Infected by unreality, rapt around
By dense unreason, irreproachable force
Is cast in pandemonium, flittered, howled
By harmonies beyond known harmony.

- Wallace Stevens
Introduction

Our subcontinent in general, and India in particular, has a rich literary heritage handed down to us. For a close critical scrutiny of this heritage, it becomes imperative to examine how our poets have deftly manoeuvred language. The multiple ways of their engagement with words become apparent in their apprehension and narration, their creation or retrieval of their place/spaces, and their formulation of ideologies.¹

- Anisur Rahman and Ameena Kazi Ansari

The patterns or/and scripts evident on the surface of any text can be gauged effectively if it is imagined as a palimpsest.² The evocation of this metaphor entails within it myriad implications. At the outset, a palimpsest is a surface which accommodates more than one layer of writing. This is achieved by erasing the initial writing and by rewriting and/or over-writing on the earlier layer(s). Here, the act of erasure is partial, as it leaves faint traces of earlier scripts on the surface, at times subsuming the superficial script, signifying a superimposition of the new over the old. In effect, the patterns on the surface of such a text will be enriched and enhanced by the many layers beneath it. The flexibility of such a surface and its openness to changes, thus, become the crucial factor in discerning the value of that text.

Apart from highlighting the worth of a text, the metaphor of palimpsest forces our attention to certain essential acts such as writing, re-writing and over-writing and thereby to the polemics of presence and absence inscribed on the text by these acts.³ The subtleties of these acts open up paths, which in turn determine the processes of analysing and meaning making, as there is a compulsion from such a text to dig
deeper in order to discern those layers which make their presence felt even in their absence.

The insinuations inherent in the evocation of the metaphor of palimpsest also take into account, on one hand, the dialectical relationship between text and reader and on another, creators’ engagement with words or images that go on to create the patterns on the surface. The proclivities attached to this metaphor is foregrounded when approaching any text that transcends the idea of being sacrosanct and reliable, hinting at the central premises common to poststructuralism and postcolonialism -- the deferment of meaning and the act of signification as an endless process of becoming resulting from differences, exhumed by factors such as “the dislocation of subjectivity, otherness and desire.”

In conjunction with these aspects, it is imperative to call into context the opening quote. The lines highlight certain important aspects that demand attention while studying a vibrant area like Indian Literatures in English, particularly poetry. The main points of contention are the multiple ways of engagement with language and the need to examine how Indian poets have deftly manoeuvred it, which becomes the focus of this research on Kamala Das.

While examining the poetry of Kamala Das, the aspects that gain prominence are also remarkably similar- how words and/or languages are manipulated to aid in comprehending the many apprehensions arising out of lived experiences; methods of narration that are relied on to achieve this and the consequent creation of an exclusive niche. However, this research undertakes the task of reflecting on the ways in which Das, by focusing on the same concerns, moves beyond them. Moreover, the evocation of the metaphor of palimpsest and its ramifications too are pertinent here. It
becomes one of the ways to approach the paradox and multifariousness that characterises her, and their consequent immanence onto the ambivalence in her verse, which, ironically, is projected in her works as a means to transcend the self.

Why Kamala Das, is the next question. Why not? She has a literary lineage going back to the roots of the Malayalam literary tradition as her mother, Balamani Amma and her maternal uncle Nalapatt Narayan Menon were prominent literary figures in the Indian language Malayalam and so was Das, seeking the ‘nom de plume’ Madhavikutty. Equally important is her role in the comparatively new, yet equally vivid tradition of Indian Literatures in English. She was among the harbingers of modernism into the genre, and had a substantial formative influence on the younger poets, directly, through Bahutantrika — an informal literary gathering she held at her home in Bombay from the 1960’s to 1970’s — and indirectly through her verse. Running parallel to these traditions are the legacies of women’s writing in India and women’s writing at large. Her situatedness in these various traditions and her engagement with them from the point of language and location, as a nomad, is problematized in my thesis, by focusing on the ambivalence in her verse.

