Chapter Five

Sensuality as a Key to Sensibility

The will to change begins in the body not in the mind.
My politics is in my body - Adrienne Rich

Both Anne Sexton and Kamala Das look upon human sensuality from a thoroughly uninhibited manner in their poetical works of art. Though they differed vastly in the cultural milieux in which they were born and brought up, their treatment of the subject of sexual passion in their art reveals remarkable similarities thus vouching for the universality of instinctual passion. As Virginia Woolf asks, “Who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet’s heart when caught and tangled in a woman’s body?” (50). This chapter makes an attempt to probe into the relevance of making a comparative analysis of the sensual themes dwelt on in their poems, with a view to achieving a mutual illumination of their arts, each in the light shed by the other.

As Theodor Reik states, “Confession is a repetition of action or of certain ‘behaviour’ substituted by displacement and with different emotional material, as words must substitute for action” (206), and confessional poetry concerns the “more intimate aspects of life, areas of experience that most of us would instinctively keep from public sight” (Mills Jr. 156). As true confessional poets, both Sexton and Das are
intensely aware and confident of the charm they exude in their feminine bodies and their capacity for arousal of sexual passion.

Poetry dealing “exclusively of love, sex, and liveliness in the tone of an insistent confession” is “that by exposing those dark areas which are normally concealed, it might touch some of the deepest points in the reader’s own subconscious and so uncover what is worth uncovering”. It may also be “part of an elaborate private therapy, a literary drug used to make the poet feel better” (Jussawalla 74-75). As Adrienne Rich observes, “the feminist vision has recoiled from female biology…. I believe … physicality as a resource rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully human life, we require not only to conquer our bodies … we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, the corporal ground of our intelligence” (62). True to Adrienne Rich’s observation, Sexton’s poems reveal a feeling of growing awareness of the impact of her maturing physique at the stage of her adolescence. Having become an adult, Sexton develops a passionate obsession with her own remarkable physique. As Ostriker observes, “Sexton’s material is heavily female and biological” (78). For instance, in “The Breast”, she dwells on her inner aspirations, and the body she would ideally like to possess: “I measured my size against movie stars. / I didn’t measure up. Something between / my shoulders was there. But never enough” (CP 173).
Kamala Das’s poems too reveal a feeling of awareness and self-absorption with regard to the impact of her own maturing body. Her poem, “An Introduction”, expresses her growing consciousness of the blossoming charm of her own lascivious body: “I was a child, and later they / Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs / Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair ....” (OP 26).

The protagonist in Das’s poem, “The Suicide”, is increasingly conscious of the spell her body casts on others. In this poem, her grandmother points out to her the charm exercised by her nubile physique on the onlookers, when she wants to go swimming naked in the sea: “Darling, you must stop this bathing now. / You are much too big to play / Naked in the pond” (OP 36).

Only in Das’s “Next to Indira Gandhi”, the protagonist shows a little impatience with her dusky complexion and momentarily chafes under an irritation caused by a feeling of inferiority which her father thoroughly resents: “Did I disappoint you much / With my skin as dark as yours” (OS 118). However, it is an exceptional commentary on herself on the part of Das, as there is, on the whole, a complete self-acceptance in Das’s art.

Sexton’s “In Celebration of My Uterus”, which Stark calls a record of “mystical insight and acceptance” (244), celebrates her womanliness in a thoroughly unbridled fashion almost in a Whitmanic mode of exhalation:
in celebration of the woman I am
and of the soul of the woman I am
and of the central creature and its delight
I sing for you. … (182)

Such an intense fascination for and obsession with her own physique makes Sexton seek her ultimate refuge in it too, in her moments of psychological anguish or tension by exciting herself through auto-eroticism.

In “The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator”, Sexton makes a confession of her obsession with herself through paradoxical sexual imagery simultaneously suggestive of agony and ecstasy:

I break out of my body this way,
an annoying miracle. Could I
put the dream market on display?
I am spread out. I crucify. (198)

In the context of the admission of her own self-generated excitement, the protagonist’s use of the phrase ‘crucify’ suggests both passion and pain; ecstasy and guilt. The protagonist’s feeling of utter loneliness symbolized by the strenuous stretching of her own passionate self is revealed in her pathetic admission: “At night, alone, I marry the bed”, a refrain occurring seven times in the poem evoking the intensity of her haunting obsession with the self. It also symbolizes its cyclical
recurrence in her life, from which she found no exit. Commenting on the refrain, Dickey observes that “Anne Sexton attempts to force resonance on a line which has very little inherent complexity” (15). These poems “come about”, as Sexton explained, “as a result of new attitudes, an awareness of the possibly good as well as the possibly rotten. Inherent in the process is a rebirth of a sense of the self each time stripping away a dead self” (Paris Review 163).

The poem reveals not only Sexton’s pain experienced at the “end of the affair”, but also the complex of her self-directed feelings of jealousy, anger and pity, all confessed through the objective correlative of masturbation, a deliberate act of self-destruction:

The end of the affair is always death.
She’s my workshop slippery eye,
out of the tribe of myself my breath
finds you gone. I horrify
those who stand by. I am fed.
At night, alone, I marry the bed. (198)

Sexton also expresses a feeling of anger, as she prepares to ruin her own body. Her body is under her own possession now, the sight of which only reminds her of how another man had exploited it thoroughly earlier. Overcome with anger at her own self, she takes her revenge now:
Finger to finger, no she’s mine.
She’s not too far. She’s my encounter.
I beat her like a bell. I recline
in the bower where you used to mount her.
You borrowed me on the flowered spread.
At night, alone, I marry the bed. (198)

Her loneliness at night grows restless and urges her to imagine the happy union of couples with painful jealousy, extreme self-pity and self-hatred:

Take for instance this night, my love,
that every single couple puts together
with a joint overturning, beneath, above,
the abundant two on sponge and feather,
kneeling and pushing, head to head.
At night, alone, I marry the bed. (198)

She comes to know of her lover’s wedding that day, and the thought of union of the couple torments her. She cannot think of his wife without the feelings of jealousy and loss:

She took you the way a woman takes
a bargain dress off the rack
and I broke the way a stone breaks.
I give back your books and fishing talk.

Today's paper says that you are wed.

