



## A Comparative Psychoanalytic Reading of Confessional Poetry: John Berryman and Kamala Das

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**Abstract**

This study presents a comparative analysis of confessional poetry through the works of John Berryman and Kamala Das, focusing on how the confessional mode functions differently in Western and Indian cultural contexts. The confessional poetry genre, popular in the middle of the twentieth century, is often linked to extreme self-disclosure, personal trauma, and inner struggle, especially when it comes to the poems of Western poets. But this paper will argue that this definition is inadequate when it comes to explaining the various cultural interpretations of the concept of confession in non-Western literature. The study employs Freudian theories of the unconscious, guilt, repression, desire and trauma which is done using a psychoanalytic approach in analyzing Berryman "Dream Songs" and "Book of Sonnets". Through his poetry a very inward-looking confessional style can be observed that is influenced by the conflict in his mind that had been left unresolved, his emotional instability, and his self-destructive tendencies. Kamala Das poetry, on the contrary, is also explained in the context of the collective unconscious, as formulated by Carl Jung. Though her poems are very personal in the tone, it goes beyond the personal to collectively reflect the emotional and psyche reality of an Indian woman, as she lived in the patriarchal and postcolonial system. By studying the text carefully, the study demonstrates that at the same time when Berryman uses confessional poetry to focus on the personal experience of suffering and inner breakdown, Das converts personal confession into an effective cultural critique and feminism. Her poetic "I" transforms into a shared voice that breaks social taboos, gender inequality and emotional restraint. Through the comparison of the two poets, the paper reveals the adaptability of the confessional poetry and outlines the necessity of culturally aware psychoanalytic approaches that take into account gender, society and its historical times. In the end, the paper will show that confessional poetry may be used as a way of an individual psychological resistance and as a way of communal protest and societal change.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The confessional poetry came up in the mid-twentieth century as a significant shift against the conventional poetic traditions that valued impersonality and aesthetic distance. It is defined by the first-person voice usage, self-disclosure, and investigation of the strong emotional, mental, or moral experiences. Poets of American and European descent, including Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and John Berryman, have been called the champions of confessional poetry because of their own themes of personal trauma, mental illness, guilt, sexuality, and family struggles (Rajan, 2024). Confessional poetry in such situations tend to reflect the inner world of the author, his/her feelings and mental conflict which is why it is extremely personal and autobiographical.

Nevertheless, the rigid Western-centered definition of the confession poetry might not completely reflect its role in any other cultural setting. The example of the poetry of Kamala Das, one of the prominent Indian English poets of the end of the twentieth century, is an attempt to break the line of thought that treats confession as an autobiographical genre. Although the mode used by Das is often confessional, her poetry is often transcendental of self to include the social, cultural and psychological reality of the Indian women in general. Das challenges the institution of patriarchy, the social taboos, and female oppression with the help of her poetic voice, turning her confessional I into the reflection of a more global female experience instead of a highly personal one (Kohil, 2014; Das, 1965). This proves that the purpose and intent of confessional poetry may change considerably across cultural, historical and social context of the poet.

The gaps that are taken care of by this research are the absence of a culturally sensitive approach to the analysis of confessional poetry. The majority of the critical approaches focus on Western experience of trauma, self-disclosure, and mental collapse that is effective with poets like Berryman but inadequate to comprehend Das poetry (Tanti, 2024). Hence, the purpose of the paper is to investigate the different ways the confessional poetry may work in various cultures and how the poetic I could be both personal and socialized.

The following are the two key research questions of this study:

1. What confessional strategies are used by Kamala Das and John Berryman in their poetry and how do the strategies speak of their cultural, social, and psychological backgrounds?
2. What will psychoanalytic theories, mainly the works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, contribute to the understanding of the differences in their approaches toward the confessional poetry?

To provide these answers, the research philosophy takes a psychoanalytic approach. The Freudian theories of the unconscious, guilt, and desire as well as psychic conflict are used to analyze the poetry of Berryman to trace his obsessions, anxiety, and self-destructive nature of his themes. The poetry of Kamala Das is interpreted with Jungian ideas and more specifically the concept of collective unconsciousness, where personal expression is combined with the collective cultural experience and the social reality of gender in Indian women. This dualistic theoretical approach provides the possibility to make comparative reading, taking into account both the personal and communal aspect of confessional writing.