Furthermore, as Devika Nair concludes in her article, “Kamala Das: many selves, many tongues”:

"Perhaps the greatest “work” of hers is the alter self whom she created, this mysterious and puzzling, ambiguous and sphinx-like “persona” that is Kamala Das, who emerges from her writings taking Protean forms – to fascinate and charm, to tease and torment, to hold and enthral, and to reveal her world anew with each new reading."
Having established the palimpsestuous\textsuperscript{xiii} nature of the text at hand, it goes without saying that a study of it is equally challenging as each of the apparent layers has to be lifted up and examined one after the other, to comprehend the text in its entirety. It is at this juncture that the act of tracing comes into the picture. As an act and a concept, it also points to numerous contingencies. In the common manner of speaking\textsuperscript{xiv}, this word refer to acts such as looking for something or somebody, keeping track of something or somebody by going back to the origin and following the path of its/their evolution, outlining something on a surface in order to understand a pattern, and to imply the presence of something. All these connotations play an important part in this research.

But, while engaging with a text which is, in essence, of an unreliable nature, it is necessary to acknowledge here, the contribution of the discourses of post structuralism to the understanding of the term trace, particularly, the contribution of Jacques Derrida\textsuperscript{xv}. Since this research focuses on Kamala Das’ engagement with language and the ambivalence in her verse, the act of tracing that is undertaken imbibes, to a great extent, the dialectics of presence and absence as contrived by the Derridean trace, which “… has come to be represented in the form of a word that exists on the page but is cancelled through by a mark: the word is present in front of us, but it is also erased; its significance hence lies in its simultaneous existence and erasure.”\textsuperscript{xvi}. When he uses the term trace, open- endedness and arbitrariness of words are highlighted, as according to him every sign/ word contains trace of other signs/ words which differ from each other in essence. Thus, Derridean trace is a paradox which implies the possibility of a presence only in an absence, thereby, calling into context the metaphor of palimpsest, the poetry of Kamala Das, and the fact that
nuances of this concept evolving from writing as difference\textsuperscript{xvii}, gains a warranted relevance in postcolonial theoretical discourses too.

The act of tracing with equally vibrant possibilities, essentially, becomes a viable approach to understand the text(s) at hand. So, what is being attempted as part of this research is a navigation through those signs that Kamala Das has left behind or left beneath to be discerned; those subtexts underlying the main texts, those interpretations that are present even in their absence. This too is the point of reference, where the metaphor of palimpsest and the act of tracing, with all its trajectories, meet the equally dynamic notion of cosmopolitanism. Even though the propensity of the term to accommodate multiplicity evidently justifies the choice, the trajectory of this concept is outlined briefly, in order to understand its relevance as a base to approach Das’ poetry.

At the outset, as an idea, cosmopolitanism implies that in spite of differences, whole of humanity belongs to a single moral community, based albeit, superficially on an aspect of mutuality, which could be rooted in a shared morality, or/and in an all-encompassing political structure or/and in a free and widespread economic relationship. In short, this concept stresses an inclusiveness affecting the entire world. However, the root of the idea is traced back to the ancient classical period- 4BCE Greece and originates from the famous reply of Diogenes- the Cynic, to the question where he was from. He is believed to have replied, 'I am a citizen of the world [kosmopolitês]\textsuperscript{xviii}.

Broadly speaking, cosmopolitanism rooted in the Greek word “kosmopolitês”, takes Diogenes’ view forward — all people are citizens of the world — implying an allegiance with cosmos, the world beyond one’s immediate location — state or polis.
The term, which has since been part of intellectual discourses, is seen as a metaphor for a way of life and is rarely taken literally. However, the very word — combining a cosmos and a polis — is, in itself polemical, as it brings together two apparent contradictory hues, which has impacted its reception and interpretation down the ages. In the Stoic and Cynic philosophical approach, the idea that a citizen of a cosmopolis — a larger space such as cosmos — would be an ideal citizen of the polis — a polity or a sovereign state — implied the focus on serving humanity as a whole, when viewed in the light of a citizen’s duties towards the respective place of one’s allegiance.

Down the ages, when the idea was inducted to approach Christianity, the debates concerning location shifted to new realms, — earthly city and divine city — as explicated by the writings of St. Augustine and St. Paul. Thus, in the middle ages, the problematic of local and cosmopolitan shifted to that of secular and religious and it is only with the teachings of Erasmus that the idea took a turn back to the Stoic philosophical thought, with a renewed focus on the remarkable humanistic tradition.

