Chapter - II

Sources of Violence

Taking upon herself the mantle of being a mouthpiece of Indian women, Kamala Das looks at the predicament of gender inequity as an incurable canker that struck the human civilization and spread its tentacles to the body politic in India and its decadent tradition. She is aware that this disease affects the whole of humanity, and that the same has to be recognized and diagnosed beyond the immediate socio-cultural and ethnic boundaries. Therefore, she superimposes through her violent poetic expressions the ideas of the Western women’s liberation movement mutatis mutandis in the Indian scenario in her fight against the social, familial, linguistic, and cultural subservience of women both in the physiological and psychological contexts. She tries to understand the deeply hidden woes of average Indian woman, and poetically expresses her concern in all their verbal manifestations. Of all the women poets of the present in India, she projects herself as a fervent feminist poetic voice always exacting for a dignified place of honour, a respect for the naturalistic freedoms and choices of woman. Thus, Das’s poetry contributes for the strong reactions and justifications for the most needful awakening of woman as a living entity in being-in-the-world. The element of violence and angst in her poetry emerges chiefly from her concern on woman’s loss of personality as a result of the conditioned and passive state in which she is destined to exist in almost all the counters of human interaction. As she says in her poem “The Siesta,” the world she lives in looks like an “alien world which talks of Gods and casual sins,” where she longs to pick herself an average
identity, to age
through years of earthly din

pently, like a cut flower until

it's time to be removed  (BK 9)

So in this ‘alien world which talks / Gods and casual sins,’ she, being a woman, is hardly recognized to be a person. Thus, a major source of violence in Kamala Das’s poetry can be attributed to the personality crisis that she as a woman faces in our biased social system.

A. Personality Crisis

Personality is a concept that needs explanation. Personality and ego are commonly used synonyms, though they do not have exactly the same meaning. According to G.W. Allport, personality is “the dynamic organization within the psychophysical systems that determine his or her unique adjustment to his or her environment” (48). According to modern psychology and psychiatry, personality is a reflection of the inner self of a person. Since the goal of the self is continuous victory achieved through liberating experiences, whenever this sense of victory is crushed mercilessly by the institutional prerogatives in the society, it struggles to reconcile to such despondency, and confronts them restlessly. This restlessness is born out of the apprehension by the ethical, moral, and religious surroundings that always make ominous inroads into the familial interpersonal dimensions of life, and contribute for a sort of checkmating the personality. As a result, a desperate longing for freedom is born within the self out of a keen desire for liberation, not of the sort that is prominently projected by religion, called moksha (“redemption”), but significantly
evolved by psychology as 'sublimation.' Insistence on this sublimation accordingly in the man-woman interpersonal relations is a coveted necessity; but this sublimation comes only in a free and frank atmosphere of transparency and dependency on the mutual interpersonal attitudes and dispositions. Modern feminists argue that achievement of this sublimation, technically called orgasm, is a birthright of all women, which is cognate with what the modern psychologists call the 'aha' experience achieved by the human organic system in the course of the interpersonal involvements.

1. Interpersonal Relations and Personality Crisis

Kamala Das gives vent to the intense feelings of frustration born out of the discrimination imposed upon the feminine counterpart in the process of her achieving the finite ultimate sublime 'aha' experience. The word 'sublime' also in its original context smacks of the esoteric and religious phenomenal context. But then, the interpersonal transaction of man and woman in the act of love conforms itself to offering an infelt highest satisfaction, again, by the 'person,' in its intense desire for assertion of its liberation through freedom from the outward clutches that hold it tight and unassertive. This process of imposing checks on achieving the ultimate 'sublime' experience is consistently rebelled at by Kamala Das in her poetry. In her poetic rebellion she never hesitates to destroy and demolish the age-old conventions and traditions insofar as they become boulders and speed-breakers in the process of her personality aspiring for the most requisite liberation through sublimation. This kind of free and frank achievement of sublimations, again, is a matter of personal necessity. Life for Kamala Das is a personal affair. The immense charm of this
personal affair emerges out of transparent, clear, and uninhibited interpersonal engagements of men and women. But in the patriarchal egoistic interpersonal entanglements, these requisite transparencies are brutally effaced due to sheer ignorance and neglect of feminine needs by the male partner. There is a very moving suggestion of this kind of neglect on the part of the male partner in the poem “The Motif in the Mirror”:

How shall I describe that first embrace, you have not seen
The many mirrors in his room. When we embraced, we fell in their
Cerulean pools as a deathless motif, repeating, repeating,
Repeating this reflection of a reflection, this shadow of
A shadow, this dream of a dream, and I knew him then by knowing who
I was, and knew myself more by knowing who he was, but he said,
Rising from my side, it is eight, get up ‘sweet wife’ I’ll take you home.

(OSK 37)

What is presented here is the brutal imposition of the male ego on the female partner, which comes in the way of her attaining a sublime satisfaction in ‘that first embrace.’ The exhilaration and ecstasy experienced by the female persona suddenly collapses with such interference that creates in the sensibility virtually a vacuum as if someone stoned down and splintered in one flash the ‘many mirrors in his room.’ If so, the intense Freudian overtones and undertones are obvious. Woman’s quest for emotional involvement with the partner in the act of love invariably ends up in a sort of enslaving herself under his autonomous impositions. Woman desperately needs liberation from this traumatic experience of “lying buried / beneath a man”
Woman particularly suffers from a sort of colossal denial of her due when her male counterpart absolutely lacks the necessary objectivity and sensibility to be a love partner. Engagement with such a partner is certainly a matter of ‘lying buried’ as an unfeeling deadwood as though she does not have any genetic living responses to offer. Das rightly points out that the woman’s world and the woman’s necessities, in being love-partners, have really a great vibrancy that goes unattended to by men.

2. Indian Women and the Personality Crisis

Kamala Das as a feminist poet realizes the personality crisis of the Indian women strategically perpetrated and perpetuated by the unbending patriarchal traditions, and she violently reacts to this situation. In the characteristically unrelenting Indian socio-cultural milieu, where any surface commotion does not percolate very easily, particularly when it is against traditions and conventions, Das makes a poetic revolt by way of introspectively pondering upon the unfortunate state of existence in which Indian women conduct themselves. Like a seasoned artist, she penetrates her imaginative insight to sympathetically understand the possible average grievances of the Indian woman as extremely exploited agent in the social, ethical, moral, and existential circumstances.

