STRUCTURES OF DESIRE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DAS AND WRIGHT
Central to the feminist discourse are two important issues, one that is to struggle to reconstruct a feminist literary tradition, and the other, is to define women’s writing Virginia Woolf, for the first time, interrogated the so-called mainstream writing, while making a claim to the type of writing that suits women’s imagination. Although Woolf did not overtly underline subjectivity in essential and unitary terms she made a strong claim, mapping a tradition from Aphra Behn till her time, arguing that the women writers in English during different centuries through their struggles, have been able to express their experiences and give shape to their imaginations. Drawing upon the works of Virginia Woolf, Tillie Olsen, Ellen Moers, Elaine Showalter and others, “women’s writing” has emerged today as an area of disciplinary study. Showalter examines British women novelists since the Brontes from the point of view of women’s experience and outlines three phases of its development: ‘Feminine’, ‘Feminist’, and ‘Female’, each achieving a greater liberation than its predecessor without losing its distinctiveness as women’s writing. She also discusses the nature of female creativity and language, and the historical problem facing women as writers. She maintains, “Representatives of a formal Female Aesthetic such as Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, begin to think in terms of male and female sentences, and divide their works into
"masculine" journalism and "feminine" fictions, redefining and sexualising external and internal experience" (in Rice and Waugh, ed: 1989: 103).

Making a value judgement, she further maintains that "The feminist content of feminine art is typically oblique, displaced, ironic and subversive: one has to read it between the lines, in the missed possibilities of the text (ibid.: 101)." Considering the whole field of feminist activity, Showalter points at the fact that "gynocriticism" deals with distinctive themes, structures and genres of women's writing.

Woolf believed that women have always faced social and economic obstacles to their literary ambitions. In "Professions for Women", she discussed the disabling situation of 19th century womanhood. The ideal of the "Angel in the House" too for a woman insists on her to be sympathetic, unselfish, and pure. However in order to make space for writing, a woman had to use "wiles" and flattery. The taboo of the expression of female passion was another serious restriction. Woolf's A Room of One's Own (1929) opens up the question of female language and the nature of genres. However, patriarchy continued to be the most important challenge to feminists of all hue. Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949) established the principles of modern feminism. When a woman tries to define herself, she starts by saying, "I am a woman", revealing the fundamental
asymmetry between the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine'. De Beauvoir showed with great clarity that men's dominance has been secured through the ages by ideological power: legislators, priests, scientists and philosophers have all prompted the idea of women's subordination. For feminist's to break this patriarchal domination it is necessary to challenge men in all spheres of critical and creative activity. The psychoanalytical theories of Lacan and Kristeva have suggested that female sexuality is revolutionary, subversive and heterogeneous. The female is simply to remain outside the male definition of the female.

Helene Cixous’s "The Laugh of the Medusa" is a celebrated manifesto of women's writing that calls for women 'to put their bodies into their writing'. She believes that feminist writing will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phalocentric system. Female sexuality is directly associated with poetic productivity - with the psychosomatic drives which disrupt the tyranny of unified and logocentric meaning. In her words:

I have been amazed more than once by a description a woman gave me of a world all her own which she had been secretly haunted since early childhood. A world of searching, the elaboration of a knowledge, on the basic of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity. This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a
resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful
Beauty will no longer be forbidden

I wished that woman would write and proclaim
this unique empire, so that other women, other
acknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim, I too overflow: my
desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of
songs. Time and again, I, too, have felt so full of
luminous torrents that I would burst, burst with forms
much more beautiful than those which are put up in
frames and sold for a stinking fortune. And I, too, said
nothing, showed nothing; I didn’t open my mouth, I
didn’t repant my half of the world.