Nonetheless, a seminal moment in the evolution of this term and idea comes in with Enlightenment and reaches the highpoint in Immanuel Kant’s treatise “Toward Perpetual Peace”, a path breaking text which reinstated cosmopolitanism as a prevalent idea, through a “universally philanthropic policy”. The ideas that took off from this treatise had an impact on almost all spheres of human life even when it came to be known as moral cosmopolitanism, based on the ubiquitous focus on human reason and rights in 18th C, and have had repercussions even on the contemporary understanding of the idea.
Cosmopolitanism and its link to capitalism became one of the emphases of 19th century, which is evident in the way Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels approached the notion. On the one hand, they saw it as an ideological representation of capitalist globalisation, while on the other, the rallying call of Communist Manifesto “Proletarians of all countries, unite!”xxiv paved way for a new avatar of cosmopolitanism – a propagation of a classless society, and a world without borders. Even when the use of the term by them verged on contradictions, — where it imbibed the elements of a global capitalistic society and that of an international workers movement — it went on to influence international relations extensively, as is evident from the formation of organisations such as League of Nations, and later United Nations, The International Criminal Court, and in the revival of moral cosmopolitanism in the formation of organisations such as International Red cross etc…

Interestingly, in the 20th century, even when nationalist tendencies were manifesting itself around the globe, there were parallel movements with reference to kinds of communities among human beings beyond social and political affiliations. However, here, the dimensions of cosmopolitanism came to be categorised into broad heads such as moral cosmopolitanism - evoking a sense of universal brotherhood with a moral commitment to help others; political cosmopolitanism - in the possibility of a centralised world state along the lines of a cosmopolitan democracy or republican cosmopolitanism; cultural cosmopolitanism- which encouraged cultural diversity and rejected nationalism; legal cosmopolitanism with the aim of establishing an all-encompassing human rights, evidenced, among others, in the formation of International Court of Justice; and economic cosmopolitanism highlighting free trade and minimal political involvement. But, for the sake of the present study the more
dominant aspect of cosmopolitanism – cultural cosmopolitanism, which has extensive exchange is taken into consideration, the implications of which are delineated thus:

… on the one hand, the cosmopolitan encourages cultural diversity and appreciates a multicultural mélange, and on the other hand, the cosmopolitan rejects a strong nationalism. In staking out these claims, the cosmopolitan must be wary about very strong ‘rights to culture’, respecting the rights of minority cultures while rebuffing the right to unconditional national self-determination. xxv

These points point inevitably to the implications inherent in the notion of world citizen today, both on literal and metaphorical planes.

Extending beyond the idea of border, this term, thus, impress upon the nuances of mutual understanding rather than assimilation or integration, and in the present context, foregrounds the act of empathy rather than that of accepting or asserting something or someone as right or wrong, which is more eloquent in the post-globalised and post-liberalised world. It can, hence, be reckoned that, though, ontologically, cosmopolitanismxxvi is a concept defined by geo-politics, the transformation that has come in its indices and elucidations, as embodied by many theoristsxxvii, has opened up many avenues, accommodating diversities, which enables one to approach the ambivalence inherent in an entity like Kamala Das. The words of Ulrich Beck is relevant in this context: “Cosmopolitanism, then absolutely does not mean uniformity or homogenisation. Individuals, groups, communities, political organisations, cultures and civilizations wish to and should remain diverse perhaps even unique. But to put it metaphorically: the walls between them must be replaced by bridges.” The very fact that this idea works against the process of homogenisation,
and corroborates that elements of difference and freedom to be so enriches everyone, legitimises the use of this concept, as an appropriate theoretical base to engage with Indian Literatures in English.

Furthermore, the fact that, “Most importantly of all, such bridges must be erected in human minds, mentalities, and imaginations (the "cosmopolitan vision"), but also within nations and localities ("interior globalisation"), in systems of norms (human rights) etc.”, maintains the tendency of this concept towards engagement with the “other”. This is foregrounded in the works of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida and has led to the resurgence of cosmopolitanism in contemporary thought which, in a way, frames the gradual spread of cosmopolitanism into the arena of postcolonial studies at the close of the 20th century, as necessitated by multiple displacements and diasporic movements, in the wake of colonisation and post-imperialism. Besides, “the sense of the term that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, belong to a single community, while ultimately utopian, concurs with the postcolonial critique of nationalism and nation-state.”, the implications of which, are dealt with at length by critics such as James Clifford, Homi. K Bhabha, Ulf Hannerz, J. Brennan among others.

