LITERATURE AND GENDER

Paper-IX

(Option-i)

Section C & D

M.A. English (Final)

Directorate of Distance Education
Maharshi Dayanand University
ROHTAK – 124 001

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M.A. (Final)
Modern Fiction and Drama

Paper-ix (Option-i)

Max. Marks : 100
Time : 3 Hours

Note: *Candidate wll be required to attempt five questions in all, choosing one question from each of the five sections. Questions will be based on the prescribed texts with internal choice i.e., one question with internal choice on each of the units.*

SECTION C

Unit 6 A STREET CAR NAMED DESIRE
Tennessee Williams

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SECTION D

Unit 8 MY GRANDMOTHER, HOUSE, THE LOOKING GLASS,
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Unit VI - Tennessee Williams - Street Car Named Desire

(1) Life and Work

The original name of William Carlos Williams was Thomas Lanier Williams. In his childhood, Williams used to go on weekly visits to the poor and ailing in the company of his grandfather, who was an Episcopal minister in rural Mississippi, on the regular round of parish calls. Born on March 26, 1911, Williams lived in Columbus along with his elder sister, mother, and grandparents. On these weekly visits they always made a long stop at a certain house where one Laura Young, a thin, wasted woman, who never seemed to get better, greeted them with a sad, patient smile. One day when they did not go there, the boy Williams asked for the reason. His grandfather told him that she was dead. The boy never forgot the wistful, fragile face, the glow of religious faith that shone from her eyes as she talked to her minister. It was this very girl, Laura Young, who served as model for the heroine of Williams's first full-length play, *Battle of Angels*, some twenty-five years later.

Laura was not the only one who left a deep impression on the boy's mind on these weekly rounds. He discovered more than one trait of human nature on those rounds with his grandfather. He discovered more than one personality that impressed itself on his mind who later came to people his plays. On their return from these rounds, Williams would play with his elder sister Rose in the rectory sitting-room or in the rocky backyard outside. Rose was delightful companion for her brother. She was spirited, imaginative and fun-loving. She used to make up stories and games to entertain he brother. In turn Williams looked up to her during their entire childhood in Mississippi and Tennessee, in the various villages and towns of their grandfather's parishes. All these years, Williams and her sister saw very little of their father. He was a traveling salesman who came to see his family only for brief visits. Also, even on those short visits he paid little attention to his children. For the seven years of William's early life, his mother lived in the shelter of the church, until her husband found a steady job.

When Williams was five years of age, he was struck by a serious illness which affected his life in a strange way. Diphtheria was a common disease, but rather dangerous. It left him with weak kidneys and paralyzed legs. He could not play outdoor with his sister Rose. For the better part of two years his legs became useless, his body frail. He could not now accompany his grandfather on the weekly rounds. During this period, and even before, he lived largely in the company of his grandmother, his mother and his sister – three generations of women. These women helped to keep him occupied and oblivious of the fact that he was close to being an invalid for many months. Then just as the boy was recovering his father got a permanent job in St. Louis, where the family had to move. Then furnished house the family bought for living, though adequate for their needs, was drab and gloomy. It had small dark rooms that required electric light even in the daytime. They lived in an uninteresting, treeless part of town, of middling social status. The neighbourhood was extremely colourless and incredibly dull. To Williams and his sister the house was a tenement, if not a prison. Neither he nor Rose ever liked St. Louis, "from the moment they set foot in it," according to their mother.

It was at St. Louis that Williams joined school, and felt lost and terrified in the welter of shouting pupils. The boys teased him because of his southern (Mississippi) accent and taunted him as a "sissy" because he hung back and would not take part in games. He was too shy to disclose to them about the paralysis of legs he had suffered two years ago, rendering him unfit to run, or even to walk. His legs even after two years continued to be weak and shaky. As he said about his condition at school, he was "scared of everyone on earth and particularly public school boys, and public school teachers, and public school principals, most of all." Even in the upper grades, the name *public school* kept "stabbing at his guts" until he wanted to cry, old as he was. A new problem that arose for the children was the presence of their father who now lived with them. Williams found his presence over-bearing and unbearable. His father had joined them after having lived for long in a very different sort of environment. Williams' dislike for his father increased his isolation all the more. Cornered by illness and uncaring father, Williams turned to books and the world of his imagination instead of atheletics for his recreation.

Quite early in his youth Williams began writing stories; he was only eleven years of age then. Gradually, he withdrew from the entire family except his elder sister Rose, who had been a constant companion for all his early life. His father

scoffed at his preference for reading or going to movies with his sister instead of playing baseball with the neighbourhood team. His father often referred to Williams as "Miss Nancy" in humorous contempt. The boy tried to laugh it away, but his face always grew red in resentment whenever he heard it remarked about him. The friction between father and son increased year by year. Williams's mother, who was sympathetic to him, always sided with the son against the father. However, this only added to the aggravation between them.

Williams's father was equally at odds with the boy's mother. The reason for the marital discord was the man's rough habits and pastimes. She strongly resented his poker-playing friends among the salesmen and his liking for liquor. Mismatched from the start, they constantly disagreed. She had to put up with his ill-tempered tongue lashings, his stinginess in spending even on the most essential household items. She was not prepared to tolerate any drinking or gambling in the house. She always insisted that if he must indulge in these vices, he should go to the club for the purpose. So he generally stayed away, but whenever he came home he would roar like an ogre, a tyrant over all members of the family. As Rose grew older, the man picked on her as much as he did on Williams, pushing her toward her eventual mental breakdown. Rose's father objected to everything she did, which made her sullen and withdrawn. Occasionally, she did flare up and flung a few angry words – or, as her mother said, was "saucy" to her father – at him before shutting herself up in her room to mope, fingering the little glass animals for comfort.

Gradually, distance developed between Williams and Rose; it finally led to his abandoning his sister for the typewriter his mother had given him on his eleventh birthday. He began to write stories instead of making them up with Rose. He principally wrote as an escape from the miserable family life. His father would even object to his "running up too high an electric bill." This made the growing Williams more and more secluded, who would stay with his typewriter, after returning from school in the afternoon, till late in the night. His work on the typewriter helped him forget the irritations his father must cause without fail. The growing young man, thus, found an outlet, a life apart "from the world of reality, in which [he] felt acutely uncomfortable." Williams succeeded in removing himself so well that his first reward came as a result of presenting himself as a sophisticated divorced man and winning third prize in a *Smart Set* contest on the question, "Can a Wife be a Good Sport?" A schoolmate of Williams, Hazel Kramer, with whom he shared the joy, encouraged him, despite his father's opposition, in his struggle to be a writer. Both his writing career as well as his love for Hazel bloomed together. As his stories started receiving publication, so Hazel started responding to his advances. The two planned to join the same college so that they would not be separated. But for his father's interference, their love would have developed into a romance.

Williams's father played the villain. He manipulated things in a manner that his son and Hazel join different universities. Williams, when he came to know of his father's role in their physical separation, got furious. But he repressed it in the interest of his writing career. He did not want to get involved in the family squabbles. As a student at the university of Missouri, he opted for a course in drama, which gave him an opportunity to read the plays of Chekhov, Lorca, and others. This reading prompted him to write a play of his own, although he had little experience as well as knowledge concerning the art of drama writing. He became the first freshman to win an honourable mention in the Dramatic Arts Contest. This little success prompted him to make another attempt, and yet another, until all he wanted to do was to write plays. "My conversion to the theatre arrived as mysteriously as those impulses that enter the flesh at puberty," he wrote later. He soon plunged into the act of drama writing, and submitted manuscripts to the drama department. One of these, sketch called *Beauty Is the Word*, was produced at the university theatre and pronounced "an original and constructive idea," but the handling was "too didactic and the dialogue often too moralistic," according to the criticism. His maternal puritan background was evident throughout.

Williams's father got annoyed at his son's disinclination to military training and inability to clear ROTC. So he forced him to discontinue his studies and got him a job for $65 a month at the International Shoe Company. Williams was most unhappy. His reaction was: "Designed for insanity, it was a living death." That is how twenty-one year old dramatist described the drudgery that lasted two and a half years – his "season in hell," he called it. Williams entered his father's world as a menial – dusting shoes, typing out factory orders, hauling around packing cases for eight hours a day. He went through the ordeal in utter silence, doing his writing work long after the blast of the radio had been turned off and his parents' arguments had died down. His sister at the time was in a state of vague melancholia. She

had been to hospital twice in his absence, the second time after a broken romance with a widower, who was killed in an automobile accident. She went about depressed. Williams could not get through to her except by taking her to the movies. Leaving his job after an ailment, Williams joined Washington University at St. Louis, for which his grandmother agreed to pay his tuition. Here he read more literature, especially drama, and resumed his writing work.

At St. Louis, Williams was prompted by his mother to try for Webster Grove Theatre Guild contest, which he did. Several weeks later came the announcement that he had won the contest by the unanimous decision of the judges. His prize-winning play, *The Magic Tower*, "is a poignant literary tragedy with a touch of warm fantasy." Despite this success, however, the playwright's father thought he was only wasting time and so refused to extend any financial support for the payment of his tuition. But the young man's grandmother again came to his rescue. His tuition worry over, he completed two more full-length plays. One of these entitled *Spring Strom*, a play "all about love," he read aloud to the class one day. It received the comment: "Well, all we have to paint our nudes." His second play, *Not About Nightingales*, dealt with a prison riot that took place in the South during the thirties. Setting out to be realistic, Williams drew the picture in full scale. Before he had completed a satisfactory draft he received his B.A. degree from Iowa (1938), where he had joined because of the reputation of the university's drama department.

Back home at St. Louis, he felt that he had reached a turning point in his career as well as life. As he put it, his was "a life of clawing and scatching along a sheer surface and holding on tight with raw fingers to every inch of rock higher than the one caught hold of before." He needed support for subsistence. His only earning at the time was a little money he received by selling an occasional short story, but it was not enough to take care of his needs. His father, who took pride in his younger son's atheletic power and military laurels, continued to regard his elder son (Williams) as a weakling, a hopeless struggler, even a wastrel. Williams, on his part, looked on his father with a cold, humorous contempt, beneath which his resentment still simmered. He felt a certain pity for both his parents, for he knew they were beset with guilt about Rose. Later, Williams felt that perhaps he, too, was responsible for his sister's condition. But at the moment he only knew that it was not possible for him to live in his home at St. Louis. The time had come when he must manage to live on his own.

Much as she dreaded to see him go Williams's mother, always sympathetic toward his talent, although somewhat fearful of his prospects as writer, agreed to the proposal of his going away from home. He was eager to see New Orleans as he had heard stories about the Mardi Gras city. So in the early fall of 1939, he set off, although he had "not one cent in his pocket," as his mother said. Here, his experience was an eye-opener. He met with "shadow people," as he called them, who were creatures without roots, who lived in utter loneliness. Like Eugene O'Neill, he felt a certain kinship with them. His feeling was that the grim emotions he had been suffering from were shared by a whole segment of human life. These lost souls, he saw, would go to any length to dispel their despair. He was overwhelmed by their way of living, which included a Kaleidoscope of drinking, sex and revelry. Walking wide-eyed through the streets of the Latin Quarter, he rubbed shoulders with panhandlers, prostitutes, procurers, homo-sexuals and dope addicts, "living a fringe-area life fraught with desperation and wild despair." Unlike O'Neill, however, Williams did not allow himself to sink into the pit of dissolution. He did, of course, revel in the abandon he found, but he did not allow it to drag him as close to destruction as O'Neill did.

Williams had hard life in New Orleans. He started as an elevator operator in a small hotel, then took up several odd jobs to keep himself going. But outside his working hours he now lived with greater abandon than he had ever known before. As he said, "I found the kind of freedom I had always needed. And the shock of it against the Puritanism of my nature, has given me a subject, a theme, which I have never ceased exploiting." Thus, the clash of the puritan and the bohemian gradually fused in the future playwright. However, despite his mingling with the ragged fringe of society a part of the personality of Williams always remained the observer. Depicting this life he wrote a series of one-act plays concerned with the individual struggle for freedom against hopeless emotional and material odds. Later published as *American Blues*, under the name "Tennessee" Williams, which he decided to adopt at this time, these plays came as close to being plays of social consciousness as any he ever wrote. Sending three of them off to the Group Theatre, he set out for California, hoping to find work in Hollywood.

Rather surprised at the turn of events in his life, Williams found that his one-act plays made him the winner of a

citation and $100 which he received in California. Meanwhile, in New York, the Group Theatre decided to take him under its protective wing, sending the young playwright a word that the Rockefeller Foundation had awarded him a grant for playwriting. His joy knew no bounds. As he put it, "I knew how Lazarus must have felt when he sat up and saw daylight again." He also received a scholarship to an advanced playwriting seminar at the New School in New York City in 1940. Although he did not like New York better than he did St. Louis, he was able to hand in, at the end of the semester, the first draft of a full-length play, *Battle of Angles*, a drama of the South. It included the portrait of Laura Young, the sick, faded Southern belle, helpless and repressed. The play opened in Boston in the fall of 1940, but met with very little success. The play was banned because of its subject matter – the unsparing presentation of repressed sexuality in a Southern community. Its production had to be withdrawn.

This failure left Williams once again a rootless, wandering writer, trying to eke out a living by occasional acceptances and odd jobs, pushing steadily onward in spite of all odds. Soon after the debacle, he went to Florida, where he landed a job as teletype-operator for engineers in Jacksonville. During a few months stay there he picked up enough material and local colour for a number of one-act plays, which were eventually published under the title *Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton*. During all his financially lean period his grandmother kept sending some money in her letters unsolicited. He traveled through the South covering Texas, New Orleans, Mexico, seeking truth and genuine feeling in a callous, competitive world.

Williams's next attempt as dramatist was a full-length play, *The Gentleman Caller*, which, in his own words, was "a memory play." The play dramatizes the writer's remembrance of the one portion of the past he was not able to forget, which was the sad fate of his sister Rose. In 1942, he had written an autobiographical piece about his "season in hell" at the International Shoe Company. The piece was called *Stairs to the Roof*, with the revealing subtitle, "A Prayer for the Wild of Heart That Are Kept in Cages." Recalling the grim moments of those miserable months inevitably brought to his mind the memories of Rose. From hindsight Williams could see that his typewriter every night to shut out the sight and sound of bickering and violence, he had actually been closing the door to his sister Rose. He felt that his attempt at self-presentation had been at the cost of his sister's sanity. He now blamed himself as much as his parents for his sister's pitiful state at the end. He hoped that his play, *The Gentleman caller*, in some dim way would make it up to her – at least, in his own mind. Even though she might not hear it, the work would be his cry to her madness, by default.

As the play's plot reveals, *The Gentleman caller* is largely based on the history of Williams's own family. He revised the play, including its title, which became *The Glass Managerie*. The Broadway (in New York) production of the play opened on March 3, 1945, and received instantaneous acclaim from critics and audiences alike. After staying in New York for sometime, he moved to Mexico where he settled in the remote spot of Chapala. Here he began to work with steady concentration on a play destined to bring him far more fame than his first success. Based on the scenes and personalities he had observed in New Orleans, the locale of the play, he created composite characters for a skillfully structured, emotional drama, to which he initially gave the naturalistic title *The Poker Night*, later changing it, as he had done with *Gentleman Caller*, to the imagistic or surrcalistic – *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

After two years, on December 3, 1947, the play with the odd yet compelling title opened on Broadway and assumed its proper role as the most significant, powerful, and artistically wrought dramatic work in many a season. Shown to full houses from day one, *A Streetcar Named Desire* won several awards for the year 1947-48, including the Drama Critics Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Several critics acclaimed it as "psychological masterpiece." The play's female protagonist attracted special attention, with the critical judgement that Blanche Dubois was "no less a tragic figure than Antigone or Medea."

The Christmas of 1947 was a happy occasion for Williams for more reasons than one. Besides the stunning success of his *Streetcar*, he also received the welcome news that his mother, at long last, was obtaining a legal separation from his father, who was going to Tennessee to live with his sister. As Williams wrote to a friend, "A tragic situation has worked itself out too late. As for the old man – he has probably suffered more than anyone, and it will be a bitter end to his blind and selfish life." Williams, as expected, sided with his mother. Keeping no contact with his father, he made his mother a copartner in the receipts from *The Glass Managerie*. The unpublished and published versions of the play were copy-wrighted by "Tennessee Williams and Edivina D. Williams," so that she shared in all the royalties and could be financially independent. Rather than to return to St. Louis and its unpleasant memories, Williams brought his mother to New York. In the years that followed the separation, he often took her to Europe or invited her to spend the

winter in his Key West home. On these trips he always took along his grandfather, whose company in his childhood years he always carried in his memory as the most cherished phase of his life. His grandmother, to whom he owed so much of his success, was unfortunately no more.

Williams fell in love with Italy, with the Italian people. The warmth he felt for the country and its people emerged in *The rose Tattoo*, a tragi-comedy set in the Sicilian colony along the Gulf of Mexico, which he wrote soon after his return from Europe in 1950. In 1948, he had produced another play named *Summer and Smoke*. But the one about Italy, produced in 1951, revealed a lyric, yet lusty, earthy side of the poet-dramatist, a facet of his talent as yet undeveloped. In 1953, Williams produced his most cynical, heavy-handed, symbolistic theatre piece, *Canino Real*. Written in free verse, replete with literary allusions, it was apparently intended to be the greatest philosophic and poetic contribution. The play, a dismal failure, was a bitter disappointment to Williams. But he also profited by his mistake in his next play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which was something of an emotional bombshell in its honest yet sensitive handling of homosexuality, its grasp of human greed, desire and frustration. Here again, in Maggie-the-Cat, Williams created a heroine of tremendous, if obsessive vitality – a modern instead of a faded Southern belle, not without charm – pitted against the formidable passivity of her husband.

Williams revised his earliest play *Battle of Angels* and gave it a new title, *Orpheus Descending*, produced in 1957. In 1959, he also brought out a new drama, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, a strange mixture of melodrama and striking character study. Called a "scenwright" as well as playwright, he was acknowledged a master of human emotion who could keep his audience enthralled. Among the later plays, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *The Garden District*, and *Night of the Iguana* all have scenes of great power and intensity. And whether he was successful or not, he showed the sensitivity of the poet, combined with the theatricality of the dramatist and the dedication of the artist, to place him among the foremost of modern American playwrights. Although grouped with Arthur Miller, he does not compare well with the latter's larger social concerns. More at home with family situations, marital tensions, he lacks the kind of larger social commitment which characterizes most plays of Arthur Miller.

Williams also suffers in comparison with Eugene O'Neill, although both are best in depicting domestic tragedies. Also common to both is their personal unhappy family experience, which goes into the making of many of their best plays. But the intensity of tragic experience and a sense of inevitability of tragic ends is much more powerful in the plays of O'Neill than in those of Williams. His plays fall short of great tragic status, and remain either tragi-comedies or soft tragedies, which are more melodramatic than tragic. But in his own domain of domestic drama, he remains unsurpassable.

(2) Williams's Concept of Drama

Before we discuss Williams's concept of drama, we must know certain essential features of the American theatre, which came of age and acquired its distinct character in the early twentieth century with the plays of Eugene O'Neill, Robert Sherwood, Elmer Rice, and Sidney Howard. Although, like many other aspects of American cultural life, American drama was strongly influenced by European models, especially the British, it reflected native American manners and customs, characteristics and ideas, issues and conflicts, as they appeared and developed with the growth of America. Some of the new features of the American drama include a new American touch to comedy as well as tragedy. While the European drama remained bound to the concepts formulated by Aristotle and later classical critics like Horace and Seneca, the American drama cared less for the concepts and more for the actual life experience in the American context. The American way of life dominated by the business ethics remained the core of the drama, both tragic as well as comic. The comedy in America was never the comedy of manners as in England, but comedy of situations, more rooted in provincial ways of the different regions than on the class distinctions. Tragedy, too, focused on the common man, not on the exceptional characters of high profile. With these few preliminaries, let us now look at the particular features of Williams's own practice as dramatist.

Williams initiated a new epoch in American drama with his poetic play *The Glass Managerie*, opened in New York in 1945. As O'Neill had dominated American theatre in the 20's and 30's, making it an indigenous form as well as responsive to the new European trends, so Williams became the major figure in the 40's and 50's. In the twenty years or more since the first production of *The Glass Managerie* in 1945, Williams confirmed his position

of dramatic leadership by bringing out even more influential plays than the first. The influence of his concept of drama, particularly that of his interpretation of character and plot, significantly influenced the work of such subsequent dramatists as William Inge and Edward Albee. Of even greater importance was the impetus which Williams and his interpreters gave to the development of a distinct dramaturgy, to the refinement of a distinctly American art of acting, staging, and designing. Of greatest significance, perhaps, was his contribution to the development of a popular theatrical form. Williams's contribution as dramatist has been his talent for creating characters, situations, forms of dialogue, and scenic environments which possess the valuable qualities of verisimilitude – plausibility in performance. It is this ability to create an illusion of reality in the theatre which won for him various honours. One of the important measures of his competence was his ability to win and to sustain the artistic loyalty of the theatrical profession. Moreover, because of his commitment to the principle of artistic collaboration between playwright, director, designer, and performer, of opportunities to interpret his plays are highly coveted by those working in the theatre. The effect of this admiration was that he received the advantage of a high level of production. In turn, this high-level production enhanced his reputation as a popular artist. He was perhaps the first American to earn the title of "popular dramatist."

Although the film makers found Williams's plays most suitable for the motion picture, his popularity as playwright was not only due to his success as a commercial artist. More important factor for his fame was his dramatic art, his keen sense for the stage. His attempt always was to recover the natural function of the drama as the mirror of the popular imagination. He definitely departed from the literary tradition of the theatre established by such playwrights as Luigi Pirandello, Bertolt Brecht, Jean-Paul Sartre, T.S. Eliot, Thornton Wilder, etc. On the contrary, he attempted to recover for drama its primary identity as a pre-literary form. He was committed to a theatre which is extra-verbal in nature, to a dramatic form that seeks to explore not only rational but also irrational and supernatural planes of human experience. He proposed to mirror the ambiguous reality of his perception in a language which can be understood by popular audiences. He undertook to project those events, ideas, attitudes, and collective feelings that characterized life in the mid-twentieth century America into the physical, emotional, moral, and symbolic environment of the common man. As he clarified in his preface to *The Glass Managerie*, "These remarks are not meant as a preface only to this particular play. They have to do with a conception of a new, plastic theatre which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions if the theatre is to resume vitality as a part of our culture."

Williams as dramatist always viewed vitality a means for a return of the drama to joyous and irreverent entertainment, to the simulation of shock and terror, and to the ritual exploration of modern man's life cycle. Like other popular dramatists in the past, Williams proposed that, for the vitalization of the theatre, there was a need to modify the conventional drama through the introduction of idiomatic forms drawn from the vulgar arts. His best plays, *The Glass Managerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, gain much of their popular appeal from familiar elements adapted from the cinema, radio, and television, from American jazz music and folk songs, from circuses, political rallies, and revivals, and from the common language of the American streets. In his early plays named *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real*, he put down his linguistic method as under: "I am trying to catch the quality of really 'tough' Americana of the comic sheets….all the rootless, unstable and highly spirited life beneath the middle class social level in the States."

Williams anti-traditional or unconventional approach to drama was, of course, not accidental. It very much represented a conscious effort to mirror new perceptions of reality. His apparent disregard for the Aristotalian concepts of plot, hero, diction, etc., was a clear reflection of his attempt to create a form true to the realities of his time. His plays about contemporary life decidedly differ from those of more orthodox writers, such as O'Neill, Wilder, and Miller. As can be seen, his plays are not just written *about* the common people, they are designed *for* them. The only exception to this practice are *Camino Real* and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, where many of the intellectual prerequisites are there. All other plays of his can be seen to have benefited from his popular view of drama as a sensuous rather than a rational form. It was his view of drama which allowed him to interpret human conflict in a syntax which is universal: that is, in a richly symbolic language which links word to gesture, movement, sound, design, and poetic inference.

The success that Williams achieved in rendering theatrical images in the language of the common people was not just the result of personal or individual talent. He had certain advantages which were not available to his predecessors. It

was from the experiments of earlier American dramatists like O'Neill, Wilder, Odes, Rice, etc., that there had developed by 1945 a certain type of typical American language of the theatre, which came handy to Williams. It was a system of communication with its own themes, types of character, modes of speech, styles of acting, and patterns of staging. This poetic language that developed in the early decades of the twentieth century had a parallel in an emerging art of the *mise-en-scene*, an art of production which had been given impetus by O'Neill and the members of the Provincetown group. During these decades of the twentieth century, this new American dramaturgy had been undergirded by the formulation of a significant body of dramatic theory. Like several dramatists of his generation, Williams inherited the basic communicative structure on which his own linguistic system was to be built. It seems, he learned the rudiments of his theatrical syntax in several academic settings: at the University of Iowa, and, later, at New York's New School for Social Research. From these academic sources he received an aesthetic and literary orientation which was to support his own theory of form. But more important than this orientation or learning was the technical skill he acquired in the use of conventional language common to the whole range of activities which characterized the developing American theatre.

If Williams acquired literary background and technical skill from the academic institutions he attended, he also acquired a practical understanding of the drama from the theatre itself. Like the French dramatist Moliere, he put together his controversial concept of form under the influence of a young and gifted provincial company. In his introduction to his play called *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*, Williams wrote of his apprenticeship with "The Mummers" of St. Louis, Missouri, as under:

> *The Mummers of St. Louis were my professional youth. They were the disorderly theatre group of St. Louis, standing socially, if not also artistically, opposite to the usual Little Theatre group…. Dynamism was what the Mummers had and for about five years – roughly from about 1935 to 1940 – they burned like one of Miss Millay's improvident little candles – and then expired…. They put on bad shows sometimes, but they never put on a show that didn't deliver a punch to the solar plexus, maybe not in the first act, maybe not in the second, but always at last a good hard punch was delivered, and it made a difference in the lives of the spectators that had come to that place and seen that show.*

It was, quite clearly, during this period of practical apprenticeship that Williams developed his concept of a popular American form. We get some idea as to the level of maturity to which this concept had developed by 1940 from the short plays he included under the titles *27 Wagons Full of Cotton* and *American Blues*. In these early collections, he seems to have experimented with other kinds of writing. He also wrote some of the short stories during this period published under the titles *One Arm* (1948), and *Hard Candy* (1954). He also wrote poetry during this period, published under the title *In the Winter of Cities* (1956). All these forms of writing he did at the time appear to have been a part of his broad experimentation with the problem of creating an effective language for his popular theatre.

In his unrelenting effort to develop a popular form of drama, Williams seems to have attempted permanent ties with practical theatre. After his departure from St. Louis, his home town, he struck new relationships with the theatrical world of directors, designers and actors. During the early years of his New York career he was associated with certain very talented directors of the time, the most notable among them being Elia Kazan. This famous director staged four plays of Williams's major period, namely *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Camino Real*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Sweet-Bird of Youth*. From this creative association came out a mature dramaturgy for his theatre, an art of acting, directing, and designing appropriate to the demands of his texts. Roughly, we can divide the development of his dramaturgy into three stages. The first stage Williams himself described as "personal lyricism," covering the plays written upto 1945. These plays are concerned with the essentially poetic problems of self-expression, self-identification, and even self-creation. The most mature example of this early form is *The Glass Managerie*. Like the most short plays that preceded, this plays represented an attempt to re-create a singularly lyric version of reality. In this work, he projected on the stage the symbolic "screen" of consciousness – all of the shapes, sounds, colours, textures, and moods that characterize the protagonist's memory of the past. Williams embodied his vision of this reality in the metaphor "The Glass Managerie." However, his vision, projected in his plays, is not merely an illusion re-invoked for the delight of audience. His hero in this play seeks to discover within the sensuous fabric of experience the form of

absolute truth. In this respect, Williams comes closer to some of his more intellectual European contemporaries such as Sartre, Camus, and Pirandello. The question all these playwrights, including Williams, addressed was: What is the relationship of experience to reality? If we look at this early play of Williams, we find that it does not offer any conclusive answer to the question; rather, it attempts to isolate the alternative truths which emerge as the play's action unfolds itself. The poet-protagonist of the play, an approximation of the author himself, identifies four possibilities about existence: the truth of action, the truth of ideals, the truth of beauty, and the contemplative truth of art.

When Williams enters the second phase of his career as dramatist, a phase which is regarded as the major phase of his achievement, he attempts to extend the range of meaning affecting his lyric search for truth. As he writes in his preface to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, his intention was to objectify the personal vision which was the basis of his lyric form. In the plays written during this period (1945-1955) there emerges a second level of interpretation. In the plays of this middle period the dramatist attempts to create a popular myth out of contents drawn from common experience. As for the elements of his symbolic structure, he borrows them from Christian theology, Greek mythology, Freudian psychology, and from the cultural history of the United States, particularly that of the rural South. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Camino Real* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* have as their first level of interpretation the lyric form of self-exploration and self-expression. But in addition, they offer a more objective level of interpretation through the medium of his synthetic myth.

The most ambitious effort on the part of Williams as dramatist seems to be his construction of a modern myth in *Camino Real*. In this play, Williams uses the legend of the American soldier Kilroy in order to dramatize the threat of human annihilation in our time. The play is set in a small town in Central America, but through the use of the mythic structure, correspondences are drawn between the problems of the twentieth century and those of earlier epochs in human history. In *Streetcar*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Camino Real*, he tries to help the audience to interpret his personal crisis in terms of the mythic reference to persistent patterns in the history of mankind.

In the third phase beginning 1955, Williams attempted to resolve his contemporary reading of recurrent life patterns. The plays of this period, namely *Orpheus Descending*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Sweet-Bird of Youth*, *The Night of the Iguana*, and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* are all notable for the presence of a tentative resolution of human conflict. The fragmentary cycle of the early plays, such as *The Glass Managerie,* gets gradually submerged in a pattern which is essentially theological in character. It seems consistent with Williams's dramatic philosophy that whatever proposition is offered for human salvation should be relevant to the experience of the common man. In the context of this philosophy, it is not at all surprising that he should offer God as the answer to the problem of human suffering. In his later works, such as *Suddenly Last Summer*, *The Night of the Iguana*, and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, the protagonists are found going in search of God. The theological motive, hardly suggested by Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, is openly embraced by Shannon, the protagonist of *The Night of the Iguana*. The dramatic conclusion reached in this play, as well as in the other ones of the period, is essentially that which the plays of more orthodox dramatists, such as Eliot and MacLeish, had offered. Williams does, however, differ from Eliot and MacLeish in the image of God he creates. For him, God is not the philosophical abstraction of *The Cocktail Party*, nor is He the inscrutable Old Testament deity of T.S. Eliot. His God, like his man, is the figment of the popular imagination. He is the stern but forgiving "Father" of American Protestantism.

Tennessee Williams's position as the leading popular dramatist of his time is generally attributed to a number of related factors. Like several of his contemporaries, he attempted to create for modern man an image of his urgent concerns. But he had a singular advantage over others in his ability to translate the particulars of the emotional, social, and moral issues of the time into a common language of great power. As in the past, the talent for dramatizing in the language of the common man the political events, philosophical perceptions, and social conditions of an age had brought to the playwright and his theatre a wide and varied audience. While Williams's plays have never been rated among the greatest, he has remained an important figure in the history of the American theatre. Popular dramatists of subsequent generations have always found something to learn from him, especially his skill as a mediator between past and present, tradition and talent, the theatre and the common man.

(3) A Streetcar Named Desire as Tragedy

Ever since Aristotle's *Poetics* became available in the beginning of the European Renaissance, it has dominated the discussions of drama as tragedy or comedy. Arthur Miller, a close contemporary of Tennessee Williams, raised a banner of revolt against Aristotle's concept, arguing that in an age of democracy, why should a dramatist (or a critic, for that matter) be governed by the rules and concepts of a slave society to which Aristotle belonged – a society in which only Kings and Princes could be considered the fit subject for tragedy. In Miller's view, the fall of a common man, his change of fortune from happiness to sorrow, from joy to suffering, is as much tragic to us was the fall of princes to the slave society. In fact, one of the points that Miller makes in this context is that the fall of someone like us would involve us more than that of a prince or king with whom we cannot identify so easily. Miller's argument has been an issue of debate with critics taking position on both sides of the case. Those who have sided with Miller sound more convincing than those on the other side.

Williams never wrote an extended piece on the subject as Miller had done, but his practice shows that he fully endorsed the view Miller held on the subject of tragedy. An evidence to this effect is the social strata to which his protagonists belong; their social status, which is, without any exception, that of the common man or woman. Williams is different from Miller in one very important sense: he has, in more than one play, female protagonist, which is not the case with Miller. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* itself, the protagonist is a female, named Blanche Dubois. When we meet Blanche for the first time, she is at the same stage as Laura of *The Glass Managerie*: just one more of life's frustrating disappointments would be enough to ensure her retreat from the world. However, the fact that misfortunes have broken her irrepairably cannot obliterate the equally unrefutable fact that she does not finally retreat without a struggle. We can remind ourselves here of the critical controversy about the character of the tragic protagonist. It has generally been a critical consensus that (as Arnold and Yeats insisted) passive suffering is not a fit subject for tragedy. The point put forth in this regard is that passive suffering evokes pathos, not tragic feeling. The difference which is generally made out between the tragic and the pathetic is that while the tragic character actively struggles against the odds being faced by him or her, the pathetic character passively submits to the odds, or goes down crying without offering any resistence. One of the most often–quoted case of such a pathetic conduct has been the one depicted by Shelley in the following lines:

> *I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed*

Although Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* seemingly appears a passive character, she actually has struggled all along against the odds of life. In fact, the odds in her case are not merely those that any human being is likely to face in this world and which are of not his or her making; they are also those that a woman called the "weaker," or the "second," or the "other," sex has to face in this world not of her making, but of man's making. In fact, it will not be an exaggeration to say that Blanche's struggle, as it progresses, determines the very movement of the play's action. In other words, the plot of the play assigns the pivotal position to the fortunes of Blanche. Like any hero of tragedy, Blanche stands out as a distinguished character among those who surround her. This superior-to-others aspect (in moral terms rather than social) is made quite clear to us right from the early stage we see her. Note how Williams takes pains in his stage directions to emphasize this aspect of her personality:

> *Her appearance is incongruous in this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace, and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district…. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her clothes, that suggests a moth.*

In the modern theatre, unlike the Elizabethan, we see how the dramatist gives very detailed stage directions, and how these details are rather symbolic, contributing to the play's texture (just as the texture of images in a poem). Here, the texture becomes more important than the structure. Action in the Elizabethan, or conventional sense, takes a back seat, making place to stage manipulations. As Gerald Weales has pointed out, Blanche's clothes are used as a characterizing device and a way of separating her from her surroundings. Like any other tragic hero, she is going to be destroyed by the end of the play's action. Williams wanted her very first appearance to imply that end. Costume here foreshadows the tragedy to come. The very image of the "moth" to which Blanche is compared suggests her life as

a short-lived affair. One thing must be noted, that these expressionistic or symbolistic devices, including setting and costume, take away tragic intensity which an action-oriented play would have. Here the texture dissipates the tragic intensity.

Williams also uses music and other sounds to symbolize the brute force represented by Stanley, the husband of Blanche's younger sister, which would eventually destroy the moth-like Blanche. The very first appearance of Stanley the brute establishes his credentials as a destructive force. When we see him the first time, he hurls a blood-stained package of raw meat at his wife. Music and other sounds that the dramatist uses to communicate a sense of the ineludable primitive force operating around Blanche. From the Four Deuces, a nearby right spot, come the sounds that express New Orleans life: blues, jazz, honky-tonk. Elia Kazin, the famous director who produced and directed *A Streetcar Named Desire,* made the following remark on the function of the "blue piano" music which is in the background of much of the action:

> *The Blues is an expression of the loneliness and rejection, the exclusion and isolation of the Negro and their longing for love and connection. Blanche, too, is looking for a home, abandoned the friendless…. Thus the Blue piano catches the soul of Blanche, and miserable unusual human side of the girl which is beneath her frentic duplicity, her trickery, lies, etc.*

Thus Blues plays as Blanche arrives in the Vieux Carre and is particularly dominant when she recounts the deaths at Belle Reve in Scene I and when she kisses the newsboy in Scene 5. Similarly, when Blanche is led away to the asylum and Stella cries uncontrollably, the music of the Blue piano swells in Scene 11. At one point this music catches the soul of Stanley too: when Stella leaves him, and he sobs: "I want my baby," the *blue piano* plays for a brief interval in scene 3. But normally, the uncomplicated obtrusive rhythms of the honky tonk express Stanley's personality. This music dominates the rape scene, too.

As can be seen Williams uses music for symbolic expression of the inner world of his characters. Elizabethan dramatists like Shakespeare depended more on the power of the dramatic speech than on the theatrical aids. Of course, there were sounds and songs in Shakespeare, too. Thunder and lightening were used for similar effects from behind the stage. The aid was still aid and an outside one. But the effect in Shakespeare, with all the power of rhetoric was created by the dramatic speech, rather than by the accompanying music. Here, the power of dramatic speech or the force of character gets transferred to the stage setting. No wonder the modern tragedy does not create an intense emotional effect on the reader's mind as did the Elizabethan or the Greeko-Roman. Decidedly, symbol cannot create the effect of action including speech. We can recall how Hamlet and Antony speak, or Lear and Macbeth speak; it is their speech that thunder, not any Blues. The power of passion cannot be compensated by the power of accompanying music. And even if it succeeds, the hero, the person in action, gets overtaken by the supporting aids. The aids gain prominence at the cost of the protagonist. It is on this very basis of the character of the protagonist, its power and position in the play's action, that it had come to be believed that tragedy was not possible in the modern age. The overt argument was that the modern man is no longer a man of powerful passions; he is more of a thinking (than a doing) being – a man of thought rather than of action, etc.

In placing Blanche and Stanley against each other Williams returns, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, to his often-told tale of the defeat of the weak by the strong. But there is a significant difference, too; in that both figures represent complex and morally ambiguous position. Blanche is far from perfect. But even Aristotle did not require the tragic protagonist to be without a flaw or flawless. She is at times a plain liar, and alcoholic, and she would break up the Kowalski marriage if she could. Despite his tough exterior, Stanley genuinely loves and needs his wife, and he cannot be blamed for protecting his marriage against the force that would destroy it. The ambiguity of Blanche and Stanley makes them more realistic than the characters we have in tragedies like those of the Elizabethan period or the Greeko-Roman convention.

This has also been a point of debate: whether in the realistic mode of literature tragedy as a form is possible? The argument that realism as a mode is inappropriate for tragic form seems quite convincing because for attainting the tragic effect and intensity we have to idealize a bit the character of the protagonist. Correspondingly, we have to exaggerate the character of the antagonist, making him blacker than his real metal. In the case of the present play we cannot say that Williams has strictly adhered to the realistic mode. He does deviate from realism to effect a complete

contrast between the delicate and refined Blanche on the one hand and on the other rough and tough Stanley. Seen in the surrealistic lights of the play, the two look like the fairy and the brute, the moth and the hyena. The very symbolism of the play is meant to get over the limitations of the realistic mode. It takes away the colourlessness of ordinariness and presents reality in sharpened and darkened colours. The play may not match a romantic tragedy of the Elizabethan age, it does come up to the tragic level, making the story of Blanche a moving experience, leaving the reader sad but civilized.

(4) Blanche as Tragic Heroine

In tragedy, product as it was of the tribal, feudal and aristocratic societies, the dias has been heavily set against women. In fact, in the ancient tribal Greek societies, there was still a possibility that the woman would find a place, although not usually, in the world of tragedy, but there was no place for woman in the tragedies of feudal and aristocratic medieval societies. Even in Elizabethan England, woman was not considered good enough for occupying the central slot in tragedy. In Greek tragedy, we could still have an Antigony or Electra, but in the Elizabethan tragedy, we can only have secondary roles for them like that of Ophelia or Cordelia. The conventional binaries of man/woman, strong/weak, outdoor/indoor were strong beliefs in the Christian societies even until the Elizabethan age. In this hierarchical belief about man/woman relationship, while man is considered the master ('my lord'), woman is a serving second; while man is strong, woman is weak; while man is an outdoor performer, woman is an indoor doer. With these ideas, having a very strong prejudiced view of woman, she would naturally remain a character to perform secondary roles, subsidiary to man's.

These conventional images of man and woman are actually derived from the mythologies. Greek or Christian, woman is viewed as next to man, created only to create problems of man. Pandora, the first woman in Greek mythology, is sent to punish Prometheus, the first man. We know how Pandora's box is considered a container for all the ills and evils of the world. Similarly, Eve, the first woman in Christian mythology, became the cause of the fall of man. Thereafter, she was branded as the weaker sex, the second sex, with weakness not merely physical but also moral. "Frailty thy name is woman," says the hero in Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*. This conventional view has remained for centuries so strongly stamped on the womankind that the gender has been for all these long years on the receiving end, subjected to all sorts of humiliations and indignities. Even as late as eighteenth century could poets like Pope throw all sorts of funny comments on women. "Women and watches never agree" is one such remark he makes in one of his poems. Even as late as the Victorian age, Tennyson, the poet laureate, neatly assigned only the domestic duties to women, leaving the outdoor world of action an exclusive domain for the male.

Although Williams was not a crusader for women, his closer affinity with his grandmother, mother and sister, and distance from his father, made him understand the plight and position of women in the American society. Like Hawthorne, Williams had an advantage over most of his contemporaries in that he was able to develop greater sensitivity to the concerns of women. No wonder then that he places Blanche at the center of his play's pattern or plot. Her status as a tragic heroine has been debatable for more than one reason. The problem with Blanche is that she is made a battleground for either the psychological forces of illusion and reality, or for the historical forces of a dying culture and a growing violent way of life. Both these conflicts tend to reduce the character of Blanche into a symbolic figure rather than an actual living person struggling against the odds of life. No doubt, she tries to hold on to her position, even if it is illusory, resisting the aggression of the brute force that Stanley represents. But her fight seems so unequal in the play that she comes out more pathetic than tragic, more like Ophelia than Hamlet or Antigone.

Williams depicts in Blanche the total defeat of a woman whose existence depends on her maintaining illusions about herself and the world. She is both a representative and a victim of a tradition that taught her to believe that attractiveness, virtues, and gentility led automatically to happiness. But reality proved intractable to the myth. Blenche's lot was Belle Reve, with its debts and deaths, and homosexual husband who killed himself because, for once, her sensitivity fails her. Blanche's "amatory adventures…are the unwholesome means she uses to maintain her connection with life, to fight the sense of death which her whole background has created in her." Since "the tradition" allows no place for the physical and sensual, she rejects this aspect of her personality, calling it "brutal desire." As Kazin writes, "She thinks she sins when she gives into it…yet she does give into it, out of loneliness…but by calling it 'brutal desire,' she is able to separate it from her 'real life,' her 'cultured,' refined self." If Blanche is the last remnant of a moribund culture,

Stanley is in the vanguard of a vital and different society. Even Blanche recognizes his strength when she says, "He's just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve." If Blanche's way of life cannot make room for brutal desire," Stanley's comprehends little else. As the author describes him,

> *Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women…. He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them.*

It is only logical that this "brute" Stanley should destroy blanche with sex. As Benjamin Nelson has said, "sex has been her Achilles heel. It has always been his sword and shield." After her rape by Stanley, she is no more her normal self. She gets broken in her mind. When the play ends, she is being removed to the asylum. The critical comments, cited above, notwithstanding, Blanche remains a tragic heroine, who actively opposes standing and goes down fighting against this evil figure who destroys her.

(5) The Feminist View of a Street Car named Desire

We know how consciousness about the ill treatment of women, about the denial of equal rights to them, about their discriminatory representation in literature, has been a movement, at least from the end of the eighteenth century when Mary Wolstonecraft wrote her tract about the rights of women. The movement got an impetus from writers like Virginia Woolf whose *A Room of One's Own* still remains a seminal work of feminist movement. After mid-twentieth century, feminism, besides its being a political movement, has been a separate school of literary criticism that has taken up the task of re-interpreting literary texts, showing how the patriarchal societies have produced literature heavily biased against women, presenting them, as a sort of divine work, as secondary and inferior to men, made only to serve them, mostly as a sexual object and domestic servant. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, having two leading women characters in the play, both sisters, easily lends itself to feminist interpretation. The other ways of interpretation – formalist, mythical, historical, psychological – tend to ignore the gender question. To be able to see the position of women in the American society in the middle of the twentieth century, which the play depicts, it is necessary that we look at the play from the viewpoint of feminism.

Significantly, the play opens with a conversation between two women, one Eunice (a white woman) and another a Negro Woman (no name given). The play, thus presents, not merely the matter for gender study but also the matter for racial study. As for the second, we find that the black or Afro-American woman is not even given a name, because in the white society, all Negroes are the same, they are a type, a myth created by the whites. Note, for instance, the kind of language this Negro Woman is given to speak:

> *…she say St. Barnabas would send out his dog to lick her and when he did she'd feel an icy cold wave all up an' down her. Well, that night when –*

We can see how the Negro Woman here is made to speak the language of superstition and orthodoxy, allowing her no personal feelings or ideas that she might have as an individual. Since we are not considering here the racial question, we may not continue the discussion in that direction. But even in the scope of the gender question, this Negro Woman has a place, because it is her position in the play as a mere street voice and a secondary presence that reveals the status of the black woman, which is much inferior to that of the white woman. Although Williams speaks of "cosmopolitanism" of New Orleans, it is limited to mere presence of people of more than one race or nation (as origin). Note, for instance, the following authorial comment:

> *Two women, one white and one coloured, are talking air on the steps of the building. The white woman is EUNICE, who occupies the upstairs flat; the coloured woman a neighbour, for New Orleans is a cosmopolitan city where there is a relatively warm and easy intermingling of races in the old part of town….*

The authorial assertion notwithstanding, we find that the Negro Woman, who appears as a voice and a presence, disappears as such soon, and the stage remains occupied by Eunice, Blanche, and Stella, all white women.

Now, looking at the white women's representation, the very first thing one notices is that women, in the play's society, are made to live largely their body-life. Those (like Blanche) who try to attempt something beyond that life are destroyed, are taught a lesson, so to say. See how when the two sisters, Blanche and Stella, meet, what is it that occupies their attention

> *BLANCHE: …But you – you've put on some weight, yes, you're just as plump as a little partridge! And it's so becoming to you!*
>
> *STELLA: Now, Blanche –*
>
> *BLENCHE: Yes, it is or I wouldn't say it! You just have to watch around the hips a little. Stand up.*

So on and so forth. This conversation about body fitness, and physical looks goes on between the two sisters for quite sometime, until they take up the case of Stanley, the husband of Stella, the man whom Blanche has to encounter. One recalls here the encounter between Mildred and Yank in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, for Blanche is as delicate and airy as Mildred, and Stanley as crude as the Hairy Ape (Yank), and as earthy.

The way men like Stanley treat women is made quite clear through his reactions and responses to things concerning Blanche and Stella. The moment he hears of the property disposal at his wife's end, he goes crazy and forgets even the basic courtesies which he should be extending to his wife's sister. Even his general attitude to women is indecent, which is representative of his class of people in particular. Note, for example, the following:

> *STANLEY: You hens [Stella and Blanche] cut out that conversation in there!*
> *STELLA: You can't hear us.*
> *STANLEY: Well, you hear me and I said to hush up!*
> *STELLA: This is my house and I'll talk as much as I want to!*
> *BLENCHE: Stella, don't start a row.*
> *STELLA: He's half drunk! – I'll be out in a minute.*
> *[She goes into the bathroom. BLANCHE rises and crosses leisurely to a small white radio and turns it on]*

This further irritates Stanley, in fact, infuriates him. For women for him exist only for serving men the way they like to be served. Now since he is playing cards with friends, and having drinks, too, women in the house have no business to disturb the exclusive male company. They are no better than hens. See now how he behaves:

> *STANLEY: Who turned that on in there?*
> *BLENCHE: I did. Do you mind?*
> *STANLEY: Turn it off!*
> ……
> ……

[*STANLEY jumps up and, crossing to the radio, turns it off. He stops short at sight of BLANCHE in the chair. She returns her look without flicking. Then he sits again at the poker table. Two of the men have started arguing hotly.*]

Of course, all women are not equally sensitive to the gender question, or to the question of conduct in general. Even the two sisters, Blanche and Stella, are poles apart from each other. If Blanche is highly refined, Stella is quite coarse. Stella has not only come to tolerate Stanley, she even enjoys some of his coarsenesses, for instance the sexual. For a clear view of the cultural difference between the two sisters, note as an example the following:

> *STELLA: NO, it isn't all right for anybody to make such a terrible row, but – people do sometimes. Stanley's always smashed things. Why, on our wedding night – soon as we came in here – he snatched off one of my slippers and rushed about the place smashing the light-bulbs with it.*
> *BLANCHE: He did – what?*
> *STELLA: He smashed all the light-bulbs with the heel of my slipper! [She laughs.]*
> *BLANCHE: And you – you let him? Didn't run, didn't scream?*

STELLA: I was – sort of – thrilled by it. [She waits for a moment]….

Williams is, of course, using in the play the age-old comic device of incongruity, making the two sisters antithetical, and more so the poker-playing men and the chattering hens. But the antithesis, especially the imagery, the dramatist uses conforms to the clichéd concepts of man and woman. He succeeds in providing laughter, but does he attempt any sensitization about the coarseness that goes with all this? It seems he does not. One of the problems with such standard ways of creating comedy is that it reduces ever serious things of life to a laughing matter. Laughing becomes a way of overlooking the serious cultural flaws carried without any consciousness in everyday conversation and activity.

Not that Williams has designed Blanche to be a feminist, a spokesperson for women's cause in the world, but he has certainly made her representative, not merely of a decadent dying culture but of 'culture' as such, which includes a rightful, a decent place for a woman in society, even if it remains male dominated. Her long comment on Stanley as man, worth only for a fling or two, but not worth a life-long companion for a woman, implies an ideal, a set of values, for a woman's position in society. Note, for illustration, the following:

> *He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something – sub-human – something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something – ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in – anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is – Stanley Kowalski – survivor of the Stone Age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you – you here – waiting for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in the front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night! – you call it – this party of apes! Somebody growls – some creature snatches at something – the fight is on! God! May be we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella – my sister – there has been some progress since then! Such things as art – as poetry and music – such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching…. Don't – don't hang back with the brutes.*

We must notice here, first of all, that this discourse echoes the kind of difference Leavis made out between "minority culture" and "mass civilization." Here, while Blanche obviously represents the former, Stanley and his friends represent the latter. What she is talking about here is that antagonism of Arnoldian or humanist culture and the blind march of material, machine or mechanical civilization. It must also be noted, here, that Blanche seldom, in fact, never, invokes the conventional pieties of social institutions such as marriage or family. While Stella represents, in this second antagonism, the traditional woman, Blanche represents the unconventional, new, educated, woman. Blanche, even without being gender specific, would like to have a decent place at home and in outside world, in her relationship with men. Expressionistic exaggerations apart, which Williams uses as a stage technique, Blanche genuinely represents a certain modicum of decency that goes into making a women "cultured."

Blanche is given the role of a female crusader, too, however muted or subdued that role might seem in the more noisy antagonism of culture and civilization, aristocracy and democracy. The way she has to face the odds of life alone, when left to live with ailing and dying members of the family; the way she has to survive in a society of sharks (mostly the male) gives the play the feminist dimension. Large part of her misery or suffering stems from her being a female. See what she has suffered:

> *I, I, I took the blows in my face and my body! All of those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret, that dreadful way! So big with it, it couldn't be put in a coffin! But had to be burnt like rubbish! You just came home in time for the funerals, Stella. And funerals are pretty compared to deaths. Funerals are quiet, but deaths – not always. Sometimes their breathing is hoarse, and sometimes it rattles, and sometimes they*

> *even cry out to you, 'Don't let me go!' even the old, sometimes, say, 'Don't let me go.' As if you were able to stop them! But funerals are quiet, with pretty flowers. And, oh, what gorgeous boxes they pack them away in! unless you were there at the bed when they cried out, 'Hold me!' you'd never suspect there was the struggle for breath and bleeding. You didn't dream, but I saw! Saw! Saw! And now you sit there telling me with your eyes that I let the place go! How in hell do you think all that sickness and dying was paid for? Death is expensive, Miss Stella! And old Cousin Jessie's right after Margaret's, hers! Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep!…Stella. Belle Reve headquarters! Honey – that's how it slipped through my fingers! Which of them left us a fortune? Which of them left a cent of insurance even? Only poor Jessie – one hundred to pay for her coffin. That was all, Stella! And I with my pitiful salary at the school. Yes, accuse me! Sit there and stare at me, thinking I let the place go! I let the place go! Where were you? In bed with your – Polak!*

This is not so much gender specific as general condition humane – an individual left alone to face all the miseries that can fall in a selfish world driven by desires. But the fact that Blanche as an individual woman against all odds of sickness and death in a family living jointly, facing deaths and funerals of all, mother, father, cousin, etc., having no help even from her own sister, speaks a good deal about the general status of woman as well as the fibre of this particular individual.

A gender specific speech comes from Blanche when her rather "shady" past gets revealed to Stanley and Stella and she is pushed to the wall to offer a defence for herself. See what revealing facts are brought home to us about the plight of the female gender in the male-dominated patriarchal society:

> *I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft – soft people have got to court the favour of hard ones, Stella. Have got to be seductive – put on soft colours, the colours of butterfly wings, and glow – make a little – temporary magic just in order to pay for – one night's shelter! That's why I've been – not so awf'ly good lately. I've run for protection, Stella, from under one leaky roof to another leaky roof – because it was storm – all storm, and I was – caught in the cetnre…. People don't see you – men don't – don't even admit your existence unless they are making love to you. And you've got to have someone's protection. And so the soft people have got to – shimmer and glow – put a – paper lantern over the light…. But I'm scared now – awf'ly scared. I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick. It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft and attractive. And I – I'm fading now!*

This speaks volumes about the status of woman characterized as "softer" or "weaker" sex, who, for her survival, must sell her body one way or another – by looking soft and attractive, by looking beautiful. She must secure "protection" from the strong, obviously the male, for she cannot survive alone among the sharks, which most men are, acknowledging her existence only when she is an object of love (in fact, sex). In such speeches as the present Williams imparts to the story of Blanche a sharper edge of feminism. It is, obviously, consciously and deliberately so designed.

A real conflict of genders arises soon after Blanche arrives at her sister's place and has to live in the same house Stanley lives (as husband of Stella). He feels challenged as male authority by the way Blanche goes about, talks, thinks, etc. As a male "master" of the house, his house, he is not prepared to accept a woman, including his wife, who thinks a little too much of herself. Note, for instance, the following:

> *STANLEY: That's how I'll clear the table! [He seizes her arm.] Don't ever talk that way to me! 'Pig – Polack – disgusting – vulgar – greasy!' – them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister's too much around here! What do you two think you are? A pair of queens? Remember what Huey Long said – 'Every Man is a King!' and I am the king around here, so don't forget it! [He hurls a cup and saucer to the floor.] My place is cleared! You want me to clear your places?*

Here is the crux of the gender theme. The male is the king. He is the authority in the house. Women can get their

measure of freedom only to the extent it pleases the king. His authority is no less than the divine right. Women can only stay at his mercy, not in their own right. His terms are absolute and binding. See what the women do after hearing the "brute" male authority:

> *[STELLA begins to cry weakly. STANLEY stalks out on the porch and lights a cigarette. The Negro entertainers around the corner are heard.]*

(6) Symbolism in a StreetCar Named Desire

Williams is known not so much for his sophisticated literary technique as for his popular style of dramatic compositions. No doubt, he uses literary techniques such as expressionism and symbolism. But he uses them not so much as a means to externalize an obscure psychological or philosophical reality but as an instrument or a device to enhance the visual and theatrical effects. In fact, the effects, which are audio-visual, are not even theatrical so much as they are cinematic. As in cinema, so in Williams's play, stage setting as well as accompanying music are used to enhance the effect, not to clarify or simplify an obscure or difficult emotion or experience. The purpose is to make action or speech louder than the actual pitch, more visual than the normal shade. Thus, the play's action and speech are greatly heightened both visually as well as auditorily. It is a part of Williams's attempt to make drama a popular art. Cinema being more popular than theatre, largely owing to its audio-visual aspect, Williams chose to adopt the cinematic techniques.

We may recall here how Aristotle, while listing the six elements of drama, had placed spectacle at the bottom of the list. With writers like Williams spectacle acquires, as it does in cinema, an important place; it moves from its bottom position to the central. Also, while Aristotle gave plot the prime position as soul of tragedy, in modern drama like that of Williams's, character replaces plot. As we see in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, plot is more of a peg on which the characters are hung. Actually, it is the characters, their juxtapositions and encounters, which become of greater interest than the plot or action as such. Although, as Henry James remarked, it is hard to separate plot and character, the two being intrinsically linked up with each other, rather inextricable, to the extent we can, character becomes more important in modern drama than plot. One reason has been our increasing knowledge about human mind and character. The growth of modern psychology has made the difference. Interest in the working of human mind and the making of a man's characters – his habits, attitudes, values, etc. – increased manifold in the twentieth century to which Williams belonged. As a result, drama in the age of Williams became more psychological and symbolical. With him, it tilted towards the popular form, bringing it closer to cinema, bridging the gap between the academic and the popular, the theatre and the cinema.

Symbolism in *A Streetcar Named Desire* begins with the setting itself. The setting in the play is emotionally charged. As usual with Williams, it is described in detail in the form of stage directions. For instance, both the inside and the outside of the Kowalski house are made to appear on the stage. On the literal level, the house is in a slum in the old section of New Orleans. The backdrop to the house is symbolically designed (as shown in the play's original production) featuring angled telephone poles, lurid neon lights and ornately decorated facades on crumbling structures. Despite its dilapidation, however, Williams insists that the section "has a raffish charm," especially in the blue light of the sky "which invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully attenuates the atmosphere of decay." Thus, the low locale of the house is symbolically made to suggest a charm which actually or normally is not there in a slum. It is just the light-effect which gives the place a certain imaginative clouring the dramatist has desired.

The "charm" added to the locale is, however, meant to be relative. Stanley, for example, is at home in this neighboured. Stella, his wife, has learned to like it. But its charm eludes Blanche who is, in fact, a person of imagination: "Only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allen Poe! – could do it justice," she says. She finds the Kowalski environment rather cramped and conjested, foul and ugly, so unlike her childhood home, Belle Reve, "a great big place with white columns." In coming to reside in New Orleans, "Blanche is brought face to face with an ugly reality which contrasts with her "beautiful dream." To show the relation between the decadent New Orleans street life and the events inside the Kowalski flat the dramatist asks that the back wall of the apartment be made of gauze to permit, under proper lighting, a view of the city alley. This wall becomes transparent in the rape scene. Now, all this carefully designed setting assumes symbolic meanings meant to externalize the inside of the characters associated with the setting. As can be seen, it is something which Shakespeare or any Elizabethan dramatist would not care to waste his time on. Here it is all important because

the play has become, in the age of Williams, less dramatic and more imagistic. It is the pattern of imagery, a mosaic of scenes and settings, rather than the chain of incidents, which has assumed significance.

As paraphernalia of symbolism, Williams uses costumes, props, and lighting to convey the emotional states of his characters. In order to reinforce the dichotomy between Blanche and Stanley, all these items or devices of symbolism are pressed into service. The overwrought, emotionally drained Blanche, for example, always wears pastels in half-lights. Stanley, on the contrary, the "richly feathered male bird," appears in vivid primary colours under strong, garish light. Blanche's clothes establish her uniqueness even in her first appearance on stage. The stage directions elaborately prescribe:

> *Her appearance is incongruous in this setting. She is daintily dressed with fluffy bodices, necklace, and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district…. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as for clothes, that suggests a moth.*

Normally, in drama there is hardly any scope for such elaborate descriptions which Williams gives in his stage directions. In fact, even in "dramatic" novelists like Hemingway, as Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound made him learn, there are very few descriptions. Here, in Williams, there is always an added emphasis given to such descriptions, because it is through audio-visual effects that he heightens the character-contrasts and cultural conflicts. As Gerald Weales has rightly remarked, Blanche's clothes are a device of characterization and a way separating her from her surroundings. As he suggests, "Blanche is going to be destroyed by the end of the play and Williams wants her first appearance…to imply that end. Costume here becomes a way of foreshadowing the events to come." By the time Blanche is made to appear on the stage, the audience have already met the bellowing Stanley, dressed in work clothes, who hurls a blood-stained package of raw meat at his wife. On her part, his wife Stella, despite her surprise, deftly catches the bundle. She has adjusted herself to the ways of her brute husband and his boorish friends. She has learned to live in this society.

The symbolic potential of light and colour is also exploited by Williams in the Poker Night scene to create a certain mood. As he so often does, Williams cites an example from the visual arts as a model for the effect he wishes to create. Note, for example, the following:

> *There is a picture of Van Gogh's of a billiard-parlor at night. The kitchen now suggests that sort of lurid nocturnal brilliance, the raw colors of childhood's spectrum. Over the yellow linoleum of the kitchen table hangs an electric bulb with a vivid green glass shade. The poker players – Stanley, Steve, Mitch and Pablo – wear colored shirts, gold blues, a purple, a red-and-white check, a light green, and they are men at the peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colours. There are vivid slices of watermelon on the table; whiskey bottles and glasses.*

Here, the description clearly seems to emphasize the vibrancy of this scene. However, Van Gogh's *Night Café*, obviously the model for Williams, is harrowing in its buridness, its colour contrasts, and tilted perspective suggesting moral degeneracy. Surely, the dramatist intends the poker players to be frightening in their physical strength. Their primitive tastes and pleasures are the norm in the Kowalski set, and those who fail to conform to this norm, have no chance of survival. We know how Blanche finds herself at odds with the Kowalski set, and how she fails to conform to the norm, as a result of which she is finally destroyed.

Another powerful device of symbolism that Williams uses in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is music. As we see, music and other sounds communicate in the play a sense of the ineluctable primitive forces that operate in the Vieux Carre'. From the Four Deuces, a nearby night spot, come the sounds that express New Orleans life: blues, jazz, honky-tonk. As Elia Kazin has commented on the function of the "blue piano" music which is in the background of much action:

> *The Blues is an expression of the loneliness and rejection, the exclusion and isolation of the Negro and their longing for love and connection. Blanche, too, is looking for a home, abandoned and friendless…. Thus the Blue piano catches the soul of Blanche, the miserable unusual human side of the girl which is beneath her frentic duplicity, her trickery, lies, etc.*

As Blench arrives in Vieux Carre the Blues plays and is dominant when she recounts the deaths at Belle Reve in

Scene I as well as when she kisses the newboy in Scene V. The Blue plays again when Blanche is being taken to the asylum. When Stella cries uncontrollably, the music of the blue piano swells correspondingly in Scene XI. At one point, this music is used to symbolize the soul of Stanley too. This takes place when Stella leaves him, and he sobs, "I want my baby," the "'blue piano plays for a brief interval'" in Scene III. However, normally, the uncomplicated obtrusive rhythms of the honky-tonk express Stanley's personality. This music dominates the rape scene too.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the role of music is both subjective as well as objective. For instance, only Blanche and the audience hear the Varsouviana polka, which was played as Blanche's husband shot himself. Here, through its association in Blanche's memory with impending death, music becomes a symbol of imminent disaster. For example, Blanche hears it when Stanley hands her a Greyhound bus ticket for a trip back to Laurel in Scene VIII. The music of the Varsouviana weaves in and out of the scene in which Mitch confronts Blanche with whatever information (or misinformation) he has gathered about her background. The dramatist's directions at the moment are important:

> *The rapid, feverish polka time, the Varsouviana,' is heard. The music is in her mind; she is drinking to escape it and the sense of disaster closing in on her, and she seems to whisper the words of the song.*

In the same scene (Scene IX) the polka time fades in as the Mexican street vendor, harbinger of death, arrives, changing "Flores para los muertos." These aural and visual reminders of death symbolize for Blanche reality in all its harshness and ugliness. She also hears this music in the last scene, when Stanley and the asylum matron corner her.

Another symbolism used in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is that of bathing to which Blanche is shown taking frequent recourse. She seems to be doing it in order to further lay bare her inner nature. As an aspect of the visiting in-law joke, Blanche's "hogging" of the bathroom is amusing. The earthy Stanley's references to his bursting kidneys add to the humour. Serious symbolism, too, is no less obvious: "Blanche's obsessive bathing is a nominal gesture of guilt and wished for redemption." Like her drinking, Blanche's bathing is an escape mechanism. The ritual cleansing which takes place in the tub restores Blanche to a state of former innocence. Once again she is young and pure in a beautiful world. The bath is, in fact, a particularly functional symbol in the play's Scene VII, in which it is used to reveal the dual world of Blanche's existence and the tension between Blanche and Stanley. Stella is shown setting the table for Blanche's birthday party, to which Mitch, the one person who offers Blanche a genuine possibility for redemption, has been invited. As the scene progresses, it becomes amply clear that the occasion will be anything but happy. The festive occasion that falls flat is a staple of drama. Williams uses it to intensify the ironic discrepancy between appearance and reality. As Blanche bathes in preparation for the party, Stanley discloses to Stella the details of her sister's past sordid life. The stage directions for the occasion are important.

> *Blanche is singing in the bathroom a saccharine popular ballad which is used contrapuntally with Stanley's speech.*

The symbolism and realism are so blended here that the two cannot be separated for any critical convenience. The louder Stanley gets in his insistence upon the undeniable facts about Blanche, the louder Blanche sings in the bathroom. Her song asserts the capacity of the imagination to transform mere facts:

> *Say, it's only a paper moon. Sailing over a cardboard sea –*
>
> *But it wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!*
>
> ……
>
> *It's a Barnum and Bailey world. Just as phony as it can be –*
>
> *But it wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!*

When Stanley's disclosures reach the climax with the most damning charge of Blanche's seduction of a student, "*in the bathroom the water goes on loud: little breathless cries and peals of laughter are heard as if a child were frolicking in the tub.*" Thus the two Blanches are counterpoised. In emerging from the bathroom, Blanche immediately senses the threat that Stanley's world of facts poses to her world of illusion. Her usual contented sigh after the bath gives way to uneasiness: "A hot bath and long, cold drink always give me a brand new outlook on life!…. Something has happened! – What is it?" Background music, at this stage, is pressed into service to reflect her fear: "*The distant*

piano goes into hectic breakdown." That is how symbolism is made to work, for serving a psychological purpose. The emotional states of the characters, Blanche in particular, are brought out auditorially for an impact on the audience. What otherwise may remain subdued, even though not without perception, is made effectively loud through the symbolism of music, used throughout the play.

No less effective is the use of "light" as symbol in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. We know how Blanche remains obsessed with lights all through the play. The obsession with lights in Blanche is as intense as the one with baths. On reaching at her sister's house her very first request is that the overhead light be turned off. Subsequently she buys a paper lantern to cover it, so that the light is subdued and may not have to be turned off. On one level, Blanche's dislike of bright lights is a matter of vanity, for dimness hides the signs of ageing. It can also be said to be a mark of cultural sophistication, of an educated, delicate sensibility. But it is made clear in the play that the light bulb has a further significance, perhaps unconscious, for Blanche, who says to Mitch: "I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action." Just as the naked light must be toned down by an artificial lantern, so every sordid reality must be cloaked in illusion. Also, romance, as Hawthorne insists, belongs to the twilight, not to day-light. In the same context, one can recall Shakespeare's use of light as symbol in *Hamlet*. When you have something to hide, just as Blanches has, you prefer shady places to lighted ones. Thus, we can see, how the light symbolism carries multiple connotations.

As opposed to Blanche's preference for soft lights, we have Stanley, the man of harsh realities, the earthy character, who likes very bright light: the clear cold light of day and the naked bulb reveal to him what is real and, therefore, what is true. We can recall here Hamlet's remark that he is "too much in the sun," telling his mother that he is in the know of reality or truth. Stanley, too, "brings to light" the sordid facts about Blanche's past life. Mitch, having been "enlightened" by Stanley, tears the paper lantern from the bulb and demands to take a good look at Blanche:

> *BLANCHE: Of course, you don't really mean to be insulting!*
> *MITCH: No, just realistic.*
> *BLANCHE: I don't want realism. I want magic! Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth. I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it! – Don't turn the light on!*

Compelled to face the reality Blanche's refusal to recognize it as significant becomes the cause of her breakdown. In the play's last scene, as Blanche is led away, Stanley tears the paper lantern off the light bulb – he has no use for it – and extends it to her: "*She cries out as if the lantern was herself*." Blanche is as delicate and pathetic as a paper lantern; she cannot deflect the hard light of Stanley's vision of reality.

Along with different shades of light – bright and dim – the other items of setting, such as telephone, telegraph, etc., are used as symbols to indicate the mental state and changing mood of Blanche and other characters. Costumes, too, continue to play symbolic role in the internal drama that must be made visual to the audience. For example, in Scene X of the play, where Stanley imposes his vision of reality on Blanche – by raping her – the acceptability of the situation is made possible and acceptable to the audience largely because of visual and aural detail through which the psychological intangibles are made objective. At the beginning of the scene the audience are aware of Blanche's tenuous emotional state. Her appearance itself indicates that she is now beginning to retreat into her world of illusions:

> *…she has decked herself out in a somewhat soiled and crumpled white satin evening gown and pair of scuffed silver slipper with brilliants set in their heels.*
> *Now she is placing the rhinestone tiara on her head before the mirror of the dressing-table and murmuring excitedly as if to a group of special admirers.*

We can see how the entire setting, including the costumes put on by characters, is made symbolic in keeping with the inner condition of the character on the stage. Thus, the foreground characters and the background setting are so perfectly matched that they get fully integrated with each other, so blended that they become one harmonious spectacle. This technique is expressionistic. It is also surrealistic in that realism is raised to the level of super-realism, making reality heightened into a lurid spectacle of sharper colours and louder sounds than the normal.

What is remarkable about Williams's use of this technique is that even though raised to the level of illusion, reality in

A Streetcar Named Desire is not completely obliterated; it remains lurking even in the midst of illusion. For instance, although revelling in her fantasies, Blanche is still shown capable of distinguishing them from actual events. In the middle of her feigned discussion with her admirers she catches sight of her face in a hand mirror, recognizing it as real, and breaks that mirror. At this point Stanley appears in his "*vivid green silk bowling shirt*," to the tune of honky-tonk music, which continues to be heard throughout the scene. When Stanley confronts Blanche with his knowledge of her background, the abominable reality that Blanche detests begins to impinge upon her:

> *Lurid reflections appear on the walls around Blanche. The shadows are of a grotesque and menacing form. She catches her breath, crosses to her phone and jiggles the hook.*

Williams uses telephone here as a symbol of escape for Blanche; it is an avenue to a better world. When she sought what she called a "way out" for herself and Stella in Scene III, the telephone and telegraph were the means to effect her plan. Now once again she attempts to escape into a different world by calling her Texas millionaire. But when she fails to give a number or an address, the operator cuts her off. Reality again gets an upper hand! Her illusion fails her once again. The stage directions for the scene indicated the result on Blanche of this thwarting of her plans:

> *She sets the phone down and crosses warily into the kitchen. The night is filled with inhuman voices like cries in a jungle.*

As we have seen, Blanche has been sensitive to sounds throughout the play. In the first act she jumped at the screech of a cat; later, when Stanley slammed a drawer closed, she winced in pain. Now "the cacophony that we hear is inside Blanche's head – imaginary sounds and real sounds turned grotesque and horrible by her fear." To make Blanche's mounting fear tangible Williams uses the scrim:

> *Through the back wall of the rooms, which have become transparent, can be seen the sidewalk. A prostitute has rolled a drunkard. He pursues her along the walk, overtakes her and there is a struggle. A policeman's whistle breaks it up. The figures disappear. Some moments later the Negro woman appears around the corner with a sequained bag which the prostitute had dropped on the walk. She is rooting excitedly through it.*

As can be seen, the New Orleans figures become for Blanche analogous to all that reality means to her: violence, theft, immorality, bestiality. No wonder she tries hard to escape it, even temporarily. Here, she returns to the telephone for yet another attempt: "Western Union? Yes! I – want to – Take down this message! 'In desperate, desperate circumstances! Help me! Caught in a trap. Caught in –' Oh!" there is no escaping reality now, for its arch crusader, Stanley, is back:

> *The bathroom door is thrown open and Stanley comes out in the brilliant silk pajamas. He grins at her as he knots the tassled sash about his waist…. The barely audible 'blue piano' begins to drum up louder. The sound of it turns into the roar of an approaching locomotive….*

Here is the familiar symbol of the 'locomotive,' widely used in American literature as the destroyer of dream. In his seminal book, *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx theorises that while the garden is the symbol of the pastoral imagination, or the American dream, machine is the symbol of technology that has destroyed the pastoral, and hence the American dream. Here, in Williams's play, too, the locomotive is used as a symbol of harsh reality of the industrial society, which smashes all dreams that Blanche cherishes. If we go into the components of Blanche's dream, it is found to be no other than the American dream itself – of individual freedom and pastoral home.

As the roar of the locomotive symbolizes the approaching menace which is Stanley, Blanche reads the meaning of the roar correctly. She rightly fears that she will be taken over by the world of roaring sound and hot lust. Her tormentor teases her with the spectre of her fears:

> *You think I'll interfere with you? Ha – ha!*
> *(The 'blue piano' goes softly. She turns confusedly and makes a faint gesture. The inhuman jungle voices rise up. He takes a step toward her, biting his tongue which protrudes between his lips.)*

Blanche feels almost defencelss. She only picks up as a last resort a broken bottle and threatens Stanley with it. For Stanley, it is too soft a weapon to deflect him from his determined move. He springs like an animal at prey and catches her by the wrist:

The bottle tap falls. She sinks to her knees. He picks up her inert figure and carries her to the bed. The hot trumpet and drums from the Four Deuces sound loudly.

Blanche's involuntary journey to the depths of sordidness results in her losing contact completely with any kind of reality. The theatrical (or cinematic) devices, aural and visual, which represent not objective occurrence, but inner action, enable the audience to understand Blanche's ordeal and her retreat into insanity.

(7) Battle of Sexes in a Streetcar Named Desire

The running conflict between Blanche and Stanley in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is meant to be a strife between sexes in a society which makes the male sex privileged, and makes the female sex unprivileged. Between the two of them, while Stanley is strong, Blanche is weak; while Stanley is advantaged, Blanche is disadvantaged. Williams dramatizes in this play total defeat of a woman whose existence depends on her maintaining illusions about herself and the world. Blanche is both a representative and a victim of a tradition that taught her to believe that attractiveness, virtue, and gentility lead automatically to happiness. But that is only one dimension to her story. She does represent the Genteel tradition, and she becomes a victim of that tradition. But there is another, and more important, dimension to the story of Blanche. She is the representative of the female sex, the fair sex, the weaker sex, the second sex, and she is the victim of a patriarchal society that makes its males economically, physically, and politically stronger than its females whom the same society makes economically, physically, and politically weaker. The patriarchal society assigns to its women the roles of becoming attractive to men, of becoming serviceable to them at home, of owning nothing except their bodies which they can sell in times of necessity. Blanche as a woman is, therefore, born to bear the brunt of being a weaker sex, economically dependent, physically vulnerable, and politically powerless.

Blanche's lot was the estate of Belle Reve, with its debts and deaths, and a homosexual husband who killed himself because, for once, her sensitivity failed her. Blanche's "amatory adventures…are the unwholesome means she uses to maintain her connection with life, to fight the sense of death which her whole background has created in her." The conflict that goes on within Blanche between illusion and reality. Such attempts are actually to sidetrack the more pressing social and political issues. To critics who want to ignore questions like social or gender injustice, psychological and mythical constructs about human conduct come very handy. We have numerous interpretations of the play making Blanche's gender struggle an abstract "human" struggle between illusion and reality, between moral consciousness and animal appetites, between genteel culture and industrial civilization. Well, these many conflicts may be there in the pattern of the play. But a more obvious and more pertinent conflict is, for sure, the gender conflict between Blanche and Stanley.

That the gender bias is as much rooted in literary criticism as it is in the power structure of the social fabric can be gauged from the following:

> *Stanley is, after all, not a monster. He bears remarkable resemblance to the kind of hero that Americans love, the hero to the westerns or the tough dectective stories: the gruff masculine pragmatist who commands the adulation of women even as he scorns them for his male companions.*

To present Stanley as the sole representative of "reality," to admire him for that boorish brand of "reality," to make a hero out of a villain, nothing can be more absurd than this sort of criticism, which is, to say the least, a downright dishonest interpretation of the play. The psychological and mythical symbolism notwithstanding, the play carries greater force if grounded in its historical context, and if the gender-specific social fabric of the play is allowed to retain its dramatic force.

