



COMPARING POETIC TECHNIQUES OF KAMALA DAS AND SYLVIA PLATH

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ABSTRACT

Confessional poetry is an expression of thoughts and words in which emotion spontaneously embodies itself. In modern poetry, the form of words and the execution of language play an important role and stand over and above the emotional expression of individual experience. Shelley's definition of poetry that as the expression of imagination would be considered inadequate by modern poets, because poetry in the modern world is not only concerned with the poets' thoughts, emotions, sufferings, joys and revelations of self but also with the ability to observe and apprehend experiences in a dramatic form and to manipulate language to express them adequately. Form and content, thus become independent and constitute an indivisible core of the poet's art.

INTRODUCTION

T. S. Eliot observed:

The notion of appreciation of form without content, or of content without form, is an illusion; if we ignore the content of a poem, we fail to appreciate the form; if we ignore the form, we have not grasped the content — for the meaning of a poem exists in the words of a poem and in those words only.¹

DR. RICHA VERMA

1P a g e



The confessional poetry of Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath is a clearly distinct in respect of form and content. It adopts a proper diction and language suit its purpose. A diligent use of appropriate words for expression is characteristic of much modern poetry. Plath and Das also skillfully employ such technique in their confessional poetry. Both of them recognize the value of style and technique, which they exploit in their own way.

The poetry of the 1950's, is labelled as "academic poetry", in contrast to the traditional poetry written earlier. Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath also fit into the category of "academic poets"; they abandon the 'closed' form and adopting 'open' forms for their poems. The development in poetry during the late 1950's involved the abandonment of traditional stanza forms, traditional rhyme schemes and formal 'literary' diction. Most of the American poets during that era were trained to use 'heightened' diction to produce syllabic poetry. In the beginning, Sylvia Plath also used 'heightened vocabulary' employing heavy diction, writing "her earlier poems very slow, Thesaurus open on her knees".² The earliest examples of her first mode show a bookish, artificial diction that inhibits the flow of image and idea. After 1959 however, she discarded the traditional forms and started working towards a different kind of poetry, highly lyrical with an unrelenting rhythm and easy diction. Kamala Das preferred to write in a simple language, with a fusion of thoughts, vivid expressions, natural rhythms and meaning in her verses. The words in her poetry create a symbiosis of several sensations like visual, auditory and emotive, with immense thoughtfulness. Even in her haste, she is able to

*"reveal a mastery of phrase and control over rhythm the words often pointed and envenomed too, and the rhythm so nervously, almost feverishly alive."*³

Suitability of diction and syntactical appropriateness are undoubtedly essential elements for a poet, and the control of technique is the first step towards perfection. Poetry should have an original vividness accruing from the right choice of words, images, sounds and thought, patterns. Both Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das initially suffered due to the originality of their poetry. Sylvia Plath, did not face any problems with language but she tried to employ lofty words and phrases in her initial works, which tends to subdue the thought process and smother her expressions. She also used some German words and local slangs to convey the desired meaning accurately, but it made her poetry somewhat difficult for common people. During the phase of immaturity her poetry suffered from the subterfuge and deliberate obscurantism. Kamala Das, used English only as a second spoken language and in the beginning found it difficult to develop the needed accuracy in her poetic language. Despite criticism from various quarters she stuck to her choice of English as the medium of poetic communication. When asked about her choice of medium, she replied "Why in English ?" is



a silly question . . . English being the most familiar [language], we use it, that is all”.⁴ In a poem “An Introduction”, she asserts:

*. . . I am an Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two.*

Then, more emphatically she writes:

*.. Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest.*

Kamala Das finds English as natural to her “*as cawing is to crows and roaring is to lions*”. She would not approve of the view that in poetry correct language and use of words should be given more emphasis than thoughts and emotions. She says:

*“The language one employs is not important, what is
important is the thought contained in words.”⁵*