Even though there are many avenues opened up by the initiation of cosmopolitanism into the discourse of postcolonial studies there are certain ideas that become the focal point in this research, particularly the engagement with the idea of the “other” which precipitated renewed attention to the concept at the commencement of 21st Century. For instance, Kwame Anthony Appiah refers to cosmopolitanism as a paradoxical concept with the defining characteristics of universality plus differences, implying an “ethical consideration of the acceptance of other”. For Ulf Hannerz, a more genuine cosmopolitanism is first of all an orientation, a
willingness to engage with the Other and entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness
toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrast rather than uniformity.”

While, Simon Gikandi stresses upon the aspect of locality arguing that
differences and inequalities persist, entirely receding universalist and transnational
ideals to the background, another reading to the phenomenon of cosmopolitanism is
appraised through Bill Ashcroft’s concept of transnation, which focuses on the
fluidity of subjectivity, where there is a conscious and/or unconscious disruption of
geographical, political, administrative and imagined boundaries, where the notion of a
national self is viewed with apprehensions. These are a few among the variants,
imbibed into the research in order to understand the situatedness of Kamala Das and
her poetry in the extensive rubric of Indian Literatures in English. Accordingly,
cosmopolitanism is used as a strategical tool to locate a subject in the world and to
define subjectivity within that space.

Hovering between these nuances is the writer and persona or to be more
specific the entity known to us through names (proper nouns) such as Kamala Das,
Madhavikutty and Kamala Surraiyya. Since the focus of this dissertation is her
poetry in English which she wrote under the pseudonym- Kamala Das, this becomes
the referent by default. The thematic concerns of her poetry testifies to the openness
that she practised towards her experiences in life. They range from nostalgia for her
lost childhood, land and ancestral home to her personal engagement with dualisms,
arising out of her encounters with various places, people and religions, establishing
her as a migrant in space and time, among others. Moreover, her seemingly
unconventional style of writing filled with “vernacular oddities”, where the voice
operates between ideolcct and dialect, stresses a claim over her roots, on the notion of
locality. It can be conjectured that the confessional mode of writing that she utilised
gave her the much needed dispensations for working within these apparent inconsistencies and/or paradoxes, though she tapped the immense possibilities that arose from these and at times moved beyond “the politically correct anguish of writing in English” as indicated by Eunice de Souza.\textsuperscript{xxxviii} The apparent vacillant position of hers can be understood as her attempt at creating a dialogue between the socio-political milieu in which she was living and the evolving linguistic milieu within it, thereby linking it to the shades of cosmopolitanism.

In the variegated spectrum of her poetic imagination, there are shades of locality (regional ethos of Malabar), shades from across India, shades from beyond these realms (a collective unconsciousness), alluding to a cosmopolitan space rather than a global or universal space, as there is a permeation of each of the shades into the rest. In other words, the experiential quality of her verse evoked a sense of refraction rather than reflection, where subtle nuances of all the shades can be discerned. In short, an understanding of the panorama painted by Das through her life and writing and her gradual yet informed acceptance of the diversity of self opens the evolving frontiers of the discourse of cosmopolitanism, which, on many levels, still continues to engage with the aftermaths of colonialism and a post-colonial society in transition. Incidentally, this is also an aspect that played a poignant part in establishing Das as a strong poetic voice.

It becomes imperative here to state that my attempt is not merely to establish Kamala Das as a cosmopolitan poet but to place her poetry within the framework of the evolving discourses of cosmopolitanism which has moved beyond the initial polemics as an expression associated with geographical space\textsuperscript{xxxix}. The choice of cosmopolitanism as a theoretical base also arises from the need for a refreshingly new approach to study poetry in English written by Indian writers, as is explicated by
Anisur Rahman and Ameena Kazi Ansari in their essay “Indian English Women Poets: Some reflections on Language, Location, Ideology”:

It is not enough to say that our women poets reflect and share the major concerns of the broader postcolonial condition. In fact, this would be a gross misreading for the simple reason that our post coloniality is of a different make and mix, and needs to be read keeping a different parameter in mind. Such a reading would hold value not only for us but also for others who inappropriately nurture the notion of universalistic postcolonial paradigms of reading, making it amount to yet another hegemonic/colonialist move to create essentialist paradigms of reading.

