



## HABBA KHATOON & KAMALA DAS'S POETIC DISCOURSES THROUGH LACANIAN LENS: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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*The comparative approach to literature has a dual nature: it brings us closer to what is foreign to us in such a way that we can appropriate it, and at the same time distances us from what is familiar to us so that we can survey it.*

*...The academic study of literature hands us a telescope: one end magnifies, the other reduces ....*

– Hovedstromninger

*Desire is always the desire of the Other.*

– Jacques Lacan

*After robing my heart, you have taken to lonesome retreats*

*Come back to me my blossoming Cupid.*

– Habba Khatoon

### ABSTRACT

In the contemporary era, Comparative Literature, like other literary concepts, has heavily gained its distinctive place on the international academic map of the world. In fact, this perspective of comparison in research and scholarship has now heavily grown and it has been (and continues to be) widely used in various disciplines and areas of study. It incorporates writers from all languages and literatures all across the world. This has led the scholars and researchers to search for & find newer meanings and innovations. This area of study has given recognition even to various local and regional writers and this way enabled researchers to make these writers known to the world and earn a niche for them too in the world literature or on the world academic map.

In this backdrop, this paper makes a humble attempt to search for Lacanian reading through his desire domain, pleasure principle, *Objet Petit a*, *self-other* notions in the poetic discourses of two women poetesses– one from Kashmiri literature and the other from the Indian English Literature – though from two different eras, geographical locations, cultures, civilizations and languages yet they share many similarities once read under / through Lacanian lens.

**Keywords:** *Comparative literature, Lacanian Jouissance, Objet Petit a, Self-Other diachotomy, & Desire domains*

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## INTRODUCTION

At the outset, we need to remember that in the postmodern era, Comparative Literature, like other literary concepts, has emerged as a distinctive branch of study in literature. In fact, this comparative branch has enabled scholars to compare world, national, and regional writers to one another and trace out the similarities and differences among them and their writings. A lot of research in the recent years has been carried out on comparative literature. Pertinently, the following definition of comparative literature will make us understand the true concept of Comparative Literature:

The discipline of Comparative Literature is in to a method in the study of literature in at least two ways. First, Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and/or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, Comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types, etc. ... Comparative Literature has intrinsically a content and form, which facilitate the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of literature and it has a history that substantiated this content and form. Predicated on the borrowing of methods from other disciplines and on the application of the appropriated method to areas of study that single-language literary study more often than not tends to neglect, the discipline is difficult to define because thus it is fragmented and pluralistic. (Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature* 13)

Similarly, Buddhadev Bose, the founder at Jadavpur University of the first (and for a long time the only) full-fledged comparative literature department in India, once said:

Potentially, India is one of the richest fields for Comparative Literature. The age and complexity of our civilization, the diverse elements that compose it, that “world-hunger” of which Tagore spoke a hundred times and which took possession of us with the dawning of our modern age – all these provide the material and atmosphere demanded by the nature of this discipline. The history of India is a story of absorption, adaptation and assimilation, of continual coming to terms with foreign influences, and of resistance transformed into response. We have great links with many cultures of the East and West; our religions have influenced Western thought; interest in our arts and literatures is now keen and widespread. If Comparative Literature is permitted to develop, it can be of service in bringing India and the world spiritually closer and it can make a small contribution to the growth of that cosmopolitan spirit which is much more discussed than achieved. (Bose 1959: 10)

In the same vein, Sandra Bermann in her essay on *World Literature and Comparative Literature* opines:

Between the mid-1970s and the 1990s, comparative literature grew and changed dramatically, and in ways that offered new space – and eventually a renewed welcome – to world literature. Theory, largely but not only European, became a major interest, and soon a defining feature of comparative



literature. First structuralism and then post-structuralism revolutionized it, transforming the ways individual texts were read and how they might be read comparatively. Cultural studies emerged as another strong (and sometimes conflictive) current, bringing with it a much keener sense of historical and political contexts. As the century progressed, postcolonial studies and translation studies in particular, but also gender and sexuality studies, new historicism, race and ethnicity studies, and trauma studies, all expanded the global range of texts read as well as the theoretical assumptions brought to them. (Damrosch, David and Kadir 2012:172)

