Chapter V

Summation

In the poems of Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan and Kamala Das taken up for analysis and evaluation, an interior journey is made, and a lived experience is presented. Readers hear a voice that is open, and intimate in particular. It is a poetry that links to experience through the active participation of the poets themselves. It is a poetry that is an extension of the personages. It is a poetry that is real because the voice that speaks is as real as the poets themselves.

A study of the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan and Kamala Das from the points of view -- personal, familial, cultural, historical -- should not create an impression that they could easily comparted into these categories. In fact, there is an overlapping of ideas in their poems and there emerges a poet of blended vision.

In Kamala Das, there has always been “a strange blend of the liberated Western materialistic spirit and the traditional Hindu ethos” (qtd. in Kalaithasan 257). So is it in the poems of Nissim Ezekiel. Despite the divided personality in him, there is a commitment to India. Even in the case of A. K. Ramanujan, though he has relinquished his Hindu roots, there is always a hankering after Indian tradition in his poems. Though a product of Western education, he is not totally alienated from Hindu convention and Indian tradition. There is an identity of theme in all these three poets – the living past.

Confessional flavour is in evidence in their poems. The three poets confess their love, marriage and life. Even the language is nakedly embarrassing when these three poets talk about their unfulfillment love in marriage in a language that is unconventional and uninhibited.
There is an essential difference between the love poems of Kamala Das and those of Nissim Ezekiel. In Kamala Das’s love poetry, man is sexually over passionate trying to appease his carnal hunger with no response either physical or psychological from the woman but in Nissim Ezekiel, readers find woman as the focus of all his love poems. The protagonist in the love poems of Kamala Das finds absence of love or negated of love in her union with her man, whereas the protagonist in the love poems of Nissim Ezekiel always derives voyeuristic pleasures.

The marital partners of both Kamala Das and Nissim Ezekiel are from their own cultural backgrounds but in contrast A. K. Ramanujan has married, a Cherian Christian. In spite of his professed commitment to Braminic Vaisnava tradition he cannot help himself falling an easy victim to the sexy seductive charm of the streetwalker as confessed in the poem “Still Another View of Grace”.

Marital life suffered a terrible jolt in the case of these three poets. They have no soft word for their partners. There are warm references paid to their mothers by Nissim Ezekiel and A.K Ramanujan but the same cannot be said about Kamala Das towards her mother. A note of dissent can be struck to the voice of Satendra Kumar, “There is no conflict of past and present but only assimilation of the past and the present in the poetry of A. K. Ramanujan” (“The Conflict of Past and Present in the Poetry of A. K. Ramanujan” 46). In A. K. Ramanujan’s poetry the present is rooted in a past which is looked out through the eyes of the present. Past always haunts his poetry. Rama Jha himself confesses, “The past never passes. Either the individual past or historical past or cultural past. It is with us” (“A Conversation with A. K. Ramanujan” 5). He keeps on providing paradigms. By revoking myths in his poetry A. K. Ramanujan tries to perpetuate the link between the past and the present.
Nissim Ezekiel, one of the foremost Indian Poets in Indian English, attracted considerable critical attention of scholars in India and abroad. He cannot be said to have seen India through the spectacles of books. His observations of Indian scenario are based on his actual acquaintance with the Indian setting. His parents are Bene-Israel. His ancestors came to India years ago and made India their home and country. But Nissim Ezekiel, as confessed by him, cannot identify himself with India’s comprehensive past with its culture and tradition. In many a poem there is the recordation of the alienation felt by Nissim Ezekiel in the Indian situation. But at the same time he admits that he cannot detach himself from India. Thus there is in evidence a split personality in Nissim Ezekiel in a number of poems.