The paper has placed Kamala Das and John Berryman in their historical, cultural and social background bringing out the differences in the way the confessional poetry works in the Western or Indian context. Although the poetry of Berryman is based on individual psychological crises, which are usually influenced by the dysfunction of the family, trauma, and mental illness, the poetry of Das is used as an instrument of cultural criticism, feminist statement, and societal commentary. The comparison of the two then leads this study to assert that the assumption according to which confessional poetry is a set of uniform literary practice is inaccurate and that gender, culture, and social environment must be taken into account in the process of interpreting the confessional mode.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Human experience revolves around interpersonal relationships and literature tends to reflect the issues, pleasures and pains of human relationships. Relationships in the poetry of Kamala Das and John Berryman are not just the backgrounds but the fundamental fibers that the two poets weave their identity, desire, and trauma, and resiliency. The confessional mode of both poets is used to open the window of human feelings, but the prism through which this

window is viewed varies dramatically, depending on the culture, history, and experience (Rajan, 2024; Rajesh Tanti, 2024).

The poetry of Kamala Das has a strong connection with the Indian socio-cultural background. Her words concern the frustrations, conflicts and desires of women living in pressures of patriarchy and post colonialism. Emotional neglect and colorism in childhood make imprinted marks on her psyche, which affects the perception of love, desire, and identity. Das does not simply read off her personal experience; she is speaking on behalf of many Indian women whose lives were limited by the social norms and expectations through her confessional voice (Fathima.M.S, 2025). Her poetry sweeps easily through delicateness and power, sensuality and resistance. As an example, in *An Introduction*, she states that she is sexually and emotionally independent, and it defies the standards of society that tries to define her being female. The combination of metaphor, grotesqueness and uninhibited confessions help her turn her individual voice into a societal statement, the voice of the so-called collective unconscious of the Indian woman as proposed by Carl Jung. By doing so, Das redefines the confessional mode as not an act of self-indulgence but a means of social and cultural criticism.

Berryman on the other hand directs his confessional voice into highly personal and psychological realms. His characters in *Dream Songs* especially the main character Henry, struggle with a world of existential uncertainty, trauma, and inner conflict. According to Berryman, relationships tend to be the locations of desire, dejection, and dislocation in that the poet experiences mental instability, alcoholism, and unresolved mourning. His poetic act is in accordance with Freudian concept of unconscious where suppressed desires, guilt and trauma create the psyche. The human relationships are fragile, and at the same time, tense and painful as Berryman demonstrates in his poems (M. Soares, 2015). As opposed to Das who represents a collective experience, Berryman poetry is about the inner world of an individual and his inability to balance personal wishes to meet the demands of the society.

An outstanding similarity that can be observed between Das and Berryman is the lasting effect that childhood relationships have on the relationships in adulthood. Childhood neglect and cultural indoctrination in the poetry of Das bring a strain in her identity, intimacy, and freedom quest. In the writing by Berryman, the death of his family members and emotional neglect enhance his existential anxieties, which affect his interaction and emotional reaction. Having been traumatized in early stages of life, both poets emphasize that human relationships contain some inaccessible traces but the cultural and personal backgrounds cause the authors to present the theme differently (Fernandes et al., 2015).

Their poetic landscapes also vary by the manner in which love and desire are explored. In Das, love is seen as a source of fulfilment as well as a place of rebellion against the social reality. Her poetry praises the physical and emotional intimacy and challenges the gendered restrictions to demonstrate the intersection of the interpersonal relationships with the social structures. Her poetry contains the grotesque and ironic elements which are in her life because of the contradictions of love and desire and helps to reveal that relationships can be caring and limiting simultaneously. However, Berryman describes love in a very tragic manner, being characterized by loss, longing, and irrevocability. The relationships in his poems are often vulnerable, isolated, and existential and reveal the human life weakness as well as the inner conflicts of the self instead of the social commentary.

Critics have put much focus on the psychoanalytic aspects of the work of both poets. The confessional mode of Das as interpreted using the Jungian notion can be understood as not just personal voice, but also the voice of women who traverse the oppressive systems. Analyzing the verse by Berryman through the Freudian theory, the latent and repressed forces

of desire, guilt and trauma that define the characters and his own emotional reality in the verse would be revealed (Fathima.M.S, 2025; M. Soares, 2015). In both instances, the poets unveil the complex interplay of inner psychological conditions and outer social conditions and prove that human relations depend on the personal background and the social situation.