The story of Blanche carries a strong social message. It exposes the crude command of males like Stanley who are 'kings' in their respective homes. They have the 'divine' and 'birth' right to 'husband' or 'master' their women, or any women, ill-treat them, rape them for silencing resistance from the 'fair' sex. Here is the climactic scene of this social tragedy, not comedy, nor a symbolic show of an imbalanced mind:

> *BLANCHE: Stay back! Don't you come towards me another step or I'll –*
> *STANLEY: What?*
> *BLANCHE: Some awful thing will happen! It will!*

STANLEY: What are you putting on now?
[They are now both inside the bedroom.]
BLANCHE: I warn you, don't, I'm in danger!
[He takes another step. She smashes a bottle on the table and faces him, clutching the broken top.]
STANLEY: What you do that for?
BLANCHE: So I could twist the broken end in your face!
STANLEY: I bet you would do that!
BLANCHE: I would: I will if you –
STANLEY: Oh! So you want some rough-house! All right, let's have some rough-house!
[*He springs towards her, overturning the table. She cries out and strikes at him with the bottle top but he catches her wrist.*]
Tiger – tiger! Drop the bottle-top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!
[*She moans. The bottle top falls. She sinks to her knees. He picks up her inert figure and carries her to the bed. The hot trumpet and drums from the Four Deuces sound loudly.*]

The woman fights the man. She goes down fighting. The strong male has his way. He rapes her only to humiliate her, to show his superiority. The result is that the woman is shocked out of her wits. She goes mad, and is sent to asylum. She resists, she fights, but in vain. The whole set up is on the side of the man – all males and females of the neighbourhood. She is dispatched by force. No one comes to her rescue. Her own sister, Stella, whose husband raped her and turned her insane, has alone this much to say:

STELLA: Oh, my God, Eunice, help me! Don't let them do that to her, don't let them hurt her! Oh, God, or, please God, don't hurt her! What are they doing to her? What are they doing? [She tries to break from EUNICE's arms.]
EUNICE: No, honey, no, no, honey. Stay here. Don't go back in there. stay with me and don't look.
STELLA: What have I done to my sister? Oh, God, what have I done to my sister?
EUNICE: You done the right thing, the only thing you could do. She couldn't stay here; there wasn't no other place for her to go.

Nothing could be done more outrageous to a woman than what has been done to Blanche. It is not done to a man. It is not possible to do so to a man. Not by a woman, in any case. Only the poor, helpless, disadvantaged, powerless woman could be put to such a treatment. And yet there are critics who would have the cheek to say that what has happened to Blanche is only a pulling out of illusion into reality. She has been shown the realty. Henceforth she would have no illusions. Illusions about what? Her position in a patriarchal society? Do we mean to say that she should have no illusion about her being a slave, a secondary presence, subservient to Stanley and his like, with no right even to resist or protest? Whatever else be the function of criticism, it is decidedly not to spread perversion of social reality into deceptive psychological or mythical constructs. At least women would not like to have any truck with such a criticism.

(8) Blanche and Stella

While literary works give representation to life, depicting actual living people and incidents, critics look for convenient, preconceived categories borrowed from psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, etc. Looking at actual life figures through one or another eyeglasses of a theory is to perceive, not the truth, but coloured portraits, which are not what they actually are, but what they have been perceived in the coloured light. In the present case of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the popular glasses used have been the historical, which show a conflict between the dying genteel tradition represented by Blanche and the reigning industrial force represented by Stanley. One of the dangers of reading literature through such categories is that it easily gets reduced into a conflict of past and present, automatically giving advantage to the reigning and disadvantage to the dying or outgoing. Obviously, such categories draw out sympathies the wrong way, for what is reigning (Stanley) tends to get legitimacy by the very force of its being there, and what is outgoing tends to be dismissed as something of the past (and hence of no use to us today). Decidedly, such an outlook would promote moral confusion or amoral approach to life in which the questions of right and wrong, or good and evil, are obliterated by the preference for the present as against the past.

It is such a reading of *A Streetcar Named Desire* which has been responsible for giving legitimacy to monsters like Stanley as representative of the present, the reality, and shrinking sympathy for Blanche as representative of the illusory past. Decidedly, the play is not about illusion and reality or past and present. Rather, it is about right and wrong. And without any ambiguity Blanche is right in demanding a decent world of cultured people with values of politeness and respect. The menace called Stanley has reverence for none of these values and believes in brute masculine force to rule the women folk in the family. Using the same eyeglasses, there have been flattering portraits of Stella, who not only accepts Stanley as a normal 'male' but enjoys his company, at least in bed. But if we take off those glasses for a moment and look at Stella and her sister as individual women and look at them from the viewpoint of the gender equality or justice altogether different portraits would emerge of the same women. The coloured light of categories removed, the compromising Stella, compromising her dignity and self-respect as an individual human being, and the uncompromising Blanche, fighting for a respectful place as woman, as a female member of the patriarchal society, come out as two very different persons.

The moment Blanche arrives at her sister's house, questions about her place in the house, about her husband's conduct, arise in her mind. It is these questions which inform, overtly or otherwise, most of the play's text all through its progress from beginning to end. Ignoring these questions, and imposing instead an external or extraneous structure of historical or psychological categories, is only to deliberately distort the actual story of Blanche and her sister.

BLANCHE: Will he be back?
STELLA: He's gone to get the car greased. Why?
BLANCHE: Why! I've been half crazy, Stella! When I found out you'd been insane enough to come back in here after what happened – I started to rush in after you!
STELLA: I'm glad you didn't.
BLANCHE: What were you thinking of? [STELLA makes an indefinite gesture.] Answer me! What? What?
STELLA: Please, Blanche! Sit down and stop yelling.
BLANCHE: All right, Stella. I will repeat the question quietly now. How could you come back in this place last night? Why, you must have slept with him!
[STELLA gets up in a calm and leisurely way]
……..
……..
STELLA: What other can I be? He's taken the radio to get it fixed. It didn't land on the pavement so only one tube was smashed.
BLANCHE: And you are standing there smiling!
STELLA: What do you want me to do!
BLANCHE: Pull yourself together and face the facts.
STELLA: What are they, in your opinion?
BLANCHE: In my opinion? You're married to a madman!
STELLA: No!
BLANCHE: Yes, your are, your fix is worse than mine is! Only you're not being sensible about it. I'm going to do something. Get hold of myself and make myself a new life!
STELLA: Yes?
BLANCHE: But you've given in. And that isn't right. You're not old! You can get out.
……..
……..
STELLA: No, I didn't think so.
BLANCHE: Oh, let me think, if only my mind would function! We've got to get hold of some money, that's the way out!

In this crucial scene, which hits the central theme of the novel, it is the man-woman relationship, the gender question, that is made a matter of debate between the two sisters, and a subject for contemplation for the audience. One thing

that emerges from the present piece of conversation is that while Blanche is more sensitive to the status of woman in a society of Stanleys, Stella is comparatively not. An obvious reason for the difference of sensitivity between the two is education which Blanche has to a higher degree and Stella does not. Another, and more important, though related to the first, is that while Blanche is a working woman, Stella is just a house wife. It is for these differences that while Blanche can so easily contemplate "walking out" of marriage, Stella cannot conceive of any such thing. Blanche's suggestion that they must "get hold of some money" has great significance in the present context, for having economic independence is the only way a woman can think of walking out of marriage, or even to demand decent treatment from the husband and other male members of the patriarchal society. The play's implied message obviously is that women, to get a rightful place in society, must aim at education and economic independence. As Virginia Woolf had pleaded in her *A Room of One's Own*, women, to have rights comparable to these enjoyed by men, must have a room of their own and £500 a year. Her contention, in other words, is that the woman must have her private space, and not just a place on her husband's bed. Besides, she must have economic independence. Therefore, education and employment are crucial for a woman to secure right equal to those enjoyed by men.

Another thing that becomes crystal clear from the scene just cited is that there is nothing of the illusion-reality conflict in the primary circle of the play. Here, Blanche speaks of facts, not of illusions. She accuses her sister of evading the facts, or reality, of her situation. She makes attempt to compel her sister to face the facts of her life, her married life, living with a quadruped called Stanley. Also, it is unfair to reduce the play to a sort of dual between Stella and Blanche, which themes like illusion-reality conflict conveniently appropriate. The man-woman relationship, or the gender conflict, is not confined to Stanley-Blanche conflict alone. There are similar conflicts between other characters as well. Stanley-Stella relationship is no less important. Nor is the conflict scene between Steve and Eunice. In fact, unless we place these scenes together and side by side we are quite likely to miss the main emphasis of the play, which is the man-woman relationship, or the feminine struggle in a masculine order. Stella or Eunice may surrender, but not Blanche. The latter resists gender injustice, she struggles against the unjust order, unjust to womankind, and pay the price for her courage to face the consequences of her struggle. We know the rough weather she has to face in her sister's house, culminating in her rape by her own sister's husband, ending in her being sent to a lunatic asylum.

Thus, Stanley is not the only male who is crude and cruel to women. There are several others. In fact, being a masculine order dominated by the likes of Stanley, all women are at the receiving end, and all men are arrogant and brutal in their treatment of women. Here is another instance of cruelty to women, of their oppression:

> *EUNICE: I heard about you and that blonde!*
> *STEVE: That's a damn lie!*
> *EUNICE: You ain't pulling the wool over my eyes! I wouldn't mind if you'd stay down at the Four Deuces, but you always going up.*
> *STEVE: Who ever seen me up?*
> *EUNICE: I seen you chasing her 'round the balcony – I'm gonna call the vice squad!*
> *STEVE: Don't you throw that at me!*
> *EUNICE[shrieking]: You hit me! I'm gonna call the police!*
> *[A clatter of aluminium striking a wall is heard followed by a man's angry roar, shouts, and overturned furniture. There is a rush; then a relative hush.]*

Here is a clear evidence of man's unchallenged authority over woman, any woman. He has the liberty to hit a woman on slightest provocation, to roar and shout, to overturn furniture, to throw utensils around. The woman can only moan and shriek. It is a sort of repeat performance of what Stanley does to Blanche, and it cannot be considered a stray happening, without any purpose. Like the double plot in Shakespeare, the repetition of similar incidents here in Williams's play is meant to carry the same effect, to give the happening the stamp of universality, of wider occurrence, suggesting a way of life in the society in which it takes place.

(9) Treatment of 'Other' in a Streetcar Named Desire

One of the aspects of the contemporary theory is the concept of the 'other,' which under the blanket activity of deconstruction comes up in different forms, such as the racial other, the cultural other, the national other, the gender other, etc. The idea is that in every culture, and even in every text, there is the subject or the centre, or the core character or set of characters, who carry about them a certain sense of assuredness, of authority, of superiority, of being 'us,' and treat or consider certain other characters, on the basis of their race, ethnicity, nationality, or gender, the 'other,' not being 'we,' and being 'they.' This divisive feeling of splitting the human community between 'we' and 'they' brings in the idea of the other, which has been one of the areas of study in contemporary criticism.

Here, in Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, this aspect of the 'other' is decidedly one of the themes of the play. To begin with, we find that the English speaking, of Anglo-Saxon origin, considering themselves the original Americans, Blanche and Stella carry that sense of 'we' and 'they' about the Polish immigrants, settled in America, doing factory or related jobs, living in the slum dwellings rather than suburban areas, speaking English with an accent, lacking in the civilized or sophisticated way of life. Obviously, this gives Blanche Dubois a sense of superiority over these people, who, out of feeling bordering on contempt, are called 'Polaks." We come upon this feeling quite early in the play. Note, for instance, the following:

> [*Two men come round the corner, STANLEY KOWALSKI and MITCH. They are about twenty-eight or thirty years old, roughly dressed in blue denim work cloths. STANLEY carries his bowling jacket and a red-stained package from a butcher's.*]
>
> STANLEY[*to* MITCH]: Well, what did he say?
> MITCH: He said he'd give us even money.
> STANLEY: Naw! We gotta have odds!
> [*They stop at the foot of the steps.*]
> STANLEY[*bellowing*]: Hey, there! Stella, Baby!
>
> [STELLA *comes out on the first floor landing, a gentle young woman, about twenty-five, and of a background obviously quite different from her husband's.*]
>
> STELLA[*mildly*]: Don't holler at me like this. Hi, Mitch.
> STANLEY: Catch!
> STELLA: What!
> STANLEY: Meat!
>
> [*He heaves the package at her. She cries out in protest but manages to catch it: then she laughs breathlessly. Her husband and his companion have already started back around the corner.*]

Here is what we call multi-cultural situation in which there is a clear conflict of cultures, between a working-class immigrant Stanley and the 'gentle,' of Southern aristocratic landed gentry, Stella. The man is roughly dressed, lacks manners of an educated, well-off, sophisticated class to which Stella belongs. He speaks the working-class English, associated with blacks and other immigrants of that class, using 'Naw' for Now, and 'gotta' for got to, and 'Baby' for his wife. Thus, at the very first sight the author, himself of original white American stock, gives a distinct class description of the 'other' in the play. Stella, on the other hand, speaks proper English, feels discomfort at the boorish behaviour of her husband. She puts up with him, even laughs away his oddities, but she registers a certain annoyance, sharing (later) with her sister a sense of superiority over people the likes of her husband.

This kind of divide, cultural divide, also racial and ethnic, has been a subject with rich potential for comedy. We know how the Jew baiting was so much common in the Elizabethan comedy. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* shows us how racial and ethnic prejudices provide a great source of comedy. Even as late as Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), we have Jew baiting, using Robert Cohn as a butt of humour. Here, too, the cultural differences become a source of comedy, turning ultimately to tragic proportions. The 'Polaks' are the 'other' in the play, against whom the 'classy' Blanche, along with her sister, carries a good deal of prejudice, and a great sense of superiority.

Here is an example:

EUNICE: We own this place so I can let you in.

[*She gets up and opens the downstairs door. A light goes in behind the blind, turning it light blue.* BLANCHE *slowly follows her into the downstairs flat. The surrounding areas dim out as the interior is lighted. Two rooms can be seen, not too clearly defined. The one first entered is primarily a kitchen but contains a folding bed to be used by* BLANCHE. *The room beyond this is a bedroom. Off this room is a narrow door to a bathroom.*]

EUNICE[*defensively, noticing* BLANCHE's *look*]: It's sort of messed up right now but when it's clean it's real sweet.

BLANCHE: Is it?

EUNICE: Uh-huh, I think so. So you're Stella's sister?

BLANCHE: Yes. [*Waiting to get rid of her*] Thanks for letting me in.

EUNICE: *Por Nada*, as the Mexicans say, *por nada*! Stella spoke of you.

BLANCHE: Yes?

EUNICE: I think she said you taught school.

BLANCHE: Yes.

EUNICE: She showed me a picture of your home-place, the plantation.

BLANCHE: Belle Reve?

EUNICE: A great big place with white columns.

BLANCHE: Yes…

EUNICE: A place like that must be awful hard to keep up.

BLANCHE: If you will excuse me, I'm just about to drop.

EUNICE: Sure, honey. Why don't you set down?

BLANCHE: What I meant was I'd like to be left alone.

Now, here is a complete contrast between a house and a house, a class and a class, a culture and a culture, a language and a language. The one-room apartment on the one hand and on the other the great big place, the working-class woman on the one hand and on the other the woman with landed-gentry background, 'the 'genteel' culture on the one hand and on the other the slum-dweller's way of life, the suggestive, metaphoric language on the one hand and on the other the plain, uneducated idiom, all these contrasts or conflicts of the opposites are brought into play here in this conversation. The working-class woman, like the working-class man, is the 'other' here, being treated by Blanche as an unwanted presence, trying to be familiar or intimate, not acceptable to Blanche for the sharp differences of two classes or cultures. The way Blanche turns monosyllabic in her conversation with Eunice shows the measure of her reluctance to get into any sort of dialogue with her. The delicacies and decencies of Blanche's language and gesture are beyond comprehension to the other woman. Irritated by the failure of communication Blanche tells the woman in her own plain language that she wanted to be left alone.

Blanche's class and cultural superiority makes her not only distance herself from the 'other' but also makes her develop, owing to long distance, a downright prejudice against the 'other.' That is the case with human psychology, the more distance you maintain with something, the more exaggerated the picture of that something becomes in your mind. No wonder that Blanche' view of Stanley and the like becomes rather surrealistic; it gets exaggerated on the negative side owing to her prejudice. As the distance increases, indifference turns into prejudice, prejudice into dislike, or contempt, or hatred. It has happened the same way in the case of Blanche's view of these working-class people, male and female alike; she is particularly prejudiced against the male members because of her gender fears as well. A clear view of this phenomenon comes out in the following:

BLANCHE: May I – speak – *plainly*?

STELLA: Yes, do. Go ahead. As plainly as you want to.

[*Outside a train approaches. They are silent till the noise subsides. They are both in the bedroom.*

Under cover of the train's noise STANLEY *enters from outside. He stands unseen by the women, holding some packages in his arms, and overhears their following conversation. He wears an undershirt and grease-stained seersucker pants.*]

BLANCHE: Well – if you'll forgive me – he's *common*!

STELLA: Why, yes, I suppose he is.

BLANCHE: suppose! You can't have forgotten that much of our bringing up, Stella, that you just *suppose* that any part of a gentleman's in his nature! *Not one particle, no*! Oh, if he was just – *ordinary*! Just *plain* – but good and wholesome, but – *no*. There's something downright – *bestial* – about him! You're hating me saying this, aren't you?

STELLA[*coldly*]: go on and say it all, Blanche.

BLANCHE: He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something – sub-human – something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something – ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in – anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is – Stanley Kowalski – survivor of the Stone Age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you – *you* here – *waiting* for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in the front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night! – you call it – this party of apes! Somebody growls – some creature snatches at something – the fight is on! *God*! May be we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella – my sister – there has been *some* progress since then! Such things as art – as poetry and music – such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make *grow*! And *cling* to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching…. *Don't – don't hang back with the brutes.*

[*Another train passes outside.* STANLEY *hesitates, licking his lips. Then suddenly he turns stealthily about and withdraws through the front door. The women are still unaware of his presence. When the train has passed he calls through the closed front door.*]

As the beginning and ending of this conversation is capped by the passing of the train, Stanley is quite clearly associated with the locomotive as a force of that sort, or a representative of the mechanical or machine civilization. Blanche's speech dwells upon the kind of distinction Leavis made (in his debate with C.P. Snow on the subject of two cultures) between minority culture and mass civilization. At one level, the conflict between Blanche and Stanley is, for sure, the one between these two notions of culture. Also, as the language of Blanche's discourse reveals, her opinion of 'other' (here Stanley) has hardened into a strong prejudice carrying with it an element of contempt as well. Her surrealistic vision of the 'other' shows the extent to which she is removed from that world, and hence equally strongly prejudiced.

(10) Woman as Other

The discriminatory and prejudiced feeling about 'other' is not merely a phenomenon of culture, it is also a gender phenomenon. From the viewpoint of culture, Stanley and his friends constitute the 'other' for Blanche and her like. But from he viewpoint of gender, it is Blanche and her like, as well as women of the working class, form a single category of the 'other.' In the all-male or masculine world of the Poker-party, or the mass civilization dominated by muscle, women are pushed to the periphery, or are marginalized in terms of their 'gender' or political status. The way these women, irrespective of their social status, are treated by the men-folk in Elysian Fields, their less-than-equal status in gender terms is made quite clear. Note, for instance, the following (at the Poker Night, an all-male card game party with drinks and meat and jokes about women, the 'other'):

STEVE [*dealing a hand*]: Seven card stud. [*Telling his joke as he deals*] This ole nigger is out in back of his house sittin' down th'owing corn to the chickens when all at once he hears a loud cackle and this young hen comes likety split around the side of the house with the rooster

right behind her and gainig on her fast.
STANLEY [*impatient with the story*]: Deal!
STEVE: But when the rooster catches sight of the nigger th'owing the corn he puts on the brakes and lets the hen get away and starts pecking corn. And the old nigger says, 'Lord God, I hopes I never gits *that* hungry!'
[STEVE *and* PABLO *laugh. The sisters appear around the corner of the building.*]
…….
…….
STANLEY: Where you been?
STELLA: Blanche and I took in a show. Blanche, this is Mr. Gonzales and Mr. Hubbel.
BLANCHE: Please don't get up.
STANLEY: Nobody's going to get up, so don't be worried.
STELLA: How much longer is this game going to continue?
STANLEY: Till we get ready to quit.
BLANCHE: Poker is so fascinating. Could I kibitz?
STANLEY: You could not. Why don't you women go up and sit with Eunice?
STELLA: Because it is nearly two-thirty.[BLANCHE *crosses into the bedroom and partially closes the portieres.*] Couldn't you call it quits after one more hand? [*A chair scraps.* STANLEY *gives a loud whack of his hand on her thigh.*]
STELLA [*sharply*]: That's not fun, Stanley.
[*The men laugh.* STELLA *goes into the bedroom.*]
STELLA: It makes me so mad when he does that in front of people.

Let her feel what she might. Stella has no option but to brook all such humiliating treatments meted out to her by her 'lordly' husband. The joke about cock and hen, showing the female as a mere object for male chase, is a downright insult to the 'second' sex. Here is, so obviously, treated the woman as 'other.' She is a butt of ridicule. She can be whacked or whipped on the thighs whenever the masculine lord so pleases, as he does here for the sheer fun of his masculine company.

This attitude of male lordism and treating woman as 'they,' not 'we,' is further reinforced when a conversation between Blanche and Stella is going on about these men and their women. Note, in this context, the following:

STELLA [*with girlish laughter*]: You ought to see their wives.
BLANCHE [*laughingly*]: I can imagine. Big, beefy things, I suppose.
STELLA: You know that one upstairs? [*More laughter*] One time [*laughing*] the plaster – [*laughing*] cracked –
STANLEY: You hens [Stella and Blanche] cut out that conversation in there!
STELLA: You can't hear us.
STANLEY: Well, you hear me and I said to hush up!
STELLA: This is my house and I'll talk as much as I want to!
BLENCHE: Stella, don't start a row.
STELLA: He's half drunk! – I'll be out in a minute.
[She goes into the bathroom. BLANCHE rises and crosses leisurely to a small white radio and turns it on]
STANLEY: Awright, Mitch, you in?
MITCH: What? Oh! – No, I'm out!
[BLANCHE *moves back into the streak of light. She raises her arms and stretches, as she moves indolently back to the chair.*
Rhumba music comes over the radio. MITCH rises at the table.]
STANLEY: Who turned that on in there?
BLANCHE: I did. Do you mind?

STANLEY: Turn it off!
STEVE: Aw, let the girls have their music.
PABLO: Sure, that's good, leave it on!
STEVE: Sounds like Xavier Cugat!

[*STANLEY jumps up and, crossing to the radio, turns it off. He stops short at sight of BLANCHE in the chair. She returns her look without flicking. Then he sits again at the poker table. Two of the men have started arguing hotly.*]

Stanley's conduct here is in keeping with the exclusive male order, in which females exist only for the pleasure of men, as and when men get into the mood to have pleasure with women. Women are also needed for housekeeping, taking care of the male needs of catering to their eating and drinking habits, sleeping and waking hours. As for money and property, it remains the male preserve, keeping the woman as a dependent slave. This all-male order reveals how the peripheral woman is not a part of this world, and how she remains an 'other,' to be treated as someone outside the male order, and to be treated as someone inferior and available for jokes and ridicules, whatever way the male company pleases to talk about her.

(11) Plot of a Streetcar Named Desire

Although Tennessee Williams is not a classical dramatist, the plot of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is as classically constructed as any of the Greek tragedies. Reading from opening to ending of the play one is reminded of Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*. Like the Greek tragedy's plot, the plot of the Williams's play perfectly observes the principle of three unities (of time, place, and action). The play opens in Elysian Fields, a part of New Orleans town, more precisely in the ground-floor flat of a two-story corner building, in which Stanley and his wife Stella live and where Blanche has come to stay with her sister Stella. The play ends at the same place, in the same building, and the same ground-floor flat. The entire action, just as in *Oedipus the King*, takes place just at a house. As for the unity of time, the play's action gets completed in a span of a few weeks, although Aristotle allows a longer span of one year. The course of action is as compact as that of place and time. The entire action is focused on the life of Blanche, as to what happens to her in the company of her sister. Her fatal encounter with Stanley, her short-lived affair with Mitch, her inglorious past unfolded in a logical unfolding of her life, all combine in a cause and effect sequence to give the play's action an inevitability of a tragic plot. The rising intensity toward the tragic end comes logically to the play's middle and beginning, the three being causally connected with each other.

Like any successful tragedy, *A Streetcar Named Desire* has at its core a conflict which arises, intensifies, and climaxes as naturally as leaves to a tree. Also, like any successful tragedy, the conflict, as we go along, not only complicates but also enlarges, gaining more and wider meanings associated with it. Despite her weaknesses, more in the nature of a tragic flaw, than in the nature of a vice, Blanche emerges, with her virtues of decency and politeness and with her vision of a cultured society, a true tragic character, resisting and opposing the destructive forces around her, ready to sacrifice all that she has, but not prepared to make any compromise on her principles. Her commitment to her cherished dream of having a life of her own, of making life like that of an art, ennoble her character. No other character comes close to her rising stature in the play's widening circle of life.

Even the ending, which some have termed pathetic, is not at all tame. We see Blanche struggling against all those out to trap her like an animal and transport her to the asylum. She fights against Stanley who ruins her. She fights against the doctor and the matron who are called to manage her to the asylum. Like any tragic protagonist, she goes down at the end, but she goes down fighting, refusing to compromise her dignity and integrity. Even when she desperately needs someone's love to sustain through life that has broken her, she remains true to herself. She reveals to Mitch, the man who seems to like her and also ready to marry her, all about her past shady sexual life, along with the explanation as to why she was driven into these ignoble ways. But discovering that Mitch's mind was brainwashed by Stanley and was not prepared even to believe her honest revelations or confessions, she asks him to get out of her room. She may have been made desperate for love, for life, but no amount of desperation can take away her dignity and integrity from her. That is what lends her tragic dignity. See how it goes:

BLANCHE: What do you want?
MITCH [*fumbling to embrace her*]: What I been missing all summer.
BLANCHE: Then marry me, Mitch!
MITCH: I don't think I want to marry you any more.
BLANCHE: No?
MITCH[*dropping his hands from her waist*]: You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother.
BLANCHE: Go away, then. [*He stares at her*] Get out of here quick before I start screaming fire! …

Thus, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, except for its tendency to make certain scenes cinematically visual, at times even sensational, is perhaps the best play, a great tragedy, that came out from the prolific pen of Tennessee Williams. Even if we remove the accompanying cinematic devices of light and sound, the play, even as a written texts remains a moving piece of art, a true tragedy. In fact, only as a text does it display it strength of poetic richness and artistic pattern. For the specific purpose of gender reading also, it remains one of the most useful work, making effective illustrations of certain key points related to gender politics.

(12) Biographical Element in a Streetcar Named Desire

Writers generally draw upon their experience of life for creating fictional plots in their plays, novels, or poems. Of course, what eventually emerges in the made-up plot would vary from writer to writer. In some cases, the personal experience remains predominant and rather apparent. In other cases, the personal experience gets transformed into an unrecognizable life experience of general nature. In other words, there are various mutations of a personal experience possible in literary creations. The greater the distance between the man who underwent that experience and the writer who used it for fictional purposes, the more mature will be the work of art created out of it. Conversely, the less the distance between the man who underwent that experience and the writer who used it for fictional purposes, the less mature will be the work of art created out of it. Broadly speaking, that is the difference between a classical writer and romantic writer, or between an individual like Shakespeare and another like Shelley. Williams, though a dramatist, is more subjective in his plays than a writer of drama is normally expected to be. In his *A Streetcar Named Desire,* we can easily see direct echoes of his family members in certain characters drawn in that play. Even the place used as a locale for the play's action comes straight from the dramatist's own locality in St. Louis.

The most conspicuous resemblance with a member of Williams's family can be seen in his characterization of Stanley. Knowing that Williams's own father was a poker player, who would attract sailors to his home for his poker nights, would drink heavily, would be rough with his wife in particular, it is not hard to see that there is much in Stanley that has directly come from Williams's experience of his own father. Stanley's foul mouth, his domineering attitude, especially towards his wife, also closely resemble the qualities that the father of Williams regularly displayed at home in St. Louis. Stanley's wife in A Streetcar Named Desire, Stella, who has to put up with the boorish behaviour of her husband, tolerating not merely his roudy poker nights but also his habitual uncivilized conduct, also seems to share a good deal with Williams's mother. Of course, the real historical personage and the fictional creation by the artist are never identical in all respects, nor is it desirable in art to have them so identical. It is only a few essentials of the historical personage that get transferred into the artistic creation. And there the identification ends. The fictional or artistic creation as a whole has to be a different person because it has to meet the requirements of a definite plot situation, whereas there are no such definite designs in actual life.

These similarities between characters from real life and those in a literary work have two dimensions to them. One is that since the writer has known and experienced a particular person or a type of person, when he comes to draw that type he would be able to make it life-like, lending it greater authenticity than is possible to achieve in the case of a purely fictitious creation. The other is that the writer, since he cannot remain much detached in the case of a known character, his sympathy or antipathy towards that character is bound to creep into the creation, and creep in certain cases in a very direct form. In the case of Dickins, such possibilities could be seen in a novel like David Copperfield. The danger, in other words, in such a case is, that we get in the literary work not a specimen but a specific person,

done by the artist with personal indulgence, made either a model or a monster. In any case, the portrait would suffer from an exaggeration in the positive or negative direction depending on warm or cold equation of the writer with the historical person in hand.

In the case of Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire, the portrait of Stanley may have received a grain of prejudice the dramatist had come to develop against his father, though not without a sound basis. But Williams is free from the sentimentality of Dickins, hence the exaggerations are less because of personal reasons and more because of the artistic. Even less prejudiced than the portrait of Stanley is that of Stella, and understandably so because Williams enjoyed a positive and warm equation with his mother on whom the character of Stella seems to be based, if not entirely, at least partly. Even the portrait of Blanche is not without a basis in real life. The dramatist's own sister Rose, whose mental breakdown in later life was caused by the harsh treatment of their father, too, seems to have provided a model for Blanche. Like the metaphor or simile, of course, the comparison between subject and object, or tenor and vehicle, is never in every detail about the two personalities. It is more in the nature of a vague sort of similarity which one perceives without much precision. What Aristotle calls recognition of the familiar is what provides pleasure in literature. Thus, we see these similarities only to seek greater clarification and clarify as to the nature of characters on the stage or in the pages of a work, not at all for knowing about the biographical details of the author.

A Streetcar Named Desire, though having some basis in the personal life of the dramatist, stands on its own as a work of art, speaking for life far beyond the limits of an individual experience. Here, in the play, the individual or personal experience acquires a universal character, making characters, as well as incidents, types of general human nature. And it is this aspect of the story that makes it art, not the aspect of its being close to the writer's own life. Williams's strength as artist lies in transforming the personal into impersonal, the subjective into objective. And it is for this very quality of objectivity that Williams is valued as a dramatist and artist. The personal source of the play's plot or a part of the plot has been its strength, carrying a certain resonance not possible otherwise, and not carrying an untransformed personal element in any portrait. No wonder that the play has been popular for its objectivity and authenticity, and not for any personal or sentimental reasons.

BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

1. BANTLEY, ERIC, *The Dramatic Event* (New York, 1954)
2. ……., *In Search of Theatre* (New York, 1953).
3. CORRIGAN, ROBERT (ed.), *Theatre in the twentieth Century* (New York, 1963).
4. GASSNER, JOHN, *Direction in Modern Theatre and Drama* (New York, 1963).
5. TAUBMAN, HOWARD, *The Making of the American Theatre* (New York, 1962).
6. WEALES, GERALD, *American Drama Since World War II* (New York, 1962).
7. DONAHUE, FRANCIS, *The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams* (New York, 1964).
8. FALK, SIGNI, *Tennessee Williams* (New York, 1962).
9. NELSON, BENJAMIN, *Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work* (New York, 1961).
10. TISCHLER, NANCY, *Tennessee Williams, Rebellious Puritan* (New York, 1961).

QUESTION BANK

1. Consider *A Streetcar Named Desire* as a play about gender conflict.
2. Discuss *A Streetcar Named Desire* from the viewpoint of feminist critical theory.
3. Compare and contrast the characters of Blanche and Stella in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
4. Write a note on the role and significance of minor female characters in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
5. Interpret *A Streetcar Named Desire* from the viewpoint of women as 'other.'
6. Interpret *A Streetcar Named Desire* from the viewpoint of Stanley and his friends as the 'other.'
7. Discuss *A Streetcar Named Desire* as the tragedy of a modern woman.
8. Write a note on the plot structure of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
9. Discuss Williams's use of 'expressionism' in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
10. Write a note on the function and significance of audio-visual aids in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Unit VII - Girish Karnad – Nagamandal

Girish Karnad: The Man and the Writer

Girish Karnad is the foremost playwright of the contemporary Indian stage. He has given the Indian theatre a richness that could probably be equated only with his talents as an actor-director. His contribution goes beyond theatre: he has directed feature films, documentaries and television serials in Kannada, Hindi and English, and has played leading roles as an actor in Hindi and Kannada art films, commercial movies and television serials. He has represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture.

Karnad was born on 19 May 1938 in Matheran, a town near Bombay. His childhood was spent growing up in a small village in Karnataka where he had first-hand experience of the indigenous folk theatre. His encounter with the Natak companies at the early stage of' his life made a lasting impression on the mind of Girish Karnad. Says he: "It may have something to do with the fact that in the small town of Sirsi, where I grew up, strolling groups of players, called Natak Mandalis or Natak companies, would come, set up a stage, present a few plays over a couple of months and move on, My parents were addicted to these plays. That was in the late 1940s. By the early 1950s, films had more or less finished off this kind of theatre, though some Mandalis still survive in North Karnataka in a very degenerate state. But in those days they were good or at least I was young and thought so. I loved going to see them and the magic has stayed with me."

During his formative years, Karnad went through diverse influences. He was exposed to a literary scene where there was a direct clash between Western and native tradition. It was India of the Fifties and the Sixties that surfaced two streams of thought in all walks of life-adoption of new modernistic techniques, a legacy of the colonial rule and adherence to the rich cultural past of the country. Karnad's position was akin to that of John Dryden, the seventeenth century British dramatist who, while writing his plays, had to choose between the classical tradition and native tradition; In the first, norms had been set rigorously by Aristotle, the, second was a more liberal, native approach that was practised by Shakespeare. Dryden evaluated the merits and demerits of both the traditions in his famous critical treatise 'E*ssay on Dramatic Poesy'*. Karnad was fascinated by the traditional plays, nonetheless the Western playwrights that he read during his college days opened up for him "a new world of magical possibilities. "

After graduating from Karnatak University, Dharwad, in 1958, Karnad moved to Bombay for further studies. In the meantime, he received the prestigious Rhodes scholarship and went to England to do his Master's degree. During his stay at Magdalen College, Oxford, Karnad felt immensely interested in art and culture. On his return to India in 1963, he joined Oxford University Press, Madras. This offered him an opportunity to get exposed to various kinds of writing in India and elsewhere. Such influences made an indelible mark on the creative genius of Girish Karnad. In 1974, he received an important assignment and was appointed Director of the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune. In 1987, he went to the U.S.A. as Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago. From 1988 to 1993, he served as Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (National Academy for the Performing Arts), New Delhi. In 1994, he was awarded Doctor of Letters degree by the Karnataka University, Dharwad.

When Karnad was preparing to go to England, amidst the intense emotional turmoil, he found himself writing a play. One day as he was reading the *Mahabharata, just* for fun, he read the story of Yayati. It clicked in his mind. He started writing. It came as a play.' He suddenly found he was a playwright and a Kannada playwright at that. This was so sudden and so natural. The play was in Kannada, the language of his childhood. And the theme of the play *Yayati* was taken from ancient Indian mythology. While the theme and language was typically native, the play owed its form, not to numerous mythological plays he watched, but to Western playwrights whom he had read. While the subject matter was purely native and traditional, the form and structure were essentially western.

Karnad's writing of the play Yayati without any premeditation, set things straight. He was to write plays, not poetry, which he aspired to write, and that the source of his inspiration was native stuff, history, mythology and folklore. Even

at the age of twenty-two, he realized that he could not be a poet, but only a playwright. Until he wrote this play, Karnad fancied himself a poet. During his teens, he had written poetry and had trained himself to write in English. "The greatest ambition of my life was to be a poet," says Karnad. By the time he was in college, he wanted to write in English, become a novelist and be internationally famous. There have been more poets and more novelists, but there have been very few playwrights and very few good plays. Karnad further realized that the art of a poet or a novelist was easier than that of a dramatist. As he says:

> *The subject that interests most writers is, of course, themselves and it is easy subject to talk about. But you know it is always easier if you are a poet or a novelist because you are used to talking in your voice. You suspend your whole life talking as writer directly to the audience. The problem in being a playwright is that everything that you write is for someone else to say.*

A playwright has many problems. What is upsetting for a playwright is the total lack of plays in India, although the company Natak tradition made a major contribution that flourished since the early decades of the eighteenth century. Where does the playwright look for the sources? And why does one write plays at all? --questions Karnad. There is hardly any theatre in the country. Karnad got into films in an effort to find some kind of a living audience. And perhaps to earn his livelihood.

Karnad has always found it difficult to find a suitable, rich subject for writing plays. For instance, after writing Yayati, he read all kinds of books in an effort to find a plot, some plot that would truly inspire. He read the history of Kannada literature by Kirtinath Kurtkoti and learnt from him that Indian history has not been handled by any Indian writer the way it has been done by Shakespear or Brecht. Greatly impressed by this statement, Karnad went through a book of Indian history. And when he came to Tughlaq, he said, "Oh! Marvellous. That is what I wanted." That was a subject in tune with the times. In those days, existentialism was quite in fashion. Everything about Tughlaq seemed to fit into what Karnad had surmised frorn Kurtkoti. He felt that in Tughlaq he had hit upon a fantastic character. He realized tha he had absorbed this character and it was growing in front of him. Tughlaq was the most extraordinary character to come to the thrrone of Delhi: in religion, in philosophy, even in calligraphy, in balltle, warfield, and all other areas, he was unsurpassable, no other ruler could match his capability. Writing on such a subject seemed challenging and rewarding.

Karnad's *Tughlaq* bears several resemblances with Shakespeare's *Richard II.* Like King Richard, Muhammad-bin -Tughlaq is temperamental and whimsical. Events in both the plays centre around the eccentricities of their protagonists. Again, like Shakespeare, Karnad presents the historical events and complexities of the time with perfect objectivity of a true historian, throwing upon them the beautiful colouring of art. He exhibits without concealment the weakness of the king's character but spares no pain to evoke our whole-hearted pity for him in his fall.

Tughlaq had a tremendous success with the reading public and it achieved greater popularity on the stage as actors have liked to do the role of the emperor. As opposed to the first play, Karnad wrote this one in the convention of the Company Natakas. For form of the play, Karnad was no more interested in John Anouilh. He divided the play into scenes in the indigenous fashion of the natakas.

The political chaos which Karnad depicts in *Tughlaq* reminded many readers of the Nehru era in Indian history. Karnad finds this similarity accidental. Says he, "I did not consciously write about the Nehru era. I am always flattered when people tell me that it was about the Nehru era and equally applies to development of politics since then, But, I think, well, that is a compliment that any playwright would be thrilled to get, but it was not intended to be a contemporary play about a contemporary situation."

The publication of *Yayati* in 1961 and especially of *Tughlaq* in 1964 established Karnad as master dramatist. Subsequently he published *Hayavadana (1971), Angumalige* (1977), *Hittina*-Hunja *(1980), Naga-Mandala (1988), Tale-Danda* (1990) and Agni Matlit *(1995).* Karnad wrote all his eight plays in Kannada; these have been translated into major Indian languages including the national language Hindi. Five of his *plays-Tughlaq, Havavadana, Naga-Mandala, Tale-Danda and The Fire and the Rain-have* been translated into English. *The* first three of these have been published by Oxford University Press in India and the remaining two by Ravi Dayal Publishers, New Delhi.

Karnad is a skilful translator. He writes his plays in Kannada; English is the language of his adulthood. He writes

articles, essays, film scripts in English but not plays. When he translates his own work, he has a great advantage. He has a lot of freedom that another translator will not have. A translator has to be faithful to the text and he does not have the freedom to make changes if it is somebody else's text. "My translation," says Karnad, "must therefore, be seen as approximation to the original." *(Translation, 218)* To begin with, he was quite reluctant to translate his own plays. He realized that translating from Kannada into English required a great deal of rewriting--a kind of transcreation. He translated *Tughlaq* when Alyque Padamsee was to stage it and then *Hayavadana* for the Madras Players. He feels that translating from one regional language to another is easier than translating into English. The basic problem for the translator lies in his search for appropriate cultural equivalents.

Besides his own plays, Karnad has translated Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* which was well-received in literary circles. He found translating the play very enjoyable and rewarding. As a translator, he kept in mind the utterance value of the dialogue. He also conveyed appropriate rhythm and pace of the original language. Karnad has an immense faith in the discipline of translation. It is the only way for creative writers to reach a wider audience. How else, wonders Karnad, should one experience world theatre!

Karnad's plays have been performed on stage, directed by eminent directors. The historical play *Tughlaq,* in particular, has stood the test of time. B.V. Karanth's 1966 Kannada production in Bombay, Om Shivpuri's Hindi production in Delhi the same year and Alyque Padamsee's English production in Bombay in 1970 are some of the memorable performances of the play. In 1974, the National School of Drama Repertory Company mounted a memorable revival of the play at the Old Fort in Delhi under E. Alkazi's direction**.**

Karnad's plays have received an international recognition. These have been widely performed in Europe and America. The play *Tughlaq* has been translated into Hungarian and German. The B.B.C., London, broadcast it in 1979 and *Hayavadana* in 1993. Directed by E. Alkazi, *Tughlaq* was presented in London by the National School of Drama Repertory Company as part of the Festival of India in 1982. Karnad's mythical play *Hayavadana* was presented at the Berlin Festival of Drama and Music in Germany in 1985. Directed in German by Vijaya Mehta, it was part of the Repertoire of the Deutssches National Theatre, Weimar, in 1984-86. It was rechristened as "Divided Together" and presented at the Ark Ensemble in New York in 1993.

The play *Naga-Mandala,* directed by Vijaya Mehta in German. Was presented by the Leipziger Schauspielhaus at Leipzig and Berlin for the Festival of India in Germany in 1992. Again, it was performed at the University Theatre at Chicago and subsequently at the Gutherie Theatre in Minneapolis as part of its thirtieth anniversary celebrations in 1993. In the same year, Gutherie Theatre commissioned Karnad's latest play *The Fire and the Rain.*

Karnad has received wide recognition for his plays. He got Mysore State Award for *Yayati* in 1962; Katualadevi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh for the Best Indian Play of the Year for *Hayavadana* in 1972. For *Tale-Danda,* he won a number of awards: B.H. Sridhar Award in 1992, Karnataka Nataka Akademi Award for the Best Play of 1990-91 in 1992, Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award in 1993 and Sahitya Akademi Award in 1994. He was honoured in 1990 by *Granthaloka,* Journal of the Book Trade, as "The Writer of the Year" for his play *Tale-Danda.* In 1992, he received Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Award for the Most Creative Work of 1989 for *Naga-Mandala.* He has also received Govt. of Mysore Rajyotsava Award in 1970; Sangeet Natak Akademi's Award for playwriting in 1972; Karnataka Nataka Akademi Award in 1984-, Nandikar, Calcutta, Award for playwriting in 1989; Booksellers' and Publishers' Association of South India Award in 1992.

Karnad is an important film-maker and writer of film scripts. He has written the script and dialogues for the film *Sainskara* (1960) in Kannada based on the novel of the same name by U.R. Anantha Murthy, and played, the lead role in it. With B.V. karanth, he has co-directed the film *Vansha Vriksha* (1971) in which lie has also acted, and *Godhuli* (Hindi), *Tabbaliyu Ninade Magane* (Kannada) in 1977. He has also directed films like *Kadu* (1973) and *Ondanondu Kaladalli* (1978) in Kannada, *Utsav* (1984) and *Cheluvi* (1992) in Hindi. His roles in *Manthan* (1976) and *Swami* (1978) are among his best in Hindi art cinema.

Between 1963 and 1970, Karnad was an active member of an amateur group called "Madras Players." He worked as actor and director, in such plays as *Evam Indrajit, Six Characters in search of an Author, Uncle Vanya, The Caretaker, The Crucible* and A *View from the Bridge* in English during 1964-69. He also acted the lead roles in *Oedipus Rex* and

Jokumaraswainy, directed in Kannada by B.V. Karanth, for the Open-Air Festival in Bangalore in 1972.

Karnad has also published a number of articles, the most significant being "In Search of a New Theatre" in *Contemporary Indian Tradition,* ed. Carla Borden (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1988) and "Theatre in India," in *Daedalus, Vol. 118,* No. 4, pp. 331-52.

While as Karnad is a multi-faceted personality, it is essentially as a playwright that he is at his best. He confesses, 'I have been fairly lucky in having a multi-pronged career. You know, I've been an actor, a publisher, a film-maker. But in none of these fields have I felt quite as much at home as in playwriting." In India, unfortunately, the writers cannot live on their writing alone; it does not yield enough royalties for sustenance. Says Karnad, "One can't earn a comfortable living even from a successful play. Take *Tughlaq. As* you know, it's been enormously successful --critically as well as in performance. Playwrights in the West have been able to retire on such successes--or at least, to devote themselves to that activity entirely. I can't."

Today Girish Karnad is considered one of the most significant Indian dramatists. He has enriched the Indian literary scene by his contribution to art, culture, theatre and drama. It is most befitting that Karnad has been conferred by the President of India, the prestigious awards, Padma Shri in 1974 and Padmabhushan in 1992. Also, he received the Gubbi Veeranna Award from the Government of Karnataka in 1997.

Karnad is based in Bangalore and lives with his wife, a medico, and his two children-a daughter and a son-both in their teens. He keeps shuttling between Bangalore, Bombay and Delhi as the three metropolitan cities abundantly offer him opportunities for creative writing, acting in films, and directing serials for national television.

Karnad is not impulsive by temperament, and does not resort to writing just at the flash of an idea. He follows a golden mean of thought and action when he launches on a new play. Commenting on the character of Horatio, Hamlet says that those persons are indeed blessed in whom "blood and judgement are so well commingled" that they are not treated by fortune as a musical instrument on which Fortune may play at will mid from which Fortune may be able to produce whichever tune she wishes to produce. The classical qualities of balance and restraint are true of the person of Karnad too. He is a genius as a writer, man of excellent disposition. And one in whom all the four elements, to use a Renaissance analogy are so well-mixed that Nature may stand up and say "Here's a man."

Girish Karnad - Placement and Hierarchy in Indian Drama

While attempting a study of Indian Drama in the post independence period we need to deal with two factors, the impact of independence on the writers of post independence, the assimilation of all regional literature under the banner of Indian literature. It can be noted with a sense of pride that the major Indian Playwrights of this era came from different states and have written in their own regional languages. Apart from Mohan Rakesh who wrote in Hindi, Vijay Tendulkar wrote in Marathi, Badal Sircar in Bangla and Girish Karnad in Kannad.

The two-fold tradition of Ancient Indian Theatre, that is the classical and the folk, provides a background to the plays of all the writers mentioned above. Inevitably, Modern Indian Theatre is influenced by the Euro-American theatre but most of the modern playwrights have been able to retain the 'Indianness' of the themes. The western influence has not damaged or weakened the substance of the plays, the bewilderment of the man and the absurdity of life have been conveyed through a medium, which comes home to the reader, foreigner or Indian with equal ease.

In the introduction to the 'Flowering of Indian Drama', K. Venkata Reddy and R.K Dhawan, while tracing the history of Indian Drama say,

> *"—as a genre, Sanskrit Drama is essentially romantic in its impulsion and expansion. And with its predilection for comedy, it generally concludes on a note of peace, calm and quiet. The emotional impact of the play on the audience normally settles down into a condition of aesthetic delectation and purposive repose. It is not concerned with mere realism in incident and character, nor preoccupied with outer forms of appearance, sequences and other mechanics, but geared to strive through shadow, symbol and gesture to reach at the truth behind the apparent"*

K.K Sriniwasa Iyengar who observes in ' Drama in Modern India'," …. A long discipline, a world of symbolism, a

whole crowd of conversation and interpreting ad enveloping them, and a philosophy of life and art gave this ancient drama an individuality and beauty and power of it's own"

It needs a bold endeavour to place Karnad in the hierarchy of Indian Drama, as such that what he writes has deep moorings in the classical and mythical epics and folk-lore of the country. Karnad chooses to live in the courtyard of the Hindu tradition in most of the plays while delving into history, he ventures into an arena of the reign of Mohammad-bin- Tughlaq.

Karnad assigns himself no social or humanitarian role while writing his plays. He is neither romantic nor a prover of truth in the sense of the Indian aesthetics and ethics. The emotional impact on the audience is neither of peace nor quietude. His plays offer no solace nor are there any purgation of feelings at the end of his plays. The plays end with questions, doubts lurk in the mind of the audience and the restive feeling of resolution is marred by the fact that there are no final truths. What seems to be real is also not real either to the personae of the play or the reader.

Yes. Karnad's plays do not abide by any realism of incident or character. Karnad is not preoccupied with giving us the truth but does succeed in his aim of proving the falsity of what looks like truth.

I am making these observations in relation, especially to the play prescribed to you, Naga Mandala'.

Karnad's play stands in close proximity to Iyengar's description. There is a kind of discipline in the play, emotional intellectual and spiritual – man is bound by a code of morality, he interprets the dictates of his mind and heart following or breaking the norms. Karnad's plays are crowded with symbolism and imagery. Karnad's play is modern and yet it has the beauty of, an abstraction conducive to thought and musings.

Where does Karnad fair in the standard set by Bharata in his treatise Natya Shashtra. All aspects of drama from stage setting, plot construction, characterization to dialogue, acting, music and dance must be considered and examined to assess its nearness to perfection. We shall come back to this in the later part. It would suffice here to say that though Karnad achieves perfection in most of the aspects, he differs in the end result of emotions that he raises in his audience. He does not, as Bharata expected, make the faith of the audience any firmer in either ethics or hope in life. Also the reader/ audience gets up from his plays with a feeling of vexation and doubt about the destiny of man rather than peace and optimism.

Karnad's plays though not spiritual in the strict sense of the term are nevertheless profound; they deal with questions about life, not temporal but universal, not about one but about all. Karnad stands at the crossroads of Indian classical and modern European literature. Karnad like the Indian drama itself owed his flowering to foreign grafting. He has at several places spoken of his indebtedness not only to the Indian writers like A.K. Ramanujan but to foreign playwrights as well. Exposed to Western thought and literature, he is equally, rather more intimately, involved with Indian thought and aesthetics.

An artist, a writer, a man who creates and is pushed and turned over by many currents, schools, genres and movements in today's world. It is difficult to immune oneself from the movements that work the mind of the writer, they are compulsive forces, which give strength and take their toll at he same time. It would be rewarding to examine Karnad as the object molded and shaped by the forces of his time and birth.

Girish Karnad stands shining in the galaxy of playwrights like Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and many others who wrote in Hindi, their regional language or English. The names of those who wrote directly in English are few and appear slightly later on the scene. Mahesh Dattani, to name one, is one of the most well known playwrights. Whereas Vijay Tendulkar is known as the pioneer of the avante-garde movement in India, others have contributed no less. They have all contributed not only their individual style but also proved how diverse and fertile an artists mind can be. Mohan Rakesh wrote in Hindi, his tryst with Drama is of a different kind altogether. Writing of Kalidasa and his beloved's love in ' Asharh ka Ek Din", of a man's anguish and dilemma- experience of the tug of war between love and spirituality in ' Lehron Ke Raj Hans' and marital discord in its worst form in Adhe Adhure, he tries to bring before us the predicament of human life. Nirad Chaudhari sums it up in the words,

> "*With Mohan Rakesh Hindi drama makes a departure from Psuedo-modernism and traditional symbolism to the drama of non-communication—the modern man's failure to understand himself or to understand the other person and their mutual failure to understand each other, which is the real tragedy of modern life" Mohan Rakesh is able to lend this complexity to historical characters as well*".

Popularly known as the bare-foot playwright, Badal Sircar stands in the forefront too but for a different reason. His

are existential plays- continuing the absurdity of life with a new trend of the audience participating in the plays. A founder member of the Third Theatre, he has contributed plays like ' Procession', Bhoma and State News. One of the most popular plays 'Procession' deals with the search for a new house—a new society.

Vijay Tendulkar, the Marathi stalwart, has taken up somewhat different themes and adopted a new style. Man's life is marred by selfishness, rituperance, injustice and fear of failure and extinction. For this he shall assault, murder, use all his cunning for survival, having neither compassion nor scruples. He loathes and hurts and is incapable of sacrifice. He shows man in stark nakedness, beyond redemption. Hence there is, in his plays no hope for reprieve. His popular plays, ' Silence the Court is in session! " Sukharam Binder" and Ghashiram Kotwal" all deal with Man's inability to change the social system of power games and gain, leading to man's annihilation. The structure of life remains unchanged and man after man falls prey to this demonic hold of those in power be it Man versus Woman or Ghashiram versus Nana. A sense of foreboding prevails in all plays lending it a touch of nihilism and maniacal depression.

Karnad's Major Plays

Naga Mandala, Hayavadana and Yayati

Girish Karnad's three plays, ' Yayati', Hayavadana' and 'Naga Mandala' have one thing in common, their themes are borrowed either from Indian myth or folklore.

For his first play ' Yayati', Karnad borrowed from Mahabharata, making drastic changes in the events to suit his purpose and style. The episode of Yayati who unsatisfied, still craves for physical pleasures and borrows his sons' youth to quench his thirst is unique in Indian mythology—it has intrigued and enchanted the readers for centuries.

Yayati's story is symbolic of man's attachment to life, youth and pleasure. Veena Noble Dass in her detailed analysis of the plays in " Flowering of Indian Drama" points out the different motives and causes, which bring about a change in Yayati towards the end. She says, " Karnad's originality lay in working out the motivations behind Yayati's ultimate choice. In the Mahabharata, Yayati's renunciation is the result of his recognition of the nature of desire itself; the realization that desire does not finish through fulfillment, it is by its very nature recurrent. In Karnad's play it is a consequence of a series of symbolic encounters, which lead to Yayati's recognition of the horror of his own life and his assumption of the moral responsibility for it"

There are other innovations too. The character of 'Sutradhar' is introduced, who tells the historical perspective of the plays, its lineage to the Puranas, of the man who cannot change the predictable of his life- looking for alternatives is futile- therefore, the morals about values of human life must be followed. There is no choice for a man but to grow old, no choice for a saint but to overcome the unavoidable path of sin and temptation. The 'Sutradhar' spells this theme thus:

" Sometimes as we are walking along a path we see two paths in front of us. We take one road, yet we still wonder, what would have happened—yet—let the untrodden road be untrodden and let its secret be buried. Whatever grandma's stories we have heard in our childhood let us stick to their morals. This is useful in our lives. Our play is also based on such a story"

Sharmishtha, the traditional woman in the play sticks to her convictions, whereas Puru, the one who is in the beginning of the play a symbol of filial love becomes a symbol of wasted life towards the end. Karnad has in this play as in some others like 'Naga-Mandala' tried to cater to the modern sensibility, connecting the mythical with the present. How far he has succeeded in this is a matter of debate.

Hayavadana is based on a story from Vetala, the story of the 'Transposed Heads in the Sanskrit Vetala Panchavinshan- each of these stories poses a riddle at the end which Vetala challenges the King to solve.

Padmini is married to Devadatta, a man of intellect. He has a friend Kapila, a man of the body. In the original story Padmini interchanged the heads of her husband and brother, she wanted her husband to have both the beauty of mind and physique. After the heads have been transposed, the question was who was Padmini's husband— when the ghost posed this difficult question to the King- this is what Trivikravasena says:

> *" that one of the two, on whom her husbands' head was fixed, was her husband, for the head is the chief of limbs and personal identity depends on it"*

Bhagvata who is a predecessor of the Sutradhar in Sanskrit drama, announces not only the theme, the dilemma of

man's aspirations and failures to compromise with the limitedness of human life but also of the tragic end of Padmini's failure to reconcile with the interpretation of all mortals. Even God's are imperfect, Ganapati himself ahs a human body and an elephants head.

The play has some features of the Yakshagana, the folk drama of Karnataka. The Bhagwata is borrowed from the classical drama, the fool from the folk-play. Karnad talks of the sources in the note to Hayavadana. Originally written in Kannada, the play was later translated into English on the persuasion of Rajinder Paul, who published it in the 'Enact', ' The Central episode in the play' syas Karnad. The story of Devadatta and Kapila is based on a tale from the ' Kathasaritasagar', but I have drawn heavily on the Thomas Mann's reworking of the tale in the 'Transposed Heads'.

Tughlaq and Tale Danda

Tughlaq, again written in Kannada, was translated into English later at the behest of Alyque Padamsee, the well-known advertising and theatre man of Bombay. Published in 1964 it was Girish Karnad's second play, the first Yayati came in 1961.

Tughlaq was an immediate success; first produced in Kannada in 1965 it was followed by a production of the Hindi version by the National School of Drama. That the response to the play was immediate and overwhelming is proved by the successive productions in Bengali and Marathi. An English production took place in Bombay in 1965.

Tughlaq has an urgent topical significance. Based on the life and times of Mohammad-Bin- Tughlaq, the early 14th century Muslim Emperor, the play does not aspire to be a historical drama in the literal sense. Karnad takes liberties with historical facts, adding not a sub plot but also imaginary characters and incestuous relationships like that of Tughlaq with his stepmother.

The play, a mixture of idealism, intrigue, murder, dreams and disillusionment shows once again, Karnad's concern with human predicament in situations beyond his control. The play considered by many as a political allegory depicting the theme of man's ludicrous situation is, if studied deeply, more than that. Man's suspicion of man and one community's suspicion of the other gives the play an undercurrent of 'uneasy calm before the storm'.

The King is an idealist. He dreams of Hindu- Muslim unity and at the very beginning, after restoring his land to Vishnu Prasad announces the decision to move his Capital from Delhi to Daultabad, justifying it on the ground that it is symbolic of his efforts to convince the Hindus, who had majority population in Daulatabad.

Throughout the play, Tughlaq does not have a single moment of peace. Surrounded by sycophants on one hand and perpetrators of intrigue on the other, he looks for unwarranted support to build his kingdom but fails. His passionate and sincere speeches make him appear mad and eccentric to the public, a clever tyrant to the Amirs.

Tughlaq is, some believe a usurper who as come to the throne after getting his father and brother murdered while they were saying their prayers.

Tughlaq has the power to hold power. He knows that to survive in the game of snakes and ladders all opponents or friends who brook danger must be eliminated. Tughlaq weeds out his stepmother, Shihab-uddin and an upright saint like Sheik Imam-uddin. The characters vary from the Tughlaq confidants like Vizir Muhammad and Najib to the go-getters by all means like Aziz and Azam.

Tughlaq's loss of friends and dreams at the end of seven years at Daulatabad leave him a disillusioned and sad man surrounded by people who are seekers of power, Tughlaq uses methods of persuasion, politics, statesmanship and tyranny to get rid of his foes, formidable in politics, religion or connivance. Starting with the vest of intentions, the Sultan may be called a victim turned sinner.

The story of his Tale-Danda', which literally means beheading, is borrowed from an important historical movement that took place in Kalyan in 1168 A.D. The movement was started by a group of poets, philosophers, mystics and social revolutionaries. They wanted not only change in the status of women but also fought boldly for equality of all castes. They wanted to abolish idolatry of all kind, religious as well as social. The play shows how people fighting to turn the seats of power and shake the pillars of blind faith in ritual and pest-ridden systems are defeated by the demonic powers of those mightier than them. The play ends in bloodshed and terror. Girish Karnad wrote the play in 1989 and offers the following reasons for writing it,

" I wrote Tale-danda in 1989 when the Mandir and Mandal movements were beginning to show again how relevant the question posed by these thinkers were for our age. The horror of subsequent events—have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered"

Fire and the Rain

Published in 1998 the play is based on a tussle between two forces, religious authority and secular values. While discussing the title and theme of the play Karnad holds, "Thus the phrase Agni-Mattu-Male in addition to counter pointing the physical elements normally seen as antagonistic, also sets up several outer oppositions between an Indo Aryan (Sanskrit) and a Dravidian (Kannada) language, between the Pan-indic and the regional point of view, between the classical 'marga' and the less exalted 'desi' traditions, between the elevated and the mundane and even perhaps between the sacred and the secular."

If Paravasu stands for the sacred, the Actor Manager and Arvasu represent secular forces. The King with a team of priests, with Paravasu as the Chief priest has arranged a 'Yagna' to propitiate Lord Indra for rain. After the failure of the fire-sacrifice to bring rains, the Actor Manager who extols the powers of drama as a 'Fifth Veda', puts up a play with the help of his brother Aravasu.

The God of rains, Indra is so pleased with it that he is prepared to give any boon that Aravasu asks for. The rains come not by the seven-year fire-sacrifice but by the spontaneous art of Aravasu.

Aravasu is in love with Nittilai, a tribal girl. The tension between the religious and secular builds up on many planes. Yarakri's mystic experience, his self-mortification, stands for ritualism and morbidity in religion. Nittilai stands for secular forces working for the good of mankind. The play ends in death and destruction.

The Authors Introduction to the Three Plays Naga-Mandala, Hayavadana, Tughlaq

My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self-justification: tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future hat opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. This is the historical context that gave rise to my plays and those of my contemporaries.

In my childhood, in a small town in Karnataka, I was exposed to two theatre forms that seemed to represent irreconcilably different worlds. Father took the entire family to see plays staged by, troupes of professional actors called *natak companies, which* toured the countryside throughout the year. The plays were staged in semi permanent structures on proscenium stages, with wings and drop curtains, and were illuminated by petromax lamps.

Once the harvest was over, I went with the servants to sit up nights watching the more traditional *Yakshagana* performances. The stage, a platform with a back curtain, was erected in the open air and lit by torches.

By the time I was in my early teens, the *natak companies* had ceased to function and *Yakshagana* had begun to seem quaint, even silly, to me. Soon we moved to a big city. This city had a college and electricity, but no professional theatre.

I saw theatre again only when I went to Bombay for my postgraduate studies. One of the first things I did in Bombay was to go and see a play, which happened to be Strindberg's '*Miss Julie'* directed by the brilliant young Ebrahim Alkazi.

I have been told since then that it was one of Alkazi's less successful productions. The papers tore it to shreds the next day. But when I walked out-of the theatre that evening, I felt as though I had been put through an emotionally or even a physically painful rite of passage. I had read some Western playwrights in college, but nothing had prepared me for the power and violence I experienced that day. By the norms I had been brought up on, the very notion of laying bare the inner recesses of the human psyche like this for public consumption seemed obscene. What impressed me as much as the psychological cannibalism of the play was the way lights faded in and out on stage. Until we moved to the city, we had lived in houses lit by hurricane lamps. Even in die city, electricity was something we switched on and off. The realization that there were instruments called dimmers that could gently fade the lights in or out opened up a whole new world of magical possibilities.

Most of my contemporaries went through some similar experience at some point in their lives. We stepped out of mythological plays lit by torches or petromax lamps straight into Strindberg and dimmers. The new technology could not be divorced from the new psychology. The two together defined a stage that was like nothing we had known or suspected. I have often wondered whether it wasn't that evening that, without being actually aware of it, I decided I wanted to be a playwright.

At the end of my stay in Bombay, I received a scholarship to go abroad for further studies. It is difficult to describe to a modern Indian audience the traumas created by this event. Going abroad was a much rarer occurrence in those days; besides, I came from a large, close-knit family and was the first member of the family ever to go abroad. My parents were worried lest I decide to settle down outside India, and even for me, though there was no need for an immediate decision, the terrible choice was implicit in the very act of going away. Should I at the end of my studies return home for the sake of my family, my people and my country, even at the risk of my abilities and training not being fully utilized in what seemed a stifling, claustrophobic atmosphere, or should I rise above such parochial considerations and go where the world drew me?

While still preparing for the trip, amidst the intense emotional turmoil, I found myself writing a play. This took me by surprise, for I had fancied myself a poet, had written poetry through my teens, and had trained myself to write in English, in preparation for the conquest of the West. But here I was writing a play and in Kannada, too, the language spoken by a few million people in South India, the language of my childhood. A greater surprise was the theme of the play, for it was taken from ancient Indian mythology from which I had believed myself alienated.

The story of King Yayati that I used occurs in the Mahabharata. The king, for a moral transgression he has committed, is cursed to old age in the prime of life. Distraught at losing his youth, he approaches his son, pleading with him to lend him his youth in exchange for old age. The son accepts the exchange and the curse, and thus becomes old, older than his father. But the old age brings no knowledge, no self-realization, only the senselessness of a punishment meted out for an act in which he had not even participated. The father is left to face the consequences of shirking responsibility for his own actions.

While I was writing the play, I saw it only as an escape from my stressful situation. But looking back, I am amazed at how precisely the myth reflected my anxieties at that moment, my resentment with all those who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future. By the time I had finished working on Yayati---during the three weeks it took the ship to reach England and in the lonely cloisters of the university-the myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally. Whether to return home finally seemed the most minor of issues. The myth had nailed me to my past.

Oddly enough the play owed its form not to the innumerable mythological plays I had been brought up on, and which had partly kept these myths alive for me, but to Western playwrights whom until then I had only read in print: Anouilh (his Antigone particularly) and also Sartre, O'Neill, and the Greeks. That is, at the most intense moment of self-expression, while my past had come to my aid with a ready-made narrative within which I could contain and explore my insecurities, there had been no dramatic structure in my own tradition to which I could relate myself

One of the first plays of post-independence India to use myth to make a contemporary statement was Dharamvir Bharati's 'Andha Yug' ('The Blind Age'). The play is about the aftermath of the Kurukshetra War, which forms the climax of the epic Mahabharata. The entire epic is in fact a build-up to this great confrontation between Good and Evil, in which God himself participated in the form of Lord Krishna. It was during this war that Krishna expounded the *Bhagavadgita*, a discourse on the ethics of action and. knowledge that has exercised the most profound influence on Indian thought through the ages. Yet this fratricidal war left in its wake nothing but desolation and a sense of futility. No 'new world' emerged from the wholesale massacre of the youth of the country. Arjuna, the hero, became impotent, Lord Krishna himself meekly accepted a curse and died an absurd death, In his play, Bharati used the myth to give voice to the sense of horror and despair felt in India in the wake of the partition of the country and the communal bloodbaths that accompanied it.

Although later Satyadev Dubey's production proved that it was genuine theatre, Andha Yug was actually written for the radio, as a play for voices. It was as if, at the time of conceiving the play, the playwright could imagine no stage on which to place it.

Indeed this contradiction haunts most contemporary play-wrighting and theatre in India. Even to arrive at the heart of one's own mythology, the writer has to follow- signposts planted by the West, a paradoxical situation for a culture in which the earliest extant play was written in A.D. 2001. The explanation lies in the fact that what is called 'modern Indian theatre' was started by a group of people who adopted 'cultural amnesia' as a deliberate strategy. It originated in the second half of the nineteenth century in three cities, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. None of these seaports built by the British for their maritime trade had an Indian past of its own, a history independent of the British. These places had developed an Indian middle class that in all outward respects aspired to 'look' like its British counterpart. The social values of this class were shaped by the English education it had received and by the need to work with the British in trade and administration.

Inevitably the theatre it created imitated the British theatre of the times, as presented by visiting troupes from England. Several new concepts were introduced, two of which altered the nature of Indian theatre. One was the separation of the audience from the stage by the proscenium, underscoring the fact that what was being presented was a spectacle free of any ritualistic associations and which therefore expected no direct participation by the audience in it; and the other was the idea of pure entertainment, whose success would be measured entirely in terms of immediate financial returns and the run of the play.

Until the nineteenth century**,** the audience had never been expected to pay to see a show. Theatre had depended upon patronage-of kings, ministers, local feudatories, or temples. With the myth-based story line already familiar to the audience the shape and success of a performance depended on how the actors improvised with the given narrative material each time they came on stage. Actors did not rehearse a play so much as train for particular kinds of roles, a system still followed today in folk and traditional theatre forms. The principle here is the same as in North Indian classical music, where the musician aims to reveal unexpected delights even within the strictly regulated contours of a raga, by continual improvisation**.** It is the variability, the unpredictable potential of each performance that is its attraction. The audience accepts the risk.

With the new theatre, in conformity with the prevailing laissez faire philosophy, risk became the producer's responsibility, the factor determining the company's investment policy. The audience paid in cash to see a show guaranteed as a 'success' and in return received as much entertainment as could be competitively fitted within the price of a ticket; a performance became a carefully packaged commodity, to be sold in endless identical replications. The proscenium and the box office proclaimed a new philosophy of the theatre: secularism-but a commercially viable secularism.

The secularism was partly necessitated by the ethnic heterogeneity of the new entrepreneurial class. In Bombay for instance, the enterprises were financed by the Parsis, who spoke Gujarati. But the commonly understood language was Urdu, popularized by the Muslim chieftains who had ruled over most of India since the sixteenth century. Naturally many of the writers employed by the Parsi theatre were Muslim. And the audience was largely Hindu!

The consequences of this secularism were that every character on stage, whether a Hindu deity or a Muslim legendary hero, was alienated from his true religious or cultural moorings, and myths and legends, emptied of meaning, were reshaped into tightly constructed melodramas with thundering curtain lines and a searing climax. Unlike traditional performances, which spread out in a slow leisurely fashion, these plays demanded total attention, but only at the level of plot. Incident was all. Even in natak companies run entirely by Hindus, the basic attitude was dictated by this Parsi model,

There was, however, a far more important reason for the superficiality of the fare. The audience that patronized the Parsi theatre professed values it made no effort to realize in ordinary life. Whereas in public it accepted the Western bourgeois notions of secularism, egalitarianism**,** and individual merit, at home it remained committed to the traditional loyalties of caste, family, and religion. Only a society honest enough to face squarely the implications of this division within itself could have produced meaningful drama out of it. But as the new bourgeoisie claimed to be ashamed of the domestic lifestyle to which it nevertheless adhered tenaciously, the theatre certainly would never be allowed to acknowledge and project these contradictions.

It is possible to argue, as Ashis Nandy has done, that this inner division was not psychologically harmful at all but was a deliberate strategy adopted by this class to ensure that its personality was not totally absorbed and thereby destroyed by the colonial culture. Whatever the case, the effect on drama was to render it sterile. Despite its enormous success as spectacle over nearly seventy years the Parsi theatre produced no drama of any consequence.

With the advent of 'talking' films in the 1930s the Parsi theatre collapsed without a fight. In the West, movies diminished the importance of theatre but did not destroy it. In India, professional theatre was virtually decimated by the film industry, which had learned most of its tricks from the theatre and could dish out the made-to-order entertainment on a scale much larger than the theatre could afford and at cheaper rates. India has not seen a professional theatre of the same proportions since.

In the process of settling down, the Parsi theatre had absorbed several features of traditional or folk performing arts, such as music, mime, and comic interludes. In Maharashtra, for instance, where this theatre flourished and continues to survive, its greatest contribution was in the field of music, in the form of a rich and varied body of theatre songs. However, to my generation of playwrights, reacting against memories of the Parsi stage in its decadence, music and dance seemed irrelevant to genuine drama. The only legacy left to us then was a lumbering, antiquated style of staging.

Yet there was no other urban tradition to look to, and in my second play, having concluded that Anouilh and Co. were not enough, I tried to make use of the Parsi stagecraft. This time the play was historical and therefore, perhaps inevitably, had a Muslim subject.

(I say inevitably, for the Hindus have almost no tradition of history: the Hindu mind, with its belief in the cycle of births and deaths, has found little reason to chronicle or glamorize any particular historical period. Still, independence had made history suddenly important to us, we were acutely conscious of living in a historically important era. Indian history as written by the British was automatically suspect. The Marxist approach offered a more attractive alternative but in fact seemed unable to come to terms with Indian realities. Even today Marxist ideologues are lost when confronted with native categories like caste. It was the Muslims who first introduced history as a positive concept in Indian thought, and the only genuinely Indian methodology available to us for analyzing history was that developed by the Muslim historians in India.)

My subject was the life of Muhammad Tughlaq, a fourteenth century sultan of Delhi, certainly the most brilliant individual ever to ascend the throne of Delhi and also one of the biggest failures. After a reign distinguished for policies that today seem far-sighted to the point of genius, but which in their day earned him the title 'Muhammad the Mad,' the sultan ended his career in Woodshed and political chaos. In a sense, the play reflected the slow disillusionment my generation felt with the new politics of independent India: the gradual erosion of the ethical norms that had guided the movement for independence, and the coming to terms with cynicism and real politik.

The stagecraft of the Parsi model demanded a mechanical succession of alternating shallow and deep scenes. The shallow scenes were played in the foreground of the stage with a painted curtain normally depicting a street-as the backdrop. These scenes were reserved for the 'lower class' characters with prominence given to comedy. They served as link scenes in the development of the plot, but the main purpose was to keep the audience engaged while the deep scenes, which showed interiors of palaces, royal parks, and other such visually opulent sets, were being changed or decorated. The important characters rarely appeared in the street scenes, and in the deep scenes the lower classes strictly kept their place.

The spatial division was ideal to show the gulf between the elders and the ruled, between the mysterious inner chambers of power politics and the open, public areas of those affected by it. But as I wrote Tughlaq, I found it increasingly difficult to maintain the accepted balance between these two regions. Writing in an unprecedented situation where the mass populace was exercising political franchise, in however clumsy a fashion, for, the first time in its history I found the shallow scenes bulging with an energy hard to control. The regions ultimately developed their own logic. The deep scenes became emptier as the play progressed, and in the last scene, the 'comic lead' did the unconventional-he appeared in the deep scene, on a par with the protagonist himself. This violation of traditionally sacred spatial hierarchy, I decided-since there was little I could do about it-was the result of the anarchy which climaxed Tughlaq's times and seemed poised to engulf my own.

(An aside. whatever the fond theories of their creators, plays often develop their own independent existence. In his brilliant production of Tughlaq, E. Alkazi ignored my half-hearted tribute to the Parsi theatre and placed the action on the ramparts of the Old Fort at Delhi; and it worked very well.)

'Another school of drama had arisen in the 1930s, at the height of the struggle for national independence. When social reform was acknowledged as a goal next only to independence in importance, a group of 'realistic' playwrights had challenged the emptiness and vapidity of Parsi drama. The contemporary concerns of these playwrights gave their work an immediacy and a sharp edge lacking in the earlier theatre, and a few plays of great power were written. While trying to awaken their audience to the humiliation of political enslavement, many of these new playwrights made a coruscating analysis of the ills that had eaten into Indian society. This was essentially the playwright's theatre; the plays were presented by amateur or semiprofessional groups and were mostly directed by the playwrights themselves. Unlike in the Par.3i theatre, where a hardheaded financial logic was the guide, here the writers, the actors, and the audience were all united by a genuine idealism. They created a movement, if not a theatre, for the times.

Although its form aimed at being realistic, it must be pointed out at once that this drama concentrated on only a small corner of the vast canvas explored by Western realistic theatre.

The door banged by Nora in '*The Doll's House'* did not merely announce feminist rebellion against social slavery. It summed up what was to be the main Concern of Western realistic drama over the next hundred years: a person's need to be seen as an individual, as an entity valuable in itself, independent of family and social circumstance. Indian realism, however, could not progress beyond analyses of social problems, for in India, despite the large urban population**,** there really has never been a bourgeoisie with its faith in individualism as the ultimate value. 'Westernization' notwithstanding, Indians define themselves in terms of their relationships to the other members of their family, caste, or class. They are defined by the role they have to play. In Sudhir Kakar's words, the), see themselves in 'relational' terms in their social context, and they naturally extend the same references to theatre as well.

Let me give an example. A few years ago Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* was presented in Madras. Eddie Carbone, the play's protagonist, is an Italian dock worker. He is a *good* man but tragedy is brought about by his incestuous passion for his orphaned niece. He harbours two young, illegal Italian immigrants in his house, one of whom falls in love with the niece. Consumed by jealousy, Eddie breaks his code of honour, betrays the immigrants to the authorities, and is killed by one of them.

