

**Men and Masculinity: Reading Simone De Beauvoir's Legacy of  
Blame-Game in Kamala Das and Maya Angelou's Poetry**

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I hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own work and that it has not been previously submitted to this university or any other institution for a degree, diploma, or any other certification.

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## **Certification**

This dissertation titled *Men and Masculinity: Reading Simone De Beauvoir's Legacy of Blame-Game in Kamala Das and Maya Angelou's Poetry* by Raisa Karim, ID: 2014-1-93-004, is being submitted as a partial of fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in English Literature.

Name and Affiliation

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## **Abstract**

This paper scrutinizes the selected poems of Kamala Das and Maya Angelou from the point of view of what Simone De Beauvoir has depicted in her masterpiece *The Second Sex*. Analyzing both of the authors and the critic, this paper identifies the old question blame-game against male and masculine force as the primary barrier against the coexistence of men and women. The further analysis scrutinizes how different phase of women life and their personal experience shape and reshape their idea of man. Finally, this paper shows that since woman sketch men based on their personal experience and revolve around masculine force to justify female existence, they should first come to a concrete and concise idea about male, rather demanding the equality at the first place. Without revising their facts and ideas, nothing will change and remain like the past.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The debate of male-female equality has been on the top chart of intellectual discussion for quite a long time. Theorists, critics, intellectuals, philosophers, authors, and poets- all have given their own point of view, come up with their unique theories and reflected their own ideas regarding the coexistence of male and female, shedding light on historical, cultural, societal, and psychological aspects. In most cases, they have conflicting ideas, views and theories and so there has also been a lot of heated debate, arguments, counter theories and criticism. If we closely observe and scrutinize the major female critics, poets, theorists and authors, we would see several approaches to look at feminism which often contradict with each other or weaken the rationality. As a consequence, this, as we have seen so far, ends up in a blur and hazy point from where any single conclusion or solution is impossible to draw.

It is often observed that feminist poets and authors tend to scrutinize male body in their writing. They consider the male body supreme. The comparison of organs often confuses the readers as to whether the feminists are actually blaming the nature or their own fate for this physical injustice or if they are blaming the male community for this. It is obvious that males have nothing to do with, “growing manly”. They are given a physical advantage naturally. However, it is often observed that feminist critics see it as a problem or major barrier against the equality of men and women. They often feel that due to the male organs, men are automatically blessed and have the upper hand. A simple example can be the much talked about and heavily debated, controversial concept of, “penis envy,” coined by Sigmund Freud.

French philosopher and feminist critic Simone de Beauvoir stresses and emphasizes on this physical aspect, by somewhat putting it in this way – “the body is not a thing, it is just a situation: it is our grasp of the world and our sketch of our project” (TSS 298). It seems that, for her the body plays the most important role to establish and corroborate our existence. If this is true, then it is also true that, if we consider the feminist approach to male body, then male gender also needs to have the edge in authenticating their existence. Even their bodies need to be considered, just like female organs, that have been much talked and speculated about.

Therefore, the primary concern that hinders is the equality issue is that of the male body.

However, apart from the male body, the next thing happens to be that, often, feminists tend to blame the psychology of male that leads to the idea of a,” patriarchal” and “misogynist” society.

This aspect is intertwined with the first one, which is the body issue. Since physical superiority gives the male community an edge, they naturally hold the position to execute the society. As a result, this situation raises tension between male and female, which is often reflected in the feminist writings. Although feminist trends have undergone many shifts and changes, nothing has changed much yet, because rather than offering a concrete solution, feminist critics, theorists, philosophers and authors have most of the time merely portrayed the difference and the aftereffects. Even if there are some who have tried to provide solutions, nothing has changed much because of counter criticism by other feminists. As a result the legacy continues without any solution.

In this paper, Simone de Beauvoir’s masterpiece *The Second Sex* has been rediscovered in two modern contemporary feminist poets from two regions- Kamala Das and Maya Angelou. After close scrutiny, their poems are categorized based on two aspects- how do women see men when they are in love and what is their approach when they see men as an opponent? Is there any

similarity between these two aspects, or are they merely, just hypocritically contradicting with each other? Whether there is any similarity or difference and why do this legacy of blame game continue which has changed nothing but hindered everything? These are the questions that will be explored in this paper to extract a satisfactory answer.

Kamala Das and Maya Angelou represent two specific communities- South Asian and African. Reading idea of exploring Simon de Beauvoir is to see the European idea of feminism in postcolonial feminist writings. Although this paper does not directly discuss about any of postcolonial issues, it intends to find the correlation between different regions in terms of feminism. In this paper I have tried to explore whether feminism is universal, or does it change after boundaries have been crossed and horizons have been expanded.

Both Kamala Das and Maya Angelou have written several poems about men. Many of these poems reflect the tension between male and female body. Many of the poems depict the stereotypical idea of women by men. Sadly, the irony is that, each and every poem, at the same time, is stereotyping the male body as well. Men are being discussed and depicted in their poems from a lover's eyes and an opponent's eyes. This paper closely reads and examines both the views and tends to find out the contradicting ideas, which are ultimately responsible for this gridlock situation of feminism. Kamala Das and Maya Angelou are just two of the representatives of feminist community backed by Simon de Beauvoir, who are explored in the paper to depict the problem and consequences of blame game in the history of male female conflict.

Only the poems which have talked about male female relationship have been taken into consideration in this paper. As a result, poems like *Relationship*, *Love*, *The Stone Age*, *The*

*Maggots, An Introduction, In Love, The Looking Glass, and Summer in Calcutta* by Kamala Das have been explored in this paper. Similarly, Maya Angelou's poem *Remembrance, Men, Equality, Still I Rise, Phenomenal Woman, and Alone* have been taken to understand the male female duality created by the feminist writers. Both of these poets have written about their lovers and other men, in general, in these poems. This paper explores how these two poets view their lovers or any man in general, applying Simone de Beauvoir's discussion in *The Second Sex* and finally offers an answer to the question why nothing has actually changed due to the legacy of the blame game.

## Chapter Two

### Women in Love

The problem which is evident in the poetry of both Kamala Das and Maya Angelou is that they tend to objectify women as delicate things in front of men. The masculinity in contrast with feminine fragility has also been objectified in their poetry. On one hand the objectification of femininity and on the other the ruthlessness of masculinity— this poetic depiction of rivalry has only increased the tension between men and women. Reading these two poets often gives an echoic impression of what Simon de Beauvoir has said in *Second Sex*.

The perplexing matter here is to analyze the love relationship between these two opposite sexes. The impression these two poets give us is contradictory, confusing and perplexing. They seem to portray exactly the same words Beauvoir says in the chapter ‘Women in Love’ in her book *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir quotes a various number of different scholars, philosophers, authors, theorists, critics, and writers to prove that womanly love is completely opposite or has different properties and characteristics than that of men. The poems analyzed in this paper by the two poets also echo the same idea. There should not have been any problem with this idea, if a contradictory idea was not going on, parallely hand in hand with this one. This contradicting idea springs from the idea where women see men as the opponent will be discussed further in the next chapter. Let us, for now look back and focus on the current issue where women seem to be in favor of men and in love with them. However, the language or approach of these two poets use force on the readers to contemplate in another way. The poems where Kamala Das and Maya Angelou express their affection for their beloveds seem to have double meaning. They are

praising men, ofcourse but on the other hand, sometimes, it appears as though they are simultaneously poking at men's masculinity for being," masculine," (possessing male qualities.)