At night, alone, I marry the bed. (199)

The persona's conflict reaches its climax in the final stanza of the poem, where she visualizes in her mind the love-making of the lovers that night in contrast to her utter loneliness. The erotica portrayed is visualized in more vivid sensual terms, frame after frame of sensuality, thus, realizing her own heightened excitement. The lovers get 'overfed' even as she feels 'starved':

The boys and girls are one tonight,

They unbutton blouses. They unzip flies.

They take off shoes. They turn off the light.

The glimmering creatures are full of lies.

They are eating each other. They are overfed.

At night, alone, I marry the bed. (199)

In "Double Image" again, Sexton makes a passing reference to how she "made love among my petticoats" (CP 39). There is no such explicit reference to obsession with the self in any of the poems of Das, but there are some instances in her poetry which are oblique in their suggestion of auto-eroticism on the part of the protagonist, such as the following episode:

"I kick aside the warm weather of my blanket, / the touch my own things,
breasts, / is an embarrassment ...” (OS 62). The popular doubt raised by Luce Irigaray is noteworthy in this context:

But if women are to preserve and expand their auto-eroticism, their homosexuality, might not the renunciation of heterosexual pleasure correspond once again to the disconnection from power that is traditionally theirs? Would it not involve a new prison, a new Cloister, built of their own accord? (368)

Such repressions, according to Freud, lead to “fragmentary manifestation of sexuality perversions and even neuroses” (94).

Both the poets have written openly about the femaleness of their being, especially their menstruation. Sexton’s reference to the fact of menstruation in “Those Times...” is couched in euphemism: “I did not know the woman I would be / nor that blood would bloom in me / each month like an exotic flower” (CP 121). In the same poem, Sexton talks also of the delivery of her two children, how they, “would break from between my legs / two cramped girls breathing carelessly, / each asleep in her tiny beauty” (121).

In “Menstruation At Forty”, Sexton refers to her abortion, the shattering of the hopes of her baby for whom she had already decided upon the name and the resulting nerve-shattering flow of blood. Referring to the
abortion of the foetus she points out how all her dreams of a child resulted only in a huge deluge of blood: “All this without you – / two days gone in blood” (CP 137). Sexton’s observations on the female body and its functions in poems such as the above have not gone down well with some readers, who disapprove of her excesses in the sphere of self-revelation. For instance, Louis Simpson goes to the extent of observing, “Menstruation at Forty” was “the straw that broke this camel’s back” (qtd. in Kumine xx).

In “The Looking Glass”, Das openly refers to her monthly routine of life while enumerating her gifts to her lover the scent of “Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts, / The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your / Endless female hungers. . .” (OP 25).

Sexton has a keen eye to obscure and record the changes coming over not only on her own body but also those over her daughter. In “The Fortress”, she notices a mole on her daughter’s face and feels teased and mystified as a mother:

I press down my index finger –
Half in jest, half in dread –
on the brown mole
under your left eye, inherited
from my right cheek: a spot of danger
where a bewitched worm ate its way through our soul
in search of beauty. . . (CP 66)
The phrase “a spot of danger” suggests Sexton’s sense of teasing humour as well as maternal pride and sense of possession of having such a good-looking daughter.

“Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman” is a highly feminine poem in which Sexton dwells on the parts of the daughter Linda, who is almost twelve using primarily agricultural imagery:

... I saw

lemons as large as your desk-side globe – …

the market stalls of mushrooms

and garlic buds all engorged.

Or I think even of the orchard next door,

where the berries are done

and the apples are beginning to swell … (CP 146)

Thomos P. Mc Donnell is of the view that “her womanness is totally at one with her poems. … If a woman alone, in the physiological sense, could have written a poem like “Menstruation at Forty”, then also a woman alone, in the finest possible sense, could have written so exquisite a poem as “Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman” (730).

Recalling the luscious and fleshy fruits, which are sources of temptation, the mother-protagonist in the poem expresses her anxiety for the young daughter: “You grow this way / you are too many to
eat” (CP 46). In Sexton’s sensual descriptions of her daughters, as Demetrakopulos has observed, “she recognizes her own sensuality and fertility, her own personal yet transpersonal eros, bursting out in her daughter’s body” (128). He further points out that Sexton’s daughter poems “reveal to the reader the degree and quality of psychic consolidation with which she lives” (133), and he is also of the opinion that Sexton’s is “the first psychoanalytic-poetic rendition of this theme” (144). As Betty Friedan opines, “Motherliness is a way of life. It enables a woman to express her total self with the tender feelings, the protective attitudes, the encompassing love of the motherly woman” (51).

Sexton’s “A Little Uncomplicated Hymn For Joy”, expresses the mother’s thrill at the vision of her daughter Joy’s physique: “A song for your knee-bones, / a song for your ribs, / those delicate trees that bury your heart” (CP 149).

Kamala Das does not have any daughter, and there is no such occasion for her to dwell on feminine details such as the beauty of her daughters.

Besides brooding over the ripening feminine charms of her daughters, Sexton also presents an equally ‘feminine’ description of her mother. As she readily identifies the mole on her daughter’s cheek as her own legacy, she identifies her own smile as an inheritance from her
mother’s: “Your smile is like your mother’s, the artist said” (CP 37). As Hirsch points out, “the early erotic attachment between mother and daughter ... remains permanently incorporated into the daughter’s psyche” (86).

The imagery of ‘breasts’ figures almost like a fetish in Sexton’s sensuous poems. In the poems about her own mother stricken with breast cancer, Sexton is moved to her depths of misery, over what she feels as her mother’s death, recalling how “They carved her sweet hills out / and still I couldn’t answer” (CP 38). In poems such as “Dreaming the Breasts”, Sexton employs the haunting vision of a nightmarish mammalian imagery of ‘bats’ with its associations of evil and hell, because of her inveterate sense of guilt: “the breasts hanging like two bats / and then darting at me, / bending me down” (315). Sexton also compares herself to a ‘bee’, consuming her mother’s breasts in her nightmares (315).

Sexton’s poems written on her mother’s cancer in general do not refer to her maternal breasts in any casual or sensual sense but purely symbolic of maternal love and exalted motherhood. In “Jesus Suckles” Jesus is presented as sucking the milk from the breast of His mother, Mary “like a fire”. Significantly, Sexton’s mother’s name was Mary Gray: “Mary, your great / white apples make me glad ... / I close my eyes and suck you in like a fire” (337). In “Again and Again and Again”, the ‘breast’ stands as a maternal image as well as a primary location for sexual arousal:
"Lust has taken plant in it / And I have placed you and your / child at its milk tip" (CP 195).

