

# **POETRY AND FEMINISM : A STUDY OF KAMALA DAS AND JUDITH WRIGHT**



BY

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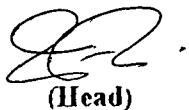
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Panthapriyo Dhar

Writing and reading are not all that distinct for a writer. Both exercises required being alert and ready for an accountable beauty, for the intricateness or simple elegance of the writer's imagination, for the world that imagination evokes. Both require being mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision. Writing and reading mean being aware of the writer's notions of risk and safety, the serene achievement of, or sweaty fight, for meaning and response-ability.

**Toni Morrison : *Playing in the Dark***

The free woman is just being born; when she has won possession of herself perhaps Rimbaud's prophecy will be fulfilled: 'There shall be poets ! When woman's unmeasure bondage shall be broken when she shall leave for and through herself, man – hitherto detestable – having let her go, she, to, will be poet ! Women will find the unknown ! Will her ideational worlds be different from ours? She will come upon strange , unfathomable, repellent, delightful things; we shall take them, we shall comprehend them.' It is not sure that her ' ideational worlds' will be different from those of men, since it will be through attaining the same situation as theirs that she will find emancipation; to say in what degree she will remain different, in what degree these differences will retain their importance – this would be to hazard bold predictions indeed. What is certain is that hitherto woman's possibilities have been suppressed and lost to humanity, and that it is high time that she be permitted to take her chances in her own interest and in the interest of all

**Simone de Beauvoir : *The Second Sex***

## INTRODUCTION

The problem in women's writing as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak maintains "is not only who is speaking and how is she speaking, but to whom is she speaking and on behalf of whom she is speaking. (1996:6)." In her studied observation, Spivak opens up the complexity of a discourse towards which most feminist oriented creative writers endeavoured to work. Besides *identity* and *autonomy of selfhood*, women writers claiming to belong to a tradition of their own, articulate other challenges, while writing back to patriarchy. They also attempt to deconstruct the assumptions of patriarchy's monolithic structure considered axiomatic or universal. While asserting autonomy of selfhood, on the one hand, they attempt in various ways to speak about their gender, desire and sexuality. The theme of love and relationships; man - woman, mother - child are variously problematised, in that, a discourse of resistance is articulated.

Some women writers declare that language must be shattered because language is supposed to be male as it is a conveyor of among other things, male chauvinism. They claim for themselves 'another language', that in its new form, would be closer to woman's lived experience, an experience in the centre of which the body is frequently located. Hence the watch words 'liberate - the - body' and 'speak - the - body' are in use. While at one level it is legitimate to expose the

oppressions, the mutilations, the objectification of the female body, another level, it subverts the individuation of the feminine identity. Furthermore, the themes of *otherness* and of the body merge together, because the most visible difference between man and woman is indeed the difference in biology. To advocate a direct relation to the body is therefore not subversive because it is equivalent to denying the reality and the strength of social mediations. The feminine discourse is articulated in different modes taking into account the experiencing - self that moves between a pre-linguistic idealisation of the body to a symbolic level of self-actualisation.

Emerging out of such a ferment, the articulated subject position of a woman writer gives voice to her suppressed emotions and unbind herself from patriarchal bondage in both literary and social articulation. Kamala Das and Judith Wright are such voices, who among the post colonial women poets, express their inner worlds and address in a self reflexive manner some of the important issues of feminism. Well known for their confessional mode of expression, honest and frank views on man woman relationship, and unconventional approaches to some of the burning issues of the day, Kamala Das and Judith Wright are imbued with a typically feminine sensibility. Although both Judith Wright and Kamala Das were born in two different parts of the world in divergent societies, a common strain of feminism is conspicuous and all

pervading in their poetry. While the body is a central metaphor in Kamala Das's poetry, it is not the same with Judith Wright. However, as creative writers they are acutely alert to question of *identity* and *selfhood*. A close examination of their works reveal that the body in its physical and spiritual manifestations variously foreground their creative endeavours.

Born in 1915 at Wallalumbi in New South Wales, Australia, Judith Wright had poems published in children's papers from the age of ten. No recent Australian poet has won wider appreciation and critical regard than Judith Wright. A small number of her poems inevitably recur in anthologies because they are by common consent her best, and are among the finest poems we have. Her first volume, *The Moving Image* (1946) was an immediate success. In these poems, Judith Wright set about her life's long quest to define Australia as a land, a nation and a metaphysical entity, in language that showed awareness of contemporary overseas writing in English but also recognised the unique environment and society of Australia. The young poet of *The Moving Image* was no amateur: she had at least twenty years of apprenticeship to poetry behind her. The epigraph to the volume quoted is from Plato that 'Time is a moving image of eternity'. The epigraph conforms to Judith Wright's sense of celestial time never suiting to the

human rhythm. The sense that 'both time and fear' are a creation of the poet, who must resist both, otherwise she will cease to exist. Despite the oppressiveness of time and death; life and desire are to be found in nature, visionary madness and love. This great metaphysical vision is what the poet puts before herself as a manifesto and a programme to give expression to her creative urge. She realizes that she is a maker, the maker not only as poet, but the maker of time and fear which are the material out of which poetry is to be made. *The Moving Image* is the beginning of many roads along which the poetry of Judith Wright proceeds, but it is also the bringing together in one place, and in one personality formed by and fitted to that place, of many strains of thought.

*Woman to Man* (1949), Judith Wright's next book of poems is a stronger and more profound work, though it breaks no new ground. The majority of the poems in this volume are openly metaphysical where before they were mainly so by implication. In particular, many of them are devoted to those experiences of love and love-making from the woman's point of view on which so few women have commented in poetry. Most of them have written much on love, but not on making of love. And as is natural for a woman, not only the act and the passion, but its outcome, the conception, the gestation,

the birth and nurturing of a child, are the subjects of Judith Wright's meditation. The aspects of the world to which she gives an articulate voice bears upon her identity as a woman poet. Love and procreation are seen as profound mysteries, shaded by the thought of death. They are expressible in complementarities and antimonies: the foetus, for instance, is to its parents 'our hunter and our chase', 'the maker and the made', 'the question and reply'; in its birth it 'shall escape and not escape'.

In her first two volumes, Judith Wright enunciates the three chief concerns of her work. The first is the nature of time, the motion of flux or change, and the resoluteness that the poet must conjure, mostly through love, to defeat her fear of time. The second is the attempt to resolve into a harmony or a creative paradox, the basic antimonies of human existence - man and his environment, past and present, soul and flesh. The third is the Australian landscape and its appropriate expression and sublimation in language.

Judith Wright's next volume *The Gateway* published in 1953 seems to be a continuation of the themes dealt with in *Woman to Man*. Some poems in this volume introduces a new strain to her argument about life and death. It seems to depend on a Jungian sense (perhaps a Buddhist sense) of the dissolution of the self

in 'the depth of nothing' The collective unconscious is the abode of both life and death, for from it emanates 'the bright smoke' that is 'the flowing and furious world'. In fact from this point on in Judith Wright's poetry there are moments when the poet seems to lose her certainty, her sureness of touch, her instinct for the right phrase. *The Two Fires* (1955), her next volume contains a number of poems, including the title poem, written at the time of the Korean war, when the world's destruction by atomic warfare seemed distinctly possible. The lyrics in this volume have a different movement and tone from the earlier ones forged into a more subtle and meditative rhythm. Another path explored in this volume and to be followed in her later poems is the one, too rarely tried, of amused and delightful irony. In the poems of her next volume *Birds* (1962), most of the earlier bardic qualities give way to a personal and intimate delight in the creatures of nature she describes - sometimes describing them in anthropomorphic terms. The poems in *Birds*, however, are vivid and accurate in detail, having an element of simple humour since a number of them were apparently written for the entertainment of a child. All the individual poems in the volume are on the one theme and contribute to common effect. *Five Senses* (1963) is a retrospective selection, with many new poems. The more relaxed, personal mood continues, through the old images of light, bone and depths, so does the emphasis on time's flux, death and fear. The poems appear to bear a metaphysical strain where the old crystal vision is replaced by dark surmise and a hesitation between aspects of the world beyond the senses which are ambiguous or contradictory. Judith Wright's quest for illumination which

seemed a kind of inspired innocence, is now in the world of experience aware of the growth of a new consciousness within her, an alien and baffling vision. In *The Other Half* (1966), Judith Wright appears to be formulating a new and uncompromising theory of creation as something willed and controlled from beyond the individual mind. The two halves are the conscious and the unconscious personalities, the one that 'undrowns' when she is asleep and the other that conducts the business of daily life. It is a psychological concept which partly replaces the mystical and metaphysical principles that inspired the earlier volumes - and again it seems to be continuous with them. This volume is full of hints that figure a movement away from poetry as a consciously practiced art, a deliberate attempt to capture the beauty of the world by an effort of the will, a deliberate attempt to localize the meaning of life in the ship and crew on the ocean of eternity, instead of the ocean itself which alone gives the temporal meaning.

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 it 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. What also 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 of the poet seems to

react integrally to each situation or problem: the self is not a divided one, and the poet has had little need for the ironies and ambiguities or dramatizations that many modern poets have required.

The feminine and mystical charm is very explicit in the poetry of Judith Wright. However, she is at her best in giving expression to issues that directly concern the woman. The quest for identity attains a metaphysical significance. And Judith Wright is able to reconcile the mystical and metaphysical strains from a feminine perspective. It only needs a slight acquaintance with her poetry to discover the latent feminism intertwined with nature which is meditative, intuitive emotional with strong metaphysical searching. Even in her love poems, Judith Wright rarely meddles with physical description or with the physical details of love making, even on a symbolic or metaphorical level. The whole visible sensible world partakes in the mystery of gestation and birth when the poet as a woman takes them into her mind, in a poem like 'The Maker', as into a womb in which they grow another nature and are finally born into poetry. Some poems of Judith Wright are beautifully sexual but it is the sexuality of the whole mystery of reproduction, felt as one process and directed to one end. And it is presented not notionally or intellectually, but as a matter of direct experience, having a strong participatory insight.