The Indian woman, in spite of the classical eulogies paying to her in the literary traditions, was allotted a place of negligence even in the practical domestic circumstances from time to time. This kind of biased treatment meted out to women irked Kamala Das to the extreme. The invisible agony that woman suffers as a mother, as a wife, and as a daughter, particularly in the Indian familial context, is the
proper subject of her poetic activity. As a poet she presents herself as a crusader in revolt against this kind of injustice. Das's concept of freedom leads her to an existential conflict with the traditional social institutions like marriage, family, and the society as a whole, which put on woman shackles of domesticity where she is required to play the pre-determined roles of "happy woman" and "happy wife" as she says in "The Suicide" (D 2). This concern further finds violent and moving expressions in poems like "The Old Playhouse," "The Stone Age," "I Shall Some Day." In the "Old Playhouse," she indicted her man for his brutal manners in the companionship:

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget
Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless
Pathways of the sky. (OP 1)

Here Kamala Das appears to be vociferously bargaining for a sort of colossal appeasement of her instinctive needs for freedom as a woman. She attributes for herself symbolically the personality of a 'swallow,' and in the very first line there is a suggestion that a great plan or scheme was made in order 'to tame a swallow.' Swallow is not a tameable bird like a parrot. In its 'season' it makes its own joyful unrestrained flights in the sky. The irony in the expression 'the long summer of your love' is notable. In the tropical countries 'summer' is attributed to anything unbearable, but here the poet attributes it to 'love.' But no 'long summer of love' can hold a 'swallow' imprisoned, as the rainy season is bound to come. In a sense she
wants to suggest that men have grossly erred in considering woman as a tameable entity. She already makes it clear to reawaken in herself the 'raw seasons' and 'the homes left behind.' She also wants to acquaint herself with her 'nature.' In a very complacent and loving manner she confirms that her nature (i.e. woman's nature) is in the 'urge to fly' along 'the endless pathways of the sky.' The childlike autistic daydreaming is hinted at. But at the same time she is very clear that nature had awarded her with immense potentialities, and the exploration of those potentialities is the only purpose of woman opting man as her momentary partner in love.

Interpersonal love, in the sense of two concerned partners struggling to arrive at a harmonious sublimation, is a matter of serious mutual responsibility. But Kamala Das's experience in life warrants her that the partners' sharing of a common purpose of sublimation detracts themselves on the opposite directions. Her self-love and the urgency of concerns for herself on the one hand, and his Narcissistic inversion into himself with a great urgency of serving his own sublime purpose on the other bring forth a sort of emotional conflict. This is further clarified in the following lines:

The strong man's technique is
Always the same, he serves his love in lethal doses
For, love is Narcissus at the water's edge, haunted
By its own lonely face . . . (OP 1)

In the above lines male love that was like a 'long summer' in the beginning of the poem transforms into a slow poison served 'in lethal doses.' According to S.C Harrex: "The narcissistic picture of love in "The Old Playhouse" introduces an interesting perspective on the themes in Kamala Das's poetry that are concerned with
the quest for identity through sexual passion and through the giving and receiving of love” (171). But the aspirations of attaining orgasm and sublimation, and the ‘identity’ of being human ‘through sexual passion and through the giving and receiving of love’ do not ever gain success in the patriarchal concept of familial relationships, where the female partner either becomes a tamed ‘swallow,’ or a “granite / Dove” into whose dreaming eye the barbarous husband “stick a finger” as she suggests at in the poem “The Stone Age” (OP 51) How a woman’s personality shrinks in the man’s totalitarian state called family is poignantly revealed in “The Stone Age.” She literally indicts her husband for what he is, but suggestively does a sobbing bargain for kindness from him:

Fond husband, ancient settler in the mind,
Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment,
Be kind. You turn me into a bird of stone, a granite
Dove, you build round me a shabby drawing room,
And stroke my pitted face absent-mindedly while
You read. With loud talk you bruise my pre-morning sleep,
You stick a finger into my dreaming eye. ... (OP 51)

At the outset, the very title of the poem “The Stone Age” alludes to the barbarous nature of her man in the interpersonal transactions. Thus, the ‘swallow’ image of the “Old Playhouse” and the ‘granite / Dove’ image of “The Stone Age” assume the same status, trapped in the ‘webs of bewilderment’ woven by her man (‘Old fat spider’). In this context, Nair rightly observes: “‘The Stone Age’ is, thematically, a continuation of ‘The Old Playhouse.’ The condemnation of male insensitivity is in more fierce
terms and the glorification of an extra-marital affair imparts it a strange significance as one of the crucial poems in Kamala Das’s contrived system of male-abhorrence” (39). In “The Stone Age” she suggests at this ‘extra marital affair,’” apparently imaginary, in order to avenge the inconsiderate nature of her own man:

When you leave, I drive my blue battered car
Along the bluer sea. I run up the forty
Noisy steps to knock at another’s door.
Through peep-holes, the neighbours watch,
they watch me come
And go like rain... (OP 51)

Here there is a broad confessional statement concerning the feminine needs of sublimation. Modern sexologists confirm that there is a substantial difference in the orgasmic experience in man and woman. Man arrives at it at one jolt towards the end of the interpersonal entanglement, while woman has the inherent physical potency to arrive at it innumerable times during one session of love-play. Quite naturally, after man single-handedly serving the purpose of his sublimation, woman still needs a companionship to achieve her multiple orgasms. In the above lines, the poet vibrantly confirms the inner urgent need of woman in the interpersonal companionship. Herein probably lies the naturalistic difference between man and woman. While man’s need is acquired sublimation through the feminine counterpart, woman’s need is that Platonic complexity called ‘love’ for want of any better verbal equivalent. By stating ‘When you leave, I drive my blue battered car / Along the bluer sea. I run up the forty / Noisy steps to knock at another’s door,’ the poet wants to make it clear that a
mere sublimation through ejaculation as it happens in man is not at all the end or goal of love-play for woman. Simon de Beauvoir's observation in this context is worth quoting:

... there is no doubt that for man coition has a definite biological conclusion: ejaculation. In woman, on the contrary, the goal is uncertain from the start, and more psychological in nature than physiological; she desires sex excitement and pleasure in general, but her body promises no precise conclusion to the act of love; and that is why coition is never quite terminated for her; it admits of no end .... even when overwhelmed, exhausted, she may never find full deliverance ... (134-135)