- I write woman, woman must write woman.
And man, man. So only an oblique consideration will be
found here of man, its up to him to say where his
masculinity and femininity are at: this will concern us
once men have opened their eyes and seen themselves
clearly. (Selden, 1992: 541 - 542)

Besides gender difference, there is a lot of debate
among feminists in relocating women as the subject. Subjectivity like
identity is linguistically and discursively constructed and displaced across
the range of discourses in which the concrete individual participates. In
contrast to post-modern and post-structuralist projections of the subject
, feminism put forward an alternative conception of the subject as
constructed through relationships.

If women have traditionally been positioned in terms of
‘otherness’, then the desire to become subjects (which
dominate the first phase of post-1960s feminism) is
likely to be stronger than the desire to deconstruct,
decentre or fragment subjectivity (which dominate post
1960s postmodernist practice and post structuralist theory).
They have not yet experienced this ‘whole’ or
‘unitary’ or ‘essential’ subjectivity. However, it seems
to me that it is the gradual recognition of the value of constructing human identity in terms of relationship and dispersal, rather than as a unitary, self-directing, isolated ego, which has fundamentally altered the course of modern and contemporary women's writing concerned to challenge gender stereotypes (Eagleton, ed. 1996 360-61)

From the above discussion, it follows that location of the subject by far is central to creativity. Subjectivity in the context of women's writing does not stand on its own, but is related to self experience, that views female anatomy as different. While articulating its needs and responses to relationships. Subjectivity has been further recognized as a relative and shifting position. It has been understood that for some of the women writers of the 60s and 70s unity rather than dispersal has been central to creative endeavour. To believe that there might be natural or true self that should be discovered through creativity is not unlikely in contemporary poetry

Women's writing variously seeks liberation of the subject from political, social, economic and literary imprisonment. Mrs. Browning's version of caged bird metaphor in Aurora Leigh is likened to the situation of women in 19th century society. Aurora says:

A sort of cage bird life, born in a cage,
Accounting that to leap from perch to perch
Was act and joy enough for any bud
Dear heaven, how silly are the things that live
In thickets, and eat berries!
I alas,
A wild bird scarcely fledged, was brought to her cat
And she was there to meet me. Very kind.
Bring the clean water, give out the fresh seed.
(Moers Ellen in Eagleton ed. 1996 : 294)

In these lines, the agony and anxiety of Aurora is clearly manifest.
The poetic motif clearly implies that the bird’s habitation is the free
and unlimited sky and not a cage. However, total freedom in
articulating one’s body and experience started with Anne Sexton. Sexton
dared to create poetry about breasts and wombs, about abortion,
menstruation, masturbation, incest and adultery. She broke new grounds,
shattered taboos and as a poet was able to find unity between a
woman’s sexuality and her spirituality, her creativity and her
procreativity, herself and other women, her private and her public self.
Sexton writes:

Everyone in me is a bird.
I am beating all my wings.
They wanted to cut you out
but they will not.
They said you were immeasurably empty

but you are not.
They said you were sick unto dying
but they were wrong.
You were singing like a school girl.
You are not torn.
Sweet weight,
in celebration of the woman I am
and of the soul of the woman I am
and of the central creature and its delig
I sing for you. I dare to live.
Hello, spirit. Hello, cup.
Fasten, cover. Cover that does contain.
Hello to the soil of the fields.
"It seems, while celebrating sisterhood of women, Sexton struck a note of joy in transcendence, in celebrating women's physical nature.

From the time of Anne Sexton to the present day, women's writing has come a long way. It is not only that contemporary poets do not hesitate in writing their bodies into poetry, but also attempt to redefine man-woman relationship. Themes such as love, marriage, motherhood have been prominently focused in their creative works. Kanada Das and Judith Wright have variously articulated these themes in their poems. As creative writers, their unswerving allegiance have been to the cause of women's liberation. However, the sense of freedom is conceived differently with shifting emphases that direct the reader's attention to their social, marital and material backgrounds.