The audience watching the play in Madras was English educated**,** familiar with Western literature. Many of them frequently were-abroad and had a living contact with the Western way of life. The production was a success. But most of the audience entirely missed the element of incest in the play; rather, they chose to ignore it as an unnecessary adjunct to an otherwise perfectly rational tale. After all, Eddie was his niece's guardian, a surrogate father. It was only right that he should be interested in her welfare. You certainly could not blame him for trying to safeguard her future. On the contrary, the illegal immigrants emerged as unsympathetic, for they had betrayed their host's confidence by seducing the niece's affections.

Even apart from consideration of social roles that led the Madras audience to write its own *A View from The Bridge*, Eddie Carbone perfectly fits an Indian archetype: the father figure aggressing toward its offspring. Our mythology is replete with parental figures demanding sacrifices from their children-as in my own Yayati— Eddie's position was not one in which the Indian audience was likely to find any tragic flaw.

To get back to realistic theatre, its great improvement over the Parsi theatre was that it took itself seriously both as art and as an instrument of social change. Yet it remained saddled with the European model. Bernard Shaw was its presiding deity. The proscenium continued, only now the grand spectacles gave way to the interior set with the invisible fourth wall. And that three-walled *living* room succinctly defined the basic limitation of this school of writing.

From Ibsen to Albee, the living room has symbolized all that is valuable to the Western bourgeoisie**.** It is one's refuge from the sociopolitical forces raging in the world outside, as well as the battleground where values essential to one's individuality are fought out and defended. But nothing of consequence ever happens or is supposed to happen in an Indian living room! It is the n:)-man's-land, the empty, almost defensive front the family presents to the world outside.

Space in a traditional home is ordered according to the caste hierarchy as well as the hierarchies within the family. Whether a person is permitted inside the compound, allowed as far as the outer verandah, or admitted into the living room depends on his or her caste and social status. And it is in the interior of the house, in the kitchen, in the room where the gods are kept, or in the backyard, where family problems are tackled, or allowed to fester, and where the women can

have a say. Thus the living room as the location of dramatic action made nonsense of the very social problems the playwright set out to analyze, by distorting the caste dimensions as well as the position of women in the family.

How Could these playwrights have so misunderstood the geography of their own homes? The three-walled living room was a symptom of a much more serious malaise: the conceptual tools they were using to analyze India's problems were as secondhand and unrealistic as the European parlour. The writers were young, angry, and in a hurry. The concepts defined for them by their English educators were new and refreshing and seemed rational. If the tools didn't quite fit the shifting ambiguities of social life, reality could be adjusted to fit these attractive imports. It may also be said that the refusal to go beyond the living room exactly mirrored the reluctance of these Westernized ' upper-caste writers to go to the heart of the issues they were presenting.

To my generation, a hundred crowded years of urban theatre seemed to have left almost nothing to hang on to, to take off from. And where was one to begin again? Perhaps by looking at our audience again, by trying to understand what experience this audience expected to receive from theatre? This at least partly meant looking again at the traditional forms that had been sidelined by the Parsi theatre. The attempt, let me hasten to add, was not to find and reuse forms that had worked successfully in some other cultural context. The hope, rather, was to discover whether there was a structure of expectations and conventions about entertainment underlying these forms from which one could learn.

The most obvious starting point should have been the Sanskrit theatre. *Sakuntala* and M*rechakatika "*-two Sanskrit masterpieces, had been presented successfully on the Marathi stage in the early part of this century. Recently, Ratan Thiyam, K.N. Panicker, and Vijaya Mehta have brought Sanskrit plays alive again for today's audience. But no modern playwright has claimed, or shown in his work, any allegiance to Sanskrit sensibility. Sanskrit drama assumed a specific social setting, a steady, well-ordered universe in which everyone from the gods to the meanest mortals was in his or her allotted slot. Even in its heyday it was an elitist phenomenon, confined to a restricted group of wealthy and educated courtiers, remote from the general populace.

Along with this court theatre there had existed other, more popular forms-more flexible, varying in their emphasis on formal purity. The exact relationship between Sanskrit theatre and these popular forms is of course difficult to determine. Sanskrit was not a language spoken in the homes; it was the language of courtly, literary, and philosophical discourse. The popular forms, on the other hand, used the natural languages of the people. Further, most *of* these languages came into their own as vehicles for artistic expression only about A.D. 1000, by which time Sanskrit literature particularly drama-was already moribund. Even the aesthetics of these two theatre traditions differed. Sanskrit drama underplayed action and emphasized mood. It avoided scenes that unduly excited the audience. The popular forms wallowed in battles and hard-won marriages, blood and thunder. The biggest hurdle from our perspective is that unlike in Sanskrit, in which plays were written as independent works of art, this class of performing arts eschewed written texts and depended on improvisation within limits prescribed by their separate conventions, making it difficult to trace their historical growth. But in India, as has often been pointed out, the past is never totally lost; it coexists with the present as a parallel flow. A rich variety of regional theatre forms still exists, with a continuous history stretching over centuries, though through these centuries they have undoubtedly undergone changes and even mutilations.

For the first two decades after independence, how traditional forms could be utilized to revitalize our own work in the urban context was a ceaseless topic of argument among theatre people. The poet Vallathol had given a new identity to *Kathakali,* Shivaram Karanth a new lease of life to *Yakshagana.* Habib Tanvir has gone to areas in which the traditional troupes operate, taking with him his urban discipline. He has taught, lived, worked, and toured with tile local troupes and evolved through them a work that is rich, vital, and meaningful.

But what were we, basically city-dwellers, to do with this stream? What did the entire paraphernalia of theatrical devices, half-curtains, masks, improvisation, music, and mimic mean?

I remember that the idea of my play *Hayavadana* started crystallizing in my head right in the middle of an argument with B.V. Karanth (who ultimately produced the play) about the meaning of masks in Indian theatre and theatre's relationship to music. The play is based on a story from a collection of tales called the *Kathasarilsagara* and the further development of this story by Thomas Mann in "The Transposed Heads."

A young woman is travelling with her insecure and jealous husband and his rather attractive friend. The husband, suspecting his wife's loyalties, goes to a temple of Goddess Kali and beheads himself The friend finds the body and, terrified that he will be accused of having murdered the man for the sake of his wife, in turn beheads himself. When the woman, afraid of the scandal that is bound to follow, prepares to kill herself too, the goddess takes pity and comes to her aid. The woman has only to rejoin the heads to the bodies and the goddess will bring them back to life. The woman follows the instructions, the men come back to life except that in her confusion she has mixed up the heads. The story ends with the question: Who is now the real husband., the one with the husband's head or the one with his body?

The answer given in the *Kathasaritsagara* is: since the head represents the man, the person with the husband's head is the husband.

Mann brings his relentless logic to bear upon this solution. If the head is the determining limb, then the body should change to fit the head. At the end of Mann's version, the bodies have changed again and adjusted themselves to the heads so perfectly that the men are physically exactly as they were at the beginning. We are back to square one-the problem remains unsolved.

As I said, the story initially interested me for the scope it gave for the use of masks and music. Western theatre has developed a contrast between the face and the mask-the real inner person and the exterior one presents, or wishes to present, to the world outside. But in traditional Indian theater, the mask is only the face 'writ large'; since a character represents not a complex psychological entity but an ethical archetype, the mask merely presents in enlarged detail its essential moral nature. (This is why characters in *Hayavadana have* no real names. The heroine is called Padmini after one of the six types into which Vatsyayana classified all women. Her husband is Devadatta, a formal mode of addressing a stranger. His friend is Kapila, simply 'the dark one.') Music-usually percussion-then further distances the action, placing it in the realm of tile mythical and the elemental.

The decision to use masks led me to question the theme itself in greater depth. All theatrical performances in India begin with worship of Ganesha, the god who ensures successful completion of any endeavour. According to mythology, Ganesha was beheaded by Shiva, his father**,** who had failed to recognize his own son (another aggressive father!). The damage vas repaired by substituting an elephant's head, since the original head could not be found. Ganesha is often represented onstage by a young boy wearing the elephant mask, who then is worshipped as the incarnation of the god himself'.

Ganesha's mask then says, nothing about his nature. It is a mask, pure and simple. Right at the start of the play, my theory about masks was getting subverted but the elephant head also questioned the basic assumption behind the original riddle: that the head represents the thinking part of the person, the intellect.

It seemed unfair, however, to challenge the thesis of the riddle by using a god. God, after all, is beyond human logic, indeed beyond human comprehension itself. The dialectic had to grow out *of* grosser ground, and I sensed a third being hovering in the spaces between the divine and the human, a horse-headed man. The play *Hayavadana,* meaning 'the one with a horse's head,' is named after this character**.** The story of this horse-headed man, who wants to shed the horse's head and become human, provides the outer panel-as in a mural-within, which the tale of the two friends is framed. Hayavadana, too, goes to the same Goddess Kali and wins a boon from her that he should become complete: Logic takes over. The head is the person: Hayavadana becomes a complete horse. The central logic of the tale remains intact, while its basic premise is denied.

The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these-values, of making them literally stand on their head.' The various conventions-the chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and nonhuman worlds-permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative attitudes to the central problem. To use a phrase from Bertolt Brecht, these conventions then allow for 'complex seeing '. And it must be admitted that Brecht's influence received mainly through his writings and without the benefit of his theatrical productions, went some way in making us realize what could be done with the design of traditional theatre. The theatrical conventions Brecht was reacting against--character as a psychological construct providing a focus for emotional identification, the willing-suspension-of-disbelief syndrome, the notion of a unified spectacle-were never a part of the traditional Indian theatre. There was therefore no question of arriving at an 'alienation' effect by using Brechtian artifice. What he did was to sensitize us to the potentialities of nonnaturalistic techniques available in our own theatre.

How invigorating this legacy of traditional theatre has proved for Indian theatre can be illustrated by two other plays, which appeared soon after *Hoyavadana.* In his *Ghasiram Kotwal,* Tendulkar uses *Dashavatara,* a traditional semi classical form, to investigate a contemporary political problem, the emergence of 'demons' in public. These demons are initially created by political leaders for the purposes of their own power games, but ultimately go out of control and threaten to destroy-their own creators. It is a theme recurrent in Indian mythology: the demon made indestructible by the boon of gods and then turning on the gods themselves. (A decade after the play was written, in Punjab, Sant Bhindranwale and Mrs. Indira Gandhi seemed to be re-enacting the theme in real life in horrifying detail.)

The central theatrical devil in the play is the use of about a dozen singers who start conventionally enough as a chorus. But as the play progresses, they become the human curtain alternately hiding the action and revealing bits of it as in a peep show. From neutral commentators, they slide into the roles of voyeurs who enjoy the degeneration they condemn, of courtiers who perpetrate atrocities, and of the populace that suffers the harassment. In the final scene the demon is ritually destroyed, torn limb from limb; the city is exorcised, and the now-purified stage is filled with revellers led by the politician who initially created the demon.

In Jabbar Patel's production, music and dance become the instruments of comment and analysis. Ritualistic movements turn imperceptibly into an orgy or a political procession, the music by Bhaskar Chandavarkar, based on traditional devotional tunes, continually turns upon itself, sometimes indulgently, sometimes critically. Unexpected breaks jangle the nerves of the audience. There is no explicit political analysis, but the matrix of the myth and the ironic use of *Dashavulara* drive the point home.

Unlike most Indian playwrights writing today, Chandrasekhar Kambar does not come from an urban background. As he was born and brought up in the country**,** there is no self-consciousness in his use of *Bayalata,* a secular folk form of his region. He draws upon the rich resources of popular speech and folklore with an effortlessness that conceals a rare sophistication of sensibility and technique. He is a poet at ease with the ballad, and his approach to poetry on stage is through the ballad rather than the lyric; the imagery is the action, the metaphors serve to resonate the narrative at different levels of meaning.

Joku1naraswamy starts with a fertility rite in honor of the phallic deity Jokumara, who is worshipped in the form of a snake gourd and then consumed by those desirous of bearing children. The basic situations as well as the music are all traditional, in the sense that they are set pieces, familiar in *Bayalata* drama. The impotent chieftain's virgin wife feeds the snake gourd by mistake to the village rake and has a child by him. The rake's death at the hands of the chieftain's men is a kind of gang rape-cum-fertility offering. The chieftain himself is literally left holding a baby he cannot disown.

Through this semicomic tale, Kambar makes a very Brechtian statement about the right of the peasants to the land on which they work virtually as series for an absentee landlord. But the analysis goes beyond this rather obvious political manifesto to a complex exploration in action of political power as a compensation for sexual inadequacy, of philandering as a psychosexual equivalent of anarchism**,** which can be controlled by love and responsibility. By working out the psychological, social, and political implications of the concept of virility, the play brings out the ambiguous nature of the very fertility rite it had set out to celebrate.

It must be admitted that the popularity of traditional forms on the urban stage has much to do with the technical freedom they offer the director. Music, mitre, and exotic imagery open up vast opportunities for colorful improvisation, which nevertheless can-and alas! all too often does--degenerate into self-indulgence. While there are productions today which combine traditional theatre techniques with modern choreography and visual design to an effect unimaginable in tile '60s, most such efforts tend to be imitative and soul-less. It is as though now that the problem has found a technical solution, the spirit of the quest has been lost.

Naga-Mandala is based on two oral tales I heard from A. Ramanujan. These tales are narrated by women-normally the older women in the family-while children are being fed in the evenings in the kitchen or being put to bed. The other adults present on these occasions are also women. Therefore these tales, though directed at the children, often serve as a parallel system of communication among the women in the family.

They also, express a distinctly woman's understanding of the reality around her, a lived counterpoint to the patriarchal

structures of classical texts and institutions. The position of Rani in the story of *Naga-Mandala,* for instance, can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles-as a stranger during the day and as lover at night, inevitably, the pattern of relationships she is forced to weave from these disjointed encounters must be some thing of a fiction. The empty house Rani is locked in could be the family she is married into.

Many of these tales also talk about the nature of tales. The story of the flames comments on the paradoxical nature of oral tales in general: they have an existence of their own, independent of the teller and yet live only when they are passed on from the possessor of the tale to the listener. Seen thus, the status of a tale becomes akin to that of a daughter, for traditionally a daughter too is not meant to be kept at home too long but has to be passed on. This identity adds poignant and ironic undertones to the relationship of the teller to the tales.

It needs to be stressed here that these tales are not leftovers from the past. In the words of Ramanujan, 'Even in a large modern city like Madras Bombay or Calcutta, even in western-style nuclear families with their well-planned 2.2 children, folklore . . is only a suburb away, a cousin or a grandmother away."

The basic concern of the Indian theatre in the post-independence period has been to try to define its 'Indianness.' The distressing fact is that most of these experiments have been carried out by enthusiastic amateurs or part-timers, who have been unable to devote themselves entirely to theatre. I see myself as a playwright but make a living in film and television. There is a high elasticity of substitution between the different performing media in India: the participants as well as the audiences-get tossed about.

The question therefore of what lies in store for the Indian theatre should be rephrased to include other media as well-radio, cinema, audiocassettes, television and video. Their futures are inextricably intertwined and in this shifting landscape, the next electronic gadget could easily turn a mass medium into a traditional art form.

Perhaps quite unrealistically, I dream of the day when a similar ripple will reestablish theatre-flesh-and-blood actors enacting a well-written text to a gathering of people who have come to witness the performance-where it belongs, at the centre of the daily life of the people,

Summary

Note to the Play Naga Mandala

In the note to the play that the author wrote on 28 November 1988 he has acknowledged his debt to Professor A.K. Ramanujan for the source, the play, the two oral-tales from Karnataka as told by the Professor. Incidentally Karnad also dedicated the play to Professor Ramanujan.

Prologue

The play begins with a prologue. The setting of the play in the inner sanctum of the rural temple sets the tone of the play. The ruined temple, the broken idol, the moonlight filtering through the cracks in the roof combine to suggest that the play shall unfold something more ethereal than merely material.

A man sitting all alone in the desolate precincts is trying hard to keep himself awake. He opens his eyes wide, turns his eyelids upside down and shakes his head violently to keep himself from falling asleep. He addresses the audience to tell them the cause of his desperate need to remain awake.

He had been told, says he, by one mendicant to keep awake for at least one night of the month failing which he would die. He had tried hard to keep awake for the whole night one after the other but failed. It is not so easy to evade sleep; one falls asleep involuntarily in spite of the best efforts to hold oneself together, sleep comes stealthily and conquers you. The man's speech is interspersed with pauses.

The age-old analogy between death and sleep is deeper in this case, since sleep on this particular night can bring the Man's death. He even warns the audience that he may fall dead in front of them if he fails to keep awake. The man has realized the power of sleep over man's body.

" I thought nothing would be easier than spending a night awake—— I was wrong— Perhaps death

makes me sleepy. Every night this month I have been dozing off before even being aware of it—— for tonight is the last night of the month—of my life, Perhaps? For how do I know that sleep would not creep in on me again as it has every night so far?

The explanations of the mendicant, the cause of the curse upon the man, break the mysterious and mythical tone of the play. The man is a playwright, we are told, and has written such boring plays that people lured by the theatre virtually fell asleep while watching his monotonous themes. The discomfort of the chairs turned them into an abused mass of sleep.

The interjection, the story of the playwright who was revered at home as a great writer, is a pun on writers in general. The man did not want to die a death of ignominy in front of his family and had therefore decided to come to this desolate place.

The man vows then not to have anything to do with plays, themes and stories. He swears not by the God omnipresent but by the God who is absent—this is in a sense skepticism of the man – he may be an apostate – remember that the nature of the deity in the temple cannot be figured out because the idol is broken. The playwright intends to create an atmosphere of the spiritual but he does not boycott the temporal by the religious—The Man's fate and the artist's failure and absurdity are almost ludicrous.

Just when the Man has made all his declarations about severing ties with story telling and play writing he hears some female voices. They are talking, naked flames of light without support, without a base. It is apparent that the flames gather there every night and though not explicitly described, it can be deduced from their conversation that they are the night flames-lights of different households The Man confirms this after hearing their conversation for sometime. He tells the audience

" I had heard that when the lamps are put out in the village, the flames gather in some remote place and spend the night together, gossiping, so this is where they gather"

The flames gossip like typical village women. They talk of their Masters and Mistresses, of their homes and hearth as well as their affections and sexual life. They also vie with each other on the quality of the houses they give light to. When Flame I relates how their household ran out of all oils, Kushi, peanut and castor oil, Flame II taunts her, boasting of the fact that the family she burnt for came from the coast and used only coconut oil.

Flame IV, which is supposed to be the kerosene flame is unusually early that night – her story is different from that of Flame I. Whereas Flame I's master is a skinflint, a miserly fellow feels that his wife is a spendthrift (she has a hole in her palm) Flame IV had been serving a master who had an ailing mother. The entire house was alert because of her illness. The old lady had died that day bringing relief to the couple. Since the Master wanted to make love to his juicy like a cucumber wife, the flame was chased out fast.

Flame 3 envies Flame IV for her good luck. Flame 3 was generally retained by the master since he wanted to feast himself on the beauty of his wife limb by limb, she was therefore forced to witness what she would have preferred to be done in dark.

It is obvious that there are many flames that gather at the ruins every night after the lamps are extinguished. Though not all flames enter into the conversation, their participation is important as eager listeners.

Attention of all the flames turns to the new flame who is welcomed enthusiastically by all. The playwright tries to bring out the typical nature of a man in the flames not only by the tone of slandering and sneering but also by their eagerness to hear new tales about people, to mock, giggle and enjoy the fun. The gossip, the story telling, lovemaking, the lighting of the flame and putting it off are all activities of the night. Story telling becomes vibrant and love making more rampant during the hours of darkness.

The new flame has a strange incident to relate since she lived with only an old couple, there was nothing exciting for her to say but something that had happened that night was unbelievable. The old lady had finished her household chores and was preparing to retire for the night when she saw a young woman clad in a bright sari coming out of her husband's room. The moment the young woman saw the mistress she ran away in the night. The old lady woke her husband up to ask who this woman was but the husband had no clue. The new flame, however, knows who she was. Her mistress had been suppressing inside her a story and a song she knew for long. She would not say or sing them. The story and the song were being choked inside her for a long time; they were like prisoners waiting desperately to be released. That afternoon when the woman went for a nap after lunch, she started snoring and her mouth was left

open. This is when the story and the song escaped and hid themselves in the attic. At night when the old couple went off to sleep, the story who had assumed the shape of a woman wrapped the song as a sari around herself and came to the husband's room just to create a feud between them. This is how the story and the song avenged themselves on the woman for having imprisoned them for so long. The moral of the story is if you try to gag one story another happens. The flames are anxious about the fate of the story and the song as well as eager to them. Stories must be told as well as be heard. The flames are happy to know that the new flame has asked them over to the place and welcomes them when they arrive shortly.

The Story however, is sluggish and spiritless since she has languished inside the woman for so long. She needs to be told and then retold by the ones who have heard it. The flames can hear the story but cannot pass it on. The flames are sympathetic but helpless. It is at this point that the man makes his dramatic entry. Suddenly emerging from behind the pillar he seizes the Story by her wrist. Though he has vowed not to have anything to do with story telling, he is a compulsive listener as well as teller of stories.

The Story is an inner compulsion to reveal and relate herself too. She is happy that she has found a listener who would listen to her all night long. But the Story is not content with being heard only without accompanying gestures. She must act out the parts too.

The man has a condition before he listens to the story. The story should be interesting enough to keep him awake and save him from dozing off. The story has the condition that she must be retold by the man since keeping it to himself would mean death to her. The prologue poses a question important to all littérateurs—How to ensure, for your self-respect, that what you produce is lively and interesting enough to keep people awake and not doze off like they do in the case of the playwrights plays.

The man is afraid of repeating the story since he does not want to incur the wrath of the audience, by disgusting them with his worthless plays and being cursed by them. The man finally announces the enactment of the story for fear that if he refuses to hear he may die as a consequence of falling asleep. He commands the musicians, the story and the song to commence.

What follows is the play during which the Man and the story remain on the stage at a distance hearing and watching the flames attentively.

ACT I

The story begins in the house of Appanna in the village where he had brought his wife Rani. As the story gives us a short introduction in the form of a prologue, we come to know that Appanna had married Rani many years ago, he has however brought her home after waiting for her to attain womanhood as the custom in the traditional Hindu families is. Since the boys and girls got married at a very early age, the girls lived with their parents till both the boy and girl reached puberty. The girl as in many Cinderella type stories is the only daughter of her parents; lovingly they called her Rani, the Queen.

To facilitate what has to happen later in the story, she has long tresses of hair falling to her anklets, when let loose and looking like a black cobra when tied up in a knot. The young man that Rani's parents find for her, is seemingly a suitable match, young and rich and above all with his parents dead. Rani should have no problems with such a man, what happens actually is just the opposite.

Two things must be noted in the story's narration of Rani's and Appanna's marriage, that none of the spouses has a real name. This is important, it signifies that it could be a story of any man or woman. The name Rani is just a nickname, which is used commonly for any woman who is dear to her husband or parents. Appanna could be any man. It is on the suggestion of the Man that he is named Appanna, for the story any common man would do, means it could be the story of any common man.

Appanna opens the lock of the front door and both he and Rani enter holding bundles in their hands. Rani has traveled with her husband to this house, which is going to be hers from now. Appanna does not waste any time in preliminaries and after being assured that all the bundles have come in, leaves Rani alone, locking the door from outside. He leaves instructions for the food to be kept ready for next days' lunch and departs.

Rani's looking out of the barred window is suggestive of her being a caged bird. The locked house is a metaphor of a woman's life in wedlock, the attitude of Appanna of man's chauvinism, his indifference and lack of concern.

It is in a dream that Rani is taken to her parents by an eagle. The idyllic surroundings of the garden where she is carried by the eagle are typical of all Indian folk-tales, across the seven seas, on the seventh island, in a magic garden.

Rani dreams of her parents, embraces them in her sleep and cries, the parents console her, reassure her that they would let her go. Every morning shatters that dream, Rani wakes up to the reality of her life, the routine morning washing and cooking, feeding her husband and being locked up again. A few points that the reader should make note of is the use of mime, use of dreams, the change of the story-teller, with Rani and the Story taking turns to relate how the things rolled by.

There are lovers of Rani too. The first is a stag with the golden antlers, who is really a prince. He calls out to Rani but she refuses to go.

Rani's life is monotonous. She cooks mechanically, feeds her husband but does not look forward to doing so. Her looking blankly into the open and her beginning to sob suggest her helplessness.

Two characters who play a major role in the play are introduced now. Kurudavva, the blind lady, mother of Kuppanna and a friend of Appanna's deceased mother and her son Kappanna. She considers it her moral duty to set things right in the house of her dead friend's son and does not listen to Kappanna. Kuruduvva, a traditional woman, would not have Appanna visit his concubine after getting married. She curses and abuses him; his treatment of Rani proves that he should have born a beast or a reptile. He got human birth by mistake she is convinced. Kappanna dissuades her from tangling with Appanna but she pays no heed.

The relationship between the mother and son is one of unaffected love and affection. Kurudavva has lost her sleep after hearing that Appanna is neglecting his wife for that harlot and Kappanna has got a backache carrying his mother to Appanna's house. When the son complains of a backache, Kurudavva immediately retorts saying that she does not need his help to move around since she was very familiar with every nook and corner of the village, where she had been brought up. She however, feels flattered and happy when Kappanna tells her that he always prayed to God Hanuman for more strength so that he could carry her around.

Kappanna is reluctant to approach the house. It is in the first place wrong to visit the house when Appanna wants no interaction with people; secondly the visit is futile since the front door is locked. Kurudavva wants to find out whether Appanna is keeping his wife with him, she has fears that he may have sent her back to her parents. Finally Kurudavva approaches Rani while Kappanna waits under a tree.

Kurudavva's conversation with Rani reveals her innate motherliness as a woman and Rani's desperation to be freed. She would like to back to her parents failing which she would prefer jumping into a well rather than live a life like that. Kurudavva's description of Rani is also typically Indian. She has her own stereo typed way of describing Rani's hibiscus like ears, skin like mango leaves and lips like rolls of Silk. She feels sorry that such beauty as Rani's is languishing in loneliness. She wants to know whether Rani has ever been touched by her husband but Rani has not been instructed in Man-Woman relationships by her mother.

Utterly moved by Rani's desperation, Kurudavva sends her son home to bring two pieces of root kept in a tin trunk in the cattle shed. Kurudavva's conversation with her son, who is sometimes obstinate, giving himself up to her coaxing and chiding, is full of tenderness and spontaneity. Kurudavva's love for her son is obvious in her words to Rani, *" My son Kappanna, Oh don't let his name mislead you. He isn't really dark. In fact when he was born, my husband said: such a fair child, lets call him fair one! I said: I don't know what fair means my blind eyes know only the dark: So let's call him the little parrot of my eyes, the dark one! And he became Kappanna"*

Kurudavva relates, while Kappanna is away to bring the roots, the story of her own life, how she was born blind and the events, which led to her almost impossible marriage.

She was born blind, she tells Rani, and her father found it almost impossible to find her a groom in spite of his best efforts. Then one day, as luck would have it, a mendicant came to their house when everybody was away. Kurudavva cooked the meal and served him with full devotion and reverence. The mendicant was so pleased with her that he gave her three pieces of a root, one small, the other mid-sized and the third large. He told her that if she could feed a

man one of these he would immediately fall in love with her and marry her. She should try the smallest first, then the middle sized, failing which she may try the largest.

Luckily a young man distantly related to the family came to their house. Shortly thereafter, Kurudavva ground one of the pieces and mixed it in his food. Lo! The man fell in love with her at once and married her within two days. The root worked miracles; the man never went back to his village. It took the plague to detach him from Kurudavva.

This is the root, which Kurudavva leaves with Rani to feed her husband on. She tells Rani to wait for the result after he has been fed the smallest root, he is bound to forget the harlot who has bewitched him and take Rani as his wife. To Rani's innocent remark that she was already his wife she has no answer. Moreover, it is time for her to go as Appanna has arrived. Kurudavva ties the bigger root in the corner of her sari and hurriedly departs. Appanna crosses her and immediately suspects something fishy. He approaches Kurudavva, trying to talk to her, dismisses her rudely as a meddler and remarks that he needs to keep a watchdog for the likes of her.

His conversation with Rani is equally matter of fact. He tells her that he would be lunching out. He orders Rani to give him a glass of milk. Rani notices the root while pouring the hot milk in the glass and hurriedly grinds it into paste and mixes it in the milk. Appana drinks the milk in one gulp and is ready to leave the house. While locking the house as is customary with him, he feels giddy and falls flat at the doorway. It is after Rani splashes some water on his face that he wakes up but only to leave as usual, locking her in the house.

There is another dream sequence. Rani dreams that a demon has locked her up in his castle. It then rains for seven days and seven nights. The city swells with water to reach the door of the castle, as earlier a lover comes to her in the form of a whale and entreats her to go with him.

It is now that Kurudavva comes with Kappana to know what has transpired between the husband and wife. There is an altercation between mother and son lending some innocent humour to the play. Kappana wary of going to Appanna's house had refused to accompany her. On hearing what Rani had to say about the effect of the root, Kurudavva persuades her to give her husband the larger root. She clears Rani's apprehension about the consequences the second root can have by telling her how the root was tried as miraculous.

Appanna has however, other plans. He brings a watchdog to keep the blind woman and her son away. Rani is reluctant to serve him the second root as the curry in which she has mixed it is red like blood and looks dangerous.

Rani's question to the Story whether she should feed him the curry shows, in the first place, the presence of the Story. Secondly it shows the power of the Story to change the future action in the play. This shall be discussed later.

Rani is faithful, virtuous and thoughtful. She would not like to do anything that would bring harm to her husband. She immediately checks herself. Confused and fearful she wants to spill the curry with the paste somewhere outside the house. She is scared that her husband would notice the red stain. On the suggestion of the Story, she pours the curry on the side of the anthill.

The watchdog has started barking. A King Cobra raises its hood and starts following Rani. Appanan's anxious to know why the dog is barking. He comes out and sees Rani returning from the anthill, this is one of the most dramatic scenes of the play. While the dog continues to bark, the King Cobra assumes the shape of Appanna and enters the house through the bedroom drain. He has drunk the root and fallen in love with Rani. Henceforth, Rani's lover, in the form of Appanna is called Naga.

ACT II

The first scene in this Act is one of tender love and care, of a loving man, full of compassion and softness against the harsh attitude of the man in the first Act.

The Naga woos Rani slowly but carefully. Rani who is used to a relationship which is limited to serving food asks if she could serve him something to eat and cannot believe him praise her without a motive. The Naga puts her at ease by first sitting at a distance from her and then enquiring about her, her longing for her parents and the harsh treatment that she has been getting.

The way Girish Karnad has made use of dramatic irony in this scene is worthy of praise. The Naga manipulates

conviction in Rani with subtlety and a sharp presence of mind. He condemns Appanna to be a rotten husband and talks about the menace of the dog barking incessantly, but covers up both with a genial smile.

Rani who has been holding back so much suddenly bursts into sobs and it is after Naga has assured her that he will arrange for her to go and meet her parents that he comes and sits by her. Bewildered by the sudden change in her husband, Rani does not suspect anything at all. She feels a kind of solace in putting her head on his shoulders. By the time Naga starts knowing about her family she has fallen asleep against his chest.

The long black hair of Rani is her premier possession. He unties her hair and wonder at their length and fragrance. They are long and thick and can cover both Rani and Naga. But he must relate them to his real self and hence his exclamation, "What beautiful long hair like dark black snake princesses"!

The Naga would assume his real shape every night from now on and slither away through the hole. Rani gets up to find her husband gone, is baffled but does not give much thought to it. It is only when Appanna comes back to his usual offensive mood that she starts thinking again. " Why is he, the one who was so concerned about her sleep being disturbed, barking of the dog, so indifferent gain? Why is her husband who was so tender at night so distant now?"

The mystery grows deeper for Rani. Was the last nights experience only a dream? It must have been since Appanna was behaving as he had done all these days.

But the next night the Naga visits her again. He has had a fight with the dog who was guarding the house, a tooth and nail fight where he ultimately vanquished and killed the dog. He has entered the house through a drain again washed himself of the blood stains and come to Rani. Rani is unsure of him, does he love her or does he not, will he be tender or will he be cruel in the morning.

It must be noted that whenever Naga starts a conversation with Rani, he wishes her to talk about herself, of her parents, of her childhood and what they used to talk about in their small family. Naga and Rani are now lovers in spite of the complaints and grievances, Rani does not want Naga to go. She has, for the first time opened up to her husband. She is perplexed, happy and sad at the same time. If she only was not dreaming last night, why did Appanna behave so rudely in the morning?

There is irony in her words, which must be kept in mind while discussing the method of dramatic irony and paradox used by Karnad. What can Rani say when her husband behaves like this, " you talk so nicely at night, but during the day I only have to open my mouth and you hiss like a stupid snake" During the conversation between Rani and Naga both of them are trying to outwit each other affectionately and playfully. Rani's desire for Naga becomes evident. She admits that she was desperate that he should come again. She finds herself discomforted by the riddles, which he seems to be spinning to her.

It is typical of the folk-tales of ancient civilizations and their myths and mythologies to accept the riddles of life, to live with what you accept to be your destiny, without questions, without doubts. But miraculous powers have loopholes too. The Naga may be able to take any form he likes but his reflection remains unchanged. During this scene, one of the most dramatic in the play, Rani while trying to rest in his arms suddenly notices the blood on his cheek and shoulders. He must have run into a barbed wire or thormy bush and immediately rushes to apply ointment on the wounds. She remembers that the ointment, which her mother gave her for hurts like these, was in the mirror box. But before Naga can shift so that Rani may not see his reflection in the mirror, Rani sees it and screams. There is a real cobra at the place where her husband was sitting but Naga again successfully brushes her fears aside. Rani is superstitious like most Indians and believes that even mentioning a Naga means bringing a calamity on the house.

She believes what the elders have told her, all superstitions and all traditional norms. She accepts whatever her husband says without doubt or debate. When Naga tells her, " I am afraid that is how it is going to be. Like that during the day, like this during the night, don't ask me why", she submits readily to it and promises never to ask why. The recurring image of the cobra lends to the play as a faint touch of terror and trepidation. When the cobra has coaxed Rani not to apply the ointment on his wounds, she suddenly looks into his eyes and is startled by the cobra-eyes. Even his blood is cold unlike the warm human blood.

But the fascinating power of the cobra can put you in a hypnotic state. Rani remembers what her father had to say

about the power of the cobra over the bird. The cobra simply looks into the birds' eyes. The bird stares and stares unable to move its eyes. It doesn't feel any fear either. It stands fascinated watching the changing colours of the cobra –eyes. It just stares, it's wings half opened as though it was sculpted in the sunlight"

This is how Rani sculpted in front of the Naga. Shorn of all fears and doubts, she is ready for the consummation of her marriage. The Naga strikes and swallows her; she is ecstatic through the experience. The joy of physical union with her husband is overwhelming, yet she has a sense of shame after it. What would her parents say of her if they knew of this act? Her husband was wicked he had enticed her into this with honey sweet words.

Rani has in her mind stigma attached to the notion of sex. When Naga suggests that her parents would be happy to see that she has followed in their footsteps, Rani angrily rebukes him. Her parents were in her eyes pure and would not indulge in acts, which are peculiar to goats. What follows is one of Karnad's most poetic speech. The Naga sings the lyric of the love act between the male and the female. Why do a man and women unite in body, what urges them to do so. How does nature make them submit to its ways willingly?

Sexual characteristic is peculiar of not one animal or man but common to all, geese, frogs tortoise, fox, crabs, ants, sharks, swallows all are urged by an inexplicable force. The female starts to smell like wet earth and stung by her smell the male starts looking for his queen. It could be frogs crocking in the pelting rain, it could be tortoise singing soundlessly in the dark or it could be the King Cobra frantically looking for his partner. Everything in nature is pulled by this strange power, which compels all towards the destined role of male and female.

The tiger bellows for his mate. The limestone caving from the womb of the heaven, the aerial roots of the banyan tree penetrating into the cracks of the earth, opening to receive them. Everywhere, when the time is ripe, the blossoming of the forest announces the meeting of the lovers, they cling together and then saturated with love, fall apart lazily fulfilled and complete.

Rani is bemused at this articulation. She is amazed that he who would refuse to utter a word during the day is so pleasantly vocal at night. She rebuffs him for acting the way he has. It is to the lizards and snakes that she refers again as beings who may act in that shameful way, but the human being should have a better sense of propriety.

Having awakened the desire in Rani, he has succeeded in making her accept that she will never ask questions about the reason for his visits either during the day or night. The mystery of Appanna inside the locked door, the emergence of the cobra from the drain, does not raise much doubt in the minds of Rani, Kurudavva or Kappanna. Rani is happy that her married life has started, so is Kurudavva. Kurudavva though is surprised to see the dead dog in front of the house (it was not there last night she says), discusses it with a small piece of advice to Rani. She should burn incense and keep it on the opening of the drain. Kappanna has seen a man inside it is Appanna, it looks like Appanna but how come the front door is locked? Nobody seems to mind if Rani and Appanna are together, living as husband and wife. Kurudavva tries to convince her son that it must be one of the games that couples play when they are making love. Kurudavva and Kappanna are convinced that it could be nobody but Appanna.

The mother and the son are returning when suddenly Kappanna stands frozen to the ground. He has seen 'her' again. Neither of them knows who she is but if she is not a village girl, who, according to Kurudavva would not dare to step out at that deadly hour of the night, who is she?

Kurudavva fears that whatever it be, is certainly taking the mother and son apart. Kappanma has seen her coming out of the haunted well, he has seen her just now stepping out of the cemetery, waving and smiling at him.

It must then be either a spirit or an ogress. It is as difficult for Kappanna to describe who she is, as it is for Kurudavva to understand it. Arguing, the mother and son exit. The night is gone and it is time for Appanna to come home.

Appanna's discovery of the death of the dog he had bought for fifty rupees, no mean amount by any standard, shocks him. It was dog, which had once cornered a cheetah, who could have killed it? The thought that immediately satisfies Appanna is that it must have been attacked by a cobra whom it must have sensed and then given a fight.

There is an eeriness in Rani's realization that there are no marks of the wounds she had noticed on her husbands chest and shoulders the previous night but Rani continues to cook the meal for him as usual, casting away doubts and fears. Appanna after attending to the job of finding an untouchable to bury the dog's carcass proceeds to eat, lock the door and go.

What the Story narrates at this juncture of the play is of utmost importance for understanding the play.

Angered by the death of the dog, Appanna brings a mongoose; he would be a more formidable enemy for the snake. But the very next day the mongoose too is found dead. It is evident however, by the bits of snakeskin in its mouth and the bits of flesh in its claws that it had given a tougher fight to the cobra.

Rani fainted when she saw the dead mongoose. Why did she faint? Was it only a feeling of aversion and fear that repelled her or was it something beyond that?

It is of significance that Rani pines for Naga when he does not come for the next fifteen days. She cries, wails and longs for him and when he comes at last she only tends and caresses him. She does not question him about the wounds, only applies ointment. She wishes to raise no questions. She only wants him to be there.

Needless to say when her husband came during the day, says the Story, there were no scars on the body.

The Story and the flames though not the dramatic persona per se, remain an integral part of the play. The Story takes over and completes Rani's story.

There is a kind of celebration of Rani's and Naga's love in the following scene.

The darkness, which covers the stage, will soon be lit, with lamps, by Rani. There is a kind of reveling in love- the fragrance of the flowers, in the blossoming of the night queen. Fragrance announces the arrival of the lover. The entire house opens to welcome him. It sets every fibre in Rani's body on fire; she waits for him to come. The anticipation of the meeting is itself loaded with ecstasy, too heavy for her to describe.

The flames surround them, while Rani and Naga embrace. (The song of the Flames will be dealt with later in the book). Naga and Rani are seeing lying in bed, Naga affectionately playing with her hair, the scene seems to be repeated every night. After Rani awaits his arrival with the afternoon and evening lingering on till darkness spreads, sending the birds and cattle home. It is then the time for Naga to come to her. Only one fear troubles her every evening, will he come or not?

It is in this complacent and happy mood that Rani shares her secret with Naga, the secret that she has guarded for all these months. It has dispelled all doubts from her mind, the doubts that made her uneasy while Naga visited her very night. Were their meetings real or was it simply a fantasy, a figment of her mind. Her pregnancy has however, reassured her, it was no make believe, it was real, she was now going to be the mother of his child, it should have made her happy but since she was not sure how he would react, she had kept it from him so far. Rani fondly accuses him of being most unpredictable, she is never sure what would please or enrage him.

Naga is at a loss. He does not know how to react since he knows what is going to befall Rani after the disclosure of her pregnancy. He wants her not to disclose this for as long as possible. Naga has a premonition of something deadly since he knows the truth of which Rani is oblivious.

Rani's long speech about her situation sums up the predicament in which she is placed. The two sentences that she has heard so far from Appanna and Naga are, ' Don't ask questions' and ' Do as you are told'. She has complied with both. ' Why do you change like a chameleon? She asks. His embraces at night, his indifference at day, his forbidding her to ask for any explanations, all this is becoming an enigma. The whole thing puzzles her; she suffers at the loss of grasp about what she knows nothing. The ignorance becomes burdensome to her. Rani for the first time asserts her right to know.

Naga is afflicted by his knowledge of both what has been and what may be. Naga wants to say something but is stopped by the knowledge of what he foresees.

In the scene where day is sharply contrasted with night, Appanna's treatment of Rani is foiled against Naga's care of her. Naga has no consolation or advice to offer to Rani, he can simply stare blankly when she speaks of her desperation. She sees him unhappy and uncommitted and feels helpless. She wishes to abort the child, but knows that it is impossible; she has been pregnant for five months now.

Naga's sadness at the grim situation, his helplessness stands in sharp contrast to Appanna's treatment of Rani in the same scene. Rani is abused and assaulted by Appanna for betraying him, she has found a lover inspite of the lock, she had blackened his face.

While Rani suffers the physical and verbal assault by Appanna, Naga watches helplessly, unable to rescue or help Rani as she writhes in pain. He watches Appanna drag Rani outside the house, he is about to hit her with a big stone but Naga averts it by moving towards them hissing menacingly. Diverted by the Naga, Appanna aims the stone at him, Naga promptly escapes into the anthill giving Rani an opportunity to escape. She runs into the house, locks herself up while Appanna is left banging at the door.

The change between Appanna's exits and Naga's entrance is managed with great dexterity by Karnad. The moment Appanna leaves, warning and threatening Rani of dire consequences, she will have to face when he has reported the matter to the village elders, the Naga enters counseling and consoling her. Perplexed and bewildered, she complains, but has no choice except to depend on him and believe him, to do what he says.

Naga advises Rani to go through the snake ordeal to prove her innocence in front of the village elders. He tells her that a King Cobra lives in the ant hill near by- she should agree to pull the King Cobra out and take the oath of chastity on the cobra. She is dead scared of this.

There is no way to avert Rani's fate. She must undergo the test and speak the truth. What truth should Rani speak; it is a dilemma as to what the truth is. To her question 'what is the truth, what is the fact that she must tell the elders when her husband forgets his nights during the daytime and daytime during the nights? Naga philosophically replies that this is what she is destined to do so.

After assuring her that all will be well for her the next day and Rani shall get what she wanted, Naga prefers to go.

In Rani's address to Naga, she expresses her fears not for herself but for him. She is worried not so much about her own suffering or what could be her own death but what awaits them, whether they will continue to meet, as they have been doing, in the future. What shall make him her slave? Why is his heart hammering? Why does it flutter like a bird if he is sure that nothing untoward is going to happen?

Her words speak of the separation that is lurking somewhere in the future. Her premonition 'that tomorrow won't be a day like any other' is ironically truer for Naga than herself. There is hidden pain in her feeling that Naga will no more be able to love her. She desperately wishes him to stay. There is an uncanny unsurety about the future; she would not let him go lest she lose him. While Rani is lost in her thoughts, Naga has left.

The playwright's comments that anew thought has occurred to her and she rushes to the bathroom brings many thought s to the readers mind. We shall discuss these later.

The stage suddenly turns into the village square where crowds have gathered to witness the trial of Rani. The three elders who act as judiciary in this case take seats near the anthill.

The elders of the village are sober, moderate in their speech, considerate in their treatment; they are bound by their position to be just without being harsh. They are bound morally to let Rani speak in her defence. They recoil from the thought of hooliganism and are wary of the crowds that gather in their inquisitiveness, which is not too healthy.

Appanna has told them that he has not touched his wife since the day of their marriage; he has announced publicly that his wife has lost chastity and that she has conceived by another man. As elders of the village they have no choice but to judge her, to condemn or acquit her.

The traditional way of proving one's innocence has been to take an oath while holding a red-hot iron in hand or sometimes if the accused so desired by putting the hand in boiling oil. Rani, has however, chosen to take oath on the cobra. The elders try their best to dissuade her from taking this risk. If the cobra bites her she will lose not only her own but also the life of her unborn child, committing the sin of killing her own child. The village community will automatically become a party to the sin.

A sin, may as a result, visit the whole village. Rani sticks to her decision of swearing by the King Cobra but recoils at the sight of him when he emerges out of the anthill. She is afraid, but must confess before the elders and accept the punishment thereafter.

Rani's denial of having committed any wrong enrages the elders. The elders, it is clear have a feeling of compassion for Rani, they are sorry to see a youth wasted for a small error. They give her the choice to either confess or go through the ordeal. They don't mind if she reverts to the ordeals suggested earlier.

Rani to is afraid to touch the cobra; she prepares herself to take the oath on the red-hot iron. The reaction of the village people should be noticed as it speaks of their intention and mentality, whereas Appanna is revolted by the elder's consideration towards Rani. The crowd lets out a roar of disappointment at having lost the opportunity to watch the grim spectacle of Rani's encounter with the cobra. The elders are the only ones who heave a sigh of relief; they have been saved from the guilt of taking Rani's life.

It is when the iron is about to be heated for the ordeal that Kurudavva suddenly enters the scene. She is looking for her son, who she says has 'melted' away.

A Yaksha woman or a snake woman, may be, had come to their house, she took Kappanna away. Kappanna had been talking about this temptress but Kurudavva had paid no heed. And now he was gone as he had feared and Kurudavva wandered looking for him. The village folk think her mad, but she is not mad she tells Rani. She knew he would not come back but could not resist herself from looking for him. The elders in the meantime keep asking Rani to go through the ordeal.

Rani now poses a question to the Story. Why should Kurudavva suffer like this? This and the second question' So desires reach out from other world right into our beds?, are the questions which the play raises. The confession that Rani makes with her hand on the cobra has many meanings, subtle and hidden. She has, she says, touched only two males after her marriage, Appanna and the cobra. The scene where the cobra slides over her shoulders and spreads his hood is one of the most spectacular in the play. The people are dumbfounded by the docility of the cobra, Rani is surely a Goddess, an incarnation of purity who should be worshipped. The crowd falls at her feet. She is lifted into the palanquin, chastity has been vindicated, music must be played to rejoice and Thank God for such a glorious woman.

Appanna and Rani are carried to their house in the palanquin. Rani is Goddess incarnate, the elders tell Appanna and congratulate him on being the instrument of revealing such an incarnation. They advise Appanna to respect and revere her and not treat her badly.

Appanna left alone with Rani after the crowd has dispersed doesn't know how to react, failing to understand, confounded by the events, he falls at her feet. He throws away the lock. The Story now tells the rest of Rani's story, which was a happy one. She not only has a servant to draw water for her but Appanna's concubine, who witnessed the miracle of the cobra ordeal becomes a menial in their house. Everybody is overawed by Rani's purity. Rani gave birth to a beautiful child and lived in happiness with her husband and child.

But as the story is relating this part, the flames create a hubbub. It is time for them to leave as the morning is coming spreading light. It is time for them to leave and would not wait for the story to conclude.

The man and the Story are left to assess the story that has been unfolded. The man is not satisfied with it; he finds too many loop holes in it. Kurudavva's story is for example incomplete so is Rani's, Appanna's and Naga's in a sense. Rani and Appanna are living with a doubt in their mind, Naga with a sense of remorse. Though the play had a happy ending in the usual sense of the term, none of the characters is satisfied with the justice meted out to him or her.

Rani must obviously have realized that Appanna was a different man than the one who had given her a son. Appanna knows that the son he is rearing up as his own is not his, he has been trapped, condemned by his community where-as Rani is revered as a Goddess. Naga is the one who is most unhappy, cast away as nobody after giving Rani all she has.

The cobra's death by being entangled in the long tresses of Rani's hair is the end of his life's tragedy. He however, gets his rightful place after his death. He is to be cremated after his death with all rites and rituals and his pyre is to be lit by their son, his own son. But the cobra has left his heir too whom Rani will nurture in her hair, which she calls the symbol of her wedded bliss. Rani is the wife of Appanna and Naga and has begotten sons to both.

The flames are non-dispersing to their homes; light of the morning is spreading. The man has been able to keep awake the whole night. He is saved; he must thank the audience for helping him do so. Ho bows to them and leaves.

Metamorphosis and Shape Shifting: Naga Mandala

Makarand R. Paranjape explores in his essay " Metamorphosis as Metaphor: Shape Shifting in Girish Karnad's Plays", the importance of this device, as used by the writer, in his works. Written in the form of a play, Paranjape,

gives us not only the meaning of Shape Shifting but also deals with its psychological implications. Paranjape poses questions and then answers them, giving a clear-cut picture of the features and method of application. The following are some of the important questions raised:

Q *1: D*efine what shape shifting is.

Ans 1: Shape shifting is the term cultural anthropologists and folklorists: use to describe the transformations that are so common in the myths and folklore of most cultures. You know, like when a hen a plant becomes an animal or when a woman becomes a bird, or when a statue becomes a man, or when a dead person becomes alive, or when person becomes someone else by changing shape or form in any way. You know how the prince became a frog and then became a prince again when he was kissed by the princess. Or the story of the beauty and the beast. Or how Cinderella's fairy godmother made a fine carriage out of a pumpkin, or the legend of the werewolf... Our own epics, *puranas,* and folk tales are also full of examples of shape shifting. No wonder, Karnad draws upon such resources in his plays. *Hayavadana,* as we know, is based on a story from the *Vetal Panchavimshati* and Somdeva's *Brihatkatha Saritsagar,* which were also used by Thomas Mann in a story. And. *Naga-Mandala, is* based on a couple of folk tales which A.K. Ramaujan told Karnad.

Q 2*: Is* shape shifting the same across cultures or is it different?

Ans 2. Earlier, our observations hinted at a universal cultural tendency of shape shifting. But on closer thinking, we find that in shape shifting, to use a Judeo-Christian terminology, *is* something distinctly pagan, even unchristian. In traditional Christian belief, only the Devil had this power and therefore shape shifters were usually evil, like werewolfs, witches, *or* vampires. Abrahamic religious traditions, it would appear, were pretty literal minded, allergic to metaphor. Legitimate and "good" shape shifting was, of course, reserved only for Christ, who became man though he was the Son of God, and who later came back to life after being crucified. We Hindus, though, have no such difficulties or squeamishness about shape shifting.

Q 3: But what does shape shifting represent? What does it mean? What are its functions?

Ans. 3: We have seen that shape shifting is a universal motif, which does not, however, have a uniform significance. In other words, its meanings and functions change depending on the context.

Q 4: But surely there must be an underlying purpose.

Ans. 4: It seems to me that shape shifting is a way of exploring similarity and difference.

Q 5: So far we've only considered the meanings and implications of shape shitting, but what about its necessary preconditions and consequences

Ans. 5: Shape shifting, after all, isn't a *normal,* ordinary, routine occurrence, no matter how prevalent it is in folklore and myth. It's common only in a certain kind of literature.

Q 6: You mean you won't find it in the so-called "realistic" or "naturalistic" mode?

Ans.6: Precisely. Shape shifting only takes place in nonrealistic fantasies, fables, myths, or folk tales. It is, moreover, associated with the supernatural. The crossing of boundaries, after all, is a dangerous, even magical event. It needs special powers and might have unpleasant consequences. That's why, in Karnad's plays, shape shifting often has disastrous consequences. It might end in death, destruction, or unhappiness. It's as if he who transgresses must pay the price, like Naga in *Naga-Mandala* who must die once his shape shifting is found out. Yes, shape shifting only takes place under unusual circumstances and at the behest of a powerful person or spell. In *Hayaiwdana,* Padmini seeks a boon from the Goddess in order to transpose the heads. In *Tughlaq,* the Emperor uses the incredible concentration of power in his hands to effect a change in the capital. And in *Naga-Niandala* the shape occurs only after Naga has been affected by the old woman's magic potion. And in each of these cases, there is an unforeseen, unfortunate, even tragic outcome of the shape shifting.

Q 7. How does Karnad make this message relevant to the modern reader?

Ans.7: That, I think, is the modern aspect of Karnad's plays. The artifice of shape shifting is traditional, ritualistic,

mythical, but the outcome is tragic in a modem sense., It reveals the characters' loneliness, isolation, frustration, or self-knowledge-all achieved at a very heavy price. Some critics have accused Karnad of being a revivalist or a purveyor of gimmicks. They allege that the audience he has in mind is Western. Only will they be charmed by his use of, myth and ritual, the argument goes. But I think we have seen that the use of myth is not merely a gimmick or a ritual or even merely a structural device. It is a means of exploring a modem outcome of traditional situation. Thus, Karnad' ' s plays too work out the dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity, which is a central theme in contemporary Indian society and literature.

Q 8. How does Shape Shifting work in Karnad's plays? Is it instrumental to some illumination in Karnad's characters?

Ans.8 : After having looked at the concept in general, let's take a quick look at how it works in the plays. Take *Hayavavadana.* The question is of completion. What is a complete human being? Also, is the head more powerful than the body? The answer in the end is, yes, the head is more powerful than the body-if you have the head of a horse, you'll end up as a horse. Instead of a constant tension between a man and horse, it's better to be just a horse, perhaps. But also that there's no perfect being possible. For a human being, that is, it's better to live with a constant and opposing tension rather than try to resolve it through some impossible hankering after perfection. Kapila's head on Devadatta's body, therefore, results not in perfection, but in failure in the end. In *Tughlaq* the major example of shape shifting is the attempt to change the capital to Daulatabad. What's being tried is to turn Daulatabad into Delhi. The attempt, of course, fails. Why? Because there's a fundamental difference between illusion and transformation. In the former, one thing pretends to be another; in the latter, one thing becomes another. *Tughlaq* is a play full of dissimulations, illusions and lies. In fact, the whole play is about lies mid hypocrisies. This is the dominant theme, illustrating the moral decline of a polity, so apt in our own times. No wonder, the play abounds in metaphors from theatre as some critics have pointed out at great length. Tughlaq himself is a great role player; in Aziz he finds his double. No wonder, Aziz kills Ghias-ud-din and pretends to be him. Daulatabad cannot succeed in being Delhi because it is blessed not by a holy man but by a murderer masquerading as a holy man. In *Tughlaq,* then, shape shifting does not really take place, instead, there is merely "acting," dissimulation, pretence and betrayal.

Q 9. How does Karnad use this device in Naga Manadala?

Ans.9 *Naga-Mandala* (1986) has several examples. The main one, of course, is the cobra assuming the form of Appanna to make love to Rani. But earlier, the flames take on human shapes to gossip at the temple after they've been "put out" in the houses. In the New Flame's story of the old woman who knew a story and a song, the story becomes a young woman and the song, a sari. Wearing the sari, the story walks out of the old woman's house. The point is that stories mustn't be stingily confined to oneself as the old woman did. As Flame I puts it, "So if you try to gag one story, another happens." And later, the woman Rani, after her cobra ordeal, is apotheosized into a living goddess, an extraordinary woman.

Characterization in Karnad's Naga Mandala

Delineation of characters in literature is inherently related to the theme of the play. A play like Hamlet can indulge in the intricacies and complexities of Hamlet's mind, a play like Tughlaq, by Karnad can delve into the complexities and dilemma of Tughlaq's mind. But Naga Mandala is a story of a different kind. The bare structure of the story is a triangle with Rani, Appanna and Naga forming the three angles. The story is to be seen from the point of view of the three, the wife, the husband and the lover. The husband and the lover could be either one or split into two as in the case of Rani.

Rani is described as any woman, named Rani simply as a term of affection by her parents, similarly Appanna is any man, any man in the traditional patriarchal society. Rani is a conventional wife, cooking for her husband, following his instructions, raising no questions, either of her rights or of his life outside as well as inside the house.

Naga is the symbol of male virility, of man the wooer, the lover who expects no jobs done and is chivalrous enough to withdraw when Rani becomes the wife-mother in home.

Kurudava and Kappanna represent the mother and son relationship. Kurudavva is a mother not only to Kappanna but to Rani as well. Kappanna is the son who relinquishes his filial duty to fulfill a dream he has been dreaming for long.

Such a play, therefore, does not necessitate a development in the character nor do the characters require complexity

and transformation, the denoument at the end of the play does not come with unraveling but with a settlement of matters within the known framework.

The characters in Naga Mandala are, therefore, stock characters- stereotyped and known to the audience. The play is allegorical, not in the rigid but milder sense—the characters stand for many things at the same time and even the story does not have an end- that there is a possibility of many ends to the story- hints at the broader perspective, not involving one life and character on clear cut design, life is continually being sculpted, the turn of events is not so significant in a life where re-conciliation with the absurdity of what happens is inevitable. In such a scenario we shall try to probe into the characters of the play.

Rani and Appanna

Rani is, on the surface, an ordinary Indian adolescent girl, married to man found suitable by virtue of being young and rich. Rani's life will be, they expect, smooth since Appanna has no encumbrances, not even old parents to look after since they are already dead. Rani is however, fated otherwise. Appanna has a concubine whom he meets every night leaving Rani alone in the house. He ensures that Rani is not able to have any contact with anybody at all. His locking the door when he is away establishes two things at the same time, namely, his distrust of Rani and his fear of being exposed if Rani shared her thoughts with somebody.

Brought up in a typical patriarchal set up, Appanna has no doubts about her duty as a wife. He does not hesitate to abuse or assault her at the slightest provocation. That Karnad has attempted a split, physically, in the husband and the love is a different manner, in a more complex play, the husband could be ardent at night, an autocratic male during the day.

Rani's predicament reflects the human need especially that of a woman to live by fiction and half-truths. The juxtaposition of love and marriage against one another, instead of merging into one, brings out the contrast between life as women live it, in Indian homes and their dreams, which they nurture in their hearts, dreaming and fantasizing of love and fulfilment. This can be studied as an offshoot of the problem of alienation in man.

The Problem of Alienation

The problem of alienation is brilliantly delineated by Norman O. Brown, a psychoanalyst, in his L*ife against Death.* He states that Apollo and Dionysus stand for self-alienation and self-unification respectively. Once man enjoyed Dionysian ego but he lost it in the process of civilization in his great endeavour to prove to himself that he is superior to all other beings in Nature. And his mind started working independent of his body. This led to the emergence of Apollonian ego where the feelings of his mind do not spread through his body and where the sensations of his body do not reach his mind. This makes his personality and his life incomplete. Then he strives to overcome this and feels frustrated at his failure. *Hayavadana* illustrates this crisis of mankind very effectively. And Karnad exploits *Yakshgana* , the folk theatre of Karnataka, very cleverly to bring out this theme.

In Naga Mandala, the alienation of the social image and personal desire are evidently clear in Appanna. He is, at first, as per the norms of Hindu marriages, overbearing, indifferent and callous to Rani. He is the lord of the house whom the wife is obliged to serve. A relationship of the husband, the master and the wife, the supplicant, is complete. At the end, he himself supplicates at Rani's feet but not out of any inner conviction or change but simply out of a social necessity, which is stronger than him. His submission to all Rani's dictates- hidden in soft words lead more to an inner defeat than awakening or realization.

The solution to Appanna's and Rani's problem is not a final solution. There is a change in the things as thy stand, the morbidity of the culture remains, the change in Appanna's attitude being a superficial one, only skin deep.

Rani has successfully come out of the snake ordeal and the Elders congratulate him on being the chosen one for divine proclamation, that of Rani being chaste and hence a Goddess. Chastity is the acid test of a woman's nearness to a Godly perfection and Rani's chastity has been proven beyond doubt. Even the Naga has corroborated the fact, he has not only let her touch him but has come and danced on her shoulders. The irony of Rani's words that she touched only two male in married her life, Appanna and Naga might be lost on the Elders and the villagers but not on the audience.

Irony can be felt also in the relationship between Appanna and Rani towards the end of the play. Kuradavva, Naga as well as the Elders have, in the true sense, failed to bring harmony in the marital life of the couple. Gender inequality

remains, it is only reversed, this uncommon situation and role reversal leads not to quietude and harmony but doubts in the minds of both. Rani tries to be timid and regimented but the espousals remain jinxed. The truth seems to spill out of the seeming tranquility. Rani and Appanna are reconciled to fate, to the social dictates and the matrimonial demands, but doubts keep lurking in their minds.

The concept of ritualistic purity of the metaphysical tradition has structured the hierarchical line up of the Gods at the top, men below and women still underneath. It is only after Rani is given the status of a Goddess that she is placed above Appanna instead of below him.

Rani, in spite of the treatment meted out to her by Appanna hesitates to feed him on the aphrodisiac root, which looks dangerous to her. She refrains from doing what could perhaps make him her slave. Appanna exercises total supremacy over her while he arrogates to himself the power of spending nights with another woman. She is supposed never to ask questions or seek explanations. No wonder, she does not confront Naga with any questions.

Rani's mind is full of fears about sex. She has been brought up to think of sex as morbid and sinful. She accused Naga who comes to her as Appanna of having trapped her with honeyed words, she wonders what her parents would think of her if they came to know. Naga has to give her a whole discourse on the inherent nature of every living being, his desire for union with the opposite sex.

Rani's longing for her parents' affection shows not only her loneliness but need for care and love. She is so far innocent of the erotic and physical desires. The child in Rani dreams of eagles, whales and stags who would come and rescue her. After she has given Appanna the glass of milk with the smallest root and he suddenly collapses, she is distraught at the thought of something happening to him. Fearful as a child she brings water and splashes it over his face. After Appanna regains his consciousness, he pushes her in and locks her as usual. She in her dreams recounts the story, which might have been told to her as a child.

So the demon locks her up in his castle. Then it rains for seven days and seven nights. It pours. The sea floods the city. The waters break down the doors of the castle. Then a big whale comes to Rani and says: 'Come Rani , let us go'

Rani's parents are dear to her, the only ones she can rely upon. It should be noted that the Eagle, in the beginning of the play as well as Naga towards the middle woo her with a promise of taking her to her parents.

The eagle promises Rani, ' Beyond the Seven Seas and the Seven Isles, on the seventh island is a magic garden and in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under the tree your parents wait for you. In this case Rani does not refuse the eagle. She is on the other hand impatient to be carried to them and she is carried across the seven seas. Reassured by her parents, Rani sleeps a comfortable sleep.

The stag with the golden antlers promises her freedom from Appanna. But Rani refuses to go, thought the stag vouches that he is not a stag but a prince. The point to be noted is that Rani does not only want a release, she would venture out of Appanna's house only if she is taken to her parents.

Rani is a dreamer with language pouring out from her heart, rhythmic and soft, proverbial at times with delicate nuances, which convey her feelings.

Appanna offers little by way of speech. A male chauvinist he has no will to communicate with any one. His only words to Rani are in the form of instructions. When angry he hurls abuses at her, harlot and slut are followed by accusing her of having a lover who has bloated her tummy.

Rani is concerned about Naga's wounds and applies ointment on him when he kills the dog and then the mongoose, which have been brought by Appanna to keep intruders at bay.

Though full of inhibitions in the beginning, Rani starts enjoying her wedded bliss with Naga, later waiting for Naga to come, she looks for the signs of the approaching night. She is afraid, lest the night queen bush does not blossom. The symbolic meaning and suggestion of the visit of the animals from the non-human world and the participation of flowers suggests the flowering of a woman, the contentment of both man and woman in making love.

Rani is an ardent lover—as eager to love as to be loved. Her complains to Naga about his fifteen day absence and her fear that he may never return, when he prepares to leave on her announcing her pregnancy, show her deep seated

fears and loneliness. Rani's final decision to cremate the King Cobra with all rituals and with their son giving fire to him speaks of her love and gratitude to Naga.

A devoted wife and lover, she is also an affectionate daughter and a good friend. She does not forget Kurudavva's gift and responds to her when she is herself passing through the ordeal at the end.

She has imagination as well as compassion, she is dutiful and reveres those older to her, be it Kurudavva or the Elders. The anguish in her heart of loving the King Cobra persists in her heart, though she has prepared herself to live in conjugal harmony with Appanna. It is as difficult for her to figure out the reasons for Appanna's behaviour at the end as it was in the beginning.

Appanna is equally perplexed but he has changed not by any feeling of remorse but simply by the dictates of a superior power.

Prologue: Flames and the Story

The tradition of prologue is old, used by some classical Greek dramatists and by Kalidasa in Shakuntala, it was later used by Goethe in his play *Faust*. The use of prologue in this play is not an innovation but the way it is used by him is certainly innovative.

The role of the Man as a playwright who is under a curse, is Karnad's reflection on the fate of the writer who yarns stories, puts them up for the people to entertain them. Failing to produce something that could entertain he ends up getting the curses of men. He simply explains why he is there at that unearthly hour.

The more important role in the play is assigned to the Flames and the Story. It was said in the folk/traditional stories that when the oil lamps were put off for the night, the Flames having retired for the day, would assemble at a secluded spot to relate whatever happened in the households where they were lit in the evening. The conversation of the Flames, their eagerness to hear and tell their stories, their giggles and jokes, give us a glimpse of the female-world. They neither condemn nor philosophise, they simply amuse themselves in a mood of abandonment, talking of the erotic, the sex lives of the Master and Mistress. Their pleasure is however, well intended, not malicious. It is lightly subvertive.

The Flames discuss their Masters sometimes ironically, attacking them, at other times boasting of their household style. Flame One's master is a miser, a skinflint who does not trust his wife with the household expenses. The Husband's accusation of the wife being extravagant is a common one. The incident is an example of how finance is controlled by men in many Indian Households. The Flames relish telling tales, savouring every bit of it. The Flames leave no chance of tearing their Masters to pieces, they are equally eager to establish their superiority over each other. Flame 2 turns up her nose at the mention of Kushi oil, Castor oil and Peanut oil. Her family comes from the coasts, she boasts, and won't touch anything but coconut oil.

Every Flame has a different story. Flame 4 was tied to a household where the old, ailing mother of the Master kept awake till late in the night. The house was full of stink, cough and phlegm. The old woman had died the previous day and the Flame was put off early as the husband wanted to be with his young and juicy wife. Flame 3 relates her part with a slight feeling of disgust. Her Master would feast on his wife limb by limb, exasperating the Flame with scenes, which were better left to the dark.

The new Flames' story is more relevant to the play—it is she who announces not only the coming of the Story but also connects the whole concept of story telling. The Man is to be punished for the poor plays he wrote, the old woman who kept the Story and the Song captives within her for stifling and suffocating the story. The story took her revenge upon her by escaping from her mouth and also by maliciously creating a feud in the family. This is how a story, or a woman could avenge herself if she was locked for too long.

The moral is, " If you try to gag a story another happens' The Story arrives with the Song, the Story assuming the form of a woman, the song that of her Saree, the Story is the main thing, the Song, the style, the embellishment.

The Story is sad at first. 'Even if he relates the story to the Flames, it won't be passed to others. Since stories must be passed on-she is happy that the Man will listen to her story- as he can pass it on. She not only wants to relate her story, she would act out the parts as well, to make it more interesting. She assures others that hers will be a story of class, interesting enough to hold his attention through the night. Both the Story as well as the man will profit from it, the man will keep awake and the Story will have somebody to pass it on to.

The Story begins the narration and participates in the furtherance through out. As in the beginning, so at the end, the Man, the Story and Flames intervene and make suggestions regarding the progress and end of the story.

Naga the Lover

Naga represents sacred images in Indian mythology. In South India it has particularly important place in the Hindu households where 'special place is reserved amongst the groves for it'

Cobra is the symbol of masculine strength and virility. It is worshipped as such, Shiva- Linga which represents man's ability to procreate through women is at once the giver of fertility as well as provide sense of self to the woman.

That the earlier human form was one complete whole, which was later, spilt into male and female is retold in our mythology as well.

Naga is in this play masculinity minus chauvinism. Naga is not merely a totem. Transforming himself into the person of Appanna, he becomes completely human, not only physically but emotionally as well.

The cobra is invested with many powers, so the story tells us. It can assume any shape. After Rani has poured the curry with the aphrodisiac roots on the anthill, the cobra consumes it and at once falls in love with Rani and follows her to the house.

He sees contempt in Appanna's behaviour with Rani, stung by her charm and touched by her plight he simply watches her. Even when he moves near her he simply caresses her. Naga's attempt to make her comfortable in their first meeting reveals him as a man in whom physical desire follows love. He understands women psychology and allows her to speak of her parents and childhood- the preliminaries of courtship are performed and observed with chivalry and decorum.

His attraction to Rani is accompanied by his sympathy for her. He calls Appanna a rotten husband but Rani fails to catch the meaning of it. Rani is bewildered not so much by his presence at night as by his treatment of her during day. She who is used to serving Appanna only food and complying with his orders, is surprised by the loving words of Naga, you are beautiful; 'Poor thing', 'Did it hurt? Are addresses, which perplex her rather than relieve her.

Naga's insight in to her mind unveils the woman in Rani. She starts sobbing when he asks her about her parents and promises to arrange a meeting with them.

Naga is clever at covering up the lapses in his speech. He at once covers himself up when Rani is surprised at his concern about the barking of the dog when he had himself brought it.

He removes all Rani's fears by telling her that he was not a mongoose or a hawk but does not refer to a snake. That he sees Rani as a snake lover is clear in some of the dialogues and speeches he delivers.

After Rani has fallen asleep against his chest, he admires her beauty, ' what beautiful long hair! Like dark black snake princesses! Says he; once again reminding us that he is Naga the cobra and not Appanna the man.

The riddles that Naga spins for Rani are spun cleverly by him. He poses questions to Rani, asks for her choice, whether he should visit her during the day or night and makes her feel helpless. She loves to have him with her, awaits him every night and the fifteen days when he does not come after killing the mongoose, she is miserable. Trusting him more now than before she asks him ' Why do you tease me like this?'

He successfully abolishes all her fears after she sees his real reflection in the mirror box. He moves with lightning speed and shuts the mirror-box.

His adroit handling of the situation confirms that he is not simple and naïve but clever. Naga knows the consequences of his identity being disclosed to Rani. She shudders at the very mention of the word cobra and tells Naga, ' Don't mention it. They say that of you mention it by name at night, it come into the house.' She continues to express her fears of a thing whose very name is unmentionable. The simile of the bird and the snake where the snake blinds the bird and swallows it suggests that rani's chastity may be vitiated in the same manner. Naga arouses the sexuality of Rani by his long poetic speech on the fulfillment of man and woman through their union. It is he who makes her enjoy her sexuality, which she later calls the ' wedded bliss of her life'

Naga has asked her not to ask questions as Appanna had done but Rani would agree to do it willingly in his case, not

because of fear but because she would ask him for that pleasure again. That Naga is not a dream or a fantasy is proved to Rani when she conceives. But the disparate behaviour of Appanna during the day and night still disturbs her.

In spite of his love for Rani, Naga it seems cannot save her either from the shame or the ordeal she has to undergo and suffer. But he does contrive to not only save her dignity but also establish her as a Goddess incarnate.

He persuades her to choose the snake ordeal instead of the hot-iron or burning oil test and helps her regain not only her reputation but also a happy home with an obedient husband and a lovely child. It is surprising thought that whereas Naga's reflection remains that of a snake, his begotten son is human and not a reptile.

Naga knows that destiny cannot be changed nor can the social norms. The judgement by the Elders cannot be avoided or questioned nor the fate averted. Torn between anguish, anger, jealousy and his love of Rani, he wavers between the temptation to kill her and surrender and sacrifice himself for love.

The whole scene needs a close study for a clear appraisal of Naga's role in the play.

Why should I not take a look? I have given her everything. Her husband. Her child. Her home. Even her maid. She must be happy. But I haven't seen her… It is night. She will be asleep. This is the right time to visit her. The familiar road. AT the familiar hour.(laughs) Hard to believe now I was so besotted with her.

Rani! My Queen!. The fragrance of my nights!. The blossom of my dreams! In another mans' arms?

Why shouldn't I kill her? If I bury my teeth into her breasts no, she will be mine—mine forever. I can't. My love has stitched up my lips. Pulled out my fangs. I thought I could become human. Turn into my own creation. No! Her thighs, her bosom, her lips are for one who is forever a man. I shed my own skin every season. How could I even hope to retain the human form.

Naga realizes his powerlessness. He can neither attack nor love as a man. Yet he would not live without her. Naga's decision to reduce himself in size to hide himself in her tresses is his last attempt to be near Rani.

The death of Naga is a revelation to Rani. She has gained the knowledge from which she was barred. She ensures that the cobra gets his rightful cremation as the father of her son. Her words of thanksgiving for her son's life amply confirm that Rani has realized who Naga was. He had to save their son's life, ' as by a father', his pyre was to be lit by their son ' as was due to a father'.

Naga dies a noble death, he has given Rani happiness as a woman.

Naga stands in sharp contrast to Appanna, as an example of an understanding male and a husband who can bring matrimonial happiness.

Kurudavva and Kappanna

Kurudavva plays a significant role in the play. She is the one who is responsible for granting Rani the boon of a happy marriage. Kurudavva is a blind woman, a typical folktale character who acts as an agent of benevolence in Rani's life. Her story ends in a somewhat loose manner, giving her episode a disjointed look. We see Kurudavva 's growth from a girl to mother. Through her narrative Kurudavva tells Rani her story introducing to her Kappanna, her son. She was born blind and her father wore himself out looking for a bridegroom for her since nobody would marry her.

Mendicants appear in folktales to foretell, warn or bless people. In Kurudavva's case a mendicant whom she served well once, when nobody was at home, was pleased with her and gave her three roots, aphrodisiac in nature, which could turn a man fed on the roots crazy for the woman who fed them. Kurudavva used one root and married the man who got so attached to her that 'it took a plague to detach him from her.' Devoid of any self-pity she is eager to help the daughter-in-law of a dead friend, Appanna's mother.

Kappanna is Kurudavva's son, full of affection for him; she does not hesitate to assign him errands and jobs. He is fair! She tells Rani, but was named Kappanna simply because, darkness was the only thing visible to her and that is the name she wanted to give her son. If Kurudavva is the symbol of motherly love Kappanna is of filial duty and sexual compulsions. As a young man of twenty he carries his mother hither and thither, wherever she commands. Reluctant at times, as shown in the play, he never refuses or contradicts her; the mother does not hesitate to exercise her authority on him.

The conversation between the mother and son though naïve and mundane is full of warmth.

The voice of the temptress calling Kappanna is no fantasy as Kurudavva had thought, drawn by her he disappears not to be found by Kurudavva. It could mean the loss of a son's total attention and love after he attains manhood. Kurudavva wanders looking for her son who ' seems to have melted away' she says.

> *I woke up. It was midnight. I heard him panting. He was not in his bed. He was standing up… stiff.. like a wooden pillar. Suddenly I knew. There was someone else in the house. A third person….*
>
> *Now I wander about calling him. They tell me he is not in the village. They think I am mad. I know he is not here. I know he will not come back. But what can I do? How can I sit in the house doing nothing? I must do something for him.*
>
> *It is Kurudavva who reminds Appanna of his own mother at the end—Appanna realizes his duty towards Rani because of Kurudavva. He also revives his bond with his mother through her.*

Kurudavva represents the Indian woman as traditionally conceived, happy to serve, eager to help, concerned about the marital happiness in every house. She does not like to meddle with Rani more than is necessary, " My work is done", she says, and goes off giving her last tip to Rani, to burn the incence in a ladle and stick it into the drain to keep the reptiles out.

The Elders

The scene where the Elders give trial to Rani is short, and Karnad has used great precision in writing this scene. It is evident that much has happened when Elders start talking to Rani. The most important points to be considered in the delineation in this group of Elders are the following:

It would have been observed that the Elders are not only the Judiciary but also counselors. They dissuade Rani from taking any harsh or hasty decision about the ordeal. Fearing for her as well as for the child's life in her womb they deter her from the snake ordeal.

They are concerned about not only her life. But also about the honour and welfare of the village. Not in a hurry to indict her, they use their words carefully. They realize the implications of the accusation that Appanna has registered against his wife and are unhappy about having to judge a case like this. They disapprove of people's curiosity about the trial. Says Elder 1' the village court has turned into a country fair'. ' Such curiosity is not healthy for the village, nor conducive to justice'. They are God-fearing people who do not want to be a cause of either Rani's death or of her child.

