Chapter - III

Violence against Nature and Fellowmen

Kamala Das as a poet continually and constantly aims at comprehending the feminine interior potentialities in order to flash the focal length of her poetic vision into a sort of search for the very meaning of being a woman in the nature as well as in the society. The whole purpose of her poetry in concentrating upon the inner potentialities of being woman appears to be associated with analytically revealing the collective feminine psyche in its responses to the external realities in which it is nurtured. As Anne Brewster rightly comments:

While investigating that chimerical creature, the female consciousness, in all its paradox and complexity, the poetry [of Kamala Das] further assumes a more primal function as a vital tool for the interpretation of the interaction of the consciousness and the external world of phenomena that surrounds, shapes and delimits it. (137)

Therefore, her poetry turns out to be a kind of tract in the act of liberating woman's entire being from the overpowering and subjugating powers of nature both the external and internal. For the purpose of her poetic feud, to a great extent, the external nature is compounded in man who always apparently stands in opposition with woman in all the possible dimensions of life. Thus, the entire poetic property of Kamala Das turns out to be an incessant and interminable fight between man and woman. This does not mean that she is pleading for feminine dominations. On the other hand, she is just advancing a poetic proposal for man to come for an equal consideration of the earnest naturalistic, social, and interpersonal needs for
companionship of each for each other. But then, since this fight is in between the inevitable and ens realae halves of the very human set, the fight itself takes a very interesting poetic manner of vociferously bargaining for recognitions and understanding of the needs and dignities in being woman on one side, and the unrelenting patriarchal authoritarian onslaughts on the other.

Somehow, other than the partners involved in this fight, there is a third powerful and mysterious entity to propose and dispose, to construct and dismantle the aspirations of the partners for sublimation in the interpersonal involvements. This entity, called nature, plays a vital role in constantly and continuously discarding the requisite level of sublime heights to the mutually incompatible entities called man and woman. While examining the property of violence in Kamala Das’s poetry, therefore, there can be traced two rival camps in operation as far as the poet’s notion of being a woman is concerned: one, the continual autocratic offending nature of the fellowmen, and the other, the very creaturely dimensions bestowed upon human life by nature itself leaving them no leeway for attaining true sublime experience. So in order to understand the treatment of violence in her poetry, it is necessary to examine its course both towards nature and fellowmen

A. Violence Against Nature

Kamala Das as a feminist poet has nurtured in herself a special grievance against nature. At the outset, she could never tolerate the idea of nature awarding distinctly different and antagonistic physiological and psychological structures to man and woman. She thinks that it is these variations that give an opportunity for man to subjugate and enslave her, more or less in the same listless manner as he conducted
against nature itself. In her poetry, however, it is difficult to come across direct attacks against nature in the sense of the external natural world of our habitation. She loves nature as a vivid and life-giving property in all its wildness, primitiveness, and purity. Even as a grown up woman, she looked at nature in its myriad colours, shapes, and movements with childlike awe and dread. But her strong conviction, that she being a grown up woman nature is not available to her in the same fascinating manner as it was available to her when she was a child, makes her aggrieved and aggressive towards the natural process of growth itself. When this growth further pushes her into a situation where she as a woman has to encounter many a social dictate, formalities, and role-playings, she turns violent against nature for its pretence as a well wisher of humans. Two major symbolic gestures that present themselves in her poetry against this macrocosmic inscrutability and inconsistency are her revulsion against growth, and her agony of not achieving due fulfilment of being a woman.

1. The Inscrutability of Nature

On a close scrutiny of the ways of nature, it appears that it never had a programme of ultimate happiness or the highest pleasure for beings by way of sexual or spiritual fulfilment in the context of male-female union. All the sublimations and satisfactions are mysteriously held by nature as the possible formulas of irresolvable and interminable temptations. Such temptations are practically and particularly true in the case of Homo sapiens who are gifted with a rare felicity of imagination and a capacity to formulate projects for themselves in accordance with this extended imagination. While this imagination is considered as a gift of nature to man as a being, it functions in actuality as a never-ending agony for him. In the interpersonal
union of male and female this imagination works towards aspiring a conceptual sublime experience. Nature implants in all the living beings only an intuitive apprehension of sublime heights. But the reality of survival in its creaturely status as well as in its existential heights awards no such sublime complements in the real life. In other words, nature does not seem to offer total and complete satisfaction to either man or woman; it only gives a passionate desire and temptation through the perceptual instinctive properties of beings. This temptation as a well-founded property of nature has its own mysterious purpose in the context of evolution. So the sublime height that the humans aspire is not at all a factual felt reality in the present. But a passionate desire to attain for themselves this height is a perennially haunting dream for them. It is under this compulsive dream impetuosity that Kamala Das becomes counter-aggressive as against her man. As a matter of fact, reason and analysis, which are the attending intellectual properties in understanding the available reality, is a mere infinitesimal ignited portion or particle of intuition. Kamala Das has a profound intuitive apprehension concerning the human relations. So the painful manner in which Kamala Das pines for a unified and harmonious sublime experience simultaneously by the love-partners is a mere romantic wish fulfilment. Needless to say, she is attributing on herself a sort of representative capacity of every woman and all women into her personality, and poetically asserts herself as a prominent and dominant mouthpiece of the feminine frustrations and failures. To the extent that these frustrations and failures are purposely-implanted characteristic features by nature, there seems to be no real and realistically comprehensible solution for the feminine anxieties as represented in her poetry. If so, it is inevitable that failure in the
sense of not coming to mutual sublimation simultaneously, and the conscious psychological trauma of the possible failure invariably enter into the very neurons of the partners, and actively contribute for the frustrations. Therefore, the fundamental poetic structural fabric of Das maintains in itself a never-ending and ever-brewing frustration and failure. But for this infelt failure and frustration of women, she always finds a cause of revenge on the men-folk whom she always considers exclusively selfish and abnormally self-satisfying in being the life-partners of their women. So man's failure as a partner compounding in woman an irreconcilable revenge and grievance becomes the ultimate theme of her poetry.

Everybody admits that human interpersonal love is not a mere animal-like avidity; over and above the creaturely formula of the blue print of nature there is a secular and aesthetic height that has to be aspired by active partners in love. If so, Das has a quaint romantic view of ecstasy and exquisiteness to be shared equally by both the partners. But this is only a matter of her desire and aspiration. She is exclusively concerned with the feminine needs and feminine purposes, and she rebels against nature for the incompatibilities between the masculine and feminine entities. These incompatibilities, as she suggests in the poem “An Introduction,” arise out of the fact that there is “In him the hungry haste / Of rivers, in me the ocean’s tireless / Waiting” (OP 26). The ‘river’ metaphor indicates the aggressive manner of male approach towards female in his thoughtless urgency, whereas the ‘ocean’ metaphor speaks for the profound manner in which the female partner patiently awaits the arrival of the ‘river.’ Beauvoir arrives at a similar conclusion regarding the incompatibilities of male and female entities in being partners in love.
Feminine sex desire is the soft throbbing of a mollusc . . . her expectation can become ardent without ceasing to be passive; man dives upon his prey like the eagle and the hawk; woman lies in wait like the carnivorous plant . . . . Hence it is that there is in her not only resistance to the subjugating intentions of the male, but also conflict within herself. (125)

All Beauvoir wants to prove is the fact that nature has created male and female as two totally incongruous entities both physiologically and psychologically craving and contending for physical and spiritual fulfilments by way of love play, which are never available to them in their optimum dimensions.