Das makes use of a variety of ‘Indianised’ English, borrowing words and phrases even from the local language. She believes that the honesty of expression and sincerity of own feelings and sentiments are more essential than the language used. She is at times ignorant of the morphology or even the grammatical nuances of words, although she does seem to recognize their power and emotive effects. Writing in a highly expressive form in a foreign language, is in itself a great accomplishment and Das’s exact use of words is in a striking contrast to that of some other woman poets of later years with a flat, coarse and ineffective syntax. Bruce King comments about Das’s style of writing poetry: “*Often her vocabulary, idioms, choice of words and some syntactical constructions are part of what has been termed as the Indianisation of English*”.⁶ As confessional poets, both Plath and Das portray their poetic self in a tangible manner, the help of language and words. They see poetry as an effective method of controlling, rather than capitulating on, emotionally and psychologically disturbing material. For these poets, great poetry is a combination of three elements: rhythm, employment of words, and idea or vision of truth.

Rhythm is a predominant feature of good poetry. Western poets, however, have been adopting a non-rhythmic poetry and using free verse. This kind of verse tampered not only



the poetic form but also the music in poetry. T. S. Eliot has warned that “no verse is free for a man who wants to do a good job”. He further writes that “only a bad poet could welcome free verse as a liberation from form”.⁷ Blank verse or free verse has been frequently used by Kamala Das, but she seems to have an instinctive grasp of rhythm and a variegated musical structure of word combinations. She eases out the harmony of lines by appropriately positioning her words in the stanzas. Her poem “A Request” is a good example, where phrases are effectively harmonised to keep the balance of the poem:

*When I die
Do not throw the meat and bones away
But pile them up
And let them tell
By their smell
What life was worth
On this earth
What love was worth
In the end.*

The first line “When I die” balances with the last line “In the end” and the words like “meat and bones” and “pile them up” are harmoniously positioned while the rhyming words like tell/smell and worth/earth contribute to an over-all rhythmic movement of the poem. Another example of such harmonising of phrases may be seen in the poems “Blood” and “Dance of the Eunuchs”:

*It was hot, so hot, before the eunuchs came
To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals
Richly clashing, and anklets jingling, jingling
Jingling. Beneath the fiery gulmohur, with
Long braids flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced and
They danced, oh, they danced.*

Indian poets like Das might have adopted the rhythmic expressions and nuances from their Western contemporaries, but they do possess the core of cadences of folk lyrics and classical literature from the earlier era. In confessional unlike in romantic poets like Keats, Wordsworth Shelly, there is much less scope to come out with different aspects of lyricism and rhythmic movement. In confessional poems, the overflow of inner emotions is so great that even free verse can be accepted as a mode of expression. Plath and Das have come out with some good examples of rhythmic patterns and use of musical sounds in their poems. Sylvia Plath has used in about 20 poems of The Colossus, the Chaucerian rhythm, which is

based on a heavy, native stress-accent. The best among these poets are “Suicide of Egg Rock” and “Blue Moles”:

/ / / /
Fountains are dry and the roses over
 / / / /
Incense of death. Your day approaches

The lines are divided into two halves with two stresses. In each line the beginning suggests the end . Another line with the same rhythm is:

/ / / /
Beast of Oasis, a better time.

In her pre-Colossus poems, her technique is less developed, as in like “Go Get the Goodly Squab”:

*Go get the goodly squab in the gold lobed corn
 And pluck the droll-flecked quail where thick they lie,
 Go reap the round blue pigeons from roof ridge,
 But let the fast-feathered eagle fly.
 Let the fast feathered eagle fly
 And let the sky crack through with thunder;
 Hide, hide in the deep nest
 Lest the lightning split you as under.*

Here she uses a six-stanza pattern with three even stanzas in iambic pentameter and three odd stanzas in iambic tetrameter, the last line of the odd stanzas becoming the first line of even stanzas. The rhyme-scheme is complex and the straining of heightened diction can be felt in awkward compounds like “gold-lobed”, “droll-flecked”, and “fast-feathered”. In the collections, The Colossus and Crossing the Water, however, her poetic technique improved and she developed a set pattern for stanzas with right use of syllables. John Fredrick Nims points out the rhyme sequence in The Colossus and her use of several variations to choose rhymes “atonally”. He further says that the poems have:

*.. the same vowel sound but with different consonants after
 it: ‘fishes’ - ‘pig’ - ‘finger’ - ‘history’; ‘worms’ - ‘converge’.
 Different vowel sounds but with same final consonant:
 ‘vast’ - ‘compost’ - ‘must’; ‘knight’ - ‘combat’ - ‘heat’ . . .*



*Unaccented syllable going with accented or unaccented:
'boulders' - 'wore': 'footsoles' - 'bale'.¹⁰*

The Colossus (1960) contains poems composed by a young woman whose mental disturbance can be detected in her subjects and images. Richard Howard read the poems and described their form as unhealthy (the rhymes all slant, the end-stop avoided like a reproach) and called the book a “breviary of estrangement”¹¹. This book focuses on the poet’s conflict with herself and an impulse to live on what Howard calls a “lithic impulse”. In these poems Plath identifies herself with the lower forms of existence - *mushrooms and moles, snakes and insects, stones and bones*. Her search through the lower forms reaches an ultimate depth in whiteness and death. Every landscape is a nightmare or, as Jan B. Gordon calls it, a psychescape of dead creatures and boat wrecks. In her transitional poems like “Crossing the Water” and “Winter Trees”, Plath’s vision lifts from the earth’s depths and surfaces to those of the moon and the clouds beyond, without relieving her from psychic pressures.

Plath’s more mature and experienced poems are collected under the title Ariel. In it she has given only one syllabled poem and rest have no metrical innovation. ‘Lady Lazarus’ is considered to be the best formed poem with a more regular metrical pattern:

*One year in every ten,
I manage it
A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,
My right foot
A paperweight,
My face a featureless, fine
Jew linen.
Peel of the napkin
O my enemy.
Do I terrify?*

John Frederick Nims remarks about this poem as follows:

“Lady Lazarus” illustrates the new manner. The poem is printed in units of three lines, but the rhyme is not in her favourite terzarima pattern. . . Almost Skeltonian: the poet seems to carry on ‘a’ sound about as long as she can, although not in consecutive lines.¹²

Words and images used in modern confessional poetry are often visual and picturesque, at lacking the value of sound image. Confessional poets mostly have a constant stress on



subjective vision, projecting most of the poet's personality in order to express the intense insight with new verses, words, set stanzas and definite rhythm. Plath and Das use all such poetic techniques powerfully, in redefining their own lives. Their later poems are considered more matured and technically more perfect. Das's poems are often shifted from her set pattern adopting a free verse while Plath's last poems were "written to be read aloud", creating a distinct pattern of sound and images. In "Lesbos" the dominant sounds are of s/z, which give a kind of hissing effect. The opening lines of the poem contain an established sound pattern:

*Visciousness in the kitchen!
The potatoes hiss.
It is all Hollywood, windowless.
The fluorescent light wincing on and off like a
Terrible migraine.*

Another example of crucial underpinning structure can be seen in 'Purdah', in which short single words are used to create free verse:

*Jade –
Stone of the side,
The agonized
Side of green Adam, I
Smile, cross-legged,
Enigmatical,
Shifting my clarets.*

Confessional poetry is mainly concerned with the revelation of self where joys, sufferings, longings and anguishes of a person are caught in the welter of existence. The spontaneity of expression embodies thoughts and emotions as irreconcilable entities. Poetry for them is a means of unburdening the scarred self, reliving the mishaps and despairs of life perhaps in order to achieve a state of peace and tranquility, with no such emphasis to language and words. But still, Plath and Das choose words on the basis of their tone of voice and use them with unmistakable instinct to convey the perpetual burning within their self. Kamala Das's poem "Words" shows how words can be depositories of disturbed feelings:

*All round me are words, and words and words,
they grow on me like leaves, they never
seem to stop their slow growing
from within . . . But I tell myself, words
are a nuisance, beware of them. They*

DR. RICHA VERMA



*can be so many things, a
chasm where running feet must pause to
look, a sea with paralysing waves,
A flash of burning air, or
a knife most willing to cut your best
friend's throat. Words are nuisance, but. . .*

For her, words became a carrier of feelings rather than meaning. She has remarked that *every good writer is a sculptor with words*. She has outlined her philosophy of writing a poem in 'Without Pause' in Summer in Calcutta:

*.. write without
a pause, don't search for petty words
Which dilute the truth, but write in haste of
Everything perceived, and known, and loved.*

Kamala Das's language is colloquial and is shaped by a confessional urgency. The common speech used in her poems is that of an English-educated Indian and is not cluttered with the artificially borrowed poetic words. The simplicity of lines and easy tones from the daily speech is combined with the hidden lyricism:

*Today I shall weave white flowers into my
baby-son's hair
For the guests are coming up the stairs
Talking of war, bloodshed and despair.*

These lines from the poem "The White Flowers" show the originality of day to day life, weaved in poetry in simple language. Sylvia Plath pours her hatred towards words in her last poem "Words", but there is a dearth of easy words in her poems.

*Words dry and riderless,
The indefatigable hoof-taps*

The confessional mode Das has adopted makes her expression impactful and loaded with meanings, expressing the turmoil of self and emotional disturbance. Sylvia Plath, on the contrary, may be seen imitating some of the great confessional poets of the period like Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Theodore Roethke and Anne Sexton. The language of such poets clearly influenced her writings, with their ordinary speech, either in blank verse, rhymed or not rhymed. She wrote to her mother about Anne Sexton's poems: "She has none of my clenches, and an ease of phrase and an honesty."¹³ Apart from strong influences of her

DR. RICHA VERMA

8P a g e



contemporaries, Plath's creative style is one of the most distinctive in contemporary poetry, never failing to leave an impact. There is an immense difference in her style of writing between her earlier poems and the later ones. In an interview given in 1958, she herself commented on her style:

*Technically, I like to be extremely musical and lyrical, with a singing sound. . . . I think there should be a kind of constriction and tension which is never artificial yet keeps in the meaning in a kind of music, too. And again, I like the idea of managing to get wit in, with the idea of seriousness, and contrasts, ironies, and I like visual images, and I like just good mouthfuls of sound which have meaning . . .*¹⁴

Sylvia Plath developed a protective barrier for her earlier poems (1950-1959) that could keep personal realities outside the text. In *The Colossus*, for example, she develops a new method of triadic stanza, indebted to *terzarima* of Dante which dispenses with regular rhymes and line lengths, thus allowing her to shift from one image to another and from one linguistic level to another with great rapidity and ease, as in "Mushrooms":

*Our toes, our noses
Take hold on the loam . . .
Soft fist insists on
Heaving the needles.*

In such poems, she breaks the rhyme within a stanza while joining stanzas by interlocking its rhyme with the preceding or the following paragraph. The unity of the poem is maintained, while shift in the images is identified both thematically and structurally by a perceptible shift in the rhyming scheme. In another poem "The Companionable Ills", from *The Colossus*, she relates the image of God to horses, and the shift of the image and the rhyme is very gradual. The last stanza of the poem reads:

*Dug in first as God's spurs
To start spirit out of the mud
It stabled in; long-used, became well-loved
Bedfellows of the spirit's debauch, fond masters.*

Words like "spurs" and "masters" match rhythmically at the end, while the images of God and the horse are effectively paralleled. The style of the poems change to reflect a more direct relationship between the poetic speech and reality, giving it a more personal tone. The



ease of her late writings such as “Lady Lazarus” and “Daddy” is the result of the combination of colloquialism and Latinism. The effect is totally aesthetic, formal and linguistically modified giving her poems a new immediacy. She writes with great intensity in “Lady Lazarus”, projecting a suffering human being:

*Soon, soon the flesh
The grave cave ate will be
At home on me
And I a smiling woman.*

Like many modern and post-modern writers, Plath found the twentieth century to be an era of dehumanisation and violence that requires of the poet an extraordinary openness to suffering.¹⁵

Confessional poets represent of personal crisis in modern life and experiences of pain and suffering. The central experience of in the poetry of both Plath and Das is an encounter with pain in relation to love, sex and family, where the female identification is the focal point in exhibiting its several manifestations. Their honesty and courage are uncompromising in bringing out the real emotions with a boldness in expression. Kamala Das said in an interview:

*There is a lot of love in my poems, I feel forced to be honest in my poetry. I have read very little poetry. I do not think I have been influenced by any poet . . . When I compose poetry, whispering the words to myself, my ears help me to discipline the verse. Afterwards I count the syllables. I like poetry to be tidy and disciplined.*¹⁶

Her poems are indeed tidy and disciplined as far as the confessional theme is concerned. As M. L. Rosenthal suggests, “Confessional poetry puts the speaker himself at the centre of the poem in such a way as to make his psychological vulnerability and shame an embodiment of his civilisation”.¹⁷ Plath and Das keep themselves at the centre of their poems to show their existence in an inordinate world. Sylvia Plath told Peter Orr in an interview about her unsympathetic view towards her inner cries. She thinks that her “poems come out of the sensuous and emotional experiences” she had.¹⁸

Kamala Das’s poetry is termed as a “sort of compulsion neurosis”.¹⁹ It, however, characterised by richness in organisation, and the thematic conception is boldly original, conveyed by some apt metaphorical expressions and powerful images. Bruce King identified several themes in her poems and appreciates the variation in handling those themes.

DR. RICHA VERMA

10P a g e



According to him, she has “*opened areas in which previously forbidden or ignored emotions could be expressed in ways which reflect the true voice of feeling; she showed how an Indian woman poet could create a space for herself in the public world.*”²⁰

Das’s poems register her protest against the male-dominated world, her chosen mission in life being “to retain her personal worth in the world of categorizers.”²¹ This attitude intones a spirit of existential rebel in her; and an initial alienation which she felt due to her critics’ protests asking her, “Do not write in English” attitude. According to Devindra Kohli, such “*larger and more universal alienation (sexual, social and artistic) seems to characterise some of the best literature of our age and is perhaps at the heart of any attempt of self-exploration and self-integration.*”²² Many of Das’s technical improvisations can be found in the collections *The Descendants* and *Summer in Calcutta*. They include the use of alliteration, unmatched rhymes, images, both physical and unnatural, and her recurring themes of loss of identity and fearful femininity.

Kamala Das’s use of imagery is unique and explicit. She has a tendency to use different kind of images in a single poem. “Composition” is one of her long poems containing quite a few apt images. This narrative poem begins with the image of ‘sea’ and then the kaleidoscope of images changes with rapidity. This poem can be divided into seven sections, each coalescing into the other thematically and symbolically. The first section has the images of ‘sea’ and the grandmother’s red house where “The sea was only two miles away”. As the poem proceeds, the poet loses the touch of sea. The imagery of “dance” is conjures up in search of emotional security:

*I must let my mind striptease
I must extrude
autobiography.*

Sylvia Plath has also used the same expression in similar context in “Lady Lazarus” to refer to her physical torture as a woman:

*The peanut-munching crowd
Shoves into see
Then unwrap me hand and foot
The big striptease.*

‘Sea’ is a reverberating symbol and a recurring image for these confessional poets. It comes out as an escaping agent for their sufferings and grief; and death by sea is a perfect source of comfort for both the poets. Kamala Das writes:



*Often I have toyed with the idea of drowning myself to be rid of my loneliness which is not unique in any way but is natural to all. I have wanted to find rest in the sea and an escape from involvements.*²³