Both Sexton and Das lovingly dwell on the masculine physique exploring its charm from various perspectives. Sexton is consistently outspoken in articulating her response to the carnal appeal of her male lovers. Her poems not only describe the anatomy of the male body but also its instinctual response to the spell of the female body. In "The Breast", for instance, the protagonist expresses the delight and thrill at the touch of her lover's hands on her breast and the latter's aesthetic sensitivity and skill in exploring her: "your hands found me like an architect" (CP 175), paying tribute to his 'fingers' which are capable of awakening her dormant inner 'self' inch by inch: "I am alive when your fingers are" (176).

"That Day" again celebrates the tactile thrill the protagonist derives from the rousing skill of the lover's tongue and lips, employing imagery that are primarily animalistic and instinctual:

That was the day of your tongue,

your tongue that came from your lips,

two openers, half animals, half birds

ccaught in the door way of your heart. (CP 180)

The same poem elaborates also on the tactile sensation caused by her lover's undeniable all-conquering feline tongue, into whose domain of
enchanting spell she slips like a helpless fellow victim, annihilating all the divisive chasm between her ‘self’ and his body which is as solidly monumental and impressive like a Greek chorus on a larger-than-life, exalted stage: “with its tongue like a king making up rules as he goes, / with its tongue quite openly like a cat lapping milk, / with its tongue – both of us coiled in its slippery life” (180).

Kamala Das’s poetry is “as honest, it is as human as she is” (Wadia 7). In “The Freaks”, Das describes pointedly the ungainly cheek and the cavern-like mouth of her lover which shows her toroximity and her cool appreciation and growing curiosity of his dark looks, prior to further exploration on her part:

He talks, turning a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam, … (OP 11)

According to Anisur Rahman, Das “views the male body as an agent of corruption” and “regards it as a symbol of corrosion, the destroyers of feminine chastity” (38), and also “she is aware of both the beauties and crudities of the male body” (42). The image of ‘sun’ is “an agent of scorching heat, corruption and lust” (44).
In “In Love”, Das alludes to her lover’s passionate mouth, comparing it to the burning sun, which is about to overwhelm her inner world:

Of what does the burning mouth
Of sun, burning in today’s
Sky remind me … … oh, yes, his
Mouth, …. (OP 15)

In the same poem, the protagonist compares her lover’s limbs to the “pale and / Carnivorous plants”, suggestive of predatory instinct, which cannot be denied passage.

In the poem “Glass”, Das talks fondly of her lovers’ fingers, capable of evoking the nostalgia lying deeply in her unconscious, thereby underlying her own vulnerability. Their “Strumming fingers” may “revive / the fond melodies of a past” (OP 21).

In “A Relationship”, Das becomes so obsessed with the physique of her adolescent lover that she breathes her prayers into his bones and makes her passion for him transform him into a mature love. The carnality implicit in the opening lines of the following stanza ripens to fullness in the closing lines underlying the much-needed mutuality of desire needed for a successful relationship:
This love older than I by myriad
Saddened centuries was once a prayer
In his bones that made them grow in years of
Adolescence to this favoured height. … (OP 41)

Das’s “The Looking Glass” presents a sensuous description of certain parts of her lover’s body and the grace of their admirable movements, while suggesting also her own penchant for a dominant role in making love:

… Notice the perfection
Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,
Dropping towels, and the jerky way he
Urinates. All the fond details that make
Him male and your only man. … (OP 25)

Souza observes that in this poem, Kamala Das moves us deeply through her “passionate urge and drive of the rhythm” and through her “haunting images of sterility” (86).

Sexton’s is a “poetry of the nerves and heart” (Boyers 19). In her Love Poems, which is “the record of a love affair which … lasted about four years” (Shurr 245), Sexton’s body functions as a principal medium for experiencing the thrill of sensuality as well as gaining insight into the
theme of transcendence, a fact already recognized by some critics: 
"Throughout Sexton's canon the physical body is a nexus for meaning and meaninglessness, for nurture and deprivation, for wholeness and fragmentation" (Palaniyappan 58).

According to Morton, "the solidity of marriage is the pervasive theme of this remarkable volume of erotic verse" (60). "The Kiss" by Anne Sexton describes the act of kissing employing a paradoxical imagery, smacking of potential assault and consequently, unexpected injury: "My mouth blooms like a cut. / I've been wronged all year, tedious / nights, nothing but rough elbows in them" (CP 174).

On the one hand, only a lover's kiss on her mouth can give her such an arousal of passion leading her to a "resurrection":

Before today my body was useless.

Now it's tearing at its square corners.

It's tearing old Mary's garments off, knot by knot and see – Now it's shot full of these electric bolts.

Zing! A resurrection. (174)

The effect of her lover's mouth on hers is electric. Observing Sexton’s employment of the image of the kiss in the poem, Joyce Carol Oates has observed, "The unorthodox imagery is exactly right: her poems bloom, blossom like flowers, and yet they are small angry wounds, not to
be forgotten easily" (43). The term ‘resurrection’ is doubly significant in this context, for her biographers have noted that Sexton experienced a sexual renewal in her middle age, though such affairs, in itself a kind of ‘re-education’, which made her indulge herself in them in excess and explore its worth. The net result of her daring experiment was her Love Poems:

... in early 1966 Sexton was groping her way toward expressing discoveries about her sexuality. At mid life, she was undergoing a reeducation in sexual pleasure, and the experiences she embarked upon that year would inspire the themes of her most widely read book, Love Poems. (Middlebrook 248)

By her own admission, this ‘resurrection’ meant for Sexton nothing short of a discovery of a medium for giving vent to her long-suppressed vitality:

My nerves are turned on. I hear them like musical instruments. Where there was silence the drums, the stings are incurably playing. You did this.

Pure genius at work. Darling, the composer has stepped into fire. (CP 175)

The lover is represented as a musical ‘composer’ who tunes music in the nerves of her body. By the term ‘fire’, she expresses the intensity of her
passion, and this fire keeps burning and blazing, throughout her love poems. The image of the ‘breast’ occurs time and again in these poems as a primary source of sensation: “This is the key to it. / This is the key to everything. / Preciously” (CP 175).