It is now clear that any comparative literature study primarily focuses on comparison between / among authors and their artefacts. In this paper, two women poets from two different geographical locations have been chosen for the comparative study through Lacanian lens. This study is a comparative study and will examine the works of these two very renowned poetesses of India – one from Kashmir and the other from Kerala – namely Habba Khatoon and Kamala Das in order to trace the presence of select Lacanian notions in their poems. Here, the researcher will focus on how woman emerges as a silent sufferer with enough repression, traumas, and anxieties in their love lyrics. It will answer the following questions:

- i. Do the poetic expressions exhibit the search for the loss of *objet petit a/ jouissance* and *self-other* distinction in the poetry of these writers.

- ii. Are these given writers truly victims of Lacanian realm of symbolic or desire domain or pleasure principle?
- iii. How the lives of these women writers share the similarities in their sufferings, experiences of love (desires), and life experiences in Lacanian sense?

### Main Argument

During a thorough study of both Habba Khatoon and Kamala Das, the researcher finds that they share a lot once they are placed under the Lacanian lens. Both of these poetesses as women became victims of Lacanian desire domain, self-other dichotomies, suppression and also experienced evidently other Lacanian realms or notions. Both suffer in the hands of patriarchy. Both were made to accept the 'societal policing' i.e., Law-of-the-Father with a lot of toughness and both were, though in two different geographical locations, civilizations and ages yet experiencing such experiences in love which lead them to share with sincerity what they went through in their blind feelings of love. Habba Khatoon was from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Kashmir and Kamala Das was from the 1934 Southern Malabar in Kerala. Before proving my propositions, it is better to throw light on select Lacanian notions such as *Jouissance*, pleasure principle, *self & other* (Imaginary) and Symbolic. Undoubtedly, Lacan's ideas opened up a new way of "understanding the play of unconscious desire in the text". (Homer 2007: 2.). Lacan creates different categories to explain a similar trajectory from "infant" to "adult." Lacan formulates three newly devised concepts – need, demand, and desire – which roughly correspond to the three phases of development or three fields in which humans



develop or grow: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. Tyson says:

In entering the Symbolic Order—the world of language— we're entering a world of loss and lack. We've exited the Imaginary Order, the world in which we had the illusion of fulfillment and control. We now inhabit a world in which others have needs, desires, and fears that limit the ways ... and the extent to which we can attend to our own needs, desires, and fears. (Tyson 2006-27)

All desire springs from the above mentioned lack which all humans strive continually to fill. The whole human world revolves round this lack: absence of the real objects designated by signs point to the fact that words have meaning only by virtue of the absence and exclusion of others. To enter language, then, is to become a prey to desire; language, Lacan believes is what hollows being into desire. This desire domain earns the name of Lacanian Other for humans. In fact, for Lacan, the term *Other* has many connotations as he uses "*Other*" in numerous ways. In the simplest way, in the sense where "other" is the "not-me", but becomes "me" in the *mirror stage*. Lacan also uses an idea of *Other*, with a capital "O", to distinguish between the concept of the other and actual others. The image that the child perceives in the mirror is an *Other* which shapes in the child the idea of other as a structural possibility, one which makes possible the structural possibility of "I" or "self". In other words, the child now onwards encounters actual others: its own image, other people and this way understands the idea of "Otherness," things that are not itself. Lacan refers to

this loss of object of desire as *objet petit a*. Lacan believes that humans search for the actual others throughout their lives and while searching, they become victims of their own desires if they fail to earn or win them fully which is referred to as the loss of the *Lacanian objet petit a*. Jacques Lacan opines:

In the seminar of 1960–1, Lacan articulates the *objet petit a* with the term *agalma* (a Greek term meaning a glory, an ornament, an offering to the gods, or a little statue of a god... Just as the *agalma* is a precious object hidden inside a relatively worthless box, so *the objet petit a* is the object of desire which we seek in the other (S8, 177).

