Chapter - VII

Conclusion

In the foregoing chapters a modest critical attempt has been made in order to highlight the poetic greatness of Kamala Das. In fact the essential loss of adventure, surprise, and sense of wonder from life as a whole, as the ultimate result of industrial revolution, compounded in Kamala Das certain typical feminine demands which acquired for themselves a par excellent poetic form. It is very important to note that the basic tenets of violence in Kamala Das emerge out of the widespread insufficiencies of life catered by the above significant losses. The industrial man had suppressed the naturalistic man; and this negative influence of industrialisation and mechanization turned her into a feminist rebel. If so, Kamala Das is prominently addressing her poetry to the social and cultural systems that are on the road to ultimate perfection. In this act of pursuing perfection of the human aspirations, dispositions, and attitudes, she prominently questions certain kind of ignorance and incapacities to understand. Offering the most needful understanding of the feminine nature and needs being the whole purpose of her poetry, her poetic exquisite indulgence into the audio-visual screenplay has to be understood in its proper spirit. It is an objectivized screenplay with all the ultimate purpose and design of making humanity somewhat more intimate, freer, more frank, and more transparent.

Listen to Kamala Das in the poem “Wood Ash”.

in this new world i lack coherence

listen differently for what i have to tell

let your blood listen and from within
your descendants shall hear me. (OSK 28)

It is with this hope of the reader listening ‘differently’ that she conducts her poetic activity. Kamala Das is a gross feminist without any confusions and complacencies of being a traditional woman in the third world. In her as a person there is a full-grown trait of feminine individuality, akin to a stern matriarch or an enlightened feminist. To the extent that she draws her inheritance from the Nair community of Kerala, the matriarchal component of her personality is understandable. But it is her pure love and passion for the feminist liberation movement of the West that she conforms herself as a restless mouthpiece of the suppressed femininity, particularly as it is in the Indian context. Equality and equal opportunity for women to be what they are, is the minimum that she demands in the social and cultural distributional parameters of life. In the naturalistic context, she is profoundly conscious of the superior nature of femininity as the creative prime mover. Denial of equal opportunities to women for centuries together almost fossilized them, and it is this fossilization that Das rebels at. Since the fossilizing agents are the autocratic and chauvinistic men-folk, her fury against them categorically evolves into a profound poetic fury extending to an irresolvable feud. The very essence of her poetry is the wildness of the expression of this irreconcilable feud. Biological oppression and exploitation of women leading to psychological atrophy, and psychological oppression and exploitation of women culminating into biological atrophy are the two fundamental grounds of Kamala Das’s creative activity. Glaring examples of biological exploitation and oppression can be traced to the acts of rape and forced sexual congress. So far as the psychological exploitation and oppressions are concerned, they are broadly born of the patriarchal
composition of male superiority and female inferiority. The discriminative and
denying factors of sublimation for women are traceable to these two kinds of
exploitations born of sheer ignorance. Greater the psychological feel of the
exploitative modalities, higher the poetic pitch of her voice, very often extending to
extraordinarily challenging intimidations. Therefore, her poetry is a potential emblem
of feminine individuality asserting itself as an intellectual formula pleading for a
gracious and graceful recognition of woman as equal individuals in a given social
system.

That she takes a fighter’s stand in conducting a feud against the blinkered and
blindfolded attitudes and dispositions of men towards women is only a matter of
stylistic conformities. In fact there is no fight intended. Yes, the war cry-like poetic
challenges are very much there in the very corpus of her poetic forms. She becomes a
feminist rebel poet, particularly in the Indian context, and quite strongly exposes the
aetiological damage that man perpetrated and perpetuated upon woman during all
these centuries. But behind the ostentatious fury of this war cry, there is always
hidden a conscious persuasive mode of pleading for an understanding of woman’s
point of view. There is in her poetry an opening up of vibrant insight into the
psychophysical dimensions of woman as a matter of additional knowledge. With this
mission of offering knowledge and insight in mind, Das makes certain instinctive
poetic efforts of squarely, transparently, and uninhibitedly discussing, determining,
and defining the most personal needs of woman in being an equal gregarious partner
with man. Therefore, her conscious avidity towards the exposure of the feminine
needs should not be mistaken as cheap and peripheral imaginative attempts at
confectioning pornography and obscenity. In the man-woman confidential relationship of privacy there is no place for the ideals of pornography and obscenity.