In the poem titled “Background, Casually” Nissim Ezekiel looks at his life against the backdrop of India. Though born a Jew, he has had his birth place in India where he lived, played, married and worked and had tasted the joys and sorrows of Life. No doubt, he was born and brought up as a Jew, taught the scriptures, and made to adhere to the style of life led by the Jews. Even when he went to school, he felt he was placed in a hostile atmosphere among Hindus, Christians and Muslims. He had his sarcastic laugh at these major communities of India. But he never feels at home among them. Even in the poem “Background, Casually” he refers to the atmosphere in which he has found himself in the midst of boys belonging to Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. He recalls how “A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears” and how “I grew in terror of the strong lands/ But undernourished Hindu lads” (179). In spite of this sort of unwelcome atmosphere, Nissim Ezekiel remains attached to his place of his birth. In the same vein, Nissim Ezekiel gives an unpleasant picture of the Roman Catholic Goan boys. These boys pay lip service to the prayers they say, but their prayers are not heart-sprung.

But all these could not make him accept unquestionably his Jewish ancestry. As Kalaithasan remarks:
There was no pride in him of his Jewish stock. But at the same time he did not identify himself with Indian environment. In the concluding part of the poem “Background, Casually” Ezekiel has no soft word for the Indian landscape. He is conscious of the fact that the Indian landscape with all its misery and squalor sears his eyes. Ezekiel manages to survive in the heat and squalor of India (“Ezekiel: A Split Personality” 45).

The idea that he belongs to the city of Bombay seems to have been with him all the time in the interior of his mind, though he is unaware of it. When he goes to Edinburgh, the image of Bombay mangoes appears before his mind’s eyes:

I have not come
to Edinburgh
to remember
Bombay mangoes,
but I remember them
even as I look
at the monument
to Sir Walter Scott,
or stroll along
in the Hermitage of Braid.

(NECP 293)

But soon he realizes that it is not mangoes he longs for: “Perhaps it is not the mangoes / that my eyes and tongue long for, / but Bombay as the fruit” (NECP 293).

Nissim Ezekiel has no soft corner to India also. The poems about Indian scene and situation are the outcome of the recollection of the acquaintance with such experiences. He calls India a country of hawkers and hutment dwellers, beggars, pavement sleepers, burnout mothers, frightened virgins, wasted children and tortured animals. All around him, he finds people undergoing different kinds of suffering. Even in the poem “Island” he calls India a country of sky scrapers and slum dwellers, “Unsuitable for song as well as sense / the Island flowers in slums and skyscrapers” (NECP 182).

With all these eye sores in the Indian landscape and ugly scars in the Indian society, Nissim Ezekiel confesses his commitment to be bound to India: “I cannot leave the Island/ I
was born and belong.” He wants to protect himself from leaving India. Therefore he offers a prayer to God:

Confiscate my passport, Lord
I don’t to go abroad,
Let me find my song
Where I belong.

(*NECP 212*)

Readers wonder why he should ask God to confiscate his passport, once he has decided not to leave the country he was born in.

The poem “India” brings out the double standard practised by Indians. For example in a New Year party Indians in the western style of life are there “men in grey or black, / women, bosom semi-bare.” (*NECP 132*) While men are out to enjoy such freedom they are very careful to see their women remain pure.

The concluding part of the poem presents another picture. The earlier description of wives sitting apart applies to married women but the description that follows now applies to young unmarried sophisticated girls who work in English Companies with British bosses. One such maiden meets an English boss in a large apartment. The first meeting turns out to be an introduction with exchange of intoxicating drinks, news and literature and enthralling music but what happens in the second meeting shocks the readers. Commenting on this statement Kalaithasan observes, “The sexy seductive advances made by an English boss and the struggle put up by the Indian spinster to quiet her spirit of conscience are well portrayed. The lines “certainly, the blouse would not be used again” tell the readers more of what can be dreamt of” (“Ezekiel: A Split Personality” 45).

Nissim Ezekiel does not fail to have a dig at the ignorance rampant in the Indian society. In the poem “Night of the Scorpion” the poet describes a rural scene. People stand around the scorpion-bitten mother and go on talking about mitigation of evil, a previous birth
and fortune of rebirth. They talk all at once without doing anything to end the suffering of the poor woman. The poet speaks of the attitude of the peasants, father and the priest towards the mother groaning in pain because of the scorpion bite. The single line “After twenty hours it lost the pain” (130) brings out the futility of superstitions to end the pain. Here again the father of the poet, though he is a skeptic and rationalist turns out to be a bundle of opposites. He tries both the mantra and the medicine as brought out by the phrase: “Trying every curse and blessing” (131).