When Rani gets frightened of the cobra, the Elders understand her and reprimand Appanna for being vituperative. Their consideration of Rani, who may have erred since she was only a child, is more compassionate than rigid. While Appanna continues to hurl abuses at Rani, the Elders persist in their endeavour to save Rani's life.

The Elders proclaim Rani as the Goddess after the ordeal. Their exclamations and awe prove their belief in the miraculous powers of the divine. The crowd follow them ad prostate themselves at her feet.

After the celebration of having a Goddess amongst them, they are overwhelmed, but they are not angry with Appanna. Appanna is as human as Rani is and must be forgiven for the excesses he committed on her. They console Appanna asking him not to have any feelings of remorse. " Don't grieve if you have judged her wrongly and treated her badly"

They congratulate Appanna for being the instrument of the revelation of her divinity and send the couple home advising Appanna to spend the rest of his life in her service. The Elders are portrayed with great reserve, measured and ordered in speeches, which lends them a touch of dignity and compassion. Duty bound to dispense justice they refrain from witch hunting.

They enjoy neither the mob curiosity of the common crowds nor the cruelty of the ordeals. They have realized, before others do in the play, the falsehood of all dogma, the strict codes that simply inflict pain and are of no use to them.

The Elders remind you of the ecclesiastical jury in G.B. Shaw's 'Saint Joan'. Karnad portrays the Elders with as much restraint as Shaw, making them free of prejudice, bias or cruelty.

Myte, Folklore and Modernity

That there is in Naga Mandala the myth of a snake changing into a man has already been discussed. The folklore of the only daughter married to a demon is a common one. Girish Karnad admits having based the play on two folktales

told by Ramanujan. The folk-element and the myth combine to produce an effect of distancing the audience from the happenings in the play. The suffering of Rani, the anguish of Naga and the confusion of Appanna are seen representing a deeper truth, applicable to all humanity in all times.

The use of mime, dance and song bring it closer to the *Yakshagana* tradition of Karnataka. The use of certain numbers repeatedly like seven seas, the seven nights and seven days by Rani add a touch of agelessness to the story. The oft-repeated numbers and the story of stags, whales and eagles lend a fairytale atmosphere to the play.

The simple linear structure of the play with no episodes to distract and divide the interest make it singularly cohesive. The intervention of the Story and the Man also help in the furtherance of the plot. There are not too many characters apart from the central characters, Rani, Appanna and Naga, the others appear not as off shoots but as an integral part of the play.

Karnad has successfully observed the unity of action time and place in the play. Revolving around the life of Rani, the events take place in one linear progression. The playwright does not revert to the past or peep into the future. The action takes place at the house of Appanna which itself is converted into the village courtyard for Rani's trial.

What gives the play a proximity to modern drama in the Brechtian sense is that no solutions or truths are found at the end. Appanna is as perplexed as Rani at the end and their relationship, instead of being devoid of doubts is based on the lies that they have both accepted.

There is one difference however. Whereas the realization of this mirage of happiness and truth has led to disintegration and self-alienation in man, in Karnad's story the Indian philosophy is able to hold Appanna and Rani together. It saves them from falling to pieces. The realization of absurdity of life does not disturb but reconciles them with the reality that much is unknown. The truth is that things happen and human life is shaped by powers beyond us. Man cannot change but only modify his life with his limited comprehension and compromise.

The nature of divinity or cosmic powers are not described. Divine power is alluded to but man cannot perceive them fully. Those who change their physical form like the King Cobra or the Friends in *Hayavadana* have to suffer and die.

The powers above are shown as neither benevolent nor malicious, their indifferent nature makes Naga Mandala and other plays of Karnad more akin to the modern absurd theatre.

What is in the purview of man is to change the social structure. The pernicious powers beyond human control can only be propitiated for mercy- but their response is not certain.

Karnad repeatedly draws our attention to the disease-ridden society, smitten by caste distinction, religious fanaticism and social taboos. He dreads the political dictators as well as bigots who swear by the truth and finality of their own convictions. Karnad chooses the Indian dramatic tradition and format because his search for truth and happiness does not run parallel to the western writers, the minds don't identify the inherited notions of each other. Spirituality lies in the unconsciously hidden in the Indian mind and heart. It easily reconciles with the paradoxes and seeming ambiguities of life. The search for truth is an inner search rather than the search of equations that may help resolve the incongruities around, in circumstance and human relations.

In Karnad's play, the calm after the storm is not the final quietude; uneasy currents can topple and disturb the balance. Man needs to gear himself up not for a fight with the Godly or the earthly powers, but to face the inevitability of turmoil and eruption in man's life.

The morbidity of the social systems adds to the agony of man. Since change can be initiated in matters of politics and administration, in gender and caste issues, we should strive to do that.

In Naga Mandala, Karnad focuses on the gender issues. It is for us to extract the meaning and message out of the play.

Naga Mandala: Women in Patriarchy

Naga Mandala deals in depth and detail with theme of woman's predicament in patriarchal socieities. The flames in 'Naga Mandala' are all women who gather at night to share their experiences with other flames, at home they are only supposed to burn till they are turned off.

The character of the 'story' is also a woman who will tell the story of Rani, interpret, interrupt and address Rani's thoughts, her anguish as well as joy, to the audience.

Karnad talks of two powers in a woman's life, that of the father and the husband. The Indian mythology is replete with archetype father figures aggressively safe-guarding the purity of their daughters, marrying them off to the grooms chosen by them, best suited to the dignity of the family and economic security of the daughter. More than that is not their concern.

The second authority is that of the husband and it is this authority that Karnad focuses on in *Naga Mandala*.

Naga Mandala is based on two oral tales he had heard from A K Ramanujan. These tales are narrated by women normally, the older woman in the family- while children are being fed in the evenings in the kitchen or being put to bed. The other adults present on these occasions are also women. Therefore these tales although directed at children, often serve as parallel system of communication among the women in the family.

They also express distinctly women's understanding of the reality around her, a lined counterpoint to the patriarchal structure of classical texts and institutions. The position of Rani in the story of *Naga-Mandala*, far instance can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in the two unconnected roles- as a stranger during the day and as a lover at night. Inevitably the pattern of relationships she is forced to weave from these disjointed encounters must be something of a fiction. "The empty house Rani is locked in could be the family she is married into."

Rani's tale is the story of every woman. Rani like every girl in India (as in most parts of the world) lives with her parents till she is married, then, suddenly her husband's house becomes her home. The locked house metaphorically describes her position in the house where she can have no contacts against the wishes of her husband.

Appanna does not entertain any questions from Rani. Rani is asked to do what she is told. Rani is not allowed either to express her fears or her longings; she expresses her sadness for her parents only through a sob or a tear. There is no one to hear her except for Kurudavva, who being a woman understands her agony at being treated the way she is. Kurudavva's remark that Appanna keeps Rani locked up like a bird sums up her position. Rani's duties are limited to serving him lunch and giving him whatever little information he needs. Appanna does not talk more than what is required. Do this, do that, serve the food, are the only syllables that he utters.

Rani's mother has not counseled her on the matters of sex, the whole situation is ambiguous to her. She is puzzled and has no one to share her feelings with. She feels lonely and bored. Kurudavva is the first woman in whom she can place her trust and she immediately confides in her. The contrast between the care she got from her parents and the apathy with which her husband treats her is clear in her words to Kurudavva.

> *" I am so frightened at night, I can't sleep a wink. At home I sleep between father and mother. But here alone……. Will you please send word to my parents ……. to free me and take me home. I would jump into a well ……".*

A woman's redemption from suffering is possible if the husband is attached to her. For this the herb is provided by Kurudavva. Rani's desperation for freedom from her husband, who is described sometimes as a demon and at other times as a reptile is shown in her dreams.

The concern for her husband's welfare and life is a part of Hindu Sanskara that she has inherited in her blood and thinking. While giving the herb to Appanna, she is constantly worried about the effects it may have.

But more than any thing else, the point that the story focuses on is the contrast between the position of a man as against a woman in society. Whereas Appanna is never questioned about his relationship with the other woman, Rani has to go through the ordeal to prove her purity. It is for the elders to judge her either as a harlot or a goddess. The decree in favour of Rani is, if looked at closely, a decision of the conventional code set up to judge women. The modalities of the code are also unconvincing since they are partial to one sex.

There is also, in the final judgment, a hint that there is no finality of truth and hence the possibility of a lapse in the conduct of moral judgement.

Rani's response to Naga, which often turns to overtures brings out the for bidden truth that women are as prone to sexuality as men. After the Naga's long discourse on the beauty of meeting of the opposite sexes to immunize Rani of her inhibitions about the shame of sex, Rani has no hesitation in expressing her own desire of it:

" The Pig, the Whale, the Eagle – none of them asks why, so I would either. But they ask for it again. So I can too, can't I."

The desire for the opposite sex and the joy of the erotic is clear in women, from the stories that the Flames narrate about the relationships of their masters. It is also obvious in the way Kurudavva relates her husband's slavery to her after the dose of the herb.

In the Indian context, it is imperative that Rani does not walk out on her husband, nor would it be in the fitness of things to have a lover. A woman must gain at least her status, if not emancipation within the rules set up. Karnad was conscious of the controversy the play could raise if Rani was to have Naga as her lover, Naga must die and the people must believe that Rani was an epitome of chastity.

Rani, it seems, is relieved at the end that her lover was no more than a snake and dismisses the whole thing after a customary homage. She would herself not like to admit having a lover.

The stories in India must conform to the Indian minds reservation about human behaviour. Karnad was conscious of it, as were the earlier storytellers and avoided themes of incest or marital infidelity in women.

Important Questions

Long Questions (400-450 words)

Q. 1. Explore the theme of Love and Marriage in the play Naga Mandala. Discuss with reference to Rani-Appanna and Rani-Naga relationship in the play.

Q.2. Discuss the use of metamorphosis and shape shifting in Naga Mandala. How far do you think has Karnad been able to use the device successfully in Naga Mandala?

Q.3. Girish Karnad successfully mixes the mythical, folk and modern sources and style in the play Naga Mandala. Elucidate.

Q.4. The riddles of life are inexplicable and inescapable. The only way to cope with them is to reconcile with the enigma that they present. Discuss with examples.

Q.5. The golden rule is that there are no final truths. Discuss with reference to Naga Mandala.

Q.6. Karnad successfully uses the myth to reveal the absurdity of life in Naga Mandala. This brings him closer to the modern Brechtian drama. Discuss.

Q.7. The gender issues are the most important in Karnad's plays. Discuss with reference to Naga Mandala.

Q.8. The characters in Girish Karnad's Naga Mandala lack dimension and dynamism. Do you agree?

Q.9. The story of Rani is the story of every wife, that of Kurudavva every mothers story. Discuss the vents of their lives bringing out their universality and common appeal.

Q.10. Naga, the King Cobra is a symbol of male strength, lover's adoration and an anti chauvinist male. Discuss giving examples from the play.

Short Questions (200-250 words)

Q.1. What role is assigned to the Elders in the play Naga Mandala? How far are they able to dispense justice?

Q.2. Kurudavva represents a woman in three stages, daughter, wife and mother. Discuss her role in the play.

Q.3. Kappanna is a youth haunted by dreams and temptation. Discuss the tension between filial duties and self-fulfillment in the Indian society taking his life as an example.

Q.4. The Man and the Story represent the creative urges in humanity. Look for Karnad's views about a writer's role in their character.

Q.5. Trace the use of different features of Yakshagana (Karnataka folk form) in the play Naga Mandala.

Q.6. Write short notes on:

i) The Story

ii) The Man
iii) The Flames
iv) Kurudavva
v) Music and dance in the play
vi) The ending of the play
vii) Totems and the Magical roots
viii) The socio-cultural importance of the play
ix) The role of the Elders
x) Structure of the play

Q.7. Attempt the Character Sketch of the following:

a) Rani
b) Naga
c) Appanna

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Unit VIII
Kamala Dass

INDIAN ENGLISH WOMEN POETS – TIMES AND TRADITION

Women writing in India dates back to as early as 6th century B.C. when Buddhist nuns expressed themselves in verse. Thereafter Pali, Prakrit and regional languages became the medium of expression with these poets. With the establishment of British rule in India and the introduction of the British system of education, the modernization of Indian female psyche began. In the 19th century many women poets took to English and made their presence felt in the literary scenario.

Infact, poetry has been a favourite genre with Indian-English women writers before and after independence. A noticeable fact is a large number of women poets indefatigably writing verse today. The fact has compelled attention from critical circles also. P. Lal has pointed out the phenomenon of 'high percentage' of women writers in English producing technically competent and sensitive work. He goes on to remark "many of the Gargis and Maitreyis of 20th century are Indo-Anglian". Their poetry possesses not merely quantity but quality also. They have reaped rich honours and bagged coveted literary awards.

Since a writer expresses a sensibility shaped and moulded by his Age, a full appreciation of his or her works is better possible if we understand the background influences at work. These influences assume even greater significance in the case of women writing as women lead a comparatively more society-defined and society-governed life. Such extraneous influences play an important role in formative period of any literature.

When these women poets made their debut on the literary scene, it was a period of upheaval in the political, socio-cultural and economic spheres in India and abroad. Darwinism, Freudism, Marxism made the modern age an age of interrogation, disillusionment and revolt which found expression in different forms in different fields of life.

Indian Renaissance received a fresh impetus during 1920 to 1947 and 1947 was a watershed in the history of India. The country had a traumatic experience of partition and a mass-scale communal carnage which left many dead and many more refugees. The chasm between the two communities has never been bridged and communal passions run high. The secessionist and divisive forces have raised their ugly heads in almost all parts of country and terrorism has become a tool in the hands of disruptionist forces. Three wars have been fought since independence. A greatly disconcerting factor is the defiled politics and lack of role-models. On the positive side, politically the period is remarkable for democratization of power with equal opportunities to all irrespective of caste, creed and sex. The rise of young as a separate class, an awakening among the down-trodden and emancipation of women are the highlights of the period. India's political decision to remain a member of British Commonwealth has had far-reaching consequences. It has resulted in the retaining of the cultural bond with the Western world and has also ensured a bright future for English language and English literature.

There has been a metamorphosis in the social scenario also. A change of immense significance is the emancipation of women. Women's liberation and feminist movements abroad and efforts of our reformers like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar and Gandhi brought about a revolutionary change in the status of women. These reformers raised their voice against the prevalent evil practices like sati, illiteracy among women, ill-treatment of widows and they gave women an access to education and progressive legislation. Gandhiji furthered the cause of emancipation of women by involving them in the struggle for political freedom. He opposed the customs of child marriage, purdah, prohibition of widow remarriage and temple–prostitution. A vast number of women participated in Satyagraha movement and organized themselves under personalities like Ramabai Renade and Pandita Rambai to fight for the cause of women. A critical event was formation of All-India Women's Conference in 1927. It has been instrumental in bringing about many legislative reforms like Sharda Act (1929) banning child marriage, dissolution of Muslims Marriage Act (1939) and the Bill for better supervision of Orphanages, Rescue Homes and

Marriage Bureaus (1940). There are many thousands of agencies working for the upliftment of women. Unlike the extreme feminism in the West, Women Lib. movement in India has concerned itself with social and economic issues like atrocities against women, wife-bashing, rape, dowry deaths, violence in family and problems of working women. Equal opportunities are being made available and there is a steep rise in the percentage of women in jobs. We have women teachers, legislators, bureaucrats, technocrats and now even the all-male services like army and aviation have been thrown open to them. Women are becoming less inhibited, more expressive, bold and demanding.

The status of women writing has also shown a great improvement in India and abroad. In the post-independence era we have an opulent literary creativity by women and recognition of their merit in critical circles. Three epochmaking works Simone de Beauvoir's ***The Second Sex*** (1953), Betty Frieden's ***The Feminine Mystique*** (1963) and Germaine Greer's ***The Female Eunuch*** (1970) imbued modern woman with great self-esteem and self-confidence. More book-length studies ***Literary Women*** (1977) – Ellen Moer, ***A Literature of Their own*** (1978) – Elin Showalter and ***The Mad Woman in the Attic*** (1979) - Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar established validity and excellence of the genre. Women literature is, in fact, the craze of the day and the focus of scholastic and critical interest. Even in India we have women publishing houses like Kali for Women, Courses on Women Studies introduced by the University Grants Commission and women journals like ***Manushi*** and ***Samyashakti***. There are female texts, feminist criticism and there is now a female literary tradition.

Indian woman's circumstances are, however, very peculiar. Both Kalpana Chawla and Bhanvri Bai are a part of Indian reality. The evils of dowry deaths, child-marriages, ill-matched marriages have continued, violence and crime against women have increased and to this has been added the heinous crime of female-foeticide and consequent falling sex-ratio. Working women are also doubly burdened with the new role and responsibilities outside and the traditional role and responsibilities at home. The Indian woman today is experiencing all the pangs and woes of a society in transformation. She has changed, is more aware but the other variables and factors have not changed much including the male-psyche and all this has created a lot of tension in interpersonal relations and family. The Indian women poets are writing in the backdrop of all these factors and reveal these influences in their writings.

Toru Dutt (1856-1877) and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) were the first two great predecessors of modern Indian English women poets. Toru Dutt, the daughter of the distinguished poetic Dutt family of Bengal, is a poet with a real historical significance. She holds the distinction of being the first Indian-English woman poet. Her poetry laid the foundation for the future edifice of Indian-English poetry. A pioneer and an innovator, she gave authenticity to Indian-English verse. In her short life span of twenty-one years Toru's literary output includes two novels ***Le Journal De Mademoisell' Arvers*** (French), ***Binaca*** (English) and two books of poetry. Her poetic collection ***A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*** (1880) is a translation of about two hundred poems by French poets. Her ***Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*** (1941) contains Indian legends like 'Dhruva', 'Lakshman', 'Battoo', 'Savitri', 'The Royal Ascetic and Hind', 'Jogadhya Uma', and 'Sita'. In these legends and ballads the poet's translative impulse becomes transcreative. Her poetic contribution is her eight original poems – 'Miscellaneous' pieces in ***Ancient Ballads and Legends***. Themes are nature, love, home and the poems reveal her narrative and descriptive skill. Indian world of myths and legends is authentically portrayed for the first time in her ballads. Toru remains a case of 'promise unfulfilled' due to her premature death. To her goes the credit of putting Indian poetry on the international literary map by evoking wide critical attention abroad.

The next important poet of this period is Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949). The child of a Bengali family with rich cultural heritage, this 'nightingale of India' is a most popular poet who has won great recognition in India and outside. Her poetic corpus includes four volumes: ***The Golden Threshold*** (1905), ***The Bird of Time*** (1912), ***The Broken Wing*** (1917) and ***The Feather of The Dawn*** (1961). Toru Dutt's original poetry is very little and Sarojini is the first full-fledged Indian English woman poet. She takes up various themes like love, Nature, God and death. In her poems we find traditional India unravelled in all its beauty and splendour. Naidu's poetry is marked by lyricism and mysticism. She reveals influence of English Romantics like Keats and Shelley on one hand and Persian and Urdu poetry on the other. Though she played an important role in Indian freedom struggle, yet she remains only a singer of sweet lyrical songs in her poetry. Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons advised her to write about native world and Sarojini has

presented the heart and soul of India to the West.

Both Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu were the first authentic Indian voices in English. Their successors were minor versifiers whose poetry could not rise above romantic indulgence in dreams, fancies, love and mysticism. Susi P. David's ***The Garlands*** (1938) contains sonnets on themes of love, God and death. Sister Lalita's slender volume ***The Star and the Path*** (1944) reveals her mystical sensibility. Sabita Devi's ***Phantasies*** (1943) is a collection of small lyrical verses describing beauty in different forms. Her speciality is her unrhymed pattern of verse and lines of unequal length. Sukhalata Rao's ***Leading Lights*** (1956) contains seventy-three pieces of uneven quality of which twenty deal with mystical themes. Zeb-un-Nisa Hamidullah describes frustration in love in her two poetic volumes- ***Indian Bouquet*** (1942) and ***Lotus Leaves*** (1946). This poet also reveals social consciousness in her poem "The Call" where she gives a call to women to cast back veil of centuries and "Harijan Boy" which is a sympathetic and affectionate portrayal of the boy. ***Poems*** (1956) by Themis contains seventy-four lyrics articulating her mystical experience through Radha-Krishna myth. She conveys her emotions in simple and rhythmic verse. These poets do not possess the grandeur of Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt. One poet who merits attention here is Bharati Sarabhai with her poetic play ***The Well of the People*** (943). Romanticism and realism intermingle here. The play contains five choruses – the first two are sung by old women, the next two by Gandhian Social workers describing the new identity of India and the last chorus is sung by old women workers and peasants. The choruses are a celebration of India's new emerging identity. The play embodies the changing social scenario during the pre-independence period. The poet projects a social theme on the spiritual-metaphysical level. Thematically Bharati Sarabhai holds the distinction of acting as a bridge between the pre-independence Romantics and the post-independence Modern women poets.

Gradually the winds of change started blowing and this change was reflected in the writings of these women poets also. From Monika Varma onwards 'Songs of Innocence' became 'Songs of Experience'. Greater realism, analytical approach and greater awareness now marked their poetry. The canvas became wide and interests more varied. Thus, the real flowering of their genius came in the post-independence era. Vasant V. Shahane and M. Sriramakrishna record:

> *The post-independence scenario presents a richer*
> *and more fertile crop of Indian-English women poets*
> *who through their wonderful creations have carved*
> *an abiding niche in the temple of Muse.*

As compared to the pre-independence era where we had just two well-known figures of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, we have a larger number of modern Indian-English women poets who have made their presence felt.

Monika Varma (b.1916) is one of the significant poets of post-independence India. She is a prolific poet and a critic with knowledge of Upanishad, comparative philosophy and Christian and Bengali literature. Her verse translation of ***Gita Govinda*** with the capturing of highly sensuous spirit of Jayadeva in English is her real achievement. Her ***Facing Four*** (1973) is the first critical book-length study of modern Indian-English women poets – Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Suniti Namjoshi and Bharati Sarabhai. Her published poetic volumes are ***Dragonflies Draw Flame*** (1962), ***Gita Govinda and Other Poems*** (1966), ***Green Leaves and Gold*** (1970), ***Quartered Questions and Queries*** (1971) ***Past-Imperative*** (1972), ***Across the Vast Spaces*** (1975) and ***Alaknanda*** (1976). For her almost exclusive involvement with the world of Nature she can be designated as a 'nature poet'. Her other areas of interest are personal life and poetic art. Her later volumes reveal her social consciousness also. Monika Verma reveals a lyrical and imagistic sensibility, love for form and love for sound of words. She has been hailed as "one of the major Indian-English poets of post-independence era".

Lila Ray (b.1910) is a Britisher who settled down in India in 1930. Apart from being a poet, she is also an editor, essayist, and the founder President of All India Translator's Society. Her poetic volumes are ***Entrance*** (1961), ***The Days Between*** (1976), ***Songs of Mourning*** (1976), ***Alive and Dying*** (1976), ***The Valley of Vision*** (1977), ***The Flowering Heart*** (1980) and ***A Visit to the Zoo*** (1986). Her poetic psyche has responded to personal, social and mystical experience. ***The Days Between*** brings out her social consciousness and ***The Valley of Vision*** contains her mystical-philosophical poems. Her sensibility is lyrical and the poet has proceeded from sentimental attachment to philosophical detachment.

Margaret Chatterjee (b.1925), another Britisher settled in India since 1956, is an important voice among modern Indian-English women poets. She is a versatile genius – a poet, a philosopher, a musician and a critic. She has published a number of poetic volumes, namely, ***The Spring and The Spectacle*** (1967), ***Towards The Sun*** (1971), ***The Sandalwood Tree*** (1972), ***The Sound of Wings*** (1978) and ***The Rimless World*** (1987). Her distinction lies in her wide range of subjects, humanism and presentation of Indian life and philosophy. Her favourite topics are Nature, love, music, poetic art, social concern and philosophical musings. The poet draws on her varied experience as a philosopher, musician, critic and traveller. There is Indian rootedness of concern with wide-ranging transcendence of frontiers. She also evidences a command over technique and reveals a 'unified sensibility' – a beautiful combination of form and meaning. Her poetry makes delightful reading and she holds her own distinctive place in the scenario.

Gauri Deshpande (b.1942) is another poet who has earned a niche for herself. She is also a short story writer and a novelist. She has edited ***An Anthology of Indo-English Poetry*** (1974) and has translated sixteen volumes of ***Arabian Nights*** into Marathi. Her poetic corpus includes three volumes – ***Between Births*** (1968), ***Lost Love*** (1970) and ***Beyond the Slaughter House*** (1972). Like Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande is also concerned with man-woman relationship, its tensions and frustrations. The physical aspect of relationship also receives much emphasis but the intensity of Kamala Das is missing. In her third volume the poet reveals her social consciousness and responds to the issues related to working women. Her poetry is lyrical but at times it is marred by sentimentalization and shaky craft.

Mamta Kalia (b.1940) is a bilingual writer and writes both poetry and fiction in Hindi and English. She is author of more than twenty books in Hindi. In English she has published – ***Tribute to Papa and Other Poems*** (1970) and ***Poems 1978*** (1979). Her poems deal with frustrations in a woman's life in and outside the house, boredom of married life and chaos of values in society. She is gifted with an ironic perception and introduces into the poetry written by women the element of light-heartedness and gaiety. Her distinction and contribution lies in initiating the present contemporary manner of colloquial verse with speech rhythms. Her style was taken further by the later poets like De Souza and Melanie Silgardo.

Suniti Namjoshi (b.1941) is another writer gifted with ironic perception and wit. She writes both poetry and fiction. In collaboration with Sarojini Namjoshi she has also translated ***Poems of Govindagraj*** (1968) from Marathi to English. Her poetic volumes in English are ***Poems*** (1967), ***More Poems*** (1971), ***Cyclone in Pakistan*** (1971), ***The Jackass and the Lady*** (1980) and ***The Authentic Lie***. Her other books are books of fiction and prose writings: ***The Conversation of Cows*** (1985), ***The Blue Donkey Fables*** (1991), ***Feminist Fables*** (1994), ***St. Suniti & the Dragon*** (1996), ***Building Babel*** (1996) and ***Goja*** (2000). Namjoshi reveals a wide social consciousness and presents the anomalies with ironic incisiveness. Love also receives an ironic treatment. The poet shows economy and control over medium. On one hand is her lyricism and on the other, her dry cynical verse. She makes stylistic experiments and her volumes contain prose-poems also. Her mastery over English has received a warm appreciation from William Walsh, "Indians enjoy an unusual inwardness of understanding of the English language".

Sujatha Modayil (b.1934) is a poet with a wide range of subjects. She is also a short-story writer and a practising critic. Her poetic corpus includes ***Crucifixions*** (1970), ***We the Unreconciled*** (1972) and ***The Attic of Night*** (1991). Her forte is her social consciousness and social concern. Sujatha is one of the poets who are strongly aware of their identity as a woman and crises in a woman's life. Her third volume reveals a certain maturity of vision. She writes lyrical verse but has also attempted poems with prose rhythm in her third collection. Her poems have been published in anthologies and journals including *Chelsea* (NY) and *2 plus 2* (Switzerland).

Eunice De Souza (b.1940) writes extensively on contemporary Indian culture and literature. She has published four books for children and along with Adil Jussawalla is the co-editor of ***Statesman*** (1976) - an anthology of Indian prose in English. Her collections of verse are ***Fix*** (1979), ***Women in Dutch Painting*** (1988), ***Ways of Belonging*** (1990) and ***Selected New Poems*** (1994). The poet has received critical attention and she figures in a number of foreign and Indian poetic anthologies. Her first volume ***Fix*** was described by K.D. Katrak as "a practically perfect book and one of the most brilliant first books." Her forte is satire and her weapon is irony which she uses in a superior way than other women poets. She writes on the topsyturvydom of values in society, personal relationships and identity crisis experienced by a woman. De Souza's distinction lies in her creation of memorable characters like Ms. Louise who

live in readers' minds. Her poems are marked by a greater vigour, vitality, unexpectedness, speech rhythms and colloquial diction. Poetry has been stripped to bare minimum here. De Souza is a promising poet and has influenced her successors like Melanie Silgardo and Behroze Shroff. She has recently published a few novels also – ***Dangerlok*** (2001) and ***Dev and Simran*** (2003).

Meena Alexander (b.1951) is a talented cerebral poet, a practising critic and a novelist. She has published many critical articles and a study of Romantic poets in her book ***The Poetic Self*** (1979). Her poetic volumes are ***Bird's Bright Ring*** (1976), ***Without Place*** (1978), ***I Root My Name*** (1977), ***Stone Roots*** (1980), ***House of a Thousand Doors*** (1988), ***The Storm*** (1989), ***Night Scene, the Garden*** (1992), ***River Bridge*** (1995) and ***Illiterate Heart*** (2002). Her themes are alienation exile, chaos, violence and disillusionment of modern life. The poet's distinction lies in her experimental style and typographical verse. Her collection ***Bird's Bright Ring*** is a long poem – a network of repeated images, symbols, references and allusions. It is a poem in stream-of- consciousness style – an expressionist experiment. ***Without Place*** is another long poem with dramatic structure – a prologue and an epilogue and it is replete with allusions. She is a superb artist but at times her too obscure thoughts and personal symbols and images present difficulty for the reader. Meena Alexander represents one important way that modern feminine poetic psyche has responded. Her novels are ***Nampally Road*** (1991) and ***Manhattan Music*** (1997).

Sunita Jain (b.1941) is an author of more than thirty books. She is a bilingual writer who writes in both Hindi and English. She has published seven volumes so far, namely, ***Man of My Desire*** (1978), ***Beneath the Frost*** (1979), ***Between You and God*** (1979), ***Love Time*** (1980), ***Silences*** (1982), ***Find Me with Rain*** (1984), ***Till I Find Myself*** (1985) and ***Sensum*** (2001). Her concerns are man-woman relationship, expression of feminine identity in various roles and identity crisis felt as a woman. Sunita's world is a dreamy, lyrical world of romantic longings and nostalgic memories. She reveals a genius for perfect image and her poetry has been praised by Lee T. Lemon for her "passionate virtuosity".

Two new poets who compel our attention are Sujata Bhatt (b.1956) and Rukmini Bhaya Nair. These two represent a further stage of growth in the psyche of Indian-English women poets. Sujata Bhatt has received Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia), a Cholmondeley Award and Alice Hunt Barlett Prize. Her poetic volumes are ***Brunizem*** (1991), ***Monkey Shadows*** (1992), ***The Stinking Rose*** (1995), ***Augatora*** (2000) and ***A Colour of Solitude*** (2002). The poet possesses a real large consciousness where cross – cultural influences are revealed. Asia, America and Europe – all are part of her poetic world and so are the worlds of Nature, mythology, women and personal relationships. Her poetry is rooted in native soil. The poet adopts new words, new ways of using language and new ideas about old concepts. She is one of the few women poets who have attempted long poems. Her stylistic achievement is her multi-lingual poems where her mothertongue Gujarati mingles with English. The poems have controlled and passionate speech rhythms. Her verse has been designated as "a definition of Indian-English poetry at its ideal best."

Rukmini Nair, the recipient of All India Poetry Contest Award (1989), has published two books of verse ***The Hyoid Bone*** (1992) and ***Ayodhya Cantos*** (2000). In her poems the Occidental and the Oriental, the Old and the New, the East and the West meet. Verse is strongly characterized by her consciousness of her gender identity. The poet takes pride in being a woman – a new line of thinking in women poets. Besides issues relating to women, her other interests are poetic art, eco-friendly consciousness towards Nature and social issues like child-labour and anguish of refugees. Various maladies and lacunas of Indian society receive an ironical treatment from the poet. Her book ***Ayodhya Cantos*** is an epic – an extremely powerful, highly dramatic ironical criticism of Babri Masjid demolition tragedy. Her poetry, rich in allusions and references, reveals her wide-reading and scholarship. Her real achievement lies in her stylistic excellence. A Ph.D. in linguistics, Rukmini adds a whole new dimension to the poetry written by women. She is also an intelligent manipulator of words and writes typographical verse. Nissim Ezekiel has noted the "impressive control" of medium in her poetry.

Besides these major voices, the poets who have aroused interest and made their presence felt are Roshen Alkazi, Lalitha Venkateswaran, Lakshmi Kannan, Gauri Pant, Mary Ann Das Gupta, Vijaya Goel, Imtiaz Dharker, Malavika Sanghvi, Charmayne Desouza, Chitra Divakaruni and Melanie Silgardo. Most of these women poets have been published by P. Lal's Writers Workshop but other publishing houses like O.U.P., Sterling, Penguin, Arnold Heinemann, Rupa, Viking, New Ground and Praxis have also published their works. The modern Indian-English woman poet is becoming a power to reckon with.

Thus, even the short span of creativity of these women poets – 1960 to 2003–offers a rich variety where we have confessionals and cerebral poets, the poets expressing feminine sensibility and the poets with large consciousness, the poets writing of personal experiences-a subjective verse and others attempting impersonal verse. We have today come far , not only from the times of Sarojini Naidu but also from those of Kamala Das.

The poetry of these women poets has become an essential aspect of Indian English poetry. It is not a chirp of pretty warblers but an authentic and powerful expression of their awareness. It is a growing and flourishing literature which holds great importance not only from the view point of academic interest but also for its social significance.

These modern poets express a sensibility which is very different from their predecessors. Freed from the British shackles and not obliged to take up nationalistic concerns, these poets address themselves to the realities of modern urban life and its challenges. There is a change in attitude, outlook, themes, imagery and use of language. Their poetry is more in tune with the Age, its ethos and its temper. These poets reveal themselves as moderns in concerns and style. We have here an increased social consciousness, a strong awareness of identity as woman, the championing of women's cause, the problems of alienation and identity crisis, a daring portrayal of sex and emphasis on the study of personal relationships. Even in the treatment of conventional themes like love, Nature, God and death, they have revealed a modern's approach. A great realism, scrutiny and intellectual quality underlines all the writing. Their modern sensibility also finds expression in style which is a far cry from the cloying, sweet and ornamental verse of Sarojini Naidu.

KAMALA DAS

The bilingual writer Kamala Das alias Madhavikutty holds the distinction of being the most celebrated and the most anthologized of Indian English women poets. Born at Punnayurkulum in South Malabar in 1934, Kamala Das rose to become a reputed Malayalam writer and an international literary celebrity. A versatile genius – a poet, a novelist, a short story writer, a columnist and a painter – she has been a favourite with her readers and critics alike. With the publication of her first poetic volume ***Summer in Calcutta*** in 1965, she initiated a new era in Indian English poetry. The readers, fed on the Romantic coyness of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, were startled by a voice that was modern and uninhibited.

Daughter of the renowned Malaylam poet Balamani Amma, Kamala Das had writing in her genes and she was further deeply influenced by her uncle Nalapat Narayan Menon, a prominent writer. Her formal education was limited to a short span of schooling – a European School in Calcutta, elementary School at Punnayurkulum and a Boarding school run by Roman Catholic nuns. After school, she was privately educated till the age of 15.

Though her family was not very well-off, it had a traditional and aristocratic atmosphere. She was not satisfied with her parents' incompatible alliance. In her autobiography ***My Story*** she writes: "My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched". All these factors had their impact in shaping of her psyche. Her parental homes, especially her grandmother's, was influenced by the movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. Kamala was deeply attached to her grandma and often remembers her in her poetry.

At the age of 15 she was married to K. Madhava Das, a Reserve Bank of India official in Bombay. Kamala Das has had a love-hate relationship with her husband, a man much older to her. In her early writings and poetry he is portrayed as a very insensitive and callous husband. In fact, much of Kamala Das's poetic corpus is built of her jeremiads and protest against her unsatisfying married life devoid of conjugal bliss. Widely experienced in sex with other women her husband could offer, her only lust, not love. Kamala Das's entire life and her writings are a quest for this true love which she could get neither from her husband nor from her other lovers. Mother of three sons, including the well-known journalist M.D. Nalappad, former editor of ***Mathrubhumi*** and former resident editor of ***Times of India***, Bangalore, Kamala Das continues to be active in many spheres.

Once she had remarked, "I wanted to fill my life with as many experiences as I can manage to garner because I do not believe one can get born again". True to her word, she has not limited herself to only writing and has dabbled in painting, social welfare activities and even politics. In the 1970s she entered politics with a compaign for an indigenous Green Movement and contested election in 1984. Recently she has established a political party LOK SEVA CHARITABLE TRUST with the aim to concentrate on humanitarian work and promote secularism. Be it her highly provocative autobiography ***My Story***, nude paintings, election-contesting or her furore-causing conversion to Islam in 1999, Dr. Kamala Surraiya (her new name) has always been a constant companion of controversies. Though a loser

at the hustings, she is a winner all throughout – doing whatever she wants.

Kamala Das is the most decorated of Indian English women poets. She was awarded the Asian Poetry Prize for her anthology ***The Sirens*** in 1964, Kants' award for ***Summer in Calcutta*** in 1965. In 1969 her short story ***Thanuppu*** was adjudged as the best story by the Kerala Sahitya Academy. She has to her credit her being short-listed for the Nobel Prize (1984) along with Marguerite Yourcenar, Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer. Her book on child memories ***Neermathalam Pootha Kaalam*** bagged Vayalar award in 1997. She has been the editor of the ***Poet*** magazine, ***Illustrated Weekly*** and has also held coveted positions as the Vice-chairperson, Kerala Sahitya Acedemy and Kerala Forestry Board.

Kamala Das's chef-de-ouvre includes works in Malyalam and English. The pioneer of feminist writing in Malyalam literature, Madhavikutty captured the attention of the Malyalam literary world with her autobiography ***Ente Katha*** and has published more than fifteen works in her mothertongue. However, edifice of her fame rests on her writings in English. Her works in English include her poetic volumes – ***Summer in Calcutta*** (1965), ***The Descendants*** (1967), ***The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*** (1973), ***Tonight This Savage Rite*** (1979), ***The Anamalai Poems*** (1985) and ***Only the Soul Knows How to Sing*** (1996). Other works are her autobiography ***My Story*** (1976), her novel ***Alphabet of Lust*** (1976), ***A Doll for Child Prostitute*** (1977) and a collection of stories ***Padmavati The Harlot and Other Stories*** (1992). Besides Kamala Das continues to publish articles in various popular magazines and periodicals like ***Opinion, The Illustrated Weekly of India, Poetry East and West, Debonair, Eve's Weekly, Femina, Imprint, Weekly Round Table*** and now on rediff.com and so on. Her syndicated columns in various leading dailies deal with varied issues ranging from personal to social concerns.

Kamala Das is a living legend of these times, the woman poet who epitomizes the modernization of the Indian feminine poetic psyche.

MAJOR THEMES

Kamala Das is pre-eminently a Poet of Love. Her poetry embodies her quest for a fulfilling relationship and the anguish over her inability to find such a relationship inside or outside marriage. Her concept of love is all-inclusive where she wants not only physical but also emotional and spiritual fulfilment. C.N. Srinath observes, "Love-desire, genuine love, love on various planes is Kamala Das's main pre-occupation, her obsession". A corollary to this is the poet's pre-occupation with the theme of Body. Body for her is a source of both 'pains of hell' and 'pleasures of heaven'. She celebrates body but loveless relationship makes her loathe, body as an instrument of subjugation and exploitation. Poems of desire and love form a major chunk of Kamala Das's poetic corpus. Body-soul conflict also emerges as the central concern in many of her poems. Woman's instinctive fascination for man, her longing for a sacred and perfect love that goes beyond the joy of sex, the disillusionment that men only lust after her body; the man-woman relationship in Kamala Das's poetry operates within this emotional triangle.

Her poetry is a very strong expression of feminine sensibility. Devendra Kohli finds it to be 'celebration of beauty and courage of being a woman'. She is 'every woman' expressing all that comes with the territory of being a woman – the strong 'wants as woman', the beauty of filial love, the dependence on man for happiness, the concern with physical decay, the identity-crisis, the unwilling acceptance of allotted roles and jeremiads against the insensitive male and male-dominated society. In fact, hers is a unique example of feminine-cum-feminist sensibility.

Kamala das is also a poet of memories. Many of her poems include recollections of her childhood experiences. Her grandma, great grand mother and her Malabar house are a constant presence in her psyche and they come to acquire a kind of symbolical significance. In various poems contained in her poetic volumes she has relived her past moments.

Her poetry is fraught with descriptions of Death and Decay. Death is a part of the outer and also of the inner landscape. In her encounters with myriad-faced death the poet seeks to unravel the mystery of death and afterlife. Kamala Das's poems also reveal an existential agony – her loneliness, rootlessness, nothingness, hurt and humiliation, pain and suffering. Preponderance of such moods gives the impression of her vision being a tragic vision.

Though 'self' is pre-occupation of the poet, she has also evinced her social concern in her poems on social themes. Her poetry shows a gradual widening of concerns as she liberates herself from initial obsession with gender-identity and extends sympathy to entire sections of the marginalized, the poor, the minorities, women, children, abandoned youth, deserted mothers and victims of war and violence.

Kamala Das's poems breathe Indian ethos. Unlike many other Indian English poets she does not feel 'denationalized' or 'estranged' from her surroundings. Indian locales, scene, events, problems, festivals, characters, seasons, natural objects, cities, villages – all find their place in her writing. She speaks not as an 'alien' but as one who is a part and parcel of all that is happening around her.

Kamala Das is a Rebel poet – a feminist rebel against the patriarchal forces imposing stereo-typed role on women – 'Dress in saris, be girl', a rebel against the male's inadequacy to provide a meaningful and fulfilling relationship – 'nothing more alive that skin's lazy hungers' and a rebel Indian English writer protesting against the carping critics – 'Don't write in English'.

Her poetry is neither a record of any metaphysical quest nor a store-house of philosophical musings or a propagation of any theories of feminism/socialism/post – colonialism. She is a class apart - a poet of fluctuating moods, an original writer – most herself, composing a poetry that is 'human' and 'honest', the poetry that raises questions and also gives flashes of vision and wisdom.

THE BODY OF KAMALA DAS'S POETRY

Summer in Calcutta, her epoch-making work, was published in 1965. The opening poem 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' with its irony sets the tone and temper of the entire volume. Through an external familiar scene the poet suggests her strangled desire. Eunuchs' dance is not a dance of ecstasy, but mere 'convulsions', not of abundance but drought. 'The Freaks' brings out the poet's disgust with a man who can provide only physical gratification and nothing more. In 'Love' she wonders whether 'skin-communicated thing' can be called love. In 'Winter' her soul is 'groping' for roots in his body. 'A Relationship' makes Kamala Das realize that she will find her rest, sleep, peace and even death in her 'betrayer's arms' only. The poem 'Spoiling the Name' mocks at the value attached to words and abstractions. In a woman's case, name is a weight and a burden. 'An Apology to Gautama' works out a contrast between the ascetic and the sensual, Gautama and her own man.

'Visitors to the City' is a passionate sketch of a morning scene on Strand Road, scene composed of 'sights' and 'sounds'. 'Punishment in the Kindergarten' is recollection of the poet's childhood painful experience when she was chided by her teacher and mocked at by the other children. The title piece 'Summer in Calcutta' projects a selfcontained mood of sensuous luxury with April Sun bringing in a sense of sensuous repletion and warm intoxication. In 'The Siesta' sleep brings her 'an anonymous peace' and dream which 'glow pearl-white'. But these offerings of mysterious Siesta are neutralized by her inability to meet 'this alien world which talks of Gods and casual sins'. 'With its Quiet Tongue' expresses the poet's agonised concern with coldness of heart. 'My Morning Tree' takes up the theme of desperate longing for fulfilment. The poet looks forward to the moment of blossoming but ironically blossoming will come too late and it will be 'red, real morning flower' of death. 'The Testing of the Sirens' narrates the poet's experience with two lovers; neither of the relationships brings her any comfort and she misses another young man, a family friend. In 'A Wild Bougainvillea', pining for 'touch of a man from another town', she walks through the decaying scenario, notices 'wild bougainvillea' and 'marigolds' blooming midst tombs and her life-spirit is revived.

In her poems 'The Flag', 'Someone Else's Song', 'Forest Fire', 'An Introduction', 'Stranger and I' the poet depicts a larger panorama of experience. In 'Someone Else's Song' she is 'a million, million people talking all at once'. In 'The Flag' she strongly feels for the poor babies dying of hunger, poor old men coughing their lungs out and blood-drenched Indian soil. In 'Forest Fire' she relates herself to the baby sitting in a pram, the lovers walking hand-in-hand, the old basking in the sun, the cabaret-girls cavorting, the eunuchs swirling around, the wounded moaning and the mothers dying with hopeful eyes. 'An Introduction' is, in a way, a manifesto of Kamala Das's creed and this polyphonic poem gives a fair idea of the poet's major thematic and stylistic concerns. Her assertion of her Indian identity, her defence of use of English, her traumatic first experience of 'love', her identity-crisis as a woman, her natural desire as 'every woman who seeks love' - all these lead her to a state where she professes to contain opposing multitudes and declares, "I have no joys which are not yours, no Aches which are not yours".

Thus the dominant theme of *Summer in Calcutta* continues to be herself-her exploration of love and her various experiences. In some of her poems she goes beyond and relates herself to the larger perspective. The tone continues

to be ironical and the mood one of sadness and despair.

The Descendants

This collection of 23 poems was published in 1967. It contains her long poems 'The Suicide' and 'Composition'. Once again the first piece 'The Suicide' sets the tone of the volume which is pervaded by the feeling of death-consciousness. The poet's search for an ideal relationship continues bringing in its wake pains and pleasures.

'The Suicide' is a conversation between the poet and the sea. Body-soul conflict is a central concern and with it she mixes up her childhood and adult memories, her identity crisis as a woman and her final realization, i.e. 'only the soul knows how to sing! At the vortex of the sea'. In the short lyric 'A Request' the poet suggests futility of Body and unfulfilling love relationship. 'Substitute' is a poignant and ironical poem which brings out the hypocritical society's emphasis on role conformity, inability of her lovers to give more than physical satisfaction and her desperate hope "it will be alright between the world and me". 'The Descendants' borders on nihilism and the poet, disgusted with 'insubstantial love', bemoans: 'We are not going to be redeemed or made new'. 'Radha' is her vision of ideal love where the beloved 'melts' in 'true embrace' and in this 'chaste bond' there is no scope for 'doubting' and 'reasoning'. 'Palam' presents a disappointing love experience leading to death-in-life feeling. In 'Luminol' she seeks solace in 'pilled' sleep as 'ruthless, human and clumsy' lover will then not be able to invade 'the soul's mute arena'. 'Annette' brings out her concern with the process of ageing and physical decay. 'Ferns' has glorification of physical love with an element of disenchantment. In 'The Invitation' in her dialogue with 'sea', she recalls her blissful moments of togetherness even as the 'sea' repeatedly invites her to 'end in me'. In 'The Doubt' she goes beyond the confines of opposite binary identities of male-female as mere 'sex-accessories' do not govern our behaviour. In 'Captive' the poet misses her grandmother and laments her own futile forays into various relationships as running from one 'gossamer lane to another' she is now her 'own captive'. 'The Proud One' brings out a man's ego and his subjugation of his wife. 'Contacts' links sleep with 'longer sleep' and reveals the poet's faith in continuity of life. In 'The Conflagration' the almost feminist revolt: "woman is this happiness lying buried/ Beneath a man? It's time to come alive" ironically ends with 'burning' of 'elemental fire' to warm the 'coal streams of his eternal flesh'. 'Three P.M.' brings out a man's loneliness which he exhibits only in sleep. In 'The Maggots' Radha feels 'dead' in her husband's arms after a fulfilling relationship with Krishna. 'The Joss Sticks at Cadell Road' portrays a funeral scene near the sea behind Cadell road. 'The White Flowers' reveals mother Kamala's anxiety for safety of her son in this violence-torn world. 'The Looking Glass' is a highly erotic poem, celebrating the physical and then grieving over the pain of separation. In 'Convict' the poet feels that merely physical love and hacking at each other's parts is like convicts hacking and breaking clods at noon. What it gives is only 'ache'. 'JaiSurya' expresses mother Kamala's maternal affection for her first born. The final poem 'Composition' talks of the poet's loss of innocence, her discovery of life as tragedy, her dissatisfaction with marriage and other relationships, her loneliness, her missing of her grandmother, her feelings of sex-solidarity, her writing being a confessional act, her desire to be 'completely involved', the ultimate discovery of 'we are immortal' and the realization of her being 'trapped in immortality'.

'The Descendants' shows a greater concern with physical decay, nothingness, frustration and failure than the first volume *Summer in Calcutta.*

The Old Playhouse & Other Poems

This volume published in 1973 contains 33 poems in all. Fourteen poems in this volume have been culled from *Summer in Calcutta* and six from *The Descendants.*

The title poem 'The Old Playhouse' is the poet's protest against a suffocating marriage which has turned her mind into 'an old playhouse with all its lights put out'. 'Gino' reveals her obsession with death and decay. Lover's kiss is bite of 'krait' and the poet's dream is of clatter of trolleys with dead lying on them. She wears her body without 'joy' as she knows that wrestling with 'impersonal lust' body will decay and she will enter another womb as one who is 'marked by discontent'. 'Blood' is a poem where memory is mixed with sadness. The poet remembers her grandmother - her life and her death, her own promise to her grandma to rebuild the ancestral house, her failure in keeping her promise and her being haunted by strong feeling of guilt. 'The Inheritance' is the poet's indictment of religious

fanaticism. 'Glass' describes a painful love experience and brings out her longing for fatherly affection. 'Love' is a beautiful expression of feminine sensibility as the poet who 'wrote verses', - 'drew pictures' and 'went out for walks', after finding her lover, lies contented, 'curled like an old mongerel'. In 'The Prisoner' she expresses her resolution to someday find 'an escape' from 'trapping' of lover's 'body'. In 'My Grandmother's House' the poet misses her grandmother, the house 'where once I received love' and laments her present loveless state. In 'Nani' she remembers a childhood incident—death of her maid servant who had hanged herself. When child Kamala talked about her, her grandma replied, "Nani, who is she?" and this 'designed deafness' lead the poet to understanding of higher truths like mortality, immortality and peace.

In 'Kumar Gandharva' she is 'cocooned in song' and is yet 'unsafe' as in 'every little pause' her ears lose their peace. 'The High Tide' portrays a man's state of powerlessness. 'The Snobs' sketches an evening scene of buffaloes tramping up the road, herdsmen singing Punjabi songs, girls from municipal schools pausing at the poet's gate and smiling, and the poet's regret that she has nothing to offer them except her constant 'complaining voice'. 'The Corridors' brings out her torturing loneliness. 'Loud Posters' is a poem of 'self-revelation' where the poet regrets the 'sad sacrifice' of her making compromise of putting 'private voice away' and 'adopting the type-writers click-click'. 'I Shall Some Day' expresses her desire to free herself from 'the cocoon' he builds around her 'with morning tea' but she knows that she will have to ultimately take refuge in his 'nest of familiar scorn'. In 'Drama' the tragedienne poet speaks of 'unrequited love' and wails 'I am so wronged'. Her male audience and later her husband make fun of her. In 'The Stone Age' she speaks disapprovingly of her 'fat spider husband' and his activities, goes to another man as a reactionary act but even this intense physical experience cannot bring her any abiding joy. 'The Swamp' expresses her dissatisfaction with the merely physical gratification offered by the lover, her resolve to 'stalk out of his bed' and her affection for her child and grandma. 'Sunset, Blue Bird' narrates a painful experience where the one who said 'he loved me' deserts her when told about her pregnancy. The woman continues to be haunted by his memories.

In this volume Kamala Das is once again occupied with herself. Quest for a fulfilling relationship continues and brings in its wake a lot of discontentment, disenchantment and pain. Many of the poems contain reminiscences of her childhood and her lasting love for her grandmother.

Tonite this Savage Rite

In this collection published in 1979, 15 poems are reprints from earlier volumes. In 'A Losing Battle', the poet, disgusted with her lover's infidelity rejects the entire male class: "men are worthless" and concludes "love in a woman must mean tears". 'Phantom-Lotus' embodies her journey from 'body' to 'bodylessness'. Her quest is for him 'who has no more a body' and whose 'face is a phantom-lotus'. In 'Morning at Apollo Pier' she describes the morning scene of choppy sea, pavements and the poem concludes with celebration of lover: "You are the poem to end all poems" and the poet's desire "love me till I die". In 'The Blind Walk' she longs to 'sow as seed' her 'soul in fertile soil of his body'. In 'The Lion' she feels so 'Incomplete' when 'apart' from her lover. The poems 'Yvonne' and 'Lines Addressed to a Devdasi' bring out the loneliness, grief and lovelornness of these characters. 'The Caretakers' describes a relationship which 'stopped a step away from love'. In 'A Man is a Season' the poet lodges a complaint against her husband who 'let your wife seek ecstasy' in 'other arms'. She also regrets her 'losing way' and 'going astray' in life. 'The Sunshine Cat' brings out her disenchantment and disillusionment with her lovers who tell her "I cannot love, it is not in my nature to love!" and her 'ruthless watcher' husband who "neither loved nor/used her". In 'For S After Twenty Five Years' the poet remembers a delightful relationship and unravels her vulnerability.

In 'The Westerlies' she seeks to forget 'the desert in soul' and go meet the 'young sun' as inside her ageing body her desire is ever young. 'After the Party' is a sketch of a lady 'celebate by choice', with a body 'tamed by will and practice, taught never to make demands'. 'The Latest Toy' brings out her man's inability to relate at the emotional level: "emotion is the true enemy of joy" he comments.

In 'The Winner'–after a strife, the beloved is haunted by the lover's memories even in her dreams. The one long poem of the collection is 'Ghanashyam'. 'Ghanashyam' has built his 'nest' in the 'arbour' of her 'heart' and her life, earlier a 'sleeping jungle', becomes 'astir with music'. The poet calls death 'a drought' and life 'water'. She shares

that her 'method of survival' has been migration to 'warmer climes' when snow in love begins to fall. 'Stark white loneliness' tortures her and she seeks 'peace' that will 'doze in whites of my eyes when I smile'. The ones in 'saffron robes' told her of 'Ghanashyam' and towards him her thoughts 'race like enchanted fish'.

The volume is replete with her jeremiads against her men's incapability to offer anything more substantial than lust. The distinctive quality of the collection is the poet's growing interest in the spiritual and the mystical.

Only the Soul Knows How to Sing

Published in 1996, it is a selection from the entire poetic corpus of Kamala Das and it also includes her latest poems. The new poems finding place in this selection fall into three categories - poems on social themes, poems on the theme of death and decay and the poems on relationships.

In her poems on social themes the poet has strongly condemned violence and bloodshed. Her stance against state-sponsored or patriotic violence and war is an extension of her battle against feudal and patriarchal violence. In 'Toys' her indictment is unambiguous: "Doomed is this new race men who arrive/with patriotic slogans to sow dead seeds". In her poem 'Delhi 1984' she boldly attacks the terrorist violence unleashed on the innocent Sikhs in the wake of Indira Gandhi's assassination that turned the 'scriptural chants' into 'a lunatic's guffaw'. Her denouncement of terrorism is equally vehement in poems like 'If Death is Your Wish' and she ridicules the men whose vigour reposes in the guns they tote and not in their loins. Kamala Das castigates the caste-bred violence in her poem 'The Dalit Panther' where a Dalit youth lifts a bandaged arm and complains: "It was not the Gods who beat me but the police". The genocide of Tamils in Sri Lanka grows into a metaphor of collective violence in her poems on this theme like 'Smoke in Colombo', 'The Sea at Galle Face Green' and 'After July' as herein she sees a macabre repetition of earlier holocaust in Colombo where 'the robust Aryan blood, the sinister' gives Hitler the right 'to kill his former friends'. In 'Daughter of the Century' she bemoans the growth of forces of hatred: "we mated like gods but begot only our killers".

'The House Builders' is a sympathetic portrayal of men 'building houses for the alien rich' and in 'The Dalit Panther' the poet laments the lot of low caste poor compelled to live a life of 'lost chances, lost beauty'.

In this volume old age, death and nothingness are a recurring presence. 'Women's Shuttles' expresses agony of the poet who is saddened by 'innumerable trips behind a dear one's bier'. 'I Shall Not Forget' narrates the poet's close encounter with death at the time of her father's death. Death is etched on her mind: "I have seen death! and I shall not forget". 'Life's Obscure Parallel' describes a death-in-life experience. 'A sudden drought' seems to have settled itself on 'sunbleached' estuaries of her body and wondering 'What I seem to do is living or dying?' the poet concludes: 'Life's obscure parallel is death'. In 'Death is So Mediocre' the poet imagines her own death and decay when she will go 'in silence leaving not even a fingerprint on this crowded earth". In 'Smudged Mirrors' she bemoans her ill-health and ageing with "calves forever aching/ and traitors of senses deceiving". In 'A Chinagi Airport' the airport unveils 'death's lustrous chamber' and in 'The Sea at Galle Face Green' the city seems like 'a half-burnt corpse'. In 'The Intensive Cardiac Care Unit', in a death-charged atmosphere, patients 'await' their 'execution' and half-grown nightmares crouch under beds. In 'Old Cattle' the scene of vermillion-branded caged cattle being driven to a slaughter house reminds her of her own illness with 'electrocardiographs' and 'sedatives'. In 'Stock-taking', immortal love, self-realization, beauties, scriptures, pacifying philosophies - all seem meaningless before the inevitability of death. In 'My Father's Death' and 'A Requiem For My Father' the poet details her father's death after a long illness and expresses her longing for fatherly affection which she never received.

In her poem 'Larger than Life was He' the poet exposes her marriage as a sham. It was a 'mismatched pair' where 'he was free to exploit' and she was 'free to be exploited'. 'A Faded Epaulet on His Shoulder' reveals promiscuity of her husband who was involved with 'fairskinned maid servants' and was always 'floundering' and 'blundering'. In 'The Widow's Lament' the poet mourns her husband's death who was her sunshade and her home.

In 'A Journey with No Return' desire swims and sports in the poet's blood. 'The Lion in Siesta' brings out the essential physicality of man who even in his dream remembers the woman's 'ripe fruit breasts'. In 'Cat in the Gutter' the poet describes how 'no-soul' love-making makes her feel like only a 'high-bred kitten/rolling for fun in the gutter". In 'The Seashore' possibility of love which can take to 'worlds where life is evergreen' is frustrated and the poet

'feels the loss of love she never once received'. In 'Mortal Love' she argues that fidelity is only for 'immortals' and for mortals 'life is too short for absolute bliss' and 'too long for constancy'.

Some of her poems composed on her father and on her marriage reveal her feminist streak where she revolts against the two males dictating her life - an autocrat father who never gave her any love and threw her into a mismatched marriage, and her promiscuous, exploiter husband. Once again the attitude is ambivalent as the poet mourns her husband's death describing him as her 'home' and 'sunshade' and in 'A Requiem For My Father' she goes sentimental: "I loved you father, I loved you all my life".

In this volume also Kamala Das continues with her usual concerns - death and decay, her jeremiads against unfulfilling male-relationships and her love-hate attitude towards these relationships. However, the collection is an achievement both in theme and style. Her canvas becomes wider and imagery more original and modern.

Critical Appreciation of Poems

1. My Grandmother's House

'My Grandmother's House' is one of the finest poems in Kamala Das's maiden publication *Summer in Calcutta.* Though short, it touches upon many favourite themes of of her favourite. It is a poem of nostalgia, uprootedness and the poet's eternal quest for love in a 'loveless' world. Relationship with her grandmother is the poet's favourite relationship and grandma is a symbol of harmony, affection and security in her poetry. In her poem 'Composition' Kamala Das discloses two of her guarded secrets:

I am so alone
And that I miss my grandmother

The poem under consideration also brings out the poet's loneliness and her fondness for her grandmother. Both the old lady and the ancestral home at Malabar brought to Kamala Das the feeling of belongingness.

The poet has provided detailed information about the origin of this poem in her autobiography *My Story* (Chapter 33):

After the sudden death of my granduncle followed by that of 'my dear grandmother' the old Nalapat House was locked up and its servants disbanded. The windows were shut, gently as the eyes of the dead are shut... . The rats ran across its darkened halls and the white ants raised on its outerwalls strange forms–totems of burial.

After growing up, the poet shifted to another house which was far away from her beloved ancestral house. She still misses the place 'where I received love' with a great intensity. The memory of those days when she was loved chokes her with emotion. The poet recalls the death of her dear ancestress - "That woman died" dwells on the difference the death made to the house and the poet's life. Grandma was the very life and soul of this house. When she passed away, even the house could not take the grief and 'withdrew into silence'. It was an atmosphere of allround mourning and desolation. At that time the poet was a very young child who could not read books but even at that age she had a feeling of 'snakes' moving among books - a feeling of deadness, horror and repulsion. She recollects how the death of her grandmother had affected her as a child. It had a benumbing and chilling impact on her. Her blood lost all its invigorating power and its colour came to resemble the colour of the pale lifeless 'moon'.

Her grandmother's house always had a special significance for Kamala Das. During one of her serious illnesses she had taken shelter in Malabar and was nursed back to health by her caring grandmother. The grandmother is no more, yet the poet often yearns to visit her beloved house. She would once again look through its windows. The windows are 'blind' - shut, covered with colored windowpanes and with the overpowering sense of death. Death haunts the house and even the air is 'frozen air'. A visit to this house would revive memories of her childhood and grandmother in the poet.

Her grandmother's house has been a citadel of security and protection which is conspicuously missing from the poet's later life. For her, even the darkness of this house is not terrifying in its impact. It is rather a faithful companion providing comfort and security. The poet wishes to transport some of this comforting darkness and memories of this house to her new house. These memories will be her constant assuring companions in her married life. In his article on Kamala Das, O.J. Thomas has observed, "Memory of that house at Nalapat comes back to her as a soothing thought. The very thought created a sort of energy in her and inspiration to live and love."

As the poet remembers her present life, she is once again filled with grief over her loveless state. She badly misses her grandmother, the ancestral house and her secure and loved childhood:

You cannot believe, darling
can you, that I lived in such a house and
was proud and loved

That early stage is in painful contrast with her present state sans love and sans pride. The 'proud' and 'loved' child is now a beggar, begging at the 'stranger's doors' for love "at least in small change" i.e. a little measure. Since love is not to be found in the company of people close to her, she knocks at the stranger's doors and begs for it. In her quest for true love she has 'lost her way' and wanders here and there. This wistfully nostalgic poem thus ends on a tragic note.

For Kamala Das her grandmother was her mother-substitute. "She was the first I loved" says the poet in her poem 'Captive'. None of her later relationships could match the warmth and tenderness given by her grandmother. The oft-repeated desire to be with her, to be in her house, is expression of Kamala Das's natural desire to be one with the mother in the womb.

In its overall impact the, poem is a forcefully moving poem fraught with nostalgia and anguish. The poet has intensified the emotion through presenting the contrast between her childhood and her grown-up stages. The fullness of the distant and absent and the emptiness of the near and the present give the poem its poignancy. The images of 'snakes moving among books', blood turning 'cold like the moon', 'blind eyes of windows', 'frozen air' evoke a sense of death and despair. The house itself becomes a symbol - an Ednic world, a cradle of love and joy. The escape, the poetic retreat, is in fact, the poet's own manner of suggesting the hopelessness of her present situation. Her yearning for the house is a symbolic retreat to a world of innocence, purity and simplicity.

Kamala Das has resorted to her favourite technique of using ellipsis to convey the intensity of emotion. Ellipsis also serve another purpose of suggesting a shift in mood and tone. She has used a variety of sound patterns, assonance, alliteration and especially consonance. Consonance (e.g. line-1 house, once: */s/)* and assonance (e.g. line-11 - bedroom, brooding: */u/)* create the drowsy somnolence apt for the atmosphere. Frequent alliteration (e.g. behind, bedroom, brooding) gives emphasis to the poet's meaning. The rhetorical question spread in the last four lines underlines the emotional state created by absence of love.

The poem is remarkable for its utter simplicity of diction and intensity of emotion.

2. A Hot Noon in Malabar

In one of her pieces Kamala Das confesses: "From every city I have lived, I have remembered the noon in Malabar with an ache growing inside me, a homesickness". 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' *(Summer in Calcutta)* is a poem which captures this 'ache' and 'homesickness' in a very effective manner. It is a poem steeped in nostalgia. The poet craves for the noon in Malabar which was a full-blooded experience as compared to her experience of noon in a big city.

She recollects a noon scene in Malabar. The picture has the typical colour of the villages in Kerala. The beggars beg for alms in plaintive, long-drawn voices. Some tribal fortune-tellers arrive from hilly regions, carrying with them caged parrots and worn-out, soiled fortune-telling cards. The poet also recalls the 'Kurava' girls - a caste of fowlers, basketmakers and fortune-tellers. These brown-complexioned girls look at the palms of their customers and foretell their fortune in their carefree, singsong voices pleasing the customers. The contrast between the 'old eyes' and 'singsong voices' of these girls suggests the odds and pressures they struggle against in life. The bangle-sellers display their red, green and blue-coloured bangles on the 'cool black floor' of her Nalapat house. Their bangles carry the flavour of 'the dust of the roads'.

Malabar noon is a noon of all such people who undertook a long and tough journey to reach the poet's house. When they ascended the porch of her house with their rough feet, it produced a 'grating' and 'strange' noise.

The poet also remembers some other details of the scene. Some strangers - exhausted, sun-scorched pedestrians, try to look inside the room parting the window - curtains. With their sun-stained eyes they cannot see anything inside the room. Getting disappointed they turn to brick-edged well to quench their thirst and find respite from the scorching sun. Some other strangers who arrive there wear a different expression and have 'mistrust' in their eyes. When dark-

complexioned, quiet, recalcitrant strangers speak up, their voices are 'wild, jungle-like voices'.

As the scene comes alive in the poet's memory, the poem moves from memory to desire and yearning:

Yes, this is
A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love

The poet is simply in love with such a wildness - wild voices, wild thoughts, wild men, wild love and feet stirring up the dust. She could find all this at 'my home' in Malabar, the place which gives her a freeling of belongingness. As she thinks of the place and the noon scene, she is filled with anguish at her being in a distant city:

To
Be here, far away, is a torture

The poem ends with a lament:

I so far away...

The final clause gives final emphasis to nostalgia developed throughout the poem.

The poem is remarkable for its presentation of Indian locale. Bruce King has remarked, "Kamala Das brings a sense of locality to her poems" and the poem is rich in creating the typical colour of village life in Kerala. However, Kamala Das's sketch has no romantic glamorization of the life in Malabar. The beggars have 'whining voices', fortune cards are 'stained with time', kurava girls have 'old eyes', bangles are 'covered with the dust of the roads', feet are 'cracked' causing 'grating and strange' noise and strangers have 'mistrust' in their eyes.

Averse to artificial city life of 'windows shut' and 'airconditioner' (The Old Playhouse), Kamala Das clamours for a natural life - a throbbing wild life which can be a reality only in Malabar and so she yearns to be there.

The poem also brings out the centrality of Man in the poet's vision. The noon awakens in her the desire for 'wild men, wild thoughts and wild love' without which her world is so incomplete.

The sensory images describing noon in Malabar are dexterously accompanied by the hypothetical imagery of wild men, initiating 'wild thoughts' and 'wild love' thus mixing memory and desire. The lexical compounding 'window-drapes, 'jungle-voices', 'brick-edged' helps compress the meaning and intensifies the impact of imagery. The repetition of the word 'wild' in the forceful sentence: "Yes, this is a noon for wild noon... wild love" brings out the poet's intense passionate desire to be a participant in such a scene. All recurring motifs are voiced consonants and have a relaxed articulation:

Line 1 –"This is" : /z/

Line 2 –"Voices", "hills" : /v/, /z/, /l/

Line 3 –"All", "Kurava girls" : /1/, /v/, /z/

At the abstract level of sound symbolism, the presence of soft-consonants symbolically represents the content - half-dreamy, relaxed-mind of the speaker.

The mixing of images of memory and desire creates the desired aesthetic effect. With its rich and beautiful imagery, proper lexical selection and sound symbolism, the poem comes out as another of Kamala Das's appealing pieces.

3. The Looking Glass

Culled from ***The Descendants*** (1967) 'The Looking Glass' is a highly erotic poem by the 'Queen of Erotica' Kamala Das. Sex as a means of transcending the physical is crucial to Kamala Das's vision of love. The present poem establishes the mutual need of Man and Woman for physical pleasure. In her characteristic bold and unconventional manner Kamala Das presents description of male and female bodies and the acts. The ironic tone and the intermittent unpoetic matter make readers see the futility and sterility of such a lustful relationship.

The female persona guides a supposedly women's audience about the suitable course of action to be taken by women who wish to have a lover. For procuring a man's love what a woman 'needs is only the desire for physical gratification in her and her confession of such a desire before him. He will be pleased at the thought that he is the 'giver' and she, the 'receiver', and it is her lust that he is going to satisfy, not his. To further satisfy his male ago, a woman should stand naked, initially, not in front of him but in front of the mirror. Kamala Das endows her male and female personae with

the traditional attributes - male has only physical strength and female has softness, loveliness and youth. When they stand in front of the mirror together, man will be able to literally see himself as the 'stronger' one and perceive woman as tender, younger and beautiful one. Her feminine softness and loveliness would excite his passion and also glorify his vanity as the superior male.

Kamala Das advises the women to play a more active role in this foreplay drama. A woman should praise the masculine prowess of the male and should notice perfection of his limbs. She should also admire the arousal of passion in him - his eyes reddening under the shower, his 'shy-walk' across the bathroom floor and his dropping towel revealing his masculine firmness. Freeing herself from inhibitions, a woman should appreciate:

All the fond details that make
Him male

She should also make him feel that he is her 'only man' for sexual satisfaction.

A woman should be a full-blooded participant in the physical act. She should uninhibitedly give herself completely to him:

Gift him all
Gift him what makes you woman

She should gift him all - not only the poetic but also the unpoetic. Along with the scent of long hair, musk of sweat between the breasts, the woman should also not hesitate in giving him the 'warm shock of menstrual blood'. Her 'endless female hungers' can be satiated only after such a full participation and involvement in the act.

The poet returns to her initial premise:

Getting a man to love is easy

Physical intimacy is not a problem but the consequent tensions and complications abound. For a man, it has simply been a sexual encounter with a lustful woman but she will undergo the pangs of emotional vaccum and lonely existence. It will be a death-in-life experience for her. She will be once again among 'strangers', with ears hearing 'his last voice calling her home' and her lacklustre eyes which have given up all 'search'. As the lover deserts her, it will be a painful contrast:

Your body which once under his touch had gleamed
Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute

Once she was all aglow with passion, but afterwards she is a forlorn, melancholy woman ravaged by disease and decay. The poem concludes with prediction of transient nature of sexual love, a statement without which the poem would have lost its appeal and message.

The poem is highly charged with passion and passion leaps out of every line and diction. It is a powerful evocation of passionate relationship between the two sexes. The poet builds up the passion step by step and the release comes with 'gift him all' to satiate the hunger. The poem is unparalleled in its uninhibited expression of female sexuality. The poet has dauntingly gone ahead to celebrate Body and included even 'unpoetic' details like 'jerkyway he urinates and 'the warm shock of menstrual blood'.

However, the beauty of the poem lies in its psychological validity and underlying irony - the subtle psychological analysis of the male mentality in the first part and the feminine psyche in the second. The poet has not been swept off her feet by passion. She has retained her awareness all throughout - awareness of climax, awareness of the impending anti-climax, awareness of male-ego, awareness of mutual need and awareness of the transient nature of the physical act. This bifocal vision is expressed through the ironic mode.

The poet has made deft use of alliteration all throughout. Repetition of phrases - 'Gift him, gift him' and lines 'Getting a man to love you is easy' enforces the thought and emotion.

The poem is rich in corporeal imagery and body language. It can be compared with Sylvia Plath's 'Mirror'. Plath makes mirror a dramatic persona that talks. The strength of Plath's poem lies in her greater control of tone, language, verse and imagery and the strength of Kamala Das's poem lies in its passionate intensity.

The poem is remarkable for its uninhibited and daring portrayal of the theme of physical its assertion of female sexuality and its exploration of male and female psychology.

4. The Freaks

Quest for love continues to be the leit-motif of Kamala Das's poetry. Her failure to get a fulfilling relationship and its consequent shattering impact on her psyche are the subject of her poem 'The Freaks' *(Summer in Calcutta).* 'The Freak' is one who is whimsical, capricious in nature and deviates from the accepted norm of behaviour. Herein both man and woman behave in an unexpected way.

The beloved describes the lover, his features and their moments of togetherness. Unlike a handsome, pleasant beau of a fairy tale, 'he' is repulsive to the woman and she dwells on the ugliness of his features. His cheeks are 'sun-stained' and brownish in colour, his mouth seems to be horrible like a 'dark cavern' and his teeth are 'uneven' and calciferous.

These images of ugliness reveal the woman's disgust with the man and her abhorrence for this forced relationship.

As a gesture of love-making, the man puts his hand on her knee. Despite the fact that they have 'willed' their minds to race towards the love, their minds - particularly of woman - keep wandering away from love. The relationship offers 'puddles of desire' full of dirt and filth, i.e. lust. Obviously, the communion is only at the physical level and not at the level of heart, mind or soul.

The female persona is filled with disgust at the failure of a lover who cannot provide anything more than merely physical fondling and foreplay - the 'skins lazy hungers'. Her search all through has been a search for a fulfilling relationship - a mental and emotional communion – an involvement of the whole being. This hopeless state with only the physical sans the emotional dialogue makes her feel like she is 'pinned on the wall and wriggling'. Like in her poem 'The Descendants', the situation seems to be quite irredeemable. Her heart is like 'empty cistern' emotionally sterile and barren, filled not with water of love but with the deadly snakes of silence. Devender Kohli calls it 'a rather helpless situation'.

The female persona feels as if she is abnormal and her behaviour is unnatural. She is not able to behave like a normal woman and is asexual, sterile or frigid. In order to hide her own supposed frigidity, she puts on a mask of 'grand, flamboyant lust' and shows that she is moved by an overwhelming hunger for sexual gratification. Such acts of the poet are however only a pose, a facade to hide the painful truth - the truth of her hopeless and helpless situation of loveless existence.

The poem is important as it gives the readers an idea of Kamala Das's concept of love. For her love is to be more than arousal of 'skin's lazy hunger'. If it offers only the physical pleasure, the male-body is viewed as an 'agent of corruption' and the act becomes a loathsome and ugly happening. The poem also suggests that Kamala Das is nor merely the 'Poet of Body' or 'Queen of Erotica' given to satisfaction of 'endless female hunger'. The lines

It's only
to save my face, I flaunt, at
Times, a grand, flamboyant lust

recall similar meaning lines from her other poems - "the sad lie of my unending lust" (In Love), "I'm not yours for the askingbecause I don't feel the need" (Composition) and "he said, 'It's a physical thing", "end it, I cried" (Substitute).

A very strong point of the poem is its apt imagery. It is one of the poems where the poet is at her best. 'Sun-stained cheeks', 'dark cavern mouth', 'stalicities of uneven teeth', 'puddles of desire', 'empty cistern', heart filled with 'coiling snakes of silence' are all an integral part of the poem presenting the mood in a very effective way. The two consecutive rhetorical questions spreading over 7 lines forcefully bring out the poet's great anguish and despair with her situation. She has made an impressive use of alliteration and ellipsis. The final declaration in the last three lines brings an end to the tension built up in the poem. He is left in his state and the female persona emerges to assert her individuality. For its rich imagery and insight into Kamala's concept of love, the poem is highly significant.

The two poems 'The Freaks' and 'The Looking Glass' put together, give us insight into Kamala Das's mind. Love of man is crucial for her. The physical is welcome but in order to be a meaningful and fulfilling relationship it has to be a communion at the level of heart and mind also. Otherwise male and male body create in her the feelings of revulsion and despair.

5. The Old Playhouse

'The Old Playhouse' is the title piece of Kamala Das's collection *The Old Playhouse and other Poems.* The poem is the poet's protest against her dissatisfying conjugal relationship and an overpossessive, egotistical and obsessed husband. The women reader's empathy with the conditions and circumstances described herein makes the poem a feminist piece. The poem also gives an insight into Kamala Das's concept of love and her penchant for natural life over artificial life.

The poem begins with an accusation on 'You', the husband.

