CHAPTER VI

CONVERGING PATHS

The principal argument of this study is that Katherine Mansfield and Kamala Das, though writing during different periods in time and place, shared the same sensibilities. They underwent life experiences which were alike in many aspects and this has also led to similarities in their short stories. But there are difference also. The differences follow mainly from their environment and cultural background. This chapter attempts a resume of the previous chapters and also highlights some differences seen in their work.

Frank O'Connor in his essay on Katherine Mansfield calls her "A Writer in Search of a Subject." He says that try as he would, he could never recollect her stories after an initial reading, though he enjoyed them much at the time of reading. This is because Katherine Mansfield never dabbled in the great throbbing sensational issues of life. The events in the lives of her characters are not of any major import. They are not worth bothering about in the hectic routine of living. Events and episodes are not developed to their logical or catastrophic end. Romances never end in marriages, nor marriages in divorces or
dramatic endings. Their subject matter is the prosaic and the ordinary, the life of everyday. Kamala Das also isolated and selected the passing events of life and projected them on a small canvas. Therefore their stories are not stories in the accepted sense of the word; they are merely the embodiments of truth experienced and felt by the characters. No life on earth is without crises and these writers' predominantly feminine world is full of minor crises. As feminine impressionists, they portray a feminine world and make incisions into time during the pre-selected brief moments. As such, their literature is literature as vision, rather than as fable.  

Both writers followed Chekhov's method of story telling. Hence they believed that fiction did not have to be shaped towards a conclusion, a climax, a denouement and that it is not the same thing as a story. A fiction survives, not by leading us anywhere, but by being at every point authentic, a recreation of life, so that we experience it and remember it as we experience and remember actual life itself. The writer effaces herself and becomes the character she wishes to represent.

Both writers show a distaste for surface events and outward action. The turn of this century also gave rise to the plotless story, owing to the intellectual climate of
this period. In a world where God was dead and evolutionary theory had produced a sharp sense of man's insignificance in a changing universe, the only alternative seemed to be the retreat within, to the compensating powers of the imagination. With such a retreat came the stress on the significant moment or "epiphany" and importance to psychology in short fiction. Both writers are exponents of the "plotless" story, concentrating on inner mood and impression rather than on external event.

Until the twentieth century, the English short story had in general retained the well-proven services of the audible narrator, a figure whose function was to establish values, scene and tone. But in Katherine Mansfield's work the action is presented to the reader as a "happening" without a palpable narrator to stand between the reader and the truths he perceives. By dispensing with the narrator, it got rid of explaining; lent itself to the portrayal of everyday life and forswore long periods of time. This method, of which the brevity was "that of the flash, not of a condensed narrative" was adapted by Kamala Das in her stories.

Symbolism is the art of expressing ideas and emotions not by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images, but by suggesting what these ideas and
emotions are, by recreating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplained symbols. To name an object in a literary work, is to banish the major part of the enjoyment derived from the work, since this enjoyment consists in a process of gradual revelation. By using symbols in their work, both authors enhance aesthetic enjoyment through the process of gradual revelation. Besides, the use of images and symbols allows language to embody non-verbal experience.

Their range of character portrayal is narrow and circumscribed, but they have the capacity to enter into the hearts and souls of the characters and to project their emotions in such a way that we accept them as universally true. They succeed in presenting authentic pictures of personal relationships and especially of children and adults within the family. They make the small happenings of children luminous by floodlighting them. Their characters have no pedigree. They are devoid of the details of the history of their forebears nor are they invested with details concerning their vegetative existence. The characters’ immediate reactions to their environment and their desires and motives are depicted with consummate skill.

The work of both writers contain a greater than
usual amount of the dynamism of the feminine universe, because it is their main preoccupation. The trivialities of the daily routine of life might in theory bore male readers, but it is made interesting by the rhythm of the events and the evocation of atmosphere within the story. The use of interior monologue, stream of consciousness and irony as narrative techniques and a shifting of the point of view from one character to another are other common features in their short fiction.

The modern writer is one who synthesises the past and the present. He does not altogether refute the present nor take refuge in the past. His traditional ambivalence does not aim at a rebirth of classic culture. Yet he is aware that modern materialistic culture has led to the ruin of spirituality. The modern artist is aware that material progress has resulted today in spiritual loss. His extreme awareness that he and his age are responsible for it makes him uneasy. He looks enthusiastically towards the past and with aversion at the present. It is in the same strain that F.R. Leavis and Dennis Thompson state that good literature cannot be created by spreading roots into the ruined cultural conditions of the modern age. Prof. Achuthan says that "the communicability of the modern artist who transcends time views the past in the same way as Othello looks upon Desdemona after causing her end."
Incidentally, for both writers life was divided between two worlds, of the past and of the present. Katherine Mansfield spent her childhood and adolescence in the distant dominion of New Zealand where her father was an enterprising young man working his way up in Wellington society. Katherine Mansfield left New Zealand in 1908 as she believed that she was cut out for a life in the literary metropolis of London. Thereafter, she was never able to visit her home country. Her later stories show a great nostalgia for the home country which, ironically, she had once derided as the land of the Philistines.