Kamala Das's poetry seems to function at a level far removed from larger realities of life yielding place to the constricted world of a cloistered self.

Her obsession with love , or more appropriately with intimacy , which critics without exception have identified as the most prominent feature of her poetry , is often described as evidence of an ahistorical temper . Indeed , occasionally the poet allows herself to be contrived into such a mould by writing essays and reminiscences that promote ahistorical readings of her poetry . The very nature of her verse reflects her emotional temper , which makes her feel ill at ease with the present day materialistic world trying to lay a seige around her . Kamala Das's concerns as a poet are not philosophical or mystical or spiritual ; they are also not directed towards the propagation of a commitment or the formulation of a theory of poetry . In fact , she is dedicated to the celebration of love in all its manifestations .

Kamala Das was born in 1934 at Punnayurkulam in Kerala . She was born in the traditionally matrilineal community of Nairs . Her mother and grand uncle were poets of repute in Malayalam . Thus Kamala Das was nurtured in an atmosphere of poetry . She began to write both in Malayalam and English . In 1969 she received the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award for her collection of Malayalam short stories *Thanuppu* (Cold) . The recognition of Kamala Das as an Indian poet in English came when she won the PEN 's Asian Poetry Prize in 1963 . Her poetic output in English is rather thin . It consists merely of three slender volumes , *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) , *The Descendants* (1967) , and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973) . The last volume includes many of the poems published

in the earlier volumes . Still she has made her mark and is universally acknowledged as one of the greatest of Indian poets writing in English . Kamala Das had the courage to express her essentially feminine sensibility , honestly and sincerely without any reservations or inhibitions . Concentration entirely on one theme gives her poetry the power , the intensity and the urgency that has cast its spell on all her readers .

*Summer in Calcutta* (1965), the first published anthology of Kamala Das's poetry sets the tone for her entire poetic output . It contains only fifty poems and with few exceptions the theme of all of them is love , or failure in love . Kamala Das lived in Calcutta for several years during her childhood and after her marriage . The poems in the volume are not about Calcutta but they arise from the poet's agonised response to the external world of traumatic experiences of her childhood and early married life. They suggest the poet's conscientious involvement in the panorama of life around her and a larger vision than what the immediate sensory perceptions could provide . They are a response to the intense summer heat of experiences presented to the poet by the medley of life that throbbed under the Calcutta sky . The rude summer of her life crept into every line she wrote . Kamala Das notes in her autobiography that Calcutta's vast human complex provided her with most of her poetic resources at this time. Calcutta was also the city where childhood , adolescence and adulthood merged in a continuous present . It also

taught her , or so she claims , to doubt human nature . But she drew inspiration from the life of the city which she did not like :

Yet Calcutta gifted me with beautiful sights which built for me the sad poems that I used to write in my diary in those days. It was at Calcutta that I saw for the first time the eunuchs' dance. It was at Calcutta that I first saw a prostitute , gaudily painted like a cheap bazaar toy . It was at Calcutta that I saw the ox-carts moving along the Strand Road early in the morning with proud heavy turbaned men , their tattooed wives with fat babies dozing at their breasts like old drunkards in clubs at lonely hours (1976 : 157)

In this volume we come across a world which is harsh , sun - scorched , tropical , heavy with the smell of rotting garbage and death , where even the men have limbs like 'carnivorous plants'. The lanes are 'fevered', the trees dusty and leafless , cheeks sunstained. Only the hardy marigolds and bougainvillea survive , and courtesans with 'tinsel and jasmine in their hair'. Against a background of this fraught landscape , on to which the poet projects so much of her inner sense of dirt and sexual disgust , Kamala Das plays out her roles of unhappy woman , unhappy wife, mistress to young men , mother , reluctant nymphomaniac , pining for the joys of innocence and childhood which have been lost .

*The Descendants* , published in 1967 , is Kamala Das's second volume which is considerably slimmer than the first . Nine poems in this volume are extremely short and two are among the longest poems ever

written by her. The themes of love, lust and disillusionment constitute the leading motif in these poems. Whereas her first volume was more diffuse in scope, the second volume's focus narrows down on the poet herself. The external world is still present in her poetry, but it is subdued by her inner moods for the most part and lacks the flamboyant abundance of *Summer in Calcutta*. Most poems in *The Descendants* show a metaphysical concern with time, death and decay. A preoccupation with loneliness and a corroding sense of futility mark some of these poems. The incongruity between man's guiding desire and the insubstantiality of his achievements strikes the poet lending her vision of human destiny a tragic dimension. Most of the lyrics in this volume are further variations on the theme of love, and are pessimistic even death-conscious in tone. Kamala Das's personal frustrations and sense of loneliness are always there; imparting to the poems a rare intensity and immediacy of appeal. Her courage to stand against the odds and express herself fully and frankly has deepened her faith in life whereby she has acquired a vision that typically smells of the native soil and heritage. *The Descendants* reveals the thematic and symbolic structure of Kamala Das's poetic consciousness moulded by meditation over death and physical decay, ugliness of the body and the mind, and the fallibility of human emotions. Here, Kamala Das the woman and Kamala Das, the artist, become one and the person

experience is universalised. *The Descendants* certainly displays greater artistic maturity and control.

Kamala Das's third volume of verse, *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* appeared in 1973. The volume contains thirty three poems in all of which twenty have been taken from the two previous volumes. In this book there are no radical shifts in tone, no obtrusive breaks made with the essential themes and approaches of the first two.

It combines the essence of both volumes, the uninhibited abandon and enthusiasm for life seen in *Summer in Calcutta*, and the shadow of death, suicide, disease and old age found in *The Descendants*. The thirteen new poems in this volume reveal some new facets and a further artistic maturity. The love-theme is still there, but an entirely new dimension, a new intensity are added to its treatment. Kamala Das's concern continues to be the exploration of the nature of love, lust and frustration. Yet another concern is her involvement with the deeper meaning of life and death, disease and decay. The poems have a more disciplined structure and poet has proved more effective in the organisation of materials and controlled expression. But many of the new poems suggest that the experiences incorporated swept her along till they destroyed her inner resources. What appeals to and disturbs us, is

the seeming inability of the poet to learn from experience, to withdraw and show restraint.

Kamala Das is primarily a poet of feminine longings. Her poetry reflects her restlessness as a sensitive woman moving in the male-dominated society and in them she appears as a champion of woman's cause. Her experiences were limited, so also her range. But like Jane Austen, she recognised the limitations of her range and achieved excellence by working on her "three inches of ivory". Quest for love, is the central theme of Kamala Das's poetry. Her greatness as a love poet arises from the fact that her love-poetry is rooted in her own personal experiences. It is an outpouring of her own loneliness, disillusionment and sense of frustration. Her love-poetry is unconventional and shocking to the orthodox, for her treatment of sexual love and the human body is free, frank and uninhibited. Thus the conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male-oriented universe emerges as a major theme in her poetry. But Kamala Das never tries to escape from harsh reality. Courage and honesty are the strength of her character and her poetry. Though there is a lurking social consciousness in her poems, she generally shies away from explicit social themes. She has not been fully aware of the social maladies around her but has also reacted emotionally to social injustice, cruelty of the rich and the inequality and poverty among the poor.

Kamala Das is not committed to any ideology in her poetry ; but she is committed to humanism and love. Kamala Das follows the confessional mode in her poems. The painful assertion, "I too call myself I" comes from the predicament of a confessional poet. The moods of a confessional poet are diverse and constantly shifting. One of the longer poems of Kamala Das, "Composition", embraces such diverse moods as passionate attachment, agonising guilt and inhuman bitterness. She does not attempt to idealize or glorify any part of the self. Kamala Das's poems reveal her restlessness as a sensitive woman moving in the male-dominated society and in them she appears as a champion of woman's cause. In some of her poems the emphasis is largely on sexual love and female organs. Feminine sensibility, in the real sense of the term implies stress on emotional bond and an attitude which Kamala Das explores very realistically in other poems. In "The Music Party", the aroma of feminism is obviously reflected in the poet's silent eyes which are not brave and cannot look into the man's eyes to prompt a response. Kamala Das reveals her typical feminine persona by being love-lorn without a word to say. Instances are various to illustrate her feminine sensibility, particularly in those poems which she writes in the garb of Radha waiting for Krishna to redeem herself through love. Going through her poetry never do we

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miss the central concern of Kamala Das which is characterised by a typical feminine awareness.

In the light of the above discussion, the present study proposes to explore, in the poems of Kamala Das and of Judith Wright, the articulation of feminine sensibility while taking into account their similarities and differences, as women, as poets and as feminists.

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CELEBRATING THE BODY:  
A STUDY OF KAMALA DAS

As a powerful interrogative mode, feminist critical theory holds suspect the universalistic assumptions of the dominating patriarchal discourse. Underlining the fact that aesthetic value is not universal and confined to the text only, it is historically and culturally determined, feminist theory considers patriarchy's essentializing assumptions as relative not absolute or axiomatic. Although the Anglo-American and the French feminist theorists differ significantly in their approaches to women's literary productions, women's representation in literature and women as readers, they unanimously emphasize women's subjectivity and autonomy of selfhood. What started as a social agenda soon emerged as a literary polemic. While the American approach addresses real readers and situations, the French polarize feminist issues into body and language. Irigaray and Cixous are the ardent advocates of a feminist poetics that takes note of women's body as the object while pleading for different

linguistic register for creative expression by women. Although there are resistances to such a position it is true that women's body is an important aspect of her identity and self-expression. It is a text on which are inscribed the visible/invisible traces of centuries of domination and oppression.