The lover in this poem is represented as an “architect” and the protagonist recognizes what he is doing to her: “I am alive when your fingers are”. She is thrilled by his mode of introducing her to the ecstasy of her feelings by ‘preciously’ operating on the awakening ‘key’. The burning of fire in her continues to rage higher and higher in her to a point of near-madness:

I am unbalanced – but I am not mad with snow.
I am mad the way young girls are mad,
With an offering, an offering …
I burn the way money burns. (CP 176)

Such an offering at the altar of love on Sexton’s part is not simply sexual but spiritual and maternal as well, almost as sacred as a sacrifice to the personified god: “Predictably breasts are symbols of maternal nurture in Sexton; but, not so predictably; their presence can signify the withholding of nourishment” (Palaniappan 62). The lover turns instantly into a “jugful of milk” for the infant in him, and a passionate gift that burns “the way money burns”, hot and quick.
Love-making constitutes one of the primary motifs in Sexton’s poems in which the male is presented as domineering and overtly aggressive against the female. Sexton’s “The Interrogation of the Man of Many Hearts” presents such a dominant, chauvinistic lover: “To say I have bedded with her is not enough. / I have not only bedded her down. / I have tied her down with a knot” (CP 178).

Sexton’s “That Day” describes a luxurious scene of the protagonist initiating the game of love in a metaphorical language dwelling lovingly on the ecstatic moment of eruption of desire in the male. In “In Celebration of My Uterus”, Sexton refers to the ‘uterus’ as the “central creature” which earnestly urges her to “dare to live”. Sexton’s heart is consistently close to the mystery of maternity and creation. “The Nude Swim” compares the protagonist’s act of making love to the ‘nude swim’. The dominant metaphorical diction in the poem renders the experience described, more dramatic and enthralling. Hayman is of the view that most of the poems in Love Poems “seem to have been written far too quickly, as if she were rather nervous of over cooking emotional raw material” (77). Duyn goes on to the extent of commenting that “they have as little to do with believable sexuality as an act of intercourse performed on stage for an audience” (140).

Sexton is adept in narrating the art of love-making through an aesthetically appealing metaphorical language. Her “It Is A Spring
Afternoon” offers a fine example for such a poetic skill: “Two rivers combine beneath her … / The woman is all that can be seen / in her animal loveliness” (CP 194).

In “You All Know The Story of The Other Woman”, Sexton dwells only on the existence of woman’s physical ‘self’ while dealing with their love-making: “She knows flesh, that skin balloon, / the unbound limbs, the boards, / the roof, the removable roof” (CP 196). Though Sexton is intensely preoccupied with presenting an exhaustive account of the exquisite details of love making in words, she submits that her momentary enjoyment of the paradoxical feeling of agonizing ecstasy in sex is such that cannot find suitable words, for translating all her passion or excitement; as language falls flat before actual experience:

She is private in her breath bed
as his body takes off and flies,
flies straight as an arrow
But it’s a bad translation. (196)

In “Barefoot” too, Sexton ends up playfully exposing her entire bodily charms as well as the passion that consumes herself and her lover, who raging in the inexorable heat of his heart’s passion, runs in hot pursuit of her all over the place, having been subtly initiated into the realm of sensual frenzy earlier by the protagonist herself: “Now you grab me by the
ankles. / Now you work your way up the legs / and come to pierce me at my hunger mask” (CP 200).

Any kind of denunciation of sensuality is only fleeting in Sexton as quite often her feeling changes in the very next moment and she longs for becoming a victim of passion, at least for a brief while, again. The following passage depicts such a quick change of moods though it has a slight implicit touch of Electra Complex about it, on account of the mention of the fetish of ‘Papa dress’ in particular:

Please Mr. Gunman, dance once more, commenting on costumes, holding them to your breast, lamenting our black love and putting on that Papa dress.

Papa and Mama did so. Can we do less? (CP 201)

Sexton’s “Now” clearly renders the urgency of her passion in a forthright manner, with a perfectly worded title:

Now it is time to call attention to our bed, a forest of skin where seeds burst like bullets.

We are in our room. We are in a shoe box. We are in a blood box.

We are delicately bruised, yet we are not old and not still born. (CP 202)
The urgency and the immediacy of the protagonist’s desire is reiterated towards the close of the poem again: “He will lie on your bed / and urinate and nothing will exist / Now it is time. Now!” (202).

There is a striking contrast between the apparent finality and sufficiency of the carnal passion expressed in Sexton’s “… nothing will exist / Now it is time” and Das’s emotional striving for transcendences and aspiring for the spiritual, far beyond the pale of the physical in “Nothing remains but / You …” (OP 9). In Das, the urgency for the union expressed is not purely confined to the body alone, but symptomatic of the quest of the spirit and the mind, lurking deep within the body.

Like Sexton who finds her limits as a literary artist, while essaying to express the subtleties of carnal passion its climatic ecstasy, Das’s persona in “Convicts” too reaches the frontiers of her art when she writes, “There were no more / Words left, all words lay imprisoned” (OP 25).

In “When Man Enters Woman”, in a profound metaphoric sense, the woman is presented as the receptive palpitating oceanic surf, with her inviting ebbs and flows and whatever is exchanged by words by the lovers smacks of the universal ‘Logos’, the origin of all creation, seeking the essence of a ‘star’. As in “Now”, here again Sexton employs a metaphor that connects the ‘personal’ with the ‘cosmic’ or the universal. The lovers
"with their double hunger" strive to "reach through / the curtain of God" and God "in His perversity / unties the knot" (428).

The repetition in "We harvested, / we harvested" in "Us" also suggests a universal image, suggestive of the richness of the bliss she finds in the arms of her lover.

In "Mr. Mine," the early metaphors of the lover as an 'architect' and a 'carpenter' undergo a further transition to that of an industrialist and a 'constructor' engaged in building the 'city of flesh'.

Notice how he has numbered the blue veins in my breast. Moreover there are ten freckles.
Now he goes left. Now he goes right.
He is building a city, a city of flesh.
He's an industrialist. ... (CP 204)

These lines, besides expressing her ecstasy of feelings at the lover's touch, compare the climactic build up of the sexual act to the gradual rise of a metropolitan skyscraper: "Now he constructs me. He is consumed by the city. / From the glory of boards he has built me up. / From the wonder of concrete he has molded me" (204).