Marriage had a different meaning for the speaker and her husband. For him it was an execution of a 'planned' action i.e. curtailing of a woman's freedom. The poet makes use of the 'swallow' image - the swift, flying untameable migratory bird whom the man tried to entrap in the 'long summer' of his love. His purpose was to make her totally oblivious of her love for freedom. He wanted her to snap all her relations with her happy past experiences and her old home. Not only this, her husband intended to make her forget her very identity as a woman, her desire for freedom and the various vistas and opportunities available to her for self-exploration and self-growth.

The lady had entered marriage with entirely different expectations:

It was not to gather knowledge
of yet another man that I came to you but to learn
What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow

Her quest was for a relationship that could help her in self-discovery and self-realization. What actually happened was totally the opposite. A selfcentred and selfish person as he was, the entire focus was on his own satisfaction.

What her husband wanted from this relationship was merely the physical gratification. He was satisfied with her body, its response and the routine 'shallow' convulsions. He often forced her into the act, killing all the beauty and romance of the physical union. His loathsome acts were highly repugnant to the poet:

You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you
poured yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed
my poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices

Since she was now his 'wife', she was taught to ungrudgingly perform all wifely duties and to look after her husband properly, supplying him tea, food and vitamins at the 'right moment'.

To satisfy her husband's 'monstrous ego' she adopted her new role and accordingly adjusted herself but all this had a disastrous impact on her psyche and it resulted in a total loss of self-esteem and selfconfidence:

Cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego, I ate the magic loaf and
Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
Questions I mumbled incoherent replies

Clearly it was a no-win situation for the wife.

She realizes that the relationship has started becoming very tiresome losing all its freshness and charm. It is the onset of 'autumn' the decline of passion and decay of relationship. The 'ruder breezes of the fall' and 'smoke from burning leaves' suggest the slow death of the relationship and the suffocating atmosphere. Her husband's world is an artificial world of artificial lights, cut off from the freshness of nature by 'always-shut' windows. The cut flowers in the vases stink of human sweat and even an air-conditioner cannot dispel the 'all pervasive male scent' of his breath.

Such a life has a wrecking impact on the sensitive psyche of the poet as it kills her cheerful spark and lands her into a kind of stupor:

No more singing, no more dance
my mind is an old
playhouse with all its lights put out.

The man is physically strong and his approach in love is that of domination and subjugation. The contact with him is no rejuvenating experience as he offers his love in 'lethal doses'. The speaker wishes to uphold her individuality which her husband perpetually seems to destroy by 'confining her in loathsome sex-acts and mundane household work. She seeks:

at last
an end, a pure total freedom

from self-centred, self-obsessed narcissistic love of her husband.

The last lines of the poem contain an extended imagery of Narcissus. Her partner's serving his love in 'lethal doses' is a cruel and heartless act and conduct for he is a totally self-centred man. The speaker understands the reason of such a behaviour by her man:

Love is Narcissus at water's edge
haunted by its own lonely face

But in her view love is to be made a liberating force. It can become one when it is pure, emotional and spiritual, free from ego and self-obsession. For Kamala Das this purification is possible through the physical. Night is very significant in her world. Extending the Narcissus imagery, the poet expresses the hope that 'kind night' i.e. physical union can 'erase' the 'water' and 'shatter the mirror' which reflect ego and self-obsession. Purged from the suffocating fatal force and impurities of self-obsession, love will become a truly pure, liberating and life-giving force.

The poem is imbued with strong feminist feelings as the poet speaks against a conjugal relationship which curtails a woman's freedom and erodes her personality. She revolts against the insipid domestic chores , 'wifely duties' and the stereo-typed role of 'mumbling incoherent replies'. For her, love is to be a liberating and life-giving experience which helps in self-growth.

Kamala Das, the poet who loves wild voices and wild men cannot be comfortable in the world of artificial lights, shut windows and airconditioners.

A salient feature of the poem is its beautiful imagery. The metaphorical expression 'my mind is an old/playhouse with all its lights put out' is highly apt and suggestive. Similarly the images of 'swallow', 'sky', 'summer', 'fall', 'lethal-doses' and the last cluster of images–narcissus, mirror, night and 'water' - all convey the poet's message in a very skilful way. Both irony and pathos are woven in the warp of the poem. Lexical cohesion is another striking feature of this poem. It has been achieved through repitition of 'love', 'summer' and 'learn'. The repetition of 'I' and 'You' makes the tension between the two partners very palpable. The poem starts with the suggestion of freedom, freedom is truncated in the middle part and in the end the desire and vision of freedom come up again.

For its tone and temper, for its highly suggestive imagery, for its strong feminist flavour and for its final vision of love as a liberating force, the poem makes a rich reading.

6. The Wild Bougainvillea

Like many other pieces of Kamala Das 'The Wild Bougainvillea' *(Summer in Calcutta)* is a poem of 'psychic striptease' and exudes 'autobiograhpy'. Her sadness, death consciousness, craving for a man and her final ability to transcend this nihilistic experience - all find expression in this aesthetically and stylistically appealing poem.

Calcutta holds a significant place in Kamala Das's mental make-up. Unlike Pritish Nandy's disappointing Calcutta, Calcutta was a source of enriching experience for Kamala Das:

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 first saw a prostitute,
Gaudily painted like a cheap bazaar toy.

In 'The Wild Bougainvillea' the poet recollects one of her experiences during her stay in Calcutta. It was summer time and she had one of her bouts of sadness. Time hung heavy on her heart. She compares the slow passing of those days to the 'mourners passing behind the bier', 'sadly' and 'moodily'. She was in such a state of body and mind that

no amount of physical rest made her feel any better. Her bed became a 'troubled sea tossing her on its waves' and she could not relax day in and day out. She was deeply tormented by her desire to be with a man from another town'.

However, the poet did not languish in this state for long and tried to collect. She lost herself in activities like taking long walks, walking new roads and looking at charming faces. She finds this world 'a good world' because it offers a lot of 'distractions' to people if and when required and this mitigates the intensity of one's suffering. Gradually her craving for the man grew weaker.

The poet set out on her odyssey and walked through the city. As a wanderer she experienced the disgusting everyday realities - rot, corruption and grotesque sights. She saw barges with rotting undersides, garbage rot, dead fish rot and also smelt death and decay all around. She walked the streets where standing under yellow lamps the prostitutes with artificial large breasts wooed men with their 'sickly smiles'. She also trod on the roads close to the graveyard. Here she found a complete domain of death. With the passage of time and ravages of weather, even the writings on these tombstones had withered. The tombstones looked totally discolored. To the poet, the scenario of such stones looked like a 'harvest' of 'grotesque, old teeth' - decayed and deformed. These tombs were also in a state of sheer neglect as no mourners visited them to pay floral tribute or to shed any tears in the memory of the dead. Thus the poet saw a picture of decay, degeneration, destruction and death all around her. The deadness of inner world was matched by the deadness of the external world.

For all its decay, it was not a world beyond redemption. Right in the heart of Death, the poet discovered life as she saw

Beside
The older tombs some marigolds bloom and the
Wild red bougainvillea
Climbing their minarets

This experience of watching the spurt of life amidst death sank inside her and brought a change in her psyche and perspective. Now when she walked, saw and heard, the city was no more a formidable stranger or a conundrum of death but a familiar place to which she could easily relate. As the city became familiar, the craving for that particular man was gone. The experience was a liberating force for her which freed her from her emotional bondage. She sent to this man some flowers, had a peaceful sleep and woke up in the morning, 'free' from longings and cravings. The end of the poem suggests the emergence of self not hampered by death and decay. It is reflected in the ultimate celebration of joy in attainment of freedom.

The poem revolves around twin ideas - the poet's inability to find meaningful relationship of love and her longing for freedom from this bondage. It is to her credit that she finds in the world of reality not only death and decay but also life and regeneration. It is the objects of Nature–marigold and bougainvillea–which nourish the life-spirit and eros of the poet and give her strength so that she can celebrate the tragic aspects of existence in a poised manner.

The poem is rich in its stylistic beauty. Repitition of syntactic parallelism (NP+VP structure) gives the poem structural unity. The feminine rhymes of line 4 and 6, internal rhyme and repetition intensify the effect. The syntactic break in line nine effects shift. There is a rich harvest of sensory images. The image of rottenness is effectively worked out through lexical items - rot, smell etc. Images of corruption are evoked by 'night girls', 'sauntered', 'sham', 'sickly' - all words suggestive of the passage of to time, destitution and corruption. Besides the poet shows sensitivity through selection and arrangement of lexical items and images of time–summer, day, night, old, morning and so on. Past tense is maintained throughout with absence of nodals/auxiliaries. Grammatical pattern of the poem lends its aesthetic appeal.

The poem has both death and regeneration. In the first part' death and decay dominate, but the end brings out the inevitability of regeneration and life.

Theme of Love

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

is Kamala Das's declaration in her poem 'The Suicide'. Love is the leitmotif of Kamala Das's poetry. An eternal quest for true love is the pivotal concern in the writings of this 'High Priestess of Love'. Her forte is not cerebral complexity, intellectual stamina, philosophical musings but her emotionally rich poetry and profoundly deep feelings expressed in forceful intimate verse. Her achievement is her daring and unconventional portrayal of the emotion of love in its myriad shades.

Kamala Das's writings are by and large autobiographical and her poetry is *My Story* narrated in verse. Her personal experiences in life, first as a child and then as a grown-up woman, have not been very pleasant. A sensitive being always looking for love, she almost always failed to receive it in various relationships. As a child she longed to have her father's affection but as her autobiography records "He was not of an affectionate nature. So we grew up more or less neglected." Later, at an early age of 15, she was married to a much older person. It was a totally incompatible marriage, deprived of any emotional involvement. Even her relationships with other men could not give Kamala the kind of love she was looking for. Her poetic corpus records her quest for love, her celebration of moments of love but more predominantly her anguish at not being able to find the ideal relationship.

A poet, who took to writing to 'woo a man', Kamala Das accords to Man's love the central place in her life and vision. In her poem 'The Lion' she feels 'so incomplete' when 'apart' from her lover. 'The Invitation' articulates her need for man:

I am still young
And I need that man for construction and destruction

In 'The Wild Bougainvillea' she longs for man's love: "I groaned/ and moaned /and constantly yearned for a man". A satisfying relationship with male can be a source of contentment and bliss. 'Love' expresses the bliss the poet had once experienced:

Until I found you
I wrote verses, drew pictures
And went out with friends
For walks
Now that I love you
Curled like an old mongrel
My life lies content
in you...

For the poet, man's love continues to be the summum bonum of her existence, the ultimate achievable ideal: In 'Morning at Apollo Pier' the poet celebrates her lover and love:

You are the poem to end all poems
A poem absolute as the tomb
… … … …
O love me, love me, love me till I die.

Physical aspect of love occupies a prominent place in Kamala Das's poetry and it is one of her dominant themes. She uninhibitedly expresses her 'wants as woman'—'the ancient hungers'—and celebrates the moments of intimacy. Her poem 'The Invitation' thus records the poet's rapture:

On the bed with him, the boundaries of
Paradise had shrunk to a mere
Six by two and afterwards
When we walked, out together, they
Widened to hold the unknowing city

Some of her poems literally burn with passion. In her highly erotic poem 'The Looking Glass' the poet dotingly describes the male body parts and activities - 'perfection of limbs', 'eyes reddening under shower' and so on. The poet urges the women to be active participants in the act:

Gift him all

Gift him - what makes you woman - the scent
of long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts
The warm shock of menstrual blood and all your
endless female hungers

Another poem 'The Stone Age' celebrates the physical union in a string of rhetorical questions: "Ask me, ask me, the flavour of his mouth...". 'The Conflagration' is a poem boiling with passion. The man asks the woman: "lay on me, light and white as embers over inert fires" and the woman thus evokes the gods of passion:

burn on, elemental fire
warm the coal streams of his eternal flesh
till At last they boiling flow, so turbulent with life

Though the poet often complains against unfulfilling relationships, she accepts the redeeming power of physicality in no unclear terms. Her 'body's wisdom' tells her time and again:

I shall find my rest, my sleep, my peace
And even death nowhere else but here in
my betrayer's arms.

'The Suicide' records how for the poet an intimate relationship with man is an anti-dote against the travails of existence:

In him I swim
All broken with longing
In his robust blood I float
Drying off my tears.

However, Kamala Das's glorification of body and bodily pleasures does not sum up her vision of love. Her wants as woman are not merely physical but also emotional and spiritual. In fact, communion at the levels of mind, heart and soul is very important for the poet. Love for her is also a means of self-growth and self-realization.

In all her relationships she looked for affection and warmth which her father could not give and grandmother gave. Her poem 'Glass' expresses the longing of a woman for a father's affection, missed out on as a child:

I've misplaced a father
Somewhere, and I look
for him now everywhere.

In many of her poems she fondly remembers with deep affection her grandmother. The poem 'The Millionaires at the Marine Drive' presents 'the contrast between the two types of relationships - one based on warmth and the other on lust. The poet always

thinks
of her, of the warmth that she took away
wrapped in funerary white

In her later relationships with males

no longer was
There someone to put an arm around my
Shoulders without a purpose, all the hands
The great brown thieving hands, groped beneath my
Clothes, their fire was that of an arsonist's
Warmth was not their aim, they burnt my cities
Down.

And then 'not blood' but 'acid' flowed through her 'arteries'.

The poet's quest was for a tender, sharing and caring relationship but unfortunately her partners were looking only for the physical.

Consequently, she often suffered pangs of emotional unfulfilment. Her poem 'Ghanashyam' brings out her agony:

Each time his lust was quietened
And he turned his back on me
In panic I asked Don't you want me any longer?

In the poem 'The Swamp' the poet relives her moments of tenderness when she called him her 'baby' holding him to her breast. Soon after she was confronted with the shattering reality when her man wore a 'stern look' with 'Do you want something?' attitude. The change is so complete that she is 'silent and in silence must move away'. From his side, the communion is almost always on the level of body only. An emotionless relationship makes the poet's heart 'an empty cistern', filled with 'coiling snakes of silence' in "The Freaks". Her quest is for more than merely physical and she gets desperate:

Can't this man with
nimble finger-tips unleash
nothing more alive than the
skin's lazy hungers?

Frustrated with the experience, the poet puts on a mask:

It's only
To save my face, I flaunt, at times
a grand flamboyant lust

Her lover in 'The Latest Toy' tells her: "oh, please don't become emotional/emotion is the true enemy of joy". When she is told, "It's a physical thing" by her man in 'Substitute', she revolts: "end it and let us be free". Kamala Das's tragedy is that right from her first experience when she asked for 'love' and the 'bedroom door was closed', all her life, her men could not give her love but 'let her slide into a bed made soft with tears and she lay there weeping'. In the poem 'The Sunshine Cat' the poet ascribes her tragedy to basic male-female temperamental differences:

And they said, each of
Them, I don't love, I cannot love, it is not
in my nature to love

And the poet's world is replete with complaints and anguish against such a nature of her male counterparts.

Kamala Das clamours for a fulfilling relationship - a 'first true embrace' where all 'doubts' and 'reasonings' are silenced and 'everything melts', even the 'hardness at the core'. Otherwise merely physical gratification is highly repugnant to her. In poem after poem she laments the loveless physical experience. In 'Convicts' the poet regrets:

The use, what's the bloody use
That was the only kind of love
This hacking at each other's parts

'In Love' a million questions trouble her mind and she cannot call 'the skin communicated thing' love. 'The Descendants' brings out the poet's despair at her helpless unredeemable situation:

none will step off his cross
no lost
love
claim us, no, we are not going to be
ever redeemed, or made anew

In 'The Prison' the poet expresses her resolve to 'Someday find, an escape from its snare (body)'.

For Kamala Das, a poet with a strong feminist consciousness, love is also a means for self-growth and self-realization. In her poem 'The Old Playhouse' she asserts:

I came to you but to learn
what I was, and by learning, to learn to grow

In her view the ideal relationship is one based on equal-footing, free from ego dominance -an experience which does not have a cramping impact on her personality. In 'The Old Playhouse' and many other poems dealing with marital relationship, she has lamented the loss of individuality and erosion of personality caused by her husband's overpowering ego and possessiveness:

Cowering
beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
Questions, I mumbled incoherent replies

Kamala Das seeks freedom from 'such a debilitating and devastating relationship:

It must seek at last
An end, a pure, total freedom

The poet's concerns are spiritual and mystical also. Physical becomes a medium of transcending the Body. Her poem 'The Phantom Lotus' explicitly states:

Loving this one, I
seek but another way to know
him who has no more a body
To offer and whose blue face is
A phantom lotus on the waters of my dreams

In her poem 'Luminol' she seeks 'sleep' as then her 'ruthless one' shall not enter 'the soul's mute arena'. She knows 'only the soul knows how to sing/ at the vortex of the sea' and the merely physical does not suffice for her. In fact, the mythical framework of Radha-Krishan myth is an objective correlative for her quest for spiritual love. For Kamala Das 'Vrindavan lives on in every woman's mind'. 'Radha' contains the poet's vision of ideal love - a chaste bond without 'doubting and reasoning'. 'The Maggots' brings out the contrast between fulfilling relationship with Krishna and the physical encounter with husband where Radha feels 'dead'. In 'Ghanashyam' she weaves for 'my Ghanashyam' 'a rainment' with words, a 'sky' with songs. Her thoughts race towards him and the poet expresses her flashes of bliss:

Ghanashyam
You have like a koel built your nest in the arbour of my heart
my life, until now a sleeping jungle,
is at last astir with music.

Obviously, the poet's concept of love is very wide and inclusive as it includes not only the physical but also the mental, emotional and spiritual communion. It is a fulfilling relationship which is instrumental in the growth of self. Not an eerie or unearthly phenomenon but a real, lived experience, love continues to be Kamala Das's antidote against the meaningless of existence.

Kamala Das – The Poet of Body

With publication of her first poetic volume *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) Kamala Das instantly became a phenomenon to reckon with. What compelled immediate attention was her daring and uninhibited portrayal of Body and bodily pleasures in her works. M.K. Naik's observation "the most obvious feature of Kamala Das's poetry is the uninhibited frankness with which she talks about sex" is a representative critical remark. Her sexually charged poetry was, indeed, a shocking experience for Indian psyche fed on the cloying romantic verse of Sarojini Naidu. Not lagging behind Ezekiel, her contemporary who pronounced "nakedness is good". Kamala Das went on focusing on Body and earned for herself the titles like 'The Poet of Body' and 'The Queen of Erotica'. The poet has the matrilineal blood of Nalapat women in her veins, and English as a language of the western world and its liberal values offered a great liberty to her. Body is a central referent in her poetry and she is conscious of body all throughout - at times celebrating body, at times condemning it and at times concerned with the decay of body.

For Kamala Das, Body has the most vital role in her concept of love. It is a most significant building block in the

magnificent edifice of love. As discussed earlier, the poet has celebrated body and its pleasures in a large number of poems. She has expressed her desire for the physical in beautiful phrases - 'wants as woman', 'endless female hungers', 'ancient hunger' and so on. She dotingly dwells on both feminine and masculine body parts. The initiation into experience of love is through body. "Against his body my body summered" she recalls in 'The' Gulmohur'. In fact, body continues to be important for Kamala Das throughout her odyssey. In 'The Westerlies' the poet openly admits:

Inside
This ashen fatigue my blood is a bouncing fountain ageless
Red and warm, I shall get to meet the young sun

Her poem 'The Looking Glass' brings out her preoccupation with body in its highly alliterative lines. Her regret is that after the lover leaves

Body which once under his touch had gleamed
Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute

Kamala Das's preoccupation with body can also be seen in her contempt for body in relationships devoid of emotional communion. Body then becomes a means of exploitation, instrument of subjugation and cause for aversion. The poet portrays body as ugly and horrible. In fact, if no other women poet has revelled in the rapture of the physical more than Kamala Das, none else has presented an uglier picture of body also. Poem after poem is replete with such body - bashing by the poet. The 'skin's lazy hungers' which the man with 'sun-stained cheeks' and 'uneven teeth gleaming like stalactites' awakens are spurned, and so are his limbs like 'pale, carnivorous plants' and acts of 'dribbling spittle into mouth'. For her, the loveless body - centred relationship is only a 'tragic sport' that has made them addicts and in 'The Swamp' she leaves unsatisfied for "what does he bare for me on the bed except his well-tanned body?" In 'Gino' she realizes:

This body that I wear without joy
shall wither battling with
my darling's impersonal lust

Very revolutionary questions torment her:

Woman, is this happiness, this lying buried
beneath a man
It's time again to come alive
The world extends a lot beyond his six foot frame.

Her lament in 'Captive' is: "what have/we had after all between us but the/ womb's blinded hunger". Desperate, she seeks to break free from this imprisoning relationship of body in 'The Prison':

I study the trappings of your body
For I must somebody find
An escape from its share.

Kamala Das's poetry is also characterized by Body - Soul dualism and her attempt to resolve the tension arising from it. The crisis is aggravated as this spiritual yearning remains unsatisfied. It is a conflict between 'the body/that he knew how to love' and 'soul/that he knew how to hurt'. In her heart of hearts, the poet realizes the inevitable truth and expresses it in 'The Suicide':

Only souls may enter
The vortex of the sea
Only the soul knows how to sing
At the vortex of the sea.

She is also inclined to 'throw the bodies out' as she can't 'stand their smell'. The poet wishes to leave behind her a message and her instrument is body. She makes 'A Request':

When I die
Don't 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 poet seeks to transcend body through body. Physical leads her to metaphysical and body to soul. Loving the human lover she "seeks another way to know/him who has no more a body to offer".

Occasionally she experiences a state of almost cosmic consciousness in and after the act. 'The endless female hungers' become a cosmic and all consuming fire in 'Forest Fire' where she intends, like Whitman, to contain multitudes:

In me shall sleep the baby... walk the lovers...
Old shall sit... street lamps shall glimmer... cabaret girls cavort... wedding drums resound...
eunuchs whirl around... wounded moan

In 'Convict' the lovers sing:

Each note rising out of
Sea, out of wind, out of earth.

Decay of body is a matter of great concern for the poet. In 'The Westerlies' she speaks of her 'ageing body'. In her poem 'Composition' she feels the oppression of advancing age and remarks, "I have reached the age in which one forgives all". In all despair she confesses:

I have failed
I feel my age and my
uselessness

Her poem 'Annette' brings out the crisis of womanhood aggravated by ageing:

Annette
At the Dresser
Pale fingers over mirror fields
Reaping that wheat brown hair
Beauty falling as chaff in old mirrors
While calendars in all
the cities turn

Gino reveals the poet's apprehensions about her future:

It (body) shall grow gross
and reach large proportions before its end
… … …
I shall be the fat-kneed hag

In 'After the Illness' the poet laments the loss caused to her body by illness as there was not so much 'flesh left for the flesh to hunger', the blood 'weakened too much to lust' and the skin was 'numb and yearning'.

For the poet love is the defence against the perishablity of body. 'In Composition' she exhorts

all who scan the mirror for that white
gleam in the hair
fall in love

A modern woman poet writes her body and body consciousness haunts works of Kamala Das also. The word 'Body' itself appears umpteen times in her poetic corpus. The poet has used corporeal diction and corporeal imagery. Words

like 'womb', 'bones', 'touch', 'lips', 'limbs', 'sex' ,' fetus' 'heart' 'skin' 'blood' 'breast' 'chest' 'kiss', ' pubis', 'menstrual blood' abound in her poetry.

A denizen of the twin worlds, the actual world where love is usually a synonym of lust - 'skin communicated thing' and the mythical world of 'vrindavan', Kamala Das's work celebrates joyous potential of the Body while also acknowledging its concurrent dangers. Her concern with the emotional and metaphysical makes her much more than the mere 'Poet of Body'.

Feminism

According to a simple and broad definition, anyone who recognizes the existence of sexism, male-domination and patriarchy, and takes some action against it is a feminist. It is also entails assertion of one's individuality and identity. Feminism is a significant feature of women writing. Whenever women describe their experiences, they cannot gloss over their secondary status, subjugation and exploitation. The expression of feminism is at times explicit and at times implicit.

Kamala Das has been celebrated as a 'champion of womens' causes' and the first 'feminist' amongst Indian-English poets. Her writings–autobiography, poetry, novels, stories and her columns - reveal a strong feminist streak in various forms.

For the girl child Kamala, the very moment of entering this male dominated world was her tryst with the painful reality of her existence, the fact of being 'unwanted', and this trauma haunts her all her life. In her poem 'Next to Indira Gandhi' she calls her father in the convict box and asks:

Father, I ask you now without fear
Did you want me
Did you ever want a daughter?

As she started growing up, patriarchal forces started tightening their grip over her life through various representatives. In 'The Suicide' Kamala Das narrates how elderly female ancestors who had internalized patriarchy told her to desist from her favourite movement - swimming in her pond:

My great grand mother cried
you must stop this bathing now
you are much too big to play

'An Introduction' records how the 'categorizers' appeared on the scene and prescribed the do's and don'ts of her life:

Dress in Saris, be girl
be wife, they said-Be embroiderer, be cook
be a quareller with servants. Fit in, oh
belong

No wonder, the poet thinks:

Tragedy is not death
but growth

and sends in her poetry jeremiads against our sexist society for enforcing stereotyped roles on women.

Her father picked for her a husband with her first sari at the age of 15. She was married off to a man much older than her and henceforth started the saga of her suffocation, sufferings and sobs. She laments in 'Next to Indira Gandhi':

It was not the right most groove for me
It wasn't my cup of tea

Hers was a totally incompatible marriage:

It was never a husband and wife bond
We were such a mismatched pair
… … …
Not for a moment did I own him

Her autobiography 'My Story' and her poems are replete with her protest against such a man and the institution of marriage itself. 'The Old Play House' expresses Kamala Das's contempt for all that marriage entails—the man, his activities, the act and her loss of identity. Like a feminist who seeks growth of self in a man-woman relationship, the poet went to her man:

I came to you
but to learn
what I was
and by learning
to learn to grow

However, her man sought to 'tame' a 'swallow', and make her forget her very nature and the urge to fly. She was dwarfed by his overpowering ego:

Cowering
beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
became a dwarf, lost my will and reason, to all your
questions I mumbled incoherent replies

The wifely chores performed for such a man nauseated her. It was only a violent physical relationship and the poet, always looking for tenderness, recalls the details of his sexual exploits with abhorrence. The outcome is:

My mind is an old playhouse
All singing and dancing are gone

Predictably the poet seeks 'a pure, total freedom' at the end of the poem. 'The Sunshine Cat' is her complaint against a husband 'who neither loved nor used her, but was a ruthless watcher'. In 'The Swamp' she regrets "1 am a puppet on his string" and avers:

I shall rise one day I shall stalk out of his bed.

In 'The Stone Age' her 'old fat' husband 'weaves webs of bewilderment', kills her individuality and turns her into 'a granite dove' and 'a bird of stone'. She flees from him to another lover but this act also does not bring any abiding joy: "Ask me what is bliss and what is its price". In 'A Man is a Season' she chides her husband for "letting your wife/ seek ecstasy in others' arms."

In 'Substitute' the poet satirizes the psuedo-life a married woman is expected to lead in the name of making adjustment:

It will be alright when I learn
To paint my mouth like a clown's
It will be alright if I put up my hair
Stand near my husband to make a proud pair

In 'The Suicide' the poet unmasks the mask that a woman is supposed to wear all through her life:

I must pose
I must pretend
I must act the role of happy woman
Happy wife

Having known the reality of marriage, the poet offers her tongue-in-cheek advice to couples in 'Composition':

Here is my advice to you
obey each other's crazy commands
ignore the sane
turn your house into a merry
dog house
Marriage is meant to be all this

being arranged in
most humorous heaven

The relentless and caustic irony of these lines is expressive of the poet's disgust in this matter.

Kamala Das, the rebel, has also voiced her frustration with–and her anger against– 'malekind' who in her view can offer nothing more than merely the physical. As described in 'An Introduction', her very first experience was a disaster. She asked for 'love' and was 'closed in bedroom'. This unwanted sex-encounter created for her a crisis of identity as a woman:

He did not beat me
But my sad, woman body
felt so beaten
The weight of my breasts and wombs crushed me
I shrank pitifully

and then she reacted:

I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness

Male's inadequacy and inability to provide anything more than mere physical gratification is lamented time and again by the poet. In 'The Freaks' her despair is:

Can this man with nimble finger tips unleash
Nothing more alive than skin's lazy hungers?

For the poet, in the loveless 'tragic sport', male a body becomes 'an agent of corruption' and a means of subjugation. She is highly averse to 'sun-stained cheek', 'dark cavenous mouth' with 'stalactites of uneven gleaming teeth' and she loathes his limbs looking like 'pale and carnivorous plants'. In 'The Swamp' she realizes:

what does he bare for me on the bed in his
study except his well-tanned body?

In 'Composition' she declares:.

I am not yours for the asking
I shall be indifferent...
I do not feel the need

In 'A Losing Battle' the entire male-class is rejected into to:

Men are worthless, to trap them
Use the cheapest bait of all but never
love, which in a woman must mean tears
And a silence in the blood

This male-dominated world has made the poet suffer a lot and in 'Drama' she wails:

I am wronged, I am wronged
I am so wronged

K. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks: "Kamala Das's is a friendly feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurt it has received in an intensely, largely man-made world".

Apart from Kamala Das's protest against the male-apartheid, she is a feminist in her bold and uninhibited portrayal of female sexuality. Some of her poems like 'The Looking Glass' literally boil with passion and have earned for her the title of 'Queen of Erotica'. Her expressions 'wants as woman', 'endless female hungers', 'body's wisdom', 'womb's blind hunger' have become proverbial cliches to refer to female sexual desire. Kamala Das openly accepts her strong physical desire and uninhibitedly describes her marital and extra-marital relationships. In fact, by virtue of this bold

articulation of feminine urges, she instantly attracted international attention. Writing in 1965 she shocked her readers and critics alike. In this aspect she stands a class apart, as very few poets have been able to express such an intense passion and consuming desire so effectively and have celebrated 'body' so profoundly.

Jettisoning stereotyped expectation of feminine coyness, the poet resorts to use of corporeal language in her poems. Body images are woven into the body of her poetry. In consonance with feminist strategy she writes Body into Text. Words such as 'body', 'flesh', 'limbs', 'heart' eyes' 'face' 'womb' 'hands', 'palm' 'mouth' 'kiss' 'caress', 'corpse', 'skin', 'belly', 'breast', 'pubis', 'bosom' 'foetus' recur umpteen times in her poems. Kamala Das goes to the extent of making her poetry unpoetic by including details and expressions like 'urinating in a jerky way', 'shock of warm menstrual blood', 'hand clasping the pubis' and so on.

Her poems also reveal sex-solidarity. In 'Composition', the poet confirms her sex-solidarity and sisterhood:

We are all alike
We women
In our wrappings of hairless skin

The poems express a deep attachment for her female ancestors–grandma and great grand mother. In 'Captive' she writes:

My grandmother
She was
The first I loved

The poet nostalgically recalls the details of her smallest interaction with these women and badly misses the tenderness and warmth of these relationships. Her poems 'Devdasi', 'Nani' and 'Yvonne' are sympathetic presentations of these women characters. In 'The Forest Fire', 'The Snobs' and 'Middle Age' she brings out the sufferings of mothers.

Along with this articulation of feminist concerns, Kamala Das's poems are a very strong expression of her feminine consciousness. Suresh Kohli finds her vision 'vitally particularized by the woman's point of view'. She seeks to epitomize the quintessential woman:

I am every woman
who seeks love

In 'Glass' She writes:

I give a wrapping to their dreams
A woman voice
And a woman smell

Her poems' Jaisurya' and 'The White Flowers' are expressions of her maternal instinct and celebration of filial love. The poem which best expresses her consciousness of identity as a woman is 'Gino'. As a patient lying on the bed she is 'dreaming of home' and imagines herself performing all traditional feminine chores and roles:

I shall be the fat-kneed hag in the long bus queue
The one from whose shopping bag the mean potatoes must roll across the road
I shall be the grandmother-willing away her belongings, those
Scraps and trinkets
More lasting than her bones.

Kamala Das is seriously and creatively concerned with her own identity as woman.

Thus, Kamala Das's feminism is her own kind of feminism. Though aware of 'man-made' crisis, the poet does not reject Man and seeks from Man-woman relationship physical, mental, emotional and even spiritual fulfilment. However, credit goes to her for modernizing Indian feminine poetic psyche, for providing a breakthrough from teenagish romantic world of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, and for making woman's experiences and the revolt against the established sexist order, full-fledged subjects for poetry. Though 'self remains the nucleus from which her poetry flows, her personal domain acquires profound symbolic significance for all bruised and battered womankind. Iqbal Kaur, the feminist critic, has pertinently remarked: "Kamala Das did display tremendous courage in revolting against the sexual colonialism

and providing hope and confidence to young women that they can frustrate the sexist culture's effort to exploit and marginalize women". Her mantle has fallen on many young poets and in their poetry expression of feminism acquires more pronounced and explicit form.

Reminiscences of Childhood

Quest for true love continues to be the leit-motif of Kamala Das's poetry and most of her well-known poems revolve around her adult relationships. However, the poet also reveals a fondness for travelling down the memory lane and conjuring up images of her childhood, her ancestral home and her relations like grandmother, great grandmother and father. Reminiscences of childhood form an expressive part of many of her poems. An extremely sensitive being right from her childhood, Kamala Das has projected very vivid memories of her childhood in her poetry. This memory-treasure is a mixed bundle which is a source of both comfort and discomfort for the poet.

In poem after poem she lets her mind 'striptease' and readers are able to have a fair idea of her childhood. She makes use of memories as 'building blocks' in her poems. Like 'Allahabad' triggering off memories of childhood for A.K. Mehrotra, it is 'Malabar' and her ancestral home in Malabar which hold a paramount place in Kamala Das's world. In fact, in her world, grandmother/great grandmother and the ancestral home both become one as they bring her a feeling of belongingness, warmth and security. Most of the time the poet misses both of them together. In her poem 'Blood' she muses on treasured memories of childhood through snapshots and impressions. She and her brother "always playing on the sands/Drawing birds and animals" were briefed by their great grandmother about the dilapidating condition of the old house. She told them that the house had the tiles

fallen here and there
The windows whine and groan
And everynight
The rats come out of holes
And scamper past our doors.

The grandmother felt agonized:

O it hurts me she cried
Wiping a reddened eye

For I love this house, it hurts me much

To watch it die.

Deeply moved by her grandma's concern for the house, the young Kamala avowed that when she grows up she will

rebuild the fallen walls
And make new this ancient house

The great grandma passed away in her eighty-sixth year and the poet is not able to redo the house. Hearing 'death-cry' of the house all along, she bursts out:

Old house, I seek forgiveness
O mother's mother's mother

The poet retains all the memories of her great grandmother's day-to-day routine - her prayers to God, her royal elephant ride to Siva Shrine, her jewellery box, brocade, perfumes, sandal, story of her marriage to a prince, her disease, death, funeral and also her prejudices:

She told us
that we had the oldest blood
my brother and she and I
the oldest blood in the world
A blood thin and dear and fine

While in the veins of the always poor
And in the veins
of the new - rich ones
flowed a blood thick as gruel
and muddy as a ditch.

In 'The Swamp' Kamala Das calls to her mind her great grandmother's advice: "virtue is the best jewel".

One woman who stands out in Kamala Das's poetry is her grandmother and fond memories of this ancestress continue to be Kamala's cherished treasure. In 'Composition', the poet openly confesses:

The only secrets I always
withhold are that I am so alone
and that I miss my grandmother

The poem 'The Millionaires at Marine Drive' brings out Kamala's deep attachment with her grandma. She is haunted by the memories of her grandma:

Eighteen years have passed since my grandmother's death
I wonder why the ache still persists. Was
she buried bones and all, in the loose red
soil of my heart? All through the sun-singing
Day, all-through the moon - wailing night, I think
of her.

The poet badly misses

the warmth that she took away
After her departure
no longer was
There someone to put an arm around my
Shoulder without a purpose

Kamala's thirst for 'warmth' remained unquenched all through her relationships with men:

all the hands
The great brown thieving hands, groped beneath my
clothes, their fire was that of an arsonist
They burnt my cities down

The poet had many of her significant experiences in the company of her grandma. She was the one who made the poet aware of her body and its growth:

My grandmother cried
Darling you must stop this bathing now
You are much too big to play
Naked in the pond.

It was grandma again who silenced Kamala in 'Nani' when the latter enquired about Nani, the maidservant, who had hanged herself. Grandma made the poet realize:

Each truth
ends thus with a query. It is this
deafness that turns mortality into
Immortality

For Kamala Das, grandma is associated not only with security and affection but also with her childhood innocence:

That was long ago
Before the skin

intent on survival
learnt lessons of self - betrayal

The poet has never been able to overcome her grief at her loss of innocence:

The red house that had
stood for innocence
crumbled and the old woman died

In 'Evening at the Old Nalapat House', Kamala imagines her grandma's spirit walking on the white sand of the courtyard, climbing stairs and sighing. Obviously, the memory of grandma is almost an obsession with the poet.

Kamala Das has drawn sustenance from her memories of childhood and her home in Malabar all throughout. Even the titles of her poems are quite suggestive - 'Evening at the Old Nalapat House', 'No Noon at My Village Home', 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' and 'My Grandmother's House'. In 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' she has recollected the entire scene in vivid images:

This is a noon for beggars with whining
Voices, a noon for men who come from hills,
With parrots in a cage and fortune - cards,
All stained with time, for brown Kurava Girls
With old eyes, who read palms in light - sing song

Voices, for bangle sellers who spread
On the cool black floor those red and green and blue
Bangles, all covered with the dust of the roads.

She remembers all - visual as well as auditory details
when they clambered up our porch, the noise was grating Strange

She herself longs for 'a noon of wild men, wild thoughts, wild love' and for her

To
be here, far away, is a torture. wild feet
stirring up the dust, this hot noon, at my
Home in malabar, and I so far away...

Her fond childhood memories are etched on her mind:

I had a house in Malabar
and a pale green pond
I did all my growing there.

Kamala, a lover of natural life, enjoyed her childhood activities in the lap of natural elements:

I swam about and floated
And dived into the cold and green
I lay speckled green and gold
In all the hours of the sun.

Specific allusions to structure of her ancestral home and its environment help us visualize and experience the Malabar Magic in her poems. In 'The Swamp' she describes the walls of the house as being 'cracked and torn' and the snake-shrine 'dark with weeds'. The poet grows nostalgic whenever she thinks about her Nalapat house. In 'The She - mouse Returns Home', Kamala states that she should never have 'walked out' of her home in Malabar "around which the Westerly and the trees weave silken music" and she realizes that "the process of change, the imitation of the city type was itself a long illness, a nausea in the brain."

Kamala Das also describes the incidents which caused her anguish and pain as a child. Her memories of her father and their relationship are a source of much unpleasantness. In 'Next to Indira Gandhi' daughter Kamala writes:

My father I feared the most
… … …
He was the one who had no time for me

When I was growing up

The poet remembers her scare:

When I saw him each day for half-a-minute
Climbing down the stair
He stared past me

Grown up, she asks her father:

I ask you now without fear
Did you want me
Did you ever want a daughter

Her father was also an autocrat who

Chose my clothes for me
My tutor, my hobbies, my friends
And at fifteen with my first saree
You picked me a husband

and with this he threw his daughter into 'a life of suburban dullness'. This father-daughter relationship was never a cordial relationship:

There was a cloud of tension
Between him and me
… … …
He brought me on each
Short visit some banana chips
And harsh words of reproach

She feared her father and felt so very alienated from him:

Only in a coma
Did he seem close to me

Kamala expresses her intense longing for her father's love in 'My Father's Death':

Yes
You should have hugged me, father, just
Once, held me to your breast

For child Kamala agony once came from another source also and she has recreated that painful experience in one of her beautiful poems 'Punishment in Kindergarten'. It was an apparently unimportant incident of childhood but even as an adult Kamala remembers it in all its details. Once her K.G. teacher 'drained her honey coloured day of peace'. Kamala was enjoying all by herself when the teacher chided her:

Why don't you join the others, what
a peculiar child you are

and her schoolmates made fun of her. The poet

buried
my face in the sun-warmed hedge
and smelt the flowers and the pain

Time and again, she coerces herself into 'not' remembering that pain:

Today the world is little more my own
No need to remember
That picnic day when I lay hidden
By a hedge, watching the steel-white sun
Standing lonely in the sky

Thus, Kamala Das's presentation of her childhood is a far cry from the childhood reminiscences of English Romantic

poetry which are a celebration of sentimentalization and innocence. Hers are not 'children are close to heaven' poems of English Romantics. Instead the poems owe their appeal to their psychological richness that provides an insight into Kamala Das's mind. Besides, her mental and physical return to her home is also a symbolic return to her matrilinear tradition.

Social Consciousness

Women writers have often been criticized for the 'limited range' of their themes as their writing is generally supposed to centre around their personal and that too family life. The charge most frequently and scathingly levelled against Indian-English women poets is their lack of social consciousness and their obsession with the theme of love. Lakshmi Kannan, herself a practising poet, calls this poetry 'a narrow social phenomenon'. Most of Kamala Das's earlier poems are poems of 'sighs and thighs' but she has also gone beyond her 'self and composed poems which reveal her concern with the world around. In her case, even the personal is political as it becomes microcosm of the macrocosm that Indian women inhabit.

The poet has made an explicit claim of self-expansion in 'An Introduction'. She is not merely 'every woman' but also the 'I'

Who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns.

The poet goes on:

It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
It is I, dying
With a rattle in my throat

Opposites meet in her:

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.

In 'Forest Fire' Kamala Das intends to contain multitudes in her:

In me shall sleep the baby
That sat in prams...
In me shall walk the lovers
and in me the old shall sit
In me, the cabaret girls cavort, the
Wedding drums resound,
… … …
The wounded moan
And in me the dying mother with hopeful
eyes shall gaze around

The poor and downtrodden section of society has repeatedly compelled Das's attention. 'The Flag' is her indictment of the unequal Indian society. For the poet the green colour of the flag is

Pasture of paradise
Where even the poor may have place.

but the reality is that 'poor babies die of hunger'. The unbridgeable gap between the haves and the have-nots is a real embarrassment:

Rich men dance with the another's wives and
eke out a shabby
secret ecstasy, and poor old men lie
In wet pavements and
cough, cough their lungs out.

In 'The Dalit Panther' the poet brings out the inhuman treatment meted out to Dalits:

The young
Man in a skull-cap that hides his wounds lifts a bandaged arm to
Drink his cup of tea. I spoke against the Gods, he said, who wouldn't?
But it was not the Gods who beat me but the police.

The lifestyle of the high-caste rich is:

They eat the gourmet fare
advertised in evening papers, and watch old films
on their T.V. sets, the heroine's unrequited love makes
Them reach out for handkerchiefs.

Kamala Das emerges as the spokesman of the oppressed class:

who rest now in warm safety vaults of the earth
they have had enough of cold outside.

For her it is a national shame:

they shall not rise again
On that flag-flying day, now not so far away
To claim last chances, lost lives, lost beauty.

In 'The Housebuilders' she speaks about men who 'crawl up the cogged scaffoldings/building houses for the alien rich' and affectionately describes their personal lives and activities. A significant feature of her writing on the subject is that she has not only presented the plight of the poor but has also endowed them with dignity. They are individuals in their own right. The house builders have a 'robust' personal life and the poet, in a way, extols them:

Past sunset
Their jest sounds ribald, their lusts seem robust
Puny, these toymen of dust, fathers of light
Dust children but their hands like the withered boughs
of some mythic hoodoo tree cast only
cool shadows and with native grace bestow
Even on unbelievers, vast shelters.

The crisis of values and the increasing callousness in our modern day life also antagonize the poet. In 'Cochin's Jewish Quarter' she laments the lack of compassion. In the 'unsmiling town' she sees a man all alone in his room 'slowly dying':

With a twitch of his loosened mouth
and a rolling of
His eyes, there was none else in the room but the dog
He was dying of some fearsome pox alone.

Here the poet herself plays as the representative of the insensitive and callous society. Even while feeling like 'sitting holding his poor/failing hands', she walks away:

Coward that I was and civilized
To suit the age, I entered an antique shop
With a neat rapid stride, and in the rasping voice
Of the greedy, bargained for a ring...

Moderns are cut-off from the world of Nature and Das regrets Man–Nature divorce in her poem 'Sepia':

They do not go up the trees
To read with fingertips
A fringe of summer clouds
They do not go down the sea
To count the mermaid's eggs

That lie beneath the Anemones

She is disgusted with the artificial and snobbish modern life:

They are faceless
… … …
Their religion?
The newspaper - hate, the bulge
In wallets, the scent of morning tea
And of course
The weekend's tired lust.

Such a world unsettles the sensitive beings. Lunacy becomes a way out of this quagmire. In 'The Lunatic Asylum' the poet writes:

Don't pity them, they
were brave enough to escape, to
step out of the Brute regiments of sane routine.

A factor that has really jolted Kamala's consciousness is violence carried on in the name of religion, caste and community. In one of her Malyalam books *Nisavastram* Kamala Das states that she is a preacher of the religion called 'love' and all other religions are executioners. She writes: "instead of waging wars India should eliminate the moral poison called religion from her blood-stream". The poet has composed very touching poems on the anti-sikh riots in Delhi and ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. In 'The Inheritance' she lodges protest against the fanaticism of religion which breeds hatred and intolerance. Religions make 'hearts grown scabrous with a hate, illogical'. The fanatics proceed to

slay them who don't
believe, disembowel their young ones
and scatter on the streets
the meagre innards.

In pungently ironical lines the poet speaks up:

Oh God
Blessed be your fair name, blessed be the religion
Purified in the unbeliever's blood, blessed be
Our sacred city, blessed be its incarnadined glory....

Her poems 'A Certain Defect in the Blood' and 'The Return of Hitler' carry the voice of the oppressed Tamils of Sri Lanka. Their very existence became a horror:

Fear had wrapped our movements
Like spiders exposed
To a waterjet we curled ourselves into
Tight bolls.

They were like 'rodents all holed up in fear':

Their smell began to resemble the rats'
A mixture of dung, copper and potash
They were the hunted, they cowered behind
doors.

The ceaseless violence had as if totally desensitized the Tamils:

They stopped us, a somnambulistic
Daze was in their eyes, there was no space
Between us and their guns, but we were
Too fatigued to feel the fear, or resist

The abrupt moves
Of an imbecilic will.

'Summer 1980' expresses her agony over the senseless communal violence:

familiar
Caressing hands unshaped the clay
And swifty formed a death-head

'Delhi 1984' is a deeply moving poem on the anti-sikh violence unleashed after Indira Gandhi's assassination:

The turbans were unwound, the long limbs
broken and bunched to seem like faggots
so that when such bundles were gifted
to their respective homes the women
swooned as their eyes lighted on a scarred
knee, or a tatooed arm. The scriptural
chant sounded like a lunatic's guffaw;

And the poet declares her faith:

Any God worth his name would hasten
To disown these dry-eyed adherents
Of the newest cult.

In her poem 'The White Flowers' mother Kamala shares the grief of mothers experiencing the tragedy and pain of their sons' death. She also prays for her son's security in a world torn with violence and hatred.

Kamala Das's poetry is also a poetry of a woman's assertion of identity in a male-dominated world. She becomes a representative of her gender in her jeremiads against the sexist patriarchal society. Syd Harrex observes, "Kamala Das's poems epitomize the dilemma of the modern Indian woman who attempts to free herself, sexually and domestically, from role bondage sanctioned by the past." The women readers empathize with the poet when she talks about the pressures of growing up:

my grandmother cried

darling you must stop this bathing now

You are much too big to play

naked in the pond.

and when she remarks

Tragedy is not death
but growth

The categorizers 'pinning' Kamala Das 'on wall' are such familiar voices:

Dress in saris, be girl

be wife... .be embroiderer, be cook
fit in, oh
belong.

The cramping impact of marriage on a woman's personality and erosion of her individuality by the overpowering male ego are other realities of our society:

Cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf
And became a dwarf

And the outcome is:

My mind is an old playhouse
All singing and dancing gone

Kamala Das is disappointed with the entire 'male' class and concludes:

Men are worthless, to trap them
Use the cheapest bait of all, but never
love which in a woman must mean tears
And a silence in the blood.

In many of her poems the poet shares the grief of 'ageing mothers' and the 'old mothers', slighted by their children and suffering the agony of desertion. She also speaks with tenderness about the generally isolated segments of society like 'harlots'. Her poems 'Yvonne' and 'Devdasi' are sympathetic portrayals of such characters.

It is a world where 'poor babies die of hunger', people live life of 'lost chances, lost beauty', persons lay 'dying of fearsome pox alone', fanatics 'disembowel their young ones and scatter on streets the meager innards' and women become 'dwarfs' with minds becoming 'old playhouse, all singing and dancing gone'. The poet wishes for extinction of such a world in 'Sepia':

Are they the distinguished
Human race?
Enough, enough they have just had
Enough of everything
Let anger grow like a living sun
and scorch
Scorch to the very marrow
This sad mouthed human
Race.

Though 'self continues to be the nucleus of Kamala Das's poetry but the few poems composed by her on social themes bring out her genuine concern for her subjects - the poor, the suffering, the oppressed and the discriminated ones. She comes out as a poet with humanitarian and democratic values who has advocated equal rights and dignity for all beings irrespective of their class, caste and gender.

Theme of Death

From Henry Derozio to the poets writing till date, death has been a perpetual theme with Indian-English poets. Indian-English women poets have also responded to this significant theme, and in keeping with their outlook on life itself, the modes of encountering Death have varied from one poet to another. Some consider it to be a malevolent force - a Destroyer, a Tyrant, an Oppressor and they revolt against it while others welcome it as a Friend, a Reliever, a way to immortality and an essential stage to reach God. For still others it is a fact of life which they complacently accept without trying to seek any deeper significance therein. In Kamala Das's world, Death seems to be omnipresent. In *My Story* she writes: "I have come to believe that life is a mere dream and death is the only reality. It is endless, stretching before and beyond our human existence." In her poetry death manifests itself in varied forms and evokes myriad of feelings.

The poet carries in her mind the painful memories of her near ones' departures - her grandma, great grandmother and her faher. Saddened by all these experiences, Kamala in 'Women's Shuttles' is in such a mental state where

Nothing can
Bring back a twinkle in these eyes
That took root in memory
During those innumerable
Trips behind a dear ones' bier

She has observed death from very close quarters and it has become an integral part of her psyche. In 'I Shall Not

Forget' she confesses:

I have seen death
And I shall not forget. . .

She, indeed, does not forget the omnipotence of time, transience of life and inevitability of death. Sooner or later, all comes within Time's bending sickle's compass. She laments her premature dessication in 'Too Early the Autumn Sights Have Come' :

Too early the autumn sights
have come, too soon my lips
have lost their hunger

'Sea' invites Kamala in 'The Invitation':

What do you lose by dying
end in me, think of yourself
lying on a funeral pyre
with a burning head

Her frequent illnesses make death an imminent presence for her. In 'Gino' she dreams of

Morgues where
The night-lights
glow on faces shuttered by the soul's exit.
And long corridors
To the x-ray room's dark interior
(O, the clatter of the trolleys, with the
dead on them)

She imagines her body reaching large proportion 'before its end' and 'aeroplanes bursting in the sky'. In 'Smudged Mirrors' her illness makes her desperate and brings death-wish:

For what bizarre purpose I live on
My calves forever aching
and traitors of senses deceiving?

In 'The Swamp', reflecting on herbouts of illness, Kamala Das thinks, "If I had died that week, I would have walked as a ghost to my home."

Death consciousness haunts the poet and in poem after poem shadows of death loom large. Deaths of grandma, greatgrandmother and father are woven into the texture of many of her poems. In 'Composition' she traces the final stages of her grandmother's life:

The old woman died
lying for three months
paralyzed
while thieving ants climbed her hands

In 'My Grandmother's House' a heart-broken Kamala Das mourns death of her grandma "... that women died". 'The Blood' contains description of her greatgrandma's death:

She lay dying
In her eighty sixth year
A woman wearied by compromise
Her legs quilted with arthritis
And with only a hard
Cough for comfort

The poet relives her father's death in poems like 'A Requiem for My Father', 'My Father's Death', 'Next to Indira

Gandhi' and 'I Shall Not Forget'. 'Long clawed birds of death' stayed by her as she saw her father die. Kamala distinctly remembers the painful details:

His smoky eyes had died long before he died
The earth had entered the skin
… … … ...
I pulled back the eyelids once to look
They were dead fish eyes with a cataract mist

Death is a pervasive presence in many of her poems. In 'For S After 25 Years', as she recalls a scene of togetherness and the details of the locale, she cannot forget 'dead saint's hollow room'. In 'Love' the inadequacy of physical experience forces the poet to join the mourners:

at
Night, from behind the Burdwan
Road, the corpse-bearers cry
'Bol Hari Bol ...'

In 'The Joss Sticks at Cadell Road' she describes the funeral procession and Cadell Road scene where the poor men's bodies 'burn as joss sticks' - dark thin corpses bound with strings of tuberose and brilliant marigold. Her husband, a co-witness of the scene, needs a 'glass of beer' and she goes to 'lie' near her friend 'for half an hour' as she 'badly needs some rest'. In "'The Forest Fire', with cabaret girls, wedding drums and songs of love, 'dying mother' is also a part of the scenario. In 'A Relationship' Kamala refers to death in the same breath as to rest, sleep and peace. Death pervades the poem 'The Wild Bougainvillea'. The poet walks through the streets beside the sea where 'barges float with undersides rotting, garbage rot and dead fish rot'. She smells:

the smell of dying things and the
Heavy smell of rotting dead

She walks through the old streets near old cemeteries where the dead are so dead:

that even their tombstones have lost
their names in the rains

The 'pale yellow tombstones' look like 'a harvest of old grotesque teeth'. No mourner brings flowers or sheds tears. Death is all around. In this kingdom of Death the poet spots 'marrigold blooms' and 'wild red bougainville' and it has a transcendental impact on her death-haunted consciousness. Now the city 'tames itself' for her, she sleeps a silent dreamless sleep end wakes up in the morning 'free'.

Kamala Das also has the ability to evoke pathos by juxtaposing death with ordinary incidents of living. An individual's death has no impact on the surrounding world and life continues at its pace. In 'My Son's Teacher' her teacher

Swooned on a
grey pavement
Five miles from here and died from where
she lay, her new skirt
flapped and fluttered, a green flag
half - mast, to proclaim about death's triumphs.

She lay on the pavement unwept, unlamented and the celebrations of 'Vinayak Chaturthi' continued with a great pomp and show.

Kamala Das is a poet for whom life's shattering experience are much more agonizing than the experience of physical death:

The tragedy of life
Is not death, but growth

She writes in 'Composition' that death does not unnerve or scare her. She declares in 'The Suicide': "I have enough courage to die". In 'The Descendants' the poet is ready to

give ourselves to the fire
or to the hungry earth

like 'a child to mother's arms' but death is not preferable to life. It is 'draught', 'hot' sauna and 'the last sob of the relative' whereas life is 'moisture, water, semen and blood'.

In Kamala Das's world, 'death' and 'love' go together. Lack of love or absence of lover is synonymous with death as it gives a death-in-life experience. In 'The Sunshine Cat' her husband's ruthless behaviour makes her' a cold and half-dead woman'. In 'The Freaks' 'skin's lazy hungers' induce death-like feeling and she mourns absence of anything more 'alive'. A loveless physical contact is a death-like experience for her

What is
It to the corpse if maggots nip?

is Radha's reaction in 'The Maggots'.

Love is an antidote to depression caused by the thoughts of death in 'Morning at Apollo Pier' :

Love me. Love me, till I die.

Dr. O.P. Bhatnagar regrets the lack of anything more than mere stereotyped images of death in Indian poetry in English and asks: "Are not there deaths by violence, adulteration, social tortures, ritual killings or self-destruction'?" Kamala Das has explored the social facet of death in her writings. Her poem 'The Flag' talks of 'death by hunger' as she thinks of the 'poor babies who die of hunger'. The poems 'Interitance' and 'The Return of Hitler' protest against the ethnic and communal violence and murders - 'disemboweling' of young ones and how 'they were hunted'. In the poem 'Cochin's Jewish Quarter' the poet brings out deterioration of societal moral standards by describing insensitive reaction of modern people towards death of a fellow - being, 'slowly dying, of some fearsome pox alone' with only a dog nearby.

D.W. Harding, a famous critic, opines "It is the final attitude towards the experience of death that has to be evaluated". Death gives Kamala Das insight into life's higher truths. In 'The Doubts' death makes her wonder.

When a man is dead, or a woman
we call the corpse not he
or she but it.
Does it
Not mean that we believe
That only the souls have the sex and that
sex is invisible?

She realizes the futility of Body and Sex and wants to share with others the same knowledge in 'A Request':

When I die
Don't throw meat and bones away But pile them up
And let them tell
By their smell
What life was worth
on this earth.

This realization leads to rejection of body and bodily hungers in 'The Suicide':

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

In 'Contacts' the poet realizes the impermanence of world and the permanence of self:

In that longer sleep only
The world
shall die, and I

remain, just being
Also being a remaining

Kamala Das has also revealed faith in the immortality of life and philosophy of afterlife. In 'Composition' the 'basic hunger' of human beings is:

To crumble
to dissolve
and to retain in other things
the potent fragments
of oneself

In 'Anamalai Poems' she comes to "look beyond the/chilling flesh, the funeral's pyre/beyond the mourner's vanquished stance" and finally understands:

Where would
death be then, that meaningless word
when life is all that there is, that
raging continuity.

The poet goes still further and links immortality with God:

that
raging continuity that
often the wise ones recognize as God

Kamala Das reveals a strong death consciousness. Her treatment of the theme of death differs from her early Romantic predecessors like Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. She has not composed any eulogizing elegies or indulged in highly sentimental mournings. Death has been portrayed as both a benevolent and a malevolent force. There is no elation or panic but an overall acceptance of death as a fact of life. She has also talked about man-made deaths in wars and social atrocities. Death has also been looked upon as a way to new life and immortality. Unlike her Western counterparts obsessed with death, Kamala is, in fact, a survivor who loves 'this gift of life more than all' and 'its only when love is not to be had' that she wants to be 'dead'. (The Suicide)

Tragic Vision

Tragedy of life
Is not death but growth
The child growing into adult

The above - quoted lines appear to sum up Kamala Das's vision of life. Her vision seems to be an essentially pessimistic and a tragic vision. As the poet sees it, the cup of life served to her has been a bitter one. An unwelcome girl child longing for fatherly affection, a sensitive wife marred by an incompatible marriage, a woman failing in her quest for a meaningful relationship, a human being tormented by her frequent bouts of illness - life has been a saga of suffering for her. All this finds expression in her autobiography and poetry. Her poetry abounds in details of death and disease, loneliness and helplessness, misery and grief, frustration and rejection.

My Story contains several passages which bring out the poet's tragic outlook on life. About her post-engagement days spent in her fiance's company she remarks: "It was a disappointing week for him and me", her marriage made her feel extremely lonely: "I became lonelier and lonelier. I sat still as a statue, feeling the cruel vibrations all around me". Her honeymoon period was 'miserable honeymoon days'. The poet felt that she just could not fit anywhere, inside or outside the house: "I was a misfit everywhere. I brooded long, stifling my sobs." Her illness made her "physically destroyed beyond recognition" and she became obsessed with the idea of death: "I have been for years obsessed with the idea of death. It is endless".

In her poem 'Without a pause' the poet sets forth her agenda which has more of negative than positive themes. She will speak of

life's purity
life's betrayals ...seed's first awareness
childhood's malice, of adult love, of
darkened rooms, where old sit thinking
filled with vaporous fear.

Accordingly, Kamala Das's poetry unfolds her tragedy and plight, her miserable lot and helpless condition. It is a poetry replete with humiliation, suffering, anguish and agony. Much of her hurt and humiliation have come from her inability to find true love inside and outside marriage. In 'Gino' she openly admits "our blood's/tributaries never once merging". Her poems like 'The Old Playhouse', 'The Stone Age', 'Next to Indira Gandhi' and The Sunshine cat are all very strong indictments of an oppressive marriage which is a completely shattering experience for the poet. Turned into a 'tamed swallow', 'a granite dove' the poet cries out in 'The Old Playhouse':

no more singing, no more a dance, mind is an old
playhouse with all its lights out

Gross physical lust without tenderness or warmth fills her with revulsion for male, male anatomy and the act itself. She contemptuously speaks of 'pale carnivorous limbs', 'cavenous mouth', and 'dribbling of spittle into mouth'. Her relationships with other men also end in disasters. They can offer only body and she leaves 'unsatisfied'. In 'Ghanashyama', to the dismay of the poet, her lover suddenly remarks: "It is a physical thing". "End it, I cried" is Kamala Das's response. For her the purely physical is only like 'hacking at each other's parts, like convicts hacking breathing clods". In 'Glass' her womanly self is 'rudely' treated by the lover as he draws her to him

with a lover's haste, an armful
of splinters, designed to hurt
and pregnant with pain

'Wombs blinded hunger' leads her nowhere and in 'Captive' the painful realization is:

For years I have run from one
gosammer lane to another. I am
now my own captive.

In her experience with her lovers it is always "a bed made soft with tears where she lay weeping". In 'A Losing Battle' she links 'love' with 'pain':

Love in a woman must mean tears
And a silence in the blood

because 'It is not in my nature to love/they say' and they can offer only 'skins' lazy hungers/nothing alive'. The poet's heart is 'an empty cistern', filled with 'coiling snakes of silence' in 'The Freaks'. Her reactions - 'I flaunt a grand flamboyant lust' (The Freaks), 'deliberately whipping up froth of desire' (Composition), 'sad lie of my unending lust' (In Love), are all expressions of her despair as her 'wants as woman' and 'endless hungers' remain unsatiated. After trying her level best and repeatedly failing in her effort to strike a meaningful relationship of love, Kamala Das thus laments her unredeemable situation in 'The Freaks':

Who can
help us who have lived so long
And have failed in love.

The poet has also experienced the hurt and humiliation that comes with her gender. The trauma started right at the time of her birth. In her poem 'Next to Indira Gandhi' she narrates the woeful story of her early years and agitatingly asks her father:

Did you want me
Did you ever want a daughter
Did I disappoint you much

She felt suffocated as her autocrat father exercised his control over nitty-gritty of her daily life:

You chose my clothes for me
My tutors, my hobbies, my friends.

The patriarch was joined by the women of the house in curbing her naturalness. Her grandmother forbade her to involve herself in the only activity Das loved, i.e. 'Swimming' as Kamala was 'much too big to play'. The categorizers also created an identity-crisis by trying to make her fit into stereotyped roles:,

Dress in Saris
Be girl
Be wife, they said, Be embroiderer, Be cook
Fit in, oh, belong, cried the categorizers.

And when she was fifteen, her father with her first saree, 'picked me a husband' and the poet mourns in 'Next to Indira Gandhi':

It was never a husband and wife bond
We were such a mismatched pair

In 'An Introduction' she narrates her very first experience which was a trauma and perpetrated her crisis of womanhood:

When I asked for love
he drew a youth of sixteen into the bedroom
my sad woman body felt so beaten
The weight of my womb crushed me
I shrank painfully

And the poet in reaction:

wore a shirt and my brother's trousers
cut my hair short
and ignored my womanliness

The mask she had to wear as a wife and the stereotyped role where

I must pose
I must pretend
I must act the role
of happy woman
happy wife

with pressures of maintaining 'the right distance' with 'high and low'. 'Between world and me' was a wrecking experience for her and in 'The Suicide', after narrating this experience, the poet expresses her desire for an uncomplicated natural life:

O see, I am fed up
I want to be simple

The realization of her ultimate helpless situation as a wife is also a cause of much anguish for the poet. In 'I shall Some Day' her initial resolution "I shall someday leave, leave the cocoon" is followed by "I shall someday return/ losing nearly all, hurt ... too hurt". She knows it will be a 'defleshed, de-veined, de-blooded' world and she'll be compelled to take refuge in his "nest of familiar scorn".

Kamala Das's poems are also replete with existential agony. Suffering results from a host of factors. In her view, growth is inseparably linked with pain. In 'Ghanashyam' she states:

The child's umbilical cord shrivels and falls
But new connections begin, new traps arise
and new pains.

Growing up has been a very disillusioning process for the poet. In 'Composition' she narrates how this world gave her painful lessons like:

Friendships
cannot endure
Blood ties don't satisfy

As she grew up:

The red house that had
Stood for innocence
Crumbled

and

The skin
Intent on survival
Learnt lessons of self-betrayal

'Body' itself has been a source of much pain and suffering. Its impermanent nature causes anxiety in 'Too Early the Autumn Sights':

Too early the autumn sights
have come, too soon my lips
Have lost their hunger, too soon
The singing birds have
Left.

Her worry in 'Gino' is:

This body that I wear without joy shall wither... .
shall grow gross
And reach large proportions before I die.

Frequent illnesses wrecked her body and her poems record this state. In 'My November' she is' huddled in bed' and 'like a sickle embedded in flesh' is her pain. In 'The Swamp' the poet writes: "so much of me was taken out and sent in jam jars to the psychological lab". 'After the Illness' describes how she battled with the pain of:

bones
turning sharp beneath the dry loose skin
the yellowed eyes, the fetid breath

It was a stage when "there was not much flesh left, blood had weakened too much and the skin was numb and unyearning."

The poet's deep attachment to her Malabar House, grandma and the later separation from both aggravate her agony. In 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' she misses her ancestral home:

To be here
far away is a torture

Her promise to her grandma in 'Blood' to rebuild the old family house and her later inability to do so haunt her all her life causing much anguish. Even while she shifted to other towns, the house was ever present in her consciousness:

From every town I live in
I hear the rattle of its death
The noise of rafter's creaking
And the window's whine

The poet is full of remorse:

I have let you down

old house, I seek forgiveness
O mother's mother's mother
Call me callous, call me selfish...

A highly sensitive being, the poet cannot forget her hurts she received as a child. Her poem 'Punishment in Kindergarten' records her pain where she was scolded by her teacher and mocked at by her classmates:

Pain
A blue frocked woman caused, throwing words at me
like pots and pans

She has not been able to forget 'the picnic day when she lay hidden by a hedge'. As a child she also missed her father's affection. In 'Next to Indira Gandhi' she remembers that he had no time for her, 'stared past' her and she 'feared him the most'. In 'My Father's Death' Das recalls 'a cloud of tension between him and me', 'the harsh words of reproach' and her estrangement from him: "only in a coma/Did he seem close to me". As an adult, in all her relationships, she searches for the 'lost father':

I have misplaced
a father somewhere
and I look for him now everywhere

In her professional life as a creative writer, the carping critics and other self-appointed well-wishers were also a source of much unpleasantness. In ' An Introduction' she vehemently protests against encroachment on her right of choosing her medium of expression. To the command 'Don't write in English' she reacts:

Why not leave me alone
Critics, friends, visiting cousins
Everyone of you, why not let me speak in
Any language I like?

She is none too happy with the eroticism in her writings. In 'Loved Posters' she confesses the truth:

I've stretched my two dimensional
Nudity on sheets of weeklies, monthlies
quarterlies, a sad sacrifice

She had to 'put her private voice away' and adopt the typewriter's 'click-click' as her only speech.

Ironically, Kamala Das's desire to be 'alone' brings her to a state of loneliness and she often experiences the pangs of killing loneliness. In 'Composition' her most guarded secrets are:

I am so alone
I miss my grandmother

Loneliness haunts her in 'Ghanashyam':

at three in the morning
I wake, trembling from dreams of
a stark, white loneliness

and her loneliness is like

bleached bones cracking in the desert sun

Even in her dreams the poet is an isolated being:

Why do I remain ever
a stranger, tramping the lost
lanes of a blinded mind, while
all around, they recognize
they love

and she "lingers at strange door ways/lonely to the bone" . In real life her loneliness is all-engulfing. After her unfaithful lover's departure she can:

count on fingers
my very few friends

Even her poetry is her means to fight away her loneliness. In 'Anamalai Poems' the poet confides:

If I had not learned to write how could
I have written away my loneliness?

Kamala Das's world is also haunted by death and shadows of death pervade her poetry. The poems 'The Joss Sticks at Cadell Road', 'For S after 25 Years', 'The Wild Bougainvillea' are descriptions of death and the dead. In her poems on grandmother, greatgrandma, father and the maid servant Nani, the poet painfully recalls the deaths of these near ones. Along with deaths caused by social violence and callousness, she has also narrated death-in-life experiences of loveless relationships. Faced with the hardship of life she seeks solace in death in 'The Suicide':

How long can one resist?

Death is very much an intrinsic part of her imagery and diction till her last published volume.

With such an outlook on life, Kamala Das finds life to be a long woeful tale of losses and helplessness, with a feeling of failure on all fronts. In 'Substitute' the poet feels 'lost' in losses:

It is hard to believe
that I only lost
lost all, lost even
what I never had

Her

Life is quite simple now
Love, blackmail and sorrow

In 'Composition' she makes a candid confession of her failure:

I have failed
I feel my age and my
uselessness

The poet declares in 'The Snobs' that she has 'nothing'

To offer at
This shrine of peace, but my constant
Complaining voice

'In Composition' this realization of meaninglessness creates the desire to end everything:

All I want now
is to take a long walk into the sea
and lie there resting

But for such a poet even the thought of 'immortality' is a 'trap' and offers no solace:

I must linger on
trapped in immortality
my only freedom being
the freedom
to discompose

And when Kamala Das, a discontented being all her life, takes rebirth, it will not be a joyful conception:

Some womb in that

Dark world shall convulse
When I finally enter
A legitimate entrant, marked by discontent.

Even her portrayal of the world around is coloured by her vision. In 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' beggars have 'whining voices', kurava girls have 'old eyes' and strangers have 'mistrust in eyes'. In 'Evening at Old Nalapat House' farmers returning home are not a pleasant sight but they have 'ankles bruised by thorns/inside bruised by memories'. Her description of rain in opening lines in 'Jaisurya' is nauseating and repulsive - 'weeping tree', 'lush moss like eczema' and so on. Hers is not a world of beauty and bounty.

Kamala Das's dark world is, however, not without its silver lining. For all her disappointments in love, the poet continues to be a seeker and celebrant of love and does not become a man-hater. In fact, she has celebrated body and her lover in beautiful verses. In 'Invitation' she fondly narrates as to how with him 'on bed the paradise had shrunk to a more six by two' and when they walked together, it had widened to the 'unknown city'. The lover in 'Morning at Apollo Pier' continues to be

the poem to end all poems
A poem, absolute as the tomb.

In her recent columns and interviews about 'bliss' of a satisfying relationship, Kamala Das's comments affirm her faith in rejuvenating power of love. Even her attitude towards all-pervasive feelings of death and decay has its redeeming features. Death is a way to new life for Kamala Das. Unlike many of other Western counterparts - Sylvia Plath or Anne Sexton - the poet has not courted Death. In fact, in some of her poems, she has professed her Eros:

I

Who loves gift of life more than all

As stated in 'The Suicide' her prime concern is not death but love:

I want to be loved
and if love is not to be had
I want to be dead

In fact, Kamala Das's poetry is not only a poetry of 'what life is' but also of 'what life can be' and the experience of this possibility redeems her tragic world.

A Confessional Poet

The eminent critic M.L. Rosenthal has used the term 'confessional' for American poets like Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, W.D. Snodgrass, John Berryman and Theodore Roethke. Kamala Das, the internationally acclaimed Indian-English poet, writes in confessional mode and she has been placed along with other world famous confessional poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Before we proceed to evaluate Kamala Das as a confessional poet, it will be in place to have some idea of the genre itself. Confessional poetry 'confesses' and is, according to Robert Philips, 'a declaration of guilt, anguish and suffering'. It is a breakthrough into very personal emotional experience as the poet takes up ruthless self-analysis. A confessional poet displays deep subjectivism by placing no barrier between self and a direct expression of the self. Anything in his net is a fish and not accepting any restrictions on the subject matter he writes about all - a sweetheart and sweat. He also feels alienated from his surroundings and courts death and destruction. Personal failure, losses and illness are the stock-in-trade. The poetry is mostly anti-elegant and anti-establishment.

I must let my mind striptease
I must extrude
autobiography

says Kamala Das in 'Composition' and 'self continues to be the pivot of all her writings. Her poetry has a strong note of subjectivism. The poet operates more from the level of the personal and the particular than the general and the universal. Her poems bring out her pains and her joys, the latter being very few. In her poems Kamala Das lays bare

her heart, mind and soul. We see her as Kamala – the child, the daughter, the granddaughter, Kamala – the adult, Kamala – the wife, Kamala – the beloved, Kamala – the mother, Kamala - the aging woman, Kamala Indian-English creative writer, Kamala – the rebel and Kamala – the traditional woman. Her hopeless married life, her physical rendezvous, her 'endless female hungers', her painful extra-marital relationships, her ambivalent attitude towards man-woman relationship, her existential agony, her obsession with death, her identity crisis as a woman, her loneliness, her illnesses, her memories of grandma, great grandmother and father, her body-soul conflict, her tensions, her struggles – all find a full-mouthed expression in her poetic corpus. Such a bold and uninhibited treatment of private life is in keeping with the nature and themes of confessional poetry.

Like Sexton, Plath and Lowell, Kamala Das is also concerned with herself as a victim of hurt and humiliation and her poetry is fraught with misery and suffering. As discussed earlier, a tragic, pessimistic and melancholy outlook is found to be at work in her poetry. Much of her suffering originates from her failure to find love in her relationships inside or outside home. Her undesirable arrival in the world as a 'daughter', the pressures of stereotyped roles, her mismatched marriage turning her mind into 'an old playhouse', her double life as a wife and her aborted affairs resulting in 'tears! and a silence in the blood' - all have created a crisis of womanhood for the poet. Add to this the severe illnesses, decay of body, unbearable loneliness and a haunting sense of death and death-in-life. It is a life of 'blackmail and sorrows', her smile is 'fraudulent' and her sleep is 'banked in the heart of pills'. Even her imagery and diction are steeped in her tragic vision.

In his book ***Crowell's Handbook* of *Contemporary American Poetry*** Karl Malkoff observes: "It is out of the conflict between the movement towards psychic wholeness and yearning for disintegration that basic tensions of confessional verse originate". This conflict is revealed in ever-fluctuating moods of the writer, a chain of shifting mental states and voices within voices. While celebrating the most beautiful and sublime experiences, Kamala Das exhibits awareness of the most mundane thing as its counterpart. Images of physical love are frequently followed by images of rotting, despair and decay in 'Gino', 'In Love' and many other poems. Fluctuation of moods characterizes most of her poems. 'The Looking Glass' is replete with erotic drama as man and woman come together and the poet instantly hops to the next state of being away from the lover and expresses the consequent hopelessness of her situation. 'An Introduction' has a chain of shifting moods - the poet's assertion of her Dravidian identity, her defence of her choice of English, her identity-crisis as a woman, her rebellion against categorizers and her assuming of a larger self. In 'The Swamp' we move from grandmother's safe and virtuous world to Kamala's maternal affection, her being haunted by shadow of death, ruthlessness of her lover and her final resolution to 'stalk out of his bed'. In 'Blood', self-assertions and selfcondemnation intermingle. 'In Love' the shift is from the description of physicality to the depiction of Burdwan Road scene with sleek crows and corpse-bearers, and the poem finally concludes with the poet's doubts about 'skin-communicated thing'. 'Ghanashyam' contains a number of mood fluctuations. After description of her life 'astir' with music' in Ghanashyam's company, the poet goes on to compare Life *vs* Death. Then follow descriptions of her love game, her panic at love that offers only physical gratification, her loneliness, the pain of growth and Kamala Das finally winds up with expression of her desire to attain peace and wisdom. However, the two masterpiece examples of her shifting moods and fluctuating thoughts are 'Composition' and 'The Suicide'. 'Composition' is composed of diverse moods like attachment, disgust, nostalgia, bitterness and guilt. 'The Suicide' swings between Body *vs* Soul, contains description of her hurt and humiliation, of pressure of double-life as a married woman, of her flashes of self-destruction, of her forays into past, her identity crisis and her final declaration of "only the soul knows/how to sing at the vortex of the sea". In all these poems Kamala Das includes all facets of self, none glorified or condemned.

Confessional poetry is also a poetry of desperate struggle to relate the inner experience with the external experience. The outer world is supposedly hostile to the world of self. Kamala Das's poetry is an attempt to strike a balance between the two. In 'Substitute' the poet repeatedly expresses her hope:

It will be all right, it will be all right
It will be all right between the world and me.