Happiness in the interpersonal union is a matter of both psychological and physiological compromises and adjustments. But the psychological and physiological needs of both man and woman are variant, and in this variance lies the very mystery of nature in its processes of evolution. If at all there is a possibility of achieving equal mutual interpersonal sublimations simultaneously, the very urge to aspire for more and more comes to stagnation, which in itself is a property of self-denial of nature itself. Such self-denial through repression and annihilation does not seem to be the programme of nature. Thus, the aspiring partners after happiness must constantly and continually re-cycle their mutual efforts at contending for pleasure. Kamala Das’s poetry insists upon the urgency of continual and interminable processes of such recycling with an added enthusiasm of mutual give and take. As a feminine partner she realizes the physiological and psychological limitations of male partner as the necessary stumbling block in woman’s gaining of ultimate happiness as a definite
property. Since this ultimate happiness is cut short and denied by the male partner, her poetry becomes a furious tirade against man. Her poetic fury is not against any man as such. It is more or less against the very withdrawing and sinking nature of man in his capacity as a partner in life. In effect, her poetry turns out to be incessant charges of fury against the very nature in general and the nature of man in particular.

2. The Apocalypse of Growth

Nature is available to the living organisms on Earth as a ground for primary activity, which is the same for all the species including human beings. The primary activity, i.e. self-preservation and preservation of the race is, again, the most important principle and purpose of nature in its scheme of things based on creation, reproduction, and progressive evolution. In this process of evolution human beings cannot definitely conclude that nature considers them different from other creatures, or sees the living distinct from the dead. In her poem "Daughter of the Century," Kamala Das hints at this indiscriminate behaviour of nature in its programme of evolution:

At times, a storm sinks some ships with men in them
Or a typhoon devastates a town.
But nature, aware of life's intent,
Does not care to seek anyone's pardon.
It sees no great difference
Between the living and the dead. (BK 140)

But nature's awareness of 'life's intent' that is birth, growth, decay, and rebirth becomes for man psychologically a leap from bad to worse. With the passing
of each stage of man’s organic development, in him is created a sense of loss, and he becomes nostalgic and melancholic owing to his own psychophysical experience that whatever is past was a better time for him. Kamala Das’s poetry deals with this “tragedy of life” from a feminine angle of perception. As she clarifies in the poem “Composition,”

The tragedy of life is not death, but growth,

the child growing into adult,

and growing out of needs (D.30).

The ‘tragedy’ of the ultimate death is not as potential as the continually haunting death of the being in the sense that metaphorically it accompanies life from one stage to the other stage of ‘growth’: the death of the childhood in the youth, that of the youth in manhood, and ultimately that of the manhood itself in the threatening old age. Even in the strict Indian traditions of thought, death is not an event resigned and relegated to a future moment of operation. It is a perennial secret agent that constantly and continually attends life in all its continuing moments with an inevitable ultimate trump card in its custody to overpower, defeat, and destroy life in a certain future moment. The mysterious secret agency of death continually subsisting along with the moments of life is in itself a prominent property that affects the very growth and development of man from childhood to maturity. For Kamala Das, as she says in the poem “Life’s Obscure Parallel,”

Life’s obscure parallel is death. Quite often

I wonder if what I seem to do is living

Or dying. A little of each is in every
Gesture, both my mind's and my body's. (CP 54)

Thus, death is a constant and continual phenomenon that invariably attends life in its various stages of growth and development. Quite naturally, the last stages of the life of childhood, of youth, and of adulthood complexly create in the poet a poetic agony and melancholy compounding in her a fervent state of loss and frustration. This is suggested at in the poem “Daughter of the Century”:

We are aided by death in our careers,

We ought to learn to take in each sight

Filtered through its eye.

At night the hunter and the hunted often lie asleep

In an innocence shared unwittingly

And all the hatreds seem fancied

All the prejudices unreal. (BK 140)

The expression ‘the hunter and the hunted often lie asleep’ suggests at the continuous and interminable company of death in the life of man, which makes all his attempts of flights from death a mere fancy; and all his self-pride a mockery. If so, for the poet death is not a future event staring and challenging life to be itself; metaphorically it is always attending man as his alter ego destined to inevitable destruction. This inevitable destruction of life’s vitality through the process of growth is metaphysically rebelled at by Kamala Das in her inconsolable confessions.

Even for bringing forth a generalized picture about the exclusive predicament of woman in being a lesser social entity than man, Das uses an autobiographical formula in her poetry, and time and again plunges into her own childhood. She falls
into loneliness, and the introspection thereby turns out to be a painful confession of her concerns with life, particularly as a grown-up woman in the Indian situation. In her poems the frequent reference to her grandmother’s protective love and affection and the later agony of loneliness that she feels is also a concerned reflection at the loss of the childhood innocence with growth in age. When she was still a child, lying beside the grandmother at her ancestral (Nalapat) home, she “could hear at night / the surf breaking on the shore. / The sea was only two miles away” (“Composition,” D 29). The vastness of the sea symbolizes the extent of freedom that the poet longs for, which was well within her reach both in its physical and metaphoric forms under the warmth and care of the grandmother. But

That was long ago
Before the skin
intent on survival
learnt lessons of self-betrayal. (D 29)

Here is a clear indication that with the growth in age woman also develops a sense of growth in the instinctive demands. The expression ‘skin intent on survival’ is very significant. It is inevitable that the growth in age automatically brings forth certain instinctive desires. These desires were not prominent so long as the grandmother took care of her. Ceasing of such a protective shade is the starting point of the skin’s secret cherishing of new freedoms. The way she uses the expression ‘survival’ and not existence confirms the force of creaturely demands in growth and development. There is no alternative freedom left for the creature in growth. The almost coercive manner in which the child gets distanced from its childhood’s warmth and care is
beautifully expressed in the lines: "I was busy growing / I had then / No time for the sea" (D 30). Here the nursery rhyme's gusto is poetically reflected. The sea symbolizes the magnificent 'other' as against the self. The suggestion here is that when the self is totally pre-occupied with its own being it does not have a relative vision of the 'other,' as it usually happens in reciting the nursery rhymes. The 'sea' also symbolizes the sea of life in the sense of the grand panoramic problematic nature of existence in the world. The self, in its total pre-occupation with the concomitance of its own growth and growing demands, cannot concentrate on the 'other' as an entity available for its perusal. It precisely suggests the simple idea that when the instinctive urge predominates the self the inevitable 'other' as a presence ceases to be operative. This irreversible course of alteration resulting in the irretrievable loss of a much better time is the most agonizing experience in her.

Every passing phase of ageing has its own pains and pleasures inseparably grounded. This imaginative escape into the childhood as cherished by Kamala Das is just her own manner of poetically suggesting at the implicated agony of being-in-the-present. It is not at all a 'Romantic' escape. It is just a way of telling that the present is insufferable. In fact all these moorings on the part of Kamala Das verge on the unspeakable agony of being-in-the-world. The very property of being-in-the-world has to be complimented with the height of feeling of becoming or acquiring for oneself a sort of preciousness. If so, self-importance is the central point of her poetic ego. Both nature and the fellowmen somehow fall into a conspiracy of eroding her self-importance of being-in-the-world attended by the necessary courage to be an
individual. The causes are both physical and metaphysical, and to a great extent incontrovertible.