Besides, their approach to interpersonal relationships has interaction with wider social issues. Das criticizes the patriarchal Indian society and provides the image of female resilience, agency, and liberation. Berryman is also involved in the existential and societal pressures and this is a postmodern struggle on identity, meaning and belonging. Whereas the confession in the poetry of Das is directed outside to the social standards, in the poetry of Berryman it is directed inward, the questionings of the depths of the individual consciousness, the despair of the personality. Their works combined reveal the possibility of human relationships, their differences and complicated, the individual and communal, the emotional and social.

Nevertheless, the available literature implies that both Kamala Das and John Berryman present the two sides of the coin, as far as human relationships are concerned. Das preempts feminine experience in general, through her confessional voice, to the issues of social injustices and the limitations of the patriarchal world. Berryman underlines the psychological conflict of a person and his/her vulnerability in existence, and shows the complex mixture of trauma and desire, and identity. Through the comparison of their works, we have a better insight into how the poetry of confession can be used to define the dynamics of human relationships as one that captures the personal as well as the cultural power that determines our lives. Their poetry is testimony to the timeless ability of literature to analyze the human condition using the prism of relationships, identity and resilience.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The approach used in this study is a text-based qualitative study that is based on a psychoanalytic theoretical framework. The theory of unconscious conflicts and repressed desires is that what influences the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of an individual is his unconscious conflict and repressions, which are manifested in literature writing, symbolic words, narrative voice, and confession. The paper relies on psychoanalysis as an interpretive but not a deterministic model using the concepts of Sigmund Freud, who proposed the ideas of unconsciousness, repression, desire, guilt, and psychological trauma, and Carl Jung who introduced the theory of collective unconsciousness and collective psychic experience as the main ideas of psychoanalysis.

The major corpus is the poems of Kamala Das which were chosen in Selected Poems and poems of Dream Songs of John Berryman. The texts are selected due to their continued interest in self-disclosure, emotionality, psychological contradiction and the confessional use of the first person, the I that are major characteristics of confessional poetry. Evidence is determined by close reading, by paying attention to the imagery, metaphor, tone, narrative stance, and expression of desire, anxiety, and identity. Some analysis of textual moments as symbolic articulation of unconscious processes is made instead of reading poetic confession as direct autobiography, according to the theoretical framework.

The research identifies two confessional expressions, namely, individual psychological articulation and collective/cultural expression. In his poetry, John Berryman is discussed mainly in the Freudian context, according to which it is a topic of personal trauma, guilt, psychic fragmentation, and inner struggle. Kamala Das poetry, on the contrary, is interpreted in the Jungian approach, according to which the confessional voice becomes a persona presenting the emotional and psychological truths of Indian women in the patriarchal,

postcolonial society. This is what enables the study to contrast the variations in meanings stipulated by the same confession techniques in different cultural and psychological conditions.

#### **4. CONFESSIONAL POETRY: ITS HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Confessional poetry is a development that was found in the mid-20th century especially in the United States when poets started writing about their most personal experiences. Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and John Berryman were some of the writers who dealt with love, trauma, mental illness, and family conflicts with a psychological intensity never before seen. The word confessional is borrowed after the religious process of sins confession, however, in poetry, it was transformed into a process of self-disclosure, usually taboo, immensely personal, and socially transgressive.

American and European poets of confession concentrated on suffering of self, but Kamala Das treated the form in a different way. Her poetry is personal and direct but it speaks of the feelings of Indian women as a whole, and deals with social agitations, sexual conventions, and cultural taboos. In this regard, her confessions resonate with Jungian concept of the collective unconscious, making the expression of the individual one social commentary.

John Berryman, in his turn, adheres to the classical Freudian model, expounding on the themes of guilt, fear, and inner struggle with the use of very personal stories. Nevertheless, the two poets have some common elements of confessional poetry such as the first-person narration, emotional integrity, and the violation of literary and social norms. Nonetheless, there is the impact of the cultural background on their work: Berryman is interested in the subjective psychological trauma, and Das is interested in the social and collective life. This historical position underlines the flexibility of the confessional poetry and its eternal capability of searching the mind and the society.