Such being the true nature of the difference in the attainment of sexual pleasure between man and woman personalities, the ultimate requisite satisfaction comes to woman in keeping herself entangled with the companionship even after man exhausted himself. Here it is just possible that the exhausted man keep the companionship intact if only he realizes the naturalistic variances in the award of pleasure through multiple orgasms in woman. However, insofar as it is a state of nature, man, even as a vibrant and sympathetic partner, cannot really help his woman in being a consistent partner until woman comes to a total satisfaction of companionship. This is all the more the reason that man is required to be a seasoned artist as a lover and not a mere male-animal that serves his own purpose and cold-shoulders his partner after. The whole fight of Kamala Das against men aims at coaxing the men-folk to become the necessary artists in love rather than relegating
themselves to the mere male animal status. Behind the whole poetic fury and rebellion, the essential purpose of Das is to affect in men-folk a right co-ordination of their sense and sensibility in relation to woman with a particular reference to love-act, as well as in reference to the general social and cultural attitudes and disposition towards women. What she wants to imply is that in the naturalistic state of experience, love for woman is an inexhaustible and interminable course of activity. Thus, in the love-play both woman and man are equally active partners, but in their own ways. The lines, 'they watch me come / And go like rain' indicate the shortness of her stay, and the frustration she has at the end of the whole affair. The concluding lines: “Ask me why life is short and love is / Shorter still, ask me what is bliss and what its price . . .” (OP 51) are ironic and in fact imply that these are the questions to which even she could not find any answers.

This sort of imaginary wish-fulfilment of having freedom from familial bondage appears also in “I Shall Some Day” where she, in a challenging tone, addresses her partner in love:

I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea,
Love words flung from doorways and of course
Your tired lust. I shall some day take
Wings, fly around, as often petals
Do when free in air . . .  (OP 48)

Here we have a very interesting feminine confession put forth as a grudging reaction to what men usually compound in themselves as a phenomenon of doubting the
fidelities of their women: woman might go to somebody else is a haunting doubt in
man's psyche stuffed in the most conservative dimension of patriarchal traditions.
Such wavering thoughts of man being given a confessional shape by his woman is
only a matter of expression of the immensity of personal freedoms being vibrant in an
assured ground of understanding.

But the source of her pain and violence within is the awareness of the
impending failure at the end of each endeavour to free herself out of the 'webs of
bewilderment.' However hard she tries to run away from the snare of domesticity she
knows that some day she would have to

... return, losing

Nearly all, hurt by wind, sun and rain,
Too hurt by fierce happiness to want
A further jaunt or a further spell
Of freedom, and I shall some day see
My world, de-fleshed, de-veined, de-blooded,
Just a skeletal thing, then shut my
Eyes and take refuge, if nowhere else,
Here in your nest of familiar scorn. . . . (OP 48)

Nair finds the above lines "a sense of incurable ambivalence in the woman's strange
urge to flee and to return and then again to 'jaunt' for a further spell of freedom. This
paradox illustrates the freakishness of desire" (15). Nair misses the point, for what
the woman persona says is a negative fact, that is, she would be 'Too hurt' to 'want /
A further jaunt or a further spell / Of freedom' Rather than the 'freakishness of
desire,' it is her knowledge of the hurting nature of the ‘fierce happiness’ outside her husband’s ‘nest of familiar scorn’ that compels a return. The point to be borne in mind is the fact that whenever she talks about the extra-marital relationships and the ‘freedom’ of the outside world, it is a product of her imagination, and these lines suggest that the world of imagination is short-lived, and ultimately she has to return and shrink into her man’s ‘nest of familiar scorn.’ We have such famous lines of John Keats as: “Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf” (“Nightingale,” L. 73-74). In both the cases it is the loneliness of the self that induces the mind to wander in imagination, and at the same time, it is the self’s awareness of the inevitability to return to the stark realities of life that becomes the source of agony and violence. So far as her freedom of fancy is concerned, the younger Romanticists like Keats and Shelley greatly influence Kamala Das. The profound flights of imagination are quite fanciful and only real to the interior authentic modalities of poetic imagination asserting itself as a free and precise voice of personal freedoms shared in the imagined intimacies of interpersonal relations. This kind of imaginary flight can be traced in another love poem called “Ghanashyam”:

In love when the snow slowly began to fall

Like a bird I migrated to warmer climes

That was my only method of survival

In this tragic game the unwise, like children, play

And often lose in. (CP 94)
The escape motif is obvious. The poet wants a childlike sojourn into the imaginary world, as the practical world is a cruel, coercive phenomenon. No doubt, for the poet life has been a losing game. Nevertheless, she would like to play this ‘tragic game’ indefatigably.

These extra-marital poetic stipulations that Kamala Das makes are purely fallouts of her autistic poetic imagination. Autism is a very interesting psychological phenomenon that shows in children beset at home resorting to impossible daydreams. Das’ s poetically vibrant escape modalities through flirting are such autistic imaginative poetic artefacts. They are in the nature of that of a daydreaming child who ultimately knows the contingent impossibility of really making his daydreams true. However, these fantastic imaginative flights have their own purpose for the poet. As Irshad Ahmed rightly observes,

Trapped in a loveless relationship with an insentiate husband, the poetic persona escapes into fantasy and myth. What is denied to her in the real world is attainable in the shadowy world. The two worlds, as is clear, complement each other. Thus, a major aspect of her creativity can be called wish-fulfilment . . . . Thus, in her poems and her autobiography My Story the descriptions of and references to extra-marital love-affairs are nothing but fantastic adventures of the searching self during its sojourn in that ‘shadowy world’. (131)

She knows that her flirtatious authentic poetic flights of imagination cannot really be achieved. They are not even really meant to be achieved, they are just there to be imaginatively engrossed and absorbed in a poetic moment. Therefore, she comes
back to her partner's 'nest of familiar scorn.' The spacious imaginative freedom that she shares in her poetic flights is a mere chimera, but it is a threatening chimera for her as well as for her man. This is what Ahmed observes in the above lines while talking about her aggressive poetic efforts to conquer in imagination what has been denied to her in reality.