In her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa", Helen Cixous, writing on women's creative writing, maintains that "Women must write herself : must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies or the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text as into the world and into history - by her own movement (1996 : 320)." To Irigaray and Cixous, the female body is no more a despicable object, but can articulate its own subjecthood. Therefore semiotically, the body becomes the very text that rewrites femininity's difference in culture, history and literature. This is where both French theorists see the possibility of a feminist poetics in formation that opposes sexism and endorses feminism's agenda for raising consciousness in the socio-cultural and artistic domain.

In India there is a long tradition of women's writing. The *Vedas* bear testimony to this proud initiative. Women in ancient India demonstrated their creative gift by composing hymns and songs

which were no less gifted in point of music and poetic quality than those composed by men. However, their writing did not vindicate their social position under a Brahmanic social system. Manu's *dictum* perpetuated not only social marginalization of women but inflicted an epistemic violence as well. Women's body was considered impure and held against her. The songs of Bahinabai, a Buddhist nun, make a telling expression of woman's position. She writes :

The Vedas cry aloud, the Puranas shout  
 "No good may come to woman"  
 I was born with a woman's body  
 How am I to attain truth?  
 "They are foolish, seductive, deceptive  
 Any connection with woman is disastrous."  
 Bahina says, "if a woman's body is so harmful,  
 How in this world will I reach truth?"  
 (Taken from *Women's Writing in India*, Vol. I, edited  
 by Tharu and Lalita, 1995 :107).

From Bahinabai to Kamala Das one may underline a tradition of feminist resistance and self actualization. Without debating over whether the female body should/ should not be considered as the subject of literary composition, there may be unanimity on the fact that the female body is in essence the only possession woman has and the civilizational wounds have been inscribed on it. It thus makes sense that the female body needs to be contextualized in literary composition, for it is the fountain head of women's creative impulse. Kamala Das's poetic endeavour is sharpened with her intimate and deeper understanding

of the socio-cultural and historical location of her body in a dominating patriarchal society. It is through this understanding that she articulates her identity and selfhood. She maintains :

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 : 57 - 60 ).

From an acute awareness of selfhood and identity issues a poetics of *otherness*. Such a poetics while in opposition to the dominant poetics is foregrounded in the metaphorical exploration of the body. The body is the central metaphor in Kamala Das's poetic canon. As Stephen Heath maintains :

The woman is close to the body, the source of writing - it is obvious that a woman does not write like a man, because she speaks with the body, writing is from the body. Writing resembles the body and the sexual division of male and female is expressed in the difference of women's writing: 'a feminine textual body can be recognised by the fact that it is always without end, has no finish, which more over is what makes the feminine text very often difficult to read (1996 : 313).

Although Kamala Das's poetry is not difficult to read for she shows a competent craftsmanship in creating, poetically, a 'textual body', acceptance of the body and its physical limitations is not easy. It is bound up with Kamala Das's exploration of the love theme. Writing about pornography in 'Obscenity and Literature', she describes

herself as "too emotional to be pornographic" and expresses a justified impatience with the Indian morality. To her, our moral position mystifies sex and gives the body 'too many secrets to hold'. Her various illnesses which forced her to visit hospitals have brought to her an enriched awareness of the naked body :

I have spent a lot of time at hospitals both as an inmate and as a visitor. When I was convalescing, my private nurses had to wheel me past the general wards where the nurses sponged the patients or helped them into the clothes. I have seen corpulent men, pregnant woman and the green hued cancer patients all naked. I have seen wrinkled bellies and thin backs broken with red bed-sores. Not once have I felt sick looking at any of them. The human body in all conditions fills me with awe and tenderness. I am humble when I look at it.

(Weekly Round Table : 23rd April, 1972 :32).

Kamala Das's sensibility is not limited to her frank confessions of her sexual life or in her detailed description of private parts of the body, it is expressly manifested in her attitude to love. In the ecstasy of love she experiences both pleasure and agony. The feeling of being jilted is most painful to the poet. She offers an aggressively independent assessment of man - woman relationship that makes most of the poems speak for themselves with distinct voices. With an unusual spontaneity of expression and intensity of feeling, the poet articulates her most intimate responses and uninhibitedness in her

poems, in a sense presenting a novel poetic mode that verges upon the self-confessional

"An Introduction" best sums up Kamala Das's predicament. It is wholly female as well as wholly Indian, and also part of the general Indo-English dilemma. The run-on lines, the casual juxtaposition of her own responses with suggestions made by others, the defiant assertion of her right to use a language, which become hers alone, her account of her husband's rejection of her love - described more fully in her autobiography - all these lead up to the fact of her loneliness, for she would not fit in with the "Categorizers". In her poems, her persona is always present, playing its varied role which define her as woman, sexual partner or lust object.

The human body to Kamala Das, is of deep interest and fascination. It is through the contours, shapes and dimensions of the body that Kamala Das explores the theme of love and lust. Her obsessive search for true love has often ended in despair because the flow of true love is always as it seems could not take off beyond the body. Das situates the concepts of love and lust in the dialectical interplay of the soul and body. However, the body is important because it is the source of excitation and thrill. The body is the gateway to the spiritual, for the

spiritual cannot be conceived without its material origin. It is for this that Das is an admirer of physical beauty free from vulgarity. She has been conscious of her own dark skin and poor features and always liked to appear dressed in silk and jewellery.

I hated to see myself as I really was in mirrors which threw back at me the pathetic contours of my thin body and the plain face with the protruding teeth. (1976: 50).

The poet is aware of the beauty and ugliness of the human body and treats it as a symbol of disgust when lust fills it. The body is subjected to lust, disease, pain and death. The body appears in Kamala Das's poetry often as a symbol of lust and consequent emotional corruption. In the ecstasy of love male and female differences vanish and the lovers become one. However, her concern with the theme of the body may seem ambiguous. If at one level she loves it intensely, at another level, she loathes it as an unwelcome burden. Thus loathing is not so much of a feeling of its inadequacy as of her own prolonged illness. Moreover, one may locate the articulation of an interrogative stance that has been often traditional and radical. If we accept Das as a feminist, her treatment of body as a burden is to focus more of its relevance to the woman's creative consciousness.

In "The Freaks" the poet's disgust with the lustful

body is expressed in phrases such as 'sun-stained cheek and mouth, a dark cavern'. Decay and disease of the body kill both love and lust.

This body that I wear without joy, this body  
Burdened with lenience, slender joy, owned  
By a man of substance, shall perhaps wither ...  
(1973 ; L 37-39).

The male body's several attractions fascinate the poet even when they are linked with lust - the leonine grace, hemlock smile, 'the deep armpits and the shadowed groin'. However, it is contemptible and abhorrent when the body pulsates with mere lust:

...Notice the perfection  
Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under  
Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,  
Dropping towels, and the jerky way he  
Urinate....(The Looking Glass ; 1967 : 7-11)

This male vulgarity of lust is counterbalanced by the female's stinking seductions :

....the scent of  
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts  
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your  
Endless female hungers...

( 'The Looking Glass' ; 1967 : 13 - 16 )

'The Looking Glass' is about man - woman relationship, love and lust.

There is an ironic suggestion about the need to flatter the male ego. The woman has to yield to his strange and abnormal demands and 'gift him all'. She has to allow him to feel his superiority ; 'admit your admiration', for him. There is unrelieved sense of despair in the thought that in spite of sacrifices and self-effacement of the woman,

it is difficult to keep the man with her. He slips away insulting the woman's pleasure of possession. The painful contradiction in the man-woman relationship is brought out in the following lines.

...Oh yes getting  
A man to love is easy, but living  
Without him afterward may have to be  
Faced... (1967 ; 16 - 19)

Kamala Das's frequent bouts of illness and nervous breakdown have made her the recipient of her husband's protection, and during such periods 'there developed', as she tells us, 'between myself and my husband an intimacy that was purely physical'. And 'I accepted with gratitude his tenderness which was but lust, loud and savage, for it seemed like a good substitute for love'. But more than this, it was her own body in its nakedness that she began to accept totally:

Whenever he tried to strip me of my clothes, my  
Shyness clung to me like a second skin and  
made my movements graceless. Each pore of  
my skin became at that moment a seeing eye,  
an eye that viewed my body with distaste.  
But during my illness, I shed my shyness and  
for the first time in my life learned to surrender  
totally in bed with my pride intact  
and blazing (1976 ; 100)

One of the ways in which Kamala Das's conflict between, her physical and spiritual aspects of love can be understood and appreciated

is by understanding her attitude to the place of words in the love - experience. The intensity of passions makes words irrelevant in the poems of Kamala Das. Silence, and not words, are the strength of her love - experience. Either love is identified with physical relationship or it exists as an unfulfilled longing. While a complete physical gratification benumbs the body and buries momentarily all longing, it troubles the poet for she is not sure whether she was really loved or not.

Kamala Das is concerned with love as the innermost reality, the naked self as distinct from the mask of social convention and mere physicality. Her conflict between the coarse physicality of life and the informing and harmonising principle of love and the desire for freedom from all material trappings is achieved in some of her poems that exudes in a free flowing rhythm and cadence. It is difficult to say whether Kamala Das succeeds in resolving the conflict between the physical and the spiritual aspects of love, however, there is no doubt that the poems in which she articulates this conflict are authentic and moving :

Love is not important, that makes the blood  
Carouse, nor the man who brands you with his  
Lust, but is shed as slough at the end of each  
Embrace ( 'Jaisurya' ; 1967 ; 21 - 24 )

'A Relationship' identifies love with physical desire. The 'sterile sting' of rejection and deception is juxtaposed with 'body's wisdom' which tells that the poet would find rest and peace in her lover's arms though he might betray her. Here love is older than the lover by 'myriad saddened centuries'. Her desire makes the male beautiful. It originates in the primordial instincts of the lovers. The betrayal with words does not matter so long as the body whispers wisdom and so long as the lovers 'communicate' this wisdom to one another. She knows that neither verbal harshness nor verbal disloyalty can destroy their bonds :

...Betray me ?  
 Yes, he can, but never physically  
 Only with words that curl their limbs at  
 Touch of air and die with metallic sighs.  
 Why care I for their quick sterile sting while  
 My body's wisdom tells and tells again  
 That I shall find, my rest, my sleep, my peace  
 And even death nowhere else but in  
 My betrayer's arms...  
 ( 1965 ; 9 - 17 )

'In Love' is a poem of a mild variation of the same theme and focusses on the carnal nature of physical love. The poem brings the poet face to face with her unpleasant memory of haunting sexual experience. She is hesitant to call it love at all for its sensual completeness is forced without caring for 'the moody mind' :

...where

Is room, excuse or even  
 need for love, for isn't each  
 Embrace a complete thing, a  
 Finished jigsaw, when mouth on  
 Mouth I lie, ignoring my poor  
 Moody mind, while pleasure  
 with deliberate gaiety  
 Trumpets harshly into the  
 Silence of the room..