Kamala Das's work also shows a nostalgia for the little village and a way of life that she had experienced far away and long ago in her childhood in rural Kerala. It was an agrarian, feudal society, the kind of which has become almost extinct today. Married at the age of fifteen, she left this scene for the big cities and ever since has adapted a highly urbanised way of life. In the work of both writers, there is an impassioned plea for that memorable period of childhood that was irretrievably lost forever.

In her short fiction and her reminiscences, Kamala Das draws upon a cultural model laden with pre-colonial values. In her stories there is a nostalgic desire to
restore ancient Hindu values in our public life and she succeeds in portraying a rosy, benign, feudal social structure. In her work nostalgia manifests in the recurrent theme of the joint family with grandmother and the village house where the writer spent her early childhood. In her prose reminiscences Kamala Das remembers her grandmother and great grandmother with fondness and wistfulness. They are no more; but she carries in her blood much of what they represent. Hence in stories like "Prabhatham" and "Venalinte Ozhivu" she takes the reader into that remembered world. The best example of this return to the past is seen in "Neermathalatinte Pookal," (The Flowers of the Nirmatala) where the atmosphere of an ancient Nayar tharavad is evoked. The heroine, a newly married young girl brings her city-bred bridegroom to the "tharavad" to get him acquainted with its mystery and strange aura. Characteristically, she wants her husband also to partake in that glorious past which she fondly cherishes and which has moulded her personality. They leave together the next morning after the bride has invoked the blessings of her forbears. But in the course of the evening, the writer, takes us back to her beloved past, replete with the "tharavad" and its strange odours, the memory of loved ones within its precincts and the ancient Neermatala showering its butter coloured flowers over the entire scene.
Like Kamala Das, Katherine Mansfield to a degree almost unparalleled in English fiction, put her own experiences into her stories. She wrote of nothing that did not directly happen to her even when she appeared to be at her most imaginative. Her stories, read in their order of composition, gain force and significance, and are illuminated at all points by the events of her own history. Her whole work, read in this manner emerges as a kind of "recherche de temps perdu" (remembrance of things past) in a distant dominion. If in "Neermathalathinte Pookkal" Kamala Das tries to bring alive her own past, it is interesting to note what Katherine Mansfield says about her story "At the Bay":

It is so strange to bring the dead to life again. There's my grandmother, back in her chair with her pink knitting, there stalks my uncle over the grass. I feel as I write, "You are not dead, my darlings. All is remembered. I bow down to you. I efface myself so that you may live again through me in your richness and beauty."

In their nostalgia for an idealized feudal past, in their strong desire to make it come alive through their work, the writers share a common aim.

Both writers grew up in an extended family.
Katherine Mansfield's family consisted of her own parents, three sisters, the much awaited baby brother, maternal grandmother and maternal aunt. The family had a maid and a handyman who lived with them. Kamala Das also grew up in the atmosphere of a joint family consisting of her maternal grand-uncle, great grandmother, grandmother and other relatives. The family also looked after numerous dependents who worked for them.

Kleinians and Freudians argue that the average person finds the sense of his own worth from rewarding interpersonal relationships within the family. As a child, if a person is loved sufficiently by his parents, he never questions the point of life or the meaning of his own existence and he incorporates so firm a sense of his own value because of what his parents have given him, that he continues throughout his life to feel significant.

Unfortunately for these writers, the mother was often an absent figure. Katherine Mansfield's mother suffered from poor health and handed over the children to her own mother as they were born. That she did not have any rapport with her mother is clear from her words:

I often long to lean against Mother and know she understands things . . . that can't be told . . . that would fade at a
breath . . . delicate needs . . . a feeling of fineness and gentleness. But what Mother hadn't is an understanding of work.11

Kamala Das describes her mother as a vague figure who took little interest in the household but spent her hours writing poetry lying on a four post bed. Besides, the writer spent her childhood mostly at the Nalapatt "tharavad" while her parents remained in Calcutta.

The relationship that each writer had with her father also shows a marked similarity. Katherine Mansfield flouted all her father's plans for her future and against his wishes, returned to London to pursue a literary career. The father who was an important person in Wellington was often embarrassed by his daughter's bohemian life in London. In much the same manner, Kamala Das's outspoken attitude as a writer caused much discomfiture to her renowned father. In their youth, both writers experienced a great emotional distance from the father. Kamala Das in her reminiscences and Katherine Mansfield in many of her stories poke fun at the egotism of the father in a humorous tone. Being artists, neither writer could be understood by her practical, down-to-earth father who upheld strong views of traditional morality.
Yet it is significant that they were able to reach a better understanding with the parent towards the latter part of their lives. In her poem, "My Father's Death," Kamala Das portrays this love-hate relationship and says about her father, "He brought with each visit/banana chips and words of reproach." In spite of all misunderstandings, love him she did as seen in the lines:

Only in that lost coma did he
seem close to me, and
I whispered into his ears that I
loved him, although bad . . .
A bad daughter, bad wife and bad
mother, but in the task
Of loving the bad ones where the ablest.