In these poems, the readers get to see and realize that the how these poets describe the endless devotion and affection of women when they are in love or are being loved. Being devoted, may seem to be a great characteristic until someone makes an effort to get this devotion noticed forcefully by the beloved and others. Only then the question of sincerity arises regarding the love of women. In these selected poetries of Kamala Das, the explicit depiction of sexuality in relation with the male-female duality has only made the issue more complex. Similarly, Maya Angelou, in her poem describes masculinity from her personal sexual and emotional experiences. Although separated by continents, Maya Angelou and Kamala Das seem to have depicted Simone de Beauvoir perfectly, which eventually goes back to the same old question again– what has been achieved by this blame game or what the feminists intend to show after all? We will look into this question in more details in chapter four. As of now, let us see what Kamala Das has experienced in love relation with her beloved.

### 2.1 Kamal Das: 'In love' and 'On Love'

Before scrutinizing her ideas, let us look at a very short poem of hers called 'Love'. Here she speaks out to her beloved about how much she admires her and how his presence has changed her life forever.

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. . . . (Das, 23)

These four lines in the first stanza give the readers an impression that the speaker was enjoying her freedom until her beloved came in the second stanza. She makes it evident that she loves the man in her life, but leaves the interpretation to the readers whether she enjoys being a lover or is a helpless woman who has no other option but to give her lover a fake gesture of love. Also, she compares herself with a mongrel –a dog breed unintentionally. This also raises a question whether she identifies her birth as an unwanted one or her love for the beloved as unintentional. The point may be taken into consideration since female childbirth has never been welcomed. In another way, the lover here could be the husband whom she was married due to an arranged marriage. Whatever the case is, her life revolves around him and as a consequence of that she has stopped doing things she used to enjoy before.

The readers may ask what is the main issue that she wants to raise here. She gives the answer in her another poem, ‘Relationship’ where she finds peace in her ‘betrayer’s arms’. The speaker in this poem seems to be explicit about her sexual experience with her lover. She terms her husband as her betrayer, but at the same time she believes that her lover cannot betray her physically. Perhaps she indicates male lust for the feminine body. However, she openly talks about her craving for the ‘quick sterile sting’ which actually refers to the male organ. Since she craves for the male sting, and since she says, “it was my desire that made him male and beautiful’, does it mean that being a male and being masculine is only the result of her wish, her desires? Does she really want that or it’s just her realization?

From her poems it seems that she undergoes a self-realization in each poem and that the feminine body or the speaker literally craves for male touch and strokes of male organs, but at the same time hypocritically it is presented in such a way that it is her who makes the male feel masculine, about himself. Otherwise, males have no self confidence in themselves. It is as if she is stroking the male ego and coaxing them to think they are all masculine and manly.

The problem in her depiction, however, is between being in love and looking at her love and at her lover from a neutral point of view which contradict with each other. She loves her lover, craves for her lover, longs for her lover, but calls himself a betrayer who acts sometimes as a lion or a snake and sometimes nip like maggots (Das 41, 51). The objectification of the male body with animal figures, perhaps her way of victimizing masculinity out of envy. For example, the way she compares her body with her beloved body in the poem 'The Looking Glass', depicts her frustration of being a woman.

In the poem she compares her body with masculine structure of her husband. She calls for total submission so that her fragile body can make her lover's body look stronger.

“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. (*The Looking Glass*, Poemhunter)

Das explicitly talks about her male lover's organs from a feminine point of view. The way she compares her womanhood with his manhood arises a question of jealousy. Beauvoir would

oppose the term jealousy and would stress that women are like that. They devote themselves in order to gain complete attention from their lover.

In reference to Nietzsche, Beauvoir distinguishes between womanly and manly love. She identifies that the love of a woman is not only a partial dedicated and devoted love, rather she compares it with the unconditional and complete submission where both soul and body are given as gifts. On the contrary, she believes that male emotion does not follow the same path. Rather, men only love when he desires and restrain himself from getting carried away completely. This for Beauvoir is the deciding factor between men and women when it comes to the question of love. She even rejects the devoted ones –who she considers as exceptions– to consider as actual men (*TSS* 652).

Kamala Das is repeating the idea of what Beauvoir says in her writing–

All the fond details that make

Him male and your only man. Gift him all,

Gift him what makes you woman (*The Looking Glass*)

The complete devotion by the speaker makes the man stronger and the representation of woman seems weaker. Man, here in this case, her lover becomes a cult for her. She deliberately worships him who is her God. She seems to be unable to live without him. She cannot even stand the idea of losing his sight. This possibly can be for the reason that because she wants to hold him back for her ‘endless female hungers’. As Beauvoir says, “there is no other way out for her than to lose herself, body, and soul, in him who is represented to her as absolute, as the essential. (*TSS* 653)

Since he has become essential, it is impossible for the speaker to let him go, and even if he goes, her life becomes an aimless wandering. Thus she says,

Oh yes, getting

A man to love is easy, but living

Without him afterwards may have to be

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*)

The speaker here is talking about the one man, the only love of her life. She does not want any other man because she will never be able to get over him. It's not clear whether he died or left her, but whatever the scenarios are, she continues worshipping her. Perhaps the emotion and attachment she had with her former lover can never be replaceable. This image of a woman and the idea of men-women mutual relationship contrasts with the image and the idea of men-women relationship in chapter three, where women see men as opponent.

Sexuality is also metaphorically as well as extensively explored in her writings. Beauvoir talked about feminine sexuality and its influence on the interpersonal relationship between men and women. In some cases, the man becomes worshipping idol for women as they please her 'endless female hunger'.

The desire for love becomes a passionate love only when it is carnally realized. Inversely, love can arise as a result of physical intercourse; in this case the sexually dominated woman acquires an exalted view of a man who at first seemed to her quite insignificant. (TSS 654)

The similar kind of statement of Beauvoir can be found in the poems *Summer in Calcutta* and *In Love* by Kamala Das. She talks about her female desire and sexuality in these poems. She drinks the April sun, the fire, and drink until she gets drunk. She laughs ‘unhurried laughter’ and carries on drinking. Her ‘unending lust’ ignites every time he is close to her. She ignores her mind while having bodily pleasure and listen to the moans and harsh sounds in the silence of her room. She becomes one with her lover. She devotes her body and soul both to him. This is how a woman in love looks at her lover, looks at a male, looks at masculinity, their male race. Her poems seem to depict that a woman in love won’t hesitate to be the mistress of her master. Rather, she will try each and every way possible to please her master. Kamala Das is depicting the moment where sexuality, sensuality, and spirituality merge together, a desperate state where the woman in love can think of herself without a support, without a masculine figure. Her words almost echo what Beauvoir says:

This is the moment when love becomes a necessity.... She is not seldom satisfied even if she has felt the orgasm, she is not set completely free from the spell of her flesh; her desire continues in the form of affection. In giving her pleasure, the man increases her attachment, he does not liberate her. As for him, he no longer desires her; but she will not pardon this momentary indifference unless he has dedicated to her a timeless and absolute emotion. Then the immanence of the moment is transcended; hot memories are no regret, but a treasure delight; ebbing

pleasure becomes hope and promise; enjoyment is justified; woman can gloriously accept her sexuality because she transcends it; excitement, pleasure, desire are no longer a state, but a benefaction; her body is no longer an object: it is a hymn, a flame. (*TSS 659*)

The depiction of a man in her poetry initially gives an impression of a woman where she appears to be the most loved and affectionate companion a man can ever have. A woman has a distinguished love that of a man. She loves a man with an unconditional love. Her entire world revolves around the man. However, if we read Beauvoir in Kamala Das, then her ideas about women can be changed according to Beauvoir. For Beauvoir, women devote themselves completely because “love becomes for her a religion” (*TSS 653*) and “the more demands the man makes, the more gratified the woman feels” (*TSS 660*).

