Preface

This thesis aims at a comprehensive study of the poetry written by two eminent women poets of the present generation, Adrienne Rich and Kamala Das who belong to entirely different cultures. With the changing times and changing perspectives which are revolutionizing human perception of reality, gender issues have moved from the fringes to the centre-stage of social discourse. The evolution of new attitudes and approaches and the greater recognition sanctioned to the views of people who remained subjugated for long made it necessary to recognize forms of literature other than mainstream literature. This explains the validation that has been granted to feminist literature. The emerging significance of women’s studies in the academic realm may be viewed in this light as a form of response to the new challenge to update theoretical frameworks and accommodate new literary theories. Women academics, researchers and grassroot activists have joined hands combining research, investigation and activism in carrying out and pursuing Women’s Studies. A distinguishing feature of this branch of social science is that it is interdisciplinary in nature and has the potential to lead to the empowerment of women ultimately.

The poetry written by the two women poets Rich and Das is examined using feminist parameters. A real understanding of the poetry written by women poets is possible only if it is approached from the feminist perspective. Such an approach will cut across essential differences between women poets separated by geographical boundaries since their acculturation as women is different from that of men. Their experiences, perspectives, ideas and visions will bear similarity. It is such an awareness which has spurred me on to take up a
comparative study of the poetry of Adrienne Rich and Kamala Das in the light of feminist theory.

Rich is a leading feminist poet of the United States who has been nurtured in the values of America. She is a radical feminist who has proved her calibre as one capable of using language as a powerful medium to give voice to her well-defined views and convictions. Her works are seminal in the re-definition of patriarchal concepts and in visualizing a non-sexist culture for the future. In Kamala Das one sees a modern Indian woman poet who is keenly aware of her unenviable predicament as woman in a patriarchal society with the innumerable and contradictory demands made on her by the family and society. Though, unlike Rich, she is not a committed feminist, she writes poetry of revolt aimed at subverting the hypocrisy and hollowness of the established society. She writes in a vein of candour and frankness, transmuting her personal experiences and giving expression to the experiences of the entire woman community. It may be said that Das’s poetry takes off from the springboard of feminism, articulating the female sensibility of modern India.

An exploration of the poetry written by the occidental poet and the oriental poet is attempted in this paper. Perceptible similarities in the preoccupations of these women poets which transcend the personal and geographical barriers which divide them bring out the fact that women’s experience and socialization as a whole are different from those of men. It is their common heritage as women and common bond of experience that are pivotal in moulding the poetic perspective contributing to the assertion of surprisingly identical values in life and literature irrespective of their socio-cultural background. My attempt in this thesis is to analyse the poetry of Adrienne Rich and Kamala Das on the basis of feminist parameters and probe the similarities in their poems against
the disparity of the cultural context in which they are conceived and composed.

In the introductory chapter, "The Politics of Gender" the power-structured man-woman relationships in patriarchal society, the feminist concern to redefine power, an exploration of the historical beginning of male domination and the evolution of the marginal status of woman are dealt with. A brief history of the women's movement is sketched and a detailed description of five models of gender difference is given. The second chapter is devoted to a study of the poetry of Adrienne Rich, highlighting her feminist perspective in dealing with issues which are of specific relevance to feminism such as the question of conformity, women heroes of the past, woman as victim, the concept of autogenesis and global sisterhood. In the third chapter a study of the poetry written by Kamala Das is made with particular reference to her treatment of the quest for love which is entangled with the search for identity. Besides, her depiction of the discontented and unbalanced heterosexual relationships in male-dominated society in a daring and outspoken manner and the frank portrayal of the female psyche tormented with anguish and frustration in love are also dealt with. The fourth and fifth chapters, "Crossing the Cultural Borders" and "The Dream of a Common Language" provide comparative appraisals of the poetry of Rich and Das in the light of feminist theory. The chapter, "Crossing the Cultural Borders" comprises the biological cultural and experiential models of difference. The psychoanalytical and linguistic models are treated in the fifth chapter, "The Dream of a Common Language." The study of the poetry of these two women poets on the basis of the five foci of gender difference-biological, cultural, experiential, psychoanalytical and linguistic- throws light on the way their poetry articulates feminist concerns. In the concluding chapter a recapitulation of the thesis and the findings derived as a result of the comparative study of the
two poets are included.

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