Ted Hughes writes about the poem “Point Shirley” that “it is a deliberate exercise in Robert Lowell’s style.”²⁴ Plath’s nostalgic reflection on her grandparent is similar to the mood of Lowell’s elegies written for his grandparents, In Memory of Arthur Winslow and Mary Winslow. Also, the early poem of Lowell “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket” has a similar conception of a savage sea containing the rapidity of a beast. In Sylvia Plath’s poems, sea is generally opposed to human struggle, as in “Point Shirley”, but it also offers the calm haven to the tortured human beings of the modern industrial society. She describes all the faces of sea in the lines:

*.. like a deep woman, it had a good deal,
It has many faces, many delicate veils.
It spoke of miracles and distances,
If it could court, it could also kill.*

Plath regards the sound of sea as a pleasant element in the scene _ “The forgetful surf creaming on those ledges” and an escape for humans from a bleak vision.

The poet sees the underwater world as a life “beyond the mundane order”, which” according to her transforms the boredom and monotony of daily life into an eternal peace. In poems “Lorelie” and “Full Fathom Five” the complexity of both fear and desire is stated. She longs for an eternal peace by drowning herself in water. ‘Sea’ for her is a source of retirement from the torturous world. She wishes to mingle with the harsh waves of the sea in order to seek peace. In the world of her connected private mythological symbols, the sea and her father and herself become one. Her underwater search for a father/god figure can end only in death. An employment of the sea imagery in terms of death is purposive in Plath’s poems. In ‘Men in Black’ the presence of her father clad in “dead/Black” and balanced on the spit of stone in the sea reveals stress on Plath’s sanity.

In the later poems also, we can feel the painful dominance of the uncaring moon, which subdues the element of sea: “As the moon for its ivory powers, scours the sea”, “It drags the sea after it, like a dark crime”, and “It is she that drags the blood-black sea around”. Plath’s use of the moon imagery in early poetry, is basically denotative. She relates the whiteness of



the moon to death, decay and infertility. In “Moonrise”, she pits the white colour of the moon goddess Lucina against the red colour of ripeness, maturity and life:

*White catalpa flowers tower, topple,
Cast a round white shadow in their dying . . .*

The symbol of “moon” is also associated with blankness and baldness. “The Disquieting Muses” contains the image of a bald figure to describe the moonlit night.

David Holbrook finds this image of an old woman as illogical, he argues that there is no inevitable link between the “wasted forms of the thin people” and the “gradual etiolation of the moon as the old woman cuts pieces of it.”²⁵ But Plath consciously juxtaposes these disparate images with those of birth and renewal. She sees no possibility of renewal after the Holocaust, and the thin people are doomed to remain thin forever as the crescent.

In “Moon and the Yew Tree” the yew tree stands as a powerful image but Plath here identifies herself with the moon. Like a woman, the moon suffers painful changes. The parallel is drawn between the moon and the poet’s being, both hiding their dark sides. This poem is consciously shaped in terms of a rhyme scheme and immediate structures, but it is considered to be a complex poem in terms of patterning its images. The symbol of yew traditionally implied inexhaustible life and immortality. Its Gothic shape implies her belief towards Christianity and Church, through which she finds a way towards heaven:

*The yew tree points up. It has a Gothic shape.
The eyes lift after it and find the moon.*

This important symbol is found in other poems such as “Little Fugue” and “The Munich Mannequins” as well. She recycles the small set of images about the variations of blackness, blankness and baldness. Mannequins are described as “Naked and bald in their furs”, and

*The yew’s black fingers wag;
Cold clouds go over.
So the deaf and dumb
Signal the blind, and are ignored.*

Sylvia Plath relates herself with the outer world by using such concrete images and symbols. Confessional poets often try to recollect the lost and neglected world which they often relate to their own self. These poets go much farther than their predecessors in employing private experiences, ideas and agonies and their dimensions are enhanced by the use of images and symbols.