"My Father's Death"

The rift with an authoritarian father that started in childhood for both writers was dispelled only late in life. Yet in My Story Kamala Das frankly admits that "my father had always been the foundation of my feeling of security." Antony Alpers remarks that as an artist, Katherine Mansfield owed much of her self development to her father, for it was he who had given her "Karori" and "Day's Bay" in her childhood, and an education that was more bent to her purpose than his, if his was to flatter his vanity. It was he who had taken the first step towards finding a publisher for her work, and sprung to her defence when its
originality was questioned, for Mr. Beauchamp showed a
great understanding of his daughter's talent when he wrote
to E.G. Brady, "She herself is, I think a very original
character, and writing — whether it be good or bad — comes
to her quite naturally."\textsuperscript{14} The cloud of tension between
Kamala Das and her father was caused by the writer's
confessional mode of writing. But fortunately, for both
writers, maturer years brought about a reconciliation with
the parent.

Another common feature is that from early childhood,
both had a very deep and satisfying relationship with their
grandmothers. The role of the absent mother was also taken
up by the grandmother. Kamala Das grew up under the
protective wings of the two grandmothers at Nalapatt. The
grandmother played an important part in moulding the
character and personality of the child Kamala. Kamala Das
learned the ancient Hindu values and imbibed her early
lessons about the Hindu religion from her grandmother. In
her reminiscences she makes it clear that her grandmother
had a high sense of values although she had very little
exposure in life. The atmosphere at Nalapatt was one of
"simple living and high thinking." In her work, the
grandmother is revealed as the symbol of the great moral
values of the pre-colonial past. Similarly in the stories
of Katherine Mansfield, the grandmother is presented as the
single source of practical wisdom and deep moral values. The grandmother is the only person who understood the writer, who was a sensitive child and who often suffered a kind of alienation within the family. Hence she becomes an important figure in the stories about childhood for both writers.

Critics like Claire Tomalin and Kate Fullbrook have presented feminist readings of Katherine Mansfield's stories. Kamala Das is also a feminist who used her writing rather than any political group to express her views. If, as Virginia Woolf suggests in A Room of One's Own, one of the tasks of the committed woman writer is to begin to transcribe "the accumulation of unrecorded life that comprises most of women's lost history," then Katherine Mansfield and Kamala Das surely saw themselves from the beginning as one of those who broke that silence. Their feminism came as a matter of course, so much so that overt discussion of it as a political principle is absent from their writing while its underlying presence is everywhere.

The female tradition frequently provoked anger in Katherine Mansfield's stories, not humour. "The woman at the store" was once a barmaid "pretty as a wax doll." After six years of marriage and many miscarriages she has become a pathetic figure.
"I says to him, I says, what do you think I'm doin' up 'ere . . . Over and over I tells 'im - you've broken my spirit, and spoiled my looks, and wot for . . . I 'ear them two words knock in' inside me all the time - 'Wot for!' . . ." (p.558)

Her cry echoes that of little Frau Brechenmacher in a powerful story based on Katherine Mansfield's observations of life in Bad Worishofen. At the end of the story as the Frau returns home, the question "Wot for" keeps resounding in her thoughts too, as she reflects upon the meaningless nature of a housewife's existence.

They walked home in silence. Herr Brechenmacher strode ahead, she stumbled after him. White and forsaken lay the road from the railway station to their house—a cold rush of wind blew her hood from her face, and suddenly she remembered how they had come home together the first night. Now they had five babies and twice as much money; but - "Na, what is it all for?" She muttered, . . .

Linda Burnell is another housewife who questions her meaningless role as a housewife. These stories reflect the writer's dissatisfaction with the traditional roles attributed to women.
Kamala Das is also ever alert in exposing the inequalities within marriage. "Koladu" (She-goat) and "Chitthabrahmam" (Hysteria) are two powerful stories that reveal the oppression of women within marriage. She also raises her voice against the practice of denying education to female children and casting them in the traditional role models with which they cannot become reconciled. She questions the concept that marriage is the be all of a woman's life and the practice of disposing daughters for good by marrying them off to the most convenient suitor. While she does not deny the role of woman as housewife and mother, she feels that a woman should not sacrifice her own individuality in marriage. She celebrates motherhood and the role of woman as mother but at the same time condemns sex without the bond of love.