The use of a concept like cosmopolitanism gains relevance here, because of its essential feature where even within the universal space there is a prominent role for the particular, the local, as is reflected in the evolved avatars such as vernacular cosmopolitanism\textsuperscript{xli}, discrepant cosmopolitanism\textsuperscript{xlii} etc.... Thus, in effect, this dissertation, “instead of subscribing to these preconceived and limiting notions of reading post-colonial texts” looks into, “some cardinal issues”\textsuperscript{xliii} such as language and location (though not limited by them) and tries to tap the scope of heterogeneity laden within them.

A certain level of obscurity or ambiguity that Kamala Das’ poetry presents itself with, is approached with inroads from poststructuralist psychoanalytical theories of Jacques Lacan, some symptoms of schizophrenic condition\textsuperscript{xliii} and act of ventriloquism. Das’ play with space and time as well as her evolving notion of “I” is further linked to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s and Bill Ashcroft’s takes on the concept of cosmopolitanism, Lacanian notions of subjectivity, and certain symptoms of
The act of ventriloquism is inducted to estimate the vernacular presence in her poetry. The possible links between these ideas and the way they contribute to the engagement with Das’ work is brought forth through my dissertation, thereby emphasising the palimpsestous nature of Kamala Das and her works.

As is the case with a significant majority of writers in the tradition of Indian Literatures in English, Kamala Das was a bilingual writer – writing in the Indian language, Malayalam - her mother tongue and English (though, ontologically not Indian, yet Indian); experimenting with literary genres such as poetry, short story, novels, plays and autobiography. Evidently, she made her presence felt across languages and genres. Even though, my research focuses on her poetry in English, the entire gamut of her works is considered in order to understand her poetry, mainly because there is an acknowledged interchange between genres and languages in her case. Critics have pointed to her poetic prose and prosaic poetry and also to subtle presence of Malayalam in her writings in English and vice versa.

Though, my research accounts for these and many more reverberations within the oeuvre of Kamala Das, the major works that are critically examined include eight poetry collections of Kamala Das in English, published between 1965 and 2009. They are *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and other Poems* (1973), *Tonight, this Savage Rite* (1979) – a collaborative collection with Pritish Nandy, *Collected Poems Vol.1* (1984), *The Best of Kamala Das* (1991), *Only the Soul Knows how to Sing* (1996) and *Closure: Some Poems and a Conversation* (2009) – a collaborative work with Suresh Kohli. Other than these, her short story collections, novels, and autobiography are also used as part of the research. Her ‘collaborative biography’, *The Love Queen of Malabar: Memoir of a Friendship with Kamala Das* (2010) by Merrily Weisbord and *Wages of Love* (2013), a
posthumous collection of her unpublished works edited by Suresh Kohli too become crucial texts to understand the many patterns that have gone into the palimpsest that she creates. Adding to these is the latest collection, *Kamala Das: Selected Poems* (2014) edited with an introduction by Devindra Kohli — a close friend of hers and a prominent scholar on her work. In short, Das’ poetry in English is approached from many angles as has already been outlined and is spread across six chapters.

Chapter 1: “‘I too call myself I’: Tracing Kamala Das”, outlines focal points of this dissertation and strategies employed to tackle them. At the outset, this chapter evokes the metaphor of palimpsest, details the act of tracing, and then appropriates her poem “An Introduction”— her poetic manifesto— into its fold, examining it in detail in order to discern the possible layers. The indices for this chapter are the languages and locations of Kamala Das and how she perceived her self (ves) within them. Towards this end, this chapter takes on the form of an enquiry into the major events of her life, which have gone on to impact her writing at large, as is reflected in the themes of her poetry, and the confessional mode she manipulated expertly. For the convenience of the study as well as for better comprehension, the entire range of her poetry is divided into three broad categories, focusing on the cross roads in her life that have impacted her creativity. The rationale behind the division forms a crucial part of the chapter. However, the essence of the chapter is to highlight the multifariousness that characterises the life and works of Kamala Das and why there is a need for a new approach and framework to understand her poetry; rationalising the relevance of cosmopolitanism.