Kanada Das has used the confessional mode in most of her significant poems. Her poems, while painting her pains, also depict the pressures a modern Indian woman encounters in her journey from bondage to freedom and tradition to modernity. Robert Lowell once described Sylvia Plath's confessional poems as the 'autobiography of a fever.' This is true of Kanada Das's poems also. Her fever can be traced back to the adolescent fear about her femininity, the complex
about her dark skin and ordinary features, the suspected unconcern of her husband and her neurotic loneliness. Judith Wright's poems, on the other hand, reflect the harmonious relationship of the world of man and nature and she is able to reconcile both the strands in a philosophical perspective. The movement towards philosophy may have been largely due to Judith Wright's own interest in philosophy, but there were certainly other influences which reinforced this - the most important influence being that of her husband. In the poetry of Kamala Das we come across her deep sense of ennui and boredom, anxiety and restlessness, caused by her ill-matched and ill-fated marriage. The nuptial knot in which she has been tied cannot be undone and this has spelled disasters for her in her personal life. Clearly, as is manifest in her poems and more so fully in her autobiography, Kamala Das's husband is an unfeeling soul, having contracts with 'sluts and nymphomaniacs' and forcing his wife to turn revengeful towards him and to betray him for another man. In the poem "The Old Playhouse", she writes:

...You called me wife,
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
To offer at the right moments the vitamins Covering
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate and magic loaf and
Became a dwarf.  (1973: 12-16)
On the contrary, Judith Wright’s married life has been one of smooth sailing with a perfect understanding with her man. In this regard, Wright says:

I have been lucky in my relationship with men especially with my husband with whom I worked in a kind of intellectual symbiosis.

(1981:104)

It is not generally realised that the late J.P. McKinney, the husband of Judith Wright, was a philosopher of no mean ability and reputation. A creative interaction of ideas in the McKinney household created a cultural climate which was philosophical in tenor. Poems which give imaginative expression to philosophical concepts were obviously the subjects of stimulating discussion.

Poetry is but the thought and words in which emotion spontaneously embodies itself. It is an organisation of the best words in the best possible order. There is something more than mere expression of imagination in great poetry and it is futile to separate thoughts, emotions and expression in poetry as if they are irreconcilable entities. In great poetry, the poet is concerned with the revelations of the self, the joys, sufferings, longings and anguish of the self, caught in the welter of existence. It celebrates man’s ability to observe and apprehend experience as well as to manipulate language expressively. The expression of the self in poetic terms in a tangible manner requires the
assistance of language and words. Thus form and content in poetry are interdependent and constitute the indivisible core of the poet’s art. In the poetry of Kamala Das, the distinction between form and content disappears because it works synergically on the several planes of our sensibility and consciousness. She chooses words by their tone of voice and uses them with unmistakable instinct to convey the perpetual burning within her. Kamala Das believes that honesty of expression and sincerity to one’s own feelings and emotions are more fundamental to poetry than the language employed. In “An Introduction”, the poet touches upon this question and replies to those who advise her not to write in English:

... I am an Indian, very brown, born in Malabar. I speak three languages, write in Two... (1965: 4-6)

Then again, more emphatically she says

... Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half Indian. funny perhaps, but it is honest.
(1965: 9-13)

Kamala Das’s joys, longings and hopes come naturally to her in English language as ‘cawing is to crows or roaring to the lions’. She is ignorant of the morphology or even the grammatical nuances of words but recognises their vital power and emotive effects. Her poetry is an
adventure with words and then myriad combinations. They unlock a world where experience arable to the expressed. Judith Wright's poetry, however, is characterised by the metaphysical quality of her lyrics. The metaphysical strain develops and she is increasingly concerned with such philosophical questions as the nature of reality, the nature of the cognitive act and the ability of language to express it. In her own words:

Poetry is concerned with what drives deepest into the soul. However, much we may learn academically about night and darkness, unless we have experienced them, we do not know the truth about them. This kind of truth is the business of poetry.