From 1963 onwards, *a* comes increasingly to acquire connotations of the real, although it never loses its imaginary status; in 1973 Lacan can still say that it is imaginary (S20, 77). From this point on, *a* denotes the object which can never be attained, which is really the cause of desire rather than that towards which desire tends; this is why Lacan now calls it 'the object-cause' of desire. *Objet petit a* is any object which sets desire in motion, especially the partial objects which define the drives. The drives do not seek to attain the *objet petit a*, but rather circle round it (S11, 179). *Objet petit a* is both the object of anxiety, ... the cause of the analysand's desire. In the seminars of 1962–3 and of 1964, *objet petit a* is defined as the leftover, the remainder, the remnant left behind by the introduction of the symbolic in the real... In the discourse of the master, one signifier attempts to represent the subject for all other signifiers, but inevitably



a surplus is always produced; this surplus is *objet petit a*, a surplus meaning, and a surplus enjoyment ... (Evans 1996:128 - 129)

In light of the above quote, we can say that *objet petit a* remains linked to an imaginary representation of *Jouissance* as fullness. According to Lacan one signifier implies another and that another, and so on *ad infinitum*: the 'metaphorical' world of the mirror has yielded ground to the metonymic chain of signifiers, meanings, or signifieds which will be produced; but no object or person can ever be fully 'present' in this chain. This endless movement from one signifier to another is what Lacan means by desire. In fact, the truth about desire is somehow present in discourse which never articulates the whole truth about desire: whenever discourse attempts to articulate desire, there is always a leftover, a surplus. On the basis of this fundamental understanding, Lacan maintained throughout his career that desire is the desire of the *Other*. Tyson says:

Our desires, beliefs, biases, and so forth are constructed for us as a result of our immersion in the Symbolic Order, especially as that immersion is carried out by our parents and influenced by their own responses to the Symbolic Order. This is what Lacan means by his claim that "desire is always the desire of the other" (See, Seminar Bk. XI: 235).

For Lacan, desire is the main power behind all human acts. He says that desire, a function central to all human experience and behaviour, makes life meaningful. He strongly believes that desire of the other is nothing nameable (see, Lacan, Seminar

2:38 and Seminar BK .XI:235). Desire and *Jouissance* rule human existence and the loss of *Objet petit a* refers to disaster and tragedy for the humans who become victims of the Lacanian realm of imaginary i.e., *self – other* distinction. We get here reminded of Lacan who says that desire is:

A function central to all human experience and behaviour, makes life meaningful. He strongly believes that desire is everything. In fact, he states that desire is always the desire of the other, nothing nameable. (See, Lacan, *seminar 2:37* and *seminar Bk. XI: 235*)

Similarly, Noelle Vahanian states:

Desire is the possibility of satisfaction in language, through language. To desire sex is to be in language, to desire the image of the other, an image of the other, rather than the raw, in itself other that you will never know..... (Taylor & Winquist 2001: 94)

He further states:

Desire is the vital force of creativity, because desire imagines its objects. Desire imagines ideal objects and has to face discrepancies with ordinariness. And so, desire rethinks itself on finite terms; and rethinks itself again, and celebrates its necessary and arbitrary constructiveness. The equivocal subject always under construction desires without end because desire is a word, and language is a sublimated terrain of nature.

Desire is a word in a world and is all that is the case. Thus, to desire is to think, to speak, to write to read: in sum, it is to live in a



world that knows no other world. (Taylor & Winquist 2001: 94)

Similarly, Lacan believes that desire refers especially to feelings, attitudes, emotions, performance, orgasmic intensity, etc. It deals with speech, the analysand's discourse, and the demands and is also symbolic expression which the analysand talks is in fact desire manifested by and hidden in language. Psychoanalysis functions to restore the analysand to his or her desire, which lies unacknowledged with his or her demands. In fact, he also argues that it is the signifier which is actually the cause of *Jouissance* (Lacan 1977). He considers that all desire springs from lack which humans strive to fill. In fact, the human world revolves round this lack: the absence of the real objects designated by signs point to the fact that words have meaning only by virtue of the absence and exclusion of others. To enter language, then, is to become a prey to desire: language, Lacan believes, is what hollows being into desire. Tyson remarks rightly: 'In entering the Symbolic Order – the world of language – we're entering a world of loss and lack'. (Tyson 2006:30)

We desire what we are taught to desire. In fact, it is only in the absence of a desired object that language becomes necessary, and through the use of language that a desiring *self* comes into existence.