The nuances of cosmopolitanism and the possibility of it being used as a tool to approach the tradition of Indian Literatures in English is put under scrutiny in the second chapter, “‘The Inheritance’: A Disinherited Self”. A study of representative
Indian poets writing in English including Kamala Das is undertaken here to identify how the choice of language and themes, becomes a pertinent part of the discourse. The inescapable colonial legacy demands that English is the language of choice, but the question that this chapter deals with is how it is a mix of Indian languages and English, thereby denying its existence as a homogenous entity which, ironically, is also an act of choice, which is attested to by the debates surrounding the inclusion of English into the schedule of Indian languages\xv. The paradoxical existence of Indian, combining both regional and national elements, makes the presence of ‘Indian’ in Indian English problematic, thereby calling into question the problems that beset its being labelled as such.

Tapping the possibilities of a heterogeneous entity — Indian Literatures in English — the engagement of the ‘local’ with the ‘global’\xvii is dissected here with theoretical inroads paved by cosmopolitanism. Clearly, the focus is on the need to move beyond the polemics of dualism and to establish a continuum. In short, this chapter discusses how it is possible to find nuances of cosmopolitanism pervading almost all the writers of the Indian English traditions and how and why Kamala Das is unique and/or different. Thus, the chapter situates Das within the discourse and highlights how she being a part of it, is not a part of it, how her search for her self ends with the realization that there is a plurality to this self and that a negotiation with these different selves is the only reality— which is influenced by her peculiar situatedness and conclusively becomes her inheritance.

Taking off from the question of language engaged with in the earlier chapter, Chapter 3, “‘Someone Else’s Song:’ Ventriloquing the Vernacular”, evokes the metaphor of ventriloquism to analyze the use of English as well as the motley of themes in the poetry of Kamala Das. How she affects a translation on multiple levels—
literally and figuratively—is the focus of this chapter. This is done by exploring the ways in which she induces a native sensibility into the (Indian) English idiom, and the way myths, folklores and customs—regional and national—are de-territorialised in order to bring in a transformation to both. Tracing out the imperious presence of vernacular in the poetry of Kamala Das, be it in language or the representation of the innate sensibility of a region, this chapter contends that for Das, poetry is a schizophrenic dovetailing of the myths and folklores with the mundane and the everyday. The focus of this chapter is also on how she consciously affected the discourse of ‘Indian English’ through her play. The evident engagement with locality is linked to the nuances of cosmopolitanism such as vernacular cosmopolitanism.

Another angle to the language question is delineated in the next chapter with theoretical inroads from psychoanalysis. Based on the premise of Jacques Lacan that the unconscious is structured like a language, Chapter 4 “Composition:” The Structure of the Unconscious in the Language of Kamala Das” searches for the ways in which this gets reflected in Das’ poetry. This chapter detects the manner in which Das’ play with language unfolds an unconscious revelation of her self through the utilization of images, symbols, and metaphors and evocation of memories. I endeavour to point out that it is not possible to find a unitary self, true for all times, on the contrary, the quest is always on for the chimerical self as is reflected in her poetry. The numerous nuances of “transnational subjectivity” as implied by Bill Ashcroft is read in conjunction with Lacanian psychoanalysis linking the two major identifiers—language and location.

Engagement with self becomes the focus of Chapter 5 ““An Unfinished Woman”: Mythographies of the Self in Kamala Das’ Life Writings” which slightly shifts the focus away from the language question and tries to explore the idea of
location especially subjectivity. It connects Das’ unsuccessful yet ephiphanic quest for a unified self to the process of creativity, thereby investigating how she (re)creates herself /selves through her writing. Certain aspects of schizophrenia manifesting themselves in her poetry is linked to the ways in which she creates myths of her self, thereby evoking the polemics surrounding the notion of truth and fiction in life writings. The essence of this chapter is her continuous engagement with the idea of self and how her journey towards the attainment of closure ends on the ultimate paradox, where she states that closure is not possible and that this realisation is the only closure one can achieve. Her diverse engagements with religion and the way she meandered through various names are problematized as her life long quest for understanding the quintessential irony of her life. The myth-making faculty of hers is linked to the nuances of a cosmopolitan subjectivity and I contend that such a situation is inevitable for a writer haunted—consciously or unconsciously—by a post(-)colonial angst.