Poetry deals first of all, that is, with experience—physical experience, or emotional experience, or mental experience—and nothing that the poet learns from books or from other poets can teach him to make a poem unless he experiences the things he writes of, and knows them so deeply that they become his personal truth.

(1963 vi)

Judith Wright's poetry certainly arises from personal experience, but the personal experience is not as a rule the theme, rather it is the accidental means to a theme which is typically general—concerned with the human condition, with what is like to be subject to time and change, having and losing, knowing and feeling, in a world which never ceases to be strange though familiar. Also what strikes one is that, though there are positives and negatives within this personal experience—
unresolved conflicts in the signals that come from the outer world there is very little interior conflict. The whole person seems to react integrally to each situation or problem: the self is not a divided one and Judith Wright has had little need for the ironies and ambiguities of dramatizations that many modern poets have required. Commenting on her poem “Woman to Man”, Syed Annuddin writes:

Perhaps no other poet, not even Judith Wright herself, could excel the beauty of this poem. The theme, diction, imaginative sweep, effective imagery, controlled tone and drama, are here in perfect blend. A careful choice of monosyllabic words and the admirable visual imagery add to the quality of the poem. (1981: 139)

The philosophical basis of Judith Wright’s poetry has not yet been subjected to a close or systematic analysis. It is important that we recognize in Judith Wright a lyricist, who does not operate solely on an instinctive or intuitive level. Two of her lyrics “Wonga Vine” and “Blue Arab” do not have a definite intellectual toughness either subsumed within the symbolism or overtly expressed. This intellectual strength is almost masculine in quality and is finely balanced against the lyrical impulse. The modulation of this metaphysical or intellectual strain into an overt philosophical bias is a definite feature of those poems which deal with cognition and aesthetic creation. This raises the overall problem sometimes of a uneasy relationship between philosophy and poetry. Judith Wright is well aware of the dangers of what John Crowe
Ransom defines as Platonic poetry, yet it seems that in some of her polemical poems dealing with the Vietnam War and for instance in "Christmas Ballad" or "At a Public Dinner" - she violates Ransom's terms herself. At its best, her own philosophical poetry is not the 'imposition of the prejudging mind on the holiness of unpredictable experience', but the imaginative expression of concepts which have become so absorbed and sublimated that they have modified and coloured, rather than replaced Judith Wright's prime concern - a direct response to nature.

Procreation and child bearing are the prerogatives of womankind and both Kamala Das and Judith Wright speak about these aspects very candidly. Motherhood offers a sense of fulfillment to the mother and it is more than a biological function. Childbirth is an overwhelming psychological function with cathartic effect. The growth of the foetus, its soft stir in the womb and its quiet expulsion are linked with the creative forces of nature. They are conceived as the several parts of a fertility ritual and the mother is the earth. In Kamala Das's poem "Jausurya", childbirth is treated as fulfillment of love. The poem exhibits exemplifying sophisticated feminine sensibility. The anaesthetic effect of the ram on the mother in labour pain suggests the secretive sympathy that exists between nature and its creations.
symbolism of light and darkness, helps to identify the son as ‘a streak of light thrust into the faded light’. The son is separated from darkness that was mine and in me. Singular symbols of light and darkness are used by Judith Wright in her love poems like Woman’s Song and Woman to Child. In the latter poem, the poet is the essential feminine portraying graphically the mother’s role in child bearing. There is a sense of joy and exultation in her. She is the feeder to the child and has a solid link with it to Judith Wright, the love of individuals for each other - of woman for man, of mother for child born or unborn is not presented as a relationship which is contained in and penetrated by the continuous epic of generations, in which the personal affection is the core, but becomes also a means of apprehending the world of being and becoming. The centre of the world is not love-making but life-making. In Judith Wright’s poetry, the procreative act is seen in a more harmonious light due to the poet’s successful married life whereas in Kamala Das motherhood and child-bearing are viewed to the exclusive exclusion of the male. The condemnation of male insensitivity is expressed in fierce terms and the glorification of an extra-marital affair imparts a strange significance to Kamala Das’s contorted system of male abhorrence. The husband is the ‘old fat spider’ weaving webs of bewilderment around her. In a hundred ways he has destroyed her feminine personality. The wife is reduced
to the status of a slavish dwarf and the husband has been administering
to her in 'lethal doses' not love but lust, rendered her life joyless.
dark and passive Kamala Das's bitterness for man buckles down under
the weight of motherhood and she melts like a waxen doll when she
speaks of child-birth and the experiences of motherhood. The poet's
care for her child, born in an age of bloodshed and despair, grows
into a universal concern for mankind. 'Jansurrya' is Kamala Das's
narrative meditation on childbirth in which she expresses sentiments
similar to that of Judith Wright