Thus, woman, particularly in the Indian familial context, as a being, is almost a non-entity, a thing to be used and forgotten like any other tool. In the patriarchal mode of familial relations, she has always been like a tamed 'swallow' or a 'granite dove' whence her self always longs to fly away, but eventually it has to come back helplessly, sliding "pegs of sanity into / A bed made soft with tears" as Kamala Das says in the poem "The Sunshine Cat" (OSK 54). Das's aggressive feminine sensibility is not ready to compromise on these social and familial parameters, and in the real world when she meets with non-recognition, personality crisis, and deprivation of the natural feminine experience both physical and metaphysical, her poems become violent outcries of the occasions. Her poetic world is a world of equality, freedom, love, and recognition of her feminine demands, as woman being the most important creative agent in the naturalistic context. The underlying principle of her ideal feminine world, as is portrayed in her poetry, is the quest for freedom from the vortex of social and familial tie-ups without being detrimental to the naturalistic feminine prerogatives and sensibilities. In that world both the sexes have equal significance. It has no norms for dominations or subordinations by any side. The freedom should come from within. The achieved or bestowed freedom can only deceive, and finally become "a dancing shoe" ("Composition," D 30).

On the other
hand, the real freedom should emerge from the bedrock of human existence itself without strings attached to it. Freedom should be inherent in the life processes, should be as indispensable as birth and growth, as natural as leaves on a tree, and as inevitable as death itself. Kamala Das aspires to achieve this unhindered freedom for herself knowing fully well that such atmosphere of freedom and choice is not at all available for her in the caged context of the woman’s psyche. The more she feels the external constraints that cage her being, the more rebellious she becomes in her poetic imagery and rhetoric. While the imagery is quite uninhibited, quite fearlessly the rhetoric of her poetry takes upon itself an irrepressible tone of agony and pain.

B. Alienation and the Ensuing Frustration

Another essential source of violence that gives its immense vibrancy to Kamala Das’s poetry can be traced to the alienation syndrome. Since alienation syndrome is a pervasive phenomenon in the modern literature in general, and in the modern women’s literature in particular, a brief discussion on the cause of this alienation syndrome in general instantly becomes pertinent before its particular effect on Kamala Das’s poetry is taken up.

We have innumerable traditional cultural, social, ethical, and moral institutions, which contributed for the well being of humanity from time to time in the course of the historical past. These traditional institutions assume upon themselves certain broad, rigid formal parameters. With the growth and development of understanding in the intellectual dimensions, these rigid laws and conventions become quite nonadjustable to all the individuals at a time and to some individuals at various times. Thus, there is always a sort of tie and tension between individuals and
the institutions in spite of the fact that these institutions are originally supposed to be protective, life-giving forms. Alienation, as such, is mostly a psychological context, which emerges as a potential reactionary force in a personality, particularly when the personality becomes incapable of adjusting harmoniously with the existing stringent laws of the institutions. Needless to say, the dawn of individualism coupled with a sense of unrestrained freedom of man that had become a mode of individual disposition after the Renaissance, probably contributed for a kind of unbridgeable cleavage between man with his strong determination to assert his freedom of mind, and the traditional social institutions which are more or less equally unbending in its rigid structural parameters. Somehow, instead of a free, frank, and transparent give and take between man and these institutions in which he prevails, there emerged a sort of irresolvable strife and tension between the members. As a result, the institutions started alienating the individual gradually; and the individual too started wilfully distanced himself from the rigid pursuit of the institutions. When the institutions kick at the individual it is called alienation, but when the individual starts kicking at the institutions it becomes a matter of resignation and renunciation. In both the cases, the individual suffers a great agony and strife.

1. The Psychic Origins

The poetic sparkles of women being alienated can be originally traced to the songs and anecdotes, which are available in almost all the Indian languages. In the songs of the tribal people, we find glaring examples of the alienation syndrome verging upon out and out pornographic dimensions. Kamala Das inherited these two strains—alienation and pornographic imagery—from the songs of women and tribal
folks of the past, in principle. But then, she is quite ingenious in coordinating and comprehending the feminine anxieties and tribal furies with the par excellent modern feminist literary fundamentals of the West. In fact, Kamala Das made a profound innovation of the Indian feminine psyche being associated with the modern Western feminist literature.

Kurup feels that the feeling of alienation in Kamala Das emerges from a conflict between her individualism and the democratic upsurge in the country because, according to him, her individualism "prevents her from identifying herself with the larger democratic upsurge in the country and feels herself alienated from the society which expects women to be modest, submissive, unobtrusive and destined to be buried beneath a man's six-foot frame" (283). The so-called democratic upsurge in the country stooping to annihilate and destroy the democratic rights of Kamala Das as an individual is quite ironical. This also confirms the fact that India had adopted the 'democratic upsurge' in a half-hearted manner. So long as Das is not absolutely transgressing the fundamental laws of rhetoric, her democratic rights as an individual should not be questioned. While her conflict with the society can be chiefly attributed to her self-conscious individualism, one cannot overlook her biographical particulars that have played a very important role in developing this aggressive individualism in her, and moulding her rebellious creative mind. If so, in Das's case, the character of alienation is not only of a historical nature but is an amalgam of various factors viz., social, familial, intellectual, and above all the man-woman interpersonal relations, all of which came together to weave the "webs of bewilderment" (OP 51) around her. Her rebellion is also due to the biographical
constraints that she suffered even as a child in the school, in the house, and in the
society. In this context, her My Story is an autobiographical sketch of her own
rebellious personality. When the family and other social institutions had shown no
proper concern at all for women, she felt a compulsive need to present and represent
the agony and pain of women being sidelined, alienated, and declared unworthy of
human dignities and understandings. If so, it is a sort of psychological trauma that
she undergoes, and the tone and tenor of her poetry vibrantly expresses her
excessively traumatized self in its condition of privation, disownment, and more
particularly dishonour. In the words of Arlene Zide, “She [Kamala Das] refuses the
mold [sic] others would have her fit; her alienation from all such molds [sic], be they
‘proper’ language to write in, or ‘proper’ female role, are at the heart of what she is
saying about being free, to be the ‘I’ she is” (240). So rather than freedom to be,
what she experiences is a sort of distancing from the group, which leads to
insufferable loneliness. Thus, different types of forces operate around the poet’s life
in varying degrees, which are instrumental in constructing a sort of absolute
alienation syndrome that recurrently echoes in her poetry. These are mainly
patriarchal literary traditions, institutional maladjustments, and interpersonal conflicts
arising out of lack of proper understanding in between the life partners concerning
their naturalistic, social, and psychological demands and capacities.