( 1965 ; 7 - 16 )

The concentrated warmth of the movement of physical union, like that of 'the burning mouth of sun', is too complete, self-contained and intense in itself to be identified with love, perhaps even to be named. The sun with its heat is suggestive of the glow of passion and lust. The 'unending lust; which binds the lovers together momentarily is suggested by the imagery of 'male limbs as carnivorous plants':

...his limbs like pale and  
 Carnivorous plants reaching  
 out for me...  
 ( 1965 ; 4 - 6 ).

The tranquillity attained in lust slowly fades into a death reverie provoked by the sight of the 'corpse - bearers'. 'The sleek crows flying like poison on wings' resurrect the noxious memory of love - making. In 'The Suicide', like Walt Whitman, Kamala Das underlines the fact that the body and the soul are inseparable. Therefore, she cannot choose between a physical and spiritual death.

But the sea in the poem expresses a preference for her soul because

I throw the bodies out  
 I cannot stand their smell.  
 Only the souls may enter  
 The vortex of the sea.

( 1967 ; 9 - 12 )

The emotional restlessness of the poet in the volume '*The Descendants*' is more complex and more accentuated partly because of the positivity of the 'body's wisdom' which is qualified by the new recognition that the body itself is subject to decay and that this brings physical ugliness into view. This is in sharp contrast to the poet's volume '*Summer in Calcutta*' where the devouring vastness of the forest fire is used to focus the poet's all absorbing white-hot sensibility. In '*Ferns*' there is ironic glorification of physical love even when the poet is painfully aware of its sad end. The poem arrests sexual love in an image of self-devouring and self-mocking intensity which suggests that perhaps there is a sense which her glorification of physical love carries with it an element of disenchantment. The putrescent sensuality that haunts the relationship of the lovers is conveyed through such metaphors as 'dismembered heads', 'night streets grinning in static mirth' and 'eat its own hotted flesh' and confirmed by the pictorial lines

...and our

Bodies stacked on beds will mimic the slow  
 Gestures of the mind and take on the blame  
 In silent sin...

(1967 ; 16 - 19)

Desire is identified with the flesh. In its various forms it fascinates as well as troubles. Kamala Das identifies desire with sexuality. The idea of sexuality runs like forest fire in Kamala Das's poetry. However, it is the disappointment and disgust with sexual union without love that mark most of her poems. In her poems love and hate, excitement and depression appear side by side. In her life-long search for true love and true lover, the poet has stumbled on the painful discovery that man succumbs only to the snare of lust. Thus the woman is nothing more than a passive participant in the ritual of sensuality planned by man. Graces of love are unknown to him :

Men are worthless, to trap them  
 Use the cheapest bait of all, but never  
 Love ...

( 'A Losing Battle' ; 1965 ; 3 - 5 )

And the cheapest bait is lust. The poet's repeated forays into the intricacies of sexuality, lust and depression are laced with a longing for an ideal man to fill her dreams with the hues of love. In spite of her obsession with the hectic love life that never get fully realized, the poet has never been a nymphomaniac, reluctant or otherwise. These

alignments form the basic design in the general pattern of Kamala Das's explorations into the meaning of love, lust and sexuality. For her ideal love is a fulfilled experience attained through sex but beyond its constructive dimensions. It is a tension that envelops the body, the mind and the soul. When love stops with the intimacies of the body, it becomes lust and the lovers are deprived of the ultimate bliss which is part of an ideal man-woman relationship. In Kamala Das's poetry, there is an untiring search for the perfect masculine male and each encounter with the male either as husband or the lover, is an experiment in discovering the meaning of true love. The repeated failures of such experiments make her resentful and defiant turning each encounter for her merely as a substitute for the real experience. Her preoccupation with the intensity of sexual love, or with the tensions of a love which she herself cannot fully resolve, does not bring her to the brink of inarticulation. Words are an abstraction and being the product of conscious formulation, are therefore opposed to the elemental darkness of passion. This is one of the strands which runs through her poetry, and time, and again she shows us the inadequacy of language to cope with the weight and depth of her emotional experiences. As Kadiatu Kanneh puts it :

The tremor which seizes the woman from  
the depths of her lungs, the irresistible

use of the body to complement the unmanageable ripple of her voice, is an accurate account not of an inherent feminine essence but of the direct results of social marginalization and intolerable sexual visibility. Not conditioned to wear mastery in a public scene or to forget the role of her body in a voyeuristic male society, the female public speaker acts, in this prototypical case with a shivering uncertainty, handling the language of politico-theoretical discourse with stumbling skill. (1996, 332)

In Kamala Das's case, however, it is not merely a question of the palpableness of sensuous experience seeking a viable vehicle in intellectual form and notation, but also a question of the sheer quantity of energy, the density of passions.

The theme of lust is apotheosised in 'Convicts' a poem in which sensual love is portrayed in terms of physical labour and heat. The convicts are the lovers and their lust is universal. The comparison of the lovers with 'toys dead children leave behind' implies the fatal nature of lust. The lovers have lost their separate genders in the heat and heaviness of lust:

That was the only kind of love,  
This hacking at each other parts  
Like convicts hacking, breaking clods  
At noon. We were earth under hot  
Sun. There was a burning in our  
Veins and the cool mountain nights did  
Nothing to lessen heat. When he  
And I were one, we were neither

male nor female. (1967; 8-16)

It is tragic that 'love' should manifest itself through such acts of destruction. The reader's response is further complicated by the presence of a wistfulness in the poetic persona, especially towards the end of the poem. It is implied here that there might have been greater sexual harmony under more congenial circumstances.

Numerous references in her autobiography and other prose works substantiate to a certain extent the kind of discoveries she has made about men on whom some poems are based. In *'I Studied all Men'*, Kamala Das writes how she was spurred by her unusual marriage:

'... into a hectic love life with a  
small capital - just a pair of beautiful breasts  
and a faint musk - rat smell in my perspiration  
... Each night, after stripping myself,  
I put aside my soul and entered the  
arena with a body as efficient as a  
clockwork toy'. (Love and friendship ; 14)

The concept that marriage was a union of souls and mind seems to have gone astray. It had degenerated into lust bereft of the participation of the soul. And the constant struggle of the poet to free herself from the impasse yielded little result. Kamala Das identifies herself with Radha and seeks to realise union with the Lord. The Radha - Krishna

myth provides an objective correlative for her passionate yearnings and repressed desires. In the above article, she writes :

I was entirely without lust. I hoped that  
Someday as I lay with a man, some where  
beneath the bone, at a deadened spot, a  
contact would be made, and that afterwards each  
movement of my love would become meaningful.  
I looked for the beautiful Krishna in every man.  
(Love and Friendship ; 5)

In several poems of Kamala Das, lust causes devastation and disintegration of the self. The fragility of love experience is the theme that dominates 'Glass'. The poem describes in a tone of mock indifference the woman's ritual manipulations of various lovers. Fragility of glass is analogous to the fragility of love :

I went him for half an hour  
A pure woman, pure misery  
Fragile glass ...( 1973 ; 1 - 3 )

In the arms of the lover she is reduced to 'an armful of splinters', a handful of broken glass. She enters into love experience with a sort of unconcern bordering on the abominable. The absence of involvement and the sad satiety haunt her :

With a cheap toy's indifference  
I enter other's  
Lives, and  
Make of every trap of lust  
A temporary home. ( 1973 ; 18 - 22 )

The juxtaposition of 'trap' and 'home' instantly illustrates the irreconcilability of her love experience with genuine pleasure. A feeling that nothing endures in man - woman relationship fills the poem. After every encounter, the woman - body feels so badly beaten. There is a search for the 'misplaced father' at the end of the poem. The father figure merges with the lover in a Freudian manner and the picture that emerges is that of 'every woman who seeks love', flitting from one man to another as if in unmentioned revenge against the male order. However vital 'the body's wisdom' may be, it cannot satisfy the poet for long. Nor it can be the end of any search for certitude and meaning, clinical or mythical. In 'The Prisoner', the poet compares herself to the convict who 'studies his prison's geography' with suspicion and hope :

I study the trappings  
Of your body, dear love  
For I must some day find  
An escape from its snare.  
( 1973 ; 3 - 6 )

Trapping here has a double meaning for Kamala Das - one is that she wants to be free herself from the trapping of lust to know true love and, the other is the soul's cry against the mortal dress. Either way there is a trap since body and soul are not envisaged by Kamala Das

as separate entities there is little qualitative difference between losing one or losing the other

Bereft of soul  
 my body shall be bare  
 Bereft of body.  
 My soul shall be bare.  
 ( 'The Suicide' : 1967 ; 1 - 4 )

There is no final escape 'from cages of involvement' and there is no freedom which does not run the danger of becoming imprisoned. Even after recovering from her ailments, Kamala Das has to reconcile herself with 'the weary body settling into accustomed grooves'. In the poem 'After the Illness', the imagery of lust and flesh suggesting her recovery, reviving the will to live :

...There was  
 Not much flesh left for the flesh to hunger, the blood had  
 Weakened too much to lust ...  
 ( 1973 ; 10 - 12 )

In spite of the body's unattractiveness and skin's numbness what made her husband lust for her ? Was it the 'deeply hidden soul'? In attempting to find answers to these questions, Kamala Das contradicts herself with the stance that the body and soul are one entity as in 'The Suicide'. It seems here in 'After the Illness' that the body and soul are separate. It is characteristic of the poet not to attempt to resolve the dilemma beyond the limits inherent in the very nature of her own experience. Kamala Das seems to suggest that

perhaps the body and soul are inseparable, but she finds it difficult to experience the wholeness, the sense of completeness without a shadow of doubt and uncertainty. Her exploration into the nature of lust is not merely confined to the exposure of the male personality but also, as indicated above, into her own anguished self. This is the despair that every woman goes through mostly the married ones. There is a perceptible gap between their longing and its gratification. In the anguish and anger of unfulfilled desires there hides a tacit confession that the woman needs the male's solicitude to realise herself fully. Instead of lending a helping hand to the wife to raise herself to the pedestal of self-realisation, the husband exploits her body and destroys her mind :

...You were pleased  
 With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow  
 Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured  
 Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed  
 My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices. You called me wife.  
 ( 'The Old Playhouse' ; 1973 ; 8 - 12 ).