For a while I too was earth
In me the seed was silent, waiting as
A baby does, for a womb's quiet
Expulsion. This then was my destiny.

(1967· 14-17)

Feminine sensibility is largely discovered in the writings of sensitive
women endowed with imagination, especially when they treat such
subjects as menstruation, child-bearing and motherhood. Poets like
Kamala Das and Judith Wright can speak on these subjects with
confidence and authority. In "Camphor Laurel", Judith Wright describes
the conception and birth of a child very skillfully in the following
passage:

Under the house the roots go deep,
down, down, while the sleepers sleep;
Splitting the rock where the house is set.
Cracking the paved and broken street
The experience is purely feminine. The passage successfully maintains the mystery of womankind. The naked display of private parts of the body, the breasts, the white legs and the pubic - that one finds in Das in certainly missing here. Yet, Wright adroitly recounts the rootedness and depth of the mother Kamala Das on the other hand has her own stock of such typically feminine feelings and experiences. Procreation constitutes the core of love and sex between men and women, it also forms the basis of a happy family life and society. Judith Wright's poem 'Ishtar' articulates this very idea in a logical and convincing way.

In the poem, woman is presented as a votary of Ishtar who fully knows the truth of the body but who can't read her thoughts or hopes. She is actually an inseparable part of the entire procreative system of child birth and of continuity of life. The epigraph prefixed to the poetical collection "Woman to Man" (1949) partly runs thus "Love was the most ancient of all the gods, and existed before every thing else, except chaos, which is held coeval therewith. " Love is certainly as old as the history of the universe, but as compared to animal love, humans put it to a better use by rendering it purpose oriented or creation oriented. In 'Woman's Song', Judith Wright is least bothered about the equality of man and woman, but she seems to maintain the view that woman is a superior partner in the drama of love and sex.
According to her, man is 'a helpless victim of desire' whereas woman is the controller of his desire and recipient of his seed. The following extract from "Woman's Song" betrays her exultation and sense of pride over becoming a mother:

O move in me, my darling, for now the sun must rise; the sun that will draw open the lids upon your eyes.

O wake in me, my darling The knife of day is bright to cut the thread that binds you within the flesh of night.

(1972: 1-8)

It is interesting to note that the celebrated poems of conception and child birth in 'Woman to Man' predate Judith Wright's marriage and the birth of her only child. Perhaps the longing for this personal fulfillment accounts for the power of poems where the poet is apparently projecting herself into the situation she longs for, while the satisfaction of her desires leads to poems in which the tension noticeably slackens.