Now a thorough study of the poetic discourses of Habba Khatoon and Kamala Das reveals that their poetry is heavily loaded with the aforementioned Lacanian realms and concepts especially *Desire* and *Jouissance*. Let us look at Habba Khatoon who is popularly known as the nightingale of Kashmir. Dr. Aziz Hajini, a well-known poet and critic of Kashmiri

language, mentions in the foreword of Professor G R Malik' book *Habba Khatoon: Collected Poems*:

She drew out Kashmiri poetry from the realms of the mere spirit to the joys and sorrows of everyday existence. Her songs possess a moving pathos springing from a genuine feeling for the woes of mankind. All this finds expression in a lyrical language which remains unmatched in Kashmiri poetry. No wonder then that she has won the epithets of 'Philomela of Kashmir', its sweet singing 'nightingale'.

Regarding Habba Khatoon's poetry Professor G R Malik writes:

All of Habba Khatoon's poems are love lyrics...The love of which Habba Khatoon sings in full-throated ease in love "felt in blood and felt along the heart." It is not a pose but a soul-stirring and, very often, excruciating experience. (Malik 2018:8-9)

Pertinently, a lyric is a short poem with a speaker (not necessarily the poet) expressing his/ her feelings, here, in case of Habba Khatoon, we find her spontaneous complaints and then passionate waiting for her callous lover. Her poetry (love lyrics) possess an intensity of sentiments and through these only she voices her yearnings, nostalgia, suffering, loneliness, romantic feelings, disappointments and lasting pain which she experienced first in the hands of her first unlettered husband, Aziz Lone, and later her second husband, Yousuf Shah Chak, the King of Kashmir, who was arrested, imprisoned and finally exiled by Mughal Emperor, Akbar. After experiencing separation from her lover, Yousuf, Habba Khatoon languished heavily and composed several movingly



poignant songs which she sang while roaming from village to village. In this regard, Ghulam Nabi Khayal mentions in his paper titled "Women Poets in Kashmir", published in *Indian Literature*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (May-June 1982):

Habba Khatoon, separated from her lover by the cruel hands of tyranny, felt greatly the pangs of desperation and during the last days of her miserable life, poured forth her heart in her songs that are full of pathos, longing and emotion. (Khayal 1982:80-86).

Her romance with the king has been artistically reflected by her in her poetry and which fully parallels and resembles Lacanian desire domain. In this regard, Professor G R Malik writes: 'Every word, every turn of the phrase in her poetry stands witness to this sincerity and authenticity'. Habba Khatoon voices her heart and *self* in the following verses:

*Naesif raatan bair vaet taeraymai mae  
Saatha yekhna cheie  
Phieri chuuni keeh tai phiri chuk paawan  
Cheie keho gae meen dhie*

It is the middle of night, my doors wide open  
for you,  
Come and enter my gates for a while;  
No doubts are there why then this misgiving  
Why this apathy!

*Oesh ches trawan bie Chali Chaalie  
Mae baali ghusham chie  
Chi Khuu waatimaeni aakhi Maashirawan  
Cheiekeho gae meen dhie*

My tears flow in ceaseless torrents  
I want to have you and you alone;  
Why this foregoing my ways,  
Why this apathy!

*Baam toie zili ches soozwaayanie*

*Waelinaie tawthaem nie goosh  
Kaam keh gave yemi moei waanie  
Chaw maen dhaanie poosh*

In treble and bass, I sing my song  
But you refuse to hear my wails;  
Where ever did I fall short in love's bargain?  
Come and enjoy my pomegranate bloom.