2. Literary Traditions and Alienation

The most characteristic feature of modern feminist literature is the pervading
sense of alienation, an estrangement from the mainstream of history and civilization.
This sense of alienation is certainly not a product of feminist imagination, but rather
the result of a historical, cultural, and literary abandonment of women and their activities. The absence of active participation of women in the evolution of history made it exclusively a male dominion in almost all the modern cultural contexts, be it social, intellectual, moral, or ethical. Even the most aggressive modern feminist poets and novelists dreadfully feel the absence of predecessors on the one hand, and the need for an empathetic audience to fully comprehend and appreciate the real meaning and import of feminist writings on the other. Theirs is a continual struggle to free themselves from the male-centred literature, and attain a self-determined state of existence in the world of literature. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar rightly comment on “the woman writer’s artistic self-definition”:

. . . the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience, together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of female invention – all these phenomena of ‘inferiorization’ mark the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterpart. (qtd. in Showalter 468)

All the above cultural complexities are relevant for Kamala Das’s creative upsurge. In the Indian context, this problem is even more significant as compared to the West owing to the unrelenting traditional roots in the field of women’s writings.
In the case of Das, the most orthodox and conservative society of the sort we have in India absolutely cold-shouldered her formal poetic innovations. As a result, a kind of negativism emerged as a critical tradition against her. The fact is that in her poems she is vibrantly transparent concerning her grievances against the patriarchal authoritarianism of man as a class apart. Her aggressive manner not only irritated but also disgusted the male-readers as it had dared the very intellectual capacity/incapacity of men in establishing a proper understanding of the naturalistic uniqueness of woman as a person and also as an equally responsible agent in nature, as well as in the social counters. Quite naturally, the male readers turned out to be critical, oppositional, and sceptical about her creative preponderance. Sometimes the freedom of her poetic imagination overstretches themselves into images and acts of transgressing the moral and ethical propensities of social systems. But then, as she contends, women are emancipated from all the patriarchal moral laws insofar as they are instrumental in annihilating the feminine freedoms, harmonious happiness at all being the ultimate purpose of her poetry. The critics and reviewers including women have very often condemned this kind of attitude of Kamala Das. They even went to the extent of charging her with all sorts of personal insinuations. Referring to the first three volumes of Poetry by Kamala Das, what Eunice De Souza comments is pertinent here. Says De Souza:

Obcessive, confessional writing can be a source of power. It can also be tedious if it gets out of control, and then no amount of mere honesty will save the poem. Mrs Das's main problem is not knowing when to
stop... Too often there is scarcely a trace of grit or resilience to shape and control the emotions. (46)

The orthodox manner in which Das's women critics respond to her poetic expressions speaks for what Gilbert and Gubar say above as the woman writer's 'need for sisterly precursors and successors,' and her 'urgent sense of her need for a female audience.' However, critics like Shirley Goelkin Lim aptly react to this negative response to Das's poetry even from women's quarters. In Lim's opinion,

The negative responses of Indian women critics such as Monika Varma, Vimala Rao, and Eunice de Souza to Das's work and to the work of other candid Indian women writers such as Gauri Deshpande and Mamta Kalia demonstrate that perceived transgressions of social decorum and traditional behavior [sic] still affect literary evaluation. (86)

It is evident from the above statement that Indian criticism has not grown enough to perform an in-depth, impartial evaluation of confessional writers like Kamala Das. This fact makes the women poets like Kamala Das feel an estrangement, an alienation from the literary mainstream.

3. Social Institutions and Alienation
a. Familial Alienation

The seeds of the feeling of alienation and frustration were first sown in Kamala Das in the alienated atmosphere of her own home spent with the unfeeling parents who, as she mentions in her autobiography, brought up their children without according them the love and care they deserved. She writes, "Gradually our instincts
told us to keep away from the limelight” (MS 5). Thus, she was made to feel that her own parents considered their children “mere puppets, moving our limbs according to the tugs they gave us” (MS 77). Even the poet’s poet-mother appears to have forgotten to bestow any motherly affection on her children. In an interview with Iqbal Kaur, Kamala Das says, “My mother has never been able to give me the love and security that I needed. She has always been indifferent” (161). Since a child is helplessly dependent on its parents, when denied proper nurturing, it becomes reflective and introspective, and sometimes even schizophrenic. This is what happens to Kamala in her childhood. So the feeling of a neglected entity as yet a child established in her mind an everlasting wound that played a dominant part in moulding her rebellious poetic personality. When her tender aspirations went unattended, she turned into an archetypal rebel. Even after she had grown up as an adult she looked everywhere for parental love, be it in her husband’s arms. The following statement in My Story point towards the fact that she was looking for a sort of parental protective love and care even from her husband:

I had expected him [her husband] to take me in his arms and stroke my face, my hair, my hands and whisper loving words. I had expected him to be all that I wanted my father to be, and my mother. I wanted conversation, companionship and warmth. Sex was far from my thoughts. I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms, the loneliness of my life. (87)

The confession in the above lines is vibrant enough to suggest that she had never got any sympathetic protective treatment from her own people. Her grievances against
her husband as a partner are understandable. The grievances are not at all born out of self-pity or a need for self-elation. It is a literal fact that the husbands usually do not establish any objective correlative in their female-counterpart probably because of their patriarchal authoritarian predilections. In the above lines, like an orphaned child even when the parents are virtually living, she pleads for love and care to be awarded to her. Her confessional manner of expecting these niceties from her husband devolves upon her from the autistic, archetypal imaginative counters of a child denied of all such fond necessities. Sometimes these expectations go beyond the domestic frame, and they take the shape of an ever-haunting psychic phenomenon; here the poet looks for such fondling from any male entity she comes in contact with. There is an ironic expression of such a longing in the poem “Glass.” Even when the poetic persona offers her body to different men and “make of / every trap of lust a temporary home,” she painfully confesses:

I do not

ever bother to tell, I have misplaced a father

somewhere...

and I look for him now everywhere. (BK 103).

Where the patriarchal dominations are vibrantly present, psychologists had pinpointed that Oedipus complex for male and Electra complex for female are inevitable archetypal properties that take strong inroads into their contingent personalities. The poetic sensibility invoking all sorts of fondling from her husband virtually emerges out of her inbred Electra complex. On the same analogy, the father
figure in the fond child’s psychic personality grows into that archetypal giant or traditional villain in the imaginary counters of women as creative writers.

Kamala Das always perceived her father in a fearsome light. In her poem “Next to Indira Gandhi” she writes:

Next to Indira Gandhi my father I feared the most.