Both writers strongly deride the economic dependence of women upon men. Traditionally, the Nayar women enjoyed a right to the family property unlike the women in other sub castes among the Hindus in India. Till recently, they were entitled to receive a greater share of the family property than the male members of the family. Because of the matrilineal tradition, their women were never really cut off from their families even after their marriage. This peculiar social position made them independent and free from the dictates of the husband's family. Kamala Das
grew up in the Nalapatt family where the women folk enjoyed much economic freedom. In the matriarchal system of the past, women did not become economically dependent on the husband. Having grown up in this system, Kamala Das derides women's economic dependence within the contemporary nuclear family. It makes her enslaved to male domination. In stories like "Koladu," "Kalichanta" and "Shiksha", she raises a pointer at the need for women's education and economic independence.

Through the portrait of the autocratic paterfamilias and the cringing womenfolk in "New Dresses" and "Prelude", Katherine Mansfield also raises the same issue. In Katherine Mansfield's stories, the women of the household are solely dependent on the male bread winner, who avails himself of every opportunity to remind them of their status as resident consumers within the household. The source of the paterfamilias's power is money and he emphasizes it to enjoy his rights. The women are obviously at a disadvantage as seen, from the housewife's wishful thinking in "Six Years After":

She did hope he would be tipped adequately. It was on occasions like these (and her life seemed to be full of such occasions) that she wished it was the woman who controlled the purse. (p.456).
Both writers seem to agree that women "identify with each other" but do not communicate, as men do, "through ideas and projects of personal interest," and are only "bound together by a kind of immanent complicity."¹⁹ In "Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding," the Frau is so caught in her own horrors that she cannot even think of communicating with the other women. All the wives in the story are masks speaking to masks, dumb in their captivity under bestial sexual norms. Women, they believe are aware of inhabiting a special domain separate from men - in which they discuss recipes, children, clothing - but nevertheless they regard each other as rivals for the attention of the masculine world. Thus Rosemary Fell, inspite of all her talk about the sisterhood of women, decides to get rid of her protegee as soon as her husband evinces an interest in the poor waif and in a moment, forgets all plans for emancipating the girl. In Kamala Das’s "Chuvanna Pavada", (Red Skirt) this situation is repeated, for the mistress fears the husband's compassion for the servant maid. That women are bound together by a kind of immanent complicity is revealed through the stories of both writers.

Devendra Kohli justly comments that Kamala Das is essentially a poet of the modern Indian women's ambivalence, giving expression to it more nakedly and as a thing-in-itself than any other Indian woman poet.²⁰ The
reason, he says is that Kamala Das has a good deal of the conventional woman in her make-up, so that not only is she able to speak of the common woman and her need for love and security, but in addition, expresses an ambivalence proceeding from her own duality, that is, the combination in herself of a need for domestic security and the desire for an independence consistent with a non-domestic mode of living. Similarly, Katherine Mansfield was in many ways resentful and angry at many aspects of the traditional female role. During 1913, when she tried her best to fit into the role of being Murry's wife, she realized that throwing away the chains which bound her to the housewife role was not as simple as she had envisaged. As she protested about it in 1913, "When I have to clean up twice over or wash up unnecessary things I get frightfully impatient and want to be working." 22

Linda Burnell, her heroine in "Prelude" is radically confused by the contradictions between her fractured responses to life and the conventional code of wife and mother that is supposed to inform her existence. So the duality of a need for domestic security combined with an independence consistent with a non-domestic mode of living was a hallmark of both authors.

Both writers are good at children because they have
that purity of vision which enables them to enter into their lives without sentimentality, without condescending or patronizing them. Owing to the many hairbreadth escapes that they had with death, both contemplated much on the mystery of death and it becomes a common theme in their work.

But this is not to say that there are no differences. To begin with they lived in two worlds, cut away from each other in space and time. Katherine Mansfield lived in the early part of this century and died five years after the First World War. She did not live to experience the extremely mechanised mode of life in the nuclear age, as Kamala Das who started writing forty years later did.

The life that they saw around them and of which they partook is reflected in their work. On her own as a young girl in London seeking a literary career, Katherine Mansfield had to face the hardships of a single woman in a metropolis. This was an experience alien to Kamala Das who always had the security either of the parental home or that of marriage with a well-placed husband. Katherine Mansfield's hand to mouth existence as a literary aspirant gave her a great inside knowledge of the life of single women in London and it lead to the "dames seules" (women on their own) theme in her work.
Jean Milloy and Rebecca O'Rourke draw out the social conditions of Katherine Mansfield's period in their book, *The Woman Reader*. They comment on the changing patterns of employment, the impact of granting full suffrage rights in 1928 and the consequence of significant numbers of women remaining unmarried. This rise in the number of single women was often not a question of choice and could be traced back to the devastating losses of the 1914-18 war. So this was a theme which was highly relevant to Katherine Mansfield's society.