In these two confessional poets, the craft is essentially symbolic and metaphor-based. They have projected the history of their times in their poems through the use of symbols and metaphors, and have offered us grim, pictures of the world.

In another poem “The Thin People” Plath sensitively employs the Holocaust imagery treading the troubled path between “dreadful anonymity” on one hand and “dreadful familiarity” on another. She starts with the premise that thin people reflect our worst nightmares and as the poem progresses, these haunting figures move out of the dream world into a reality. This poem is made up of twenty-three half-rhyming couplets plus a single final line capturing the resonant images of concentration camp victims.

The poem “Daddy” is regarded as the most metaphorical poem of Plath’s. In it the tone and symbols work together to represent the overall mood of the poem. The rhyme scheme symbolically represents the love-hate feelings she held for her father. The irregular unpatterned scheme of rhyme contains words with “oo” sound such as “you”, “blue”, “shoe”, “two”, “Dachau”, “Jew”, “do” and “through”. She imaginatively kills her father’s memory and dramatises the war between the Nazis and Jews in her soul. Robert Phillips calls it a “*terrible poem, full of blackness, and one of the most nakedly confessional poems ever written.*”²⁶ It is a poem of rejection from the family and society. The poet’s earlier terror of death is replaced by a romance with it. “Edge” describes death as a perfection. In ‘Ariel’ we again see Plath at her best. She begins to favour shorter lines which suits the imagery of her poetry. She uses slant rhymes which carry the repetition of sounds from one stanza to another, threading the poem together. Alliteration and assonance bring a steady pace to the poem. For example, the sound “s” and long and short sounds of “e” weave the first three stanzas – “stasis”, “darkness”, “substanceless”, “distances”, “lioness”, “passes”, “heels” and “knees”, and also the “o” sound in “pour”, “tour”, “grow”, “furrow” and “brown”.

The sense of blackness and nothingness is an integral part of the torture, pain and sufferings of the world and eventually of infertility, death and destruction. These symbols are used in an entirely confessional way to project the darker side of her inner self. Kamala Das has also used the symbol of darkness in poems like “White Flowers” and “Jaisurya” in the collection The Descendants. The childbirth is the fulfilment of love. Devindra Kohli writes that this poem “*brings together light and darkness, fire and water, to weave a pattern of feeling which holds itself a joy of creations.*”²⁷

Kamala Das’s later poems are essentially devoted to Indian mythological figures such as Lord Krishna, Radha and Durga, which help her achieve a unique relationship with the celestial bodies. She uses in them traditional religious images In ‘Line Addressed to



Devdasi' she projects herself as a Devdasi and yearns for love outside marriage. She titles one of her chapters in My Story as "I was Carlo's Sita", where she mentions all her love affairs. Wedded inherently to Hindu traditions, she surpasses her cultural legacy and skillfully relates mythological stories with that of her broken self. Her efficient narration of myths and fables, and accurate identification with traditional folklore make her poems distinctly religious. Like other confessional poets, Das is also death obsessed, but unraveling the whole world, she comes to the final resolution and accepts the pain and hardships as a part of life, realising "*that our ends, our destinations are our beginnings.*"²⁸ For Plath, there is no psychic relief and she finds death as the only source of contentment. In her very first book she uses an image of death: "Incense of death. Your day approaches". Unlike Kamala Das, Plath's beginning is her end. Plath's vision lifts from earth's depths and surfaces to those of the moon and clouds beyond in experimental poems, but there is no relief from mental sickness which is personified in physical images of surgery and bandages. The full revelation of her agony comes in Ariel --her most famous confessional book, where the poems grew more dark and more spare. These striking poems are obsessed with death and she discusses marriage, estrangement and suicide - a pattern which follows her own life. Written in a simple language and ordinary diction, their poems present their predicament in a forceful manner. Their confessional mode gives authenticity to their thoughts and experiences. Thoughts and language are welded into one and this fact makes their poems highly readable.

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