- (Malik 2018:9-10)

Habba Khatoon's lover, Yousuf, didn't return and Habba Khatoon kept waiting for him. It is said that her separation from her much loving husband, Yousuf, became the main case of her renunciation. In fact, her poetry is evidently based on sorrow of her separation and thus heavily pregnant with her search for *Lacanian Objet petit a* and loss of *jouissance*. She has succeeded in voicing Lacanian Desire in her amorous poetry. Her poetry is primarily based on human need for love and desire which is fully Lacanian in nature. Initially, she was the dearest object of Aziz who loved her because of her unique beauty, her melodious voice, beautiful features, bright alluring eyes, and her clear ivory complexion. He would forget everything once he used to repose in her lap. This developed jealousy in his mother who poisoned Aziz's mind against her. He spied soon and took to drinking soon. Professor Waklu rightly makes following observation:

...not even with a microscope would one observe a rain of mutual love between Habba and Aziz. Their relationship had reached the stage of final rapture; Habba's frigid heart could no longer in spite of her resolve allow Aziz his conjugal right. Her nerves tingling with excitement and anxiety  
..... (Waklu 2007:91)



Thus, she experiences evidently Lacanian loss or absence or lack. In fact, on the request of her friend, she sings:

*Rah baskhistam sarey parwardigaroo  
chae kahoo watityoo maeni marnai  
loli soi thew thum lalwun naroo  
chae kahoo watityoo maeni marnai*

Oh Allah! Forgive all my sins  
What gain to you, my love, if I die  
For a burning fire I carry in my heart.  
What gain to you, my love, if I die

Here again, Lacanian desire domain is at work. After her separation from Aziz, Habba Khatoon became the great queen of Kashmir by marrying king Yousuf who was profoundly in love with her. She would beautify herself for Yousuf by loading herself with heavy jewelry and flowers and everything she possessed was now meant for Yousuf – be it her long silken soft hair, alluring charm, beautiful face or wild eyes all were waiting for the love of Yousuf who would console and pacify her passion by making love to her. In this regard, Professor Wakhlu paints a romantic picture of Habba Khatoon in the following words:

There she lay the fairest thing. The web of dark hair flowed all about her. One white rounded arm made a pillow for her head. Her rich lips were parted in a smile, showing the ivory lines of teeth and her rosy limbs were draped in a thin robe of silk held about her by a jeweled girdle so that the white gleam of flesh shone through it (Wakhlu 1994:151).

Initially, she enjoyed his company and love quite comfortably but soon time didn't favour her and he was imprisoned leaving Habba languishing in separation only to wail her pitiful plight. Alas!

Nothing helped her thereafter. This reminds us of Lacan who says: "All speech is demand; every demand is a request for love." (Lacan 2001)

Yousuf in prison was invariably caught in Habba's dreams. Again Lacanian desire domain. He would long for her even when he was on deathbed. He would cherish his romance with Habba Khatoon. In fact, he while being in prison once asked one of his servants named Qadira to sing:

*'Let no one lose her years of youth!' Which he had last heard from her beloved, Habba. In this song too, Lacanian desire is very evident. Here, I quote some lines of the song:*

*Tuli nar chum lali wun mooray  
bi chesaiy yatie tei chae chahum dooray...  
doshwai daray jani jan  
moi chaevi habba khatoonay tari tooray  
kainsi may ray wen shoray paan*

I have to suffer the scorching flames in my heart  
I am here while you are far away there ...  
Both loved so dearly each other  
Habba Khatoon has drunk deep of love  
Let no one lose her years of youth!

Lacan says that desire is never satiated as it is always accompanied by loss, lack or absence. The above quoted lines are truly an outcome of Lacanian Desire domain.