Nissim Ezekiel is critical not only of the land and of the life style of the Indians steeped in superstitions but also of the English language spoken by the Indians. He has his laugh at the peculiarity of sentence construction in utter disregard of grammatical tenses in the poems such as “The Railway Clerk,” “Irani Restaurant Instructions,” “Good Bye Party for Miss Puspa T.S,” and “Very Indian Poems in English”. The Indian’s flair for English but the faulty way of framing sentences in utter disregard of articles and tenses is well brought out in these poems.

The study of the poem quoted in snippets underline the fact there is a double impulse working in Nissim Ezekiel. As said by William Walsh, “One is aware of a double impulse in the poet, which on the one hand keeps him at a distance from his environment as he clutches to his private history and aspirations, and which on the other, by means of a free and painful act of will, reconciles him to his environment” (“Small Observations On A Large Subject” 106).

The poem titled “The Patriot” pictures an Indian as a compound of contradictions. The speaker in the poem claims to be a stout champion of the Indian philosophy of Mahatma Gandhiji’s peace and non-violence but the irony is that in this country of Ahimsa, one goonda fellow throws stones at Indira Behn. He claims to be a Swedish against foreign things but the
irony is he reads *The Times of India*. The speaker talks about the National Integration and is proud of the secular character of India but he talks for the establishment of Ram Rajya. As Chetan Karnani states, “Exekiel has reflected not only what many Indians think but also the way they think in English” (97). In the poem “Truth about the Floods” Nissim Ezekiel exposes the indifference of the government officials and they are blaming Nature for everything gone wrong. Nissim Ezekiel brings before the mind’s eyes of the readers the picture of flood - affected areas. The government officers are sent for rescue operations and relief measures but they talk of their own district being flooded.

Love in its varied forms is the subject matter exploited by many a poet. The poetic fancy of Nissim Ezekiel has had a rich harvest of poems both sensual and at times spiritual. Nissim Ezekiel too is given to descriptions of love from different angles. Most of the poems deal with the physical aspects of love. Experiences, marital and otherwise, have had their impact on his life. There are also autobiographical touches in the poem selected for study where he talks about reminisces, painful and pleasant, of his wife.

In the poem titled “A Woman Observed,” Nissim Ezekiel in the art gallery stares at a pregnant woman with the protruding front. He is fascinated by all “the sensual moment bursting through their dress” (*NECP* 140). On a second occasion Nissim Ezekiel has the opportunity to see a woman in her tight pants going through the shelf of poetry. In the poem titled “Bookshop” he feasts his eyes with an anatomy of the woman scanning through books on poetry. Every moment of her physical parts sends him into rapture. Nissim Ezekiel with no layer of secrecy lays bare his motives in the heart of his heart to enjoy the cabaret dancer. In the poem titled “At the Hotel” he confesses that he entered the hotel along with others not to drink coffee but to delight his eyes with the sight of naked Cuban dancer.
The confessional flavour of the lines in Nissim Ezekiel cannot be missed. He feels gravitated towards the various organs of the female body; the breast, the thighs and hair, belly and torso, bone and marrow, lungs and liver and eyes. These images abound in the poem “Lines.”

There are a good numbers of poems dealing with the aches and ecstasies Nissim Ezekiel felt in his relationship with his wife or the protagonist feel in his union with his partners. In a playful but serious way he discusses pure and physical love. The poem “Jewish Wedding in Bombay” is his recollection of his own marriage. All this ritualistic ceremonies made matrimony an entertainment to be laughed away rather than an enjoyment to be cherished forever. The poem “To a Certain Lady” celebrates physical union. The poet has a nostalgic peep into his life. He is for endless male hungers and wants the bride to make a total surrender to him in her act of physical love.

With a touch of wonder Nissim Ezekiel looks upon the single hair and the places -- head arms and thighs, Nissim Ezekiel gives expression to the delight he derives at the sight of the breast of the woman bulging out of women’s blouse. He poses for a fine gentleman but there are moments when he is tempted to imagine unabashedly the anatomy of the woman waiting for a bus. This is clear in the poem, “In the Queue.”