Her God’s order pleases her because she finds happiness in obeying command and satisfying her God. Her religion, her cult mesmerizes her, hypnotizes her. The problem with this blind devotion is that, in a way, she captivates her God in her love. Now, a single wrong move by her God will displease her, and as a consequence, she will be tempted to punish herself. As Beauvoir says on this matter, “She requires her God no longer to admire her and approve of her; she wants to merge with him, to forget herself in his arms” (*TSS 660*). This worshipping ultimately leads to an ambiguous narcissism, where she takes the turn as a controller who controls herself by letting her lover control her. She is infected with her own infection, which she has created unconsciously to remain conscious. No one ever asked her to be that loyal, or never has she been asked to show insane devotion. However, as she has captivated herself inside herself, now she has no other way to get out, but attach herself with her love as the glue. Now, if something goes wrong in this situation, for example, if she does not get her expected attention or

she gets betrayed like the speaker in Das' poem, she helplessly injures herself. As she cannot attempt any action against her God, her love, her man, she decides to take the anger on herself. Thus Beauvoir says, "The love that at the start seemed a narcissistic apotheosis is fulfilled in the bitter joys of a devotion that often leads to self-mutilation" (*TSS* 661).

## 2.2 Maya Angelou's Idea of Love

Maya Angelou extends from where Kamala Das ends. She echoes the same ideas, same words, and same womanly emotion. She remembers her love and cannot get over him. She 'greedily' consumes his presence by remembering his hands and other gestures on her (*Remembrance*). Her sexuality has been shown in her poems and her understanding about men and her body is also depicted in her poems. In the poem *Men*, the speaker looks at men from a fifteen year old girl's point of view. She distinguishes men as "wino men, old men, young men sharp as mustard", and metaphorically says that "men are always going somewhere". Perhaps what she actually means is that men are always in the process of making love to other women, they are always busy going into someone's private area. Then she proceeds by saying that "I was there. Fifteen Years old and starving for them" which indicates her experience of exploring her sexuality and sensuality during the time of puberty. Then she shares the first experience of her intercourse and perhaps her first betrayal as well. It seems that the intercourse has not been pleasing since she was a young girl who is handed roughly. This argument seems more legit because she has no interest on them later and her craving is gone. However, she is not sure enough since she ends her poem with the single phrase 'May Be'. This depicts the uncontrollable power masculinity has over female. At one point she is reluctant to mingle with any man, at the same time she can't be sure of what she intends to. Perhaps, Beauvoir is right.

The adolescent girl wishes at first to identify herself with males; when she gives that up, she then seeks to share in their masculinity by having one of them in love with her; it is not the individuality of this one or that one which attracts her; she is in love with man in general. (*TSS* 653-654)

The stage Beauvoir is talking about is the early stage of a girl when she explores her sexuality and sensuality. She sees men in a different way than she sees them in the later stage. Men seem to be a mystery to her; they are like a maze or riddles. They are not separate personalities; they are just men to her. They are collectively a single entity. Perhaps men, in front of a young girl, are an image of absolute power, strength and total force. Their presence, even the thought of their presence shakes the girl from the inside. The adrenaline rush runs through her body. Her heart pounds as they come closer to her or touch her fragile body parts and enters into them. It all goes to one single point, the penis envy and the castration complexity. The realization taunts them so much that they feel numb. At the beginning the pain she feels during intercourse changes her views about men. As we can see in the case of Maya Angelou when it makes her astounded and puzzled at the same time, and she puts the situation kind of this way:

Your mind pops, exploding fiercely, briefly,

Like the head of a kitchen match. Shattered.

It is your juice

That runs down their legs. Staining their shoes.

When the earth rights itself again,

And taste tries to return to the tongue,

Your body has slammed shut. Forever.

No keys exist. (*Men*)

Yes, no keys exist which can change the locked stereotype of women. They carry on this stereotypical idea to their adult years when they encounter 'love' finally. Their lover described in their speech, their writings, and in their poems is unlike the man who had molested them at their early age. Their lover is praiseworthy and passionate. He is charming and his strength is admirable. In both cases, masculine strength plays the dominant role. Beauvoir also thinks in the same way:

It is commonplace – and seemingly a truth – that the prostitute is proud to be beaten by her man; but what exalts her is not the idea of her beaten and enslaved person, it is rather the strength and authority, the supremacy of the male upon whom she is dependent... (TSS 662)

Therefore the strength factor plays the most important role in both the cases. A woman feels so small in front of masculine strength, so fragile and delicate that she starts to worship it. This idolization of masculinity comes when they write about love, at the same time when they write against men. After scrutinizing Maya Angelou and Kamala Das, and interpreting them in Beauvoir's writing, it seems that women are most concerned about the masculinity of men rather than taking them as a human being like them. The existence becomes less important and the essence takes it over:

A naïve young girl is caught by the gleam of virility, and in her eyes male worth is shown, according to circumstances, by physical strength, distinction of manner, wealth, cultivation, intelligence, authority, social status, a military uniform; but what she always wants is for her lover to represent the essence of manhood. (TSS 654)

As they carry on looking the essence in different man, they sometimes fail and sometimes succeed. Maya Angelou has succeeded few times and failed at times. Her poems depict how she has taken those experiences and what her reflections are. In both cases, her main focus has been on the essence of manhood. Like Kamala Das and every other feminist poet, she seems to be on a quest to depict the physical dissimilarities and their consequences rather going into the mind of men. Even if she goes sometimes, the root is still the same, the masculinity.

### 2.3 Womanly Love in Feminist Writing

The depiction of women when they are in love shows the devoted side of a woman. However, if we consider the question of equality between men and women, then a question arises – are women really this much devoted or do they have no choice but to please men to have a better personal relationship. The question is simple– is womanly love fake or real? Are women in love ‘helpless’ and ‘option less’ or are they actually in love?

The two poets represent two distinct cultures – Indian and African American. Women in these two cultures may be different in rituals, but they are not different in their basics – their personal relationship with their beloved. It seems universal of women to feel similarly about their male counterpart. In both Kamala Das and Maya Angelou, we have seen this similarity. Beauvoir studies women very closely before interpreting the general idea of women, which she discusses in her book *The Second Sex*. If read closely, Beauvoir’s interpretation very closely matches with these two poets thoughts. If these two poets and Beauvoir can be related, then the idea of love and relationship between women and men can be generalized since these three women are representing three different cultures from three different parts of the world.