A study of her works shows that she loved life with all its vicissitudes, trials tribulations which fell to her lot and which she suffered with patience, tempered sometimes with a glimmer of hope, sometimes with protest and sometimes with resignation venting or singing of sorrow or loss or pain. She was the first true poet who was sincere in her feelings and expressions. She didn't hide anything while garbling her thoughts. She has been true even in showing her languishing sighs and heavy heart which is full of love





and inexpressible feelings. We also realize that Habba Khatoon experiences *self – other* dichotomy throughout her life due to her unfulfilled dreams. In Lacan, 'there is always the lover as the subject of love, the *erastes*, and the loved one, *the eromenos*, as the object of love. She is invariably in search of her *objet petit a* (lost object)' (Nobus 2000).

We must remember that Habba Khatoon voiced very boldly her lived reality in her verses – 'the articulation of desire in words', 'women were only the objects of desire and only the recipients of proposals of love in her times' – focusing primarily on her experience of day-to-day physical existence such as love, expectation, aspiration, sorrow, longing, disappointment and frustration which constitutes fully Lacanian brand of desire domain. Perhaps she was among those who couldn't mortify the flesh. She was very alive to Lacanian notion of desire which according to psychoanalysis constitutes the crux of human existence. They believe that our lives become meaningful only after recognizing the symbolic realm especially when one embraces it, desire, fully (Lacan: 1977).

S L Sadhu in work, *Makers of Indian Literature: Habba Khatoon*, states that Habba Khatoon made her songs vibrant with her true and sincere feelings. She doesn't take refuge in symbolism and thus gives tongue to her pain and sorrow with rare spontaneity. '....she continues to remind the 'callous' and the 'faithless' beloved of her sufferings ...her utterance is steeped in pathos which is natural....'(Sadhu 2004).

A thorough study of Habba's poetry shows that love, full of desire, is the crux of almost all lyrics. In this regard, Professor G R Malik remarks:

... we see her lamenting the vagaries of fate and non-fulfilment of aspirations ... Unfortunately, the love that we come across in Habba Khatoon's poems is generally an unrequited love; her intense passion is a passion that has remained unfulfilled. Disappointment and failure in love lurks beneath her bitter complaints against unpleasant disposals of fate, its callous inexorability. (Malik 2018:7-10)

In case of Habba Khatoon too, it is her lover and lost love. Hence, she turns insane searching and venting her inward longing very strongly in the following poetic expressions:

"Come back to me my blossoming cupid",  
 "Come and enjoy my pomegranate bloom",  
 "Leaving me ever craving for him", "Which rival of mine has seduced you away from me, why this apathy!" "Tearing loose the necklace I wore", "My love I have gathered these tulips for you", "Let me make all preparations to receive him", "Darling, I will bow and offer my head to you" "Now I shall die pining for you" and "May no body's nascent infancy be ruined thus!" (See, G R Malik's *Habba Khatoon: Collected Poems*)

We now realize that her songs/ lyrics present the theme of unfulfilled love, longing, or pangs of separation or Lacanian lack of jouissance or desire domain. In almost all her lyrics, she blames her lover for her miserable plight and makes a fervent appeal to respond to her love. Apparently, she is highly obsessed with the urge to seek him alone. Her main objective is her absolute love, dedication and surrender to her lover in order to earn her long



awaited satiation of her desire. This makes clear the fact that her lyrics are compact with the Lacanian desire, jouissance and self – other dichotomy. It is finally believed that Habba and her lover both have been searching real and perfect utopian love and beauty which form the basis of Lacanian realm of desire domain and this is evident from the verbosity used by the poetess in her poetry.

Now in Kamala Das, we find a similar but stronger voice which in many respects resembles Habba Khatoon, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri poetess. Das, like Habba, vents bravely Lacanian desire domain in her amorous poetic expressions, lyrics, where she demands nothing except her satiation or union with the desired urge / object of love i.e., *objet petit a*. She searches and urges strongly for her lost *Other* i.e., love and desire. She speaks blatantly and repeatedly about love and sex in most of her poems. Her poetry puts forward her own personal experiences about her unfulfilled love and repression. K. N. Daruwalla believes that 'Kamala Das is pre-eminently a poet of love and pain, one stalking the other through a near neurotic world'.

