuine poetic talent is at work here. It lives on every page is woven through even the most distressingly flawed poems. And in a few superb pieces it stands forth unchallenged and unmistakable."


7 Linda Hess, p. 38.
Though Kamala Das, like Emily Dickinson, did not profess a poetic principle or theory, both elaborate discussions and scattered observations relating to the poetic medium/craft are available in her prose and poems alike. For instance, in "Introduction" she discusses at length that the medium has not bothered her so much as the thoughts contained by it.

"...Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness
All mine, mine alone. It is half-English, half-
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest.
It is human as I am human, don't
you see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
is to Cows or roaring to the lions, it
is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears
and is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain
of the incoherent mutterings of the blazing
Funeral Pyre.

The above lines make it clear that she writes in English because it helps her to say whatever she wants to say.

Regarding the viability of English as the medium of her poetic communication, she writes: "Why in English" is a silly question. It is like asking us why we do not write

in Swahili or Serbocrate. English being the most familiar, we use it. That is all." 9 Yet elsewhere she writes more emphatically about it. "The language one employs is not important. What is important is the thought contained by the words." 10 This, however, is to be borne in mind that Kamala Das does believe in the conscious effort the poet should make to express thoughts adequately. She is fully aware of the immense potentialities of words. In fact, she has a poem devoted to "words":

All round me are words, and words and words, They grow on me like leaves, they never Seem to stop their slow growing From within ... But I tell myself, words Are a nuisance, beware of them, they Can be so many things, a Chasm where running feet must pause, to Look, a sea with paralysing waves, A blast of burning air or A knife most willing to your best Friend's throat... words are nuisance, but They grow on me like leaves on a tree They never seem to stop their coming From a silence, somewhere deep within .... 11

9 Kamala Das, "Replies to the Questionnaire," The Miscellany, 32 (April, 1969) XXXVIII.

10 Ibid., XXVIII.

Knowing that words could be a "nuisance," a poet has to be careful and conscious in using them as tools of communication. She says:

It is not essential that a good poet should change and recreate the language. But some words when used by a poet are seen to change and acquire a different meaning. Every good writer is a sculptor with words. An artist has the right to do what he thinks best with his material. This right he acquires gradually with experience." 12

From the above one can make out that Kamala Das does not consider novelty as source of vitality in her language. According to her, appropriate words were the only reliable means through which she could give expression to most innate and personal feelings and experiences:

...... On
This paper so bridal white, write of
Life's purity, of life's betrayals....
Write the Seeds first awareness, of
Darkened rooms, where the Old Sit thinking
Filled with Vapourous fear. Write without
A Pause, don't search for pretty words
which dilute the truth, but write in haste of
Everything perceived, and known, and loved... 13

The poem convey Das's belief that words come naturally along with ideas. It is quite unlike Nissim Szokiel's dictum

12 Kamala Das, The Miscellany, 32 (April 1969), XXIV.
that "the best poets wait for words." Kamala Das' diction is generally commonplace; at many places, the words used by her seem to have been conceived on the spur of the moments. This confirms her belief in the 'inevitable' flow of vocabulary in her poems adequate to the ideas they express. Das does not go to the past masters for her idiom, but relies exclusively on her own resources. Her words are simple and informal, used in such a way as to yield the complexity and richness of her meaning. For instance, we may look at the following poem:

... How well I can see him
After a murder, conscientiously
Tidy up the scene, wash
The blood stains under
Faucet, bury the knife...
And, what I am in sex who shuttles
Obsessively from his
Stabs to recovery
In her small silent room? 15

The lines describe the persona's distaste for sexual love. The lexical choices, "murder," "blood stains," "Knife," "Stabs" are all associated with blood-shed. Through this vocabulary the poet pointedly makes it clear that sexual

14 Nissim Ezekiel, "Poet Lover, Birdwatcher," The Exact Name (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1965) No pagination.

love for her is no less brutal than murder, and that her involvement in the act is a thing not of her choice. In the poem "In Invitation," she uses simple words to suggest the sexual experience:

All through that Summer's afternoon we lay
On beds, our limbs inert, cells expanding
Into throbbing Suns. 16

Here, the two bodies are apart, The phrases "cells expanding" and "throbbing Suns" are suggestive of the sexual act.

In "The Child in the Factory" also the sexual suggestion is implicitly conveyed in simple words.