"Song For a Lady", by Sexton employs the striking metaphor of a baker's art for the lover's prowess of arousal of desire in the woman: "as
you knead me and I rise like a bread" (CP 205). In the same poem, the imagery of the ‘rain’ is used to connote the unexpected but incessant onslaught of the pullulating sensation of the raindrops of sensual passion. Almost all the visible parts of the female body are touched upon in Sexton’s poems on sensuality. One does not come across such exhaustive references to the details of anatomy of the female body in Das. True to Freud’s famous verdict on women, “Anatomy is destiny” (qtd. in Felman 20), the female anatomy does prove to be a destiny which lies bare in the poetry of Sexton.

**Eighteen Days Without You**, a cluster of eighteen poems by Sexton is significant for the novel nomenclatures Sexton assigns to her lover. She calls him a “hunter” who is in hot pursuit of her body, a “voyager”, “dogging up the old globe going west” (CP 207), and her “smooth smith” and “softener” and hence, “We take love in all its seasons” (208). Again in the same series of poems, Sexton recalls with sensuous relish certain episodes of lovemaking she has shared with her lover in an intricate metaphorical language:

Then I think of you in bed,

your tongue half chocolate, half ocean,

of the houses that you swing into,

of the steel wool hair on your head,
of your persistent hands and then

how we gnaw at the barrier because we are two. (CP 214)

In the final poem of the series, Sexton works up a literary crescendo of ecstasy, displaying her sensuality with the least inhibition: “I am laid out like paper on your cabin kitchen shelf. / So draw me a breast. I like to be underlined” (CP 220).

In her exhibitionist traits, Sexton emerges as a curiously paradoxical figure, an immaculate child-girl on the one hand and a voluptuous nymphomaniac on the other: “Draw me like a child. I shall need / Merely two round eyes and a small kiss.” (220).

While Anne Sexton confesses to the fact that “she owns her own hunger” (CP 173), Das openly declares that she is the woman endowed with “vast sexual hungers”. As Dwivedi judges, she is “unquestionably a poet of love and sex” (21) and her poems “breathe an air of love, amorousness and sexuality” (29). Parthasarathy also opines that “with a frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context, Kamala Das expresses her need for love. What is overpowering about her poems is their sense of urgency. They literally boil over” (22).

In the poem, “In Love”, the protagonist unreservedly admits the truth of her “unending lust”. While the imagery employed for the male involved in making love is that of a predatory but seductive victimizer, the
climax of the poem is arrived at, with the admission of the protagonist to her own concealed but inexpressible passion verging on nymphomania: "the sad lie / Of my unending lust" (OP 15). It is to her credit that the protagonist also realizes that her affairs are not entirely based on any love experience but on a mere superficial obsession, mere "skin-communicated" experience, and it is this cynical strain in Das that causes the difference in the degree of realization of the superficiality of human passion that stood Das ultimately in good stead, unlike in the case of Sexton:

... Where
Is room, excuse or even
Need for love, ...
This skin-communicated
Thing that I dare not yet in
His presence call our love. (OP 15)

In another poem entitled, "Ethics", Das compares the superficial attraction of the bodily senses to 'window shopping': "his eyes window shop, idly they cares / my brow, my lips, my breasts, ethically / he cannot afford more ..." (OS 121).

The closing line marks a sad realization on the part of the protagonist that there are 'ethical' limits imposed by society and culture on the individual which curbs his/her sexual inclinations. The lines are ironic
in the sense that the residual feeling in them teeters on a fine edge of ambiguity, between the individual’s penchant for passion and society’s right to formulate its values. To state in Freudian terms, there is an essentially tragic realization of the conflict within the protagonist between her ‘id’ and ‘super ego’ here, between her ‘instinct’ and ‘intellect’.

Growing into adulthood, Das, however, learned new lessons in love and occasionally mourns over the loss of her earlier native innocence, so irretrievably lost now. Meanwhile, her inexorable indulgence in lust continues to gnaw her heart with a profound sense of guilt in her, and she can hardly say whether this love-making goes on triggered off by love or hatred of the ‘self’. However, the poem provides only a facile resolution to a profound and raging conflict in the poet:

It may be
that in my heart
I have replaced love with guilt
and discovered
that both love and hate are involvements. (OP 6)

It is also true that never for a moment Das seeks to presume any moral pedestal in public and does not hesitate to own up her permissive way of life:
Reader,

you may say,

now here is a girl with vast
sexual hungers
a bitch after my own heart. (7)

There is perhaps one of the most daring moments of baring her "sexual hungers" in Das. There is even a vicarious suggestion of her making herself provocatively intimate with the readers of her verse here. Das's "Convicts" presents another episode of promiscuous union in the process of her exploration for love. The following lines seem to border on the metaphysical annihilating the boundaries of body and spirit, youth or old age, native or foreign, male and female, the conscious and the unconscious, all structuralized through a passionate communion in the arms of experienced lover:

... There was a burning in our
Veins and the cool mountain nights did
Nothing to lessen heat. When he
And I were one, we were neither
Male or female. There was no more
Words left, all words lay imprisoned
In the ageing arms of night ... (OP 25)
In “The Freaks”, another poem of conflict, Das makes sure that the love experience she describes is purely physical and there is absolutely no room for any emotional attachment, however much she might wish it to be otherwise:

... his right
Hand on my knee, while our minds
Are willed to race towards love;
But, they only wander, tripping
Idly over puddles of
Desire ... ... (OP 11)

There is somehow a vague suggestion of an ongoing quest in Das for a deep emotional involvement in lover after lover, which, invariably turns out to be a failure every time with each lover reaching out to her only for the mere physical thrill of the moment and deserting her instantly, making her continue to burn with desire for love again. She herself confesses in an article, “All at once the plot thickened with a researcher’s hunger for knowledge, I studied all men” (I Studied All Men 15).

The protagonist’s capacity for enjoying the surface pleasures of sensuality ("puddles of desire" and "lazy hungers") do not however, mean that, she does not look for anything beyond the physical thrill of love-making. Das’s poems also record faithfully the resultant frustration and
impatience she meets with, at the end of all her quest for fulfilment, through an exercise of passion: “An empty cistern, waiting / Through long hours, fills itself / With coiling snakes of silence … …” (11). Deep within herself, Das remains a lonely, disappointed soul, who puts up a mere exhibitionist show of sensuality. The irony in the following lines is unmistakable: “I am a freak. It’s only / To save my face, I flaunt, at Times, a grand flamboyant lust” (11).

A reading of Kamala Das’s biography and the emotions expressed in her poetry may render it obvious that all her apparent flair for promiscuity simply marks an exhibitionist’s attempt to conceal her solitude, and to seek a lasting love relationship. Her art tends to reach out ultimately to the ‘spiritual’ self in the other, of course, without ignoring the mediation of bodily ecstasy.