At the outset, it is not at all a romanticized or plasticized view of the feminine angle that becomes all-important in Kamala Das’s poetry. If the exciting plasticity of the feminine human postures is vibrantly presented by Das, it is only with a mind to express the extent of restlessness and humiliation of being a secondary slave-like citizen. She certainly does not mean to imply that love and love-play amongst the humans is an uninhibited exhibition of the animalistic posture and dimensions of man and woman. But when a spacious cognisance of the need of creaturely survival in the naturalistic context is taken into consideration, certain in-camera visualization of animalistic orgies becomes not only inevitable, but also right on instances where such instances are exclusive personal moments of interactions. Since they are poetically offered to the readers, the preciousness of the personal manner of outpouring one’s grievances and concerns becomes poetically established and aesthetically received. For a close-camera reading, the picturesque pornographic dimensions that she offers become the primary quickening forces for establishing a potential insight into the exclusive needs and necessities of women as love-partners. Thus, again, the pornographic dimensions of her poetic images have to be sensibly taken into personal consideration, just like one looks at oneself as a primal unsophisticated being-in-the-world, particularly when he/she stands face to face with his/her life-size mirror.

For the same reason, the male generations have to read her poetry as a matter of private confidential and explicit confessional poetic outpourings, which in all probability are most likely to challenge and question the settled ethico-moral
dimensions of the traditional thought and action. This challenge is an intended stylistic device poetically adopted by Kamala Das in an exclusive atmosphere of freedom and choice of talking of all her feminine demands, exercising no reservations and restraints, which speaks for her adaptation of innocence and naivete as proper educable modes of offering real insights into the depths of femininity.

However, the dominating and autocratic tone and tenor of her poetry, which is a mere stylistic strategy of drawing arrestingilly the attention of the reader's mind, was popularly mistaken as a sort of bacchanalian orgy, and unwanted excesses of talking more than what the social decencies can withstand and accept. But when the social decencies that are objectively and forcefully imposed upon woman become the very bone of her poetic contentions, the only way for absolute transparency is an unabashed expression of anxiety and concerns through equal violence. Thus, her poetry contingently and intriguingly imparts a pristine sensibility that at bottom every particular individual is a person, or should be a person in order to live one's own life with the ultimate satisfaction of having lived it for purpose, the purpose being the achievement of liberation of the self through freedom, and freedom of being through liberation, and freedom and liberation though sublimation.

But unfortunately her initial critics and reviewers as well as average readers just made a surface peripheral attempt at understanding her poetry. For all such readers and reviewers, the pornographic imagery had become the target of levelling a sort of destructive and negative critical charges upon her. Many of the critics of Kamala Das inducted her for out and out pornographic poetic effects. For instance, one of her critics says, "With Kamala Das love is a disease, being mixed with an
overdose of sex” (Raphael 136) Love is certainly not a ‘disease’ in Kamala Das. Love in one form or the other is a universal demand that emanates out of the primal pregenius instinct. If the famous Bergsonian concept of *ānubhāt* (“life force”) is taken into consideration, it becomes easy to understand and appreciate the essential point of view of Kamala Das as a poet of love.

Further, the question of ‘overdose of sex’ or pornography in art comes to the forefront, and the prolific critical discussions for and against the so-called exhibitionistic indiscretions ever remains inconclusive. But as the old adage goes, pornography or indecency is very often in the eyes of the onlooker, and not in the object poetically presented. It is true that many of the poems of Kamala Das are full of intimidatory imagery verging upon the pornographic dimensions, but then, pornography is not at all her poetic aim. Pornographic imagery is an incidental poetic phenomenon taken up by her in order to give vent to the feminist fury on being exploited and subjugated. As a matter of fact, she writes exclusively personal poetry to be read and pondered deep in a personal way. But by close critical reading and appreciation, this charge of ‘overdose of sex’ on her is altogether unfounded. In fact, pornographic imagery is the handy medium for her to highlight the innermost sufferings of woman in a social system that had never inculcated and awarded a place for individualism and other human dignities associated with it.

