Chapter - V

Philosophical Foundations of Violence

The leftist upsurge and the feminist liberation movement, both of the nineteenth century origin, took up their massive popular assent and confirmation in the Twentieth Century. Karl Marx and Simone de Beauvoir formulated the profound theoretical bases through *Das Kapital* and *The Second Sex* respectively. Both these sociological developments are the proper landmarks in the Western Historicism which stipulates and envisages a continual human progress attended by the ultimate human perfection at the end in course of time. Both the feminist and the leftist movements respectively and ideologically stipulate that the right of instinctive happiness must be through equal manner of sharing the exquisiteness and ecstasy of interpersonal intimate relations between men and women, and that the material comforts in a way must accrue first to those who produce those material effect (say, labour), in a given social system. Both the movements are partially physical and rational, as well as metaphysical and irrational; and, at the same time, they both finally address themselves to the ultimate manner of acquiring happiness for individual members, and their happiness in all probability is a state of mind and a personal prerogative.

A. Metaphysics of Violence

"Metaphysics," according to F. H. Bradley, "is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe on instinct." As happiness or otherwise is basically dependent on our instinctive capacity to apprehend and comprehend the knowledge of experience, Bradley hastens to add to the above, "the finding of these reasons is nonetheless on instinct" (qtd in Hocking 5-6). All admit that language as such is an
insufficient and insubstantial medium in the act of expressing what all abundance we feel on the instinctive base; and the metaphysical course of violence has its origin in this insufficiency and insubstantiality of language, at the outset. Therefore, Blaise Pascal in one of his Pensees says, “Ask not, lest I would be forced to tell you a lie” (qtd. in Pascal, “Quotations” Hutchinson). Pascal’s Pensees squarely asserts that what all that can be expressed through language is bound to be a tentative lie, for the ultimate Truth like Immortality invariably eludes the human grasp through intelligence or language. As all the human aspirations of happiness are in one form or the other equivocally cognate with ultimate Immortality of Truth, the contingent manner of Kamala Das constantly and continually exacting for such happiness in her poetry approximates itself to a broad metaphysical sphere of understanding life in its true intuitive dimensions. Whereas all the sweetness of life is in doing away with formalities, Das aims at comprehending life itself in its vibrant instinctive flares of operation, which she confirms by saying, “I am always guided by one guru, that is my instinct” (“My Instinct” 161).

The pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of Immortality and Truth or Immortality as Truth are more or less aetiologically the same in the metaphysical manner of pursuit. Both are subtle and evasive of any concrete illustration and example, for they do not find apt metaphors in any given language. Both are equally instinctive, and are available for intuitive apprehensions. Where reason fails, intention helps. Thus, metaphysical rebellion or violence has an instinctive conviction and thrust of its own because, to invoke Blaise Pascal again, “The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of” (qtd. in Pascal, “Quotations”.)
The concluding lines of Kamala Das's poem "The Suicide" are worth quoting here, where she appeals to the sea:

*Take in my naked soul*

That he knew how to hurt.

Only the soul knows how to sing

At the vortex of the sea. (D 2)

The very idea of 'soul sing(ing)' is somewhat antithetical. In fact soul is a silent presence within the self. If the poet says that it sings, that too at the vortex of the sea, it is all her heart's reasons which probably the reason itself does not know. All this implies that there are many things in the world of the heart where reason cannot penetrate. This is one nice example of giving 'bad reasons' for what she immensely felt as true in her heart of hearts, probably through intuition.

What all Kamala Das apprehends as the exclusive feminine province and property of happiness eludes a rational grasp. Therefore, it cannot be distinguished, defined, and designated in any specific terms of a language. The urgency to tell it and the lack of means to tell, compound in her a typical metaphysical fury, which operates poetically as a strong and vehement argumentation for a square recognition and understanding of women's problems in the course of achieving for herself the most requisite pleasures and happiness. She poetically affirms and analyses the feminine aspirations and prospects of happiness. Thereby she wants to bridge the gulf between the manners in which men and women thought and comprehended differently about the content and quanta of happiness they derive in the interpersonal relations. But, however, insofar as it refers to happiness, even when it is interpersonal, it has its own
metaphysical distinctions. Happiness and pleasure in its fullest measure always eludes both men and women. The contingent unbearable nature of this state of affairs of women turns into a verbal charge and expression of frustration in Kamala Das. For her poetic purpose, she targets men as the immediate cause of violation of the rightful tenets of happiness for women. Thus, her verbal feud in all probability can be defined as sexual metaphysics.

Metaphysical rebellion is always a fissure that reverts on itself. Therefore, the rebellious content of Das's poetry turns against herself in exposing her fever and fret as unbecoming of a decent woman in the honorific social traditions. Moreover, in her poetry there is no specific or reasonable clarification as to what the exact requisites and demands of a woman are, and to what extent they could be fulfilled by man even as perfect sympathetic partner. As had already been observed, nature does not provide all such pleasures and happiness as free gifts. Nature's purpose in implanting hopes and desires for pleasures and happiness both in men and women is inscrutable. Since it is inscrutable, Das's outcry is a mere metaphysical 'sound and fury signifying nothing'. However, insofar as it is an expression of these metaphysical concerns—these metaphysical concerns themselves are half-truths—her poetry profoundly substantiates the emotional extent of her fury and rebellion. This is what takes an ultimate shape in tone and tenor in the poems like "The Dance of the Eunuchs." The vibrant manner in which she implants far-reaching procreative desires in the eunuchs is in itself a matter of a critical controversy. Likewise, most of her poetry takes its sum and substance from out of some controversial point of determining the sexual relations of men and women as equal partners with equal mutual responsibilities.
Violence in art and literature is fundamentally metaphysical to the extent that it emerges out of heart's unattainable aspirations and inordinate desires for happiness and Immortality. It does not mean to imply that the heart is an impoverished agent. It just suggests that its empowerment is not as potential as it could substantially achieve happiness in its fullest measure. The automatic outcome of all this is frustration. The sort of great frustration that one finds in the poetry of Kamala Das mostly emerges out of her own infelt incapacitated state—a sort of inferiority complex, psychologically speaking. When this inferiority complex takes a superiority posture in all its outward appearances, it takes the form of a hectic rebellion. Thereby she resorts to compound her poetry with immense accusations and charges against her co-sharing partner as is found in expressions such as “Can this man with / nimble fingertips unleash nothing more / alive than the skin’s lazy hungers?” A few lines after, she says, “I am / a freak. It is only to save my face / I flaunt at times...” (The Freaks, OP 3). Read together, the above statements clarify her inferiority complex taking a superiority posture, which may be classified as an example of her metaphysical violence.

So far as the metaphysical nature of the feminine concerns of Kamala Das, the specific causes can be elucidated from what Albert Camus says as the ground of metaphysical rebellion. In Camus’ words:

Metaphysical rebellion is the means by which a man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it disputes the ends of man and of creation. The slave protests against the condition of his state of slavery, the metaphysical rebel
protests against the human condition in general. In fact in both the cases we find an assessment of values in the name of which the rebel refuses to accept the condition in which he finds himself. (29)

If so, the drive behind metaphysical rebellion and violence is an urgency to change 'the condition in which he finds himself,' and 'an assessment of values' that have been the sources of development of all consciousness and consciences. Metaphysical violence as such erupts inevitably from the newly enlightened self of the one who rebels, and it emerges from a realization that something better exists beneath the available, beneath the given, which has been practically denied to him. Thus, rebellious or violent art emerges from polarities and conflicts in personal impulses and worldly values. Worldly values, ironically, has a mask of the ingredients for human progress, but they never do offer a strategy for naturalistic creative development to the individual's self, and would rather insist on the perpetuation of society's rigid notions on the myth of enlightenment and progress. We are travelling in time on the wheels of a civilization that has always endeavoured to impose a sort of discriminative value systems on its subjects. These values have two contradistinctive faces: at the conceptual level they prevail as the vital ingredients for an ideal human world, and at the practical operational level they function as a sort of deceitful, discriminative, and double-edged set of laws tacitly operating within a given social set up, which invariably make ominous inroads into the domain of personal freedoms and choices. But in most cases the affected remain mute sufferers of their own destiny because in their case, as Camus very pertinently observes, "the problem of revolt never arises, because for them it has been solved by tradition before they had
time to raise it—the answer being that tradition is sacrosanct. . . . Metaphysics is replaced by myth" (26). The following ironic lines of Das’s poem “Nani” will further illustrate Camus’ point:

They are lucky
Who ask questions and move on before
The answers come, those wise ones who reside
In a blue silent zone, unscratched by doubts
For theirs is the clotted peace embedded
In life, like music in the koel’s egg,
Like lust in blood, or like the sap in a tree. (OSK 76)

‘Music in koel’s egg,’ ‘lust in blood,’ and ‘sap in a tree’ are synonymous non-thetic properties that are being thought of as the real propellers of self’s aspirations. It is true that in its embryonic state koel’s egg does not contain any ‘music’; that the blood alone is not the accelerator of lust; that the sap in a tree is only a catalyst contributing for the tree’s growth. These properties, unless activated by a second agency, are not fully capable of bringing forth their respective effects. According to the poet, the ‘clotted peace’ that the ‘wise ones’ enjoy is like that of latent things such as ‘koel’s egg,’ ‘blood,’ and ‘sap in a tree.’ As Vrinda Nabar observes, “Perhaps, the logical interpretation would be that the music in the koel’s egg, the lust in the blood, the sap in the tree, if not allowed to manifest themselves, are really not symbols of vitality but of life-in-death. Hence the peace the ‘wise ones’ experience is ‘clotted,’ not smooth or unblemished” (71).
However, for those who ‘ask questions’ and ‘do not’ ‘move on before / The answers come,’ it invariably leads to conflicts within and without. By the expression ‘without’ is meant that for more passionate and less creative minds, these conflicts get manifested in violent actions or physical violence. But in a creative and highly imaginative psyche, the drive for physical violence is replaced by metaphysical violence and a passion for creative imagination. If so, metaphysical violence is the refusal of the artistic self to yield to the present order of things, and this penchant to refuse to yield eventually propels an artistic creation that may be violent in its operations—emotions, feelings, and volitions. Rebellious works of literature are such products of conflicts within the creative minds. Camus has further clarified this by saying that creation “presumes uninterrupted tension between form and matter, between evolution and the mind, and between history and values” (238). Here, by ‘values’ what Camus means is the archetypal values theoretically sanctioned to the dignity of being human. However, in the poetry of Kamala Das, more aggressively than in any other contemporary Indian poetry, is manifested this ‘uninterrupted tension’ in between the primary and secondary concerns of human life.

The tension that Camus speaks of in between ‘form and matter’ and ‘evolution and mind’ is evident in the above quoted lines of Kamala Das. When there is no scope to resolve the tension itself even in poetry, as well as in life, the inevitable outcome is a kind of mad fury. But this mad fury becomes poetically convincing and aesthetically relieving. Thus, the irresolvable nature of the tension itself becomes an aesthetic particular that enthuses the reader’s attention. All questions do not have answers, and the answerless postulates invariably contribute for a tension. Therefore,
the very tension here is a poetic particular and it gets resolved through the irrational metaphors. This is so because of the fact that the very tension, thus created, is in itself irrational. It is a tension clashing with another tension and providing a momentary release through a startled reaction that they go to create. Any tension, whether poetical or real, has to be released and relieved through proper sublimation. This kind of sublimation need not be pleasant or agreeable in operation. It can as well be in its own unacknowledgeable dimensions like active war or a street fight between two neighbours. If so, the sublime relief offered by Kamala Das's antithetical metaphors certainly contribute for a release through a sudden surprise or a wonder. The very unacknowledgeable nature of the rationale of certain expressions in her poetry contributes for a release of charge or tension through a sort of sudden wonder as a matter of reaction. Thus, in the reader's mind, the wonder itself has its own 'bad' or absurd reasons emerging out of instinctive reaction. In such contexts the meaning of the poem reaches the reader's heart long before the poem reaches his analytical attention. Such is the cryptic manner of metaphysical reaction through instinctive operations.

On a close analysis it perspires that Das's poetry is a categorical documentation of the personal grievances that emerge in a woman from the tension between 'history and values' because of her rigorous conditioned nature of life as lived and practised in the male-chauvinistic world. Her poetry being a potential expression of personal grievance as a woman, it attributes for itself an unabashed tone of violence. This violence is born out of her extraneously constrained freedom of herself, which is inborn in her personality because of its transparent awareness of the
need of such freedoms as a necessary prerequisite for happy living. It is a matter of her personal experience that such freedoms which should have been enhanced and accelerated in the context of human survival, have invariably become incidental casualties. The feminine clarifications that she offers through her poetry are awfully vibrant with the very needful nature of the feminine contentment. But the impossibility of gaining such contentment by way of freedoms and choices is a fact, for in the practical context the unyielding traditions leave no leeway for her to demand such freedoms. The consequence of her interrogative temper is certainly known to her, as the following lines of the poem “Tomorrow” suggest:

Tomorrow they may bind me with chains stronger than
Those of my cowardice, rape me with bayonets and
Hang me for my doubts.

Further lines have a tragic but challenging tone:

Resident Gods,

Seal the high notes of pain, still the faltering will’s

Ultimate grown, grant

Me silence below the gallows ... (CP 28)

The expression ‘Hang me for my doubts’ is very important. The ‘doubts’ always manifest themselves as questions that invariably carry the seeds of resentment and rebellion. This resentment and rebellion against the ‘Resident Gods’ was always thought to be granted ‘silence below the gallows’ by the rigid traditional parameters.

But Kamala Das’s resentment and rebellion is the natural fallout of the instinctive flares in operation owing to her primary concerns and, therefore, cannot be
contained by any secondary agencies. The caged and conditioned manner in which women survive in the present context is insufferable for her poetic self. Therefore, she makes a violent and vociferous poetic campaign against 'form,' against 'evolution,' and against 'history' by way of transparently clarifying the need of naturalistic freedom of woman as prime movers of the very creative process. If so, the balance in which she weighs her concerns of freedom tilts towards primary concerns based on the primitive animistic lawless and flawless atmosphere of human interactions.

B. Freedoms – Primary and Secondary Concerns

Northrop Frye talks of two types of "concerns" in human life. In Frye's words,

There is a primary concern and there is a secondary concern. Primary concern is based on the most primitive of the platitudes, the conviction that life is better than death, happiness is better than misery, and freedom is better than bondage. Secondary concerns include loyalty to one's own society, to one's religion, or political belief, to one's place in the class structure, and in short to everything that comes under the general heading of ideology. All through history, secondary concerns have had the greater prestige and power. (21)

Thus, the 'primary concerns' are naturalistic acquirements of men, whereas the 'secondary concerns' emerge out of the emotional attachments to the man-made traditional institutions and their conventions. Needless to say, the naturalistic acquirements are invariably superior to the man-made institutional traditions.
made institutional parameters invariably alter and change in course of time, and these alterations and changes in themselves are likely to become nonadjustable constraints in a later stage of life in the historical process. Therefore, these man-made conventions very often require reformations and revisions in accordance with the immediate temporal demands. However, the response of a person to his surroundings is dependent on how strongly or less strongly he or she receives these conditions into his inner self. If and when the secondary concerns get overstretched beyond their necessity in operation by nature, the response of the individual to them is most likely to be negative. This creates a conflict between the individual and his surroundings.

Humanity in its abstraction is permanent and the institutions are temporal. This provokes the cognitive self to take a rebellious stance against all the forces of culture and civilization, which have menacingly interfered in the primary individual freedoms by way of awarding exclusive importance to institutional prerogatives.

A close study of Kamala Das's certain poems would reveal that she is all for the primary concerns and permanent aspects of human existence, for her ultimate poetic theme is feminine happiness/denial of happiness, particularly in the counters of man-woman relationships. The very manner of attributing a defeatist tone and tenor to her poetry completely explains the horrifying manner in which the feminine primary concerns are subjugated, exploited, and declared as non-entities. The feminine self that suffered for centuries the muted silences which are mercilessly imposed upon it suddenly opens up the floodgates, and the confessions that she makes become highly important for a humanistic discernment, if not for an aesthetic
establishment of the feminine primary concerns and freedoms. Her poetry invariably 
reflects her demand for this naturalistic, primitive freedom of existence.