He was the one who told me when I was five

That dark children should wear only white.

He was the one who had no time for me

When I was growing up. (OSK 118)

She, however, does not clarify as to why she feared Indira Gandhi the most. In putting Indira Gandhi and the poet’s father in their own gradations as dreaded characters, Kamala Das probably wants to suggest that they both had contributed for the spoilage of domestic atmosphere. Instead of love and compassion towards other members of the family, they only catered a typical authoritarianism that ultimately resulted into an irresolvable conflict. It is just possible that Kamala Das implies a little bit of satiric humour in characterizing her father as a fearful person only next to Indira Gandhi. For the purpose of her family, it is her father as a strong autocrat that created a sense of dread and hatred among the children. As a child, she probably aspired for a fond petting from her father, which she always missed.

We have innumerable examples of autocratic parents contributing for overt and covert phobias, particularly in the young children within the family eneirclements. Emily Bronte too nurtured in herself a sort of inexplicable dread in relation to her father, and the result is the character of that psychotic abnormal called
Heathcliff as the chief protagonist in her novel *Wuthering Heights*. Kamala Das, however, denounces and decimates the father figure in a very straightforward and vibrant manner by transparent confessions filled with anger and violence. Again, by delineating her father in such fearful dimensions, she is striking at the ominous generation gap and generation conflict, which, according to her, is the initiator of all kinds of disruptions in the otherwise harmonious family environment. It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that the father figure ultimately created the insatiable in the psychological nuances of young Kamala. In her grown up state, she vehemently resented everything that prevailed upon her as an oppressive insufferable exploitative phenomenon. Elsewhere in a poem called “My Father’s Death” she betrays all her pent up suffocative emotions and longings as a neglected child:

You should have hugged me, father, just
Once, held me to your breast, you should
Have asked me who I was, in truth. (OSK 117)

Here she is obviously referring to the intellectual distance between her father and herself, which in years had widened to such a proportion that interactions almost became impossible. The most important figure in the family avoiding her and keeping her at distance becomes a cause of an everlasting feeling of alienation in her young mind.

b. Racial Alienation

Another factor that has contributed to the feeling of alienation in Kamala is the racial discrimination she faced in the missionary school in Calcutta, which might have worked as a catalysing agent to her already hurt sensibility and the inherent rebellious
spirit in her. In the school she had the most unpleasant experience of discriminations, and the consequent atrocities committed by the wanton White students on the native children, both physiologically and psychologically. In My Story she narrates many incidents of such tortures her brother and she had to undergo only for the reason that they were brown children of Indian origin. The White children used to mock at her brother, saying, “Blackie, your blood is red” (MS 2). Once the principal asked Shirley, a White student, to read a poem that Kamala had composed. But when the visitor asked who wrote it, the principal said, “Shirley of course, she is a combination of beauty and brains, and then there was from the Governor’s wife a special kiss” (MS 3). Also, whenever there was a special occasion in the school like important visits, “the brown children were always discreetly hidden away, swept under the carpet, told to wait in the corridor behind the lavatories where the school ayahs kept them company.” And she adds: “None of us looked too pretty in those days” (MS 3). Such unpleasant incidents became a serious point of personal grievance in Kamala’s sensibility, as yet a child, and a matter of lifetime trauma conforming in her a sort of emotionally irrepressible hatred towards all those who she considers are opposed to her as a being. It is interesting to note that she carries the essence of this trauma in her mind all through her life. The native children being discriminated and tortured was not something new in those days in India, but in all probability, the packed animus that she compounds in her poetry has its fictional source in the writings of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain in their novels David Copperfield and Huckleberry Fin respectively. The child-time experience had been a haunting archetype that takes innumerable hallucinatory dimensions in her poetry. As she grew in age and matured,
there emerged in her an attitude of oppression and dissent, and she cries a cry of protest wherever she perceives differential treatment towards women in social and domestic environments. It is notable here that the very title of the first chapter of her autobiography, *My Story*, is “The humiliation of a brown child in a European school” (MS 1).

c. Collapse of Matriarchy

The so-called modern middle class culture of India brought forth a sort of interpersonal segregation instead of a cohesive harmony. This middle class culture had evolved out of the cross-cultural rapport between the East and the West. The resultant middle class familial structure sustained irreparable damages in the sense that it could not remain Eastern in its essence, nor could it adopt for itself the Western familial ethos. The original Eastern familial system is the joint family system with an extended familial relational pattern in which the members constitute themselves as a harmonious whole. But the Western family system as it might be traced in the twentieth century context is altogether of a nuclear character where man, woman, and their minor children constitute themselves as a single family. The unified dimensions of Western and Eastern family systems contributed for a typical note of withdrawal and inhibition, particularly on the part of women as partners in the family unit. There occurred a strong erosion of woman’s importance both in the structural and in the psychological dimensions of the modern middle class family institutions in India. Kamala Das takes up the onerous task of giving poetic expression to the intense stricken feminine feelings emerging out of the restrained circumstances in which the Indian family system found itself in our times. Poverty on the one hand and illiteracy
on the other complexly contributed for a cultural context which provided no place of
honour or dignity for woman as exclusively dependent individual within the society
and in the family. It is this dependence ultimately that brought forth all kinds of
constrictions on woman's freedom of expression by way of turning her choice-less.
Therefore, she finds herself in the crumbling structural dimensions of the family
systems, in the context of which almost all her freedoms are colossally eroded. The
result is alienation of woman, which becomes an insufferable sore on her heart. It is
with this sore that Kamala Das conducts her poetic activity whereby she fervently
appeals for a kind of honourable and decent understanding of the Indian woman's
problems.

A typical traditional family system from which Kamala Das descends adds to
the feeling of alienation in her. This situation is associated with her racial particulars.
She comes from a community (the Nayar [or Nair] community of Kerala) that
remained out and out matrilineal for a long time in the past. In that system women
enjoyed much more freedom and authority as compared to men, particularly in their
marriages as well as in vital family matters. In this context, F. Fawcett makes the
following observation: "The chief immediate interest attached to them [the Nayars]
lies in the fact of their being the best, that is the fullest, the most complete existing
example of matriarchy, or, to be more strictly accurate, of inheritance through
females" (186). Although matrilineal system of family became extinct in the poet's
family a generation before her birth, she appears to have an ardent longing for going
back to the old system. Her frequent poetic indictments of the patriarchy are not
individual charges against men, but they are impassioned urges of a conscious mind
to do away with all such systems that are not humane and just in their operations. In a speech she voices her emotional attachment to the old tradition of her community:

I come from another kind of community; we were matrilineal, matriarchal. So when I seek my roots, I find women used to run households, women owned property, the matriarch ruled. So it is sometimes very difficult for me to comprehend when people come and tell me this is what happens to women. You know only patriarchy.