If so, it is rather the temporal departure than the spatial separation that is the cause of the nostalgic sentiments in Kamala Das's poetry. The root of every problem for her is the distinct phases of alteration and change from childhood to adolescence, and then to womanhood. The growth in age, particularly for women, becomes a confusing phenomenon as they cannot cope up with the external environment compounded in the society and fellowmen. As Beauvoir rightly says about woman in general, "Oscillating between desire and disgust, between hope and fear, declining what she calls for, she lingers in suspense between the time of childish independence and that of womanly submission" (77). The relative manner in which Das presents the various facets of growth in life ultimately contributes to one simple summation that is life in its overall presentation of growth and development offers no relative comfort or ease. In all probability life has to be lived, and for the poet it has to be lived with all contingent regrets and distinct agonies from time to time. The manner in which she presents the agony of living ultimately matches with that of the Greek poets and philosophers who untiringly depicted life as a grim ironic presentation having no ease or respite from the pains of living. In her poem "An Introduction" Das expresses this agony of growth with an ironic tone: "I was child, and they / Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs / Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair" (OP 26). The expression 'they / Told me I grew' and further details of physical growth clearly suggest at the society's disregard for the development of a girl child's interior personality. Society measures her growth by the swell of body parts and
sprout of hairs at new places. This physical change is no ecstatic experience for her but is only a prelude to the onset of social and cultural complexities of adjustments. This alteration or growth is typically nonadjustable because of its chaotic novelty conditioned to the pathetic reflection imposed by fellowmen and the family members. Beauvoir observes this sort of quandary and shame of being woman in the initial stage of adulthood: “When the breasts and the body hair are developing, a sentiment is born which sometimes becomes pride but which is originally shame” (47). The uneasiness and delicacy of the visible development in certain exclusive female organs on the one hand, and the onset of social and familial dictates on the other make a young woman vulnerable. To quote Beauvoir again, “Her inferiority was sensed at first merely as a deprivation, but the lack of a penis has now become defilement and transgression. So she goes onward towards the future, wounded, shameful, culpable” (68). This situation coupled with unfeeling fellowmen makes her introspective and sometimes even schizophrenic. Because what awaits her in society is a pre-determined and biased social order that makes her a timid daughter, an enslaved life-partner, a toiling mother, and so on. At the initial stage itself she becomes aware of her predicament and “she feels in these changes the presentiment of a finality which sweeps her away from self-hood: she sees herself thrown into a vital cycle that overflows the course of her private existence, she divines a dependence that dooms her to man, to children, and to death” (Beauvoir 48). Voicing against such pre-determined ‘finality’ becomes a compulsion to such an aggressive poetic sensibility as that of Kamala Das because the whole process of changes that take place in a girl is seen by her as a preamble to a social categorization, a make-up to fit into a certain social pattern. She remains under
constant threat of loss of the given; life appears to be slipping out of the grips, like a fish that constantly slips out of the clutches of the fisher in the sea of living. The dilemma that the poet projects is like that of a child eating sweetmeat that wants to relish it and hold it back too; hence her resolution, 'The tragedy of life is not death, but growth, / the child growing into adult, / and growing out of needs.'

Thus, her poems become the outbreaks of a never-ending violence against the natural order of growth and decay. The naturalistic decay is something more than physical; it ultimately becomes a restraining formula of metaphysical yearnings as well. It is the degeneration of the delicate aspects of life into the 'lessons of self-betrayal' through interpersonal machinations of evil amongst the sexes. And she believes that this predicament is consequential to the process of growth. Her rebellion against the social formalities emerges out of this infelt betrayal because the repercussions of this naturalistic alteration and growth take her to a situation where all around her, the "categorizers" scream dictates like:

Dress in sarees, be girl,
Be wife. . . Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong. . . ("An Introduction," OP 26)

The 'presentiment of a finality' of status, roles, and functions of women, 'which sweeps her away from self-hood,' as observed by Beauvoir above, is sharply attacked in these lines. The dictates of the 'categorizers' to 'Fit in. Oh / Belong' imply a desperate attempt on the part of the fellowmen to fix the female entity into a pre-moulded groove.
In another poem called "Maturity" Das is still more vibrant and emotive in exposing the repercussions of growth:

Growth is the stoicism of sewers
beneath great cities, accepting the rush
of putrid waste, the abstract pulling down
of shades, the switch-off of curiosity,
the closure of apertures that allow
the river of unhappiness to flow in
towards the heart's restive ocean.... (CP 48)

The metaphoric complexities of the 'sewers' symbol clarify the manner in which the nastiness of creaturely survival compounds in one, more or less a misanthropic agony of being-in-the-world. The expression 'putrid waste' with its nauseating presence compounds this agony of being-in-the-world. The expression 'switch-off of curiosity' ultimately fulfils the poetic intensity of loss when the total darkness dawns on life and its precious treasures. The essential pain and misery of growth and its attendant devastations are well brought out in the immense metaphoric manner of the above lines. The very pain of growth in life cannot be expressed in any other manner. The 'river of unhappiness' flowing 'towards the heart's restive ocean' completes the miserable apocalypse.

3. The Agony of Unfulfilment

A person, either as a man or as a woman, is always unique and uniquely undivinable. As partners, the very depths of their personalities always remain arrestingly mutual mysteries to each other. One way of facing these mysteries is
poetically comprehending and advancing the very tenets of their mutual personalities in an atmosphere of fearless freedom, joy, and transparency. The profound purpose of Kamala Das's poetry lies in the fact of capturing this freedom, joy, and transparency. It is not pessimism of any kind that lends a sort of tragic dimension to her poetry. She is full of life and it is this passion and fervour for life that give her poetry its vibrancy. Life is very precious for her, and she does not want to give up her thirst for living at any cost. The tragic tone of her poetry owes much to the frustration of not fulfilling life's longings and aspirations. In the kind of environments that she lives in, granting free flow to her desires would mean risking an existential conflict with the conventional social and familial codes. This is suggested in her poem "A Souvenir of Bone":

My desires

Were many, if granted freedom I knew they would burn
Down like tongues of flame, the monastic peace of my home.

Rob me, destiny, if you must,
Rob me of my sustenance, but do not, I beg
Of you, do not take away my thirst... (CP 32-33)

The poetic content of her violent personality compels her to make such instant, instinctive, and emotional outpourings coupled with a stricken feminine psyche on to the face of the world. This compulsion arises not from a tragic vision of life but from dejection owing to her unfulfilled desires and the frequent set backs she has had in the process of seeking pleasures in life. Thus, for her the story of life is one of
emotional and spiritual unfulfilment, and this spiritual vacuum gradually gets filled up with frustration and violence towards the very formula of nature as an agent with malevolent and insidious plans of its own. She makes a categorical comparison of the spiritual and the secular heights of being-in-the-world with the naturalistic creaturely evocations that go with woman as a matrilineal agent. These creaturely evocations are awfully disgusting for her as they should be for any creature.

The agony of unfulfilment coupled with the fear of time slipping away functions as a catalyst to stir up an urgency in Das's poetry. This urgency and fear give the poem "The Fear of the Year" its vibrancy, wherein she feels, "no smile, however fond, can / Settle time like a paper weight" (CP 108). The sum total of human life was deemed by T.S. Eliot in The Waste Land as only "fear in a handful of dust" (L. 30). Das suggestively elaborates on this aspect:

... fear has warped us all; even
in the freedom of our dreams, it
Thrusts its paws to incarnadine
The virgin whiteness, so that we
Perceive the flying steel hands sow
Over mellow cities those dark,
Malevolent seeds and the red,
Red mushrooms hotly sprout and grow
On an earth illogically
Stilled, and silenced, and dead, dead, dead. (CP 108)
Categorical suggestive references to T.S. Eliot are vibrant here. T.S. Eliot initiates *The Waste Land* with the words: "April is the cruellest month / Breeding lilacs out of dead land" (l. 1-2). The "flying steel hands sowing / Over mellow cities those dark, / Malevolent seeds and the red, / Red mushrooms hotly sprouting" is her poetic parallel to Eliot's "Breeding lilacs out of dead land." The imagery and its symbolic notations in Kamala Das are more vibrant in being uncontrollably more elaborate than in T.S. Eliot. Both are suggesting about the all-purveysing deadness of earth around them. While Eliot is talking about the dead land (wasteland), Kamala Das is speaking of "an earth illogically / Stilled, and silenced." The very title of the poem "The Fear of the Year" substantiates the idea of the passing phenomenon of time in the modules of year after year, and confirms the invariable deadening process that mercilessly descends on human destiny. Every moment of time is invariably fated to death and relegated to the past in the very next moment. Thus, the precious present is always 'dead, dead, dead.' If so, this is an expression of the inevitable loss that she perceives in every moment of her life, and which hangs on her as an insufferable phenomenon of time. In this context, Devindra Kohli rightly says:

The "flying steel hands" of time sow the seeds for mushroom-like moments, which sprout quickly and die quickly, on desires which are "illogically/Stilled, and silenced and dead." Thus, with slow dead desires and moments coming and going, the poet is faced with the 'malevolent' challenge of unfulfilment. (Virgin 8-9)

This 'malevolent challenge of unfulfilment' in its final analysis, is in the all embracing waste of life itself in that continually and uncontrollably wasted processes
of time. This ‘malevolent challenge’ becomes more disquieting particularly when her conscious mind is wakeful to the fact that the waste is not only an eternal process in the game of being-in-the-world but it is the only finale. This view of life being pervaded by the agony of ‘unfulfilment’ finds expression also in the poem “A Cask of Nothing”:

If I close my eyes I see nothing
If I close my ears I hear nothing
Nothing but nothing
inside or outside
the nothing that resides
as an ache within
the only content
the human cask can contain. (BK 108)

It is this awareness of the finality of the ‘nothing, inside or outside’ that creates in her sensibility a sort of restlessness. From this angle, life for all the practical purposes is a mere matter of immense activity without any achievement or satiation. It is this conscious concern in her for the inevitable passage of time without ever awarding any substantial satisfaction of being-in-the-present that is the ultimate metaphysical concern of Kamala Das.

Kamala Das’s violence against nature has this metaphysical disposition of arguing out the cause of her feminine grievances against the backdrop of imperfections in the microcosmic existence of humans in the macrocosmic arrangement. She poetically implies that it is these imperfections that provoke man to
fall into a mad race in the name of civilization and progress. In this race nature gives rise to material prosperities for man (of course 'by unequal laws'), but at the same time it also brings forth a sort of spiritual defeatism, thus making human life as low as that of any other creature on earth.

B. Violence against Fellowmen

In the primeval circumstances of prehistoric context, women prevailed as the centralized forces of power and prowess even in the domestic environments. Matriarchy ruled the roost, and man quite willingly served her more or less as a bondsman. This opinion gets validated by the following observation made by F. Fawcett: “This system [Matriarchy], obtaining at one time amongst the Celts and other races of Europe, was probably universal in the sense that it existed at some period in the life history of every race of mankind, and is now to be found here and there in the world” (186). But in course of time, the man-made social and cultural systems perennially sidelined the importance of woman by way of adopting only for themselves a programme of enlightenment and progress. In this programme of enlightenment and progress, the due share and prerogative of woman had always been neglected. Virginia Woolf in her book “A Room of One’s Own” rightly comments on this sidelining of woman by history in all its practical counters:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover, she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction, in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired
words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell, and was the property of husband. (qtd. in Singh 64)

Under the thundering shell of man’s superiority it is but natural that woman self-negated herself to such an extent that she ‘could hardly read, could hardly spell, and was the property of husband.’ Such is the stupefying effect that man had imposed on woman. Just as he enslaved and used many of the lower species as domestic hands to facilitate his comforts, he looked at women also as mere enslavable products of nature. The surrealistic avidity of man abolished the natural as well as the real concrete worth of being-in-the-world in callously sidelining woman and her real naturalistic prerogatives. It is not only a matter of neglecting woman’s all important place of honour in the naturalistic counters but also a stringent suppression of the feminine faculty itself with a great strategic control almost as a matter of privilege extended to man by the anonymous, unwritten, and incredible laws of self-supposed superiority.

In effect, the interpersonal relationship of man and woman is not that of master and slave. Kamala Das fervently clarifies that she as a woman has greater place and purpose in the scheme of nature. From this angle, she does not bargain for a mere equality of sexes; she wants that there should be a wide and proper recognition of the superiority of woman in the state of nature. In the name of morals, ethics, and religion, this naturalistic phenomenal property of woman should not be sabotaged. It is a naturalistic fact that nature depends primarily on woman as a creative base in its formula of evolution. So far as the genetic standards are concerned, man is merely a
provider of seed. It is woman who receives the seed and synthesises it with egg in her, and contributes for the formation, growth, and fulfilment of the living human agent. The following very striking lines of Das's poem "Jaisurya" would illustrate how precious is this motherhood for her:

Love is not important, that makes the blood
Carouse, nor the man who brands you with his
Lust, but is shed as slough at end of each
Embrace. Only that matters which forms as
Toadstool under lightning and rain, the soft
Stir in womb, the foetus growing, for,
Only the treasures matter that were washed
Ashore, not the long blue tides that washed them
In... (D'27)

Even the present day naturalists admit the primacy of woman as a creative agent. But then, the very purpose of nature in its evolutionary phenomena is a permanent secret of nature itself. In spite of Darwin's theory of evolution and that of natural selection, the ultimate purpose of nature in evolution is still a mystery. On the same analogy, Kamala Das contends that woman as the primary creative base of nature should be regarded with a sense of mystical adulation.

There are two polarizing grounds on which woman transacts with her man: in the social context and in the feminine physiological context. In the social context, man always tried to subjugate and enslave woman by way of dictating the very terms and conditions of her survival; and in the feminine physiological context, which
includes her psychological personality also, man had never shown a reasonable
understanding of woman as an equal individual personality nor awarded her due share
of opportunity to enhance her inner being and its significance for herself. In the
companionship of man, there are again two levels of operation at which woman
struggles to establish her identity: one is at the inevitable creaturely level of survival
in the context of nature; and the other refers to the existential height and honour that
she deserves in accordance with the social laws of equality, fraternity, and love.
Kamala Das perceived that both at the creaturely level of survival and the existential
level of heights there is a gross unsympathetic man prevailing upon woman, as a
malignant force to reckon with. In the present context, more particularly in the Indian
situation, there is a great and deplorable lack of mutual understandings between man
and woman, as a result of which the whole communal life suffers a sort of atrophy.
Ultimately, the whole poetic argument of Kamala Das turns out to be a fervent appeal
for the men-folk to co-ordinate their senses and sensibilities in an equal plane of
mutual understanding. Her poetry becomes a clarion call on behalf of woman making
a serious and violent threat probably of the very extinction of human content from
humanity, if man would not make proper coordination of his senses and sensibilities,
more particularly in relation to woman and quite generally in relation to nature itself.
She never hesitates in charging that men never come to the requisite and expected
levels in being equal partners of their women companions as understanding and
loving friends. In the poem "A Losing Battle" she evaluates men's worth, "Men are
worthless, to trap them / Use the cheapest bait of all, but never / Love. " (OSK 48)
Here 'the cheapest bait of all' is the same as the "grand flamboyant lust" of the poem
“The Freaks” (OP 11). The use of the word ‘trap’ (In the interpersonal context, a plausible word would be ‘court’ or ‘woo’) itself is an indication of the snare of lust from which man can never redeem himself in his relationship with woman.

Therefore, what Kamala Das traces in the male entity is a macho-syndrome in all the cultural counters of interaction: linguistic, social and familial, and psychological. Each of the personae of her poems portrays the quintessential woman who always asserts herself against the patriarchal prejudices and hypocrisies ingrained in the social and cultural counters. If so, the ultimate purpose of her poetic arguments is to denounce and demolish the culturally sanctioned structure of patriarchal authoritarianism, its linguistic parameters, and above all, the inauthentic macho-syndrome embedded in the male consciousness.

1. The Crusade against Patriarchy

It is a fact that the naturalistic prerogative of woman was ruthlessly suppressed by way of imposing upon her all sorts of psychological and physiological abstractions in the way of her freedom of thought and action. Further, as far as the differentiation between man and woman in the context of social and familial interactions is concerned, again, it is a strategically contrived malady by the patriarchal civilization with the intriguing purpose of carving a superior place and status for men in the society. In this context, the following findings of Beauvoir are very important.