The ultimate poetic manner in which she exacts for the pleasures of flesh and blood might appear to some as questionable properties from all the angles of morals and civic decencies. But then, the reality of being human, to the extent that it is inextricable from the concomitance of sex, conforms in her a par excellent poetic urge.
to bare all her wears without any fear or inhibitions. In this context she is a lone voice that has the rare courage to call a spade a spade, in order to assert that sex is sex, and to par excellently insist upon its inevitability in the human set. The moralists, the religionists, and the so-called decent people may not agree to the ways and means in which she performs herself as a poet. But they cannot deny that what all she says is the essential truth of life and not a criticism of life.

In order to critically solve the puzzling problem of charging Kamala Das with pornography, the Indian readers must bear in mind that in the Indian mythology, sexuality has been celebrated for its vitality and importance for healthy mind and body. Sexual love is the vital force of the primary function of nature—continuity through evolution. Ancient India had recognized sexuality and sex as a vital principle in life, which, rather than being suppressed or hidden, gets manifested amply and aesthetically in the classical literatures, paintings, and sculptures. For instance, if one thinks of the great Vatsyayana of the "Kamasutra," or the out and out 'pornographic' sculptures in the Indian temple architecture, it is very difficult to consign one's thoughts and imaginations that either Vatsayana or the ancient Hindu temple architects were votaries of pornography. On the same analogy, the content of pornographic interpersonal relations are there in the poems of Kamala Das as poetic artefacts meant to arrestingly involve and engross the reading public into the kind of inhuman and wicked dimensions in which women are held as mere usufruct, unfeeling objects meant to serve the carnal purposes of macho men. Of course, she pretty violently proposes her poetic thoughts and imagery in a challenging manner. Exhibitionism and sensuality are not the real themes of Kamala Das; they are just
metaphoric incidentals in her poetic structural strategies. As a feminist, she visualize
the very love-hate tangle from exclusive woman's point of view; and, insofar as she i
making wide analytic confessions of the feminine needs and demands of love, there i
only a place and opportunity to gauge the intensity of love itself as a primitiv
animating fundament in woman. Love for man is an act whereas for woman it is th
very basic stratum of generation and evolution of nature in all its fundamental mode
of operation in the world. Unless and until one is capable of sympathetically,understanding the rhetorical onslaughts of Western radical feminist writers lik
Simone de Beauvoir, it may not be possible for him to put an insight into the source
of violence in Kamala Das. This point had prominently been clarified in th
foregoing chapters.

Everybody has an urgency to be himself or herself in accordance with th
naturalistic potential and cultural dispensation of justice and dignity. The entir
poetic tissue of Kamala Das emerges out of this urgency to assert herself for he
conscious experience as a potential being-in-the-world. Her exact feminine proble
lies in the harrowing manner in which she conducts an extended introspective self
search concerning the importance of being a woman. In spite of the fact that this fe(
of self-importance is an unfounded subjective innermost predilection, any obstructio
and impediment for this conscious feel of self-importance becomes wort
denouncing. It is Kamala Das's poetic convenience that conforms this apprehende
oppositional force in the metaphor of male counterpart. The presence of the
insurmountable male counterpart ultimately serves her poetic purpose of a standin
mute wall on which she goes on banging, quite revengefully of course, with th
ultimate purpose of momentarily declaring for herself a fleeting instance of victory. She says in “Composition.”