In several of Das’s poems on love-making, the male is presented as a dominant partner and “conqueror” of the female body. For instance, in “Gino”, the protagonist writes how she is totally prepared to trespass all ethical limits in her passionate devotion to her illicit lover. The only hurdle she faces lies deeply buried in her psyche in the form of the memory of a touch, stubbornly referring to get dislodged from her mind:

If I could only dislodge the inherited
Memory of a touch, I shall serve myself in
Bed room-mirrors, dark fruit on silver platter,

While he lies watching, fair conqueror of another's

Country. … (OP 13)

Das presents the male lovers invariably as rough and rude, in contrast to the 'fragile' and delicate woman figuring in her poem. In “Glass”, the protagonist says

He drew me to him

Rudely

With a lover's haste, an armful

Of splinters, designed to hurt, and,

Pregnant with pain. … (OP 2 1)

On the contrary, the female protagonist shows a high degree of tolerance, generosity, humility, self-effacement and endurance in submitting herself to such relationships in a vague or futile hope of attaining some kind of emotional communion with him at some distant point of time. Yet, as Spencer remarks, though woman is placed on the side of passivity, “authority, exercised by a woman with a hold over man’s affections … was feminine enough” (527). Hence, she is able to draw sustenance from even such short-lived affairs which seem to fill herself imaginatively, with a sense of transcendent kind of bliss, far higher to that of her male counter-part, in her quest of the soul.
"The Corridors" reveals admirably the emptiness the protagonist feels, a ceaseless pain after a scene of frenzied love-making, who finds no emotional response in the lover:

... I remain ever

A stranger, tramping the lost

Lanes of a blinded mind, ...

... and, once awake, I

see the bed from which my love

Has fled, the empty room, the

Naked walls, ... (OP 45)

Das’s “After the Illness” shows the persona’s pleasant surprise when she sees her lover continuing to stay with her, consoling her in her sick-bed. Hope seems to spring in her and she gives vent to her own bafflement on this dizzily happy occasion in the form of a rhetorical question: “What lusted then / For him, was it perhaps the deeply hidden soul?” (OS 50).

Being a seeker of genuine love for years, the persona in Das’s poems knows only too well, the worth of true love and the supreme bliss it brings. In “In Love”, the protagonist reveals her feeling of fulfilment in love, contrasting it clearly from the garish variety of mundane pleasure:

... when mouth on

Mouth, I lie, ignoring my poor
Moody mind, while pleasure

With deliberate gaiety

Trumpets harshly into the

Silence of the room ... (OP 15)

Das's "The Stone Age" is a rare account of an affair of the persona with someone called the 'lion' with whom she is passionately in love and is filled with ecstasy at his very thought, and the moments dwelling on her new found love for him transcends all limits of sexual expression. In My Story, Das refers to this love affair. She describes the lust of her lover, "handsome dark one with a tattoo between his eyes", as her "Krishna" - "You are my Krishna, I whispered kissing his eyes shut. He laughed. I felt that I was a virgin in his arms. ... The sea was our only witness. How many times I turned to it and whispered, oh, sea, I am at last in love. I have found my Krishna ..." (190-91). There is a pure and loud ring of euphoria about this expression of unalloyed passion:

... ask me the flavour of his

Mouth, ask me why his hand sways like a hooded snake

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. ... (51)
In “The Swamp”, a prose-poem, the protagonist is lost in a recall of moments of ecstasy, she shares with her lover:

... i am the puppet on his string ... he is the jewel i prefer to wear once or twice a week with pride he rubs oil on me he puts me in his bath tub i cower before his incurious stare the warm water grazes at my harbours and cools his eyelids droop he is about to fall asleep like frankenstein’s brutal toy ...

(OP 53)

The free play with regard to the punctuation marks and line divisions in the poem suggests the narrator’s state of pleasurable bafflement defying all order or logic. The same poem also talks of his ‘violent’ ways and his indifference to her after every session of love-making, when she yearns for his intimacy:

my beloved is armed with cunning and violent hates and mistrust but he comes to my arms unarmed and when the last of strengths in drops is shed i call him very baby i hold him to my breast but often after taking leave i open his door again and see him at his desk signing letters with the glasses with the stern look with the do you want something the change is so complete that i am silent and in silence must move away.

(OP 53)
The brusque 'silence' at the end seems to be ominously pregnant, as it is utterly devoid of any communion. In “Sunset, Blue Bird”, again the protagonist talks of this lover of whom she feels threatened, but cannot resist herself from falling prostrate before him like a fly in the fire, in utter helplessness:

... believe me he was like a man like any man he clutched me to his breast he said he loved me and i was happy and thought he was happy too ... after a year two yellow moons waxed and waned without a sign of blood and i told him lying on his lap i told him and suddenly the sunset on that beautiful face his breath was heavy in my ear he said not a word. (OP 54)

The poem seems to convey the artless disposition of the woman and the inscrutability of the lover in a metaphorical language. The description of sensual passion in the poem serves as a relief to the aching sensibilities of her yearning soul. Here again the male views the affair as merely physical, while the woman longs for a more harmonious and fulfilling kind of love.

In Das’s “Substitute”, the motif of rejection by the male is even more explicitly presented, but the persona is ready to face life without him:

Yet I was thinking, lying beside him
That I loved, and was much loved
It is physical thing, he said suddenly,
End it, I cried, end it, and let us be free. (D 7)

The lovers who fail to transcend beyond the frontiers of their physical bond, find nothing but emptiness in their relationship:

Our bodies after love-making
Turned away, rejecting.
Our words began to sound
Like clatter of swords in fight. (7)

Nevertheless, quite ironically, there are moments in the lives of even these lovers, when they transcend all the barriers surrounding them in the ecstatic frenzy of sensual bliss they share together: “We kissed and we loved, all in a fury, / For another short hour of two / We went all warm and wild and lovely” (7).

It is her continuous quest for profound and lasting love that drives Das's persona in art from the arms of one lover to those of another. As Kohli observes, “When Kamala Das speaks for love outside marriage, she is not really propagating adultery and infidelity, but merely searching for a relationship which gives both love and security” (27). Mithilesh K. Pandey also advocates the same idea (53). Ultimately, it must be conceded that the persona reaches a point of no return, having resigned herself to a life of
promiscuity and permissiveness: "After that love became a swivel-door, / when one went out, another came in" (7).