The husband's lust administered to the poet in 'lethal doses' rendered her life joyless, dark and passive. Kamala Das's protest here, is not merely against the superficial aberrations of married life but also against the usual domestic credo that permits the free exhibition of the male ego in all its horrid manifestations.

Kamala Das has always been concerned with the precariousness and incompleteness of the love-relationship. The precariousness may be due to the change of feelings or to the nature of sexual love which, Kamala Das, despite her occasional glorification of it, finds inherently incomplete and brief. From the theme of the incompleteness of love, it is quite logical for the poet to turn to the very precariousness of the body on which it depends. Sometimes, such a deep immersion in this theme leads Das to reflect on the contrasting attitudes in man and woman to love. At other times, these are complimentary, even though physiologically they are opposite: 'the hungry haste of rivers' in man and 'the ocean's tireless waiting' in the woman. Woven into this is the poet's central theme, the exploration of the true nature of love and of the extent to which the intensity of love, when achieved is self sufficient. There is a frequent reference to illness; and the concern with the decay of body and with all the sensuous pleasure that is bound up with its physical limitations is more pervasive than before. The decaying house of the grandmother is sometimes internalised through physical symbols as in the following:

My body is like a mansion where once parties were given. Wine flowed The dancers danced the musicians sang Every guest was noble Every guest was a pleasure seeker. Then the house crumbled, and one day the slum dwellers began to arrive with their shabby luggage Each step they took was with an apology.

We know that we ought not to have come here, they said. Like the slumdweller the aches came creeping in a night into this body where once only pleasures lived. These are the new tenants, they know that they have come to stay.

(*'The Sparrow on the Glass - Pane'*, No-5)

In 'Gino' multiple meanings emerge from the single central concept. It encompasses the terrestrial delusion of love and lust as well as the ethereal visions of life, death and rebirth. Juxtaposition of lust and death is a common device in Kamala Das's poetry that projects the consciousness of futility wrapping all lust activity. In the latter part of the poem, the poet discards the idea of triumphant love instead of chasing it, she realises that they are unreal. She also feels that the sheer burden of the body growing uncomely and gross with years and its slow decay are more real:

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

(1973 : 37-41)

The strength of Kamala Das's poetry lies in its haunting ability to awaken our dormant human sympathies and our repressed passion for genuine man - woman relationship. Her ideal man - woman relationship is based on love without lust, passion without desire for

possession and sympathy without condescension. Kamala Das has admitted that there is 'lot of love' in her poems. She wrote.

Love is beautiful, whatever four-lettered names  
The puritans call it by. It is the foretaste of  
paradise. It is the only pastime that involves the soul.  
( 'Obscenity and Literature' : April 1972 ).

But she is not a poet of free love as allegedly some critics opine. On the contrary, she upholds the sanctity of domestic and marital relationship. But she is disheartened when marital love degenerates into lust, and when marital relationship turns into one of domination by the male over the female. The traces of sexual repression and gloomy-foreboding found in the love poems of Emily Dickinson and Emily Bronte are absent in the poems of Kamala Das of love and lust. She is perhaps, the most feminine among the women poets writing in English and her feminine sensibility is manifested not in her fulmination against the male world but in her rapture and excitement in receiving pure love and her subsequent disillusionment when the same degenerates into lust. Her repeated explorations of the same theme in poem after poem is an incantatory and ritualistic performance that secures for her emotional purgation and ultimate tranquillity and serenity. Kamala Das's poems on the theme of love does not exist for its own sake but concerns with lust, death, decay, illness and the human

body . If lust produces frustration in the woman subjected to it , it also produces cruelty in the man who practices it .

Thus love and hate , excitement and depression appear side by side . Love expression in Kamala Das's poetry is a kaleidoscope of numerous tensions . Their several alignments form the basic design in the general pattern of her explorations into the meaning of love , lust and sexuality . For her ideal love is a fulfilled experience attained through sex but moves beyond its physical dimensions . It is a tension that envelops the body , the mind and the soul . When love is imprisoned within the intimacies of the body , it becomes lust and the lovers are deprived of the ultimate bliss which is a part of every ideal man - woman relationship . Since , the quest in her case is a failure , sex is no more than a 'mindless surrender' or a heartless participation and not a 'humming fiesta' K.R.S. Iyengar rightly points out that hers "is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely man - made world ." (1984 ; 680) .

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THE BODY AND BEYOND A  
STUDY OF JUDITH WRIGHT

“We don't know what women's vision is. What do women's eyes see? How do they care, invent, decipher the world? I don't know. I know my own vision, the vision of one woman, but the world seen through the eyes of others? I only know what men's eyes see (1996 ; 56-57)” - maintains Viviane Forrester in her essay 'What Women's Eyes See' in an attempt to differentiate between male and female sensibilities, Forrester makes an open call to underline how reality is perceived. From perception of reality issues out two interrelated positions one that acknowledges one's selfhood and the other that determines subject position. These two interrelated issues are crucial to women writers as well as to feminist discourse. What we understand by feminine sensibility today is how creativity is related to articulation of human relationships. Judith Wright as an important woman creative writer from Australia accepts the difference in sensibilities (male and female) and articulates her own experiences and feelings as a woman. Her strength as a poet, however, is a vision of integration and unity. In this chapter a detailed analysis of Judith Wright's poetry is attempted to show what does she see and how differently does she see things, the world and reality as a woman, a feminist and a human subject. The radical feminists may find Judith Wright too conventional for she does not like to use their language for she conceives woman as the mother earth and reveals a sensibility that is like Jane Austen, self-absorbing and celebrating the essential goodness of the world. She comes closer to Showalter's understanding of orthodox humanism, a

belief in literature as an expression of universal unity encompassing men and women known as 'human nature'

As a powerful voice from Australia, Judith Wright has shown stronger feeling for the land and its traditions. She has registered a distinct voice through her poetic works that runs counter to the male tradition of robust balladry and outdoor narrative Preoccupation which are obvious, throughout Judith Wright's whole poetic canon - continuity, love, nature, the imagination and language - are all interrelated aspects of a unity which she seeks. It must be stressed that this unity is both physical and psychic. On the one hand, the pattern of human life is seen as an integral part of the cycles of the natural world. On the other hand, through the workings of the imagination, the mind of man is united with the natural world. Love and vision are the forces working for unity - for personal integration of man with the world about him. Love is seen as a powerful, physical and metaphysical force, the life force itself. It ensures the unity of man and nature and is the agency through which continuity is achieved.

. Philip Lindsay writing about Judith Wright glorifies her as :

the only woman who has kissed and told. Other woman have sung of love, but apart from Sappho - and she after all, was a man in female skin - none have written honestly and without shame of their desires (1968; 35)

He pronounces Judith Wright as 'the first woman honestly to unbar her lover's heart in her verse' in contrast to Emily Dickinson, Emily Bronte, Christina Rossetti, whose love poetry, according to him, is inspired by 'sexual repression' and starved hearts rather than sexual fulfillment.

The search for unity accounts for the conflict at the heart of Judith Wright's poetry. For the compulsion to unity (for instance, surrender to love and natural process) is countered by the poet's fear of the full implications of such a surrender. Many of her most powerful lyrics contain both contrary impulses in synthesis, and the inclusion within any one poem, or even within a particular symbol, of both points of view leads to that sense of realism which is a mark of the best of Judith Wright's poetry. One expression of the above mentioned fear is the poet's obsession - particularly in the early poetry - with time, death, evil and psychic disintegration. However, her quite considerable prose writings provide a rational basis for the sense of disintegration which is so strongly felt in the poems of *'The Moving Image'*, which re-emerges in *'The Two Fires'* but which is definitely latent throughout the poetry. Considering the poem 'The Company of Lovers' in the former collection, with all the human description also concentrates on a sense of life lost, of desolation, of deprivation:

Death marshals up his armies round us now.  
 Their footsteps crowd too near.  
 Lock your warm hand above the chilling heart  
 and for a time I live without my fear  
 Grope 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 cordons in. (1972:9-16)

The poet's search for unity is modified by a number of important phases in her life and development. "*The Moving Image*" was written at a time when war and death were oppressive facts of everyday life, and the emphasis is upon vulnerability and disintegration. Affirmative elements in these poems are focused upon an awareness of the continuity of the physical and the psychic life of mankind. Throughout the poetry continuity has a wider sense than that of a simple temporal progression. Continuity is a cognitive concept too, in that man's vision of reality, his total world picture is not only an inheritance from the past, but is shaped and communicated through language - hence the importance of the word. For Judith Wright, to love is to communicate and thus to feel divine; and to communicate is to feel creative. Language is an affirmation of the power of love for Judith Wright: words are necessary for interpreting one's passions. In "Water" the simple perception of the movement of water can stimulate a perception of a profounder process:

Such sentences, such cadences of speech

the tonguing water stutters in its race  
 as may have set us talking each to each  
 before our language found its proper pace.