When talked about love, sexual relationship comes with it. However, the way of looking at female and male concept of love and sexuality is completely different for Beauvoir. To her, the love of the female is more intense, which is worth mentioning. On the other hand, men in love are cold. His love is calculative and temporary. Thus she distinguishes male and female sexuality kind of this way:

From a more or less unsatisfactory affair a man is almost sure of obtaining at least the benefit of sex pleasure; a woman can very well obtain no benefit at all. Even when indifferent, she lends herself politely to the embrace at the decisive moment, sometimes only to find her lover important and herself compromised in a ridiculous mockery. If all goes well except that she fails to attain satisfaction, then she feels 'used', 'worked'. If she finds full enjoyment, she will want to prolong the affair.... Her pleasure, far from bringing deliverance, binds her to the man; separation wounds her even when supposedly a friendly parting. It is much more unusual to hear a woman speak amicably of a former lover than a man of his past mistress. (TSS 702)

Perhaps Beauvoir is telling the truth, since both Kamala Das and Maya Angelou recall their past. Let us look at the way they are recalling their past. Kamala Das is lamenting in some of her poems, remembering her beloved and his presence. Maya Angelou, not too much explicit like Das, also remembering her lover a few times. In her poem *Men*, she describes her painful intercourse with one of her early lovers. The description reflects Beauvoir's idea that the absence of pleasure makes the woman think that she has been used or molested by men. In contrary, her devotion intensifies when she finds ultimate pleasure from her beloved, in this case we see

Kamala Das remembering her lost love again and again. Perhaps her chemistry with her lover has been satisfactory.

The two poets talk about their lover in their poems just the way Beauvoir thinks that mistresses are not discussed by men. On the other hand, former lover of women –no matter how he has been– are always discussed and remembered by women. This leads to a conclusion that it's completely upon women, whether they'll remember a man as a 'molester' and 'pedophile' or will men be remembered as a lost lover for whom women long for. This hypocritical generalization at the end proves that "every woman in love is more or less a paranoiac" (*TSS* 670).

It seems surprising that if it is always men who are to blame for the fate of women, especially in the case of personal relationship. There are countless cases where male domination and torture are evident in interpersonal and sexual relationships. However, the point we must focus here is not women abuse, the focus should be the perplexing and close-ended views of woman towards their relationship with men. This should be taken into serious consideration for both healthy and unsuccessful relationships because, if Beauvoir, Das, and Angelou are right, in every culture, every race, and in every religion the way of looking at male partners are the same. If the question arises, if someone asks why they do that, perhaps Beauvoir would give the answer:

...woman seeks the father image in her lover; but it is because he is a man, not because he is a father, that he dazzles the girl child, and every man shares in this magical power. Woman does not long to reincarnate one individual in another, but to reconstruct a situation: that which she experienced as a little girl, under adult

protection.... What she wants to recover is a roof over her head, walls that prevent her from feeling her abandonment in the wide world... This childish drama haunts the love of many women; they are happy to be called 'my little girl, my dear child'; men know that the words: 'you're just like a little girl,' are among those that most surely touch a woman's heart. (*TSS* 655)

The longing for the root, the long gone situation is the idea produced and shared in woman's mind. They are not confident enough to demand their love rather tend to surrender themselves in the hands of men even though they didn't ask for it.

The love of women's life sometimes is never found. Although Kamala Das and Maya Angelou, both have talked about their idea of love in their poems, none of the poem shows any static or stable lover or love life either. An ideal love life seems to be a myth for them. All they have is betrayal, roughness, harsh words, melancholy, and remembrance. This takes us back to Beauvoir again. For her, women have always chased a kind of love which actually hard to find. There are many things in life that are of greater importance. The problem with this statement of hers is that the important things she talks about include husband and children. So it appears to be confusing enough to find out what love she actually is talking about. Perhaps it means that the love women chase is a mystical one, which even they don't have a full understanding of. Thus, they carefully avoid it.

But it often happens that a woman succeeds in deifying none of the men she knows. Love has a smaller place in woman's life than has often been supposed. Husband, children, home, amusements, social duties, vanity, sexuality, career, are much more important. Most women dream of a grand amour, a soul-searing love.

They have known substitutes, they have been close to it; it has come to them in partial bruised, ridiculous, imperfect, mendacious forms, but very few have truly dedicated their lives to it. (*TSS* 654)

If most the women have not dedicated their lives in search of pure and divine love, then what love do they bear for their husband? If the love for their husband is not true, then we must note this point and ask justification for all that devotion Beauvoir and Kamala Das have shown in their poetry. Perhaps Beauvoir is right. Women have been deceiving not only men, but themselves too. If they live side by side, share a bed with men, sleep with them and make love to them without the presence of love, then all the love poems become pointless. Each of the love poems is a paradox, a hollow emotion, and a fake depiction. The mysticism is not for love, it's for something else:

...it is not that mystical love always has a sexual character, but that the sexuality of the woman in love is tinged with mysticism. 'My God, my adored one, my lord and master' – the same words fall from the lips of the saint on her knees and the loving woman on her bed... she calls for the burning presence of divine Love; the other, also, offers and awaits: thunderbolt, dart, arrow, are incarnated in the male sex organ. In both women there is the same dream, the childhood dream, the mystic dream, the dream of love: to attain supreme existence through losing oneself in the other. (*TSS* 659)

This means that men are god or similar to god for women. They are master and women are mistress. Women in love, this means, are not actually in love. They are in love with the idea that they are in love. They are in love with the image of masculine force over their head. The godlike

figure whom they can worship, the master whom they give the privilege to order and control them are men. Men become the center of their life. They become the purpose. In Beauvoir's words, "So long as she is in love and is loved by and necessary to her loved one, she feels herself wholly justified: she knows peace and happiness" (*TSS* 663).

Therefore, we may come to the conclusion that women in love find peace and happiness in only when she feels her existence is justified. She does not need to feel the true emotion or fall in love truly as her goal is not to pursue love, rather it's all about existence. She no longer remains as a separate entity. She seems to live and experience the same existence as her partner, in this case, her god, her master. Thus Beauvoir says, "...she is another incarnation of her loved one, his reflection, his double: she is he. She lets her own world collapse in contingency, for she really lives in his" (*TSS* 663).

As Kamala Das says in her poem "My life lies, content, in you" (*Love*), for women, men become the reason to live for. Whatever the critics may argue, no one can avoid the fact. The 'love' women bear for men, perhaps is the foundation of all miscommunication and every misinterpretation. The idea of love in Kamala Das, Maya Angelou, and Beauvoir is similar at the same time different. Perhaps culture plays a different role here. Since they belong to three different cultures – Europe, African American, and Indian – their way of looking at their lover may vary. However, the most common similarity among them is that no woman can avoid a man's presence in her life, whether it is in the form of love or in a form of the master.

Such traits are found in every woman in love. If need be, she herself tyrannizes over herself in her lover's name; all she is, all she has, every moment of her life, must be devoted to him and thus gain their *raison d'être*; she wishes to possess

nothing save in him; what makes her unhappy is for him to require nothing to her, so much so that a sensitive lover will invent demands. She at first sought in love a confirmation of what she was, of her past, of her personality; but she also involves her future in it, and to justify her future she puts it in the hands of one who possesses all values. (*TSS* 660-661)

The problem with this type of thinking is that women at one stage design their own lives on the basis of men's existence in their lives, and on the other stage they think about their equality where men become the obstacle. Women still have not realized that no one but they have put men in the place of god, and also it's them who look at men as opponent.

## Chapter Three

### Women as Opponent

The question of equality has founded the ground of the feminist movement from the beginning and this issue of equality comes into feminist writing very often. The problem often arises with this issue is, equality often gives birth to rivalry. Women tend to see men as their opponent and rival when it comes to share the rights and privileges equally. Several issues have infuriated this tug of war between men and women.