Look at me, your voice might say
Cross the fence and come
To me, as close as you can come.
I am the one-eyed child
Sitting at the window-sill
With immortal. One by One
The imbecilic creams, untrue
By immortal. One by One
The intelligence fall, the pumps,
The pipes, the throbbing
Mechanisms, and with a final
Angry glow, the factory Dies.
Half drunk with sleep,
And sick with lies, I obey,
I recognise,
I love. 17

A beloved with her dreams of true love seeks fulfilment in sexual love and is disgusted with the act. Her dreams


have been termed "imbecilic" because they cannot be realized on the profane level but only on the spiritual level; hence they have been termed "immortal." The lexical item "intelligence" signifies the inhibitions being dropped before the sexual act suggested through the lexical items "Pumps," "Pipes," and "Throbbing mechanisms." The culminating point of the sexual act is described as a "final angry glow" and its coming to a stop has been suggested in "The factory dies." The poem ends on a note of disgust, apparent in the line "sick with lies"; the beloved recognises the kind of love possible of fulfilment on earth.

In "Captive," while adhering to the theme of disgusted love Kamala Das renders sexual desire in a vocabulary which is not sexual.

What have
We had, after all, between us the
Wombs blinded hunger, the muted whisper
at the core ... for years I have run from one
gossamer lane to another, I am now my own captive. 18

Here we notice that simple words have been placed in unusual collocations which lend richness to meaning. "Wombs blinded hungers" is such a collocation. The poet conveys that

18
sexual desire cannot differentiate between true love and mere physical pleasure. Therefore, "Wombs hunger" have been termed "blinded." "Muted whisper at the core" suggestively implies the culmination of a sexual act. The poet thinks that her physical desire has made her a "captive" of her own wishes. This is reinforced by the item "gossamer," signifying a web.

The syntax of Das's love poems is by and large analytical, often presenting a long chain of clauses. Through such syntax, she does not give elevation to the language but flashes out in random directions the distaste and scorn that underlies her concept of physical love. "The Stranger and I" can serve as an illustration:

I have seen you walk around in gardens 
Pausing to peer at names, knife-engraved 
On trees now grown tall; on beaches, 
With down cast eyes, at cock-tails, 
Glass in hand, bulking behind Those 
Potted plants; I've seen your bitten nails, 
Your sickly smile, heard your brittle 
Broken talk; I know you now too well 
Not to recognise ... 19

The analytical form of syntax here accords well with the description of the earthly lover presented with contempt by the poet. His smile is described as sickly and his talk

19 Kamala Das, "The Stranger and I" Summer in Calcutta, p. 44.
"brittle and broken." His behaviour deserves no respect.
The beloved's love for him has been worthless. This gains
weight from the elipsis in the last line "Not to recognise
...."

It has been Das's usual practice to use elipsis as
a device to reinforce her sense of futility of physical
love. For instance her poems of physical love entitled
"In Love," "The Freaks," "Convicts," "Glass" all have
syntactic elipsis at the end of the poems or in between the
lines of the poems. An excerpt from "Glass" is cited as an
example:

I went to him for half an hour
As pure woman, pure misery
Fragile glass, breaking
Crumbling ...
The house was silent in the heat
Only the Old rafters creaking
He drew me to him
Rudely
With a lover's haste, an armful
Of Splinters, designed to hurt, and,
Pregnant with pain. 20

The elipsis at the end of line 4 is meant to convey the
futility of sexual love, that ends only in pain. It
derives weight from the lexical choices of "breaking,"

20 Kamala Das "Glass," The Old Play house and Other Poems
“Crumbling,” “Creaking,” “Splinters,” “hurt,” all associated with an unpleasurable activity. The beloved who goes to her lover for fulfilment experiences only pain and torture.

Within the analytic syntax, Das often resorts to repetitiveness of phrases or clauses to lend intensity to the feelings conveyed. For instance in the poem:

Ask me, everybody, ask me
What he sees in me, why he is called a lion,
A libertine, ask me the flavour of his
Mouth, ask me why his hand sways like a hooded shape
Before it clasps my pubis. Ask me why like
A great tree, felled, he slumps against my breasts,
And sleeps. Ask me why life is short and love is shorter still, ask me what is bliss and what its price... 21

The beloved is disgusted with physical love to such an extent that she sees the earthly lover with scorn. The intensity of her dislike and the urgency of her message are conveyed in the repeated use of “Ask me.” This repetition helps the poet to linger upon the given situations and come out with its implications. A similar repetition is noticed in the poem “Drama” where unrequitted love is lamented.