As Iqbal Kaur rightly points out, Das "has been liberal enough to hide every woman in the burka of ‘I’, be it a lesbian, a girl indulging in extramarital sex, an adulterous woman, a girl running from door to door for love or a raped girl. It is this literal use of ‘I’ for any girl or woman flouting the norms laid down by a conventional society that makes the readers feel that she is an immoral woman" (xxi).

Like Sexton, Das too employs the cosmic imagery to register her sexual experiences: "In him ... the hungry haste / Of rivers, in me ... the ocean’s tireless / waiting ...” (OS 27) closely recalling Sexton’s “woman, / like the surf biting the shore / again and again” (CP 128). The experience of love for the two is a different experience. “There is common agreement about only one thing, that woman’s erogenous zones are spread all over her body, that she is more sensitive to caresses, and that her sensuality is rarely as direct, as immediate as man’s” (qtd. in Chavan 7).

Sexton’s “The Break” written on an episode of the fracture of her hip, also throws light on her exclusive body. The significance of this poem lies in cutting the persona quick to the fact of mutability of her physique, despite all its lasciviousness and glamour:
My clothes are loose as clothespins,
as abandoned as dolls in a toy shop
and my heart, old hunger motor, with its sins
served up like an engine that would not stop. (CP 192)

In this poem, Sexton employs the images of 'town', 'country' and
'house' to denote her own body. It is ironic that the "real" problems
associated with her body make her twinge in pain and cringe in anxiety,
while the "zeal" of her passionate body "doth eat me up".

Sexton's "Moon Song, Woman Song", vividly pictures the fragility
and mutability of her physical 'self': "an old vessel who used up her oil, /
bleak and pale boned" (CP 196).

In "The Operation", Sexton sums up the ultimate fact of life during
her sojourn in a hospital as wearisome and mutable:

Clean of the body's hair,
I lie smooth from breast to leg.
All that was special, all that was rare
is common here. Fact: death too is in the egg.
Fact: the body is dumb, the body is meat. (CP 57)

and in "Eighteen Days Without You" also, she uses the image of 'meat' to
refer to the 'body': "I was the piece of bad meat they made you carry / I
was bruised …” (207). As Dickey rightly points out, “it would be hard to find a writer who dwells more insistently on the pathetic and disgusting aspects of bodily experience, as though this made the writing more real” (13).

Such an inner, humble awareness of her own physical vulnerability, despite all its superficial symptoms of raging passion can be traced in Das too. “Gino” is a good case in point:

> This body that I wear without joy, this body
> Burdened with lenience, slender toy, owned
> By man of substance, shall perhaps wither, battling with
> My darling’s impersonal lust. Or, it shall grow gross
> And reach large proportions before its end. (OP 14)

It is interesting to note that while the body is to be ultimately abandoned as a “doll” for Sexton, it continues to linger as a “slender toy” for Kamala Das. Das’s “The Suicide”, also reveals the persona’s utter contempt for the body, “bereft of soul”:

> I throw the bodies out,
> I cannot stand their smell
> Only the souls may enter
> The vortex of the sea. (OP 34)
The body is referred to as a “poor thing” and “dead as driftwood” which “shall bruise white / against the coral reefs”.

In “Loud Posters”, Das utterly repudiates her body and strains to locate her soul beyond all the barriers of her physical body. She has “spent long years trying to locate my mind / Beneath skin, beneath flesh and underneath / The bone ……” (OP 47). In lines such as these, Das expresses her profound spiritual longing in lieu of her obsession with the body. “Pre-occupied with the flesh, she swings between experiencing body as something sacred and experiencing it also as rotten and filthy” (Nigam 103).

Das’s ironic poem, “A Request” too warns her readers to be particularly alive to the worthlessness, mutability and mortality of the body, which is little more than ‘meat’ after death:

When I die
Do not throw the meat and 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. (OP 5)

It is interesting to note that both Sexton and Das use the identical image of 'meat' to refer to the 'body'.

It is pertinent to note that both these poets who celebrate the glamorous appeal of their bodies in their youth and the ecstasy of love-making throughout the active phase of their lives bear a definite contempt for their bodies and realization of the utter uselessness of the flesh at the end. Their poems thus show both sensitivity and sensibility. Both the poets show their realization of the paradoxical truth of the body, only late in life, just at the time of their admission to the hospital. However, once they are healed, they think of their bodies only in the context of hedonistic pursuits.

Like the phoenix, I rose from the ashes of my past. I forgot the promises that I had made to God and became once more intoxicated with life. My lips had without rest uttered the sweet name of Lord Krishna while I lay ill, but when I recovered my health I painted them up with pink lipstick. On moon lit nights once again I thought wistfully of human love ... (170)

Sexton employs other images like that of an 'acrobat', a 'carpenter', a 'cook', a 'jailor' too in the same poem while talking of the sexual act:
Lock in! Be alert, my acrobat
and I will be soft wood and you the nail
and we will make fiery ovens for Jack Sprat
and you will hurl yourself into my tiny jail
and we will take supper together and that
will be that. (CP 220)

Later in the poem, Sexton feels so satisfied with the “supper” that she cries out in joy, using a musical metaphor, “this is the music for which I was born” (CP 220). The meaning of fulfilment in life dawns on Sexton suddenly through her sense of fulfilment in the domain of sensuality. Full-length narration of sexual episodes is more frequent in Sexton than in Das. Nowhere else in Das do we come across such kind of experiences bordering on pornography, such as “he bit me in the buttocks” (CP 332). Though both the poets do gravitate towards the issue of sensuality in their poems, the degrees of their eloquence and inhibition with regard to the subject vary from poem to poem. There seems to be also a marked difference between their basic attitudes to the theme of sexuality.