The poet Nissim Ezekiel looks upon woman as an edible object meant for consumption. In the poem “The Female Image,” he reflects on the possibility for sexual participation; where it sprouts, “She lies, the female image / on the lonely pillow, in the single room, / incessantly reborn rolling the senses” (NECP 68). In the poem “Situation” Nissim Ezekiel expresses inability to love but his frustration is caused because of the fact that he wanted to love but could not. The poem titled “Encounter,” Nissim Ezekiel stresses the need for action here and now or then and there. He seems to say that it is much better to act
than the day dream. Nissim Ezekiel’s “Marriage Poem” brings home a paradox about sex that when one’s carnal hunger is satisfied, one feels the need for it no longer.

   It is sad to know the love has become elusive in the life of the poet. No doubt he is married, has a wife, and has had children but marital bliss has always been beyond his reach. Once love ceases to exist, the marital boat is wrecked. The poet’s fear keeps on harping on what he has missed. “Marriage” is a fine lyric; it is a sad reminder of the failure of his marriage.

   Next comes A. K. Ramanujan to share his memories with the reading public. Most of his poems are memory poems. Memory opens up endless possibilities for poetry. It is a thumbscrew that a poet turns to his advantage. Perpetuating past events and experiences across time and space, he makes them timeless and space-free. A.K. Ramanujan is a poet of memory. The members of his family flash before his mind’s eye and the Indian customs and conventions get branded on his memory and leave their marks in the poems. The family is usually the central metaphor that explores the hinterland of memory and knocks his experience into disturbingly vivid forms. A. K. Ramanujan’s poetry shows how an Indian poet in English derives his strength from going back to his roots -- his childhood memories.

   The following poems, for example, “Small-scale Reflections on a Great House,” “Obituary,” “Of Mothers, among Other Things,” “Love Poem for a Wife I,” and “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing” are the recordation of the reminiscences of his family. A. K. Ramanujan has nothing edifying to say about his father. The poem “Obituary” registers no filial piety on the part of the son. There is neither a lamentation over the loss nor an affectionate reference in the recollection of the memory of his father. The anguish-charged expression “changed mother” leads A. K. Ramanujan to say what opinion he has formed of his mother. He has a pleasant word for the mother. The poem “Of Mothers among Other
Things” is a fond recollection of the affectionate and loving care only a mother is capable of demonstrating towards her children.

The poetic piece “Son to Father to Son” is a dream poem about the poet’s father, his sister and his son. Nor can he forget his dream of his sister swinging high on the creaky swings or of his son darting an arrow at his daughter falling into the hands of hungry men. And the poet dreams of the ceiling falling over the son fallen dead with the eye shut. The poet wakes up from his dream and watches his son accusing him. That A. K. Ramanujan has no soft word for his father is in evidence in a number of poems.

The poem “History” unfolds an untold story of the poet’s petite little aunt. She turns out to be a sheep in wolf’s clothing. So far she has been taken for a sweet looking woman but the day the poet’s great aunt died she betrayed her true nature. The poet and his wife cannot share each other’s experiences because they cannot know each other’s parents. The poet’s inability to have empathetic identification with his wife is due to the absence of common childhood memories between them.

The poem “Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees” in quick succession with other two poems “Love Poem for a Wife 1” and “Love Poem for a Wife 2” record the unhappy reminiscences of his relationship with wife who is always wavering and vacillating like picking up quarrels in all places known and unknown and making nights sleepless and days restless. A. K. Ramanujan has no word of praise for his cousin. The poem “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing” records a remembered experience of the woman-persona’s childhood incident.