#### **5. THE POETRY OF KAMALA DAS**

It is best to begin any critical analysis of confessional poetry in other cultures with the understanding that individual expression is played out by social constructs, cultures and expectations of gender. Indian literary Confession in the Indian literary context does not merely refer to the expression of personal feeling; it is more likely to be a form of creating resistance against silence, repression and moral control. Kamala Das, in this respect, stands out as a key figure, whose poetry strikes a compromise with the ambiguous borders of gender, desire, identity and psychological conflict in a highly patriarchal society. Her work demonstrates how the confessional mode, when situated in a non-Western context, functions not as self-indulgence but as cultural critique.

Kamala Das holds a special place in the tradition of the Indo-English literature as one of the poetic voices of the most influential in the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Her poems continue to herald female sadness, discontent, and lack of emotion, particularly in marriage and love affairs. More importantly, her work is outright in questioning and challenging strict moral codes, cultural taboos and patriarchal rules that inform Indian society. Das is a writer with an acute consciousness to her audience as she does not practice restraint or self-censorship; she is a confessional mode, both personal and representative. She makes her use of the first-person pronoun recurrently to assert her I as the “I” of Indian women of her era by asserting the collective “I” of Indian women.

In the poem “An Introduction”, Kamala Das directly addresses her dissatisfaction with conjugal life and legitimizes her search for emotional and physical fulfillment outside a loveless marriage. The male figure she encounters is deliberately rendered anonymous and universal:

*"I met a man, loved him. Call / Him not by any name, he is everyman / Who wants a woman, just, as I am every / Woman who seeks love." (Das, Lines 43-45)*

Here, "everyman" functions as a symbolic figure rather than a specific individual, suggesting that the poet's longing is not illicit desire but a fundamental human need for love and recognition.

Das is acutely conscious of the way the society may judge her immoral or characterless but she resists this judgement very much. Claiming sanctity and transgression at the same time, she is protesting against the dualistic moral system that is instilled in women and insisting on her entitlement to bodily and emotional integrity without oppression.

The use of cold and indifferent spouse is also a recurring theme in the poems of Das and a primary cause of disappointment and mental torment. When she reacts to this negligence, she does not act in isolation but she represents other women who had gone through the same situation. The unwritten rules and traditions of culture, religious rigidity, deep-rooted taboos are constantly broken in her work. This point of revelation highlights the fact that love does not end in the act of physical intercourse but in creative and emotional revival as in the case of Das.

Her poetic individualism is based on her confessional mode. She creates a clearly female sensibility, which is resistant to social control through it. She becomes a fearless voice against Indian females who resist the age-old constraints put on them. In the closing section of "An Introduction," Das articulates her shared identity with her readers:

*"I am sinner; / I am saint. I am beloved and the / Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no / Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I." (Das, Lines 56-59)*

According to Bijoy Kumar Das in his article Paradigm Shift in the Reading of Poetry by Kamala Das, despite being admittedly confessional, Kamala Das does not want to be labeled as belonging to any one literary genre (Das 245). This fact is supported by her self-identification as a sinner and saint, which is a statement that reflects the moral and psychological depth of her poetic voice.

Kamala Das uses metaphor in "The Old Playhouse" to convey the issue of marital domination and mental isolation. She likens herself to a swallow tamed by her husband's manipulative affection and articulates her inner desolation with haunting clarity:

*"My mind is an old Playhouse with all its lights put out." (Das, Lines 24-25)*

The burned playhouse is a metaphor of the loss of imagination, independence and emotional richness in an overbearing marriage system.

In the same manner, The Looking Glass is a work that touches on gender inequality and emotional exploitation using irony. The man partner is transformed into the reflection of whom the lady strips not out of empowering herself but as a form of submission:

*"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 ..." (Das, Lines 1-6)*

The sarcasm in these lines reveals how old-fashioned gender expectations require female self-denial in order to perpetuate male dominance.

Kamala Das being a feminist-confessional poet has put her work in it, and firmly placed it in terms of the Indian patriarchal and postcolonial setting. Her wish to break the gender norms is outright in "An Introduction":

*"I wore a shirt and my brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored my womanliness." (Das, Lines 31-33)*

Devindra Kohli writes about Kamala Das that An Introduction is written in an argumentative tone and awakening politics. He notes that repetition and self-assertion help the poem to become a strong political statement.