It was soon my turn to be the Tragedienne, to take Vague Steps.

Black crowned, black veiled
And Wail, and beat my breast
And speak of unrequited love.
I am wronged, I am wronged
I am so wronged....  22

In view of Kamala Das's resourcefulness and skill in
the use of diction and syntax, it does not seem fair to
characterise her poetry as "full of syntactical and
linguistic defects."

On the other hand, she deserves
praise for chiselling her medium to suit her purpose. She
believes that, "a poem does not ripen for you, you have to
ripen for it."  

This process naturally demands a conscious
effort to manipulate words and syntax in a way to meet the
demands of a situation.

The foregoing analysis of the language of the love
poetry of the three poets, Dickinson, Rossetti and Das has
shown that all of them accommodate language to their needs.
Thus Dickinson does not bind herself to the conventional
use of language, but goes beyond it. As the creative

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23
C. Paul Verghese, Problems of Indian Creative Writer

24
Kamala Das, "The Sparrow on the Glass Pane," Dialogue,
p. 5.
impulse demands of her, she exercises her choice in the
use of words, and "Wrestles" with the language in order
to use it creatively. Mostly she exploits various
possibilities inherent in the language system at the level
of syntax; she dislocates the usual word order through
Hyperbation to secure emphasis. These dislocations
involve simple inversions that do not complicate the lines
and also complex inversions that often give rise to
ambiguity and obscurity. Her syntax often assumes analytical
and elaborate forms. Within such syntax, she invariably
resorts to dislocations of word-order. The resultant
complexity both conveys and matches with the complexity
of the argument she is presenting. At several places, she
makes use of similar syntactic structures. The obvious
effect of such repetitions is elegiac or meditative, or a
certain heightening of the tone demanded by the theme. In
some poems she verbalizes the intensity and excitement of
her thought through such syntactic device. She often
compresses language into fragments, deleting the grammatical
categories though ellipsis. Such compression of language
ensures conciseness, serving to convey the excitement of
her passionate thinking and also lending compactness to her
utterance. Dickinson's use of vocabulary appears to be
simple, but it is not straightforward. She chooses vocabulary
items from all spheres of experience. She mostly chooses
words having semantic cohesion and often juxtaposes concrete
terms with abstract ones to achieve vivid immediacy. She
also changes the levels of discourse. Such changes are
realised in terms of tonal shifts and rhetorical devices.

Unlike Dickinson, Rossetti's poetry is marked
throughout by simplicity of language, which lends an element
of stability to her style and gives her language a
recognizable pattern. There is hardly any innovation to be
noticed in the way she uses language. With simple words
charged with feeling, drawn from everyday experience, she
portrays several expressive moods. Her lines, stanzas,
phrases and cadences conform to the poetic conventions she
inherited. However, she chose to rely more often on
biblical diction. This helped her to lend specificity to
the experience she verbalized in a simple and straight
forward manner. Her syntax is simple on the whole, but at
several places it tends to be analytical, but is not
elaborate enough to lend any degree of complexity to the
form. Through this analytic syntax she gives solemnity to
her poem, appropriate to the theme. At times she uses
simple inversion of word order to achieve emphasis. But
she does not resort to any complex inversions that could
give rise to obscurity and vagueness. There is no
ornateness in her, but within analytic syntax, at times,
she uses parallelism to convey the intensity of her passionate thinking.

Unlike Rossetti, Kamala Das does not present uniformity of language pattern in her love poems. She goes beyond poetic conventions to forge a medium of hers to communicate her thoughts and experiences convincingly. For instance, her use of analytic syntax does not serve the same purpose as it does in Rossetti or Dickinson. The latter two poets achieve heightening of language through analytic syntax. Kamala Das, on the other hand, highlights the inadequacy of a particular experience through such syntax. Her use of ellipsis is not like Dickinson's. Through such ellipsis she does not achieve compactness of thought as Dickinson does, but shows the futility of pursuing such an experience. Like both Dickinson and Rossetti she uses the devices of repetition and parallelism to convey the intensity of her feeling towards a particular experience. Kamala Das avoids perfect regularity in language and uniformity of pattern. Her freedom from conformity to the established norms and forms enables her to convey the depth and sincerity of her experience. One can say that Das's deviations from or violations of the poetic norms are not without significance. They fulfill the needs of her poetic communication.