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society. It is civilization as a whole that produces
this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is
described as feminine (9)

The fury of Beauvoir at the patriarchal bias in our existing system is understandable.
The place apportioned to woman by the existing conventions is well brought out in
the expression ‘between male and eunuch,’ and is quite vibrant. In addition to the
fact that such exploitation is absolutely humiliating, it is also a matter of deriding the
fundamental human dignities of being-in-the-world. The central experience in Kamala
Das’s poetry is the feminine fury directed towards this ‘civilization as a whole that
produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as
feminine.’ In her poem “Ode to a Lynx” she says:

Civilization irks me with its cunning ways
I connect only with candour. (CP 88)

Civilization is particularly a human property. The process of civilization invariably
transcends the parameters of the blueprint of nature. In the name of civilization the
social, cultural, ethical, and moral institutions very often prescribe some rigid codes
of conduct, which are likely to crumble and annihilate the naturalistic potentialities of
men and women. Very often the naturalistic necessities of women are mercilessly
crushed and crumbled. The whole poetic purpose of Kamala Das is to reaffirm the
most needful clarification concerning the naturalistic demands of woman in a growing
civilization. She intensely feels that the civilized man should not neglect the
freedoms and choices of woman. It is with a kind of courage to be a woman-in-the
world that she writes her poetry. She certainly does not accept the idea of woman and
her faculties being neglected in the civilized social system of the sort that we have in the world today.

Apparently the naturalistic exploitation of woman is simultaneously linked with the breadwinner egoity in men. At the outset, the male-world deprived woman any access to self-dependable economic prerogatives. In many of the traditional cultures women are deprived of their inheritance facilities in the family properties. Even the educational polarities also are awfully variant and different in the man-woman ratio. This is another extraneous manner in which man held all the choices and freedoms of woman tight in his hand in the name of traditions, moralities, religions, and last but not the least, the most unfounded concept of purity of the race. It is this ruthless and meaningless manner of man that ultimately contributed for a furious revulsion and rivalry that all women commonly share in their hearts of hearts. But interestingly, they would not come to open challenges for fear of losing the minimal survival facilities and protections offered by man in the context of the social and cultural systems. However, these minimal survival facilities are mocked at by Das in her poem “A Feminist’s Lament”:

An ideal woman, they said, was but a masochist. Trained from infancy to wear the flannels of cowardice next to her skin, trained to be inert under a male, committed by vows to feed her, clothe her and buy for her the 1000 sq ft flat with a loft
for storing the debris of passing years. (OSK 127)

The suggestion that woman is not innately inert is notable in the expression 'trained to lie inert.' The life force in man and woman is naturally of the same measure, but it is her 'training' that makes the passive woman that she is in the social and familial environments. As soon as she becomes the property of a single man, the fire of her essential feminine faculty is put out and she is made to 'lie inert / under a male.'

Also in another poem called "Love," she talks about how the intellectual faculty of woman is shattered by male company:

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       (OP 23)

Again, this 'Now that I love you' situation is something feigned and hollow, and this hollowness is born out of the dismal state of the woman persona. Instead of a heartening and comforting bestowal of love and care of equal measure from her man, the woman lies 'curled like an old mongrel' at his feet. Since the literal meaning of the word 'mongrel' is an animal, particularly a dog of a mixed breed, for the woman who has the status of an 'intermediate between male and eunuch' as suggested by
Beauvoir, it is again the minimal survival necessity, i.e. food, clothe, and 'the 1000 sq. ft. flat with a loft / for storing the debris of passing years' that compels her life to lie 'content' in him.

Precisely speaking, the poet considers that men are definitely aware of the superiority and importance of the female genetic system; and, in their pursuit of selfishness and self-aggrandisement, they prefer to suppress and marginalize this naturalistic superiority of women by way of neglecting and sidelinining her existential privileges, choices, and freedoms in the context of the institutional strictures. It is not a matter of exaggeration if a conclusion is made that man virtually fear woman and her naturalistic superiority. Therefore, he invents all sorts of myths for the purpose of exploiting and subjugating woman under his iron clutches. This social and cultural phenomenon is worth denouncing according to the modern civilized contexts of life, where equalities and equal dignities are constantly and consistently being bargained in the name of social justice. As a matter of fact, so far as the naturalistic genetic variations are concerned, there is an urgent need for a reasonable perception of the nature's need in conceiving man and woman as different entities. Nature does not appear to approve of the naturalistic variations and differences being taken as a ground for opposition and strife. Therefore, in the strict metaphysical comprehension, life, its preservation, and its propagation in the name of race enhancement and enlargement still remain a mystery even after innumerable analytical academic studies through Sociology, Psychology, Prehistory, Phenomenology, Anthropology, and the Logistics of the politics of sex. Through her poetry Kamala Das makes a threatening
challenge to men by way of forcibly inviting them to consider the pros and cons of their ham-handed autocratic behaviour towards woman.

2. The Logo-Centric Anomalies

It is important to note that all personal experiences, both of men and women, are unique in being their exclusive personal affairs. If so, the deficiency in the traditional language in evaluating male-female personal experiences in an equal manner of understanding became a casualty. Needless to say, woman as a person has her own personal comprehensions and apprehensions of herself; and these comprehensions and apprehensions are required to be attended to prominently by way of lending a sympathetic and judicious ear to her voice. So far as women’s writings are concerned, they are not exposed to the full resources of the available theories of language because women as writers have been traditionally constrained to conceal the most intimate details of feminine experiences. In this context, Showalter’s remarks are pertinent. In her opinion, “Women’s literature is still haunted by the ghosts of repressed language, and until we have exorcised those ghosts, it ought not to be in language that we base our theory of difference” (467). This truth about language has prompted the modern women writers to altogether reject the traditionally prescribed language formula in their writings. They had to invent new idioms, new phrases, and a new language that is efficient and capable of expressing their experiences, their agonies, and their anxieties. Therefore, as Shoshana Felman puts it, “The challenge facing the woman today is nothing less than to ‘reinvent’ language . . . to speak not only against, but outside of the specular phallogocentric structure, to establish a discourse the status of which would no longer be defined by the fallacy of masculine
In the Western feminist poetry, however, this 'challenge' to 'reinvent language' was first taken up by American confessional poets like Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, and Adrienne Rich. While making their own rules and ideology of social existence, these women poets have also discovered new dominions and vistas of language that can poetically express the exclusive feminine concerns and experiences. The language they have invented is so potent that it has disturbed the complacent siesta of the masculine world, and upset the applecart of male hegemony.

In Indo-Anglian poetry, Kamala Das pioneers the experiment with the creation of a new poetic language suitable to spell out the agonies and aspirations of the collective Indian feminine psyche. She felt the need to redefine the 'specular phallogocentric structure' that is unsuitable and insufficient to catch up with her emotions, feelings, and volitions as a woman. She realized the impotency of the male-oriented traditional language, and for the first time in Indian poetry, she has successfully created a new and powerful language of fury, and expressed it in full blatanty. In the unprecedented poetic revolt unleashed by Kamala Das in the Indian poetic milieu she had no native predecessors to fall back on. She had to experiment with a new style of writing and use of a fresh language and idiom, one suitable for the expression of her exclusive feminine problems. The traditional women poetry in India obviously did not help her, as it was too plastic to suit her rebellious temperament. In fact no physical language seemed to have been fit enough to catch up with her stream of consciousness. In this regard Das herself admits:
I don't find it easy to write either in English or in Malayalam. Language has been very difficult for me. . . . Thoughts were there, but to cover them up, to wrap them up in decent language is very difficult. I am discovering a new language, trying to make a new language, create it, which will suit me. Because I have yet to find a language which can keep pace with thinking. (My Instinct 161)

This kind of logo-centric lacuna is endemic with the male-centred social and cultural activities. The special and unique interior components of woman's experiences as conformed by the male-generations are absolutely lacking in the needful depths of understanding the feminine psychology as well as physiology. The extra-romantic poetic eulogies confectioned by man about woman are substantially defective, for they are born of male-personal apprehensions without any corroborative consent or approval from the feminine angle. If so, all this argumentation by the poet about the parameters of language here suggests at one simple point that her inner experiences of agony cannot be translated into the available logo-centric formulas. As Anne Brewster rightly comments: "She [Kamala Das] craves the total freedom that language can give, to express herself fully in all her paradoxical and complex ramifications, without being bound by reason, reputation, morality or other limiting codes" (142)