In the case of Das, love, language, and life are all inseparable. In her poetry, love goes beyond sexuality and it is a quest towards a psychological and physical balance. She glorifies lust without any moral withdrawal:

*"I am Indian, very brown, born in / Malabar, I speak three languages, write in / Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said, / English is not your mother-tongue." (Das, Lines 4-7)*

For Das, freedom of life, love, and language are inseparable. She celebrates desire openly, refusing moral retreat:

*"It is I who laugh; it is I who make love / And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying / With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner, / I am saint." (Das, Lines 54-57)*

In "The Suicide," Das further explores the tension between body and soul:

*"Bereft of soul / my body shall be bare. / Bereft of body / my soul shall be bare..." (Das, Lines 1-4)*

Yet the poem ultimately expresses a longing for simplicity and love rather than death:

*"O sea, I am fed up / I want to be simple / I want to be loved." (Das, Lines 50-52)*

Kamala Das continues to claim her identity and reject the social structures in the world through her poetry throughout her poetic career. Despair dominates her work though it is neutralized by rebellion and endurance. Her writing style has an element of naturalness that is credible, but her voice does not stand in the realms of autobiography but as a voice of the entire Indian women. Kamala Das therefore fills a lone position in Indian English poetry. She is standing in a figurative sense alone in a great sea, representing millions of others whose silence and suicidal tendencies should not become their norm, but to rebel against cultural enslavement and to declare the classical struggle of female independence and selfhood.

## 6. THE POETRY OF JOHN BERRYMAN

John Berryman is one of the most important representatives of the history of American confessional poetry in the mid-20th century, who became famous thanks to his personal, psychologically bright investigation of personal trauma and existential despair. It is especially vulnerable to a Freudian reading as his work and especially the Dream Songs and Book of Sonnets are typified by a sustained investigation into the workings of unconscious desire, guilt and identity. The poetic strategies of confession have been used by Berryman earlier, but not simultaneously, in the manner of social and cultural commentary, which Kamala Das employed: Berryman instead projects the individual struggle with psychological perspective onto his poetic character, Henry; his life has been defined by loss, failed relationships, and obsessive introspection.

In "Sonnet 27" from the Book of Sonnets, Berryman portrays a doomed love affair with the wife of a colleague, exposing the impact of desire and moral conflict on his psyche:

*"In a poem made by Cummings, long since, his / Girl was the rain, but darling you are the sunlight / Volleying down blue air, waking a flight / Of sighs to follow like the mourning iris / Your shining-out-of-shadow hair I miss / A fortnight and to-noon." (Berryman, Lines 1-6)*

In this case, the poet raises his beloved with the images of nature, which puts love in the connection to vitality and light. Yet, the further breakdown of this relationship triggers the in-depth psychological trauma. In "Sonnet 43" the high level of emotional breakdown is stated:

*"Listen, for poets are feigned to lie, and I / For you a liar am a thousand times, / Scars of these months blazon like a decree; / I would have you a liner pulls the sky / Trust when I mumble me. Then gin-&-limes / You are cooler, darling, O come back to me." (Berryman, Lines 9-14)*

The "scars", in this case, are symbolical to mean the internalization of guilt and loss of relations, the validation of the Freudian concept of traumas as a mental wound and obsessive thoughts. The classics of emotional up and down, which are found in the sonnet style of the poem, are dramatized with the language which Berryman employs, the desire and the despair movement. Love, which is not only life giving, but also life destroying deforms his psyche.

Berryman's confessional mode extends beyond romantic failure into broader existential and moral anxieties. In his sequence Eleven Addresses to the Lord, he reflects on sin, lust, and penance:

*"Sole watchman of the flying stars, guard me / against my flicker of impulse lust: teach me / to see them as sisters & daughters. Sustain / my grand endeavors: husband ship & crafting. / Forsake me not when my wild hours come; / grant me sleep nightly, grace soften my dreams; / achieve in me patience till the thing be done, / a careful view of my achievement come." (Berryman, Lines 1-8)*

This text shows that Berryman is extremely conscious of the unconscious impulse, specifically the Freudian Id, and he tries to enforce some control over it with the help of the moral and spiritual ideal. His confessions are not confessions of repentance, but confessions of negotiations between the psyche and guilt, desire, and what is expected of us, and the social conditions.