Grovel at my feet,

remove your monkey-suits and dance,

sing Erato Erato Erato,

yet I shall be indifferent. (D 31)

Even if such kind of victory in making the male oppressor into a grovelling victim is just momentary, instant, and instantaneous, it serves well her purpose of declaring her victory even in defeat, that is, declaration of success in failure itself. The poetic metaphor of man in her poetry is certainly not conquerable because it is irrational without any transparency or fair play. So far as the absence of transparency, clarity, and fair play are concerned, all humans are equally deprived. It is here that Das has a wide poetic scope for generalizing the eternal grievances. They are not feminine grievances; they are in effect universal grievances affecting both men and women more or less equally. Pleasure or happiness of the sort that Das poetically comprehends as the due naturalistic province of women, in fact, should be a given for all living beings. But then, as had already been suggested, nature offers no pleasure or happiness-offering shop to the subsisting species. On a right perception, life does not counteract man as a given. It only establishes the possible chance encounters as promises. The realization or otherwise of the promises is a matter of innermost subjective conformity. The modern existentialists designate life as a given, but Kamala Das, with all her supreme poetic sensibility, considers it as a promise, a
promise that perennially eludes the capture. But it always stares into her eyes from an enticing distance.

The out and out virago rhetorical dimensions that Kamala Das attributes to her poetical tones brought forth many bitter ones amongst her critics who contingently turned to levelling personal charges on Kamala Das, which of course are gross violation of decencies in rhetoric. Contending that all the problems poetically inflated by Kamala Das are her personal problems, and that they do not in any way concern with the generality of public, is tantamount to blinkered critical vision with all the negative purpose of declaring her as an uncontrollable feminist virago. But in all the poetic sound and fury of her tirade against men her essential purpose is to give vent to the inner most hitherto consciously suppressed counters of the feminine freedoms and choices. In this context she becomes a wide vocal articulator of the problems of all women insofar as they are concerned with the negligence and rejection in the minds of their own so-called loving counterparts.

Yet while probing into the confessional mode of Kamala Das’s poetry, there has been a predilection among critics of Kamala Das to trace her inheritance of Nayar lineage of Kerala. For instance, M. Elias thinks that Das’s confessions are merely “the Nayar maiden unburdening her collective nightmare” (18). He further adds, “Kamala Das’s sexual philosophy is thus located in her own cultural heritage deriving from the South or Dravidian India” (22). Here the critic miserably fails to discover the paradigmatic resonance pulsating beneath the personal ‘I’ in her writings. Considering her confessions as a representation of the ‘Nayar maiden unburdening her collective nightmare’ is the result of a far-fetched critical meandering. In her
poems it is rather the 'collective feminine unconscious' (as Jung has put it) that unfolds its nightmarish experiences. In this context G. B. Sajjan rightly asks, "When it is plain that Kamala Das stands for the universal type, the eternal woman waiting in search of her man . . . why should she be equated with a representative Nayar woman unbarring her psychic sore?" (53). After all, even a Nayar woman is a woman at the outset, and the most general manner in which Das poetically inflates the real feminine problems have nothing to do with the erstwhile matrilineal dimensions of the Nayar community. But one has to agree to the point that her Nayar heritage had given her the necessary courage to stand up as a significant voice in a world that mercilessly suppresses all the personal voices and freedoms of women.

Further, A. G. Khan, in a very cursory estimate of Das's writings, comments, "A Nair woman might enjoy certain freedom of sex: but when it is depicted by Kamala Das, it might suggest that all Indian women enjoy promiscuity!" (36). It is true that Kamala Das's ancestors practised the matrilineal traditions of inheritance, in which women used to have the maximum freedom when it comes to the matters of inheriting properties and their own marriages. What Fawcett writes about the very matrilineal system [of Nayars] is very pertinent here. Says he: "Equality of the sexes in all sexual matters, the man and woman being on terms of equality, having equal freedom, is certainly an uncommon merit in the Marumakkattayam 'matrilineal' system (Italics mine)" (237). This has to be considered as a matter of extended freedom to the individual rather than an advance of callousness in choice, or 'promiscuity'. In fact, Khan's very painstaking exposition grossly slips out his primal ignorance of human psychology and its endemic attachment to the concept of
freedom. The psychological inward of humans performs itself very often in an autistic manner and in gross contravention to the well-founded and established morals, traditions, and ethics. The far-reaching freedom of imagination, to the extent that it is a human virtue, conforms itself as a potential and lone free voice in the poetry of Kamala Das. Her confessions are neither 'the Nayar maiden unburdening her collective nightmare,' nor are they a treatise on 'promiscuity,' as the above critics have concluded. Her confessions are her attempts to explore the inner authentic self in her quest to know herself, as she clarifies in "Composition":

by confessing

by peeling off my layers

I reach closer to the soul

and

to the bone's

supreme indifference. (D 33)