A thorough study shows that Kamala Das is a strong confessional poet with unparalleled sincerity. She writes her autobiography *My story* (1977) and showcases women's plight at various levels and their attempts to liberate themselves. In it, she talks heavily about her unfulfilled love and other concerns. Vincent O'Sullivan remarks:

Das is a woman who stands square onto three of the most interesting features of literature in the last twenty or so years, the dominance of what loosely we call "Confessional" poetry, the effect of feminist

thought has had on how we now read writing by women, and the increasing attention accorded to "new literatures", that hold all terms for writing as it emerges from post-colonial contexts, and in India's case emerges in the language of former imperialism" (O' Sullivan 1986: 179).

Das's poetic collections are *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old play House and other poems* (1973), *Only the soul Knows how to sing* (1996), *Tonight, this savage Rite* (1979) and *Closure: Some Poems and Conversation with Suresh Kahil* (2009). Being more emotional than Habba Khatoon, she mostly talks in her poetic collections about her personal self, her feelings and her physical desires. Nabar opines:

There is indeed a lot of love ..... a high degree of intensity along with an almost compulsive condour, a disregard for "nice" feminine concealments and an aggressively independent assessment of the man women relationship". (Nabar 1994:19)

Similarly, K.C. Shinivastara rightly comments: "Her femininity makes her glory in motherhood and makes her heart quiver with tenderness of love which she is continually seeking" (Shinivastara 1993: 94). Das approves of freedom and love to women. Here, we get reminded of Bijay Kumar Das who says:

As she deals with the conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male oriented universe, her tussle with love, lust and women hood has most usually centered itself upon her relations with her life" (Das 1982:44).

Since Das was alive to the transitory nature of life, in "Beauty was a short season", she talks about her fear



that her beauty and youth would soon vanish. She voices her longing for love and mourns its absence:

*I wish my  
Eyes were similarly  
At least once before the  
Singing stopped and you left  
quickly, without good bye.*

Here, the lover leaves the beloved even without saying good bye and thus it is an evident instance of loss of Lacanian *objet petit a*. She even makes use of Radha – Krishna myths for voicing true love. Das declares that women require both physical and emotional love. A woman craves for this eternal phenomenon and cannot be ignored. She writes:

*I met him, loved him, call  
Him not by any name, he is every man  
Who wants a woman, just as I am every  
Woman who seeks love* - Introduction

Das's feminine tenderness excites naturally her lover sexually. In fact, she writes in "The Looking Glass":

*..... Gift him all.  
Give 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*

It is for this reason that her poetry is a true expression of *Lacanian Other*. Her *objet petit a* is lost in traditional assumptions of gender. She talks about going beyond femininity for winning her lost "Other". A thorough study shows that she searches for love, Lacanian pleasures principle, *objet petit a* and *jouissance* which constitute primarily Lacanian desire domain. She reveals the true psyche of woman by saying:

*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 ...* - The Looking Glass

In this regard, Devendra Kohli says:

Almost, all the critics of Kamala Das have been quick to notice that part of the strength of poetry emanates from her powerful personality... women's ambivalence which is the certitude and the precariousness of sexual love (Kohli 1974:15).

Kamala Das writes regarding her longings in *My Story*:

I was looking for an ideal lover. I was looking for the one who went to Mathura and forgot to return to his Radha. Perhaps I was seeking the cruelty that lies in the depths of a man's heart. Otherwise why did I not get my peace in the arms of my husband? But consciously I had hoped for the death of my ego. The ones who loved me did not understand why I was restive (Das 1976: 92).