A. K. Ramanujan does not glorify the Indian Landscape. The poem titled “A River” recalls A. K. Ramanujan’s recollection of his visit to Madurai once at the time of the flood in the river, Vaikai, and also registers his criticism of the Tamil poets for their indifferent attitude to the havoc caused by the river in spate.
Indeed, A. K. Ramanujan strikes the readers as one who is passionately nostalgic drawing frequently from his memories of childhood. Memories of the unpleasant experiences and scenes do come to the fore in some of the poems purging the poet’s mind of unwanted memories. They act as therapeutic and cathartic agents unburdening the mind of the poet. As L. T. Arasu observes, “How an incident triggers the mind of the poet to recall an incident that happened long ago is found in his much – anthologized poem “Breaded Fish,” which is considered to be one of the fine lyrics in A. K. Ramanujan’s first collection of poems The Striders (1966)” (“Memory as the Axis of Poetry: a Study of A. K. Ramanujan’s ‘Breaded Fish’ and ‘Snakes’” 62).

In the poem ‘Still Life” there is a veiled suggestion of the poet’s romance with a woman and their sharing lunch. Her memory he bears in his heart, long after she is no more seen. The poem “Still Another View of Grace” records the protagonist’s feeling gravitated towards a streetwalker in spite of his upbringing as an orthodox Vaisnavite Brahmin. The poem is only a projection of the poet’s personality. The poems “A Hindu to His Body,” “THE HINDOO: he reads his GITA and is calm at all events,” and “THE HINDOO: he doesn’t hurt a fly or a spider either” are the projections of A. K. Ramanujan’s personality.

Though outwardly A. K. Ramanujan poses to be a sophisticated Western educated man, inwardly he feels drawn to his Hindu roots. He entertains the hope to die in his own native soil and to be cremated in the sandalwood to the chanting of Sanskrit mantras. The poem titled “Routine Day Sonnet” is a memory poem and he narrates how his conjugal life suffers a jolt.

The poems of A. K. Ramanujan expose his extraordinary ability to record facts in such manner that the past integrates into the present and the present into unknown future. His strong association with firm convictions in the native culture enabled him to see the essential India despite his long stay in the United States (qtd. in Satendra Kumar 52). Robert Lowell
once observed in an interview: “From year to year, things remembered from the past change almost more than the present” (Lowell 113). A. K. Ramanujan’s poems are also about the complication of memory by one’s engagement with the present.

A study of Kamala Das’s poetry from the points of view as the ancestral past, the familial past, the personal past, and the cultural past should not lead the readers to conclude that she could be categorized easily. In fact, there is an overlapping of ideas in her poems. The historical past and the poet’s personal past are not exclusive. They run into one another and become inseparable. The poet’s grandmother and the great grandmother belong to the familial past. Her feudal Nair ancestors belong to the ancestral past or historical past. The familial, the historical and the personal past together with her religious past do not remain apart from each other but cohere with each other.

In the poems of Kamala Das, an inward journey is made by her and she explores the territory of her bitter sweet experiences that have got printed on her memory. She writes “incessantly about love, or rather the failure of love, her unhappy personal life, her unsuccessful sexual encounters and relationships” (De Souza 20). She examines her inner world of failings and pains in love and love-relationship in a characteristic confessional manner.

The disappointment and the disillusionment she experiences drive her to go in search of an extra fulfilling relationship. She begs “now at strangers’ doors to / Receive love, at least in small change” (“My Grandmother’s House”), she groans and moans and constantly yearns “for a man from / Another town” (“The Wild Bougainvillea”), she runs up “the forty / Noisy steps to knock at another’s door” (“The Stone Age”), and she enters “other’s / Lives” and makes “of every trap of lust / A temporary home” (“Glass”).
She runs “from one / gossamer [sic] lane to another” (“Captive”). She realizes “love became a swivel-door, / when one went out, another came in” (“Substitute”). She hears each man saying “I do not love, I cannot love, it is not / In my nature to love” (“The Sunshine Cat”). She finds love “an empty gift, a gilded / empty container, good for show, nothing / else (“Captive”). She finds love to be a “hacking at each other’s parts” (“Convicts”), and also finds its worth in the end to be the stinking meat and bone of the body (“A Request”). She is aware of the futility of the human body. Hence her longing for freedom from the snares of physical love, and for the soul’s release from its mortal dress.