"The Tiredness of Rosabel," "Pictures," "Miss Brill," "The Swing of the Pendulum" and "The Canary" are all written on this theme of loneliness and desperation. Her own sojourn to Paris as an unaccompanied young woman led to the story "Je ne Parle pas Francais." This theme is absent in Kamala Das's fiction because at the time she wrote, women leading single lives were more the exception than a rule in her society.

On the other hand, a woman seeking love outside marriage is a theme which becomes almost a preoccupation with Kamala Das. Married at the age of fifteen and finding herself tied to a hollow relationship which she could not untie; Kamala Das's own story strikes one as representative of a not so uncommon social phenomenon in India. Marriage
and love are not and need not be mutually exclusive, but for Kamala Das as for many Indian women, they have proved to be so. As she confesses in *My Story*, "A broken marriage was as distasteful, as horrifying as an attack of leprosy." (p.102.)

Besides, her parents and relatives were obsessed with public opinion and bothered excessively with their society's reaction to any action of an individual. A remarriage was impossible for her nor did she have the educational qualifications to get a job. Under these circumstances, the only remedy was to reconcile herself to the hollow relationship and to look outside marriage for emotional sustenance. Hence Devendra Kohli differentiates that 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.  

One section of Kamala Das's stories deal with simple men and women who are transplanted into the hollowness of sophisticated city lives from the basically sound and loving country homes they grew up in. They strive to keep up with the Joneses and think and act like the enlightened elite of the city with whom they hobnob due to professional, business or political necessities.
These are men and women who have money, time, freedom, power and great patches of boredom and an emotional vacuum in their lives. They often seek emotional gratification or may be freedom from tedium and boring routine in extra-marital affairs. Illicit relationships add excitement and provide diversion to life but the characters are often plagued by pangs of guilt as seen in "Swatantra Jeevikal" or "Rathriyil."

Prof. Achuthan remarks that Kamala Das is one woman writer who frankly discusses the existence of Indian women who seek physical pleasure outside marriage. Kamala Das explains that this is because they are locked in loveless marriages due to the pressure of circumstances and forced to lead unnatural lives suppressing normal desires. So they take the first outlet out of this mire by seizing opportunities of finding love and laughter elsewhere. No fear of social condemnation restricts Kamala Das in revealing these situations which we know exist, but are wont to admit. These are not mere "peeping Tom" sort of stories either, they have a certain depth and dignity.

In some stories the tedium of office or family lives induces men and women in their middle years to fear the untimely death of their emotional lives. This fear overrides their concern for the purity of their married
lives, chastity or the fear of social disapproval. In some, as for Madhavi in "Idanazhiyile Kannadikal" (Mirrors in the Corridor) it is purely an emotional need for reassurance. In others it is only a biological necessity, as for the housewife in "Suryan". (The Sun).

The characters in these stories have certain peculiarities. They are intellectual. They relentlessly criticise their own feelings and actions. They are "cruel to be kind." Their longing to release themselves from the prison of family/society and to follow the dictates of their hearts can be gratified only by cruelly dispensing all that they held holy hitherto. In order to be kind to themselves they have to appear cruel before society. Achala of "Chathurangam" restrains herself by thinking, "Go home, there you will never have the cruelty to be yourself." (p.35).

Personal circumstance and the fatal encounters with the complexities of modern urban life lend their intrinsic nature liberation and return them to the state of the primitive - set them free to follow primal instincts. This is what the writer points out in her stories. Freud has said that the more civilized a society is, the more neurotic its members.\(^{25}\) To protect the values of family life and social life one has to overcome primitive
instincts. Only by channelising these instincts into moral and creative activities can life remain safe and sound. Civilization itself is a result of this channelisation. The characters of these stories have not succeeded in this process of channelisation. They simply pretend to have succeeded. Therefore their burden is all the more heavy. The loss of values that is undermining the social structure in the west is rapidly influencing Indian society too, especially amongst the urban, upper class elite. Kamala Das's stories about extramarital relationships point to this factor.

Jean Milloy and Rebecca O'Rourke in The Woman Reader write about Katherine Mansfield's society as a frivolous one which gave rise to more serious sexual radicals like Dora Russell. The period was associated with sexual freedom. Katherine Mansfield herself walked out of her marriage with George Bowden the day after because she felt averse to it. It is also significant that when she met John Middleton Murry in 1913 a stable relationship of living together was begun which resulted in marriage only five years later when she was legally divorced from Bowden. Katherine Mansfield's married status did not deter her from living with the man of her choice. Hence the theme of extra-marital relationships was not a relevant one for her.
Another major difference between the two writers was that Katherine Mansfield questioned the notion of a stable self which could be "lost" under the detritus of social forms, but which nevertheless existed in a pure and discoverable state within the depths of individual being. Instead, she conceived of self as multiple, shifting, non-consecutive without essence and perhaps unknowable. The extreme vulnerability of identity under such a conception is at the centre of her view of character. The only protection for individuals, who are in constant danger of utter fragmentation, she felt, is the covering of a mask, a consciously wrought presentation of a coherent self that was of necessity artificial. The understanding of the complete isolation of the individual, both from others and from any sure sense of self, that follows from such a theory, has an effect on her writing. Thus her character Beryl in "Prelude" and "At the Bay" is at the same time acting the role of many different persons in her dealings with other characters. As Beryl herself puts it:

If she had been happy and leading her own life, her false life would cease to be. She saw the real Beryl - a shadow . . . a shadow. Faint and unsubstantial she shone. What was there of her except the radiance? And for what tiny moments she was really she. (p.59)
Not only Beryl, but Linda Burnell and Stanley are all playing so many roles. At times, Linda even feels that the inanimate objects around her communicate with her. ("Prelude," p.27)

This questioning of one's identity in her writings can be attributed to the sudden interest in psychology that arose in her time; particularly to the publication of Freud, by the Hogarth Press. Jean Milloy and Rebecca O'Rourke state that it led to an interest in the unconscious and questions of sexual behaviour, morality and influence. In a world where God was dead and evolutionary theory had produced a sharp sense of man's insignificance in a changing universe, the only alternative seemed to be the retreat within, to the study of the human mind. Thus Katherine Mansfield's pessimism, her sense of fixed social forms as laughably flimsy and arbitrary and yet powerful as the sources of an otherwise unattainable communal illusion of certainty about individuals, and the sudden shifts in tone that emphasize discontinuity of vision are all, in their different ways, related to her ideas regarding the self. From the symbolists she also imbibed the notion of an essential self, discoverable only in moments of spiritual inspiration.

Many of Kamala Das's men and women characters too are
constantly wearing masks because they are the victims of
their social environment. They suppress their inborn
tendencies inside them and submit to societal norms, thus
suffering a kind of aversion and frigidity. Being
intellectuals, they criticise their own feelings, inner
motives and actions.

Kamala Das also gives much importance to the human
unconscious in her fiction. "Pakshiyude Manam" and
"Malancharivukalil" deal with the death wish in the human
unconscious. "Unni," "Virunnukaran" and "Kalyani" are
stories that call for close psychological analysis in order
to be understood. The housewife Kalyani manifests a
personality crisis complex: name, place, relationship,
character, belief, action, direction - all these are
distorted, and the author's phenomenological investigation
itself provides a framework for the story. 31 Kalyani's
strange experience of being rejected and repudiated even by
her beloved husband could perhaps be interpreted as a
manifestation of her oppressive sense of guilt - from
deceiving her husband. Even "Nunakal" (Lies) which is on
the surface an episode from everyday life can be read as
a story about the stirrings of Oedipal complex in the
little boy. These stories where the boundary between the
conscious and the unconscious are not clearly demarcated,
which have a mist laden appearance and a strange magical
attraction which evoke different responses in the readers are unprecedented in Malayalam.32

In the twentieth century for all its economy and singleness of purpose, short fiction became remarkably eclectic and the influence of other disciplines like psychology becomes clear in the work of Kamala Das as in that of Mansfield. Freud's sense of the mind becomes significant in their work. He suggested the agonising tensions of the self in the modern world, caught between complex constraints and primal needs. As Ian Reid comments, since the twenties, as with film, it was not necessary to determine that a particular writer has read Freud. It is the age of Freud.33

But although Kamala Das reveals that the line of demarcation between the conscious and the unconscious is rather thin, she is not racked by questions of identity like Katherine Mansfield. This is because she has a deep religious faith in her which has been imbibed from her childhood. With the years this belief has only grown stronger. In My Story she dispels her own doubts about identity with the simple faith of one who believes in God:

In actuality who is he? Who am I? Who are these three boys who call themselves my children? We are burdened with
perishable bodies which strike up bonds which are also unreal, and perishable. The only relationship that is permanent is the one which we form with God. (p.186)