In order to "express fully in all her paradoxical and complex ramifications," Kamala Das makes vibrant poetic innovations of inventing a verbal medium by way of introducing unique gestures, suggestions, and movements through a sort of symbolic idiom. Her poetry in a way is her unique body-cross against any male-
attempt at destroying her feminine worth. In effect, it is this vibrant body language that she invented for her poetic purpose that becomes absolutely inflated with the prominent gestures. This is one of the reasons for the emergence of obscurity, in the sense that there is a profound divergence between what the poet offers and what the reader comprehends. One of the many types of ambiguities in poetry occurs, according to Empson, "when a statement says nothing, by tautology, by contradiction, or by irrelevant statements; so that the reader is forced to invent statements of his own and they are liable to conflict with one another" (207). This is what can be called the poetic reasons as to how obscurity or strategically implanted defect in the particulars of the poems ultimately turns out to be an exquisite poetic formula of experience acquired by the reader. In this poetic transaction of what exactly happens to the reader as poetic experience in the act of reading, may be distinctly different. This is to say that in the lyric poetry particularly, there is no possibly of insisting upon what T. S. Eliot called 'objective correlative.' The subjective or the personal experience, being unique and non-repeatable even for a poet, compounds in itself certain emotive properties whose nature eludes verbal communication. Therefore, in an imaginative poet of the sort that Kamala Das is, what all that perspires in her revolting experience very often remains as a subjective non-correlatable. This non-correlatable, instead of taking a verbal form, comes out in the form of delicate gestures. Whenever the fury becomes uncontrollable and reaches a high pitch, Kamala Das resolves the problem through tenuous gestures whose performance very often remains ironic both in tone and meaning.
All said and done, with all the initial reactions of opposition and criticism towards Kamala Das and her poetry, the male generation has been profoundly compelled by her poetry to her voice and to her urgency of clarifying the feminine point of view, particularly in the man-woman interpersonal transactions of love from various angles. Kamala Das is, rightly speaking, a love poet and not a hate poet as she has wrongly been comprehended. The strong and vibrant phenomenon of hatred poured upon the ignorant manners of man in all its dimensions of strife and fury is only a matter of her own stylistic mode of expression. If so, it is the new idiom and language of Das that becomes a thing to be aesthetically appraised and comprehended not through opposition and criticism, but by way of assuming upon oneself the actor’s trunk of interior paramour in being one with her subtle and vibrant exposition of feminine concerns.

In creating her own poetic language, Kamala Das surpasses all the possible linguistic conventions. However, while inventing a language, like in the case of any other new inventions, the inventor will have to confront the ‘saviours’ of traditions. Helen Cixous very aptly clarifies the reason for this confrontation. In her own words,

"as soon as we exist, we are born into language and language speaks (to) us, dictates its law, a law of death: it lays down its familial model, lays down its conjugal model, and even at the moment of uttering a sentence, admitting a notion of “being”... we are already seized by a certain kind of masculine desire, the desire that mobilizes philosophical discourse." (482)
All this confirms that we are stringently ensituationalized by language, as a result of which the very inborn freedom of being-in-the-world gets smashed. In order to shake off this seizure of 'a certain kind of masculine desire,' one needs extra energy and audacity. One is in a vicious circle and getting out of this circle becomes a daredevil act. The situation becomes graver particularly when the traditional roots are embedded in the logo-centric stylistics. For Kamala Das, the traditional language, insofar as it restricts her poetic imaginative freedom, becomes absolutely of no use as a medium for self-expression. For a poet of her sensibility and sensitivity, language should effectively reflect her interiority and the turmoil it goes through in a social milieu where she finds herself a misfit. She is not a painter of the plasticity of the outer panorama; but she is a scriptwriter on her deep and turbulent interiority. As this interiority is a state that is almost inconceivable, the spontaneous outflow of emotions born out of this state is not fully comprehensible by any available language formulas. But the urgency of expression in her is so potent that she would not falter, and she takes up the task of creating her own language. In the poem “An Introduction” Kamala Das spells out her rebellion in clear terms against any criticism on her poetic language; like a critics’ critic she asks:

Why not leave

Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,

Every one of you? Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? The language I speak

Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses,

All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,

It is human as I am human, don’t

You see? (OP 26)

The exhortation of the poet to her ‘critics, friends, and visiting cousins’ speaks for itself that the ground realities of general public in India and their attitudes towards the women’s movement are not at all worthy of decent rhetoric. In pleading that she as well as her language be left for herself, she indicates her prerogatives as a creative artist in handling her ideas as well as her language almost in an exclusive manner of her own. This is one more way of suggesting at the uniqueness of her poetry, which she is consciously aware of. Also she is aware that she would incur the personal displeasure of her readers because of the simple fact that they would not sanction on their own authority the freedom of expression for a woman in a male oriented society. In effect, her ‘All mine, mine alone’ language is a violent formula of expressing the very heat and dust of her humiliation in being a sabotaged and relegated being in the world. It is interesting to note that all this heat and dust is directed towards the trenchant sexual politics ingrained in our social and domestic conventions.

The naturalness of her language is confirmed in the subsequent lines of the poem by asserting that her poems are spontaneous outcries of the occasions: “... it is useful to me as cawing / Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it / Is human speech” (OP 26). ‘Cawing’ of crows, and ‘roaring’ of lions are involuntary and instantaneous outcries of the occasions. Likewise, the human occasions in the volatile circumstances prompt such involuntary outcries in order to give vent to the pent-up repressed feelings and emotions. What the poet implies here is the fact that her
poems are the proper outcries of the occasions. The pleasure and the pain of these
‘cries’ are inseparably involved. The love of expression on the one hand, and the
agony of the inexpressibility on the other ultimately contribute for the sad outcries,
i.e. her poems. In this context, her poetry takes its life-blood from the British
Romanticists and the modern confessional poets, who always insisted upon pain as
the necessary springboard of human expressions. Kamala Das’s ‘outcries’ are on the
central ground of the painful experience of being a woman. The spiralling self rages
within against the lack of recognition. The articulation of this anger becomes
impossible in any socially recognized traditional language formulas. It has to be
honest, and, therefore, as she says in the poem “Loud Posters,” it necessitates
stretching of her

two dimensional

Nudity on sheets of weeklies, monthlies

Quarterlies, a sad sacrifice” (OP 47).

The active world of experience as we have it is always three dimensional, but the
world of poetic imagination, like a cinematographic picture present on its screen, is
just two dimensional like a mirror image when we are face to face with the mirror. In
her poetry, Kamala Das is always face to face with her poetic imagination, and
renders the felt image in the possible language, which instantly provokes her to ‘cry’
out. And in doing so, her poems become unique and vibrant articulations of the
suffocative experiences that lay hidden for centuries in the interiorities of the
women’s psyche. She is aware of this uniqueness, and asserts that her poems are

... the speech of the mind
That is here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or rain or the
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing
Funeral pyre. ("An Introduction," OP 26)

The use of antithesis and paradox is vibrant here. The demonstrative complexity of phrases like 'here' and 'not there' really does not need any further clarification to what they express on the occasion. However, Vrinda Nabar complains of ambiguity in these lines, and asks: "What precisely do phrases like 'here and there' mean? . . . All this sounds suspiciously like raving, an extravagance" (31). If the content of 'ambiguity' is present, it is there with the poetic purpose of suggestively pointing at the poetic target. However, a closer look at the context as brought out in these lines would reveal that there is no place for ambiguity or verbosity here. The 'mind / That is here and not there' is a confident pronouncement of the originality of her poetic revolt. This originality is asserted through suggesting at the spatial variation of the mind, the mind that is not to be found elsewhere ('That is here and not there'). It is a hint at her resolution to override the traditional limits prescribed for the expositions of the feminine psyche. Further, 'the deaf, blind speech / Of trees,' the 'monsoon clouds,' 'the rain,' and the 'mutterings' of the 'funeral pyre' are basically meaningless sound productions. These elements of nature may have the ability of expression, but they are free from suffocating experience of inexpressibility. Also, since the dead do not know who died, the funeral pyres cannot subjectively lament the death. Here the condition of her poetic mind is in contrast to that of these elements. It has to find
relief by ventilating the agonies and suffocations. It is through poetic expressions that it fulfills this purpose. In fact the above lines have the effect of a sudden waking from a hallucinatory state of inexpressibility and suffocation, and bursting out; and at the background of this outburst is a rebellious spirit against centuries of oppression undergone by women.