However, Elias, Khan, and such other critics would have drawn a blank had they looked for such racial chromosomes at work in other confessional poets like Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, as well as the modern novelists like Katherine Ann porter, Flannery O’Conner, and the enviable dramatist Lillian Hellman, who immensely handle feminist themes such as extra marital affairs, marital discord, love, sex, and frustration, with a delicate sense of humanistic sanctity. As a matter of fact, such personal charges and ominous remarks, camouflaged in the garbs of literary criticism, point to one simple fact: the conventional roots still embedded in the philosophy of Indian literary criticism, its mindset, and methods compel its practitioners to blindly...
use the same formalist yardstick everywhere—to evaluate either a medieval morality play or the modern feminist literature. As a result, the intrinsic philosophy of the modern women's writings and the subtle nuances of the very sensibilities that express them, invariably go unnoticed; and the pragmatic dimensions of its manifestations are consciously shrouded. Such criticisms laden with personal and racial prejudices eventually turn out to be a mere but deliberate subterfuge to digress from the main point of discussion, i.e., the feminine demands. It also amounts to waylaying the critical rhetoric into a marginalized periphery.

Very few critics denounced her language and its poetic fervency. But a majority of them have raised their critical cudgels against her forward ideals and ideologies as though they are dangerous for the social and cultural health and harmony. This kind of negative attitude towards Das results from a sort of prudish self-consecrated manners of people who evaluate themselves as proper authorities on all matters. In fact all the critics that railed against Kamala Das had attacked her from personal angle of their taste and temperament, but not from any judicious appreciation of her arresting poetic craft. Creating arresting and controversial sensibility is part and parcel of the par excellent poetic strategy of Kamala Das. At the outset she inflates the retaliatory sensibility of the reader, and then poetically resolves its content as a mere universal establishment of human desires to substantiate themselves as the necessary ground truths and realities of life.

While Elias and Khan try to trace the roots of only the negative dimensions of 'Nayar' heritage in Das's poetry and prose, her women critics lash at her on other accounts. Vimala Rao blames her for the weak and deliberate 'eroticism.' In Rao's
words, "The flagrant eroticism loses its strength and becomes a weakness in her art as it is bound to become in life. As a result, Kamala Das appears to be a poet of decadence, a poet who is a victim of the inadequacies of her life, failing to gain control even over her art" (88). Since Rao obviously overlooks the poetic sublimation of Kamala Das, her charges are far too personal in nature. The brash manner in which Rao concludes that Kamala Das is a failure both in life and poetry confirms the fact that Rao could not somehow put her proper insight into the universal nature of interpersonal relations, which always remain on a threatening threshold of temptation and withdrawal. It is unfortunate that critics like Rao obviously misunderstood Das's poetic fury as mere celebration of 'eroticism.' Kamala Das is certainly not a 'poet of decadence.' If exacting for a due consideration for women and their happiness is the real theme of her poetry, there is no decadence here.

Further, naming her as 'a victim of the inadequacies of her life' amounts to dwindling critical activity to a personal plane of disagreement. So far as the inadequacies or otherwise are concerned, it is all purely a personal matter of judgement. When her art is fervently concerned with the overall present 'inadequacies' in the social surroundings in which we survive, it is not possible to pooh-pooh her poetry as fallout of personal inadequacies. Rao in the above lines speaks like mere critical mouthpiece trying to acquire for herself a critical superior importance as a woman over and above Das.