(1972 ; 9 - 12)

Concern with the relationship between language and creation is at the heart of Judith Wright's "Camping Split Rock". Each perception is an involvement within a word :

The finger of age old water splits the rock  
 and makes us room to live ; the age-old word  
 runs on in language and from obstinate dark  
 hollows us room for seeing . (1972 , 17 - 20)

in "prayer" confronted with the thought of death herself, the poet prays that she retain love which includes 'the power to see the words', as well- as the power to speak words :

And you, who speak in me when I speak well,  
 Withdraw not your grace, leave me not dry and cold,  
 I have praised you in the pain of love, I could praise you still  
 in the slowing of the blood the time when I grow old.

(1972 ; 17 - 20)

Judith Wright never gets breathless even when she is at her most intense as in "*Woman to Man*", the collection of poems she is best known by . In "To Hafiz and Shiraz", she suggests that with the repetition 'of experience, there is a corresponding simplification of words but that repetition and simplification need not mean the loss of intensity for .

Every path and life leads one way only ,  
 out of continual miracle , through creations fable  
 over and over repeated but never yet understood ,

as every word leads back to the blinding original word.  
(1972 : 18-21)

In the poems of "*Woman to Man*", Judith Wright finds the answer to her earlier sense of disintegration, for the celebration of sexual love and physical creation swings the balance to the other extreme: that a joyful unity with and integration into the great round of nature. The most frequent critical comment made about Judith Wright was that in her poetry she succeeded in creating a satisfying fusion of passion and intellect. This unity is consummated and guaranteed by the creation of the child. Motherhood and child-bearing are the prerogatives of womankind that offer a sense of fulfillment and contentment to her. In the role of a mother, woman is not different from the earth. The last stanza of Judith Wright's "*Woman to Child*" highlights this truth:

I wither and you break from me :  
Yet though you dance in living light  
I am the earth, I am the root ,  
I am the stem that fed the fruit,  
The link that joins you to the night.  
(1972 ; 16 - 20)

At the same time, the mother as poet achieves a further unity, - the unity of the imagination and the world of nature. The philosophical concept of unity is fully realized in works which are themselves fine examples of organic unity, with theme, structure and symbolism all contributing to a fully integrated whole. The symbolism merits the close scrutiny to which it is subjected, for the ambivalence of the

poet's attitude to love and nature is largely expressed through symbolism rather than through direct statement

Our love is so natural  
the wild animals move  
gentle and light on  
the shores of our love .  
(Our Love is so Natural' :1972 :1-4)

The urge to identity with physical passion and with natural process is strong and the intellectual qualifications are subsumed within the symbolism, so that the result is poetry of sensual passion and metaphysical strength, for the lyrical urge to sing of love in time . The symbolism which fuses these contrary urges is archetypal in the truest sense, for it takes us back to the primitive mythic sense of the fertility of the earth, of the turning cycle of the days, the seasons and the cosmos, and of man's participation in and integration into this round. Judith Wright's use of myth may also be considered under the concept of continuity, in that the emotional history of mankind, the most powerful concepts by which man lives and shapes his experience and accounts for his world, are mythic in quality :

Only the rider's heart  
halts at a sightless shadow, an unsaid word  
that fastens in the blood the ancient curse  
the fear as old as Cain .  
(Bora Ring' : 1972 · 13-16)

The use of myth, from the poet's early and self-conscious imposition of an Old Testament pattern upon colonial experience, to her later assured and skillful handling of the mythic and symbolic patterns of fecundity and renewal is discussed in this context. At its best this symbolism unites the physical and imaginative life of man with the help of the cosmos, and recognises the ambivalence of man's position in the cosmic context.

Judith Wright's confrontation with the darker aspects of experience - the imperfection of love and the duality of nature is manifestly overt. There is a radical change in her aesthetic from the simple rapture of the monist at one with his world, to the more analytic stance of the aesthetic theorist. The poet is deeply aware of the limitations of the cognitive-aesthetic act, of the inadequacy of language and the failure of the imagination. Judith Wright's realistic confrontation of imperfection in three related areas - love, nature and poetry - destroys the basis of the unified vision and leads to poetry of detachment and acceptance, 'Unity becomes duality' and the polarities of her poetic vision - joy and pain, life and death, reality and art, unity and disintegration - are accepted as necessary and even appealing aspects of being:

A far-off boat moves on the morning sea.  
That broad and equal monotone of light  
is drawn to focus, purpose enters in

Its unity becomes duality,  
and action scars perfection like a pin.  
(‘Return’: 1972: 1-5)

Detachment and acceptance are the keynotes of the poems and this is reflected in the technical aspects of the poetry. Although there are many admirable poems which express this changing vision, many others are marred by a lack of poetic control (either inflation or banality), prosaic diction, or by a loss vigour and poetic tension.

‘The Moving Image’ one of the most important of Judith Wright’s early poems initiates in one form or another all of her major themes:

I am the maker. I have made both time and fear,  
Knowing that to yield to either is to be dead.  
All that is real is to live, to desire, to be,  
till I say to the child I was, “It is this; it is here”.  
In the doomed cell I have found love’s whole eternity  
(1972 : 32 - 36)

The poem deals with not only man’s increasing subordination to time as he matures from childhood to adult life but also it affirms the power of the human spirit to triumph over its temporal bondage. The child’s carefree conception of time is examined in minute detail. To him the years seem “enormous” eternity is eminent in every green field and he is unafraid. This is the best of Judith Wright’s projections of the integrated vision of the child who is in tune with natural time. His ‘green’ world is measured by the recurrence of the natural cycle: the

time 'between one blue summer and another', the 'tree dressed in gold' for autumn. His temporal awareness is measured by moments of heightened consciousness and is characterised by a fluidity of spatial and temporal concepts.

Love for Judith Wright is a physical compulsion which ensures the continuity of the generations, a vitalistic force which moves through and orders the entire phenomenal world, and finally a powerful, spiritual force - the counter to fear, evil and hatred. As such love is primarily a unifying power, reconciling individuals with one another, integrating the individual into the cycles of the natural world, and guaranteeing the unity and continuity of all aspects of being, for all are manifestations of the primal creative force of life itself. This accounts for Judith Wright's emphasis upon sexual love, for sexual love is the force which integrates the pattern of human life - of love and procreation, of birth and death - into the cyclical pattern of renewal in the natural world. The poet is able to achieve this by means of dramatic lyrics which present a particular physical situation and at the same time define its metaphysical significance. "Woman to Man" exploits the full ambience of mystery and paradox to communicate the spiritual as well as the physical miracle of the creation of new life. The purely physical level is direct and explicit. 'The blind head butting at the

'dark' is both the phallus (the immediate) and the child's head at the moment of birth - the future implicit in the present. The poem has a double time perspective in which intercourse and birth, the act and the future contained in it are synchronized. The physical act is also suggested by the rhythm which gathers impetus in the final stanza and reaches an orgasmic climax in the final line where the sexual act, and its significance fuse in the mind of the woman.

This is the maker and the made;  
 this is the question and reply;  
 the blind head butting at the dark'  
 the blaze of light along the blade.  
 Oh hold me, for I am afraid.

(1972 : 16-20)

The sexual embrace is inseparable from the mystery of conception and gestation. The woman is the creator, and to her the sexual act is not only an act of love, but an act of creation involving 'the third who lay in the embrace'. This integration is largely achieved by the symbolic identification of birth and the life pattern with the seasons, the diurnal cycle and the fecundity of the vegetation cycle. Yet nowhere is sexual love seen as purely physical. Through the sexual act and through conception love repeats the primal creative act and man is inducted into the cycles of life which constitute eternity in Judith Wright's terms. The most frequent critical comment made about Judith Wright was that in her poetry she succeeded in creating a satisfying

fusion of passion and intellect. But this determination to think about the quality of her feelings brought tremendous stresses and strains which eventually told on both her language and technique. Stephen Heath analyses the particular situation in the proper perspective:

The woman is more naturally a writer, since close to the mother tongue, close to creation: 'it is the woman who is more the writer, by the very fact that she creates an idiom; and the poet well knows that it is the mother tongue he speaks and no other', woman's pleasure being in excess and at expense of the phallus, the phallic order of the signifier, it is like process of writing: 'female pleasure can be seen as writing this pleasure and the literary text (which is also written like an orgasm produced from within discourse) are the effect of the same murder of the signifier. (1996 : 313)

Judith Wright's manifesto - 'I am the maker' - does not simply apply to the poet as 'maker'; it is also a recognition of the power of sexual love to transmit life through time. Such a shift of perspective transforms time the destroyer into time the agent of continuity and generation, for it is within time that love fulfills its creative function, and time brings to fruition the continuing cycles of life which love creates. In all this there is no guarantee of personal immortality; the reassurance is one of involvement in continuity. The individual becomes part of something which is eternal - the family of man and the vitalistic cycles of nature. The joyful acceptance of this involvement elevates physical experience to a transcendent dimension.

sanctifying the child as evidence of both physical and spiritual continuity

You who were darkness warmed my flesh  
 where out of darkness rose the seed.  
 Then all a world I made in me ;  
 all the world you hear and see  
 hung upon my dreaming blood.

(*Woman to Child* : 1972 : 1-5)

This experience for Judith Wright gives the individual access to creativity - both physical and aesthetic. It is also a recognition of the basic physical unity of man and the world of nature, in that the same life processes govern both.