I, constantly threatened by the 'categorizers' demanding her to 'fit in', seeks to assert its identity in 'An Introduction':

It is I who drink lonely

drinks at twelve...
I am sinner
I am saint, I'm the beloved and the
betrayed, I have no joys which are not yours,
no aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

The poet attempts a Whitmanian expansion of self in 'Forest Fire':

In me
The sight and smells and sounds shall thrive and go on
In me shall sleep the baby
… … … …
In me shall walk the lovers. In me the old shall sit
… … … …
In me the street lamps
shall glimmer, cabaret girls cavort, eunuchs swirl
wounded moan, dying mothers go around

But her "I' does not become 'we' and it remains a self *vs* world situation. This conflict also assumes the form of Body *vs* Soul motif so frequently employed in her poetry. In 'Luminol', lover i.e. body is sought to be kept away from the 'soul's mute arena'. In 'Doubt' the poet is confused about the issue of identity:

when a man is dead, or a woman
we call the corpse not he
or she but it. Does it
Not mean that only the souls have sex and that sex is invisible
Then the question is, who
is the man, who the girl
All sex accessories being no
Indication?

Her poetry, in her own words, is a confessional act. In 'Composition' she says:

by confessing
by peeling off my layers
I reach closer to soul and
to the bone's
supreme indifference.

In 'The Westerlies' the poet 'inside the ageing body' has 'bouncing fountain of ageless blood' and forgetting the 'desert in soul' she wishes to 'go meet the young sun'. In 'The Blind Walk' she seeks a union of body and soul: "let me seed my soul in the fertile soil of his body". In 'After the illness' the poet's weak flesh, blood and skin are no more capable of lusting but she still feels the pull and wonders:

What lusted then
For him, was it perhaps, the deeply hidden soul?

In 'Ghanashyam' the poet feels baffled:

If he is you and I am you
who is loving who
who is the husk who the kernel
where is the body, where is the soul?

A monologue addressed to the sea, the poem 'The Suicide', fully reveals the poet's conflict and its possible resolution.

The dilemma is:

Bereft of soul
My body shall be bare
Bereft of body
My soul shall be bare

Knowing well that

Only the soul knows how to sing
At the vortex of the sea

the poet declares:

I throw the bodies out
I can't stand their smell

Her request to 'sea' is:

toss my body back. Bereft of body
My soul shall be free Take in my naked soul.

In Kamala Das there is another struggle between 'passive acceptance and active rebellion against male domination'. She loves and hates in the same breath. The two conflicting attitudes characterize most of her man-woman relationship poems. In 'The Conflagration' and 'I Shall Some Day' she explicitly expresses and accepts this ambivalence within the space of each individual poem. "Woman is this happiness lying buried beneath a man?" ends in "burn elemental fire" and "I shall someday leave the cocoon" culminates in "I shall someday return take refuge here in your next to familiar scorn", but this reconciliation is all along accompanied by the pain of self-effacement.

Confessional poetry is believed to be anti-establishment and antielegant in nature. There is much of anti-establishment element in Kamala Das. Her protest against categorizers : "Leave me alone", "I wore my brother's trousers" (An introduction), her revolt against husband "I shall someday stalk out of this bed" (The Swamp), her resentment against carping critics: "The language I choose becomes mine" (An Introduction) and her going to other lovers as a reactionary behaviour - all these are but the expression of her anti-establishment stance. Her poems also abound in anti-elegant details. The poem 'The Looking Glass' with 'jerky way he urinates', 'warm shock of menstrual blood' and 'The Stone Age' with his hand 'swaying like a hooded snake before it clasps my pubis" are only a few examples. Kamala Das declares in 'I Shall Some Day' : "I shall someday leave the cocoon" and this 'cocoon' seems to be all the bonds of establishments.

A crucial factor in all confessional poetry is the matter of tone. As in the confessional poetry in general, Kamala Das employs the medium of free-verse as only 'verse libre', with its inherent elasticity and tenderness, can completely articulate her 'open heart'. Directness, simplicity and spontaneity are the hallmarks of her style. She avoids cliches of expression and treats the most intimate experiences without being over sentimental and without pathos.

Thus we find that Kamala Das exhibits many essential features of confessional writing but there is more to her than mere confessionalism. Unlike her death-obsessed Western counterparts she celebrates Life and Love. In a number of her poems she has also evinced a strong social consciousness. There are no bouts of insanity in her poetry. It is more or less catharsis of a restless soul. However ineffective it may be, she seeks an expansion of self in poems like 'An Introduction'. Even her description of hurt and humiliation is not exclusive it is done in such a way that women readers empathize with her. She seems to poeticize 'universal experiences of women'. In fact, some of her poems even go beyond 'womanly affairs' and express a universal concern.

Indianness

The issue of 'Indianness' has always been a crucial one in any discussion of Indian English writing. English being a foreign language and the language of the colonizers, Indian-English writers are almost invariably expected to pass the acid test of 'Indianness'. R. Parthasarthy observes, "It is not surprising that writers in English are conscious of their Indianness because at the bottom of all lies a crisis of identity." Early women writers like Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu

put pre-independence India on the international map by composing verses on Indian locales, traditions, flora and fauna. In the later modern poets 'India' exists in its different shades. Kamala Das expresses her Indianness in her outlook and in the content and style of her poems.

The poet has explicitly asserted her Indian identity in some of her poems. In 'An Introduction' she proudly announces:

I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar.

She relates herself to the political and linguistic scenario also. Her use of English is no status symbol but a matter of honesty and humanity:

It is half-English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest, it is as
Human as I am human.

Das reveals pride in her Dravidian Brahminhood and in her 'oldest blood' she pleads:

Don't blame my blood
So thin, so clear

All through her life 'Malabar House' continues to be her 'home', a place she feels she belongs to. Many of her poems like 'My Grandmother's House', 'Evening at Nalapat House', 'A Hot Noon in Malabar', ' No Noon at my Village Home' and 'The Swamp' contain nostalgic description of her Malabar house and the surrounding place. In 'The Suicide' she thus recalls her childhood:

I had a house in Malabar
And a pale green pond
I did all my growing there
In the bright summer months.

Kamala Das has set her poems in Indian milieu and described Indian people, places, situations and socio-cultural ways of life. Even a glance at the titles of her poems brings out her pre-occupation with India 'Morning at Apollo Pier', 'Delhi 1984', 'The Dalit Panther', 'Farewell to Bombay', 'The Gulmohur', 'Summer in Calcutta', 'The Anamalai Hills', 'Palam', 'Jaisurya', 'The Millionaires at Marine Drive', 'The Dance of the Eunuchs', 'Nani', 'Kumar Gandharva', 'Anamalai Poems', 'Next to Indira Gandhi', 'The Joss Sticks at Cadell Road' and so on. While reading her poems, one gets the very feel of India. In ' A Farewell to Bombay', Bombay comes alive:

Crowd
Near the sea, walking or sitting
But always talking
Talking talking

The young people land up in Bombay with 'unjaded eyes' and the poet asks Bombay to

Give them your sad-eyed courtesans with tinsel
And jasmine in their hair, your marble
Slabs in tongues, your brittle
Roadside laughter.

'The Wild Bougainvillea' contains a vivid description of Calcutta:

I walked along the sea shore where
The barges float. . . . . ..
… … … …
The garbage rot and the dead fish rot
… … … …
Streets where night-girls
Under yellow lamps, smiled

… … … …
The streets near old cemeteries
where the dead have tombstones.

In 'The Snob' the poet paints a beautiful evening scene of Indian life:

When the buffaloes tramp
Up the road, the weary herdsmen
Singing soft Punjabi songs, and
Girls from free municipal schools
Pause shyly at our gate and smile

'The Dance of the Eunuch' presents a powerfully evocative picture of a familiar Indian scene:

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.
… … … …
There were green tattoos on their cheeks
Jasmine in their hair, some
Were dark and some were almost fair

In 'A Requiem for My Father' the poet refers to the South Indian festival of Onam and festival-related activities:

This time for Onam
I shall not decorate my floor
With flowers, father, for I dressed your chest with jasmine
When you died a few weeks ago

She also talks about specific death rites:

You were laid on the drawing room floor
A dead Nayar gets only the cold floor to lie on

'The Old Cattle' presents a very common Indian sight of the 'aged cattle being driven to the slaughterhouse' and 'the vermilion-brand on their shoulders'. 'The Joss Sticks at Cadell Road' sketches in details the funeral scene of the poor burning like 'joss sticks'.

The Indian world of Nature with its geographical details, seasons, vegetation and animal world finds its place in her poem. 'Anamalai Hills' contains a realistic description of the scene of the hillside:

There are no clocks here at Anamalai, no cock crowing
The morning in, as the muezzins call from cold mosques
Only the mist so absent-mindedly lingering on, long past
The dawn's legitimate hours and the invisible
Birds' crazed cry, occasionally from the mosquito tree

In 'The Daughter of the Century' the poet describes her journey through the world of Nature in South Indian woods:

The deep woods dividing
The State of Kerala from Karnatka
The bewitched muthange forest
Where Cheetah crossed our path
And the monkeys with fly-whisk tails.

In 'A Faded Epaulet on His Shoulders' she wears 'parijat' in her hair and puts 'sandal' on herself. 'The Gulmohur', 'The Ancient Mango Tree' are all related to the innerscape of the poet. Various Indian seasons - summer, winter, rain are always present in the background of her poems and are woven in her imagery.

Her world is populated by Indian characters - her father, her grandmother, her husband, her lovers and other characters like the maid servant 'Nani', 'Yvone,' and 'Devdasi'. Her great grandmother is a typical royal class Indian woman:

She told us how she rode her elephant
When she was ten or eleven
Every Monday without fail
To the Shiva shrine
… … … …
And told us of the jewel box
And the brocade from the north
And the perfume and the oil
And the sandal for her breasts

Some of her poems also deal with the problems of Indian social life. 'The Flag' laments the lot of the poor. Here

Poor babies die of hunger

And

Poor old men lie
In wet pavements and
Cough, cough their lungs out.

'The Dalit Panther' mourns the society's callous attitude towards the lower caste. The Dalit youth protests: "It was not the gods who beat me but the police". Kamala Das is pained to see this saga of 'lost chances, lost lives and lost beauty'. In 'The House Builders' the poet affectionately speaks of Tamil" men who crawl up the cogged scaffoldings/ building houses for the alien rich." The poem 'Cochin's Jewish Quarter' brings out the growing callousness in today's India where she finds a man 'dying of fearsome pox alone'. The Preacher of Religion of Love, Kamala Das, has expressed her anguish and agony over violence let loose in the name of religion, caste and community. Her indictment of such tendencies come out in her poems like 'The Inheritance', 'Delhi 1984', 'Summer 1980', 'A Certain Defect in Blood'. The poet speaks bitterly and ironically:

Oh God
Blessed be your fair name, blessed be the religion
Purified in the unbeliever's blood, blessed be
Our sacred city, blessed be its incarnadine glory.....

Even in the narration of her experience of identity crisis as a woman and her protest against stereo-typed role and sex discrimination, Das is a modern Indian woman. The categorizers' attitude is typically Indian:

Dress in Saris, be girl
be wife, they said, Be embroider,
be cook be a quarreler with servants
… … … …
Be amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty.

In her desire for freedom from a claustrophobic, incompatible relationship with Man, she has become a spokesperson of the liberated Indian woman:

I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon.

In her ambivalent attitude towards her male counterpart also, Kamala Das truly represents the psyche of modern Indian woman. The speaker of

I shall someday leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea

is also aware of another ironical, painful reality that she will have to

shut my
Eyes and take refuge, if nowhere else
Here in your nest of familiar scorn.

Kamala Das's use of Radha-Krishna myths, her longing for 'Ghanashyam' and 'blue face' firmly establish her Indianness. In 'The Phantam Lotus' the poet describes her journey from 'sakaar' to 'nirakaar':

Loving this one, I
Seek but another way to know
Him who has no more a body
To offer, and whose blue face is
A phantom lotus on the waters of my dreams

In 'Ghanashyam' she is ecstatic:

Ghanashyam
You have like a koel built your nest in the harbour of my heart
My life, until now a sleeping jungle, is at last, astir with music.

For Kamala Das 'Vrindavan lives on in every woman's mind'. In 'The Cobwebs' she grieves over Krishna's desertion of Radha: "poor Radha must live on for life is long" and in 'Radha Krishna' lovers' souls hang on 'Kadamba Tree'.

Kamla Das has also revealed her Indianness in her attitude towards various themes like love, death and after-life. Her attitude towards death is unmistakably Indian as she expresses faith in immortality. For her, the basic hunger is

to crumble
to dissolve
and to retain in other things the potent fragments
of oneself.
the ultimate discovery will be
that we are immortal

She describes death as:

meaningless word
when life is all that there is
that raging continuity that
often the wise ones recognize as God.

This triumph of Life over Death is the oriental celebration of life.

The consistent concern with soul in Kamala Das again co-relates her poetry with Indian thought:

Only the souls may enter
The vortex of the Sea

In 'Anamalai Poems' love, immortality and reincarnation all come together and the poet philosophizes:

There is a love greater than all you know
… … … …
Its embrace is truth and it erases
even the soul's ancient indentations so that
Some unknown womb shall begin to convulse
to welcome your restructured perfection

It is no more 'dark womb' marked by discontent.

Besides Indian imagery, the poet has also occasionally included Hindi words and native lexicon like 'Baksheesh' (My Father's Death), 'Bol, Hari Bol' (In Love), 'Saree' (An Introduction).

Unlike the contemporary male poets - Ramanujan, Kolatkar, Mahapatra and Parthasarthy, Kamala Das does not reveal any desperate quest for native roots, yet she has revealed enough 'Indianness' to prove her authenticity as an

Indian writer. Rather than observing or alluding to their environment, her poems assume their location and create their space by being set in situations. Her concept of religious tolerance, humanitarianism and her democratic values are all expressions of the secular, tolerant and open Indian mind. Her outlook on various phenomena like Death, Afterlife, Rebirth is characteristically Indian and so is her representation of modern Indian woman's psyche. K. Satchidanandan has made a very pertinent observation, " Kamala Das is typically Indian in her identification of lover with Krishna, in her emancipating compassion for all those who suffer and in her battles with the body to go beyond it to an unfettered world of human spirituality."

Imagery & Symbolism

Through imagery a writer conveys his abstract thoughts and emotions in a concrete form. The process of image-making is like picture-making and it involves a skilful use of mental-pictures, metaphors and similes. Kamala Das's diction is characterized by simplicity and clarity. It is the language of emotions without much of abstraction, complexities and intricate construction. She has however made ample use of images. By their recurrent use some of these images have turned into symbols also.

The poet employs the images drawn from the human body most frequently. As a symbol body is both a destroyer and a preserver, a source of life and death. In 'The Freaks' through images of horror and ugliness male anatomy is presented as repulsive and destructive - the mouth is 'dark cavern', cheek is 'sun-stained' and teeth are 'gleaming stalactites'. In such poems her rejection of body is a symbol of revolt against male-ego and male-domination. In 'Convicts' she describes the lustful nature of the relationship as

hacking at each other's parts
like convicts hacking, breaking clods

The poet also celebrates body and physicality in her poems. With its series of images the poem 'The Looking Glass' concretizes her fond awareness of male and female body and also reveals her ecstasy of union:

Notice the perfection
of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor
… … … …
Gift him all
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
long hair, the musk of sweat between breasts.

And without the lover:

Your
Body which once under his touch had gleamed
like burnished brass now drab and destitute

In 'The Invitation' on bed with him the 'boundaries of paradise' shrink to 'six-by-two'. In fact, Kamala Das's images are her themes as well as modes of expression. Her fascination and revulsion for body embodies her ambivalent attitude towards man.

Kamala Das has also borrowed her imagery from the world of Nature. One such dominant image is 'sea' and the recurrent use of this image accords it the status of a symbol. Devindra Kohli has called 'sea imagery a part of Kamala Das's elemental symbolism'. It is related to her twin moods of anguish and release. In 'Composition' the image develops and becomes a symbol. In her childhood memory, the sea is 'the wind's ceaseless whisper in a shell' and the 'surf breaking on the shore.' Later on, it promises her rest and comfort:

All I want now
is to take a long walk
into the sea
and be there, resting

completely uninvolved

'Sea' is the cosmic home, eternity, basic principle of life and regeneration. 'Greater hungers' and 'immortality' lurk at the basement of the sea. In 'The Suicide' sea is an associate of 'soul' rejecting the body:

Only the souls may enter
The vortex of the sea

As a child Kamala Das loved to swim and as an adult also she wishes to swim in the waters of emotional contentment:

O sea, I am happy swimming
happy, happy, happy

Her identification with 'sea' is complete:

O sea
You generous cow you and I are big flops
we are too sentimental
for our own good

In other poems like 'The Invitation', 'Convicts', The High Tide', 'The Joss Sticks at Cadell Road', sea emerges as 'secondary image' without any symbolic overtones. Familiar to her from her childhood 'sea' becomes for Kamala Das a handy tool to express her emotions.

Another oft-used image is the image of 'sun' though it does not have a systematic symbolism. The image of sun is not a benevolent one that illumines her world but it is one that consumes it with its oppressive power - the force of lust and consequent destruction. Both the 'burning sun' and the male body signify the same for her. The poem 'In Love' explicitly states the similarity of the two in Kamala Das's vision:

of what does the burning mouth
of sun, burning in today's
Sky remind me... oh, yes, his
mouth. . .

In 'Sepia' it is a destroyer of life and world:

It's time to hold anger
like a living sun and scorch
this sad-mouthed human
race.

'The Dance of the Lunch', 'Summer in Calcutta' suggest oppressive power of sun and 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' brings out its 'wildness'. In other poems like 'The Pigeons', 'Drama', 'Punishment in Kindergarten, 'Convicts' the image of sun has negative associations. Unlike with 'sea' the poet's relationship with 'sun' is a distant one. In 'A Half-day's Bewitchment' she writes:

azure remain our dreams, both the sea's and mine
And all the experiences worth remembering come
To us only in dreams which we forget when we wake
face to face with
the sun as eternal as
truth itself

Kamala Das has made use of four natural elements - water, air, fire and earth in her poetry. 'Fire' image is the most powerful of all symbol of passion and destruction. In 'The Millionaire's Marine Drive', the fire of lovers' passion was that of 'arsonists' and in 'The Flag' it signifies destruction:

The courage stands for fire, fire that eats
us all in the end

The 'air' image helps to intensify the central mood of the poem in many poems like 'The Conflagration, 'Winter', 'Composition', 'The Old Playhouse', 'The Grandmother's House', 'Ghanashyam' and 'Requiem for a Son'.

'Water' is the prime mover of life. In 'Ghanashyam' 'life is water' and in some poems lovers are 'only water' in which the poet swims 'broken with longing'.

'Earth' is the symbol of feminine body and of the poet herself. In 'Jaisurya' mother Kamala 'for a while was earth' and in her 'the seed was silent' .

In some of the poems all the above elements combine. In 'Afterwards' the poet thus describes the act of passion through richly suggestive lines:

The earth we nearly killed is yours
Now. .. the flowers bloom again
And the sudden pain
But the sun comes again, and rain

Along with sun, darkness also abounds in Kamala Das's world. It suggests loneliness, negativity and sterility. In 'Jaisurya' she defines 'darkness':

The darkness I have known
lived with. The darkness of rooms where old
sit, sharpening words for future use
The darkness of sterile wombs and that of
the miser's pot.

It is also related with 'sex' and womb. In 'The Testing of the Sirens' the night 'dark-cloaked like a procuress' brings lover to her. In 'My Grandmother's House' darkness offers safety of womb and the poet wishes to 'pick an armfulness of darkness' from her ancestral house to 'lie' behind her bedroom door 'like a brooding dog'.

Grandma's house and grandma herself are symbols of innocence and security for the poet. In 'Composition' she writes:

The red house that had
Stood for innocence
crumbled
and the old woman died

Other recurrent images are of 'bird' and 'window'. 'Bird' is suggestive of freedom and the poet mourns being a caged bird. In the poem 'The Stone Age' she regrets her being turned into 'a bird of stone' and 'a granite dove'. In 'The Old Playhouse' she condemns her husband's plan to tame her as a 'swallow' and make her forget not only the 'pathways of sky' but her very nature 'to fly'. In 'I Shall Some Day' she expresses her desire for freedom from shackles:

I shall some day take
wings, fly around...

'Window' is essentially a possibility of link and connection between the past and the present in 'My Grandmother's Home' and between the insiders and the strangers in 'A Hot Noon in Malabar'.

Kamala Das has also turned Indian myths into symbolistic imagery. She makes frequent use of Radha-Krishna myth in her poems. Her women personae often become Radhas seeking love that transcends the merely physical. It also provides a mythical framework to love outside the institution of marriage. Her love-longing finds an objective correlative in this myth. In 'Vrindavan' she states:

Vrindavan lives on in every woman's mind
and the flute, luring her
from home and away from her husband.

Such a 'chaste bond' makes all the 'doubting' and the 'reasoning' silent. Krishna promises divine bliss:

Ghanashyam

You have like a koel built your nest
in the arbour of my heart
My life, until now a sleeping jungle, is
at last astir with music

Death - imagery is also a part and parcel of Kamala Das's image-treasure. City is 'like a half-burnt corpse' in 'The Sea at Galle Face Green', lover's kiss to beloved is 'maggots' biting of 'corpses' in 'The Maggots' and the poet's sleep is 'hangman's troubled pre-morning slumber in 'A Requiem for My Son'. In 'The Fatalists on Stone Benches' people have 'cold tombstones of eyes', in 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' eunuchs are like half-bunt logs from funeral pyres and days pass like 'mourners behind a bier' in 'The Wild Bougainvillea'.

Imagery from the world of music also finds place. In 'Nani' peace is described as 'music in koel's egg' and Nani's dead body does 'a comic dance'. In 'The Intensive Care Unit' heartbeat sounds as 'distant drums'.

Mind is 'an old playhouse' with no more singing, no more dance'. In 'My Father's Death' police batons direct the 'traffic orchestra'.

Feminine and domestic imagery are an integral part of the poet's expression. In 'For Cleo Pascal' the poet wears Canada as an 'overcoat warming my breasts and belly'. She wishes to hold 'the wounded wind in my arms to lull it back to sleep' in 'A Souvenir of Bone'. 'If Death is Your Wish' speaks indignantly of men who will shatter with violence our decade like shattering of 'an unblest babe and its cradle'. In 'Smoke in Colombo' the smoke lingers on:

as milk lingers on
in udders after the calves are buried
as grief lingers on
within women rocking emptied cradles

Along with the traditional and natural imagery, the poet has also employed modern imagery. In 'Substitute' love is like a 'swivel-door', in 'Loud Poster' she regrets adopting 'typewriter's click-click' as her speech, in 'A Relationship' we have 'metallic sighs', night is like a 'wallpaper' in 'A Souvenir of Bone', time is 'paperweight' in 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' and the husband is like a 'banklocker' and 'a file in the cabinet' in 'Larger than Life was He'.

Though Kamala Das has not evidenced much originality in her choice of imagery and symbols but the imagery used is apt and suitable. It is always functional and never merely decorative. She mostly employs corporeal imagery, imagery drawn from the world of Nature, feminine imagery, death-imagery and imagery from the world of music. In her later works imagery has increasingly become more modern and original. Acquiring a symbolic significance, her images enhance the expressive quality of her diction and suggestive quality of her verse.

Diction & Versification

Like many modern poets Kamala Das has chosen verse-libre or free verse which offers her much-required flexibility of expression and freedom of utterance. Almost all of her poems have been composed in free verse except a few prose pieces like 'The Swamp', The Sunset', 'The Blind walk' and 'The Old cattle' which have been written in the experimental style of E.E. Cummings. 'The Sunset, Blue Bird' goes like:

... he no longer calls for me no longer comes to see me or stands at the other window to smile at me but everywhere I look I see him.

Another example of prose-poem is 'A Faded Epaulet on His Shoulder':

after marrying me he walked more erect and my hand a gilded epaulet on his shoulder but that was shortlived pride even a fair skinned maidservant could take him away from me for hours

As free verse does not apply any binding on the line-length, the poet has composed both long-line and short-line poems. 'A Souvenir of Bone' has long line verse:

The fire was red blood that night, I remember the house Burning down, the slow folding

of its limbs, the crackle And the children carried in sleep, asking dully from
Under the trees, what is it since then the littlest fire
Has had for me a very secret incantation

Example of short-line verse is furnished by 'A Request':

When I die
Don't 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

She has also introduced both short-lines and long-lines within a single poem. 'Ghanashyam' has this mixed arrangement of line-length:

Ghanashyam
You have like a koel built your nest in the arbour of my heart
… … … …
But at each turn when I near you
Like a spectral plane you vanish
… … … …
Life is moisture
Life is water, semen and blood
Death is drought

Barring a few exceptions, the poet has generally used run-on lines in her poems. A few poems like 'Three P.M.', 'Someone Else's Song' and 'The Flag' have couplets and stanzas but here also she has not subscribed to the traditional forms.

Most of the poems are short poems with usual length of 15-25 lines. She has also revealed fascination for 'capsule verse' in poems like 'Fatimah', 'Request', 'The Maggots', 'A Losing Battle', 'The Latest Toy', 'Krishna', 'Winter', 'Love', 'Ischaemia in August', 'The Prisoner', 'Radha Krishna' and 'Kumar Gandharva'. 'The Prisoner' expresses the poet's desire:

As the convict studies
his prison's geography
I study the trappings
of your body, dear love
for, I must some day find
an escape from its snare.

Kamala's attempts at long poems are 'Composition' and 'Suicide', poems marked by shift in moods and emotions.

Among the sound devices, the favourite device of the poet is that of alliteration and her poems abound in alliteration. 'Out of breath/ the bulbs blurring his eyes' (The Intensive Cardiac Care Unit), 'sit strongly silent' (Pigeons), 'have heard and holding a haunting' (A Souvenir of Bone) are only a few examples. Such alliterative lines recur in her verse and can be easily located in 'Substitute', 'The Suicide', 'Composition', 'The Stone Age', 'An Introduction', 'Love' and 'In Love'.

Another device of syntactic and semantic value in Kamala Das's hands is the device of repetition - repetition of words, phrases and sentences. Sometimes the poet uses same word in different clauses to give sweep, speed and

movement to the poem. In 'Inheritance' she writes:

Oh god
Blessed be your fair name, blessed be the religion
Blessed be
Our scared city, blessed be its incarnadined glory

At times she repeats a whole set of expression and a full clause, e.g. In 'The Stone Age':

Ask me, everybody ask me
What he sees in me ask me, ask me, ask me, why he is called a lion
... ask me the flavour of his
mouth... ask me what's bliss and what is its price

Another example is 'Substitute' where the clause 'It will be all right' is repeated a number of times. Other poems like 'Drama', 'Radha', 'Composition' also employ this device. The repetitive application of words gives Kamala Das's poetry a music and rhythm in poems like 'A Hot Noon in Malabar', 'Summer in Calcutta', 'The Testing of the Sirens', 'The Doubt', 'Blood' and 'Glass'. In 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' the poet repeats: "This is the noon". In 'The Testing of the Sirens' repetition of 'again' makes the lines moving:

Ah, why does love come to me like pain
Again and again and again

Eunice De Souza points out, "repetition reinforces predominantly emotional quality of her verse.

In her poems Kamala Das has also made a prolific use of ellipsis also for the purpose of emphasis, continuation, interrogation and exclamation. Many of her poems conclude with ellipsis. In 'A Relationship she finds peace:

nowhere else but here in my betrayer's arms...

The early poems make frequent use of ellipsis even during the course of a single poem. 'The Invitation' has as many as seven ellipsis. Kamala Das's use of ellipsis has evoked criticism. Linda Hess has criticized Kamala Das for 'alarming number of ellipsis' in her poems, showing 'lack of wit and energy'. Anisur Rehman has, however, justified her use of ellipsis and he finds them 'expressive' and 'communicative'.

The poet has an essentially lyrical sensibility and her diction is characterized by simplicity and lucidity. She sums up the insecurity of ageing in a beautiful simple poem:

Dusk is upon my hair
Dusk is upon my skin
When I lie down to sleep
I am not sure
That I shall see
The blessed dawn again

At times she writes in aphoristic and maximatic diction also:

1. Tragedy of life is not death but growth (Composition)
2. Life is quite simple now Love, blackmail and sorrow (The Descendants)
3. Love like life, is sweetest before its end

Kamala Das has also attempted colloquial verse. In 'An Introduction' she writes:

Don't write in English, they said
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Because mine

don't you see?

and

Be Amy, or be Kamala or better
Still, be Madhavikutty.

Her diction is both traditional and modern. Though much of imagery comes from the world of nature, yet one finds words like swiveldoor, bedroom-mirror, aeroplanes, ballroom, microbes, paperweight, wallpaper, bank-locker, radar, currency, gown. The poet has also used a few words from native language i.e., Hindi, e.g, Sari (An Introduction) , Bol Hari Bol (In Love).

The abundant use of imagery renders her poetry pictorial and sensuous and it produces auditory, tactile and sensory effects on the readers. Her beautiful similes and metaphors also give richness and suggestibility to her poetry. She employs domestic imagery, corporeal imagery, traditional imagery from the world of Nature and also modern imagery.

Unlike her successors Rukmini Nair and Sujata Bhatt, Kamala Das has not introduced any stylistic innovations or typographical experiment. There are not many novel or original symbols or images which can stand and live in readers' memory. At times excessive repetition spoils the overall effect. Her strength is her feel for the right word and her emotionally charged language. Imaginative use of commonplace raises prosaic to the level of poetry. Epithets glow with emotion and some phrases have become immortal. Bruce King calls her a 'natural poet' with an excellent feeling for 'sound, rhythm, phrasing, image, symbol, wordplay and drama'. Srinivas Iyenger praises her 'mastery of phrase' and 'control over rhythm'. Her contribution is that she has rejected the refined, lady-like language of Monika Verma and Gauri Despande, the romantic platitudes of Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt and the excessive precision and economy of male poets. She has brought to poetry a directness of expression, a natural-colloquial vigour and intensity.

Kamala Das's Contribution

With publication of her first poetic volume *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) Kamala Das took the literary world by storm. She has carved for herself an abiding niche in contemporary Indian English poetry. Though not a prolific poet like many other women poets, she continues to be one of the most cherished writers of our times, sharing her place with the best male poets in India and the best women poets in the world. Something in the tone and temper of her work made her readers sit up from the very first poem. The noted English poet, Geoffery Hill, was prompted to remark that one poet who stood out in P. Lal's *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and* a *Credo* (1969) was Kamala Das.

Kamala Das's poetry is the crossing of the Rubicon for English poetry composed by Indian women. She has made a major contribution to Indian English poetry at both the thematic and the stylistic levels. In fact, she has modernized and revolutionized Indian feminine poetic psyche. Prior to Kamala Das, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and their successors like Susi P. David, Sister Lolita, Sabita Devi, Sukhalata Rao and Themis were writing a kind of verse where the concerns were mostly limited to mystical presentation of the themes of love, God, Death and portrayal of exotica of traditional India. Their verse had romantic coyness, usual meters and tame versification and diction. Kamala Das's poetry is also a far cry from her contemporary women poets like Gauri Deshpande and Monika Verma who wrote about Nature, love, death and God in a refined and lady-like language. After Kamala Das, the poetry composed by Indian English women poets has not looked the same again. She has taken up some new themes and has also dealt with the usual themes from a new angle.

With Kamala Das, woman's experiences became a valid subject matter for poetry. In her works she gave ample expression to her feminine-cum-feminist consciousness. A woman's body, mind, heart and soul were unravelled as she gave vent to joys, sorrows, hopes and fears of womankind. The poet plays all the traditional feminine roles of a daughter, granddaughter, beloved, wife and mother but she also goes beyond it and seeks self-growth and self-realization. Along with revelling in the typical feminine activities, the poet also expresses her identity crisis as a girl child, a beloved and a wife. Her works - poetry, novels and columns all bring out her feminist streak, as she articulates the need for freedom and asserts her identity as a woman. This gender-generated crisis becomes acute in the later women poets.

The most revolutionary feature of Kamala Das's poetry is her daring and unconventional attitude towards the theme of man-woman relationship. Kamala Das has given a totally uninhibited, free and frank play to the physical in her poetry. Writing in the year 1965 and writing in a traditional Indian society, such writing by Kamala Das was indeed an

extraordinary act of courage. Her works are an assertion of female sexuality and a celebration of physical union. The poet goes further to analyze the very act and makes exacting demands like accompaniment of the physical with emotional communion. Devoid of emotional richness, the gross physicality is spurned and so is the man who can provide nothing more than 'skin's lazy hungers'. The poet makes no secret of her strong physical desire and her extra-marital affairs. Tabooed topics like 'lesbianism' and words like 'pubis' find free occurrence in her poetry. She freed the Indian feminine poetic psyche from inhibitions in the expression of above matters once and for all.

Kamala Das infused in Indian English Poetry a courage and straight-forwardness. She rebelled against all kinds of categorizers, be it the sexist forces compelling her to 'fit in' the stereotyped roles or other categorizers. Her defence of use of English language by an Indian English writer became the classic defence of Indian English poets and it clinched the issue of use of this language all for time to come:

Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine.

A lover of natural world at heart, Kamala Das has also written about the city. One finds in her poems various Indian cities, surroundings and locales. She is the first woman poet to give a realistic portrayal of the squalor and the heat, the crowd and the slum life with a great precision. This portrayal is free from the biting social irony of Nissim Ezekiel, savage subjective irony of Shiv Kumar and alienation from social milieu as found in Dom Moraes.

In ***Summer in Calcutta,*** the poet turned the poetic focus on Indian socio-political scene and its lacunae in her poem 'The Flag'. It was exploration of a new possibility as hitherto in Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and other women poets the orientation was towards glorification of India. Kamala Das widened the poetic range of sympathy by relating to the poor and the downtrodden of the land. Her poems continue to protest against violence in the name of community and caste, and to bemoan the erosion of values. In the later poets social concerns have become much more pronounced.

With Kamala Das the expression of existential agony also came in practice with the women poets openly talking of their hurt, humiliation, loneliness, misery and anxiety. The poetry became a 'psychic striptease'. The psychological richness of her poems is an appreciable contribution of the poet to Indian English poetry written by women.

For Indian English Women poets Kamala Das was a trend-setter in the stylistic field also. She adopted verse libre, attempted prose-poems and introduced modern imagery. Besides, the poet exemplified the effectiveness of irony and power of corporeal diction. Her introduction of directness of speech, rhythm, her colloquial verse and her Indianization of diction had a far-reaching impact. Language no more stood in the way of emotion. It became an effective instrument for presenting a range of highly volatile emotions in poems replete with shifting moods.

In the final analysis, Kamala Das is not as witty and intellectual as many of the other confessional poets, she is not as prolific as many of her other contemporaries, nor has she the scholarship of 'academic' poets or the philosophical metaphysical viewpoint of 'enlightened' writers but she is in a class of her own - an original artist who is very much herself in her poems. In fact, this poet is unique for the intensity of her emotionally charged diction. She has a feel for the 'right' word. Linda Hess, a ruthless critic of Das also concedes that "a genuine poetic talent is at work here". Kamala Das has democratized Indian English poetry by relating herself to all - men and women, rich and poor, rural and urban, Hindus and Muslims, eunuchs and prostitutes, hetros and homos. She has exemplified through her life and literature that it is possible for a woman to make choices and decide the course of her life. The publication of *Summer in Calcutta* changed the history of Indian-English poetry, especially of women poets. Her mantle has fallen on many succeeding women poets. Taking courage from Kamala Das, the later poets have experimented in theme and style, and have come up with truly modernistic and bold poetry.

LIST OF QUESTIONS

A Short Answer Type Questions

(1) Bring out the symbolic significance of Grandmother and Malabar house in Kamala Das's scheme of things.

(2) Examine how the poem 'My Grandmother's House' reveals the poet's loneliness and her fondness for her grandmother.

(3) Discuss 'My Grandmother's House' as a poem of nostalgia and anguish.

(4) Comment on the device of contrast used by Kamala Das in her poem 'My Grandmother's House'.

(5) 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' is a poem mixing 'memory' and 'desire'. Discuss.

(6) Comment on the presentation of Indian locale in 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' .

(7) How does the poem 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' capture 'homesickness' and 'ache' of the poet?

(8) Comment on the mood of nostalgia as expressed in the poem 'A Hot Noon in Malabar'.

(9) Analyze the exploration of male and female psychology in the poem 'The Looking Glass'.

(10) Discuss 'The Looking Glass' as an example of daring and uninhibited treatment of the theme of physicality.

(11) Comment on the underlying tone of irony in 'The Looking Glass'.

(12) Justify the title of the poem 'The Freaks'.

(13) Comment on the style of poem 'The Freaks'.

(14) The poem 'The Freaks' gives an idea of Kamala Das's concept of love. What is your impression of the concept?

(15) The poems 'The Freaks' and 'The Looking Glass' taken together give us an insight into Kamala Das's vision of love. Explain the concept in your own words.

(16) Bring out the feminist element in the poem 'The Old Playhouse'.

(17) Kamala Das is a votary of natural life as against artificial life. Substantiate your answer from the poems 'The Old Playhouse', 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' and 'The Wild Bougainvillea'.

(18) Comment on the use of imagery in the poem 'The Old Playhouse'.

(19) Write a note on the imagery of death and decay in the poem 'The Wild Bougainvillea'.

(20) Discuss how in the poem 'The Wild Bougainvillea' the poet finds life in the midst of death.

B - LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

(1) In the light of the studied poems discuss Kamala Das as a Poet of Body.

(2) "Love in its various shades continues to be the leit-motif of Kamala Das's poetry". Discuss and illustrate.

(3) "Memories are building-blocks in Kamala Das's edifice of poetry". Elucidate.

(4) "Tragedy of life is not death/ but growth". Discuss Kamala Das's vision of life as expressed in her poems.

(5) "Body-soul conflict characterizes poetry of Kamala Das". Elaborate.

(6) It's said that Kamala Das represents modern Indian woman's ambivalent attitude. Discuss the validity of the statement with reference to the studied poems.

(7) Analyze Kamala Das's poetry as a strong expression of Indian sensibility.

(8) "Kamala Das's uniqueness is her feminine-cum-feminist sensibility". Discuss and illustrate from the poems you are familiar with.

(9) Write a critical note on Kamala Das's use of prominent imagery and symbols in her poems.

(10) Discuss how Kamala Das lives simultaneously in two worlds - the actual world of 'skin-communicated love' and the mythical world of vrindavan.

(11) "Kamala Das's themes transcend the personal and what she presents is the universal experience of women". Discuss in the light of this statement the poems you have studied.

(12) "A poet's raw material is not stone or clay, it is her personality. I could not escape from my predicament even for a moment" observes Kamala Das. Examine the veracity of this statement in context of her poems you are familiar with.

(13) Show how Kamala Das's poems are marked by a mercurial change of mind, attitude and tone.

(14) The aim of Kamala Das is not self-exposure but self-discovery and self-realization. Discuss and illustrate with suitable examples.

(15) "Kamala Das's poetry is vitally particularized by the woman's point of view". Do you agree? Substantiate your answer with examples.

(16) Discuss how death is a part of the outer and the inner landscape in Kamala Das.

(17) How is Kamala Das's presentation of her childhood a far cry from childhood reminiscences found in the romantic poetry?

(18) How far do you concur with the view that some of Kamala Das's poems go beyond 'womanly affairs' and express a universal concern?

(19) Kamala Das's poetry abounds in details of death, disease, loneliness, frustration, grief and helplessness. Do you agree? Substantiate your answer with illustrations.

(20) Write a critical note on Kamala Das as a confessional poet.

(21) Critically examine Kamala Das's concept of love as it emerges from your reading of her poems.

(22) "Kamala Das is typically Indian in her identification of love with Krishna, in her emancipating compassion for all those who suffer and in her battles with body to go beyond it". Examine Kamala Das's poems in the light of this statement.

(23) "Kamala Das's inner world has not remained her personal domain, it has acquired a profound significance for all bruised and battered womankind." Discuss and illustrate.

(24) Discuss the recurrent themes in Kamala Das's poetry.

(25) Critically evaluate Kamala Das's thematic and stylistic contribution to Indian English Poetry.

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Unit IX - Short stories

SECTION - I Introduction

As a distinct frame of knowledge, gender studies evolve around some basic questions, some of which include: What does it mean to be a woman or a man? Do these categories constitute and are constitutive of some basic nature, inherent in an entity called man or woman, or are these notions simply cultural constructs, embedded in the discursivity, i.e., constructed by and circulated within particular cultural formations and signifying practices called femininity or masculinity, that is invariably contextual and hence variable? If basic, does this nature remain unchanged through time, or does it evolve with time and across cultures? What are the constituents of these basic, essential or real human categories? What is the inter-relationship between male and female – is it one of difference, complementarity, dependence or reciprocation? And how does one's embodiment of one's self as male or female impact one's notions of the self and surrounding? What are the processes and mechanisms that produce, reinforce, impact, or mutate one's experiences of femininity and masculinity?

Gender study probes these and allied questions and insert them within material, discursive and theoretical contexts, in the process inflecting almost all the fields of enquiry and activity. Literature as a field of aesthetic representation that vicariously straddles the actualities, possibilities and probabilities of life, is invariably implicated in and impacted by this debate.

GENDER: ESSENCE OR CONSTRUCT?

Gender theorists, who swear by **gender as an essence**, posit men and women in terms of **psychological and physical differences and incompatibility**. These differences are evoked from the vantage point of science, religion, history and tradition.

These differences when analyzed through the gaze of Darwin' theories of evolution (Cronin belongs to this class), explain the dominance of man over woman as a process of natural selection, wherein the **natural** aggression, competitiveness, ambition, status-consciousness, dedication and perseverance of men won over the women who **by nature** have been cautious, intuitively 'judicious' and emotional in their everyday life-choices and actions. This sexual difference or these natural attributes - i.e., that there are ways of thinking and behaving which are 'essentially' manly, and certain ways of thinking and behaving which are 'essentially' womanly – are **eternal, innate, distinct and immutable facts** of life.

Quoting from the Old Testament, Anna Tripp explains the essentialist embedding of gender difference in Christianity as follows:

> The Old Testament defines the destiny of women as follows: 'Unto the woman God said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee'… The woman is not told that her *duty* will be to her husband; she is told that her *desire* will be to her husband. A duty is an externally imposed obligation – and might not prove so difficult to resist – but a desire is most often experienced as something which comes from inside of us, as an intimate and inextricable part of ourselves. In defining who we are, we often invoke what we want: our goal and ambitions, our likes and dislikes. In this way, Genesis presents a god-given definition not just of how a woman is required to behave, but also of what, in essence, she *wants* and *is.* (Tripp, Anna, ed., *Gender,* Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000, p.2)

Constructionists, like Showalter and Greer propose a diametrically opposite understanding of differences between women and men. They posit gender – i.e., femininity and masculinity- as cultural, political and historical construction. This is how Germain Greer rebuts the essentialist gender position:

> I…agree that masculinity is very different from femininity…but I also believe that men work very hard at *creating* masculinisms…There's a lot of aspects of the way they behave which are highly cultural and extremely protean, [and] could change pretty quickly… Things cannot *not* fit with biology…that's obvious. The point is that culture does it own thing with biology, [and] it could have done any one of a number of things. (Greer, *In our Time,* quoted in *Gender,* edited by Anna Tripp, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000, p.2)

Constructionists, then, distinguish between sex and gender. The votaries of this model argue that gender – i.e., the behavioral, intellectual and interactive pattern of men and women – is cultural specific and hence a variable and

unstable historical construct. The gender attributes are the function of culturally imposed normativity –and tend to vary across culture and time. In other words each culture inscribes and interprets the body/biology/sex within its own specific references. This practice generates its own semiosis and significance around the fact of biology.

Each model has its own political praxis: while the essentialist models are invariably conservative, the constructionist models tend to be radical and open. Within these two extremes there exist various positions vis-à-vis sex and gender. R. W. Connell, who defines gender as "the structure of social relations that centers on the reproductive arena and set of practices (governed by this structure), that brings reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes" (Connell, R. W. *Gender*, Cambridge: Polity, 2002, p.10), nevertheless, states that there occur at least three distinct evolutionary waves of gender theorization in the West. These include:

1. The idea of natural difference, which treats the body as a machine.
2. The idea of two separate realms of sex and gender.
3. The idea of gender as a discursive or symbolic system which treats body as a canvas on which society paints.

However, 'gender' is only one of many categories through which one understands, describes and analyses reality. Gender, as a category of description and analysis, thus does not exist in isolation but straddles across other analytic categories such as that of caste, race, nation, religion etc. Understood as such, feminism, which takes gender as its analytic frame, unfolds itself as 'activism' that manifests itself through the interplay of moment, milieu and (wo) man.

EVOLUTION OF GENDER AS AN ANALYTIC CATEGORY:

The deployment of gender as a category of analysis is a relatively recent phenomena. Anna Tripp charts the evolution of this concept thus:

> It was not until latter part of the twentieth century that it became widely acceptable to make a distinction between 'sex' – denoting anatomical or biological 'maleness' or 'femaleness' – and the term 'gender' – denoting the distinct sets of characteristics culturally ascribed to maleness and femaleness and signified by the adjectives 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Meanings are never stable or static, and a glance at any dictionary which includes etymologies will show that 'gender', like all words, has a long, complex and evolving history, signifying different things at different times (as well as different things at the same time).
>
> For the fist two-thirds of the twentieth century, 'gender' was most widely used as a technical term specific to the study of grammar. The 1966 edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* defines it as '(Gram.) any of the three "kinds", masculine, feminine and neuter, of nouns, adjectives, and pronouns'. For example, in French, the gender of the noun *glacage* (icing) is masculine, while the gender of the noun *patinoire* (ice rink) is feminine. So, until the late 1960s 'gender' was generally understood to have a fairly narrow and uncontroversial meaning, and moreover, to have less relevance in English (which does not routinely gender nouns or adjectives) than in other language.
>
> 1968 is treated by many commentators as the year in which a definitive shift took place and the modern meaning of 'gender' emerged in the English language. It was during this year that the American psychoanalyst Robert Stoller published a book called *Sex and Gender,* in which he clearly differentiates between these two terms. In his 'Preface' he makes the crucial claim that:
>
> [O]ne can speak of the male sex or the female sex, but one can also talk about masculinity and femininity and not necessarily be implying anything about anatomy or physiology. Thus, while sex and gender seem to common sense to be practically synonymous, and in everyday life to be inextricably bound together, one purpose of this study will be to confirm the fact that the two realms (sex and gender) are not at all inevitably bound in anything like a one-to-one relationship, but each may go in its quite independent way. (Tripp, ibid, p.4)

'Feminine' or 'masculine' forms of behaviour, Stoller (Stoller, Robert, *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity*, London: Hogarth Press, 1968, p. xiii) contends in relation to various case histories, may have less to do with biological sex than with cultural conventions and conditioning. He argues that 'gender…[is] primarily culturally determined; that is, learned postnatally. This cultural process springs from one's society'. In this way, from the late 1960s onwards, it began to be possible to use the term 'gender' to signify all those culturally

produced assumptions, expectations, conventions and stereotypes concerning 'appropriate' demeanour and 'normal' behaviour for women and for men.

FROM GENDER TO FEMINISMS:

From 1960 onwards, the concept of gender steadily metamorphosed into a critical base for theorizing women's location – epistemological, philosophical and socio-political – and gained "critical mass". While gender had provided an analytic framework to understand man-woman relationship, feminism, by yoking gender to ideology, provided it with a socio-political rigour. This shift over was not simple but incorporated in its evolutionary contours the intricacies of gender theorization. If gender gave rise to feminism, feminism in turn inserted gender into socio-political domain. Anna Tripp explains this relationship as follows:

> [By 1960's feminist critics like] "Germaine Greer, Ann Oakley and Kate Millett set about theorizing and politicizing the newly available analytical category of gender. These feminists emphasized not only the cultural construction of gender, but the cultural construction of *gendered inequality:* in other words, the ways in which gender constitutes power relations. Oakley, Millett and Greer all identified the society in which they were living as patriarchal: that is, structural in ways that tend to privilege men's interests over women's interests."
>
> Now as we enter the twenty-first century, it seems undeniable that feminism has made profound differences to the ways in which Western cultures understand gender. However, when talking about feminism, it is also important to recognize that it has never represented a single, unified 'theory of gender'. As Catherine Belsey puts it: 'There are many ways to be a feminist.' Feminism – if it can be referred to in the singular at all – consists of many different theories, practices, perspectives and agendas. (Tripp, ibid, p.5)

Though feminism is a distinctly modern phenomenon, it is with Virginia Woolf – more precisely with the publication of her work, *Room of One's Own,* in 1929 that modernist forays into literary feminism gets concretized. Her work is a pioneering effort to chart out "the typically ambiguous signpost, concerned as it is with both women's literary output and the 'fictions' written about women." Woolf's feminist analysis, though it grew without any concrete theorization of gender, betrays distinctly materialist leanings, in that it embeds a keen understanding of socio-historical and linguistic implications on the literary production, maintenance and transmission of culturally constructed notions of 'woman' and 'man'. In her critical writings she foregrounds literary aesthetics – its quality and quantity – as a function of gender conditioning, which directly bears on and springs from the differentials of socio-historical materiality rather than from any fundamental or essential differences between women and men. Patriarchally circumscribed horizons of female acculturation and existence – unequal access to education, careers and political processes, leisure time and adequate living conditions – argues Woolf, limit the full flowering of their potentials. This bears on the quality and quantity of aesthetic production. Woolf thus understood woman as a product of "variable cultural constructions… from within the context of British modernism". With the advent of Postmodernism this tendency grew into a more thoroughgoing skepticism towards the existence of universal, trans-cultural of a historical truths and essence. This is how Anna Tripp, quoting critics like Elizabeth Spelman and Jean-Francois Lyotard, states the postmodern trajectory of feminism:

> Elizabeth Spelman, for example, asserts that 'the more universal the claim one might hope to make about women, the more likely it is to be false, Jean-Francois Lyotard, one of the writers primarily associated with postmodern skepticism, also adds the vital corollary that 'the right to decide what is true is not independent of the right to decide what is just.' Taking this into account, one might begin to suspect that claims regarding 'the truth about women' articulated in the name of science, religion or in other influential discourses might be profoundly political after all, since the power to define a person or group goes hand in hand with the power to control that person or group, in legislating what is and is not appropriate and acceptable behaviour. Gender is an ongoing effect of meanings and definitions culturally produced and circulated, and, crucially, these definitions have very real material consequences in our lives. (ibid, 6)

Feminism, thus, is a complex, heterogeneous and a contradictory intellectual, ideological and activist baggage. Though a female-centered consciousness constitutes its core and informs its basic premises, it is, nevertheless, a daunting task to undertake a rough review of the movement and its basic theoretical assumptions. This is because this movement, over the years has evolved through the accretion of diverse, uneven, and often contradictory feminist perspectives or

feminisms, each conceptualizing gender in its own distinctive way. Though belonging to the same movement, the stances feminist theoreticians/activists take are not necessarily compatible with each other. Most of the time they seem to speak from the vantage point of an already existing theoretical position – Liberal, Marxist, Radical Freudian, Lacanian, Deconstructive, Structuralist, Post colonial etc – or an eclectic combination of all these. This necessarily gives feminist movement its enriching diversity.

But despite this seemingly cacophony of voices, the movement is held together by a commonality of some basic premises:

1. Feminism as a perspective provides a female-centric conceptual framework - theoretical and political – to understand reality and woman's location within this reality. It enables socio-cultural, economic, political, philosophical and epistemological analyses of society from an overtly self-conscious feminist perspective.
2. Theoretically, feminism emphasizes gender both as a category of description and a tool of analysis. However, like all other knowledge perspectives, over time, this analytic category has been broadened to include the questions of race, class and nationality.
3. Like any movement it has its own history that has evolved over time and space. Feminism is an ever-evolving corpus of theory and practice. What had originated as Feminism in the west as a monolithic concept has, consequently, been replaced by a more plural concept 'feminisms'**.** This shift from Feminism to feminisms foregrounds not only the constant evolutionary movement of feminism, but also indicates its increasing intersection with other conceptual frameworks like race, class, sexual orientation, and nationality, among others.
4. At the level of praxis, feminism has evolved as a socio-cultural and political movement for ameliorating the condition of women.
5. At the level of theory, it straddles across and deconstructively engages with various discourses to create its own discourse that aims at understanding and empowering, and emancipating women and creating women-centric episteme.

FEMINISM AND LITERATURE:

The concept of feminism, based as it is on multiplicity of perspectives, each having its own analytic emphasis, privileges the heterogeneity and plurality within feminist literary studies. But broadly speaking feminism is a way of approaching literature from feminist angle, i.e., viewing literary activity – its production, communication and consumption – from a woman centric location. This approach views author and the reader as the product of moment and milieu. Whereas the moment signifies a temporal awareness of one's surroundings, the milieu signifies the socio-cultural dynamics of reality and one's location within it. It also includes an awareness of one's literary heritage and literary milieu. Author's context thus raises the issues of his/her relationship with literary traditions, his/her vision, and his/her ideological underpinnings, and his/her notions of literature and literariness, and his/her relationship with the text. The author not only writes the reality but also writes himself/herself into literature.

Text does not exist in a vacuum. Being a product of author's creativity, it necessarily encapsulates author's understanding of reality and his/her visualization of it from a certain perspective. It embeds its author's interpretation of the reality. The text is also something that exists not in itself but in relation to other texts that have succeeded it, i.e., it exists within a literary/textual/discursive tradition. It is a part of socio-cultural scape. Finally, seen from readers' perspective, the text becomes an interactive platform between the location of the reader and the writer, and among various readers themselves. The focus on text raises the issues of literary history.

The focus on reader, who is the ultimate target of the text, also raises the issues of 'reading'. The reading of a text is not an innocent activity. It involves the issues of location of the reader, the question of pleasure and instruction etc. It raises the issues of canonicity and methodology etc.

While all literary theories - Marxist, psychoanalytic, formalist, romantic - can be explained by writer-writing-reader model, feminist critical approach, as Raman Selden, points out in his book *Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, does not fit neatly into this schema. Whereas other critical approaches presume 'a priori' relation between them and literature, and are woefully blind to the 'gendered' nature of literary dynamics, Feminist poetics/criticism attempts a re-interpretation of all these issues and, in fact, all literary approaches from a feminist point of view. It not only brings under its incisive focus various components of literary process, but also critiques the assumptions underlying various critical approaches.

There have been numerous schematic attempts to understand the phenomenon called feminism. These include:

1. Understanding literary feminism as a sequence of historically evolving phases or waves: Early feminism, First Wave Feminism, Second Wave Feminism, Third Wave feminism/Post Feminism etc. Each wave is a heterogeneous group, demarcating the evolution of various strands of feminisms across the globe. Another way within this schema is described thus: "The history of feminism has been generally narrated in two ways: by contrasting French and Anglo-American feminisms with each other, and aligning with anyone in particular. For example, Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* employs this historical approach and aligns with French Feminism. In contrast, Janet Todd in *Feminist Literary History* aligns with Anglo American approach." (Warhol, Robyn R. and Diane Price Herndl, *Feminisms*, New Burnswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996, p.xv)
2. Understanding literary feminism as location-specific phenomenon: Anglo-American Feminism, French Feminism, Post-colonial Feminism, etc. This is what Showalter does when she asserts that, "the emphasis in each country falls somewhat differently: English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses oppression; French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytic, stresses repression; American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression."
3. Understanding literary feminism as ideologically embedded phenomenon (as an offshoot of various theoretical positions already in existence): Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Post-colonial Feminism, Marxian Feminism, etc.
4. Understanding literary feminism in terms of the methodology the feminist critics employ: the Psychoanalytic Feminism, Deconstructive feminism, etc.
5. Understanding literary feminism in terms of their sexual difference and sexual focus: Gender studies, Lesbian studies, etc.
6. Understanding literary feminism in terms of their aims at defining or establishing a canon or theories seeking to reinterpret and re-vision literature (and culture and history etc): Gynocriticism, liberal feminism etc.

However, all these patterns of understanding overlap; the distinctions are only schematic and often blur. There are many intersections among theories, and feminists use an eclectic array of various approaches to understand the mechanisms through which gender operates within texts. For example, Elaine Showalter in her book, *A Literature of Their Own*, sees the evolution of literary feminism in Britain in terms of moments and phases (the Feminine, the Feminist, and the Female) but on the other, she uses locational taxonomy to understand feminisms in her essay "Feminist Criticism in Wilderness". It is better to understand feminist critical dynamics by focusing on certain concepts that recur regularly in feminist critical debates. It is through the deployment of these concepts strategically that feminist criticism seeks to re-write the traditional notions of literature.

The following section attempts a critical survey of literary feminisms by focusing on some of the important concepts we as students come across while wading through theoretical jigsaw that presents itself as feminist poetics, i.e., feminist aesthetics, feminist history, feminist criticism and feminist theory*. (*The outlines of the following argument are based on Warhol and Herndl's *Feminisms*)

1. Feminism as a Critique of Institutions: Feminist debates posit the omnipresence of systematic or institutionalized nature of women's oppression. The concept of institution subsumes within it the concept of self or individuality as 'constructs' within institutions. Institutions establish orderliness, rules, and sameness. Insuring homogeneity and 'otherness' are two important ingredients of any institutional definition. Feminisms contend that institutions have established the sameness at the expense of the 'difference' represented by women. Feministic reading explores how women's otherness from established patterns has caused their exclusion from various structures of power. It focuses on how women's difference necessarily disrupts and disturbs the orderliness imposed by male dominated systems. In the process of homogenization, difference is excluded, overlooked, forced back into conformity with an artificial norm, or suppressed.

Feminists begin this analysis from outside, as people who had themselves been excluded from and oppressed by educational, religious, and governmental institutions. They try to understand how oppression had become institutionalized, how it functions, and how it could be changed.

Feminist literary criticism has been a part of this challenge, questioning the **basic institutions of literary study**: how we evaluate literature, how we constitute knowledge about it, how its study is determined by the structure of academy, and how it is separated from other disciplines. Out of the latter concern, was born a whole new integrated field of

inquiry – Gender/Women Studies. From other questions, has come serious critique of how literature is taught, what is taught, and who teaches it. Literary study has been dramatically changed in the last few decades, largely as a result of feminist critique of it as an institution. Showalter's gynocriticism is a step forward in this direction.

Three institutes that feminist criticism addresses itself to are Methodology, Canon and Tradition. The canon and tradition are direct questioning of some aspects of literary tradition. They explore the construction, maintenance and functioning of literary studies: literary criticism, literary history, and academic evaluation in the academic institution.

These literary issues/institutions are generally explored in relation to other systems: criticism, the history of Western thought, psychoanalysis, literary history etc. Each examines the inter relation of these structures and how they support each other; e.g., sexism institutionalised in one system contributes to sexism in another structure, sometimes even when the second system is deliberately working to avoid it.

Western dichotomous thinking has adversely impacted literary criticism and women. Oppositional thinking dominates patriarchal cultures (we define things by their opposites and impose hierarchy upon the opposition: man/woman, sane/insane, speech/silence, same/other). The traditional ways of defining a woman has always tended to subordinate her in this dichotomous gender opposition; she is man's other and therefore what he is not – insane and silent. Many feminist critics have examined the impact of this opposition upon the critical institution. Traditional literary criticism is blind to women, unable to theorize or visualise otherness. The task before a feminist critic is how to work against and from the outside of linguistic and critical institutions so that she will no longer be defined as mad, silent, Other, and invisible.

Recently, there has been a shift in feminist institutional criticism. It has become more self-reflexive. Post- Feminists have begun to question each other to examine their methods, goals and alliances and their exclusion and possible oppression. For example in "Not One of the Family: The Repression of the 'Other' and feminist criticism"(1989) Helena Michie returns to the question of otherness and feminist criticism. She examines how feminism's reliance on metaphors from other institutions – psychoanalysis and family – has excluded in the sense of 'other women', outsiders, whether defined as outside of family as sexual threats or as Other, in the sense of being different – third world, lesbian, or antifeminists. Feminism remains uneasy with otherness, so the 'Other' woman is often either displaced or incorporated into sameness, even in feminist texts that set out to avoid it. Michie advises feminist critics to be careful about how they attempt to include the 'other woman' so that they do not merely reinscribe the institution of sameness.

2. Methodologies of Feminism: American feminist critics are moving away from androgyny (effacement of gender differentiation) as a standard of art to a beginning to embrace difference in the production and evaluation of literature. Gender provides them the primary methodological tool. As it has a significant impact upon experience, gender makes an important difference in the production and evaluation of literature. That is why questions as – Does the difference of gender inhere in the body, or is it culturally constructed? What do the signs of gender difference look like in literary texts? What difference does gender make when a critic undertakes to evaluate a work written by a woman, or one written by a man? How can feminist criticism overcome the double marginalization of lesbians and minority women writers? Should feminist criticism adopt a pluralist theoretical stance? Does it need theory at all? – come to acquire importance in feminist criticism.

For some feminists, "Feminism is a stance, a rethinking of assumptions." So they are constantly bothered about the feminist methodological assumption. Jehlen, for example, questions the advisability of concentrating exclusively on literature by women, and asks how 'ideological' and appreciative criticism might come together in feminist study of men and women's texts.

Another methodological problem in feminism is that of reconciling contradictory ideology and aesthetic values. This problem manifests in feminism in questions such as: should we (feminists) avoid the temptation of universalising all literature as male? Are there problems with heterosexual assumptions within feminism vis-à-vis lesbian literature? Is feminism an inclusive or exclusive way of referring to women?

The differences among feminist critics, and among the theoretical movements they represent, are chronicled in Elaine Showalter's "A Criticism of Our Own: Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory" (1989) and in "Feminist Criticism in Wilderness" (1981). She is one of the primary historians of literary criticism, postulating categories in which to place all the varieties of feminist projects, and explaining the evolution of these

categories within chronological framework. It outlines dominant feminist methodologies. She shows that it has evolved through parallel stages. Six versions of its history are:

1. Androgynist poetics dedicated to effacing gender differences
2. The feminist critique of male culture
3. A Female Aesthetic celebrating women's culture
4. Gynocriticism, or study of traditions of women writing
5. Gynesic, or poststructuralist feminist criticism, focusing on "the feminine" as a category within culture
6. Gender theory

3. Canon: One of the axioms of traditional literary criticism has been that "great literature" represents "universal" experiences. But with feminism this notion has been questioned. What had appeared universal to once homogeneous group that studied literature and defined it as great as well as universal – a group entirely composed of white upper/upper middle class males – does not seem so to heterogeneous groups. What had once taken been for purely "aesthetic" choices about literary texts that would be included on course syllabi, in anthologies, and on academic programmes have begun to be questioned as political and social choices. The canon of literature – those works recognized as great or worthy to be read and studied in academic settings – was never as codified as its religious namesake.

Judgment is at the center of canonicity. Feminist reading is redefining the parameters of this canonicity: It is joining issues with male judgmental values as to what makes literature great or what makes it academics worthy?

Is the purpose of literature to examine "universal" or individual, diverse experiences? Should we value repetitive or aesthetic language? What makes an experience universal? What guides our choice of what is aesthetic? As women readers found supposedly "minor" women writers whose works were more moving, exciting and representative of their experiences than that of "major" writers, they began to question the standards of literary taste and to question the grounds on which those standards were based.

Many judgments of tastes were based on an exclusion of difference. Feminists, particularly French feminists, turned difference, which was characterized as threatening and inferior by male canonicity, into source of strength.

Feminist criticism sees the task of denial of absolute values as both an opportunity and challenge of feminist criticism. They have effectively demonstrated that the forms of criticism are not value free. In feminist revision of canon, the work of criticism and of political action converges. Feminist critics cannot rely on solely literary criteria, because such criteria are never value free, and can never be innocently used. Instead, feminist criticism calls for an evaluation of culture, the role literature plays in the culture, and the role that criticism plays in making the world better and our lives fuller.

As feminism posits female aesthetics an encapsulation of a different experience, it strives to establish a literary tradition, different from the mainstream that can account for feminine creativity. A corollary of this fact is the resurrection of female texts and female genres. Showalter hints at it. In India, Tharu's and Lalita's monumental project, *Women Writing in India*, is a step in this direction.

4. Tradition: Late 1970s and early 1980s saw the beginning of mapping out the tradition of women's writing. The impulse to tell the story of women authors' relations to their predecessors is an important part of, what Elaine Showalter calls, gynocriticism: the study of female writers in the context of their own, not in relation to 'Great Tradition' that included a few of them but rejected many more. Theories of women's tradition resemble androcentric literary history in that they conceive of literary development in terms of phases, modes, or moments, and they typically see change as evidence of progress. Sometimes too, they borrow the terminology of mainstream literary movement to describe phases in tradition, such as lesbian realism, lesbian romanticism (Catherine Stimson). Such terms are used, however, without specific reference to their historical links to men's writing.

Because gynocriticism limits itself to purview of texts written by women, it has become vulnerable to charges of a biologically based essentialism. Critics have become suspicious of assertions about women's writing that seems to suggest universal or ahistorical stereotyping of women, or that seems to point to the physical fact of femaleness as a determinant of how people write.

However, Elaine Showalter anticipates this objection in her *A Literature of Their Own*" that was published in 1977. She is very careful to explain that the women's tradition she charts is the "product of a delicate network of influences

operating in time", and that it "comes from the still evolving relationship between women writers and their society." She concentrates on British women writers and who published novels after 1840, and she finds in their work, "an imaginative continuum, the recurrence of certain patterns, themes, problems, and images from generation to generation." She attributes this to "female subculture" which, in Victorian England especially, ensured that women's experience of living and of writing would be pointedly distinct from each other."

Showalter, whose partiality to the phases is evident, enumerates three moments in the women's tradition she charts: Feminine, Feminist, and the Female. Though non-feminist commentators sometimes treat these terms as interchangeable, Showalter painstakingly distinguishes among them, showing how the attitudes novels evince towards women's roles and female authorship are tied to their cultural contexts in Victorian and Modern England.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar primarily focus (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, 1979) upon canonical women writers, though their concentration on the 19th century British and American novelists and poets. Their main thesis is that women authors experience the anxiety of authorship. Based on the woman's socially determined sense of her own biology, this anxiety makes its way into women's texts in recurring patterns of themes, forms, and motifs.

While Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Showalter revise literary history to better account for the place of canonized women writers in it, other theorists have sketched out alternate traditions, parallel to but not dependent upon the development of writings by white, heterosexual, middleclass women authors. These include lesbian novels and African –American women's novels. These histories are trying to make place by writing literary histories of tradition that have been excluded from conventional studies of great literature and that hold only peripheral place in traditions based on 'great women writers." Each conceives of a tradition she sketches out as independent and free standing. But each is honest enough to acknowledge how her tradition has developed in response to and in reaction against the dominant culture's conception of lesbian and black women.

5. Body: "Write yourself. Your body must be heard." This rhetorical call given by Helene Cixous has provoked much speculation about sexual difference as an aspect of literary production. It suggests a feminine writing that is the direct function of sexual difference that possibly extends in the realm of language. It is a writing that is different from the kind of writing usually valued in Western culture, and which is specifically gendered. Though not restricted to female writers, it, nevertheless is seen to vary along gender lines, to correspond to culturally determined gender codes. These codes differentiate male language as rational, logical, hierarchical, and linear and female language as 'a-rational'/ irrational, contra-logical/illogical, resistant to hierarchies, and circular.

The movement was founded in France by, among others, Cixous and Irigaray, in mid 70s. At its core lies the refusal to accept the traditional body-mind separation. In such dichotomous definitions one term is privileged over the other and is usually linked with the male. Woman, linked with body rather than the mind, was supposed to be antithetical to writing, an activity presumed to be restricted to the intellect. The authors associated with *l'e'ctriture fe'mininie* have challenged these traditional notions in two ways: first, by celebrating women's association with body, thereby refusing the subordination of body to mind; and second, by refusing to accept the separation between the two. Writing the body or letting the body be heard are clearly attempts at refuting the sense of writing as a strictly mental act.

The field, which has most thoroughly explored the connections between mind, body and language, is psychoanalysis. The theories of Freud and Lacan thus provide an important subtext to the critics of *l'e'ctriture fe'mininie.* Questions of the relation between being biologically sexed female and culturally gendered feminine are central to these critics. Unlike Freud, who saw female sexuality as a "dark continent", yet to be explored, these critics see female sexuality as something that is likely to be apparent in women's written texts. Though these critics refute the Freudian postulate that "biology is destiny", they do raise the possibility that biology makes itself heard in literary discourse.

Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975/76) both discusses and illustrates her theories of women writing. It is not linear, logical, or progressive, which means that it is not constrained by traditional (masculine/ patriarchal) notions of argumentation and development. The movement of feminine writing is more fluid than direct, more experimental than argumentative.

Luce Irigaray carries on Cixous' celebration of difference of the female body, and further develops the issues raised by her predecessor. She rejects traditional psychoanalytic notions, which take male sexuality as the norm and model

and suggests that female sexuality is not marked by a lack (of penis) but is marked by multiplicity and abundance. Transposing this argument analogically on literature she argues that femininity and the language of femininity is not singular (not one) either but multiple. Therefore, woman's pleasure in language, like her pleasure in sexuality, is not direct, linear or singular: "she sets off in all directions leaving him [the male reader] unable to discern the coherence of any meaning". The masculinity of the patriarchal language, on the other hand, does not give woman a chance to express her genuine self. It leaves her fragmented. What is left of her in linguistic representation is not her complete self. She finds the pieces of her self missing. Irigaray suggests that the realization of language would result neither in woman's 'wholeness'(if by wholeness is meant "unicity" and "singularity") nor in "ownership", but that its realization will allow for woman's "nearness" to herself.

Irigaray analyses the oppression of women in terms of Marx: women are turned into property, into objects of exchange between men, a transaction which denies their subjectivity and turns them into objects. She urges women to use their nearness to themselves to develop closeness to each other, to work together to resist the oppression that denies them their pleasure and their language.

Irigaray and Cixous envision a separate language for women metaphorically based on their women's physical experience of their sexuality. Kristeva sees women's role in language primarily as providing oppositional force within traditional discourses.

However one should caution oneself about the problems that this "bodily based feminism' can create. Some of the problems that may be created are:

1. Notion of "essential" female sexuality is not sustainable. All psychoanalytic models of sexuality recognize sexuality as culturally constructed. To accept these cultural constructs as "natural" is not advisable.
2. One should be cautious about the political effects of taking "women" as too generalized a category, since race, class, and national origin may account for more differences than would gender.
3. Is it possible to write from the body, given many women's difficulty with language?
4. Is a separate language desirable at all (given the richness of our historical connections to cultural and linguistic traditions)?

Cixous's connection between writing and female body creates an essentialist trap, by tying creativity to procreativity.

6. Desire: "What does a woman want?" asks Freud. "Penis," he supplies the answer himself.

The question of wanting, of desire, is one of the central issues in feminist criticism. The concept of feminine desire, i.e., what a woman wants and what is wanted of/ from her, has been problematised at length in feminism/gender studies.

This problematisation has a significant bearing on feminist literary theory. Whereas Freud had conceptualized woman's desire as 'envy', as arising out of 'lack', the feminist are concerned with the exploration of whether this desire can be analyzed in more positive term and whether or not female desire must always be subordinated to male desire.

Desire is a dense term. While Freud understood female desire in terms of 'lack', and 'envy' that manifests itself as female's envious desire for acquisition, Jacques Lacan, the French 're-reader' of Freud, analyzed it in terms of "gap". He arrives at the notion of desire in a very complex manner. According to him, each person, in the process of growing, encounters a deep split when s/he begins to use or "enters" language. Language is something exterior to human existence. (Lacan presumes an exteriority of linguistic experience). Language completely changes one who uses it and structures the unconscious. Language is always metaphorical (it always stands for something else and can never be that thing), there is always a gap between expressing a wish and receiving its answer, since language can never fully express exactly what we want. **This gap is desire**. Lacan postulates that human desire is always for ***juissance*** (a French term that refers to both to orgasm and to state of blissfulness), an ecstatic union that would complete us, would heal the split when we enter language. This desire is unrealizable. Its impossibility however, does not keep us from continually seeking its fulfillment.

"Desire" becomes an issue for feminists because of the precarious relation women have to it. The woman is understood

by Lacan, to be desirable to man because of the (false) beliefs that she will be able to complete him, that she is his Other (all that he is not), and that union with her is a union with all that he is not. Lacan's famous assertion, "The woman does not exist," does not refer to real woman, but to this imaginary woman who could complete man. Desire is also important to women because of how their own desires are defined – and therefore limited – within psychoanalytic discourse. Irigaray warns that such restrictions within the realm of discourse may well limit the possibilities open to women in the world of lived experience.

The symbol most central to desire for Lacan is the phallus. Although it bears a connection to the physical penis, Lacan argues that it did not represent the physical organ itself, but came, metaphorically, to stand for all that was desirable. The origin of this signification for Lacan, as it was for Freud, the castration complex; the male fears the loss of penis, the female feels the anxiety of never having had one, and therefore the penis comes to represent that which is desirable. But Lacan insists that its symbolic force always exceeds its reference to the physical organ. Not surprisingly, though this is one point that has troubled feminists writers deeply; the line separating phallus and penis is very fine. The "phallocenticism" of Lacan's reliance on male metaphor irrevocably marks his work as male dominated and male privileging, and therefore raises serious questions for its applicability to feminist thought.

Feminists have however used psychoanalysis in their critique of gender, despite misgivings about its phallocenticism. Psychoanalysis provides a framework for understanding how gender is defined, how it comes into being. Feminists have also realized that psychoanalysis has been (with Marxism) a discourse that has shaped the 20th century. To ignore it would be to concede grounds to hostile forces.

Two other Lacanian terms, the Symbolic and the Imaginary, are also important. Language exists in the order of the symbolic, because language symbolizes things in the world. "The symbolic" refers to connections between signifier (a word) and signified (what it stands for) which is always arbitrarily established (no essential connections) The system in which these symbols work is outside the subject who uses it and that subject is never in control of the system. Lacan calls this arbitrary system the "Law of the Father", because of its structural similarity to the establishment of paternity and its chronological connection to the Oedipal complex.

The Imaginary on the other hand, is the realm of the image. Unlike symbols, whose connections to the signified are arbitrary, images have a visual relation to the signified. The imaginary is typified, for Lacan, in the relation of subject to his/her mirror image: that image both is and is not the subject. Whereas the symbolic is triadic – signifier, signified, and signifying system – the imaginary is dyadic –image and signified.

Desire has become an issue for feminist literary critics because it exists within the field of language. As Lacan understood it, desire was the motivation for all languages. Desire is its origin and its root. The literature shapes and is a vehicle for desires.

How desire shapes issues that are crucial to feminist criticism? Are desire and its forms specific to each gender? Does desire shape our understanding of sameness and difference? How is desire related to political power? The central question about desire for feminist critics is: How is sexual/political desire expressed in literary representations?

Irigaray has tried to join issues with the Freudian conception of desire by raising some crucial questions: Why should a little girl necessarily recognize the penis as valuable, enviable organ at all? Why she should experience sense of lack of sexual organs when she clearly has not the only one but several? And, finally how it benefits Freud to believe that he has the thing women envy? She goes onto show that woman's desire is defined in psychoanalytic discourse by male desire, that woman functions for Freud as a mirror that reflects back what the man wants to see. The whole issue of visibility becomes central to Irigaray's questioning here.

The field of vision also has a central place in Lacanian thought. Lacan describes the original experience as of the split in the subject as an experience before the mirror, and has described the "gaze" as itself a source of pleasure. For Irigaray, the privilege accorded to visibility in Freud's thought – the penis is more highly valued because it can be seen, and therefore desired – results in a misrepresentation, or non-representational of women's desire.

Julia Kristeva, in *Desire in Language* (1980), links questions of desire to large issues of linguistic, political, and historical change. Using psychoanalytic and socialist frame of references, she casts doubt on the notion that women's desire is fundamentally different from men's, and probes what the ramifications of desire would be if it were different.

Women desire political, economic and reproductive equality. Second generation feminists have tried to explore their own differences and the specificity of women's experiences in/of language. Kristeva is troubled by uncritical acceptance of women's differences by feminist critics.

Kristeva provides a model of desire in which gender is not an issue. Both man and woman suffer from the lack of being unfulfilled and lacking. Both of them suffer the psychic split which Freud called *Spaltung* and which Lacan located at entry into language.