Kamala Das’s past life encapsulates in itself poems relating to familial past, ancestral past, historical past and religious past. There are evocative references to her grandmother’s younger sister, Ammalu, great aunt, Ammini both of them spinsters devoted to Lord Krishna. Kamala Das spent her childhood on the comforting warmth of her grandmother’s lap. She had an unbounded love for her grandmother, who lived in her ancestral house. The house appears to be a world in itself. As remarked by Sree Devi K. Nair: “The inmates of the house include the loving, scholarly, Nalapat Narayana Menon, the great grandmother, grandmother Kunju, the carpenter Sankaran Nair, the cook Kuppan, the goldsmith and a whole train of servants…” (“Gabrielle Roy’s Street of Riches and Kamala Das’s Childhood Memories A Contrastive Study of their Childhoods” 104).

There follows the pictures of her father for whom Kamala Das has no soft word. Her father treated his children like slaves and never allowed them to express their views. As remarked by Sree Devi, “Kamala Das felt that they seemed like ugly ‘rustics’ who looked like scarecrows to her father. He never regarded them good enough to be displayed to the civilized outside world (“Gabrielle Roy’s Street of Riches and Kamala Das’s Childhood Memories A Contrastive Study of their Childhoods” 105). She blames her marriage on her father. All the differences between father and daughter evaporated during his prolonged
illness. “A Request for My Father” reveals a respect and affection towards her father. She confesses the impossibility of achieving during his life time. In the poem “Too Late for Making Up” the poet lets loose her bent up emotions at the sight of her father lying in the death bed. The outpouring of the poet in the poem titled “A Requiem for My Father” is indicative of the unconscious outburst of her affection for her father lying dead.

Kamala Das and her mother Balamani Amma did not meet emotionally. My Story talks of highly regimented atmosphere in which the poet grew up under excessive parental control. Kamala Das records her protest against her parent’s attitude. Kamala Das’s mother is portrayed as very simple a woman who never knows how to butter people. Commenting on this line Sree Devi K. Nair says:

She was considered (Kamala Das’s mother) a Kutty, (which means a child) by her husband and young Kamala did not register in her mind any special love or hatred for her. Kamala Das’s father V. M. Nair was wealthy as well as powerful. He was respected and obeyed by all around him. Yet Kamala feels that she was never loved by her father. It’s a pity that Kamala felt in the presence of her father like stray dog, which had to run away tugging his tail at the harsh and loveless words which fell upon her like sharp stones (“Gabrielle Roy’s Street of Riches and Kamala Das’s Childhood Memories A Contrastive Study of their Childhoods”105).

The poet recalls her emotional affection to her grandmother and her grandmother’s house. The poem “My Grandmother’s House” records the poet’s loving memory of her grandmother. The poem “Evening at the Old Naapat House” represents the yearning of the poet for the grandmother and the Nalapat house.

Repeatedly readers can hear the voice of Kamala Das’s grandmother advising the granddaughter not to deviate from the path of innocence. The voice of the grandmother is heard in the lines that follow in the poem “The Suicide”: “Darling, you must stop this bathing now. / You are much too big to play / Naked in the pond” (109). The poet also remembers in
her nostalgic mood someone or other always objecting to her life style that will cast aspersions on her character: “… Don’t sit / On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows” (“An Introduction” 120).

Kamala Das pays tribute to her grand uncle Nalapat Narayan Menon whose house was a centre of scholars and became a beehive of literary and philosophical discussion. The Nalapat house hummed with intense intellectual talk. Kamala Das’s grandmother and the Nalaphat House cannot be thought of as separate entities.

Kamala Das’s marriage marks the second stage of her alienated self. The poet has a nostalgic peep into her married life. The reminiscence of her married life brings to her mind only bitterness.

The poem “Nani” portrays the tragic death of a hapless woman who was a victim of the carnal hungers of a rich Nair. The poem “Honour” is an ironic expression of the theme of suffering and dishonour to which women of lower caste are subjected. “Honour” gives a realistic portrayal of the poet’s feudal ancestors.