Due to physical strength, men have the edge over women. This eventually has given them a position to control and run the society since the Stone Age. The head of the clan from ancient time now has become the head of the family, head of the bureaucracy, and head of the community. Nothing has changed so far. After all these jumping and protesting, after all the movements, the result we see is still almost the same. The objections against male dominant or patriarchal society vary among cultures, races, and religions. However, the most common issue in every community is the distribution of familial and social rights. As a human being, one may expect the division of facilities equally. However, unfortunately the distribution lacks equality. It was uneven then, and it is uneven now. Yet, she has to ignore the situation and please men (as they believe) and obey the men to survive. Firstly, she has to ignore all the injustice done to her, which indeed is a major sacrifice. Afterwards, she has to drive herself according to the male rulebook to enter into their cast, pleasing them all the way. The humility and hopelessness are intensified in every aspect in her case. This situation is best described in Simone De Beauvoir's words:

I have already pointed out that the existence of a privileged caste, which she can join by merely surrendering her body, is an almost irresistible temptation to the young woman; she is fated for 'gallantry' by the fact that her wages are minimal while the standard of living expected of her by society is very high. If she is content to get along on her wages, she is only a pariah: ill lodged, ill dressed, she will be denied all amusement and even love. Virtuous people preach asceticism to her, and, indeed, her dietary regime is often as austere as that of Carmelite.

Unfortunately, not everyone can take God as lover: she has to please men if she is to succeed in her life as a woman. (*TSS* 690)

Here she doesn't only talk about her lover, rather she is pointing to the entire male community. Talking about the entire community, let us now look at what women think about men and equality. Both Kamala Das and Maya Angelou have talked about their equal rights and women's right in general. Like all other feminist, raising their voice for equality, they also put their ideas into words in the poem. The problem we find in their voice is that in the quest for equality, they look at men as their opponent and try to oppose them in an attacking way. It is utterly surprising to see the same woman who once had been deeply hypnotized by the love of man now attacking them for equal rights. Even if it seems logical, the way, the demand has been made seems harsh and threatening. The timid woman we see in their love speeches is long gone and the rise of another kind of women is evident in some of the poems. The lover, the god, the savior suddenly has turned into a competitor to them. If Kamala Das, Maya Angelou and Beauvoir are read carefully, few of these dissimilarities will be evident.

Firstly, in demand of equal rights, feminist writers and critics pointed out the upbringing which they think has been uneven between men and women from the very beginning. They

believe and agree with Beauvoir that it is women who are actually stereotyped by men and trained to become and act like 'women' from their childhood. Thus Beauvoir says:

For when she begins her adult life she does not have behind her the same past as does a boy; she is not viewed by society in the same way; the universe presents itself to her in a different perspective. The fact of being a woman today poses peculiar problems for an independent human individual. (TSS 691)

Both of the poets talks about their young age too, and the challenging journey of becoming a woman from a young girl. As we have seen Maya Angelou talks about her first sexual experience as a bad one, Kamala Das too has stresses this point in her poetry. She says in the poem *An Introduction*:

When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask

For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the

Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me

But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.

The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. (Das )

This incident depicts that how women like Kamala Das has grown hatred against men as well as societies for manipulating and exploiting women in their young age. Bijay Kumar Das, in his reading of Indian poets in the seventies, also stresses this matter where women were "given away" before they "could understand love and sex" (103).

Secondly, Beauvoir distinguishes between male and female attire. She identifies that male need not to bother about how they look at all as “nobody expects him to take care of them himself: some kindly disposed or hired female relieves him of this bother” (*TSS* 693). She identifies that men need not to be concerned how they look in front of others. On the other hand, women always have to be concerned about what they put on and what make up they use. Their look does matter– to men as well as to them. However, women have to take care of themselves where men can rely on women since they are serving men from the very beginning. Thus Beauvoir says:

Woman, on the contrary, knows that when she is looked at she is not considered apart from her appearance: she is judged, respected, desired, by and through her toilette. Her clothes were originally intended to consign her to impotence, and they have remained unserviceable, easily ruined.... But she will have to make most of the repairs herself; other women will not come benevolently to her assistance and she will hesitate to add to her budget for work she could do herself. (*TSS* 693)

Even though women are bound to maintain their appearance by themselves and at the same time serve men, they still will do it happily since they are women. Beauvoir talks about feminine tradition to analyze why a woman would do such thing after all she had faced. She points out that for centuries, women are executing multiple tasks and still taking care of her ‘womanliness’. In a way Beauvoir is giving credit to the female community for their courage and endurance. She puts this as:

It is not regard for the opinion of other alone that leads her to give time and care to her appearance and her housekeeping. She wants to retain her womanliness for her own satisfaction. (*TSS 693*)

Obedient to the feminine tradition, she will wax her floors, and she will do her own cooking instead of going to eat at a restaurant as a man would in her place. She wants to live at once like a man and like a woman, and in that way she multiplies her tasks and adds to her fatigue. (*TSS 694*)

Afterwards, she points out the domination of the male and submission of women. We have discussed in other chapters that women submit themselves to gain the acceptance of male. At the same time, while pleasing men they tend to admire their domination as well. This may seem contradictory, but that is the actual case. She is both conscious and at the same time unconscious that she is making herself prey of men. One part of her loves to be dominated and the other part opposes to that domination. At one time she is being eaten like a fruit and the next moment she protests for being molested. This situation is best described in Beauvoir's writing:

Even when her effort at seduction succeeds, the victory is still ambiguous; the fact is that in common opinion it is the man who conquers, who has the woman. It is not admitted that she, like a man, can have desires of her own: she is the prey of desire. It is understood that man has made the specific forces a part of his personality, whereas woman is the slave of the species. She is represented, gently to the spell of sex feeling; she is fascinated by the male, who picks her like a fruit. At another time she is regarded as if possessed by alien forces: there is a devil

raging in her womb, a serpent lurks in her vagina, eager to devour the male's sperm. (TSS 699)

Now let us look at Kamala Das and Maya Angelou again. Both have opposed men in different occasions. They openly have challenged male domination and tried to get rid of these dominations in their own way. They clearly distinguished between male and female essence and existence both. Both of the poets at some point of their life, experimented with their womanliness. It was a gesture of protest against male domination and stereotype. In her poem *An Introduction* Kamala Das gets rid of her womanliness in this way:

I wore a shirt and my

Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored

My womanliness. (Das 26)

Similarly, Maya Angelou mocks the traditionality of other women and opposes the stereotype of a beautiful woman.

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.

I'm not cute or build to suit a fashion model's size (Phenomenal Woman)

Both of the poets at times attack men as well as the patriarchal society for being dominant to women. Their writing reflects their anger which is just a result of the oppression they have suffered from. Their anger, not only attacks the male community, but at the same time the entire society for creating a system where women have to be calculative for their survival. The condition is that they have to accept the system to be with men otherwise they will be considered outsiders and will be cornered soon. Maya Angelou in few of her poetry has tried her best to

break the shackles and rise above all the stereotypes and injustices. Her poems *Phenomenal Woman, Equality, and Still I Rise* embark on the fact that women are not born and brought up only to be the secondary, rather they have their own way of living which men must accept like the way women have accepted theirs. If it does bother any man, she has answer for him:

You declare you see me dimly  
 Through a glass which will not shine,  
 Though I stand before you boldly,  
 Trim in rank and marking time...  
 Equality, and I will be free.  
 Equality, and I will be free. (*Equality*)

Talking about equality, there has been a long debate over this issue for centuries. The term ‘equality’ is perplexing and has different meanings. Equality can be demanded on many levels. Women have to be very clear which equality, they are talking about. Again, since there are thousands of feminists all over the world with different cultural background and personal experience, it is near to impossible to provide a single concrete meaning of equality. For instance, take the example of sexuality that Beauvoir has analyzed in her book *The Second Sex*. In sexuality, there is a matter of giving and receiving from both sides. Let us first look at how Beauvoir sees this issue:

For most women – and men too – it is not a mere matter of satisfying erotic desire, but of maintaining their dignity as human beings while obtaining satisfaction. When a male enjoys a woman, when he gives her enjoyment, he

takes the position of sole subject: he is imperious conqueror or lavish donor – sometimes both at once. Woman, for her part, also wishes to make it clear that she subdues her partner to her pleasure and overwhelms him with her gifts. Thus, when she imposes herself on a man, be it through promised benefits, or in staking on his courtesy, or by artfully arousing his desire in its pure generality, she readily persuades herself that she is overwhelming him with her bounty. Thanks to this advantageous conviction, she can make advances without humiliating herself, because she feels she is doing so out of generosity. (TSS 697-698)

Again Beauvoir is blaming the female community for deceiving themselves here. The male desire, the masculine force on women is taken as if men are achieving a reward. Beauvoir reminds the women that they are not doing it as part of social services; rather they are doing it for their survival which most of them are unaware of. Women like Kamala Das and Maya Angelou think in this way. They seem to be unaware of the fact that their craving for their beloved and description of their lovemaking is heavily mistaken. Their ‘endless female hunger’ has never been the center, at least according to Beauvoir. They are not taking anything or giving away anything either, that is what Beauvoir thinks. Men are in the position of the controller and women are the subject which would be controlled by them. As Beauvoir says:

Very often he views the bed as the proper terrain for asserting his aggressive superiority. He is eager to take and not to receive, not to exchange but to rob. He seeks to possess the woman to an extent over and above what she gives him; he demands that her consent be a defeat and that the words she murmurs be avowals he tears from her – demands that she confess her pleasure and recognize her subjection. (TSS 699)

This idea of subjection is evident in both of the poet's writing, but not in a similar way. This subjection is vividly evident at their younger age where they describe how they have painfully suffered by male sexual oppression. However, in later stages, when they realize that the pain is not over, rather it has just been transformed into a new formation women don't hesitate to identify their male counterpart as their opponent. By doing this, they unconsciously start a battle against men in their mind. They now see the brutal past, the painful male force in every gesture of men. However, although they look at men as opponent, but except a few, the sexual lives of women are still very much attached to men. This attachment with their opponent makes the scene ambiguous. In order to be free, they first have to be free sexually. Women are seen to struggle throughout their lives with their sexuality and sexual preference:

Today the woman who works is less neglectful of her femininity than formerly, and she does not lose her sexual attractiveness. This success, though already indicating progress towards equilibrium, is not yet complete; it continues to be more difficult for a woman than for a man to establish the relations with the other sex that she desires. Her erotic and affectionate life encounters numerous difficulties. In this matter the emancipated woman is in no way privileged: sexually and affectionately most wives and courtesans are deeply frustrated. If the difficulties are more evident in the case of the independent woman, it is because she has chosen battle rather than resignation. (*TSS 696*)

Thus we can see here, each individual undergoes different problems in their personal life. No matter how women handle their sexual and social lives, the frustration is always there.

Few of the women try to break the shackles and to go against the flow. They are unlike the ones who follow the tradition and historical legacy. The idea of a woman we get from Kamala Das and Maya Angelou in their love poem may be compared to the traditional body of a woman. However, there are few poems where we see these two poets talk about their individuality and rights. Later in chapter four, we will talk about how and why the woman in chapter two who wanted to merge as a single soul with men suddenly becomes a self-conscious woman in chapter three. Let us now look at the female voice in the poem *Still I Rise* and *Phenomenal Woman*, and *Equality* by Maya Angelou, and *An Introduction* by Kamala Das.

In the poems Maya Angelou reminds men that they no longer can define women in their own language. The woman will rise in her own majesty. She will bring equality and will be free. She calls out to remove the covers from men's ear and eyes so that they could see women rising. They will never see women looking down with shameful eyes, never again. She will rise every time they kill her with their twisted harsh words and hate. Similarly, Kamala Das also raises her voice against male domination. Like Maya Angelou, she also criticizes male for imposing language barrier in women writing. She also has demanded the freedom and equality.

These kinds of out of the box women, according to Beauvoir, have to struggle twice. At first they have to struggle against the male force, the masculine entities. In the middle of this, they also have to co-exist along with the traditional women who in real make the rebel women's life miserable. Thus Beauvoir says:

What is extremely demoralizing for the woman who aims at self-sufficiency is the existence of other women of like social status, having at the start the same situation and the same opportunities, who live as parasites. A man may feel

resentment towards the privileged, but he has solidarity with his class; on the whole, those who begin with equal chances reach about the same level in life. Whereas women of like situation may, through man's mediation, come to have very different fortunes. A comfortable married or supported friend is a temptation in the way of one who is intending to make her own success; she feels she is arbitrarily condemning herself to take the most difficult roads; at each obstacle she wonder whether it might not be better to take a different route. (*TSS 707-708*)

## Chapter Four

### **Nothing has Changed: Blame-Game Continues Against Male and Masculinity**

Throughout the history, many feminist authors, philosophers, theorists, poets and critics have written about their rights and raised their voice against the oppression of masculine society. The intention has always been the same – equality. However, the problem with the term, “equality,” is in its definition. Almost all the feminist writers have failed to give a common answer or a shared idea of the term, “equality”. Nor do they have answers similar to each other, regarding the definition of, ‘equality’. Perhaps this scenario is a result or consequence due to the cultural differences among women, or it can be dues religious differences, as well. Whatever the reason is, feminism had always tried to unite under one particular observation – men as their opponent, if not, at least as the main constraint in their way to freedom and individuality. The masculine force has always been a problem which also has been a major theme in feminist writing. As a result, since women have a different approach to things due to cultural and historical upbringing, the generalized idea of men has been interpreted among women in different ways. These interpretations at times have turned into contradictions. Even if it did not conflict, it did not, either give or provide any satisfactory solution. This, unfortunately, has prolonged the blame-game against masculinity and men in general, instead of neutralizing the situation in the first place.

The issue which tantalizes the conflict most is the feminist view towards the relationship between male and female. Beauvoir distinguishes male and female as master-mistress relationship. For her, men “...even on their knees before a mistress, what they still want is to take possession of her... and ...for woman, on the contrary, to love is to relinquish everything

for the benefit of a master” (TSS 653). This use of terms to identify and distinguish women and men is evident in feminist writings too often. Even Kamala Das and Maya Angelou have echoed this idea in their poetry. The way they have distinguished men and women in their poems seems to be a blind generalization. Now we may ask, what triggers these stereotypical views of women to men? Is it an act of helplessness against male domination or has it come out of jealousy? Freud has said about penis envy which is a complex women suffer from. Surprising enough, most of the feminist critics and authors don’t want to consider Freud’s analysis of women; still one of the most famous feminist Beauvoir is repeating the same idea of penis envy in her own way. She identifies that having a phallus gives men an edge both socially and morally which women do not have. As a result, the approach towards sexuality and approach in sexuality are completely opposite for these two.

Through the identification of phallus and transcendence, it turns out that his social and spiritual successes endow him with a virile prestige. He is not divided.