(“My Instinct” 160)

Her strong belief in the virtues of matriarchy makes her nostalgic about her past, and creates in her a sort of turmoil as is manifested in her violent poetic outcries. She uses two poetic symbols to convey her feelings of alienation from a traditional family system that offered love, warmth, and care. These two symbols are her “grandmother” and her ancestral home, the ‘Nalapat’ house. In most of Das’s writings these two symbols (one dead and the other on the verge of collapse) frequently appear one after the other to suggest her emotional attachment to the past. In this context, Nair rightly comments, “Often the images of the grandmother, great grandmother and the family house coalesce into each other to form an enormous memory-symbol that ballasts the tottering edifice of the poet’s emotional existence” (86). This emotional attachment to the pedigree on the woman’s side vibrantly speaks about her heart and its natural bias towards women. Even in the patriarchal contexts also, grandmothers and great grandmothers are usually held high in the Indian context. But as far as her nostalgic poetic plunges into the past are concerned, it is not regret but rather the violence against the elements that worked behind this separation that is the prominent note of
her poetry. In the poem “Composition” she suggests how the edifices of past innocence crumbled. Here she is reminded of the warmth and care she had enjoyed and the promise of love and life she had felt while “lying beside” her “grandmother” under the roof of Nalapat house. But gone are those days; now,

\[\ldots\] the red house that had
stood for innocence

crumbled

and the old woman died,
lying for three months,
paralyzed,

while the thieving ants climbed her hands

and ate the cuticle. (D 29)

In a wider perspective these lines carry beyond its literal meaning a melancholy in the poet’s heart, born out of her having witnessed the extinction of a cultural structure that was unique in many respects. The grandmother is symbolic of an age that might have awarded a much better life for the poet than that of the present day. The lines ‘the red house that had / stood for innocence / crumbled’ suggestively point to the inherent goodness of a tradition that is no more. The expression ‘old woman’ is a reference to her grandmother who becomes an archetype in the poem. The slow and painful dying of the grandmother after having lain ‘paralyzed / while thieving ants climbed her hands / and ate the cuticle’ is a requiem for a now extinct tradition, and a lamentation for her inability to revert to the system ‘that was long ago,’ which, according to her, was more sympathetic to her feminine demands. As she grew in
age, the sound of the sea becomes as inaudible as the dead voice of her grandmother. Later in the same poem she confesses:

The only secrets I always
withhold
are that I am so alone
and that I miss my grandmother. (D 31)

Her passion for familial warmth and love is evident here. Even if she is partial and biased towards the ‘grandmother’ (here symbolic of matriarchal joint family system), what all she hoped to have within the familial context is a mere fistful of love and compassion, which probably would be available more in the maternal instinct than in the paternal enclaves.

Again, in the poem “Blood” there is a very pathetic picture of the old Nalappat house that stands as the last monument of matrilineal lineage in her family. Her great grandmother’s words:

You see this house of ours
Now three hundred years old,
It’s falling to little bits
Before our very eyes

For I love this house, it hurts me much
To watch it die (OP 16),

and the poet’s consoling words to the great grandmother:

When I grow old, I said.
And very very rich

I shall rebuild the fallen walls

And make new this ancient house (OP 16),
establish her ardent longing for associating herself with the past. Metaphorically, as
Vrinda Nabar says, “The death of the house need not be interpreted literally in terms
of its physical decay. It could also refer to the corruption of the old bond, of
traditional values, and the erosion of the moral fabric on which the house/family-
circle had been built” (67). However, the poet fails to keep the promise given to her
great grandmother to rejuvenate the ‘house,’ and makes a very passionate confession
of her failure:

    I have let you down
    Old house, I seek forgiveness
    O mother’s mother’s mother
    I have plucked your soul
    Like a pip from a fruit
    And have flung it into your pyre. (OP 18-19)

In fact, in the poet’s family the great grandmother and grandmother stand as the last
living evidences of the matriarchal lineage that professed much more freedom to its
women than any other system did in the known cultures in history. It is highly likely
that Kamala Das’s nostalgic attachment to the grandmother and the ancestral home
(Nalapat house) grows from a defeated subconscious which, in her childhood, had
asserted herself to be the next Matriarch.
There are many poems in which the poet nostalgically recalls her ancestral home and its inmates and environments. In “A Hot Noon in Malabar” she passionately thinks about the “wild men, wild thoughts, wild love” (BK 18) of her home and its environs. Again in the poem “My Grandmother’s House” she takes the readers back to that place where “There is a house now far away where once / I received love” (CP 120). Time has taken away much from her life, but the memories of her house are still afresh in her, the environs of which contrast with the present life situations of the poet. This prompts her to put a sudden question:

You cannot believe, darling

Can you, that I lived in such a house and

Was proud, and loved... I who have lost

My way and beg now at strangers’ doors to

Receive love, at least in small change? (CP 120)

The idyllic contentment that she had in her ancestral home (Nalapat House) when she was a child is lost forever. The angst of de-homing is obvious. Moreover, the sobbing manner in which she expresses her loss of inner containment and contentment is vibrant in the lines, ‘I who have lost / My way and beg now at strangers’ doors to / Receive love, at least in small change?’

The crumbling Nalapat house again appears in the poem “No Noon at My Village Home.” The old pride of the house is now no more. It now presents her a pathetic picture

On the dust of

Windowsills I spot the signatures of
The patient ghosts the trees have thatched a darker
Roof, the moon of cities, the moon of vast
Rice fields sprinting past the trains, is nowhere
To be seen. Only the fireflies light up
Our porch, only the silence tells me that I must
Stay... (CP 31)

This feeling that 'I must stay' is a desperate longing not only for arrest of time, but also to journey back in time to a past that was much better. If so, nostalgia in Kamala Das is not an individual's homesickness owing to a temporary spatial alienation, but it is a grown up individual's fear and frustration in the unfortunate state of being uprooted from a promising cultural heritage, and the anger against the wide gulf between the self's aspirations and the crude realities of everyday life. The poet here stands on the debris of a crumbled tradition, and what lies beneath is its innocence and meaningful associations. Her awareness of this irretrievable loss of a unique familial tradition makes her feminine psyche feel deceived. Her subsequent experiences in life confirm this deception. Her feeling of alienation is born out of her experiences as a neglected daughter, uncared wife, and probably even as an unloved mother in the modern familial context.

d. Interpersonal Alienation

The protagonists of Das's poems, with manifold manifestations of woman in her essence, perennially suffer on the anvil of patriarchal moulding, and struggle to free themselves from the roles of conventional womanhood in which they get only a
negligible part to play. This subservient place of woman in the nuclear family presents a pathetic picture as is expressed in “A Widows Lament”:

This has always been

someone else’s world, not mine.