In Kamala Das's poetry, there is an unceasing search for the perfect masculine being and each encounter with her husband or lover is an experiment in discovering the meaning of true love. The repeated failures of such experiments make her resentful and defiant and she looks upon each encounter as merely a substitute for the real experience. The poet's relationship with the husband and the several
lovers constructs the framework of her love experience and forms a
symbolic centre of her fantasies and dreams. A desire for all
absorbing love is turned into despair after every encounter and the
structure of her emotional existence falls apart into a void of haunting
loneliness. The hope-doom paradox in Kamala Das’s poems enacts
the agony and restlessness of the poet. With a candid sense of regret
she writes:

"My poems had been read by several people. My articles
on free love had titillated many. So I continued to get phone
calls from men who wanted to proposition me. It was
obvious to me that I had painted of myself a wrong image;
I was never a nymphomaniac. Sex did not interest me except
as a gift I could grant to my husband to make him happy.
A few of our acquaintances tried to touch me and made
indiscreet suggestions; I was horrified. When I showed my
disgust at their behaviour they became my bitterest critics and
started to spread scandals about me. If I were easily
promiscuous and obliging I would not have gained the hate
and the notoriety that my indifference to sex has earned for me”.
(1976: 191-92)

The failure to find true love and the quest for it being a failure,
Kamala Das aspired for spiritual gratification. And this she developed
through the Radha-Krishna myth. She began to search for Krishna in
her encounters with various men. She identified herself with Radha and
to her the ecstasy of love-fulfillment was in Radha’s total surrender to
Krishna. The poem ‘Radha’ is an expression of the united desire for love.
after a long waiting. The desire for unification with the Lord is echoed devotionally

Everything in me
Is melting, even the hardness at the core
O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting
Nothing remains but
You...

(1967: 6-10)

The repetition of the word 'melting' heightens Radha's suffering of love.

In 'The Maggots' which also is related to the Radha-Krishna myth, Kamala Das muses over the futility of sexual union which suggests the failure of the poet to find fulfillment spiritually:

That night in her husband's arms, Radha felt
So dead that he asked, what is wrong,
Do you mind my kisses love? and she said,
No, not at all, but thought, what is
It to the corpse if the maggots nip.

(1967: 3-7)

Obviously, Kamala Das does not find what she has been searching for, and her Radha-Krishna syndrome comes too late to rescue her. Here Krishna sounds a misfit in her poetic landscape. Though there are a few references in her autobiography, they hang on to a tenuous thread and are too fragile to sustain. In contrast to the unrequited love of Kamala Das, Judith Wright has been able to reconcile her love life with the great cycles of nature. In particular, many of her poems are devoted to those experiences of love and love-making, which so few women have commented in poetry. Most women poets have written
much on love but not much on making love. And, as is natural for a woman, not only the act and the passion, but its outcome the conception, the gestation, the birth of the child are the subjects of the poet's meditation to which she gives an articulate voice. To Judith Wright it is love in the metaphysical sense, containing and infusing all love in the physical and the spiritual sense that is largely the theme of the volume 'Woman to Man'. A high degree of affirmation is achieved in her poems, and she proposes such a variety of images that the total impression one gains is positive. Perhaps, to Judith Wright there is, after all, nothing but the great round of nature. The shock of her husband's death initiates her into another phase. Here it is brought home to her in extremely personal terms that her affirmation of the life process with the individual, it involves a capitulation to the more fearful aspects of the natural cycle - decay and death.

The quest for true love and companionship has forced Kanala Das to explore various possibilities. She may have got over the need for physical love, but she wrote repeatedly about it and about unconventional relationships. She theorised on matters pertaining to sex and to extra marital affairs. But the failure of any of these relations to exist permanently appears to have purged her of all physical desire and the self was focused as the centre moving towards spiritual bliss. The-
suffering and agony towards spirituality'; at the centre of her work is symptomatic of an acutely disturbed psyche going through several traumas.