Whereas it is required of woman that in order to realize her femininity she must make herself object and prey, which is to say that she must renounce her claims as sovereign object.... She refuses to confine herself to her role as female, because she will not accept mutilation; but it would also be a mutilation to repudiate her sex. Man is a human being with sexuality; woman is a complete individual, equal to the male, only if she too is a human being with sexuality. (TSS 691-692)

The woman with sexuality who is in love and the woman who is not in love are different. A loved and lover woman looks at male with a different gaze. On the other hand, a woman who is not in love looks at male and masculinity from another point of view. These two categories should be divided into further categories to justify the idea of this paper. Firstly, these two

categories must be divided in terms of geographical location with cultural reference and religious identity. Afterwards, woman in love should be divided into the woman who craves for masculinity truly, and the other group who thinks love for women is a disguise or a trick to fit into the male community by pleasing them. There is the third kind like Beauvoir who understands female psychology in terms of love relationship and later identifies that this love that women think real is actually a way of deceiving themselves for their survival. Apart from simplifying this complex emotional feeling of women, she also has given her observation on the 'love' which women is proud of. The ethereal womanly love universally recognized by women and especially the poets is also scrutinized by her. As we have seen in chapter two, both Kamala Das and Maya Angelou have portrayed their idea of love which represents the general idea of love among women. In those poems, the woman in love sometimes seems helpless, sometimes happy, and sometimes painfully sad. Beauvoir has described this multifaceted portrayal of love kind of this way:

She gives herself to him entirely; but he must be completely available to receive this gift. She dedicates every moment to him, but he must be present at all time; she wants to live only in him – but she wants to live, and he must therefore devote himself to making her live. (*TSS* 666)

This, if we consider true, we must look at the poems again. In many poems they celebrate their love with pride. The love they bear for their husbands and lovers is unconditional and endless. It even continues when they are left alone but the description of the love changes. It may seem that their love is so genuine that it lasts forever, for eternity. Their love has the true meaning in human relationship. Even though Kamala Das and Maya Angelou may have thought like that, Beauvoir gives this attraction a different name. Her writings about feminist love give the

impression that the overwhelming of women love for man is similar to a chronic obsession which ultimately gives birth to narcissism. Women, according to Beauvoir look for constant attention of their lover in order to be recognized and justify their identity. She describes these characteristics in this way:

The woman in love who before her lover is in the position of the child before its parents is also liable to that sense of guilt she felt with them; she chooses not to revolt against him as long as she loves him, but she revolts against herself. If he loves her less than she wants him to, if she fails to engross him, to make him happy, to satisfy him, all her narcissism transformed into self-disgust, into humiliation, into hatred of herself, which drive her to self-punishment. During a more or less lengthy crisis, sometimes for life, she will make herself a voluntary victim; she will struggle furiously to hurt her ego that has been unable to gratify him to the full. At this point her attitude is genuinely masochistic. (*TSS* 661-662)

It appears to be like women, commonly bind their lives with their beloved to get a meaning of life. At the same time, they expect the same devotion they have been showing to men. If this does not go right, they become impatient and insecure. Their love becomes vulnerable which they do not take so easily. As a result, they turn to self-punishment to get rid of their problems. Their self-disgust triggers the sadistic attitudes towards them which eventually hamper them as a human being. Once they take this punishment by themselves, once they voluntarily victimize themselves, they start to see men as their opponent. Men become the rival of women without even knowing what they have done. This should be mentioned again to clarify any confusions; this argument does not support male violence against women by any means. This is just to show the complex root of blame-game which eventually has done no good so far. Coming to the point

again, this extreme and obsessive devotion bruises the idea of a male in female mind. As a consequence, even after he's gone from her life, a woman still laments or in the least, recalls his memory in her writings or some other ways.

It is actually the other way around. The way women expect the men to be, that should be questioned first. From the beginning of their lives, till the day they realize men are 'bad'— this journey of their realization must be reconsidered again. We have seen both Maya Angelou and Kamala Das, at one point has celebrated womanly love and missed their lover. Again on the other hand, they have been seen to blame male community in general because they have bad experience in the past and overall in their life. If we keep aside some general male behavior and look into feminist mind again, we will see the perplexing ideology instead. Their ideology is fixed about men, which is actually the stereotype they have created themselves:

If he gets tired or careless, if he gets hungry or thirsty at the wrong time, if he makes a mistake or contradicts himself, she asserts that he is 'not himself' and she makes a grievance of it.... Her worship sometimes finds better satisfaction in his absence than in his presence; as we have seen, there are women who devote themselves to dead or otherwise inaccessible heroes, so that they may never have to face them in person... (TSS 665)

This gives us a clear idea how obsessed some women often can get. It seems that they cherish the idea of a lover rather than the lover himself.

Both Kamala Das and Maya Angelou in their poem depict how similarly they look at men. However, the question arises, if Beauvoir is true, and both of the poets are also true, then

the idea of manhood in feminist writers is perplexing. At one point they seem to worship and adore the masculinity, and the just after that they blame masculinity and males in general.

This brings to us to the conclusion that the struggle of women throughout centuries and the blame-game between men and women have failed to find any solution. Nothing seems to have changed since the beginning to feminist movement till date. The confusing and dissimilar views in feminist critics and authors have only repeated the cliché ideas of equality and nothing much. According to the chapters and discussion so far, we have seen the two sides of women emotion and two ways of looking at men. At one point we see out two poets and one critic celebrating womanly love and flattering their love and lover so much. In contrary, we see them to react on man to have equal rights. On a surface level, these two arguments may seem natural since there is nothing wrong to demand equal rights if one is a lover or beloved. Things get really complex when Beauvoir identifies the emotion that women show as a lover is not the genuine emotion. Rather, she calls it a deception that women use to deceive men as well as themselves to survive in the society and coexist with men.

Masculine pride conceals the ambiguities of the erotic drama from the male: he lies to himself unconsciously. More easily humiliated, more vulnerable, woman is also more clear-sighted; she will succeed in blinding herself only at the cost of entertaining a more calculated bad faith. Even granted the means, woman will never find the purchase of a male satisfactory solution. (*TSS* 697)

The bad faith here is the deception. Beauvoir she clearly distinguishes between male and female here, which is also evident in both Kamala Das and Maya Angelou's writing. We don't know that whether these two poets are actually aware of the fact that they are deceiving themselves. If

they are aware, then we must stress this fact and may say that they are being hypocritical here. Talking about female devotion and at the same time blaming the male for it can never match. Yet, if these two poets are unaware of their bad faith and are truly showing their emotions, then again it should be stressed that they lack justification to stand against the male community whatsoever. Pursuing one's demand is justified, but they must ensure the ground they are standing on. The ambiguities only stretch and prolong the debate rather solving it.

Apart from this, while talking about equality, Beauvoir brings the issue of sexuality just the way our both poets have brought in their poems. Women sexuality is a broad and complex topic. Our poets explicitly describe their sexual views where we see two types of stages a woman sexually encounters with. In the first phase, we see a kind of a woman who always is curious about male body, and the idea of male as a whole. In the next stage we see the same woman who struggles between the bed she shares and the society she lives in. In both cases, women get slammed by male force (they think it that way). At the early age, when the masculine force penetrates into her feminine fragility her whole world changes. She carries that experience to the next stage where she again gets slammed by the society. These two experiences, according to this paper, seem to be the primary reasons for this blame-game:

The independent woman of today is torn between her professional interests and the problems of her sexual life; it is difficult for her to strike a balance between the two; if she does, it is at the price of concessions and sacrifices which require her to be in a constant state of tension. Here, rather than in physiological data, must be sought the reason for the nervousness and frailty often observed in her. It is difficult to determine to what extent woman's physical constitution handicaps her. (*TSS 706*)