My man, my sons, forming the axis,

while I, wife and mother,

insignificant as a fly

climbed the glasspanes of their eyes. (OSK 125)

The longing as expressed in the poem “I Shall Some Day,” “I shall some day take / Wings, fly around” (OP 48) like a free bird gets shattered, as she could only become a small insect ‘insignificant as a fly’ that cannot fly high in the heavens but only can get stuck to the ‘glass panes of their eyes,’ and wriggle. This shrinking of personality, this dissolution of the self is the horrid face of patriarchy where:

There wasn’t a thing

that I could do to make myself grow

to reach their ordained height

although I loved shyly and from afar. (OSK 125)

The emotional distance between the woman persona and the male figures as husband and sons in the domestic environments, which relegates the woman to almost a non-entity, is unambiguously hinted at in the expression ‘someone else’s world’ in the earlier lines and ‘I loved shyly and from afar’ in the later part. However, as far as the summation of this wretched existence of woman within the family is concerned, the poem “Gino” has the final word: “Perhaps some womb in that / Darker world shall
convulse when I finally enter / A legitimate entrant, marked by discontent” (OP 13).

It is this collective ‘discontent’ of women in being in ‘some one else’s world’ that Das infuses into each of the protagonists in her numerous poems, giving a feel of her own life-experiences, invariably agonizing, from childhood to womanhood through adolescence. For Kamala Das, the male-counterpart should be an understanding agent rather than a powerful and authoritarian entity that asserts his will on her. To her it is high time man, rather than becoming a self-sanctioned autocrat, shed his ego and looked towards woman as an essential part of his existence as a gregarious entity, particularly in the social and familial contexts. To know and understand each other should be the prime objective of their togetherness. To know oneself by knowing the other is the end of being each other. The poet clarifies this in the following lines of the poem “The Old Playhouse”:

It was not to gather knowledge

of yet another man that I came to you but to learn

what I was and by learning, to learn to grow, but every

Lesson you gave was about yourself.... (OP 1)

As the woman persona as portrayed in her poems invariably undergoes a sort of psychic disintegration, she not only fails to learn what she was, but also, instead of learning ‘to grow’: “Cowering / beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and / became a dwarf” (OP 1). This sheer contradiction between the desire to ‘grow’ and the reality of becoming ‘a dwarf’ compounds in her a sort of suffocating agony. It is this failure to come near each other psychologically that Kamala Das resents to the full length of her poetic life and products (poems). There is always a need for
arriving at such compromises through a wilful effort of mutually compounding the
said happiness in a free and frank atmosphere of total transparency. Therefore, 'I
came to you, but to learn / What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow.' Her
ultimate grievance in this context lies in the utter lack of such transparency and
readiness in man to share the sublime experiences with equanimity. If so, man must
maintain such temper or temperament of understanding his woman in the same
manner as she aspires to understand her man. But her experiences in life have been
otherwise, which have taught her to perceive woman’s life from a subjective angle.
When she finds that the modern life-giving institutions like family, society, which are
meant to safeguard the interests of its individual members, are out to annihilate them,
and the personality of the individual, particularly woman, has never been given any
significance, she becomes determined to take it up with the society on her own.

The poetry of Kamala Das, thus, is a potential form of appraising and
intimating her male-counterpart, of course through taunting tonalities, about the so-called non-conspicuous features of woman as an intimate partner with her man.
These non-conspicuous features are both psychological and physiological. The
psychological fury in her poetry is intended to make bare and transparent the
physiological uniqueness of woman as a woman. The physiological non-conspicuous
features always remain unavailable for man for they emanate from her unique
feminine personality. So what all that Kamala Das intends to suggest at is about the
need for recognizing this physiological uniqueness of woman. For generations on
end, it is man that alienated woman. Therefore she feels the compulsion of clarifying
the feminine point of view. Alienation and ostracism that inevitably follows it are the
80 structural ground realities of her poetry. Alienation, as such, is the spinal force of her poetic tract, and she comprehends the smothering man-woman relations from this alienated angle, like a caged bird, fluttering her poetic wings in order to seek the necessary freedoms of survival and existence.

Thus, the poetry of Kamala Das is a profound conversational manner of grievously inflating the stricken causes of femininity in the context of male predomination and autonomy. At the same time, she is proudly conscious of the extra-ordinary importance of being a woman as a basic medium of entire creativity. This is the prerogative extended to woman through maternity by nature. Kamala Das's poetic violence springs from the realization that this naturalistic archetype of evolution and progress has been fatally interfered in by the institutional pattern of the process of civilization. Patriarchal civilization, in the course of time, atrociously enslaved woman for its purposeless pursuits of supremacies and superiorities, thereby annihilating her personality and abandoning her as a non-entity. As a father, as a husband, and as a monitoring agent of the family affairs, man had always potentially undermined the very personality and psyche of woman in a sort of unfeeling and out and out irresponsible disposition towards her. The tone of rivalry in her poetry emerges out of her strong psychological bias that wrenches in her personality a typical irresolvable alienation and disownment by the male counterpart in the family in a particular manner. As a feminist, these are the grievances of Kamala Das against man, and hence the sources of violence in her poetry.

However, it is not only towards man she looks with grievance. For that matter she indicts even nature for its pretence to be a well-wisher of human beings.
rebellion often turns against the whole macrocosmic complexities in which human beings are destined to have a feeble existence, always extending their hands for the unfathomable, perennially striving towards the summit that is non-existent. If so, Kamala Das's poetic violence is directed not only towards the unfeeling fellowmen and the society that breeds them, but also towards the metaphysical aspects of nature and its complexities. In the following chapter an attempt has been made to examine the working of this exclusive feminist violence in her poetry towards nature and fellowmen.