7. Reading: There are two literary meanings of reading; the first meaning centers on text, the second on receivers of texts. In the former sense, a 'reading' implies interpretation, an individual critic's version of a piece of writing. A feminist reading in this usage would be interpretation of a text assuming gender's centrality to what the text means. In this reading, gender can come into play as something represented in the text (image of woman criticism), as something shaping the experience, and therefore the writing, of the author; or as significant influence in the life – and, therefore, the interior experience – of a particular reader who is trying to understand what the text says.

"Reading" in the second sense, refers directly to that interior experience of readers, understood as an activity or a process. This aspect of reading is not much debated. Generally the reader response theorists hypothesize a universalized abstraction called "the reader", and they describe what 'he**'** feels, thinks, or does when confronted with a given text. For such critics "reading" is something conceptual, based on their own personal experiences of the text. In such a theoretical framework gender is not seldom seen as a potential influence upon the reader's experience.

Feminist reading implies a reception and processing of texts by a reader who is conceived of not only as 'possibly female', but also as one conscious of the tradition of women's oppression in patriarchal culture. The feminist reader is committed to breaking the pattern of that oppression by calling attention to the ways some texts can perpetuate it.

Feminist reader is the resisting reader. Feminist reading is a process that occurs when a female reader confronts an androcentric (male-centered) or even a misogynist text. Explaining that 'great ' literature treats male experience as universal, this canon requires one to identify as a male, to sympathize with masculine heroes whose troubles are overtly or covertly associated with women in their stories.

This has led to emasculation of woman as reader, who must identify 'against her own self' as she reads. In the process, she becomes a 'divided self'. The resisting reader would work to "exorcise" the male-imposed part of that self, to be conscious of the way male classics exclude and alienate her.

Some feminist critics take gender as a biological given. Within their argument, a person's sex is the primary determinant of the identification process s/he undergoes while reading. On the other hand, Jonathan Culler, in "Reading as a Woman" (*On Deconstruction*, 1982) asks whether woman is defined by anatomy or by culture. He breaks the feminist reading into three moments:

1. First moment is feminist criticism's assertion that gendered experience carries over from personal/social life into reading, and its confrontation of "the problem of women as consumers of male produced literature"
2. The second moment is described as the effect achieved by the 'postulate' of a woman reader, which served to make male and female readers begin questioning the traditional assumptions about gender on which their reading had traditionally been based. It calls into question that male reading perspective is "gender neutral."
3. The third moment has less to do with specifically with reading than with the critique of all Western Culture: in it, feminists question whether "rational" literary criticism might be culpably "in complicity with the preservation of male authority," and explore alternative, non-rational ways to read literature.

8. Discourse: The question implied in this concept is: Can we talk? It also repudiates theory as a patriarchal device. In the 1980s, feminists were confronted with the question of articulation. Though most of them worked as their predecessors had previously worked within the mainstream theoretical frameworks, like Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Structuralism and Post-structuralism, there was an increasing awareness among feminists that "Theory" was essentially a patriarchal device. It led to an intense debate within feminism. While some asserted the necessity to reject theory as a tool of feministic articulation, others saw theory as holding a promise of precise vocabularies, widely circulated premises, and analytic methodologies that could lend **form** to feminist observations and could enable them to engage in conversation with the critical community. They advocated an insertion of gender into the models proposed by andocentric theorists to examine how these formulations and applications impacted the understanding of the femininity and the female.

The original meaning of discourse is to "to talk". It denotes a conversation among theoretical communities. Discourse, in critical vocabulary, however, refers to a particular use of language in a given time and place. Novels, television commercials or political speeches are not themselves discourses, rather they are instances of discourse, of the way language gets used on given topics in particular culture and society.

How does this concept concern itself with Feminism? Feminists insist that there is a need to change/break the masculine discourse to change society. Herein such questions as the cause of oppression, class struggle vs. Gender inequities are raised.

All narratives supposedly consist of two components: Story (what happens in a narrative), and discourse (how 'that happens'). All narratives get shaped in language. The question of voice, perspective, temporal organization, and repetition (stylistic/ linguistic components of narrative) has an important bearing on how knowledge and power through knowledge is constructed in the narrative. The knowledge of this discursive dynamics is important for feminists to expose the hidden agenda or false consciousness in literature and devise discursive means to counter it.

9. Ethnicity/Race/Nationality/Cultural othering: "From margins to the center." This provocative phrase (attributed to bell hooks) encapsulates the movement of women's study as a whole. Feminism has worked to pull women's voice, experiences, and concerns out of the periphery of official culture, and has insisted upon placing gender-related issues squarely in the middle of all academic fields of inquiry. If women have traditionally occupied the margins, the women of colour have been doubly marginalized. And such women, whose sexual preferences, class or nationality differentiate them even further from the heterosexual, middleclass white norm, have – till recently – been pushed so far into the margins as to have been almost imperceptible to the academic eye.

Feminists who enter feminism from ethnic perspective have tried to redress the marginalization of women of colour in mainstream feminism, as well as culture at large. The argumentative strategies of these feminists closely parallel those of the feminists who do not bring race into the foreground of their studies. Some of the salient aspects of their feminist strategies are:

1. They tend to celebrate difference. According to them, ethnic difference (like gender difference) is culturally constructed. Ethnicity refers to person's cultural orientation as it has been shaped by the traditions and experiences associated with that person's race, which is itself not a biological matter, but another arbitrarily defined category within culture and society.
2. The focus on ethnicity requires readjustments in information and the perspective which reader brings to the experience of reading. What one knows (or does not know) about a literary work's extra literary context will determine one's appreciation of it, and what one has experienced (directly or imaginatively) will shape the perspective one takes in evaluating or understanding it.
3. Experience, therefore, plays a crucial role in feminist criticism that focuses on race. It is a criticism that moves freely among academic observations, personal anecdotes, and literary analysis.
4. The issue of activism is also important. The experience of activism affects not only the information a feminist critic brings to her work, but also her perception.
5. One's expectations and information affect one's reading of a minority text.
6. Community is the theme frequently recurring in criticism on marginalized groups.
7. Another central issue in this category is that of woman writer's assertion of her subjectivity in the act of telling stories about herself and others like her.

But the problem with this criticism is how to define minority disadvantage: "All minorities are marginalized; some are more marginalized than others."

10. History: Historiography has departed from diachronic narratives of political and military 'events' moving into more synchronic accounts of such matters as conventions for courtships, attitudes towards smell and personal hygiene, and even patterns of weather in the past. The 'new history' tries, among other things, to scrutinize the experience of those who have inhabited the margins of culture and society, whose voices had previously been silenced because their race, class, gender or sexuality or nationality denied them access to power and self-expression in the world of 'events'.

In literary studies, "new historicism" holds texts up against non-literary documents from their own historical period,

looking at how a culture's discourse on a topic – be it sexuality, knowledge, madness, etc. – affects our interpretations of a work of literature addressing the same topic. New historicism puts literary texts into historical context.

Though feminists have been using history in their analysis of literary texts, not all have been using it in a 'historicists' way. For example, the "image of women" movement of the 1970s, along with certain modes of Freudian and Jungian archetypal criticism tended to locate certain female figures in texts (as "earth mother" or as "witch goddess") outside of history, pointing to the recurrence of types and of psychological patterns without reference to their specific movements in time. Even gynocriticism (the study of women's literary tradition) suffers from this tendency. According to Newton it tends, "to focus on the presence of unchanging or trans-historical patterns," a focus she identifies as the crucial difference between her project and those of Elaine Showalter, Nina Auerbach, and Gilbert and Gubar. Although these critics arrange their works around historical periods and chronological developments, they do not account for literature's relation to "developing material conditions" or "shifting ideologies". In other words, practitioners of gynocriticism do not usually adopt a Marxist model of explanation for historical change and stasis.

Salient features of neo-historicist feminist criticism are:

1. It makes use of Marxist premises and makes explicit its intention to 'do history' when reading literary text.
2. This is apparent from critics' focus on questions of class and economics, and in their use of the language of false consciousness and dominant ideology, capitalism and class struggle. Marxism often provides a vocabulary for feminist analysis of women's social and political status.
3. The seeming compatibility of two modes is Marxian insistence that there is such a thing as "the material conditions, the real relations" operating in the world. For all our post-structuralist sophistication, a questioning of the truth status of discourse and texts, all feminists do agree on certain fundamental truths, for example, that the oppression of women is a reality, which ought to be eradicated. Marxism grounding in economic evidence – its belief in the 'real' – provides reinforcement for feminism's parallel interests, as well as providing an operative model for radical or progressive social change.

11. Class: Difference – the exploration of differences between men and women – has been one of the chief concerns of feminist criticism. Recently, though, feminist theorists have become interested in the differences among women, insisting that to categorize women as just "women" is to reinscribe a sexist ideology that sees all women as just the "same." Differences exist among women in countless aspects, including race, age, sexual preference, and social class. The feminists concerned with the concept of class explore not only what the differences of social class might mean, but where they come from, and how they have been – and continue to be – part of the oppression of women.

Many feminists have long felt that not all women share the same struggle, that workingwomen have very different lives and different concerns from those of middle-and upper-class women. Yet when they turn to the most fully theorized analysis of class, that is, Marxist critique, they find that it devotes almost all its attention to men and traditionally male institutions.

These feminists also try to work through the question of the place in literary studies of what has been traditionally the academic domain of the social sciences. How do gender and class issues become literary questions? Although each critic answers this problem differently, they all share one assumption: Literature has a definite function in society beyond simple aesthetic pleasure. Aesthetic pleasure itself, they argue, is clearly tied to the way literature acts as a social agent. Literature does not exist in a realm that is somehow independent of social and political questions, but is intricately involved in our understanding of culture and the shaping of society.

The conceptual debates discussed above come handy in the gender/feminist reading of literature.

GENDER ANALYSES OF A TEXT:

The gender analyses of a text privileges woman as the producer, communicator and consumer of a text. It seeks to understand a literary text – its form and theme – as an embodiment of the location of the author. Consequently, literature tends to acquire extra- literary dimensions, i.e., it also becomes a socio-political discourse, traversing and cutting through the boundaries of the real and the representational, the political and the aesthetic. Some of the issues that gender analyses of a text focuses on are:

1. How is **gender** represented/ constructed in a text?

2. What are the text's assumptions regarding **gender**?
3. What responsibilities, characteristics, freedoms, desires, etc. are attributed to members of each **gender**?
4. What are the images of women/ men in the text (especially images of women in texts by men)?
5. How and why is woman identified as **"Other"** (merely the negative object) to man as the defining and dominating "Subject"?
6. What are the covert ways in which power is manipulated in the text so as to establish and perpetuate the dominance of men and subordination of women?
7. What are the female points of view, concerns, and values presented in the text? And if absent, how so and why?

Gender analyses of a text usually deconstruct the gender bias inherent in a text. It touches the question of aesthetics, i.e., the dynamics of writing only tangentially. It becomes imperative, therefore, to address, as reader/consumers of women's literature, some of the following questions, in order to put women's writing in perspective:

1. Why do women write?
2. What is the range of women writers' subject matter and themes?
3. What genres have women chosen to write in and why?
4. How are female characters presented in women's texts?
5. What innovations in form and style have women contributed to literature?
6. How have women's texts been received by readers?
7. How have the processes of publication affected women's writing?
8. How has the process of canonization shaped the literary history of women?
9. How have women writers responded to literature written by women?
10. How did women's literature affect history and culture, including feminism?

Gender Studies versus Feminism: Though both the concepts are inter-meshed, yet they do differ in details. **Gender,** simplistically speaking is a way of analyzing man-woman equation in the society, while feminism is a way of analyzing the location of women in society. **Feminist Literary Criticism** critiques the ways in which representations of gender produce, transform, and transcend social stereotypes about women and men.

Practical Tips Regarding Gender/Feminist Reading of a Text: For a beginner, who goes to the text for a general, and not a specialist, feminist perspective, the following tips may come in handy:

1. **Scan the text for:**
   - **A. Traditional Female Stereotyping** – to understand the depiction/classification of woman (in the text), say, as angel, mad, temptress and witch, false and cheat, etc.
   - **B. Generalization of Traits, both Positive and Negative** – to see the patterns of marking women for their sentimentality, irrationality, conspiracy, passivity, etc.
   - **C. The Narrative Stance Adopted -** to see whether the stance towards woman's action, feeling and thought is ironic, satirical, appreciative or belittling.
   - **D. Erasure, Marginalization and Silencing –** to see for deliberate omission of women altogether from a narrative where they should be
   - **E. Comparative Cataloguing of Female and Male Depiction** - to see which way the bias lies.
2. Read the patterns that follow from scanning against **the grain of a masculine dominated culture** that determines both reading and writing. This is to say, if you are a male reader, you should read against yourself and against your impulses. If you are a female reader, you should be able to see the male biases in the narrative so that you can expose their falsity.
3. **Look for the language used in the text.** Observe whether the text uses traditional and conventional language patterns associated with the male order, or whether language is used unconventionally, and thus associated with the female order. Marks of unconventionality include loss or multiplicity of voices in a narrative, parody, fluidity of expression, bricolage, repetition, exaggeration, whimsy, multiple viewpoint and *jouissances*
4. While reading, bear in mind the two Lacanian orders: the symbolic and the imaginary. The symbolic implies the detachment of the narrative and the narrator from the mother's body under the fear of symbolic castration by

the patriarch. The imaginary order suggests a narrative or a narrator completely fused with the body of the mother, with no exhibition of any signs of fear from the patriarch.

KEY CONCEPTS:

Like any discursive/interpretive practice, gender/feminist analysis has also spawned its own critical jargon and its own debates. An appreciation and understanding of the contentions and the vocabulary involved therein is imperative for unraveling the intricacies of gender discourse and its literary import. Some of the key debates and concepts involved herein are:

Allegory: typically a narrative in prose, verse, or drama that self-consciously presents its meaning through concrete symbols**.** The significance of a given symbol, however, is determined by the conventions of the allegory as a whole. An allegory has at least two levels of meaning: the literal level of the immediate narrative and the political, historical, philosophical or moral commentary the author intends to be recognized. Thus allegories are generally didactic in focus.

Commodification: A Marxist concept that describes all things in a society (even people) as commodities. All material and social phenomena are products of a society and contribute to the production of other components in that society. This concept emphasizes the Marxist strategy of evaluating everything in terms of the economic exchange and competition occurring in culture.

Discourse: As used by Foucault, this term connotes an authoritative way of describing. Through this concept he gives a 'name' to the systems of linguistic representations through which power sustains itself. He argues that within individual discourses a series of mechanisms are used as means of controlling desire and power, which facilitate classification, ordering and distribution. Discourses are propagated by specific institutions and divide up the world in specific ways. In this way mastery is exerted over what appears to be the randomness of everyday reality. It is thus possible to investigate these discourses that have been used to master reality and, in turn construct it, in the past. Literary criticism is also a discourse, as is the terminology associated with grading.

Patriarchy: male **hegemony** or rule by the father. The basic view is that our civilization is pervasively male-centred and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: religious, familial, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic.

Self/ Other: the female tends to be defined by negative reference to the male as the human norm, hence as a kind of non-man or abject Other, by her lack of the identifying male organ, of male powers, and of the male character traits that are presumed to have achieved the most important inventions and works of civilization.

Phallogocentric: this term evolved from deconstructionists who questioned the "logocentrism" of Western literature and thought, i.e. the belief in the centrality of logos, understood as cosmic reason (affirmed in ancient Greek philosophy as the source of world order and intelligibility) or, in the Christian version, the self-revealing thought and will of God. Feminists illustrate how all Western languages, in all their features, are utterly and irredeemably male-engendered, male-constituted, and male-dominated. Discourse is phallogocentric because it is centered and organized throughout by implicit recourse to the phallus both as its supposed ground (or logos) and as its prime signifier and power source; and not only in its vocabulary and syntax, but also in its rigorous rules of logic, its proclivity for fixed classifications and oppositions, and its criteria for what we take to be valid evidence and objective knowledge.

Gender: It is widely held that while one's sex is determined by anatomy, the concepts of "gender"-the traits that constitute masculinity and femininity-are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs, effected by the omnipresent patriarchal biases of our civilization. The masculine in this fashion 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.

Representations of Women: Patriarchal ideology also pervades those writings, which, in our culture, have been considered great literature, and which until, recently have been written almost entirely by men for men. Such works, lacking autonomous female role models, either leave the woman reader feeling like an alien outsider or else solicit her to identify against herself by assuming male values and ways of perceiving, feeling, and acting.

Gender and Binary Oppositions: The conventional wisdom understands men and women in terms of binary opposition'. They are generally described as 'opposite sexes'. The feminist wisdom, however, posits this opposition as a result of the

naturalization of a linguistic habit, and consequently demands a closer scrutiny of this naturalizing process. Their probing generates a number of issues: "Why are women 'opposite', as opposed to, say, 'adjacent', or simply 'different'?"

In her essay 'Gender or Sex?' Diane Elam draws our attention to this issue and identifies what she calls a 'binary logic' at work in our understandings of gender, and suggests that 'we satisfy our prescribed gender role more through a knowledge of what we are not than what we are (Quoted in Anna Tripp, p. 6). From this perspective, gender is not a free-standing identity; it is constructed in relationship, and we come to our understandings of masculinity and femininity through a process of differentiation. One is masculine precisely by not being feminine, and vice versa; thus masculinity must simultaneously repudiate and rely on a notion of femininity as its defining and constitutive difference.

Binary logic, according to the French feminist Helene Cixous, is a crucial characteristic of Western patriarchal though, both generating and underpinning gendered power relations. Binarism structures reality into a series of 'either/or' oppositions, for example as active/passive, culture/nature, rational/irrational, public/private. Within each of these oppositions, one term will tend to be privileged over the other, with the subordinate term typically aligned with femininity. Although it is integral to many of our habitual modes of thought and expression, and thus difficult to escape, binary thought can be seen as both reductive and restrictive: it attempts to polarize plurality, complexity and nuance into a simple question of either/or, collapsing a multiplicity of variations into a single opposition. In the light of these considerations, it is not surprising that it has become a primary objective of many feminists to destabilize and deconstruct rigid binary constructions of gender, the stabilizers of patriarchal power. (Tripp, pp.6-7)

Resistance: It is concept that denotes a activism geared towards emancipating women from the stronghold of patriarchal stereotypes**.** Anna Tripp in her book *Gender* explains the concept of resistance, and its evolution within critical conscience thus:

> Given the ways in which…patriarchal cultures attempt to normalize or naturalize culturally constructed gender roles, and to fix gender into a rigid binary oppositional structure – and given that these understandings of gender are deeply ingrained in habits of thought and expression (as in the phrases 'a real man' or 'a member of the opposite sex') – in what ways might those involved in radical gender politics go about challenging such constructions?
>
> It is not possible simply to cast off or step outside of cultural constructions of gender. Gender may be a construct, but gender also *constructs us.* In fact, it is possible to argue that our concept of the human subject is always already gendered, and the intelligibility of human subjects depends on their identification with a specific gender: other people are always 'he' or 'she' to us, never 'it'. As Judith Butler puts it in *Bodies That Matter,* 'the "I" neither precedes nor follows the process of…gendering but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves'. In these ways, gender functions for us as a cultural typology, setting parameters for signification and interpretation, and cultural understandings of gender difference would seem to be inevitably and inextricably present in the ways in which we make sense of ourselves, others, and the world in general.
>
> Does this condemn us then to cultural determinism, leaving no room to resist the gender norms imposed on us by our culture? [Most of the feminist critics address themselves to this dilemma]… [For] Woolf … constructions of gender are never singular or fully seen, the term 'gender' means different things at different times and different things at the same time – and the same goes for the meanings of 'feminine' and the meanings of 'masculine'. Thus there always exists within a culture the possibility that these things can and will be interpreted differently. It is the inconsistencies, instabilities and contradictions of the cultural meanings we encounter and internalize which can provide the impetus for change.
>
> Joan Riviere's discussion of the dilemmas…demonstrates that conventions of feminine behaviour may at times come into conflict with the demands of other roles played by the same person. It is easy to see that internalized conflict may have negative effects: after all, the living out of contradiction is pathologised in Riviere's case histories. However, in other instances and different contexts this frustration might be channeled in more positive directions, becoming the motivation for political action and analysis: Catherine Belsey argues that one of the primary forces inspiring feminism is 'the anger which is a consequence of those contradictions lived materially as women's experience'.

> Neither femininity nor masculinity are fixed, coherent or static constructions. We are not of us simply one thing; we are none of us wholly or exclusively 'feminine' or 'masculine'. Gender is never, so to speak, unadulterated: it is always already inflected and intersected by differences of generation, class, 'race', ethnicity, sexuality and so on. In spite of exasperated complaints from both sexes, women are patently not 'all the same', and neither are men: understandings of femininity and masculinity as homogeneous and fixed binary opposites are not sustainable. Gender differences are inevitably complicated by other differences, and cannot ultimately be separated out from these. It seems an obvious but important fact that not all women are equally oppressed and not all men benefit equally from the arrangements of a patriarchal culture. This is a consideration which some feminists, in their understandable eagerness to find common ground between women, have perhaps failed to take fully into account. It is a problem associated especially with middle-class, liberal, reformist feminists in affluent Western cultures, and one which is addressed in detail by Adrienne Rich and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in their essays… Both of these writers suggest that, for feminists, the possibilities of communication and solidarity should never be taken for granted, but must be forged, as the outcome of a painstaking attention to and respect for 'the differences among us'.
>
> The construction of gender is marked by difference *between* cultures and differences *within* cultures. It is also subject to *historical* differences. Woolf's [idea of resistance]ends on a speculative note, considering the radical transformations that may take place in the lives of women a hundred years into the future. Because social values and realities change from one historical period to another, what is held to be indisputably 'true' about women or men at one point in history may be contested at another. Close attention to historical differences is an immensely productive strategy for feminism: as Gillian Beer puts it, 'we need to be alert to the processes of gender formation and gender change…we shall better discover our own fixing assumptions if we value the *unlikeness* of the past'. Such an awareness counters the inertia of day-to-day common sense and empowers those engaged in a politics of transformation. (ibid, pp.7-8)

Feminism and Psychoanalysis: Feminism's interface with psychoanalysis – in its attempt to theorize sexual and gender difference – has been tumultuous. While some feminists have angrily rejected psychoanalysis as an insidious instrument of patriarchy: others, however, have sought to re-evaluate and appropriate the strategies and insights of Freudian and post-Freudian theory to aid their analysis of the gendering process to which, in varying ways, all human beings are subjected. Summing up this trajectory Anna Tripp writes:

> Kate Millett is a persuasive example of the former tendency. In *Sexual Politics* (1971) she denounces Freud's equation of masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity, and pours eloquent scorn on his notion of penis envy, in which the female is seen as destined by her anatomy to experience a sense of lack and inferiority. Three years later Juliet Mitchell countered with a book called *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* in which she argues that psychoanalysis does not have to be seen as *advocating* a patriarchal society, but simply as *describing* one, and can provide a useful analysis of its structure and mechanisms. Shifting Millett's emphasis, Mitchell points to Freud's notion of undifferentiated infant sexuality, arguing that in this way Freud's work allows us to recognize we are not born 'masculine' or 'feminine', not are we born heterosexual: these things are rather *acquisitions* made by human subjects as they are integrated into a particular type of human culture.
>
> Possibly the single most important aspect of psychoanalytic theory to feminism, however, has been the notion of the unconscious, and the ways in which it undermines rationality, subjectivity and meaning, rendering them inherently unstable. In the early twentieth century – when Freud first became fashionable among Anglophoen intellectuals – Virginia Woolf sought to play out in her writing the disturbing effects of the unconscious on orthodox understandings of character and communication; in the second half of the twentieth century, theorists like Jacqueline Rose have developed this line of enquiry with greater hindsight and rigour. It is through the notion of the unconscious that psychoanalysis can provide an effective antidote to cultural determinism and its disempowering assumption that gender norms are inevitably and effectively internalised. Psychoanalysis provides feminism with useful material because it explores the many difficulties and failures of this process, identifying what Rose memorably calls 'a resistance to identify at the very heart of psychic life'. Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis emphasize the ways

> in which he unconscious divides subjectivity against itself, continually undermining and disrupting any assumption of a unified and table sexual identity. In these ways, what feminism may have to gain from an alliance with psychoanalysis is the possibility of viewing femininity as neither a set of natural attributes nor as a cultural *fait accompli,* but rather as a laborious and sometimes bungled acquisition. (ibid, pp.9-10)

Masculinity: Feminism deconstructs woman's location in society vis-à-vis man and his masculinity. However masculinity and femininity as critical term are no longer conceived in terms of pure binary essences but in terms of identities, which are relational. However, feminist redefinitions of what it means to be a woman still takes masculinity as a frame of reference that it seeks to counter, subvert, or redefine. As such recently there has been a surge of interest in masculinity as a complex and changing cultural construction. And as Anna Tripp says: "Some of this work on masculinities has been carried out in the service of feminism…some might be seen as complementary to feminism… while some represents a hostile reaction to what has been seen as feminism's emasculating effect. What is clear is that, while feminism has played a pioneering role in the articulation, politicization and development of questions of gender, the field of enquiry into gender is broader than feminism".

"Masculinity has long and often been represented as the human norm – and conventionally masculine qualities (such as vigour, courage, rationality, authority, mastery, independence) have been seen simultaneously as universal 'human' ideals. In patriarchally organised societies, masculine values become the ideological structure of the society as a whole. Masculinity thus becomes 'innately' valuable and femininity serves as a contrapuntal function to delineate and magnify the hierarchical dominance of the masculine." (ibid, p.11)

Masquerade and Performativity: Joan Riviere, a contemporary of Freud, in her essay 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1929) discusses case studies of women, who, because of the contradictory demands made of them in their social context (for example, a demand to be 'feminine' and self-effacing at the same time as a demand to be an articulate, assertive and competent professional), experience anxieties and instabilities of identity. These women, she argues, may put on a show or 'masquerade' of disarming girlishness, in order to defuse perceived disapproval from those around them. She then goes on to ask how one would distinguish 'between genuine womanliness and the "masquerade" and comes to the intriguing conclusion that they may be, in fact, 'the same thing'. If womanliness is no more or less than a masquerade, this of course prompts the question of what is *behind* the mask. Riviere gives us a model of feminine identity as an ongoing charade or anxious performance which though 'real in its effect' – is never firmly grounded, never anything other than precarious. These lines of enquiry have been taken up by late twentieth century gender theorists- for example by Judith Butler, who, since the beginning of the 1990s, has become extraordinarily influential in this field.

Butler replaces Riviere's notion of masquerade with that of gender as a *performative,* and in so doing rewrites conventional understandings of the sex-gender distinction. Anna Tripp explains this feministic turn of concept thus:

> She proposes in the preface to her 1993 book, *Bodies That Matter,* that 'there is no pre-discursive "sex" that acts as a stable point of reference…in relation to which the cultural construction of gender proceeds…sex is already gender, already constructed…the "materiality" of sex is forcibly produced'. For Butler, 'women' and 'men' no longer function as stable and foundational categories of analysis, pre-existing the cultural imposition of gender. In Diane Elam's concise formulation of Butler's position, 'sex is … the retrospective projection of gender, its fictional origin'. Western patriarchies produce and naturalise the notion of an immutable binary structure called 'sex' which is supposed to predate and underpin culture; thus they designate 'as an *origin* or *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effect* of institutions, practices [and] discourses'. From this point of view, sexual identity does not precede gender, a sense of sexual identity is produced and reproduced through the repetitive performance or citation of the codes and conventions of gender in our culture. Being a man or a woman is, as Butler memorably asserts, 'a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real'. Sex is 'realized' as an effect of discourse and 'cultural performance'. (ibid, pp.13-14)

Queer Theory: Western patriarchal cultures tend to imagine masculinity and femininity as a conceptual 'couple', existing in a 'naturally' complementary binary opposition – and gender norms are produced and caught up in what Judith Butler, in her earlier work, calls a 'heterosexual matrix'. The heterosexist and homophobic character of many

habitual modes of interpretation, behaviour and expression has been thoroughly and convincingly analyzed by lesbian and gay critics over the course of many decades – but, in 1990s, a new body of work known as queer theory emerged which seemed in some ways to represent a departure from some of the more traditional premises and strategies of lesbian and gay studies.50 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *The Epistemology of the Close* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble,* both published in 1990, have often been identified as important catalysts – but queer theory also has deep roots in the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault, in particular his 1976 book, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction,* which traces intimate relationships between sexuality and discursive practices, knowledge and power.

In so far as it is possible to generalize, queer theory turns away from gay and lesbian identity politics and extends an anti-essentialist and deconstructive approach from gender to sexuality. As peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker put it: "Queer studies 'queries' orthodoxies and promotes or provokes…uncertainties…disrupt[ing] fixed or settled categorization…[Q]ueer theory seeks…to question all…essentialising tendencies and binary thinking".

For example, queer theory exposes the constructedness and historical specificity of our notions of 'the homosexual' and 'the heterosexual'. It is possible to argue that it was only in the late nineteenth century, with the advent of the pseudo-science of sexology, that the notion of homosexuality was 'invented'. As Joseph Bristow points out:

> Only by the 1890s had sexuality and its variant prefixed forms become associated with types of sexual person and types of erotic attraction. The *Supplement* to the *OED* records that both the words heterosexuality and homosexuality first entered the English language in an 1892 translation of the well-known study, *Psychopathia Sexualis,* by…Richard von KrafftEbing.

This is not of course to claim that homosexual practices did not take place before the late 1800s, but the idea of 'the homosexual' – something which one could 'be', and as a term which could explain one's entire identity – did not exist in its modern form before then. Thus queer theory offers an understanding of sexuality not as something god-given, natural or innate, but instead as a series of culturally and historically specific classification, definition, moralizations and contestations. Modern Western cultures *produce* a notion of the 'deviant' or 'queer' in order to shore up a sense of heterosexual 'normality', a 'queerness' which the 'straight must then simultaneously deny and depend on as its constitutive difference. One of queer theory's most effective strategies is to work the contradictions and anxieties inherent in these construction – exploiting, for example the way in which, as Butler puts it, 'homosexual desire…panics gender'. In other words, queer theory takes what has been stigmatized by a culture as 'perverse' and uses this as a lever to decentre, deconstruct or 'query' notions of 'the natural' and 'the normal'.(ibid, pp. 14-15)

Subaltern; Spivak uses this term to describe the colonized subject. She in effect achieved a certain degree of misplaced notoriety for her 1985 article "Can the Subaltern Speak?: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice" where she tried to problematize this concept as used by Subaltern Studies Group, founded by Ranjit Guha. In it, she describes the circumstances surrounding the suicide of a young Bengali woman that indicates a failed attempt at self-representation. Because her attempt at "speaking" outside normal patriarchal channels was not understood or supported, Spivak concluded, "The subaltern cannot speak." Her extremely nuanced argument, admittedly confounded by her sometimes opaque style, led some incautious readers to accuse her of phallocentric complicity, of not recognizing or even not letting the subaltern speak. Some critics, missing the point, buttressed their arguments with anecdotal evidence of messages cried out by burning widows. Her point was not that the subaltern does not cry out in various ways, but that speaking is "a transaction between speaker and listener. Subaltern talk, in other words, does not achieve the dialogic level of utterance.

Beyond this specific misunderstanding, Spivak also objects to the sloppy use of the term and its appropriation by other marginalized, but not specifically "subaltern" groups. "Subaltern," Spivak insists, is not "just a classy word for oppressed, for 'Other', for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie." She points out that in Gramsci's original covert usage, it signified "proletarian," whose voice could not be heard, being structurally written out of the capitalist bourgeois narrative. In postcolonial terms, "everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference. Now who would say that's just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not subaltern."

Another misreading of the concept is that, since the subaltern cannot speak, s/he needs an advocate to speak for her/him. It is seen as an affirmative action or special regulatory protection. Spivak objects, "Who the hell wants to protect subalternity? Only extremely reactionary, dubious anthropologistic museumizers. No activist wants to keep the subaltern in the space of difference…You don't give the subaltern voice. You work for the bloody subaltern, you work against

subalternity". She cites the work of the Subaltern Studies group as an example of how this critical work can be practiced, not to give the subaltern voice, but to clear the space to allow it to speak.

Spivak is particularly leery of the misappropriation of the term by those who simply want to claim disenfranchisement within the system of hegemonic discourse, i.e. those who can speak, but feel they are not being given their turn. "Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus, they don't need the word 'subaltern'. . . They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They're within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern."

Womanism: *Womanist* and *womanism* are culture-specific and poetic synonyms for *Black feminist* and *Black feminism*. Alice Walker redefined the conventional usage of these terms in her 1983 collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* to employ them as critical concept in her interpretation of Afro-American women's location within feminism.

Explaining her preference for this new coinage in *New York Times Magazine* (1984) Walker said: "I don't choose womanism because it is 'better' than feminism ... Since womanism *means* black feminism, this would be a nonsensical distinction. I choose it because I prefer the sound, the feel, the fit of it; because I cherish the spirit of the women (like Sojourner) the word calls to mind, and because I share the old ethnic-American habit of offering society a new word when the old word it is using fails to describe behavior and change that only a new word can help it more fully see." Walker added in an interview for this article, "I dislike having to add a color in order to become visible, as in *black feminist. Womanism* gives us a word of our own."

Contrasting this concept with feminism, Walker posits that: "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender". This expression suggests that womanist and womanism bring a racialized and often class-located experience to the gendered experience suggested by feminism. These terms have helped give visibility to the experience of African American women and other women of color who have always been in the forefront of movements against sexual and racial caste systems but have invariably been marginalized in history texts, the media, and feminist movements led by white feminists or civil rights movements led by men of color.

Thus, womanism reflects a link with a history that includes African cultural heritage, enslavement in the United States, and a kinship with other women, especially women of color. As Walker told the *Times*, "Feminism (all colors) definitely teaches women they are capable, one reason for its universal appeal. In addition to this, womanist (i.e. black feminist) tradition *assumes*, because of our experiences during slavery, that black women *are* capable." Her 1983 definition also included any "feminist of color ... *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist ... Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*."

By the late 1980s, the terms *womanist* and *womanism* had been adopted in many Women's Studies and Black Studies courses as well as by many of Walker's readers. In addition to identifying as womanists, for example, some historians felt better described as womanist historians, religious scholars called themselves womanist theologians, activists felt more included and inclusive by talking about womanist theory, and critics traced a womanist creative tradition that extended from quilts made by anonymous Black women during slavery to modern films such as *Daughters of the Dust*; from the timeless patterns of Ndebele women's wall paintings to the timely references in Emma Amos's paintings. Perhaps the most thoughtful extensions of Walker's definition have taken place among womanist theologians who do not offer *Black feminist* or *feminist of color* as synonyms but prefer *womanist* to stand alone, describing a woman of African descent, strong in her faith (not necessarily Christian) and concerned about the multiply oppressive impact of race, class, and gender.

Unlike *feminist* and *pro-feminist*, however, the definitions of womanism and womanist rarely included men who were also working for equality: thus some feminists, male and female, were still reluctant to use them. Others preferred *Black feminism* because retaining the adjective made racial experience visible, because the noun was better understood, or because failing to use *feminism* might have been seen as deserting its controversies; for instance, the notion that feminism is synonymous with lesbianism.

By 1993, however, the new usage of these terms was wide enough to be included in *The American Heritage Dictionary*, which defined *womanist* as: "Having or expressing a belief in or respect for women and their talents and abilities beyond the boundaries of race and class; exhibiting a feminism that is inclusive esp. of Black American culture." As Alice Walker made clear, *womanist* and *womanism* were not popularized to narrow or criticize existing terms, but to shed light on women's experience by increasing the number and richness of words describing it.

Suggested Reading List

Beauvior, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. London: Pan, 1988.

Brooks, Ann. Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory, and Cultural Forms, London and New York: Routledge, 1997

Eagleton, Mary. *Working with Feminist Criticism.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Gallop, Jane. *Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge. 1992.

Geetha, V. *Gender*. Calcutta: Stree, 2002.

Humm, Maggie. *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. New York: Harvester Wheatheaf, 1989.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual/textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London /New York : Methuen, 1985.

Oliver, Kelly, ed. *French Feminism Reader*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Warhol, Robyn R. and Diane Price Herndl, eds. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. New Brunswick/New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996.

Suggested Websites:

1. Feminisms
2. What is Feminism and Why Do We Have to Talk About It So Much? by Mary Klages
3. Feminism and Women's Studies - Carnegie Mellon U
4. Women's Studies Resources (University of Maryland)
5. Feminist Theory Website by Kristin Switala
6. Feminist Theory Resources by Karla Tonella
7. Schools of Feminist Thought by Cindy Tittle Moore
8. Feminism Theory (Women's Studies Department of Northern Arizona University)
9. Gender Studies and Feminism Links
10. ACRL Women and Gender Studies Weblinks
11. Alan Liu's Voice of the Shuttle (UCSB)—List of Links to Feminist and Gender-Related Sites
12. Mary Klages' lecture notes on "What is Feminism"

MAHASWETA DEVI: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Mahasweta Devi writes in Bengali. An activist writer, she was born in Dhaka in the year 1926. She was born and brought up in a literary ambience, as both of her parents were litterateur of standing. Her father Manish Ghatak was a poet and a novelist, and her mother Dharitri Devi was also a writer and a social worker. She began her schooling in Dhaka, but after the partition of India, her family migrated to West Bengal in India. She graduated from Vishvabharati University in Santiniketan with B.A. (Hons) in English, and did her post graduation in English from Calcutta University.

Mahasweta Devi started writing at a young age, and contributed short stories to various literary magazines. Her first novel, *Nati*, was published in 1957. She is a very prolific writer. Her literary masterpieces, among other, include *Hazaar Chaurasir Ma* (translated as *Mother of 1084,* and made into a movie), *Rudali (*adapted in a play and made into a movie*), Bioscoper Baksho*, and *Chatti Munda O Tir*, *Aranaye Adhikaar,* and stories like "Draupadi", "Breast Giver", "Dolouti the Bountiful" etc. Being a writer with a social cause, her stories and novels are a caustic comment on India as a nation and the socio-political trajectory it has taken since independence. She writes about the lives of ordinary men and women, and in particular about subaltern consciousness. Her stories, including "Draupadi", and specially her 'Palamau Stories' give voice to tribals - Santhals, Lodhas, Shabars and Mundas and the junction of folk and the modern, the mainstream and the margin, colonialism and post-colonialism.

A social activist, she has spent many years crusading for the rights of the tribals. Among her many awards is the Jnanpith Award (India's highest literary award) in 1996, and the Magsaysay Award, the Asian equivalent of the Nobel Prize, in 1997.

Since Mahasweta is a compulsive activist, and writing come to her as an instrument in her battle against exploitation,

her work takes in unconventional configurations. Her architechtonics cannot be accounted for in terms of stock categories evaluation, viz., plot construction, use of mythology, characterization, etc. Activism has its bearing on her style – style which has hitherto been the sole preserve of the ruling elite. At the level of social consciousness, she is up against the male capitalistic brahmanical order, at the level of aesthetics, she overturns the established notions of narration.

She does not try to camouflage her ideological inclinations. There are frequent authorial interventions, extended prefatory remarks, pithy concluding comments which bring forth her ideological commitment to the fore with a conviction which many art conscious writers would prefer to underplay. Very candidely she admits naxalites movement as the springboard of her creative venture. She the movement as a human catastrophe which the so-called Nation or civil society must account for. But despite her leftist leanings, Mahasweta, at times, is highly critical of Marxist leadership for its lust of power. She is a cultural materialist, than an orthodox communist.

Mahasweta's fiction is no fantasy, nor a pastoral romance. It is firmly rooted in earth, in ground reality, in the solidity of facts. Detailed documentation goes into the making of the narrative. She does not take a tangential view of reality; authenticity of fiction is first condition for its application for activist purpose. Her fiction begins with a fact-profile of either an area or a character or local practice, before it snowballs into a gripping story.

As a realist entrenched in subaltern consciousness, she ideally should puncture and deflate the grand-narrative or structural tyranny of allegories. Allegory is possible only at the cost of the marginal and the subaltern. Fiction is a crucible in which disparate ingredients – history, ideology, realism, allegory – get enmeshed in a narrative, which is discursive, real, and at the same time historically verifiable. All these structural and thematic traits are in "Draupadi", the story analyzed in detail shortly.

MAHASWETA DEVI WORKS IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION: A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Bait. Translated by Sumanta Banerjee**.** Calcutta: Seagull, 2004.

Bitter Soil. Translated by Ipsita Chanda. Calcutta: Seagull, 1998.

The Book of the Hunter. Translated by Mandira and Sagaree Sengupta. Calcutta: Seagull, 2002.

Breast Stories. Translated by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak. Calcutta: Seagull, 1997 (This book contains translation of three stories, "Draupadi", "Breast Giver" and Behind the Bodice")

Five Plays. Translated by Shamik Bandyopadhyay. Calcutta: Seagull, 1997 (It includes "Mother of 1084", "Aajir", "baayen", "Urbashi and Johni" and "Water")

Imaginary Maps: Three Stories. Translation and Introduction by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. New York: Routledge, 1995 ("The Hunt", "Douloti the Bountiful", "Terodactyle" and "Puron Sahay and Pirtha")

Etoyaa Munda Won the Battle. Translated By Meenakshi Chatterjee. N. Delhi: N.B.T., 1989.

Of Women, Outcasts, Peasants, and Rebels. Translated By Kalpana Bardhan California: University of California, 1990. (This includes six stories: "Paddy Seeds", "Dhouli", "The Funeral Wailler", "Strange Children", "Witch Hunt", "Miribala")

Basai Tudu. Translated By Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak and Shamik Bandyopadhyay. Calcutta: Thima, 1993. (It has "Operation Basai Tudu" & "Draupadi")

Mother of 1084. Translated by Shamik Bandyopadhyay. Calcutta: Seagull, 1997

Rudali: From Fiction to Performance. Translated By Anjum Katiyal, Calcutta: Seagull, Calcutta, 1997.

Dust on the Road: The Activist Writings of Mahasweta Devi. Translated By Maitrayee Ghatak. Calcutta: Seagull, (A collection of her activist prose including most of her articles in English, several Bengali pieces in translation, and editorials from her journal *Bortika*).

Old Women. Translated By Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak. Calcutta: Seagull, 1999

Our Non-Veg Cow and Other Stories. Translated by Paramita Banerjee. Calcutta: Seagull, 1998.

Outcast. Translated by Sarmistha Dutta Gupta. Calcutta: Seagull, 2002.

Till Death Do Us Part. Translated by Vikram Iyengar. Calcutta: Seagull, 2001.

SUMMARY OF "DRAUPADI":

"Draupdi" is a story of Dopdi Majhen; it is a story of victimisation of a woman who dares to confront the oppressive system. It narrates the predicament of a tribal woman caught between the pulls of subsistence living and the appropriatory logic of feudalistic-modernist patriarchal state and its allied system.

Dopdi Majhen, a naxalites informer-activist, is a Santhal. She, along with her husband Dulna, had rebelled against the oppressive state –feudal nexus. In the time of drought, Surja Sahu – the feudal kingpin of the area in connivance with the state - had got two tube wells and three wells dug within the compound of his two houses. When the whole Birbhum was reeling under famine, he and his ilk refused to let tribals share their 'unlimited' water sources. This instigated the ire of the suffering tribals and led them to join the naxalites group, headed by Arijit, and culminated in the 'revenge- killing' of Surja Sahu and his sons. In the aftermath of this killing, and consequent upon the brutal and indiscriminate manhunt launched by the state through 'Operation Bakuli' Dopdi and Dulan were forced to flee and live the life of fugitives. Working in different guises with different landowners in and around Jharkhani belt, they, completely sacrificing their family and desires, dedicated themselves to the cause of movement and the social utopia and economic freedom it promised. They kept on informing their comrades about the movement of the army. Their dedication and their ability to survive created a terror among moneylenders, landlords, grain brokers etc. In order to suppress the Naxalite movement and contain the deviance inherent in it, the state launches 'Operation Jharkhani', initially under Arjan Singh and then under Senanayak, "a specialist in combat and extreme left politics". Dulna, who could not survive this dastardly onslaught/hunt, fails to match Senanayak's cunning. Betrayed by his own people, he was entrapped while drinking water and 'countered'. Since then, Dopdi Majhen is on the 'most wanted' list of the police and is living life incognito. It is at this stage that the story begins. So far she has proved a match for Senanyak's cunning and has, so far, eluded his grasp.

Senanayak is a veteran guardian of state ideology. He has his own philosophy of tackling/fighting the enemy; he believes in destroying his enemy by becoming one with it. Theoretically he aligns with the sufferers/tribals, and hopes that the world would one day heed to the predicament of the subaltern and change for the better, even if gradually. But in practice he believes in their physical annihilation. He thus embodies a colonial ambivalence: though by his means of 'apprehension and elimination' he may be getting rid of the young/youth at the same time, he believes in delivering the world's legacy into youth's hands. To him, the most despicable way of fighting is guerrilla warfare with primitive weapons like bow and arrow, hatchet and scythe. Tribals – Dulna and Dopdi Majhen being skilful in the use of these weapons – by default belong to this category of fighters. To entrap Dopdi, he uses her own folk, men like Shomai, Budhna and Dukhiram Gharari, whom he had earlier used to destroy Dulna Majhi.

Senanayak used Dulna's dead body as a bait to get her but in vain. His soldiers obeyed his command waiting for long in the forest despite suffering shooting pains as the large red ants bit them. Dopdi, however, is an embodiment of resilience and a great survivor. She combines in her self the sense of pride that derives from her illustrious lineage with the practical survival tips of the naxalites to frustrate Senanyak's designs. A daughter of Champabhumi, she is proud of her lineage, her pure unadulterated black blood. She is proud of her forefathers who had fought for and guarded their women's blood and honour and saved it from being contaminated by foreign invaders. She despises the betrayers of her husband as a blot on community. She follows Arijit's advice in letter and spirit, not only to save her 'self' but also to keep her comrades out of trouble. Consequently, despite her love for Dulna, she does not come to claim his dead body. Senanayak's apparent failure to trap Dopdi along with Dulna, however hardens his resolve to 'capture' her, dead or alive.

Dopdi is aware of the risks that surround her life in the wake of the reward put on her head, and wilfully toughens herself, physically, emotionally and mentally, for any eventuality and the torture it might entail. She tells Mushai and his wife who know of her incognito existence as Upi Majhen, to deny any acquaintance with her in case of her capture. This is a poignant gesture wherewith she ensures that her destiny may not recoil on her sympathisers. She takes care not to respond to her real name under any circumstances. She is not afraid of being caught or encountered. Through autosuggestions she prepares to come to terms with torture: Come what may, she will prefer to bite off her tongue than to articulate anything. She is equally aware of the vulnerability her sex/body may put her to. But despite all this knowledge, she is not ready to utter a word and destroy others' life for her survival.

But these precautions don't prove full proof. Like Dulna, her own people ultimately undo her. But before being captured, she makes a last ditch effort to evade her captors and sound her comrades as to the impending danger. She

desperately tries to enter the forest she knew so well to offset the police trail, but the chaos that the footsteps following her generate in her mind, beguiles her. Instead of entering the forest, she moves towards the camp. She starts moving on rocky terrain but to her surprise, she is blocked by Rotoni Sahu, Surja Sahu's brother, Shomai and Budhna. Still she does not give up so easily. With her spreading arms, with face towards the sky, she turns towards the forest ululating with the force of her entire being. She is successful in sending the message to her comrades to change their hideouts. She is apprehended and brought to the camp in the evening.

For two hours no one touches her and she is allowed to sit on a stool. But before going for his dinner, Senanayak ordered his soldiers to "make her". Tied to the four posts with gag in her mouth, she is repeatedly assaulted by a number of cops, till she passes out. On regaining her senses she sees that her breasts are beaten raw, the nipples are torn. She is still tied but the gag is removed. Despite this 'seemingly billion lunar years long physical and mental assault', she is determined not to give up and utter the word 'water' even when she is extremely thirsty. She mistakes this break in the process of her 'making up' as being abandoned for the foxes to devour. But the process of 'making up' starts all over again. She is reduced to a still body.

In the morning, when Draupdi is brought to the tent and given cloth to cover her body, she refuses to clothe herself. She becomes defiant. With her uncovered wounded body, she prepares to go to Senanayak's tent. The guards on duty think that she has gone crazy. They don't know what to do. So they rush to their master for orders. Senanayak too is surprised to see naked Dopdi/Draupadi walking towards him with her head high. Draupadi comes closer to him. She is not at all shy or ashamed of her nakedness. She rather laughs at Senanayak when he enquires about her clothes. In a sharp, terrifying sky-splitting voice she questions his manhood. She is not ashamed of her position; rather she makes him ashamed of his manliness. She seems to communicate to him that a woman may be molested physically but cannot be vanquished mentally.

DETAILED READING OF "DRAUPADI":

Mahasweta Devi "Draupadi" is a multi-nuanced narrative, capturing the life and times of its protagonist Dopdi, a Santhal tribal, at the intersection of modern developmentalist state and subsistent subaltern survival. It raises the issues of class, caste and colonialism, and their collusion in the formation of hegemonic patriarchal nation state and how this mainstream formation maintains itself through violent 'othering' of the margins. Negotiating various ideological locations – the cultural pressures of her won community, the exigencies of naxalites activism, and the onslaught of army/state – Draupadi/Dopdi encapsulates the gendered nature of the process of othering, i.e., how the mainstream-margin antagonism uses the female body/sexuality as a site of honour/dishonour to vindicate patriarchy, its values and norms.

Mahasweta employs a very 'rugged and zigzag' narrative trajectory in this story. Her technique, however, emerges as an apt vehicle to represent the thematic violence and violent thematic of the story.

The author sets forth to depict the dynamics of 'othering' and exoticisation of the margin by the mainstream right from the beginning of the story. This is how she contextualises Dopdi's location within statist order - disorder/chaos praxis. While the state presumably stands for order, reason and progress, the subaltern-naxalite backlash is marked as disorder, non-reason, and regression:

> Name Dopdi Mejhen, age twenty-seven, husband Dulna Majhi (deceased), domicile Cherakhan, Bankrahjarh, information whether dead or alive and/or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees…
>
> An exchange between two medallioned uniforms.
>
> FIRST MEDALLION: What's this, a tribal called Dopdi? The list of names I brought has nothing like it! How can anyone have an unlisted name?
>
> SECOND: Draupadi Mejhen. Born the year her mother threshed rice at Surja Sahu (killed)'s at Bakuli. Surja Sahu's wife gave her the name.
>
> FIRST: These officers like nothing better than to write as much as they can in English. What's all this stuff about her?
>
> SECOND: *Most notorious female. Long wanted in many…*
>
> Dossier: Dulna and Dopdi worked at harvests, rotating between Birbhum, Burdwan, Murshidabad, and Bankura. In 1971, in the famous *Operation* Bakuli, when three villages were *cordoned off* and *machine*

> *gunned*, they too lay on the ground, faking dead. In fact, they were the main culprits. Murdering Surja Sahu and his son, occupying upper-caste wells and tubewells during the drought, not surrendering those three young men to the police. In all this they were the chief instigators. In the morning, at the time of the body count, the couple could not be found. The blood-sugar level of Captain Arjan Singh, the *architect* of Bakuli, rose at once and proved yet again that diabetes can be a result of anxiety and depression. Diabetes has twelve husbands – among them anxiety.

Dulna and Dopdi went underground for a long time in a Neanderthal darkness. The Special Forces, attempting to pierce that dark by an armed search, compelled quite a few Santals in the various districts of West Bengal to meet their Maker against their will. By the Indian Constitution, all human beings, regardless of caste or creed, are sacred. Still, accidents like this do happen. Two sorts of reasons: (1) the underground couple's skill in self-concealment; (2) not merely the Santals but all tribals of the Austro-Asiatic Munda tribes appear the same of the Special Forces.

In fact, all around the ill-famed forest of Jharkhani, which is under the jurisdiction of the police station at Bankrajharh (in this India of ours, even a worm is under a certain police station), even in the southeast and southwest corners, one comes across hair-raising details in the eyewitness records put together on the people who are suspected of attacking police stations, stealing guns (since the snatchers are not invariably well educated, they sometimes say 'give up your chambers' rather than give up your gun), killing grain brokers, landlords, moneylenders, law officers, and bureaucrats. A black-skinned couple ululated like police sirens before the episode. They sang jubilantly in a savage tongue, incomprehensible even to the Santals. Such as:

> Samaray hijulenako mar goekope
>
> and,
>
> Hendre rambra keche keche
>
> Pundi rambra keche keche

This extensively long extract, if read between the lines, deftly narrates the process of othering and exoticisation alluded to earlier. (Some sentences, words and phrases in the above extract have been deliberately put in bold type, so that their significance can be better appreciated) The first paragraph not only informs about Dopdi Majhen, but also marks her habitat as potentially dangerous. Both she and her area of operation need state surveillance, for both denote disorder, disruption and deviance. This explains the presence of the medallions, the police and the army, i.e., the disciplining organ of the state in the area. This socio-spatial marking, i.e., the division of the nation into normal and abnormal zones, a feature of the nation state, defines its antagonism with the margins/alternate voices but also becomes a reiterative trope of its idea of discipline and punishment. This pattern of dominance and subordination, rule and disobedience, civilised and uncivilised, light and darkness is evident through out the story and provides poignancy to Dopdi's tale.

The way the medallions react to the police poster is also very significant. Their conversation makes explicit the process of othering and exoticisation. For them Dopdi is an unusual name for a tribal. It smacks of tribal presumption for sanskritization. The medillion, through such an analysis, seems to resist the idea of margin-mainstream symbiosis. Dopdi is not only marked as socio-semiotic deviation, but is also as most notorious female, perhaps because of this very reason, and also because of daring to challenge, and teasingly elude the dominant patriarchal order.

The whole sequence, seen from author's perspective, posits India as an amorphous babel of voices, cultures and life styles. But the state seems to reduce, this plurality, despite its avowal of India as a cultural mosaic into a reductive binary via a replication of colonizer-colonised power configuration. This is apparent by the way the official/English of the officers is pitched against the 'Savage/Mundari tongue of the tribals in the above passage.

Mahasweta Devi is apparently baffled by this rational logic of the government and pokes fun at its inherent incomprehensibility:

> Government procedure being as incomprehensible as the Male Principle in Sankhya philosophy or Antonioni's early films, it was Arjan Singh who was sent once again on Operation Forest Jharkhani. Learning from Intelligence that the above-mentioned ululating and dancing couple was the escaped corpses, Arjan Singh fell for a bit into a zombie like state and finally acquired so irrational a dread of black-skinned people that whenever he saw a black person in a ball-bag, he swooned, saying 'they're killing me,' and drank and

> passed a lot of water. Neither uniform nor Scriptures could relieve that depression. At long last, under the shadow of a premature and forced retirement, it was possible to present him at the desk of Mr Senanayak, the elderly Bengali specialist in combat and extreme-Left politics.

With the advent of Senanayak on the scene, the colonial-colonised equation between the state/army and the tribal/ Dopdi is put to a broader relief. Senanayak, as Spivak has illustrated in her 'Translator's Forward" to "Draupadi" proves to be a perfect embodiment of coloniser mindset, vis-à-vis the colonised. As is apparent from the narrative itself, he is 'an insider-outsider':

> Senanayak knows the activities and capacities of the opposition better than they themselves do. First, therefore, he presents an encomium on the military genius of the Sikhs. Then he explains further: is it only the opposition that should find power at the end of the barrel of a gun? Arjan Singh's power also explodes out of the male organ of a gun. Without a gun even the 'five Ks' come to nothing in this day and age. These speeches he delivers to all and sundry. As a result, the fighting forces regain their confidence in the Army Handbook. It is not a book for everyone. It says that the most despicable and repulsive style of fighting is guerrilla warfare with primitive weapons. Annihilation at sight of any and all practitioners of such warfare is the sacred duty of every soldier. Dopdi and Dulna belong to the category of such fighters, for they too kill by means of hatchet and scythe, bow and arrow, etc. In fact, their fighting power is greater than the gentlemen's. Not all gentlemen become experts in the explosion of 'chambers'; they think the power will come out on its own if the gun is held. But since Dulna and Dopdi are illiterate, their kinds have practised the use of weapons generation after generation.
>
> I should mention here that, although the other side makes little of him, Senanayak is not to be trifled with. Whatever his practice, in theory he respects the opposition. Respects them because they could be neither understood nor demolished if they were treated with the attitude, 'it's nothing but a bit of impertinent game-playing with guns.' In order to destroy the enemy, become one. Thus he understood them by (theoretically) becoming one of them. He hopes to write on all this in the future. He has also decided that in his written work he will demolish the gentlemen and highlight the message of the harvest workers. These mental processes might seem complicated, but actually he is a simple man and is as pleased as his third great-uncle after a meal of turtle meat. In fact, he knows that, as in the old popular song, turn by turn the world will change. And in every world he must have the credentials to survive with honour. If necessary he will show the future to what extent he alone understands the matter in its proper perspective. He knows very well that what he is doing today the future will forget, but he also knows that if he can change colour from world to world, he can represent the particular world in question. Today he is getting rid of the young by means of 'apprehension and elimination,' but he knows people will soon forget the memory and lesson of blood. And at the same time, he, like Shakespeare, believes in delivering the world's legacy into youth's hands. He is Prospero as well.

Senanayak – exploiting every means at his command, i.e., experience, power, cunning, and theory and, the colonial strategy of divide and rule – is able to entrap and "counter" Dulna. But Dopdi eludes his grasp. She almost outwits him in his manoeuvres, but not for long. Caught between the diverse pulls of her culture and the demands of the ideology she aligns with in order to survive and fight oppression, she traverses a delicate balance between one patriarchal ethos (i.e., the 'affirmative' values of her Champabhumi) and the other (i.e., the 'negative' and (mis)appropriatory of the feudalistic-modernist state). While the former sustains her and gives strength to her conviction, the latter threatens to annihilate her body and soul. Her psychophysical process of toughening herself for any eventuality – despite her resilience within hardships - is premised on a keen awareness of the vulnerability of her gendered embodiment/sexuality. This is apparent from the following extract:

> Dopdi was proceeding slowly, with some rice knotted into her belt. Mushai Tudu's wife had cooked her some. She does so occasionally. When the rice is cold, Dopdi knots it into her waistcloth and walks slowly. As she walked, she picked out and killed the lice in her hair. If she had some kerosene, she'd rub it into her scalp and get rid of her lice. Then she could wash her hair with baking soda. But the bastards put traps at every bend of the falls. If they smell kerosene in the water, they will follow the scent.

Dopdi!

She doesn't respond. She never responds when she hears her own name. She has seen in the Panchayat office just today the notice for the reward in her name.

… … …

… … …

Don't come again [Mushai's wife tells Dopdi]

Why?

Mushai's wife looked down. Tudu says that Sahib has come again. If they catch you, the village, our hunts…They'll burn again.

… … …

… … …

Dopdi thought of something. Then said, Go home. I don't know what will happen, if they catch me don't know me.

Can't you run away?

No. Tell me, how many times can I run away? What will they do if they catch me? They will kounter me. Let them.

Mushai's wife said, we have nowhere else to go.

Dopdi said softly, I won't tell anyone's name.

Dopdi knows, has learned by hearing so often and so long, how one can come to terms with torture. If mind and body give way under torture, Dopdi will bite off her tongue. That boy did it. They kountered him. When they kounter you, your hands are tied behind you. All your bones are crushed, your sex is a terrible wound. Killed by police in an encounter…unknown male…age twenty-two…

As she walked thinking these thoughts, Dopdi heard someone calling, Dopdi!

She didn't respond. She doesn't respond if called by her own name. Here her name is Upi Mejhen. But who calls?

Spines of suspicion are always furled in her mind. Hearing 'Dopdi' they stiffen like a hedgehog's. Walking, she unrolls the film of known faces in her mind. Who? No Shomra, Shomra is on the run. Shomai and Budhna are also on the run, for other reasons.

… … …

… … …

Who called her from the back today?

Dopdi kept walking. Villages and fields, bush and rock – Public Works Department markers – sound of running steps in back…There was the urgency of great danger under Dopdi's ribs. Now she thought there was no shame as a Santal in Shomai and Budhna's treachery. Dopdi's blood was the pure unadulterated black blood of Champabhumi. From Champa to Bakuli the rise and set of a million moons. The blood could have been contaminated; Dopdi felt proud of her forefathers. They stood guard over their women's blood in black armour. Shomai and Budhna are half-breeds. The fruits of war. Contributions to Radhabhumi by the American soldiers stationed at Shinandange. Otherwise crow would eat crow's flesh before Santal would betray Santal.

Footsteps at her back…Nothing must be given away…Dopdi will not enter the forest with a cop at her back…I swear by my life. By my life Dulna, by my life. Nothing must be told.

But despite all her precautions Dopdi is "Apprehended", and taken to Senanayak who, in the aftermath of her capture, "was at once triumphant and despondent". The capture generates in him a feeling which at once satisfies his manhood and proclaims his guilty as to his atrocious/unmanly action (he could only capture Dropdi through treachery/trickery). His ambivalence is premised on colonial/state hypocrisy:

> If you want to destroy the enemy, become one. He had done so. As long as six years ago he could anticipate their every move. He still can. Therefore, he is elated. Since he has kept up with the literature, he has read *First Blood* and seen approval of his thought and work.

> Dopdi couldn't trick him, he is unhappy about that. Two sorts of reasons. Six years ago he published an article about information storage in brain cells. He demonstrated in that piece that he supported this struggle from the point of view of the field hands. Dopdi is a field hand. Veteran fighter. Search and destroy Dopdi Mejhen is about to be apprehended. Will be destroyed. Regret.

With the capture of Draupadi, the process of commodification of her body starts. She is no more treated as an activist with a cause but a mere body, a possession or war booty. For the feudal-modernist masculine agency – Dopdi and her body – symbolises a site of its enemy's pride and honour. It is only through the annihilation of this body that the enemy can be vanquished and one's manhood/honour retrieved. Accordingly, Senayak, simply orders his men – of course after her 'official interrogation' – to "Make her" and "Do *the needful*". This obviously entails unmaking of her as an activist/revolutionary and remaking of her as a victim body, through a vicious cycle of multiple rapes:

> Then a billion moons pass. A billion lunar years. Opening her eyes after a million light years, Draupadi, strangely enough, sees sky and moon. Slowly the bloodied nailheads shift from her brain. Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. Something sticky under her ass and waist. Her own blood. Only the gag has been removed. Incredible thirst. In case she says 'water' she catches her lower lip in her teeth. She senses that her vagina is bleeding. How many came to make her?
>
> Shaming her, a tear trickles out of the corner of her eye. In the muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts, and understands that, indeed, she's made up right. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four-five-six-seven – then Draupadi had passed out.
>
> She turns her eyes and sees something white. Her own cloth. Nothing else. Suddenly she hopes against hope. Perhaps they have abandoned her. For the foxes to devour. But she hears the scrape of feet. She turns her head, the guard leans on his bayonet and leers at her. Draupadi closes her eyes. She doesn't have to wait long. Again the process of making her begins. Goes on. The moon vomits a bit of light and goes to sleep. Only the dark remains. A compelled spread-eagled still body. Active pistons of flesh rise and fall, rise and fall over it.
>
> Then morning comes.
>
> Then Draupadi Mejhen is brought to the tent and thrown on the straw. Her piece of cloth is thrown over her body.

The violent repraisal that Dopdi suffers is not from the bullet or the knife. It is gender-specific repraisal, namely mutilation of the female body through rape. However, Dopdi is not the one to be vanquished through the shaming of her body. She in fact uses her victimhood as a ploy to stun Senanayak's manhood:

> Then, after breakfast, after reading the newspaper and sending the radio message 'Draupadi Mejhen apprehended,' etc., Draupadi Mejhen is ordered brought in.
>
> Suddenly there is trouble.
>
> Draupadi sits up as soon as she hears 'Move!' and asks, Where do you want me to go?
>
> To the Burra Sahib's tent.
>
> Where is the tent?
>
> Over there.
>
> Draupadi fixes her red eyes on the tent. Says, Come, I'll go.
>
> The guard pushes the water pot forward.
>
> Draupadi stands up. She pours the water down on the ground. Tears her piece of cloth with her teeth.
>
> Seeing such strange behaviour, the guard says, She's gone crazy, and runs for orders. He can lead the prisoner out but doesn't know what to do if the prisoner behaves incomprehensibly. So he goes to ask his superior.
>
> The commotion is as if the alarm had sounded in a prison. Senanayak walks out surprised and sees Draupadi, naked, walking toward him in the bright sunlight with her head high. The nervous guards trail behind.
>
> What is this? He is about to cry, but stops.
>
> Draupadi stands before him, naked. Thigh and public hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds.
>
> What is this? He is about to bark.
>
> Draupadi comes closer. Stands with her hand on her hip, laughs and says, The object of your search, Dopdi

> Mejhen. You asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?
>
> Where are her clothes?
>
> Won't put them on, sir. Tearing them.
>
> Draupadi's black body comes even closer. Draupadi shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting, and sharp as her ululation, What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?
>
> She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak's white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob at and says, There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed, I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, kounter me – come on, kounter me –?
>
> Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid.

This much discussed ending of "Draupadi" has been proclaimed for its subversive feminist overtones. Gayatri Spivak, who has read this story as "the allegory of the woman's struggle within the revolution in shifting historical movement" sees in this the culmination of the displacement of Draupadi's myth from religious to socio-political context. Mahasweta wrenches Draupadi out of her myth, and, by superimposing it onto Dopdi, inserts Draupadi/her myth into history. This superimposition is, in fact a calculated violence against the significances of mythical tale, so that what was conventionally thought to embody suppression turns into a tool of gender empowerment. Mahasweta defines her modus operandi thus: "It is essential to revive existing myths and adapt them to the present times and following the oral tradition, create new ones as well. While I find the existing mythologies epic and 'puranas' interesting, I use them with new interpretations". Mahasweta, as is evident from Dopdi's transcendence from the sense of bodily shame and her ultimate defiance of Senanayak, uses Dopdi as a trope with subversive overtones. The author transforms the mythological into a tribal Dopdi, the agent of a potential unmaking of gender and class containment.

ALICE WALKER - A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Alice Walker, best known as the author of *The Color Purple*, like Mahasweta Devi fits into the class of activist-writer-critic. One of her significant contributions to literary-cultural theorization has been the concept of womanism. Born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, USA, she was the eighth and last child of her sharecropper parents, Willie Lee and Minnie Lou Grant Walker. When she was eight years old, she lost sight of one eye when one of her older brothers shot her with a BB gun by accident. In high school, Alice Walker was valedictorian of her class, and that achievement, coupled with a "rehabilitation scholarship" made it possible for her to go to Spelman, a college for black women in Atlanta, Georgia. After spending two years at Spelman, she was transferred to Sarah Lawrence College in New York, and during her junior year traveled to Africa as an exchange student. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Sarah Lawrence College in 1965. After finishing college, Walker lived for a short time in New York, then from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, she lived in Tougaloo, Mississippi, during which time she had a daughter, Rebecca, in 1969. Alice Walker was active in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, and in the 1990's she is still an involved activist. She has spoken for the women's movement, the anti-apartheid movement, for the anti-nuclear movement, and against female genital mutilation. Alice Walker started her own publishing company, Wild Trees Press, in 1984. She currently lives in Northern California.

She received the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for her novel *The Color Purple*. Among her numerous awards and honors are the Lillian Smith Award from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rosenthal Award from the National Institute of Arts & Letters, a nomination for the National Book Award, a Radcliffe Institute Fellowship, a Merrill Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Front Page Award for Best Magazine Criticism from the Newswoman's Club of New York. She also has received the Townsend Prize and a Lyndhurst Prize.

With *Once*, a collection of poetry, Alice Walker started her journey as a writer. Her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, received both literary praise and criticism, with many African-American critics claiming that Walker dealt too harshly with the black male characters in her book. Walker disputed such claims, but her writing would continue to dramatize the oppression of woman thereafter. In 1976 she published her second novel, *Meridian*,

a story that chronicled a young woman's struggle during the civil rights movement. It received such acclaim that Walker accepted a Guggeheim Fellowship to concentrate full-time on her writing. She moved to San Francisco, and while in California she fell in love with Robert Allen, the editor of *Black Scholar*. They moved to a home in Mendocino where she began to write full time. Walker published her second book of short stories, i.e., *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down.*

In 1982 she finished *The Color Purple*, an epistolary novel about the life of a poor black woman named Celie. Apart from the Pulitzer Prize in 1983, this novel also won the American Book Award. Critics again accused her of portraying black men too harshly. This novel was soon made into a motion picture, produced by Quincy Jones and directed by Steven Spielberg. When the movie *The Color Purple* premiered in her hometown of Eatonton, Walker received a parade in her honor. Her sister Ruth even created "The Color Purple Foundation" to promote charitable work for education.

In 1984 Walker published her third volume of poetry, *Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful.* In 1988 her book of essays, *Living By the Word* was published, and in 1989 she published her epic novel *The Temple of My Familiar*. Her later works include: *Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy.*

A later novel, *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult*, deals with her budding realization that she might be bi-sexual. Alice Walker has gradually turned more politically inclined as a writer; her non-fiction book *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* contains many essays inspired by her political activism. This included activities in the civil rights movement, the anti-nuclear movement, the environmental movement, the women's movement, and the movement to protect indigenous people.

In September 1998, Walker came out with *By the Light of My Father's Smile.* It examines the connections between sexuality and spirituality. The story is a multi-narrated account of several generations and explores the relationships of fathers and daughters.

A remarkable feature of Alice Walker's writing is the way it draws on elements of her life and incorporates them flawlessly into her novels. The short story "Everyday Use" is central in Alice Walker's writing, particularly as it represents her response to the concept of heritage as expressed by the Black political movements of the 60s. It is contained in her collection of short stories, *In Love and Trouble*, which was published in 1973.

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SUMMARY OF "EVERYDAY USE":

"Everyday Use" is a story of a mother and her two daughters – Dee and Maggie. The mother who describes herself as "a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands" narrates the story. As a young woman, she lived a hard life farming in the countryside and presently lives in a small, tin-roofed house surrounded by a clay yard in the middle of a cow pasture. She is waiting for the marriage of her daughter Maggie, who lives with her. After that she plans to live alone in peace.

The story opens as the two women await a visit from the older daughter, Dee, and a stranger who is supposedly accompanying her during this visit. The mother is not sure whether Dee and the man are actually married. Dee, who had always been scornful of her family's way of life, had gone to college and now seems like a distant film star. The mother imagines her being reunited with Dee only on a television show such as "This Is Your Life", where the celebrity guest is confronted with her humble origins. Maggie, in comparison to Dee had been a mediocre child. The severe burn scars she bore from a house fire many years ago have aggravated her mediocrity further. Dee's glamour intimidates her now.

To her mother's surprise, Dee arrives wearing an ankle-length, gold and orange dress, jangling golden earrings and bracelets, and hair that "stands straight up like the wool on a sheep". She greets them with an African salutation, while her companion offers a Muslim greeting and tries to give Maggie a ceremonial handshake that she does not understand. Dee stuns them with her new name Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo. Rationalising this change she says: "I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me". Dee's companion has an unpronounceable name, which the mother humorously reduces to 'Hakim-a-barber'. Being Muslim, he refuses to eat the pork that she has prepared for their meal. Her education and her stay in the city have transformed Dee. Whereas earlier she had been scornful of her mother's house and its possessions and even seemed to be happy when the old house had caught fire, now she takes pride in the traditional way of life and ostensibly enjoys her returning to the fold. She takes photographs

of the house, including a cow that wanders by, and asks her mother if she may have the old butter churn whittled by her uncle; she plans to use it as a 'centerpiece' for her table. Then her attention is captured by two old handmade quilts, pieced together by Grandma Dee and quilted by the mother and Big Dee, her mother's sister. The mother has already promised these quilts as dowry to Maggie. Dee, who had never taken no for an answer is horrified: "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she says, "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use".

Maggie is intimidated by Dee's vehemence. She is ready to surrender her claim to her cherished quilts. But the mother feels a sudden surge of rebellion at what she realises is the outrageous demand of Dee. She snatches these quilts from Dee, and instead offers her some of the machine-stitched ones. Dee does not want these. Offended by her mother's gesture, she turns to leave and in parting tells Maggie, "It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it". Maggie and her mother spend the rest of the evening sitting in the yard, sniffing snuff and "just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed".

"EVERYDAY USE": A WOMANIST READING

"Everyday Use" is one of the most popular stories by Alice Walker and perhaps one of the most anthologised. The issues that this story raises are very pertinent from the 'womanist' perspective, a critical concept put forward by the author herself. 'Womanism' may be defined as a strand within 'black feminism' whereby the black woman, rediscovering her 'impudent, bold, courageous, responsible and strong' Afro-American inheritance, revels in its holistic and inclusive ethos and turns it into a tool of comprehensive social change that transcends the barrier of class and colour, and in expanded sense, 'releases' the entire mankind of its pain. It is premised on celebration of Afro-American culture, a love for physical beauty and, an appreciation/tolerance of/for the multiplicity of desires/sexual preference. The term, in its broader sense, designates a culture-specific form of woman-referred policy and theory. It is a term, which is more broad based and inclusive then feminism, as it was practiced then. As against womanism, feminist movement of the day was predominantly white-centric. A womanist is one who has or expresses a certain amount of respect for women and their talent and the abilities beyond the boundaries of race and class, and which strives for female bonding but not in hostile opposition to male.

"Everyday Use", at one level, can be seen as a literary representation of this critical concept. While narrating the life of a an Afro-American mother and her two daughters, it, through its ironic poignancy, explores the issues of culture and heritage and consequences of the mutation it underwent under the influence of black revolutionary politics of the 1960's, and its implication for black women. The story is an attempt to understand the changing relational configuration at the intersection of tradition and change from the perspective of an activist-insider.

That womanism is premised on creating a bond via tracing/forging a tradition of aesthetic fellowship becomes apparent from authors strategic insertion - "For your grandmamma" - right at the onset of this story. It triggers a series of questions in the reader's mind as to whose story it is or alternately whom is this story addressed to? For what purpose? Across what time? And as the story unfolds, one realises that the three protagonist the Mother, Dee and Maggie are mere characterisation props, they are mere types, the story in fact belongs to every one who cares to read it and live the trials and tribulations, hopes and aspirations of the characters involved. Further it is **a** story through which women converse with each other across time and space. And as Guerin et. al. put it, while analysing the story from feminist/womanist perspective, this is a story about everyday life of black women caught in the flux of tradition and revolutionary politics, and desperately trying to make a sense of life around them:

> "Everyday use" is about the everyday lives of black women past and present, encircled by family and culture. Its quilt is an emblem of American women's culture itself, an object of communal harmony made by women out of their well-worn clothes. The quilts warms and protects our bodies; it is passed down like mother's wisdom from generation to generation; its designs mirror the most everyday but most profound concerns of all women-marriage, family, love. Like much women's art it is decentered, non-hierarchical, intimate. It is a product of bonding-daughter/mother, woman/woman, domestic/aesthetic, etc. As Barbara Christian aptly notes, "Walker is drawn to the integral and economical process of quilt making as a model for her own craft"; it helps her answer the writer's question, "From whence do I come?" (Guerin, Wilfred L et. al., *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literatur*e, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 230)

A number of feminist linguists have privileged first person autobiographical narrational mode as the most conducive and authentic mode of/for capturing woman's voice. By employing this narrative style coupled with emotive language in the "Everyday Use", Walker seems to reiterate this aesthetic position. This is a language, which, being non-linear has the capacity to move freely in space and time, within and without, and capture emotions, experiences and aspirations in its fold – whether rational or irrational, real and/or imaginative. Though the whole story can be read as an example of this spatio-temporal narrative amorphousness, the first five paragraphs make this narrational characteristic very palpable:

> I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon. A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny, irregular grooves, anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house.
>
> Maggie will be nervous until after her sister goes: she will stand hopelessly in corners, homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs, eying her sister with a mixture of envy and awe. She thinks her sister has held life always in the palm of one hand, that "no" is a word the world never learned to say to her.
>
> You've no doubt seen those TV shows where the child who has "made it" is confronted, as a surprise, by her own mother and father, tottering in weakly from backstage. (A pleasant surprise, of course: What would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?) On TV mother and child embrace and smile into each other's faces. Sometimes the mother and father weep, the child wraps them in her arms and leans across the table to tell how she would not have made it without their help. I have seen these programs.
>
> Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV programme of this sort. Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the stage and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once that she thinks orchids are tacky flowers.
>
> In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing; I can eat pork liver cooked over the open fire minutes after it comes steaming from the hog. One winter I knocked a bull calf straight in the brain between the eyes with a sledge hammer and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall. But of course all this does not show on television. I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake. My hair glistens in the hot bright lights. Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up with my quick and witty tongue.
>
> But this is a mistake. I know even before I wake up. Who ever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue? Who can even imagine me looking a strange white man in the eye? It seems to me I have talked to them always with one foot raised in flight, with my head turned in whichever way is farthest from them. Dee, though. She would always look anyone in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature.