The personal history of Berryman also makes this psychological topography even more complex. The suicide of his father shadows his work with repetitive motives of fatherless behavior, death, and self-destructive behaviors. In Love and Fame, he writes:

*"Reflections on suicide, and on my father, possess me." (Berryman, Lines 10-12)*

These lines underline continuity of trauma, demonstrating how the experiences of early childhood, which received no treatment, influence the psychopathology of adults, as one of the main concerns of the psychoanalytic theory.

The Dream Songs vividly illustrate the tension between conscious self-presentation and unconscious desire. In the first poem of the series, the protagonist Henry is simultaneously "Huffy" and "Unappeasable," representing the externalized and internalized conflicts that Freud describes as ego-strain against Id impulses:

*"Huffy Henry hid the day, Unappeasable Henry sucked" (Berryman, Lines 1-2)*

Henry's struggles reflect the dynamics of the pleasure principle, seeking satisfaction while contending with external constraints and social reality:

*"All the world like a woolen lover / One did seem on Henry's side / Then came a departure." (Berryman, Lines 7-9)*

According to Freudian interpretation, what seems to cause the desperation of Henry is the lack of correspondence between the desire in him and the disappointment in the outside world, which resembles the early division of fantasy and reality in childhood that Freud finds to be the key to psychic development.

To conclude, Berryman confessional poetry is a psychological examination of the self over a considerable duration, which is based on Freudian constructs of unconscious desire, guilt and repression. His work is a contrast to the culturally mediated confessionalism of Kamala Das: in her work, Das locates the self in the context of gendered and social configurations, whereas in his work Berryman locates the self in the context of the interior drama of the psyche, exposing the far-reaching effects of the raw trauma, relationship breakdowns, and the existential crisis.

### 7. THE TWO POETS IN COMPARISON

The reading conducted on John Berryman and Kamala Das shows that their paths in confession literature are different but intersecting and both guided by the psychoanalysis involvement but with two different directions. Although both poets dig deep into the inner life of the self the nature, the purpose and the outcome of this digging is very different. The poetry of Berryman is fierce and self-centered and filled with the broken male psyche of guilt, obsessive passion, and mental trauma. In contrast, the poems of Kamala Das are changing the personal pain into the collective expression, making the personal suffering the part of the psychic and cultural as well as in the context of the Indian womanhood.

Freudianly speaking, the poetic imagination of John Berryman is all mixed up in the conflict between the Id, Ego, and Superego that is yet to be resolved. The breakdown of the Ego to balance between instinctual inclinations and moral or social constraints is dramatized by his poems severally. The desire, alcoholism, guilt and suicidal thoughts do not only come out as biographical facts but also as symptoms of the unconscious conflict that is repeated. Although not uninvolved with Freudian views of repression and desire, Kamala Das goes further to make her question into a Jungian aspect, especially the idea of the collective unconscious, and the personal trauma, which echoes in the gendered and cultural experience.

The confessional voice of Kamala Das is not a mere personal form of rebellion per se but it is a psychic form of rebellion on behalf of Indian women against the domination of the patriarchy. Her "I" is not isolated, but expressive, and explains repressed female sexuality, physical control, and emotional loss. In this regard, she goes further than the reformist leaders like Roeyka Sakhawat Hossain whose feminine liberation was more social and pedagogical. Kamala Das takes this argument to ultimate levels when she argues that sexual freedom and emotional truth are the main factors of liberation.

Kamala Das, even though her poetry acts in all levels at once at the personal unconscious and at the collective unconscious level, is in contrast with John Berryman, whose poem is rooted in the highly personal setting of psychological fragmentation. In his poetic voice, usually referred to as Henry, there is a fragmented personality swiveling between exposition and concealment, want and fear. This inward breakdown is best traced on the Dream Songs where Berryman creates a poetic consciousness which is on the brink of psychic breakdown, not resolution.