In "*Woman to Man*" both imagery and paradox transmit the metaphysical significance of the sex act. The symbolism is that of darkness and light chaos and creation, and the regenerative cycles of nature. An example of multiple layers of significance is the image of the resurrection day, the day of birth. This not only suggests the birth of the child from the darkness of the womb, but also the resurrection of Christ, with the triumphant mastery over death which this event implied. The identification of both with the rising of the sun, both here and in "*Woman's Song*" transcends the Christian reference and takes us back to the mythic identification of birth, sunrise and the origin of

the world. Each human birth repeats the primal triumph of creativity over chaos ('the selfless, shapeless seed' of line 2). In each birth, death and darkness are conquered once again. The continuity of life which is achieved through sexual love is further defined in the complex symbol of the tree of life:

This is the blood's wild tree that grows  
the intricate and folded rose.  
(Woman to Man: 1972: 14 - 15)

The 'blood's wild tree' is both a physical symbol - perhaps the tree like arteries and veins rooted in the beating heart - and a symbol of continuity in the generations. The longed for child, the flowering of this tree of passion, is the rose, the traditional symbol of beauty and transience. Moreover, the embryo rose is 'intricate and folded' bud like, suggesting both potentiality and the actual embryonic appearance. At the same time, the image of the 'blood's wild tree' insists upon the organic unity of man and nature, a unity which is reiterated elsewhere in Judith Wright's poetry. This symbol, the mother as tree and the child as flower or fruit of the tree, and the organic identity which it proposes, are grounded in myth. The tree is a symbol not only of the unity of all being, but of the inexhaustible creativity of all living things which the feminine principle represents. Thus the persona of the poet which emerges is representative of and reflects the numinous quality

of the eternal feminine, and the tree in her blood is a manifestation in time of the many-branching tree of all life which knows no time.

Procreation constitutes the core of love and sex between males and females and it is also the basis of a happy family life and society. In "Ishtar" Judith Wright presents woman as one who fully knows the truth of the body but her thoughts are not overtly expressed. She is actually an inseparable part of the entire procreative system of child birth and of continuity of life. The poet expresses the hopes and fears of a mother in the following extract:

When in fear I became a Woman  
 I first felt your hand.  
 When the shadow of the future first fell across me  
 it was your shadow, my grave and hooded attendant.  
 (Ishtar: 1972 : 5-8)

The relation that belongs to physical union is strongly conveyed, yet sexuality never becomes the most important aspect of the love relationship, nor is the lover fully individualized. Instead, he is relegated to the position of a servant to the vast impersonal power which possesses both. The focus is upon the child, both for itself and as evidence of the creative power of sexual love. The child too tends to have symbolic status rather than individuality, and the undifferentiated nature of the child as symbol allows the full significance of birth and

the renewal which it signifies, the vulnerability of the individual is continually countered. This is why in "Woman to Child" the mother contains not only the spatial world in microcosm - 'all a world I made in me' - but the temporal dimension too, in that the child is the symbol of the conquest of time:

All time lay rolled in me, and sense  
and love that knew not its beloved  
(Woman to Child; 1972 : 9-10)

Judith Wright's attitude to time is quite different considering her perception of her sexual role, for time is no longer a frightening force hurrying man on to destruction and death. Instead time is the beneficent agent of eternal recurrence and, accordingly, the poet sees her reproductive role in terms of the recurrent cycles of the natural world.

Judith Wright is not only clear about the positive and life affirming power of sexual love, she is equally clear about the misuse of sex, the denial of its creative power. This finds reference in "The Unborn" where the poet asserts:

Slight is the foothold from the well of night,  
the stair is broken and the keys are lost,  
and you whom I have wrecked and wrecked indeed;  
and yet you stand upon the edge of sight,  
and I have known no path you have not crossed.  
(1972 : 6-10)

The profound sense of loss and deprivation in the poem applies not only to the mother, but to the child whose conception she has apparently prevented, and who is 'wrecked indeed'. But 'Typists in the Phoenix Building' is probably the poet's most powerful condemnation of anti-sexual and life denying values. In this poem modern urban society is condemned as sterile, artificial and shallow, for it attempts to insure against, that is to hold at bay, the powerful forces of the natural world: not only fire and flood, but human sexuality:

Comptometers and calculators  
 compute the frequency of fires,  
 adduce the risk, add up the years.  
 Drawn by late- afternoon desires  
 the poles of mind meet lusts equators.  
 (1972; 11 - 15)

The focus of the poem is the Phoenix Building, which houses insurance firms, and the immature sexless beings who work there. The males are 'half-cock clerks', the typists 'shelter in their sex', and the corridors are 'fire proof', thus precluding sexual excitement. The train in the second stanza is a powerful image of male sexuality which in the poem is associated with pain and failure. Judith Wright's use of symbolism is clearly sensual, demonstrating an awareness of sex as a vital and indivisible component of reality. Much of her symbolism is implicitly sexual, as in the great palm of "The Bushfire" and the spring which

rises beneath it. The attenuated trunk of the palm tree suggests the phallus, and the spring within the grove is a feminine symbol, representative of the inexhaustible fecundity of the earth and of the water which is spontaneously generated by it. The implicit sexuality is a consistent factor in the poetry, suggesting always a unity between the sexuality of man and the fertility of the natural world.

The recurrent cycles of nature are mirrored not only in the birth, life, and death cycle of man, but in his diurnal cycle as well.

"Night and the Child" dramatizes the child's tentative search for the pattern of his world; his coming to an awareness of the underlying relationship between his own sleep, the death of the hawk, and the night journey of the sun:

The night comes up over you, faceless and forbidden,  
Over the hawk sunk in earth and the sun drunk by the sea,  
and who can tell, the child said, no matter what they say -  
who can be sure that the sun will rise on another day?

(1972; 7-10)

The myths of all cultures are grounded in an awareness of such underlying relationships, relationships which guarantee the subjective or spiritual affinity between the mind of man and the external world. These relationships are an expression of the basic congruence of all the cycles of the natural world, including those of man's life. Judith Wright defines the native and undifferentiated awareness of being at one

with nature which belongs to the consciousness of the child, then rejects the possibility of sustaining it, and finally points forward to a more valid and sophisticated sense of unity based not only upon the exhilaration which nature arouses in the blood, but upon an awareness of all aspects of being; of evil and suffering as well as of simple joy. An awareness of the price which unity with nature demands is characteristic of Judith Wright's thoughts. There is, throughout, a clear recognition of the individual vulnerability which is involved in the identification of the human life cycle with the rhythms of the natural world. The poet probes the ultimate position of the individual within nature and within the complex scheme of evolution. The unified vision must assimilate the polarities of experience; not only life and love, but pain, evil and death. This is the point of "Spring after War" where the resolution of the poem is based upon the dichotomies of the title (regeneration and death) and is sanctioned by the example of the natural world. The poem is beautifully balanced in its movement back and forward from the questioning mind to the exemplary world.

Though the poetry of Judith Wright is certainly expressive of feminine sensuality, this sensuality is always modified by a strong awareness of its metaphysical significance. This involves an acceptance of the feminine role in its fullest sense; of an involvement in creativity which is akin to and partakes of the dynamic creativity of the natural

world. The poetry transcends the feminine sensibility and the feminine experience which undoubtedly inform it. The poet's voice, at its most powerful, is the voice of the primordial feminine, speaking of the inexhaustible and eternally recurrent fertility of the earth's cycles of which birth is the human expression. Her characteristic imagery too is that of the regenerative cycles of physical life; imagery which is defined by Jung, and later by Newmann, as pertaining to the eternal feminine. The sympathetic identification of man with nature is not only constantly maintained, but is strengthened, for it is in sexual love, and eventually in childbirth that the poet at last feels herself at one with the earth and the regenerative cycles of nature:

I hold the crimson fruit  
and plumage of the palm;  
flame-tree, that scarlet spirit,  
in my soil takes root.  
(‘The Maker’; 1972; 1 - 4)

At the same time, Judith Wright is able to include her personal reservations towards her role, thus adding realism to her total projection of the feminine sensibility. These reservations are either overt (‘oh hold me, for I am afraid’) or sublimated within the symbolism, such as that of light and darkness and are in line with the strain of ambiguity and conflict throughout her poetry. The poet embraces physicality as the

viable counter to time, yet is fearful and resentful of the implacable, impersonal and often cruel forces which control the physical world

One of the strangest things about Judith Wright is that she has no juvenilia to show, no period of youthful and immature development. She appeared on the Australian literary scene with her talents fully grown. Her poems lack the complexity, the dark and yet urgent presence of the poet herself in them. Yet it has another quality - it is magnificent poetry of projection, of subtle and unobtrusive self-identification. The poet is there, not in the poems as a character, but within the characters themselves, and within the frame work of the language. It is a measure of the complex nature of Judith Wright that the poet who is capable of losing herself within the subject of the poem can, almost in the same breath, produce a love poem of the most turbulent subjectivity. Also with the surest possible hand, Judith Wright has created a technical framework for a kind of poetry which could quite easily have slipped over into the abyss of nostalgic sentimentalism. "Brothers and Sisters" is written in a comparatively free run on form. It is near to the conversational, but not too near:

The pianola-oh, listen to the mocking bird -  
wavers on Sundays and has lost a note .  
The wrinkled ewes snatch pansies through the fence  
and stare with shallow eyes into the garden  
where Lucy shrivels waiting for a word ,  
and Millie's cancos loosen round her throat ,

The bush comes near , the ranges grow immense  
 (1972 ; 14 - 20 )

The skill here lies in the detached quality of the verse : the emotional tone is not loaded with technical accentuation.

Throughout the poetry of Judith Wright , the evolutionary process is given a mystical significance . Through it the individual life gains a transcendent value , in that it is the product of all previous existence and effort . The individual life is also set in perspective as part of a process which preserves and ensures the continuity of the race , thus conquering time . The triumph however is achieved only by love , suffering , strife and death . The poems of "*Woman to Man*" as a whole are the clearest and most integrated expression of unity of being in the poet's entire canon of work . Central to the total concept of unity which these poems convey is the sexual act and the birth of the child which integrates man into the creative cycles of the physical world . In "Midnight" at least this state is analogous to the state of pure love known only to the mystic or to the artist in an intense state of creativity :

So let my blood reshape its dream ,  
 drawn into that tideless stream ;  
 that shadowless and burning night  
 of darkness where I find my sight .  
 (1972 ; 17 - 20)

Allied to this is the cognitive act (seen in a number of poems as a sexual act) which unites the creative imagination with the phenomenal world of nature. Moving through and validating both physical and psychic unity is the life force which is love. The system is in a state of ceaseless flux which both manifests and guarantees its vitality. And, underlying all is the source of all creativity, whether it is the generative earth, the fertile darkness, or the creative unconscious.