This demand time and again takes her back to the rare moments of past 
experiences and ecstasies related to her childhood. In the poem “A Hot Noon in 
Malabar,” sitting in a farther and modern city like Calcutta, she journeys back in 
spare and time to the simple unadulterated wild experiences of the childhood, and 
thinks that had it been her childhood home atmosphere, she definitely would have 
been having a lot of wild ecstasies and experiences. In her childhood at Nalapat 
house:

This is a noon for beggars with whining 
voices, a noon for men who come from hills 
with parrots in a cage and fortune-cards, 
all stained with time, for brown Kurava girls 
with old eyes, who read palms in light singsong 
voices, for bangle-sellers... (BK 18)

It is just like coming back to her childhood home, imaginatively of course, from her 
place of living, which, in the present context, is no home at all. Home is not a mere 
structure; it is where you have someone to receive you with all familial warmth and 
love. But for the poet, the present “home” is “where the dream awaits us / and the 
knife sharpened for the kill / Home is where the god who failed us stands awaiting” 
in Malabar,” she betrays all her pent up agony in being plucked away from the ‘wild’
of Malabar house; atmosphere.

"Yes, this is / A Noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love" (BK 18).

but contrasts it with the absence of such wild ecstasies in her present life:

To

Be here, far away, is torture. Wild feet

Stirring up the dust, this hot noon, at my

Home in Malabar, and I so far away ... (BK 18)

This affection and need for primary freedoms of life makes her always long for the

‘wild men, wild thoughts, wild love.’ When these ‘wild’ freedoms are sabotaged,

particularly when the feminine aspect gets atrociously conditioned to an awful state of

passivity with growth in age, condescending it to non-entity, such over-doings by the

patriarchal culture flare her rebellious temper or temperament, and she feels that ‘To /

Be here far away (from what is aspired) is torture.’

Looked from this angle, the feelings expressed in “A Hot Noon in Malabar”

are not a mere nostalgic craving of a commonplace sentimental mind. But it is a

retreat into the past in space and time, and a keyhole peep into the tender psychic

aspirations of her childhood innocence. The images of wilderness, which follow one

by one with a cinemematic effect, such as ‘beggars with whining voices,’ ‘men who

come from hills / with parrots in a cage and fortune-cards / all stained with time.’

and ‘brown Kurava girls / with old eyes, / bangle sellers,’ whose “voices / run wild, like

jungle voices” (BK 18) clearly indicate the longing of an aching mind for the

primitive animistic pleasure. The more she realizes the arduous nature of her physical

and metaphysical limitations of being a part-taker in such primary pleasures of life in
the present modalities of social intercourses, the more violent and rebellious she becomes in her poetical tone and tenor.

The East-West encounter played a very positive role in the life and poetry of Kamala Das. The Western culture and historicism, which is predominantly linear in its approach with a faith in the possibility of real enlightenment and progress, inducts into man a sort of aggressive approach to life with achievement-mindedness. Since materialistic achievements are detestable for the Hindu mind, he always preferred a sort of primitive animism, absolutely in tune with the rhythms of nature as against the Western man’s idea of ultimate perfection of humans. For Kamala Das, in spite of the fact that she believes in the possibility of enlightenment and progress, personal prerogatives and personal satisfactions are inevitable necessities for acquiring real happiness in life. Since her prominent personal demands are concerned with happiness, she poetically insists upon a sort of needful personal adjustment between man and woman as partners in life. This insistence of Das on the needed adjustment is akin to the ancient primitive animism, wherein men and women were well adjusted with the profundities of nature, and their interpersonal relations were attuned to the rhythms of nature and the spiritual demands of liberation. Because liberation in its totality becomes possible for humans in the naturalistic gregarious performance, in the exercise of which lies their fullest realm of experience. The entire plea for ‘wild ecstasies’ spread over her poetry, as expressed in “A Hot Noon in Malabar” as ‘wild men,’ ‘wild thoughts,’ ‘wild love,’ could, therefore, be taken as a longing for the primitive animistic freedoms in the naturalistic primary essences of human existence. Almost all her nostalgic poems that talk of unlimited love and uninhibited freedoms
as well as certain passages of her "My Story" point towards this yearning for a 'lawless' and 'flawless' peaceful co-existence against the backdrop of naturalistic prerogatives rather than a feeble animal existence reeling under the burden of institutional predominance in the context of civilized life. As it is, the peripheral reasons are the 'bad reasons' that she gives, for what all she believes instinctively as true ultimately conforms her poetry to a kind of metaphysical operation. Her real need is the necessary warmth of being possessed and comforted by her partner in love. This needful possessive instinct gets a shattering blow when she realizes the fact that all the prospects for happiness and happy living have gone into the historical past; and, in the present, the only feeling that emerges as a violent outcry is the essential feeling of the loss of all the life-giving and instinctively enthusing phenomenal particulars. If so, the loss she sustained is awfully a regrettable one, and that she does through vivacious evocative introspections.

C. Romantic Love and Primitive Animism

Romantic love, to the extent that it is fallout of plastic imagination, does not vitally and vigorously fulfil the primitive animistic demands. Moreover, Romantic love is a mere echo of the extended personal desires for a 'cloud cuckoo land.' To that extent, they are not well founded in the reality of human existence. They only emerge exclusively out of the desiring dreams. The primitive animistic evocations are not like that. The instinctive polarisation of the gregarious needs of humans subsisting in groups demands a clear understanding as to 'how it looks like being the other' in all the interpersonal transactions. This kind of mutual transaction in an atmosphere of absolute freedom of mind, gives the needful gregarious fulfilments. In
the absence of such free, frank, and transparent atmosphere in the context of interpersonal transactions, there is only a colossal denial of all that is instinctively derived as good for man as well as for woman. While the desiring self constantly makes certain fulfilling approximations, the denying self blindfolds itself to the fervent needs of the other. There emerges a sort of insufferable emotions, and these emotions have to be evacuated on instances. The entire corpus of Kamala Das's poetry, in a way, is a kind of evacuation of the pent-up grievance that reaches the metaphysical excesses as a feminist rebellion. As a poet, in spite of the fact that she emulates the structural probity of the British Romanticists, she can be considered as an anti-Romantic in the context of her treatment of creaturely avidity of love. There are no Platonic extensions here. There are stringent critical scoops concerning the relative responsibility/irresponsibility of men and women as partners in love. It is this fundamental manner of evaluating the human interpersonal relations that acquired for herself the status of a naked realist without any romantic orgies and circumlocutory extensions. It is her fearless uninhibited poetic spirit that ultimately becomes an arresting performance in her poetry.

Thus, the development of Kamala Das's poetic self gradually reveals her concern for human beings as a species rather than for men and women as opposite genders. It is interesting to note that even here she takes along with her themes a touch of love-relationships in humans. In the poem "A Relationship" she says,

This love older than I by myriad

Saddened centuries was once a prayer

In his bones that made them grow in years of
Adolescence to this favoured height. (OP 41)

If love is 'older than I by myriad / Saddened centuries,' this relationship between man and woman is not of here-and-now, but it is much older than what it appears to be. The deliberate use of 'I' in place of 'me' is notable and conveys the intended meaning that the relationship is to be looked at beyond the fleshly attractions. The word 'I' goes beyond its semantic connotation and stands here as a sort of agent travelling down 'myriad / Saddened centuries' to the present. By the said expression she is clarifying her stance that love is a gregarious instinct informed by the primitive animistic forces. If so, it is not a mere personal or interpersonal prerogative to be in love. It is the very essence that established the family institution itself in the 'myriad / Saddened centuries.' They are 'saddened' because of the simple reason that the primacy of love as a foundation stone was plentifully overlooked during all these centuries. Long ago, i.e. in the beginning of the family system, it used to be 'a prayer' that nurtured a strong passion to take inroads in the 'Adolescence,' which ultimately brought them to 'this favoured height.' In stating that love is bone-deep in being a passion, she suggests at the inevitability of true love for all the human felicities. If so, what makes man and woman exist here is each other's desire for the opposite: "Yes. / It was my desire that made him male / And beautiful" (OP 41), and this desire is as old as human life itself. Here-and-now is the meeting place of two principles rather than two physical entities, and if so, "Betray me? / Yes, he can, but never physically. / Only with words... " (OP 41). As she knows the inevitable nature of this love.