Sexton’s exploration in sex seems to be, for the most part, sex for its own sake, a kind of cyclical indulgence in almost a mindless automatic hedonistic pursuit. Greg Johnson has pointed out: “There are many elements in Love Poems which form a constant, hopeful strand in the fabric of Sexton’s continued pain: humour disapproving attitude toward suicide,
and the remarkable development of the poet’s artistic powers” (92). Many of the Love Poems are really “ironic, love poems”, as Robert Phillips claims, “speaking more of alienation than of conciliation” (64). The kind of sensuality she presents in her poems seems mostly to be the expression of an excited outcome of that kind of triumphant self-fulfilment. In Das, however, indulgence in sex is not only for its own sake, but something beyond the physical experience – namely the seeking of the essence of the ‘other’ being, far beyond sexuality, through the medium of the body. In every lover she tends to seek a truer and deeper love and meets with disappointment in most of her attempts. Thus, in a sense, every attempt in sex with a new lover holds a tragic potential for Das, the concealed seeker of the psyche. In “The Descendants”, for instance, Das refers to her affair with a lover as a kind of death by crucifixion, implied by the imagery of the cross: “We have lain in every weather, nailed, no, not / To crosses, but to soft beds and against / Softer forms, …” (OP 33).

Sexton made several attempts at suicide in her lifetime. Das too has made quite a few references to several of her attempts at sex as ‘suicide’. “The attempts that her feminine self makes of escape in this way, seeking physical love outside marriage, are mere suicides” (Kurup 128). In having sex with several men, Das has died several times in her attempts too, as she herself admits in My Story, “Like the phoenix I rose from the ashes of my past” (168), an experience Sexton would put it as “resurrection”. Das
displays her sensuality in the pages of her poems mingling it liberally with the tears of her silent disappointment. As Dwivedi rightly observes, “As a true ‘confessional’ poet, she ‘hides nothing’ from her readers (to borrow a phrase from Anne Sexton), including what is ugly and forbidden” (iv).

Most of Sexton’s love poems can be said to constitute little more than a “record of sensuous pleasures” (Palaniyappan 67) unlike Das’s poems which are predominantly life-asserting lyrics. Kim Krynock wonders at the “reverent eroticism” of Love Poems which reveals “a poet who glorifies what she can” (313). Several critics are struck by the vitality of voice and emotions. Neil Myers praises “how subtly rhetoric fits thought” (104), and Hayman feels that these poems “are no less honest – often they seem too honest – and the emotional pressure behind them may be no less urgent, but the tension is no longer captured in the verse itself” (77).

Hughes observes that “the direct intimacy of these poems actually strengthens the self to a curious inevitability, in a particularized reality that nearly becomes myth” (141). However, Peter Meinke observes that Sexton seems to show “dependence on male love and sex, as if without them she was worthless, a nothing” (27). Rawley wonders at the favourable and unfavourable uproars about her work. “The critics … blamed her for the facile melodrama of her lines, but said she had promise. Later, amid similar cavilling, they would say she had failed to live up to her gifts. Meanwhile
prizes and praise rained on her, though prudery kept many from liking poems with titles like 'In Celebration of My Uterus’ …" (1491).

Das does not lag far behind Sexton in sharing her private and joyous experiences in love. Das has “opened areas in which previously forbidden or ignored emotions could be expressed in ways which reflect the true of feeling; she showed how an Indian woman poet could create a space for herself in the public world” (King 152-53). He also points out that

she is also proud of her conquests and ability to make men love her. Having taken a lover she will mock him. Rather than the seduced, she often appears the seducer, the collector, especially of those men known as ladykillers. Driven by a need for an all – encompassing love to fill her days, she is also someone involved in the game of sexual triumph with its trophies. (150)

Kohli is also of the same opinion when he says that she confesses she wrote the poems “to make a man love me, to break down his resistance” (29).

On the whole, it may be safely observed that sensuality in Sexton is confined to the bodily bliss, despite its macrocosmic wrappings from time to time, whereas in Das, sensuality remains always the basis and a medium for a transcendent reality of emotions, feelings and the other persons involved in the act. Sexton’s appeal as a poet is infectious for she revels in
introducing sensational as out of the way imagery in her poems in order to rivet the attention of her audience to her. For instance, she employs the shocking image of ‘disease’ in the above poem: “Catch me. I’m your disease” (CP 220). Sexton is so determined as well as devious in her pursuit of love that she does not mind capturing her lover and possessing him totally, even as a ‘disease’ would. No doubt, there is a certain sadistic strain about such an imagery.

Surprisingly, Das too uses a similar kind of imagery in her My Story: “I wanted to grow in him like a cancer, I wanted him to suffer from incurable love”, and adds even more significantly, “This cruelty is typical of women when they are in love” (184). In view to Das’s love poems, Iyengar observes that “love is crucified in sex and sex defiles itself again and again” (677).

Sexton’s poetry employs cosmic imagery often to suggest the sensual experience of the lovers. Nevertheless, the ‘transcendence’ suggested through such an imagery serves for the most part in Sexton, to highlight only the momentary intensity of the lover’s sexual ecstasy. The poet-protagonist seems to consider the moments of physical bliss as the zenith of the whole experience and does not hope for anything else beyond, at least for the time being. But the metaphysical probe seems to be deeper and greater in Das though she also frequently resorts to the use of cosmic imagery in the context of her frequent probes into the issue of sensuality.
There are certainly some obvious differences between these two poets and their exhibitions of sexual urges and affairs. We come to know from the biography of Sexton that she had a happy married life with her husband Kayo, who was good, and it was sheerly due to her frequent attacks of Schizophrenia, that she was not able to live a happy married life and that Sexton went away from her husband and launched herself into several lurid affairs. Conversely the reason for Sexton’s excessive indulgence in sensuality and pervasion may also be directly traceable to her mental illness.

Das, on the other hand, had an unhappy married life with her husband Madhav Das, a bad womanizer figuring also in some of her poems. If we go by her own version of events, it was solely due to Das’s unhappy married life and failure in marriage, that Das ended up suffering from severe bouts of depression. In the case of Sexton, it was mental illness that caused her separation from her husband, goading her on to seek asylum in the arms of her lovers. In “The Corridors”, she says, “I’ve misplaced a father” (OP 22) and hers was a sincere and yearning search for a loving father in each lover, which K. Radha interprets as the “Freudian search for the misplaced father figure” (15).

In the case of Das, the principal reason for the expression of her excessive sensuality in her poems is the outcome of her mental depression and consequent humiliations she suffered in the hands of her husband, his
growing indifference and her slipping into the nadir of depression to the point of developing a death-wish. As Nasreen Ayaz has rightly compared them, Das's poetic sensibility is quite akin to the poetic sensibility of Anne Sexton ... The experience of love which is tender and beautiful, joyous and painful, is everything for both of them. Both have achieved rare success in the understanding of Wordsworth's dictum of 'poetry as a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. Like Kamala Das, Anne Sexton's powerful feelings are projected through sex. (111)