It should have been better if Rao ventured to consider Das's poetry from the standpoint of a woman sailing in the same boat as the poet herself. On a close scrutiny, it perspires that such negative charges on Kamala Das are born of some
inexplicable personal animosity, which they take upon themselves as self-appointed guardians of the so-called traditions and morals. Ethics and morals are certainly important; they are important for Kamala Das also. But then, as she appears to suggest, the real sweetness of life lies in doing away with all the formalities at least in a poetic moment, if not in life altogether. In this acquiring for oneself the real sweetness of life, the morals and ethics should not become impediments. Thus, Das’s poetry is amoral in its initial perception, but it is not immoral in the God’s world of things. The amoral streak compels one to think about the validity or otherwise of the traditional morality itself in confining woman and her freedoms to certain ranges of social, cultural and domestic environments. The aggressive manner in which she exercises innumerable poetic licences to assert her choices and freedoms as a woman automatically turn out to be ideological challenges indicting traditional man as responsible for the irreparable damage and injury done to femininity.

Among other women critics of Das, Monika Varma feels that the initial promise of vigour and violence in Das’s poetry loses its strength even before it takes off. Verma sees Das’s poetry as “dusty trivia snuffling under the munched-up spat-out remnant of chewed-up cud and chopped-up sugar cane stalks.” She adds further. “It began life green; it was sweet and full of sap and juice, but what we get is snippets of trivia” (26) As a poet herself, Varma’s grudges against Das are quite understandable. The immense vibrancy and force of Das’s poetry and its immediate effect on the readers of Indo-Anglian poetry are evident from the fact that in Iyengar’s book [Indian Writing in English. 5th ed. 1990] her name gets mentioned in as many as fifteen pages, which is a far greater recognition than what is given by him to any othe
contemporary Indian women poet. No sensible reader would ever think that Iyengar, as a literary critic and literary historian, is a chronicler of the 'spat-out remnants of chewed-up cud,' or that any amount of 'snippets of trivia' would fascinate him.

The hostile critics of Kamala Das often objects her feminism compounded with her open emotionalism, the large verbal gestures which seem to them mere rant, the rapt pleasures in raving at men-folk, and above all the bardy tone. But her bardy tone is more preferable to the modern reader than the dry impassionate discourse of the Indian romanticists. There is a certain amount of robust physicality in Das's poems duly supplemented by musical sounds and immensely visual images. Her contempt for rational meaning and behaviour as compounded in the patriarchal male counters actually counts for the enormous success of Kamala Das as a poet. It is a fact that dislike for Kamala Das derives from an orthodox fear of male-superiority and male-domination being eroded. Even the ardent admirers of Kamala Das sometimes confess to the moments of uneasiness that her poems create. This uneasiness emerges because of the fact that she strains her poetic language beyond bearable limits. The basic themes of her poetry are very simple: a love of paternal home, an obsessive concern with anatomy of sex, the inter-involvement of men and women as partners in love, and almost a profound love for primitive animistic pleasure. It can always be said that progress in her poetry is achieved through intellectual development, verbal play, wit, and incantation of fury. If one wants to search for any great ideas in her poetry, he is likely to be disappointed. Her rhetoric powerfully derives forward very often in anguish and rage. She makes a desperate attempt to overcome the near extinction of femininity in the male-machinations and
exploitations. Her idea of life is very simple; it has to be lived to the best of one's own satisfaction and happiness. Anything that comes in the way of such satisfaction and happiness is wildly resented and retaliated by her.

Honesty, stunning frankness, and aggressive antagonism to institutional prerogatives in her poetry place Kamala Das directly amongst the modern feminist confessional poets like Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. Generally, the use of the first person singular by the confessional writers puts themselves at the centre of their works. As a result, their poems gain an autobiographical tone and authenticity. But, on the other hand, this also leads many readers and critics to take it for granted that the protagonists of these works are the authors' own overt caricatures. For the same reason, many critics have based their studies on Das's fictional autobiography “My Story” for evaluating her poems. As T.N. Dhar rightly warns, “excessive reliance on her life-story has led many critics to accept her position on several things in categorical terms about which she is ambivalent in her poems” (36). Many critics, owing to the autobiographical tone and tenor of Das's poetry, have always looked at her confessions with suspicion. The poetic violence unleashed by Das through her various women protagonists, no doubt, evinces oneness between her life-experiences and her creative visions. But this fact should not mislead the reader to conclude that it is the poet in person everywhere with her promiscuous sexual encounters. In such a case, her poems would have degenerated into mere personal commentaries upon her life. But this does not happen at all. The personal frame of her poems is her stylistic manner of protesting against the condition of women in general. In this context what Arlene Zade observes is worth mentioning. In Zade's words.
The crude reality of her personal experience may not have literal counterparts for every woman, especially those in the "more modern" Western world, but it is most definitely and completely of this world. We cannot help but empathize with the girl whose "weight of breasts and womb crushed" her. It is perfectly translatable into the realization for any woman, anywhere, of what being a woman means; not merely from the sexual point of view but rather from the universal experience of women... the realization that to be a woman inevitably entails some sort of psychological shrinking. (240)