Why care I for their quick sterile sting while
My body's wisdom tells and tells again
That I shall find my rest, my sleep, my peace
And even death nowhere else but here in
My betrayer's arms... (OP 41)

Even if the lover turns out to be a betrayer of his mutual responsibility, she would
find 'my rest, my sleep, my peace / And even death nowhere else but here in / My
betrayer's arms...'. There is a veiled imploration here to her male partner not to be a
betrayer, for such betrayal is synonymous with 'death' for her.

Kurup interprets the poem based on a conflict in the narrator persona's
sensibility, between the need for escape and a tendency for enslavement:

... a woman cannot escape from her basic need of love and security.
Thus the feminine self is the combination of the need for domestic
security and the desire for independence. This predicament, which, by
and large, is common to the modern woman, leads to the confessions of
the inescapable such as "That I shall find my rest, my peace/And even
death nowhere else but here in/My betrayer's arms". (138)

But this hasty manner of arriving at the conclusion that the poet is pining for
'domestic security' and 'independence' simultaneously, striking an echo that
'domestic security' and 'independence' are antithetical to each other, is absolutely
unfounded. It is not exactly independence that she is talking about here. On the other
hand, she is imploring actually for a strong mutual dependency on each other, in the
absence of which her lover would turn out to be a 'betrayer,' and her union with him
is a matter of 'death' for her, not literally but figuratively. As a matter of fact,
instinct at all as a propelling force of desire, whether physical or emotional, is an equally compounded quality in both men and women. She is merely indicating that love as a universal instinct must be shared with equal mutual responsibilities. There is a widespread purist comprehension, more prominently in men, that physical desire should be checked or crushed at any cost. All the religions have dubbed physical desire as a sin, and the men-folk conveniently interpreted this sinful component in their favour by way of dubbing that it is a thing unwanted in women, forgetting the simple fact that it is the same instinct and desire that force them to seek the companionship of women.

Another picture of the defeated self, striking a reconciliatory note appears in “Morning at Apollo Pier.” Here the shelter of the lover is ‘absolute as the tomb’ and a ‘flawed beauty,’ but the woman predestines herself to take “refuge” even in this flawed beauty:

I hide my defeat in your
Wearing blood, and all my fears and shame.
You are the poem to end all poems,
A poem, absolute as the tomb,
Your flawed beauty is my only refuge.
Love me, love me, love me till I die... (TSR 15)

In the folk songs and literature such profound poetical effects of love partners teasing and accusing each other is a widespread commonality. Moreover, the critics never comprehended the figurative nature of most of the poems of Kamala Das, with all its folk vigour and pathos. In the Bhaktmarg(“devotional path”) of ancient India.
nine types of devotional variations are earmarked, amongst which 'hatred' too is
counted as one way of devotion. The negative manner in which Das is showing her
devotion towards her male partner should be understood as a profound folk-poetical
stroke. It is through such accusations that the partners try to induct reason and good
sense into their counterparts. The delicate 'lovers' quarrel' that she makes is
unfortunately comprehended by critics as an unabashed exposition of her 'body's
wisdom.'

In both these poems, the perception is that the gregarious existence of humans
depends on the principle love, for loneliness is the most fearful augury of being-in-the-
world. Loneliness as such is a matter of paralysing anxiety. To dispel and extricate
oneself from the intricacies of inevitable loneliness in being a person, man and
woman are under a certain psychological compulsion to hurdle themselves into a
togetherness. Even if they are averse to each other in the social interactive counters,
in the naturalistic context they have to be together in order to carry out the primaeval
plans of nature. Togetherness, which is the essence of gregarious instinct, is in itself a
matter of offering the most needful exquisiteness on ecstasy to the individual persons
in the primordial unit of man-woman relationship. When that magical 'something'
happens to man and woman as constituting units in that togetherness, the constituent
persons are not just persons, but they are mutually wanted persons. In this mutual
gregarious wanting process both man and woman are equal co-sharers of the
experience itself in its phenomenon of acquiring heights. Naturally speaking
Moreover, in the mutuality of desiring power there is something magnetic, and in that
magnetism itself there is that promise of perfection. When that wanting of perfection
is mutually aimed at, the very object of our own selves, which is outside of ourselves, creates a titillation, a thrill, and this thrill itself is a psycho-physical experience that involves our mind and the senses.

Thus, naturalistically speaking, togetherness is a minimal necessity for survival. What all is important to be noted here concerns with man being a gregarious social animal, and the minimal gregarious unit, in this context, is the whole-hearted readiness of man and woman to be such gregarious partners, at the outset. Man is not entitled or capable to override the principal aims of nature. In whatever way he vies to acquire the (unavailable) existential heights, he cannot transcend the all-encompassing principle of his creaturely survival as is designed by nature for its own evolution, in which he is only an animated being conducting his journey from the unknown past to the unknown future. Man and woman are just beings in the process of perennial becoming. Interpersonal incompatibilities are a fact in nature where man grudges woman and vice-versa. But it is for them to realise that by being-in-the-world, humans cannot expect totality or consummation, as they are only a particle in the cosmic whole. In the poem “Mortal Love,” Das clarifies this:

Fidelity in love
Is only for the immortals.
The wanton Gods who sport in their
crret heavens and feel
no fatigue. For you
and me, life is too short
for absolute bliss and much too long
In relegating fidelity as a mere phoney coinage, Das is actually pointing towards the ever-changing, never-resting phenomenal manner of a personality performing itself. Personality is not a mechanical block to be encumbered and frozen in certain mechanical spatio-temporal parameters. Very often the personality formula in itself cognate with freedoms and choices change in the instance drastically altering the personality, in the context of which 'fidelity' as a property has no real meaning. The very companionship of male and female is not merely encumbered with just two personalities. Sigmund Freud is supposed to have statistically enumerated at least six personalities taking alternative stances in the intimate relationship of man and woman.

*Libido* ("life instinct") and *Mortio* ("death instinct") are certain given properties to all the living beings. In the humans the urgency to do and perform, that too beautifully, is born of the consciousness of impending death. Therefore, in his poem "Sunday Morning" Wallace Stevens says, "Death is the mother of beauty" (L. 63). On the same analogy, Das introspectively comprehends that we the mortals are under a certain urgency to acquire for ourselves the requisite pleasures of life. Therefore, she says, 'life is too short / for absolute bliss.' The 'absolute bliss' that she talks of is a spiritual property called *Brahman*, a happiness that emerges out of the self's unification with the Supreme self. Since this 'absolute bliss' is given only to a chosen few, what all is available for us mortals is an intermediary manner of acquiring the foretaste that the man-woman instinctive entanglements provide. It is important to note here that instincts themselves perform instantly and instantaneously.
So the instinctive operation being only a moment’s given, it is certainly too short in its practical operations.

At the same time, Das quite antithetically arrives at the conclusion that life is ‘too long’ for ‘constancy,’ implying that the very feel of constancy itself is a matter of momentary operation in the phenomenal manner of experiencing. Life as an intermediary between birth and death has in itself a relative extended temporality, in the context of which constancy is an impossible acquirement. Constancy cannot stretch itself to the length of life since we are ever changing, never-resting personalities in action.

Thus, the poet’s concept of love transcends the flesh and enters a more philosophical state where man and woman should find the foretaste of bliss in being equal partners in the act of lovemaking. For her, love is a vital element for mankind for sustaining itself in the eternal march of time. It is founded on mutual compassion and concern emerging out of the gregarious context of human existence. In the social historical context women have been considered to be dependent on men, and the modern feminist thinkers of the West wanted women to be independent of men in thoughts and actions. But Kamala Das adds a third dimension to this love-hate tangle For her, woman is neither dependent on man nor is she independent of him; both man and woman are equally interdependent agents, and this interdependence will go to fulfil the nature’s purpose of self preservation and preservation of the race. Thus, in the union of man and woman she aspires to visualize the contingency of existence, as against mere subsistence or survival. Even here, the supremacy of femininity as a principle is ascertained in nature (‘Yes, / It was my desire that made him male / And
It is quite ironic in being a fate that within the togetherness there is ground prepared for difference, distinction, and mutual accusations. If this were to be the practical way of life, the poet is absolutely frustrated and scared of being left alone without being provided with a conscious feel of rest and ease in being a woman. If so, her poetry is an attempt for clarifications, the most necessary property in sharing life.