The poem "Not to Live" from Dream Songs may be examined. The poem is marked by dense figurative language, symbolic violence, and ambiguity, all of which signal a psyche attempting to mask unbearable anxiety:

*"It kissed us, soft, to cut our throats, this coast / like a malice of the lazy king. I hunt / & hunt! but find here what to kill? / nothing is blunt, but phantoming uneases I find. Ghost / on ghost precedes of all most scared us, most. most. / Howls fail upon this secret, far air; grunt, / shaming for food: you must. I love the King." (Berryman, Lines 1-7)*

The opening image describes the Freudian paradox of pleasure in the self-destruction. The "kiss" symbolizes intimacy and lust, whereas the throat-cutting creates the feeling of destruction. This coincidence is in line with Freud's idea of the death drive where the drives towards pleasure invert into self-destruction. It can be interpreted by the lazy king as a symbolic personification of the Id which is hedonist, luxurious and oppressive, as well as, finally destructive. The term phantoming unease explains why there is constant nervousness without any consistent object a phenomenon psychoanalysis considers as the state of repression and neurotic fear.

The I used in the poem by Berryman is still disjointed and alienating, unlike the aggressive and inclusive first-person voice of Kamala Das. Where Das invokes solidarity by way of identification, I too call myself "I", here the persona of Berryman is beset by the anxiety of survival, guilt and disgust with himself. His confessional poetry revolves around psychic disintegration without reconciliation many times.

However, the suffering of Kamala Das is never limited to personal biography only. Her heart aches with the sufferings of thousands of Indian women influenced by the colonial heritage, patriarchal system, and cultural oppression. The collective unconscious as proposed by Jung can provide a practical approach of why her poems can be used to say how these archetypal female experiences of desire, betrayal, and resistance are voiced in the poems. Her pain in her work turns out to be articulation and protest and not implosion.

In this way, both poets confess within the sphere of psychic conflict but their paths of confessions are too different. The poetry of John Berryman follows the inner breakdown of the self in the burden of uncontrolled unconscious impulses that end in desperation and self-destruction. It is the working of personal trauma into the collective awakening of Kamala Das that makes her poetry an embodiment of resisting and emancipating through the lens of confession. The two of them can be regarded as representing two opposing psychoanalytic forms of confessional poetry, one narcissistically self-absorbing and self-centered, the other one socialistic and transformative.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

This paper has explored the poems of John Berryman and Kamala Das by applying psychoanalytic approach in order to appreciate how the unconscious can be used as poetic inspiration and to express oneself. Though both poets are inspired by the unconscious greatly, they do so in different purpose, direction and outcome. The unconscious in the work of Berryman is mostly presented in the form of unresolved psychic trauma, which results in the creation of poetry of fragmentation, guilt, and inner collapse. His confessional mode is still mostly introspective, as it goes round the issues of personal loss, desire, and self-destructive urges but never provides any psychic reconciliation. Berryman views the unconscious as a location of agony and not ecstasy.

In comparison, Kamala Das takes the unconscious as a creative and broad power. It is often represented by the image of the sea and is both maternal and creative force that helps her to rediscover the repressed memories and express silenced female desires. Her poems make personal suffering a shared one, make personal trauma compatible with cultural and gendered experience. In this respect, her confessional voice transcends personal psychology to a group

psychic reality, which is close to the idea of collective unconscious that Jung referred to. The unconsciousness in the poems by Das is not the suffering that is merely revealed but the resistance, the renewal, and definition of self.

The end vision of the poetry of Kamala Das is not a vision of giving up but giving up to the confining systems like patriarchy, hard religiosity and cultural oppression. Actually, according to her poem *Noose*, love itself is the final stabilizing factor, and it substitutes the doctrinal or social limitation with the emotional and existential liberty. Poetry, therefore, is a unifying, curing medium to Das, and can resolve internal war and outward restraint.

Combined, the opposing poetic paths of Berryman and Das show how confessional poetry may in radically disparate psychoanalytic directions. One of them is inward toward psychic disintegration and the other is outward toward collective articulation and emancipation. The significance of the comparison is that psychoanalytic readings should be situated in cultural, historical, and gendered contexts as opposed to viewing the unconscious as a universal or homocentric category.

More studies can be done in the future by applying this comparative model to other confession poets of different cultures, as well as how the unconscious can be influenced by social location, gender, and historical experience. These studies would enhance our knowledge on confessional poetry as a form of self-disclosure as well as a very strong point of convergence between psychology, culture and literary form.

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