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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 Olson, 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 shows with great erudition that man'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 haunting since early childhood. A world of searching, the elaboration of a knowledge, on the basis 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 repent 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  
construed through relationships.

If women have traditionally been positioned in terms of  
'otherness', then the desire to become subjects (which  
dominates the first phase of post-1960s feminism) is  
likely to be stronger than the desire to deconstruct,  
decentre or fragment subjectivity (which dominates 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 construing 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 recognised as a relative and shifting position. It has been our understanding 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 a 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 misprison. 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 bud scarcely fledged, was brought to her cage

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 *empt*  
 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.

Welcome, roots

(‘In Celebration of My Uterus’ quoted  
in Schneir ed 1995 330 - 31)

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. Kamala 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.

Kamala 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 Kamala Das’s poems also. Her fever can be traced back to the adolescent fear about her frigidity, 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 their myriad combinations. They unlock a world where experience is amenable 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 dampness, 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 positive 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 Amanuddin 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 recognise 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 "Jalsurya", 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. The

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'. Similar 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 contrived 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 concern for her child, born in an age of bloodshed and despair, grows into a universal concern for mankind. 'Jaisurya' 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

(1972 13-16)

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 is 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" betray 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 unflinching 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-despair 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 muted 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 Kamala 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)

Bereft 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 lie 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 Kanneh:

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

(*'The Company of Lovers'* : 1972 : 1-8)

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.  
 Grope 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 cordons 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 flesh  
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 zest 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.



CONCLUSION

In the introduction to her work The Second Sex , Simone de Beauvoir starts with the question 'What is a woman ?' She then goes on exploring the physical and social aspects that differentiates a woman from a man . Now , in the postmodern period , we might have moved far away from de Beauvoir's fundamental assertions in inquiring into 'What is a woman ?' . There is no need anymore to establish a woman's gender identity , and argue that she is equally capable like men in the areas of creative writing as well as challenging men in the so - called areas meant 'only for man'. What is crucial in literary and critical discourse is how far we have been able to understand 'women's writing' as different from other writings . The question that needs to be explored is how the difference is articulated ? Does that difference speak of fundamental differences in thinking , feeling and articulation ? If so , how does it work ? All these question and others concerning body, motherhood , woman - child relationship , man - woman relationship , and spiritualism are discussed in the foregoing chapters in the context of Kamala Das and Judith Wright as feminist poets.

It is widely held that while one's sex is determined by anatomy , the prevailing concepts of gender - of the traits that constitute what is masculine and what is feminine - are largely , if not entirely , cultural constructs that were generated by the omnipresent patriarchal biases of our civilization . In this way the masculine in our culture has come to be identified as active,

dominating , adventurous , rational , creative , the feminine , by systematic opposition to such traits , has come to be identified as passive , acquiescent , timid , emotional and conventional . Further , it is often held that the traditional aesthetics categories and criteria for analyzing and appraising literary works , although represented in standard critical theory as objective , disinterested , and universal are in fact infused with masculine assumptions , interests , and ways of reasoning , so that the standard rankings , and also the critical treatments , of literary works in fact been tacitly but thoroughly gender - biased . The feminists of all hues challenge this bias . They call attention to deconstructing our critical approaches and dealing with literature so as to do justice to female points of view , concerns and values . In the eighties , feminists have moved from the social to the linguistic challenges of gender discrimination . The sweeping radical claim of French theorists has declared that language is not gender - neutral . Therefore , the need of the hour is not only that women should create a tradition of their own writing but should also create a language of their own . The basic problem of the French theorists is to establish the very possibility of a woman's language that will not , when a woman writes , automatically be appropriated into the phallogocentric language , for such appropriation forces her into complicity with the linguistic features that impose on females a condition of marginality and subservience , or even of linguistic nonentity .

To get rid of this dilemma, Helen Cixous points the existence of an incipient 'feminine writing' which has its source in the mother, in that stage of the mother - child relation before the child acquires the father's language. Therefore, in her view, this prelinguistic potentiality in the unconscious manifests itself in those written texts which, abolishing all repressions undermine and subvert the fixed signification, the 'logic' and 'closure' of phallogentric language, and open into a joyous freeplay of meanings. Alternately Luce Irigaray posits "woman's writing" which evades the male monopoly and the risk of appropriation into the existing systems by establishing as its generative principle, in place of the monolithic phallus, the diversity, fluidity, and multiple possibilities inherent in the structure and erotic functioning of the female sexual organs and in the distinctive nature of female sexual experience.

In our study of Kamala Das and Judith Wright, in spite of arguments and counter-arguments by critics, what has emerged clearly is their unique sensibility. Central to that unique sensibility are female experience and imagination. Although Kamala Das has shown a different language use, rhetorical employment, Judith Wright seems to be traditional. However, their feelings and experiences as women illuminate through their creativity. Hence, it will not be improper to say that both belong to the tradition of women writing with the attendant features that the feminists consider unique to 'women's

writing'. In their poems one witnesses a strong disapproval of men's point of view prioritizing only the female way of seeing and understanding things around them or through their lived experiences. If we don't accept aesthetic value as universal and axiomatic, we find in the works of both poets superb poetic qualities that resonate through a unique use of symbols and metaphors that inform the aesthetic quality of their works.

Female identity apart from being based on a difference or lack is mostly socially constructed. Kamala Das's self-definition subsumed in the poetic persona 'I' talks of her individuality and gender difference. She starts with knowing her, 'who is she' and then articulates her feelings in poetry from that position. She is often rebellious and vehement in articulating her subject position. Like Sylvia Plath, she does not want to shy away even from violence. Heterosexuality is not only a man's prerogative. However, Kamala Das visualizes it as a quest for wish-fulfillment. In her various sexual escapades, she is looking for the man of her ideal mate/man. She is unfortunate, in the sense that all her extramarital involvements only results in disgust and not in glorification. While in the social context she tries not to elude herself with the image of the ideals of Sita or Savitri, nonetheless she does not hesitate to play the role of Radha, the consort of Krishna. One may argue that Kamala Das has given a new direction to female spirituality in idealising Radha-Krishna love. To her physical love is a kind of sickness. However, the only escape from this

sickness is there in the ideal love of Radha and Krishna . The theme of Radha - Krishna love is stripped of all traditional trapping . Kamala Das understands this relationship as coming together of two like minded people . However , this pursuit does not bear fruit in the context of social control

Her anger and frustrations in her multiple relationships are obvious . This does not lead her to hate men in general . She as a mother is overgratified and loved the experience of motherhood . The birth of the child brings to her immense joy . Kamala Das may sound radical in sexual relationships , however , she is traditional in many ways as an Indian woman . As a creative writer, she combines many things traditional and modern and redefines woman's position in Indian society . On the whole , Kamala Das remains individualistic in her approach and articulation of creativity . She does not bother about Indian landscape or the nation as Judith Wright does likening her to the image of the earth mother .

Judith Wright's sensibility is quite different form that of Kamala Das's for she thinks of woman in a context of the earth- mother , procreator, nurturer of life . She is not as radical as Kamala Das in her sexual predilections . She certainly values ideal man - woman relationships . She is not a stranger in her own world ; indeed she is a happy poet who wishes all the very best . Her ideal relationship with her philosopher husband and having a home full with love shapes her poetic sensibility . She certainly starts with looking at herself as an

individual persona but works out on the relationships that persona has with others. The biological lack or difference does not trouble her for she looks at her difference as a gift that could bring meaning to her life

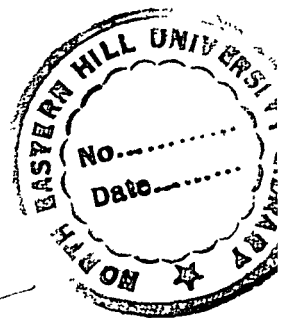
She does not make her lack as a convenient weapon to challenge rather consider it as a means through which she can bring in happiness to herself and others. Emerged from this conviction is her attitude to men and issues like motherhood and spiritualism. She enjoys motherhood and the innocent smile of a child's face brings to her heavenly feelings. In this mother - child ideal relationship she does not visualize the father as an intruder, he is in fact a part of it. Radical feminists may not like Wright for this conviction, however, she is correct in visualizing any woman as a representation of mother earth. The strength of Wright's poetry is that she strongly identifies with the Australian landscape. The landscape of Australia resonates through a kind of metaphoric flourish that adds to her feminine poetic charm. From this emerges a cohesive and integrated aesthetic vision in her poetry.

Although Kamala Das and Judith Wright differ significantly in their perception of reality and realisation of individual subject positions, they are complementary to each other in significant ways that addresses divergent view points of feminism. In reading both the poets while one, on the one hand, takes note of woman's agonies and anxieties,

depressions and deprivations , on the other, looks at those ways that may bring to her consolation and comfort, enlightenment and spiritual bliss .

More than anything else , both poets have deep faith in poetry . Poetry has become a means for not only their self - realization but also for self- expression . The Muse , ultimately becomes the goddess for an escape for anxieties or agonies and also a means of self- realization and spiritual quest . It becomes a means for them to become many women and forge sisterhood of women across the world . Poetry becomes the poets . Whether appreciated or not , they believe in the Muse as the means of their salvation :

Be caution'd then my Muse, and still retir'd ;  
 Nor be dispis'd aiming to be admired :  
 Conscious of wants , still with contracted wing .  
 To some few friends , and to thy sorrows sing .  
 For groves of Lawrell , than wert never meant ;  
 Be dark enough thy shades , and be then there content .  
 ( 1996 : 97 ).



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