D. Towards Other Precincts

Kamala Das, as a poet, was mainly considered as running a mere feminist poetic feud against men-folk by way of violently and even pornographically trying to settle the scores. In fact man-woman interpersonal relations from all the possible angles are certainly important in her poetry, but thematically speaking, Kamala Das vibrantly diffuses her poetic art to innumerable other vistas of life than the man-woman interpersonal entanglements. There is a way of understanding this poetic diffusion of Kamala Das as a matter of poetic digression undertaken to give a broader canvas for her poetic breadth. This broader canvas popularly extends to the poet in relation to nature, fellowmen (other than lovers), and in relation to her own self. In the sensitive poetic manner of considering her self's poetic demands, both physical and metaphysical, it becomes clear that she considers human life as a blend of painful orgies. It is just possible that this note of painful burden in her poetry is born of that inevitable and unavoidable existential crisis that constantly and continually grows and stares into the very eyes, and scares the very being with all sorts of fears and dreads. These fears and dreads in Kamala Das are not born of any supernatural visitations. On the other hand, they are born of frustrated hopes and fractured desires to gain for
her a relative life of calm and quietude in the human set. But, as had already been discussed in detail about her biographical particulars, the most necessary calm and quietude of life always eluded her, and life, for all her poetic retrospective purposes, turned out to be a sort of unendurable existential agony. It is in this context that Kamala Das can be termed as a hate poet poetically capturing the vehement hatefulness of life in its available creaturely dimensions and unavailable existential heights.

All said and done, Kamala Das fervently stands for pulsating primitive animism, in the context of which the human relations in a given society are required to be potentially informed by the sincere and transparent affections born of gregarious instinctive curiosity. A social system, in order to be a viable humanistic entity, cannot afford to disregard the primal affections by way of resorting to deviating and marginalizing the individual freedoms and choices of others. Most of her poems, particularly in the later stages of her poetical career, have extended consideration for all the social and ethical norms of life. These norms are usually informed by enchanting human affections towards everything in nature and fellowmen. So far as her love for self is concerned, the entire corpus of her poetry is replete with the outcries of a stricken self particularly in the patriarchal traditions and taboos. In this context her poems having the themes of naturalistic beauties and social significances—poems such as “Forest Fire,” “The Wild Bougainvillea,” “Nani,” “Honour,” “The Flag,” “Terror,” “Inheritance,” and the Colombo poems—are highly important. From these poems, it perspires that she is not a mere dogmatic feminist trying to expose the formidable enemies of feminine freedoms and choices. But,
however, Kamala Das will be remembered by the future generations as a revolutionary feminist poet who had undertaken a fervent feud against all such patriarchal forces that dictate terms and conditions to the women-folk.

1. Transcending the Ego

In fact, not much critical attention has been paid to the depth and significance of Das's many poems in which she rises above her obsessive preoccupations with gender concerns, and pilots her poetic imaginative flights to other vistas of life. Most of the criticism on her has been floating on the surface of her aggressive and open statements on love-acts and love-partner(s). In fact the plasticity of the structural properties of her poetry is more attractive to the readers than the real poetic implication centred in the thematic grounds of individual poems. Therefore, the readers arrive at an instant conclusion that sex and sexuality is all her themes. This may be so for a superficial reading. If we take the real animating forces of her poetic forms, it becomes clear that her intentions are deep-rooted in the very phenomenon of human heart that longs for a childlike comfort and protection.

However, it becomes pertinent to look at the direction in which Das's poetic concerns spread to embrace in its fold life's myriad colours, sounds, and smells; and also its fears, hopes, and vanities. In this regard Satchidanandanand observes:

Kamala Das's poetry shows a gradual widening of concerns over the years as she liberates herself from her initial obsession with her gender identity and extends her sympathies to entire sections of suffering humanity—the marginalised, the poor, the minorities, the fighters for justice, women, children, abandoned youth, victims of war and
oppression... This commitment, however, does not turn her deaf to
the call of her inner self... (13)

The 'call of her inner self' is primary in her poetry while the 'obsession with gender
identity' is only a typical initial explosive manner of her trying to express herself as a
universal feminist medium. All other concerns as enumerated by Satchidanandan are
strong attendant forces towards 'the call of her inner self.' With such attendant
concerns, Kamala Das certainly extends her poetic worth to a universal stature
Wherever there is exploitation, the intensity of her self becomes aggrieved and
aggravated to a state of rebellion. The metaphysical extensions of her rebellion
simultaneously maintain in themselves certain aesthetic niceties and vibrations, but
not any final human solutions. She merely exposes and strategically formulates the
question of happiness; she never answers it, for the answers are to be arrived at
independently and individually by the readers, that too through a sort of metaphysical
understanding, i.e. inventing one's own 'bad or good reasons' for what all one feels
'on instinct.' Kamala Das merely reads the readers' instinctive property for such
metaphysical apprehensions.

It is, however, important to note that these different commitments of the poet
eventually become a harmonious holistic blend, sublimating her poetic art towards a
zenith of compassion. In the poem 'Forest Fire,' Das is very clear about her poetic
intentions—her instinctive urgency of taking all spiritual experiences that come her
way in her creative moments. She feels a

hunger

To take in with greed, like a forest fire that
Consumes, and with each killing gains a wilder
Brighter charm, all that comes my way. (OP 39)

Thus, her instinctive creative urge is an all-embracing phenomenon, which ruthlessly prevails 'like a forest fire that / Consumes' indiscriminately what all it meets upon its way. This act of consuming makes the sensibility not satiated; on the contrary, it leaves the sensibility more and more ravenous, which is a suggestion of the naturalistic fact of craving and craving for more and more possession not knowing why. In the profound moments of poetic creation, she says,

My eyes lick at you like flames, my nerves
Consume; and, when I finish with you, in the
Pram, near the tree and on the park bench, I spit
Out small heaps of ash, nothing else. (OP 39)

The metaphor of 'eyes lick(ing) at you like flames' is reminiscent of Miltonic sublime 'tongues of flame' in the Satanic Hell. Further, if it is a matter of forest fire, it is bound to culminate into the most useless 'ash' cognate with 'signifying nothing.' She convinces herself that the poetic activity itself is a matter of great 'sound and fury' that comes to nothing. But in the meantime the inflated vision of life that are presented for her experience compound in her a passionate desire to encumber them in her poetry. But the profound poetic moments that emerge out of practical experience of the world somehow slips out of the poetic grasp, as Wallace Stevens rightly observed, 'A poem comes to words as a tree comes to twigs.'

She, however, considers her passionate creative experiences ('To take in with greed, like a forest fire that / Consumes') more important for her artistic self than her
created frameworks. If so, as she confirms above, her poems are 'small heaps of ash, nothing else.' Therefore, we are compelled to put a serious insight into the heart of the poet in its vibrant compulsive moments of such poetic creation, insofar as they are personal acquirements by the poet in her peak poetic inner activity. However, these 'small heaps of ash' give the poet only a brief moment of solace, a momentary relief each time she spits out. All the agonies and pleasures of the sights and smells and sounds will remain in the inner self of the poet forever. These experiences occur and recur in her mind as perennially conserved treasures.

In me, the street-lamps

Shall glimmer, the cabaret girls cavort, the

Wedding drums resound, the eunuchs swirl coloured

Skirts and sing sad songs of love, the wounded moan,

And in me the dying mother with hopeful

Eyes shall gaze around, seeking her child, now grown

And gone away to other towns, other arms. (OP 39)

Looked from this angle, the creative urge in the poet is only an offspring of a more aggressive urge to take and keep within her life in all its colours and smells and sounds. These colours, smells, and sounds reappear, re-enter, and resonate in the inner self of the poet, which gives her more and more creative energy. Hence the poet, 'with each killing gains a wilder / Brighter charm.'

In a very concerned manner Kamala Das provides here a continual catalogue of human acquirements that come to man on instances and leave him too on other instances of life. By and large it is the broad impermanence of the desired
eventualities of life that ultimately culminate into a great sense of frustration through loss. Nothing is more painful than the abrupt and unwarranted loss of the given in the name of family affections. All affections vanish like forest fire, vanishing into mere heaps of ash and nothing more. Virtually speaking, the poem ‘Forest Fire’ is about the inevitable manner of all human desires and hopes and dreams getting burnt in the formal facets of life in its quick and rhapsodic passage.

In the poem ‘The Wild Bougainvillea’, she writes about a dramatic change in her initial longings for a man I had left behind, a man from another town. Now her self turns towards the naked realities outside and accepts the smell and stench of life.