They (Ancestors) are imaged as base and bestial, who at night took to bed the little nieces of their low caste tenants, ravished and murdered them, then threw them into pools and wells. During the day they watered the hypocritical plant of honour. The poet unveils the ugly secrets of these ancestors whom she holds guilty of the most heinous crime against humanity. They masquerade as protectors of family honour and pass in the eyes of society as honorable men (My Story 34).

The Nair women endured injustice for the sake of survival but the poet could not identify herself with those women who have no voice of their own.

The poems of Kamala Das in which the poet’s personal past become submerged in the poet’s familial past include “Millionaire’s at Marine Driver,” “Blood,” My Grandmother’s House,” “Half Day’s Bewitchment,” “A Hot Noon in Malabar,” “Evening at the Old Nalapat House,” and “Compositions.” While poems like “Nani,” “Honour” and her recollection of
indecent advances immediately after the engagement and his impatient behaviour on the wedding night cannot be erased from her personal past. Again the shock wave she gave to the Keralities reading public by her conversion to Islam forms the woof of her personal past. Kamala Das is alive in her poems though she is dead. It is quite impossible to find another woman like Kamala Suraiya. The different aspects of the poet’s past are interwoven and interconnected.

The poet’s historical past and the poet’s familial past overlap and at points become inseparable. The poet’s recollection of her past life, with the husband is painful. She has no soft word for her husband during his lifetime but it takes a sudden turn towards identifying herself with him in the last days of his life to the extent of her willingness to breathe her last in the arms of her husband.

The terrible toll of lives of the innocent men, women and children of Tamil population in the hands of the blood thirsty Sri Lankan Sinhalese army made the poet wield her pen to expresses her poignant feelings in accents of anger in the poems “Smoke in Colombo,” “The Sea at Galle Face Green.” The persona in Kamala Das’s poems is only a projection of her personality.

The poem titled “The Old Play House” revolves round the marital life of Kamala Das. Her story is a story of woman who, from man to man in search of sexless love, found lust and sex in every man. In her earlier poetry, the readers can find her a poet of gross physicality portraying her sexual pranks and encounters. In her later poetry, she emerges into a poet of sublime spirituality, turning away from sexual love, and seeing love as a communion of the spirit rather than of the body (qtd. in Kalaithasan 33). In her search for an ideal lover, the poet passes through numberless men, “like coins/ into various hands.” Through the vicissitude of her clandestine love affairs, it is Lord Krishna who has been her True Paramour. This is well
brought in the poems “Radha,” “Ghanasyam,” “A Phantom – Lotus,” and “A Man is a Season.”

The poet wants more than physical love and yearns for an ideal love of Radhakrishna archetype. The experiences narrated here under are before her conversion to Islam. On December 26, 2009 she was formally initiated into Islam by the religious scholars from Malabar at her house in Kochi. Shocking are the statements made by Kamala Suraiah after her conversion to Islam. “I am converting Krishna into Allah and making him the prophet after naming him Mohamed. If you go to Guruvayour now, Krishna will not be there... he will be with me” (qtd. in Farzana Versey, “From Krishna to Allah: Kamala Das Surayya” 5). After her conversion to Islam, Kamala Das wrote a poem “Yah Allah” (January-March 2000) under the name Suraiah Begum. The poem celebrates the new faith and glorifies the Prophet Mohammed and His glorious blessings. It is marked by personal touches where the poet highlights her pathetic situation and prays for forgiveness.

Fact of fiction, people and events, episodes and encounters become alive in the pages of Kamala Das. Whether she really recollects them or whether she is doing an imaginary reconstruction, shall be known, perhaps, Kamala Das, even! It is anybody’s guess work. Her recollections and remembrances, thought and feelings act and react on each other – like multifaceted mirrors producing infinite images. So are her writings – the stories, the poems and My Story reflecting themselves into each other.