If she is handicapped by the tension of her sexual life, then we must assume how intensely it may have affected her views on men. Sexuality in femininity is the most important factor no matter what the other critics say or believe. A woman, a critic, a feminist, a poet – unless she is a homosexual– cannot avoid the fact that she has to be pinned down by male force (the term pinned down has been influenced by the sexual description by the both poets). The bed she sleeps and the world she lives are two completely different things, yet they are just the same. Beauvoir takes this issue to understand if this is a trade of physical pleasure or is it actually a playground to display power. She thinks this issue kind of this way:

A woman must have a considerable amount of cynicism, indifference, or pride to regard physical relations as an exchange of pleasure by which each partner benefits equally. As much as woman– and perhaps more– man revolts against anyone who attempts to exploit him sexually; but it is woman who generally feels that her partner is using her as an instrument. Nothing but high admiration can compensate for the humiliation of an act that she considers a defeat. (*TSS* 658)

As she says it clearly, Beauvoir thinks that a woman needs to be one step ahead from other women to see the sexual involvement as a mutual cooperation. However, as men do not let themselves to be exploited by any other person, women easily come to the conclusion that they are being exploited in bed as well. If this is the case, if women are truly humiliated and exploited in the bed, then why do they need men after all? Beauvoir gives the answer to this question as well:

We have seen that the act of love requires of woman profound self-abandonment; she bathes in a passive languor; with closed eyes anonymous, lost she feels as if

borne by waves, swept away in a storm, shrouded in darkness: darkness of the flesh, of the womb, of the grave. Annihilated, she becomes one with the Whole, her ego is abolished. But when the man moves from her, she finds herself back on earth, on a bed, in the light; she again has a name, a face: she is one vanquished, prey, object. (TSS 658)

This is how Beauvoir depicts the moment of climax for women. They want to become united, become one with their partners, but later they realize that it is not possible. The problem lies in their sensuality. They seem to look at their partners, and overall at the male community in their own idolized view. It clearly shows that almost all the women confusingly make the boundary between reality and sexuality obscure. They tend to judge the world according to their experience in bed. As we have seen so far, the womanly experience changes through time and age. Quoting Beauvoir, Toril Moi in her book *Sex, Gender, and the Body: The Student Edition of What is a Woman* talks about this experience and relates this with Sartre's universal idea of existence:

To say that 'woman is not a fixed reality' is to say that as human beings (and unlike animals) women are always in the process of making themselves what they are. We give meaning to our lives by our actions. Only death puts an end to the creation of meaning. As the famous existentialist slogan has it: 'Existence precedes essence'. (63)

The problem with this continuous building and rebuilding process of reality in relation with the male and sexuality make the quest entire equality thing obscure. In the process of being and becoming, women at one time get themselves to be manipulated, as said earlier, in order to get

the meaning of their existence. While doing this, if they don't get what they expect the males to do, they become upset. They act as prey in front of men, so that they can take men inside to become one, to be united. If she lets her god do whatever wishes, he may grant her existence a meaning. Therefore Beauvoir says:

Woman, therefore, can take only when she makes herself prey: she must become a passive thing, a promise of submission. If she succeeds, she will think that she performed this magic conjuration intentionally, she will be subject again. But she risks remaining in the status of unnecessary object if the male disdains her. (*TSS* 698)

Once she gets united with her man, she then asks favor from men. Now, this has to be noted down. We must appreciate Beauvoir here as she understands the main problem women have with males. Although women talk about equality, there are times when they ask for favor from men. This favor may come in any form. Whatever the form is, since men are godlike figure and since women have intentionally submitted herself as a prey in order to get favor in exchange, men are bound to provide and meet women's demand. This conception of women about the male figure is heavily corrupt. Beauvoir addresses this matter and calls for a reality check for women. She says:

The woman asks a favor from her lover. Is it granted? Then he is generous, rich, magnificent; he is kingly, he is divine. Is it refused? Then he is avaricious, mean, cruel; he is a devilish or a bestial creature.... If the 'no' discloses such abject selfishness, why wonder so much at the 'yes'? Between the superhuman and the inhuman is there no place for the human? (*TSS* 665)

According to our discussion, it seems pretty much evident that women are very much confused about what they want. Also, they seem to be very much in anguish as they cannot decide their position between a victim, a prey and the independent woman. The prey and free woman lives inside the same body. Thus their pain and anguish never goes away, and at times it intensifies too much. Sometimes one part of her wants her master to control her with a hunter, order her, dominate her, and crush her under his masculine presence. On the other hand, the free woman sometimes comes out and rebels against all odds. This is a state of mental, emotional, and sometimes physical war that women go through for so long. Thus, whether she loves him or hates him, she always wants his attention:

For the woman, on the contrary, the absence of her lover is always torture; he is an eye, a judge, and as soon as he looks at anything other than herself, he frustrates her; whatever he sees, he robs her of; away from him, she is dispossessed, at once of herself and of the world; even when seated at her side reading or writing, he is abandoning her, betraying her. She hates his sleep. (*TSS* 667)

Since women cannot avoid the fact that without male existence they are incomplete, they always have to be concern about women for their own good. They have to love men in order to hate men. This perplexing and problematic situation has been created by women themselves. As we have seen in the writings of both poets and critics, they themselves and their ideas regarding men are never constant or concrete. This kind of dilemma has been seen throughout the history which is the only reason that the blame game continues. This is why nothing has been changed so far. The women see men in two different ways, which contradict with each other. Thus Beauvoir says, “They would not seem to be dwarfs if they had not been asked to be giants” (*TSS* 665).

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

This paper has explored the tone and theme of the poems by two feminist poets and critics. In every cases, it has been seen and justified that women see men in different ways. As it is mentioned earlier, culture, race, and history play a crucial role behind the mindset of women; the common thing is women can never get hold of the idea of men fully. Their devotion often finds dead end. As Byron says in his famous poem *Don Juan*, “Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart, ‘Tis woman’s whole existence”, the problem lies in the line itself. Women seek the meaning of existence through men; this is problem number one. The second problem is, their idea of men; their stereotype changes from their youth to adulthood, so does the meaning of existence. He becomes necessary for her. Women don’t become the center for men, rather it’s just the opposite. Men become the center of their existence. Even if to hate them, women need men. The question of equality becomes obsolete because there are far greater things that should be discussed first. There are two most important questions Beauvoir asks to all the women, to all the female community:

...a woman with scrupulous mind is bound to ask herself: does he really need me?

The man is fond of her, desires her, with a personal tenderness and desire; but

would he not have an equally personal feeling for someone else in her place? (*TSS*

669)

If he is necessity to her, it means that she is evading her liberty... The dependence comes from her weakness; how, therefore, could she find reciprocal dependence in the man she loves in his strength? (*TSS* 670-671)

To bring change or at least get things into shape, one must answer these two questions first. We understand that both of the poets are “phenomenal women” who “still rise” out of ashes and shout for equality and freedom. However, before chasing the equality, women must get their views clear, most importantly about the idea of male. Their dependence is acceptable; their demand is welcomed too. The problem does not lie in their demands or dependence; rather it is within their contradictory views. The blame-game should be stopped for the sake of humanity. They must explore their femininity in order to understand masculinity. Although Beauvoir has tried to neutralize this issue at some places in her book, mostly she just portrays male domination over women or women foolishness in front of men. Like the most feminist poets, Kamala Das and Maia Angelou have generalized their personal experiences (which are mostly bad or happened at a bad time) in order to sketch the idea of men and masculinity. Thus, in order to stop this never ending blame-game, critics and feminists must step forward and take initiatives to break the ice.

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