I smelled the stench of the dead and
the heavier smell of the dying, and then
walked on streets where the night-girls
with sham, obtrusive breasts sauntered (OSK 49)

The above lines confirm the inevitability of destruction of the given. In this destruction of the given there is that contingent pain. But the pain, very strangely, is obliquely reminiscent of the given which is gone for good. Now the desiring self craves and cringes for permanence or at least a comparative constancy, but life does not provide such opportunity. If so, life has to be lived in perennial and continual frustrations. Thus, beneath this account of smell and stench of the rot, there lurks a calm and cool acceptance of life as it is, and her self becomes wakeful to the eternal cycle of myriad colours, sounds, and sights of the world around her. The dream
walking of the poet is reminiscent of the fond desiring self, pining for primal affections:

I did see beside the oldest tombs
some marigolds bloom and the red
bougainvillea, climbing the minarets.
I walked and I walked, the city then
tamed itself for me, my hunger for
a particular touch waned . . . (OSK 49)

This is a very significant realization. The co-mingling of contrasting images—the repellent ones like ‘the stench of the dead,’ ‘the heavier smell of the dying,’ ‘night girls with sham obtrusive breasts’; and the gorgeous ones like the blooming ‘marigolds’ on the ‘oldest tombs,’ the red bougainvillea climbing the minarets—definitely suggests at a realization that new life blooms from this ‘stench of the dead,’ and an acceptance of nature’s eternal cycle of birth-growth-decay followed by rebirth.

The implicit Wordsworthian echoes are vibrantly available in the above two poems. Wordsworth concludes his “Immortality Ode” with the lines, “To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.” On the same analogy, Kamala Das directs her poetic vision towards primeval naturalistic affections towards nature and fellowmen and her own self. Any gesture of love and affection emerging out of these counters gives her “thoughts that lie too deep for tears.” Particularly in “The Wild Bougainvillea,” we have such passionate poetic echoes which can be competitively adduced as poetic parallels for the Wordsworthian poetic excitations and exquisiteness. The lines ‘I did see beside the
oldest tombs—some marigolds bloom and the red bougainvillea climbing the
murrays, poetically compound an idyllic picture of the bougainvilleas ultimately
consoling and contributing for a sense of poetic complacency and conformity. The
expressions—some marigolds bloom and red bougainvillea climbing the murrays—
beside the oldest tombs—are suggestively symbolic of the ultimate victory of life over
death.

Thus, the poet arrives at the conclusion that happiness, as such, is not in the
particular experience but in conceiving, but in evolving for oneself a profound
conviction and manner of adjusting squarely both with positives and negatives. This
is what can be called equanimity of attitude towards the positives and the negatives
more or less in evoking a feeling of generous joy towards all things in life. It also
gives her the ultimate balance of heart and the necessary courage to withstand the
phenomenal manner of the antithetical properties of the world. Thus, we find here a
greater maturity of thought than what is usually available in her exclusive feminist
poems speaking of feminine demands. This is exactly what the creative sceptics call
ataraxia ‘tranquility of mind.’ It is in this altered predilection of Kamala Das in
some of her major poems that acquired for her a metaphysical stance. Ultimately she
concludes that life has always to be lived with some reason or the other, whether it is
good or bad, for the reason itself is compounded by human instinct in operation.
When the reasons are good, it is physics; when they are bad, it is metaphysics, and if
they are both good and bad simultaneously, it is life. So at any cost, life as a given
has to be experienced or suffered in accordance with the anomalous and discordant
contextual ‘particulars’ converging into ‘generals.’
The poems "Forest Fire" and "The Wild Bougainvillea," thus, set the tone of her overall poetic concerns on a wider perspective, corroborating a humanist's vision in her poetic sensibility, which closely studied assumed the charges against her of being a poet of only love and sex. However, the said poems merely set the tone of a broadening in Das's poetic concerns. For a more concrete evidence of her turning towards other precincts, it becomes pertinent to look at the poetic detouring of herself in certain important poems.

2. Violence against Feudal Traditions

A singled out reading of Kamala Das's nostalgic poems like "My Grandmother's House" (CP 120), "A Hot Noon in Malabar" (BK 18), "Composition" (D 29), "Blood" (OP 16), "No Noon at My Village Home" (CP 31), "Evening at the Old Nalapat House" (CP 38) might impress the reader that she always travels back in time and space to reach her ancestral home (Nalapat House) for reminiscence of a comfortable world of childhood. But this is far from true. She had also witnessed, as a child, many disturbing scenes at her home, which remained unexplained in her tender mind. The poems "Nani" and "Honour" speak of the outrages of the Nalapat Nayars on the poor and lower caste people in the immediate surroundings. "Nani" looks on philosophically at the discrimination even death can hold out to the poor. The poem narrates an incident when their housemaid ['Nani'] committed suicide:

Nani the pregnant maid hanged herself

In the privy one day. For three long hours

Until the police came, she was hanging there

A clumsy puppet. . . . (OP 40)
It seems that the child-poet and other children of the house could not feel the terror or
grief that normally accompanies such an incident. Because what they felt was, "Nani / Was doing to delight us, a comic / Dance" (OP 40). The expression 'comic / Dance' not only suggests at the innocence with which children perceived the whole episode, but also there is an intended suggestion at the casual way in which the superior class looks at the death of the lower masses. The whole incident happened when the poet was a small child. Therefore, Nani's death does not compound a telltale misery or agony in her mind. The extremely casual manner in which she looks at it has two important suggestions: one, tragedy or tragic visitation is only a matter of incomprehensible thrill for children; the other implication is in fact more heart-rending. ‘Nani’ is only a maidservant; in the feudal aristocratic conceptual formulas, the death of a servant is not at all a matter of any serious concern. It is in this suggestion that Kamala Das exposes the frail vanities of the feudal aristocrats. The childlike manner of looking at ‘Nani’ hanging herself is a poetic way of suggesting as to how innocently and ignorantly she could not evaluate the death of ‘Nani.’ There is a sense of inconsolable regret on the part of the poet for having looked at the death of ‘Nani’ in a slighting manner.

Quite naturally, the memory of the dead poor fades faster than time, for after a year or two, against a question from the child-poet to her grandmother whether she remembers “Nani,” a visibly upset grandmother poses a counter question, “Nani... who is she?” At this the poet is startled, and feels, “With that question ended Nani. Each truth / Ends thus with a query” (OP 40). For the child, Nani was a truth even after a few years of her death, but with the question from the grandmother, ‘who is
she?’ the poet knew that the truth of ‘Nani’ ended among the living. The question ‘don’t you remember Nani?’ and the counter question ‘who is she,’ put together, is an encounter of the innocence with the feudalistic terror. The child poet’s mind is in fact disturbed by the designed deafness of the elders, which kills the dead for a second time. The memory of ‘Nani’ is too short-lived in the mind of the grandmother that in stating ‘Nani... who is she?’ the grandmother is wantonly forgetting ‘Nani’ and her untimely death. Here, the poet is successfully exposing certain unfair attitudes of humanity in being what they are, particularly when they are divided into different classes, creeds, and the like. It is a poem that echoes a poetic sentiment that all lives are equally invaluable, and the death of ‘Nani’ had put a lifetime trauma on the authentic self of the poet. The trauma itself is more concerned with the callousness of some towards the beauty of life. For many people, the death of the other is only an inconsequential phenomenon, for many who do not know the invaluable nature of life and its given lively moments. The poem as a whole is a far-reaching poetic reflection on the callous and casual attitudes of people towards the preciousness of life as a given.

The poem “Honour” is an attack on the unjust feudal situation that prevailed among her own community (Nayars). The poet now stands bearing the burden of sins of her ancestors. She sees herself as “born out of that uneasy soil, nourished / By sweat, semen, blood, the juice of the placenta, and the / Strangled babe” (CP 47). All these repelling images suggest at her ancestors’ histrionics and cruelties in the darkness because “Honour was a plant my ancestors watered / In the day, a palm to
mark their future pyres” (CP 47). The undercurrent of sarcasm which runs through the whole poem reaches the target more powerfully than if expressed directly.