Let us analyse the above extract carefully. The story begins on a very direct note. There is no third-person background information; it emerges slowly through the discursivity of the text/narration itself. The narrative, thus, demands a sympathetic plunge into the mind and milieu of Mamma to understand the intricacies of her situation.

Mama's narrative is an intricate mix of the present and the past, the real and the virtual, anticipation and anxiety, domestic and public, memory and forgetting. For example, in the first paragraph, the poignancy of waiting is expressed through a domestic vocabulary, that concretises the cultural-spatial specificity of Mama's milieu.

In the second paragraph, it is the 'reality' of arrival, for Maggie, that is visualised. Herein the contours of mother-daughter bonding become clear. In the third and fourth paragraph, we have a peep into the 'virtual world of Mama's desires. The fifth paragraph once again jolts us to the world of reality, i.e., the concrete reality of black women's life in contemporary America. Here the narrative language that describes Mama's life comprises 'body language', i.e., it

is suggested through the language/vocabulary of the body. It is a language that derives its intensity from the sphere of her action and duties. Thematically this paragraph foregrounds feminist debate around the real versus ideal female body, i.e., where 'ideal body' is the function of beauty myth propagated by virtual-capitalistic world via a twin process – by denigrating real body as incomplete that needs further remoulding/cosmetic disciplining, and by constructing the coloured body or the labouring body as inferior/ugly. Mama's body bear the mark of her labour, its pressures and pains. Maggie's body bears the mark of burns. Dee is one who has remoulded her body into a status-enhancing spectacle.

The sixth paragraph is in the form of a shift from the virtual to the real. For Mama, the fantasy of virtual world (i.e., the world of T.V.) is a mere dream; it conflicts with the pragmatics of her reality. And this awareness of hers foregrounds the racial dimension gender. The paragraph makes explicit the socio-psychological dimension of Mama's existence. The totality of Mama's existence and her personality, thus are embedded in and emerge from the interstices of this narrative jigsaw puzzle.

A constant comparison and contrast between Maggie and Dee is another prominent structural feature of the narrative. This structural strategy helps in conceptualising the plurality of female experience within the same milieu. This strategy encapsulates another dimension of womanism, viz., womanism refuses to treat black women as a homogeneous monolith; it acknowledges intra racial, intra gender diversity. Unlike, essentialist feminist position, womanism is sensitive to change with time. But it does not patronise 'change with time' indiscriminately. It is premised on a holistic contextualization of all shades of feminist overtures. This aspect of 'womanist conceptualization' is brought to the fore by a nuanced deconstruction of Dee's response to the quilt, the central metaphor of the story.

Gruein et al, in their essay, "In Real Life": Recovering the Feminine Past in "Everyday Use", while explaining the genesis of this story posit:

> In "Everyday Use," Walker's concept of heritage is in part articulated in response to the black power movements of the 1960s, particularly the cultural nationalism that many African Americans felt during that time, with its emphasis upon the appreciation of the African cultural past. According to Christian, Walker's feminism, also born in the 1960s, articulates this response and critiques the short-sightedness of radicals who would have seen the narrator as "that supposedly backward Southern ancestor the cultural nationalists of the North probably visited during the summers of their youth and probably considered behind the times." Walker "gives voice to an entire maternal ancestry often silenced by the political rhetoric of the period." It is her way of "breaking silences and stereotypes about her grandmothers', mothers', sisters' lives." (Gruein, p.231)

Dee is a representative of that typical political rhetoric that the above passage talks about. It is a rhetoric that is more aggressive than mature; showier than subtle; more fiery then reflective. It constitutes the very being of Dee's evolution; she comes out as a being who takes activism as a fad, rather than a commitment. And in doing so she ends up simplifying and commodifying culture, instead of relating to it in any meaningful way. And womanism, here represented through Mama, calls for a critical relatedness with the heritage. The narrative articulates the shallowness and brazenness of Dee's position thus:

> Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy dress to wear to her graduation from high school; black pumps to match a green suit she'd from an old suit somebody gave me. She was determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts. Her eyelids would not flicker for minutes at a time. Often I fought off the temptation to shake her. At sixteen she had a style of her own: and knew what style was.

In the above extract two things happen simultaneously. It showcases Mama's admiration, a kind of awe-stuck appreciation, for Dee's strong likes and dislikes, her confidence and her style. But it also underlines her sense of frustration and consequent distancing from her own culture, in the garb of its backwardness. This ambivalence patterns Dee's acculturation into activism and impinges on her politics. Though Dee grows into a fiery activist, but her radicalism is based on shifting sands of fashion then on any real conviction. Womanism on the other and is premised on organic expansion of one's sensibility and not on mechanical shifts in one's opinion

In contrast Mama's evolution is premised on the solidity of experiential understanding of her cultural past, a critical awareness of her life's passage through the reality of her times:

> I never had an education myself. After second grade the school was closed down. Don't ask me why: in 1927 colored asked fewer questions than they do now...I was always better at a man's job. I used to love

> to milk till I was hooked in the side in '49. Cows are soothing and slow and don't bother you, unless you try to milk them the wrong way.
>
> I have deliberately turned my back on the house. It is three rooms, just like the one that burned, except the roof is tin; they don't make shingle roofs any more. There are no real windows, just some holes cut in the sides, like the portholes in a ship, but not round and not square, with rawhide holding the shutters up on the outside. This house is in a pasture, too, like the other one. No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down. She wrote me once that no matter where we "choose" to live, she will mange to come see us.

The above passage suggests that Mama's consciousness, despite her illiteracy, is rooted in the sense of changing times. It is a consciousness that is acutely aware of one's rights and one's sense of dignity. The moment it has the wherewithal to change its circumstances, it does that, but without snapping its relationship with past values, (as Dee has tended to).

Mama, in fact, puts Dee's feministic-revolutionary stance under critical gaze, when she says, in response to Maggie's query (whether Dee had any friends): "She had a few. Furtive boys in pink shirts hanging about on washday after school. Nervous girls who never laughed. Impressed with her they worshipped the well-turned phrase, the cute shape, the scalding humour that erupted like bubbles in lye. She read to them."

The matter of fact tone in which Mama answers Maggie is very revealing. It posits Dee's activism as something that is forced and that saps the spontaneity of relationships. Here, womanism on the other hand fosters this spontaneity.

The arrival of Dee, along with her boy friend, sets in a train of incidents that clearly bear on the theme of heritage and women's relationship with it. The first thing that the narrative foregrounds, the moment Dee steps out of the car, is the gap between two female locations, one inhabited by Mama and Maggie and the other inhabited by Dee:

> Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go "Uhnnnnh" again. It is her sister's hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears.
>
> "Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!" she says, coming on in that gliding way the dress makes her move. The short stocky fellow with the hair to his navel is all grinning and he follows up with "Asalamalakim, my mother and sister!" He moves to hug Maggie but she falls back, right up against the back of my chair. I feel her trembling there and when I look up I see the perspiration falling off her chin.
>
> "Don't get up," says Dee. Since I am stout it takes something of a push. You can see me trying to move a second or two before I make it. She turns, showing white heels through her sandals, and goes back to the car. Out she peeks next with a Polaroid. She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie and the house. Then she puts the Polaroid in the back seat of the car, and comes up and kisses me on the forehead.

The attempts at the exoticization of black culture are evident in the way Dee, before meeting her mother and sister goes on mechanically clicking the photographs of the house, the cows etc. She is more excited about freezing her erstwhile milieu than responding to and reciprocating the emotion and affection of her mother and sister. The Polaroid, here symbolises the mechanical and not the organic gaze of Dee towards her past.

And whatever interaction she has with her mother, is more in the nature of flaunting of her new identity. Mama has difficulty in adjusting to the brazenness of this new identity. It is an identity which is more in the nature of political posturing. It is completely indifferent to ones cultural location, while ironically, hell bent on proclaiming it aloud. Dee makes Mama an alien in her own (Mama's) house:

> "Well," I say. "Dee."
>
> "No, Mama," she says. "Not 'Dee,' Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"
>
> "What happened to 'Dee'?" I wanted to know.

"She's dead," Wangero said. "I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me."

"You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie," I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her "Big Dee" after Dee was born.

"But who was she named after?" asked Wangero.

"I guess after Grandma Dee," I said.

"And who was she named after?" asked Wangero.

"Her mother," I said, and saw Wangero was getting tired.

"That's about as far back as I can trace it," I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches.

… … …

"Uhnnnh," I heard Maggie say.

"There I was not," I said, "before 'Dicie' cropped up in our family, so why should I try to trace it that far back?"

He just stood there grinning, looking down on me like somebody inspecting a Model A car. Every once in a while he and Wangero sent eye signals over my head.

"How do you pronounce this name?" I asked.

"You don't have to call me by it if you don't want to," said Wangero.

"Why shouldn't I?" I asked. "If that's what you want us to call you, we'll call you."

"I know it might sound awkward at first," said Wangero.

"I'll get used to it," I said. "Ream it out again."

The author thus problematises the notion of identity and cultural-rootedness inherent in radical political stances through this extended conversation in the story. Having done so, she goes on to highlight the significance of 'womanist' culture. The rest of the story illustrates the meaning of womanist tradition, here narrated through the symbols of churn top and the quilt.

"Oh, Mama!" she cried… "I never knew how lovely these benches are. You can feel the rump prints," she said, running her hands underneath her and along the bench. Then she gave a sigh and her hand closed over Grandma Dee's butter dish. "That's it!" she said. "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you if I could have." She jumped up from the table and went over in the corner where the churn stood, the milk in it clabber by now. She looked at the churn and looked at it.

"This churn top is what I need," she said, "Didn't Uncle Buddy whittle it out of a tree you all used to have?"

"Yes," I said.

"Uh huh," she said happily. "And I want the dasher, too."

"Uncle Buddy whittle that, too?" asked the barber.

Dee (Wangero) looked up at me.

"Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash," said Maggie so low you almost couldn't hear her. "His name was Henry, but they called him Stash."

"Maggie's brain is like an elephant's," Wangero said, laughing. "I can use the churn top as a centrepiece for the alcove table," she said, sliding a plate over the churn, "and I'll think of something artistic to do with the dasher."

The preceding extract juxtaposes the smugness of Dee's perspective towards tradition with that of Maggie and Mama. Dee's re-located perspective (a consequence of her 'identity politics') reduces the living tradition, here symbolised through the churn, into an exotic artefact. At the same time her 'intellectual' superciliousness, instead of appreciating Maggie's organic rootedness within this culture, 'others' her as an inferior being. Her attitude towards both Maggie and the churn showcases how radical rhetoric many a times recoils on the very people, whose cause it is supposed to champion. This fact is further highlighted the moment one contrasts the handling of the churn by Dee and Mama respectively:

> When she finished wrapping the dasher the handle stuck out. I took it for a moment in my hands. You didn't even have to look close to see where hands pushing the dasher up and down to make butter had left a kind of sink in the wood. In fact, there were a lot of small sinks; you could see where thumbs and fingers had sunk into the wood. It was beautiful light yellow wood, from a tree that grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had lived.

For mama churn is a symbol of a symbiotic Afro-American tradition. It is a tradition of bonding, of mutual nurturance. Similarly the quilt for Mama is a not just a utilitarian item but a living tradition. Alice Walker, in fact uses the imagery of the quilt to suggest what womanism is all about. In its warps and wefts is enmeshed/woven the history/heirloom of black woman, and man. And in its "everyday use" lies the longevity of the culture:

> After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the trunk at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.
>
> "Mama," Wangero said sweet as a bird. "Can I have these old quilts?"
>
> I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed.
>
> "Why don't you take one or two of the others?" I asked. "These old things was just done by me and Big Dee from some tops your grandma pieced before she died."
>
> "No," said Wangero. "I don't want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine."
>
> "That'll make them last better," I said.
>
> "That's not the point," said Wangero. "These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!" She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them.
>
> "Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her," I said, moving up to touch the quilts. Dee (Wangero) moved back just enough so that I couldn't reach the quilts. They already belonged to her.
>
> "Imagine!" she breathed again, clutching them closely to her bosom.
>
> "The truth is," I said, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas."
>
> She gasped like a bee had stung her.
>
> "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use."
>
> "I reckon she would," I said. "God knows I been saving' em for long enough with nobody using' em. I hope she will!" I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style.
>
> "But they're priceless!" she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!"
>
> "She can always make some more," I said. "Maggie knows how to quilt."
>
> Dee (Wangero) looked at me with hatred. "You just will not understand. The point in these quilts, these quilts!"
>
> "Well," I said, stumped. "What would you do with them?"
>
> "Hang them," she said. As if that was the only thing you could do with quilts.

Maggie by now was standing in the door. I could almost hear the sound her feet made as they scraped over each other.

"She can have them, Mama," she said, like somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her. "I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts."

I looked at her hard. She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuffand it gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look. It was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself. She stood there with her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her skirt. She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at

her. This was Maggie's portion. This was the way she knew God to work.

When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open.

"Take one or two of the others," I said to Dee.

But she turned without a word and went out to Hakim-a-barber.

"You just don't understand," she said, as Maggie and I came out to the car.

"What don't I understand?" I wanted to know.

"Your heritage." She said. And then she turned to Maggie, kissed her, and said, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it."

She put on some sunglasses that hid everything above the tip of her nose and her chin.

Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car dust settle, I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed.

Dee approaches culture by deconextualising it, while Maggie and Mama relate to it with a kind of 'organic criticality.' While the former stance is mere rhetoric, the later is womanist.

In one of her interviews (quoted in Guerin et al), Alice Walker identifies three cycles of black women she would explore in her writings:

1. First are those "who were cruelly exploited, spirits and bodies mutilated, relegated to the most narrow and confining lives, sometimes driven to madness". This cycle is evident in the portraits of women in her novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) and in the short stories of *In Love and Trouble* (1973).
2. The women of Walker's second cycle constitute those who are not so much physically but psychically abused as a result of wanting desperately to participate in mainstream American life.
3. Those in the third cycle are black women who gain a new consciousness of what Christian terms "their right to be themselves and to shape the world," as seen in the heroines of *Meridian* (1976) and in *The Color Purple*, as well as in a second collection of short stories, *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981) (Guerin, p.232)

Guerin argues, and rightly so, that "'Everyday Use' contains examples of all three cycles. Maggie does not know her own worth: her mother says she walks like "a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car." Dee inhabits the second cycle; though she appears not to want to assimilate into white society, she does not appreciate her own heritage until it has become fashionable to do so. Though her mother applauds Dee's strength of self, she is saddened by her denigration of her own people's past. The mother prefigures the women of Walker's third cycle in her self-reliance but simultaneous connectedness to her past. As an older woman, she is in position in her little "community" to pass along her wisdom to the woman of the first cycle, Maggie, and perhaps, also even to Dee, and in so doing she becomes a fresh, modern, believable character…The mother's sudden snatching away of the quilts from Dee and presentation of them to Maggie demonstrates a rejection of stereotypes". (ibid, p.232)

Guerin further argues that in "Everyday Use" that Dee, who tells her mother that she just "doesn't understand," comes off for most readers as the one who doesn't understand. Dee's bossiness and her flashes of hypocrisy foreground her pretentious feminist's ideal, for womanist is one who makes a success of herself despite overwhelming odds, and doesn't use it as a pretext to intimidate others. She has managed to move to the city, get an education, and get a good job. She is politically involved and active. She, in contrast to Maggie, who symbolises past, may be future but not without blemishes The narrator acknowledges this when she says: Dee "washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand." (ibid, pp.233-34)

Again to quote Guerin et al, at the end of "Everyday Use," Dee has accepted the things passed on as her heritage but not the spirit that Maggie has accepted. She has allowed heritage to become…an "abstraction rather than a living idea," and hence subordinated people to artefacts, elevated culture above community Dee is defeated, but to assert

only that is to miss the deeper point of the story, which attempts to redefine black feminism in terms that will reconcile Dee's effort with Maggie's traditionalism: their mother is the bridge that connects past and future. She is a typical example of Walker's Southern black female character who insists upon challenging conventions, "on her right to be herself". She brings to mind Walker's refusal to use the term feminist and her insistence on using womanist instead. A an epigraph to *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Walker gives four definitions of the term "womanist." First, it is "a black feminist or feminist of color" derived from "womanish," a black folk expression of mothers to female children who are "outrageous, audacious, or wilful," who want to know more than is good for them, who want to be grown up (too soon). Second, the term can refer to "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually," who "appreciates and prefers women's culture,….women's emotional flexibility,….and women's strength." Third, the womanist "Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves and Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless." And, finally, "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." (ibid, p.234)

GITHA HARIHARAN: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Githa Hariharan, who writes in English, grew up in Bombay and Manila. She continued her studies in the US and worked with public television there. Returning to India in 1979, she has worked in Mumbai, Chennai and New Delhi, initially as an editor in a publishing house, and later as a free lancer. She is married with two sons, and lives in New Delhi. Her first book *The Thousand Faces of Night* won the Commonwealth Prize for the best debut novel. In this novel she has used myths to examine contemporary women's lives. This strategy of juxtaposing the mythical with the contemporary helps us to understand women's lives as a turbulent process, which on the surface seems rather placid and devoid of event.

Githa Hariharan's narratives bring in the sights and sound of deep South in Indian English Writing from a distinctly feminist perspective. Her works etch out women–centric agenda by breaking gender stereotypes and by reflecting sharply on the crisis of our times. This however does not mean that her solutions are simplistic, out of context or misplaced. Like other major female writers her art is based on an awareness of the complexities of Indian situation, and brings to bear on it a multi-pronged focus, both locational and narrative. For example in her award winning novella, *The Thousand Faces of Night,* she approaches the heterogeneity of Indian woman through, at least four, distinct gazes: while Mayamma and Grandma are rooted in tradition and view life from its framework, Sita negotiates life by appropriating tradition through modernity and in Devi we have the seeds of feminist rebellion, but not exactly.

Similarly, *The Art of Dying*, a collection of short stories, offers its reader a feast of life's plurality and variety. While on the one hand we have Revathi (In "Revathi") reeling under her suppressed sexuality, on the other hand we have the grandmother (in "The Remains of the Feast") who gives in, deliberately and with gay abandon, to hitherto suppressed tastes and desires while on the verge of death.

All her works are marked by a different writing style. While in *The Thousand faces of Night* she employs a distinct narrative method for each of its three sections, that shift from first to third person, ultimately to merge into a narrative mesh where all the characters seem to make a simultaneous statement, in her latest novel *In Times of Seize,* Githa Hariharan seems to leave behind all her earlier storytelling techniques – i.e., from the elliptical path or the ambiguous note of her first novella she moves on to a more clear-cut treatment of her material.

In Times of Seize is Hariharan's latest novel. As always, it also highlights the need for commitment in writing. Her stories are replete with recounting of various kinds of inequalities and power struggles.

Her need to act on her beliefs led her to file a writ petition in the Supreme Court relating to a mother's right to be a guardian of her children in 1995. Her stand was vindicated when the Supreme Court upheld her petition in a judgment given in 1999. Explaining her involvement with women's issues, Hariharan says, "The question of inequalities that women face became an entry point to the exercise of my choices." And vocalising her beliefs has never been a problem.

GITHA HARIHARAN'S WORKS:

In Times of Seize. New Delhi: Viking/Penguin, 2002

When Dreams Travel. New Delhi: Picador, 1999.

The Thousand Faces of Night. New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 1992 (Winner of the 1993 Commonwealth's Best First Book Award)

The Art of Dying. New Delhi: Penguin, 1993. (Collection of Short Stories that contains "The Will")
The Ghosts of Vasu Master. New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 1994.

SUMMARY OF "THE WILL":

"The Will" is an ironic deconstruction of patriarchy. Its story revolves around Sushila, a widow and her attempts to live with 'dignity' after her husband's death. She, prior to her widowhood, had lived a 'protected life' under the benevolent but insulating patronage of her husband, Raghu. His sudden demise shocks her and renders her anchorless.

The story starts with reading of Raghu's will to the members of the family by Raghu's lawyer. It apportions his property – all his fixed and fluid assets – equally and justifiably among his children, but keeps Sushila 'free of any burden of financial details and family responsibilities'. She only gets an envelope – containing a long letter, handwritten by Raghu – as her due inheritance. A balm to her conscience, worries and fears, the content of letter, through its contingency plan for her life, seeks to cushion, nay guide her future life in his absence. Now onwards, this letter becomes her talisman, her prayer, and her '*mantra'* for life.

As instructed/advised by Raghu in his letter, she agrees to segment her life among her children. Instead of having an independent space of her own she agrees to circulate through the 'spatiality' of her children and adjust to their way of living. Under this arrangement she stays with her elder son for the first quarter of the year. During this stay Raghu's advice, i.e., "be one with the children but not of them", guides her to respectability in her elder son's household and his friend circle. She stands apart like a friend giving her opinions if insisted. Every one, including herself, is awestruck by her confidence, her profound and 'philosophical' homilies and managerial acumen. Her days are full and satisfying. She however, is acutely aware of the source of her positive energy and knows that it issues from the letter with which she begins and ends her day.

After spending four months with her elder son, she goes to her daughter. There she helps her with the cooking and looking after her two sons. Even with this busy routine, she keeps half an hour in the afternoon for her prayer and meditation. It is time when no one is supposed to disturb her. Everyone, except the wild and untrained pet of the family, respects her injunction. This pet trails her everywhere and, one day even drenches her husband's letter in its urine. This outrageous act of the pet renders some portions of the letter illegible. She is outraged but soon, following the advice in the letter, recomposes herself. She dries the letter carefully, locks it in a box full of camphor tablets to suppress the smell of urine.

One day when she is about to leave her daughter's house, the letter slips out of her hands and flows out of the window and down seven storeys. She madly searches for it but in vain. All of a sudden, to everyone's surprise, her sense of safety, confidence slips away from her. Here on she seems to lose all her energy and becomes lifeless. Now asked her for an opinion, she fails to express despite her trial. The family deciphers the changed circumstances of her life as belated symptoms of a sense of loss and loneliness in the aftermath of her husband's death.

When Sushila reaches her younger son's house in Calcutta, she is dull and listless. Everyone treats her as an ageing invalid, a grief stricken widow. One afternoon, her seven-year-old grandson comes to her for help in his homework. His request, "Will you listen to me read?" bewilders her as to "what to do?" But the child, encouraged by her smile, starts reading out to her, and proves to be revelatory and transformative experience for her. His reading reiterates for her the lofty nobility of patriarchal values, and once again re-anchors her life. She gets back her talisman; she regains her 'mantra' to live.

ANALYSING "THE WILL" FROM GENDER PERSPECTIVE:

In her story "The Will" Githa Hariharan brings out many facets of female-life-in-the male world. It showcases how patriarchy works, how it sediments itself into the being of woman and perpetuates itself even in the absence of a patriarch. The author etches out the contours of patriarchy through Sushila's story, her worldview, and the turn of events in her life after the death of her husband, Raghu. In the process, the author enters into a debate around the notions of gender, the institutions in which it is embedded and its consequences for woman.

Patriarchy creates an aura around woman. It conceives of woman as an abstraction sans reality and a will of her own. In this scheme of things adherence to male precepts is more important than material needs. As long as she is able to mouth those precepts and live by them, she is ideal. Her identity, dignity and authority derive from and hinges

on male-given normative framework. Outside this framework, she has no life, no meaning. Bereft of this aphoristic anchor, she is reduced to a non-entity. Her sense of self is a mere construction, not an act of self-volition. Sushila is a typical embodiment of this image of womanhood and willingly colludes in its propagation. The moment she loses 'her will', i.e., her husband's letter, a document symbolising patriarchal normativity, she loses her moorings and her interest in life. She regains the sense of her self-hood through the replication of same precepts in the form of her grandson's reading. While one man, i.e., Raghu 'wills' her how to lead her life in the absence of his physical presence, the other, i.e., her seven years old grandson, resurrects for Sushila her anchor in life. The author thus shows how the patriarchy circumscribes woman's life and moulds and remoulds it, both consciously and unconsciously. While Raghu denotes one aspect of patriarchal regulation, her grandson denotes its other face. Read between the lines, Sushila's passage from Raghu to her grandson is a passage from one patriarchal construction to another. Patriarchy is eternal; it only changes its form.

That Sushila is a passive recipient of patriarchal norms is made apparent from the beginning of the story. The family has gathered to listen to the will left behind by Raghu. Even in his absence, his presence is very palpable in the house and in Sushila's demeanour. She is still wrapped in his memories and does not want to shake off this illusion:

> His spirit will always be with us, said the lawyer, as he opened the thick, sealed envelop with the will inside…The family was all there – the two sons, the daughter, the son-in-law, and the daughter-in-law. The children had been sent out into the garden to play, and they heard an occasional shout or a squeal that floated in, as if only that, their amoral fickle merriment, was real. It was the funeral thickness in the living room that was the dream.
>
> Sushila sat on her dead husband's stuffed leather chair, waiting. Her smooth little hands lay still on her lap. Such an ideal couple, condoling visitors whispered to each other. A true meeting of minds, said the paunchy bureaucrat devoted to Shakespeare. What, they all asked each other, is she going to do without him?
>
> When they had finally taken away the stiff, cold body, so unlike the husband she knew, Sushila felt better immediately. Raghu had never sat still; and if he did, it was to devise, chalk out, review, some plan of action: his junior colleague had to be transferred before he became an embarrassment; his second son deserved a promotion; Sushila had to train the new cook. No detail was too insignificant for him; no concern too humble or trifling. How could a mere heart attack reduce a healthy man in his prime to that passive, wooden object, lying stretched out on the carpet, his sharp ears and nose blocked will obscene bulges of cotton?
>
> When the body was taken away, Sushila felt him come back. Raghu would never desert her. He would have, if she knew him at all, worked out some contingency plan.
>
> The will, announced the lawyer, like a proud hostess leading them to her well-laden table. Please listen carefully.
>
> And Sushila heard Raghu's voice again. She plaited and unplaited the fringe of her sari's pallav, just as she had done years ago when she first met him. My dearest wife and children, read the lawyer. Death is inevitable. So is grief. But it need not be vulgar exhibition. I must begin by asking all of you to pull yourselves together.
>
> Sushila looked at her crumpled pallav with a twinge of guilt. He hated nervous, silly women. She drew the pallav closer around her shoulders, and sat upright again, a picture of dignity.

The opening section is very revealing in its details. Sushila is not so much bothered about the material assets, as she is bothered about how her husband would have reacted to her behaviour. So over-powering is this internalisation that it frames her very being, and regulates her responses and her memories. The public opinion – "such an ideal couple, condoling visitors whispered to each other"- is what matters to her. It encapsulates for her, her success as a housewife, i.e., as an ideal soul mate, a perfect foil for her husband. She had been under the complete sway of Raghu's aura. However, the way she invokes this aura, ironically foregrounds her own restrictive role within the household. And this sway continues even after his death: "And Sushila heard Raghu's voice again…that bewitched listeners into obedience." Sushila has thus lived a life of "bewitched obedience', completely moulding her being to the dictates of public opinion, and Raghu's dictates. She has internalised his desire as the prop of her life. Even now she is waiting for these props: "Raghu would never desert her. He would have, if she knew him at all, worked out some contingency plan". What

she considers to be a fulfilling life had been spent in the spaces Raghu/patriarchy had assigned her: the four-walls of the household and the kitchen within it. Even within this domestic space, it was only through a strict adherence to male precepts that she could acquire a semblance of dignity.

While other members of the family get material assets, Sushila only inherits an envelope: "The lawyer will give you a second envelope: this is for you. Keep it with you always, and use it well".

To sum up, the opening sequence – in its spatio-temporal and narrative arrangement – foregrounds family as a hierarchal and not a homogenous unit. The declarations of " the will" further reiterates the familial-power-hierarchy and Sushila's position within it. As a mother, she may be in a position of authority, but it ironically emanates from Raghu's chair. He still remote controls her thoughts and actions. His will is a re-embodiment of his spirit and would guide Sushila's life and govern her worldview.

Another facet of patriarchy that gets highlighted in the opening sequence is role of appearance. For a woman her role-appearance is more important than her real self: " He hated nervous, silly women. She drew the pallav closer around her shoulders, and sat upright again, a picture of dignity."(p.147)

Raghu is a typical conventional husband who believes in clear demarcation of spaces and duties meant for husband and wife. He is a protector, she is protected; he is a lover, she is beloved: "I have never let you cross a busy road alone."(p.147) Her capacities and capabilities are well chalked out by Raghu/male. "…a second envelope: this is for you. Keep it with you always, and use it well."(p.147) She has never been allowed to do anything on her own. Now a question "what should I do?" perplexes her. The question seems "to be alien to her, so monstrously large, that her lower lip trembled."(p.148) The letter becomes her talisman imparting to her the strategies of management. "You will be with them, and not of them"(p.148). Agency of opinion comes to her by her husband.

There is a parallel between a servant and a woman. Both should be given fair treatment but at the same time should not be spoiled and should be made to realise that the owner/male is in control.

As instructed/advised by Raghu in his letter, she agrees to segment her life among her children. Instead of having an independent space of her own she agrees to circulate through the 'spatiality' of her children and adjust to their way of living. The letter contains general moralities for all occasions for Sushila:

You will be with them, Raghu had told her, but not of them. You will stand apart like a friendly, tranquil island.

I will visit you first, she said to her elder son. My things are already packed.

In her new room in Madras, Sushila waited till she was alone. Then she quickly unpacked the letter, smothered it open carefully, and kept it on top of her silk saris, using a thick stick of sandalwood as a paperweight.

The days flew by, and they saw, with surprise, then resignation, that she was no silent widowed mother in the background, Armed with her talisman, the headily-fragrant letter of do's and don'ts, Sushila found that she too had opinions.

Her daughter-in-law, she discovered, was far too lenient with the servants. Of course you must be fair to them, she told the younger woman. But, she said earnestly, don't spoil them. They have to understand that you are in control.

Don't breathe down their necks, Raghu had written to her. No one wants a nagging mother an inch behind him all the time. But watch carefully, from a distance, and step forward when you must.

The son found her new confidence a little unnerving. But she was greatly admired by their friends-What profundity, they said-how philosophical she is! You are lucky you have a mother like that instead of a helpless, mindless burden.

Sushila heard some of this and her cheeks glowed with pleasure. She had little general moralities for all occasions-if they could persuade her to advise them. I don't want to interfere, she would say in her soft, diffident voice. Who am I to tell you what is right and wrong?

But they would insist, and she gave in.

Don't get involved, she told them. Keep your distance from other people's problems. Don't pamper your sons, they will expect too much later. Generosity is fine, she told them. But too much of it is foolishness.

So her days, though she rarely left the house, were full and satisfying. She couldn't believe she was managing so well – and Raghu gone just three months back! She read his letter at least once a day. It was the first thing she looked at when she woke up; and she inhaled its perfume every night before she fell asleep, like a deep, complete prayer.

When she had been with them for four months, she spoke to her son. Buy my ticket, she told him. I must visit your sister now.

Stay with us a little longer, he said. Aren't you happy here?

I will come back next year, she said firmly. Contentment comes of the heart; she received like a well trained parrot, not of the house.

> He was puzzled then, and tried to remember where he had heard that before. Where did she pick up these self-righteous morsels he thought, and went to see about her ticket.
>
> In her daughter's untidy flat in Bombay, Sushila found she had 'much to do. She insisted that she would help with the cooking and the children-two rough boys who seemed to love their wild, untrained dog more than anything else. Women are amiable when they are useful, she told her daughter, and set to work.
>
> She was so tired at night when she finally made her way to bed, that she was half asleep by the time she read the letter. So she set aside a half hour every afternoon for it, and she told them it was her time for prayer and meditation.

His letter is her mantra, her prayer (149-150), to be chanted once a day if she is to survive meaningfully. She draws all her strength from the letter. Letter patterns her life. It is her substitute for Raghu, and she trains herself to parrot its commandments mechanically. She basks in its self-righteous morsels, like, for example: "Women are amiable when they are useful"(p.150).

When Sushila loses this letter, she loses the anchor that had patterned her life as a dignified widow/mother. It leads to a loss of her 'personality, which sets in a sense of alienation with her surroundings: "She was alone, a widow"(p.151) She loses her male given articulation. She becomes silent. Her children are aghast by her metamorphosis into a 'zombie-like mother' (p.151). As long as she personified the image of ideal motherhood she was respected, but now every one wants to get rid of her. The changed circumstances of Sushila's life bring to the fore yet another aspect of patriarchy. Male assigns the woman physical-symbolic spaces. Her presence within these spaces remains meaningful only till she, her demeanour and her body correspond with the notional qualities of these spaces. The moment this correspondence snaps, or she fails to articulate the spatio-cultural norms, she is reduced into an incoherent and hence unwanted 'zombie'. To preserve her meaningful spatial presence, it becomes imperative that she re-learns and rearticulates patriarchy. This is what she exactly achieves via her grandson reading out his lessons to her:

Then one afternoon, when she lay in bed, her mind a grey, floating blankness, her seven-year-old grandson came in the room.

There's no one at home to help me with my homework, he complained. His pompous little cheeks filled out with indignation. Will you listen to me read?

She smiled at him, but felt a terrible bewilderment. What was she to do? But he, encouraged by her smile; opened his book, the one with the two angelic children on the cover, a boy and a girl hand in hand, looking up at a brilliant, sunlit sky.

A cheerful wife is the joy of life, he chanted. Standing pools gather dirt. Spare the rod and spoil the child. A good husband makes a good wife.

Ah, she said, and suddenly, like a rebirth, she remembered who she was. She looked at the child, who had stopped his sing-song recitation, and was looking at her expectantly.

Did I make a mistake? He asked.

Oh no, she said, her mind filling up again, in grateful, familiar little trickles. What noble sentiments! Wonderful! Please, please go on.

Through the above description, the author pitchforks the questions of patriarchy from familial to the sphere of epistemology, education and acculturation.

UNDERSANDING SUJATA SANKRANTI THROUGH HER WORK:

According to Ranga Rao, the publication of *The Warp and Weft and Other Short Stories* in 1998 was a literary event of multiple significance. Sankaranti being Keralite, this work is naturally suffused with the sights and sounds of Kerala, and as such pitches further the celebration of regional identity that started with Arundhiti Roy's *The God Of Small Things*. It simultaneously signals the quiet coming of age of the Indian short story in English.

As a writer Sujata Sankranti burst into literary horizon in 1998 by winning the First Prize in the Commonwealth Short Story Competition for her story "The Warp and the Weft", from which her first anthology derives its name. The collection contains seventeen stories of differing lengths, with a variety of characters, themes, and points of view and styles.

The most conspicuous aspect of Sankarant's oeuvre is the eminent readability of stories and the 'shortness' of her stories. Elucidating the second aspect of her art, Ranga Rao says that her stories enjoy the first attraction of their genre: they are short. (The original piece that won the Commonwealth Award in 1998 was less than 600 words.) In addition Sankaranti's stories are remarkable for their terse openings: "The opening paras, critical in any short story, are fluently done, unostentatious, inducing smooth instant reader entry; more often than not, dramatic; and the endings sophisticated, crisp, and often teasing and ambiguous, intriguing" explicates Rao.

Her first collection of short fiction stands out for its impressive range: If the "Musk deer" is narrated in the vein of "O'Henry-ian" delectable detective-twists, "You and I" and the "Pursuit" come out as psychological dramas. While on one hand she dabbles in social satires, on the other she specializes in poignantly ironic and intuitively suggestive character sketches. And all her stories betray shades of feminist concerns. If in "Mahadev's Garden" one comes across such feminist sallies as "What is delicate about being a girl?" in "The Warp and the Weft", we have the narrator drawing her strength from her memories as a mother and a house-wife. But this poignancy is soon shattered by the cynical riposte of Bhagwanti, yet another character in "The Warp and the Weft":

> "My husband? The last time I had set my eyes on him was thirteen years ago. He left when Shalini was two years old. I tell you, it has been good riddance. He had no job. Just sat at home, eating, drinking and sleeping! In fact, I threw him out. How many mouths could I feed? If I had given birth to a son he might have come back to claim him. A daughter meant only responsibility. So he never showed himself again!"

Sankranti's aesthetic credo demands the art of self-effacement; there is little autobiography: it is, most of the time, invention; the author performs the vanishing trick with herself. Within the seamless structure of her stories is embedded a texture that is unmistakably Indian. Her stories breathe the spirit of Kerala - and India - of today; Gandhi, Jinnah, Marx and Lenin, Jesus Christ and Dr. Ambedkar; Michael Jackson and Valentine's Day. It is a world in flux: "the oil mill had disappeared, so also the paddy fields. In their place, stood a huge building...a heart centre ("Fulfilment"). It is a world where Vishnu-stuti and Siva-stuti co-exist with stereo music. It is a world where NRIs jostle with the confused natives: the narrator of "The Garage Sale" corrects his mother; his wife is "not American, but Korean".

Sankranti's literay canvass is quite crowded. Here we have an impressive range of characters; children, lonely kids, women of all age and every disposition, caste and class. However her stories focus on victims – terminally ill women, (The Warp and the Weft"), an unjustly dismissed bank clerk ("You and I").

Indirection, understatement and an emotional brevity mark Sankranti's style. She conveys the plight of her characters without being mushy. The three 'women' of the title story are a good example of this aspect of her narrative style. These three women represent three age-groups: the first woman absorbs her own misery and with great poise and pity views the grief of her own family; the second woman is a little girl of nine: in the end it is she who lends her shoulder to her sorrowing mother ("Alfonsa strokes her mother's hand and holds her heaving body in her tender arms"). The most articulate is the third woman, Bhagwanti: all her life she has been barren; she remarks wryly, "But something is now growing in me after all."

Her characters may tread life of anguish, but they don't embody ennui. Even Bhagwanti's cynicism is diluted at the plight of Alfonsa in "The Warp and the Weft".

Sankranti's outstanding gift is her compassion: "...those half-naked kids greedily drinking chalk-white kanji, poured out in coconut shells - with makeshift spoons, fashioned out of the leaves of the jackfruit tree. Those one-eyed, two-eyed coconut shells, the skull-shaped grinning coconut shells and the leafy spoons haunted me even in my dreams" ("Distant Summer"). In story after story in this unpretentious volume, amazingly, it adds up, softly, inevitably; victims who don't wear their hearts on their sleeves: all engaged in various degrees of defiance: challenge social handicap, oppression, disease and death, and remain unvanquished, a pride of underdogs.

The creative spirit in action aims at a single goal: amalgamation. Sankranti's humanism continually brings people together; she hates divided families, warring couples. This life principle knows no boundaries; like a garden creeper it does not care where her property ends and the neighbour' begins. It cuts across classes: Sankranti' agents in this agreeable mission are nondescript people, humble servants. "Bahadur took his duty most conscientiously and had stuck to his post like a sentinel"("he Mirage". In "The Window" the lonely child receives comfort from the sensitive maid: "Susie had never looked so dear or dignified. He buried his head into her apron - smelling of detergents and

lotions - and hugged her gratefully." Not just humanism; perhaps more properly, it is Indian humanism: for strikingly, in a world of jousting couples or disintegrating families, anxious efforts are made to bring the family together; as in the symbolically titled "Mirage": "Mirage should live. Without Mirage, there is no life". Sankranti is engaged in exploring pleasures and problems of human integration. Building bridges comes naturally to Indian writers; convergence matters.

Sankranti does not indulge in verbal pyrotechnics. Most of the time the language is moulded by the theme; the author stakes all on her creative powers; the tone is just right. By way of illustration we can see how the author delineates sensuously the secular delight in "The Thirteenth day":

> Karthi sniffed at the air, taking in all the flavours and fragrance wafting around. The sweet smell of the smoking homemade coconut oil. The crisp golden banana chips! She ran around the pandals and stood staring at those sweaty men perched on rickety stools, stirring rice and milk in huge cauldrons over the naked fire. She watched with fascination, the damask-white concoction of milk and rice - foaming and surfing over the rims.

Sankranti adopts the translator's style occasionally to help out the readers: "When Amma grew emotional, she pronounced the word 'America' very proudly with the stress on the 'k' sound as though America was a jathikka, a nutmeg, or a pavakka, a bittergourd!"

The Indian character of the volume is underscored by occasional Indianisms her characters delve in: "Even a worm trapped in them would coil around my neck" ("The Warp and the Weft"). Shankrant's stories are "prose lyrics", the "capsules of imagined life" that count, they make us understand and live life vicariously in all its hues.

SUMMARY OF "THE WARP AND THE WEFT":

"The Warp and the Weft" is a story of three female characters, all suffering from cancer and sharing the same hospital ward. It comprises three short vignettes, encapsulating the lives of these women. These vignettes are narrated through the perspective and responses of the first narrator- a nameless fictional-persona, distinct from the author.

Despite her waning health, the narrator anchors her life through recollection of her busy routine that revolved around household chores. These reflections help her cope with the dread of disease and death and thus enables her to negotiate her present surroundings – the muffled moans, sobs, shrill cries and sleepless nights. The satisfaction she had derived from her role as housewife still sustains her and gives her happiness and a sense of fulfilment. Her household chores gave her a sense of life. She wants this happiness to flow from her to her children and back to her. She does not want her illness to disrupt the happiness of her children. Though she feels sorry and sad for the damage cancer has wrought on her body, yet she is equally sensitive to the strain her illness has caused to her husband. She is in a dilemma – whether to hold back these moments of love and care or to stretch them to infinity.

The second vignette captures the story of Alfonsa, a nine-year-old child, who suffers from leukaemia. The hospital inmates contribute in their own ways to celebrate her birthday three months in advance, fearing that she may not survive till her actual day of birth. Her mother, controlling her emotions, prepares a train-shaped cake, to indulge Alfonsa's fancy for moving objects like aeroplanes, trains, chariots etc. She knows that her daughter loves to drive in a speeding car, to spin and swirl in a merry-go-round. Both the parents do their best to keep their daughter happy till her end. This year, the mother has selected something special as a return gift for the children invited. This gift – a cute figurine looks like a solitary angel, lonely and lost like Alfonsa herself. If kept long, this gift would make the children cherish the memory of Alfonsa long after she is gone.

Alfona was born to her parents after ten years of heart-rending prayers. Having been born prematurely, they had difficult times in bringing her up, and now they have to prepare themselves for her pre-mature death. All the while they had scrupulously endeavoured to hide the fact of her illness from her.

Alfonsa is very excited on/about her birthday. When her mother arrives with cake and gifts, she rattles off the story of the whole day in a single breath. She acquaints her about the gifts – a silver cross in a black silk thread and a shining black leather-bound copy of the Bible – given to her by Mother Superior and her class teacher respectively. She asks her mother to remind Mother Superior about holding a special exam for her so that she can be promoted to the next class. Every one present seems to be a part of this innocent illusion of hers and pretends to be happy in her

happiness. Though all of them know that Alfonsa's end is near, they, nevertheless, wish for a miracle that may save her life.

In the evening the whole ward is in a celebratory mood. Alfonsa's friends flock around her, wishing her 'Happy Birthday'. Suddenly Preeti, Alfonsa's best friend, unaware of the 'conspiracy' of the adults asks Alfonsa the reason for advancing her birthday celebrations. Before Alfonsa's mother could intervene, Manish, the boy next door ruptures the illusion by saying that Alfonsa is sick, and she may not survive until June. The jubilant atmosphere turns into a gloomy one, full of sobs and silences. While the mother tries to shield her daughter from the onslaught of this truth/ verdict by folding her to her bosom, Alfonsa disarms every one with her smile and calm assurance that she would recover and have a long life. She reposes her faith in others' prayers and blessings. In a poignant reversal of roles, Alfonsa,who needs a tender stroke, strokes her mother's head and holds her heaving body in her tender arms. Her buoyancy surprises everyone.

Bhagwanti's life constitutes the third vignette of the story. She does not like Nandu, her stepson who is the only one to visit her regularly. Only he seems to care for her. But she behaves violently on the days he visits her. She misses Kishore, for her, he is the only one who belongs to her.

Kishore, her adopted son wanted to go abroad. When her husband refused to finance Kishore's trip, she sold her jewellery and sent him to London, where he has settle down. He has married a foreigner and has also called his blood parents to London. In the last ten years he, whom she has given the right to call her 'ma,' has not visited her even once. On the other hand, Nandu, who calls her 'bari ma', gets her rebukes and abuses only. She holds him responsible for her husband not loving Kishore.

Bhagwanti has always been accused of being barren. Her experiences have made her so bitter that she does not spare even herself. She sees in cancerous growth a cynical solace for her barrenness. Despite her illness, she has not parted with the keys of her *tijori*. She has made a will giving all her property to Kishore. She thinks that it is the greed for property which pulls Nandu and her relatives to her bed in the hospital. She thinks that everyone, except Kishore –who has never visited her, and perhaps will never visit her – wishes her only evil. She visualises all her so-called relatives as villains, waiting for her death so as to scavenge on her wealth. She is determined not to give up before them and their wish.

DETAILED ANALYSES OF "THE WARP AND THE WEFT":

Though not informed by any overt feminist stance, Sujatha Sankranti's "The Warp and the Weft", in its aesthetic and narrative arrangement, betrays a nuanced understanding of female consciousness. In the process, it foregrounds some of the issues concerned with feminist aesthetics and feminist world-view. It is a story of three women, each encapsulating a distinct perspective towards life, and in doing so, suggesting the plurality of female consciousness beyond gender politics. The detailed reading of the story that follows is an attempt to understand this aspect of Sujatha Sankranti's oeuvre.

The story begins on a very straightforward note. It directly plunges the readers into the mind of its narrator. Narrated in first person, this psychological exploration seems to underline autobiography as a preferred mode of female story telling. But the way Sujatha Sanktranti deploys this style, despite the subject matter of the story, i.e., the terminal illness of the narrating persona, does not allow it to become maudlin. It is a narration that is very sensuous, has a keen eye for suggestive details, and is economical with emotions:

> No strength left. Even to toss and turn. The coarse bed-covers, stiffly starched, feel prickly and strain against the wasted cage-like body. Never knew I had such an angular frame. Folds of flesh, which once sat pretty on me, hugging contours and curves, have fallen off like scales. Sleep-starved eyes move restlessly from the mouldy patch on the wall to the high ceiling, to the grimy blades of the mournfully whirling fan…morphine-induced trances…A jerk, a thud, cold sweat trickles down the neck. Am I falling out of my body? Back again, on vigil, fighting, braving yet another bout of pain. A muffled moan, a sob, a shrill cry—I hear my fellow sufferers. The ebb and flow, the cadence of their pain. Outside on the corridor, the heavy footsteps of the watchman mark the milestones of my night.

Instead of suppressing her body, the protagonist betrays a keen awareness for physical beauty, and obviously mourns its decay. Herself a mother, she gives a new orientation to our understanding of the 'mother body'. Her reflections,

though embedded in the domestic sights and sounds for its vocabulary, nevertheless, resist their framing within domestic spaces. As is obvious from the extract given below, the way the protagonist's reflections and associations move from the inner spaces to the outer spaces, they become symptomatic of a desire that wants to connect the nature and the culture into a symbiotic whole, instead of reducing them into gendered binaries:

> From the window at the far end of the ward, through the gap in the curtain, I have glimpses of an oblong shaped blob of a sky and the first white streaks of dawn. The sparrows, nesting in the branches of the gulmohar tree beneath my bedroom window, must be up and chirping, teasing my husband to leave his cosy bed. I hear the familiar rhapsody of the morning rituals. The swish of the broom in the countryard, now scraping against the gravel, now crackling against a heap of dried leaves. The milkman at the doorsteps, warm and cheerful, wishing a hearty *Ram Ram Bibiji.* The initial hiccups and cough of water as it struggles to escape the pipeline…The pressure cooker hisses on the stove. A whiff of spice, the delectable trail of cardamom and cloves! Shanku's milkshake swirls and whips in the mini blender. Omelette dotted with black and green pepper bubbles on the pan. Can Gopu's wife, the pretty little thing, take all this on her young shoulders?

The extract is sprinkled with feminine concerns that travel outward to encompass all in its motherly bosom. However, it also portrays woman as the bearer of domestic burden. Her sympathetic recollection of Gopu's wife is obviously premised on a sense of female bonding. But it is a bond that singularly absolves all men from all domestic responsibilities, and in fact pampers them: "The sparrows, nesting in the branches of the gulmohar tree beneath my bedroom window, must be up and chirping, teasing my husband to leave his cosy bed." By envisioning the household chores as morning rhapsody, she ironically pitchforks them into religious-aesthetic domain. Her kitchen remains with her even in the hospital ward. She draws her sustenance from her household memories and carries them with her everywhere. She in fact turns it into a strategy to keep at bay the dread of disease and death. Her role as a wife, and a mother seems to immortalise her. She wants every one to be soaked in by the infectiousness of that all pervasive love that emanates from her position as a mother and her sense of belongingness with all who inhabit the sphere of her motherhood. Sankranti brings out this aspect of her protagonist's persona, thus:

> 'Gopu, you don't have to look so mournful. I see rainbows and moonbeams in your eyes and hers. Let your happiness reach out to me. Tell your bride to cut an apple or peel an orange for me. Never mind if she has not taken to Tina. Tina is old and epileptic. Her fits can be scary. It is hard. But that is a wise decision. You must put her to sleep. No….No… Don't worry. Shanker has not been carrying tales. I agree with your bride Gopu, Shankar mustn't eat so many chocolates. Yes, he must go for jogging.' I bid them go home. They have lots to catch up with.

Her robustness for life, then, springs from the premium she puts on traditional feminine roles like motherhood and wifehood. She has obviously lived a fulfilling life in these roles, and well ensconced in her sweet memories, she is able to compress every moment and also stretch it to infinity:

> My husband walks in. He carries a single rose in his hands, a yellow rose, my favourite and his. How thin and tired he looks! Grief has darkened his face. He cannot bear to touch my head. Underneath the silk scarf, my head looks and feels like a stubble field. A well-meaning optimistic chemotherapist has harvested my luxurious long hair. He holds my hand. His hands are clammy with sweat. I can feel his strain. I urge him to go. His life has to flow to the rhythm of tomorrow. The clock ticks for him. The calendar rolls for him. And I…Can I compress this moment? Or can I stretch it to infinity…

The second vignette captures the poignancy of human bond that emerges from the extraordinary circumstances of Alfonsa, a girl child, virtually at the end of her life, but innocently unaware of it. The opening paragraph of this section sets the tone for the mother-daughter bond:

> Today is Alfonsa's birthday. Not really. Her birthday falls in June and today is only the seventh of March. But… who has the heart to utter the truth – that the little girl may not live until June? The doctors, the nurses, the ward boys, even the sweepers have willingly entered into the conspiracy. At six o'clock in the evening, Alfonsa's school friends are coming to the ward to celebrate her birthday. The ayas and the ward boy have been working since morning. Screens have been shifted to one side, curtains have been changed. They have even managed to retrieve a large rectangular table and a few chairs from the reception lounge.

> The entire ward is getting ready for the occasion.
>
> All those who are not in excruciating pain have offered to lend a hand in the arrangements. After all Alfonsa is the youngest inmate and the darling of ward number nine, the purgatory of the terminally ill patients. They know, unlike them, Alfonsa is free from burden, the burden of knowledge, the knowledge of the doom. A chirpy, giggly nine year-old, blissfully happy, who wouldn't like to keep her that way? Even the grumpy old Bhagwanti who keeps screaming and cursing from the neighbouring bed, has a soft corner for little Alfonsa.

It is around this piquant irony that the author etches out the contours of motherly pain and emotional fortitude. However, here, as compared to the restrained ambience of the first vignette, the mood is more melodramatic. The author resorts to complex interplay of emotions to condition the responses of the reader: "Festivities in ward number nine! The pain and the trauma, the countdown. Have they forgotten it all? The nurses look on, a bit amused, a bit relieved".

This strategy makes her one with the tradition of female writing, where the author is burdened with a triple responsibility – to send the message across, to create a sympathetic readership/female bond and to forge a language that could bear the weight of women's psychology. This strategy is palpably at work in the following extract:

> Of course their heart goes out to Alfonsa's poor mother…who sits by her daughter's bedside with red-rimmed eyes and a smouldering heart, taking all the woes on herself. Even when Alfonsa has her fits of fever and bouts of pain, her mother knows how to soothe her. Cradling her in her arms, she croons a song, says a prayer, or tells a story, and Alfonsa soon cheers up or mercifully slips into peaceful sleep.

The emotional idiom here is premised on the subtle use of the body language. It is a language of touch and solace that conveys the message intuitively. It is a language where pain is shared without speaking:

> Two ladies, who have beds opposite to Alfonsa's bed, are busy cutting stars and flowers out of pink and blue sheets of paper. Bhagwanti is sitting up on her bed, chopping apples and guavas. She wants to make, her special fruit chat for Alfonsa. Another lady is piecing together a rag-doll for Alfonsa".
>
> … … …
>
> … … …
>
> This morning while whipping butter and sugar into a smooth cream, Alfonsa's mother had helplessly looked at those saline drops – her own miserable tears, much more than a sprinkle – falling across the swirling stuff. Vigorously, almost with a violence that surprised her, she kept beating as it until the whole thing, sighing with air bubbles, rose up into one huge mass. No…She couldn't afford to sigh and weep. That would be luxury. Alfonsa had to be kept happy till the end. She should never come to know about the verdict. Even when they were alone, she and her husband had never talked about the countdown. Who knows, the echoes of their despair may somehow creep across to the little girl! They must bear the cross silently, for their daughter's sake. She swiftly folded chocolate and flour into the bowl and shoved the tray into the oven.
>
> She had always enjoyed giving gifts to the children who came for her daughter's birthday. She has chosen something special this time too, something they can keep for long if they wished to cherish the memory of Alfonsa. It is a cute figurine carved out of shining creamy seashells, of a little girl hugging a tiny guitar to herself and looking up at a tree in full bloom. The little girl looks like a solitary angel, lonely and lost like Alfonsa herself. With an effort, she swallows the rising lump in her throat. Both her hands loaded with baskets, she walks towards the ward.

Weeping, or articulation of emotions is a luxury that a mother cannot afford. This restraint is rooted in the very notion of motherhood, and here the circumstances are still more demanding. Such self-control, or the self-effacement is symptomatic of motherly grace and duty. The author further highlights this aspect of motherhood, its tribulation and trial, by narrating the circumstances of Alfonsa's birth and bringing up, and, by juxtaposing it with her present illness:

> Alfonsa had come to them like a real angel. She was born to them ten years after their marriage, after years of heart-rending prayers. Finally, when she was born prematurely in the eighth month of her pregnancy, what heartburn both she and her husband had gone through! For the first few days, they had watched her with bated breath like a treasure enclosed in the incubator. Their heart fluttered as they looked on, milk falling into her mouth—her ridiculously tiny mouth – drop by drop, from the end of a cotton bud. And later

> at home, trying to keep her warm with hot water bottles night after night, they had taken turns to sit by her cradle. The premature birth, they had succussed in harbouring, but the premature death, would they be able to harness it? Tears roll down her cheeks. Oh, Jesus! What kind of a trial is this?

The author however refuses to give this motherly pain an exclusively female character, and herein she comes closer to Alice Walker's concept of 'womanism'. Alfonsa's mother's articulation of pain subsumes within itself the pain of her husband. In fact the bonding that emerges in this vignette is inclusive and not exclusive, it is not gendered but human. Moreover the bond stretches across religious boundaries and advocates a kind of secular vision to life and its problems. It is a bond in which all shades of religious and human location come together in a symbiotic bond to keep intact the innocence and optimism of a child – be it Bhagwanti, the narrator, the nurses and doctors or the Mother Superior. It is a bond, which in addition, is premised on the existence of the modern with the tradition, the rational with the superstitious. Herein all the streams of knowledge, all the discursive locations exist side by side and in fact jostle with each other:

> Last Sunday in the church, Alfonsa's mother had asked the Father if it would be all right to call a soothsayer to the hospital. One of her neighbours knew a pious old Brahmin who claimed he could touch and heal.
>
> 'There is no harm in trying. Though no miracle can cure your daughter. It may give you some satisfaction.' Father had smiled at her kindly.
>
> The soothsayer had pulled a cotton wick out of his bundle. Dipping it generously in ghee, he lit it carefully and held it at Alfonsa's head for full five minutes. With his free hand, he felt her pulse and muttered a few words. He threw the live wick into the bowl filled with a blood-red liquid – a concoction of turmeric and lime. Alfonsa enjoyed every bit of the show; especially the sizzling sound of the flame as it fell into the bowl. With that the soothsayer had driven away all evil eyes. So, she was told. Alfonsa was relieved and happy. The Mami next door had sent the holy man to hasten her recovery. But her mother knew too well that neither the soothsayer nor the candles of Mother Superior could ever wave leukaemia away.

However, the author is not oblivious to fragile nature of this illusion. What the adults nurtures with effort, is shattered by an innocuous utterance of Manish, the boy next door:

> 'Alfonsa, why are you celebrating your birthday? It is not yet June.' It is Preeti, Alfonsa's best friend calling out to her from the other end of the ward.
>
> Alfonsa's mother suddenly stops in her tracks. 'Preeti, don't you know Alfonsa is very sick?' It is Manish, the boy next door, 'She may not survive until June, I heard my mother telling my father.'
>
> Before Alfonsa's mother can rush in and still Manish, he has passed the verdict.

The author exploits the potentials of melodrama to bring home the precariousness of illusions. She exploits melodrama as an aesthetic tool to immerse the readers in the intensity of emotions and to make them one with the situation. Through this method Sankranti is able to bridge the gap between popular culture and the elite culture, thus demolishing masculine notions of literariness.

The last sequence of this vignette, reminiscent of O' Henry's dramatic 'twists', derives its strength from the conventional notion of motherhood. In a strange reversal of roles, in the aftermath of Manish's "verdict", it is Alfonsa who gives solace to her mother:

> 'Mamma, I will recover. Jesus will take care of me. The monk Alphonso will protect me. The soothsayer said I would live a hundred years. Mother Superior said she would light hundred candles –each one as tall as me – and pray for me.' Alfonsa strokes her mother's head and holds her heaving body in her tender arms. Father looks on with unblinking eyes.

Alfanso's gesture becomes emblematic of the fortitude of motherhood. Her grace emanates from this very fact. She is an embodiment of future mother, a cultural symbol of suffering and sacrifice and nurturance.

In the third vignette, Sankranti offers another take on motherhood. Bhagwanti's story is a contrastive stroke in the overall structure of the story. She is a foster-mother and a stepmother, but genuine motherhood eludes her. This fact has turned her bitter in life and even in her approaching death:

> 'Get away you dogs, I won't leave a pie for you. You want to see the end of me. Who told you I am dying?

> I won't go for a long time yet. Bhagwanti will give you the surprise of your life. Me dying? Mare mere dushman! Let death come to the whole lot of you, my enemies.' When Bhagwanti kicked her feet and pounded on her chest and screamed, the nurses and the ward boys had a tough time. They had to tie her arms and put her legs into straps and pin her down to the bed. She would spit at them and curse them.

Bhagwanti was not always violent. Her violence is the result of the demands patriarchy puts on Indian wife for its self-propagation. She is debunked as a barren, inauspicious woman. Her own wishes and preferences in life – she had adopted Kishore, her brother's son and wanted to provide him the best of education – are rebuffed and resisted by Lalaji, her husband. He wants her to transfer her motherly affections for Nandu, who is the legitimate flag bearer/ substitute of/for his lineage. But Bhagwanti remains adamant in her affections for Kishore, and even manages to send him to London. 'Nandu (her husband's preference) versus Kishore' (her preference), i.e., male versus female ego turns into an irreconcilable dissension between the wife and the husband, and it violently implicates the patriarchal order for her present misfortunes:

> 'Badi ma? Who is that? I am not your Ma. You are no son of mine. Lalaji wouldn't look at my son. What was wrong with my Kishore? He was a bit dark. As if this pahadi chooha – this mountain rat is a prince! Pygmy sized, pale like death! You have come to see if I am dead or not? Where is that bitch that gave birth to you? Dead and gone, isn't it? But I am still here. That is it. There is someone above who sees every thing. Brought down from the hills to sweep the floor and wash vessels, that puny bit of a girl would dare to eat from my plate!'

This gendered contention, a function of the system she is part of, manifests itself as cynicism that ultimately recoils on Bhagwanti, and her body. Cancer symbolically becomes a pathological manifestation of her psychological war:

> 'Kishore was not born from my womb. You know I carry within me arid land. When the mango tree which my saas, my mather-in-law made me plant behind the courtyard, didn't bear fruit even after five years, I heard hushed whispers around me. Even the champak that I tended with all my love never bloomed. 'You are a banjh, a barren woman,' the women silently summed me up with their contemptuous eyes. My saas of course used it as a fond name for me. Nothing will grow on her, the accursed one. Even lice would die in her hair. I have heard her telling the neighbours. But something is now growing in me after all. The cancer…. Isn't it?' Bhagwanti chuckled. Such bitter pronouncements! She wouldn't spare even her own self. How could she be so brutal to herself? A shudder went through Monica.

The above passage is illustrative of how the woman, yielding to patriarchal norms, internalises barrenness as a 'lack', as a failure of womanhood. This sense of 'incompleteness', in the midst of hostile patriarchal gaze turns into self-flagellation, and tells on woman's sense of her self and the world around her. Bhagwanti's story encapsulates this aspect of gendered conditioning and gender biases prevalent in the society.

However, the author takes care not to let this cynicism turn into reductive binary antagonism between male and female. In Nandu, she embodies the humane and gender sensitive side of patriarchy. Despite all provocations, he visits Bhagwanti regularly and stands patiently by her bed with folded hands: "Nandu wouldn't utter a word. He would just dodge the missiles she threw at him, the apples and oranges he had carried for her. He would pick them up one by one and patiently put them back into the plastic bag. With folded hands, he would resume his place at the feet of his Badi Ma".

Through her portrayal of Bhagwanti, the author not only deconstructs the binary notion of gender, but also highlights Bhagwanti's reactions as an extreme case of cynicism. In the process, she also deconstructs the idealised notions of motherhood. Despite all her affections and troubles, Kishore does not return to India, once he has settled down in London. On the other hand, Nandu, despite every provocation continues to visit her, and despite her objections keeps on calling her 'Badi Ma'. Bhagwanti thus finds herself in 'no-mother's-land', forever dangling between the cravings to be called 'Ma' by Kishore and repeatedly assaulted by the address of 'Bari Ma' by Nandu. She is a trishanku, hanging midway between desire and despair.

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ANNEXURE

Find below extracts from critical articles (along with the citation of their sources) relevant for the study of writers included in this study material. Students are advised to go to the sources cited for better and fuller comprehension of these articles.

From "Everyday Use": Defining African-American Heritage" by David White

1. In "Everyday Use," Alice Walker tells a story of a mother's conflicted relationship with her two daughters. On its surface, "Everyday Use" tells how a mother gradually rejects the superficial values of her older, successful daughter in favor of the practical values of her younger, less fortunate daughter. On a deeper level, Alice Walker is exploring the concept of heritage as it applies to African-Americans.
2. "Everyday Use" is set in the late '60s or early '70s. This was a time when African-Americans were struggling to define their personal identities in cultural terms. The term "Negro" had been recently removed from the vocabulary, and had been replaced with "Black." There was "Black Power," "Black Nationalism," and "Black Pride." Many blacks wanted to rediscover their African roots, and were ready to reject and deny their American heritage, which was filled with stories of pain and injustice. In "Everyday Use," Alice Walker argues that an African-American is both African and American, and to deny the American side of one's heritage is disrespectful of one's ancestors and, consequently, harmful to one's self. She uses the principal characters of Mama, Dee (Wangero), and Maggie to clarify this theme.
3. Quilts are referred to in many of Walker's works. In *The Color Purple*, she uses a quilt to help a dying woman remember the mother of her adopted daughter In her essay "In Search of our Mother's Gardens," she writes about a quilt in the Smithsonian Institute that was made by an anonymous black woman: "If we could locate this

'anonymous' Black woman from Alabama, she would turn out to be one of our grandmothers". Walker uses quilts to symbolize a bond between women. In "Everyday Use" the bond is between women of several generations. Elaine Showalter observes in her essay "Piecing and Writing," "In contemporary writing, the quilt stands for a vanished past experience to which we have a troubled and ambivalent relationship" This statement seems to apply specifically to the quilts of "Everyday Use."

4. Dee (Wangero) has a much more superficial idea of heritage. She is portrayed as bright, beautiful, and self-centered. Walker uses Dee to symbolize the Black Power movement, which was characterized by bright and beautiful blacks who were vocal and aggressive in their demands. Many of them spoke disparagingly about their "Uncle Tom" ancestors and adopted certain aspects of African culture in their speech and dress. Mama's descriptions of Dee portray her as this type of individual: "Dee, though. She would always look anyone in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature…She was determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts. Her eyelids would not flicker for minutes at a time…At sixteen she had a style of her own: and she knew what style was" (Walker, "Everyday Use"). These personality traits, along with her style of dress and speech, establish her identity as a symbol of the Black Power movement.
5. It is important to recognize that Walker is not condemning the Black Power movement as a whole. Rather, she is challenging that part of the movement that does not acknowledge and properly respect the many African-Americans who endured incredible hardships in their efforts to survive in a hostile environment. She uses the character of Dee to demonstrate this misguided black pride.
6. Dee's new name, her costume, and her new boyfriend (or husband) are all indicative of her frivolous attitude toward her newly adopted African culture...Dee's ignorance of her adopted African heritage is matched by her ignorance of her actual American heritage…Dee's lack of knowledge concerning her family is symbolic of the Black Power movement's disregard for its American heritage. This neglected American heritage is represented in the story by the character of Maggie.
7. Despite all the negative observations Mama makes about her, Maggie is very aware of her heritage…[The] conflict between the two daughters over who should rightfully own the quilts and how they should be used is central to the theme of the story. Walker is arguing that the responsibility for defining African-American heritage should not be left to the Black Power movement. African-Americans must take ownership of their entire heritage, including the painful, unpleasant parts. Mama represents the majority of black Americans who were confused as to how to reconcile their past history with the civil rights reforms of the '50s and '60s, but were not quite comfortable with the Black Power movement's solution.
8. Alice Walker is, as David Cowart argues, "[satirizing] the heady rhetoric of late '60s black consciousness, deconstructing its pieties (especially the rediscovery of Africa) and asserting neglected values" (Cowart, 182). But Walker's main purpose in the story seems to be to challenge the Black Power movement, and black people in general, to acknowledge and respect their American heritage. The history of Africans in America is filled with stories of pain, injustice, and humiliation. It is not as pleasing as a colorful African heritage that can be fabricated, like a quilt, from bits and pieces that one finds attractive. It is a real heritage that is comprised of real people: people who are deserving of respect and admiration.

   [Source: White, David. "'Everyday Use': Defining African-American Heritage." 2001.
   Anniina's Alice WalkerPage. <http://www.luminarium.org/contemporary/alicew/davidwhite.htm>]

from : "In Spite of it All: A Reading of Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use'" by Sam Whitsatt (In American Review, Fall 2000)

1. Walker's peculiar sound, the specific mode through which her deepening of self-knowledge and sell-love comes, seems to have much to do with her contrariness, her willingness at all turns to challenge the fashionable belief of the day.
2. In her classic essay 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' (1974) that Walker first articulates the metaphor of quilting to represent the creative legacy that African Americans have inherited from their maternal ancestors" (3). While Walker was not the first to write about quilts, she was one of the first to write of the value of the quilt in the Afro-American experience, and she has certainly been one of the most influential writers in rearticulating the value of the quilt and in contributing to its success in the collective imagination at large.

3. If it seems clear that the popularity of the quilt owes much to writers like Walker, one needs to ask, in turn, whether Walker's story would enjoy its current status if the quilt itself had not become such a privileged symbol. And yet another way of formulating this kind of question would be to ask whether we are to read the quilt as a figure in a story, or whether the story is, as it were, a figure of the quilt. Is the quilt, in other words, to be seen as one sign of women's creative activity among many, or as the very ground of a specifically woman's world?
4. Among some critics there is a tendency, which finds encouragement in Walker's writing itself, to claim a strong analogy between quilting and storytelling, which allows one in turn to see Walker's storytelling as metaphorically subsumable to quilting, which in this scenario "precedes" her story. The violence of the metaphor is that it tends to cover over the very differences that make it possible, and the quilt seems to lend itself to this metaphoric violence since its figure tends to be taken literally. If "the most resonant quality of [real] quiltmaking," as Kelley writes, "is the promise of creating unity amongst disparate elements," it is not difficult to understand how a metaphoric slide creates an identity between the disparate elements of quilting, writing, and a world of womanly activity. The quilt is a trope whose analogue (the quilt itself) provides the stitch that untropes the trope; it is a trope stitched to a reality, and the tightness of the stitching depends on the tightness of the identity of any group which claims the quilt as its sign. Even if today, as Showalter notes, the quilt has "transcended the stigma of its sources in women's culture" and become the "central metaphor of American cultural identity" , that generalizing drift away from a certain womanly specificity has not diminished its appeal as a kind of ground for certain groups, particularly women's. Quilting can still be taken as a woman's activity which makes use of a woman's material; it can yet be deemed a woman's social, economic, and political activity which also produces an object of beauty which, moreover, does not drift into the domain of pure art, or the "institutional theories of aesthetics"; just as disparate pieces of cloth get stitched together, the quilt itself is stitched to the world that produces it. The quilt "represents" herstory, history, and tradition, binding women, and men, to the past and the past to the present. And it has been powerful in providing a ground for women, particul arly women writers. Precisely because "the writing of fiction," as Mary Helen Washington notes, can still be perceived as "done under the shadow of men" the metaphor of the quilt and its world can take women out of that shadow and ground them in an open place of their own.
5. Elaine Showalter acknowledge the critical significance of quilting, but has reservations about how the quilt as a figure is employed…Elaine Showalter convincingly argues that, "while quilting does have crucial meaning for American women's texts, it can't be taken as a transhistorical and essential form of female expression, but rather as a gendered practice that change[s] from one generation to the next..." While there is much in Alice Walker's short story which allows for a reading which would see it as a story which grounds itself in the figure of the quilt, the figurality of the ground itself always threatens to undo its grounding.
6. Walker, as an artist, tells a story in which she explores the limits of both art and the authentic. She plays with the problem by knowing that art cannot simply or purely give voice to the voiceless, and that if the voiceless are to have a voice, and in particular their own, they can only have it through art's appropriation. It is not the artist who returns who can give voice to the voiceless, but art can give voice to how the voiceless come to have a voice; the fiction of "Everyday Use," in which Mama comes to have a voice, is an art which would on the one hand deny the role of the artist, but only insofar as the one who comes to have a voice becomes an artist. And once the voiceless give voice to themselves, they too are implicated in the very problem Walker articulates: To have a voice, to be able to represent one's own, means that one has drifted just that far away, as subtle as a shift from the present to the past tense, from one's own. Representation, in order to be representation, drifts away, must drift away, from one's own, which also translates the idea of "own" and "owning" into a different register that here can perhaps best be conceptualized in economic terms:

   > Many African-American quilters employ large, often abstract designs. In the earliest days of the Freedom Quilting Bee in Alabama, this design preference contributed to the group's success. Francis Xavier walter, a priest involved in the civil rights movement, bought quilts from women in Gee's Bend and its environs, sent them to New York to be auctioned, and gave the money to the women to support themselves and to re-invest into quilting—thus beginning one of the most successful, longest enduring quilting collectives in the nation.

From: "Mahasweta Devi's Rhetoric of Subversion in 'Draupadi' by Mitali P. Wong

1. The complex rhetoric of Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" invites the reader into the text with its collage-like depiction of the confusing power struggles of post-colonial Indian society. The medley of voices in Mahasweta Devi's narrative is analogous to the babel of tongues and of political languages prevailing in postcolonial India. The protagonist Draupadi is a tribal, a young woman, a political extremist, and an outlaw with a price on her head. By allowing Draupadi to stand triumphant and defiant despite her brutal gang rape by soldiers after her capture, the narrative points to the need for changes in contemporary Indian society and politics.
2. In [the last sequence]In the above episode, Mahasweta Devi's subversive rhetoric juxtaposes masculist/ high caste/ bourgeois/ educated values together with female/ tribal / underprivileged/ uneducated rhetoric in the historical context of the Naxalbari uprising [2] to expose the soullessness and corruption of sources of power in post-colonial India. The various reiterations of "counter" throughout the narrative and in the final episode suggest that Mahasweta Devi's rhetorical device of using multiple voices — frequently ironic and/or parodic — generates several counter-meanings in Indian social and political contexts.
3. The inability of the educated and privileged class to comprehend tribal language exemplifies the cultural and philosophical differences that prevail within the complicated class structures of post-colonial Indian society. Mahasweta Devi's depiction of Draupadi and of her torture are extended metaphors of the historical subjection and dispossession of the tribal peoples of India by both the Hindus and Western colonizers. Draupadi's gang rape is symbolic of centuries' old methods of brutal tortures being inflicted upon "rebellious" low class/caste men and women in remote semi-feudal agricultural communities in India.
4. By exposing the protagonist's fear of being caught between the loyalty to her politicalcomrades and police brutality, the writer draws attention to the need for recognizing the sovereignty of the individual over all political systems. Mahasweta Devi writes: "Life is not mathematics and the human being is not made for the sake of politics. I want a change in the present social system and do not believe in mere party politics"…The depiction of the oppressive military officers Arjan Singh and Senanayak versus the uneducated, underprivileged, tribal woman Draupadi identifies both the classstruggle as well as masculist versus feminist ideologies existing synchronically with semi-feudal racist attitudes and colonialist-capitalist values in post-colonial India. Marxist scholars.
5. Draupadi's flight into the jungle is a romantic return to her natural "roots". Many tribal peoples of India live in forested areas. They live off of the forest and its natural resources. Draupadi's flight is also a symbolic reminder of the ancient so-called Aryan invasion of India which drove the Austro-Asiatic tribes into the forests, and possibly dispossessed them of their lands.
6. Mahasweta Devi's narrative stops rather than ends with Draupadi's naked and defiant confrontation of Senanayak. Despite her will to fight back, one cannot see Draupadi as wholly victorious. In terms of the plot, class distinctions as well as patriarchy and its privileges ultimately prevail over left-wing ideologies. While the tribal woman rebel Draupadi is brutally raped by soldiers, the male student-leader-party theoretician Arijit stays hidden and "safe. However, Draupadi's strength and resistance remain heroic. She is characteristic of Mahasweta Devi's socially underprivileged women protagonists in "(her) courage, (her) power to resist, to fight back".

[Source: http://www.claflin.edu/academics/engforlang/ClaflinReviewNew.pdf]

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS:

Question One: Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" deconstruct gender at the intersection of margins and the mainstream, and in the process destabilizes the concept India as a Nation-state. Comment.

Question Two: "The ending of 'Draupadi' calls for a radical orientation in woman's perception of her body and the idea of shame around it." Discuss the pros and cons the statement.

Question Three: In "Draupadi" Mahasweta Devi deliberately dislocates the myth of Draupadi from its original context to turn it into an instrument of gender empowerment. Discuss.

Question Four: Discuss "Draupadi" as a vehicle of Mahasweta Devi's aesthetic activism.

Question Five: "Everyday Use" is an aesthetic problematisation of the concept of womanism. Comment.

Question Six: In its narrative structure and tone "Everyday Use" betrays a distinctly feminist credo. Elucidate.

Question Seven:	In her story "Everyday Use" Alice Walker uses the imagery of quilt as a critical -ideological trope to examine Afro-American woman's relatedness to her past. Elucidate.
Question Eight:	"The Will" successfully showcases the omnipresence of patriarchy in the life of an average Indian woman. Do you agree?
Question Ten:	In the final analysis Hariharan's "The Will" comes out as a facile understanding of Indian womanhood. Sushila is more a caricature than the reality of Indian womanhood. Comment.
Question Eleven:	"Githa Hariharan and Sujata Sankranti offer only melodramatic peep into middle class Indian womanhood. Their aesthetics, unlike Mahasweta Devi's, merely touches upon the secondary level concerns of women's life." Attempt a detailed critique of the Indian women writers you have studied, in the light of this statement
Question Twelve:	In "The Warp and the Weft", Sujata Sankranti successfully bring to the fore the diversity inherent in the concept of motherhood. Discuss.
Question Thirteen:	Compare and contrast the ideological locations of the writer you have studied so as to bring out the difference in their analysis of gender question in India.