Chapter 6: “A Journey with no Return” offers a broad overview of the dissertation. The title of the dissertation as well as that of the individual chapters are looked into in detail as a means of summing up the important findings. This chapter also touches upon certain aspects of Das’ poetry which were not dealt with at length in this dissertation, but which requires attention. In effect, the possibilities of further research within the field of Kamala Das studies are probed into at length in this chapter.

After having outlined the research and the dissertation as such, the next chapter, “‘I too call myself I’: Tracing Kamala Das”, as is suggested by the title, undertakes the act of tracing her through her poetry, and beyond. This chapter provides an overview of the strategies employed to approach a multifarious persona
like Kamala Das, and the possible routes of tackling the difficulties that is often
associated with her poetry. In effect, the chapter, in three broad sections, engages with
ideas such as palimpsestousness, acts of tracing, and exemplifies these through a
demonstration—analysis—of her poem “An Introduction”, which becomes a
poignant point of entry into her life as well. As a means of providing an in-depth
overview of the scope of her poetry, the last section of the chapter, takes up different
angles to approach her entire oeuvre of poetry.
Notes


ii See Dillon, Sarah. Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory where she talks about the origin and evolution of the metaphor of palimpsest and the reverberations entailed in its use. She uses the term palimpsestousness, to refer to the ways in which the peculiar features of a palimpsest can be used in our readings and understanding of texts at large. She highlights, through her study, how this idea advances modern thought and impacts perception of literature.

iii See Genette, Gerard. Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree which engages with the dialectics of absence and presence by stressing on the notion of intertextuality and how certain texts remind reader of an earlier text implying a textual transcendence.


v The use of the term Indian Literatures in English is a conscious act here, which is done mainly to highlight the heterogeneity that becomes the defining feature of this genre. The polemics surrounding this is engaged with at length in Chapter 2.

vi See Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture where he elaborates on the idea of ambivalence in the colonial discourse and how there is an element of decentring at its core which is linked to subjectivity.

vii See Kohli, Devindra. “Introduction”, Kamala Das: Selected Poems. This insightful essay on Das is useful to gain an understanding— among other things— of the general intellectual climate in India from the 1960’s till the declaration of emergency in 1975 and how during the period Das’s presence in the literary and intellectual circles was problematized.


ix Kamala Das’ “An Introduction” is the only Asian poem included in The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

x At the outset, situatedness is used here to signify the act of embeddedness within a culture. However, as a concept, it is also linked to the location of subject/subjectivity in feminist discourses especially in the theory of Julia Kristeva as delineated in her essay “The System and the Speaking Subject” and the notion of situatedness focuses on the recognition of a subject’s location and is seen as crucial in understanding subject/subjectivity. Dona Haraway too maintains that location and situation — environments one inhabits — lend a great deal to one’s subjectivity specially technological, literary, cultural, political, economic and social situatedness.

xi Nomad is used here literally and metaphorically. Common meaning of a wanderer as well as the idea evoked by Giles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus (1987) as a figure which represents appropriately the postmodern subject who had to shift between contexts or spaces gains relevance here. Nomad and the related idea of planes of consistency will be engaged with at length in the course of the thesis.

Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary has a rather long entry for the word trace. There are six possible meanings attached to its use as a verb and five to the use of the word as a noun. From among them those relevant to the research are outlined in the text.

See Chapter 1 where the notion of trace is dealt with at length, particularly the contribution of poststructuralism.


See Laertius, Diogenes. Lives of Eminent Philosophers Book 6

See Augustine of Hippo. The City of God

See St Paul. The First Epistle to Corinthians, The Bible

See Erasmus. On Free Will

See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion.

See Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. “Cosmopolitanism”, Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts

See Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. Communist Manifesto


The root word cosmopolitan refers to a sense of belonging everywhere, being at home everywhere. It could also indicate a particular place/space where people from different locations converge, thereby enhancing the peculiarities of that place. It evokes on another level, a sense of convergence of diverging entities, be it the people or ideas, but it does not imply a fusion, but a neat dovetailing of each of the varying entities.

See Chapter 2 for a detailed explication of the idea and theories of cosmopolitanism.

See Levinas, Emmanuel. Totality and Infinity where the Other is foregrounded in relation to I

See Derrida, Jacques. On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness

See Derrida, Jacques and Anne Dufourmantelle. Of Hospitality

See Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. “Cosmopolitanism”, Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts

See Appiah, K.A. “Education for Global Citizenship”. Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education

See Appiah, Kwame Antony. Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers

See Hannerz Ulf. Transnational Connections


Kamala is her given name and Kamala Das is the penname she chose while writing in English. Madhavikutty is her pseudonym when writing in Malayalam. Kamala Surraiyya is the name she took after her conversion to Islam in 1999.

See Rumens, Carol. “Dislocated Carnality”. Poetry Review

Initially, the debate surrounding the use of the idea, citizen of the world entailed within it the inevitable question as to which world is he/she a citizen of, implying the need to assert the location of any individual. Diogenes himself was faced with the same question implying the need of a geographical location to understand the concept.

Vernacular Cosmopolitanism is used by critics such as Homi K Bhabha, Sheldon Pollock and Pnina Webner to engage with the presence of the local/locality in the discourse of cosmopolitanism.

Discrepant cosmopolitanism as used by James Clifford refers to a cultural interaction which resists homogenous cosmopolitanism.

See Rahman, Anisur and Ameena Kazi Ansari. “Introduction,” Indian English Women Poets. Though, they suggest three core identifiers – Language, Location and Ideology as points of reference for approaching the poets, Kamala Das’ poetry foregrounds language and location, even when it is not limited by these.

See Fanon, Franz. Black Skins White Masks where he talks about how the natives experiences a schizophrenic condition as a result of the duality that they perceive at the core of their identity. They tried to imitate the white, in the end, they reach the condition where they feel as if they are wearing white masks on their black skins.

Though many critics such as K Satchidhnandhan, Meena T Pillai, P.P.Raveendran etc… have engaged with this aspect, the reference here has largely to do with the excerpts from the lecture delivered by Prof. Udaya Kumar. He referred to the intermixing of language and genre in Kamala Das in his paper “Choosing a Tongue, Choosing a Form: Kamala Das’ Writing and the Parsing of Perception” which he delivered at the Symposium on “Kamala Das and the Tradition of Bilingual Creativity” held at the Institute of English, University of Kerala in collaboration with Sahitya Academy on 24th March 2015. His paper engaged more with the idea that Das’s poetry in English displays a directness and fluency usually associated with prose, while her early prose fiction draws on arrangements of language that is largely poetic thus moving beyond the politics of choice of a language.


It is pertinent here to distinguish between the nuances of universal, global and cosmopolitanism. Entries for each of them in Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 8th edition are as follows: Universal: (adj.) 1. done by or involving all the people in the world or in a particular group. 2. true or right at all times and in all places. Global: 1. covering or affecting the whole world 2. considering or including all parts of something and cosmopolitan: 1. containing people of different types or from different countries, and influenced by their culture. 2. having or showing a wide experience of people and things from many different counties. Noun: a person who has experience of many different parts of the world. It is clear from the entries that while global and universal hints at an all-pervading sense, cosmopolitan evokes the aspects of difference within this all-pervading notion. Also the words regional, local and native have slight variations in meanings. Regional is often contrasted with national, local and native with foreign. These nuances have to be differentiated while engaging with the various issues that is taken up as part of the discussions on cosmopolitanism.

Here Schizophrenia is evoked on a metaphorical level, taking into account the idea that a person who is schizophrenic is overwhelmed by any sensory experiences and tend to process reality from another plane altogether.

The use of the term postcolonial both with and without the hyphen is imbibed here as it looks into the problems beset in a post-colonial, post-independent India from a historical and political viewpoint and also take up the many concerns that is often associated with the ideological turn that was brought in with Homi K Bhabha’s intervention into the postcolonial discourses.