In Kamala Das's poems her protagonists invariably assume more dimensions than one, but in whatever attire they appear, including her own, they are global victims of social conditioning, gender dichotomy, and male chauvinism. But during the course of a poem, at certain points the poet dexterously makes the personal details withdraw into the background, and what takes their place is a universal quality in the thematic concerns. Like for instance, the poem "An Introduction" starts with a purely personal note: "I don't know politics." But when the poem culminates, the poetic persona transforms herself into an archetypal woman:

I am sinner,

I am saint. I am the beloved and the

Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours. no

Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I. (OP 26)

In this context, C. Vijayshree very pertinently comments.
The subject in Kamala Das’s poetry is always ‘woman’ and the content is female experience whether it is the trauma of an unhappy marriage, or humiliation of a desireless surrender in sex, or disgust at the male domination. This should not be taken as one woman’s experience in which case it becomes a stray incidence of individual misfortune. In fact, she clearly hints at the archetypal nature of her experience when she says ‘...I am every/Woman who seeks love’ [An Introduction].

Yet in intervals the personal ‘I’ peeps through the curtain, and then again withdraws. This hide-and-seek technique often deceives the reader who struggles to differentiate between the personal ‘I’ and the archetypal ‘I’. In fact, while responding aggressively to the traumatic experiences of her life as a woman, the poet, in order to unmask her hurt female psyche, put on masks of many personae. The masks are, however, pro-tempore; the real self of the poet ultimately identifies with each of the protagonists owing to the commonality of the situations a woman confronts in being-in-the world. Her representative stances are amply made clear in the poem “The Summing Up”:

Change the world with
rhetoric? Never

Life spreads its moulting
wings to sicken me but do not judge
me harshly. I am your kith and kin

I gathered your laments into a song (OSK 127)
their behaviour towards women, and the needful sanctity of complete transparency and freedom in expressing the feminine concerns and prerogatives

However, the poet nurtures a fond hope of immortality for the very fervent spirit of being human. The following lines of her poem “Composition” evidently displays a sparkle of optimism in the heart of her hearts:

The ultimate discovery will be
that we are immortal;
the only things mortal being
systems and arrangements,
even our pains continuing
in the devourers who constitute
the world (D 35)

Generations may come and generations may go; the ‘systems and arrangements’ perennially inflict a gross sense of failure on the very spirit of being human, and haunt the humans even while the elements devour them. But at the same time, the ‘systems and arrangements,’ being purely temporary, may outdate the earlier ones in chronological order. Somehow, she holds a strong faith that humanism ultimately champions by way of becoming a certain good in the ages to come, even if it is threatened in the present. Very simply, all her desire is for the human society to be more and more humane in being immortal.

Thus, the content of violence in the poetry of Kamala Das has a vibrant mission of educating men to be more and more humane in his relations with women. She is of a confirmed view that the very feminine fonts of happiness have been
crushed and smashed for centuries together, and the feminist fury in her takes the form of rebellion and violence. The compounded fury of this rebellion and violence is mainly addressed to the finer sensibilities of men. Even if it is aesthetically unpalatable to some of the traditional readers, particularly men-folk, so far as the universal validity of her arguments is concerned, one has to acknowledge her poetic vibrancy and finesse as a profound artistic achievement.