Kamala Das’s poems on death and the feudalistic attitudes towards death itself are expressive of the insensibility of human races towards pain and evil. Very often this insensibility is formally implanted in the people’s psyche as it happened in the ‘Nayar’ community, according to Das. But the incidental manner of indicting the ‘Nayar’ community really strikes at the widest spread generality of callousness towards the death of the other in the entire humanity in one form or the other.

3. Violence against State and Communal Exploitations

The chunk of the predicaments that the modern man is subjected to are by-products of the so-called socio-political institutions which, in their impatience to impose ominous strictures, perennially attempt to restrict the freedom of their members. The method in which these strictures work in a particular sovereignty is termed by Camus as ‘State Terrorism.’ But no revolution in human history, either bloody or peaceful, could preclude itself from degenerating into a distorted way of unleashing the ‘State Terror’ on its subjects. In Camus’ own words, “The prophetic dream of Marx and the over-inspired predictions of Hegel or of Nietzsche ended by conjuring up, after the city of God had been razed to the ground, either a rational or irrational State, but one which in both cases was founded on terror” (148). In the modern context, where mostly the so-called democracy is in vogue, these strictures are very dexterously administered on the people under the camouflage of appealing terms like nationalism, patriotism, and the like. According to Kamala Das, all the responses by the people to this state-sponsored propaganda are fear-driven, and not
born of any real attachment to the modern political systems. Her poems “The Flag” and “Terror” talk about the hypocrisy of nationalism. In the poem “The Flag,” she forthrightly exposes the paradox in the conceptual and perceptual contexts of the national flag. Each shade of the flag should conceptually give a message of progress, prosperity, and peaceful coexistence. But in reality:

Dear

Flag, look beneath you, the scarred limbs of this
City sprawl, scarred, so
Emaciated...

(OSK 50)

This ‘scarred’ and ‘emaciated’ look of the ‘flag’ compels the poetic sensibility to further probe into the dark and remote corners of the city under the ‘flag’; the observations are disquieting:

Rich men dance with one another’s wives and
Eke out a shabby,
Secret ecstasy, and poor old men lie
on wet pavements and
Cough, cough their lungs out. (OSK 50)

The horrifying images of life beneath the proudly flying flag expose the contrast between its conceived message and the perceived realities. The flag has lost its pride and purpose. The condition of the city where the flag flies defeats its very meaning, and fails the false hopes it gives to the people. There is no point in its staying there with its false pride. “Poor flag, dear one. / Your pride is lost, it’s time to leave the sky / And fall, fall…” (OSK 50) The Flag image symbolizes the emblematic manner of
representing a nation's sovereignty. But this sovereignty, insofar as it is a protective mechanism of the nation itself, has a profound appeal and feel of heights. But the very manner of this sovereignty and the emblematic hegemony of the flag, when inverted towards the people of the nation itself, become questionable. In a world which is trying to become unified into that laudable concept of 'one world, one nation,' all other splinter nationalisms and their national flags not only become superficial but also do not augur well for the humanity as a whole. In "The Flag" Das goes to the extent of questioning the very validity of the national prerogatives, in the name of which main attractions are perpetrated. The flag is addressed to as if it is an anthropomorphized being with a sense of discretion. Insofar as the flag is only an inanimate symbol, it cannot really comprehend the evil and rot that goes under its own nose. In fact according to the poet, the flag in being a unifying emblem of a nation, ultimately only contributes for all kinds of wretched and inhuman deeds resorted to by the people who constitute themselves as a veritable nation.

The poem "Terror" expresses the poet's concern and anxiety over the growing political institutional clutches on the individuals. The hypocrisy of nationalism, according to the poet, emerges from fear, nothing else:

Fear is our leader, leading us into

high exitless hills, standing tall

as a mountain goat upon the snow, and

all the languages paralyzed

on our tongue (OSK 41)
The existential fear of time slipping out of grip, as suggested in the poem "The Fear of the Year" (CP 108), now changes into the pervading fear of political impositions 'leading us into / high exitless hills.' The expression 'exitless hills' portrays the inescapability of the modern political subjects from the chambers of false ambitions in which they remain captives. The concluding lines expose bluntly and with pungent sarcasm the facade of national pride and the inherent tyranny of political institutions:

Terror hides behind thickets of pubic hair, all men are impotent, all women barren, the sky is taut like the face of a drum. We go round and round singing the national nursery rhymes, we are kids with souls tied into tight hypnotic knots.

We are happy, we are free, we are padmashree. (OSK 41)

The whole poem is an ironic echo of the poet's human concerns which received an irreparable damage and impairment in the hands of the people who in a self-appointed manner enact themselves as the so-called trend-benders of the human civilization itself. In the name of governance of a nation, they impose on the people a great sense of fear instead of endowing in them a humanistic impulse and feel of love. Therefore, she says, 'Fear is our leader.' In fact the poem is reminiscent of the pain in the mind of the poet about the atrocious manner in which the rulers wielded their powers as against their own subjects, as well as on the whole humanity itself. The poet looks at the very concept of nationalism from a far-reaching critical angle.
and declares it unworthy of dispensation for the real human dignities. Somehow, the very notion of nationalism breeds in its people a dogmatic irrationalism, in the context of which all the human niceties and dignities are wilfully violated in one form or the other.

In the poem "Inheritance," the topic is communalism which is "an ancient / Virus that we nurtured in the soul." For her, "the muezzin's high wail sounded from / The mosque," the "chapel bells" announcing the "angelus," and "the brahmin's assonant chant" from the temple, are all synonyms of hatred (OP 20). In the heart of hearts all know:

That it was our father's lunacy speaking
In three different tones, babbling: Slay them who do not
Believe, or better still, disembowel their young ones
And scatter on the streets the meagre innards. (OP 20)

The macabre images of communal antagonism and the ensuing violence inherent in each prayer of the institutionalised religions cannot be better expressed. The economy of words with which these powerful images are constructed is really admirable. The concluding lines in the form of a prayer, full of irony, indicts the mute(d) God:

Oh God,

Blessed be your fair name, blessed be the religion
Purified in the unbeliever's blood, blessed be
Our sacred city, blessed be its incarnadined glory. (OP 20)
S.C. Harrex observes that these lines are born of a tension in the poet’s sensibility between religious idealism and social reality:

Social criticism and spiritual questing are important, and not incompatible forces in this poet’s personality. Hence the tragic perception of the discrepancy between the religious idealism and factional, homicidal reality. It emulates both prayer and Shakespearian soliloquy, vision and violence, Brahma and Macbeth. (168)

In fact Harrex is not exactly right in concluding that ‘Social criticism and spiritual questing are important and not incompatible forces in this poet’s personality.’ He appears to have not taken the ironic tone of the poet into serious critical consideration. In stating ‘Blessed be your fair name, blessed be the religion / Purified in the unbeliever’s blood,’ the poet is categorically evoking a sense of disgust, if not hatred towards the dogmatic manner of religions asserting their sway on humanity. All religions are supposed to have sustained in the ‘unbeliever’s blood.’ Again, coming to ‘social criticism,’ Kamala Das is vibrant enough as to how the power-wielding religious leaders and trend-benders allow no place of sustenance for people in the programmes and systems of religions if they are not believers of their cult. Therefore, practically speaking, ‘social criticism and spiritual questing’ are substantially incompatible in being antagonistic and exploitative of each other.

However, these occasional poetic outbursts against social, political, and communal wrongs and terror seem to signify a growth in the otherwise egocentric poetic sensibility of Kamala Das, and also a shift of the centre of concerns. This wider recognition of life outside the poet’s private self, though occasional, has its own
meaning and significance in understanding her overall poetic property. The inward and outward journeys, after all, serve the purpose of perceiving the world through the inner eye, and also of comprehending the self through responding to the external realities, thus establishing a one to one contact of the self with the outside world. The humanistic concerns are manifested in the self’s attempt to “take in with greed all that comes my way” (“Forest Fire” OP 39), i.e. conveying the general to the particular by holding the self face to face with the external objective realities; and also in resolutions like “all men are / impotent, all women barren, the sky / is taut like the face of a drum” (“Terror,” OSK 41), i.e. comprehending the particular through the general.