I want to be simple
I want to be loved
And
If love is not to be had
I want to be dead

("The Suicide" 1967: 51-55)

Because of love, life is death. The 'I' or the self gains prominence more and more as other relationships recede to the background. But Kamala Das is well aware that the spiritual can only be gained through the physical and, therefore, the physical nature of love is not completely ignored. She remains a passive participant in the entire game of love making. The quest for identity through the self is one important aspect of Kamala Das's poetry. The yearning has largely failed in her case but the positive attempts of the poet towards realisation of the self of her comfort and consolation to her. In her perpetual quest for identity, the self is actualised through the body, however, traumatic the entire experience may be:

It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And then feel shame, it is I who die dying
With a rattle in my throat I am sinner,
I am saint I am the beloved and the
Betrayed I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours I too call myself I

(‘An Introduction’ 1965: 55-60)
In the above lines, Kamala Das attempts to assert her individuality and feminine identity against social and cultural conformity. The poet who seeks love transcends her individuality and becomes a symbol of that universal power in which everything, good and evil, merges. She is the debauchee and the lover, she is laughter and death. According to Kadiatu Kannoh:

Determinism through body language—the self at the centre of the orgasm and its roots in the unconscious—relies upon a belief in a prelinguistic reality, a way of experiencing and understanding the self which is prior to the symbolic. (1996: 332)

Spirituality in Judith Wright is very symbolic and philosophical. Metaphysical strains often tend to obscure the proper poetic perspective. Her earlier poetry had been established in one world, the finite world available to the senses, and had drawn its strength from the clarity and vitality of her sense perceptions. The effort of the later poetry is to reach beyond that world an effort that is always a movement towards regions unexplored before. In ‘The Gateway’ and ‘The Two Fires’ the contingent world has become both an earnest of the ideal world and a denial of it, at times a prison and at times a means of release. The satisfied and consummated love life of Judith Wright has made her to search for identity on her own terms quite differently from Kamala Das. In her poems, her own personal is sublimated with the lover/husband much in the manner of—
John Donne and the quest for identity results from a united yearning.

The 'I' appears in Judith Wright's poems as an extension of the union between husband and wife from a broader perspective and is in many poems a substitute for 'we'.

We meet and part now over all the world.
We, the lost company.
take hands together in the night, forget
the night in our brief happiness, silently.
We who sought many things, throw all away
for this one thing, one only,
remembering that in the narrow grave
we shall be lonely


Spirituality is here attained through the temporal. Happiness of physical existence benumbs the yearning for attainment of the spiritual. Judith Wright acknowledges the need of the male in the entire cycle of procreation and propagation of the race. She measures 'identity' and writes about selfhood in terms of a single, unified entity.

Lock your warm hand above the chilling heart
and for a time I live without my fear.
Grape in the night to find me and embrace
for the dark preludes of the drums begin,
and round us, round the company of lovers
Death draws his cords in.

(Ibid : 1972 : 11-16)

To Judith Wright, unlike Kamala Das; spirituality is notable not only for its symbolic complexity, but also for its realism. It confronts the full implications of the human situation. The child which is the agent of the life-force also forms a part of the 'self' of the poet. The child
in a very real sense is the sexual urge made flesh. The poet too is controlled by the impersonal power of the life-force. This accounts for her fearful response in her poems which is wholly successful not only for its dramatic immediacy, but because it resolves the complex levels of signification. Identity is established in Judith Wright's poetry by a powerful presentation of physical love in which the lover/husband is an active partner. Viewed from the metaphysical level her poetry proposes that in each sexual act there is the potential for conception and a resurrection that defies time and death. The woman is the proud yet fearful instrument in this process. On this point, Judith Wright in an interview maintains:

"...because women are much more inclined to rely on their basic experience. They're more in touch as it were, with life in the raw. They're not dealing with it in the same way that men are. They're coping more day-to-day, and I think that women have to rely and should rely a good deal, on their emotional reaction to life, rather than their intellectual reaction to life: and I feel that one has, one's really walking a knife-edge there. One can't over-develop one's intellect or one loses the emotional reaction. The basic touch, with life probably is women's main strength. (in an interview to John Thompson: 1967: 38)

Fundamental to her observation as revealed above is the theme of the life of the woman—the special metaphysical vision of woman that considers her as a special kind of human being, a special kind of living being— for to be female is to be more than a part of the human race. Women as poets have tended to speak in the forms prescribed. Most of them
have not been able to give expression in words what makes explicit the peculiar and unique experience of generations of women and their experiences. This task of speaking the original native word not translated into masculine terms is implicit in the programme outlined by Judith Wright for herself. The 'tone of voice' of her poetry allows one to speak of her in a real sense as a poet, without any of the implications of mediocrity, of sentimentalism or of patronage, that the term usually carries with it.