The scene in which a story is set often contributes in decisive ways to the total effect. The locale of the happening, always colours the happening, and often, to a degree, shapes it. Chekov's fidelity to the "magnificent common place world" held a fascination for Katherine Mansfield. Landscapes, seasonal changes and constantly altering weather play a part in her fiction. The effect is of the dexterous creation of what has been called a "silent character" in the background of each story.34 By making nature part of the action Katherine Mansfield was successful in introducing the colonial experience into her work. As Antony Alpers states, "the silent character [in her work] was the stillness of the bush, the disdain of the lofty islands for the huddled little pockets of colonial intruders, the silence of the vast sea desert that encircles them."35 The stillness of the bush which had not known man or mammals and the extended family and the Trouts were Katherine Mansfield's defence against this remoteness and desolate scene. Alpers explains that "the silent character" that Katherine Mansfield was called on to present was not a human society but the lack of one.36 There are no "others" in the New Zealand stories.
In 1883, when Katherine Mansfield's family moved from Throndon to Karori, they were not moving, as a similar family might have moved in England, into a readymade environment containing "neighbours." They were moving into a valley which only fifty years earlier had been covered with dense forest, and which now was sparsely populated by colonists, uprooted, like themselves, from well defined English social strata, who had not yet learned how to live together. A measure of the Beauchamps' awareness of what they were doing is the fact that they took, in effect, another family with them to keep them company. When later they crossed the harbour to the summer colony at Day's Bay, to hold the festival of Christmas in the broiling sun once again, "too self sufficiently," they and their neighbours had to fill the little canvas for themselves. It was this, their loneliness and spiritual deprivation, that enabled Katherine Mansfield to pity her people at last; and this that she had to use as the "indispensable element" of her story.37 Thus, another of the things that Katherine Mansfield wished to do in her New Zealand stories, was to introduce a new experience to literature. With art that conceals if not with intellect that obtrudes, she was to give expression in symbolic form to a colonial experience, now passed and not to be known again, which still holds good as material for literature.38
A colonial experience of a different type is seen in Kamala Das's reminiscences "Balyakalasmaranakal" and in "My Story." Kamala Das reminisces about her school days in a European convent in Calcutta where as dark skinned Indian children, Kamala and her brother had to suffer many discriminations. In her memoir "Woodburn Park," Kamala Das remembers that as a child her father wanted her to imbibe western culture and manners. So once a week, Kamala was sent to Paletti's, to lunch with the family of her English teacher, Liza Beck. Kamala's father wanted her to learn how to conduct herself in the company of his westernised colleagues. She listened to piano and music recitals and the Becks spoke to her about art, literature and music. Kamala reminisces about the ambient atmosphere of her Calcutta home where her mother was ever dressed in white Khadder and followed a Gandhian style of life. But at the same time they employed a cook who was an exponent of western cuisine for her thoroughly westernised father. There are references to the colonial experience in her recollections of the Nalapatt house in Kerala too. But there, the experience is mainly that of the independence struggle against the British, in which the members of the family were keenly interested.

One characteristic of Katherine Mansfield's writing is that she took an infinite delight and value in detail.
"not for the sake of the detail but for the life in the life of it." There is a life in the detail which makes the physical reality live and the experience live. We approach the "nerve" of the feeling of purity in her writing. As she herself said, she tried "to convey these overtones, half tones, quarter tones, these hesitations, doubts, beginnings, by trying to get as near to the exact truth as possible." Arthur Sewell notes that she does it in quite small things, in those trivial little items of experience which no one but a sensitive artist would notice.

There is a passage that illustrates this in "At the Bay," where Linda lies in a deck-chair, dreaming the morning away. In it, Katherine Mansfield conveys that lazy, sleepy exquisiteness of perception, in a day-break, where the mind has just enough energy to linger over the minutest detail, of the pattern of a wall-paper or the play of light on the carpet or the tracery of leaves against the sky.

She looked up at the dark, close dry leaves of the manuka, at the chinks of blue between, and now and again a tiny yellowish flower dropped on her. Pretty - yes, if you held one of those flowers on the palm of your hand and looked at it closely, it was an exquisite small thing. Each pale yellow petal shone as if each was the
careful work of a loving hand. The tiny tongue in the centre gave it the shape of a bell. And when you turned it over the outside was a deep bronze colour. But as soon as they flowered, they fell and were scattered. You brushed them off your frock; as you talked the horrid little things got caught in one's hair. Why, then, flower at all? Who takes the trouble - or the joy - to make all these things that are wasted, wasted . . . It was uncanny. (p.221).

The prose here moves slowly, lingeringly, like the moments in the mood, and the philosophizing comes upon the reader unawares. In short, the passage is akin to the lyric and this lyrical quality differentiates the prose style of Katherine Mansfield from the objective, uninvolved style of Kamala Das which is close to that of Virginia Woolf.

Arthur Sewell conveys the unique quality of Katherine Mansfield's style thus:

Words only capture the "whole of the mind" when they are used poetically, when the "over-tones are given by shadows that memory and association may cast over words - when words have a phantom - life as well as sound and meaning.  

Ironically, Kamala Das, the poet, adopts a purely
objective, dispassionate and uninvolved style in her short fiction while Katherine Mansfield deliberately uses a prose that is almost lyrical in quality.