The critics are apt to arrive at the conclusion that Kamala Das is a poet of endless female hunger. Her My Story and a number of her poems read like pages from a book on pornography. The critics and journalists have been heartless and merciless and she has been misrepresented (qtd. in Kalaithasan 259). The critics do not realize, “The writer is a human being too not, somebody you can impale on your pen” (qtd. in Gopal 65). The poet considers them “a lot, so full of venom” (qtd. in Remedies 59).
A peep into the past of these three poets has given rise to a number of poems and the experiences have been poetically articulated in the pieces they wrote. The facts stated in these poems are not dry bones but they become alive in the pages carrying the poetical image of these three poets. The past is treasured in the memories of the three poets, Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan and Kamala Das and it is artistically articulated in the corpus of their poetry. The past is looked at from different angles by these three either from personal past or familial past or ancestral past. Each poet taken up for analysis makes a nostalgic peep into the recollection of their experiences they underwent in the course of their lives. It leaves either an aching heart for the past or a distaste for the past. The vibrant past echoes through the literary creations of the three founding fathers of Indian English. The poems that have been analyzed in the foregoing chapters indicate the flashes of memory that have shaped the whoops and warps of the poetical works of these three poets taken up for study.

This thesis is no comparative study. It is an academic exercise in the interpretation and explication of the works of these three poets. The foregoing discussion registers that Indian poetry in English has turned its back on existing Romantic tradition, and imitative Victorian style and introduced contemporary idiom and imagery to suit the temper of the times against the back drop of Indian setting and sensibility in the hands of Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, now known as Kamala Suraya, amd A. K. Ramanuajn. To quote Mishra Sanjit:

While Kamala Das is obsessively preoccupied with defining self in terms of her personal experience, A. K. Ramanuajn picks up the family metaphor to relate himself to South Indian Brahmanic tradition; no crux of Nissim Ezekiel’s poetic absorption is to find his relevance in terms of the surroundings reality (154).

Kamala Das is preoccupied with her ‘self,’ A. K. Ramanuja with the family metaphor and Nissim Ezekiel with backward place.
The present intensive study with reference to the three poets discussed in the preceding pages does not glorify the contemporary Indian life nor fail to pinpoint the cracks in the fabric of Indian society. In all the three there is a deviation from Indian ethos. These three writers whose language ring with vigour whose thoughts wield power and whose feelings grip the readers evoke the sympathetic response from a widening circle of readers. These three poets share with the reading public their memories bitter or sweet. There is an identity of theme in the works of all the three poets. Readers are sure to find two streams of culture, Indian and Jewish or Western in Nissim Ezekiel, Indian and sophisticated western milieu in Kamala Das and tradition-bound Vaisnavite Brahmin culture and Western life style in A. K. Ramanujan.

The present study shows the well-marked phases in the memory graphs of the three creative writers and the significant milestones reached in their creative Odyssey. While Kamala Das strikes the readers as a poet of fact and fiction, Nissim Ezekiel comes out as a poet of realism with no colouring of imagination but A. K. Ramanujan emerges a poet with passion for truth. A. K. Ramanujan’s poetry derives its roots from the past life he lived in India but which he now recalls away in America; Nissim Ezekiel’s stems from the environment in which he lived and to which he was exposed. The poems of Kamala Das, in particular, are echoes from her past life lived as an unloved child at home, an unwanted woman married to a loveless husband and a frustrated wife seeking love at another’s door and always sending shock waves by her unconventional style of life and by her unorthodox views on love, sex and marriage.

The different aspects of the past discussed in the poems of the three poets lend themselves into different types of past -- familial, ancestral, personal, religious but they can never be kept as water tight compartments. They do overlap in the sense that some of the relics of the past analysed for example in the familial past makes inroads into the personal
past and those in the personal past into the religious past. Though the events and incidents relate to their bygone days, they become alive in the pages of these three poets, thus justifying the researcher’s finding that the past is not dead but it lives in the present in the poetical works of Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan and Kamala Das.

No doubt years have rolled by since the three poets lived and wrote but these poets cross over space and time, sit by our side and chat cheek by chowl and whisper into the ears of the readers their past experiences and episodes. The present researcher’s say on these three poets cannot be called to have the finality of evaluation. There is scope for further research, and the investigation can be extended by taking to the road not taken or less travelled by others. A comparative study of these three poets with their Western counterparts is sure to yield richer harvests in pastures new.