Judith Wright appeared on the Australian literary scene with her talents fully grown and no poet past or present has shown so much concern for the land and its people like her. Pioneers, bushrangers, convicts, aborigines - whatever or whoever is colourful and significant in Australia comes up as ghosts and speaks in her poetry giving it a curiously haunted quality. Judith Wright is at complete ease when she treats such diverse subjects as the Australian earth, the feminine question exploring the mysteries of love and childbirth, and of profound and searching meditations of life in general - all outstanding for their intensity of vision and their richness of language and music. Judith Wright has been passionately involved with Australian concerns, particularly with settlements by Europeans and its consequences for the traditional aboriginal owners as well as the ecology. However, her-
poetry has its philosophical side, reflected in its awareness of duality and longing for unity in its concern with the relation of time to eternity. Kamala Das, on the other hand, shows little concern for the country or its people in general, where she resides. In her poems, the dust, the heat, the crowds, the poverty of India is intertwined with the misery and endurance of womankind. Her troubled marital life and other social concerns gave her little time to focus on matters of local or national interest. She talks of war, but only on purely personal terms. War destroys both love and life. In ‘The White Flowers’ there is thoughtfully expressed anxiety and anguish:

They talk of India, in strong beautiful voices With fresh blood they shall love her, I know, most lovingly And burn as incense, living flesh. (1967. 7-9)

The poet’s concern for her baby son born in an age of bloodshed and despair grows into a universal concern for mankind. The white flowers are contrasted with the red cherry wine suggesting the contrast between peace and bloodshed. The ghastly sense of death created by images like ‘the dead man’s palm’ and ‘the weeping of old mothers’ is counterbalanced by the poet’s determinism to protect the baby-son. Judith Wright also voices similar concerns in “The Two Fires” from a broader viewpoint. Her despair in response to the hydrogen bomb and the Korean War marks a crisis in her thinking. It is not simply the physical threat of the bomb: to Judith Wright the bomb represents the
ultimate alienation of mind and world, for here man turns in fury not only upon his fellow man, but on the genetic basis of life itself. It is upon this genetic vitality that the poet has based her whole defence against time and death.

Death, decay and destruction are concerns which are voiced intermittently in the poetry of Kamala Das. This is largely due to the failure of the poet’s search for a true and lasting relationship. Death is revealed as an obscure parallel to life. The poet’s longing for death is also a part of her belief in immortality. Death is temporary phase through which the human soul passes from life to immortality. Kamala Das writes:

I have been for years obsessed with the idea of death. I have come to believe that life is a mere dream and that death is the only reality. It is endless stretching before and beyond our human existence. To slide into it will be to pick up a new significance. (1976: 218)

On several occasions death appeared to her as an easy escape from the loneliness of life. The idea of suicide also haunted her frequently. However, the poet’s jest for life prevented her from taking the extreme option. Judith Wright’s preoccupation with family life, her concern for Australia and its people, her relationship to the great cycles of nature prevented her from seeking an escape from the realities of the
temporal world. She had suffered moments of depression but she found
solace in poetry.

Then poetry’s electing shade
enclosed me with its darkening ray,
left me no face to recognize,
no eyes to meet my searching eyes.
The solitude of poetry
locked me within its second shade.

(‘Clock and Heart’ : 1972 : 7-12)

Because of love and a consummated married life, Judith Wright’s
attitude is responsive. She does not confront a passive and loveless
world like Kamala Das. The union of mind and matter, life and death
is one of total integration.
Works Cited


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