Unlike Habba Khatoon, Das searches for love in more than one person and this leads her to tragedy and complexities as she doesn't realize her Lacanian *Other*, the desire domain where Lack is always at work. The same sentiment is also present in her poetic expressions:

*... you cannot believe darling,  
Can you, that I lived in such a house and  
Was proud and loved ...I who have lost  
My way and beg now at stranger's doors to  
Receive love, at least in small change?  
- My Grandmother's House*

This urge for love or realization of her *objet petit a* becomes intense in her poetry. Unlike Habba Khatoon, many persons got associated with her life



as lovers and she does not conceal this fact as she was trying to earn her lost *objet petit a*. She says:

... Oh yes, getting  
A man to love is easy, but living  
Without him afterwards may have to  
Faced. A living without life when you move  
Around, meeting strangers, with your eyes that  
Gave up their search, with ears that hear only  
His last voice calling out your name and your  
Body which once under his touch had gleamed  
Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute

- The Looking Glass

Kamala Das longs for an ideal love or the *Lacanian Other* but fails miserably in earning it. She also talks of her concept of ideal love in "The Old Playhouse" as:

... love is Narcissus at the water's edge, haunted  
By its own lonely face, and yet it must seek at last  
An end, a pure, total freedom, it must will the mirrors  
To shatter and the kind night to erase the water

Her experiences with love make her to pass through frustrations, chaos and painful times. She wants a love of her liking i.e., the *Lacanian Other* but she invariably missed it:

As the convict studies  
His prison's geography  
I study the trappings  
Of your body, dear love,  
For I must someday find,  
An escape from its snare

- The Prisoner

The search for ideal or the *Lacanian Other* is evident throughout her poetry. Her concept of love takes a new turn often. In 'Love', she confesses:

Until I found you,  
I wrote verse, draw pictures,  
And, went out with friends  
For walks.....  
Now that I love you,  
Curled like an old mongrel  
My life lies, content,  
In you...

- From Summer in Calcutta

Her love sickness was skin-deep. Her love and intense passion makes her helpless and hence she sighs desperately and says:

O sea, I am fed up  
I want to be simple  
I want to be loved  
And  
If love is not to be half  
I want to be dead, just dead.

- The Suicide

In "the Looking Glass", one gets almost the same impression. The male body's attractions fascinate (evident *Lacanian Other or Desire*) the poet even when they are linked with lust:

Getting a man to love you is easy  
Only be honest about your wants as woman.  
Stand nude before the glass with him  
So that he sees himself the stronger one  
And believes it so, and you so much more  
Softer, younger, lovelier....

Kamala Das is a poet of love and as such celebrates love by searching the *Lacanian desire* domain in it. She believes that all women are actually prisoners of male ego, selfishness, lust and greed. She pines for love with freedom. Her longing for true never fills her with emotional fulfilment and never gives her peace of mind. She yearns for complete freedom from all even from the societal clutches. She eagerly yearns for *Lacanian pleasure principle*. She devotes herself fully to festivity of love. In her poem, "Love", she writes:

Until I found you,  
I wrote verse, 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...

- Summer in Calcutta



Das advocates for freedom of women and allows them to realize fully their desire domains or Lacanian *Other* or *Lacanian Objet Petit a*. We find that Das believes in complete Lacanian yearning or desire. She wants invariably to be loved for realizing the true Lacanian pleasure principle. Her search resembles fully with Lacanian *Jouissance & desire* which one never realizes fully.

It is proved now that both of these poetesses, very honestly and blatantly, voice their search for Lacanian love, desire, *jouissance* and lost *objet petit a*. They forget and sacrifice everything even their identities or egos in order to be one with their lovers. They get shattered if their tender imagined world (*Lacanian Other*) experiences any disturbance. Their passionate demand for love becomes the nucleus of their lives and poetic discourses. Their poetry comprises of earnest longings, desires and long cherished dreams. Search for love especially unfulfilled / lost love (desire) is usually the main crux of their poetry.

On the whole, the poetic expressions of these two poetesses are heavily pregnant with the Lacanian notion of desire, *jouissance*, *objet petit a*, *self -other* dichotomy and pleasure principle. It was also evidently found that though these women poets lived in different ages, cultures and in geographical locations yet they share many similarities. Literature, hence, in reality, voices truly what is deep in human psyches and hearts all across the world and cultures.

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