Das's awareness of her powerful language makes her place a warning, though ironically, before the 'critics' and 'friends':

But I tell myself, words

    Are a nuisance, beware of them, they

Can be so many things, a

Chasm, where running feet must pause. ("Words," OSK 36)

Such are the dangers of words "growing / From within" (OSK 36). And also she is aware of the isolation she may have to face owing to her curt language because words sometimes become "A knife most willing to cut your best / Friend's throat" (OSK 36). But she cannot help their coming 'From within.' They come quite effortlessly and naturally, "like leaves on a tree, / They never seem to stop their coming / From a silence. somewhere deep within" (OSK 36) Nissim Ezekiel in his poem "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher" insists, "The best poets wait for words," and then alone "the poet finds his moral proved" (L. 3), whereas for Kamala Das, waiting for words might lead to camouflaging truth. In her poem "Write Without a Pause" she exhorts the poets to.

Write without

A pause, don't search for pretty words.
Dilute truth, but write in haste, of

Everything perceived, and known and loved . . . . (qtd. in Radha 24)

While writing 'in haste, of / Everything perceived, and known and loved,' Kamala Das's poetic vocabulary defies all conventional norms. The 'All mine, mine alone' language grows in her naturally 'like leaves on a tree,' which is charged with powerful emotions, and is invariably targeted at the patriarchal bias. The honorific tradition of women poetry might also be abounding in descriptions of love, frustration, marriage etc; but it had never endeavoured to display its creator's "two dimensional nudity" (OP 47), or give an account of how they played "Naked in the pond" (D 3), or "the jerky way he / Urinates" (D 25). They never gave the reader "The warm shock of menstrual blood" (D 25). Writing about "pubis" (OP 51), "the musk of sweat between the breasts" (D 25), or about the "chests where / New hair sprouted like great-winged moths" (OSK 54), was a wild dream for the traditional women poets. As Nabar rightly points out in the context of Das's powerful poetic vocabulary, "One of her chief strengths is her ability to write of love honestly, not in order to romanticize or soften, but to describe even what had conventionally been hardly mentioned – the smell of the body, sprouting hair on chests and elsewhere, menstrual blood, uneven teeth etc" (63). For a poet who incessantly writes about the most intimate interpersonal entanglements and experiences, their elations and frustrations, use of such vocabulary becomes quite natural in order to express their complexities in the most passionate and subtlest manner. Kamala Das, however, uses such expressions in her poetry not for their cheap erotic or rhetorical effects, but she does it with a vengeance in order to mock at the hypocrisy ingrained in the hollow
social prejudices of nice feminine concealments and sacrosanctities. Thus, in her poetic language we find a ‘different kind of beauty’ that is not present in the plasticity of the language used by the Indian Romantic poets.

3. The Denouncement of the Inauthentic Macho in Man

Coming to the practical experiences, the formulas of male and female dominations are categorically institutional, and differ from person to person. What the modern feminist thinkers suggest is that there is but a gross imbalance and insufficiency in the man-woman interpersonal relations. The incompatibility of such relationship is a dominant theme in Das’s poems. In reality, the man-woman relationship always hangs on the central beam of petty male ego. Kamala Das as a feminist poet is conducting a poetic feud against men. Since ‘everything is right in love and war,’ it can be squarely understood that she has some strong point of view in writing her revolutionary and aggressive poetry. In the case of Das the concept of society and fellowmen is compounded in the volatile familial relations. The poetic manner in which she taunts and exposes the incapacitated nature of man in understanding his woman, projects her almost a feminist virago challenging the very potential and intention of man in considering himself as an equal loving partner. In a way she rebels at the inhuman tendencies of a self-engrossed and self-elating society in perpetuating what the modern psychologists call ‘macho’ as a ruling passion in the male progeny. So the ultimate tenet that Das wanted to demolish is the proneness of men towards macho compounded with a strident egoity born of their exclusive, self-emanated, and self-sanctioned temperamental superiority as the intended trend-benders of the social systems. She is absolutely convinced with the idea that it is the
macho-egoity of man that had blinkered and blinded his naturalistic potentialities in properly coordinating his senses and sensibilities in a harmonious manner in relation to women and their naturalistic rights of being-in-the-world as persons endowed with all human dignities.

In the poem "In Love," the brutal and self-centred approach of the male partner is revealed by the woman persona as unbearable as "the burning mouth / Of sun" (OP 15); looking at the 'sun,' she is reminded of

... his.

mouth... and his limbs like pale and carnivorous plants reaching out for me, and the sad lie of my unending lust. . . . (OP 15).

The expression, 'the sad lie / of my unending lust,' is in fact poignantly revealing, which suggest at the indifference of the female partner to a shallow physical transaction between her and her man. She avenges the male self-centredness with a deceitful show of 'the sad lie' of her 'unending lust.' Here the love play becomes a mere mechanical act only involving the bodies of the partners in love. In such an outward togetherness:

Where

Is room, excuse or even

Need for love, for, isn't each

Embrace a complete thing, a

Finished jigsaw, when mouth on
The moment 'mouth' sets on (my) 'mouth,' 'I' becomes absolutely unmindful of the 'poor moody mind.' The expression 'poor moody mind' is important here. The very 'moodiness' of the mind confirms the need of intended desire for absolute freedom of mind to be itself. But the 'mouth on mouth' deliberately marginalizes the essential freedom of the mind and declares it as a non-entity. This state of the mind is insufferable because 'pleasure' harshly trumpets 'into the silence of the room' with a 'deliberate gaiety.' The most requisite sublime ecstatic state of mind, which is otherwise desiring silence, i.e., freedom, becomes disturbed. Thus, the love-play is a momentary 'deliberate gaiety' into the mind and crushes mercilessly the calm and quietude of the mind ('silence of the room'). The anticipated delicacy and softness of the situation is contrasted by the expression 'pleasure / With deliberate gaiety / Trumpets harshly into the room.' When 'Each embrace' turns out to be as mechanical as a 'Finished jigsaw,' each painful 'Finished jigsaw' reverberates in her senses through horrid images like:

... the sleek crows flying

like poison on wings and at

night from behind the Burdwan Road

the corpse-bearers cry 'Bol
Hari Bol' . . . ("In Love," OP 15)

The images of 'poison on wings' and 'the corpse-bearers' suggest at the deadening effect of each interpersonal entanglement on the senses and sensibilities, and the ultimate outcome of life-in-death.