There was an emotional vacuum in Katherine Mansfield's life after the death of her dearly loved grandmother. Besides, she experienced great loneliness as an expatriate who would not be acceptable into gentle society. So a classmate named Ida Baker (L.M.) became her boon companion. It was a strange relationship although strong and lasting and has given rise to insinuations of lesbianism. Kate Fullbrook reports that in 1909, on her return to New Zealand from England, Katherine Mansfield's mother promptly cut her daughter out of her will on the suspicion of lesbian tendencies. Katherine Mansfield's bisexuality is mentioned also by her biographer Alpers. Therefore it is significant that she deals with the physical attraction between two women in "Bliss". In "Prelude" Mrs Harry Kember tries to patronize the young and vulnerable Beryl, who on her part is depressed by her single marital status. Mrs. Kember is revealed admiring Beryl's physical charms while the latter, with her narcissist tendencies, revels in these attentions. With great clarity and subtlety, Katherine Mansfield shows the physical chemistry that can exist between women.
In *My Story* Kamala Das relates how an older girl took a great attraction to her when she was about fifteen years old. Having been pampered and caressed by the girl during a long journey and later at a friend's house, Kamala Das writes unabashedly; "Both of us felt rather giddy with joy like honeymooners." She also confesses that back at Nalapatt, it seemed to her that the older girl was "haunting me with her voice and with her smile." She also states, "I wished to put her out of my life, to bring back the order that I had in my mind before I met her." (p.80) Perhaps this experience has gone into the writing of her story "Chandanamarangal" (Sandalwood Trees) which treats the relationship between two women in a frank manner. The main aim of these writers in dealing with the theme of lesbianism is simply that of inclusion as part of the process of breaking down the barriers of isolation and invisibility. As Milloy and O'Rourke comment, as far as lesbianism is concerned, the problem of invisibility needs to be faced. For it is still too often the assumption that people are heterosexual unless they state otherwise, and coming out is not always easy or even possible. Again, in dealing with the lesbian theme, as committed women writers both Kamala Das and Katherine Mansfield begin to transcribe "the accumulation of unrecorded life" that comprises most of women's lost history.
Comparative literature is defined as an examination of literary texts in more than one language, through an investigation of contrast, analogy, provenance or influence. Analogy and contrast have already been discussed. It would be interesting to note whether there has been the influence of one author on the other. Katherine Mansfield's short stories have been widely read in India from the 1940's and have been included in anthologies prescribed by many Indian universities. Kamala Das did not have a formal education but she admits that Katherine Mansfield has been one of her favourite writers in *My Story*:

One day, while we were walking towards the Strand Book shop, he [Carlo] told me that we had common foster parents. Had we not grown up listening to the firm voices of Chekov, Flaubert, Maeterlink, Mansfield and Virginia Woolf? The sounds that our real parents made in our presence had been so indistinct while the dead ones filled our ears with their philosophy. (p.121)

P.O. Purushothaman in his book on Comparative Literature states that at the time of composition the writer's mind reaches a unique stage. In such inspired moments his genius flows consciously and unconsciously towards other works. A writer's genius is the sum total of
his own experiences and what he has seen and heard and read from others and made a part of his own consciousness. The cultures absorbed from other works is included in it. These influences that a writer has made a part of his own experience from reading other writer's works and which finds way into his own composition is called "unconscious imitation." This unconscious imitation of Katherine Mansfield's work may have taken place in that of Kamala Das. But of course, it could also be the influence of Chekhov, filtered through Katherine Mansfield, for Chekhov was also one of the masters she admired. It would be appropriate to conclude this study with the view of a renowned critic of the Malayalam Short Story:

Madhavikutty's [Kamala Das's] stories are the outward expressions of the unusual workings of the mind, the atmosphere of human moods, or ideas. In these stories we see reflected the glory of Chekhov's manner which has emanated through Katherine Mansfield. Madhavikutty does not make turns of feeling the slave of incident, rather we are made to feel these turns of mood with a few deft strokes of the hand which has a definite feminine quality. The reader becomes unsettled; he is given a chance to think for himself and judge the values while the author stands apart in an impartial manner. To show the experiences of life in the focus of a
story - that is all she does. She does not eke out a channel of thought for the reader. Sometimes it may invoke dissatisfaction in the reader. There is a criticism that there is little Keralite experience of life in Madhavikutty. But on the other hand there is the presence of a modernised universal human consciousness in her fiction. 53

"The universal human consciousness" may be the result of the unconscious imitation of the masters whom she calls her foster parents and listening to whose firm voices, she had grown up into a writer.
Notes


7. Ibid, p.129


10. Ibid.


14. Ibid.


21. Ibid.


26. Ibid.


34. V.S. Pritchett's criticism that "There is no silent character in the background" in Mansfield's fiction as there is Mother Russia in Chekhov's. Quoted by Antony Alpers in *Katherine Mansfield*, p.321.


36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid, p.323.

40. Ibid, Letter to Arnold Gibbons on June 24, 1922.


42. Ibid, p.21.

43. Ibid, p. 6.

44. Kate Fullbrook, Katherine Mansfield, p.13.

45. Antony Alpers, Katherine Mansfield, p.199.


50. As seen from the short story anthologies prescribed for under graduate students in the erstwhile Travancore University and Kerala University.

51. P.O. Purushothaman, Comparative Literature : Theory and Relevance, p.16.

52. Ibid, p.22.