4. Violence against Ethnocide

For a poetic sensibility like that of Kamala Das, discrimination in any form is unbearable and something to be abhorred. The whole poetry of Das in one way or the other voices against discriminations in the political, social, and cultural contexts of human interactions. The fact that she lends it a personal mood and colour is her own manner of creating powerful poetic images for the purpose of inviting the attention of the world. As had already been discussed, in Das one can trace back the source of violence against discrimination to her childhood experience of maltreatment of the ‘Brown children’ by the Whites in the primary school. As this was her first experience of prevalent social inequities, hot embers of the unbearable agony caused by such experiences lay hidden in her mind, ready to manifest themselves on the first encounter with any such situation. Her Colombo poems are sketches of extraneous over-doings inflicted by the Sri Lankan army on the resident Tamils. Whatever be the
political reasons behind the conflicts in Sri Lanka, the poet only looks painfully on the pervasive atmosphere of terror unleashed by the army, hating and suspecting every Dravidian to be a militant. After all, the whole racial fight is meaningless in the sense that the ideology behind these fights is only a self-generated suspicion of one race overpowering the other, both living on the same land. In the poem “Smoke in Colombo” Das presents the most tragic picture of the aftermath of each fight. Only smoke welcomes and smoke follows the visitors, which was there:

... in the rubble and the ruins,

Lingering on as milk lingers on

In udders after the calves are buried,

Lingering on as grief lingers on

Within women rocking emptied cradles. (OSK 58)

The expression “as milk lingers on / In udders after the calves are buried, / Lingering on as grief lingers on / Within women rocking emptied cradles” are heart-rending examples of the perpetration of inhumanity. Such inhumanity is the ultimate result of all ethnic conflicts which are usually flared by certain egocentric interested parties in order to hold their sway on the affairs of the nation and culture. The seething violence in the poet’s mind towards such racial hatred and ethnic fights finds very powerful expression in the poem “The Sea at Galle Face Green,” where she asks, “Did the Tamils smell so / Different, what secret / Chemistry let them down?” (OSK 59)
The poem “After July” presents yet another dreadful picture of ethnic violence. Here, the enormity of the cruelty and terror is personified as a tyrant and a racial fanatic:

Hitler rose from the dead, he demanded
Yet another round of applause; he hailed
The robust Aryan blood, the sinister
Brew that absolves a man of his sins and
Gives him the right to kill his former friends (OSK 75)

The poet uses her experience of visiting Sri Lanka during the peak days of the racial violence to unravel her bitterness over racial domination of any kind. In the poem “A Certain Defect in the Blood?” the poet recalls with a shudder the fear of ethnocide, which had overpowered her in Sri Lanka:

Fear had warped our movements. Like spiders exposed
To a water jet we curled ourselves into
Tight balls, preparing to escape, to escape,
Into sleep and its wide freedoms of the soul (BK 135)

The ‘fear in a handful of dust’ as suggested by T. S. Eliot is manifested throughout Kamala Das’s poems in many forms. While in “The Fear of the Year” it is the existential fear that “has warped us all” (CP 108), in “Terror” it is the fear of political terror, where “Fear / is our leader, leading us into / high exitless hills” (OSK 41). But in “A Certain Defect in the Blood,” the fear of ethnic killing and bloodshed makes her shudder, and she tries to ‘escape into sleep and its wide freedoms of the soul.’ This fear triggers her to think that all this violence and bloodshed is the
outcome of some very old hostility of Aryans and Dravidians for each other, for she says:

It was a defect

In our blood that made us the land's inferiors,

A certain muddiness in the usual red,

Revealing our non Aryan descent. (BK 135)

The ethnic tragedies of Colombo as visualized by Kamala Das take a sublime agonizing form of poetic outcry. She only means to imply that in the true belief of the metaphysics of a nation there should be no place for violent conflicts and perpetration of atrocities. But in the overall assessment of her concerns, one finds that any kind of oppression and discrimination is unbearable for her sensibility. As Nair rightly says:

The Colombo poems are a part of Kamala Das's perpetual attempt to free her consciousness from the oppression of tyranny, despair and neglect. She is always in sympathy with souls in distress whether it is a case of woman mutilated by the onslaught of male lust or a people mutilated by the onslaught of racial venom. (74)

Kamala Das as a fervent feminist poet has spoken at length about the tragic end results of racial conflicts, particularly when man and woman are comprehended as belonging to two different and even antagonistic races. It is the same kind of odd racial polarization in the context of Sri Lanka that awfully shatters her poetic sensibility. Neither men and women are of two different races nor are the Sri Lankans and Tamilians enemies of each other. Only a little bit of humanistic understanding is likely to contribute for a glorious difference. Again, the ethnic
differences, to the extent that they are universal and equally available in every nation
and state, have certain far-reaching inhuman implications. They go to contribute for
an irreparable damage on the humanity itself. If so, Das's Sri Lankan poems are a
timely poetic warning to the inhabitants of Sri Lanka about the atrocious nature of
their conflicts, particularly when looked from the gregarious instinctive angle of
comprehending the entire humanity and all the living beings as invaluable creation of
nature in its phenomenal operations.

The whole purpose of examining Kamala Das's poems on humanitarian,
social, political, and communal themes is to exorcise the demons of criticism around
her of eroticism as the only end of her poetic exercise, and to establish the fact that
her poetic sensibility is not narrowed down to the themes of love and sex. It is true
that such objective pathetic pictures as portrayed in these poems (Poems such as
ethnic violence) are a rarity in the whole poetic endeavours of Kamala Das, and her
poetry is more or less completely suffused in the vast interiorities of subjective
experiences. Even then, such rare surfacing of the self out of the private world, and
its intercourses with the objective realities definitely add to the human flavour of her
poetic property. As a result, the tedium of overall egocentric imagery is suspended at
least for a while, and the images of daughter, wife, lover, mother, and even woman,
coalesce into an archetypal human figure as the prime protagonist of her poetic
outcures.

Those who rebel physically and those who rebel metaphysically, though their
spheres vary, have the same chromosome of violence and passion in their psyche
against oppression and injustice. Such violence is not always founded on egoistic reflections. It can also spring from outside the private experiences of the one who rebels. In such cases it results at times from an identification of oneself with the oppressed, and at others even from an element of intolerability in oneself, of other people being insulted. This view finds support with Camus when he says, “When he rebels, a man identifies himself with other men and, from this point of view, human solidarity is metaphysical” (23). When we evaluate the poems of Kamala Das, we should invariably keep in mind this ‘human solidarity’ embedded in her poetic violence. She is undeniably a rebel poet who rebels against the forces of oppression and injustice in all the counters of human social interactions. She is very much aware that the philosophy working behind the gender discrimination in human society does originate from the same malevolent male-egocentric mindset that spreads its tentacles to other spheres of human life, and causes vices such as social inequities, racial discriminations, political suppressions, and communal extravaganzas. This awareness makes her turn chiefly against injustice on women, of which she too is a direct victim. When she sees that her experiences as a woman in the familial and social environments are similar to that of other women, or when she considers others’ experiences as her own, what Camus termed as ‘metaphysical human solidarity’ comes into play. As and when this element of ‘human solidarity’ enters her very neurons, there emerges violence towards all the forces of suppression, mostly towards man and his autocratic, self-emanated, self-sanctioned, and selfish formulas of traditions and conventions. Das in an interview with Iqbal Kaur reflects upon this ‘metaphysical human solidarity’. 
Whether something happened to me or to another woman is immaterial. What really matters is the experience, the incident. It may have happened to another woman who is probably too timid to write about it. I wanted to chronicle the times we lived in and I had to write about the experience.” (“I Needed” 165)

It is this personal nature of her poetry that ultimately compounds a feeling and sense of human psyche in its restless moments of existence. Love for her is a must, hatred in all probability must be crushed if only humanity wants to survive as a dignified and glorious entity on the earth. Her poetry formally puts an invitation for a judicious reconsideration and re-assessment of all that happened to humanity in the traditional context, which impoverished its enthusiasm: and for finding means and ways to subsist and survive as a humanistic whole. Thus, the philosophy arousing the phenomenon of violence in her poetry can be attributed to the ‘collective unhappiness’ of all those who endure any type of oppression, discrimination, and wrongs in their socio-cultural milieu.

The sources of philosophical violence ultimately land Kamala Das into the phenomenal properties of aesthetic violence, in the context of which her poetic emotions take a leap from the conventional aesthetic standards by way of re-defining the very concept of aesthetic involvement of man with the world. In this context, her poetry opens up new blinding and focuses upon certain aesthetic novelties of her own personal emotions and feelings. These aspects will be taken up for discussion in the next chapter.