What Das always deplores in her poetry is the absolute lack of a sort of equal concern in men for his feminine counterpart in the matters of shared intimate relationship. The woman persona's frustration with the partner's attitude towards mutual intimacy, is vibrantly expressed in the poem "The Freaks":

Can this man with
Nimble finger tips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skin's lazy hungers? (OP 11)

The entire verbal fury of such lines in her poetry is in its reality a sobbing appeal to her male counterpart to be more and more concerned in being a partner. It is all a plea for a sort of equally shared sublimation. Man being a proud self-serving agent (due to his false ego) often leaves his woman in a lurch and vacuum. He never gives himself a chance to understand his female-partner other than 'unleash(ing)' 'Skin's lazy hungers.' Thus, her real hatred is against the vituperative manner of man as a performer; she expects him to be a seasoned artist in performance just like women by nature are artists. The artistic finesse of woman as arrogantly claimed by Kamala Das may not be real, but one thing is certain, and that is, nature exclusively endowed woman with the creator's prerogative as a mother, as a wife, as a daughter, and even as a situational partner in life. In the naturalistic context male principle is a mediate
phenomenon, and the female principle is the immediate base. It is her umbilical association and relation with the created beings that makes woman comparatively superior to man.

The stigmatic manner of the masculine entity showing a sort of gross unconcern and irresponsibility is more or less common for all women, and, to that extent, Das violently represents the frustrated feminine concerns in the man-woman relations. She obviously exposes through her poetry the pettiness of male ego in being an interpersonal partner of woman. In her fight against man and his self-supposed superiority, she goes to the extent of exposing man's abject ignorance about the feminine psyche and the naturalistic physiological demands of woman as woman. As a matter of fact, the poet, in this particular poetic operation, charges and rails against the most probable lack of the needful vigour and vitality in the men-folk to come to the expectations of women in general. This is more or less the stand taken by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex, and Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own. For instance, one can trace the trumpets of a new awareness in the modern feminine sensibility when in the said book Woolf comments, "Women have served all these centuries as looking glass possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of a man twice its natural size" (qtd. in Woolf, "Quotations," Hutchinson).

However, whereas Woolf sees in women all the properties of a 'looking glass,' for Das the 'looking glass' is a third device against which the male figure wants to juxtapose himself and his woman only to see himself reflected bigger and stronger. In the poem "The Looking Glass," she ironically suggests at these male expectations
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 . . . . (D 25)

The ludicrous manner of male demands from his female counterpart is pornographically exposed here. Man is such a daft creature that he would be complacently happy with a mere two-dimensional image of himself and his beloved reflected in the mirror. His image of relative superiority of himself gets a boost here. But then, he is absolutely oblivious of the three-dimensional literal woman available for him in his hands. In effect, it is the mirror image of egocentric male superiority that makes him the necessary fool of himself without ever ranging his vision to the reality of things. The irony in the initial line ‘Getting a man to love is easy’ suggests that a lover who gloats on his own male-superiority image is very easy to find, as more or less every man is stuffed with this egoity and superiority complex. Contrary to the above condition, getting a real man to love is not at all easy, particularly in a world where only mirror images make everything, and the reality on hand is nothing.

The ironic suggestion at the need to inflate the male ego in the lines, ‘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 . . .’ is a pointer towards a vicious and clandestine agenda tacitly operating within the social system to see woman as a lesser entity than man. What is expected of woman, not by man alone but by the
society as a whole, is a total surrender of her personality before ‘her man.’ She should customarily

Gift him all,

Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of

Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts

The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your


The expression in the last line ‘all your / Endless female hungers’ is very important. Virtually speaking, the ‘endless female hungers’ do not come under the category of giftable items. In fact the poet means to imply that she is required to mercilessly sacrifice all her desires just to be a plaything in the hands of her male partner. In the above lines, Das is at the height of her piercingly potent language that prima facie appears distasteful and pornographic. Here S.C. Harrex rightly comments on the effectiveness of the poem: “We notice in “The Looking Glass” how she confidently speaks in tones of dramatic irony, portraying the expectations of Indian male egoism, while being ironically bitter about the sexual politics of female submissiveness” (163). In the poem “Composition” Kamala Das mocks at such ‘expectations of Indian male egoism’ in the familial context:

Husbands and wives,

here is my advice to you.

Obey each other’s crazy commands.

ignore the sane

Turn your home into a merry
dog-house,

marriage is meant to be all this

any way,

being arranged in

most humorous heaven. (D 33-34)

The new poetic definition that she gives to marriage is quite ironic and quite mind-harrowing simultaneously. The marriage institution itself needs to be radically emancipated from its traditional structural rigidities. Since it is a personal matter of wives and husbands, she draws the attention of Indian ‘Husbands and wives’ to the burning problem on hand by way of looking at the marriage institution itself in a vibrantly transparent manner instead of taking a traditional parameter for granted as they are. In a sense Kamala Das implores husbands and wives to become human personalities at the outset, without ever relegating themselves to the traditional typifications of ‘husbands and wives.’ Therefore, the above lines vibrantly speak about the manner in which traditional marriage norms make the family institution into a ‘merry / dog-house.’ Elsewhere in an article she says, “In twenty years marriage might become unfashionable. Already I hear the rumblings of revolt among the upper middle classes” (Path 137)

As a matter of fact, the poetic outcry of Kamala Das is a persuasive appeal to the fellowmen to free themselves from the dogmatic forces that have been fiercely in operation in the social and familial environments throughout history. She invites the men-folk for an introspective understanding of women’s needs, and implores them to initiate a process to better the future of human race by correcting the cultural mistake
The mother-woman dichotomy that rocked the imagination and chiselled the personality of D.H. Lawrence is plentifully recognized by Kamala Das in railing against the ambivalent self-serving manner of man as an agent. The traditional manner of attributing sacrosanct phenomenal features to womanhood, and the simultaneous manner of attributing a sort of hateful disposition towards femininity ultimately contributes for an overall nerve-lock in men in their equivocal transactions with their feminine counterparts. If so, the poetry of Kamala Das is a concerned invitation for an analytical outlook as to how best the fruits of life can be shared to the satisfaction of all. It is an invitation for consideration and discussion. Hers is a transparent confessional formula of pouring forth the feminine desires and emotions. For generations together, man, brought up in the chauvinistic, autocratic traditions within the patriarchy, really metamorphosed himself into an egocentric and authoritarian patriarch. Das's grievance is against this exclusive patriarch syndrome in fellowmen. It goes without saying that man should humble himself by way of relinquishing his false ego, and start functioning as a real creative and progressive agent along with woman, and as a perennial cherisher of happiness and not misery.

In Kamala Das, thus, the phenomenon of nature and phenomenon of fellowmen get turned into a curious admixture or synthesis. The synthetic effect of fellowmen and nature in their togetherness contributes for her experiences coupled with emotions, feeling, volitions, and desires. The outward expression of these experiences in reaction perform themselves as violent products of intentions. One important aspect that comes with her attitude is with experience itself. For her, experience is not what all that happen to her in the formal and informal interactions
Experience for her is the way she receives it, she reacts to it, and she reconciles/irreconciles with it. Intention too is a subtle and evasive property of energy. It cannot be handled or concretised in the manner that we comprehend time, space, fellowmen etc. In a subjective sense, intention is an abstract that stands as a backbone for interpersonal affections as well as disruptions of it, and the consequent ironies and antitheses. The resultant poetic creation lands on a sort of irresolvable tension that in its term breeds a natural violence and retaliation towards the objects of her intentions. Very often the object of her intentions is conformed in the male counterpart who, according to her, callously and unconcernedly cold-shoulders her aspirations for consummation and sublimation of feminine self and feminine physical entity. The protest that reverberates through her poetry towards her male counterpart takes the form of violent poetic reactions. However, her poetry of violence and anger towards man is not with the purpose of defeating him or throwing him out as a hateful entity. Behind this streak of poetic violence and retaliation, there is always a bleak and omniscient cry of persuasion in order to make the feminine demands transparent. Her poetry is vibrant with a tone of restlessness and grievance, with the help of which she tries poetically to plead for a glorious prospect of mutual understanding and enhancement of happiness.

The properties of violence against nature and fellowmen automatically directs the artist to evaluate the impressions on one's own self. Poetry for Kamala Das is a medium of her personal experience. It becomes imminent to take up a critical reflection and evaluation of the subjective self of the poet, and this aspect is taken up for discussion in the next chapter.